

'BORDERING ON CHAOS' WITH CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

'Bordering on Chaos' is a two-act stage play that looks into the small lives of ordinary people. The challenge was to elevate these small lives and instil in them the dramatic action needed to hold the attention of an audience. Each character has a story to tell.

This critical analysis considers the importance of dramatic action in the writing process and looks at ways in which established playwrights have used this in their own work.

Dramatic action is essential for the structural development and character progression within a play and the analysis shows this to be the case.

Confronting Chaos: finding dramatic action in a tale of small lives

'Bordering On Chaos' follows the stories of four individuals who are dealing with the recent loss of one of their community. As it is set in a local small town taxi office, the audience is able to witness how, after the loss of a loved one, one person's actions are able to affect and divide a close community. Some of the characters appear to be coping, but all of them are struggling in their own ways. In this critical analysis I look to explain the importance of dramatic action and how it is used to elevate the lives of my characters. I begin by looking at the structure and why it needs to be focused on when creating and developing the plot line, making reference to professionals in this area. Next I explore the importance of balancing the world inside the taxi office with the world outside, and draw parallels with influences from contemporary and classical playwrights who have achieved this in different ways. Finally, I explore how Aristotle's concept of action (one of the three unities) enables my supposedly boring and aimless characters to come alive onstage.

My previous writing has been based around issues prevalent in modern society. 'Crisis of Faith' (2011) looks at the relationship between a mother and her teenage son. The play focuses on their varied impressions of life and their opposing viewpoints. 'On The Tracks' (2012) explores the relationship between two railway workers at the train station. It shows how, despite their close relationship at work, they have no understanding of each other outside of that situation. In both of these pieces, I looked into stripping down characters and exposing what was really underneath. Despite its dark undercurrents, 'Crisis of Faith' was received well and provoked a lot of laughter. My main intention is to show the difficulties everyone faces and how even those closest to us are sometimes unable to comprehend what is going on. My work is focused on exploring the stories of people who fade into the background on a day-to-day basis. 'Bordering On Chaos' looks into the struggles faced by such ordinary people and how their lives may appear mundane, but are nevertheless important to them. The challenge was then to elevate these small lives and instil the dramatic action needed to hold the attention of an audience. Over the course of the play, it becomes apparent that there are many hidden undercurrents. Maybe people are stronger or not as confident or comfortable with life as they initially appear to be. Through this piece, I explore how people can get so caught up in their determination to survive that those who helped them can be left to fall by the wayside. It is important to remember that, no matter where people go, there is always an option to involve themselves in community life, and that depression can strongly affect decisions and judgements. Potential audiences should be able to relate directly to, or have an understanding of, each character's struggles.

The theme running through 'Bordering On Chaos' is the importance of the life of an ordinary person. Gestalt theory suggests that our experiences (including that of feeling more or less stressed by circumstances) are the result of what happens in the interaction between an individual and their environment. This means that each person will respond physically to something which happens to them. Our bodies emit warning signs when we become upset, stressed or tired, but many people see these as signs of weakness and refuse to accept them. If these reactions are ignored, they will grow and can have a negative impact on peoples' states of mind and their communication with others. The use of characters in 'Bordering On Chaos' demonstrates the varying ways in which stress can affect people, highlighting that it is up to each individual to realise that there are ways of coping and that it

is never too late to ask for help. I grew up in a small town where everyone knows everyone else. Having always been a part of that town, I found it very different living in a big city where more effort needs to be put in to building your own community links. In a taxi office one evening, I met my inspiration for Karl, Mags, Gemma and Saskia. I realised that there are real people whose stories deserve to be heard. The young man who inspired Karl had recently lost his brother in tragic circumstances and was being cared for by the woman who ran the taxi office. I was not initially aware of this. He questioned me about my life which, being different to his own, he seemed not to understand. Another girl came in and started talking, which took the focus away from me, and when he left we were told more information about him. The girl then realised that she had worked on his brother's case at the hospital. One of the places in which community thrives is in the local taxi office where people gather to wait for transport. Those who run this type of place are able not only to recognise their regulars but also to remember where they are coming from and going back to. The person behind the desk is all-knowing, but also may have a protective attitude towards those whom they know well. When part of this community is damaged, how obvious is the injury and how quickly and wisely do people respond? On returning home I thought of how interesting it was that everyone had been so closely linked. I then began working out how my characters could be developed and decided to write about how this close community copes when one of them is damaged. Every individual has a story to tell, whether it is about knowing where the next pay cheque will be coming from, bringing up children, whether they can have a holiday this year or how they can cope with loss. Exploring these difficulties provides an opportunity to witness what each character has to deal with on a daily basis. Some of life's difficulties can be coped with by building communities which provide a sense of relief from the everyday norm. The problem is that these communities can also add immense pressure and be lacking in understanding and support when it is really needed.

I believe that theatre is an essential part of daily life. Mike Bradwell, founder of Hull Truck Theatre Company, (2010, p.xiii) describes theatre as '*not a matter of life or death, it's much more important than that.*' People choose to assume different characters as a means of coping with different situations; children are educated through performance art and theatre lives on to tell peoples' stories and give perspectives of life long after the writers and performers have died. Bradwell's main reason for becoming involved in theatre was the influence of Joan Littlewood, who stated at the Edinburgh Theatre Conference in 1963 that '*all drama is piss-taking and we are all here to take the piss*' (cited in Bradwell 2010, p.2). Bradwell watched her production of 'Oh What a Lovely War' in 1963 in the West End and '*knew something different was going on*' (2010,p.2).

Through their stories, my characters are able to explore themselves and build an understanding of their own world in the eyes of the audience. These characters aim to reflect people walking past us in everyday life. Being able to recognise and sympathise with the characters, or directly relate to them through personal experience, will make my work accessible to a wider audience. Theatre has developed and changed over the years; Bradwell states that '*real theatre must have the same dirty corruptive influences as rock 'n' roll*'(2010,p.xiii), and that writers and performers should stay true to their own experiences, take influence from the past and share what they have learnt with today's audience. Littlewood's experimental use of improvisation, a stepping stone which was '*derided at the time by actors and directors*' taught performers '*to move from comedy to tragedy at the drop of a hat*'(Bradwell, 2010, p.2). Littlewood's approach combined with Chekhov's declaration

that he made theatre '*in the hope of influencing them to make a new and better life for themselves*' (cited in Bradwell, 2010, p.2) inspired Bradwell to use theatre as a way of expressing issues that he thought needed to be aired. Times have changed since the sixties; corporal punishment in schools has been abolished, we now have equal rights for both women and men and it is illegal to discriminate against someone due to race, sexuality or disability. Despite these big changes, we are still not living in a utopian society: wars are still happening, governments are making bold decisions which affect entire countries and many people are only thinking about how their actions affect themselves. Through my work, I intend to highlight some of these issues and encourage audiences to take away what has been said and to think about it and about how such matters could be changed for the better. 'Bordering On Chaos' is a ninety minute stage play which allowed me to explore, through four characters, how some people embrace the help available and move forward, whereas others have more difficulty putting aside their pride, accepting that they are not as capable as they once were, or do not fully comprehend the new situation. Until they can do so, life will continue to be a struggle. The play is divided into two sections which look into psychological problems and issues aimed at an adult audience.

My first challenge was to focus the play. As the title suggests, 'Bordering On Chaos' is about chaotic lives which are shifting and changing and how this can result in the disintegration of a community. My first draft lacked structure. Waters (2010, p.1-2) talks of '*offering an inventory of conventions*', believing that many writers expect to discover a ready-made play through classic guides to playwriting. Instead, such guides should provide ideas from which the writer can choose which points would be most effective for the development of their own work. I created interestingly desperate characters who express themselves well, but the multiple locations took away from the character development. My script lacked plot development, but David Edgar's (2009, p.17) reference to Aristotle's 'Poetics' provided me with a means of resolving this problem. Edgar talks of the '*necessary unities of time, space and action*'. Aristotle's Poetics is considered to be a '*problematic text*', but through '*later interpretations*' of his work, the three unities have become a reliable source when learning how to build a comprehensible plotline and ensuring that it is well structured. Many Ancient Greek plays were set in one space, over a specific amount of time, with one main action. I found that Aristotle's three unities, space, time and action, provided a guideline for writing what Aristotle would consider a quality piece of theatre. I believe that the unities are an essential way of providing structure for the plot. They are like building blocks; a means of developing various situations and characters. These points have worked for Ancient Greek plays like Sophocles' 'Oedipus Rex' and 'Antigone', where all the action happens within one place (their cities). Each story takes place in one specific timeframe and the main action is then followed throughout the entire piece. Oedipus presents a prince turned away, who is determined to take control of the throne; Antigone presents the need to defy her uncle Creon and respectfully bury her brother. Aristotle refers to how Epic poems diversified into comedy and tragedy once the unities were in place, resulting in what we recognise as theatre today. Littlewood used improvisation in the 1950s, which was a key means for dramatising epic poetry in Ancient Greece. The skills used in Ancient Greece have developed and changed to suit modern theatre. This ancient work is being produced and watched in modern times because the stories translate well into modern day life.

David Edgar (2009, p.41) talks of how important the social rank of characters in Ancient Greek and Roman theatre is, with the audience able to look up to the 'high placed'

characters who fall from grace in tragedy and look down on the 'middle and low life' in comedy. These stereotypical representations still entertain people today, in exaggerated farcical performances such as pantomime or in the tragic storylines followed in ballets such as 'Swan Lake'. In theatre today, the representations of people are not so far from our own. They present situations which may be different to our own experiences, but we are able to relate to the characters and imagine ourselves feeling the same, whether it is as part of a gang in 'West Side Story' experiencing expectation, young love and dramatic loss or as someone who has lost their way and is unsure whether they can trust the person they are travelling with, as in 'Waiting For Godot'. Thus we see that Ancient Greek theatre styles resonate with a modern-day audience and that Aristotle's unities are still relevant in modern-day theatre.

David Edgar describes action as a '*slippery*' term used sometimes to describe '*everything that happens on stage (dramatic action), sometimes it refers narrowly to physical activity (stage action)*' (2009, p.17). In this essay I am specifically researching dramatic action and how it can be found in the lives of ordinary people. I understand action to be the main driving force of the plot. The characters can be created and the scene set, but action is required so that the plot can develop and a story can be told. My intention has been to update the perception of a middle or low-class person from the Ancient Greek representation. Times have changed; the class system does still exist but is no longer a means of defining people's physical and emotional responses to daily life. Previously, a person from the lower end of the class system did not have as far to fall in society as someone of a high class status. This meant that the fall of the lower class person would be seen as comical and that of the high class person tragic. 'Bordering On Chaos' provides proof that people may not be well off or living a luxurious lifestyle, but when they lose everything it does not mean that their fall hurts any less.

Originally, 'Bordering On Chaos' had multiple locations and was spread out over a period of six months. Following an initial read-through, I decided to adopt Aristotle's unity of space by focusing all of the action in a single physical space, and his unity of action by limiting the subplots. In turn, I had to provide reasons for the characters not being able to leave this space. When performing this piece in June 2012 Karl developed a limp which restricted his movement and meant that he would not be able to walk far. This added depth to his character as, forced to stay in one place and having difficulty expressing himself vocally, he became defensive when other characters questioned how he had injured himself. Containing 'Bordering On Chaos' within the course of one evening meant that nowhere else would be open. There was hope of alternative transport when tensions ran high, but the possibility became non-existent. In 'Bordering On Chaos' I was able to find a one-off dramatic incident, the death of Karl's brother, which affected the people in my ordinary taxi office. The main action is getting Karl home. Edgar (2009, p.17) says that '*dramatic action provides a means of encapsulating the narrative progression*'. The characters in 'Bordering On Chaos' have similar problems dealing with the issues and weaknesses in their lives. They each contain their emotions and problems within themselves because of their fear that voicing them out loud will show weakness. They join together, attempting to look after Karl in a manner they deem appropriate. Each character tries to help Karl by contacting taxis, offering him lifts and talking to him, but he refuses them which builds the action and pushes forwards the narrative progression. Both Aristotle and Edgar (2009, p.41) believe that '*character takes the second place*' when writing plays. I disagree, as each of my characters responds to their issues in

different ways, such as growing angry with one another or detaching themselves from what is happening. These characters are just as important as the plot line as, when their support backfires, it may upset and frustrate them, but the characters being able to express themselves in these ways pushes the action forwards. Dramatic action is used in this play as a way of moving the plot forwards and showing just how much is happening within the characters' supposedly depressing, mundane and predictable existences.

There are limited means of gaining information within the taxi office. It is a very basic office with a taxi radio and a phone. It being late at night in a quiet, small town, there are not many people walking past. Calls do come in earlier in the evening, but as time moves forward they become less frequent. Instead, most of the information shared about the outside world comes from the characters themselves. Throughout the entire first act, Mags and Karl struggle to express their emotions. It is only as tensions run high in the second act (Act 2 Scene 2 p.100), as the dramatic action starts being pushed forward, that the characters become more honest about how they feel.

MAGS: What the hell does that mean?

SASKIA: It means I'm fed up. Fed up of you. I'm fed up of this town.

MAGS: Why don't you piss off then?

Communication between these characters, vocal and physical, is the key to moving the action forwards. Introducing Gemma and Saskia later in the play provided the opportunity for Mags and Karl to build their characters during the first act. Throughout the first act, Mags and Karl talk of their lives and how they believe that outside forces have caused their lives to become chaotic and unsatisfying. Their being fixed in position in the taxi office also allows the audience to understand their relationship and the protective feelings that they have for each other by focusing attention on the dialogue. Gemma and Saskia arriving in the taxi office at this point adds a new dimension to the play. They show a contrast to Mags' and Karl's negative perspectives on life. Gemma and Saskia are not problem free but, rather than trying to avoid change, they are looking to the future and trying to deal with what has happened in a positive way. They provide new perspectives on how to cope with the loss of one of their community. Their excitable behaviour and constant chatter in this fixed location is a stark contrast to Karl and Mags' steady and sometimes silent communication.

David Campton's 'The Cagebirds' (1976) uses a different method to contain the characters. He encages them in one room of an institution and, rather than letting them move about, makes all of the characters content in this restricted environment, except for the Wild One who says 'You can't be alive because if you were you'd be charging at that door with me this very minute' (p.13). Campton uses not only physical barriers, but also the psychological barriers that build up after years of entrapment. This surreal exploration of the instability caused when one person does not conform to the everyday norm made me question what would be the result if none of the characters wanted to be in this environment. As with Campton's Cagebirds, who are so reliant on the room they have always lived in, the taxi office in 'Bordering On Chaos' provides safety and security for the characters, and moving away from it could make them more vulnerable. Because of this, I was able to delve deeper into my characters, analysing and exploring how one person's death could affect a community. In 'The Cagebirds', it is only when one of the characters begins to warm to the Wild One's plea that they become actively worried. Will the Wild One destroy their reliable

routine, or do they in fact wish to leave the cage they live in? Despite the desperate situations in which the 'Bordering On Chaos' characters are living, not all of them would consider moving away or would be comfortable with changing their routine or trying something new. They are unaware of how life works outside the area in which they have always lived. The unknown is far too terrifying, and starting afresh is far more effort than drowning in their own misery. As with the Cagebirds, the characters in 'Bordering On Chaos' have been on the inside of the taxi office, living in that town for so long that they cannot imagine being able to cope with the perceived terrors on the outside. The difference between them is that the Cagebirds' only two choices are to join together and escape or to get rid of the catalyst. The Cagebirds respond with action: they make a decision together and follow it through. In effect, they become like wild animals determined to carry out what needs to be done. The characters in 'Bordering On Chaos' are in control of their actions but, as with any person, if they stop looking after themselves, their body will gradually shut down and, like Karl at the end, respond to instinct rather than thinking things through. None of the characters is happy to be in the taxi office or in each other's company, which inevitably causes conflict. They also need to keep on good terms with each other until their taxis arrive. Waters (2010, p.141) says that when writing a play *'it is less about creating symbols and more about controlling them'* and with 'Bordering On Chaos' being such a static piece, it is essential to build and contain the conflict, so that the action is able to develop.

Characters are there, Alan Ayckbourn puts it, *'informing us directly or indirectly, through word and deed, of their individual thoughts and emotions'* (2002, p.35-36). 'Faith Healer' by Brian Friel (1980) proves that constant movement is not essential for the depiction of dramatic action. The whole play is performed in four monologues which tell the story of three characters, Frank, Grace and Teddy, and how they cope with the loss of a child. Being performed in a series of monologues makes the story very intimate and emotional. Each monologue provides a different perspective on the situation. These varying perspectives are developed by the characters' assumptions of what each other thinks and through their differing opinions. Friel's use of multiple characters' stories enables the audience to understand each character and to build the action, providing more information within each monologue. Frank, the faith healer, believes that his clients *'had come not to be cured but for confirmation that they were incurable'* (p.15). This is an unhappy alliance between Frank and his clients, as they are regrettably in need of one another. Friel's use of suggestion gradually unravels the characters, whilst at the same time creating dramatic action, which moves the story forward. 'Faith Healer' is a story of living a life where reliance on other people is the key to survival. This is not entirely a happy situation. Despite the cynicism shown to Frank, he offers a solution to their problems through belief. The alternative is to find a way of accepting and dealing with their own problems. Frank is trying to find purpose in his life through this work, but is searching in the wrong places.

The characters in both 'The Cagebirds' and 'Faith Healer' have limited contact with the outside world. The women in 'The Cagebirds' have contact with the nurse who brings their food or a new companion but new information is not needed. Frank in 'Faith Healer' regularly comes into contact with the outside world, but is too immersed in his own problems to take any notice. The characters in 'The Cagebirds' have been contained and cut off from the real world for so long that any sign of reality breeds discomfort. Instead of sharing new information, they repeat phrases and mainly talk to themselves about topics they are well versed in. Frank in 'Faith Healer' regards both his friends and the general public with

cynicism and suspicion. 'Bordering On Chaos' has taken these traits, typically held by people who live solitary and lonely lives, to show how, even when surrounded by people, it is difficult to accept that you are struggling and must ask for help.

Throughout my work, I tackle painful and uncomfortable issues, exploring them through characters who exhibit humour, in spite of often being down and depressed. During Act 1 Scene 1, there is a conversation between Mags and Karl which developed after fixing the location. Within this conversation there is much discussion of the past, how things used to be, and a palpable fear of moving on. It shows how both characters are suffering from a form of denial and demonstrates Karl's tendency to resort to anger. In order to gain a better understanding of what these characters would be facing, I conducted interviews with several counsellors, who all stressed the importance of following through the grief cycle after experiencing a trauma. This cycle can be used to cope not only with the loss of a person, but the loss of something that you once held dear or relied upon. They explained how, in the Kubler Ross grief cycle, there are five different stages of the grieving process: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. I also looked into the unreliability of human behaviour, how people do not follow the stages step by step. Some people will jump between different stages depending on their mood or the way in which they see themselves and how others perceive them. Many will never reach acceptance because of the difficulties faced trying to get through stage number four, depression. Most of my characters suffer from some form of depression, but I thought that it would be fitting to use one character, Gemma, who, despite having been through all five stages of the grief cycle, has a tendency to relapse. There are many reasons for people to relapse but, through my interviews, I found that the main one is fear. Ayckbourn's earlier question '*Without light how can we possibly create shadow?*' (2002, p.4) gives reasoning to Gemma's expectation that if she sorts everything out and begins to live a happy life, it is likely to fall apart again, causing the pain to be even worse. In Gemma's case, she believes that the happier she becomes the worse it will be when it comes to the end: there is no hope that she will be able to live a happy life.

My final challenge was to present the aimless and boring lives of these characters in an interesting way. Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' (premiered in 1953) is a text which explores the predictability and underwhelming lives of two worn out and tired men. It follows these characters and their sad stories, showing that they are destined to live this way because of their reliance on one location beside a tree, unaware of any other way to break this cycle. The tree is used as a meeting point where the two characters return each morning with a particular purpose in mind, to wait for Godot to join them. This creates a unity of place and provides focus as, each time they return, there are more stories to tell of their nightly struggles. The main action is represented by Estragon's never-ending faith that they will escape from their current lives with Godot's help. Godot could be interpreted as a prophet or a saviour: he becomes a character that everybody is waiting to meet because he can supposedly resolve all the problems that the characters are dealing with. The stories of these characters' pain and suffering during the previous evenings and their faith that Godot will arrive one day fuels the action. Wordsworth describes this as '*to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday*' (cited in Edgar, 2009, p.19). Beckett's characters, Estragon and Vladimir, show emotions which are recognisable to a modern-day audience even though they are physically a world apart. My play differs from 'Waiting For Godot' as it is a naturalistic piece rather than theatre of the absurd and set in a recognisable location, but like 'Waiting For Godot' it is focused around people who are lacking in ambition and living out a

repetitive routine. My characters work in a similar way to Vladimir and Estragon. They were constructed as a means of showing how people become reliant on a location or situation which is detrimental to their well-being. My characters' conversations do not cover the same existential subjects as Beckett's, but their reactions to life and their feelings about themselves and what will happen next are comparable. The main difference is that I have located my characters in an environment which is recognisable to the general public. I had to find the 'novelty' in an everyday situation and focus on ensuring that my characters' boring and aimless lives are interesting when performed onstage.

David Edgar (2009, p.51) talks of needing to use dramatic action to capture exceptional circumstances, but what may be perceived as exceptional to one person may be another person's predictable daily routine. Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' (Act 1, p.9-10) examines how Estragon and Vladimir's daily routine is to meet next to the tree. The exceptional circumstance is the fact that they keep doing this despite the torment which causes them at one point to discuss suicide.

ESTRAGON: Let's hang ourselves immediately.

VLADIMIR: From a bough ? [They go towards the tree.] I wouldn't trust it.

ESTRAGON: We can always try.

VLADIMIR: Go ahead.

ESTRAGON: After you.

VLADIMIR: No no, you first.

ESTRAGON: Why me?

VLADIMIR: You're lighter than I am.

Making this suggestion to commit suicide into a joke lifts the seriousness of the mood, without ignoring or excusing the dark situation in which they find themselves. 'Waiting For Godot' is a piece of absurd theatre, but through this bizarre reality, Beckett uses his characters to portray how we are able to find comedy in tragic circumstances. This is what I chose to represent in my own work. However, my work is focused on living in the present and finding resolution to the issues facing people in the moment. I took inspiration from a recent interpretation of 'Waiting for Godot' by Ian Brown (Artistic Director, Yorkshire Playhouse, Spring 2012) at the Birmingham Old Rep theatre. Brown's Rastafarian-influenced interpretation uncovered the comedy hidden within and also sped up the dramatic action. Brown's development of the characters' comical interactions increased the pace of the play. Emphasising the humour meant that, rather than pitying the characters throughout the piece, the audience were better able to connect with them and to empathise with their struggles. After watching the Brown performance I knew that, despite my characters' issues, there also needed to be comedy within the script. The limited movement of my characters meant that it was essential to present this humour through the characters' conversations and attitudes towards each other. Mags begins the play irritably, answering the phone to a customer 'What do you expect on a Saturday night?', Karl enters mid phone call remarking, 'Your people skills are improving'. This instantly shows that there is a familiarity between the two characters and that, despite the dark story ahead, there is going to be some comic relief.

'Bordering On Chaos' (Act 1, p.10-11) has been written to show that, no matter how dark life seems to be getting, there is always a spark of hope. Mags and Karl are constantly in conflict with each other, complaining about life and starting arguments, but they are still able to make a joke and raise a smile.

KARL: Such restraint.

MAGS: It's what I strive for. Provides me with a sense of satisfaction.

KARL: Knowing that every arsehole on the other end feels well appreciated and part of the taxi family?

MAGS: That's my job.

Karl laughs

KARL: A welcoming smile for each customer.

MAGS: Customer satisfaction is essential.

KARL: I'm not sure they quite get that feeling.

Karl and Mags are living out the same routine they go through each evening, but they are able to do tease each other. They are dissatisfied with their lives, but do not believe that they are capable of achieving anything more, and the best way to deal with this is by making jokes and using sarcasm.

I set out to write a play which showed the day-to-day struggles affecting a group of people who have experienced a tragic incident. Through these characters I intended to build awareness of the different lives lived by people on the fringes of society and how they are not so different from everyone else. This plot line enabled me to explore how lives that appear predictable and mundane are lived by people who have diverse and interesting stories to tell. My three main challenges were: to give a coherent structure to the play whilst focusing the plot line so that it was comprehensible; to balance the world of my play with the real world so that it translated well; and to depict my characters' boring and aimless lives in an exciting way. Each of these challenges hindered the development of my play and required me to really think about what my play represented and how I was going to ensure that it came together at the end. Aristotle's three unities became the key way for me to build a structure for 'Bordering On Chaos'. Time, space and action provided a structure for my characters to work around and helped me to understand how important it is to have a well structured play and how focus can be developed from that. David Edgar's interpretation of dramatic action (which helped to push the plot line forwards in a comprehensible manner) and Joan Littlewood's use of improvisation built my understanding of how relevant ideas from the past can be in modern society.

Playwrights such as Campton, Friel and Beckett provided inspiration for how to balance my characters' world with life outside their own situation. Campton's characters being forcibly contained and Friel and Beckett's characters containing themselves within their own minds helped me to see how I could play with not just the physical barriers in the taxi office, but also the psychological barriers which my characters could impose on themselves. The limited contact with and the distance from the wider community these writers' characters had

made me focus on making sure that, as cut off as my characters are, they needed to be within in reaching distance. Mags has communication over the phone and radio with the outside world and talks of the people at home. Karl, Gemma and Saskia have all been on a night out and are reliving their communication or decision not to communicate with other people. Studying the writers mentioned above enabled me to make my characters active within the confines of the taxi office, but not be completely shut off from the outside world. 'Bordering On Chaos' has successfully developed into a script which tells the stories of four people who at first seem predictable and boring. Once the surface has been scratched they are seen to lead lives worthy of recognition. They are not world leaders, members of the royal family or celebrities whom people are in awe of but they experience highs and lows. They face difficulties such as finding somewhere affordable to live, keeping their jobs and being able to pay for food each week, never mind eating a healthy diet. These characters have developed well and push the plotline forwards with their constantly changing emotions and refusal to accept help. This storyline, which was originally fragmented and incomprehensible, now coherently represents the lives of ordinary people who are fighting to survive day in, day out. I have proved that dramatic action is the key to telling these people's stories, because without action there can be no progression.

It is essential to take influence from writers such as Aristotle, Ayckbourn, Beckett and Waters. Aristotle's three unities will be a constant influence when creating and structuring my work, as they are an effective means of laying out the plot and ensuring that the work stays focused. Bradwell and Littlewood's determination to educate and excite audiences into taking notice of their community has encouraged me to use theatre and performance to bring uninterested and broken societies together. Through Edgar I have learnt the importance of researching subject matter, looking at the subject from different perspectives and building my own interpretations. I did not entirely agree with all of Edgar's statements, but that did not invalidate my opinions. It meant that what I needed to do was more research to develop and back up my own interpretations. Because of this, I started to trust the different ideas I developed and influences which I found whilst carrying out research. I started comparing my experiences and interpretations of text and how they correlated with professional opinion. I can take forward the confidence in my own research and knowledge after proving that dramatic action can be found in a tale of small lives.

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Bordering On Chaos
By
Lucy Hayward

Characters

Mags

Karl

Chris

Saskia

Gemma

Act 1 Scene 1

Mags is sitting at a table flicking through notes, Karl enters awkwardly, stumbling to a spare seat.

Phone rings, Mags heaves a sigh and picks up the phone.

Mags: (Monotone) County Cars, Where are you going? Where from? Ok. That'll be an hour. An hour! What do you expect on a Saturday night.

Mags puts the phone down

It is Saturday in't it, I lose all sense of time sat here every day. I can only tell it's Saturday as the sirens are more frequent at the weekend.

Phone starts ringing, Mags ignores it, eventually picking it up with a sigh.

(Monotone) County Cars, Where are you going? Where from? That's not in our district, we don't cover that area. No idea. Try Mason's. Not my problem.

She puts the phone down

Karl: Your people skills are improving.

Mags: As always.

Mags picks up the radio mike blast of static, then starts grunting in frustration as she tries to make it work.

Static

Mags puts the mike down and dials on her phone

Hello, (*Sighs and dials again*) Chris, are you able to pick up, it is Saturday night. (*Mags puts the phone down*)

(*Mutters*) bloody answerphone.

Karl: Such restraint.

Mags: It's what I strive for, provides me with a sense of satisfaction.

Karl: Knowing that every arsehole on the other end feels well appreciated and part of the taxi rank family?

Mags: That's my job.

Karl: A welcoming smile for each customer.

Mags: Customer satisfaction is essential.

Karl: I'm not sure they quite got that feeling.

Mags: It comes and goes.

Karl: Like most things.

Mags: What do you expect?

Karl: It is Saturday night.

Mags: I've already said that.

Karl: I was confirming.

Mags: Thanks.

Mags is still fiddling with the radio

Just in case I was unsure.

Karl: Exactly.

Mags: You can always tell by the sirens and the fact this radio ...

Phone rings

Mags ignores it whilst fiddling with the radio

Phone is still ringing, Mags ignores it, eventually picking it up with a sigh.

(*Monotone*) County Cars, Where are you going? Where from? Are you ringing for him? I told him we don't cover that area. I told him, try Mason's.

Takes a deep breath

Don't get shirty with me, love. It's not my problem that you're travelling with a tosser. Talk like, that you're asking to be barred. Fuck off and come back when you're sober.

Mags slams the phone down

Karl: Who was that?

Mags: Denise.

Karl looks confused

Mags: Hangs out with Wayne.

Karl: He's a prick.

Mags: I know that, He's got a stagnant mind.

Karl: A what?

Mags: Doesn't think about what he's saying to whom.

Karl: I know what you mean.

Pause

Mags: He said something to you?

Karl: No.

Mags: He's been chasing off about my little 'un.

Karl: Kayla's a good-looking girl.

Mags: I am well aware.

Karl: Far too classy for him.

Mags: Wouldn't believe what he said to me ...

Karl: What?

Mags: Not saying it out loud.

Karl: Why not?

Mags: I'm not repeating that filth.

Karl: Don't normally mind.

Mags: What he said about my daughter, I told him; you try it an' I'll have those bollocks straight between a pair of pliers.

Mags checks headphones and rearranges her papers.

Karl: Walking on ice cubes.

Mags: It's ice.

Karl: What?

Mags: Walking on ice.

Karl: That's what I said.

Mags: No, you said ice cubes.

Karl: Ice, ice cubes, what's the difference?

Mags: More likely to fall in a gin and tonic on ice cubes.

Karl: Yuk.

Mags: What?

Karl: Gin. It's disgusting.

Mags: Depends what you're drinking.

Karl: I'm keeping away from them now.

Mags: Ice or ice cubes?

Karl: Both. I can't balance.

Mags: You tried?

Karl: Didn't end up good last time.

Mags: It's all about confidence. You show them what you mean. Never slip over again.

Karl: On the ice?

Mags: Can be. You've got to be in control. Show them that you mean what you say.

Karl: I thought I'd just hold onto the side.

Mags: (*Sighs*) Metaphors are lost on you.

Karl: Everything's lost on me. Couldn't find my phone this morning.

Mags: Nicked?

Karl: I'm sure I had it at home.

Mags: It's when you put it down, come back a few hours later and it's moved.

Karl: Exactly.

Mags: Been doing that a lot lately.

Karl: Though I did wake up on the sofa with two empty bottles of vodka and half a gram in my lap.

Mags: Had the boys over?

Karl: Nah, by myself. I think.

Mags: They could have been there.

Karl: No ... Well.

Mags: That's where your phone's gone.

Karl: They're my mates.

Mags: When they feel like it.

Karl: They're alright.

Mags: That's your choice.

Karl: They've always been my mates.

Mags: I'm just saying.

Karl: Mags, leave it out.

Mags pulls out her paper, starts flicking through. Karl stretches out his legs, one noticeably awkward.

Mags: Spoken to Gem?

Karl: Not yet.

Mags: Takes time. I've been speaking to Saskia.

Karl: She's talking again?

Mags: Not easy.

Karl: Nah.

Mags: Don't start on me. I lost control.

Karl: I didn't say nothing.

Mags: She wasn't hurt.

Karl: But she's talking again?

Mags: For the moment.

Karl: What did she say about Gemma?

Mags: Went a bit crazy last week.

Karl: Yeah.

Mags: Everyone goes a bit crazy.

Karl: Sure.

Mags: I don't see what she's making a fuss about.

Karl: It's hard.

Mags: She's not the only one.

Karl: No.

Mags: Wasn't her brother.

Karl: No.

Mags: See. Not like they'd been together forever.

Karl: Nah.

Mags: They weren't the happiest of couples.

Karl: Who is?

Both go quiet, awkwardly avoid looking at each other.

Mags: Saskia's got her seeing some kind of counsellor.

Pause

Karl: Best thing for her.

Mags: Playing with your mind? They get you to think about things that you would rather lay forgotten. All that placebo stuff. I've seen that Derren Brown on TV.

Karl: They're not like that.

Mags: Manipulation, that's all it is.

Karl: Nah, they're trained, Studied the mind.

Mags: You can see it in his eyes, he's a shifty bugger. Working out how to tempt you and get what he wants.

Karl: They've been to university and learnt.

Mags: I wouldn't trust him an inch. Been to university? How did you work in the school system, I could learn you a few things. I'll bloody teach that Wayne if he comes anywhere near my Kayla.

Karl: Mags.

Mags: Since when did you get all goody two shoes?

Karl: Kayla's pretty good protection for herself.

Mags: What do you mean?

Karl: What I said.

Mags: You're alluding to something.

Karl: What?

Mags: What are you trying to say?

Karl: Nothing. I'm not.

Mags: What happened?

Karl: Nothing. All I'm saying is you taught her well.

Mags: Depends what situation she's in.

Karl: She's a good girl.

Mags: I'm well aware of what she is, and it's not always the nice guys that finish last. You tell me what you've seen.

Karl: I haven't seen anything.

Mags: Sure you haven't.

Karl: Why don't you believe me?

Mags: Why should I?

Karl: Alright.

Mags: So, tell me, or you won't be getting that taxi home.

Karl: OK, I saw her in town last week.

Mags: Saw Kayla last week?

Karl: Yeah, met up with the boys.

Mags: Last week?

Karl: Yeah, a few drinks.

Mags: You didn't get home till yesterday.

Karl: Nah, it was a birthday.

Mags: You came back for a birthday, the week before you were due back?

Karl: Was a good night.

Mags: Where did you go?

Karl: Giros.

Mags: Giros?

Karl: Yeah. Classic nineties.

Mags: Classy.

Mags: How did you get in?

Karl looks up at Mags.

Karl: How did I get in?

Mags: You're not exactly well dressed.

Karl: Not, how did your sixteen-year-old daughter get in to an over twenty-ones' club.

Mags: She's got her ways. Her and her mates they all dress up. Giros has a strict dress code, how did you get in when all you wear is trainers?

Karl: I have my ways.

Mags: And it was nineties, shell suits and jelly sandals. Bet you fitted right in.

Karl: Thanks.

Mags: You're welcome.

Karl: I just needed to let off some steam.

Mags: The week before you were due home?

Karl: Yep, and Kayla was there.

Mags looks up,

Mags: Who was she with?

Karl: A few girls.

Mags: Names?

Karl: (*Cautious*) Names? There was a blonde one, high heels.

Mags: Liss.

Karl: Afro and big boobs.

Mags: Lexy.

Karl: They were there.

Mags: The usual crowd.

Karl: They were dancing like maniacs.

Mags: You were watching them.

Karl: Just caught my eye.

Mags: Who were you with?

Karl: I dunno. Can't remember now.

Mags: You can't remember somebody whose birthday you came back for a week early?

Karl: Birthday?

Mags: Yes.

Karl: It was a busy night.

Mags: So busy that you remember Kayla and her friends but not the birthday boy.

Karl: Birthday boy? It was Mick.

Mags: Ah OK, you need a calendar or a diary so you can work out which day you're on and you know who you're out with.

Karl: Do you do that?

Mags: I've got a job.

Karl: I'm off sick.

Mags: Yeah, I know.

Karl: Sick leave.

Mags: Of course. It's a hard time.

Karl: Do you think I'll still have a job when I go back?

Mags: Everyone's put off work now

Karl: You aren't.

Mags: I can't be.

Karl: Difficult.

Mags: Can't you go back part time?

Karl: Now?

Mags: Course not. It's almost midnight.

Karl grins.

We're here for you.

Karl: I know.

Mags: We've just got to push on and you've got that nice girlfriend, Julie.

How's she getting on?

Mags turns back to paper.

Karl: Doing a course.

Mags: Like everyone else. They're all doing courses now, building up your skills. I worked at a slaughterhouse. You don't get a certificate for that. Does Julie get one?

Karl: I guess so.

Mags: Not in a slaughterhouse. You don't exactly come out, put that on your CV and find job offers flying through the door. You go there to earn money. People moan about the lack of it, yet they don't want to go do something like that, do they. What's her course?

Karl: Massage or beauty or something.

Mags: Relaxing.

Karl: Doubt it.

Mags: You not fancy that? Training up as something?

Karl: I'm a mechanic.

Mags: Course. You could train in something else too. Widen the job market. Get a certificate.

Karl: I'm a mechanic.

Mags: I know. How long's the course?

Karl: What?

Mags: How long's her course?

Karl: Whose course?

Mags: Julie's course, when does it finish?

Karl: I don't know.

Mags: Karl, I'm trying to show an interest in your girlfriend.

Karl: Don't.

Mags: I'm trying.

Karl: You don't need to.

Mags: Karl, you need to sort this out.

Karl: Not now.

Mags: You can't carry on like this.

Karl: Like what?

Phone starts ringing.

Mags: One more chance, spill it now or forever hold your peace. I won't have moping on my watch.

Phone is still ringing.

Karl: It's nothing.

Mags: There's obviously something.

Karl: There isn't.

Phone carries on ringing.

Mags: Yes.

Karl doesn't say anything, Mags picks up the phone.

(*Monotone*) County Cars, Yes, Where from? Where to? That'll be forty minutes, What? Oh, OK, two hours.

Puts phone down.

Grumpy fucker. Wish people were a bit more cheerful. I might be more enthusiastic when answering the phone. They're all tossers at this time. They're probably drinking at home so they don't have to spend so much when they're out.

Karl: Tossers.

Mags: Exactly, no self-control. It's always the same.

Karl: Phone's ringing.

Mags: Been a few phone calls but it's not exactly ringing off the hook.

Karl: It'll liven up once the clubs close.

Mags: Yeah, but there's all this time in the middle. Really I should be getting people needing a cab into town.

Karl: What for?

Mags: I don't know, dancing, drinking? Yoga classes?

Karl: It's Friday night.

Mags: Saturday.

Karl: Yeah, course, even less likely then.

Mags: Why?

Karl: Sunday's a day for recovery.

Mags: Maybe for you. Other people do things on a Sunday.

Karl: Like what?

Mags: Go for lunch,

Karl: I eat.

Mags: See the family.

Karl: Don't have any.

Mags: Or friends.

Karl: I'm on sick leave, I'm not in a state to do these things.

Mags: So you say.

Karl: You know why I'm off.

Mags: You've lost your brother, but time moves on.

Karl: it's not gonna stop for me?

Mags: No. It's not.

Karl is getting upset and frustrated from the loss of control.

Mags: You are not going to drive yourself into the ground on my shift.

Karl: (*Grunts*) I'm fine.

Mags: I can see your face.

Karl: I'm fine.

Mags: You're not helping yourself.

Karl: Not like I have it easy.

Mags: Who does?

Karl: Everyone.

Mags: What bollocks.

Karl: You don't get it.

Mags: Leave it out. You know you're perfectly capable.

Karl: I'm off work for a reason.

Mags: That you're milking out.

Karl: Why shouldn't I?

Mags: You've got to move on.

Karl: See, you can't understand.

Mags: No, I can't, but I am always here to help.

Karl: Your Kayla's been really good to me.

Mags: My Kayla has absolutely nothing to do with this.

Karl: She's got everything to do with it.

Mags: What do you mean?

Karl: When I went to the hospital, she was there.

Mags: Yeah.

Karl: She listened to me, talked to me.

Mags: She's a good girl. Looking out for people.

Karl: She was there for me.

Mags: She's working there.

Karl: I know.

Mags: You're like her big brother,

Karl: Big brother.

Mags: She'll be checking up on you, making sure you're OK. Did she sing Soft kitty, warm kitty?

Karl: What?

Mags: She sings it to me when I'm ill.

Karl: That was our song.

Mags: Karl. You and Julie?

Karl: I need a fag.

Mags: You always need a cigarette.

Karl: It's relaxing.

Mags: I like the smell.

Karl: Like petrol.

Mags: What do you mean?

Karl: One of those rank smells but everyone likes it.

Mags: I guess. I always fancied having one in here.

Karl: I like them when you're waiting for a train.

Mags: Better be careful.

Karl: Why?

Mags: They'll think you're trying to blow the place up.

Karl: Nah, I just want a fag.

Mags: Fancy one?

Karl: I'm all out.

Karl pulls out an empty rolling tobacco pouch.

Fag machine wasn't working.

Mags: And all the shops close at six. I've got plenty.

Karl: Chuck it here, I can roll it then go outside.

Mags: Why go outside?

Mags reaches down to her bag and starts rifling through, she pulls out a pack of cigarettes.

Karl: I'll pass, not so keen on straights.

Mags carries on rooting through, checking each pocket. She pulls out a pack of tobacco, lays it out on the table in a very methodical manner and starts putting it all together.

Karl: You're doing that in here?

Mags: Why not?

Karl: Smoking ban ...

Mags: The French ignored it, why should I take any notice?

Picks at her tobacco and starts laying out a skin and roach then starts rolling a cigarette.

Karl: Yeah, that's the French for you.

Mags: What was that?

Karl: Nothing.

Mags: Should think so.

Karl: Cheese eating surrender monkeys.

Mags: You think about what the Resistance did.

Karl: Bollocks. They were sat there drinking red wine and smoking Lucky Strike.

Mags: You ignorant little shit, think of those fucking Americans and their silk bloody stockings. If they had come in earlier.

Karl: Mags, it's a hundred years ago now.

Mags: Almost.

Karl: You gotta let it go.

Mags: We could have lived better then.

Karl: I'd probably be dead.

Mags: You'd be out fighting.

Karl: You'd be at home making stockings. I don't think it suits you.

Mags: There were more options then.

Karl: No. Shit.

Mags: What?

Karl: There'd be no Dungeons and Dragons or World of Warcraft.

Mags: No, there wouldn't.

Karl: I got to level ninety and everything, waiting for the next expansion pack.

Mags: We all have to sacrifice something.

Karl: I couldn't do it, not without my computer.

Mags: I could.

Karl: No Halo, no GTA, no PlayStation, what would I do with my life?

Mags: What indeed?

Karl: Are you still rolling that?

Mags: Takes time.

Karl: Not when I do it. Pass it here.

Mags: I'll have it in a minute.

Karl: Why have you got your straights out as well?

Mags: I was hoping the time it took to roll would remind me where I put me lighter.

Mags licks the skin and seals the cigarette

Karl: Use mine.

Holds his lighter out to Mags

Mags: Chuck it over here.

Karl throws it to Mags' table, Mags catches and lights her cigarette, taking a deep breath.

Karl then begins rolling his own

Feels like after hours. Used to love it in the pub when the lights went down and you'd get a glass of whiskey and a cigarette.

Karl: Not good for your lungs.

Mags: What?

Karl: Confined space, it's healthier to smoke outside.

Mags: Karl, not sure you get the idea of smoking.

Karl: There's more oxygen, so not so much goes in.

Mags: Depends how deep your breaths are.

Karl: Have you seen those shisha ones?

Mags: Ah, a pipe?

Karl: No cigarette. I'm thinking of getting one.

Mags: You want an electronic cigarette?

Karl: You can get them in blueberry.

Mags: I bet that's your favourite flavour.

Karl: Getting the tobacco ones is best.

Mags: Cheaper to buy a pack of fags.

Karl: But no tar.

Mags: Bollocks, there's always tar.

Karl: Have you seen the pictures on the back of fag packets? That could happen to me.

Mags: Already has.

Karl: It's educational. It's their way of stopping us killing our lungs.

Mags: Sure stops you, returning home to roll up some cheese.

Karl: That's a medical cure.

Mags: They may say that in California, but it's not legal here yet.

Karl: Since when have you been bothered about legality?

Mags: I'm more concerned about the impact it's having on you.

Karl: I'm fine.

Mags: Not when you spend Sunday afternoon in a haze of smoke. You're going to lose your grip on reality.

Karl: What?

Mag: Reality, fiction,

Karl: Like DC and Marvel.

Mags: Almost more real life and fantasy.

Karl: OK, I get it,

Mags: Worries me how long you'll keep it up for.

Karl: I'm not that bad.

Mags: Not at the moment.

Karl: Yeah.

Mags: I don't want any more visits to the cell for you.

Karl: That wasn't my fault.

Mags: Half a gram plus whatever else that fucker gave you does not excuse it.

Karl: That wasn't my fault.

Mags: Course not, but you got caught.

Karl: You can't talk.

Mags: I'm not condoning what you're taking, just saying if you're going to do it, get quality.

Karl: Not much about.

Mags: You're not looking in the right place.

Karl: Sure.

Mags: I told you before that I am always happy to help.

Karl: Thanks.

Mags: You need something to do.

Karl: I've got Halo.

Mags: Yeah.

Karl: And World of Warcraft, what more could I want?

Mags: Perhaps something more productive.

Karl: I'm waiting for the new expansion so I could have a go at Dungeons and Dragons. It's not really top of my list, but what else is there?

Mags: I was thinking more along the lines of work.

Karl: I'm on sick leave.

Crackle of the radio takes Mags' attention.

Mags starts muttering down the radio, trying to contact whoever is trying to communicate, Karl leans back in his seat, dozing off.

Mags: Hello, hello, can you hear me?

Crackle

Hello, Chris?

Crackle.

Somebody, hello, where are you?

Crackled response.

I didn't catch that, can you repeat?

Mags starts fiddling with her screwdriver.

Stupid machine, can't even work out the buttons. Shouldn't the technological generation have made these easier to work out? Though I guess using such a fucking old model doesn't benefit from such advancements.

Mags ruffles and reorders papers.

I rifle through so many of these sheets and I swear that as soon as daylight goes, it's dark enough in here. Generally I'd say that's a benefit, looking at the faces of the clients but it's just reading things, I can read, but when the lights go down. I mean I can't ask Karl, he's got enough going on. I've had to start bringing in a torch. You see these daylight energy saving lights are so low, I can't work a thing out. And now they've stopped processing the light ones, some kind of health risk or something. I reckon it's the government: first the bedroom tax, now the lighting tax. Have you got more than a 12 watt bulb, we'll be taking a cut from you. (*Shouts in frustration*) Fuckers.

Karl: (*Wakes suddenly*) What?

Mags: (*Under her breath*) Fuckers.

Karl: Talking to yourself again?

Mags: Don't worry love, just getting everything done.

Karl: Need some help?

Mags: You need to rest. This is my work. I've gotta get through it.

Karl: Pull out your torch.

Mags: What?

Karl: I've seen you with it.

Mags: With what?

Karl: Some old people have magnifiers, you have a torch.

Mags: I think you need to restrain your tongue, young man.

Karl: What did I say?

Mags: Show a bit more caution when commenting on a lady's age.

Karl: It's not that bad.

Mags: We'll see how you feel when time catches up with you.

Phone rings.

Karl: Piss off.

Mags picks up the phone straight away, glaring at Karl.

Mags: County Cars, how may I help you? Hmmmm. Yes, No, Where's that?

Slams the phone down.

Mags: Fuckers.

Karl: What do you expect when you're such a bitch?

Mags: What did you say?

Karl: Going deaf as well?

Mags: Cut it out.

Karl: You can't face the truth.

Mags: What are you talking about? I am not going to stand for this much longer.

Karl: You know.

Mags: I know what?

Karl: You're hiding in the dark.

Mags: Karl, I know you're an idiot, but please, a bit of sense.

Karl: You're hiding yourself away.

Mags: What am I hiding from?

Karl: I don't know.

Mags: Why start on this if you don't know?

Karl: Only you know that.

Mags: Can you stop talking crap.

Karl: Just making a point.

Mags: Yeah, well I can't deal with your profound bullshit.

Karl: It's true.

Mags: Is it really?

Karl: Yeah.

Mags: Forgive me if I don't take any notice, I am far more concerned with the fuckers on the other end of this phone.

Karl: I hate this town.

Mags: Me too. But we live here.

Karl: If I move anywhere else ...

Mags: It'll be the same and you'll hate it there too.

Karl: What if I move to a city?

Mags: There's just as many cocks and arseholes, probably more. They'll just have a different accent.

Karl: No hope?

Mags: That's the general way. Proven by some of the fuckers I have to talk to. No escape from it, they're all arseholes. One day and you've ... gone quiet. Like being at home. I'm ignored or receive abuse down the phone. Fuckers.

Waits for a response.

I get the same amount of respect from bloody Kayla.

Karl: She's a good girl.

Mags: When it suits.

Karl: She's been good to me.

Mags: You're not her mother.

Karl: Kind heart she's got.

Mags: When it suits.

Karl: No.

Mags: We've been through this, Karl. Kayla looks out for herself. More than capable of using you for what she needs and chewing and spitting men out at the end.

Karl: She's a girl.

Mags: Dangerous one.

Karl: She's not that bad.

Mags: And she's sixteen.

Karl: She is young

Mags: Working hard. Or so she says.

Karl: You've got to.

Mags: The way now. We worked hard before, but it's all about money now.

Karl: Always has been.

Mags: Nah, used to have fun.

Karl: Still can now.

Mags: Only with a full wallet.

Karl: Mine's never full.

Mags: And we know why that is.

Karl: Dunno what you're talking about,

Mags: I bet you don't.

Karl: (*Mutters*) Not any more.

Mags: I've got some cash In hand if you want it.

Karl: What?

Mags: You need cash, go back to work, you'll be back on 9 to 5.

Karl: No.

Mags: Pays well.

Karl: Not if I get locked up.

Mags: You've done it before. Just got to use your brain.

Karl nervously laughs.

You know how it works. They'll call you up, give all the details, get it done sorted.

Karl: Not my style any more.

Mags: What else are you going to do?

Karl: I don't know.

Mags: Come work for me, you can earn a bit when you want. Be like a transition before you go back.

Karl: No.

Mags: I can stick you on flexi time.

Karl: Mags, that was the one thing I promised.

Mags: Suit yourself.

Karl: Kayla up to much tonight?

Mags: What?

Karl: Kayla.

Mags: Why?

Karl: Just wondering.

Mags: She's working,

Karl: At the hospital?

Mags: Yeah. She's got this part-time job. A few hours a week.

Karl: That's good. I thought she was volunteering.

Mags: She was but a position came up. I told her, if she wants to make it as a nurse, she'd better show that she can handle the blood. I'm not forking out for university just so she can quit.

Karl: University?

Mags: She's got two years yet, but if she still wants to after two years working in a hospital, I am happy to support her.

Karl: She going far?

Mags: Don't know, league tables change every year, don't they. See where she fancies when it comes to it and where she can afford the rent. To be honest, I think she has far too much fun there, there's this mate of mine Angie, she's Glaswegian and when they get bored she takes her down to the morgue and they start rearranging the bodies. Gave one of the students a right shock, walked in and there's this corpse, dead body, walking along the floor. God knows how she lifts it: her father's strength.

Phone rings, Mags answers.

Mags: Yes. Hello, County Cars, how may I help you? Of course.

Pause.

You sod, alright. I don't know about that. Been trying to get through. Always the same. You sure?

Pause.

I wouldn't have thought so. He's gone, nah. Really. Pretty dire about that news report. I know. I don't know the half of it. We only hear what they want us to. How's your mum?

Pause.

That's a bit hairy, what was she doing out that late? Tell her to keep that bloody dog in. *(Laughs)* Where you going tonight?

Pause.

Boring old sod. I can get it there in half hour. Perfect. Have a good night.

Mags puts the phone down.

(Muttering to herself) Can you believe that?

Karl is staring across the stage, Mags is trying to tune her radio

Idiots.

Karl: *(Quietly)* Mags.

Mags: She is a daft cow.

Karl: *(Louder)* Mags.

Mags looks up at Karl.

Mags: Broken ribs, can you bloody believe it. She's a right catastrophe.

Karl: *(Whining)* Mags.

Mags: Just seems to be one of those years and I can't even work out these bloody buttons.

Karl: You're not listening.

Mags: I'm always listening, look at my ears.

Karl: Like Noddy?

Mags: Not the best description, but I've had worse.

Karl: Have I got long?

Mags: *(Still tuning)* What? Wait a minute, is it working? Can you hear that crackle?

Mags fiddles with the radio.

I think. Is it?

Radio crackles.

Did you hear that? Life in the old dog yet.

Crackle

Chris, Chris, II you hear me?

Karl: He's not there.

Mags: If I could get through.

Karl: What difference does it make?

Mags: The difference between sitting behind a desk and actually running a taxi rank.

Mags calls down the radio.

Chris.

Chris: *(Crackled V/O)* Yes.

Mags: Yes ...

Chris: Hello?

Mags: Chris, is that you?

Chris: Yes, I think.

Mags: Hi Chris, at last.

Chris: Mags?

Mags: Yes, it's me.

Line static.

Chris: Hi, Mags

Mags: We've done that.

Chris: I can't quite hear you.

Mags: It is fuzzy, I think its dying.

Chris: Sorry, Mags, can you say that again.

Static

Is someone dying?

Mags: No Chris, the radio.

Static

Chris: I know we're on the radio.

Mags: Don't worry.

Static

Can you re-route?

Chris: What about my boot?

Mags: No, can you re-route?

Chris: What?

Mags: Go a different way.

Chris: (*Static fuzzes over*) Drop off, be done in twenty.

Mags: Did you say something? (*Shouting*) Chris.

Chris: Sorry, static on the line, I think it's the wind. Dropping off, be back in twenty.

Mags: That's good. Next one's The Anchor.

Static

Chris: The Anchor?

Mags: The Anchor. Can you do it on your way back here.

Chris: What's the name?

Static

Mags: Paul, He's in The Anchor. He's waiting.

Chris: Thanks, Mags.

Mags puts radio down, goes back to her paper.

Mags: Stupid radio. Been telling them to get it fixed for ages

Mags fiddles with radio.

Since I started. Ridiculous.

Radio crackles.

Going to break down on me one day.

Radio crackles.

Karl: It is quiet tonight.

Mags: Can't hear a thing.

Karl: Going deaf?

Mags: Ha ha ha, you're funny.

Karl: Never know.

Mags: No, could hit me when I least expect it.

Karl: Could.

Mags: Used to get Charles Bonnet syndrome.

Karl: What's that?

Mags: When your eyes have trouble seeing things and they show you memories of things you've seen before.

Karl: Like hallucinations?

Mags: Not as fun.

Karl: Sounds fun.

Mags becomes defensive.

Mags: Not when you're searching for something you thought you saw before.

Karl: What?

Mags: I spent a day looking for my car keys.

Karl: You don't drive.

Mags: Not any more. I see things on the road

Karl: I see things everywhere.

Mags: Nah, like I'd think Kayla was sat in the passenger seat then I'd realise I'd dropped her off ten minutes ago.

Karl: Shit, some serious visions.

Mags: Went to the library to read up on it.

Karl: You went to the library?

Mags: Yeah.

Karl: With all those books?

Mags: No, I went to the cupcake library! Tastes better.

Karl: I meant.

Mags: I know. You don't do books.

Karl: It's so big and dark.

Mags: Thought you liked the dark?

Karl: When there's strobe lights.

Mags: Fine tastes.

Karl: And it smells musty.

Mags: I went to the book library to use a computer.

Karl: That's OK, don't you have one?

Mags: What would I want with a computer?

Karl: To look things up, I use it for streaming music and films.

Mags: Why not go to the cinema or a gig?

Karl: It's easier.

Mags: Lazier.

Karl: I guess.

Mags: No, I don't have a computer because all I would use it for is to research whatever medical issue I'm having at the moment, and I don't want to be tracked.

Karl: Tracked?

Mags: Yeah, they have those little bugs in them.

Karl: Cookies?

Mags: Whatever, that's how they track what you're looking at, where from. All that stuff.

Karl: Scary.

Mags: Yeah.

Mags focuses on the radio once more, muttering to herself in frustration, eventually giving up and flicking through a magazine.

Karl: Mags.

Mags: Yes, Karl.

Karl: Just wondering.

Mags finds something to focus on in the magazine and pulls out a pen.

Mags: Wondering?

Karl: I wanted to ask you ...

Mags: You want to ask me what?

Mags is struggling quite a lot and has to rearrange her desk lamp and torch.

Karl: Is there any chance.

Mags: *(Muttering out loud)* Do you know how annoying this is?

Karl: Maaags.

Mags: Mmmmmh, give me a sec.

Karl: But Mags.

Mags: Sssh, I need to concentrate.

Karl stares upstage to Mags. Once done, she looks really tired and frustrated, glaring at Karl.

Karl: Mags.

Mags looks to Karl.

Mags: What is it?

Karl: Don't you know this look?

Mags: I've got no idea, Karl, I'm trying to do something and you won't leave me alone.

Karl: Can't you tell by my eyes? I ask this every night.

Mags: No, I can't tell by your eyes you insensitive little cunt.

Karl: We do this every night.

Mags: Tonight is one night too many.

Karl is getting nervous.

Karl: What do you mean?

Mags: I'm fed up. I've had enough. It's too much.

Karl: What does that mean?

Mags: Sometimes you just have to accept that something has come to an end. There's always a time to move on, and you should never leave it too late.

Karl: It's good to have ambition.

Mags: Karl, have you got any idea what you are actually saying?

Karl: Ambition, it's good to have it.

Mags: Rephrasing the sentence doesn't provide a sense of understanding.

Karl: I know what it means. It's all about moving forward. Fresh start kind of thing.

Mags: Yeah, but you never do it do you?

Karl: I've got enough going on.

Mags: It's the perfect time.

Karl: Too much.

Mags: No, you need to go out, do something different.

Karl: I'm a mechanic.

Mags: Not at the moment.

Karl: I don't need to do anything new.

Mags: You could go, take Julie, travel the world.

Karl: That's done.

Mags: Bollocks, relationships don't come easy. You've got to work at it.

Silence.

You're like that show, waiting for something. But will it ever turn up? Sitting here night after night and not really doing much. He wouldn't want you to be sat here night after night.

Karl: (*Whispers*) Mags.

Mags: He wanted you to have a fresh start.

Karl: Don't.

Mags: You're not meant to be here.

Pause.

You should have got out of here six months ago.

Karl: Leave it.

Mags: You need to get out, just get up and go. You've got a chance. You're young, go wherever you like. Too late for me but you, you can do it all, that's what I tell my Kayla. Look at this town, it's dark, dirty, everywhere shutting down. I can't get out, too many taxes and responsibilities, but you: you can get out and make something of yourself. Before this shithole swallows you up and spits you back out in the middle of Giros on a Saturday night after some pissed girl's kicked you in the balls.

Karl: I can't today.

Mags: Why? You do this every night, just sit there.

Karl: But ...

Mags: Come on, tell me why you can't live your life.

Karl: My leg.

Mags: What is it about your leg today?

Karl: Got kicked in the ankle by a pissed girl in Giros.

Mags laughs.

Mags: Sure you did.

Karl: It's killing me.

Mags: You're an idiot.

Karl: I did say.

Mags: Who were you fighting this time?

Karl: No one, got kicked by a pissed girl.

Mags: Sure you did, wearing army boots were they?

Karl: It wasn't my fault.

Mags: Never is.

Karl: It wasn't.

Mags: You managed to walk in on it.

Karl: It's really painful, that's why I'm here, I was meant to be starting my healthy routine.

Mags: Healthy routine?

Karl: Yeah, started it a few months ago.

Mags: Where?

Karl: Online, you can do it over the Internet.

Mags: Really?

Karl: Yeah it's all done step by step.

Mags: Like the twelve steps?

Karl: Yeah, it's like 'My Name is Earl'.

Mags: What?

Karl: The TV programme, he's doing all his apologies as a way of living a better life, this is all about accepting and moving on.

Mags: Sounds fun?

Karl: It's good.

Mags: You're enjoying it?

Karl: Trying to sort it out.

Mags: I bet.

Karl: With all the trouble I've had.

Mags: Got yourself into.

Karl: I am trying to sort it out.

Mags: Good for you.

Karl: It's hard.

Mags: Do you have a buddy?

Karl: Like you had?

Mags: Yeah.

Karl: Kind of, but it's different.

Mags: Course.

Karl: It's about looking at things in a different way.

Mags: That sounds good.

Karl: You've got to separate yourself.

Mags: Separate?

Karl thinks.

Distance?

Karl: Yeah, that's it.

Mags: I wouldn't mind a bit of that.

Pause.

Have you stopped ...

Karl: I'm on tablets, they control things.

Mags: You want to break the routine.

Karl: They're alright for the moment.

Mags: Most people end up on them forever.

Karl: Nah, they said only a short period of time.

Mags: Bollocks, tried to get me on them. You've got highs and lows, take these.

Karl: Did you take them?

Mags: No fucking way, that's what Mother's Little Helper's about.

Karl: What?

Mags: Stones song, 'Mother's Little Helper', all about the legal drug trend. Once you pop, you just can't stop.

Karl: They calm me down.

Mags: How calm?

Karl: I'm alright now.

Mags: Not exactly happy to be back.

Karl: No, why would I be?

Mags: That's what they do. You're hooked.

Karl: I guess.

Mags: You've got to get off them.

Karl: But.

Mags: You know that, that is exactly what he would say. He'd be so proud of you if you did it, you've just got to put it into process.

Mags and Karl look to each other for a moment, Karl quickly looks away

Here, I'll give Bill a ring. He should be ready by now.

Karl: No.

Mags: He can drop you back with Julie.

Karl: There's no need.

Mags: Then she can spend the evening picking up pizza for you, Perfect.

Karl: No.

Mags: As much as I love you, I am at work. I cannot spend my weekend tending to your every need. You're not having the best of times, and you've taken it out on your girlfriend but that's what relationships are about, giving and taking. Bill is happy to give you a lift.

Karl: I don't think so.

Mags: We all know what has happened, everybody is trying to understand.

Karl: She can't.

Mags: Is there someone else?

Karl: No.

Mags: She'll forgive you, these things happen, just show her you care.

Karl: I don't, I am not going back.

Mags fixes Karl with a stare.

Karl: I'm alright.

Mags: You don't look it from here. Chris should be back soon, you can catch a lift with him.

Act 1 Scene 2

Gemma and Saskia enter.

Saskia: It's cold.

Gemma: Wouldn't believe it's spring.

Saskia: All that sunshine and then ...

Gemma: It snows.

Saskia: What else can you expect of this country?

Saskia turns to watch Mags at the desk.

Mags, I can smell smoke?

Mags looks up at Saskia, eyeing her cautiously.

Mags: *(Whispering)*, Just a minute, Sass.

Saskia glares at Mags.

Saskia: Sorry!

Gemma: It is smoky.

Saskia: We should go.

Saskia heads towards the door.

Mags: Wait.

Saskia: Why?

Gemma: We can't go now, it's so cold.

Saskia waits near the door.

Mags: Yeah.

Gemma: It's predictable weather, just annoying when I could be in flip flops.

Saskia looks to Mags.

Mags: I'm trying the radio for Karl, just wait.

Gemma looks up.

Saskia: OK.

Saskia moves away from the door. Gemma rushes to the seat next to Karl.

Gemma: Karl, you're back. How are you? I didn't see you there.

Gemma gives Karl a hug

Karl: Yeah.

Gemma: How are things going?

Karl: Alright.

Saskia: Alright?

Karl: I'm OK.

Gemma: He's ok, look at him.

Karl: I'm getting things sorted.

Gemma: Really?

Karl: Yeah.

Gemma: What are you doing here?

Karl: Getting a taxi home.

Gemma: I thought you were starting your new keep fit programme?

Karl: Kinda fell through tonight.

Saskia: Why? What happened?

Gemma: It's not good to slack.

Karl: Done my leg in.

Gemma: Aww, how did ...

Gemma and Saskia look at Karl's leg.

You ...

Saskia: Shit, how did you manage that?

Karl: Defence.

Gemma: Kaaar! You're fighting again.

Saskia: Were you?

Gemma: You're meant to be starting afresh ...

Saskia: Let him explain.

Gemma: A new way of life.

Saskia: Gemma, shut up.

Gemma: What happened?

Karl: I was defending myself.

Gemma: What happened?

Karl: I just told you.

Gemma: Come on, what's the story behind it?

Radio crackles.

Mags: Mike? Hello?

Static.

Mike, are you there? Can you read me? Hello?

Mags sits watching the radio.

Saskia: Broken again?

Mags: I can't even work out how to fix it.

Saskia: Have you hit it?

Mags: I'm worried that'll kill it.

Saskia: Didn't seem so worried last time.

Mags: That was different.

Saskia: Not an inanimate object?

Mags: No one got hurt.

Saskia: Go on. Seek your revenge.

Mags: No, not yet.

Saskia: Waiting for the right timing?

Mags: When is?

Saskia: Exactly.

Mags: I don't want to be responsible for its death.

Saskia: That's a first.

Mags: Saskia, I didn't intend for that to happen.

Saskia: Yet you're in control this time?

Mags: That's not what I said.

Saskia: Have you called us a taxi yet?

Mags: Haven't had a chance.

Saskia: I've heard that one before.

Mags: All the technology has given up on me.

Saskia: Pass the blame. A shoddy workman blames his tools.

Mags: Try Chris, I think he's going that way.

Saskia pulls out her phone,

Saskia: Of course, go to a taxi rank and call your own cab.

Mags: Not much option with a duff radio.

Saskia: Got his number?

Mags: Somewhere.

Mags begins rooting through her desk in search of the phone number.

We should talk.

Saskia: Really?

Mags: Yeah.

Saskia: What about?

Mags: What happened.

Saskia: You lost control.

Mags: No. Yes. I lost control.

Saskia: Yes. Have you got that number?

Mags: Here.

Mags hands Saskia her phone, Saskia reads the number from it.

Saskia: At least you can do one thing right.

Saskia dials the number into her phone then rings it.

What's the matter with Karl tonight?

Mags: *(Returning focus to the radio)* He's broken up with Julie.

Saskia: What's that in aid of?

Mags: Do we ever really know?

Saskia: Have you not found out?

Mags: It's all a case of maybe it works, maybe it doesn't.

Saskia: But you should be sure.

Mags: I'm certainly not sure about half these dials.

Saskia: Is it long term?

Mags: *(Focusing on radio)* I'm not sure, do you think it's the catalyst?

Saskia: Depends which catalyst it is.

Mags: I'm not sure.

Saskia: Maybe it's all this stuff catching up, been a busy few months. Isn't likely to last long.

Mags: That's what I'm thinking.

Saskia: Can't be sure.

Mags: Nah, what about the transistor?

Saskia: What? In Karl?

Mags: No. In the radio?

Saskia: Mags.

Mags: What?

Saskia: Can you not take anything seriously?

Mags: There's no need.

Saskia: Fuck.

Mags: What?

Saskia: I knew it was low.

Mags: What?

Saskia: My battery. Forgot to charge it before I came out.

Mags: However will you survive?

Saskia: I need to ring Chris.

Mags passes her phone over, Saskia dials.

Hi Chris, it's Sass. You available?

Pause

You what? Want to talk to Mags?

Saskia passes the phone to Mags.

Mags: Yes, what?

What do you mean?

Fuck.

Passes phone back to Saskia.

Here, Sass

Saskia: Yeah, we need you here.

OK do you think.

Radio's blown, Mags is trying unsuccessfully to fix it.

We're at base.

Gem and me. Perfect, be out in a sec.

Saskia puts the phone down and hands it back to Mags.

That was lucky.

Mags: Is he coming for you?

Saskia: Says he's almost at the bridge.

Mags: He said it's all blocked off.

Saskia: Everyone behind him's being turned away.

Mags: Not going to get anyone through town centre tonight.

Saskia: Doesn't look likely.

Mags: No taxis tonight.

Saskia: It'll be alright.

Mags: Easy for you to say.

Saskia: Catch you tomorrow?

Mags: Why?

Pause.

Saskia: You wanted to talk.

Mags: Yeah. I'll ring you.

Saskia: Gem, time to go.

Gemma: Where we going?

Saskia: Taxi's coming across the road.

Gemma: Are we going round?

Saskia: Got to.

Gemma: Karl, would you like to catch a lift with us?

Karl: I'm alright.

Gemma: You sure?

Karl nods

See you around.

Gemma and Saskia exit.

Phone rings, Mags picks it up.

Mags: We don't have any cars available at the moment or for the foreseeable future.

Lights dim.

Act 2 Scene 1

Mags is sitting at a diagonally set table, stage left off centre flicking through notes. Karl is slumped on a chair close to the table.

Mags: Shit.

She sits back, rolls her eyes.

What the hell can we do?

Karl: It's not that bad.

Mags: There's no cars.

Karl: Yeah.

Mags: How the hell do you run a taxi rank with no cars?

Karl: It's only town centre.

Mags: The key area on a Saturday night.

Karl: Yeah.

Mags: Yeah. Is that all you've got?

Karl: What?

Mags: No more wise advice for me?

Karl: I was just saying.

Mags: Well, don't!

Karl: You're grumpy.

Mags: And you're a prick.

Karl: What was that for?

Mags: Do you not understand? This is my livelihood.

Karl: You need a better job.

Mags: Thanks, Karl.

Karl: Pretty hard at the moment.

Mags: Exactly, and I'm not exactly the picture of youth.

Karl: Could always go on the council.

Mags: Not with my documents. Think of the shit area they'd give me.

Karl: Gem's on it now.

Mags: I'm too old for this and don't want to be waiting on that list for so long, then getting rehoused when Kayla moves out.

Karl: Not that bad.

Mags: How would you know?

Karl: I don't.

Mags: Shut up, then.

Karl: Why should I shut up? You're the one getting stressed.

Mags: Cos I'm really tired and can't deal with you making a scene.

Karl: You're always knackered.

Mags: Goes with the territory.

Karl: You need a break.

Mags: Like everyone else.

Karl: Yeah.

Mags: I'm more concerned about the lack of cars, which limits my chance of a holiday, as I won't earn anything. I'm not even sure what I'm doing. There's no escape from work when you're the only bloody person for a shift.

Karl: It's hard.

Mags: Stick to the same routine.

Karl: It's easier.

Mags: Much.

Karl: At least you've got a job.

Mags: You telling me to count my blessings?

Karl: No, there's a lot of people without.

Mags: Like you?

Karl: I've got a job.

Mags: Not doing it.

Karl: I'm on sick.

Mags: How long are they going to wait for you?

Karl: As long as it takes.

Mags: While you get spoon-fed by the government?

Karl: I'm ill.

Mags: Everyone's ill, other people hide it better.

Karl: I don't need to hide anything.

Mags: Everyone has something to hide, and you're a crap liar.

Karl: At least I've got people.

Mags: Who?

Karl: She's somewhere.

Mags: She's always somewhere.

Karl: Yeah.

Mags: Not when you need her, though.

Karl: No ...

Mags: Not much use to you, is she?

Karl: She doesn't know what to do.

Mags: She's not exactly helped you, has she?

Karl: Wasn't that bad.

Mags: Your mum went to prison.

Karl: That wasn't my fault.

Mags: Course not.

Karl: She doesn't speak to me now.

Mags: What did you expect? Stupid bitch.

Karl: Mags ...

Mags: What you going to do?

Karl: She's my mum.

Mags: She didn't do a good job, did she?

Karl: She doesn't get it.

Mags: That's her problem. I know what you're talking about.

Karl: Thanks, Mags.

Mags: I'm always here.

Karl: I know.

Mags: You should have gone with the girls.

Karl: Too early.

Mags: What?

Karl: And too expensive.

Mags: You could have split the cost.

Karl: Nah, it'd be too much.

Mags: They're not that far away.

Karl: Wouldn't be right.

Mags: You talk a lot of shite sometimes.

Karl: Nah, it'd be too much.

Mags: I could have given you a tenner, you would have been fine. Can't see you getting back tonight unless you walk.

Karl: Not so bad.

Mags: Provided it doesn't start raining. Have you spoken to that mate of yours yet?

Karl: Who?

Mags: The one that chucked up in the back of the cab?

Karl: He did down two bottles of vodka before going out and got through ...

Mags: A bottle of Sambuca and half of gold schnapps in the bar.

Karl grins.

I couldn't care less what he drank, I'm more concerned about the amount he owes for cleaning it up.

Karl: I haven't seen him for a while.

Mags: You tell him from me.

Very faint patter of raindrops starts.

Karl: He will.

Mags: When?

Karl: I don't know. I haven't seen him for a while.

Mags: You find him and tell him.

Mags starts rearranging papers on her desk, sorting them into three piles. She then stacks them in alternate directions on top of one another on the corner of her table. She picks up the one on the top and starts flicking through it, studying certain sheets carefully.

Mags: It's raining.

Karl: No it isn't

Mags: Can't you hear it?

Karl: No.

Mags: Clean your ears out.

Karl: I did this morning.

Mags: Can you see them?

Karl: Can you?

Mags: No, it's too dark over here.

Karl: But you can hear them?

Mags: Go have a look.

Karl: I don't want to move.

Mags: Check for me, I don't want to be hearing thing as well. I've had enough hallucinations.

Karl: Alright.

Karl levers himself up, shuffles over to the nearest window.

They're still out there.

Mags: Who?

Karl: Gem and Sass.

Mags: They're still out there?

Karl squints out of the window.

Karl: Yep, standing on the kerb.

Mags: Been out there ages,

Karl: Think Sass is on her phone.

Mags: She said her phone was dead.

Karl: Oh...

Mags: Where's Chris got to? I thought he was picking them up.

Karl: They're going to be soaked.

Mags: Where is he?

Karl: He'll be on his way.

Mags: It's taken him twenty minutes.

Karl: They are wearing beer jackets.

Mags: Gem isn't, she's sober.

Karl: Is she? Why?

Mags: I don't know. What is Chris doing?

Karl: Traffic?

Mags: It's midnight, one a.m., what kind of traffic do you get at this time?

Karl: Maybe something's happened.

Mags: Like what?

Karl: A crash?

Mags: Tell them to come inside.

Karl: No.

Mags: They might know what's going on.

Karl: They looked fine.

Mags: I can't do it.

Karl: I've got a bad leg.

Mags: You've just walked in on it.

Karl: It's really bad now.

Mags: Play the victim, why don't you?

Karl: I'm not, just saying.

Mags: That it's too much effort after all I've done for you.

Karl: That's right.

Mags: Ungrateful sod.

Karl: You're not going to do it?

Mags: I can't leave this desk.

Karl: Not like you've got a dodgy leg.

Mags: No, I'm working.

Karl: Not working very hard.

Mags: It's difficult, alright?

Karl: Hope you're not playing the victim.

Mags: Shut up.

Karl: What did I say, Mags?

Mags: Be quiet.

Karl: Everyone's got issues.

Mags: I've got you.

Karl: Thanks, makes me feel so wanted.

Mags: Glad to have been of some help.

Karl: Always.

Mags: Now shut up and let me do some work.

Karl: What work have you got?

Mags: Plenty.

Karl: Not exactly ringing off the hook.

Mags: Karl, shut it.

Karl: That's what happens when you get old.

Mags: Shut it.

Karl: Don't like the truth?

Mags: I am not in the mood for this.

Karl: The mood for what?

Mags: Your silly games, I've got enough to worry about.

Karl: Mags, I think you need to chill out.

Mags: Shut it.

Karl: Doesn't sound very chilled to me.

Mags: Not likely to with you around.

Karl: I'm just helping out.

Mags: Fat lot of help you are.

Karl: I think it's time.

Mags: Leave it out.

Karl: I'm getting hungry.

Mags: For Christ's sake. We go through this routine every night.

Karl: And we're going through it again.

Mags: You've already tried it once, and you know the answer.

Karl: Do I?

Mags: Yes, same as earlier.

Karl: You'll moan for ten minutes then go fetch me something.

Mags: This is not the night to try me.

Karl: Is it ever?

Mags: Karl. I am not going tonight.

Karl: Why not?

Mags: Why should I?

Karl: Because I'm hungry.

Mags: Hungry enough to walk over?

Karl: I can't move.

Mags: You've not even told me what you want.

Karl: I don't know what there is.

Mags: Nor do I.

Karl: You can read them to me. Have you got a menu?

Mags: No.

Karl: There's one there on the end.

Mags: No, there isn't.

Karl: I can see it.

Mags: You've been going there every Saturday night for as long as I can remember.
You should know the menu by now.

Karl: There might be something new.

Mags: It's a kebab shop.

Karl: You never know.

Mags: Go and check it yourself.

Karl: I can't tonight.

Mags: Why not?

Karl: My leg.

Mags: There's no point playing that card.

Karl: Mags.

Mags: You're perfectly capable.

Karl: I won't ask you again.

Mags: Sure you won't. I told you, I'm not going, that was your last time.

Karl: That's what you said last time.

Mags: I'm sticking to it this time.

Karl: Sure.

Mags: I bloody mean it this time.

Karl: But I can't move.

Mags: Bollocks, you're perfectly capable. What if I moved and the phone rang?

Karl: I could answer it.

Mags: How are you going to move from there to here if your leg's that bad?

Karl: I could do it.

Mags: Then you can go and fetch the food yourself.

Karl: I can't move.

Mags: Probably a good thing. It's not the healthiest of diets.

Karl: It tastes good.

Mags: Have you not seen You are What you Eat?

Karl: Daytime TV is worse than a takeaway.

Mags: Definitely not fetching it for you now.

Karl: Didn't want it anyway.

Mags: You've got to think of your twelve steps.

Karl: What?

Mags: Your keep fit programme. The way to a healthy body is a healthy mind and your choice of food.

Karl grunts in stubborn agreement.

You're not setting yourself up well with a pizza or greasy kebab.

Karl: They're not greasy, they pick the best quality meat and cook it ...

Reciting from memory.

to create the most tantalising flavours of Turkey that you could experience.

Mags: I'm sure they can't sell it as the dreg ends of a carcass and whatever we can scrape off the claws.

Karl: Pigs don't have claws.

Mags: You don't make doner from pork.

Karl: Why not?

Mags: Beef if you're lucky.

Karl: If you're lucky?

Mags: It doesn't matter where the meat comes from, for all we know it could be horse, as long as the price is right.

Karl: Do you think they use humans?

Mags: Cannibalism is illegal, so I'm hoping not.

Karl: But ...

Mags: Not only am I not fetching you that kebab, it's probably better if you avoid it altogether.

Karl: Can I have a fag, then?

Mags: One of mine?

Karl: I don't have any.

Mags: Course not. If only you had a job to fund your habit.

Karl: I'm on sick leave.

Mags: So I've heard.

Mags pulls out her tobacco, lays out the skin, puts tobacco on top and starts rolling but is not doing it well.

Karl: Give it to me.

Mags: I can do it.

Karl: Not very well; hand it over.

Mags: You want one?

Karl: I asked for them, didn't I?

Mags carries on purposefully struggling with the rolling.

Pass it here and I can do it for you.

Mags: No, no, are you saying I am not capable of rolling myself a cigarette?

Karl: I might have been hinting.

Mags: Fine!

Mags crumples up the skin, puts the tobacco back in the pouch, pulls out a straight cigarette and lights it.

Karl: Can I?

Mags throws the pack of cigarettes.

Karl: Thanks. You got the tobacco?

Mags: What?

Karl: Roll ups.

Mags: Here.

Mags throws the tobacco to Karl who catches it and starts rolling a cigarette.

As Mags finishes her cigarette, Karl lights his.

Act 2 Scene 2

Gemma and Saskia re-enter, grumbling.

Gemma: Are you smoking?

Mags: Nah, they're cigarettos.

Gemma: I remember those.

Mags: Is she old enough?

Gemma: I'm not that young.

Saskia: So cross when they stopped them, looked so cool on the school gates with a chocolate fag in my mouth.

Mags: I bet.

Saskia: I was the coolest year four ...

Mags: Not long after that you started smoking the real thing.

Saskia: True enough. Got any spare?

Gemma: Saskia! And Karl, really?

Karl: What?

Gemma: I thought you were keeping fit.

Karl: What's the point?

Gemma: What do you mean?

Karl: How's it going to help me?

Gemma: So many ways, you won't get cancer, be healthy, no asthma.

Karl: How do you know?

Gemma: If you don't smoke, you're less likely to contract anything like that.

Karl: Doesn't mean I'm safe.

Gemma: No, but it means you will be healthier, therefore less opportunity of infection.

Mags: What a load of bollocks.

Gemma: Pardon?

Mags: Pardon?

Gemma: Just because I talk properly.

Mags: No, because you talk a load of bollocks.

Gemma: There's no need for ...

Mags: No need for what?

Gemma: You don't have to behave like this.

Mags: Don't I?

Gemma: No.

Mags: Depends who you hold responsible.

Gemma: It wasn't my fault.

Mags: Sure it wasn't.

Gemma: I've lost my fiancée.

Mags: His brother, and he does not need you filling his head with airy fairy bullshit about how to live his life.

Saskia: Leave it, Gem.

Gemma: I was simply pointing out ...

Mags: You were simply pointing out, I don't give a shit what you're pointing out. If you're staying here, you can shut it. I don't want any of your crap.

Gemma: (*Quietly*) She's in a good mood.

Karl: Not been going well.

Gemma: Radio still out of action?

Karl: It's only been half an hour.

Gemma: No, it's coming up to one.

Karl: Doesn't matter.

Gemma: Guess not.

Mags: I don't know.

Saskia: It's not her fault.

Mags: I know.

Saskia: She's got nothing to do with us.

Mags: She was messing him around.

Saskia: They were getting married.

Saskia: Exactly.

Mags: She had to get rid of him somehow.

Saskia: What has that got to do with us?

Mags: Us now, is it?

Saskia: Suit yourself.

Mags: She looks too happy.

Saskia: It's been six months. They found no traces of anything on him. It was Sudden Arrhythmic Death Syndrome, they said.

Mags: Sure it was, they say things like that.

Saskia: You can't blame Gemma.

Mags: Why not? She doesn't look the grieving widow does she?

Saskia: You have to move on.

Mags: It was her fault.

Saskia: There's no point passing the blame.

Mags: You saying it was my fault?

Saskia: Some things are.

Mags: I'm looking out for him.

Gemma: So am I.

Mags: *(To Saskia)* Keep her quiet

Karl: I'm good.

Gemma takes the cigarette out of Karl's hand and stamps it out on the floor.

Gemma: It's not good for your eyes, and think of your lungs. My granddad has emphysema.

Mags: Mine died of syphilis, but is that going to stop you having a shag?

Gemma: I haven't had sex since.

Gemma starts welling up.

Mags: I bet you haven't.

Gemma: How dare you?

Mags: They've all been warned off now.

Gemma: I'm in mourning.

Mags: You poor thing, mourning for the free ride you lost. Have you gained redemption yet?

Gemma: It's not about redemption, it's important to feel at peace, to be one with yourself and with everything that's happened.

Mags: I'm sure.

Gemma: You should try it, Karl.

Karl: Try what?

Gemma: Being at peace with yourself and everything around you.

Mags: Don't think we're quite there yet, are we, Karl?

Karl: Where?

Gemma: It's the best way to move on,

Karl looks uncomfortable

Karl: Move on from what?

Gemma: From what's happened.

Saskia: Gem, stop.

Gemma: You need closure. Have you heard about the grief cycle? It's all a process.
You've got to accept each bit. Piece by piece.

Mags: Ignore her, Karl, you're OK.

Karl: It's ... It's ... it's too noisy in here.

Mags: I was thinking the same thing.

They all go quiet, looking round at each other, except Karl, immersed in his own world.

Karl: Can I have another one?

Mags: You're asking me now?

Karl: Yep, I need a fag.

Mags: Go ahead.

Karl starts rolling a cigarette, uncomfortable silence.

Saskia: It was getting freezing.

Gemma: Been raining.

Mags: I know that.

Saskia: It's not tipping it down.

Gemma: Not any more.

Mags: What happened to Chris?

Saskia: Don't know, No signal.

Mags: Which network?

Saskia: Does it matter?

Mags: Guess not.

Saskia: They're all as shite as each other.

Mags: Like politicians.

Saskia and Mags giggle.

Mags pulls out her phone, looks at the screen.

It's on. Ummm,

Saskia: You alright?

Mags concentrates hard on the screen.

Mags: Yeah, just working it out.

Saskia looks over.

Saskia: It's ringing.

Mags: You want to phone him? It is your taxi.

Saskia: Sure, you alright?

Mags: Tired.

Karl lights his cigarette.

Gemma: Can I have one of those?

Karl looks at his cigarette.

Karl: One of these?

Gemma: Yes.

Karl: You can't roll.

Gemma: Couldn't you roll it for me?

Karl: Not now.

Gemma: Just a little one, I can have it without a filter.

Karl: No

Mags: Stop pestering him, you don't smoke. It's revolting.

Gemma: Everyone else has one. I wanted to try one.

Mags: Pathetic.

Gemma: What?

Mags: That's pathetic, you can't even uphold your own values. Thank god you didn't have children.

Gemma: What did you say?

Mags: I said I think you'd be a crap mum..

Gemma: Says you.

Mags: I've got good kids.

Gemma: Yeah, seeing your sixteen-year-old daughter out clubbing on a Saturday night.

Mags: No tonight, she's at the hospital.

Gemma: Oh, did she get into an accident whilst dancing like a whore?

Mags: She's working.

Gemma: She was working w...

Saskia: Gemma ...

Mags: (*To Saskia*) What's she saying?

Gemma: I'm sure she's working very hard.

Mags: What?

Gemma: Thought I saw her tonight, but it was someone else.

Mags: What did I expect?

Saskia: She's trying to wind you up.

Mags: How predictable. Thankfully, I'm not easy to wind up.

Gemma: Sure you're not.

Mags: Where the hell is this taxi?

Saskia: I was wondering where ours is.

Mags: Look at him, he needs to get home.

Karl is slouched uncommunicatively in his chair

Saskia: You cannot be connected to this caller.

Mags: Fuckers.

Saskia: Probably got no signal.

Mags: I need to get him home, it's his first night back.

Saskia: He's just come back?

Mags: Yeah.

Saskia: Mags, are you sure?

Mags: Why wouldn't I be? Is this another thing I'm wrong about?

Saskia: I thought I saw him a few weeks ago.

Mags: Where?

Saskia: I thought I saw him around town.

Mags: You mean last week?

Saskia: Maybe.

Gemma: Yes. We did.

Mags: For that birthday party?

Saskia: What birthday party?

Mags: He came back for Mike's birthday party, they were in Giro's.

Gemma: You mean Mick?

Mags: That's him.

Saskia: Mick wasn't here last week.

Mags: What?

Saskia: Went to Mallorca for his birthday.

Mags: What?

Saskia: He's a little over 18-30 but fancied a week in the sun.

Gemma: Sea, sun and a bit of fun.

Mags: You saw Karl in town?

Saskia: Yeah.

Mags: But not for a birthday?

Saskia: I don't think so.

Mags: What the hell was he doing back then?

Saskia: When?

Mags: That little fucker's been lying to me.

Gemma: Ooops ...

Saskia: I'm sure there's a reason for it.

Mags: A reason to shove his head up his own arse.

Gemma: Mags.

Mags: You can't say nothing.

Saskia: Gem, back off.

Mags: You do not lie to family.

Saskia: He's got no family.

Mags: He's got me ...

Gemma: And me.

Mags: I want a bloody good reason for this

Saskia: A reason for what?

Mags: He's going to bloody tell us.

Saskia: What is he going to tell us?

Mags stops and looks at Saskia.

We can ask him whatever you want.

Mags: I need to find out why.

Saskia: Why what?

Mags: Why?

Mags gives up.

I don't know.

Saskia: We need to be careful, Karl isn't himself at the moment, not likely to be until he gets some support.

Mags: He's got me.

Saskia: You're hardly the picture of calm and understanding.

Mags: He needs to sort himself out.

Saskia: There's not an overnight fix.

Gemma: I'm still working on it.

Mags: You keep out of this.

Saskia: You can't solve this by shouting and screaming. You'll push him over the edge.

Mags: He's hiding something.

Saskia: Probably, but you won't find out what it is by bullying him. I'm going to check on your phone again.

Saskia dials and holds phone to her ear.

Saskia: Not answering.

Mags: Still?

Saskia: I've tried him three times.

Mags: I've been calling him for hours. Spoke to him twenty minutes before you got here and he said he was on his way.

Saskia: This person is unavailable to take your call, press one if you wish to ...

Mags: Tosser.

Saskia: Exactly my thoughts.

Mags: What the hell is he doing?

Saskia: Calm down, Mags.

Mags: Why?

Saskia: We've been through this.

Mags: I want him home.

Saskia: Me and Gem, too. I'm sure there's a perfectly good reason.

Mags: Get on and ask him them.

Saskia: Would it be better if I took Karl for a walk? He looks like he needs a stretch.

Mags: How's a walk going to solve this?

Saskia: I can have a chat with him, see what's going on.

Mags: Very diplomatic.

Saskia: It's the booze.

Mags: Alcohol consumption normally causes anger or depression.

Saskia: I am a wonder of society.

Mags: You're winding me up.

Saskia: My talent.

Mags: Yeah.

Saskia: You need to get this sorted.

Mags: What?

Saskia: It's not healthy to live with those kind of issues

Mags: I've managed this long.

Saskia: But it's affecting things.

Mags: No more than usual.

Saskia: I watched you that night.

Mags: I didn't mean for that ...

Saskia: I know you didn't, but it does not change what happened.

Mags: It won't happen again.

Saskia: How do you know?

Mags: It won't happen again.

Saskia: This place isn't doing you any good.

Mags: What other option is there? What choices do I have?

Saskia: We've always got choices.

Mags: To live or die.

Saskia: More, should you stay or should you go?

Mags: This is not the time for The Clash.

Saskia: But if you could, would you?

Mags: I can't. I have Kayla, she's going to uni and I work here.

Saskia: Yeah, but it's obviously not working for you. You're sat squinting at your phone, shuffling papers you can't understand, and you haven't had a call for a taxi since me and Gemma turned up.

Phone rings, Mags grabs it.

Mags: County Cars ...

Pause.

Wrong number.

Mags slams the phone down.

Saskia: See.

Saskia looks Mags in the eye.

You've got to get yourself sorted before you can help anyone else.

Gemma: How long before our taxi? I'm getting hungry.

Saskia: I could give Chris another call, got your phone Gem?

Gemma: Battery's dead.

Saskia: Karl?

Gemma: Karl, got your phone?

Mags: Couldn't pay his contract.

Gemma: Sweetheart, are you OK?

Mags: He's fine, just getting tired.

Saskia: Keep an eye on him, Gems, I need to ring Chris.

Mags: He's fine. Leave him alone.

Saskia: Mags?

Mags: Here.

Saskia picks up the phone.

There's a missed call. I'll check it.

Saskia checks the phone.

Saskia: It's Chris, Mary fucking Gardner, what were you thinking?!

Mags: It's on vibrate.

Saskia: Fitting.

Mags: How was I to know?

Saskia: It's on your desk, you're meant to notice these things.

Mags: Not my fault if you're all fucking arguing too loud for me to notice.

Saskia: I was trying to help you.

Mags: Fat lot of use that is.

Saskia: All I can do is help.

Mags: Is that what it is?

Saskia: I can't make you do anything.

Mags: Thank god.

Saskia: It's not as if I wanted to come here tonight.

Mags: Why not? You sure seemed happy waltzing in here, telling me how to change my life?

Saskia: I'll be just as happy waltzing out.

Mags: You've already done that.

Saskia: I can't take much more of this.

Mags: Can't take much more of what?

Saskia: Can you not see how aggressive you've become?

Mags: You watch it, or you'll regret what you're saying.

Saskia: How come no one dares to disagree or stand up to you?

Mags: I'm blunt.

Saskia: Bollocks. You're a bully.

Mags: I'm all about family.

Saskia: Yeah, you spout that one again.

Mags: I look after everyone.

Saskia: Only if they follow your orders.

Mags: What the hell does that mean?

Saskia: It means I'm fed up. Fed up of you. I'm fed up of this town.

Mags: Why don't you piss off, then?

Saskia: I am. The main reason for coming out tonight was to tell you that I'm leaving.

Mags: Go on, then.

Saskia: I got a promotion.

Mags: Marvellous.

Saskia: I'm moving away.

Gemma: She is: she says I can have the spare room.

Silence

Saskia: Come on, Gem, let's go, we can use a call box.

Gemma: I might stay here a bit.

Saskia: Do what you want, I'm off.

Saskia exits.

Act 2 Scene 3

Mags stays fixed to her seat in silence. Gemma is checking on Karl.

Gemma: You know she's going.

Mags: I don't need her.

Gemma: Be strange without her here.

Mags: Do us all good.

Gemma: You're not going to say anything?

Mags: What is there to say?

Gemma: Plenty.

Mags: *(To Karl)* I know you weren't here for a birthday last week.

Gemma: Leave it out.

Mags: He can explain himself.

Gemma: He has not spoken for a good half hour and now you're going to berate him for going out on a Saturday night?

Mags: It was a Thursday night.

Gemma: The day does not matter.

Mags: Matters to me.

Gemma: Everything matters to you.

Mags: Says the girl who doesn't care about anyone or anything.

Gemma: Of course, that's why I've been in counselling the last six months.

Mags: Making a scene.

Gemma: At least I express my emotions.

Mags: What, rather than bottling them up and fucking someone's daughter?

Karl jumps up and exits.

Gemma: Well done, Mags. You're so understanding.

Mags: Can't hide the truth.

Gemma: Truth?

Gemma stands up.

Mags: Always comes out. He'll reap his rewards soon enough.

Mags goes back to her papers, Gemma moves towards the door.

Gemma: You don't get it, do you?

Mags: I get everything, I get it time and time again. He won't get away with it this time.

Gemma: Mags, get a grip on yourself.

Gemma exits.

Mags: Smarmy cow. What did I expect? They don't care about anyone but themselves. How could they even comprehend what I have to face every day with their government hand-outs.

Phone rings, Mags looks at it and lets it ring out.

Mags: Yeah, they can all piss off. Not like I have anyone to talk to, anyway. No need to worry about a taxi any more.

Mags looks at the radio again.

And the stupid radio. Not much use for it now. Everything seems to be falling apart. Everyone's turning on me, taking advantage or running away. Deal with emotions? I'll fucking deal with how I feel when I see Karl again. No counselling needed there.

Saskia re-enters.

Saskia: No call boxes in service.

Mags: Nah.

Saskia: They've all been decked in.

Silence.

Mags: That's what happens round here.

Saskia: I need to use your phone.

Mags: You'll always find a use for me.

Saskia: Oh yeah. I forgot: you're the sob story, aren't you?

Mags: Don't talk bollocks.

Saskia: We are all stabbing you in the back, aren't we?

Mags: I couldn't care less.

Saskia: I'm not here to piss about.

Mags picks up her phone, playing with it.

Mags: You like playing games, don't you.

Saskia: Games? Physical abuse is not a game.

Silence.

Mags: You didn't report it.

Saskia: Phone ...

Mags: Can't have been that serious.

Silence.

Can it?

Silence.

And now you're running away.

Saskia: I got a promotion.

Silence.

Mags: What an example to set.

Saskia: Gemma doesn't know.

Mags: Of course not.

Silence.

Wouldn't want to look weak, would you.

Saskia: Give me that phone.

Mags: Not even going to explain?

Saskia: What's the point?

Mags: That's what I said.

Saskia: Not quite the same with you, though, is it?

Mags: Not easy.

Saskia: You need to sort yourself out.

Mags: When you go off to live your new, fresh life?

Saskia: You don't have to stay here.

Mags: So you say. Where do you propose I go?

Silence.

Saskia: Where do you think?

Mags: With you? What about Kayla?

Saskia: Change of scenery would do her good.

Mags: Keep her away from Karl.

Saskia looks round.

Saskia: Where are Karl and Gemma?

Mags: I found him out.

Saskia: Shit ...

Mags: Yes, shit, him and Kayla ...

Saskia: You weren't meant to find out this way.

Mags: Wasn't meant to find out at all. I did well not to sock him on the spot.

Saskia: They're doing the car up for you.

Mags: What?

Saskia: They've been working on it the past few months.

Mags: He said, she's got to tell me.

Saskia: She has.

Mags: What do you mean.

Saskia: I've already spoken to her, she wants to stay.

Mags: She's just like me.

Saskia: But thinks it would be better if you go with me.

Mags: Where's she going to live?

Saskia: Karl needs a flatmate and he's like her big brother.

Mags: What?

Saskia: It's all worked out.

Mags: So, he's not been shagging my daughter?

Saskia: No, where did you get that idea?

Mags: But ...

Saskia: They've been doing the car up so you can drive back and see them. It's been good for Karl. Gives him a distraction from everything. That's what he needs: his emotions are so up and down at the moment.

Mags: Shit.

Saskia: What? Where are they?

Mags: I accused him of ...

Saskia: How bad was it?

Mags: I didn't touch him.

Saskia: Did you shout?

Mags: I was aggressive.

Saskia: Mags. He's got previous.

Mags jumps up from behind the desk

Mags: I know. I thought he was over that.

Saskia: You know where he's going?

Mags: It was the bridge near the takeaway last time.

Mags runs out of the door.

Saskia: Lucky he's so predictable.

Mags' mobile phone rings.

Saskia: Hello, Chris, yes. I don't think we'll be needing you now. Maybe in an hour.

Bye.

Saskia rings off and walks out of the door.