

Scene 1 - Aubergines

1

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

1

24th March 2020

First full day of lockdown begins.

UK Deaths from coronavirus - 331

HE

The only thing keeping us together is our child.

SHE

Arthur.

HE

Little Artie.

SHE

His name is Arthur.

HE

If it weren't for little Artie we would have split up years ago.

SHE

The truth is we just

HE

don't like each other

SHE (CONT'D)

Can't stand each other

SHE (CONT'D)

And so this lockdown – me and him, in the same house. *Together...*

HE

See, the only thing that makes living with her remotely bearable is knowing that I get to walk out of the house every day.

SHE

I feel exactly the same

HE

Saying goodbye to you is – *without doubt* – the best part of my day.

SHE

I mean just being in the same room as him, it's...

HE

And coming back and seeing her again – I mean *fuuuuck*...

HE (ALTERNATIVE LINE) (CONT'D)

And coming back and seeing her again - I mean chriiiiist...

SHE

it's like sadness and soul-stink both mixed together.

HE

I hate your face.

SHE

My face?

HE

I hate your face.

SHE

You hate my face?

HE

I hate it, I just hate...

SHE

You're saying I'm unattractive then, or...

HE

Oh no, you're attractive, your very...

It's just your face - I hate it.

SHE

I actually think of you as cancer.

HE

I hate looking at it, the eyes or

SHE

Not like skin or testicle, but one of the really bad ones: liver... pancreatic...

HE

the cheeks or... something? I can't quite put my...

SHE

... colo-rectal... When I think about you, I get exactly the same feeling as when I think about my dead dad's cancer. *Exactly* the same.

HE

No – it's the lips. Your fucking lips.

HE (ALTERNATIVE LINE) (CONT'D)

No - it's the lips. It's your stupid lips.

SHE

I've got great lips.

HE

You have, they're great, you've got great lips but I totally hate them.

SHE

We should never have got together in the first place.

HE

It was madness...

SHE

We're so different, poles apart. But at the time you think – opposites attract.

HE

Because you're caught up in all the

SHE

You know what else attracts?

HE

hormones and pheromones and

SHE

Serial killers to victims.

HE

intoxication and the heart racing - the sex...

SHE

Oh god don't... The thought of us actually having sex...

HE

I know, right?

SHE

And politically as well – totally different. Worlds apart.

HE

I believe in hard work.

SHE

Everyone believes in hard work.

HE

Whereas she's an old-fashioned, unreconstructed socialist.

SHE

That's my mum you're describing, you're talking about my mum's...

You have never understood my politics: I'm actually quite moderate – I just happen believe in not exploiting the workers of this country.

HE

Workers – listen to this. What do you know about the workers? I grew up with the workers, okay? I'm from the workers and the workers are not what you think – it's not all roll ups and fish suppers and sing songs round the old Joanna. The workers are horrible.

SHE

You just hate people.

HE

I just hate lazy.

Meanwhile those who were brought up in the chattering classes...

SHE

Here we go...

HE

The literati elite

SHE

My dad was a dentist!

HE

You pull yourself up by your bootstraps! That's what I did – I worked, I got on top, I got myself out

SHE

Okay, dial it back – you're from Kilmarnock not Compton.

*

HE

We were poor! I got out, I worked hard.

SHE

I thought at the time – oh he's a Tory, that's cute

HE

I'm not a Tory

SHE

You have voted conservative in every election since we got together.

HE

I voted for Blair.

SHE

My case rests.

HE

Can we just not talk about politics, please?

Pause.

SHE

We're worried about my mum.

HE

We should've brought her here.

SHE

There's no point in rehashing, we made a decision...

HE

I know, I know - I'm not trying to rehash, we made a decision, I know. But she's on her own. And little Artie

SHE

Arthur

HE

only has one grandparent and I'd like him to keep her. It's not like there's that many people that you know... get him.

SHE

She has carers that come round.

HE

Oh, they're awful.

SHE

They are not awful, they're overworked.

HE

They come in for 45 minutes three times a day – they microwave a bit of pasta, change her colostomy bag then sit on their phones.

SHE

That was just one, one girl - some of them are amazing. And they're paid shit - they can work from 7 in the morning til 10 at night, they travel from client to client and if there's waiting in between clients they don't get paid for that, you know. It can work out at less than minimum wage.

HE

I'm not having a go at them, okay – I know some of them are amazing, but some of them are not amazing and they are not family. And yeah, that's another thing – they're travelling. I mean is that okay?

SHE

I don't know...

HE

I mean do they wear masks on the bus or whatever, I've seen people wearing masks out there, people are doing that

SHE

They're advising against wearing masks...

HE

I mean on transport, are they like a vehicle or a vector - but other countries are wearing masks, so should we be wearing -

SHE

I don't know!

HE

That's what I'm saying! No-one seems to know anything!

Beat. O-kay...

SHE

We've been trying to get her into a home - me and my sister

HE

It's a beautiful place. It really is a beautiful, beautiful place - its got all the gear

SHE

We're not trying to get rid of her.

HE

line-dancing in the morning, kidney dialysis at tea time, absolutely amazing place - she knows you're not trying to get rid of her.

SHE

Last time I was there she said ‘You bitches are trying to get rid of me.’

HE

She’s a colourful character

SHE

We just want her... looked after.

HE

And both my parents are dead so, you know. Thank God.

Beat.

HE (CONT'D)

Look, I’m sorry.

We’ve got to get on, I know that: god knows how long this is gonna last. But it’s just a bit... This whole thing, it’s confusing. It’s like no-one knows what’s going on. It’s like the ships is steering itself and all the grown-ups have been fucking beamed up.

And the people? I mean the people, out there...?

SHE

What about the people out there?

Doesn’t wanna say. But...

SHE (CONT'D)

Go on, say.

HE

No, no, it’ll only get all...

SHE

Well, if we’re gonna get through this we’ll have to... you know.

HE

What?

SHE

Talk.

HE

Talk? Us?

SHE

Yeah. I think – don’t you?

HE

You want me... to talk?

SHE

Well – I suppose so. Don't we have to, a bit?

A moment. Then...

HE

Okay.

So... yesterday, just before they announced the lockdown I was in the Tesco's Local. You know, the one on the corner...

SHE

The one on the corner, by the...

HE

Yeah, that's the one. And it was stripped bare. I mean locusts. And I'm there because I wanted aubergines - I was gonna do the

SHE

katsu curry aubergines?

HE

I was gonna do my katsu curry aubergines, yeah - I mean it's the only fucking thing he'll eat. But there was not a sign of an aubergine – not a courgette, not a tomato, not a carrot. And then I saw this lady that works there, and I've seen her before: late 50's, short, she's quite recognisable because... well this is not meant to be rude, but she's got... quite a large nose.

SHE

I know her.

HE

You know the one I'm talking about?

SHE

She's lovely.

HE

Anyway she comes out through one of those flappy plastic curtains they have – and when she does I see a stack of crates and in the back there, and in the top of these crates – aubergines. Masses of them: masses. So I go up to her and I say to her

'Excuse me, have you got any aubergines?'

And she says 'No, we're out', just like that, not even particularly polite

SHE

Which is unusual for her, normally she's lovely

HE

So I go 'Excuse me, excuse me – erm, look, I hear what you say but I just happened to glance inside there beyond the flappy curtains and I just saw a crate of aubergines.'

And she's a bit flustered, like maybe there's a situation or something? And she says 'I can't give you those'

'Why not?'

'My manager said those aubergines are not to go out yet.'

'Okay, okay - I get that. But you see my son, he's a lovely boy, but he's a bit weird about things. And right now, aubergines are the only thing he'll eat. So I'm not asking you to go in there and put those aubergines out, I'm asking you to go in there and get three aubergines for me, so I can do aubergines tonight.'

And she pauses a bit and then – quietly – she says 'Sir: I can't give you those aubergines because we now believe that one of the drivers has come down with coronavirus. And we're trying to figure out if he was the one that delivered that produce.'

Beat.

HE (CONT'D)

And she thinks that's the end of it.

But I go

'I'll give you a tenner'

she says no.

I said 'I'll give you twenty.

'Sir, no'

'I'll give you fifty quid, right here and right now'

'I really can't –'

'Two hundred quid. For three aubergines.'

'Please...'

'A grand.'

Beat.

HE (CONT'D)

‘What?’

‘One thousand pounds. A grand, right here, right now. I’m good for it. I’ve my own business, I’ve done well for meself, I can go outside to that cashpoint, use three cards, get out one thousand pounds sterling and place it in your hands right now if...

you go in there

and get me

three aubergines.’

And she’s thinking.

Because she needs the money. What’s she on? Minimum wage, a little above? She’s hand to mouth, you can see it. She is thinking.

Beat.

HE (CONT'D)

She looks around to see who’s listening. Then very quietly, voice wobbling, she says... ‘Sir, I would love a thousand pounds. That would make such a difference to me and my family, it really would. But I cannot, in all good conscience give you those aubergines because if you, your partner or your son died–

well what kind of person would I be?’

Pause.

HE (CONT'D)

And I looked at her

standing there

and I said

‘You big-nosed prick. You fucking loser. You fucking big-nosed prick loser, that’s why you’re doing this shitty job while I’ve got an e-class Benz waiting for me outside.’

And I dropped my shopping all over the floor and I just walked out.

Silence.

SHE

Oh my god...

Oh my god! Oh my god oh my god oh my god...

HE

What?

SHE

You are just... awful! You are just so...

HE

What? It's the only thing he'll fucking eat, right now!

SHE

You are the worst human alive!

HE

I wanted to do my katsu curry aubergine!

SHE

What kind of...?

HE

You said to talk!

SHE

...person, what kind of awful person...

HE

Artie loves my katsu curry aubergine! You said to talk – you said that

SHE

Yeah, but I didn't know what was actually gonna come out of your fucking mouth, did I.

HE

Well now I just feel awful, thank you!

SHE

You feel awful?

A moment. Then...

SHE (CONT'D)

You know the thing that blows my mind, the thing that really makes me snap awake at night in a cold sweat is the knowledge that I once actually loved you.

I did - I really did. How is that even possible?

HE

Believe me, our former feelings for each other are as inexplicable to me as they are to you.

Beat.

HE (CONT'D)

But it's true. We were... in love.

I thought she was incredible.

SHE

And I thought he was charming.

HE

Now I think you're repugnant.

SHE

And now I think he has all the charm of diarrhoea in a pint glass.

Pause.

SHE (CONT'D)

So lockdown - it's gonna be hard.

HE

It's gonna be really hard.

SHE

It's gonna be really, really hard.

Scene 2 - Mushrooms

2

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

2

7th April

Boris Johnson is in intensive care.

Government's chief scientific advisor says cases are not accelerating as predicted, but it's too early to tell if outbreak has peaked

Pink super-moon is seen over the UK - partly due to lack of pollution.

UK Deaths from coronavirus - 7,478

SHE

Mushrooms...

HE

Oh Christ - tell them about the mushrooms. Go on, tell them.

SHE

Well, basically – mushrooms are to blame for everything.

HE

She tells this better than me – go on.

SHE

Everything is the fault of the mushrooms

HE

If it wasn't for the mushrooms we would not be together... She tells this *so* much better than me.

SHE

So this is about year three. We've had the warm, cuddly first year,

HE

bliss, love, harmony

SHE

we've gone through the slightly spikey second year,

HE

the gentle spiral into bickering and snarkiness – go on, tell them.

SHE

and now we're well into year three...

HE

the terrifying plunge into the icy, arctic tundra of –

SHE

Am I actually telling this or what?

HE

And by this stage we hate each other. We don't want to admit that, but we both know and we're both independently making plans to get the hell out of dodge.

SHE

I vividly remember being at dinner with him, watching him eat and thinking that this was the worst thing I had ever experienced ...

HE

What's wrong with how I eat? I'm not a bad eater.

SHE

It's not that you're a bad eater, it was more... the fact of you eating. It was like watching you eat made all the various processes involved in that act become apparent; the mastication and rending of flesh, the grinding of matter, the mixing with saliva and the sucking down into a large meat-bowl of acid to break it down until it's no more than a brown sausage of turd to be squeezed out via your anus.

HE

Wow. You get all that from eating?

SHE

No. Just you eating.

So it was safe to say that at this point we were not going to carry on. We'd this massive bust up before my birthday: massive. Final straw.

HE

But... I'd booked this stupid, birthday-surprise weekend.

Mushroom picking of all things. In the *New Forest*.

SHE

Christ, the New fucking Forest...

HE

And it was a non-refundable deposit, so...

SHE

So they take you out, into the New fucking Forest at some god-awful hour and they teach you how to pick mushrooms...

HE

They teach you which ones are good, how they should be picked, how they should be cooked – it was actually quite interesting.

SHE

It was *so* boring...

HE

Had we been in a living relationship we could've made some friends.

SHE

The people were awful.

HE

No, hold on – one or two of them were –

SHE

You remember that guy with the –

Does a kind of wet-mouthed, slurpy sniffing.

HE

Oh, he should've been executed.

SHE

So they teach you all this mushroom stuff. But they also teach you what mushrooms you should definitely *not* pick. And there's this particular one where the guy's like 'now this won't kill you – but it will be *very* bad. Eating this will be projectile vomiting, it will be stomach cramps, it'll be extraordinary diarrhoea and you will piss yourself.' And we're both thinking the same thing – I would love to shove that in the other one's fricassee and watch them squirm.

HE

Well...

SHE

I would just love to pick that mushroom and watch as that stupid bastard lies there shitting his pants thinking he's going to die.

Beat. He is staring at her.

SHE (CONT'D)

I mean not really; you didn't really want that to happen – you were just enjoying the possibility that it *could* happen.

HE

Yeah... And then

it did happen.

SHE

Yes...

HE

I got poisoned.

SHE

He did. He got... poisoned.

HE

One of us picked the wrong mushrooms

SHE

I mean they look stupidly like the good ones

HE

and they ended up in a fricassee – which I alone ate

SHE

Because you went on ahead...

HE

Because you were dawdling to buy New fucking Forest fudge

SHE

Because your weird friend Nathan had specifically asked for it and yet for some reason you were angry at me for trying to buy it so you sulked on ahead and cooked them on your own to make a point!

HE

I thought I was going to die.

SHE

He did. He really thought that.

HE

The pain was... extraordinary.

SHE

He really thought he was going to die.

HE

That feeling that there is something in your body that wants you dead.

SHE

He was fine though.

HE

I was at death's door!

SHE

You were - at the door. You weren't in the premises.

The guy specifically said they weren't fatal.

HE

It took the ambulance an hour and thirty minutes to get there!

SHE

No, no, he's right it did - and that was scary, it really was.

I held his hand, the entire time.

HE

Yeah - you did. You held my hand.

Beat.

HE (CONT'D)

When you go through something like that, when you feel that terrifying panic, that certainty that this is it, that you are going to die today...

SHE

To reiterate, though –

HE

and that the person you're with is the last person you're ever going to see... well that bonds you

SHE

It does. When you go through that with someone it does bond you.

We decided to try again.

HE

Which was the worst mistake in the history of mistakes. Because in that brief respite on the sunny uplands of stupidity we decided we needed a child. Do not make decisions after a near death experience.

SHE

Or even a death adjacent experience.

HE

The foetus was no bigger than bullet to the head before we remembered that we couldn't fucking stand each other.

And the rest— as they say – is shitstory.

SHE

That is the mushroom story.

Artie comes down and goes into the living room - settles in to do some homework: they watch as he does. He is kind of out of earshot, but every so often they peer in to check he's still breathing and perhaps make sure he isn't aware of what they're saying.

SHE (CONT'D)

It hasn't been as bad as we thought. Lockdown.

HE

No...

SHE

Two weeks of lockdown done, and... and we're kind of getting through it.

HE

We are.

SHE

Don't get us wrong, it's not *pleasant* – being together...

HE

God no!

SHE

We have to see each other, pass each other on the stairs...

And with everyone being all so happy-clappy, cheerful, fucking...

HE

Which is inappropriate, by the way. WhatsApp is intolerable.

SHE

Twitter, Instagram – you can't look at them. 'We'll get through this', 'we're all in it together'

HE

'look at me, I'm learning the banjo and I've made a macramé scarf out of pasta twirls' – just pack it in, alright!

SHE

But there was a lot to sort out, and I think that helped us to not focus on or talk to or even notice each other.

HE

It meant that we could just pretend the other one...

SHE

Didn't exist

HE (CONT'D)

was in a coma

HE (CONT'D)

My business for one – that has needed a lot of sorting –

SHE

Tell them what you do.

Beat

HE

Don't start with

SHE

Go on – tell them.

HE

Look, don't start because

SHE

No-one understands what he does.

HE

Yes they do, they...

SHE

I don't understand what you do

HE

Well, that's not exactly...

People do understand what I, they -

SHE

Then tell them. Go on.

Beat.

HE

Alright. I have

a boutique consultancy that specialises in data analytics and finding multi-media technological solutions...

SHE

I mean *what*?

HE

...for linear broadcast marketing providers specialising in cost efficiency savings, I mean what is so complicated about that?

SHE

When we were first together, and someone asked him what he did and he'd say all that - I'd just lean in and say 'He means computers.'

HE

Which was funny. Back then.

But it took a lot of wrapping up. Thank god for Rishi

SHE

You mean Comrade Rishi?

HE

Oh fuck off...

SHE

Just saying – the state stepped in...

HE

It was a pandemic...

SHE

...borrowing to invest in jobs...

HE

It's a pandemic!

SHE

Isn't that exactly the manifesto that Jeremy Corbyn fought the last election on?

HE

Yes – you were fighting the last election to introduce measures that would have been absolutely perfect for shutting the economy down.

SHE

And it wasn't a pandemic in 2008 when the banks –

HE

I didn't agree with 2008! Fuck 2008, there is no such thing as too big to fail, that's socialism – let the weak perish.

SHE

Don't mind the handout now though...

HE

They're loans and my company is not weak, it has never been weak!

SHE

No. It's just incomprehensible.

Beat.

HE

So there has been a lot to sort out.

There's been the loans, the refund on statutory sick pay and the VAT deferral – and of course the furlough mattered a lot to me because I have twelve employees

SHE

Who you sacked.

HE

Who I

did not sack

SHE

You'd already sent out emails firing –

HE

which I immediately rescinded when the furlough scheme–

SHE

Once the government was paying their wages.

HE

They're good people – I took them back on straight away.

SHE

At 80% of their salary

HE

Which is what the furlough is....

SHE

But you can top it up.

HE

Yes, if you're a fucking mug!

Beat.

HE (CONT'D)

Meanwhile she's still working.

SHE

I'm a co-coordinator for a charity called PFN – we're like the Taliban version of Medicine Sans Frontier

HE

Saving the world, this one...

SHE

Mainly dealing with refugees.

HE

Proud of that, though – it's good work she does, I am proud.

SHE

I'm just a co-ordinator

HE

For Europe –the whole of Europe. Working her arse off, she is. And I mean I don't agree with most refugees on principle, but some of the ones she helps...

SHE

They're no different from any others.

HE

Some of the stories of these ones

SHE

These ones I help are no different from

HE

It's heartrending, your heart goes out to these ones

SHE

what ones, what ones are these ones? These ones are no different–

I am not getting into this again with you.

So we're dealing with all this. And of course home schooling – which, to be fair, he has taken the lion's share of. And he's been good at it.

HE

The Portuguese colonisation of Macau and the melting point of lead were two little memory nuggets I was particularly proud of.

SHE

You have been good at it, I'll give you that.

HE

And actually it suits little Artie better. He's not great with other kids.

SHE

But he's lovely.

HE

Oh he's a lovely, lovely boy. Fair's fair, you gave me a great son.

SHE

I didn't give him to you, you fuck.

Beat.

SHE (CONT'D)

And then there's mum.

Obviously I was worried...

HE

We both were. No matter what there is between us, I like the old girl

SHE

She hates you

HE

She loves me

SHE

She hates your politics

HE

She *loves* my politics, it gives her something to argue against

SHE

My mum is a flat out, died in the wool communist.

HE

Proper old school, CCCP loving commie.

SHE

Never really got over the fall of the Berlin wall.

HE

Back in the 70's she had links to the Angry Brigade

SHE

No, not *links to*...

HE

remember the people who tried to blow up the telecom tower?

SHE

She wasn't part of –

HE

She's the reason the revolving restaurant no longer revolves.

SHE

She... may have hid two people who may or may not have been part of that for a number of hours, yes

HE

I found her reading Das Capital to Artie in his crib one time – I just love her.

SHE

She's fiercely independent.

It took us ages to get her to accept the carers coming in.

HE

Scared is all. Her legs are not what they once were – they get scared when the legs start going. And I mean it's all started going now...

SHE

I'm forcing her to zoom every day.

HE

...her kidneys, her eyes – her neck went this one time. Not her throat, her actual neck; the muscles holding her head up they just went.

Demonstrates – chin on his chest.

HE (CONT'D)

Like that.

Still demonstrating.

HE (CONT'D)

See? Just like this, see?

(still demonstrating)

Head flopped down, see?

SHE

And then one afternoon the carer comes in...

HE

And this was Miriam, right?

SHE

Maryama.

HE

Somali girl. I call her Miriam: she loves it.

SHE

She really doesn't.

HE

She's the good one

SHE

She's

one of the good ones

HE

And then you're doing the zoom and you see her, don't you?

SHE

She's wearing a home-made visor - its a plastic see through pocket held on with a rubber *
fucking band.

HE

And this is Miriam – and she's the good one.

SHE

And I ask her about PPE and she says they're not giving them any extra. At all. *

HE

She says they're making their own gowns out of bin bags – I mean what the...?

SHE

And she's not happy with it, Maryama isn't happy at all, because she fears for herself and her family but also her clients.

HE

Tell them how many buses she has to get.

SHE

Three.

HE

And how many clients that day.

SHE

Eight.

HE

I mean what the fucking what?

SHE

So I just go into a tailspin... I'm calling the council, the helplines, the GP, but with all this going on I can't get through anywhere.

HE

I was ready to go and bring her here – but is that exposing her...?

SHE

Does one of us go and stay?

HE

But then who's looking after Artie?

SHE

I mean we were besides ourselves. You know, there's this killer virus out there and your sitting pretty while your mother, your own mother... and I'm thinking 'is this it? Is she going to die, is my mum actually going die now?' We were fucking terrified...

Beat.

HE

But then her sister swooped in and sorted it out. Of all people.

SHE

She was amazing.

HE

Totally out of the blue

SHE

Because she's not normally... normally she is a bit...

HE

She's selfish.

SHE

She's not selfish, don't –

HE

Trying to be a comedian to something.

SHE

Not exactly a comedian, it's more performative than that.

HE

Try telling a fucking joke now and then, that might help. But I will give it to her – she saved the day.

SHE

She did. She really did. She got mum into that home.

HE

That care home - remember?

SHE

She persuaded her to go in there.

HE

That lovely care home - amazing place. God knows how she did it. But somehow...

SHE

She persuaded her to go to that lovely, lovely care home. And they took her.

HE

Overnight. They took her straight in, no messing. Overnight.

SHE

It was amazing.

HE

What a relief.

SHE

I mean at least she'll be safe there.

HE

In there? Oh yeah - she'll be safe in there.

Scene 3 - Asparagus

3

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

3

11th May

Government publishes Conditional plan to reopen society

McDonalds is given the go-ahead to open drive throughs in the UK

UK Deaths from coronavirus - 31,616

Just him. Awkward.

HE

This evening I harvested asparagus.

Never done that before. And actually, I shouldn't have done that now because I only planted it a few months ago. With asparagus you're supposed to wait three years before the first harvest so as to give the crown a chance to bed in, otherwise it dies.

Apparently. That's what google says.

But I couldn't resist it

I'd grown it. With my own hands, with soil and... see I'm not green fingered or like some vegetable

person, I'm not that, that's not me.

But this year?

With all this happening?

I ordered the crowns online, back in early February. Dunno why, I just... you know. Back at that time you were just getting a sniff of this thing happening in China in this one small place no-one had ever heard of. And these health things, they happen every so often, right? Ebola, bird flu, SARS...

And to be clear here, I'm not saying I knew all this was gonna happen. It wasn't like I was thinking I've gotta go all Grizzly-Adams-nuclear-fallout-shelter, I'm just talking about planting a few veggies. To be honest every year I think about doing it but never get down to it - it's like learning the names of trees or reading Dickens, you know it would make you a better person but you don't actually do it.

But this year...? Somehow with all that going on...? I find myself... actually doing it.

So I planted vegetables. Lettuce, radishes, courgettes...

...tomatoes, carrots, beetroot...

...onions, spring cabbage... and asparagus.

Beat.

HE (CONT'D)

And then tonight, just after they officially announced the end of lockdown we get a call from Jonathan.

Jonathan's the ICU nurse - over there at the hospital. Lovely guy, Jonathan: totally... lovely guy. I cannot speak highly enough of Jonathan.

(MORE)

HE (CONT'D)

He's the main nurse that's looking after the old girl over there in intensive care.

Because covid, you know... it swept through that place.

It rampaged right through that care home. Loads dead. Some in hospital, like the old girl - taken in, intubated, on a ventilator, put straight into a coma. And Jonathan...?

On the phone to us every day. Tells us everything. *Everything*. Temperature, heart rate, which consultant is seeing her, how she looks, when they're turning her onto her front to get her breathing going. And when he can, when he has a spare moment - which is not often, I can tell you - he sits and has a chat with her. Or holds the phone close, so that we can.

Lovely, lovely guy, Jonathan - I cannot fault him.

And tonight when he calls...

Well that's the call we've been dreading.

One of you can come in for 15 minutes. To say goodbye.

It was her that took it - this is about 6.30. And I'm watching her and she's nodding and whatever. She puts the phone down and she tells me. Real matter of fact.

It's happening. Jonathan says she's gonna die probably in the next 24 hours. They said one of us can go in for 15 minutes and that we're lucky coz in most other places you're not even allowed that. She has to be over there for 8.45.

Just the facts, cold as ice.

But inside...

I can see that inside her heart has just gone...

Two handed cupping/squeezing gesture.

He does it surprisingly long, very hard.

HE (CONT'D)

See?

It just went.

Does it again, even harder, face going red, shaking – like crushing a very, very personal grief.

HE (CONT'D)

8.45. We had a bit of time. So I went out and I harvested the asparagus.

Steamed it. Little bit of salt and pepper. Made a fresh hollandaise– not easy to make, but tasty when you do it.

And we had asparagus.

We sat down and ate it together.

She said it was lovely.

I think it helped. I think it took her mind off...

A moment.

HE (CONT'D)

But here's the thing right...

here's the thing that's been going over and over in my mind as I'm sat here waiting...

... if there was enough of an inkling in early February to make me get myself online and order asparagus crowns... and I mean who am I? But if even I can get a sniff of something back then...

then how come the people who run this country...

How come the people who actually run this country...

How is it possible that the people who actually run this country...

Suddenly the door opens.

She enters, coat on. They stand there. Don't move.

She puts her car keys down.

Picks her laptop off a table, opens it. Starts typing.

HE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

SHE

Putting her temperature into the spreadsheet.

HE

Right.

Why?

I mean does that...?

Does that matter anymore?

A moment. She looks at the laptop. It suddenly occurs to her that of course it does not.

Closes the laptop.

SHE

No, I suppose not.

He goes to hug her – she instantly pulls back.

SHE (CONT'D)

No, no, what are you doing?

HE

Well, I thought.

SHE

No.

HE

A hug, or...

SHE

No. I should self-isolate.

HE

Even in here?

SHE

Yes, of course.

Don't you think that's for the best?

A moment. He goes back to where he was.

HE

How was it?

SHE

She was unconscious.

(MORE)

SHE (CONT'D)

The er... the hospital was weird. It was kind of empty in the parts that are normally busy but you got the sense that behind the scenes, you know.

They're all totally exhausted, you can tell.

Jonathan was amazing.

HE

Jonathan is amazing.

SHE

He told me everything that was gonna happen. Said the consultant had just been in and she reckoned it was gonna happen in the early hours. And he said not to worry as he was on an all-nighter, so he promised me he'd be there with her when it was time. He said that's what the nurses do - they try and make sure that people don't die alone.

Then he showed me how to put on all the protective gear and for it to still be comfortable, you know. And then he took me in. I had fifteen minutes.

Beat.

SHE (CONT'D)

I spent the first ten talking about traffic.

HE

Why?

SHE

Because the roads were so clear.

HE

Which way did you go in?

SHE

I took the ringroad.

HE

Yeah, that's how I'd've gone.

SHE

Then after 10 minutes Jonathan leaned in and said 'tell her you love her' and I did, I did, I just, this stuff, it just flowed out of me, all this stuff.

HE

What stuff?

SHE

I told her that I loved her and that I was proud of her and that I was so grateful to her for being who she was and for everything she'd done for me.

(MORE)

SHE (CONT'D)

And that I was so, so sorry that I'd never said any of those things when she could actually hear me. And that I loved her so much that my life was already hurting without her in it and that I was scared that the hurt might never go away.

He comes in to hug her.

SHE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

HE

I just thought –

SHE

No.

HE

But.

SHE

No. No, no. No.

He moves back to where he was.

SHE (CONT'D)

And then I told her that she shouldn't worry, because I'd spoken to Jonathan, and he had promised me that when the time came, she wouldn't be on her own. I said that Jonathan had promised me that he would hold her hand as she went. That's what I told her.

Beat.

SHE (CONT'D)

I feel like I do want to put the temperature into the spreadsheet.

HE

Well you can.

But there isn't really a point.

SHE

No.

HE

But there was never a point anyway, so if it makes you feel...

SHE

Well, if there's no point...

HE

You said amazing things to her.

SHE

Did I?

HE

Yes.

SHE

Because I think I didn't.

HE

No, you totally did.

SHE

Okay. Good. Good.

Pause.

SHE (CONT'D)

And then, when I was driving back, Jonathan called again. He said it was happening. Now.

HE

What? No, no, wait...

SHE

Yeah.

HE

I thought he the said the early hours?

SHE

She took a turn for the worst, and it was happening. Right then.

HE

Jesus.

SHE

I know. I know.

And... she was alone.

HE

Well... yeah, but she had Jonathan...

SHE

No.

HE

...he was going to –

SHE

No. She didn't have Jonathan. Jonathan had another patient who was dying at the same time, a person who had no-one. He said at least my mum had me to face time in with her.

HE

Oh my god...

SHE

Yeah.

HE

What - Jonathan said that?

SHE

I begged him not to leave her.

I said 'Please don't leave my mum to die on her own.'

He said 'I have to.'

I said 'Please.'

He said 'I'm so sorry, I have to choose. I have to.'

And he did. He did have to choose.

So he propped up his phone in the bed, against one of the arms. And I sat there in a lay-by on the ring-road face-timing in. I sat watching mum die alone, listening to Jonathan on the other side of the curtain telling a man he had never actually spoken to that he was here and that he wasn't going to leave him.

So yeah, mum died on her own.

A moment.

He goes in to hug her. She almost lets him.

But at the last minute she backs away, quick. He stops. Stares at her.

A moment. Then she turns, starts to go out of the room.

Stops. Comes back, an almost guilty look on her face.

She picks up the laptop and takes it with her.

Scene 4 - Doing It

4

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

4

1st December - 1 day before the end of lockdown two

The Pfizer vaccine is about to be approved for use in the UK

Merriam-Webster names 'pandemic' word of the year

UK Deaths from coronavirus- 59,126

HE and She are there. Long Pause. Awkward. They don't quite know what to do...

HE

So...

we've been having sex.

SHE

We have.

HE

Which is...

SHE

I mean we're as surprised as you are to be honest.

HE

Totally

SHE

I mean we did not see that coming.

HE

Not at all

SHE

Not in a million

HE

I mean I never thought I'd go there again.

SHE

Last man on earth? Fine, give me celibacy – now.

HE

But...

SHE

we

you know. We have

been having sex.

HE

And

it's been

SHE

It has been...

Well, what has it been?

HE

It's been good.

SHE

It has. It has been good.

HE

It's been really good - if utterly unexpected.

SHE

But it was always good, historically speaking

HE

historically, yes

SHE

I mean I'm not saying it was like

HE

Oh yeah, no – not like, it wasn't like some super special –

SHE

not like that kind of super special showy, we're not Olympic types, or

HE

Who has the time for that?

SHE

Though we had our little... quirks, or...

HE

Oh, we did, we did, I'm not saying

SHE

back in the day

HE

definitely – there was fun and ooh la la

SHE

We were always fairly compatible.

We were both of us very...

we were very

we were both very...

HE

Quick

...solid

SHE (CONT'D)

SHE (CONT'D)

Yeah, quick.

Both parties pretty quick at sex, just... pretty quick.

HE

Not *bad* quick

SHE

Oh no, god no, I'm not saying

HE

We both just

we don't mess around, we get on with it.

SHE

not all that kind of bump and grind

HE

We're not fucking tantric, fucking, Paul Weller, fucking...

But don't get me wrong it's not a wham bam

SHE

Oh no, no, no

HE

premature, that's not

Is it?

SHE

No! No, god, no – it's not.

We just both happen to be able to get where we're going with

SHE (CONT'D)

Alacrity

HE

time to spare

HE (CONT'D)

But needless to say it has totally side-swiped us. Like a bolt from the...

SHE

We think we've figured out why it's happening, but it still doesn't make any sense. Not really. So when we tell you... well I don't think you're gonna understand it any more than we do. But here goes...

HE

It started shortly after the end of the first lockdown

SHE

The night of mum's funeral, in fact.

HE

And in fairness that was an odd day.

I've buried both my parents, and funerals... well there's this whole bunch of stuff you have to do. There's the organising, the strangers coming to the house to pay their respects, the flowers, the hymns, the catering, the painstaking choosing of a coffin and coffin ornaments. And at the time it can seem irritating - but it's actually kind of amazing. And that all those annoying bits and bobs are helping to distract you from what you've lost.

A moment.

(MORE)

HE (CONT'D)

I remember with dad – he was a sheet metal worker, taciturn old shit he was: it was like being fathered by granite – but at his funeral I remember this huge, tobaccoey grizzled, lump of a man coming up to me and locking my hands his fists, and he said ‘He was the last of the characters, that man’ he said. ‘When he left the fun went out of that place, I loved that man.’ And something like that - what it does is it shows you things you never knew about a human being that you thought you knew everything about.

Beat.

Well, none of that happens at a Covid funeral.

SHE

Five people there. Five.

HE

You don’t arrange catering for five people.

SHE

Picking a coffin happens online; ‘that one please, those handles’.

HE

No strangers come to the door for a covid funeral.

No-one sends flowers – what are you gonna do, wash them before they come in?

SHE

No-one’ sings at a covid funeral, so no hymns.

HE

And no strangers come up to you, and grab you by the hand and tell you that the person that you’re burying is –

SHE

Hold on, hold on, hold on...

Beat.

SHE (CONT'D)

Can I just say something?

HE

What...

SHE

And you’re not gonna look at me all weird after I do?

HE

I might do. I dunno what you’re gonna –

SHE

I loved that funeral.

I did. And I know I shouldn't say that because other people, Jesus it's been so painful for them, so agonising not to have the funeral they needed, but for me... for me?

It was just the best.

I mean, there's no catering to worry about, no flowers, no strangers turning up at your door and poking their bloody noses in. You're not obsessing about what the cost of your coffin is saying about your love for the person you're burying and there's no bloody hymns.

It's just you and the person you're putting in the ground - that's it. There is nothing to distract you from the pain of what you're losing and I loved that. I fucking loved that funeral.

He is staring at her.

HE

I fucking loved that funeral too!

SHE

Did you?

HE

Yeah, I did?

SHE

Then why were you all so...

Does a grim face gesture.

HE

Because I thought you were

Does a similar grim face gesture.

SHE

No, no, I was just... loving it!

Not loving it, I mean mum was dead, but...

HE

Let me tell you, that great big, six-foot, chain-smoking lead smelter who came up to me and said that shit about my dad? He ruined my year! I don't need to find out that the man who's been nothing but a twat to me for decades is actually Michael bloody Macintyre.

SHE

I never said anything coz... well, you know...

HE

Well it's a covid funeral, you're not supposed to be happy about a covid funeral. And I suppose when we came home... well we got distracted talking about Artie.

Artie was... he was...

SHE

He was upset.

HE

Yeah. Because he wanted to look at the body.

SHE

he loved his gran.

HE

And he wanted to touch it.

SHE

So what - I wanted to touch it, that's normal

HE

And he wanted to taste it

SHE

But not like a cannibal, he wasn't talking about sautéing it, he just wondered whether a dead body tastes like a live body.

HE

Which is okay, right? He's curious. He's a curious boy.

SHE

Anyway, we had the funeral, we came home, we talked about Arthur, we made a cup of tea and had a bit of cheese, and then before we knew what was going on we had a...

sexual contact.

HE

Shall we say what it was?

SHE

No, god - we don't need to go into...

HE

No, no - you're right. You're right.

Suffice to say, one of us did have an orgasm.

SHE

Okay, that's... we don't need to...

But that was it, a one off - we put it down to the day, the situation; we're not doing that again.

HE

God, no. Bang, done, over: what's on telly.

SHE

Post lockdown life started to settle in, and we just forgot about it. Things changed a bit; you could see people, you could go to restaurants...

HE

They encouraged you to go to restaurants - bizarrely

SHE

And through all that we didn't have sex once – not once.

HE

Artie was back in school.

And then out of school again, because some kid got covid. Then back in, then back out, then back in, he was like a bloody yoyo to be honest. But you know – there was space, there was time to ourselves and space to do it in, had we wished, and we didn't at all, did we?

SHE

I was working the whole time, so I was busy

HE

summer comes, then autumn...

And everyone just forgets that we're living in a country that is basically being held together by string and Sellotape and people who don't have the option to work at home - by people who get paid shit and do shitty jobs and have to look after shits like us.

SHE

Careful comrade...

HE

Fuck you - I'm not saying that. The world is dog eat dog eat dog – have an idea for Christ's sake: don't just sit around on your arse eating chicken fucking nuggets

SHE

Oh, there he is.

HE

And at no point during all this do we at all even think of having sex. Even when the lockdown to save Christmas starts, we're still not doing it, are we?

SHE

No! God no, just, no, no. Not in a million years.

HE

Then they announce a vaccine's been discovered

and we just start ploughing like teenagers.

SHE

Honestly – no idea why. Was it the announcement of the vaccine or something? I mean are other people experiencing this, is it a lockdown phenomena?

HE

Maybe because the vaccine's gonna make things better?

SHE

For you, maybe.

HE

How do you mean?

SHE

You think they're gonna be vaccinating people in refugee camps any time soon?

HE

Oh here we go - let the virtue signalling begin.

SHE

Rich countries are snapping it up.

HE

Look everyone - a good person is here!

SHE

Fuck you. Life and death shouldn't be about profit.

HE

Everything's about profit! And you talk about profit like it's a bad thing - how do you think they make the bloody vaccine in the first place? They use money!

SHE

You will be getting the vaccine long before any front-line worker in Sierra Leone has even the remotest chance - and what the fuck do you do?

HE

I'd run out there and get it tomorrow if I could.

SHE

You would, wouldn't you – you'd just go out and buy it with your big fucking wallet.

HE

I'd buy it like a shot – I'd buy it twice, three times, once for weekends.

SHE

Why am I having sex with you?

HE

I don't know, that's the point!

SHE

We did it in the kitchen this morning.

HE

Over the washing machine: that's just unfathomable.

SHE

Okay, I don't think we need to go into...

HE

What?

SHE

You know... details, and all that –

We're over sharing.

HE

Oh shit, sorry

We are; we're over sharing – sorry about that

SHE

No-one wants to know

HE

No...

SHE

all the info

HE

No, no. All the ins and outs

She snickers.

HE (CONT'D)

Oh please...

SHE

Sorry.

HE

How old are you?

SHE

How old are you?

Something exchanges between them. Something they both pull back from.

SHE (CONT'D)

But at the same time its not that we're all suddenly...

HE

What?

Oh, yeah, no – nonononono...

SHE

not suddenly all lovey

HE

nonononono, christ no

SHE

dovey – that's not what this is...

HE

No. It's physical, this is a physical, a purely contractual...

Isn't it?

SHE

Yeah. Yeah, of course.

Isn't it?

HE

Well, yeah. We're not

suddenly in

SHE

shit no!

HE

love or

SHE

Jesus, don't!

HE

through the tulips, skipping or whatever, hand in hand, braiding each others, that's not

SHE

He still makes me sick, or... something.

HE

And the sight of her still makes me wanna stab my own feet.

I mean I definitely don't...

do I?

Beat.

SHE

Look, I think maybe the truth is I...

Well, I have been struggling. After mum's death...

A moment.

SHE (CONT'D)

Maybe that's why the vaccine has triggered something. Perhaps its the thought that if she'd had the vaccine, if she'd...

And you know, the sort of nonsense of that. The unfairness of it, it just...

So this physical thing that's been happening between us, I think for some reason it's sort of... helped?

HE

Me too, actually

SHE

You too?

HE

Yeah. Sort of. I think the sex has helped.

SHE

Well, yeah, the sex, but maybe... not exactly the sex, but the contact.

HE

Yeah, you're right – the contact, it's the contact.

And... the sex as well, to be honest. For me anyway. To be honest.

SHE

And its not just the vaccine that's messing with my head. Okay, this is really hard for me to admit but I think I now have complicated feelings towards my sister

HE

I think its chilled me out a bit.

SHE

She feels terrible, just awful, so awful. And I'm trying to be sympathetic to that, but at the same time... I feel so angry, so much... anger

HE

relaxed me somewhat

SHE

And I hate myself for feeling this, I really do, but if I'm totally honest...

HE

Emptying my bags.

Beat.

SHE

What?

HE

What?

SHE

What did you just say?

HE

No, I was just

SHE

For god's sake!

HE

joking, I was just...

SHE

Don't joke...

HE

Sorry, I was just...

SHE

'Emptying your bags'?

HE

It was a joke, it was just...

No, look it was just a joke, it was...

SHE

What is wrong with you?

HE

Okay, I'm sorry!

SHE

You always do this.

HE

I'm sorry, alright, I'm

SHE

you always, always do this

HE

No, come on

SHE

just when I begin to think, you always

HE

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

SHE

just when I begin to think

HE

Just when you begin to think what?

Beat. A moment. For a second she might say something.

Doesn't. Can't. She goes.

He is left alone. Might go as well. Then...

HE (CONT'D)

She's erm... been hit by it.

Doesn't look it, but inside... the grief, you know it's er –

He might go on to say more... But he doesn't.

4 a

INT. HALL - NIGHT

4 a

SHE is standing staring in horror at the stairs. The bottles had been laid in rows up the stairs, several on each step - a video camera was set up at the bottom to capture the event. But it has gone wrong - the bottles have domino-ed: there is water everywhere. Artie is at the top of the stairs looking down at the lake below - oops.

Scene 5 - Chicken Soup

5

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

5

January 4th - Lockdown three is about to start

Modelling suggests that new variant Covid in the UK may be 74% more transmissible

Kate Middleton is announced fashion influencer of the year

UK Deaths from coronavirus - 75,576

Just her. Very wrapped up. Ill.

She coughs occasionally.

SHE

When I was a child we had a cleaner – her name was Nancy. She was nice, I remember, she was very...

She had five children. I only remember the names of two; Ann and Denny. Denny was the middle child, a mass of curly hair, curious but quiet at the same time, like he never wanted to disturb or cause a fuss. Yet inside he wanted to know things. See things.

And Ann – well Ann was just lovely.

(MORE)

SHE (CONT'D)

Ann and Denny would come to ours in the school holidays. Nancy's family never went away – they couldn't afford it. So Ann and Denny would have to come to work with her – these quiet little figures who wouldn't say boo to a goose. They'd play with me and my sister, staring in wonder at the quality of our toys (which we always thought were kind of crappy) – Ann looking at my Rapunzel Barbie castle like it was gold, Denny going for anything with a mechanism in it: flashing lights, moving parts... just sitting there turning it over for hours.

My mum told me things about them. Personal things.

But it wasn't gossip. It wasn't about feeling better than, it was about understanding, kindness. And it was about treating me like a grown up, even though I was really just a kid.

'I'm trusting you. You're never to repeat this, it would hurt them. Nancy is poor but she is very proud, do you understand?'

And I did. I did understand.

That's how I learnt that Nancy's family would never go on holiday – the closest they ever got to going away was a day trip once a year to the airport to watch planes taking off.

I learnt that their dad who was a nice enough man, could be mean when drunk – and he was drunk a lot.

I learnt that they got charity from the church, food boxes discretely passed to Nancy by a priest who cared.

I learnt that pretty much everything they wore was a hand me down.

I learnt that the games Ann told me that they would play, hiding from people knocking at the door was Nancy avoiding debt collectors.

And I learnt that Denny's black eye wasn't from football like he said, it was because he was being bullied at school where his nickname was Tramp.

Not a tramp or the tramp, just Tramp. That tramp.

The last of these personal revelations my mum ever shared with me was that their dad had been hospitalised with cirrhosis and he was not expected to make it.

Beat.

SHE (CONT'D)

On the day that I last saw Nancy she had come to us with just Denny, no sign of Ann. And Denny was wearing my Top Team top.

(MORE)

SHE (CONT'D)

My Top Team top was a zip up, navy blue and white top with elasticated sky-blue woollen cuffs and collar and it had Top Team written just above the left breast in jaunty, angular writing and I just loved it, it made me feel...

You know, the jaunty angle of the writing, it made me feel...

racing, you know? I wore it everywhere.

Eventually – when my wrists were sticking out a good four inches my mum said it was time to retire it. I said no way in hell.

And then it just... disappeared.

Overnight it was gone.

And now this is two weeks later. And mum has just told me about Nancy's husband and that I'm to be extra nice.

And Nancy brings in Denny – and the little fucker's wearing my Top team Top. I hit the roof.

I started shouting and roaring and crying – I tried to pull it off him with my bare hands, I was like a raging monster.

In the end mum dragged me into another room. Calmed me down and tells me to look at her - always did that when it was gonna be a bad one: look at me. *Look at me...*

Nancy didn't have money.

We did.

We had things they didn't.

This was because the world was an unfair place and that the society we were living in was pre-revolutionary.

So, from time to time, we helped them out by giving things we no longer needed. And we weren't going to make a fuss about a top – not today of all days.

And then she asked me

'Do you think that's wrong? Do you think it's wrong to share your wealth with those who have less?'

I shook my head.

(MORE)

SHE (CONT'D)

I shook my head because that's what she wanted.

She is interrupted by a coughing fit.

It stops. She's fine.

SHE (CONT'D)

Later that day a call came – for Nancy. Her and mum went into a huddle. Then mum came to me and said that she was taking Nancy to the hospital and that I was to look after Denny. I knew it was serious. Mum didn't need to tell me not to say anything to him.

So we're alone.

And he's just standing there... grinning, sipping his Fanta. His Fanta that he got from my fridge wearing *my* Top Team top which he had totally fucked by the way. Which now looked like the kind of grey you find on dead things, the elastic utterly destroyed and the collar looking like he'd chewed through it.

Beat.

SHE (CONT'D)

I grab a coke. Stand there, watching him. And I say 'You've ruined it.'

He's looking at me, confused. 'Ruined what?'

'My top. That was my top and I loved it and you've ruined it because now it looks dirty.'

And he doesn't know whether this is a joke or not but the expression on my face has gotta be giving him a clue, so he says 'No it doesn't. It's not dirty.'

'You're dirty.'

'I'm not dirty.'

'Tramp.'

Beat.

SHE (CONT'D)

He says nothing.

'That's what they call you, isn't it?'

His cheeks are burning, I can almost feel the heat coming off them – how did that follow him here? To this place, this safe and wondrous place? And seeing it, seeing his pain, makes me... excited.

(MORE)

SHE (CONT'D)

‘You get charity. That’s how you eat; your mum gets charity from the church, charity boy. You can’t pay your bills.

‘Everything you own has been worn by someone else first. Your trousers, your socks, your filthy underpants. And now you’re wearing my top.

Take it off.’

And he stands there, fucking terrified.

‘Take it off.’

He takes it off.

‘And the trousers.’

He takes them off. Stands there.

His underpants are ragged, awful, yellowed y-fronts, way too big for him, his tiny willie falling out to one side.

I hate the sight of him.

‘And the pants.’

He doesn’t move.

‘You’re nothing. You have to do what I say. Take them off.’

He takes them off.

He’s standing there now, about to cry. And I know...

I know this is the worst thing I’ve ever done, maybe the worst thing I’ll ever do.

But something in me can’t stop.

‘Your dad’s dying. That’s where he is now, dying in hospital. He’s dying because he’s a tramp like you’

Then I told him to put his clothes back on and I walked out.

Beat.

SHE (CONT'D)

That was the last time we ever saw Nancy. She never came back after that. And my mum...

I remember when she found out about it, after the explosion and the shouting and the recriminations and the grounding and everything - I remember her calming herself. And then - weirdly - trying to be nice.

But I could see it in her eyes. A look that said 'Who are you?'.

And I was scared that she may never really be able to look at me again.

Another coughing fit – a little trouble breathing. Just a little.

SHE (CONT'D)

There was this moment yesterday, when I thought

this is it. I'm going, I'm actually going here.

I can't get air into my body, I'm drowning...

And all night, I kept thinking about mum. And what kind of person she was.

And what kind of person I am.

Look at me, she would say.

A long pause. Something really upsetting her, hard to say. A whisper...

SHE (CONT'D)

I think it was me.

The mushrooms.

I think I picked them, in fact I know I picked them because I remember picking them. And I think I might have

I'm not sure, but I think I might have deliberately put them in with the others, because of the hate and rage I felt towards him.

And he's being so fucking nice to me, he's being -

Beat.

SHE (CONT'D)

I think I wanted to see him hurt. Or

even worse, I think I might have wanted –

She is overwhelmed – can't say it. Can't complete the words, is too scared of the sentence being out there.

At that moment he comes in, carrying a tray: bowl, spoon and condiments.

The sight of him an accusation, she tries to turn away, quickly – as if she were scared he could read it on her face.

But there is nowhere to turn away to.

He sees her face, the look on it. Understands...

HE

Oh no – the Denny thing again?

She nods, so grateful that he does not understand.

SHE

Mmm-hmmm.

HE

Look, you were a child.

SHE

I know, I know.

HE

Kids do weird things.

SHE

I know.

HE

Look at Artie.

How are you feeling?

SHE

Better. Thank you.

HE

Here.

She stares at the tray.

SHE

What's this?

HE

Chicken soup.

SHE

Chicken soup?

HE

Yeah.

SHE

Why?

HE

What do you mean 'Why?'

SHE

Have we got chicken soup?

HE

No, I made it.

SHE

What, out of a chicken?

HE

Of course out of a chicken.

SHE

Why?

HE

Because, you know...

She doesn't.

HE (CONT'D)

You're ill.

SHE

So you made chicken soup?

HE

Yes.

SHE

Like an American?

HE

It's not just Americans

SHE

It's very American

HE

No, other people make

SHE

Have you been watching Seinfeld again?

HE

Oh for Christ's sake...

SHE

It's just a weird thing to do.

HE

Do you want me to take it away?

SHE

No.

HE

Then stick it in your face!

He puts the tray down for her.

She tries it. Nice.

SHE

It's very tasty.

Beat.

HE

Oh by the way, lockdown three is starting...

(looks at phone)

now.

A moment. They feel non-lockdown life.

SHE

Doesn't feel any different does it?

HE

No. Not these days. But look – you're okay.

SHE

Last night though. I really thought there...

HE

I know

SHE

I really, really thought

HE

I know, I know

SHE

I actually thought I was gonna die.

HE

I know. I know you did. You did... think that.

Beat.

SHE

What are you...?

HE

No, I'm just saying. You thought you were going to die.

But...

you didn't, did you.

SHE

Excuse me?

HE

You didn't die. You thought you were going to die...

but you weren't gonna die. Because you didn't.

SHE

I nearly did.

HE

I don't know if that's true...

SHE

I was at death's door!

HE

Yeah. You were at the door...

but you weren't on the premises, were you.

SHE

Oh you ...

HE

You were death adjacent.

SHE

You are so...

HE

Just saying is all

SHE

You are so fucking...

HE

Enjoy the soup!

He leaves.

She is furious. Goes to throw the soup at him.

But actually it's really good.

So she just eats it angrily instead.

Scene 6 - Will You...?

6

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

6

23rd February

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has just announced a four step plan for ending coronavirus restrictions

Daft Punk split after 28 years

UK Deaths from coronavirus - 121,475

They are both there. Silence.

In the background Artie is building a FORT, but far enough away as not to be part of this.

She comes forward. He stays back, saying nothing.

SHE

I can't escape the feeling

that my mother didn't die...

she was killed.

Pause.

SHE (CONT'D)

People don't understand the word exponential.

They think it means 'a lot' or 'quite fastly'.

We see it on TV and in bad sci-fi movies - 'good god, the alien mass is growing exponentially' and we think, 'oh, that's a lot.

But it's worth taking a moment to follow the actual mathematics of exponential growth.

Picks up her phone. Starts something on it.

SHE (CONT'D)

Start with 1 and double it, say... every three days. So we're doubling every three days – got that?

If you do then by the end of the week you have 4.

1 has become 4. In a week.

By the end of the second week you've got 16.

By the end of the third week you've got 128, and as the month draws to a close you now have 512. In just four weeks.

Okay – that's a lot more than 1, but you know...

Not so much.

But if you carry on week five gives you 2048. Week six gives you 8,192, week seven 65,536, week eight 262,144 – and if you go one week later, pretty much near as dammit to two calendar months since the start of all this, you will get 1,048,576.

So the difference between the start of the first week and the end of the first week is 4.

(MORE)

SHE (CONT'D)

But the difference between the start of the ninth week and the end of the ninth week is 786,432.

Same amount of days – hugely different numbers.

Stops her phone.

Puts the phone down. A moment.

This isn't an illustration of Covid 19 by the way.

This isn't what happened - we didn't quite go to nine weeks before that first lockdown. And there wasn't just one person who brought it into the country – there was probably as many as 1,300 patient zeros. And none of this takes into account pre-lockdown efforts to battle the virus; track and trace, the beginnings of people changing behaviour, etc. What actually happened is far more complex than what I've just done.

What I've just done is to illustrate the word exponential.

It does not mean quite fastly – what it means is...

What it *means* is... timing matters.

Beat.

SHE (CONT'D)

It has been said that if we had locked down one week earlier - *just one week* - we could have saved 20,000 lives.

It seems the word exponential was not understood.

Yet I've just explained it to you in...

(Looks at her phone)

one minute and thirty three seconds. And you get it, right? I mean it's not that hard, is it?

Pause.

SHE (CONT'D)

In January 2020 the Care Provider Alliance asked the Department of Health and Social Care 'What should we do about this new coronavirus?'

They were told – 'nothing. Don't do anything different.'

*
*

A week later they ask again – should we... you know, self isolate here? Should we be... what, restricting visits from family, from friends? Should we wear masks, like... what should we... do?'

(MORE)

SHE (CONT'D)

This time they weren't told 'nothing' – this time they weren't told *anything*: they weren't told anything at all. *

It's not until a month later that they actually get guidance – this is the end of February now – and that guidance is that 'face masks do not need to be worn' and that there is 'no need to do anything differently as it remains very unlikely that people receiving care in a care home... will become infected.'

Beat.

SHE (CONT'D)

I'm going to repeat for you. I'm going to repeat that UK Department of Health and Social Care advice – 'it remains very unlikely that people receiving care in a care home... will become infected.'

You can look it up. There are still links to it.

It was released exactly one week before our Prime Minister is walking around boasting of shaking hands with coronavirus patients.

Then Imperial College points out that left unchecked the virus will kill half a million people and the government goes 'oh fuck - really? Oh... fuck. Shit!'

And then the panic is on – the NHS is going to be overwhelmed, we are gonna be like Italy, please god don't let us be Italy. Ministers order 15,000 hospital beds vacated immediately, guidance to hospitals was that discharge should take no more than three hours. So people were taken off wards and dumped back into care homes – and none of them had to be tested because covid sufferers – and again I quote here – 'can safely be cared for in a care home.'

Beat.

SHE (CONT'D)

And while everyone panicked about the NHS, while the shortage of PPE was being so hotly debated, the care homes got next to nothing – they got drips and drabs as prices shot up. They were as good as abandoned - some local authorities even threatened to withhold money to care homes who refused to take in confirmed coronavirus patients.

We sent them in to those places like biological warfare.

Like blankets laced with small pox.

We now know that in lockdown one 40% of all the people who died from coronavirus were care home residents. 40%.

You see, I cannot shake the feeling that my mother was killed.

Not by a car. Or with a knife or a gun or a cricket bat...

(MORE)

SHE (CONT'D)

She wasn't even killed by a virus.

She was killed by stupidity.

She was killed by dumbfuckery.

She was killed by looking at something that is clearly coming at you with speed of a freight train and going

'Do you know what? I think we'll just carry on, shall we?

A bit? Stiff upper... you know?

Dunkirk spirit rah, rah. Let's just carry on, old man.'

And my mother... my mum...

She cannot speak. He goes to her; holds her hand.

She doesn't seem to want to take it, not because of him, but just not being able to take comfort at this moment. But he persists, gently, not quite hugging her, but almost.

He speaks to her quiet and low – we cannot hear. She listens – nods. He speaks more – says something that really matters. She nods, wipes away the tears, sorts herself out.

He turns to us.

HE

I think that's erm...

Yeah, I think that's it. That's it for this bit. That's all she wanted to, er-

Isn't it, is that it, is that...?

She doesn't answer.

HE (CONT'D)

Yeah. That's it.

Good to get that off the, erm...

He starts to go, taking her with him.

But she is not finished. To us –

SHE

You remember that week when we all expected the lockdown to start, but it didn't? When they came out and said don't go to pubs and clubs and theatres and restaurants – but you know: unless you just bloody well want to or something? You remember that?

It was just around the time that Spain and France and Germany and Lithuania and Malaysia were all locking down...?

He waits.

HE

Is that...

Is that it? Do you...?

SHE

'Is that it'?

HE

No, I don't mean it like 'is that it?' like 'is that all you can muster'... I mean it genuinely: have you got more? Because you've the right.

SHE

Oh. Sorry.

Thank you. No. I haven't got any more.

HE

Okay.

A moment.

HE (CONT'D)

Are you alright?

Long Pause.

SHE

No. I don't think I am.

HE

Okay. You wanna... talk about it, or maybe –

SHE

I'm worried that

something in me might be changing, and I might be going into

(MORE)

SHE (CONT'D)

a very, very dark place.

HE

Oh.

Oh right. Shit.

He is slightly sideswiped by this – it is clearly true.

HE (CONT'D)

Okay, I tell you what – let's try and find something positive.

SHE

Positive?

HE

Yeah, like you know, leave this room on a... on a... positive thing.

SHE

What positive thing?

HE

Well, like...

A moment. He is slightly flummoxed. Then...

HE (CONT'D)

Arthur – what about Arthur?

SHE

Okay - what about Arthur?

HE

Right, how about this: he told me this really interesting thing the other day – *so* smart he is. It's this whole new theory: humans as prey.

No, bear with me, I know that sounds, but actually...

It's this evolutionary theory that states that far from the image we have of early hominids as the great hunter it's actually the fact that we were prey that propelled our development. I mean its still true: in Tanzania 50 people a year still get eaten by lions – there was this one case of a leopard that would stand up out of the grass so the villagers would run out and chase it and then it'd circle back and eat a couple of the babies that had been left behind, so –

SHE

That's really grim.

HE

Yeah, as I was saying it, I thought it sounded a bit grim.

Something else, something...

Can you think of anything?

Beat.

SHE

Brexit happened... that's done so...?

HE

Oh sweet Christ, let's step away from that.

SHE

Your company. That's positive, what about your company?

HE

My company collapsed.

SHE

Yeah, but you're happy about it.

HE

Don't say that! I've had to fire people.

SHE

Yeah, no, I don't mean

HE

I'm not happy about it - my company's collapsed! I've lost my job, I've got no money coming in, I'm not happy about it. I'm...

sanguine about it, I'm being sanguine ...

SHE

I meant sanguine, I meant you were sanguine about -

HE

Maybe this is a bollocks idea, this positive...

SHE

No, no, it's not! It's great. Let's do it, let's say something...

Sudden idea.

SHE (CONT'D)

Oh! Maryama's still alive. Maryama, the carer who used to look after mum? She's you know, she's still... hanging in there.

HE

How in god's name is that positive?

SHE

Its positive because coronavirus hasn't killed her yet.

HE

But we hadn't said she'd got coronavirus.

SHE

Didn't we? Oh shit...

Yeah, she got coronavirus. Quite bad actually, so –

HE

And 'yet'? 'Coronavirus hasn't killed her yet'? That's positive?

SHE

Look, I'm trying!

HE

Well we need to come up with something a lot better than that!

SHE

Well you bloody come up with it then, it was your idea!

HE

Alright then, lets... get married!

Beat.

SHE

What?

HE

Let's

you know

let's fucking... get fucking

fucking married then.

Beat.

SHE

Are you... proposing to me?

HE

No.

Well, yeah I am. Actually. Yes.

SHE

And your proposal is... 'let's you know let's fucking get fucking married then'?

Beat.

HE

It's not Keats, I'll give you that.

SHE

Are you just saying that to find something positive?

HE

No.

Well, maybe a bit, I don't know.

Look, here's the thing – we've been through all this stuff, yeah? And we are, you and I... still here.

Beat.

SHE

That is the most romantic thing anyone's ever said to me.

HE

Okay, okay, don't –

SHE

Did you get that from a song?

HE

Look, I've been thinking about it a lot. And I've been thinking that

I don't know how, but I

probably love you.

SHE

You *probably* love me?

HE

I do love you. Yes, I fucking love you, I fucking

Beat.

HE (CONT'D)

I love you alright? And I know that doesn't make sense because I sort of hate you as well, or I have spent a lot of time hating you but I don't think I do now and I think there is a chance that we, you and I, have somehow ended up in a place that is the love that exists beyond hate. And the love that exists beyond hate, well not many people have been there. And it is a peculiar, unique, extremely beautiful, and utterly rarefied place. So we should... probably, you know... marry.

Beat. She stares at him.

SHE

This is very unexpected.

HE

I know. For me too.

So what are you thinking?

SHE

I'm thinking...

I'm thinking... that...

my mental state, right... the anger I currently feel...

I mean I feel a lot of hate right now, you know? So the timing of this...

HE

Okay. That's fair, you're right, you're totally—

SHE

However

if we were to ignore that, and we *were* to do it...

Pause. She is surprised that she is actually scared.

SHE (CONT'D)

we should do it under the banner of the auspices of rigorous honesty.

Beat. He's not sure he understands that sentence, but...

HE

Okay...? What does that mean?

She doesn't answer. Is considering something...

HE (CONT'D)

What does that mean?

SHE

It was me.

HE

What was you?

SHE

The mushrooms.

I picked those mushrooms and I think I knew I picked them.

I knew what I was doing. And I did it to hurt you.

He is staring at her.

SHE (CONT'D)

I stayed with you because I thought I'd poisoned you. And then Arthur came along. And we were... stuck. Together.

He says nothing. She waits. Then...

HE

I, erm...

I know.

SHE

What?

HE

I know.

SHE

You know that I picked the mushrooms?

HE

No. I know that you think you picked the mushrooms.

You didn't pick the mushrooms. I picked the mushrooms.

SHE

Excuse me?

HE

Well, you were being such a dick – and I saw the mushrooms and I thought, you know... what would it be like to shove that in her fricassee and watch her... well, you know the rest.

SHE

But... *you* ate them.

HE

Yeah. I forgot I picked them.

I heard you telling your sister you thought you did it. And I thought...

good. Fuck her – I'll let her stew for a few weeks. Then Artie came along.

Beat.

SHE

Hold on - you were going to poison me?

HE

Well, you were going to poison me!

SHE

No - no; I was *fantasising* about poisoning you.

HE

What's the difference?

SHE

Being fucking poisoned is the difference!

HE

It was me that was poisoned! And can we stop saying poisoned, it doesn't kill you, it's not poisoning, it just

hurts you badly

a bit.

SHE

So you wanted to hurt me. You wanted to hurt me badly?

HE

I suppose... I did, yeah.

SHE

Why?

She is staring at him. He considers lying. Considers it. But...

HE

Why do you think?

You walk around right, with all this 'look at me, look at how good I am, look what I do for my fellow man.' You were fucking brutal to me - all the time!

SHE

You were doing the same to me...

HE

In self defence - I was in love with you! I was madly in love with you, I was painfully in love with you, I still fucking am. I've spent years and years being wounded by you on a daily basis.

SHE

You do exactly the same to me...

HE

But I don't despise you. I hate you sometimes, but I never despise you.

SHE

That's not fair.

HE

Oh, come on. You said honesty, you said that. You look down your fucking nose at me, you always have. You're not good - you just need to read as good. You thought you had done that to me for all those years because you are *totally* capable of doing that to me - and more. At least I know when I'm being shitty, but you? You're just a shitty person that can't smell their own stink.

Silence. She stares at him, like she can't speak. He sees this...

HE (CONT'D)

Okay, that might've gone a bit far there, right. But the thing to bear in mind here is that this is actually a proposal of marriage...

She walks off.

HE (CONT'D)

No, wait... wait!

But she does not. She does not wait at all.

Scene 7 - The Truth About Mushrooms Will Not Set You Free

23rd March - one year since first lockdown was announced.

All non essential shops, theatres, restaurants, gyms and hairdressers still closed.

Boris Johnson attributes the success of the UK's vaccination program to greed.

The Resolution foundation has said delaying the winter lockdown cost us 27,000 lives.

UK Deaths from coronavirus - 126,284. There is a minute's silence.

She is not here. He is.

Artie's fort is complete - it is quite impressive.

HE

Remember Nathan? The New-Forest Fudge Weirdo, Nathan?

Well Nathan is good at getting people to do things for him – hence the fudge. And what Nathan is doing now... is Nathan is getting people vaccinated when it's not yet their turn.

He'll take you down there - just before close. And he'll then ask that if they've got any shots leftover – would they please vaccinate you instead. He is invariably told no, in *very* strong terms. And he is not alone - there's normally a whole bunch people there, all wanting to get vaccinated before their turn, all being told exactly the same thing. But Nathan has a secret weapon...

See when it gets to one minute to close and they've got a couple of shots left - well what health care professional wants to just chuck those out? Nathan knows that they will come out to give them away. And if they see ten of you there, for these two shots... well chances are - being good, caring healthcare professionals - they will ask something along the lines of 'does any of you lot work with the vulnerable?'

A second will pass - coz no-one does, all those people will be getting their shots elsewhere. Another second goes by as ten minds start to race. A third second passes as it begins to dawn on the smarter and admittedly more venal shits in this crowd that getting that vaccine is only one, dirty lie away - and by the time you get to the fourth second hands will start to shoot up; I'm shite-icus, no I'm shite-icus, no I'm shite-icus.

But what Nathan does... is Nathan *tells* you this. And he says to you that when that question is asked you put your fucking hand up, you say 'I do' and you walk straight into that building and you get what you came for.

That's what Nathan does. Murky as fuck.

So when I find out that *she* is talking to Nathan...

Pause.

Things between us have been... not good.

You know, since the erm... Mushrooms admission.

This last month she's been very...

So her job – she always gives it the extra hours. I used to say to her, you need to get paid for that, it's not a charity.

Which is funny, because... of course it is a charity.

But she'd be there – 6.30, 7, 8 o'clock, whenever.

But now when it hits 5.30 – bang, she ends the zoom.

If it's in the middle of a meeting – bang, she ends the zoom.

If it's in the middle of a sentence – bang, she ends the zoom.

Beat.

HE (CONT'D)

Won't return her sister's calls. I asked her why and she says she has no intention of wasting more of her life on other people.

She won't argue with me – not at all. Leaves the room.

The only person she has time for is Artie. And even then...

Even then I see her sometimes looking at him and thinking

'all those years...'

It's doing weird things to me all this.

That and the company going down. I mean I always thought you lose your job, you bounce back. You fall down, you get up. You put your back into it, you pick yourself up and you... But I can't quite seem to...

get up, you know?

Beat.

I'm biting my nails.

(MORE)

HE (CONT'D)

I can't stop ordering fruit online.

I cried in the bath yesterday.

I never cry. But in the bath? That's the worst place to cry, that is an awful place to cry, crying in the bath is just... pathetic.

But I'm sort of

a mess over here.

A pause.

I'm doing katsu curry aubergines tonight.

She's out with Nathan, getting the er... you know. So I thought - keep busy.

I've got all the ingredients – got them down the same Tesco's local as before. Haven't been there since before lockdown one...

So different in there now. With the mask and the hand sanitiser and all...

Beat.

HE (CONT'D)

Last time I was in that supermarket it had been picked clean, looked like a 7-11 in a disaster movie. But now? Brimming with produce. Like everything is just, like everything is just... dandy. All the punters not giving a shit.

And there's this one guy in there right...

This fucking guy.

Late 20's, jogging gear, headphones on, shopping in a basket – no mask. No mask at all. And no-one is stopping him. And he does not give a shit.

He's in baked goods, and in front of him is this woman in the uniform putting out pitta bread. Down below.

So he's a bit over her, like that – you know.

Demonstrates.

HE (CONT'D)

You know?

And I'm looking at him thinking 'you are too close to her, pal. What is wrong with you? Don't you get this?' Because she has no choice but to be there, right? And this guy, this fucking guy...

Then he decides he has to have his walnut loaf bloomer. Has to have it, cannot live without it. So he leans in, he leans in, like this

Demonstrates.

HE (CONT'D)

right over this woman. Right over her, this close, like this...

Still demonstrating

HE (CONT'D)

And she can feel it. I mean this would be close even in normal times, a little inappropriate actually, but *now*...? With no mask?

He gets his bloomer. Gives it a squeeze.

No – not that one. Puts it down, grabs another – gives that a squeeze: lovely. He walks out.

And I am... boiling. I am fuming, like this sudden rage from nowhere. And I'm so full of this stuff that I find myself in front of this woman

because I have to say something, I have to –

And it's her.

Beat.

HE (CONT'D)

The lady I shouted at. The lady I humiliated.

She has a mask on but it's her. And she recognises me. But all she does is say 'Can I help you?'

And I can't speak. Nothing, nothing at all. Then finally...

'I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.'

She says 'What for, sir?'

I don't say. I can't say. So instead...

(MORE)

HE (CONT'D)

‘Thank you. For... this. For keeping this, us, everyone going. For the risks you take, and for what you are.’

‘And what am I, sir?’

‘You’re... a hero, you’re –’

‘No. I’m just someone that needs a job’

And now I’m sort of crying, not with actual tears, but inside...

And this woman, I just want to give her something, so I say

‘It will be different’.

‘What will be different, sir?’

‘The world. People like you, you will be valued. We won’t go back to the way it was, to valuing the wrong things, like magazines and influencers and CEOs and brand consultants and people whose jobs are not needed but who have all the–’

‘People like you, you mean?’

Beat.

HE (CONT'D)

‘Yes. People like me. We won’t forget – it will change.’

‘No it won’t. You will forget. And it won’t change.’

And I say nothing. I can’t say anything, because I think she might be right, I know she might be right. And she just says

‘Is there anything else I can help you with, sir?’

And I want to say something that matters, I want to say the one thing in my life that really matters and I want to say it to her, right now. But the one thing in my life that matters has gone. So I just shake my head.

*
*
*

And she goes back to the pitta bread.

Quietly saving all of our lives for just above minimum wage.

The front door goes. A moment.

She comes in.

Silence between them. She looks like she might head upstairs. But instead she doesn’t.

SHE

I am not

a shitty person...

HE

Look when I said that, I was angry, I was reacting to -

SHE

all the time.

I am not a shitty person all the time.

But I am sometimes.

And you're not a good person... well, very much, at all really.

But you are sometimes.

HE

Okay. Thank you, I suppose...

A pause. She comes over - a bit.

I need to make...

I've been thinking about this a lot and I need to make

Beat.

SHE

People are like 'when we get back to normal', 'when it all gets back to normal', 'it'll soon be normal.' I don't want to go back to normal. I really don't. I mean what's so good about the way things were? At each other's throats. People at each other's throats for the slightest thing.

I need to make...

a really drastic change – do you understand that?

He doesn't answer. Then...

HE

I think I do.

SHE

I want a new life. I can't go back to the old one, I just can't.

And to do that I have to make a drastic, drastic change.

HE

Okay.

Okay. No, that's erm...

No, no. I get it. I totally get it, I –

But suddenly he is overwhelmed. Tries not to cry. Fails.

He covers, hoping she won't see. But she does...

SHE

Are you crying?

HE

No, no, I'm not crying, I'm not fucking -

SHE

Why are you crying?

HE

I'm not, I'm not fucking crying.

SHE

You are, you're totally crying - that's crying, you're crying...

HE

I am not fucking -

SHE

You are, you're bawling! Why are you crying, why in god's name are you -

HE

Why do you think? I'm fucking broken up, okay! Of course I'm crying - what we're doing, this doesn't just mean nothing to me. Yeah, right, okay: I get it - this is the most sensible thing we have ever done and we should have done it years ago: I get it, I get it, I get it. But I'm not some dead-hearted ice-queen corpse with a heart of frozen granite am I. Okay, fine - let's do it, let's split up. But it hurts me, and I'm gonna fucking cry and you're gonna fucking watch me, okay.

She stares at him, stunned.

SHE

We're not splitting up.

HE

What?

SHE

We're not splitting up, what makes you think we're splitting up?

HE

You just said...

SHE

I didn't say we're splitting up.

HE

Then... then what did you say?

SHE

I said I don't want to get married - that's what I said.

HE

No you didn't.

SHE

I did, I said I didn't want to get married, not -

HE

You didn't say anything about marriage at all! You didn't even mention marriage, the word marriage never came out of your fucking mouth!

Pause.

SHE

Didn't it?

HE

No!

SHE

Well, that's what I meant...

HE

That's what you *meant*?

SHE

Look, I'm not saying let's... not be together. I'm saying let's not, you know...get bloody married, I mean what the fuck was that? What was even going through your head when you said that, what have you watching fucking Bridgeton or something?

What I'm saying is yes, let's be together. But in a nice way. If we possibly can.

(MORE)

SHE (CONT'D)

Look, everyone is just so angry at each other the whole time now. But what's the difference between any of us? I mean we're all just exactly the bloody same: we're all wearing the same clothes, we're eating the same food, we're drinking the same stupid drinks and watching the same stupid programs - the whole human race is basically racing towards each other while at the same time screaming 'get the fuck away from me'. And I just... don't want to be that anymore. Not now, not after all this. *

Artie comes in - they cover (or try to). Artie just stands there, watching them be weird.

HE

Artie! Artie, Artie, Artie! You alright? You doing good? You doing, you doing, you doing... what's that on the fort now? Is that a new erm...

Katsu Curry Aubergine tonight. A very special one - I've been working on it for a couple of hours, and I think I may have perfected the aubergine. You see I found this tip online - marinade them. Now I have made this marinade out of -

ARTHUR

I don't like aubergine.

HE

(a moment)

What's that?

ARTHUR

It's slimy. And the sauce is too thick.

HE

Oh. Right.

Fucking devastated. Tries not to show it.

HE (CONT'D)

Okay.

No problem, that's just...

Yeah, yeah, no problem. I'll just... toss that in the...

ARTHUR

(to SHE)

There's a dead parakeet in garden.

SHE

A parakeet?

ARTHUR

Yeah.

SHE

In our garden?

ARTHUR

Yeah.

SHE

Are you sure it's a parakeet? We don't get parakeets here.

ARTHUR

(to HE)

Can I bring it in?

HE

No, no - best let it stay outside.

ARTHUR

Okay.

I'll just watch it decompose.

SHE

Yeah. Or we can chuck it in the bushes so the foxes can eat it.

Arthur shrugs. A moment.

ARTHUR

You two alright?

SHE

Yeah. We're great, we're great, we're really great.

Slight pause. Then Artie goes over and gives HE a small hug.

SHE (CONT'D)

I don't despise you.

He breaks the hug, indicates for Artie to go inside. Artie does.

That's just a terrible thing to say.

HE

Its a terrible thing to feel.

A moment.

SHE

I didn't get vaccinated.

HE

You didn't?

SHE

No.

HE

Okay. Right.

Okay, that's erm.... Okay.

SHE

It was because of your stupid, moping face.

You've been moping ever since you found out. I mean fuck you, what right do you have to judge me - *you*?

I was there, with Nathan - all ready. And this bloke comes out, and there's about six of us. And he says 'is anyone here a carer for a vulnerable person'. And your stupid, moping face came into my mind, and I just walked away.

I walked away because of what you might think of me.

A moment.

HE

Because... because of me?

What I feel for you, it's so weird. Its so infuriating and irritating and sometimes depressing. But it is a sort of love.

HE (CONT'D)

Are you trying to say you love me?

SHE

No. I'm trying to say I sort of love you.

And I'm asking - is that enough?

He doesn't answer. At that moment Arthur comes through, not even looking at them. He carries a magnifying glass and some tweezers. Heads into the garden.

A moment. Then she comes over and kisses him. It is actually kind of awkward, clumsy. But also tender. They break the kiss.

SHE (CONT'D)

You wanna come out and see this dead parakeet?

Pause.

HE

Yeah. I think I do actually.

They join Arthur outside to look at the dead parakeet.

END