

WRITING THE STORM IN THE TEACUP: THE PROCESS OF WRITING THE  
CHARACTER DRIVEN PLAY, *UNIDENTIFIED ITEM IN THE BAGGING AREA*, FOCUSING  
UPON THE SEEMINGLY UNREMARKABLE LIFE OF VICTORIA BURNHAM

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## Abstract

This thesis essay will explore the process of writing the character driven play, *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* (2013), looking specifically at the main acts of playwriting that I utilised while crafting the play. I chose to craft a play out of a seemingly unremarkable character – Victoria Burnham, a middle aged post menopausal woman – and story; the play follows Victoria as she makes life changing decisions in pursuit of her own happiness. Through crafting the play, I discovered that many other contemporary playwrights choose to tell character driven stories as opposed to plot driven stories – the work of David Mamet and Patrick Marber in particular demonstrate this in their respective works. There is also a variety of critical theory surrounding the idea of character driven plays, most notably David Edgar's *How Plays Work* (2009) and David Mamet's *The Three Uses of the Knife* (2002). The result of my choosing to craft the character driven play and manipulating the theatrical convention of format to create meaning, is a play that I believe stands firm in its assertion as a 'storm in a teacup play', making the seemingly unremarkable story of Victoria Burnham worthy of the stage.

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## INTRODUCTION:

In an earlier essay exploring the notion of character and dramatic structure, research was undertaken into the source and development of character throughout theatre history. In 335 BCE, Aristotle suggested plot as the first principle of drama, with character as secondary to that (cited in Simmonds, 2013: p. 1). As the essay continues, Aristotle stated that characters must be 'consistently inconsistent' (ibid, 335 BCE: p. 13), that is to say if a man behaves foolishly all his life, he cannot suddenly become intelligent in the final scene (cited in Simmonds, 2013: p. 2).

Building upon Aristotle's works, Roman critics believed that distinctive qualities should be applied suitably to characters in terms of their rank and office, 'innocence to a woman, meanness of language to a poor man' (Plutarch, 1<sup>st</sup> C: p. 15). It is argued that Shakespeare was the first to create characters which 'gradually broke free from their origins', something that, over time, developed into the formation of multifaceted, three-dimensional characters (Lennard, 2002: p. 78). By the late nineteenth century, Ibsen describes his characters as if fully acquainted with them as, 'intimate friends, they will not disappoint me' (cited in Bentley, 1965: p. 56). Over time, character grew from that convention which supports the plot, to the more contemporary notion of being able to drive the play as a singular force, the character driven play (cited in Simmonds, 2013: p. 2).

It was a conscious decision for my play, *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* (2013), to be character - as opposed to plot - driven; stories with strong protagonists, richly characterised through the specific conventions (internal flaws, weaknesses, strong internal objectives), resonate with my personal writing manifesto (see Appendix).

Through my writing I want to give voice to truthful, honest stories from ordinary human beings – attempting to craft remarkable narratives from seemingly unremarkable people and give voice to those usually unheard. What drives me in my work is in creating complex, flawed characters from which the plot hangs, not the vice versa, ‘the human being is the best plot there is’ (cited in Bentley, 1965: p. 78).

The second aspect of the play that I decided to control was format; ‘social processes, ceremonies and rituals which audiences recognise’, (Edgar, 2009: p. 130). Playing with format, a writer sets up expectations within an audience – for example, if we see a dinner table laden with candles, glasses and plates, we know that this scene *should* follow the universally acknowledged ritual of ‘a dinner party’. The writer can then create drama through the *reversal* of these universal expectations, ‘because we know what should happen’ playwright David Edgar notes, ‘we immediately recognise – and draw meaning from – any such flouting’ (2009: p. 135). Being such an existential story, a ‘small’ story in that it is simply the trials and tribulations of one woman and her family displayed onstage, it was important to play with the conventions of playwriting, particularly format, in order to make this theatrically stimulating.

As will be explored in this essay, there were a number of influential plays that breathed life into my own crafting of *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* (2013). David Mamet’s *Edmond* (1982) was the inspiration for the character driven style of the play, while writers such as Patrick Marber and Leo Butler also heavily influenced the existential aspect of the narrative and the risks I was willing to take in writing a play that, on the surface, is ‘a storm in a teacup’ as opposed to ‘a storm on a heath’

(Butler, 2013). Contrastingly, part of the process of writing the play was to eliminate certain styles of playwriting that I *didn't* want to emulate; Sarah Kane's *Crave* (1998), which it's name-less characters and non linear, incoherent dialogue became the starting point that I actively moved away from. While writing *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* (2013), it was important for me to explore the context of other similar, and dissimilar works to date, as part of an ongoing research period.

In this thesis essay I will explore the process of writing the play, *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* (2013), and the experience of taking a 'storm in a teacup' and making it worthy of the stage (Butler, 2013).

## CHAPTER 1: DRAMATIC ACTION

My first struggle when beginning the process of writing was convincing myself that the existential aspect of the story was enough for a paying, live audience. As head of the Royal Court Studio Group, Leo Butler led a discussion on the idea of 'storm in a teacup' plays, highlighting the intense pressure there is on playwrights to write 'state of the nation' plays, plays which are a 'storm on a heath', 'big plays' (Butler, 2013). However, as Butler concluded and Alan Ayckbourn agrees, 'At its most successful, theatre views things from a human standpoint.' (2002: p. 9) I began toying with the idea of a woman who has just unknowingly experienced the menopause, and suddenly feels as if she has lost the grasp on her life. Her body has given her away, her husband takes little notice of her since retiring and her son has just started University away from home. This standpoint, rather than being specific themes or a story I felt compelled to tell, was an *action* that I wanted to examine on stage with a live audience. It is important to distinguish what is meant by 'action' in playwriting, since it is a slippery context that transcends over a number of mediums. In playwriting, David Edgar suggests that:

'Dramatic action consists of a project...followed by a contradiction or reversal.' (Edgar, 2009: p. 25)

David Mamet goes on to muse that 'Character *is* action...That's all it is. What they're physically trying to accomplish onstage, what they want' (cited in Lahr, 1997: p. 1) Relating the two together, Edgar and Mamet speak of dramatic action as somebody, a character, setting out to *do* or *achieve* something - Edgar's 'project' (2009: p. 25). The



drama is then created from the inability to achieve or obtain this thing or desire, 'He/she is not only in thrall to overwhelming determinations but also in contest with something lost' (Edgar, 2009: p. 54). It was clear to me that I had a character, Victoria, with something she *didn't* want – her monotonous lifestyle, the feeling of purposelessness – so I then proceeded to find out what she *did* want. If Victoria felt purposeless, desexualised and overlooked, surely then she *desired* to be sexualised, purposeful and noticed – her project. Victoria was now in pursuit of something but, as Terry Johnson prompts, in order for this pursuit to resonate dramatically, she must be up against something:

“Drama is the discovery of what people want and why they can't have it.” (cited in Grace, 2012: p.56)

This led me to consider Edgar's second convention of dramatic action, and indeed, leads us onto the second section of this thesis essay.

## CHAPTER 2: THE EXISTENTIAL STORY (THE HUMAN STRUGGLE)

The second part of Edgar's theory of 'dramatic action' is that, following a project, there must be a contradiction or reversal (2009: p. 25). In light of my own play, what conflicts would Victoria have to address in order to get what she wants, and how would this affect her on her pursuit? Playwright and theorist Stuart Spencer highlights the importance of struggle and conflict within a stage play:

The action of a play demands functionary characters who represent the human struggle to survive and to discover meaning in life (Smiley, 1971: p. 145).

In light of Smiley's notion of 'action of a play' involving 'human struggle...to discover meaning in life' (1971: p. 146), I decided that, in line with my own desire to explore a 'storm in a teacup' rather than a 'storm on a heath' (Butler, 2013), character driven story, Victoria's action in the play must be conceivable and human. I decided, then, that the play's dramatic action be, 'Victoria's pursues her own personal happiness, and finds that it comes at a price.' I felt that, regardless of it being a 'storm in a teacup' (Butler, 2013) idea, the dramatic action would surely resonate for an audience – it is inherent to the human condition to pursue happiness. As Steve Waters notes, it is deeply important for an audience to have a sense of catharsis in the theatre, recognising even a fragment of the action onstage in their own experiences. 'Audiences need to have some ownership of the story' (Waters, 2010: p. 93).

I also made a conscious decision to have Victoria begin each scene as the first character we see; while this is not a strict convention of the character driven play, I found it successful in maintaining the momentum of the scenes. After reading an extract of the play at the Playwright's Workshop, which included two scenes that Victoria did not lead, I found that the focus of the play was shifting onto other characters instead of remaining predominately on her. Ayckbourn highlights the importance of having your audience look 'at the same thing in the same moment' with regards to set; 'you will divide your audience', he notes, 'if you divide the stage' (2002: p. 30). I found this also to be true of dividing my audience attention between the characters that begin the scenes in my play. If Victoria is the character we immediately meet in the beginning of each scene, she will be the main focus of each scene; Ayckbourn speaks of using this device with set, however I believe it also applies to character, 'they [the audience] will tend, because it's in their foreground, to regard this as being the most important one' (2002: p. 30)

It is now important to explore how my choice of writing character driven, 'storm in a teacup' (Butler, 2013) play for the stage was influenced by both classic and contemporary playwrights and their work. I was firstly inspired by Mamet's character driven play, *Edmond* (1982). Edmond, a white collar worker, leaves his wife for a journey of self-discovery, meeting a series of people and circumstances that test his moral strength – the play is character driven, with the plot hanging from Edmond as we follow him on his journey. In *The Paris Review*, Mamet asserts the importance of his characters being the driving force in his plays:

"The main question in drama...is always, 'What does the protagonist want?'

That's what drama is. It's not about theme, it's not about ideas, it's not about setting, but what the protagonist wants.” (cited in Lahr, 1997: p. 1)

This character driven narrative is particularly apparent in *Edmond* (1982). Edmond's action *is* the plot; he wants to leave his wife so he does, he wants to have sex with a prostitute so he goes to a strip club, he wishes to take control of his destiny so he murders before he is murdered. None of the plot is external and unstoppable; it all spurs from his internal desires and physical actions. Edmond's *action* as a character is the muscle of the play; like Victoria, he too leads each scene. This notion is exemplified in the scene On the Street, outside the Peep Show (Mamet, 1982: p. 296):

Pimp: I...

Edmond: You *coon*, you *cunt*, you *cocksucker*

Pimp: I...

Edmond: 'Take me upstairs'?...

Pimp: Oh, my God...(The Pimp *has fallen to the sidewalk and Edmond is kicking him.*)

It is Edmond's *choice*, his character's *action*, to engage in a physical fight with the Pimp – there is no external circumstance that forces these two characters together by twist of fate. Mamet notes how, while the screenplay must 'basically be about plot', a stage play need not be:

A play doesn't have to be that. It has to have a plot as some sort of spine, but the spine can be very simple: two guys waiting for Godot to show up. With

Edmond, he makes things happen that cause other things to happen. (cited in Shewey, 1982: p. 1)

Mamet's 1982 play *Edmond* also influenced my own play, *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* (2013). It is an existential story of a man who 'walks out on his wife to seek, in sensuality, a relief from some unnamable malaise.' (cited in Shewey, 1982: p. 1) This inspired me in my own character driven play; one of my biggest struggles, from the outset, was attempting to turn this 'storm in a teacup' (Butler, 2013) story into one worthy of the stage. In agreement with Sam Smiley, I believe that the story of Victoria must be rooted in the 'human struggle' (1973: p. 145); I was determined to tell the *truth* about this woman's position, feeling purposeless and underappreciated, and write her journey as honestly as possible. In *The Paris Review*, Mamet speaks of the necessity to tell the truth in his plays, regardless of how big or small the story is:

You gotta talk about the truth. You can't put a band-aid on a suppurating wound. The morality of the theater is to tell the truth the best way you can. (cited in Shewey, 1982: p. 1)

Patrick Marber's *Closer* (1997) was another influential play that uses character driven, rather than plot driven, conventions of playwriting. *Closer* (Marber, 1997), first performed at The Royal National Theatre, focuses upon the intertwining lives of four characters, Anna, Larry, Dan and Alice. The characters are, at some point or another, involved with one another sexually, and the play documents their struggle

with 'aspiring to get closer to definitive truth about things' (Marber, 1997: p. xxiii). This desire to tell the 'definitive truth' is in line with Mamet's own manifesto of writing, 'When you're not doing it [telling the truth], you're being immoral.' (cited in Shewey, 1982: p. 1) In *Closer* (Marber, 1997), Marber asserts that the play's dramatic action is to deal with 'human interaction, of violent love and a need for truth' (ibid, 1997: p. xxiii); once again, the idea of the character driven play as dealing with the human struggle and need for truth is apparent. Just as in *Edmond* (Mamet, 1982) and indeed, my own work *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* (2013), Marber has granted his characters actions – the desire to *do* or *achieve* something in each scene, which creates subtle meaning for the play as a whole. As Edmond's desire in the scene On the Street, outside the Peep Show (Mamet, 1982: p. 296) is to racially and physically abuse the Pimp, in *Closer* (Marber, 1997), Larry's desire in Act One Scene Six (ibid, 1997: p. 61) is to uncover the truth about his wife's infidelity:

Larry:           You like him coming in your face?

Anna:           Yes.

Larry:           What does it taste like?

Anna:           It tastes like you but sweeter.

Both Edmond, Larry and, indeed, Victoria have a project that requires them to proceed through the play, leading the plot which comes as subsidiary to the character itself.

As aforementioned, in the research and development of *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* (2013), it was paramount that I understood the critical theory behind the conventions of playwriting that I was manipulating – in this section of the essay, this deals with the conventions of the character driven play. In his own theoretical work, *Three Uses of the Knife* (Mamet, 2002), Mamet contends that ‘the theatre exists to deal with problems of the soul’ (2002: p. 23); in light of this and in line with Smiley’s notion of theatre dealing with ‘human struggle’ (1971: p. 145), I felt compelled to write an existential play exploring both themes. Victoria, the protagonist, embarks on a journey of human struggle, facing her ‘problems of the soul’ (Mamet, 2002: p. 23) – her personal fulfillment - throughout the play. Mamet then goes on to note the importance of dramatic action in a character driven play; the character’s desire to *do* or *achieve* something, in order to further the plot, ‘The main character must have a simple, straightforward, pressing need.’ (ibid, 2010).

This pressing need discussed by Mamet that propels the character forward through the play, is what David Edgar defines as dramatic action, ‘He/she is not only in thrall to overwhelming determinations but also in contest with something lost’ (2009: p. 54). In my own play, I presented my protagonist with a project; to pursue her own happiness and to discover the truth of what that really means for herself and those around her. The theories of dramatic action from both Mamet and Edgar laid the foundations for the narrative arc of the play; a project followed by a contradiction or reversal.

It is also important to explore the idea of the character driven play as rooted in 'human struggle' (Smiley, 1971: p. 145), and therefore, the human condition. As aforementioned, both Mamet and Marber discuss the necessity to explore the truth in their relative works, *Edmond* (Mamet, 1982) and *Closer* (Marber, 1997). In *Three Uses of the Knife* (2002), Mamet continues to reflect upon the necessity to explore the truth of the human struggle on stage:

All your thoughts, at bottom, are bizarre and troubling. If they weren't, not only wouldn't we go to the theatre...we wouldn't dream. (Mamet, 2002: p. 44)

In this section (of his theoretical) work, Mamet is speaking of the inherent human *need* to go to the theatre as part of a cathartic experience. Stanislavski also reflected upon the two types of plays that one could watch at the theatre – one that would leave you saying 'What a masterpiece! Let's get a cup of coffee' (cited in Mamet, 2002: p. 18), and one that would leave you 'unsure, but which you think about the next day, week and perhaps the rest of your life' (cited in Mamet, 2002: p. 18). Both Mamet and Stanislavski describe a type of theatre that acts as a cathartic, almost therapeutic experience for the audience, through exploring the *truth* of the human struggle onstage. Mamet notes how, as human's, we turn to drama 'as a way of understanding its meaning for the hero, which is to say meaning for ourselves.' (2002: p.13)

Additionally, in his book *Playwriting: The Structure of Action*, Sam Smiley reflects upon on the act of writing a character from which plot hangs – a character who is



driven solely by they're own actions, and from which the plot hangs in a progression of cause and effect:

When alone, a person or character can more directly face the terror of life and rejoice in its ecstasy. (1971: p. 61)

The theoretical writing of Smiley, Mamet and Edgar supports the act of writing the character driven play, as I have chosen to do in *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* (2013). Edgar's theory of dramatic action – the idea that the play has a project, followed by a contradiction or reversal (2009: p. 25) – strongly influenced my development of Victoria's pressing need to find self-fulfillment. Smiley's idea of the 'action of a play' concerning 'human struggle' (1971: p. 145) also ties in with my specific act of playwriting in *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* (2013); I chose to identify the truth of Victoria's struggle and explore this onstage through the dramatic action of the play. Mamet's assertion that characters must have a 'pressing need' (cited in Chen, 2010: p. 1) also harks back to the words of Anton Chekov, a dramatist famous for his character driven plays, 'tell me what you want and I'll tell you who you are.' (cited in Pevear, 2000) In my own act of playwriting, the theoretical works of Smiley, Edgar and Mamet have greatly influenced my development.

### CHAPTER 3: FORMAT

It is not just through focusing on the dramatic action of a play that playwrights drive the narrative forward; scenes themselves serve a function through *format*. This leads us into the next section of the essay; in *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* (2013), another specific act of playwriting that I challenged was format, 'social processes, ceremonies and rituals which audiences recognise', (Edgar, 2009: p. 130). Mamet notes how those 'who rail against ritual', be it religious or even 'the PTA', will eventually 'go to the grave lonely, angry and drained' (2002: p. 60). In this sense, Mamet is describing the inertia of the audience when there is a lack of purpose in a scene, 'the job of the dramatist is to make the audience wonder what happens next' (ibid, 2002: p. 61). With my choice to craft a human drama for the stage, it was imperative that I write scenes which were constantly active, interesting to watch and, most importantly, detonated 'something that lies beyond them' (cited in Grace, 2012) Using format, I created expectation for the audience, only to reverse it, 'a format can provide especial semantic value if its rules and roles are challenged, disrupted or reversed' (Edgar, 2009: p. 133). Furthermore, in crafting scenes that have a ritualistic or universally acknowledged process, the playwright also has the chance to examine the typical characters that would be seen in those processes or rituals – for example, in a scene set in a church, it is more than likely that a priest character will be present in the scene. If not, an audience may draw meaning from the absence of the Priest and subsequent reversal of expectation, 'we immediately recognise – and draw meaning from – any such flouting' (Edgar, 2009: p. 135).

It is now important to discuss and explore the processes that I went through when challenging format, in order to create recognition and tension, in *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area*. The decision to craft scenes with recognisable social processes governing them was born from my desire to keep the play active – Mamet highlights the way a scene, particularly in a character driven play can become stagnant, ‘any logline reading “Bob and Sue discuss...” is not describing a dramatic scene’ (cited in Abramovitch, 2010). I became determined to give every scene in the play a format that governs it, or in the very least include a recognisable social process within the scene. For example, Act one scene one (2013: p. 1) from *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* (2013) is clearly structured through a specific format:

### *One*

*Gareth’s office – a gynecologist. A bed. He takes out various ominous looking medical implements. Vaginal clamps, probes, lubricant and rubber gloves. He begins to lovingly apply lubricant to his gloved hands. There is a knock at the door.*

Immediately the audience recognises a doctor’s surgery, a doctor and suspect the arrival of a patient. The audience will also unconsciously grasp the approximate length of the scene – they will have experience of the length of a doctor’s appointment. So far, in before any dialogue has been spoken in the scene, the audience has expectations of where the play will take us. It is at this point where Edgar’s idea of flouting audience expectations leads of the creation of drama – Victoria does enter, however the scene does not play out as the audience expects. Not

only does format allow for the subversion of perceived social processes but it allows for the use of the subversion and heightening of expected characters and behaviours. For example, in Act one scene one (2013: p. 3) Gareth subverts his role as the professional gynecologist:

*He opens her legs wider with force. He tries, again, to insert the speculum inside her. She winces. He steps back. He can't fit it in.*

Gareth:           You're dry as burnt toast

Victoria:

Gareth:           Married?

Victoria:          I beg /your

Gareth:           *Very* tight. Single, are you?

Victoria:          *What?*

In subverting preconceived expectations of the gynecologist, the audiences' expectations were flouted. As David Edgar notes, this subversion can lead to the creation of subtle meaning; with Gareth, I chose to explore him as the very opposite of what his job role implies he should be:

Gareth:           If I don't remove the coil carefully I could pull out half your uterus with it. So unless all you want for Christmas is a prolapse I'd ask you to *(pause)* stop...*(he pulls something)*

Victoria:          MOTHERFFFFFFF!

Gareth: Talking. There. Out.

(2013: p. 4)

In this scene, and as an overall theme of the play, I wanted to explore the dichotomy between what is expected - of a person, a job role and a lifestyle - and what is reality. In his theoretical work, Ayckbourn speaks of the danger of purely functional characters who serve to 'highlight particular qualities of another character'. (2002: p. 36) As we eventually learn about Gareth, he disregards women because he has become so used to seeing their body's daily - the flouting of audience expectations towards Gareth, I believe, strengthens him as a character; he is no longer the one dimensional, 'gynecologist' role in the scene. The subversion of Gareth's role in the scene creates further meaning when Victoria becomes sexually aroused as he examines her; while she admits to a stagnant sex life with her husband of twenty-seven years, it is the crude, vulgar, predatory gynecologist who sexualises her once again. I was determined to show that Victoria was presented with a problem she must overcome; she is sexually inactive with her husband, but her sexual needs still exist.

Another reversal of expectation in this scene is the idea of Victoria as sexualised versus the idea of her as a post-menopausal woman. The format of the scene creates the assumption that Victoria, a woman clearly in her early fifties, is having an examination. As the scene progresses, we learn she is having her coil removed. In most Western cultures, the use of a coil in gynecology is predominantly for methods of contraception - even for an audience ignorant to this fact, the very idea of a

gynecologist conjures ideas of fertility, femininity and the functioning female body. Through the heightened characterisation of Gareth as flirtatious and unprofessional, and the expectations of the scene in general, Victoria seems a confident, sexualised woman. After one rehearsed reading of the scene at The Royal Exchange Theatre, numerous audience members admitted to assuming Victoria and Gareth would sleep together – these expectations creates *tension*, however I was determined to subvert to create *meaning*. The expectations are flouted when the very man who sexualised her, the gynecologist, then delivers the news of her blood tests in Scene one (2013, p. 7):

Gareth: Post menopause, your blood says

Victoria Says what?

Gareth: Your IUD, the uh *the coil* masked the symptoms.

Victoria: Of,

Gareth: The menopause, yes.

In the same scene, Gareth has both sexualised Victoria for the first time in months, and unsexed her with the information of her post-menopausal state. The expectations of both Gareth's role as a gynecologist, the ritual of the doctor's appointment and the preconceived idea of Victoria as sexualised, have been flouted in order to create meaning; Victoria now feels worthless, unfulfilled and unsexed:

Victoria: When you tread on a worm and it's head squishes into the  
ground your mother and father say it's okay because worms can

survive with half a body only one head but does anybody actually know how the worm feels being headless and chopped in half slithering about? So it's like this I mean, you've just chopped my head off and you just expect me to grow it back and carry on, slithering through my life with half a...fucking *body*.

(ibid, 2013: p. 7)

Another example of using format as an act of playwriting in *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* is in scene seven (ibid, 2013: p. 38). The scene is set:

*The menopause support group. Victoria walks onto the stage, anxiously. She sits down on a chair and nervously rustles through her bag. Meg enters and scrunches up a Greggs paper bag. Polly enters, head down. There is a pathetic spread of stale egg sandwiches and elderflower cordial in plastic cups with smiley faces on them.*

Immediately, through the specific stage directions, the scene carries a social process: a support group. The audience will, as in scene one, expect certain things from the scene as it plays out. Firstly, that these three women are all here for support; they are all postmenopausal. The way that the stage is set with, '*stale egg sandwiches and elderflower cordial in plastic cups*' (ibid, 2013), further demonstrates the format of the support group. The third notable point is that the leader of this support group has not arrived yet - this builds expectations of the character's identity, when she will

arrive or if indeed she will arrive at all. The dialogue leading up to the entrance in Act one scene one (ibid, 2013) is fairly inactive:

Meg:            Alright?  
Victoria:       Hello  
Polly:           Hmm?  
Meg:            Just said 'alright'  
Polly:           Oh uh, nervous.

In writing 'small talk' at this point, I intended for the audience to *desire* to see the entrance of another character – Anita. As Grace asserted in his lecture at The University of Birmingham, 'playwrights are in the business of creating desire' (Grace, 2013); in building up the expectations of the audience, even before reversing them, the playwright is planting seeds for the audience to water with anticipation. I intended for the small talk of the women, in contrast with the heightened language seen in previous scenes, to build the desire of the audience to see an *active* character enter the scene. Upon entering scene seven (2013: p. 38) Anita fulfills (admittedly, stereotypical) expectations of her job role:

*Anita. Unwashed hair. She stinks the room out.*

Anita:           Morniiiiing

*She sticks signs around the room on sugar paper with irritating catch phrases such as 'Don't let your life be put on menoPAUSE', 'Periods, who needs them?', 'Sex = overrated!' followed by hearts*



*and other useless shapes.*

In doing so, I intended that the audience feel amused by their correct assumptions and amused by the stereotype– Anita functions, unashamedly, as a comic character. However, as I did with Gareth the gynecologist, I was determined to create a character in Anita which flouted her socially acknowledged role, in order to create meaning in the scene. When Polly, a vision of what Victoria could be if she *didn't* fulfill her pursuit of happiness, becomes anxious and upset, Anita exits scene seven (ibid, 2013: p. 45) dramatically:

*Meg and Victoria look to Anita for help.*

Anita:           BIT HEAVY for eleven o'clock

Victoria:

Anita:           Think it's time for a break

The expectations of the scene – that the women would be helped by Anita in some way – is not only subverted, but the very character of Anita herself proves to be the opposite. Both of these subversions are in place to create meaning within the scene; left alone with an anxious, post menopausal Polly, Victoria must once again take responsibility for the positive outcome of a situation rather than being passive to it. This subversion of the audience's, and indeed Victoria's own expectations, can be seen as the governing theme of the play, but it also serves on a functional level in this particular scene. Once Anita has reversed the audience's expectations of her character through exiting the scene, Victoria is forced to take control of the support

group. In turn, she is left to either ignore or engage with the other women, Polly and Meg. Meg, as it happens, is to be the last catalyst for Victoria; in meeting and understanding Meg, Victoria realises her own discontentment and the choices she has to make. Therefore, in this scene, not only does format serve to create drama through the reversal of expectation, it serves on a functional level – the support group allows Victoria to meet the very woman she wants to become.

It is now important to analyse the way in which other playwrights have used format as an act of playwriting. In a character driven play such as *Edmond* (Mamet, 1982) the use of format is important; with little external force applied to Edmond and his fate, it is important that something propels him forward. Mamet engages his audience by allowing us to collectively recognise the scenes Edmond finds himself in, ‘the collective insight of an audience is the chief pleasure’ (Waters, 2010: p. 163). The following scene of *Edmond* (Mamet, 1982), Upstairs at the Whorehouse, is an example of format (ibid, 1982: p. 258):

Edmond: I’d like to have intercourse with you.

Whore: That sounds nice. I’d like that, too.

Edmond: You would?

Whore: Yes.

Edmond: How much would that be?

The scene creates expectations of Edmond sleeping with a prostitute – the format is clear and recognisable by the character of the Whore, and the ritual of Edmond

offering her money in exchange for sex. When Edmond cannot afford to pay the prostitute, however, it reverses our expectations – instead of being in control, he is left humiliated and controlled by somebody else (cited in Simmonds, 2013: p. 13). The reversal creates meaning, ‘because we know what should happen’ Edgar notes, ‘we immediately recognise – and draw meaning from – any such flouting’ (2009: p. 135). Edmond, yet again, plays the role of the underdog, although he consistently deems himself to be in control of his own destiny. This, I believe, is the foundation for the play, embodied in clever deployment of format in one scene.

It is also important to understand format as an act of playwriting, in light of the contextual theory behind it. In his theoretical work, Stuart Spencer introduces ‘The Passover Question’ in relation to playwriting, that question being, ‘Why is this night different from all other nights?’ (Spencer, 2002: p. 271) With playwriting in mind, ‘The Passover Question’ can relate to the format of the scene we choose to place our characters in, and to create what meaning – why have we chosen this particular moment to follow our characters? (ibid, 2002). In *Closer* (Marber, 1997), the following scene demonstrates an exceptional circumstance, with a recognisable format (ibid, 1997: p. 27):

*Dan is in his flat sitting at a table with a computer.*

*Larry is sitting at his hospital desk with a computer.*

Dan and Larry are about to converse, unbeknownst to one another, in an online chat room. This creates audience expectation.

Dan: Do U want sex?  
Larry: yes. describe u.  
Dan: Dark hair. Dirty mouth. Epic Tits.

The scene's expectation builds and entertains as we see the characters further adhering to the format, using chat room language; 'U' and lower case letters. The expectation is then reversed when Dan says he is a woman (cited in Simmonds, 2013: p. 14). While this creates dramatic irony, proving entertaining for the audience, the format of the scene also creates meaning that 'reflects the action' of the play (Edgar, 2009: p. 136). In showing Larry and Dan speaking to one another in an internet chat room with Dan pretending to be a woman, Marber is highlighting two characters who attempt to communicate with each other, but never tell the 'truth' (1997: p. xxv).

In *The Secret Life of Plays*, Waters notes the differences between the 'scenes' which we live every day of our lives, 'when a tussle blows up in a public place, we describe "making a scene"' (Waters, 2010: p. 13), and the importance of playwriting to go beyond these everyday scenes. He goes on to muse that playwriting:

refines them [scenes] into something more telling, more heightened, more moving – and more irreversible – than most of the scenes through which we live. (ibid, 2010: p. 13)

In relation to format, Waters makes the point that a playwright must choose heightened, change provoking scenes to place their characters in. In this way, a playwright will allow for the character to make 'irreversible' choices in the scenes, choices that might be avoidable in the 'scenes' of real life (ibid, 2010). Challenging the format of each scene, that being a social process or ritual, the playwright can place his or her characters in a heightened, recognisable situation where expectations are built for an audience – from their experiences of 'real life scenes' – and then reversed to create meaning.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, through my writing I want to tell candid stories from ordinary human beings, giving voices to those usually unheard. It was a conscious decision for my play, *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* (2013) to be character driven, focusing upon the seemingly unremarkable life of Victoria Burnham. Inspired by Mamet's *Edmond* (1982), the story of one middle aged man's pursuit of liberation, I attempted to breath life into a middle aged post menopausal woman, also in pursuit of personal satisfaction. The second aspect of the play that I specifically chose to deploy, through challenging the situations I placed my characters in for each scene, was format.

Playing with format, a writer sets up expectations within an audience; the writer can then create drama through the *reversal* of these universal expectations. In *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* (2013), the manipulation of format creates parallels between what is expected of the character Gareth, his profession, and what is true to his role in the play – thus creating meaning in this contrast. The works of Mamet and Marber highlight the successful use of challenging format and developing character to create meaning, while critical theory from Smiley, Ayckbourn, Edgar and Waters all emphasise the specific implementation of scenes with significant format and character as conventions of theatre.

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## Appendix

A: Commentary xxiii from Patrick Marber's *Closer* (1997), edited by Daniel Rosenthal

Each successive generation needs to go: "No, no, this is where love is at the moment." I was lucky that *Closer* sort of did that when I wrote it.

The extent to which Soderbergh caught the mood of the times was reflected in the way that the film's title entered the vernacular, becoming the basis for countless newspaper and magazine headlines and subheadings in America and Britain that would announce tales of 'sex, lies and politics/sport [insert appropriate noun]'. That resonance chimed directly with *Time Out* magazine's Critics' Choice listings in June 1997, which described *Closer* as follows: 'Sex, lies and the internet explored in Patrick Marber's brilliant new play.'

#### *Fiction or autobiography?*

Inevitably, as a thirty-something Londoner writing about the sex lives of thirty-something Londoners, Marber was often asked by journalists if *Closer* was partly or wholly autobiographical. As he told the *Daily Telegraph* theatre critic Charles Spencer in an interview in October 1999:

'The trite answer is that everything is true but none of it happened. It is emotionally true, but the events, the plotting, the narrative, isn't true of my life, though I've experienced most of the emotions experienced by the characters in the play. When you're in your early twenties your love life seems to explode every twenty minutes or so. By the time you've reached your thirties, it is every five or ten years. Jealousy taps you on the shoulder and says "remember me?". Ditto infidelity. To some members of the audience it's a horrible reminder of what they've been through. To others, who are going through this stuff at the same time as they are watching the play, there is a strong element of recognition. I've had letters from people saying, "You've written my life, how did you know?"'

#### *The title*

Responding to an audience question at a National Theatre Platform talk on *Closer* in December 1999, Marber admitted:

'The title is stolen. I wish I'd thought of it, but it's the title of Joy Division's second album.' Joy Division were the Manchester band whose most famous song, 'Love Will Tear Us Apart', might have given Marber a subtitle for his play. Their second album was released in 1980, a few months after their lead singer, Ian Curtis, had killed himself, and its songs have been described by the Manchester rock writer Mick Middles as 'the sound of somebody in desperation'. On one track, Curtis sings 'I put my trust in you' in a tone that makes it clear that his loved one has betrayed him.

At the NT Platform, Marber added: 'Joy Division were a band I used to love when I was in my teens. *Closer* was their second album and my second play. I could have called it something like *Love and Other Miseries* but wanted it to resonate outwards. It took me quite a long time to accept it as a title because I wanted to come up with my own, but in the end I couldn't, so stole someone else's.'

It's a perfect title, encompassing the characters' contrasting searches for and reactions to physical and emotional closeness; their doomed attempts at getting closer to another person's heart and soul; and, in a play preoccupied with mortality, the way that every day brings us closer to death. 'The title is absolutely correct in its ambiguity,' Marber says. 'It is the best possible title for the play because the play is always aspiring to get closer to some kind of definitive truth about things but knows it can't.'

At certain moments, one wants to put a question mark after the title. Will Alice let the next man in her life get closer to her real identity than the last? Will a young nurse bring Larry closer than Anna could to the kind of fulfilment he seeks? At other times, you feel the characters would like to make the title an order, for instance, when Anna asks Dan (p. 79), 'When we're making love, why don't you kiss me? Why don't you like it when I say I love you? I'm on your side. *Talk to me.*' She is really saying: 'Closer!' All those things are going on in the title, agrees Marber, but ultimately the unpredictability of relationships means that: 'If you had to punctuate after it, really it's *Closer...*'



*Thesis Play*

# *Unidentified Item In the Bagging Area*

*1.10.2012*

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By Sarah Simmonds



## Autumn Day

Who has not built his house, will not start now.  
Who is now by himself will long be so,  
Be wakeful, read, write lengthy letters, go  
In vague disquiet pacing up and down  
Denuded lanes, with leaves adrift below.

- Rainer Maria Rilke, trans by Walter Arndt  
(final strophe)

## The Enemy

My youth has been nothing but a tenebrous storm,  
Pierced now and then by rays of brilliant sunshine;  
Thunder and rain have wrought so much havoc  
That very few ripe fruits remain in my garden.

I have already reached the autumn of the mind,  
And I must set to work with the spade and the rake  
To gather back the inundated soil  
In which the rain digs holes as big as graves.

And who knows whether the new flowers I dream of  
Will find in this earth washed bare like the strand,  
The mystic aliment that would give them vigor?

Alas! Alas! Time eats away our lives,  
And the hidden Enemy who gnaws at our hearts  
Grows by drawing strength from the blood we lose!

- Charles Baudelaire, trans by William Aggeler

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

- *Macbeth*, Act 5 Scene 5

## Characters

Victoria – 50

Jeremy – 60

Harry – 19

Polly – late 40's

Vish – 45

Anita – 41

Meg – 49

*The following characters can be doubled or played individually as the production permits.*

Gareth – 29

Dick – 19

}

Note on punctuation:

/ in a line means the next character must begin to speak

... indicates a hesitation or thought process

'a blank' after a character's name suggests they want to speak but cannot for whatever internal reason

## One

*Gareth's office – a gynecologist. A bed. He takes out various ominous looking medical implements. These must be horrifying and painful looking; vaginal clamps, probes, lubricant and rubber gloves. He begins to lovingly apply lubricant to his gloved hands. There is a knock at the door.*

Gareth: Open up

*Victoria enters. She is beautifully dressed with a full face of make up on.*

Victoria: It's freezing

Gareth: I'll warm my hands up first.

*He rubs more lube onto his hands.*

Victoria: Oh, blimey

Gareth: Undress please.

*Silence.*

Victoria: Now?

Gareth: Now.

Victoria: Do we not need to, have a little, chat /first

Gareth: Now is as good a time as any to have a metal clamp forcibly inserted into your vagina. I'd say, anyway.

Victoria: Okay...

*She closes the curtain so it covers her.*

Ready

*She opens the curtain.*

Gareth: On the bed.

*A basic table. She tries to get onto it. She can't.*

Victoria: Bloody things, too high

Gareth: I'd give you a hand but I wouldn't want to get your undercarriage sticky.



Victoria: Oh it's been a while!

*Silence from him. She makes it.*

There we go

*He walks towards her. Her legs stay together. He tries to prise them open but she's nervous.*

Gareth: And spread them please Mrs. Burnham

Victoria: Sorry, okay. (*He comes near*) I like your jumper

Gareth: Thank you

Victoria: Bet it's a pain to wash

Gareth: Not really

Victoria: Lovely colour

Gareth: It's, black

Victoria: ...It's a nice black. Sort of /grey-ey

Gareth: Can I /just

Victoria: Sorry go on.

*Silence. She opens them. He inspects her. We should be punched in the face with her nudity but not actually see anything vital as he stands in the way.*

Gareth: Relax...

Victoria: I'm a bit nervous

Gareth: Try not to think about it

*As he says this line he produces a huge speculum. Victoria controls her breathing.*

Victoria: Gosh that's, large

Gareth: Part and then push down for me.

*He tries to insert the speculum. She's in pain. He tries again. She's in more pain.*

Hmm.

Victoria: I don't like that noise.

*He steps back.*

Gareth: I see.

Victoria: What?

Gareth: I had hoped /that

Victoria: You see what?

Gareth: You have a cute cervix.

Victoria:

Gareth: I think I'm going to need a smaller speculum.

Victoria: ...*Oh*

Gareth: Most women your age are a lot more...

*He thinks.*

Victoria: ...More?

Gareth: I'll have another bash.

*He opens her legs wider with force. He tries, again, to insert the speculum inside her. She winces. He steps back. He can't fit it in.*

Gareth: You're dry as burnt toast

Victoria:

Gareth: Married?

Victoria: I beg /your

Gareth: *Very* tight. Single, are you?

Victoria: *What?*

Gareth: Perfectly *trimmed* so I imagine

Victoria:

Gareth: Your vulva.

Victoria: What about my vulva what's wrong with my vulva?

Gareth: Slight shaving rash, you want some aqueous cream on th/at

Victoria: I'd like to get down please

Gareth: Recent, so I'm assuming you did it for um, *me*

Victoria: (*To herself*) Oh my g/od

Gareth: For dryness, *tightness* there are tests

Victoria: I'm married. Thank you. Not that it has anything to do with you.

*He searches for another implement. Victoria begins to get up.*

Gareth: How about...

Victoria: I want to go.

Gareth: Aha!

*He pulls out a small speculum.*

May I?

*She sits back. He inserts it.*

Smashed it. I'm in. I will say, for a woman of your age actually you're /very

Victoria: Bit of a strange job choice isn't it?

Gareth: Hmm?

Victoria: For a man. Gynecologist.

Gareth: I'm a *Doctor*

Victoria: Of vaginas

Gareth: Yes

Victoria: Why?

Gareth: Why what

Victoria: Are you so interested /in va

Gareth: It's my specialism

Victoria: Why?

Gareth: Why what?

Victoria: Well why didn't you specialise in something something like, kidneys or or or brains or, *feet* or something normal that you *have*

Gareth: Because, I enjoy

Victoria:

Gareth: What?

Victoria: What?

Gareth: You're making this very difficult.

Victoria: No no, that's fine. (*Short pause*) A 'vagina-less Doctor of vaginas.'

*Gareth steps backwards.*

Gareth: You can request the female nurse to come and remove it

Victoria: No no (*Quieter*) Just don't see why you couldn't be a...penis doctor or /something

Gareth: I'll call for the nurse.

Victoria: It's in now anyway

Gareth: I can always pull out

Victoria: No

Gareth: But there'll be a lot of mess

Victoria: I'm fine

Gareth: Then lie back.

*He takes out another tool*

Victoria: What's that?

Gareth: A 'drinking straw'

Victoria: What are you doing with it?

Gareth: I'm putting it inside you.

Victoria: But

Gareth: It's a medical implement Mrs. Burnham, you can lower your eyebrows

Victoria: Why's it called a

Gareth: I'm not looking to drink your vagina, Mrs. Burnham

Victoria: But why's it

Gareth: Perhaps because it looks like a drinking straw don't quote me, mere speculation. Relax.

Victoria:

*He inserts the drinking straw. We can see a long thing sticking out from between her legs.*

Victoria: I reckon I could pick up Freeview with this thing

*She moves a bit and makes the straw sway side to side.*

*Gareth sniggers unwillingly. The atmosphere changes instantly.*

Victoria: You laughed

*He clears his throat.*

Victoria: You did. I heard it you laughed a /sort of

Gareth: Okay

Victoria: Snort. You *snorted*

Gareth: Keep your knickers on

Victoria: Pardon?

Gareth: Your knickers. They're falling off that foot.

Victoria: I am funny aren't I? I can be quite funny

*Gareth shakes his head in disbelief. She produces an electric cigarette and she puffs on it, happy with herself.*

Gareth: Trying to quit?

Victoria: My *husband* wants me to quit

Gareth: Ah.

Victoria: Bastard won't even let me kill myself properly.

*Pause.*

Says it's getting on the dog's lungs. He's got a horrible cough, mind you

Gareth: Your husband?

Victoria: The dog. I'd do an impression for you, I do a mean impression

Gareth: That's okay

Victoria: Sort of 'HRAH', no that's not it

Gareth: Honestly

Victoria: 'HHARAAH?'

Gareth: Spread your labia please

Victoria: Can't do it, too much press/ure

Gareth: More

Victoria: That's a shame, you're missing out

Gareth: Wider. (*Pause. She opens her legs really wide. He looks at her*) I don't think so.

*She's taken aback. Silence.*

You're tensing too much.

Victoria: Sorry.

Gareth: Don't think about it. Think about something...boring.

*Silence. He works inside her.*

Gareth: That's better. So what does he do?

Victoria: Who?

Gareth: Your husband.

Victoria: ...Nothing.

Gareth: ...As in

Victoria: He's retired.

Gareth: You sound thrilled.

Victoria: He *was* a schoolteacher. English. Never shuts up about it

*Gareth smiles.*

Gareth: He's *one of those* is he?

Victoria: And the rest.

*He hurts her. She makes a painful groan.*

Gareth: Nearly there

Victoria: Nearly! WHAT IS THIS mining for sodding gold

Gareth: If I don't remove the coil carefully I could pull out half your uterus with it. So unless all you want for Christmas is a prolapse I'd ask you to *(pause)* stop...*(he pulls something)*

Victoria: MOTHERFFFFFFF!

Gareth: Talking. There. Out.

Victoria: AhahahahOWWW

Gareth: Oh come on it wasn't that bad

Victoria: How would you know?

Gareth: Oh I know pain

Victoria: You men, you think we just *cough* and out pops a baby

Gareth: You've never been kicked in the balls, Mrs. /Burnham

Victoria: Well *you've* never pushed a watermelon out of your vagina

Gareth: No and neither have you I hope

Victoria: Oh you'd be surprised what I've had up my

*Gareth clears his throat.*

Victoria: Super are we /done?

Gareth: You can get dressed.

*He half closes the curtains around her. She gets her knickers on without us seeing, this must be stylised, but the rest we see on the other side of the curtain. He tidies up his implements.*

Victoria: I hope I didn't scare the receptionist

*She gets dressed.*

Gareth: I've made other women scream much louder than you, Mrs. Burnham

Victoria: Oh. That must be nice for your girlfriend

*Silence. Gareth carries on. Victoria waits.*

Victoria: ...I said 'that must be *nice for /your*'

Gareth: I heard you.

*Silence. She reacts.*

No, gynecology doesn't seem to attract much female attention. I think it's the gloves.

Victoria: Oh

Gareth: Or maybe the giant metal clamps.

Victoria: That's... sad

Gareth: Oh no I'm *fine*.

*Silence.*

No ties.

Victoria: But I mean you must miss, I mean I know you see them all day long, *women* that is but you must miss...I don't know attention?

*She steps out from the curtains. Inside she pleads with him to notice her. He does.*

Gareth: Yes I do sometimes. (*Pause*) Do you?

Victoria: What?

Gareth: Miss it.



Victoria: I'm married.

Gareth: I know.

*He looks at her for too long. He revels in it. She is taken aback.*

Right, you had blood taken, last, was it Tues/day

Victoria: Tuesday /yes

Gareth: Tuesday. That'll be in, Mrs Burnham I won't be a sec

Victoria: Right, thank you Doctor.

*He leaves. She is nervous/in disbelief/excited at the attention. She anxiously looks around his office, in awe of him. She moves to the desk and slowly sits in his chair. She holds out her hand as if to shake another.*

"Hello there, I'm Dr. Fletcher-Burnham"

*She picks up the phone*

"Dr. Fletcher Burnham speaking" oh shut up you stupid woman

*She puts it down. Looks around, reveling in the attention she's had. She hears his footsteps. Just as she makes it out of the chair he bursts in the room.*

Gareth: So

Victoria: HELLO!

Gareth: Uh

Victoria:

Gareth: ...What are you

Victoria: I um, dropped my...

Gareth:

Victoria: Umbrella.

Gareth: Your umbrella.

*Pause.*

Did you find it?

Victoria: No, can't, seem to.

*Silence.*

Gareth: Right

Victoria: I expect it'll turn up, these things always have a /habit

Gareth: It's...in here?

Victoria: Yep, some...where /in

Gareth: O-kay. I'll um I'll have a hunt for it

Victoria: Just, let me know.

Gareth: Right.

Victoria: Thanks. Thank you.

*Silence.*

Gareth: Sit, please Mrs. Burnham.

Victoria: Great.

*She sits.*

Gareth: You're postmenopausal.

Victoria:

Gareth: The blood.

Victoria: I'm what, sorry?

Gareth: Post menopause, your blood says

Victoria: Says what?

Gareth: Your IUD, the uh *the coil* masked the symptoms.

Victoria: Of,

Gareth: The menopause, yes.

*Silence.*

Victoria: Are you

Gareth: Now, some women are elated /and some

Victoria: *Elated?*

Gareth: Feel as if they've sort of been...

*Pause.*

Victoria: *Punched?* What

Gareth: A sort of

Victoria: A sort of what

Gareth: Hollow feeling. But, look, there's now *no* chance of you falling pregnant which is great news for your sex life

Victoria:

Gareth: If I were you I'd see this as freedom.

Victoria: Freedom.

Gareth: It's just a later stage in the female life cycle

Victoria: THE 'FEMALE LIFE CYCLE'?

Gareth: It's *natural*

Victoria: Natural oh it's natural okay, well um, is it natural to feel to like a fucking

Gareth: Mrs. Burnham

Victoria: Like a fucking....worm?

Gareth: ...I'm sorry?

Victoria: A worm.

Gareth: *(Pause)* Sorry you might need to expand on /that

Victoria: When you tread on a worm and it's head squishes into the ground your mother and father say it's okay because worms can survive with half a body only one head but does anybody actually know how the worm feels being headless and chopped in half

slithering about? So it's like this I mean, you've just chopped my head off and you just expect me to grow it back and carry on, slithering through my life with half a

Gareth: Right

Victoria: Fucking *body*.

*Silence.*

Gareth: ...That's a good analogy /actually

Victoria: Thank you.

*Silence. Victoria calms herself.*

Gareth: Look if you find yourself unable to cope there are support groups

*She stands*

Victoria: Thank you. I'm able to cope. I'm able to cope. Thank you.

*She extends her hand. He stares at it and takes it.*

Gareth: It's important for support, Mrs Burnham

*She scoffs.*

I mean, your husband is vital /in

Victoria: Yes thank you Doctor.

*She exits with force.*

## Two

*Outside in the garden, signified by lighting. Jeremy is washing down the patio and picking out weeds. He is immersed in it. Victoria walks onstage and watches him as he does this, holding two cups of tea. He doesn't see her, really see her, at any point during the scene. On the paint splattered CD player, we hear 'Little Lies' by Fleetwood Mac blaring. Victoria is instantly irritated by the volume.*

Victoria:

*Victoria wants to speak. She wants to be held. She watches her husband and the tender care he takes of the patio. She wishes to be the patio beneath his feet that he waters and picks the weeds out of and looks after. He doesn't notice her.*

Victoria:       Jeremy?

*He wiggles his arse to the music a bit. He scratches his crotch and pulls his trousers out from his arse. She grimaces. She bypasses speaking more loudly and goes straight to screaming.*

Victoria:       TEA.

*He jumps and turns the water off. He shouts over the music.*

Jeremy:       Where've you been?

Victoria:       Doctors, that's too loud

*He turns it down.*

Jeremy:       The bed was cold, I wondered

Victoria:       Lower Jeremy the neighbour's'll have a bitch fit

*He slams the off button. He walks towards her and reaches out to take the tea, she turns her cheek to be kissed. He misses that and takes the tea. She stands there with her cheek turned for a few seconds.*

Jeremy:       Ta love. Whad'ya reckon?

Victoria:       Looks...brilliant.

*Sniffing his armpit*

Jeremy:       I smell like Aunty Barbara.

Victoria:       Jeremy

Jeremy:       You know that sort of, *creamy, B.O smell*

Victoria:       She's incontinent, don't be nasty.

*He shivers. Silence. They both stand stage centre, facing outwards. Each holds their brew. Neither speaks.*

Jeremy: You okay love

Victoria: ...I, um

Jeremy: I'm not right you know, me. Had a piss earlier d'you know what it smelt like? Not piss. Do you know?

Victoria: No I don't darling

Jeremy: Smelt like chicken soup.

Victoria: Chicken soup

Jeremy: Cream of chicken soup, you know the Heinz one.

Victoria: Okay. The Heinz one in particular?

Jeremy: Oh yeah totally different smell to the whatsit, the Knorr noodle one.

Victoria: Oh right

Jeremy: Totally different.

Victoria: Right.

*Silence.*

Jeremy: Need to get that checked /out

Victoria: Yes I think you might do.

*Silence.*

Jeremy: There's an ants nest over there, they're crawling into the kitchen. Little fuckers

Victoria: Gosh

Jeremy: Blasted them with the hose, should sort it

Victoria: Might need more than that

Jeremy: Eh?

Victoria: You might need more than that to sort /it

Jeremy: Oh

Victoria: You need to kill it at /the source

Jeremy: Eh?

Victoria: (*Louder*) You need to kill it at the source.

Jeremy: Oh. Right, right. (*Pause*) They've stopped crawling through though /so

Victoria: They'll be squirming underneath the surface, trapped beneath the concrete. They'll find a way out if you don't see to them.

*Pause. He stretches.*

Jeremy: Job for another /day

Victoria: Why don't you just do it after lunch?

Jeremy: (*Ignoring her*) I bleached that section over there so watch out for Mowg oh there he is

*The dog coughs, very much like Victoria's impression from scene one*

*(He whistles) Mowgli! Inside*

*He coughs again, coughing gets quieter as he goes.*

Good boy...bless him

Victoria: Alright Jeremy

Jeremy: ...I didn't mean

Victoria: I've *quit*

Jeremy: I know you have

Victoria: Well then.

*Silence.*

Jeremy: Where did you say you went?

Victoria: Doctors.

Jeremy: (*Looking over to dog's direction*) Oh god he's phlegmed all over the rosemary

*Victoria chews on her cheek. He sees her. He sips his tea. He holds his mug out.*

Put sugar in this?

*She stamps the ants down into the cracks*

Victoria: Yes

Jeremy: Oh

Victoria: Two

Jeremy: Two?

Victoria: Flat ones

Jeremy: I like one heaped

Victoria: Since when?

Jeremy: Can't remember.

Victoria: I always make it with two

Jeremy: I know

Victoria: Flat

Jeremy: Prefer /one

Victoria: Why didn't you tell me

Jeremy: Didn't really matter

Victoria: Well it matters *now*?

Jeremy: Just thought I'd mention it

Victoria: Why?

Jeremy: What?

Victoria: Why now? Why today?

Jeremy: Just thought today I might tell you the truth, love. 'Stead of lies. (*Pause, he does a granddad dance*) 'Tell me liiies'

Victoria: Stop it please.

Jeremy: 'Oh no no /you'



Victoria: I've got a migraine coming I could really do without that

Jeremy: Vic.

Victoria: Leave me please.

*He stamps the ants away too. He can't look at her for long.*

Jeremy: Yer 'air looks nice

Victoria: Does it?

Jeremy: Yeah

Victoria: It's blonder this time (*pause*) do you like it?

Jeremy: Very much

Victoria: I think it, brightens me *I don't know*

Jeremy: I noticed straight away

Victoria: Did you.

Jeremy: Straight away

*She weighs up her options.*

Victoria: ...You didn't actually

Jeremy: Eh?

Victoria: You didn't notice

Jeremy: I just said

Victoria: I had it done

Jeremy: And *I* said

Victoria: Last week.

Jeremy: ...I noticed then

Victoria: Well you didn't *say* then

Jeremy: No but

Victoria: Well that's the /point

Jeremy: I said now

Victoria: Yes I know you did. Like the tea.

*Pause.*

When it's too late.

Jeremy: I said it looks

Victoria: *Alright* Jeremy

Jeremy: Puffy and /lighter

Victoria: Puffy?

Jeremy: Is that not what you asked /for?

Victoria: Yes I went into the hairdressers and said 'please, hairdresser, please can you make my hair puffy, I love it when my hair is puffy thank you *very very* much'

Jeremy: I was trying /to be

*She scoffs.*

Vic

Victoria: No

Jeremy: Come here love

*She turns to leave.*

Victoria: I'm going out

Jeremy: Come /here

*She turns to him, defeated.*

Victoria: Why?

Jeremy: ...Darl

*He opens himself towards her. He speaks quietly.*

Come here.

Victoria: Why?

Jeremy:

Victoria: What are you going to do? Jeremy. What? Kiss me? *Hug me?* I doubt it. What?

Jeremy: (*Pause. He weighs up his options*)...You've got a label sticking out

*He motions to the back of her neck. She goes to walk offstage.*

You're only just back

Victoria: I'm going out again

Jeremy: Well we need a new toilet brush

Victoria: Ha!

Jeremy: Especially after last night's korma

Victoria: *No* Jeremy

Jeremy: Upstairs bathroom's glow/ing

Victoria: JEREMY

Jeremy: And some Imodium come to think /of it

Victoria: Where am I going?

Jeremy: What?

Victoria: Where have you *assumed* I'm going?

Jeremy: ...Waitrose?

Victoria:

Jeremy: ...Tesco's?

Victoria: What have you actually *done* today apart from fanny about in the garden?

Jeremy: Sainsbury's?

Victoria: My god

Jeremy: I unblocked the sink earlier

Victoria: Great.

Jeremy: Started this

Victoria: The joys of retirement

Jeremy: I enjoy it

Victoria: Oh *that's nice for you*

Jeremy: What's wrong?

Victoria: As long as you're enjoying yourself that's /all

Jeremy: Okay, thank you

Victoria: What?

Jeremy: Thank you for you being glad I'm enjoying /it

Victoria: Oh my /god

Jeremy: What?!

Victoria: I had my vaginal coil out today

Jeremy:

Victoria:

Jeremy: Oh right was that...good?

Victoria: Contraceptive coil. Stops me falling pregnant. (Which is hilarious for /starters)

Jeremy

Victoria: Little piece of metal stuck up my vagina. Ring any bells I must have told you a /thousand

Jeremy: How was it?

Victoria: Like shitting a hedgehog, if you can imagine.

*Silence. He looks around awkwardly. She stares into him.*

Jeremy: I remember when Emma, you know Emma, blonde hair Physics teacher Emma, *she* /had

Victoria: I'm postmenopausal. I found out today. My blood says that there is nothing left inside of me that gives life to anything. I could cry. I have cried. I feel like orange

peel. I feel like the pith. I feel like the bits in between you know, the pith. I feel like a five foot five piece of skin on a hanger, left out to dry. (*Short pause*) I'll dry up. Shivel. Forget to put my earrings on in the morning. Smudge lipstick onto my teeth. Apply eye shadow to the ten folds of my eyelids that droop over my milky white eyeballs. I'll grow a beard. TENA Lady instead of Tampax. Olbas oil to soften my joints. Reek of piss because I can't wipe myself properly. Dribble. Wear my best clothes everyday because it might be my last. That's the saddest thing I think you know when you see these old people in their best clothes in *Morrison's* not because they're going anywhere Jeremy I saw two sat in the doctors they aren't going anywhere Jeremy they're just in their Sunday best because they may not ever see, another, pissing, Sunday. So it's just in case. Just in case! Imagine.

*Jeremy watches her. After a long pause he slurps his tea loudly.*

Jeremy: Doctor told you that?

Victoria: No, our homing pigeon sent the news today on a piece of rolled parchment.

Jeremy: Victoria.

Victoria: Yes.

Jeremy:

*Pause. He picks up the hose sheepishly.*

Is that the one where it hurts to wee?

Victoria: *What?*

Jeremy: Menopause. Stings to wee

Victoria: ...No.

Jeremy: Right. That was a joke.

Victoria:

*Silence.*

Jeremy: I might cook a casserole tonight. Sound okay?

Victoria: *What's the point?*

Jeremy: Need to eat

Victoria: I'll get something out of the freezer.

Jeremy: I don't mind

Victoria: There's no point in cooking a casserole for two people who don't very often cook casseroles. If we cooked them say once a week and it was a normal thing then I'd understand but we don't cook casseroles so why the big hoo haa over a blo/ody

Jeremy: Harry's got a filthy cold so he's coming home to give it to us.

Victoria:

Jeremy: He's on the train now.

Victoria: He's coming home? What's wrong with him?

Jeremy: Yes. Just a cold

Victoria: Oh poor darling

*Pause. He senses that she's perked up and is hurt.*

Jeremy: So I thought I might stew some beef and do garlic mash. Make a special effort.

Victoria: Okay. *(He turns on the water)*

Jeremy: Get brisket.

Victoria: I don't like brisket.

Jeremy: Well it's cheaper. *(Pause)* Wouldn't want to make a big 'hoo haa'.

*He turns around and starts to water the patio.*

Victoria: Fine.

*She takes his mug. She goes to walk offstage. He turns off the water and calls to her.*

Jeremy: ...Vic

Victoria: Yes...?

*She turns. They look at each other.*

Jeremy: Toilet brush.

*She exits. He turns the water and the music on, and tends lovingly to his patio. She stops just before she leaves the stage completely, and exhales. She exits*

### Three

*Sainsbury's. Victoria is staring at two packets of dishwasher tablets. Next to her, a basket. A cleaner, Vish, is mopping, whistling. We can hear the radio humming quietly in the background.*

Victoria: Excuse me?

Vish: You are okay madam?

Victoria: I just wanted to ask a question about these dishwasher tablets

Vish: Oh. *(Pause)* I have a dishwasher

Victoria: Oh, good

Vish: What would you like to know?

Victoria: Well I just wanted to know if *(she turns the box over in her hands)* these ones say they fight grease and limescale, seventy five in a box for... twelve pounds, whereas these ones say they're especially good to clean glasses, fifty in a box for sixteen fifty? My husbands forever berating me for smeary glasses so I suppose I just wanted to know whether or not the ones specifically for cleaning glasses would also fight limescale like these *(she looks closer at the box)* and also I guess why are these so much more expensive when they only seem to do the one job whereas *these ones* do it all but seem to be much cheaper?

*Vish is still. She gets progressively more upset about the dishwasher tablets.*

And also why these ones say eco friendly and the others don't? Is that the, the packaging or? Because my husband likes us to recycle but I don't know what part I'm supposed to put in the box oh and and *this* one the back of the box *this one* says suitable for quick washes. So are these ones not? Because sometimes I like to put a thirty minute quick wash on while I'm walking the dog or or having a shower. And often last night's plates haven't been cleared away which drives *him mad* if I've cooked a big, a roast or something or we've had a take away and I don't think they need a full wash, he says it wastes water too. *(Pause)* I just don't know what to do.

*Silence.*

Vish: I will get somebody to help you madam.

Victoria: Sorry, I'll ask at the

Vish: I never see your husband.

Victoria:

Vish: Your husband who hates the smeary glasses and last nights plates and wasting water

*She laughs nervously*

I never see him.

Victoria: Oh he, hates supermarkets

Vish: He is busy busy!

Victoria: Yes, yeah.

*Silence.*

Victoria: You've seen me? Here?

Vish: Oh yes, everyday.

Victoria: ...Not everyday

Vish: Most days.

*Silence.*

Victoria: Anyway, I'll (*she holds the tablets up in her hands*)

Vish: Okay, thank you madam

*Victoria picks up her basket and walks away from him.*

But best thing for smeary glasses, madam

Victoria: I'm sorry?

Vish: Tell the bastard to wash them up by hand.

*He whistles and mops. Victoria stops.*



## Four

*Victoria is running a bath – this can be basic and implied through sound/basic set. She tests the water and adds hot. We hear Adele’s ‘One and Only’ play quietly. She lays out a towel, then folds it and puts it on her lap. She takes a bubble bar out of a Lush bag – the bag will soon imply what’s inside. She empties it into the bath. Harry, nineteen, walks in with a towel around his waist.*

Harry: What’s that smell?

Victoria: *(Looking at wrapper)* Almond oil, uh cocoa butter and vanilla.

Harry: What’s that shit floating?

Victoria: Little plastic flowers. Cute aren’t they?

Harry: Oh.

*He stands there.*

Victoria: Well *come on then* it’ll get cold

*He drops his towel awkwardly. She gets an eyeful.  
He sits down in the bath.*

Victoria: It’s wonderful to see you.

Harry: Fuck me this is scorching

Victoria: Is it?

Harry: Fuuuuck

Victoria: Sorry poppet would you like some cold

Harry: Please.

*She adds cold.*

Harry: Yes, that’s fine.

*Harry stares downwards. He awkwardly wets his body. Victoria stands there watching him.*

Victoria: Look at you

Harry:

Victoria: You're all grown up

Harry: Mum.

Victoria: I barely recognise you

Harry: It's been *a /month*

Victoria: You're a *man*

Harry:

*She sits on the edge of the bath*

Victoria: Sorry.

*Silence. Adele plays.*

Victoria: You were blond when you were little

Harry: I don't have a bath at Uni

Victoria: So was I come to think of it. *Real* blonde too, not

Harry: Mum

Victoria: Well you can tell can't you, by your (*She motions downwards at his genitals*)

Harry: Mum

Victoria: Mmm?

Harry: Look

Victoria: Too cold now? Let me

Harry: Okay stop.

Victoria: What?

Harry: This is weird.

Victoria: What's weird

Harry: ...This. Me. You. Adele. (*Motions to CD player*)

Victoria: I like Adele

Harry: Everyone likes Adele, but, please...

Victoria:     Okay.

*She turns the music off. Silence.*

Harry:       Can I have some /privacy

Victoria:     But we always sit and talk while you're in the bath

Harry:       I know

Victoria:     We always have

Harry:       I *know*

Victoria:     So I don't /under

Harry:       I'm not, used to it.

Victoria:

Harry:       I'm used to my own sort of

Victoria:     Space?

Harry:       Yeah.

*Silence.*

I'm nineteen /mum.

Victoria:     I won't look. I'll sit here, and I'll we can just talk, like normal. Okay. Please?

*Harry folds his arms around his legs slowly.*

Okay?

Harry:

Victoria:     Alright. *(Pause)* So. Have you got a girlfriend?

*Harry scoffs*

Victoria:     What?

Harry:       The face

Victoria:     No face

Harry: There's a face

Victoria: Have you got a girl/friend or not?

Harry: Weird question

Victoria: You can tell me /you know

Harry: I'm seeing someone, yeah.

*Silence.*

Victoria: Oh.

Harry: Dad says

Victoria: Don't listen to your father

Harry: It's a good thing

Victoria: Oh you've told *him* have you, who is she?

Harry: A friend

Victoria: A friend or a lover?

Harry: *What!?*

Victoria: Is she. A friend. Or a lover it's quite /simple

Harry: She's both

Victoria: Okay. *(Pause)* What's it's name

Harry: It?!

Victoria: I said her I meant her

Harry: Jessica

Victoria: Is she French?

Harry: No

Victoria: Sounds French

Harry: No it doesn't

Victoria: Oh well I'm stupid. Your stupid mother aren't I? *Obviously*. Stupid bloody me, everybody thi/nks

Harry: Look can I just, have /a

Victoria: Does she cook for you?

Harry: *No*

Victoria: Clean?

Harry: Oh come on

Victoria: You're lying

Harry: Are you serious?

Victoria: What you've been there what a month that's pretty *loose* of you Harold

Harry: *Don't* call me Harold

Victoria: That's your name is it /not

Harry: We've been out *twice*

Victoria: And already she's your lover?

Harry: No

Victoria: Where's she from?

Harry: What?!

Victoria: The *North* I suspect

Harry: Dad's from Sheffield?!

Victoria: Oh *is* he funny I haven't been reminded of that everyday for *the past twenty /four*

Harry: Look

Victoria: She sounds like a hussy to me

Harry: Nobody says hussy

Victoria: Well I think it sums her up /perfectly

Harry: Look PLEASE could you just

Victoria: So a month in and you've bedded some *slut*

Harry:

Victoria: I see

Harry: See what?

Victoria: You do know it's crippling us to send you there

Harry: Urgh

Victoria: No no, you're having the time of your life but you know *nine thousand* a year is monstrous

Harry: I can't cope with

Victoria: You can't cope

Harry: No I can't

Victoria: Happy to be away are you

Harry: I didn't mean that

Victoria: Oh no I can see clearly what you

Harry: You don't

Victoria: What

Harry: See clearly. Ever.

Victoria: ...What's that supposed /to

Harry: This isn't, *normal* it's not cool

Victoria: Cool? I'm not trying to be *cool*

Harry: I'm nineteen

Victoria: Yes, I'm *fifty* would you like a badge

Harry: Just let me grow up

Victoria: I helped you with your UCAS

Harry:

Victoria: And I took you to IKEA for Tupperware before you went.

Harry: *I know.*

Victoria: Well then.

Harry:

Victoria: How am I preventing you from 'growing up' Harry?

*Silence.*

Harry: I'm naked in a bath with pink plastic flowers floating and you're sat on the edge of it and you keep looking horrified at my body. Stop looking at me like that.

*Silence.*

Victoria: Is that the oven beeping

Harry: No

Victoria: Casserole's probably burnt to buggery

*She goes to leave. Silence.*

Harry: ...I won't be long, then we can watch Midsomer Murders or some/thing.

Victoria: One question.

Harry:

Victoria: Does she get the fold right in your boxers when she irons them?

Harry: She doesn't iron my boxers

Victoria: Oh. You do it now, do you?

Harry: ...They don't need ironing.

Victoria: *(Pause)* I iron them.

Harry: ...I know. Thank you.

*She stares at him. She goes to leave. She stops and stares at the floor.*

Victoria: Fuck I forgot the toilet brush.

*She leaves.*

## Five

*The supermarket, that night. Victoria takes her basket, with toilet brush and a few other bits, to the self service check-out where she is greeted by Dick. The check-out can be basic; it is recognisable by the sound it makes, not necessarily the look of it.*

Dick: That one.

Victoria: Thank you.

Dick: Welcome.

*Dick hears a song on the radio (Tulisa – We Are Young). He does that irritating thing where someone who can dance practices quietly/casually to themselves whilst also trying to get everyone to notice.*

*Victoria stares at him. We can hear the voice of the self-service machine ringing out.*

Voice: Are you using your own bag?

Victoria: (Oh shut up)

Voice: Are you using your own bag? If so, place bag in the bagging area.

Victoria: OKAY

Voice: (Pause) Place bag

*Dick walks over and rudely pushes past Victoria, stabbing the screen manically. He steps back and watches her.*

Victoria: Thanks.

Dick: Plezsh.   *\* pleasure, abbreviated*

Voice: Scan item, then place item, in the bagging, area.

*She begins to scan. She picks up some chocolate. She scans. She picks up some toilet roll. She scans. She picks up a magazine that looks aimed at young teenage boys. She scans. She picks up a basic toilet brush. The machine beeps ferociously.*

Victoria: What?

Voice: Please wait for assistance.



Victoria:        *(To Dick, who's in his own world, dancing)* Excuse me?

Voice:           Please wait for assistance.

Dick:            Yeah?

Victoria:        She's screaming at me

*He stabs the machine manically again.*

Dick:            Do you want this toilet brush?

Victoria:        ...Yes?

Dick:            As opposed to the other one we have in store

Victoria:        What's the difference?

Dick:            The other one has, uh, blue sticky outy bits what are stronger. More expensive.

Victoria:        *(Pause)* ...Oh *bristles*

Dick:            Bristles yeah

Victoria:        Uh, no that one's fine

Dick:            If you go over to our customer service desk we can order you one in

Victoria:        No, no that's

Dick:            Or you can order one online. If you...have the internet.

Victoria:        ...I have the internet.

Dick:            *Oh.* That's fine then.

Victoria:        I want this one.

Dick:            Are you sure?

Victoria:        Yes I'm sure

Dick:            Suit yourself. I would've gone for the /other one

Victoria:        Oh really

Dick:            Yeah

Victoria:        That's interesting thank you

*Dick steps back and stares at her. She scans a bottle of wine and the machine beeps. She scans again, it beeps. She scans again. It beeps.*

Victoria: For goodness /sake

*Dick walks over and stabs the machine manically again. He steps back and looks her up and down.*

Dick: Have you got any ID?

Victoria:

Dick: ID.

Victoria:

Dick: Nothing personal

Victoria: ID.

Dick: It's policy

Victoria: You have *got* to be

*He's silent. He stares at her. Then he corpses.*

Dick: God I well had you then!

Victoria: ...I'm sorry?

Dick: Fucking well got you

Victoria: No you didn't

Dick: Did

Victoria: No, you didn't

Dick: Are you having a laugh asking you for ID, your face! Looked like you'd won the fuckin' lott/ery

*He stabs the machine for her.*

Victoria: Was that supposed to be funny?

Dick: What

Victoria: Was that funny? Is that a joke?

Dick: ...Well yeah cause you're

Victoria: Old? HA. Where's your manager?

Dick: Chill out love

Victoria: Think that's funny do you?

Dick: Yeah

Victoria: Asking a fifty year old woman for ID is the highlight of your sad little existence is it? Genius, really clever (*She looks at his name badge*) 'Dick' oh how perfect

Dick: Bitch

Victoria: Excuse me?

Dick: You 'eard

Victoria: I'll have you fired

Dick: Yeah and? Moving to Napa me

Victoria:

Dick: *Aiya Napa. S'in France.*

Victoria: It's, Cyprus, actually

Dick: Gunna get a job me singin' in them clubs, (*he sings Tulisa's song. Can't sing for shit*) 'I make mistakes that I learn from, cause I'm young, yeah I'm young'

Victoria: Okay.

Voice: Please decide how you would like to pay.

*She turns away and presses card. Dick takes a few steps back and gets his phone out on the sly.*

Victoria: Card.

Voice: I'm, sorry

Victoria: Card.

Voice: Thank you. Enter your card and key in your PIN, have you got a nectar card?

Victoria: Yes, I do. (*She gets it out and scans it*)

Voice: Key in your PIN.

*She does so. She removes her card. She picks up her bags. The machine starts shouting 'coupon' at her.*

Victoria: Oh for Christ

Voice: Coupon. Coupon. Coupon. Coupon.

Victoria: EXCUSE ME

Dick: Oh shit the fucking bed

Victoria: Help

*He picks up a coupon.*

Dick: You've got a free coupon.

Victoria: I can see that

Dick: Do you not wannit?

Victoria: What is it?

Dick: BOGOF on Oil of Olay

Victoria: Christ

Dick: Do you not wannit

Victoria: No, thank /you

Dick: (*He reads it*) 'Share the secret of a younger looking you'

Victoria:

Dick: Might come in handy?

Victoria: No thank you. Thank you. Now please you could you

Dick: I'll get my manager.

*Dick walks offstage. He moonwalks a bit.*

Victoria: Oh for (fucks) sake

*He's gone. She waits. She looks upwards and closes her eyes. She picks up the bags. She stops. She sits down in the bagging area, drained and fed up. After a few long seconds...*

Voice: Unidentified item in the bagging area, please remove this item and wait for assistance.

*She stares out into the black.*

Voice: Unidentified item in the bagging

*She stands.*

Thank you.

Victoria: Piss off.

*She exits.*

## Six

*That night. Jeremy is in the bathroom, offstage left. Centre stage, the master bedroom. There is a wall between them. Victoria sits on the bed. Jeremy has the shits. Victoria winces as she hears things she doesn't want to.*

Victoria:     Jeremy

Jeremy:       One second love

*She waits.*

Victoria:     I need to talk to you

Jeremy:       Yeah, could you

Victoria:     Now if possible

Jeremy:       Just, wait

Victoria:     I've been waiting for about twenty minutes

Jeremy:       The garlic mash didn't /agree

Victoria:     I don't think it would've been the garlic

Jeremy:       Oh it was, love

Victoria:     How do you know?

Jeremy:       Trust me, Vic

*Victoria grimaces. She waits. He cries in pain. He speaks through it.*

Jeremy:       What is it?

Victoria:     I'm really not sure it's the right

*He groans in agony.*

Victoria:     Atmosphere.

*She potters about the room, tidying. She sits back down again, then stands up. She's clearly nervous and gearing herself up for something.*

Jeremy:       Could you get me another /bog roll

Victoria: Okay look here it is: you don't touch me anymore. Jeremy. We don't fuck, anymore. And, I suppose I've tried to ignore it and I've put it down to stress and your retirement and *money* and my, well I don't know my just my feeling detached from things but right now all I want to do is be held by my husband, just be held and I feel, I wonder if we're ever actually going to touch each other again. If we'll ever turn the light out and stay facing each other at night time. I feel lonely and useless and empty and haggard and ugly and and like a worm and Harry doesn't love me like he did when he was three and he has hair all over his body which scares me, he's a man he's a grown man like you and he has somebody a *girl* and you haven't touched me in over ten months and I know that things are muddy at night time but this is real for me in the daytime and true and everything you do is *excruciating* and I've forgotten why I like you. I'm sorry but I've totally forgotten.

*Silence. He flushes the toilet and comes out of the bathroom.*

Jeremy: Don't go in there. (*He wipes his hands on his trousers and walks towards Victoria*)  
What is it love?

*She goes to speak then looks at his hands.*

Victoria: ...Have you washed your hands?

Jeremy: Yes

Victoria: There wasn't any soap in there earlier

Jeremy: I did

Victoria: I've put Carex on the list

Jeremy: There was some of that antibac gel in /there

Victoria: Where?

Jeremy: What?

Victoria: I've put that on the list too. Where was it?

Jeremy: It's there

Victoria: It's there is it well *where* is it cause /I've

Jeremy: What did you want to talk about?

Victoria: I just want to know whether you've washed your hands or not after shitting out half of Berkshire

Jeremy: Right /okay

Victoria: I'd like to know if maybe my husband is wiping E Coli around my clean house

Jeremy: *Your* clean house

Victoria: *My* clean house

Jeremy: Our clean house

Victoria: It's a house it's a fucking house who cares whose house it is you don't work for it anymore

Jeremy: What?

Victoria: Why don't you want to kiss me.

*Silence.*

Jeremy:

Victoria:

Jeremy: I've spent my life working to support you and this house

Victoria: Oh and I *sacrificed* mine to support you and this house

Jeremy: (*Scoffs*) Pulled the short straw did you?

Victoria: Certainly feels like it at the moment

Jeremy: Sittin' on your arse, spending all the

Victoria: I was *raising your son!*

Jeremy: Poor Vic sat at home with her feet /up

Victoria: You're not listening to what I'm saying

Jeremy: That's what you just said

Victoria: *Before that.* I said other things.

Jeremy: What?

Victoria: You couldn't hear me obviously. So.

Jeremy: (*He waits*) Well I'm not fucking clairvoyant am I? What did you say?

*Silence. Victoria picks the skin around her thumb. Jeremy sees she's upset. He calms.*



Well Jamie Oliver can fuck off with that creamy garlic mash I tell yer

Victoria: Why, don't you. Touch me. *Anymore.* Jeremy. *(Pause)* Jeremy. Just tell me. Come on. Just, just tell me what's wrong, with me. Just

Jeremy: Is there some soap downstairs?

Victoria: I said we've run out why don't you want me?

Jeremy: So you've not been to toilet all day?

Victoria: Who is she?

Jeremy: Victoria, stop it. Just bloody stop it. *(Pause)* You know there's nobody else. I wouldn't.

Victoria: Then

Jeremy: I don't want to have this conversation.

Victoria: We need to have this conversation

Jeremy: Look I *love*

Victoria: You don't

*He sighs*

You don't.

Jeremy:

Victoria:

Jeremy:

Victoria:

*He looks at his watch. Silence.*

Jeremy: The dog needs feeding

*Pause. He sees she's upset.*

It's *my way*, Vic

Victoria: Your way

Jeremy: My way, yeah

Victoria: This is your love.

*He nods quietly.*

Then you can keep it. Jeremy. You can have it. It's yours. Because I can't see it. I can't *feel* it. It's not mine.

*Jeremy quietly burns up inside.*

Jeremy: Better or worse, sickness and in

Victoria: Oh come on!

Jeremy: *Health*

Victoria: This is worst.

Jeremy: You don't *listen*

Victoria: 'For better or worse' well this is the worst

Jeremy: You don't *hear me*

Victoria: Oh here we go I don't let you speak well SPEAK. Jeremy. I've been waiting twenty four years for you to speak so SPEAK. Come on.

*He's struggling*

Lights on but oh look nobodies fucking home

Jeremy: You need your head checked.

Victoria: Okay

Jeremy: Nasty.

Victoria: Right.

Jeremy: You *are*

Victoria: So what. That changes *what* exactly?

Jeremy:

Victoria: Nothing.

Jeremy: ...I didn't realise you were so miserable with me.

Victoria: I'm not miserable

Jeremy: No?!

Victoria: I'm just. Gathering dust.

*He looks up.*

Jeremy:

Victoria: *(Pause)* I leave the house, angry at you *so fucking angry* and resentful and bitter but I find a calm place when I'm out of the house, these four walls suffocate me. And I find a calm, quiet place outside of this place outside of my head and I remember you and us and when Harry was little and it pissing it down on Hunstanton Beach, but the happiness, so much of it. I get in the car to come home and I feel as if I might find you again. As if I'll walk into the kitchen and I'll feel that again. I open the front door with all of this hope rising up inside me so much so that my eyes water a bit and I could laugh, almost, the slate looks clean my chest feels light and I wonder what all the fuss was about when I pulled out of the drive and could've never come back. And then I see you and

*Silence.*

Then it's

Jeremy: And then it's what?

Victoria: *(Pause)* It's as if I hadn't.

*They stare at each other. She stands there, broken up. He stands staring at her. After a few moments, he puts his arms around her. She lifts hers up slowly and goes to put them around him. He talks into her hair.*

Jeremy: I can't pretend to understand...*women troubles*. But, you need to sort yer head out, love.

*Her arms stay suspended in mid air. She doesn't move or blend in with him. It's excruciating and in one sudden movement he walks away from her. She stands there, staring.*

## Seven

*The menopause support group. Victoria walks onto the stage, anxiously. She sits down on a chair and nervously rustles through her bag. Meg enters and scrunches up a Greggs paper bag. She sits and swallows a burp. Meg has a strong regional accent and bright ginger hair. Polly enters, head down. Polly can be from anywhere but must look mousey. There is a pathetic spread of stale egg sandwiches and elderflower cordial in plastic cups with smiley faces on them.*

Meg:            Alright?

Victoria:       Hello

Polly:           Hmm?

Meg:            Just said 'alright'

Polly:           Oh uh, nervous.

Meg:            Nervous?

Polly:           A bit

Meg:            Not me girl. Not me, let's 'ave it, bring it on

*Anita. Unwashed hair. She stinks the room out.*

Anita:           Morniiiiing

*She sticks signs around the room on sugar paper with irritating catch phrases such as 'Don't let your life be put on menoPAUSE', 'Periods, who needs them?', 'Sex = overrated!' followed by hearts and other useless shapes.*

Meg:            Alright

Polly:

Victoria:       Hi

Anita:           Three! Three. And one of me.

Meg:            ...Come again

Anita:           Last group was one on one you see, ooh that rhymed

Meg:            Sounds shit

*Victoria chokes on a gulp of water.*

Anita: Ummm would we call it shit would we call it shit no I'd say it was, *thorough*.  
Thorough. So. Anita

*She holds out her hand and Meg takes it with a clap. She shakes everybody's hand*

Meg: Meg.

Polly: Polly.

Victoria: Hello, *Victoria*

Anita: Ah! Our greatest Queen. Balls, that woman, *balls*. Marvelous. I wonder if you'll be the last.

*She takes out joss sticks and lights one*

It's, all, about, the, atmosphere (*Pause*) okay. So! This group is aptly named... 'Say No to the Big Pause...(Meno).'

*Silence.*

Meg: ...I don't get it.

Anita: Well

Meg:

Anita: The, what part don't you

Meg: I don't get it

Anita: Well the 'say no to the big pause' is it means, say no to the symptoms and the

Meg: Yeah I get that bit

Anita: Oh

Meg: The meno bit. 'Big pause...meno.' Don't get it

Anita:

Meg: What's the 'meno' bit.

Anita: Well it's the first two syllables of 'menopause'

Meg: But why've you slapped it on the end like a spare prick at a /wedding

Anita: Because it's important to use *all* of the word, you know, abolish these taboos

Meg: Ain't no taboo the menopause

Anita: No it *shouldn't be*

Meg: Just fucking shit like

Polly: Hmm

Meg: Sweating my tits off every night, pissing the bed, starting to look like Bill Bailey

Anita: Right, we'll cover those

Meg: I'd get rid of the 'meno' bit, me

Anita: Uh huh, uh huh

Meg: Sounds fucking shite

Anita: Thank you...

Meg: Meg.

Anita: *Meg*. Right let's begin, fellow women of the change

*Meg burps*

Anita:

Victoria:

Polly:

Meg: Sorry, I'm a sucker for a chicken and bacon lattice, me

*Victoria is amused by her.*

Anita: As you can see, I've taken the time to put up a few *inspiring* sort of, things around the room

Meg: (*Feigning surprise*) Oh!

Anita: Yes, see, here

Meg: Didn't see those

Anita: So a little thing we, *I* it's sort of *my* idea that others have adopted but what I like to do here at the 'Say No to the Big Pause, Meno'

Meg: (To Victoria) Isn't the 'meno' bit shite

Victoria: Umm

*Polly is fidgety*

Anita: It's, attempting to

Meg: Pointless

Anita: Break away from

Meg: Ruins the whole thing for me, I'm afraid

Victoria: I don't understand

Anita: Abolishing

Polly: IT'S JUST A FUCKING WORD OKAY, IT'S A FUCKING WORD. IT DOESN'T MATTER. WHAT MATTERS MORE IS US. OURSELVES. US. YOU. ME. THIS. What we do from now on. How we get THROUGH this. (*She exhales*)

Meg: ...The fuck was that?

Polly: I'm sorry I

Anita: Right

Polly: Anxiety

Anita: Oh you poor dear, we'll cover all of that

Meg: (To Victoria) Fucking exorcist in corner, fuckin' 'ell

*Victoria stifles a laugh.*

Anita: RIGHT. As I was saying, what I like to do is read out a little *inspiring* nugget of wisdom each session

Meg:

Victoria:

Polly:

Anita: So. Here's today's, and it centres around the topic of *hair loss*. Now, girls, *hair loss* is something that we all may or may not have to deal with, Meg, obviously you, um, okay but here it is: 'Women' (that's us!) 'were *born without hair*', now, 'and', it says,

*'ultimately die without hair.'* See? And the last little bit, a sort of, you know *GIRL POWER* sort of thing is look so okay, so 'so deal with it!!' (*Pause*) Okay? So, really sort of, 'YEAH!' you know? Right

*Silence. Polly takes notes. Victoria looks around the room in quiet disbelief.*

Meg: Will it grow back?

Anita: ...It might

Meg: Don't piss on me head and tell us it's raining will it grow back?

Anita: Probably not.

Meg: Fucking shit, this!

Anita: *But, there are* ways of coping, moving *forward*

Meg: I don't want to move forward love I just want to look like me again instead of a cross between Ken Dodd and a carrot youknowwhatImeanlike

*Anita lights some candles.*

Anita: (*She sighs meditatively*) Okay. Here we go. Let's let's introduce ourselves properly. Okay I'll go first

*Meg hiccups*

My name is Anita, I'm forty one

Victoria: Wow

Anita: Yes yes, terribly sad, premature menopause

Meg: Fuck

Anita: I know, horrendous

Victoria: Gosh

Anita: Um, married, no kids and well, interesting fact I think it's nice to all say an interesting fact so *mine issssss um de dum de dum, oh* okay, yes. I'm a freegan.

Meg:

Polly:

Victoria: ...A what?



Anita: Freegan.

*Silence.*

Meg: ...Gunna have to elaborate on that love

Anita: Okay so every night myself and my husband and our little dog Buckwheat

Meg: No.

Anita: Nip to the, you know the big Sainsbury's on Kirkstall Road? We go behind there, to the bins, and we take food, come home, on the stove, ta da dinner is served

Victoria: ...Bins?

Polly: Really?

Meg: That is fucking RANK

Anita: No, Megan

Meg: Meg

Anita: It's not, it's *frugal*

Meg: The fuck's THAT, sounds even *worse*

Victoria: It means economical

Meg: Tight arse more /like

Anita: It is a way of life for us

Meg: Peel an orange in her pocket, her!

Anita: A means of of of escaping the oppressive tyranny of global Capitalism.

Victoria: Oh, right

Meg: So you eat the dirty throwaways nobody else wants

Anita: Not dirty

Meg: Do you eat the meat?

Anita: If it's packaged

Meg: Do you eat potatoes?

Anita: If they aren't spotted yes

Meg: Do you drink the bin juice?

Anita:

Victoria: Okay

Anita: I'm sorry?

Victoria: Shall I go next?

Meg: Yeah, she's knockin' me sick

Anita:

Victoria: Right

Anita: Actually just quickly, 'in my wildest dreams' I...travel to Lake Koomoowaku and live amongst the people of Titihaha in hopes to recalibrate my central nucleus.

*Silence.*

Victoria: Okay, so I'm Victoria, I'm fifty, gosh, um, married

Meg: Lucky guy (*She winks at Victoria*)

Victoria: We have a son, Harry who's just gone to Oxford

*Polly and Anita together*

Anita: Oooh!

Polly: Wow!

Victoria: Yes, I'm so very proud, and um,

Meg: What's your husband's name?

Victoria: ...Jeremy

Meg: Sounds HOT

Victoria:

Meg: Jezza. I'd have a bit of Jeremy Kyle too, me, woof

Victoria: He's a retired English teacher

Anita: Ooh very nice!

Meg: NAUGHTY SCHOOLGIRL

Victoria: Uh

Anita: Interesting fact?

Victoria: Hmm?

Meg: What's your interesting /fact

Victoria: Oh, um, let me think.

*Long awkward pause*

I can't think on the spot

Anita: That's, fine

*Polly and Anita smile awkwardly.*

Meg:

Anita: And your wildest dreams, (dare I /ask)

Victoria: In my *wildest dreams*...I...oh, snorkel with dolphins.

*Silence.*

Anita: I don't condone the involuntary use of dolphins but

Meg: I've done that

Victoria: Have you?

Meg: Just go Florida love. Take Jeremy.

Victoria: He hates America

Meg: Sack off Jeremy then. Piece of piss.

Anita: Lovely! Polly?

Polly:

Anita: Are you okay to go...?

Polly: Uh, yes yes, okay. *(Pause)* I'm, Polly, fifty two, married, well, no children, never got round to it, very, finding this all very over *(she bursts into tears)* whelming

Anita: Ladies, fear is rearing it's ugly head once again

Victoria: I have a tissue hang on

Anita: BREATHE THROUGH IT BREATHE THROUGH IT LET THE WAVES OF FEAR CRASH OVER YOU

Polly: So

Anita: Keep going Polly

Polly: ...My husband is seeing a younger woman because he, well I have no interest in (sex) any longer, it *hurts* but

*Pause.*

Meg: Spit it out love I've got AA at two.

*She pisses herself. Anita shoots her a look.*

That was a joke

Polly: He's gone. He's left.

Victoria: Oh *no*

Anita: Men. Hmm? Men. Give a dog a bone and all they want to do is suck it

Meg: Yep

Anita: Bury it in foreign holes

Meg: I hear ya

Anita: And then shove it back on your lap, soggy and limp

Meg: Mhm

Anita: And expect you to toss it for them again. That's all I'm saying.

Meg: Amen.

Victoria: So, he's left your home?

Polly: I've moved to a refuge

Victoria: Oh *Polly*

Polly: He was, violent

Meg: Fuck him off Polly! Fuck the fucker off! Don't be taking that shite, the ugly /cunt

Victoria: Are you safe now?

Polly: Yes

Meg: Stay at mine, we'll top and tail

Polly: No, thank you

Victoria: Are you, alright there?

Polly: I *miss him*, is that wrong?

Meg: What?

Victoria: Oh sweetheart

Polly: I miss him. But we're not the same anymore so it can never be as it was. I miss the ordinary. I feel like I'm skin hanging out to dry, it sounds, but, it's how it feels.

*Meg and Victoria look to Anita for help.*

Anita: BIT HEAVY for eleven o'clock

Victoria:

Anita: Think it's time for a break

Victoria: What?

Anita: Golly ten past

Victoria: Anita, I think we should

Anita: Fifteen minutes sound good? Fifteen minutes.

*Anita leaves. They stare blankly.*

Victoria:

Meg: Fuckin' bins

Polly:

Victoria: (To Polly) I know how you feel.

*They share a moment.*

Polly:

Victoria:

Polly: Tell me about you.

Victoria: ...Me?

Meg: Oh ta!

*Meg gets a sandwich and a bottle of coke out of her bag. She checks her phone a lot.*

Polly: (To Victoria) Please. Tell me how *you* have it

Victoria: Well I

Polly: Does your husband mind the lack of sex?

Victoria: ...No. No he doesn't mind.

Polly: You're lucky

Victoria: Am I?

Polly: I think I'm the only person in the world whose insides feel like they're melting. I shall be a puddle on the floor before long, if nothing is done.

*Pause.*

Polly: I'm probably being /silly

Victoria: No, you're not. You're not.

*Silence. Meg is eating a tuna sandwich. Her phone rings. She turns to one side facing the audience. She picks it up.*

Hello darlin'

*For the next few lines, Meg laughs flirtatiously on the phone and agrees with the caller.*

Polly: How long have you been married?

Victoria: Oh, coming up to twenty five years now

Polly: That's lovely. You'd be surprised how many marriages get through it. On average

Victoria: We're not average

Polly: Yes but on average, (it's a good thing)

Victoria: I'm not 'on average' I don't want to be 'on average'

*Polly's take aback.*

But yes, I suppose you're right.

Meg: *(On the phone, we hear her loudly now)* Use me as your toilet paper you filthy rug munching nymph, I'm your tissue paper, oh yeah

Victoria:

Polly:

Meg: Oh that's right, rub me all over your arse crack, let me rim you, that's it dry your hairy ball sack with my soft tissue-ey...tissue

Polly:

Victoria:

Polly: I thought she was peculiar

Meg: Oh oh oh oh um um um um go on fuck me in my arse fuck me mmmmm rub me rub me ooooooooooooooh

*She puts the phone between her cheek and shoulder and picks up her bag. She takes the thick leather handle of her bag and slaps it against the table hard.*

Smack my arse ooh yeah ooh yeah you like that baby

*She takes out a bottle of water and gargles*

Hear how wet I am oh wow oh wow

*She puts the phone down on her chair and nips over to the other side of the stage to get a biscuit.*

Ooh, hobnobs! *(she goes back to the chair and picks the phone back up)* oh, I'm just, munching on your massive... *(Pause)* Done? Phew! I'm fucked, me. That was amazing. Now get back to work you dirty bastard! Alright love, my pleasure, see yer, bye, bye.

*Polly and Victoria are speechless.*

Meg: Right anyone know where the bog is? I'm busting for a shit

Victoria: ...Through there, turn, left.

Meg: Ta.

*Silence. Polly stands*

Polly: I'm off

Victoria: What?

Polly: Yes

Victoria: No

Polly: I'm gone

Victoria: You need help. I need help. Meg needs

Polly: Yes. She does.

*Polly picks up her bags and goes to walk.*

I don't like madness. No. I have enough madness in my own life I don't need hers.  
(Pause) Are you staying?

Victoria: I

Polly: I don't know why you would

Victoria: I don't want to go to home.

Polly: At least you *have a*

Victoria: No you don't understand I don't want to look at my husband and see my dog and stare at my walls and watch my television and sit at my kitchen table and and slouch in my pyjamas and open my fridge and cook the dinner and read my book and and sleep in my bed and scrub my face and teeth and body and skin and feel it peel away and rinse it down the sink and stare in the mirror at an old face and sleep next to a person and wake and see it all again I want to go and snorkel with dolphins in Florida. Do you know what I *mean*?

*Silence.*

Polly: I'm starving. Are you coming?



## *Eight*

*Jeremy at a table, that night. His hair covered in white mousse and cling film wrapped around it. He reads Ernest Hemingway's 'A Farewell to Arms'. It is late evening. We watch him for a few long seconds, then there is the sound of a key finding a lock. She enters and the air is thick.*

Jeremy:        You're late?

Victoria:      I went for food after.

Jeremy:        Oh right

*She enters the stage.*

Victoria:      Oh

Jeremy:        Was gunna ask you to help me, but

Victoria:      Sorry.

*She puts her things down.*

Jeremy:        How was it?

Victoria:

Jeremy:        The group

Victoria:      Oh, fine

Jeremy:        Feel better?

Victoria:      Well it takes a few

Jeremy:        You went for food

Victoria:      Yeah

Jeremy:        How was that?

Victoria:      Lovely

Jeremy:        I left you some of my fish, I had chippy

Victoria:      You didn't need to

Jeremy:        I know. What did you

Victoria: I had chicken

Jeremy: ...Just chicken

Victoria: Spicy chicken

Jeremy: *Spicy* chicken?

Victoria: Yeah

Jeremy: *(Pause)* You don't like curry

Victoria: It wasn't curry

Jeremy: Oh

Victoria: It was 'piri piri'.

Jeremy: Oh. 'Piri piri'. Right.

*Jeremy puts his book down to look at her.*

Jeremy: You look, gorgeous

Victoria: I don't

Jeremy: You do

Victoria: Stop it

Jeremy: Take a compliment

Victoria: I can't

Jeremy: For *me*

Victoria: It's uncomfortable

Jeremy: For a man to compliment his wife

Victoria: When it's so sporadic it takes me by surprise

Jeremy: Then I shall bore you with it daily, is that what you want

Victoria: I want you to mean it

Jeremy:

*He leans to her. She's surprised and shows it. It's awkward. He*

*kisses her with his eyes closed. Her eyes remain open.*

Jeremy:

Victoria:      What are you reading

*She picks up the book*

Jeremy:      One book I *wish* I'd taught, tried to get it on the curriculum but it's a bit *technical* in places

Victoria:      I hate Hemingway

Jeremy:      Do you? Why didn't I know that? What else don't I know?

Victoria:      I'm sure I don't know lots of things about you

Jeremy:      What does that mean?

Victoria:      Jeremy, it's a book

Jeremy:      I know I just meant (*Pause*) Could you see if I've done it right? It was hard to get the sides

*She is taken aback.*

Victoria:      Okay

*He picks up his book again. She tends to his hair awkwardly.*

Jeremy:      I miss your head massages.

Victoria:

Jeremy:      Give us one

Victoria:      I don't think I could now

Jeremy:      Oh go on

Victoria:      I've forgotten how

Jeremy:      Try.

*She starts to massage his head. He closes his eyes in bliss. He then quickly realises that she's not doing it the way she used to. He opens his eyes. It's awkward.*

Jeremy:      Lovely. Thanks.

*She stops. He picks up his book.*

Who did you have dinner with?

Victoria: A new friend from the group

Jeremy: Male?

Victoria: Yes *male* at the menopause group

Jeremy: Oh. Doesn't, matter anyway

Victoria: No it doesn't you're right

Jeremy:

Victoria: I feel fluttery.

Jeremy: Fluttery?

Victoria: She's interesting and inspiring...it's lovely to meet somebody who, sort of, souls collide, you know

Jeremy: You had a drink at dinner?

Victoria: ...A glass of wine

Jeremy: Your breath smells of beer

Victoria: It doesn't

Jeremy: I can smell it from here

Victoria: So what if I had a drink?

Jeremy: You don't drink beer

Victoria: So what?

Jeremy: So nothing just stating that you smell of

Victoria: I never go out

Jeremy: I know you don't

Victoria: And today I met somebody

Jeremy: So you said

Victoria: Who really understands me

Jeremy: Oh right

Victoria: Why are you being like this

Jeremy: I don't understand you then

Victoria: I didn't say that

Jeremy: No you're right I haven't got a *clue* about you at the minute

Victoria:

Jeremy: You look at me with eyes full of, well it looks like like, fear

Victoria:

Jeremy: Of what? Of your age of what?

Victoria: I don't.

Jeremy: You're afraid. You're petrified

*Silence.*

Jeremy: Spicy chicken *I* don't know

Victoria: What?!

Jeremy: What's going on?

Victoria: Oh please

Jeremy: Tell me

Victoria:

Jeremy: Or heaven forbid I might kiss you again and we all know how much you *loved that*

Victoria:

Jeremy: Like kissing a sodding corpse

Victoria: I'm just tired.

Jeremy:

Victoria:

Jeremy: This is burning, could you

*He motions to his head. Silence. Victoria goes back to doing his hair, she's lost. He picks up his book. He flicks to a specific page and starts to read out loud. It's terribly awkward at first for both of them but he eventually gets into the swing of it and tries to blurt it out as quickly as possible.*

*(Quietly)* "We slept when we were tired and if we woke the other one woke too so one was not alone. *(Louder)* Often a man wishes to be alone and a girl wishes to be alone too and if they love each other they are jealous of that in each other, but I can truly say we never felt that. *(Pause)* We could feel alone when we were together, alone against the others ... But we were never lonely and never afraid when we were together."

*Silence. Jeremy waits for a response. Victoria chooses carefully. It's too late.*

Victoria: Doesn't half go on does he?

Jeremy:

Victoria: *(Wrapping the cling film tighter)* You've got ten minutes left on that

Jeremy:

*He puts his book down. He looks at her as she takes a seat opposite him and takes out the paper. She looks at it for a few seconds then puts it down. He watches her.*

You look bored.

Victoria: Mmm.

Jeremy: Do the crossword

Victoria: I don't want to do the crossword

Jeremy: It's a good one today, nine down's a tricky fucker

Victoria: I don't want to do /the

Jeremy: I was stumped for a good half hour

Victoria: I'm not *that* bored

Jeremy: I could help, might be /fun

Victoria: The day I sit and do the crossword with you is the day the earth swallows me whole and worms eat me for breakfast. Why don't we just dig holes in the back garden and bury ourselves right now? Bloody crossword.

*Silence. Air is thick with words unsaid.*

Jeremy: ...So your friend

Victoria: Mm

Jeremy: Your age?

Victoria: Ish

Jeremy: That's nice. Women need friends, the staff room was always full /of

Victoria: 'Women need friends'

Jeremy: What?

Victoria: That's a stupid comment

Jeremy: You do

Victoria: Do you not?

Jeremy: No, just women're

Victoria: What?

Jeremy: You're more, sensitive, you need, sounding boards

Victoria: I'm not sensitive

Jeremy:

Victoria: I'm not

Jeremy: I only said

Victoria: I just thought it was a stupid thing to say

Jeremy: Oh as are most things I come out with

Victoria: Okay

Jeremy: You want me to *speak* so I *speak* and you tell me I'm stupid

Victoria: That *was*

Jeremy: I was only saying that women need friends more than men because men can function alone, better

Victoria: ...What?

Jeremy: Oh for Christ

Victoria: Well done Jeremy done it again

Jeremy: Here we go

Victoria: You can function alone where as poor little feeble me I'm just following you around am I just leaning on you for support constantly 'Oh Jeremy, do tell me more about the staff room, do let /me'

Jeremy: I didn't say that

Victoria: 'Wipe your shitty arse with my sleeve'

Jeremy: You're incorrigible

Victoria: Well let me tell you something Jeremy Arthur

Jeremy: Don't use my middle /name

Victoria: It's your name

Jeremy: You sound like my mother god /forbid

Victoria: Oh *right* your mother

Jeremy: Well don't use my middle

Victoria: I don't fucking need you Jeremy.

Jeremy:

Victoria: I don't need you. I don't need this house. I don't need these walls. I don't need these *things* by which we've come to define ourselves. This jam jar of a life, the lid screwed tightly to preserve, preserve what? What is worth keeping between us? What is worth salvaging? What *is* there but the quiet and the freezing cold? I don't, need, you anymore.

*Jeremy looks at her. Really looks. He stands up slowly and leaves the stage purposefully. Victoria stares into blank space and brings herself to a new place. After some time, Jeremy returns to the stage with a towel and wet hair.*



Victoria: You had another five left on that

Jeremy: I don't give a fuck about my 'air

Victoria: Waste of time then

Jeremy: Yep

Victoria: Why did you wash it off?

Jeremy: Because *Victoria*

Victoria: '*Victoria*'

Jeremy: Because

Victoria: Here we go

Jeremy: I think our marriage is about to end and I didn't want to have L'Oreal burning into my skull at the same time as begging you not to leave me.

*Silence.*

So.

Victoria: It's done a good job anyway

Jeremy: Are you leaving me?

Victoria: *(Pause)* ...Yes.

Jeremy: Can I stop you?

Victoria: Please don't

Jeremy: Do you love me?

Victoria: I'm programmed to

Jeremy: Then you don't leave

Victoria: Tell me how you feel right now

Jeremy:

Victoria: Tell me how this feels.

*Jeremy is trying hard to speak but the words aren't there.*

Jeremy: ...I don't think I washed all of the dye out me 'air

*Victoria is in disbelief*

It's burning

Victoria: You're ignorant, you're *cold* with /me

Jeremy: I don't mean it

Victoria: You don't *look at me, really look at me*

Jeremy: I try

Victoria: You won't get hard for me

Jeremy: ...That's not f/air

Victoria: No what's not fair is feeling unable to give your husband an erection that's not */fair*

Jeremy: You're not the same either you know

Victoria: What?

Jeremy: You don't bother so much with yourself.

Victoria: Explain.

Jeremy: I don't know

Victoria: Fucking explain what you mean

Jeremy: You don't, you don't shave yourself as often.

Victoria:

Jeremy: You don't

Victoria:

Jeremy: I'm sorry but /you

Victoria: I hate you

Jeremy: Okay. I hate you too.

Victoria: What?

Jeremy: I hate you too.

Victoria:

Jeremy: We hate each other. So.

Victoria:

Jeremy: Tell me that you hate me

Victoria: Stop

Jeremy: Go on tell me that you hate me.

Victoria: I hate you.

Jeremy: Okay, thank you

Victoria: You're welcome

Jeremy: How long for?

Victoria: A while

Jeremy: You never said

Victoria: You never listened

Jeremy: Get out.

Victoria: What?

Jeremy: Get out of my house.

Victoria: Your house?

Jeremy: My house. I earned it. I worked for it. So get out of it. Get the fuck out of my house.

Victoria:

Jeremy: Did you hear me or are you deaf as well as barren?

*Silence.*

I'm sorry for that

Victoria:

*He builds.*

I don't want this anymore

Jeremy: Okay.

Victoria: I don't

Jeremy: *(He fiddles with his wedding ring)* You're not supposed to back out.

Victoria: I don't recognise us anymore

Jeremy: Stop it

Victoria: I don't *like you anymore*

Jeremy: Vic just sit down

Victoria: I don't want to sit down

Jeremy: We'll pretend we're twenty again we'll pretend

Victoria: No

Jeremy: We'll go away, we'll go back to our old digs and visit the flat, our flat, when I doing my teacher training and you were

Victoria: I was what?

Jeremy: ...Just *try*

Victoria: Exactly. I don't want to try.

Jeremy: *(Pause)* You don't want to try

Victoria: No. I don't want to try I'm fed up of trying.

Jeremy: Fine.

*He's holding his wedding ring. Pause. He suddenly snaps and throws the ring into the auditorium. We hear it ping.*

Don't fucking try.

*She stares at him. Victoria walks offstage. Jeremy stands empty. He looks out into the auditorium as if looking for his ring. Victoria enters. They stare at each other. Pause.*

Victoria: I'm sorry

Jeremy: ...Me too.

*A weak smile. He moves towards her. She stays put.*

Victoria: No, I am. I'm sorry.

*She flattens her hair. She picks up her handbag.*

Jeremy: You're going out?

Victoria:

Jeremy: Where?

Victoria:

Jeremy: We need milk.

*He tries a smile. She doesn't take it.*

Victoria: You need milk.

Jeremy: What?

Victoria: I don't need milk. I don't want to buy milk for you anymore. I don't want this, I don't want you, I don't want to quit smoking and I don't want to rot away in a house that has looked the same for fifteen years. And I don't want to hear your *mindlessly boring* stories anymore. *(Pause)* Don't say anything.

*Silence*

Jeremy: *(Pause)* Alright.

Victoria:

*Pause.*

Twenty four *years* and /it's alr

Jeremy: You told me not to say anything.

Victoria: *(Pause)* Alright.

*She leaves.*

*The front door slams. He stands there.*

## *Nine*

*He stands there. Overhead, a dial tone. It rings for a while. Jeremy doesn't budge – he can't hear it. It goes to voicemail, the generic woman's voice.*

Woman:       The person you are calling is unavailable; please leave your message after the tone.

*The tone rings.*

Victoria:       (Pause) Look I know this is really quite rude and presumptuous, it's Victoria by the way but um. I did it. I left. So uh. Cou-could I stay with you for a bit? Just until I find somewhere else.

*Silence.*

*The line goes dead.*

Interval.

## ACT TWO

### *Ten*

*A house – we don't yet know whose, but it's not her own. Victoria is hoovering. She is listening to Joan Jett & The Blackheart's – Bad Reputation and enjoying herself. There are two cups of tea on a table – one mug is plain white, the other has a huge, terrifying cat's face on it. There is also a landline phone. We hear a faint doorbell. She doesn't.*

*It carries on. She hears it. She stops the hoover and stops the radio.*

*Banging on the door, plus the doorbell.*

Victoria:     *Alright!*

*She goes offstage to open the door. Meg's on the phone.*

Meg:           Ta love thanks for ringing.... now go and clean up you dirty bastard! Bye, bye. *(To Victoria)* oh you've hoovered

*She drops a load of Aldi bags on the floor.*

Forgot that carpet was cream. And a cup of char you're a Saint

*She gulps her tea. The white mug, as it turns, says I HEART PUSSY on it.*

Victoria:     I couldn't find any other clean mugs

*Meg looks at her mug in confusion.*

Meg:           This one's fine

Victoria:     Oh good

Meg:           I HEART PUSSY

*Victoria nods*

What one've you got

*Victoria holds hers up*

Oh I like that one too. *(Pause)* I like cats.

Victoria:     *(She nods)* You don't have any?

Meg: 'llergic. Speakin' of which

*She downs her mug of tea and walks upstage and bangs heavily on the wall*

Mandy you little bitch I seen your Neil followin' me down Hatchet Lane, I ain't got your cat, I don't want a cat, and even if I did wanna cat I wouldn't have yours cause he's a shit cat anyway.

*She walks back to the table and swallows a burp.*

You rang him yet?

Victoria: No

Meg: He's not a baby V

Victoria: He's *my* baby

Meg: Needs to know. Nineteen. Grown man. Spoken to misery guts?

Victoria: Can't get through, line's cut off. And he only does that when things are serious

Meg: Right

Victoria: Like the Ashes or

Meg:

Victoria: Saturday Kitchen. But it's not Saturday.

Meg: You need to get your *things*, V, *clothes*

Victoria: He might be, I don't know

Meg: Dead.

Victoria: I hope not

Meg: Hung 'imself

Victoria:

Meg: Head in the oven, gas on

Victoria: *Can we not?*

*Meg makes the sign of the cross.*



Meg: Sorry

Victoria: Maybe I should just travel light. Leave my things. Eat out of bins like Anita.

Meg: The dirty cow. Speakin' of cows, clean ones, steak for tea. Thought I'd treat us.

Victoria: Oh, lovely

*She looks down at the bags.*

Meg: I know it ain't your Waitrose but it's good stuff in there ya know, once you've sifted through the foreign shit

Victoria: Right

Meg: Took a few extra calls on my way just so we could have fillet instead of rump. I hate rump. Idea of eating a cow's arse doesn't sit well with me. *(Pause)* Geddit? *Sit well?*

*Victoria fakes laughs. She punches Victoria hard in the arm, she goes flying.*

You like fillet?

Victoria: Love it

Meg: Bangin'. Let me unpack this shit

*Victoria goes to help*

No, you sit, you've done enough and you're the guest.

Victoria: If /you're sure

Meg: Guest. As in, hurry the fuck up and find somewhere else to live. HA! Joke. Right.

*She goes offstage with her bags. Victoria sits and sips her tea. She's tired already. After a few moments, Meg's phone rings on the table. Her ringtone is Salt-n-Pepa 'Push It'.*

Victoria:

*She stares at the phone*

Meg: *(Off)* Who is it?

*Victoria picks it up.*

Victoria: It says 'unknown'?

Meg: *(Off)* It'll be me mum

Victoria: Pardon?

Meg: *(Off)* It's me mum PICK IT UP

*Victoria looks at the phone and holds it to her ear. She clears her throat.*

Victoria: Hello?

*She listens. The line is silent.*

...Hello?

*Someone grunts. Her face drops to one of absolute horror. She covers the phone with one hand.*

*(Calling out)* Meg...?

Meg: Two secs!

*She listens. She stays like this for a few seconds. She's then wide eyed.*

Victoria: *(Into the phone)* ...Okay, thank you, bye.

*She ends the call. Meg enters smirking, with a bottle of wine and two glasses. She pours.*

Meg: Barry was it? Fuck the tea

Victoria: What just happened

Meg: Sorry couldn't resist. He's a wrongun, bless him.

Victoria: *(Pause)*...Are they all like that?

Meg: Well, they all like they're own things

Victoria: He likes /horses

Meg: Horses yeah. Bless 'im. Still, you just earned me twenny quid

Victoria: For *that*?!

Meg: Listen there's not many women'll take them calls

Victoria: No I suppose /not

Meg: You get your regulars what'll pay upfront just to connect the call and then it's a pound a minute. Others, bit boring, just wanna talk, you know proper conversation with a female what listens. Most're married, mind you.

Victoria: Gosh.

Meg: Then you get the ones ringing for the chinky up the road. Numbers exactly the same but for the last digit. That fucks me off that does. Sometimes I just pretend I'm the chinky and then they never get their food.

*She pisses herself. Victoria doesn't.*

Victoria: Why?

Meg: Dunno.

*Silence. They both sip their wine, both staring out into the auditorium.*

You like it?

*Victoria puts her glass down.*

Victoria: Mmm it's lovely

Meg: Barry I meant. The chat.

Victoria: Oh no

Meg: Good money. Bit of extra cash

Victoria: *Yeah* but

Meg: You ain't got an income no more have you? Gotta think ahead

Victoria: I don't think I'm

Meg: It's nice to feel desired. To feel sexy.

Victoria: ...Are you being serious?

Meg:

Victoria: *Me!?*

Meg: What?

Victoria: Well, I

Meg: You a virgin? (*Victoria shoots her a look*) Then you know your way around a dick. Ain't your fault your Jeremy kept his rocket in his pocket.

Victoria:

Meg: Take the padlock off your vag and think of a chat name.

Victoria: Don't be silly

Meg: It's just a name. We're being *hypothetical*.

Victoria: *(Pause)*...A name?

Meg: I'm Shitty Meg, for example.

Victoria:

Meg: Anal reference no bother, what's yours?

Victoria: This is ridiculous

Meg: What rhymes with Victoria?

*Silence. They think.*

No/thing.

Victoria: Nothing

Meg: What about, Vic? Vicky?

Victoria: *(She scoffs with embarrassment. Then pause)* ...Licky? No

Meg: Licky Vicky?

Victoria: *(Cautiously)*...Mmm.

Meg: Right you take next call

Victoria: What!

Meg: Throwin' you in at the deep end

Victoria: No

Meg: Do what you did with Barry

Victoria: Absolutely not

*The phone rings*

Meg: Oop! That'll be Mike. He likes golf.

Victoria: Meg

Meg: As in, shaggin' with a golf club.

Victoria: I don't want to!

Meg: Live a little you boring bitch, you'll be dead soon!

*Meg picks up the phone. She listens. She puts on Victoria's accent.*

Meg: Hello you're speaking to Licky Vicky, how can I help big boy?

*She thrusts the phone to Victoria's ear. They wait and listen together. Meg encourages her to speak. She's cringing.*

Victoria: Yes... I'd...love to

*Victoria shakes her head. Meg encourages her.*

Drive the caddy...(!?)

Meg: *(Whispering)* Keep going!

Victoria: Sit on the what?

*Meg laughs but keeps encouraging her. Victoria gulps her wine.*

Yes I like golf, my hus/band

*She stops herself. Meg shakes her head frantically and motions for her to up the pace. She tries to be sexy.*

*Oh, yeeees get your... golf balls out (To Meg, silently) Oh my god*

Meg: 'Put it in my hole!'

*Victoria shakes her head*

Meg: 'PUT IT IN MY HOLE!'

Victoria: *(To Meg, whispered)* I'm not saying that.

Meg: 'PUT. IT.'

*Victoria exhales heavily. She speaks reluctantly.*

Victoria: Put it in my hole.

*The man comes. The line goes dead.*

Hello?

*She listens. She puts the phone down.*

Meg: Twenny quid. Boom.

## *Eleven*

*Doctor's waiting room. A week has passed – this shown through Victoria's confidence and comfortable attitude towards Meg. Meg and Victoria sit. Victoria reads a magazine, Meg texts. Overhead, we hear the receptionist.*

Voice: Mr. Harris to Dr. Gropper please.

Meg: That's my doctor, that.

Victoria: Hmm?

Meg: The raghead. Turban.

Victoria: *Shh*

Meg: She can't hear me

Victoria: You can't say things like that

Meg: I'll say what I fuckin' want. She's a raghead

Victoria: *Shh!*

Meg: Oh come on we're all thinkin' it

Victoria: *I'm not*

Meg: Yeah but you're posh. Posh people don't think things like that. They think about things like...houmous and yoga. *(Pause)* I had Mike this morning, /golf Mike

Victoria: Golf Mike

Meg: Mmm. Asked for you

Victoria: *Really?*

Meg: Mhm. You was in the shower. *(She looks into her phone)* I reckon you'd like Tim, me

Victoria: Why?

Meg: Posh like you. Works in City

Victoria: One of those

Meg: Comes like a train

Victoria:

Meg: I'll pass him over to you next time, if you want

Victoria: What does he pay?

Meg: Look at you!

*Victoria's smiling.*

Tenner upfront. Still

*Victoria nods.*

Victoria: Yeah pass him over.

*Silence.*

Voice: Mrs. Wright to Dr. Ramikasoon please.

Meg: See! Another one! All bloody ragheads

Victoria: He's actually half Grenadian

Meg: Still brown

Victoria: *Meg!*

Meg: What?

Victoria:

Meg: Tellin' it how it is.

Victoria: You're not, you're telling it how it is for *you*, which /is

Meg: The best way

Victoria: Well I'm starting to wonder.

*She reads her magazine. Silence.*

Voice: Mrs. Meredith for Dr. Fletcher please

Meg: Lucky bitch

Victoria: What?

Meg: Fletcher, woof



Victoria: He's my gynecologist

Meg: Get out!

Victoria: What?

Meg: FIT him

Victoria: Very young

Meg: I'd pay to have a smear with him, let me tell you. I bet he'd be filthy. I bet he'd pay for it

Victoria: You reckon?

Meg: Them types. Work long hours. Yeah he'd pay.

Victoria: I've got a check up next week

Meg: I'd come but I don't wanna see your minge.

Victoria:

Meg: Him between your legs, you lucky cunt

Victoria: Well it's his job

Meg: You don't lie back and imagine him clamping your legs open and ramming his speculum

Victoria: *Meg!*

*She looks around in case anybody has heard.*

Meg: What!

Victoria: That's his door

*She motions downstage right.*

Meg: Good I hope he hears, might come out and take me off Dr. Tikka Masala

*Victoria is disgusted and put out by Meg.*

Oh take a dick Victoria. His, preferably

*Victoria's phone receives a text.*

Victoria: Harry's free on Friday

Voice: Miss. Butler for Dr. Gropper please.

*Meg stands.*

Meg: You gunna go?

*Victoria nods.*

Good girl. Get it over with. Right! Off to get my happy pills.

*Meg exits. Victoria looks over to her as she goes, and digests Meg's last line.*

## Twelve

*Two chairs centre stage. Victoria sits with two big bags of dirty laundry (in those large, chequed plastic bags). She folds a t-shirt or two. She looks down into the bags and picks up a pink thong. Harry enters, she stuffs it in the bag.*

Harry:        You got fifty p?

Victoria:     Fifty p!?

Harry:        You sound like dad.

*She gives him fifty p.*

Victoria:     How long?

Harry:        Quick wash, ten minutes

Victoria:     Will it get everything clean?

Harry:        No. But it's only fifty p so

Victoria:     Now *you* sound like your dad.

*Silence.*

Harry:        Is he alright?

Victoria:     I assume so

Harry:

Victoria:     He's fine

Harry:        You assume so?

Victoria:     Well he's rather *a closed book* isn't he but I'm sure if he wasn't, alright, then he'd let you know.

*She moves the laundry bag for no reason. She rearranges the clothes.*

Harry:        Where is he?

Victoria:     Golf, I expect

Harry        Why don't you see if he's free after?

Victoria: Mmm?

Harry: For lunch. Drive over

Victoria: Oh he'll be tired, you know how he /gets

Harry: Might as well ask

Victoria: This is nice.

*She pulls out the thong.*

Jessica's?

Harry: *Give me it.*

*He snatches it and stuffs it in a bag.*

*(Motioning to the bag she produced the thong from)* That's dirty

Victoria: I can see that

Harry: And *private*

Victoria: Are you two still together?

Harry: Looks like it

Victoria: Well I don't know, you might be one of those men who /sniff

Harry: We're still together.

Victoria: Oh good. Judging by her underwear choice she's

Harry: I said we're still together.

*Harry stuffs the laundry deep into the bag. Victoria looks at him.*

Victoria: Are you eating?

Harry: Yes?

Victoria: You look thin

Harry: I'm eating.

Victoria: What?

Harry: Food.

Victoria: Yes *what*

Harry: Dominoes

Victoria: *Harry*

Harry: Are you shagging someone?

*Silence.*

Victoria: I beg your pardon?

Harry: Answer the question.

Victoria:

Harry: Are you shagging someone?

Victoria: Who are you speaking to?

Harry: So *you are*

Victoria: I am not

Harry: But you've left dad.

Victoria:

Harry: Where are you staying?

Victoria: ...A friend's

Harry: Man or woman?

Victoria: *Woman* Harry, Christ

Harry: Who?

Victoria: It doesn't matter who does it

Harry: Are you happy?

Victoria: What?

Harry: Are you happier?

Victoria: Yes.

Harry: Is she nice?

Victoria: No she's horrible I hate her

Harry: Shut up.

Victoria: Asking stupid questions

Harry: I just want to know where my mother is living, actually

Victoria: Well now you know /don't you

Harry: Not really. She could be anybody.

Victoria: She's called Meg

Harry: Where did you meet her?

Victoria: This... group

Harry: The menopause group.

Victoria:

Harry: Dad told me you went

Victoria: He speaks to you more than me

Harry: Is she fucked up as well then?

Victoria: *(Pause)* Excuse me?

Harry: Is she fucked /up

Victoria: Yes she's fucked up as well thank GOD.

Harry:

*Victoria looks at him in quiet disbelief. Pause.*

Who's getting the BMW?

Victoria: *What?*

Harry: Can I have the surround sound?

Victoria: Harry

Harry: He's already sold his fishing gear you know

Victoria: What?

Harry: Getting his own place. Started selling things that won't fit in a flat. His guitars.

Victoria:

Harry: What?

Victoria:

Harry: You look surprised

Victoria: No it's just

Harry: What?

Victoria:

*Harry checks his watch.*

I should've been the one to tell /you

Harry: I'm seeing a flat with him tomorrow

Victoria: What?

Harry: I'm not taking sides

Victoria: Oh and seeing a flat with him isn't /taking

Harry: But you're the one who left. So.

Victoria: So *what?*

Harry: I feel sorry for him

*Victoria scoffs*

I do

Victoria: What about me?

Harry: He's by himself

Victoria: And I'm not?

Harry:

Victoria: I was miserable, Harry. Purposeless. You've left. He forgets I'm there half the time so I made the decision for me. Not for anyone else. And that's a crime is it? *(Pause)* Once you start making commitments, it's a ball and bloody chain. A mortgage. A family. A husband, a *wife*. It's great if it works, look at Nan and Granddad. Sharing Werther's Originals and sitting in their chairs, aww. But sometimes it doesn't. And I don't think I'm being unfair in saying that I'm tired of dragging my feet because of old promises I made that, *neither of us*, have kept very well.

*Silence.*

Where's the flat?

Harry: I need to get my laundry

Victoria: It's not been ten minutes, where is it?

Harry: Round the corner

Victoria: From where?

Harry:

Victoria:

Harry: My halls. Here.

*Silence.*

Victoria: ...Well you've certainly planned this well between you

Harry: He rang me. I didn't know /what

Victoria: You need to get your laundry.

*She folds more clothes needlessly.*

Harry: Please just speak to him

Victoria: Doesn't sound like I need /to.

Harry: To organise things, at least

Victoria: Sounds like he's managing perfectly well

Harry: He's

Victoria: Finding a flat selling our things do you know I wonder if the bed's still fucking warm

Harry: You can't expect him to just



Victoria: I expected Harry I *expected* him to just, to

Harry: Sit /there?

Victoria: Yes to just sit there. Like he does. Just sit there.

*Harry rubs his face with his hands. He exhales.*

Harry:

*She watches him and softens.*

Victoria: Are you upset?

Harry: No.

Victoria: Good

Harry: I'm fucking elated.

Victoria: Don't swear

*He stands.*

Harry: I don't know why you didn't do it years ago and save everybody the ball ache.

Victoria: You're angry

Harry: I'm tired of the bickering the game scoring, all of it

Victoria: *You're* tired

Harry: Get on or get out. *Jess and I*

Victoria: I'm not taking relationship advice off a nineteen year old /thank you

Harry: Fine

Victoria: Let alone one who happens to be dating a /slut

Harry: Enough. (*He snaps*) I don't care if you like her or you don't. Because A)

Victoria: I *don't* like /her

Harry: A), you haven't even met her so who on earth are you to judge

Victoria: You're my little bo/y

Harry: And B) the likelihood is you'll be dead in the ground long before the wedding bells so I couldn't give a fuck. *(Pause)* I'm not. I'm not your little boy. *(Pause)* You left. For you. That's your choice. This is mine.

Victoria:

*Silence.*

Harry: I need to get my clothes.

Victoria:

*He exits.*

## *Thirteen*

*Victoria sits in Gareth's office. He enters.*

Gareth: How are we doing then?

Victoria: Fine.

Gareth: ...Fine as in, still feeling like 'a worm' fine? Or

Victoria: Fine as in 'I've left my husband and I'm living with a woman who works on a sex hotline', fine.

*Silence.*

Gareth: Right

Victoria: I'm fine. I went to the group the support group and it was

Gareth: Fine?

Victoria: Yes.

Gareth:

Victoria: How are you?

Gareth: Me?

Victoria: Mmm

Gareth: I'm

Victoria: Fine?

Gareth: I'm *alright*

Victoria: Ooh, fancy.

Gareth:

Victoria: I'm here for a check up

Gareth: Yes

Victoria: On the bed?

Gareth: I don't need to examine you

Victoria: That's a shame

Gareth: Just a blood test, the nurse is on her way to do that for you

Victoria: Oh.

*Pause.*

Gareth: Well a lot can happen in a short space of time

Victoria: Yep

Gareth: If you need, support

Victoria: Got some more leaflets for me have you?

Gareth:

Victoria: Refer me to someone who gives a shit?

Gareth: ...It's obviously a difficult time /for you

Victoria: No it's not. It's not difficult for me. It's not difficult for him either by the looks of things

Gareth: Ah

Victoria: He's moving on briskly and so am I. I'm having the time of my life, actually. So no I don't need your shitty leaflets. Thank you.

*Silence.*

Gareth: So, what do you need?

*Silence.*

Victoria: What do you mean?

Gareth: It's fine

Victoria: *What do you mean?*

Gareth: No honestly forget I

Victoria: People tend not to forget things that Doctors say.

Gareth: *(Pause. He picks up a leaflet.)* All these say is that it helps for somebody to listen. To talk.

Victoria: And

Gareth: I have ears.

Victoria:

Gareth: And a semi.

Victoria: *Pardon?*

Gareth: ...You don't look fifty

Victoria:

Gareth: You're attractive. I'm attracted to you, I can't help that

Victoria:

Gareth: I have a two hour slot tomorrow afternoon so I'm suggesting that... I listen. To you talk. If you want to.

Victoria: ...Here?

Gareth: Or. In town. In a restaurant. Over lunch.

*Silence. He's embarrassed.*

The nurse is on her way

Victoria: Okay

Gareth: I'll leave you to it

Victoria: I said okay.

Gareth:

Victoria: Lunch.

Gareth: It has to be kept quiet

Victoria: It's just lunch

Gareth: Yes, it is. If you fancy it

Victoria: I said okay

Gareth: Okay. Le Metro

Victoria:     *(Wide eyed)* I haven't been there for *years*, it's

Gareth:       Opposite McDonalds.

Victoria:     Mmm.

Gareth:       At one?

Victoria:

*Gareth leaves and touches her shoulder on the way out. She's pleased with herself.*

## *Fourteen*

*Victoria is still sat at the table which is now in Le Metro (signified by table cloth and flower, perhaps). She's alone. She applies more lipstick. Gareth enters. She quickly shuts her compact mirror.*

Gareth: So, something stronger?

Victoria: You have to be back at work

*He looks at his watch*

Gareth: Not for forty five minutes

Victoria: Oh, good

Gareth: Have you enjoyed yourself?

Victoria: Mm lovely food

Gareth: What about me, what was I like?

Victoria: It was nice to be treated

Gareth: Anything else?

*She's bashful*

Victoria: You're, very charming

Gareth: Am I?

Victoria: Mmm

Gareth: Did he not take you out?

Victoria: Ooh Harvester if I was lucky

Gareth: You deserve to be with somebody who knows what you want and can give it to you.

*Pause.*

You're blushing

Victoria: I'm not

Gareth: Bit of pink here (*He motions to his cheeks*)

Victoria: Shall we get the bill?

Gareth: And then what?

*Victoria stares at him. He moves his hand forward. She's smiling.*

I have forty, *three* minutes until I have to be back at work.

Victoria: And?

Gareth: And I'm wondering what the best way to use that time is.

Victoria: I'd probably have a nap (*she laughs to herself*)

Gareth:

Victoria: Mmm

Gareth: Why don't you... take a nap on top of me?

*Beat. Her mood dampens.*

Victoria: ...What?

Gareth: There're rooms upstairs

Victoria: A 'nap on top of you'?

Gareth: It came out wrong

Victoria: I'm not *sleeping* with you

Gareth: I didn't suggest that did I?

Victoria: Sounds like it

Gareth: ...Why not?

Victoria: I'm still *married!*

Gareth: Not really

*She holds up her ring finger*

That can be removed

Victoria: I'm not that type of

Gareth: *Girl? (He scoffs)*



Victoria:

Gareth: I reckon you'd fuck me

*Victoria is taken aback.*

Ten minutes upstairs, you'd soon take that ring off

Victoria: You're sure of yourself

Gareth: It's the size of a Sky remote

Victoria:

Gareth: I'd split you in half

Victoria: Okay I think it's time

Gareth: A woman of your age is normally, well, *roomy*

*She pushes her chair backwards to stand up*

Stay

Victoria: I'm going

Gareth: Sit down

Victoria: I've heard enough

Gareth: Please don't go

Victoria: I'm going home.

Gareth: You don't have a home anymore.

Victoria:

Gareth: I've got money.

*Silence.*

Victoria: I'm sorry?

Gareth: I'd pay. If that makes it any better.

Victoria: ...It doesn't.

Gareth:

Victoria: You'd *pay*?

Gareth: ...A decent amount

Victoria: Is that what you do?

Gareth:

Victoria: How sad.

Gareth: I'm happy

Victoria: Work well for you does it?

Gareth: I know what you want

Victoria: Wanted

Gareth: Exactly

Victoria: Past tense. (Stupid woman).

Gareth: Bet he doesn't last two minutes inside you

Victoria:

Gareth: I'd show you how to do it properly

Victoria: He can do it properly, thank you

Gareth: S'that why you left? (*She's silent. He stands*) Tell them to keep the change.

*He throws down a wad of cash on the table.*

Victoria: Thank you for lunch

Gareth: Fuck off you crinkly old bitch.

*He exits. She sits there in disbelief. Long pause. She wipes her lipstick off and tears form in her eyes. She wipes them and tries to gather herself. She picks up her handbag and gathers her things. She exits.*

## *Fifteen*

*Meg's kitchen, this time pushed over to stage right. Lights down on stage left. Victoria is in a nightie. The landline is on the table. It's late at night. She's doing the crossword. She puffs on her electric cigarette.*

*She stops. She's drained. She folds the newspaper, picks up her mug and stands. The landline rings.*

*Shit*

*She picks it up looking upwards to check Meg hasn't stirred. She reluctantly takes it.*

*Hello, you're speaking to (Pause) Hello? The line's bad*

*She listens. She sits. Lights go up on stage left. Jeremy is sat at his kitchen table.*

Jeremy: *Can I order a delivery please?*

Victoria: *I'm sorry you have the wrong number*

Jeremy: *This is the Chinese isn't it?*

Victoria: *(She can't quite hear him) No, we're a few doors down, thanks*

*She goes to put the phone down*

Jeremy: *Who's this then?*

*She goes for it anyway, hoping for some small change.*

Victoria: *...You're speaking to Licky Vicky at Mature Madams. Can I help?*

Jeremy: *Mature Madams*

Victoria: *Can I help you?*

Jeremy: *I wanted a chicken chow mein*

Victoria: *Not to worry thanks for /calling*

Jeremy: *Mature Madams*

Victoria: *Yes.*

Jeremy: *Is that one of those phone things*

Victoria: Yes.

Jeremy: Oh *right*.

Victoria: Can I help you?

Jeremy: With what?

Victoria: *Anything you like*

Jeremy: ...I don't know what you /mean

Victoria: What's your name?

Jeremy:

Victoria: So I can build a *picture* of you, sat there

Jeremy: You're sure this isn't the Chinese pullin' me leg?

Victoria: Similar number, last digits a five not a three. What's your name?

Jeremy: (*Hesitates*) What's yours?

Victoria: Vicky.

Jeremy:

*Silence.*

Victoria: Hello?

*She checks her watch, she's pleased with how long she's kept him on the line.*

Jeremy: I'll leave you to it, Vicky

Victoria: What do you want me to do to you?

Jeremy: I think I'd better order my

Victoria: I'll do anything

Jeremy: It's not my thing

Victoria: We could just talk if you wanted. Sometimes we just talk, nothing else.

Jeremy: About what?

Victoria: Anything. I won't judge. I'm in no place to.

Jeremy:

Victoria: You've gone quiet.

Jeremy: I haven't

Victoria: You have

Jeremy: Just, my wife's name's Vicky.

Victoria: Oh

Jeremy:

Victoria: Bit odd.

Jeremy: Although she doesn't go by Vicky, she's Victoria. I used to call her Vicky when we were younger but she hated it. I call her Vic, now. She doesn't mind that. Well says she doesn't.

*Silence.*

Anyway, getting hungry now

*Victoria starts to wonder.*

*(He listens)* Oh she's gone

*He goes to hang up. She coughs and puts on a lower voice.*

Victoria: I'm here.

Jeremy: Oh thought you'd /gone

Victoria: *(She puts two and two together)* You rang for a Chinese

Jeremy: I'll get it up on Google you're alright

Victoria: Where do you live?

Jeremy: What?

Victoria: What's your name?

Jeremy: Bit hungry /now

Victoria: What do you do, then?  
Jeremy: I'm retired  
Victoria: *(Pause)* A retired what?  
Jeremy: Teacher  
Victoria: ...Of what?  
Jeremy: English. Windsor Girls. Not far

*The penny drops.*

Victoria: Did you, work there long  
Jeremy: Oh thirty odd years. Left recently  
Victoria: Did you  
Jeremy: Our son, got into *Oxford*.  
Victoria: (Oh my god)  
Jeremy: It's a lovely place, have you been?  
Victoria: ...No.  
Jeremy: He sweat blood getting there. *(Pause)* Did us proud.  
Victoria:  
Jeremy: But he's a mummy's boy. S'why I retired, didn't want her to miss him too much when the house was empty. Didn't want her to be lonely.

*Victoria is quiet.*

Y'still there?  
Victoria: The Chinese is 01753  
Jeremy: Do you have kids?  
Victoria: 618  
Jeremy: Do you want me to go?  
Victoria: You rang for a Chinese.

Jeremy: I know

Victoria: Go and get a Chinese.

Jeremy: I'm enjoying chattin'

Victoria: It's getting late

Jeremy: You said before we could just talk?

Victoria:

Jeremy: I'd like somebody to talk to.

Victoria: It's a pound a minute

Jeremy: Is it?

Victoria: This is a sex hotline

Jeremy: But sometimes you just talk, you /said

Victoria: Can't you talk to your *wife*? Why can't you talk to her?

Jeremy: She's not here.

*Pause.*

I wouldn't mind the company.

Victoria: You'd pay a pound a minute for company?

*She's horrified.*

Jeremy:

Victoria: Alright.

Jeremy: Thank you.

*Pause.*

What are you doing up at this time?

Victoria: Doing a (*beat*) crossword

*She thinks she's given herself away.*

Jeremy: Which one?

Victoria:     *(She lies)* The Sun.

Jeremy:       I do The Times ones

Victoria:     Too hard for me!

Jeremy:       Today's had me stumped for *hours* I had to use my wife's *(beat)* cheater, thingy

*They're both quiet.*

I did mean to call the Chinese you know

Victoria:     I know

Jeremy:       I'm not a married, perve ringing and pretending I'm

Victoria:     I know.

*Pause.*

Where is she...?

Jeremy:       Who?

Victoria:     Your wife.

Jeremy:       ...She left. Uh, I think we're getting divorced, which is exciting. I've never been divorced.

*He tries a laugh. She closes her eyes.*

Jeremy:       I think she's met somebody, if I'm honest I wouldn't blame her if she had.

Victoria:

Jeremy:       But I don't want to bore you /with

Victoria:     Bore me.

Jeremy:       No no

Victoria:     Pound a minute, you might as well make the most of it.

Jeremy:

Victoria:

*He's quiet.*



Jeremy: I'm not a very, open person. When I try to get my words out, see I've got it up here but they stay stuck here.

Victoria: Try

Jeremy: I try

Victoria: Try *harder*

Jeremy: You sound like her

*She freezes*

...Small things, arguments, easy. But then there's big stuff. It get's stuck.

Victoria: ...Like what?

Jeremy: You don't need to hear /this

Victoria: What's the big stuff?

Jeremy:

Victoria: Hello?

Jeremy: Hi.

Victoria: ...What is it?

*Pause.*

I might be able to help

Jeremy: You won't.

Victoria: It's unhealthy to keep things quiet

Jeremy: I know it is

Victoria: Tell me and big things might feel sm/aller

Jeremy: They won't

Victoria: 'A problem shared is a problem halved'

Jeremy: You can't halve this

Victoria: Try me

Jeremy: I promise you

Victoria: You'll never know if you /don't

Jeremy: I do know. Trust me /I know

Victoria: Just *tell me*. And I'll try. To help. But I can't if you won't just

Jeremy: I'm not /well.

Victoria: Open up. (*Beat*) What?

Jeremy: It's uh, the big C. (*It dawns on him.*) Hmm.

*Silence. Victoria falls to pieces.*

She doesn't know, I've not told her.

Victoria:

Jeremy: Always telling me to go to the doctors

Victoria:

Jeremy: I've made light of it for however long, trying to pretend it's not what it is.

*Silence. Victoria goes through the motions.*

Hello?

Victoria: *What?*

Jeremy: Anyway

Victoria: How,

Jeremy: It's late

Victoria: Is it, bad, how is it?

Jeremy: ...It's not the worst.

Victoria: Where?

Jeremy: Bowels, it's embarrassing

Victoria: So it's, not

Jeremy: It's not the worst, no.

*Beat.*

Victoria: And you didn't think to *mention it*?

Jeremy: Wasn't the right time

Victoria: The right time?

Jeremy: She's had her own battles, she's been in her own head /recently

Victoria: She might have made an exception for *cancer*

Jeremy: It's not the easiest thing to just slip /in, love

Victoria: No but you should be able to speak to your w/ife /about

Jeremy: Do you not think I've tried? She says I don't *speak*, I can speak about lots of things but how the bloody hell do you tell someone you've got, bloody cancer?

*He's lost it. This is the most she's heard him speak in months.*

When they already think you're a burden? When they roll away from you in their sleep? When you go to kiss them and you get a cheek, not a mouth? I'm accused of spending more time cuddling the dog than her but it's only because the dog doesn't ask me *why* I'm cuddling him or *why* I've stopped. *(Pause)* Little things mount up and instead of arguing like we used to, spitting venom at each other and almost enjoying it, we just lie back and wave a white flag. Get in the car just to sit in the silence. *(Pause)* How do you expect somebody to carry that for you when the two of you can't even carry a conversation? *(Pause)* I didn't tell her because I don't want her to feel bad. I know that's wrong. But I didn't want her to stick around if she didn't really want to. Which now I know she doesn't. So I suppose it's worked out for the best.

*She listens to him. She reacts.*

She wants to live outside of us because she's scared of dying and not having lived. That's what it is and I see it, but *we're not old*. When you look at everything around us *we're not old*. We just think we are and that's the most poisonous thing of all, it breeds panic and sadness and fear and I can see that in her.

*Pause*

I've got this willow tree in the garden, she hates it, she thought it was rotting I've had the men round and it's not rotting it's just a bit fragile, but it's years, centuries old. And it doesn't complain. It's centuries old and a bit tired looking but there're flowers around it. Blue and pink and a few little yellow ones. They want to chop it down say it's going to poison the soil around it one day but I said, 'there's flowers

growing, a few feet away'. They gave it one more summer. I give it a few, I know that tree I've lived with that tree I've seen it soak up the summer and lean hard against the winter. I know it. And a few summers is enough, when you think about how much you enjoy something like that. It'll do us a few more. But they'll come in September and try to chop it down because of what they think they know. *(Pause)* She left to find something new and more exciting than what we have but I think it's important to realise the different seasons of us and what you know about it all. And what you can expect. You wouldn't plant flowers in November because they wouldn't survive the winter. But there are some things that *do* survive the winter and those are the things you can be grateful for. They aren't necessarily the prettiest, but.

*He's empty. Silence.*

*She can't speak. She holds the phone tightly.*

Hello? *(He listens.)* Oh. Oh dear.

*Blackout on stage left. On stage right, Victoria sits clutching the phone, in bits.*

## Sixteen

*The kitchen in Victoria and Jeremy's house. Victoria walks onstage, anxiously, with two bags of shopping. She puts them on the table. He's not at home. She looks at the mess he's created around him in her absence. Take away boxes and empty packets. She starts to tidy things up, nervously, expecting him at any minute.*

*The door opens and shuts. She stops. She waits.*

*Jeremy walks onstage. He's holding a shopping bag, too.*

*He looks at her. He's totally taken aback. She looks back.*

*He doesn't move, just looks at her. She unpacks the shopping; milk, bread, olives.*

Jeremy:        You're home

Victoria:       ...I brought you some...olives.

*She keeps unpacking. She puts the olives nearest him on the table.*

*He puts his shopping down. He takes off his coat.*

Jeremy:        Thank you.

*She busies herself.*

Vic?

Victoria:       I thought you might need some shopping.

*She tidies up.*

Jeremy:        ...I've been shopping.

Victoria:       Have you? I'll go then

Jeremy:        Please don't.

*He walks towards her.*

How are you?

Victoria:       Okay. *(Beat)* How are you?

Jeremy:        I'm okay.

Victoria:       ...Just okay?

Jeremy: Yes

Victoria: You look tired

Jeremy: I'm fine

Victoria: Pale, your face looks

Jeremy: Do I?

Victoria: Are you, you're okay

Jeremy: I'm fine. I'm, well.

*Silence.*

Victoria: You're 'well.'

Jeremy: ...Mmm.

*She can't believe it. Something flashes across her face.*

What?

Victoria:

Jeremy: What was that?

Victoria: What

Jeremy: That look

Victoria: What look?

Jeremy: You looked at me as if I'd just self-combusted /in front of

Victoria: I didn't

Jeremy: I said 'I'm well' and your face went white (*He stops. Silence. Victoria can't hide her feelings*) Harry's spoken to you hasn't he?

Victoria: What?

Jeremy: He's told you

Victoria: Told me what?

Victoria: He's told you

Victoria: Told me *what*?

*Silence.*

Told me what Jeremy

Jeremy: Stop it

Victoria: What are you talking about?

Jeremy: You know full well what I'm talking /about

*It dawns on her. Harry knows about the cancer.*

Victoria: He knows.

Jeremy: Yes but I told him not to mention it, until

Victoria: You told our *nineteen year old son* before you told *me?*

Jeremy: I'm sorry. He came with me.

Victoria: WHAT?

Jeremy: What did he say to you? What else did he say?

*Pause.*

Victoria: Nothing else

Jeremy: Just that?

Victoria: Yes.

Jeremy: Okay

Victoria: That it's, not the worst it could be. Thank god.

*Jeremy stops.*

Jeremy: What?

Victoria: What

Jeremy: What are you talking about?

Victoria:

Jeremy: 'Not the worst it could be' what are you talking about?

Victoria: ...What?

Jeremy: 'Thank god', as well, what are you talking about?

Victoria: ...The. Your, cancer. I can't even say it.

*Beat. Jeremy freezes. Victoria freezes at his stare.*

Jeremy: How do you know that?

Victoria: What? *(Pause)* You said

Jeremy: Harry doesn't know. I haven't told anybody.

*Pause.*

Victoria: You said, 'Harry's spoken to you hasn't he'

Jeremy: How could you possibly know that?

Victoria: *You...said...*

Jeremy: I was talking about the flat. He came with me to view a flat, Vic.

Victoria:

Jeremy:

Victoria: Right.

Jeremy: No.

Victoria: How was the flat?

Jeremy:

Victoria: Put an offer down then?

Jeremy: 'Vicky'

Victoria: There's milk and bread and

Jeremy: No.

Victoria: Tea bags in the, thing

Jeremy: You can't be serious. You can't be serious.



*She gets her things together*

Sit.

Victoria: Where's my purse

Jeremy: SIT. DOWN.

*She's frozen. He quietens.*

*Please tell me it wasn't*

Victoria:

Jeremy: Just tell me it wasn't

Victoria:

Jeremy:

*He's crushed.*

Victoria: The woman I stayed with

Jeremy: Who.

Victoria: It's her job

Jeremy: Who?

Victoria: Meg. She does the, the phones and, she wanted to cheer me up and she said it might help. Give me perspective.

*He scoffs. She pauses.*

Jeremy: *Did it?*

Victoria: ...Yes.

*He can't cope.*

For a while. But then, /then

Jeremy: How?

Victoria: Then I

Jeremy: Perspective how?

Victoria: It was a bit of fun

Jeremy: Fun.

Victoria: Yes it was the *wrong thing to do* and that's why it was fun

Jeremy:

Victoria: Then you rang

Jeremy: I wanted a Chinese

Victoria: I know

Jeremy: Not phone sex with an old slapper.

*Beat.*

Victoria: It was easy money. It was, *rewarding*. (*He scoffs*) It stopped me from thinking but then, look then I spoke to you and you, opened up

Jeremy: I don't want you staying here

Victoria: Okay

Jeremy: You're not staying here

Victoria: That's not why I came

Jeremy: Why did you come? Because you found out I'm not well?

Victoria: I was *worried*

Jeremy: I don't need your pity

Victoria: You aren't getting it

Jeremy: So why are you here?

Victoria: I brought some shopping, to fill the fridge

Jeremy: The fridge is full.

Victoria: I didn't know if you'd been to /the

Jeremy: I've got legs.

Victoria: But you hate the supermarket

Jeremy: It's a supermarket

Victoria: Okay

Jeremy: It's just a supermarket

Victoria: *Okay. (She digs) You've just never been with me.*

*Silence.*

You've never come with /me

Jeremy: I don't see why it takes two to go to the supermarket

Victoria: Sometimes it might've been nice

Jeremy: To come with you to the supermarket?

Victoria: Sometimes it's nice to /go

Jeremy: To the *fucking supermarket?*

Victoria: Yes people do that.

Jeremy: Okay. Tell you what, next time we'll make a day of it. Tesco's. Maybe we'll go large and drive to the Watford Costco. Would that be enough for you? Is that enough?

Victoria: Stop it

Jeremy: Would that make you happy enough to not fuck off and join a sex club?

Victoria: Jeremy.

Jeremy: WHAT?

*Silence.*

Your voice, the way you were *talking*

Victoria: It's just what you *do*

Jeremy: My *wife*

Victoria: It wasn't *me*, it wasn't real

Jeremy: It's repulsive.

Victoria:

Jeremy: But it was *'fun'*?

Victoria: Parts of it

Jeremy: The other men?

Victoria: Not that part

Jeremy: Getting off on you

Victoria: Not that either

Jeremy: The attention?

Victoria:

Jeremy: Hmm? Sweaty old men make you feel attractive did they, make you feel sexy?

Victoria: Yes.

Jeremy: In control, powerful /with

Victoria: Yes.

Jeremy: Men exploding down the phone to /you?

Victoria: YES.

Jeremy: YEAH?

Victoria: And appreciated. And Necessary. And *Useful YES, all of those things*

Jeremy: Nice to be *used* is it?

Victoria: It's nice to be acknowledged.

*Silence.*

You don't even look at me properly

Jeremy: Are you surprised?

Victoria: Before this. Before this you didn't.

Jeremy: It's prostitution

*Victoria scoffs*

Selling yourself for sex

Victoria: I didn't sleep with anybody

Jeremy: Oh no?

Victoria: No I didn't

Jeremy: Here's a pissing medal

Victoria: But I *could have*

*Jeremy laughs scornfully*

Victoria: But I didn't I could have but I didn't

Jeremy: Well aren't you a *shining example*?

Victoria: Oh fuck you Jeremy

Jeremy: Pardon?

Victoria: I said fuck you

Jeremy: Fuck me?

Victoria: I've paid for it. With this. Not knowing has *slaughtered me*. I'm *sorry* I've said I'm sorry

Jeremy: Wipe the slate clean then

Victoria: You put me there.

Jeremy: *I* did?

Victoria: You got me there.

Jeremy: Of course

Victoria: Bleaching the patio, washing the windows

Jeremy: What!

Victoria: Walking the dog, watering your fucking *herb garden*

Jeremy: *Brilliant*

Victoria: Golfing on a Sunday, all these things that you do

Jeremy:

Victoria: And I think you do them in a *certain way* I think you do them because you *enjoy* it you enjoy doing them but you don't!

Jeremy: I do

Victoria: No you do them because then you don't have to *speak to me*

Jeremy:

Victoria: You don't know how to speak to me anymore so you do these things so we that don't *have* to speak to each other. And then we don't. We don't speak to each other. We've gone *days* without speaking, each of us busying ourselves in different rooms of the house

Jeremy: And that's my fault is it?

Victoria: I *try so hard* with you

Jeremy: So it's all my fault

Victoria: You've got CANCER. YOU HAVE CANCER.

Jeremy:

Victoria: *When* were you going to tell me that? Before or after an operation, a round of radiotherapy, 'woops sorry darling I forgot to tell you I'M DYING OF FUCKING CA/NCER'

Jeremy: I'm not dying.

Victoria: If you were? Would you have told me then?

Jeremy:

Victoria: Or kept that quiet too? Waited til you were ten feet under, see if I'd notice

Jeremy: Probably

Victoria: *Probably*

Jeremy: I didn't want to worry you.

Victoria: *You don't think I'm worried now? Not knowing when this started, not knowing anything*

Jeremy: I didn't know how to tell you.

*She stares at him in disbelief.*

How would you tell me?

Victoria: Straight away

Jeremy: On the phone? In an email?

Victoria: I'd tell you straight /away

Jeremy: You don't know that. You didn't tell me you felt like dust until

Victoria: Gathering dust

Jeremy: Gathering dust until the day you left. You don't know what you'd do in my position

Victoria: At least I told you

Jeremy: Well you know now

Victoria: You didn't tell me

Jeremy: I told you everything

Victoria: You didn't tell me as *me* you told me as her

Jeremy: You know now.

Victoria: Tell me as *me*

Jeremy: I'm not playing games

Victoria: Neither am I

Jeremy: You *know*

Victoria: Tell me as me. Tell. Me. As me.

Jeremy:

Victoria: How long?

Jeremy:

Victoria: When did you find out?

Jeremy: August.

Victoria: *(Pause)* It's November

Jeremy: I know.

Victoria: *Three months*

Jeremy: I'm *sorry*

Victoria: You've buried that for three months. *(Pause)* What does that say? What's that saying about all of this?

Jeremy: You were stressed, upset about your

*He points to her vagina.*

Thing

Victoria: My *thing*.

Jeremy: I didn't want to worry you any more than you already were. I was trying to think about you. Trying to accommodate you.

*Silence. He rubs his back absent-mindedly. Victoria softens a bit.*

Victoria: ...Are you pain?

Jeremy: No

Victoria: *Stop lying to me* are you in pain?

Jeremy: A bit

Victoria: Where?

Jeremy: Sort of. All over. Apparently that's what happens. I don't know.

*She's still.*

Victoria: I don't know what to do.

Jeremy: *(Pause. He sits down.)* Come home and we can start again

Victoria: I don't want to come home.

Jeremy:

Victoria: ...When you walked through the door I expected to love you. *(Pause)* But I just feel sorry for you. I just want to look after you. Buy you food shopping and make you cups of tea. Care for you. I don't think I love you, though. I think I just feel sorry for you. *(Pause)* That's not right is it?



Jeremy: Maybe it is.

Victoria:

Jeremy: ...You can't expect things to stay as they were when we were thirty. This might just be it. What it turns into.

Victoria: ...What if it isn't?

Jeremy: I don't know

Victoria: How would we know?

Jeremy: I don't know, love.

*Silence.*

Victoria: ...Is that *enough* for you?

*She stares out into the auditorium. He's less focused and his eyes move to the floor. Jeremy suddenly stamps his foot on the ground, he can see ants crawling on the floor.*

Victoria: What are you doing?

Jeremy: Fuckers, I thought I'd *got you*, get, gone

Victoria:

Jeremy: Blasted them with the hose, should sort /it

Victoria: You need to kill them at the source.

Jeremy: Eh?

Victoria: (*Louder*) You need to kill it at the source.

Jeremy: Oh. Right, right. (*Pause*) They've stopped crawling through though /so

Victoria: *They'll be squirming underneath the surface, trapped beneath the concrete. They'll find a way out if you don't see to them.*

Jeremy: ...Oh well, job for another /day

Victoria: Why don't you just do it after lunch?

*She looks at him.*

Jeremy: Yeah, suppose I could do.

*Silence. They sit together, apart.*

*Blackout.*