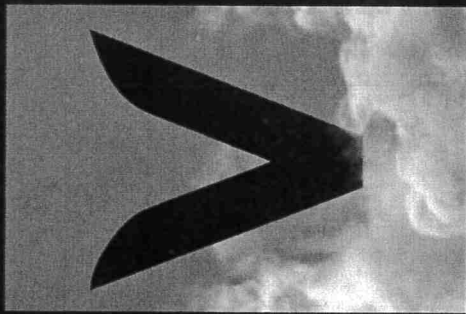


Plays from VAULT 3



- This anthology comprises five of the best plays from VAULT 2018, London's biggest and most exciting arts festival.
- Young men are dying and everyone assumes they're chemsex casualties. Everyone, that is, but Anthony, who is determined to investigate. *Tumulus* by Christopher Adams is a chilling, queer play-noir set amongst the hills of Hampstead Heath.
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- Set in a Wigan taxi, *Burtas and Bacon Butties* by Shamia Chalabi and Sarah Henley is a heart-warming comedy about taxi-driver Ashraf and his twenty-something daughter, Shaz, as they negotiate the ups and downs of living in a mixed-culture family.
- When bereaved mother Mary finds a disembodied arm, she wonders if maybe her child isn't dead after all. Shortlisted for Soho Theatre's Tony Craze Award, Sami Ibrahim's *Wind Bit Bitter, Bit Bit Her* is an enthralling monologue about love and loss.
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PLAYS FROM VAULT 3

Five new plays

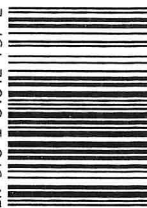
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PLAYS FROM VAULT THREE

Five new plays from VAULT Festival

ISBN 978-1-84842-737-2



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Characters

MOLLY DAVIES, *sixteen*

JOHN ANDERSON, *twenty-seven*

The following action takes place in 2016, over the course of four months in Salford, Greater Manchester.

Note on Text

A lack of punctuation at the end of a line indicates the next line should follow on at a pace.

MOLLY, *sixteen*, stands centre stage with two Aldi carrier bags full of her belongings.

MOLLY. This diary belongs to Molly Shannon Davies

Age sixteen

07867374952

mollybaby_2000@btinternet.com

snapchat mollybaby.2000

insta mollybaby.2000

If found return to 39A Welford Street, Salford, England

And do not, I repeat do not, fucking read.

...

MOLLY. It's my first day at college. I'm in the smoking area, there's a chill in the air because it might only be the beginning of September but it's the north of England so let's face it there's always a fucking chill.

JOHN. You got a light?

MOLLY. Some lad with a shitty roll in his mouth is staring at my freshly lit cigarette and my lighter and I think, that's a stupid question because I obviously do. I hand him the lighter and don't say owt because it's only eight forty-five and I ain't gonna interact with anyone before midday voluntarily.

JOHN. Thanks

MOLLY. He looks how I feel, which is tired and like he wants to be anywhere else but here. Here being college, here being Salford, here being awake at 8.45 a.m. I inhale and the smoke warms my insides and my vision clears a bit and I have this feeling that I want to look at the guy again. There's this look in his eye that tells me he's even further away from being here than I am and I look at his shoes and they're all fancy like actual shoe-shoes and not Reebok Classics like mine. And it might be early but I'm half a cigarette into the day and fuck me he's all handsome and

frowny and even though he must be a mentalist to think it's okay to wear proper shoes in this area, I still think we might get on and I want to tell him that. But I'm nowt special like, I'm just Molly and I'm shit with words and that and my tits are too small so I just say

Alright

JOHN. Good morning

MOLLY. Now I'm no Sherlock but what with that voice and those shoes it's pretty clear that this kid definitely isn't from Salford. So I say

Good morning

In a voice like his all posh like. And he says

Nothing.

Rude.

And I think back to what Mum said about how chuffed she is that I'm the first of the Davies family to get into college and how proud she was this morning and that, proper glowing like one of those pictures of Mary in the RE books at primary and I love Mum, I do even though she's a bit of a shit sometimes but well I'm a bit of a shit sometimes cos well we're human int we. And I think about how she made me do some gay-arse pinky promise to give college a go and make friends and that and I look at the kid again and I feel something deep inside me that's like, like preventing me from not looking at him and I say again

Good morning

This time in my own voice like and then well I'm getting a bit pissed off now cos he's still being a rude fuck and I've finished my cigarette and it's cold and I want to go in and I remember it's eight forty-five which is too early when

JOHN. John.

MOLLY. Molly. What form are you?

JOHN. B15, I'm -

MOLLY. Me too!

JOHN. Smoking's bad for you you know?

MOLLY. Loads of things are bad for you. Where you from?

JOHN. London. Place called Chiswick

MOLLY. Then why you in the arse-end of Manchester now?

JOHN. That's a long story

MOLLY. Condense it to ten minutes and I'm interested

JOHN. Fuck it. My dad passed away. Start of this year. I went into a bit of a. I wasn't very well for a while. Had to get away. Was looking for... Moved... Ended up here

MOLLY. Sorry. About your dad and that. And that you ended up here

JOHN. It's alright. It's not your fault

MOLLY. My dad fucked off two years ago. He's not dead like. Just not. Here I guess. He ain't around

JOHN. Sorry

MOLLY. Not your fault. Life immit. I'm going in, I'm cold.

See you

JOHN. Oh. Maybe I can borrow your lighter tomorrow?

MOLLY. Maybe.

And I go in and I think, well that was fucking odd.

But my heart is doing this thing where it feels like it's way too big for my chest and it's thumping so hard I think it might actually shoot up my throat, fall right out of my mouth, land at my feet and melt into mush on the ground and all I'll be able to do is watch it just like I'm watching this kid John now, out the window, taking a drag and inhaling deeply as if the weight of the world is on his shoulders and it's all he can do to keep smoking, keep breathing in and out. In and out. In and out.

...

MOLLY. I'm making a habit of getting to college fifteen minutes early every day which is a miracle for me cos I love sleep and I hate people. Usually, I used to crave my first cig of the day but this weird thing's happened where I feel like I'm actually just craving this time with John and the cigarette's just collateral.

JOHN. How was your weekend?

MOLLY. Quiet. Usual.

It wasn't, I had a blazing row with Mum and slept in the bus shelter Saturday night but I int gonna tell him that.

How was yours? Your weekend?

JOHN. I went to see my dad

MOLLY. The dead one?

JOHN. Yeah. The dead one

MOLLY. How was that?

JOHN. Well it was nice to have someone to talk to –

MOLLY. Fuck off John I talk to you every day

JOHN. Was nice to have someone to talk to who didn't interrupt every bloody second

MOLLY. Every bloody second.

Can I. Can I come over? To your house? I'll er, I'll bring you some cigs if you want. Proper ones so you don't have to roll

JOHN. I like to have something to do with my hands. That's why I roll

MOLLY. And he doesn't answer my question and I think that's it, I've fucked it

JOHN. Why don't you come tonight?

MOLLY. And I want to scream and jump about and that and use up all the adrenalin that's rushing through my veins, all this energy I've never ever had before, not on my sixteenth birthday when Dad visited for a surprise and not when my little brother was born. Nowt. And I've never felt an excitement like this before, like a feeling that for once something amazing could happen. But I'm just Molly and I'm shit with words and that and my tits are too small, so I just say Cool.

And we've decided. And we ain't going back.

...

MOLLY. What's your favourite colour?

JOHN. My favourite –

MOLLY. Colour. Yeah. Sorry, shit question –

JOHN. Green

MOLLY. Right.

JOHN. Yours?

MOLLY. It's a shit –

JOHN. Hmm?

MOLLY. Shit question really. Pink.

JOHN. Right

MOLLY. I have this urge to know every single possible thing about him. Everything. The magnificent and cool stuff. And the shit and boring stuff. I ask him what he had for dinner last night and how many cigarettes he smoked today and whether he had a bath or a shower this morning – cos turns out he's got a bath and a shower in his place which is mental and brilliant and the main reason why I'm always over at his place.

I want to know everything that's happened to him. Was he popular back in London and does he like Twiglets and who's his favourite *Friends* character? And – No, yes and Ross. By the way. And it's like it's not enough to just know all this shit. I want to learn it, to learn him, to learn his face and his smiles and the way he breathes when he's scared but trying not to be. I want to learn what makes him tick and how to make him happy – which is hard, by the way, cos it's hard enough making yourself happy, especially when you're from a place like Salford, let alone making another human happy. But with him, I want to. I want to get it right, I want to learn him perfectly.

I don't think I've ever wanted to learn before. At parents' evening the teachers would tell Mum I needed to 'apply myself more if I wanted to succeed', apart from last parents' evening where Mum turned up late because her knobby boyfriend Knobby-Steve was meant to watch the baby but he'd gone down the pub so she came with the baby but he

threw up down us and we had to leave during the headteacher's speech.

But John, he makes me want to learn and that. Want to learn to be better.

...

MOLLY. I go over every Wednesday and Friday. He finishes earlier than me so he waits for me in Sainsbury's car park and he drives us back cos he's got a licence and a car which is mint even if it is a bit messy and has too many empty coffee cups in there. Turns out his house is in the nice bit of Salford, the Quays bit which explains the shoes and the voice and why I never invite him to mine. We're driving back and he pulls into an alleyway, a proper pretty one like, for Salford I mean and I think maybe there's something wrong with the car but it's not the car it's

JOHN *kisses* MOLLY.

And he's kissing me, right on the mouth. And I was getting doubtful that the perfect kiss ever existed, like the ones that Lindsay Lohan used to have in films before she went crazy or on *Don't Tell the Bride* and that. I've kissed two boys before John. One was my cousin when I was four and one was with this lad Burger in Year 8 and both of them were wet and tasted a lot like yogurt which was gross. But when John kisses me it's different. It's like time stops for a bit and I can't hear the traffic out the window and I can't remember what day it is and my head gets all spinny but in a good way like I'm on the waltzers which is my favourite ever ride and not the bad way like when I nicked Mum's vodka and fell down the stairs and was sick afterwards.

He stops kissing me and I feel this ridiculous smile spreading across my face and it's so big I feel like I'm gonna run out of space on my head but I can't help it and it won't stop and he's doing the same anyway so I feel mildly less fucking idiotic.

He's putting his hand on my thigh and it's going higher and higher and then it's not touching my thigh it's touching my knickers and I like it but all I can think is that I wish I would have worn nicer knickers, except it's Friday which is washing day so I only had the shit ones clean. I get this

feeling like a bit leaky and that and I can feel myself going bright red because I think I must have come on my period or something, either that or I've pissed myself a bit and I don't know what's worse but they're both equally as bad and I'm panicking and I've fucked it and

JOHN. Should I stop?

MOLLY. Sorry. Yeah. No. I think –

JOHN. It feels like you like it?

MOLLY. I think I've come on maybe, I'm early but. Fuck. Fuck I'm putting my seatbelt on as if that'll help anything and

JOHN. Shit

MOLLY. I know. I'm sorry I er –

JOHN. Babe you're aroused. You're just. You're not. You've not. You're wet Molly.

MOLLY. And I'm so relieved that I've not pissed myself but John's doing his frowning again which I haven't seen him do in ages

JOHN. You've not done this before have you?

MOLLY. Loads of times.

No.

When you're a virgin and you're sixteen and you're from Salford it's fucking embarrassing. It's like this massive thing that you've got to try and hide only it's not a thing it's like a 'not-thing' which is even trickier to hide, like how do you hide a 'not-thing'? It's like a hole in your life and you can work around it but there's no covering it up because there's nothing to cover. You feel like there's probably definitely something wrong with you which obviously there is I mean my tits are too small and I hate people so I don't know in what world I could have had sex before but I still feel, embarrassed. And different. Like the only sober person at a party or something when everyone else is smashed.

And I don't get why they say you 'lose' your virginity. Because you're not losing anything are you. Are you? You're gaining fucking normality that's how I see it. It's easy to lose

something, lost my phone twice in one day last week, always lose my homework, pretty sure I lost my mind the day Dad left but losing my virginity? Not easy mate. Surely it's more about finding something? Finding someone. Who wants you, and who you want. And I think it's John. I do. And I want to tell him this but I'm just Molly and I'm shit with words and that and my tits are too small so I just whisper

Sorry.

And he's kissing me and touching my knickers again and he says

JOHN. Fuck

MOLLY. And it hurts a bit at first. But after that it's not so bad and anyway I love kissing him and he's mine and I'm his and we're safe.

...

MOLLY. I'm in his room. We're on the bed and he's smoking out the window that's next to the bed on his side. It's freezing cos it's November now but he's got his arm wrapped around me and I'm wearing his jumper which makes me feel ace and I can smell him on me even after I take the jumper off, like he's marked me but in a good way like a love bite and not in a bad way like a cat pissing on a tree or a tramp stamp or chlamydia.

I'm wondering how that cigarette feels, with his lips wrapped around it and then I know I've gone loopy because I'm wishing I could be an inanimate object and I'm looking at the cig and I'm looking at his mouth and it's proper, it's like beautiful. And his front tooth's a bit crooked. And the smoke's hypnotic and we're breathing in and out. In and out. In and out.

There's pills next to his bed cos he's says he used to take happy pills but he hasn't needed them since he met me which makes me feel a bit confused but mainly all rosy inside and only a little bit sad that someone as cool as him ever had to take happy pills to begin with.

Why did you take 'em? The pills and that?

JOHN. I -

MOLLY. Because loads of sad stuff was happening?

JOHN. Erm. The opposite, I guess.

MOLLY. You what?

JOHN. Sad stuff was happening, yeah. Quite a lot. Like my dad and stuff. But I actually took them before all the crap with my dad. When things were happy, well when they were supposed to be, you know? Lots of amazing stuff was happening and I felt, erm nothing. A bit, very empty you know?

That probably doesn't make sense.

MOLLY. It makes sense. And I'm thinking how maybe I've missed a trick because that's been the story of my fucking life and I ain't never had any happy pills helping me along. And I wonder what they taste like and if, just for a second, maybe I could try one and see what happens and be all buzzy and awake feeling and I wonder if they're as delicious as Calpol.

When my brother come out, of my mum like. I was in the room and that cos well, Knobby-Steve was meant to be the birthing partner but he'd got too pissed the night before and not come home and I love Mum, I do, even though she gives Knobby-Steve too many chances but like, I do love her so I went with her to the hospital and I was in the room when she pushed him out and that. I stood at like, the vag end where he actually come out and I saw the blood and the gore and the shit and the waters cos he came out in the waters like what I did which is quite rare and that and is meant to be a lucky sign although I've never felt lucky or owt.

There was so much noise, just sound after sound of machines and doctors and Mum swearing blue murder and swearing at me as if it was my fault she was pushing a watermelon out of her insides and it was loud and I hate loud things because it reminds me too much of being at home and the block of flats and the Manchurian Way but when he come out, his head came first and that and - it just went quiet. - Well it wasn't really quiet, Mum was still swearing and the doctor was telling her to push and the machines were beeping in the way that they should be beeping but to me it was. Well it was magic. Literally magic like how can something so pure come out of such a chaotic fucking situation? And how can he

belong to us now? And to Mum and Knobby-Steve.

Although I tried really, really hard not to think about him belonging to Knobby-Steve.

And I think this was one of those moments that John was talking about where I was supposed to feel like, I don't know, overjoyed and that? Happy like. But all I could feel. My main feeling, I was jealous. Jealous of this new human that hadn't fucked up or been fucked up and had every chance to turn out amazing. How can you feel jealous of a little baby? How can you feel jealous of anything Knobby-Steve had a hand in creating? But, I was like, I wanted to start again. To have a chance at not being sad. Of growing up, happy.

The baby cries all the time anyway. And his first word was was fuck, last week actually, so he definitely ain't so pure any more. Maybe one day he'll watch Mum push out her next kid with her next guy and maybe he'll feel just as jealous as what I did, and then guilty for feeling jealous, and then relieved that the new kid turns out equally fucked, and then even more guilty for feeling that.

Or maybe he'll meet someone, like how I've met John, and realise that even though we're in Salford and even though Mum's our mum and Knobby-Steve's, well, there, there's still a chance that you can feel happy in the moments you're meant to feel happy. And not jealous or empty or guilty. Just happy. And I realise that I definitely do not for a second want to try John's happy pills, and I don't want him to have them ever again either. But I do understand, why, like he wanted them and that. And I want to tell him all this but I'm just Molly and I'm shit with words and my tits are too small so I just say Yeah.

John tells me about his dad and what a legend he was

JOHN. Heart attack got him in the end. Fifty-six years old. Too soon

MOLLY. He tells me the grief counsellor gave him this book that said 'When someone dies, it feels like the hole in your gum when a tooth falls out. You can chew, you can eat, you have plenty of other teeth, but your tongue keeps going back to that empty place, where all the nerves are still a little raw.' I wrote it down like, cos I thought it was quite nice and that but

JOHN. It's all bollocks

MOLLY. Cos I guess it's not a tooth-shaped hole at all

JOHN. It's a bloody cavern

MOLLY. And I want to fix it, to mend the hole, the cavern whatever that is when it's at home but I don't know how. And I don't want to look at him any more because I can see too much and it's hurting my insides and then there's this big fat tear rolling down his cheek and splashing onto the bed and I've never seen a man cry before and I've never seen John cry before but fuck me I want to make it stop. I want to tell him that I think maybe, the hole probably won't heal, probably ever. Cos it's life and it's shit sometimes, a lot of the time. But maybe he might get used to the hole and he can eat around it and still enjoy stuff like crisps and cigarettes and that. Because that's what happened to me after Dad left. And I want to tell him that he's fixed a whole load of gaping caverns in my life that I didn't even know were there and I think, I hope maybe, I can do that for him too. But I'm just Molly and I'm shit with words and that so I just squeeze his hand and he squeezes back and it hurts my hand cos he's squeezing so tight as if he let go he'd fall over or die or do a bit more crying which I don't want, so I just let him keep squeezing and he's making these noises like inside his body that I think if he let them out might be loud but they're coming from inside which is even sadder and then he stops making the noises and doing the crying and

JOHN. I think I'm falling in love with you

MOLLY. And I say

Fuck off

Because that's mad that, cos no one's ever been in love with me. No one's ever even fancied me, apart from Burger in Year 8 but that doesn't count because I don't think anything counts coming from a lad who voluntarily calls himself Burger. And besides, he can't love me, because I'm just Molly aren't I and I'm shit with words and my tits are too small. But

JOHN. Molly. I love you

MOLLY. And he says it looking deep into the pit of my stomach. Well obviously he isn't looking at my stomach because that'd be weird wouldn't it, he's looking, staring into

the toilets, which I thought was odd because last time I checked, going toilet isn't that funny it's pretty boring and is just an excuse to check my Instagram which is never funny just boring and filled with too many filters. I thought maybe they might be doing something other than peeing, like gossiping or smoking or doing blowjobs, but whatever it was I hadn't had a laugh in ages. And I wanted to. So I went in.

I was right. Because they weren't peeing, the cubicles were all free and that, only they weren't gossiping or smoking or giving head either. All by the sink there was this white powder, loads of it like. This woman with a rolled-up fiver was leaning over and proper hovering it up the fiver and into her nose and blinking and laughing and I wanted to run into the cubicle and lock the door and stay in there for a really long time because I might not be the sharpest tool but I knew that none of this shit was legal. And it wasn't even like the fun kind of illegal like bunking off school or... skinny-dipping, it was proper, throw-you-in-jail, tell-your-mum-on-you illegal. And I wanted to run. Only I wanted to laugh too, and have fun and for fucking once be a part of something rather than standing on the edges.

The woman gives me the fiver and tells me that she doesn't usually share but that I'm Mandy's daughter and Mandy let them bring it in so she'd make an exception. And I did it and I pretended it was Sherbet Dib Dab and it was fine and my face kind of felt like it was eating itself and the next day I was really really sad.

That's it.

I didn't like it. I didn't like drinking and I didn't like that and I didn't like smoking at first but it grew on me. And I didn't know that there was much else to try. I have been happy, like when I was younger and that, like the time the tooth fairy left me two quid instead of one. And I've been sad, like countless times. I've been embarrassed like whenever I have to go anywhere with Knobby-Steve. And I've been scared, like, whenever I have to go anywhere with Knobby-Steve.

I kind of thought that was it.

But when John tells me he loves me and I say it back, I know there's more and it's like, like someone's opened the curtains

my eyes but I can feel it in my stomach, right in the gut like someone's punched me too hard but a nice punch like, a glittery punch or something. And I love him. Course I do. I love him. And all at once it's like everything in the world makes sense. All the shit stuff and the average stuff and just the stuff-stuff, it makes sense and I want to tell him that. And I want him to be like my forever person and I want him to keep punching me with his glitter punch and never stop and to keep looking at me in that way that he's looking at me now in a way that sees and not just looks and I want to tell him that. But I just say

Me too

Because I'm just Molly aren't I and I'm shit with words. And my tits are still too small.

...

MOLLY. I used to think I'd experienced everything there ever was to experience ever. Which when you're only sixteen and three quarters, is pretty fucking scary. All the fun stuff, all the stuff you're meant to wait to do, I've done it mate. And I'm not showing off like, or if I am then only a little bit but if I'm honest I'm glad I didn't wait because I think it might just have made them all the more disappointing which would have made me dead sad and that. More sad even.

I went to this party last year, at The Horse and Jockey where my mum works, I had to go cos at that point we were living out of Knobby-Steve's car and so it was either the party with Mum or the car with Knobby-Steve and even though The Horse and Jockey is a bit too loud and smells like Mini Cheddars it's better than an evening chain smoking with Knobby-Steve who can barely string a sentence together and swears too fucking much and voted for Brexit.

Everyone at the party seemed to be having way more fun than me, which isn't unusual, but like they were dead smiley and their eyes were all blinky and wide and I ain't never seen people that happy especially in Salford in winter in The Horse and Jockey. There were like more people in the toilets than out at the bar which I thought was weird because why would people be peeing so much? And why would the peeing last so long? And there was all this laughing like coming from inside

and this fucking magnificent, sunshiny view comes streaming in and I didn't even know it was there. I didn't think sunshiny views ever even existed in Salford only they do cos I'm looking at one, and feeling the heat of the sun on my skin and it's all mine to reach out and touch and it's John and he's here and I feel, excited.

...

MOLLY. We're going to Llandudno for the weekend

JOHN. Just me and you

MOLLY. He's inherited a place from his dad, some holiday home

JOHN. Probably a bloody mess

MOLLY. But good enough for us

JOHN. Good enough for us.

MOLLY. John wakes me up proper early, like stupid o'clock early. And I'm a grumpy fuck, for a second until I remember that I love him and we're on holiday and he could wake me up at whatever hour of the day and still make me ridiculously happy.

JOHN. Come on

MOLLY. Where are we going?

JOHN. You'll see

MOLLY. And I'm throwing on my clothes and his hoodie and my trainers and he's grabbing me by the hand and pulling me out the door as if where ever it is that we're going isn't gonna last for much longer so we have to get there pronto.

We're on the beach. It's pitch black. And even though it's John and I love him and his crooked front tooth is fucking beautiful, it's still pitch fucking black and so I'm starting to slightly resent being dragged out of bed and out of his arms and into the cold.

What the fuck John?

JOHN. Wait for it

MOLLY. Wait for what? I'm going back to bed

JOHN. Molly. Molly! Have a bit of bloody patience will you?

MOLLY. What are we doing here? I don't like it. I'm freezing

JOHN. Why don't you just wait? For a second Molly. Where are you... You can never bloody wait for one second

MOLLY. It's creepy as fuck, fucking fuck this

JOHN. Jesus Christ Molly you're acting like such a... Come back will you?

MOLLY. And I'm walking away, and I'm pissed off. Cos I'm tired and cold and I want to be cuddling and not stood in the middle of fucking nowhere looking at the middle of fucking nothing. And I'm trying to get back to the house and I can't see where I'm going and I trip and a whole bunch of sand scuffs upwards and flies into my face and

JOHN. Good things come to those who wait Moll.

MOLLY. And I turn back around. And it's not dark any more. It's getting lighter. And I can see John sprawled on the sand and the sun's rising over him and lighting him up and it's the prettiest picture I've ever seen only it's not a picture it's real life and it's my life and I thought perfection didn't exist, couldn't ever exist except I've found it and it's here and it's John and it's mine.

Well and then I'm embarrassed. Cos I just threw a right strop and I want to go sit by John and squeeze him and hold his hand and watch the sun rise with him only I'm embarrassed and I've fucked it cos he's seen the real me, the ugliness and the impatience and the fucking child and

JOHN. Sit with me

MOLLY. And I do. And it's the best day of my life.

I've never seen real sand before. Sand that's not in a sandpit like. And I've definitely never seen the sea before. Only on TV like, and on the postcards Dad sends me every blue moon which I'm pretty sure are fake because Dad was always scared-as of flying and besides they always come with a Manchester postal stamp.

The sun's risen now, so all I'm looking at is the sea and the sand and John and this bright-blue fairy-fucking-tale sky and it makes me feel dead small. Like wondering how many

other people are looking at the same sky and the same sea and feeling just as small as what I am. And for the first time in my life I actually feel lucky, lucky to be alive and here and breathing and that. And not disabled or starving or like those little black kids they show you in adverts to make you give fifty pee a month.

And I want to be in this moment for ever, only I know I can't cos time will go on and the sun will go down again and I'll have to go back to Salford, back to Mum and Knobby-Steve and my brother and our too-small flat and the smoke and the arguing and the baby's constant fucking crying. And I'm scared to go back but I'm not. I'm scared because I might not get to have another picture-perfect, smacked-in-the-gut, happy-as-fuck moment, but I'm not scared because wherever I go, I'm with John now and he's coming too and we're an us and it's mint and there ain't nothing can break us apart.

...

MOLLY. We're driving back. To Salford. And I think John might have just actually definitely read my mind cos he says JOHN. It doesn't matter where we are as long as I'm with you Moll.

MOLLY. He's started calling me Moll which usually I hate like if my mum or anyone else does it or owt. But I like it when he says it because let's be honest I love him so he could say anything he wanted or fart the alphabet and I'd still think he was the bee's knees. Cos love does that to you turns out. Makes you all strange in the head but good strange like one of those cats on the internet that can play the piano and not bad strange like dairy-free milk or *Takeshi's Castle* or Donald Trump.

I've packed the snacks and he's made a playlist on Spotify. He's named the playlist

JOHN. John and Moll's Mix Tape

MOLLY. Which he thinks is hilarious and really cute and that but I don't get because what the fuck's a mix tape when it's at home? The songs are a bit old and that so I can't join in the singing but that's fine cos I'm a shit singer anyway so

I just sit there and hold his hand while he sings and drives and eats crisps and it's fucking marvellous.

I haven't told my mum where I've been all weekend cos well, she hasn't asked and she never does. She's had to take on more shifts at The Horse and Jockey and she has to stay even later on the weekends and she does her best but let's be honest it's a bit shit because I never ever see her any more since Dad left. Her boyfriend, Knobby-Steve is a right knob and makes our house smell like cigarettes because he smokes inside so I had to nick Mum's perfume to try and cover the cig smell that hangs around my clothes, her proper nice perfume too CK Into You that Dad bought her before he left and I think John notices because

JOHN. You smell perfect

MOLLY. And I try not to think about the fact that I don't smell perfect at all, I smell like Knobby-Steve's cigarettes covered up by Mum's perfume which Dad probably got knock-off because let's face it we're not the kind of people that can afford CK Into You, and then that got me feeling bad for nicking Mum's only one nice thing that Dad ever gave her and that makes me even angrier with Knobby-Steve the dosser who never buys us owt nice because he won't get his arse down the Jobcentre so he's always skint. But then

JOHN. It's just me and you Moll. Me and you against the world

MOLLY. And all at once the shit thoughts melt away and all I can see is John and all I can feel is my hand in his and it's like, like, I don't have to rob my mum's perfume any more because John is my very own CK Into You covering up all the shit and making everything perfect. And I want to tell him that but I'm just Molly and I'm shit with words and that. And I'm still hoping John hasn't noticed that my tits are too small so I just say

Yeah.

And eat a Pringle and hold his hand a bit tighter.

...

MOLLY. We're at a junction.

This car's coming towards us and I know it's gonna slow down because it's got to because if it doesn't it's hitting John square-on so it's got to and at first I think the car is slowing down but then I realise it's me that's slowing down cos everything's going into this weird slow motion like what you see in films and on TV and that and this car's got to slow down cos it's got to and I can feel each bead of sweat dripping down my forehead into my eyes and it stings and this car's got to slow down cos it's got to and I can feel John's grip loosening on mine cos he's trying to steady the steering wheel with both hands and I'm trying to keep hold of his hand but I can't and this car's got to slow down because fucking it's got to and I'm waiting for my life to flash in front of my eyes but there's fuck-all apart from me and John and kissing and smoking and eating crisps and fucking and fucking this car's got to slow down cos it's got to and —

The paramedics are here. They're crowding round John and these strangers are crowding round them gawping as if we're the latest episode of *Corrie* and they can do one and I just want to get to John but they're carting him into an ambulance and I'm trying to get through so I can go with him but they won't let me because they're wrapping me in this sheet like a turkey that's about to go in the oven at Christmas and I'm not a turkey I'm just Molly and I want my boyfriend but they're driving him away, and they're asking me for his licence and where we were going and where we've been and who my next of kin is whatever that means when it's at home. And the playlist, the Mix Tape sorry, it's still playing. It's still playing. John and Moll's Mix Tape. Only it's not John and Moll cos John's not here and he's not singing and I don't know the words so I've fucked it. And all I can think of is that playlist. Playing to an empty car. With no one to sing along any more. And I'm as redundant as that playlist now John's not here. Cos there ain't anyone else who knows my words like John. No one to sing along.

...

MOLLY. When I get to the hospital he's all wired up to these machines and there's a tube in his throat and this beeping

constant beeping which I think is a good thing because it means he's alive but it doesn't seem like a good thing because nothing about what I'm seeing right now seems like a good thing. It seems pretty fucked if you ask me. And I'd give anything for it to have been me that the car crashed into and the nurse says he's in a coma and they don't know when, or if, he's going to wake up but that I should talk to him anyway and that he might be able to hear me. But I'm just Molly and I'm shit with words and my... —

Hi John. It's me. Sorry, Molly. Your eyes are shut so you don't really know who 'me' is do you. I hope you're okay. I was dead excited to go to Llandudno with you. Shit, not dead excited. Not dead anything. Sorry John. Proper. I was proper excited to go to Llandudno with you. No one's ever taken me away before, not even to Blackpool or owt. So thanks. It was mint. Perfect and that.

I er — I hope you're not in too much pain or anything.

College is shit. Same old. It's raining like every day and I've nowhere to go on Wednesdays and Fridays now except last Friday I accidentally walked across to Sainsbury's car park cos I forgot like but then you weren't there cos you were here and that was a bit sad like. But I didn't cry or owt. I'm not being a pussy or owt.

They're giving me counselling at college, for the 'special circumstances' that I've found myself in. It's bollocks John, they can't talk to me like you do, don't know my words, can't sing along like you do.

I er — I really fucking love you John. I love you. I'd really like you to stay alive yeah? I don't really know what I was doing till I found you. Just coasting I suppose. But then I found you and everything was pretty ace and I woke up proper happy and I smiled a lot, we smiled a lot didn't we John? So you can't go yet, just not yet it's a bit soon you know?

Do you know like, do you know when your dad, went, and they told you to say your goodbyes? I think they want me to do that but 'scuse my French, there's fucking no way. I ain't gonna John because you're not going anywhere right? I know you're not. It's me and you John. Me and you against the world, John and Moll's Mix Tape right?

I haven't got anything else. I'm just gonna hold your hand for a bit if that's okay? That crash John, it was nothing, you're way stronger. It was just a fucking glitter punch okay? Okay? I'm done now.

...

MOLLY. I think my time with John is probably, definitely over. Because well that nurse, she said he might not wake up and even though I think he might wake up I'm not as smart as the nurse so.

When Dad left, I thought he probably, definitely would come back, and I waited and waited, and I thought he'd definitely come back but he didn't. And I went to his work and he wasn't there and I called his phone and a woman picked up. So I'm starting to think that maybe John probably, definitely won't come back either. I think, probably all the best people like Dad and John and that, I think sooner or later they just fuck off and leave me with Mum and Knobby-Steve and my brother who won't stop crying these days as if it was him who'd just lost the love of his life and not me.

And I think I'll always be left with Mum and Steve or Mum and Ian or Mum and Chris or whoever the fuck she brings home next. Because my mum, well she seems to only bring home the proper shit ones these days and I used to think she was proper dumb and that but then well I thought, maybe she's realised that the best ones leave and the shit ones stay so she brings people like Steve and Ian and Chris and that until she gets bored and she can be the one who fucks off to find another Steve or Ian or Chris and that. Maybe she's a fucking genius.

And I think maybe after John, I would do the same, I could, do the same. I'd bring back a shit one and not a best one except there's no way. An after-John won't exist, because after John there's nothing but Mum and Knobby-Steve and college and Salford just like there was before John and I int doing that again. No way. There won't be an after-John, there won't be an after-Molly and there definitely won't be an after-Molly-and-John, we're going to survive for ever, in here, in fucking here.

She is referring to her stomach. She tries to recreate the feeling of the 'glitter punch' she experienced when falling in love with John only this time with her own hands. It doesn't work. It is horrible to watch.

Because it's too late and he's in my blood and he's poison but a good poison like cannabis and not a bad poison like cyanide or gone-off chicken, or rohypnol.

MOLLY's phone rings.

Hello?

...

MOLLY. John's in a coma for a month. But he survives. Cos he's a fucking legend. And even when life tries its best to fuck with him he sticks two fingers right back at it. My John. But there's a problem. Cos even after he wakes up when I get to college for our cigarette at eight forty-five he ain't there. And when I go into form class at nine he ain't there. And I knew he wouldn't be, they warned me and that so it wasn't a shock but it still is and everyone's staring at me and they can fuck right off and I think I'm starting to feel a bit like what John must have felt when he was talking about the caverns and that, which I googled by the way and turns out it's a just a hole but bigger. Who'd have think it? But I'm feeling this cavern in my mouth and in my belly and in my eyes from where we used to look at each other but now we can't. We've got a new form teacher instead. Because after the accident I suppose it all came out, about me and John and how it's not allowed and that and how he can't teach no more. He can't teach here and he can't teach ever and it's all my fault. Because I tried to fix the holes in his life and I just wound up making even more holes. Cos I'm just Molly, and I'm shit with words and my tits are too small and I should have left it well alone but I didn't.

They told me that

'The sexual offences act of 2003 states a sexual relationship between someone who is in a position of trust and a person to whom that trust extends, is criminal.'

And that even though I'm sixteen, it's still against the law because

'You're vulnerable Molly, and Mr Anderson abused his position of power.'

I'm not vulnerable, I'm not. I'm from Salford I ain't vulnerable mate. And it's bullshit anyway because if I went somewhere else, and this is completely true by the way, if I went to Our Lady's or Hulme Grammar or anywhere else and I was still with John then cos we met out or in Sainsbury's or whatever, then John wouldn't be in this shit. It's purely because I went to his, because he's my, was my... And that doesn't make sense. And I wanted to go to Hulme Grammar but I couldn't get in cos I'm just Molly aren't I and I'm shit with words and that. I'm not clever and I don't know much. I mean I was doing travel and tourism for fuck's sake, I'm not clever. But I know this, John's not being punished for fucking me, he's being punished because of the way the fucking came about. Which is bollocks.

And if anyone is vulnerable then it's him. He's the most gentle man I know, he's not malicious or owt. His dad just died. My dad isn't dead. He's not around but as far as I know he ain't dead and I've never experienced grief like what John told me he went through this year. And when he finally woke up after the accident he said that I was like, like fucking golden light in a pit of darkness that he was trying to climb out of or whatever. And he said that meeting me, fuck knows why, but

JOHN. Meeting you Moll. It's made me better.

MOLLY. And he said sometimes it takes losing someone you love to realise that if you find another kind of love then you've gotta cling on to it and not let go and keep punching it with your glitter punches for ever. And

JOHN and MOLLY. Fuck the consequences.

MOLLY. Well now I've lost something that I love. And I'm not allowed to feel his glitter punches again. We're not allowed to see each other no more. The police want me to press charges whatever that means when it's at home, so that his name will go on this list with like rapists and paedos and kiddie-fiddlers and actual bad people not good people like John. Fuck that. There's no way. He's my forever person. And we've got a plan.

MOLLY picks up the carrier bags from the beginning of the play. Scene is as it was at the start of the play.

I've got my stuff, I had to pack dead quick while Mum was at work and Knobby-Steve took my only weekend bag last time Mum kicked him out so I had to use the Aldi bags I found in the carrier-bag drawer under the sink. I couldn't fit much stuff in but it's okay because I don't have a lot of stuff anyway and what I do have smells like cigs and John said he'll get me new stuff when we get there.

I've never been on a plane before, I'm proper excited and only a little bit scared but mainly excited because I'll get to see inside the clouds and that and John said all the houses are gonna look dead little and the college and the flat and Knobby-Steve are gonna get smaller and smaller till we don't even have to worry about them ever at all.

John said it's me and him, me and him against the world.

I got Mum's credit card out of the drawer where she keeps all her secret things like her weed and her cigs and her Fruit Pastilles which she never shares, and I took a picture of it like John said and sent it to him so he could book the plane and make all the arrangements and that. John said he needed more because he wants us to stay somewhere dead fancy and that and I don't really have any money but I do have a

weekly saver that Dad used to do for me. I know because I've got this bank book with a little picture of a cartoon cat on the front who's waving and I think that's supposed to make me want to like trust the bank and stuff but it could have a picture of a fucking anything on and I wouldn't care so long as my dad was still topping it up like what he said he would. I've got one hundred and thirty-six pounds and eighty-one pence in there and I asked John should I draw it out but he said he would because he's over twenty-five and I'm not so they might get suspicious if I tried to do it.

John said he needed to be doubly, triply, surely sure that no one would find out about our plan and that so I had to promise I wouldn't tell Mum or leave a note or even say bye to the baby or owt. Mum's never in anyway so I probably might not even ever miss her but not saying goodbye to the baby, I think

that was the worst bit. Even though he cries all the time and he's not potty-trained and I get in trouble every time he swears, it was still the worst bit like. But I know, I think he'll be okay and that. With Mum. Cos they're family, blood and that's got to mean something, I'm just not sure what...

John said we're family now. And he's a bit late like but I know he's on his way. And he'll pick me up and we'll drive away and fly away till all our worries are as small as the tiny houses we'll see out the window on the plane. And he is a bit late like but I sent him the bank details like what he asked and I feel like I love him so much I want to give him every part of me but that's impossible cos really I'm just a person with arms and legs and small tits and how do you give someone every aspect of your being when it's still, attached? So I just gave him the money and this promise that it's us now, for definite and forever, me and him against the world and when I see him I'll give him my Aldi bags and a kiss and a squeeze and the rest of my life. Our life together.

I'm nervous about travelling like cos I've never travelled before, but then I remember how John left London and moved to Salford and I wonder if he travelled anywhere else before that and I think he must be pretty good at doing travelling now so I know he'll look after me.

I light a cig. And I close my eyes. And it's like he's standing right there, next to me. Breathing in and out, in and out, in and out. And his glitter punches have knocked everything into the right order for the first time in my life ever. And it's beautiful. It's fucking beautiful.