

‘Sounds Like Home’

A full length play with an accompanying critical analysis

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‘To be happy at home is the result of all ambition.’

-Samuel Johnson

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CRITICAL ANALYSIS.

Ideas of Lutonians, youth and sexuality.

Last Autumn I arrived at the Playwriting MPhil (B) without any real concrete idea for the full length play we were soon expected to develop. I entered the course merely with one vague idea about creating a piece that was filled with young adults who were confused about their own sexuality. The term 'confused' tends to be affiliated with those who are uncertain as to whether they are homosexual or even bisexual, but I wanted to explore sexual confusion in a wider sense, exploring the opportunities in which a person can hide behind their sexuality. The idea was inspired by a group of friends, who like me grew up in Luton; a town not only famous for the airport, Easyjet and 'That advert in the seventies with Lorraine Chase' but for one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the United Kingdom. All of us attended a Catholic secondary school and adhering to cliché, a significant percentage of the girls fell pregnant before the completion of their GCSE's. All around us sex seemed accessible and effortless but surprisingly not for us, sex was getting more and more complicated. Realising that the majority of my childhood friends have since become sexually confused adults, I felt this was an issue I wanted to explore. I would call the play 'Noticing Boys', the tag line being: 'A play of sexual exploration for the sexually confused'. The play would be made up of three characters; all twenty-two years old, they have returned from university to a summer of rain. As the rain would fall, their minds would begin to wonder and soon we would find ourselves embarking on a journey through their sexual experiences. Alongside the exploration of the characters' sexual histories, I wanted to challenge the idea that in these modern times we are accepting of all sexualities and instead unveil a world of sexual inhibition and secrecy. Furthermore, I intended to investigate whether the perplexities of adolescence have been extended now that we live in an age of perpetual youth. Today a twenty- two year old can say 'I'm far too young to be responsible, settle down and start a family' and their dismissal of adult responsibility would seem justified. Is twenty-two the new sixteen? It was with these ideas that I entered the course.

I was clueless in regard to the storyline but I did however find comfort in John Guare's advice on how to begin writing a play: 'The premise of a play can be very, very small. It doesn't have to be the most momentous thing in the world. It just has to be something that releases you emotionally.' (McLaughlin, 1997, p. 37)

For me, it was imperative that the piece be set in Luton because I believed that it would hold a vital role in illustrating my characters' aimlessness and isolation. As a part of an article entitled '*Ugly, Grey, Depressing, Why Luton Really Is The Worst Place To Live In Britain,*' writer Roya Nikkah interviewed a man called Jay Rebbeck in his mid twenties, who said: 'I was born in Luton and I have been avoiding it ever since' (Nikkah, 2004). Voted Britain's worst town in 2004, Luton Borough Council have been working toward a regeneration scheme costing the government approximately seventy-eight million pounds. In this play, Luton is not only the perfect setting for my characters to return to, who like Jay Rebbeck have been trying desperately to avoid, but Luton would also inevitably become a character in itself, who not unlike its citizens is grappling at securing its own sense of identity.

As a writer, Luton is of course greatly significant to me because it is my home. I want to give Luton a voice, for as Sarfraz Manzoor said whilst being interviewed for an article in New Statesman magazine; 'Luton is unashamedly working class; it is also deeply uncool. It is an easy target for the media because it doesn't argue back' (Trilling, 2009). Luton of course feels personal and entirely original to me but I am certain, especially as I now read through the final draft, that Luton will be identifiable to all, including those who have never resided in the town, for I am sure they will have experienced a town just like it. Towns like Luton are all over the United Kingdom; places with potential but nevertheless bad reputations, filled with people who are desperate to leave and those who will forever stay.

Style and the influence of *Kneehigh* and small theatre companies.

Although the plotline to 'Noticing Boys' was still a mystery, I was however certain of the style of theatre

that I wanted to make. Having had the experience of working as a director, I tend to consider all the visual possibilities when I am writing. Heavily inspired by *Kneehigh*, *Lost Spectacles*, *Little Bulb Theatre* and companies that endeavour to make visually stimulating theatre; I have always viewed my script as one element in a much wider vision and that is to create a spectacle; a colourful, theatrical event. Companies like *Kneehigh* have consistently delivered pieces of theatre that are visually rich. ‘Kneehigh are riding the crest of a wave.... a surreal carnival of simple yet stunning visual images’ (Kneehigh, 2004) said the British Theatre Guide. I love the idea that theatre can have an exciting, celebratory, carnival air that is full of life and youthfulness.

I have never viewed myself as a playwright but rather a maker of theatre. I am passionate about making young people excited about theatre. I recently asked a sixteen year old sixth-former from Luton what she knew of the theatre, to which she replied ‘Only what my GCSE English teacher taught me’ (Scott, 2009) and so it seems that so many teenagers see theatre as merely a part of the National Curriculum rather than an outlet for creativity. The truth is, theatre (like Luton) is ‘uncool’ and so I believe in making theatre more accessible and exciting to young people, using modes such as hip-hop or indie music, beat poetry, rap, injecting elements of multimedia or dance and writing plays with young characters with youthful voices, voices that want to be heard, just like they do. As a young writer I acknowledge that it is my responsibility to write plays for young people because these are the people that I understand. I wanted the style of the piece to remain somewhat naturalistic in order for the characters to appear well-rounded and authentic whilst still leaving sufficient room for modes such as poetry, monologues and rap to sit comfortably. Essentially I wanted to write a play where naturalism and expressionism were able to co-exist.

Elements of the final play may appear almost cinematic because of my stubborn rejection of letting my characters sit still. Unlike the theatre, the cinema holds no bounds and I want my characters to be able to seamlessly travel through time and space within seconds, with fast-paced dialogue and short scenes

juxtaposed with long scenes so that the piece would almost gain its own sense of rhythm - a play that felt like a song.

Music has always been a huge influence on me, especially when I am writing and I soon decided that a character who was later named 'Charlie' would be obsessed with the film '*Singin' in the Rain*' and old records of the M.G.M. era. I felt that not only would this provide a beautiful soundtrack to the piece but that it would inject visual opportunities for a director, perhaps even moments from the film could be projected on to the stage as she danced along to the songs in her bedroom. Ideas such as these got me excited.

Before I had even put pen to paper, my mind was almost *overcrowded* with visual ideas for the piece and I knew that I had to start writing because I am aware that these ideas are simply not enough. However much I appreciate them, theatre companies like *Kneehigh* tend to use flawed scripts. The focus is so much on the visual aspects of the production that the dialogue seems to be all the weaker for it. With this in mind I have endeavoured to write a script that is tight, honest and exciting and I fully acknowledge that this is essential before any of my visual ideas are able to come to life.

Writing approaches and structure.

As a writer who has forever struggled to structure her work in a dramatically effective and cohesive way, I approached 'Noticing Boys' with a technique, favoured by playwright Anthony Weigh, that is formally known as 'mind mapping'. 'Mind mapping' is designed to play with your imagination. 'It looks at raw material and tries to find scenes inside it and soon you start looking for a narrative.' (Weigh, 2008)

Embarking on the technique would be an unlinear, lengthy process of re-drafting but it sounded like a very freeing process. I began writing as much material as possible and started by writing a short story based on my first recollection of noticing a boy. I became very interested in that very first moment of

discovering the concept of sexual desire and the abrupt moment wherein a child loses his/her innocence. I went on to interview several of my friends and quizzed them about their own sexual experiences, in particular that first memory of noticing the opposite sex. As expected, extremely charming and humorous stories began to emerge. Recording dialogue was beneficial in hearing dialectal rhythms and once it was transcribed I then attempted to use the dialogue as verbatim. The dialogue was not as crisp as I had wanted so I edited certain areas of the transcript to suit my own dramaturgical intentions. 'Real talk isn't the same as dialogue. So developing an ear to listening to dialogue is only one step. The next step is translating real talk into fictional dialogue... All dialogue is stylised.' (Seger, 1990, p.167)

I also wrote monologues and poetry in the vain attempt to discover the characters' voices but it soon became increasingly difficult. I wanted to write a homosexual character based on a close friend named Matthew, but I found him very hard to connect with as a writer. I desperately did not want him to be a laughable, camp, cliché, but instead through him I wanted to represent a side of the gay community that I still feel is unrepresented in theatre today. I was putting a lot of pressure on myself and I began to doubt my honesty as a writer. I had recorded groups of my friends in several conversations and on one of the tapes; Matthew described what it felt like to be a homosexual young boy going through puberty. "You can't understand what that is like for a person unless you've experienced it yourself. You just can't. You can try but you can't. You feel completely alone and heterosexuals don't have that, why would they?" (Kissane, 2008)

One could argue that all teenagers feel alone and confused at some point during their adolescence but perhaps Matthew was right and maybe I could never fully understand it. I found myself writing less and less for that character and soon I had completely abandoned him altogether. In retrospect I think this was cowardice on my part, at that stage I was not brave enough to write a character so complex and different from myself. After several weeks of writing material for 'Noticing Boys', I came to a critical point inside the technique wherein I attempted to structure my scribbles in notebooks into dialogue and dialogue into scenes; the outcome of which I was somewhat disappointed with. I felt that it was not my

strongest work. My characters' did not feel wholly authentic and I was relying too heavily on the use of monologue to tell a story. My inner critic was crippling my creativity and the play, rather than being youthful and exciting, was messy and monotonous. I knew that something or someone had to 'shake things up' and push the action along.

It was at this point that Steve Waters made a pivotal suggestion. Steve suggested I insert a character from a short play I had written as a part of my Drama and Theatre Arts undergraduate course. The character was a young man named 'Martin', a loveable rogue, a scaly with a soul, an idealist with an ASBO. Martin is exciting, free-thinking and thoroughly Lutonian and so his presence within the piece would hopefully provoke havoc, intrigue and perhaps even desire from the returning university students now laden with middle class aspirations. Martin became integral to the piece.

At this point, the play was now made up of four characters and it began to slowly emerge that aside from Martin, I only really engaged with Charlie, a gutsy, childlike, idealist. I was writing far more material for her than any other character. By the Christmas break it was apparent that Charlie was the protagonist in my play but I no longer had any other characters (except Martin) because I had abandoned them due to cowardice, laziness and simply falling out of love with them. I felt suffocated by the lack of direction and control I had over the play. I was lost inside a sea of material that was simply going to waste and I had gone from using a technique that was virtually anti-method to concluding that as a writer, I needed structure from the outset. As J.B. Priestley commented; 'Some of our writers have the feeling for the surface of the play, for dialogue, but to me there's a lot more to a play and that is –solid architectural construction.' (Priestley, 2005, p. 224)

The desertion of 'Noticing Boys' and the new idea.

With a looming first draft deadline in the New Year, I was conscious that it was imperative that I think

fast. I hurriedly decided that I would write an unlikely love story between Charlie and Martin (who would later be re-named Peter). However, I did not want to write a two-hander. I wanted my play to be full of life, full of characters and full of Lutonians. I recalled a conversation that had been recorded as a part of my research for 'Noticing Boys' about a group of girls known as 'mega-riders'. 'Mega-riders' were girls at my school who rode the local buses for free in exchange for sleeping with the driver at the end of their shift. I re-listened to the recording and immediately wrote a short story about a bus driver called Barry who was teased to distraction by a young mega-rider. Suddenly and unexpectedly I had found the characters that would make up my play. Barry would be Charlie's father and his story would run alongside Charlie and Peter's love story. Not wanting to make the same mistakes that I had made with 'Noticing Boys', I mapped out the plot of the piece on large pieces of paper and sellotaped them to the walls of my bedroom. These pieces of paper listed scenes (in chronological order if possible) that were essential to the play, for example:

1. Barry and Charlie are reunited.
2. The introduction of Peter.
3. Peter notices Charlie's bedroom light on.
4. Barry meets 'Girl' for the first time on the bus.
5. Charlie performs her nightly ritual.

I slowly worked through the plot, writing up to four scenes a day. Within the space of a week, the idea and characters had completely changed but I still wanted to use the style and draw on the influences I had in mind for 'Noticing Boys' (naturalism with expressionism, poetry, monologue and shifting locations) and so a great deal of material that I had thrown away or disregarded for 'Noticing Boys' was given a new lease of life inside this new play.

As I had originally premeditated, Charlie would return home from university to a summer of rain and become lost inside her old childhood bedroom, filled with old records and memorabilia from the 1950's.

I liked the idea of Charlie rediscovering this room after having been away for a number of years. Ordinarily, students would leave for university and return at least three times a year to visit family but not her. Before her departure to university Charlie would have experienced the worst summer of her life, her mother had died and her father had been accused of having a sexual relationship with a minor. The play opens with Charlie re-entering a world that she had, not so long ago, been so desperate to escape from and now it was imperative that she face up to the past. Barry is desperate to rekindle some sort of relationship with his daughter but to no avail. Charlie hides inside her room with Gene Kelly and *Singin in the Rain*. Watching from down by the railway bridge is Peter Delaney who is captivated by Charlie and the sound of her music blaring out of her bedroom window. A boy of the street and on his ASBO, Peter rarely goes home; he just finds new ways to get into trouble and finds shelter from the rain under the railway bridge amidst all the pigeons and the rubbish. Whilst mapping out the borders of his ASBO, Peter and Charlie finally meet and after a drunken night of laughing and talking they sleep together under the railway bridge.

Meanwhile, Barry drives his bus across town, transporting the people of Luton from A to B. He meets a garishly confident young school girl who insists on ‘chatting him up’ and soon enough a friendship blossoms between them. Barry is introduced to a world of ‘mega riders’ and unknowingly enters into a world of temptation. As he and the Girl grow closer, the more difficult it becomes to resist her, and Barry soon obsesses over the idea that if he waits until the girl turns sixteen then *technically* he will have done nothing wrong and no crime will have been committed.

‘I’m careful with myself. Over-cautious even. I know where to draw the line. If they’re minutes short of sixteen, it doesn’t matter because technically it’s their birthday, so legally they are. Right on the cusp.’
(Burns, 2009, p.79)

Charlie wakes from her drunken night with Peter with regret and fixated on her private world of M.G.M.

whirlwind romance, Peter certainly does not match up. Peter on the other hand wakes up convinced that he is in love. After an argument with her father, Charlie goes to find Peter to say goodbye and announces that she is leaving Luton once and for all. That same night, Barry takes the Girl down to the railway bridge to celebrate her sixteenth birthday. They sleep together. Later that evening the girl blurts out that it was not her birthday at all. Barry loses control, lashes out and kills her.

The decision to make Barry kill the Girl was certainly difficult but it seemed that I had pushed myself and Barry into a corner where it was simply imperative that I let him kill her. Barry enters the play a shell of his former self and throughout the course of the piece goes through intense mental struggles to stop himself from acting on his sexual impulses. Since Charlie's departure to university and his wife's death, Barry has become a control freak and leads his life strictly abiding to his own self-imposed rules so that he can regain some form of emotional equilibrium. Barry carefully positions himself away from dangerous situations so that he is less likely 'to lose it'. Discovering that the Girl is under sixteen is devastating to Barry and he was bound to lose control, big time. It would not have been plausible if Barry had simply fled the scene. It certainly would have made a very weak ending. I knew that the death of the Girl would have a much stronger emotional impact on the audience. 'Without any surprise, a play becomes boring and predictable' (Edgar, 2009, p. 204) says David Edgar. I had to be brave and I knew that it would take the audience by surprise. The implications of the Girl's death would also mean that the relationship between Barry and his daughter would forever be ruined regardless of Barry's attempts to reconcile with her throughout the play.

After establishing that the Girl's death was the essential ending to the play, the hardest part was then determining *how* Barry would kill her. The act would certainly not have been pre-meditated, instead it would be a rash moment of thoughtless, impetuous behaviour and so the murder had to be quick. Due to it being a non - pre-meditative murder and the unlikelihood of Barry carrying a weapon, I concluded that he would break her neck because it would kill her in an instant and hearing it snap would be a terrifyingly

shocking moment. After the murder of the Girl, Barry returns home later that night to find Charlie in bed, with her bags all packed. He tells her that he is sorry and asks her to tell him that she loves him. She does so and they hold each other. The play closes with Peter shouting up at Charlie's window, desperately trying to get her attention.

Prose and poetry

The play is made up of dual mediums of expression; that of naturalistic scenes contrasted with direct address to the audience, using poetic monologue, transporting an audience from one plane of reality to another. When these transitions are made, naturally the audience will be alerted to the sudden change in mediums from prose to verse but I anticipate that as the play progresses they will become unconscious to the shifts in characters' vernacular and find pleasure in the verse as and when it appears without detracting from the dramatic action. As T.S. Eliot explains:

'It is unfortunate when they (the audience) are repelled by verse, but can also be deplorable when they are attracted to it –if that means they are prepared to enjoy the play and the language of the play as two separate things. The chief effect of style and rhythm in dramatic speech, whether in prose or verse, should be unconscious.' (Eliot, 1950, p.13)

The 'Girl' with no name

'The Girl' - Barry's teenage seductress has intentionally been denied a name. I want the Girl to be as much of mystery to Barry as she is to the audience, so her position inside the play will not divert the audience's attention away from Barry's emotional struggle. We should see the Girl through Barry's eyes. My approach to writing the Girl was almost Brechtian, as her function is primarily to be demonstrative of a population of young girls who roam Luton and indeed towns across the country. By not naming her, I

was able to write the character with a certain detachment that meant that I was able to *use* her for the purposes of the play rather than becoming lost inside her back story. The Girl is however intended to be seen as three dimensional and a recognisable character. She too goes on an emotional journey throughout the play. Her story is sadly ironic; desperate for fame the Girl will certainly appear in the papers but not in life; in death. The Girl was right; Barry *would* make her famous but not by managing her, by killing her instead.

I tentatively submitted this play to Steve Waters in January 2009 and I called it 'Sounds like Home'. The play was a manifestation of a completely new idea which at that point I had not shared with anyone. I feared my classmates' response and I began to doubt its potential but as Chekhov once said:

'One usually dislikes a play while writing it, but afterward it grows on one. Let others judge and make decisions.' (Cole, 1960, p.27)

The reception, research and development of 'Sounds Like Home'

The reception of the piece was much friendlier than I had anticipated. My classmates seemed to enjoy the rhythm and style of the piece and responded well to its characters, particularly Peter. Alongside the praise, of course there was criticism. With the play's ending being so entirely bleak, Steve Waters questioned whether it was possible for at least one character to be granted a moment of redemption. This was something I promised him that I would consider. As expected many remarked on the Girl's death and seemed genuinely shocked by it. I was commended for my bravery. I had certainly come a long way since 'Noticing Boys' and my cowardice in writing characters with oppressive sexual orientations. I suppose this new valour arrived partially because I was writing at such speed that I had to rely on the sincerity of impulse, but also because I believed so strongly in these new characters. I was encouraged to utilize my new found bravery by attacking the second draft with a consistent amount of fearlessness from

beginning to end.

Undeniably the piece deals with a number of serious issues, issues that in retrospect I did not fully comprehend when writing the first draft. Prior to writing the second draft, it was crucial to the integrity of the piece that I conducted a suitable amount of research. I began researching Anti-Social Behaviour Orders to make sure that Peter would in reality qualify as a recipient. The Home Office guide to Anti Social Behaviour Orders states:

‘Anti Social Behaviour that can be tackled by ASBO’s includes: harassment of residents of passers-by, verbal abuse, criminal damage, vandalism, noise nuisance, writing graffiti, engaging in threatening behaviour in large groups, racial abuse, smoking or drinking alcohol under age, substance misuse , joyriding, begging, prostitution, kerb crawling, throwing missiles, assault and vehicle vandalism.’ (Home Office, 2006, p.8)

Peter performs and/or makes reference to seven out of the seventeen listed offences tackled by the order. However, statistics show that only one hundred and thirty-eight Anti-Social Behaviour Orders have been distributed in Bedfordshire during the last seven years as opposed to areas like Greater Manchester who have distributed nearly two thousand. I questioned whether Luton was an authentic setting for a young man with an ASBO because they appear to be so rarely used. Nonetheless, as uncommon as their distribution may be, I am aware of several young men who currently live under the order in the Luton area. Furthermore, in these modern times, ASBO’s have become such a social cliché that it feels as though there must be more young people affected by them than what the statistics suggest. I doubted that an audience member would question Peter’s capabilities of falling under the order. After a period of slight wavering, I concluded that Peter would continue to have an ASBO in the second draft of the play. Peter’s impending ASBO gives a sense of urgency to the piece and illustrates that he, like Barry, is trapped ‘on the border’. The images of Peter mapping out his legal territory were also too poignant to

erase.

The weightiest issue addressed in the play is undoubtedly that of paedophilia. It was important to me that Barry was not a paedophile of prepubescent children because I knew that would automatically make him unlikeable. However, sex with a teenager, rather than with a child under the age of thirteen is somewhat of a grey area. In 2006, one of the UK's leading child protection officers; Terry Grange was reported as saying: 'It is much more of an issue for me if a child is under thirteen. I think the closer they get to sixteen the more it becomes a grey area, and I think everyone in the field of dealing with sexual health and sexual activity acknowledges that.' (Christian, 2006)

Grange's statement caused much controversy but he did have an interesting point. Just as Barry is not a cold blooded murderer, Barry is not (as Mr. Grange sees it anyway) a fully qualified 'paedophile.' If Aristotle is correct in saying that all tragic heroes ought to be 'good' then Barry is certainly an unlikely tragic hero. Barry is a bad man because of his sexual orientation and his final and fatal action on the Girl but this badness is somewhat counteracted in the way he uses the audience as a confidant throughout the piece and shares with them his emotional turmoil prior to the violent outburst. It is vital that the audience care about Barry otherwise they would have rejected the relationship that Barry had instigated and would inevitably be free from sympathy when the curtain falls, for 'an audience that doesn't care, stops listening in the end' (Ayckbourn, 2002, p.14)

Unlike several other playwrights, such as Stephen Brown (writer of *Future Me*) who have written about paedophilia, I did not interview any sex offenders. Conducting the interviews would have plagued my mind and blurred my vision of Barry - who I think if one tries hard enough *can* identify with and indeed pity on some level. Barry is not driven by sex but by love. Barry speaks of love constantly throughout the piece, he describes how he loved his wife, he tells the Girl how he nearly loved her and as the play closes he asks that Charlie reassure him with words of love.

Equipped with adequate research, I began writing the play's second draft. I spent a considerable amount of time re-reading the first draft and re-editing certain lines, endeavouring to cleverise the exchanges, shortening bulky lines; making the dialogue tighter and punchier. I wanted to push characters to be more daring with their language, particularly during moments of tension or revelation. One of the most notable differences in the second draft was that Charlie and Barry's relationship had been greatly developed. I pushed Charlie to be almost hideously aggressive with Barry; filled with anger, in scene twenty six, she screams, 'I wish it was you! I wish it was you who got killed by that cancer she had. I wish I wasn't left in this house with you, instead of Mum. My mum. My mummy.' (Burns, 2009, p.72) In response to this Barry hits her and it is another impulsive moment that he immediately regrets. It is the first sign of Barry's temper and it foreshadows his later behaviour. Although Charlie and Barry's relationship certainly became more volatile in the second draft, I wanted to hint at the audience that their relationship could be saved. I added a scene wherein Charlie and Barry listen to old music together, tender moments are shared between them and there is a sense that a reconciliation could soon be made. When Barry takes the Girl down to the underpass later that same night and kills her, the tragedy of the piece is suddenly heightened because he had more to lose; he was on the cusp of getting his daughter back.

Another major addition to the script was a brand new character - Sharon, the manager of Wilkinson's Luton. Sharon's primary function, at that stage, was to add some light-hearted comedy to piece.

Injecting Sharon and the backdrop of Wilkinson's gave Charlie an opportunity to be seen in a new context and I was able to paint a larger and more vivid picture of Luton and its people.

Working with the Company: Rehearsals and Playwright's Workshop.

Experiencing the rehearsals and 'The Playwright's Workshop' was essential to the development of the third draft and my own development as a playwright. The rehearsals were the first time that I had allowed anyone outside of the seminar group to read and question my work. Before the first rehearsal I met with

my director, Rob Cameron. This meeting was extremely beneficial to me because it was the first time I was forced to explain the play, its themes and its characters to another person. Rob wanted clarification on certain issues in the play and wanted to know more about Luton and its people. Being pushed to make decisions and answer questions forced me to think about the piece with clarity so that I could be articulate and direct in my responses.

Sitting in on rehearsals, was a strange but nevertheless endlessly informative experience. I thought I would find the prospect of letting another person take control over the work difficult but it was in actual fact rather liberating and exciting. I did however find it somewhat challenging to refrain from injecting my own thoughts on an actor's performance. It was even more difficult to refrain from giving my opinion to an actor when I was actually approached by them in the rehearsal room. I was conscious of undermining Rob's role as the director and so I frequently had to refer them back to Rob for guidance on their performance. I realised how daunting it must be for an actor to be in the presence of the playwright. 'There is great difficulty for actors in a new play, when the writer is present in the rehearsal room, they think you know all the answers.' (Fountain, 2007, p. 97) I was pleased that Rob Cameron and the actors seemed to share a genuine enthusiasm for the piece and I was glad that Rob endeavoured to make the reading as slick and as polished as possible.

I was generally pleased with how the characters were being tackled and portrayed by the company but I did feel uncomfortable with the young actress's interpretation of Charlie. It seemed that she was playing her in a very confident and sassy way but I had intended Charlie to appear far less streetwise, vulnerable and far more romantic. My first instinct was to blame the actress but I soon realised that it was me who was to blame. The actress's misinterpretation prompted me to realise that I had clearly neglected the character and it was essential that she was developed in the third draft. The scenes between Sharon and Charlie were also far from perfect. Sharon felt rather two-dimensional and clichéd. I questioned whether Sharon belonged in the play at all and briefly toyed with the idea of erasing her character from the script.

The advice and criticism of the panel was extremely encouraging and it solidified my belief that further character development was needed and moments in the play were underwritten, particularly the scenes between Charlie and Sharon. I was fortunate to have gained a new understanding of how the piece might be perceived by the general public and I realised what I had to change.

The final draft.

Whilst writing the final draft I felt a sense of pressure that I had not encountered since the process of completing the first one. I decided to re-read the script and as I read, the actor's voices from the 'Playwright's Workshop' played in my head. These voices became very useful to me because I was able to recall the lines that simply did not work in performance; lines that were not funny, bulky or flat. Acknowledging that Sharon needed more of a reason to reside inside this play, I worked on developing her relationship with Charlie. In the second draft, Charlie and Sharon shared two scenes wherein Sharon humiliates, offends and ignores Charlie, thus intensifying her mistrust and lack of affection for her hometown. In this final draft I have attempted to make Sharon a softer and more loveable character. Now, in scene six Sharon listens to Charlie's apprehensions regarding her return to Luton and the difficulties she has experienced attempting to communicate with her father and offers her sympathy. By creating a relationship inside the play wherein Charlie is able to confide and be honest, means that in this final draft, sides of Charlie's personality are being articulated more through her behaviour and her relationships and there is less of a dependency on the use of monologue to convey emotion. Further to this, Sharon has been made twenty years older so she is able to relate to the music and the mood of the era that Charlie is obsessed with, having been a young girl during the fifties herself.

The final draft also exhibits further development of Barry and Charlie's relationship and shows that although they struggle to communicate with each other, they have a loving relationship. In the first and

second draft, Charlie distances herself emotionally from her father and mistrusts him, whereas in this draft I wanted to make it clear that although she feels uneasy returning home after three years, she is happy to see her father and believes that he is a good man and that the allegations against him were false. In this final draft, Charlie has a clear objective; she wants to rebuild a relationship with her father. It is only when Sharon overhears a conversation between Barry and the Girl and relays her suspicions about Barry's behaviour to Charlie that her faith in her father begins to waver. A further tragedy takes place when Charlie is offended by Sharon's suggestions regarding her father and terminates their friendship. As the play draws to a close, Charlie proceeds to eject people from her life who love her and are willing to be there for her, but like her father she is on the road to self destruction. However, there are implications that these relationships can be revived if Charlie decides to stay in Luton; Sharon offers Charlie her old job back and the lights fade on Peter shouting up at Charlie's window. Knowing that Peter is an idealist, I hope that as the lights fade to black the audience know that he will not give up on her that easily.

I do believe that this draft is far better than the drafts that have preceded it because each draft has highlighted certain flaws that have subsequently been eradicated. Of course there are still several matters inside the play that I would be keen to explore, for example the details of Charlie's mother's death and I am interested in working with a company of actors to develop my ideas. I think it is only natural for any writer to feel a need to constantly re-edit one's script. A life of writing and re-writing can only ever really be prevented when one is able to accept that nothing can ever really be entirely perfect. There is also a danger of over-writing and draining the life out of one's play and I feel as though, now is the time to say goodbye. Writing this play I have learnt the importance of structuring your work whilst pushing yourself to discover innovative ways of telling your story. If playwriting is as David Eldridge says; 'a mixture of the three primary energies; imagination, secondary sources and autobiographical material' (Eldridge, 2008) then 'Sounds like Home' displays all of three of them in equal measure. It is a play about people who are lost in a world that is all too familiar and the ways in which they attempt to escape.

‘Sounds Like Home’

A play in one act

by Teresa Burns.

CHARACTER LIST

BARRY: late 40s, a real charmer, dishevelled but good-looking, a father and a bus driver.

CHARLIE: 21, a loner and a daughter just out of university.

PETER: 18, a scally with a soul.

GIRL: 15, the next big thing.

SHARON: early 60s, manager of Wilkinson's.

STAGING

The stage has six playing areas which characters are able travel in and out of:

BARRY'S BACK ROOM: A small table with three chairs and an armchair. It is spotlessly clean.

BARRY'S BUS: A cross section of a bus driver's cab with seat, steering wheel and silver pole.

CHARLIE'S BEDROOM: It looks like a young girl's bedroom, apart from the old black and white photos of singers from the forties and fifties and 'Singin' in the Rain' memorabilia which swamp it. It is festooned with fairy lights.

RAILWAY BRIDGE: A cross section of a disused railway bridge, its dank walls are covered in graffiti and stained with pigeon shit. There is a pile of bricks, an old stained mattress and the remains of a campfire.

(Ideally the railway bridge should be situated on a lower platform to the rest of the stage so PETER can look up into CHARLIE'S bedroom).

TRAIN PLATFORM: A steel bench, weathered by signs of graffiti.

WILKINSON'S SHOPFLOOR: A generic till area and a large window facing the high street.

Across the stage there is a thick yellow line marked on the floor.

SETTING

Luton, Bedfordshire.

Today.

PROLOGUE

Light spills across the space and we meet BARRY, he is on his bus. It's dusk.

BARRY

It's the little things in my job I enjoy, like putting in the ticket reel.

He does it.

It's a precise task - if you don't line it up absolutely right you'll find it's a devil for unspooling. Or counting up the coins and the notes. Putting them in their piles and in their bags. I've never been wrong. Ever. With my amounts. I like getting it exactly right.

It's about setting your boundaries, your parameters and never crossing them - with no exceptions. When I'm behind the wheel, people behind me, handbag on knees, muffled R'n'B playing from their mobile mp3's, above all that noise - I sit elevated.

'Mister Cinemascope.'

And I like that.

More than putting in the reel.

Yeah. I really like that.

Light fades on BARRY.

Lights up on CHARLIE, she is in her bedroom.

She takes a record player out of its box and plugs it in. Kneeling behind it, she places the needle onto a record.

CHARLIE

I measure my life in songs.

We hear the crackling of a needle on vinyl.

It's how I remember things.

I remember the exact day, the exact moment I heard 'Singin in the Rain' for the first time.

Eight years old.

Lights spill to illuminate PETER. He is under the railway bridge. He violently kicks a coke can.

PETER

I am the scrunched up fag packet in your garden. It's my feet scattering bins and litter across the stones of your sleep. I am the blot on your landscape. Your migraine. The lock on your steering wheel. The security light that bleaches out the stars. I'm off my head and I don't care about you, I'm not the one who cares about you. I'm not Trisha.

CHARLIE

I was sitting in the back seat of my mum's car. I was only little. I remember struggling to keep the big seat belt tucked under my cheek as I wiped away the condensation...

PETER

Aren't you sick of sinking ships?

Aren't you sick of headlines, that aren't headlines, just dead lines?

Aren't you tired of getting it off your chest?

Aren't you tired of rummaging around in a town of hand-me-down?
I'm not-I'm not- I'm not. Because I am the curse. I am the crush. The dirt. The drugs. The Marlboro.
The nights. Those Marlboro Light nights. The un-televised big fight nights!

CHARLIE

It was on a tape my Mum had, I think it was called 'That's Entertainment' and anyway I'd been crying, Mum and Dad had been arguing and they were drowning out all the other songs. I kept saying 'I can't hear it Daddy, I can't hear it' but they weren't listening and then suddenly out came Gene, singing: 'doo-doo-doo-do-do-do-do-do'

Coinciding with CHARLIE'S singing we hear the twinkly beginnings of 'Singin' in the Rain'. The song plays out until the end of the prologue.

And they stopped. They stopped talking altogether. They were probably giving each other the cold shoulder... but then I heard his voice, so warm...

PETER

I am that five a.m. dancing neon.

CHARLIE

And it felt like velvet
and Christmas
and home
and I was hooked
and then came the brass
and then came the strings
and then.
I was in love.
All my memories are here.
In this room - with these records.
First kisses...

PETER

The gun shot. The what shot?

CHARLIE

Our song. Mum and Me. Summer '04...

PETER

The who shot?!

CHARLIE

Mr. Bronson. Year 8.
It's all here...

PETER

I am everything you imagine me to be and more!

CHARLIE

At home.

PETER

And we're back.

Here I am lifting you up and you wake sandwiched somewhere between the earth and the stars.

Saying

Goodbye nausea.

Farewell weariness.

Welcome to the land of the in - between.

Lives that are hidden. That go unseen.

Scene!

Lights fade.

In darkness we hear the sound of heavy rain.

1.

Evening. BARRY's back room. He sits at the table. CHARLIE stands rigid - her luggage at her feet. She looks around. The room is sparkling clean.

A long pause.

CHARLIE

You're so...

BARRY

What?

CHARLIE

So...

BARRY

What, Charlotte?

Beat.

CHARLIE

Domesticated.

BARRY slurps his soup.

BARRY

Aren't you going to sit down?

CHARLIE

You look/

BARRY

Youthful? Handsome?

CHARLIE

I mean, you seem/

BARRY
Taller?

Beat.

CHARLIE
Happy..?

*They look at each other. BARRY shrugs. CHARLIE smiles.
They hurriedly embrace but the moment is short lived and they pull away awkwardly.*

BARRY
C'mon, sit down sweetheart. Eat your soup. I made some soup.

She sits down to eat.

CHARLIE
And you've cleaned. It's really, really clean.

BARRY
Well what did you expect?

CHARLIE
Well the state you were in the/last time I saw you.

BARRY
Well I couldn't stay like that forever could I? Changed a lot since then huh?

CHARLIE
Smells of bleach.

BARRY
Does it?

CHARLIE
But it also smells of home. I think.
(She speaks quickly and nervously)
Everyone's home has its own smell dunnit? Some houses you walk into and you think 'Phwoar it really reeks in here' but of course they can't smell it. Makes you paranoid about 'smell,' your own smell - the smell you can't possibly smell because it's yours, it's all yours and you can't smell it. You can't smell it until you go somewhere different. Until you come back home. Again.

Beat.

Lisa's house smells of smoke and cheap detergent I reckon.

BARRY *(laughing)*
You haven't changed.

CHARLIE *(blushing)*

Oh, really? That wasn't my intention...

BARRY
What?

CHARLIE
To *not* change.

BARRY
Oh.

Pause.

Do you like it?

CHARLIE
What? University?

BARRY
The soup.

CHARLIE
Oh. Yeah, it's nice.

BARRY
Good. It didn't taste like this the first time I cooked it, believe you me, but I'm happy with this one.

CHARLIE
Wow.

BARRY
What?

CHARLIE
You're like... a woman!

BARRY
Hey now, enough of that talk missy. I'm just trying new things. Taking control. That's all.

CHARLIE
I know. Just getting used to it.

BARRY
I suppose you'll be wanting some help unpacking all your stuff?

CHARLIE
No. No. I'll be fine.

BARRY
It's not a problem.

CHARLIE
Honestly. It's alright.

BARRY (*looking at her large amount of luggage*)
You've certainly collected a lot of crap over the years.

CHARLIE
It's not crap.

BARRY
More records?

She shrugs.

CHARLIE
Some.

He smiles at her.

BARRY (*pointing upstairs*)
You been up there yet?

CHARLIE
Yeah. Everything is the same.

BARRY
Haven't touched it. Not since you left.

CHARLIE
Looks like it. S'like one of those museum exhibits. A museum exhibit of me: 2007.

BARRY
I missed the music.

CHARLIE
Yeah. Me too.

BARRY
Three years.

CHARLIE
What?

BARRY
That's how long it's been.

CHARLIE
I know that Dad. I know how long it's been.

Pause.

CHARLIE
How's work?

BARRY
S'okay. Hard at first. People recognised me. I got a lot of stick for a while.

CHARLIE
I can imagine.

BARRY
The passengers, even the other drivers. People were angry of course.

CHARLIE
I'm sorry Dad.

BARRY
S'okay. People round here... they forget.

CHARLIE
I mean, I'm sorry I didn't call very often.

Pause.

BARRY
I'm just really glad that you're home y'know.

He touches her hand. They enjoy the moment but soon CHARLIE prizes her hand away. BARRY looks hurt.

BARRY
So, I'm working a lot of hours at the moment. Working night and day. They've had to lay a couple of the lads off so...

CHARLIE
That's alright, I can look after myself.

BARRY
I know. You're a big girl. Actually no –you're a woman now. All grown up. Your mother would always say 'Before we know it Barry, she won't be our 'little girl' anymore. She'll be a woman!' And here you are.

CHARLIE
I remember.

BARRY
Listen Charlie, I know it must be difficult for you - coming back to this house. So I've been thinking, maybe if I put a bit aside each month then I'd have enough money so we can move away somewhere - somewhere a bit smaller and on the other side of town. What d'ya reckon?

Distant banging and police sirens can be heard.

CHARLIE (*not listening*)
Dad, we are safe aren't we?

BARRY
Yes Charlotte. We're safe. It all died down. People forget things. They move on.

Pause.

It's over.

CHARLIE
It smells of her in here.

BARRY
What?

CHARLIE
Her. Mum. Everywhere, like she's asleep somewhere and I don't know where.

BARRY
Oh. I'll open some windows.

CHARLIE
No don't. It's cold out. And look. Look at all that rain.

We hear the sound of rain.

2.

Down by the railway bridge PETER enters with his hood up. He stops and turns to look at the audience. He tells them a story.

PETER
Once upon an autumn eve on Hangover Square,
I chanced upon two mud-faced maidens.
Fair as fuck and glittering in the soft glow of the bus shelter they hail me down to bring a twittering
twilight to the tips of their Embassies.
I turn to go and their flat faces turn away from the bus timetables and they watch me box my shadow and
kick the fuck out of the coke can.
They are captivated by, *me*.
Peter Delaney.
It's a warm night
Sweat patches.
Heat rashes.
I nick us some cans from the corner shop and the ladies say "You're a vandal".
I say "Well you're just vandal watchers."
They say "So?"
I say "I'm just saying."
Their harsh laughs hurt and they have every reason to be on their guard for I'd do more than bring silence
to their laughter given half the chance.

I am alone. I have lost their captivated eyes as they turn back to the bus timetable and that trashy magazine. But I'll take their harsh barks and I'll keep them because I can use them. In the space of a second, I pick up a litter bin kindly provided by Luton Borough Council and with a scream behind my eyes, I hurl it at the nearest phone box and for a moment time stands still. And I'm back. Instead of feeling alone, I feel so completely fucking alive. And tonight Matthew, I'm going to be the universe!

3.

CHARLIE enters her bedroom in darkness and turns on the light. There are boxes and records everywhere. She checks her messages. The following can be heard. As she listens she begins to unpack.

CHARLIE

Hello. I'm not able to come to the phone right now so leave a message and I'll get back to you.

YOUNG FEMALE, 'POSH'

Hey baby! Just got ba-ack! How's Luton? *(She laughs)* Oh gosh I bet it's not as bad as you make out. Anyway, we must, must, MUST do drinks yes? We'll meet in Soho sometime. Luton is just around the corner from us really isn't it? Okay, speak soon.

SHARON

Hello Charlie darlin' it's Sharon - just returning your call sweetheart. So good to hear from you after so long. Yes we'd love to have you back darlin'. Usual hours 9-5 -that okay? I tell you what; we ain't half missed ya.... Irene tried to make a Toblerone pyramid the other day - total disaster - collapsed on a toddler. She ain't got the eye for it like you do. Well darlin' see you soon!

CHARLIE puts on a record: 'Me and My Gal' by Judy Garland & Gene Kelly.

YOUNG FEMALE

Hey stranger! How are you? Do you realise how long it's been? Ages! That's how long. Hey listen; we're having a party tomorrow tonight, big reunion with all the old gang. You know you want to! Okay, bye!

AUTOMATED SERVICE

End of messages.

The music swells as the lights slowly fade.

4.

Underneath the railway bridge. Violent rain is pounding up above. PETER notices a dim light shining behind him and CHARLIE's music can be heard.

PETER

Haven't seen that light on in a while, not for a long while and that's a fact. I've got night vision. I have. And that music...

PETER is on his tip toes. He can see CHARLIE through her bedroom window.

PETER

I used to watch her!

'Charlie.?' Yeah that's right. 'Charlie'.

She looks different...

Let me see, eight forty a.m. start, every Saturday morning clocking in at Wilko's. An hour's wandering on her lunch break and then the six fifteen bus home. I'd watch her from outside, through the gaps in the posters on the windows. She never noticed me. Not never. I think I touched the back of her coat once. On the bus I'd sit just close enough to her so I could... *(He leans forward to illustrate this)*

I used to be able to tell what mood she was in by what she was listening to. She went through a period of listening to that song by that old black singer who sounds like she needs to clear her throat. She listened to her, one of her songs seven times in a row one day. I got worried about her then.

I knew everything about her.

I was a Charlie Mulroney Mastermind.

The lights slowly fade and the music swells.

5.

BARRY's bus. He whistles the tune: 'For Me and My Gal'. We see silhouettes of girls in short school skirts, giggling and chattering.

BARRY

For me, it's about the long game. Like this bus, life is about taking control over your actions. I've never lost it. Never lost it to the booze - not ever - not even on my stag night. Never overindulged - not even at Christmas. Never speeded - never gone over the limit - not even when I've been late. Never lashed out. Not even when I was pushed.

He continues whistling.

GIRL

What's your name?

BARRY continues driving.

GIRL

What's your name? Come on, mate.

BARRY drives.

GIRL

Liked your whistling.

BARRY drives.

GIRL

I'm a singer.

BARRY points to the sign.

GIRL *(reading)*

'Don't talk to the driver' Are you serious? I know you lot want company. We all want a bit of company, don't we?

BARRY drives.

6.

Wilkinson's. CHARLIE stands behind a cash register in her uniform. She is also wearing earphones. The sound of the tannoy prompts CHARLIE to pull the earphones out. The following voices are heard:

RUBY

Hello. *(She chuckles)* Welcome to-to-to-to Wilkinson's Luton. Can Chan-Chan-Chantelle please come to customer information?

SHARON

Bloody hell! What did I tell you about that tannoy Rubes?!

RUBY

Fuck you very much. I mean thank-

SHARON

Come on give it here. Give it/

We can hear the sounds of a clumsy kerfuffle.

RUBY

Fuck. Thank. Fuck. Thank you very much/

They are cut off with a bang and a loud beep. CHARLIE laughs to herself. She puts her earphones back in. SHARON enters. CHARLIE spots her and jolts upwards. She pulls her earphones out and attempts to look busy.

SHARON

You alright sweetheart?

SHARON looks exhausted, she leans up against the cash register and is breathing heavily.

CHARLIE

Yeah. Quiet today innit.

SHARON *(panting)*

Really? I'm rushed off my feet.

CHARLIE

Are you alright?

SHARON

Yeah just give me a second. I've come over all queer.

Did you hear that? (*Pointing upwards*)

Irene has called in sick so Ruby has gone AWOL with that bleeding tannoy. Christ almighty... I know it ain't her fault, she's got bloody tourettes ain't she but she ain't doing my blood pressure any good what-so-ever.

CHARLIE

Obviously not. You've gone all purple.

SHARON

I tell ya, I'm glad you're back darlin'. You're the only one round 'ere with 'alf a brain cell d'yaknowhatI mean? Chantelle just asked me how you spell 'orange' and I mean I ain't the brightest bulb in the... whatdyamacallit. But I know how to spell the primary bloody colours.

CHARLIE

Um... Orange isn't a primary colour...

SHARON

Y'see! That's what I mean about you! Clever!

CHARLIE (*laughing*)

Whatever you say Sharon...

SHARON

Seriously love, I have missed ya.

CHARLIE

Yeah right.

SHARON

I mean it. We all have. So how was it? Which one was it again?

CHARLIE

University of Birmingham.

SHARON

What? Where's yer brummie accent then?

CHARLIE

I didn't really know any brummies.

SHARON

What?

CHARLIE

Well the students are from all over aren't they...

SHARON

Toffs?

CHARLIE

Posh.

SHARON
Same thing!

CHARLIE
Yes Sharon, lots of 'toffs'! They were nice though.

SHARON
Oooh. La-de-dah.

They laugh.

SHARON (*imitating RP*)
Come to think of it, you are sounding rather well spoken darrrling.

CHARLIE
Shut it you. I've had enough of that from my Dad. He keeps calling me 'Your Majesty'. Says I sound like the Queen!

SHARON
How is he, your Dad – he alright?

CHARLIE
He's alright. Not seen much of him to be honest and when I do we don't really talk. I think he might be avoiding me...

SHARON
Course not darlin'. He's probably just tired from work that's all.

CHARLIE
Well yeah, he did say he was working loads.

SHARON
There you go then! Ooh! He's lovely is Barry. I tell yer what if I was a few years younger... Terrible what they were all saying about him. All a load of rubbish if you ask me. I mean he's salt of the earth our Barry. And bloody gorgeous n' all. Before I forget... here's your name badge. Just made up special.

She hands it over.

CHARLIE
There's no 'E'. It's Charlie with just an 'I' on the end.

SHARON
What? Gimme that...

CHARLIE gives it back.

SHARON
Bollocks. Oh sorry love. They must've cut the 'E' off by mistake. It'll have to do for now babes.

CHARLIE

S'alright. Don't worry about it.

CHARLIE pins the badge onto her shirt.

SHARON

Oh, you couldn't stay later tonight could you sweetheart?

CHARLIE

Well, I probably should get back to be honest, got so much to sort out and/

SHARON

Sweetheart, enough said. Say no more. Say no more. I know you must have a lot on your plate and I know all too well what it's like leaving university these days. There ain't nuffin' is there? My granddaughter/

CHARLIE

Alesha?

SHARON

Alesha yeah. Well she's just finished college now ain't she and she ain't got nuffin. Keeps applying for fings and nuffin. There's nuffin out there for kids these days.

CHARLIE

Gee thanks Sharon. You've filled me with complete optimism(!)

SHARON

Sorry love. You're a smart kid. You'll be alright.

CHARLIE

I haven't even started applying for things yet.

SHARON

Well you've got a lot on ain't ya.

PETER appears on stage. He is lurking in the shadows of the racks and the cheap DVD dump bins, trying to catch a glimpse of her. He spots CHARLIE and smiles. He's come to visit her. She just doesn't know it.

CHARLIE

And it's weird being back actually. Loads of things have changed like the house and... Well, I know this place hasn't. I haven't. I still feel like I'm fifteen Sharon!

SHARON

A little girl locked in her room listening to Frank Sinatra?

CHARLIE (*shrugs*)

Maybe. Been invited to a party as well tonight. S'like some sort of reunion or something.

SHARON

You should go. Enjoy yourself.

CHARLIE

I dunno. S'not really my thing. I've always hated that sort've stuff.

SHARON

Maybe it's different now. Maybe that's changed too.

CHARLIE

I doubt it.

SHARON

Live a little love, you're only young once. Your 'ead has always been in 1953 and let me tell you something from someone who knows, it weren't all roses then neither.

CHARLIE

Maybe... I'll think about it.

SHARON

Good girl. Right, well, back to the grindstone.

(Noticing something offstage and then rushing off) Ruby! Put that down! Ruby! RUBY!

CHARLIE goes back to listening to the music in her earphones. PETER puts his hood up and tries to look casual without being seen but inevitably he causes commotion. He trips over a display item causing a loud noise. CHARLIE's ears are alerted, she pulls out her earphones and rushes to help.

PETER

Fuck.

PETER is mortified. He jumps up off the ground and quickly exits without being seen by CHARLIE.

CHARLIE *(shouting)*

Oi! You alright?

CHARLIE picks up a CD that PETER had dropped. It is the soundtrack to 'Singin' In The Rain.'

CHARLIE *(to herself)*

Funny...

CHARLIE walks back to the cash register. She looks down at her misspelt name badge and sighs. Rain is heard.

7.

BARRY's bus.

GIRL

It's pissing it down.

BARRY drives.

GIRL

I buried my Nana today.

BARRY coughs.

GIRL

Never saw no-one dead till I saw her. Except for like birds n' flies n' that. Put her in the ground at 3pm. I sang at the reception. They all went mad for it. My great Aunt Elsie read my hand, said I was gonna be famous and she's never wrong. Never. Everyone said I looked just like 'er. They all bought me drinks.

BARRY drives.

GIRL

That'll all be falling on her now won't it, that rain. Funny how we all end up outside innit.

BARRY

Sorry to hear that.

GIRL

Oh, so you do talk then?

BARRY

Why don't you sit down?

GIRL

My stop's coming up.

BARRY

You'd better make a run for it.

GIRL

Nah, it's alright, I don't mind getting wet tonight.

BARRY stops the bus.

GIRL

Gonna tell us yer name now?

BARRY

Barry

GIRL

Now that didn't hurt did it?

BARRY (*blushing*)

No.

8.

CHARLIE's bedroom. CHARLIE enters wearing her Wilkinson's uniform. She dumps her bag on the floor, grabs a video and places it inside a VCR downstage. We can hear the violent rain tapping on her window pane. She runs across the space and adjusts the lighting to a dim romantic light. She goes to press play but then changes her mind.

CHARLIE (*shouting*)
Dad?

She waits.

Da-ad? DAD?! Are you there? Hello?

Giggling excitedly she rushes back to the VCR, presses play and begins her nightly ritual. She is watching a scene from 'Singin' in the Rain.' She sits, staring. We hear them speak.

GENE KELLY V.O.

...a soft summer breeze and you sure look lovely in the moonlight Kathy.

DEBBIE REYNOLDS V.O.

Now that you have the proper setting, can you say it?

GENE KELLY V.O.

I'll try.

As the song 'You Were Meant For Me' begins, CHARLIE closes her eyes and sings along in a delicate whisper. The music takes hold of her and she dances around her room smiling, holding her invisible dancing partner with all her might. As the song winds down, she opens her eyes, sinks down onto the floor and her smile fades.

9.

PETER marks an imaginary line across the stage like a tightrope walker, carrying an A-Z of Luton.

PETER

I'm spending my days mapping the borders of my ASBO.

He goes back and forth over an invisible line, like hopscotch.

Illegal, legal, ill....legal.... legal..... illegal...

It's a game, a laugh, a doss. It's like I'm on 'I'm a Celebrity...'

He laughs.

10.

BARRY's back room. BARRY is sitting in his armchair, watching television. 'You Made Me Love You' by Judy Garland can be heard from CHARLIE's bedroom.

BARRY

I've become a master of disguise,

I've had to,

I'm wearing it now.

Good ain't it?

I laugh at the same things as you do,
I walk down the same streets as you do,
Hum the same songs,
Buy the same newspapers,
But I'm not like you,
I'm nothing like you.
People talk to me – strangers - all the time
They say 'why am I telling you all this?'
Why am I saying all this to you?
I've just got one of those faces.
I smile and I nod as I study you,
I've got o-levels in you,
I've become a specialist in the art of you,
All of you

The music grows louder and louder, engulfing him. He snaps. He grabs a broom and pounds it up against the ceiling.

(This can be created through sound FX if the set does not allow for this)

BARRY
Charlotte!

11.

PETER is still walking along his ASBO line. He looks up at the houses.

PETER
Wish I could go round the front. They'll be having a street party, those Neighbours from Heaven, as I call them. Walking up and down my pavements. *(He tuts)* They'll have closed down the Neighbourhood Watch – no need now I'm out here. But what they don't know is it's like that bit in 'Jaws' when you think it's all okay and the sea's all calm again and you can eat your tea and then the shark goes...

He lunges.

... raaarrrrrrr!

12.

BARRY's back room. BARRY sits in his armchair, in his uniform and watches the television. CHARLIE enters, she is wearing one of her mother's dresses.

CHARLIE
I'm going out.

BARRY watches the television.

CHARLIE
I'm going out Dad. Don't wait up okay?

BARRY watches the television.

CHARLIE (*playfully*)
Dad, I'm going out, I'm wearing a short dress and boys will look at me and I'll let them and I'll probably drink my entire body weight, wake up in a puddle of my own sick later -that okay?

She motions to leave.

BARRY
Oh please don't start Charlotte.

CHARLIE (*laughing*)
Oh so you do talk then?

BARRY's ears are alerted.

BARRY
What did you just say?

CHARLIE
I just said that I'm going/

BARRY
Not that. After that. It. It. It. doesn't matter. (*He notices the dress and it causes him much distress*) What is that? What are you wearing?

CHARLIE
It's Mum's. Do you like it? I like it.

BARRY
Why, why, why are you wearing... what gives you the right to wear her things?

CHARLIE
Mum wouldn't have minded. I didn't think you'd mind.

BARRY
Take it off.

CHARLIE
I don't want to Dad. Is it really that much of a problem?

BARRY
Take it off Charlotte. I'm not going to ask you again okay?

CHARLIE
You're talking to me as if I were a child.

BARRY

Stop acting like one then!

CHARLIE
Are you okay?

BARRY
Yes! I'm fine. I'm sorry. I'm just stressed with work that's all. I didn't mean to snap at you.

CHARLIE
It's just that we haven't had the chance to really talk since I've been back. You just come in. Watch the TV. That's it. Don't you wanna talk to me?

BARRY
Don't get overemotional now/

CHARLIE
I'm not getting overemotional/

BARRY
Just take off the dress and that will be that. All I want is just to have a bit of quiet time before my next shift. Okay? Okay.

CHARLIE
It's been such a long time hasn't it.

BARRY
Well that was your choice.

CHARLIE
What?

BARRY
Forget it.

Pause.
She motions to leave but then suddenly turns and asks...

CHARLIE
Do I look pretty Dad?

BARRY
What?

CHARLIE
Do I?

BARRY goes back to watching television.

CHARLIE
She was really, really beautiful wasn't she?

BARRY

Yes. Yes she was...

CHARLIE

I wish I looked like her. Sometimes.

BARRY

Just take off the dress yeah? Just take off the dress.

CHARLIE

Do I look like her?

BARRY

No. Yes. Sometimes. I mean no. Stop acting like a child. Just do as I say and take off the dress. Please.

CHARLIE

So I take off the dress and you don't talk anymore. So there's just silence again/ No talking...

BARRY

Yes that's it. That's exactly what I want.

CHARLIE

Welcome home Charlie. Welcome fucking home!

She exits.

BARRY

Charlie!

13.

PETER walks downstage with his head buried in a Luton A-Z, he abruptly stops, looks down and notices that he is standing on a yellow line.

PETER

Wooooaaahh!

He looks up at the stars and then looks down at the yellow line. Lights flicker and we hear the violent sound of a train flying past. He is on the train platform.

PETER

I'm on it. I'm on the edge. I've mapped it all out now. The line. Separating the legal from the illegal, the trapped from the free. This line marks it. What are the odds? Who'd-a-thought it?

He holds his head back and laughs.

This is fate this is. My very own 'Great Escape' on a plate. When's the next train?

PETER turns to his right and there sits CHARLIE sitting on a bench, she is listening to her mp3player and it is obvious that she has been crying.

PETER

Well, well, well what do we have here?

He runs towards her.

PETER

Whatcha! I'm Peter Delaney.

CHARLIE

I know who you are.

PETER

You do?

CHARLIE

Saw you in Wilko's.

PETER (*quickly, nervously*)

Yeah about that... I wasn't being a stalker or nuffink/

CHARLIE

You were shoplifting. Told the security guard to go and eat his own shit.

PETER (*relieved*)

Oh right. That time....

(*proudly*) Yeah that was me!

CHARLIE

And you're a vandal. 'Delaney's are nothing but trouble' -that's what my Dad always says.

PETER

Well right now I'm not. And anyway, he can talk.

CHARLIE

Watch it.

CHARLIE

And my mum used to say you were the cock of the road.

PETER (*delighted*)

Did she? I feel well famous with all this chit chat.

Ah. Well. Not for much longer. I'll be on my ASBO tomorrow.

Can't stand near a car or a phone box, can't talk to my mates, can't use my mobile, can't wear a hat or a helmet, can't put my hood up even when it's raining. Can't see my mum. Can't go home.

CHARLIE

Oh.

PETER

Ask me what I can do.

CHARLIE

What?

PETER

Everything else. Everything else I can do. I'll tell you something about your Mum yeah. Me and the Brawler, well we used to er, well she was really beautiful wasn't she. We'd do the whole whistling builder thing and she was a real lady y'know, didn't tell us to 'fuck off' or whatever. Just smiled. She had a beautiful smile. She'd smile and tell us to 'Go home boys!' Course we never did...

CHARLIE

Oh right. Thanks...

PETER

I'm just saying. Am I talking too much? I do that a lot.. It's cos I'm hyperactive. I don't think straight. I think bananas and loop the loops. My Mum says it just comes out of me like a machine gun – ratter tatter. Words scatter out of my brain. I reckon the longer you talk, the longer you live. I don't believe God interrupts people. I think he lets them finish. And I'm not finished. Not that I'm saying all dead people are finished. Some I suppose get interrupted. I don't know. Okay, I'll just shut up now.

CHARLIE laughs.

PETER

What are you listening to?

He pulls her earphones out of her ears.

CHARLIE

What are you doing?

PETER

You like the old stuff don't you?

CHARLIE

How do you know/ that I like...?

PETER

I can hear from down by the old railway bridge. Hey, don't be freaked out or nothing, it's just loud and I've got twenty - twenty hearing innit.

CHARLIE (laughing)

Do you even know what that means?

PETER

Nah.

CHARLIE

You gonna take the piss out of me now is that it?

PETER

No. God no. I mean they're the greats innit. My old man, was into Sinatra. Old/Blue eyes

CHARLIE
Blue eyes.

PETER
Innit. And anyway, I quite like it. I keep it all up here (*pointing to his head*). My own personal mp3. Johnny nicked my real one, says he didn't but he blatantly did. Probably sold it on. But yeah, I soundtrack my days round the sounds of your stereo.

CHARLIE
Didn't think you'd be into all that, 'Peter Delaney'.

PETER
Well just don't you go around spreading that yeah, I have a rep to protect.

CHARLIE (*laughing*)
Whatever.

PETER
You're not scared of me are you?

CHARLIE
Should I be?

PETER
Some people are.

CHARLIE
Well I'm not.

They look at each other.

CHARLIE
I shouldn't be talking to you.

PETER
Why?

CHARLIE
Shouldn't talk to strangers

PETER
What, are you like nine?

CHARLIE
I'm just saying.

14.

BARRY is on his bus. GIRL is giving someone the 'V's

BARRY (*under his breath*)
Yeah and to you mate.

GIRL
The state of him...

BARRY shakes his head.

GIRL
Do you get many of them?

BARRY
All the time. Course we don't get the real messes, they're left to taxi drivers. Poor sods.

Beat.

Although a young lad did spit in my face the other day.

GIRL
Twat.

BARRY
You see the dregs of the gene pool travelling on buses. The weak, the confused, the poor, the old. I used to work in the music industry me, all glamour, parties, meeting new people, loved it, but working this job puts you off people, transporting the scum of this town from A to B.

GIRL
Yeah, that's what I want. Glamour. Parties. That's where I belong that is. Why don't you manage me Barry?

BARRY
What?

GIRL
Barry, I'm the next big thing!

BARRY laughs.

GIRL
Look, nobody's going to do deals with a fifteen year old girl, are they?

BARRY
Sixteen tomorrow.

GIRL
Huh?

BARRY
That's what you said isn't it? Sixteen tomorrow?

GIRL

Er, yeah but even so - they still wouldn't talk to me. But they would with you.

BARRY

Would they?

GIRL

You said you were in the business.

BARRY

A long time ago.

GIRL

I bet you still know how it works.

BARRY looks.

GIRL

What's the matter with you? Don't you want to be part of the next big thing?

BARRY

That's you, is it? Better get your autograph now while you're still using public transport.

She laughs.

15.

Back on the train platform. PETER and CHARLIE are sitting on the bench.

PETER

Do you believe in an afterlife?

CHARLIE

Sorry, what?!

PETER

Heaven? Hell? Nothingness? What do you reckon?

CHARLIE

That's a pretty heavy question to ask someone you met about five minutes ago.

PETER

We're not strangers.

CHARLIE

Practically are.

PETER

Well you seem to know just about everything there is to know about me-eee, right?

CHARLIE

Well I don't know. I guess no-one knows. Not really.

PETER

I've been thinking about it a lot recently, about where we all go.

Pause.

CHARLIE

And... ?

PETER

I believe there's a load of stuff going on up there man. I don't think this is all there is.

CHARLIE

Well, there *is* a big world out there.

PETER

Forget about what's going on down here. I'm talking about up there.

CHARLIE (*not listening*)

God. I wish I could get out of here and I've only been back a couple of days.

PETER

Well, looks like you're out of here to me. You're about to get on a train aren't you?

CHARLIE

Only to a party in town, nothing special, to be honest I don't even really want to go.

PETER

What's wrong with Luton?

CHARLIE

There's nothing here that's good. Except Dad of course and home. It's just...being here makes me feel uneasy, like I'm on the edge of something, like I'm standing outside, looking in and missing all the good stuff. I mean London is only down the road really, but it feels like a million miles away. It's all alone Luton is. And well aesthetically speaking, it's not exactly the Lake District is it?

PETER (*mimicking her*)

'Oooh aesthetically speaking'

She laughs.

PETER

Well I reckon it's alright innit. I like it. All my mates are here. It's the longest I've ever stayed in a place. Family are always moving around y'see.

CHARLIE

Are you-?

PETER

A gypsy? A gyppo? A little Irish scally?

CHARLIE

I wasn't gonna say that.

PETER

You were thinking it.

CHARLIE

Sorry.

PETER

S'alright, I'm not bothered and we ain't gypsies, we're staying put now. My mum's not well. And anyway, Luton's my home. Our home innit. I mean it ain't anything special, but where is? We're all living, walking, talking under the same stars. It's not all 'Easyjet' and factory fumes y'know. It's total magic. You heard of whatshisname? The first guy who went up on the moon/ Armstrong

CHARLIE

Neil Armstrong.

PETER

Yeah that's it. Neil Armstrong! He's my hero. I know everything about him yeah. He's the space cadet's space cadet! On that mission, before the moon-landing, he was flying through space, right, looking out the window, at The Universe. One side - Earth, 'bout the size of a football – other side he sees – a fifty foot, glowing, white angel. Can't believe it, thinks he's seeing things, thinks he's going mad, so he doesn't say anyfin. To anybody. Puts it on the back burner. Comes back down to Earth and he's a big hero. First man on the moon and all that. Parades, medals, the lot. But he's different, he's changed – and not just 'cos he's floated out there. Fast forward years, right – he's writing his life story. He writes about the angel. Starts getting these letters, from all over the world, from ex-astronauts and retired Russian Cosmonauts. They've read his book – and get this, right, get this – they've all seen exactly the same thing. Fifty foot angels...

Charlie, (*pointing to the sky*) it's all happening up there.

CHARLIE

But we're not up there. We're down here.

PETER

I know. Cool though innit.

CHARLIE

It's just weird being back. Maybe it's true : 'You can't go home again.'

PETER

Rubbish!

CHARLIE (*playfully*)

God. I must be off my head talking to the likes of you.

PETER smiles.

CHARLIE
And anyway, how'd you know all that?

PETER
What, about Neil and the angels?

CHARLIE
Yeah.

PETER
Found a book about it down the underpass - read all about it.

VOICE OVER.
The train now approaching platform 1 /

PETER
That's you/

VOICEOVER
is the 20:18 First Capital Connect Service to Kings Cross St. Pancras.

CHARLIE
Aren't you getting on?

PETER
Nah, I'm not here for that and anyway I can't can I?

CHARLIE
Thought it all started tomorrow?

PETER
Yeah. I reckon I'm gonna stay here though. Here's where it's happening. On the edge!

CHARLIE
You're the one who's off his head.

PETER
Yeeaaaaah.

CHARLIE
G'night.

PETER (*shouting nervously*)
You wanna go out sometime?

CHARLIE
Why?

PETER
Cos you're on your own/..like me

CHARLIE
I'm not on my own/

PETER
Cos I made you smile. Cos we like the same things. Cos I...like you/

CHARLIE
I don't, I er..I have to go.

PETER
No you don't! You don't even want to go!
Okay... well think about it yeah!
I'll be here!

We hear the sound of a train passing. Lights flicker. CHARLIE disappears. PETER looks up at the stars and then puts his head in his hands. He is totally embarrassed.

PETER
Fucked it!

The lights fade.

16.

BARRY's bus. BARRY and the GIRL are giggling. The GIRL starts tickling him.

BARRY
What are you doing?

She continues tickling him.

BARRY
Get off. I'm driving yeah.

She makes a grab for him again.

BARRY
Oi. What does that sign say? 'Dont distract the driver'. You don't know what you're doing.

GIRL
Why? Who getting a whatsit?

BARRY
Hey – ey- ey. You're not even full fare. Don't you forget that.

GIRL
Hasn't stopped any of the other drivers from round here.

BARRY
You're not.../

GIRL (*interrupts, indignant*)

I'm not a mega-driver! I travel for free. Mega-drivers have to shag the driver at the end of the night.

BARRY

That's disgusting that is.

BARRY's eyes are back firmly on the road.

GIRL

And anyway, what difference will it make if I'm full fare?

BARRY

All the difference.

17.

A dancing neon. CHARLIE sits downstage. We hear the sounds of a party in full motion.

CHARLIE

I'd never seen such social obesity.

This party should have monitored its guests for moral suitability.

Why did I exchange romance for a life like this?

Where religion is exhibition no kiss a stolen kiss.

To me, this party feels so empty

It's like New Year's Eve.

But how empty is the person, who doesn't have the guts to just leave?

Human strobe is created

Not by light, but by all your girlfriends tits.

My escapes to the toilet and mini-bar are not for you.

I'm about to call it quits.

Lights slowly go up on PETER down at the railway bridge. He has a can of cider in his hand. Throughout the following he is carving CHARLIE's name into the wall using a pocket knife and giggling quietly.

I had nowhere to go but to take a direct route to Hangover Square.

With a double vodka and coke I grabbed this spot, on this here sofa and clung there.

Until some kid comes in totally drunk says that she's got a crush on some bus driver who does the route round Marsh Farm flats

I said 'Whatever love, there's one thing that's certain: all bus drivers are TWATS'

And I start thinking about the dress.

And my mum, and all her songs and all the things I missed

How could I wear it? Bring her here... subject her to THIS.

By now the room is spinning and I'm definitely wasted

I don't belong here

I knew that let's face it.

I storm out of there

Ignored the dirty looks they all gave me...

The next thing I know...

I've run into the likes of Peter Delaney!

PETER runs on stage, grabs her hand, they whirl around. He's carrying a huge bottle of cider. The party music snaps off. They are now underneath the railway bridge.

PETER
We'll be safe here. Too fat to get through that fence innit.

CHARLIE
Do you nick that stuff all the time?

PETER shrugs.

CHARLIE
You do don't you? Oh my/God..

PETER
Go on have a swig. Tastes better when it's free!

CHARLIE
You shouldn't be doing stuff like that y'know, you'll get caught.

PETER
What? I'm eighteen!

CHARLIE
That's not really...the point... oh god...I think I just threw up in my mouth.

PETER
Lovely(!) You alright?

CHARLIE
Yeah, think so. Just feeling a bit light headed.

PETER
Like yer dress.

CHARLIE
Thanks it's my Mum's. I've not been down here in years, my mum wouldn't let me. Said it was full of scallies and druggies.

PETER shrugs.

CHARLIE
Look at all that rubbish...

PETER
People throw half their lives down here. I've found loads-a-stuff.

CHARLIE
Err, pigeons freak me out a bit.

PETER

Nah, they're alright.

CHARLIE

My friend back at uni - she's terrified of them. If she sees one she just freaks out, goes mental.

Beat.

Funny though.

PETER

Nah, they're safe innit. Now I can't go home they're like my new family. I paint their tails with ink – in different colours. My favourite's Betty and when I'm walking round if I spot her and see her flying in the sky I'm like 'that's my kid, that's my kid that is!' I sing to 'em sometimes too.

CHARLIE

Yeah? What do you sing?

PETER

All sorts.

CHARLIE (*drunkenly singing, badly*)

'You weere meant forrr meee and I was meeeant forrr youuuu!'

PETER

Yeah, yeah, yeah I know that one, that's from that film, where he's singing in the rain.

CHARLIE

Yeah 'Singin in the Rain'

PETER

Yeah, whasitcalled?

CHARLIE (*giggling*)

'Singin' in the Rain'

PETER

Suppose you think I'm stupid.

CHARLIE

No. No, I don't. Haven't you ever seen it though?

PETER

Nah.

CHARLIE

Not even at Christmas? That's crazy.

We used to watch it every Christmas eve. Me and Mum. Mum loved Gene Kelly, said he was exactly how a man should be. Romantic...

PETER
Check!

CHARLIE
But masculine...

PETER pulls up his sleeve to reveal his 'muscles'.

PETER (*nodding*)
Definitely check!

CHARLIE
You wish!

They laugh.

CHARLIE
But seriously, there's just something so safe about hearing that lion roar at the very beginning. Like a fire, a big, big warm fire igniting and you know for one hour and forty minutes you're there. Safe. The world just falls away. And then when Gene runs on stage at the end and starts singing 'Lucky Star' you start to feel afraid. The real world looms. It's that Sunday night feeling, that alarm clock ringing feeling. And you miss it when it's gone.

Pause.

You really miss it when it's gone.

PETER is staring at her.

CHARLIE
Why are you staring at me?

PETER
Sorry. I was just... having a look.

CHARLIE
And it reminds me of being small.

PETER
What?

CHARLIE
That music –and it reminds me of Mum.

PETER
Yeah? She liked that did she?

CHARLIE
Yeah. Always had shit loads of old cassettes in the car. My Dad used to sing. Mum used to always tell him to shut up but I reckon she really loved it. She used to secretly smile into her shoulder, so he

couldn't see. But I could -in the wind mirror -I'd see it.

Er, you're still looking at me...?

PETER smiles at her -he doesn't take his eyes off her for a second.

PETER

You sound different now. You know that?

CHARLIE

Huh?

PETER

Different since you came back from university.

CHARLIE

Not this rubbish again!

PETER

What? I'm just saying!

They giggle.

18.

BARRY's bus. Several people hop aboard including SHARON. BARRY and the GIRL continue their conversation. BARRY ignores the new passengers as they flash him their passes. As SHARON enters she clocks the presence of the young GIRL. She sits and listens to the following conversation.

BARRY

Yeah you're pretty good y'know. You might have something. You sound like a young Peggy Lee.

GIRL

Peggy who?

BARRY

Peggy who?! You don't know who Peggy/Lee is!

GIRL

Ohhhh, manage me, Barry!

BARRY

I can't.

GIRL

Come on, please.

BARRY

I'm not s'posed to.

GIRL

Why not? All the drivers've got second jobs.

BARRY

Could get in trouble.

GIRL

How can you get in trouble? I won't tell anyone. You won't tell anyone.

BARRY (*he looks around. He clocks SHARON*)

People could get the wrong idea.

GIRL

I don't care.

BARRY

I do. That's how it starts. People start whispering, nudging each other, not looking you in the eyes. Older man and a younger girl. That's how people are.

BARRY can feel SHARON's eyes burning into the back of his head.

GIRL

Barry, this is professional. You would be my manager. I'd be your protégé. That's it. Give it a month, yeah? If you think I'm crap, we'll forget it. No hard feelings. But give me a chance. We could be a little bit magic, you and me. Magic.

BARRY

One month?

GIRL

Trial period. No strings.

BARRY

If we do it, we're going to do it properly.

GIRL squeals.

BARRY

Your stop.

GIRL kisses him on the cheek and skips off the bus. BARRY touches his cheek. He's devastated. It is SHARON's stop too, as she exits, she turns to BARRY...

SHARON

Barry.

BARRY

Sharon.

SHARON

Glad to have your girl back home are ya?

BARRY

Er, yeah. S'great.

SHARON

She's a good kid.

BARRY

Who? 'er? (*meaning the GIRL*) I don't really know her to be honest.

Pause.

She stares at him.

SHARON

I meant *Charlie*. Your daughter. Wake up Barry.

SHARON exits the bus, leaving BARRY to stare into space.

19.

Underneath the railway bridge. PETER and CHARLIE have been drinking.

PETER

The moon is a madman tonight!

CHARLIE

You say funny things!

PETER

I do?

CHARLIE

Yeah. (*She sighs*) I don't wanna go back home.

PETER

You don't have to. We'll stay here forever. What do you want to do? I know, I'll, I'll nick us a car. I can nick us a car and we'll drive to the seaside. Or a boat. I could if you wanted me to. We could go to America! I'll nick us a Cadillac. The ones with the batmobile wings and we'll drive to where all those old films were filmed. I'll show you the stars. Proper stars. C'mon, let's go, let's go now.

CHARLIE

I can't. My Dad.

PETER

So?

CHARLIE

I can't leave him.

PETER
He'd be alright.

CHARLIE
I'm not sure if he would. I can't.

PETER
I thought you hated it round here?

CHARLIE
I do. I do. I just can't.

PETER
Alright. Some other time then yeah?

CHARLIE
Yeah, some other time...

PETER
Is he worth it though Charlie? After what he did?

CHARLIE
Allegedly!

PETER
Alright, alright. 'Allegedly'.

CHARLIE
What are you trying to say? You think he did it don't you?

PETER
I just hope you're safe that's all/

CHARLIE
And who are you? I don't know you from Adam! You have no right to judge other people/

PETER
I'm not judging anybody/

CHARLIE
When you're just a thug! My Dad is a good man. A good man. You don't know anything about him.

PETER
A thug? Is that what you think?

CHARLIE
You think you're some big dreamer and that you're different but you're just like everyone else round here.

PETER

Hey, calm down. I never said nothing about him. Maybe he did do it. Maybe he didn't. Maybe he just made a mistake/I don't know.

CHARLIE

Bullshit. You've made your mind up.

She gets up and motions to go.

PETER

Okay I'm sorry! I'm sorry. I had no right.

Come on, don't go. I worked hard to get you down here yeah.

Charlie, I think you're the best idea God ever had. His greatest hit. Honest.

They look at each other

PETER

At least let me walk you home.

CHARLIE

No.

PETER (*feeling rejected*)

Okay then...

CHARLIE

I want to stay.

PETER

Okay. We'll stay.

20.

BARRY's bus.

BARRY

I've been in love twice in my life. First time, was with my wife, Diane. It was sort've like the films y'know bursting into song and all that. We argued like cat and dog but I felt alive. I finally felt like I was participating in life rather than helplessly watching it pass me by. I felt clean. I felt safe.

The second time felt like a complete absence of joy, feeling sick, all the time.

It was like realising that I was someone else.

Slow fade.

21.

Underneath the railway bridge.

CHARLIE

Ever wish you could go back in time Peter?

PETER

Nah, not now. Not ever...

CHARLIE

Is that our house? Doesn't look like our house from here.

She gasps.

You can see right into my room.

Beat

PETER

Er.. yeah. S'weird not being able to hear your music actually.

CHARLIE

I should close my curtains more. You can see all my posters from here. Hi-ya Gene! Hi-ya Donald and Debbie!

She drunkenly smiles at PETER.

Hi-ya Peter.

They look at each other. PETER goes to kiss her but she pulls away suddenly. She shudders

CHARLIE

I feel sick.

PETER rubs her back hesitantly, she looks terrible.

PETER

Want some spliff? Keeps it down.

CHARLIE

No, I don't smoke. Oh my god. I'm gonna feel rough tomorrow...

Peter, I wish life could be like that (*she points up at her window*) just like all of that, just like them songs (*she starts to well up*).

PETER

I know you do.

CHARLIE

Gimme some of that...

PETER

Are you sure?

CHARLIE

Yeah.

PETER reverses the spliff and tenderly gives CHARLIE a blowback. She coughs a little and then comes back for more.

22.

BARRY's bus, he has pulled over.

Under the bridge, CHARLIE and PETER are now both very drunk and stoned. They're doing a mirroring exercise. PETER's copying CHARLIE.

BARRY stares straight ahead for what feels like a very long time.

BARRY

Still very mysterious, you know, the sea. We know more about the moon than we know about the oceans. Did you know, the sperm whale can hold its breath for an hour? It takes a breath at the same pressure that we breathe, but its food is a thousand metres deep. Think of that.

CHARLIE and PETER's game graduates to playful touching and stroking. CHARLIE is awkward at first but PETER is very sweet and gentle with her.

BARRY

I saw it on the telly. After a hundred metres, the sunlight dissolves. Temperature drops. The pressure is crushing the whale's lungs. But still it goes deeper, down to the bottom. It's all hide and seek down there. Predators and food. At a thousand metres, there's no light at all. The sperm whale only goes down there to feed. Other creatures never leave the dark. Ever.

CHARLIE is holding PETER's cheek in her palm. He reciprocates and they pull together for a kiss.

BARRY

Gulper eels with metre long tails and enormous mouths. The fangtooth, teeth so big it can never close its mouth. It just glides around in total darkness, mouth wide open, knowing it's only a matter of time...

PETER spreads out his coat on the ground and they lie down on it.

BARRY

Some creatures have actually grown their own headlamps, and others evolve into luminescence. You see, despite the predators, despite the danger, there's still the need *to be seen*. Being seen is more important than being alive. You could see them on the telly: burning red; neon blue. Beacons in the vast emptiness of the deep, black sea.

Lights spill and BARRY spots the GIRL. She is standing outside the bus. She smiles alluringly and walks out of the light. He nods tentatively.

PETER is now on top of CHARLIE They hold each other tightly. CHARLIE gasps.

We hear the sounds of sirens and rain.

Slow fade to black.

23.

Early morning. CHARLIE'S bedroom. CHARLIE is sore and hungover. She sits up in her bed. She gets up and puts on the record 'You Were Meant For Me' by Gene Kelly and Debbie Reynolds. She cries softly. Soon she starts heaving. In great distress, she smears her black eye make-up down her face. As she begins to vomit, the lights begin to fade.

24.

The railway bridge. Sunrise.

PETER

Last night I walked Charlie home and the pavements lit up our feet. I looked into her eyes. Eyes like midnight pools. I'd shagged a lot of girls but I never 'made love' to any of them though. Sounds naff dunnit. I sound like a right poof but...

I didn't think it belonged to me. I thought 'making love' only belonged to black and white films - not down the underpass. With her.

It was like every part of us was connected and everything was pre-written. Planned. Meant to be. Like some angel had lassoed the moon, pulled it closer, shaped her face just right.

Totally perfect.

I want to tell her.

I want to tell her how I feel about her. Tell her that I know that all those songs that's she's playing; I know what they mean now.

They're about me. Me and Charlie!

25.

Wilkinson's. SHARON stands with her arms crossed. She is looking up at the smashed window. CHARLIE enters.

SHARON

Jesus Christ. Have you seen this? Charlie? Have ya?

CHARLIE

Can't miss it Sharon.

SHARON

Well I suppose not. It's a bloody monstrosity innit darlin'.

These people, these 'hoodies' or whatever you call 'em. Make me sick they do. I mean what did we do? What did we do to them?

CHARLIE

I suppose it doesn't really matter.

SHARON
What doesn't?

CHARLIE
If we *did* anything or not.

SHARON
No, yeah, you're right darlin' it doesn't. It don't matter. Makes yer sick. Ooh, you're looking a bit peaky darlin'. You alright? Go to that party in the end did ya?

CHARLIE
Yeah. Didn't stay long though.

SHARON
No? Well at least you gave it a go and your young, you should be enjoying yourself/

CHARLIE
'Enjoying yourself' – I know. Thing is, as soon as I arrived at that stupid party, I remembered a lot of the reasons why I never wanted to come back to this place, and after that, the rest of the night is a bit of a blur to be honest.

SHARON
That'll be the drink no doubt.

CHARLIE
My head is pounding.

SHARON
You want some water?

CHARLIE
Sharon.

CHARLIE
Yes, love.

CHARLIE
I think I may have done something really stupid last night.

SHARON
Go on.

CHARLIE
Promise you won't say anything - to anyone.

SHARON
As if I would.

CHARLIE
I slept with someone last night.

SHARON
Right...

CHARLIE
And well I don't really remember the details.

SHARON
Well, we've all been there love.

CHARLIE
Not me. Not ever. Not 'til now.

SHARON
I see. Well were you safe? That's the most important thing.

CHARLIE
Yes. I think so. I hope so. God, I hadn't even thought of that.

SHARON
Very important to think about these things.

CHARLIE
I know. I know. I'll take care of that. I'm just not that type of... I don't do things like that. That's not me.

SHARON
Maybe it is you.

CHARLIE
No. It's not.

SHARON
Who is he? Do you like him?

CHARLIE
He's Peter De...
He's just a friend. Not even that. I mean, I barely know him. Oh God, I'm a slut aren't I?

SHARON
No! I think you're being too hard on yourself sweetheart. Come on.

CHARLIE
Everything's going wrong Sharon. I had a plan. I just wanted to...
I just feel so confused and I'm messing it all up.

SHARON
Plan? What plan?

CHARLIE
I wanted to come back and sort things out. All the things I ran away from.

SHARON
Yer Dad?

CHARLIE
Yeah.

SHARON
Charlie love...

CHARLIE
I deserted him Sharon. I did. I left him. What kind of person does that make *me*?

SHARON
There's a reason why you went away and stayed away Charlie. He messed up big time.

CHARLIE
Hold on, I thought you said 'It was a load of rubbish what they said about him' - 'Salt of the earth our Barry' and all that.

SHARON
I know. I know. I just don't know anymore. People around here Charlie... they're saying things.

CHARLIE
Saying what?

SHARON
That it *was* true. That he's at it again, with some girl. Some school girl.

CHARLIE
And you believe that?

SHARON
I don't know – I don't know, do I?

CHARLIE
I thought you were my friend.

SHARON
I am your friend! I just want you to be safe. I care about you love, I do. With all this talk lately, it makes me wonder if *this (pointing up at the window)* is about him n' all.

CHARLIE
You being serious? You think *that* is about my Dad?

SHARON
I've just got a bad feeling about all of this Charlie.

CHARLIE
You know what - I don't want to talk about this anymore.

SHARON

Charlie...

CHARLIE
Will you excuse me for one second?

SHARON
Charlie?

CHARLIE exits. Once she is offstage, her voice is then heard over the tannoy.

CHARLIE
Hello and welcome to Wilkinson's Luton. Thank you and fuck you very much. Oh and I quit!

Lights fade on SHARON.

26.

CHARLIE's bedroom. BARRY enters.

BARRY
Charlie?

She doesn't respond.

BARRY
I know you're not talking to me, right?
I haven't heard a thing out of you all week.
I've got something.
You want it? You want to open it?

She opens it. It's a cuddly toy.

CHARLIE
What is it?

BARRY
It's bedtime bear.

CHARLIE
What?

BARRY
You collected them remember/

CHARLIE
No.

BARRY

You didn't collect them?

CHARLIE
No.

BARRY
You wanna start collecting them/

CHARLIE
No.

BARRY
No?

CHARLIE
How old do you think I am?

BARRY
I know how old you are...

CHARLIE
Do you think I'm seven years old?

BARRY
I thought maybe you would/

CHARLIE
Do I act like a baby to you? Do I look like a baby to you? I don't even know what this is.

BARRY
Oh just forget about it. Just fucking forget about it.

CHARLIE
No we won't just 'forget about it.'

BARRY
Its fine, you don't like it so we'll just shut up about it.

CHARLIE
Okay, fine. Thank you Dad. Thank you so much for the cuddly toy Daddy. Really thank you. I'm over the moon, really. Not embarrassing or inappropriate at all. Happy?

BARRY
Have I done something, something else to warrant *this* reaction from you?

CHARLIE
Well you tell me.

BARRY
Don't play games Charlotte c'mon.

CHARLIE

No really, I want *you* to tell me.

BARRY

Tell you what?

CHARLIE

I just want you to talk to me Dad. I just want you to talk to me, that's all.

BARRY

I'm just really run down at the moment, that's all.

CHARLIE

I'm not asking for much Dad.

BARRY

Why can't you understand that some people need space, space to not talk, space to think.

CHARLIE

Is there something going on? Is there something you're hiding from me?

BARRY

Charlotte.

CHARLIE

Dad.

BARRY

No. There isn't. There's nothing.

CHARLIE

Do you promise me?

BARRY

I promise.

CHARLIE

Okay.

BARRY

Okay.

CHARLIE

I want to talk about her.

BARRY

Who?

CHARLIE

Mum.

BARRY
Why?

CHARLIE
What do you mean 'why'?

BARRY
I just meant 'why' as in why now?

CHARLIE
I need to know/

BARRY
What? What do you need to know?

CHARLIE
Did you love her?

BARRY
What? Of course I did. I married her didn't I

CHARLIE
What was she like?

BARRY
You knew her. You know what she was like.

CHARLIE
No, I want to really know. I want to know what she was like. With you.

BARRY
Please Charlotte.

CHARLIE
What was it like when you held her? When you kissed her?

BARRY
Stop asking stupid questions.

CHARLIE
They're not stupid Dad, they mean something, they mean something to me. I never saw you kiss. You know that? Never. Not even once.

BARRY
We kissed. Of course we did.

CHARLIE
Do you even miss her?

BARRY
Of course I do.

Pause

Of course I do.

CHARLIE

I miss her. Did you tell her that you loved her?
How did you hold her?

She grabs him and pulls him close to her.

BARRY

Stop it Charlotte.

She puts his arms around her waist.

CHARLIE

Show me how you held her.

Pause

How you touched her.

He attempts to push her off but she puts up a fight.

BARRY

Stop this. Stop this now.

He pushes her off.

CHARLIE

Come on Dad, am I too old for you, is that it?

He slaps her

CHARLIE *(with a roar)*

I wish it was you! I wish it was you who got killed by that cancer she had. I wish I wasn't left in this house with you, instead of Mum. My mum. My mummy.

BARRY stands still. He is in shock.

Long pause.

CHARLIE *(crying)*

Why can't we talk?

Pause

CHARLIE

I want the truth.

BARRY

You want the truth?

CHARLIE

Yes I fucking do. I want the truth about everything.

BARRY

You know everything Charlie. I thought you understood.

CHARLIE

How? How can I? How can I trust you? Huh?

BARRY

You know me.

CHARLIE

Did you love *her*?

BARRY

I just said that I did. I just said/

CHARLIE

Not talking about mum. Not talking about her. I'm talking about HER. Her. That other. That little girl.

BARRY

I didn't touch her Charlotte.

CHARLIE

I'm not asking if you touched her.

I'm asking if you *loved* her.

BARRY stares.

BARRY

We've gone through all this before.

CHARLIE

No. No we haven't. Not this.

BARRY

I don't know. I don't know.

Pause.

I don't know.

CHARLIE

Not good enough.

BARRY

Let's just forget this. Put it to bed. You have to pull yourself together. You're making yourself worse.

That's all over now, that part of my life is over.

CHARLIE

Really? People are talking Dad. You know that?

BARRY

What? What are they saying?

CHARLIE

So it's true?

BARRY

Is what true? I haven't done anything.

They stare at each other for what feels like a long time.

CHARLIE

I wish I believed you.

I've had enough of this. Dad, I'm going back up north. Gonna get in on a house share.

BARRY

Why? Why would you do that?

CHARLIE

I can't be here.

BARRY

I don't understand this. I don't get this. What did I do to deserve this?

CHARLIE

You? You do?!

Every day I walk around and people look at me for what you have done. What you did. Or *didn't* do. And that's what makes me scum. You make me scum.

What did *I* do to deserve that?

BARRY

Please Charlie.

CHARLIE

I want to know what's going on it that head. I have to know.

BARRY

I can't... I can't.

CHARLIE

I don't want to be a nobody okay.

I have to leave. There are too many memories here. Too many records. Too many songs. And so little, so little of everything else.

BARRY stares.

CHARLIE

Aren't you going to say anything?

*BARRY is shaking, rocking back and forth. CHARLIE waits.
She motions to leave.*

BARRY

I'm sorry if I hurt you sweetheart. I didn't mean to hit you. I'm sorry. I've messed up in my life big time but you... you're perfect. How did someone like me, make something so good? You. I'm proud of you.

She turns to face him.

BARRY

You're not really going are you?

CHARLIE

Let me go Dad. I'm not happy here. I don't belong here anymore.
I'm sorry.

She walks out of the light.

27.

Underneath the railway bridge.

PETER

The other night, after I'd walked Charlie home I got to thinking about people. People who can't see past their own living rooms and what's on the telly and what's in their fridges that feed their fat bellies. People who don't believe in anything like love or fifty-foot angels. These thoughts had me sprinting. I ran through the graveyard, past the pubs and I'm running like I never smoked a fag, like I was born running, as if I'd never been still. I fly down the towpath, over the iron bridge and into the Heineken-scented neon glare of the high street...
Where I put in every window Wilko's has to offer!

He acts it out.

We hear the sound of glass smashing.

I felt free. I did it for me. I did it for Charlie.

He runs out of the light.

28.

BARRY's back room.

BARRY is sweating, he slides his fingers in and out of one another, fitting them together and apart.

BARRY

It was all over in the autumn.

It was a lovely evening. You get some of the best sunsets in autumn. I'd parked the car for fifteen minutes before going home after work.

Ironically, that was the spot I'd first met Diane. We'd go for drives, park the car and have a kiss and cuddle which would end up us having a quick session in the back seat. I was thinking about all those times. Hand –in- hand. Unzipping, opening her lips. Closing my eyes.

It was perfect. She was perfect. It was a perfect moment.

My phone rang and I have no idea why I answered. Why the fuck would you answer? Interrupt that perfect moment.

'What's that?'

'What about Diane?'

Diane. Funny. It seemed perfectly natural. I'd just been thinking about her. Diane.

'She's what?'

No. No. No.

She was sick, terminal, I knew that, but it was still a shock. It always is isn't it?

I looked down at this little thing, this little perfect thing. And she said, wiping her mouth with her school jumper. 'What was that?'

'It's Diane' I said.

'Oh?' she said.

'That's my wife' I said.

'She's dead.'

29.

The train platform. They are shy with one another.

PETER

Where have you been?

CHARLIE

Nowhere.

PETER

I've been here, waiting for you, everyday.

CHARLIE

I'm going back, I'm leaving Luton/

PETER goes to take her hand.

CHARLIE

I'm not here to do that.

PETER

Do what?

CHARLIE

Do those things. That wasn't me.

PETER

Was you.

PETER tries to touch her again. She moves out of his reach.

CHARLIE

No please/

PETER

It was like being in a song...

CHARLIE

A bunch of us are gonna get a house or something together. It's nice up there. You should come up sometime. You'd like it.

PETER

I can't. I'm tagged. I can't leave here can I.

CHARLIE

Oh yeah. Sorry, I forgot.

PETER

I'm up in court next week. For the windows. They say I'm going to prison. Got caught on CCTV. I did it for us Charlie.

CHARLIE

For God's sake. That was you? Why would you do that? I didn't ask you to do that Peter! I'm sorry. I. I. I have to go now. I have some people to see before I catch the train tomorrow.

PETER

I feel like I'm disappearing!

CHARLIE

Please.

PETER

So it never happened then. Makes sense. Felt like a dream.

CHARLIE

I never asked you to do anything/

PETER

You never kissed me, you never laid down with me/

CHARLIE

I was tired/

PETER

Or held my hand/

CHARLIE

Of fighting every day/

PETER
Or stroke my face with your hand/

CHARLIE
Tired of being me/

PETER
You didn't say that I was beautiful/

CHARLIE
I just wanted a night off.

PETER
You used me?

CHARLIE
You know what, I don't even remember it. How do I know you didn't take advantage? A boy like you... I don't even know you.

PETER
You don't mean that.

30.

BARRY's back room.

BARRY
I'd lost control.
I loved my wife. I did. For twenty years I loved her. I nursed her to the very end. I loved her till the very end. When she got sick, when we knew it was terminal, it broke my heart. I don't know how else to describe it.
I felt like I had died.
I died long before she did.
Nurses started to come over more often, they said I needed help, that I couldn't do it on my own.
There I was slowly drifting away from her. This walking dead man.
And *that man* fell in love with someone else.
I couldn't help it.
You can't help who you fall in love with. I couldn't help myself.
When Diane died, it was like I *finally* woke up, I saw it for what it really was and I knew what I had to do.
I put an end to it - with the girl. She was upset. Really upset. She told her parents and they went to the police. Press got involved. Everything. I lost my job. I lost Charlie.
I begged her to take it all back, tell 'em that she had made a mistake. That she was upset.
I asked her to do it for me.
For my family.
For Charlie.

Pause.

I still send her a card on her birthday, every year just saying 'Thank You'.

She'll be sixteen next month.

Pause.

And now?

I'm a good boy now. I used to watch them on the bus. Burgle them with my eyes; map them in my memory but no more.

I'm careful with myself. Over-cautious even. I know where to draw the line. If they're minutes short of sixteen, it doesn't matter because technically it's their birthday, so legally they are. Right on the cusp.

BARRY makes a precise gesture with his thumb and forefinger – it echoes putting in the ticket reel.

I go up to the border.
And that's where I live.

31.

The train platform.

PETER

I don't get you. All those singers. That life. That romance inside your room.

CHARLIE

Stop it/

PETER

Inside your head.

CHARLIE

Stop it Peter/

PETER

It's all here and you don't want it. It's like you're two different people. You're a different person up there inside your room Charlie. We just get the dregs.

CHARLIE

You don't know the first thing about me.

PETER

I do.

CHARLIE

No, you don't, we live in different worlds.

PETER

Come off it.

CHARLIE

We do! I mean you're only eighteen/

PETER

S'hardly a big age gap, come on.

CHARLIE (*rambling, nervously*)

We come from different backgrounds, different families. I mean you haven't even seen 'Singin' in The Rain', not even at Christmas and you've got an ASBO for Christ sake and we look at things differently we do. We do!

PETER

What are you talking about? What are you afraid of Charlie? What are you afraid of? Why are you running, why are you always running away?
This place is a part of you. Always will be.

CHARLIE

Shut up!

PETER

Give us all a break yeah.

CHARLIE

I will -by leaving.

PETER

No. Don't. Don't you see Charlie, this whole thing isn't about Luton - it's about you. You can blame me. Blame Luton. Blame your Dad. Maybe *he* just wanted a night off. Just like you. Give this place a chance Charlie. Give us a chance.

Pause

We hear the sound of a train flying past. The lights flicker and CHARLIE is no longer there. PETER stands alone. Lights fade.

32.

BARRY sits in his back room. There are records scattered everywhere. He looks fragile. Only a lamp switched on beside him lights the space. A soft glow. He is listening to one of the records. After a few moments CHARLIE enters, she has luggage around her feet. She is amazed at the amount of records everywhere. BARRY is staring into space and initially does not appear to acknowledge her.

CHARLIE

I'm all packed Dad...Dad?

Beat.

Who's that?

BARRY

It's us.

CHARLIE

Who?

BARRY

Me and the old quartet. 'The Blue Moons'. It's one of our songs.

CHARLIE

Have I heard this before?

BARRY

Probably not. Your mother didn't like it much. She's right though. We were rubbish.

CHARLIE laughs.

CHARLIE

Do you miss it?

BARRY

Sometimes.

Pause. CHARLIE looks at him.

CHARLIE

I quit my job y'know.

BARRY

Oh? Cos you're on the... off?

CHARLIE

Well yeah, kind of. I told everyone to 'fuck off' on the tannoy!

BARRY

What?

CHARLIE

I know.

BARRY laughs.

BARRY

You're crackers you.

CHARLIE

Dad, I'm sorry for some of the things I said. I didn't mean them.

BARRY

You did/

CHARLIE

I didn't/

BARRY

You did mean them, but it's alright. I deserve them.

They listen to the song together.

CHARLIE

I remember you singing to me when I was a little girl.

BARRY (*looking at her*)

Yeah?

CHARLIE (*nodding childishly*)

Yeah.

Pause.

(singing feebily) 'Heavenly shades of night are falling it's twilight time..'

BARRY

The Platters. Brilliant they are.

CHARLIE

I know. I've got one of their records.

BARRY

Have yer?

CHARLIE

Yeah.

BARRY

1958 - that song was released. Old.... Like your father.

CHARLIE

You're not old.

BARRY

I'm not?

CHARLIE

No. You're... you're retro... vintage.

BARRY

Vintage?!

CHARLIE

Okay retro!

BARRY

'Retro' it is.

They smile.

CHARLIE
Very 'in' y'know.

BARRY
What?

CHARLIE
All things 'retro'.

BARRY
Really?

CHARLIE
Yeah. Everyone's digging out their old stuff. Polishing it, a bit, so it looks as good as new. People aren't throwing stuff out. They're keeping things. It's 'cool' now. It's... 'retro'.

BARRY
Right. That mean you're not gonna throw me out then?

CHARLIE
You're my Dad.

Pause.

CHARLIE
I remember you always lived in this room. Me and Mum would be watching the telly in there and you'd be out here. In your own world.

BARRY
I liked it. Being alone.

Beat

But knowing you were both just in there.

CHARLIE
Yeah watching Corrie or Eastenders.

BARRY
Part of the reason why I stayed out here!

The chuckle.

Beat.

BARRY
Why did you never come back Charlotte?

CHARLIE

In the holidays you mean?

BARRY

At all.

CHARLIE

It was too... too hard.

BARRY

Did you ever think of what it was like for me? Here. No-one in the sitting room.

CHARLIE

I tried not to.

BARRY

Why?

CHARLIE

Because then maybe I would've come home and I didn't want to. I didn't want to come home.

BARRY

You ran away and I had to stay here. This has always been it for me. I didn't have that chance.

CHARLIE

Because of what you did!

BARRY's blood boils.

CHARLIE

Or what you didn't do!

Pause.

And I did want to...understand - believe you – like really believe you and then maybe things could be different and normal, clean and new.

BARRY

They still can. Promise me Charlie, promise me you won't go tonight. Just give it –us - some time.

CHARLIE

I dunno...

BARRY

Till tomorrow? Please.

They look at each other.

CHARLIE

Okay Dad.

Slow fade to black.

33.

BARRY and the GIRL arrive at the old railway bridge. He carries a travel rug over one arm and a bag with booze in it. The GIRL looks older, dressed up.

BARRY

We can make a fire. It'll be like camping.

GIRL

Bit grim, innit?

BARRY

We're together, en't we?

She smiles.

BARRY starts to meticulously spread out the travel rug on top of the old mattress. He takes out a bottle of spirits, opens it. He takes a swig.

BARRY

There you go. Happy Birthday.

The bottle passes between them throughout.

BARRY

Plenty of stars.

He looks at her.

GIRL

What?

BARRY

And future stars.

She giggles.

BARRY

Can I have your autograph?

She play-punches him.

BARRY

Should've told me sooner. I could've planned something special, got you a proper present.

GIRL

I haven't seen you without your jacket on. Never seen your legs before!

She laughs nervously.

Beat.

Tell me what he said about me again.

BARRY
Not again.

GIRL
Go on. It's my birthday.

BARRY
He said he's not been this excited in years. Said you've got your own sound. That's really important – to not sound like anyone else. He said, potentially, you're worth your weight in gold.

GIRL
Worth my weight in gold! (*Shouting*) D'you hear that, Luton?

BARRY shushes her.

BARRY
I've got a daughter, just a little older than you, y'know that?

GIRL
What? You? A Dad? That's mental that is. You seem too young to be a Dad you do.

BARRY
I think she'd like you.

GIRL
Yeah?

BARRY
Maybe one day, you two could be friends. Maybe.

GIRL
I dunno.

BARRY moves over to her. She goes to kiss him. It's gentle.

34.

CHARLIE is in her bedroom. There are boxes everywhere. She restlessly plonks herself on the bed and sighs. The phone rings. She is in two minds but in the end, she does not answer. She lets it go to answer phone. We hear the following message.

CHARLIE
Hello. I'm not able to come to the phone right now so leave a message and I'll get back to you.

SHARON

Charlie? Charlie, are you there dear?

Recognising SHARON's voice, CHARLIE grabs a pillow and places it over her head, covering her ears.

I'm probably the last person you want to talk to at the moment aren't I love?

Pause

I'm sorry love. I hope you didn't mean what you said. What you said over the tannoy I mean...

Charlie, whatever I said, I said because I care about you, but I shouldn't have said it.

I'm a daft old bat I am - you know that? I shouldn't have doubted him. I just worry, you know me. I was just worried about you. You've been like a daughter to me over the years and I don't feel right after what happened. I really don't. I feel horrible love. So, maybe I'll see you at work tomorrow? Maybe.

Okay, well you take care love. Take care. Bye.

AUTOMATED SERVICE

End of messages.

CHARLIE rises from underneath the pillow.

She looks.

Slow fade.

35.

BARRY and the GIRL pull away from their kiss.

Beat.

GIRL

That was nice. Didn't know if you fancied me or not.

He laughs. She suddenly shivers.

BARRY

Course I did.

GIRL

I thought you were fit first time I saw you. Dead handsome I thought.

BARRY

Come off it.

GIRL

I'm serious! God, I'm cold.

He kisses her again.

GIRL
Can you hold me?

He does.

GIRL
That's nice. I feel safe when you hold me. I could stay like this forever.

He puts her hand down his trousers.

GIRL
What's the rush?

They stare at each other.

BARRY
You're perfect.

GIRL
Am I?

He kisses her again. It grows in passion. He climbs on top.

36.

CHARLIE's bedroom. She is sitting up in bed.

CHARLIE
The day Mum died I don't remember crying at all.
Dad was so amazing. He took control of everything. Organised everything.
I didn't speak for two days. Two whole days.
Nothing.
When we went to see her she looked so peaceful, so beautiful. I wanted to tell her.
I never told her how beautiful I thought she was - my Mum.
Dad - he cried like a baby. I couldn't get near him. After days of being in control, being on top of things,
he just lost it. He fell apart. He wouldn't let go of her hand. He had to be prized away from her. I never
heard a grown man squeal like that.
Such pain.

It was the worst day of our lives.

CHARLIE stares into space. Soon she lies down on her pillow and closes her eyes.

Slow fade

37.

Railway Bridge. Post sex.

GIRL

You can see the stars, can't you? Never been down here at night. Usually full of scallies setting fire to things.

BARRY starts crying.

GIRL

Hey, hey. You okay? Did I do something wrong?

BARRY

No, no.

GIRL

Have I/

BARRY

It's not you.

He turns away from her, not wanting her to see him crying.

BARRY

I'm glad we waited.

GIRL

Me too.

BARRY

I'm off next weekend. We could go away – stay in a fancy hotel, what d'you think?

GIRL

Can't next weekend. Having a party. Mum'll be back. She'll be back for my birthday, see. Can do it week after, though. Can we have breakfast in bed?

BARRY

Next weekend?

Beat.

GIRL

Never stayed in a hotel before/

BARRY

Hang on/

GIRL

I'll have to buy a new outfit.

BARRY

You said it was tonight.

GIRL

What?

BARRY
Your birthday.

GIRL
I know. It dun't matter though, does it? My Aunty Val was coming and I... I can't go home/

BARRY
You're sixteen. I told you that was very important.

GIRL
I know.

BARRY
You're sixteen.

GIRL
I lied, alright, I lied. My birthday's not till next week. I'm fifteen.

BARRY
Sixteen.

GIRL
Fifteen.

BARRY scrabbles away from her.

BARRY
Fuck.

GIRL
It's not like it's a massive lie, is it? It's next week. I'm virtually sixteen.

BARRY loses control.

GIRL
Come on, you knew, I'm a shit liar.

BARRY has what looks like an epileptic fit on the floor. It's scaring the shit out of GIRL.

GIRL
It's alright. I won't tell anyone, I swear. It's our secret. I shouldn't have lied. I didn't think you'd mind.

BARRY bursts out laughing, it's hysterical. He can't stop. GIRL doesn't know what's going on. She gets down on her hands and knees to be near to him.

GIRL
Hey, hey, hey, don't worry yourself.

She touches him and he stops laughing; it's like an acid burn.

GIRL

We're special, you and me. We're going away to a fancy hotel, you said.

She touches him again; he writhes as if he's melting.

BARRY

I nearly loved you.

GIRL (*crying*)

I'm worth my weight in gold. We're going all the way you and me/

BARRY

Let me think/

GIRL

I'm not going to mess that up./ Why would I mess that up?/

BARRY

Can't hear myself think.

He puts his hand over her mouth. She struggles.

BARRY

You have messed everything up. Ruined everything.

She thrashes, violently, then suddenly we hear a loud 'snap'. She goes limp. He shakes her, but she's lifeless

BARRY

Come on love. No. No. No. No.

He stares at her for a long time. He's crossed over – he knows it. He's never coming back again. All the doors are slamming shut. He gets all their stuff together, considers putting the blanket over her, changes his mind.

Rain starts to fall.

38.

CHARLIE's bedroom.

CHARLIE is asleep in bed. BARRY enters. He is carrying a highly worn jay cloth and is wearing yellow rubber gloves. He stands for a moment, looking at CHARLIE.

BARRY

Charlie. I've cleaned the bathroom.

CHARLIE (*waking up*)

What?

BARRY

I've cleaned the bathroom. It's been bleached. Flush it before you use it.

CHARLIE

I was sleeping.

BARRY

I've done the back room as well. Yes, yes I've done that. I did that.

CHARLIE

Huh?

BARRY

I didn't Hoover though, no, no, I didn't Hoover. I didn't want to wake you.

CHARLIE

You just did...what time is it?

BARRY

It's err... it's 3.15 a.m.

CHARLIE

You woke me up to tell me about the bloody cleaning?

BARRY

I'll have to go soon. They'll be coming. They'll be on their way. I had to tell you. I had to tell you before I go.

CHARLIE

What are you talking about? Who are you talking about?

BARRY

I've left it clean for you. Everything's disinfected. Everything is clean now *(He starts crying really hard)*

CHARLIE

Dad? What's wrong? What's the matter?

BARRY

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

CHARLIE

You're scaring me. What's happened?

BARRY

I lost. I lost. I lost control. I'll tell you everything. I'll tell you about her. How I loved her, how it was real. Not wrong like this. All of this.

He hugs her hard.

I've been lost. I didn't . I didn't I didn't I didn't mean. I didn't mean. I. I. I want to come home. Let's go home huh? Yeah. No. It's too late. All too late. I know that. I'm the one who has to go away. I'm going Charlie. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry.

CHARLIE
You're not well. I know you're not well.

BARRY
Do you love me?

CHARLIE
Dad.

BARRY
Do you love me Charlie?

CHARLIE
Yes.

BARRY
Please don't ever stop loving me.

He weeps into her arms. She holds him tightly.

37.

PETER is under the railway bridge. He's holding CHARLIE's hair band (or something insignificant that she wouldn't have noticed losing and that we've seen her wearing earlier). He strokes it. He looks and noticed that CHARLIE's light is on.

PETER
Charlie! Charlie!
Are you there? Your light's on!
Charlie!

The light goes off. His heart sinks in disappointment.

I know you wanna leave...

S'funny cos I'd give anything to go home. S'like some happy dream; the kettle's always on in our house. I keep thinking about my Mum. She's overweight – s'not her fault, her legs are bad. She's always cold. Even in the summer, she's freezing. She sits in front of the fire too much, see; she likes to have it up high. I'm always on at her to turn it down, but she likes to have all the bars on. You should see her – legs are like sausages grilled on one side. She can't get out and I can't get in. Can't phone her, she just starts crying and I've always hated all that. S'like being turned inside out. I miss the taste of her tea, and her mithering.

A police siren and a flashing blue light. PETER ducks into the shadows and then comes

back into the light after it has passed.

Sorry! Force of habit.

He laughs.

Charlie?

‘Home...’ It’s like some half-arsed Eden I never knew I had. Till now. I’m on an out of season holiday with no tourists and no sights. I’m not at home and I’m sick for it. I’ve gone from being the Big Balls of Bramingham to the Lost Boy of Luton.

Tears. He tries desperately to hold them back.

Charllieeeee!

We hear the rain.

Slow fade to black.

THE END.

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