

“FIREFLIES”

(a love story waiting to happen)

by

Kevin Fegan

COMMISSIONED AND PRODUCED BY THE LOWRY

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“Fireflies” by Kevin Fegan ©

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CAST: 1 Female 1 Male

CHARACTERS

Leigh Tyldesley

Nelson

(ALL OTHER CHARACTERS ARE PLAYED BY LEIGH AND NELSON)

SET

Leigh’s home and Nelson’s home.

Use of projector and large screen throughout.

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Writer’s Note

You know how it is, when you meet someone new and during the relationship you find yourselves telling each other your life stories? In Fireflies, Leigh and Nelson tell their respective stories at a time when both their lives are in crisis. As their stories unfold, the play builds to the point of their first proper meeting at the end of the play.

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“FIREFLIES” by Kevin Fegan

THE ESTATE

A HOUSING ESTATE IN THE NORTH OF ENGLAND.
ABOUT 3 A.M. LEIGH’S HOUSE. LEIGH IS FULLY
DRESSED AND SITTING ON HER SOFA. THERE IS
BROKEN GLASS EVERYWHERE. ON A LARGE SCREEN
(PRE-RECORDED) IS A VIEW OF THE HOUSE FROM THE
OUTSIDE: HER LIVING ROOM WINDOW HAS BEEN PUT
THROUGH AND SOMEONE HAS SPRAYED THE WORD
BITCH’ ACROSS HER ‘FOR SALE’ SIGN. HER LAPTOP
COMPUTER SCREEN IS ON.

SHE GETS UP AND GOES TO HER LAPTOP. ON THE
LARGE SCREEN APPEARS THE INTERNET SITE SHE IS
ACCESSING: “EASYJET.COM” OR SIMILAR.
THROUGHOUT THIS SCENE SHE IS BOOKING THE NEXT
AVAILABLE SINGLE FLIGHT FROM MANCHESTER
AIRPORT TO BOLOGNA.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) Have you ever seen fireflies? I’ve seen them
in Italy. They’re like mosquitoes, only their backsides glow
instead of filling you full of disease. They fly really slow so you
can walk alongside them, almost resting in the palm of your
hand. Fireflies flash at each other all night long. They fly
around, looking for a perfect mate whose fire flashes at the
same speed. Imagine that? Trapping off with someone who

shares the same pulse as you? It's like having exactly the same heartbeat. But we don't get fireflies in this country, do we?

SHE TYPES INTO HER COMPUTER.

They'll all be round soon.

Last time they sent that copper with the mirror-shades.

“Don't go reflecting at me,” I says.

Talking to me like that. I told him,

“I was married. I'm not one of these single mums, I'm divorced. I'm a home-owner.”

Sitting in judgement, like they do.

They'll be asking me where me ex lives? Does he see the kids? Do I have a boyfriend? Any family? How do I get on with me neighbours? Any debts? Drug-dealers? Enemies? They know nothing. I've been up and down this street with me scented candles, trying to combat the negative vibes, it's no use. Mind you, I've been up and down in me slippers and bra some nights, in fightin' mood, ready to batter somebody if I didn't get me garden furniture back. All nutters along here, me included.

There's him across the road, makes a career out of leaning on the window ledge. Never goes t' bed, he's like Winston Churchill. There he is now with his binoculars, look.

(SHOUTING AT HIM) “Oi, wind your neck in! Can't a body stand here with no window? Y' wanna get yerself a fuckin'

job!”

Then there’s her next door, Horwich: martial arts instructor, keeps gettin’ beat up by her husband. All she ever does is take out injunctions on him.

“I daren’t use me martial arts on him,” she says, “I’d kill him.”

“You should bloody kill him,” I says.

Then there’s her at the end, Irwell, spends all her time re-arranging her furniture. I says,

“Feng Shui’s not gonna stop the police knockin’ your door down – you have to stop shopliftin’.”

Irwell’s house is lovely on the outside, like her. But I can see her veins are startin’ t’ break. The alcohol she pours down her neck, if you put a match to her, she’d go up like a polystyrene tile. All her kids are turned out in Gucci and Prada and all that designer shit. Yeah, they look the part, but kids don’t want matchin’ baubles, they want their mum.

Next-door on the other side, he’s got mental health problems, by his own admission; yet he’s probably saner than most.

What they call “released into the community”, he looks like a bloody Yeti. All you see is an overcoat and hair going to the offy. I hear the kids saying,

“Don’t knock the ball over there.”

He’s got two records he plays to death: ‘Dark Side of the Moon’ and ‘Psycho-killer’. He’s out there sometimes in his back garden, “dancing with the devil”, as he puts it.

I says,

“Tommy, for Christ’s sake, come and get some new cds.”

“Aren’t you frightened?” he says.

“Sit down, you don’t scare me, Tommy.”

“You’re an angel, you are, Leigh” he says, “You were sent to guide me.”

Well, what’s the world comin’ to if you can’t have an occult dance around your own bonfire? I don’t know as any of us ‘round here would pass any Citizenship Test; but I’ve a medal here for anybody who’s survived this estate. I tell you, I want payin’ for this; I’m sick and tired of being an unpaid social worker. It’s the kids I feel sorry for. Somebody should introduce ‘*Parental* Survival Classes’. I’ve got three boys, I don’t know how they survive me?

They credit ‘Little Hulton’. He’s a sort of spirit guide. Our Ryan came out with it first. Any problems, they ask Little Hulton. Keeps them off my back, I suppose. I asked him once, our Ryan, where Little Hulton came from? He said, when grandad was dying in hospital, Little Hulton was in the bed next to him. Well, I don’t remember no Little Hulton. As far as I’m concerned the bed was empty.

In the end, they put a sign up at the bottom of me dad’s bed – N.F.R. Kids wanted to know what it meant. I said, “It means your grandad’s not coming home.”

You just had to go and bloody die on me, dad, didn't you?

LEIGH POURS HERSELF A GLASS OF WINE AND

SMOKES A SPLIFF WHILE SHE WAITS FOR

CONFIRMATION OF FLIGHT AVAILABILITY.

It takes ½ oz of weed a week for me to get by. Most of the women 'round here are survivin' on a diet of 'phet and prozac.

I feel ripped off 'cause I never got no happy pills from the doctor. I found me own though, when I started clubbin' again.

After I split up with Darwen, it was virtually home confinement

for me. I was as lonely as a truck-driver sleepin' in his cab. I

dug a big hole down the back garden. I used t' go down at

night, when the kids were asleep, and scream into it. That

was my therapy. So when Rivington said,

“Come out wi' us, Leigh.”

I thought, “Sod it, why not?”

Girls' night out at Brannigan's. Now Rivington's what Tesco's call 'a bag for life' so I know we'll be trappin' off at some point during the night.

“I'm up for it tonight,” she says, “I've got a right wide-on.”

Rivington swears down you can tell the size of a man's dick by the size of that vein in their arm, the one where the forearm meets the upper arm, on the inside of the elbow.

So there we are, cruisin' the dance-floor, eyeing up the veins.

That's when we meet the Love Bros. No, seriously, that's

what they're called. They run a computer business, or I.T. as

one of them says.

“Oh, ‘it’,” I says, “I know all about it.”

What is it with men and their hard-drives? The cheeky fucker,

he says,

“I don’t know why you wear a bra, you’ve got nothing to put in it.”

I says, “You wear pants, don’t you?”

He likes that, unfortunately. I remember now why I use a rabbit. He says,

“How d’you fancy a 71?”

“71? What’s that?”

“A 69 with 2 other people.”

“What? Rivington and your brother? Urgh! No, ta.”

I feel daft. I’m the only one with a coat and handbag. They go out now with next to nothing on. Nowhere to keep their money or their moby.

Rivington says,

“Come on, we’re goin’ to a party, I need some action; I’m wet as an otter’s pocket.”

I says, “I’m not goin’ with them.”

“Be all right, it’s one of them parties where everybody takes somebody they don’t fancy – but don’t tell them that.”

And I fall for it. I catch her writing her phone number on his erection at the end of the night.

“Call me,” she says to him, “If you can still read it in the

morning?”

Bloody Love Bros. Mine stalks me for nine months afterwards. Which part of ‘No’ don’t men understand? I send him two peeled lychees with a note saying this is what I’ll do to his gonads if he doesn’t stop pestering me. ‘Course, being a bloke, he loves that, doesn’t he? He goes ballistic with the metaphor. I come home to find asparagus wedged in me letter-box, carrots in me cat-flap and leeks in me flower-bed. He sends me a bag of fertiliser “so my love for him can grow”. There’s romance for you, eh? A bag of shite. Some men really know what turns a woman on.

SHE SWEEPS UP THE BROKEN GLASS WHILE SHE
WAITS FOR CONFIRMATION OF CREDIT CARD
PAYMENT.

My divorce has finally come through. I’ve sat all night reading the documents. I’ve looked at the words until my eyes bleed. I’m thinking, this is Darwen, the father of my children. I’m thinking, all over the world, “I love you” is wreaking havoc like a virus. Yet it’s our only hope.

I want a man to stroke my hair. I want a man to touch my face. I want a man to pick me up and spin me ‘round. I want a man to smile at me. I want a man who won’t let me down.

What does it matter what I want?

“I don’t know who you take after?” Mam and dad used to say, forgetting I was adopted. “Where does she get it from?”

Well, I know where. I know me real mam is a day-dreamer
and I know she suffers from cellulite. I’ve said ‘thanks’ to her,
apart from these hips; that’s all, just thanks. Me real dad is
from Italy where the fireflies are.

HER FLIGHT IS CONFIRMED. SCREEN OFF.

SHE PHONES FOR A TAXI.

Could I book a taxi please for 4am? (PAUSE) To Manchester
Airport. (PAUSE) The name’s Leigh, yeah, Leigh Tyldesley,
address...?

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FIREFLIES 1

MUSIC. ON SCREEN IS A FLASH FORWARD TO A
POSSIBLE FUTURE: NELSON PICKS UP LEIGH, SPINS
HER ROUND AND THEY DANCE SILENTLY TOGETHER.

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THE UNDEAD

ELSEWHERE ON THE ESTATE, AT THE SAME TIME.

NELSON'S HOME.

ON SCREEN (PRE-RECORDED) NELSON IS WAITING IN HIS TAXI FOR HIS NEXT CALL. THE SCREEN BECOMES THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR IN NELSON'S CAB AND ALL THE AUDIENCE CAN SEE ARE HIS EYES LOOKING BACK AT THEM. A LIGHT FROM HIS CB RADIO IS FLASHING ACROSS HIS FACE.

NELSON (ON SCREEN)

Fuck it, I'm not answering. What's the point? Let it flash.

World's not gonna stop turning if I disappear.

NEVERTHELESS, HE PICKS UP THE RECEIVER AND ANSWERS.

Yeah, this is Nelson. (PAUSE). I've been here all the time.

(PAUSE). 'Course I know it; it's on the other side of the estate. Where is she going? ...

SCREEN OFF.

NELSON ENTERS.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) You know how it is when she's left you for good; but she won't rest in peace? You try locking her in the attic: every photo, every letter, every gift, everything of hers you haven't burned; but she just will not disappear. You can still smell her perfume in the bathroom, you see her on the

stairs, you're in the back yard and her voice calls your name, you find long strands of her hair on the pillows, she suddenly appears in the bedroom and climbs into bed, insisting on a threesome with your new girlfriend, sabotaging your libido, deflating your manhood, mocking your sex-life. She is the undead: the past in your present, she inhabits your dreams, directs your nightmares.

Astley's taken Pendle and left me with the cat. They say 40% of dads lose contact with their kids after separation. Is it any fucking wonder when I have to put up with 'him'?

I see them out for a walk in the park, swinging Pendle between them like she was theirs. I can hear Andretti's ice-cream man congratulating this guy and Astley on such a beautiful little girl. He doesn't feel the need to explain. I don't remember agreeing to this? I'm taking her back. He resists. I smash him with a baseball bat I don't even remember carrying. Pendle screams for her mummy as I tuck her under my arm and bundle her into my car. Astley scratches my face, leaves me looking like a rapist for weeks.

In court, they're telling me I'm a violent man, that I have no legal right to see my own child, telling me I'm not fit to see my own daughter without supervision. Men don't do pain very well. Not this one, anyway. It's too painful to see Pendle so I don't. I'm not there for her first day at school, I don't read her bedtime stories or come home with pockets full of sweets,

I don't help her swim without arm-bands or watch her playing 'Silent Night' on the recorder in Assembly, I don't rush her to casualty when she falls off the swing in the park, I don't hear the applause as she summersaults on the trampoline, I don't meet her Sports Coach, her Careers Officer, her Social Worker... I go shopping twice a year: I have a room I keep ready for her with Xmas and birthday presents wrapped and labelled by the year until she is sixteen years old when, suddenly, there is a knock at the door.

PENDLE'S FACE APPEARS ON SCREEN

(PRE-RECORDED)

PENDLE

Dad, can I come and live with you?

SCREEN OFF.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) You should see my face at the door. I thought I'd never see her again. Her mum just drops her off and drives away like I was a regular weekend dad.

At first, it's great: she has her freedom, I have my daughter back.

EXIT NELSON.

MARRIED LIFE

LEIGH'S HOME.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) I know a woman who reckons she can get over love in six weeks. She says, it's happened to her that many times she's got it down to a fine art. I know another woman swears she's never been in love.

There was a time me and Darwen liked the same things. And if we didn't, we'd support each other like friends. I'd go with him to see Bon Jovi and he'd come with me to see Robbie Williams. There was a time Darwen did it for me – you know, that funny feeling in your fairy. It were the petty arguments I couldn't stand over things like shopping. I knew Darwen didn't like shopping so I never used to invite him; but every now and then he'd insist on taking me.

DARWEN APPEARS ON LARGE SCREEN

(PRE-RECORDED)

DARWEN

I've had a bonus from work. Come on, I'll buy you some trendy clothes, treat you to a meal and that.

LEIGH

Great. Let's go to the Trafford Centre, I've still not been there.

(TO AUDIENCE) We visit the first shop, I'm in my element trying on all the clothes.

DARWEN

Thirty minutes you’ve been in there.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) Second shop, the same.

DARWEN

Another thirty minutes.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) Third shop.

DARWEN

Aw, fuck this, I’m starvin’, come on, let’s get someat t’eat.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) So we do. And it’s lovely; but I need to buy something and I can’t face dragging him ‘round again.

DARWEN

Bugger me, you’re back in the first shop buying the very first top you tried on – drives me fucking bananas.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) How can you not like shopping for yourself? It’s one of life’s greatest pleasures. If only men like him realised, for women like me it’s foreplay. They’re missing out on a great opportunity to get me feeling horny. A good shop and I’m gagging for it. Same with holidays. We’d save up and go abroad with the kids to the Med. Sun, sea, sand and sodding arguments.

DARWEN

It's too hot. Why don't we come earlier in the year?

LEIGH

You know why: school holidays.

DARWEN

I can't stand hanging about.

LEIGH

It's called relaxing. Read a book.

DARWEN

I don't like books.

LEIGH

Go and have another beer then, for God's sake, leave me with the kids.

(TO AUDIENCE) I thought it might be the kids, you know, why he couldn't enjoy himself. So one year, I ask me mam to look after them and off we go to Italy. For the first few days it's brilliant. We do karaoke together, eat out at restaurants, hire a motorbike and explore the coastline, clubbing, the beach... Always seems to be the beach that winds him up. By day five, we've run out of things to say and start arguing again, about nothing.

DARWEN

How can you just lie there, frying in that sun?

LEIGH

Look, I'll stay on the beach, you go to the bar; that way we'll

both get some peace.

(TO AUDIENCE) How can he not like holidays? We look forward to it so much and when it happens, he does nothing but moan. Before you know it, you're in a war of attrition, blaming each other for everything, scoring points against each other, planning your next assault. The space between you grows and you become further and further away from each other. Communication fades until eventually you stop sending signals to each other. And when the communication stops, love just withers and dies.

EXIT LEIGH

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BROWN

NELSON’S HOME.

(TO AUDIENCE) I must have been one of the last to realise what was going on. Talk about naïve. There’s this one pick-up: young fella, doesn’t look old enough to be married, has me waiting outside his ex’s house, says she’s thrown him out, won’t let him see the kid – well, that rings a few bells, I can tell you. I tell him the meter’s running, he doesn’t seem bothered, and he’s off round the back of the house. Next thing I know, he’s loading up the cab with the video, telly, stereo, ‘til he’s filled the boot and the entire back seat with goodies.

I says, “You haven’t left her much.”

“Just taking what’s mine,” he says.

Then he has me all over the place dropping off this gear.

“I’m keeping some stuff at me mam’s... me sister’s... me uncle’s...”

This last drop can’t be his grandma’s, not unless his granny’s built like a boxing club bouncer. Still, he doesn’t have any problem paying me by the end of the night. I tell him, I says:

“Next time, use a car-boot sale, not my bloody taxi.”

No point reporting it, none of my business.

Next up, one of the neighbours, Broughton, is asking if I’ve had anyone trying to sell me any shirts?

“Some cunt’s nicked eight Ben Shermans off me washing line, one for each day of the week.”

“Eight?” I says.

“One spare,” he says.

Now he might keep a buzzard this lad, but Broughton goes out t’ work so I believe him. You should see this buzzard, it’s got a neck like Mike Tyson. He flies it on the wasteland at the back of the estate. I’m tellin’ you, it could take out a small child if it had a mind to.

It’s about this time the Sofa-Surfer makes himself at home.

This lad sleeps seven days a week, 365 days a year on other people’s sofas. And my daughter just has to make friends with him.

ENTER PENDLE.

NELSON

(TO PENDLE) Please tell me that’s not your boyfriend?

PENDLE

He’s just a mate.

NELSON

Thank fuck for that.

(TO AUDIENCE) Hang on? She just said, ‘mate’ – what kind of mate? One of those ‘let’s go ten-pin bowling together type of mates’ or one of those ‘let’s exchange bodily fluids type mates’? That’s how they think nowadays - ‘fuck-buddies’.

I should be so lucky. Turns out, teenage sex is the least of me worries.

The Sofa-Surfer brings us to a new level of weirdness.

Rolls of silver foil suddenly appear and lemon juice, but no sign of any cooking. Spoons disappear at an alarming rate until, one day, I go to binge on my favourite Petit-Filous and there isn't a single spoon in the kitchen. Same with all the belts – gone, virtually overnight. There's only me and my lass live in the house, apart from the Sofa-Surfer, so I knobble the pair of them. They come out with some crackpot excuse like,

PENDLE

I'm really sorry, everytime I eat a yoghurt I forget and throw away the spoon with the carton.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) Some nights they never go to bed, other nights they sleep for England, and weird hours, worse than a taxi-driver. Nipping out at three in the morning,

PENDLE

Just goin' t' garage for some fags.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) Always wrapped up in a hooded jacket and baseball cap, even in the height of Summer, you never see them in a t-shirt or a pair of shorts. Never seem to eat, not meals anyway, plenty of chocolate and pop, never dream of picking up an apple or a banana from the fruit-bowl. Skinny, spotty, anaemic, frozen little creatures, they are. Then there's the stream of lads at the door: at first, it's,

“Have you got a light... a glass of water... a couple of fags?”

Then it’s,

“Do you want to buy a motorcycle helmet... a cutlery set... a garden knome... cd player?”

And everything’s always a tenner, doesn’t matter if it’s a laptop or a pair of gloves, it’s a tenner; then a fiver if you say ‘no’. They always have a plastic carrier-bag, even if it they have nothing in it. They walk past your window and back again a few minutes later, all of them heading for the Brown House around the corner. Constant traffic, day and night, either on foot or in cars. I’m not daft, I can see what’s going on at the Brown House; but I’m blind to what’s going on under me own roof. You expect teenagers to ask for money all the time but every day there’s a new story from Pendle.

PENDLE

Dad, I need a tenner, I’m going out for a meal with Sofa-Surfer’s parents, it’s their anniversary; they might pay for me but I can’t assume they will.

NELSON

Sofa-Surfer’s got a mam and dad?

PENDLE

A fiver’ll do.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) Not just blind, stupid I am. Until I find a bag of needles. I must have been refusing to believe it could be happening to my little girl. Pendle was the one who said, at

the funeral of her friend who'd just o'd'd on brown,

PENDLE

How can they do it, dad? How can his mates go straight back after the funeral and take more of that shit?

NELSON

I don't know, Pendle. I don't remember it being like this when I was a teenager, I don't remember having to bury my mates.

EXIT PENDLE.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) It's not the drugs and the stealing that get to you the most, it's the pathological lies. You don't know what's real? It feels like you're dealing with someone in a parallel universe. They can be right next to you, but they might as well be a million miles away when it comes to communication.

INTERNET DATING

LEIGH AND NELSON ARE AT THEIR RESPECTIVE LAPTOP COMPUTERS, FACING THE AUDIENCE. THE INFORMATION THEY TYPE APPEARS ON THE LARGE SCREEN (PRE-RECORDED).

NELSON

I’m thinking, it’s about time I found *myself* a fuck-buddy, so I go shopping –

LEIGH

On the internet. How do I start again at my age with me roots showing? Three kids, no career and no bikini line?

They’ve got more chance of finding dark matter down a Yorkshire saltmine than I have of finding a decent fella.

NELSON

Here goes.

Name? Nelson.

THEY BOTH TYPE IN THEIR DETAILS.

LEIGH

Name? Leigh.

Age? Thirty something.

Marital status? Bitch.

NELSON

Marital status? Divorced – no, sounds like used goods.

Single.

Sex? Yes, please.

Sexuality? Very.

Children? One – plus one sponger boyfriend.

LEIGH

Profession? Other – sounds better than Mother.

Income? That would be nice.

NELSON

Appearance? Too sexy for my shirt? For my taxi? For my age? Too sexy for my own good.

LEIGH

Smoker? No - spliffs don't count.

Eyes? Two.

Vegetarian? Aspiring.

Religion? Me and God, we're like 'that'.

NELSON

Religion? Definitely not for me.

LEIGH

Star sign? Leo: Fire sign.

NELSON

I can't say Virgo.

(TYPING) The Ram on the cusp of The Bull.

LEIGH

Interests? Survival, Italy.

NELSON

Interests? Shit? Football.

Personality? Yeah, I've got one of those.

LEIGH

Personality? Still a bit of a lapdancer at heart.

NELSON

Looking For? How do you spell ‘buddy’? No, I can’t say that, can I? Someone who will value my love – and who’s still a bit of a goer in the bedroom.

LEIGH

Looking for? Someone who will value my love – and has a big vein in his inner forearm.

NELSON

Photo? That’s me snookered. Unless I touch up the image like they do in the tabloids. Give myself rosy cheeks, that’s the key. I’ve heard scientists say a woman selects a man by the colour of his cheeks.

THEY LEAVE THEIR COMPUTERS.

NELSON

14 days. Not a single taker. Them scientists must have meant ‘buttocks’ when they said cheeks? It’s no good, I’ll have to try something more radical.

LEIGH

14 days and 400 takers. How am I supposed to tell the genuine ones from the players? I need to do some serious research.

LEIGH AND NELSON RETURN TO THEIR RESPECTIVE COMPUTERS.

LEIGH (CONTINUED)

The trouble with internet dating is you have to second guess how the opposite sex thinks. So, boxing clever, I’ve decided to find out. I’ve joined this site, right, where I can meet people in cyberspace. I’ve created an avatar, a virtual “me”.

ON SCREEN APPEARS LEIGH’S AVATAR, A MALE ITALIAN FOOTBALLER.

(NOTE: ALL OF THE ON SCREEN COMPUTER GRAPHICS NEED TO BE PRE-RECORDED).

SHE RIGHT-CLICKS TO VIEW HER AVATAR’S PROFILE, WHICH APPEARS ON SCREEN (THE MENU DROPS DOWN LINE BY LINE SO IT’S EASIER FOR THE AUDIENCE TO READ).

“Alfredo.

Italian.

Professional footballer...”

LEIGH

Mmm, neat research project. I make a damn fine man, if I do say so myself.

ON SCREEN APPEARS A GORGEOUS FEMALE AVATAR, DRESSED LIKE A LAP-DANCER.

NELSON

That’s “me.” Phwoar! Do you know I really fancy myself.

Right, let’s get this show on the road. I’m off to a beach party to meet some hot chicks and find out what makes them tick.

HE CLIPS ON A MIKE AND EARPIECE CONNECTED TO HIS COMPUTER . A CURSOR APPEARS ON SCREEN AND NELSON STEERS HIS AVATAR TOWARDS A GROUP OF YOUNG WOMEN IN BEACHWEAR. HE CLICKS ON “VOICE CHAT” SO THE CHARACTERS CAN HEAR EACH OTHER.

NELSON’S AVATAR

“Hi there girls, I’m looking for some sexy beach babes like me to hang out with.”

THE GROUP MOVES AWAY.

NELSON GETS UP OUT OF HIS CHAIR AND RANTS AT THE SCREEN.

NELSON

What? What did I say? Come back you bitches.

LEIGH

Okay guys, let’s get me some ass. Here goes...

LEIGH CLIPS ON A MIKE AND EARPIECE AND USES HER AVATAR’S CURSOR TO APPROACH NELSON’S AVATAR.

You see, the secret to knowing someone are the signals:

their body language tells you more than a thousand profiles.

LEIGH RIGHT-CLICKS ON NELSON’S AVATAR AND THE PROFILE MENU DROPS DOWN, LINE BY LINE.

“Cassandra.

English.

Lap-dancer...”

LEIGH CLICKS ON VOICE CHAT

LEIGH'S AVATAR

“Hey, sexy, nice outfit.”

NELSON

Oh shit! What's happening?

LEIGH'S AVATAR

“Do you like my golden boots?”

NELSON

What do I say?

LEIGH

Ignore me, why don't you?

NELSON'S AVATAR

“I'm busy right now.”

LEIGH'S AVATAR

“Too busy to talk?”

NELSON'S AVATAR

“I'm married.”

LEIGH'S AVATAR

“That's how I like them, darling.”

NELSON'S AVATAR

“Sling your hook, creep.”

NELSON'S AVATAR GIVES LEIGH'S AVATAR TWO
FINGERS AND WALKS AWAY. SCREEN GOES BLANK
BUT LEIGH IS STILL LOOKING AT IT.

LEIGH

I'll email you then, shall I?

NELSON

Shit, is that what women have to put up with?

LEIGH

It wouldn't have worked out. High maintenance. We just weren't suited. Shit, is that what men have to put up with?

EXIT LEIGH.

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FIREFLIES 2

MUSIC. ON SCREEN IS A FLASH FORWARD TO A POSSIBLE FUTURE: LEIGH AND NELSON TOGETHER ON A SUNNY MEDITERRANEAN BEACH, LICKING EACH OTHER’S ICE-CREAM.

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CRUSTY

NELSON'S HOME

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) It's not all bad news on the estate: we got speed ramps to slow down the joy-riders. Now they've taken to burning cars instead.

The old Pole across from me, he won't have nobody parking outside his house, burned or otherwise. He hasn't got a car himself, but he's straight out there slashing tyres if anybody parks in his precious place. No wonder his lad, Seffi, lives down London. I've seen the old Pole before now with a big thick rope round his waist, like one of those “Strongest Man” contestants, dragging this wreck, inch at a time, 'til it clears his plot. The old dear next to him wasn't too happy. Not that she has anything to worry about now. Boarded up since she died. Like a lot of them around here.

When I first moved here five years ago, there was only one derelict house, at the back of me, where Crusty lives. Crusty has the run of the house to herself. She sits on the wall, with her matted dreadlocks, begging for food all day long. She's not daft is Crusty, it's a prime spot for people passing on their way to the offy. The Yeti fetches her a tin of tuna everyday when he collects his bottle of white lightning. Since my cat died, Crusty takes milk from me on the back wall. Now the Yeti lets on to me as well. There are times when Crusty's

house is rampant with cats; but I've never seen her have a litter, her insides must be knackered. Word is, someone drove past one day and threw her out onto the road. A little, long-haired scruffy kitten. I see her everyday from the kitchen window while ever I'm washing the dishes. We spend a lot of time watching each other. Never blinks, she'll stare at you with those piercing green eyes for hours, never looks away, a thousand mile stare right into your soul. Something supernatural about that cat.

EXIT NELSON

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FOOTBALL AND FUNERALS

LEIGH'S HOME

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) Timekeeping – not my strongest point. They say, I'll be late for my own funeral. I'm late for me dad's.

I've found the car keys, but the car's already open. Strange? I load the kids, the keys are in the ignition and I'm turning it – nothing. Won't fire, not a squeak. I'm out, sleeves up, bonnet up. I don't believe it, some bastard's only nicked me spark plugs. A poxy Fiat Uno, I ask you? If I wasn't wearing black before, I am now, by the time I've done messing with the car.

We leg it, me and the kids, all the way to the church. Only it's not a church, it's a meeting hall. Mam and dad converted to Quakers.

Fortunately, there's been a power-cut which has delayed proceedings while they top-up on candles. Poor dad, I'm thinking, they've pulled the plug on him again. Darwen meets us there.

ENTER DARWEN WHO HELPS HER TO A SEAT.

He's lovely to me for a change. We sit next to mam. We wait in silence for someone to say something, as Quakers do.

I look 'round to see who's turned out? Rivington's there, dressed like it were a wedding, of course, with a new fella who looks a bit embarrassed, bless. Someone suddenly pipes up about life everlasting and I think, phew, I don't

reckon I could hack it if it was any longer than it is. I can see the Yeti’s big face peering in through one of the windows.

Mam stands up and tells us how gutted she was when she first found out dad couldn’t have kids of his own. I’ve never heard her talk like this before. She jokes how they didn’t know what they were letting themselves in for when they adopted me; and how I was always daddy’s girl, even with my fiery temper. I try to smile like it was a compliment. She says, God’ll thank her in the next life for her sacrifices. I can’t be doing with God, I’ve enough to worry about as it is.

The floodgates are open and there’s a stream of people testifying to what a decent bloke me dad was. Until our Ryan stands up, all 4 feet 10, 11 years old of him, and says, “Little Hulton wants to say something.”

Everybody’s looking ‘round for Little Hulton while I’m muttering under me breath to Ryan to sit down sharpish, but he’s off on one.

“Little Hulton says grandad weren’t ready. Little Hulton were supposed to give him a signal when it was time to go; but they turned grandad’s machine off.”

I could give our Ryan a crack for upsetting mam; but he’s made me realise dad’s gone, just when I need him most. His dad tries to cover for Ryan’s strange behaviour, but it comes out all wrong.

DARWEN

They're a great leveller, kids, aren't they? Like death. I mean, the good, the bad and the ugly, they can all have kids, can't they?

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) Outside the meeting hall, it looks as though half the estate has turned out. Including some guy on the waste-ground opposite with a bloody buzzard tied to his arm. Even Winston's left his binoculars at home for a closer look. My old man was more popular than he imagined.

There's a woman sat in the middle of the road in front of the hearse. She's got an Alsatian with her and she's obviously pissed-up. The undertakers are trying to move her, but the Alsatian seems keen they don't touch her. She's shouting at everyone and anyone and she's such a fucking, foul-mouthed bitch. I'm not having this. I can't believe no one's doing anything. I'm over there, telling her not to fuck with me on a day like today. The alsatian's curling its lip at me so I spit in its face. It looks confused – just long enough for me to drag this woman onto the pavement. A police car pulls up and that copper with the mirror shades takes over, now the job's done. Darwin looks at me in disgust.

(TO DARWEN) What?

EXIT DARWEN.

(TO AUDIENCE) Up at the cemetery, I see the Yeti again,

hovering in the background. I don't know how he got here before us. He's carrying this scruffy, long-haired cat with weird eyes. Looks like something he's conjured up in one of his communions with the devil.

As they lower the coffin, mum falls to her knees, cursing me dad for not letting her have a child of her own. Everyone looks at me to see how it feels to be rejected in public; but I've made a career of it.

People invite themselves back to my house. We get some beers in for the football that night: England versus Italy, Friendly, on the run-up to the World Cup 2002.

FOOTBALL IMAGES APPEAR ON SCREEN (ARCHIVE).

LEIGH SITS AT HOME WATCHING. ENTER NELSON WHO SITS IN THE PUB WATCHING. BOTH ARE FACING THE AUDIENCE.

LEIGH

We send the kids upstairs to watch it in their bedroom and we throw the men out to go and watch it down the pub, so it's a ladies-only affair. That way, we can have a proper laugh and a good cry. We've had a few by the time it starts.

NELSON

Eng-a-land, Eng-a-land, Eng-a-land!

LEIGH

I-taly, I-taly, I-taly!

I side with the I-ties because they're fit: Nesta, Cannavaro,

Totti – hey, girls, he lives up to his name, dunt he? I'd like to play friendly with him for 90 minutes. I'd have him begging for extra time.

NELSON

Oh, you dirty fucker! Did you see that?

LEIGH

Somebody's gonna get badly hurt at this rate.

NELSON

(TO MATES ARRIVING IN PUB FROM FUNERAL) Come and join us lads, where you lot been?

(ANSWERING HIS MATES) All right for some, rest of us have to work for a living. I'm trying to stay away from funerals, Well, I din't know him, did I?

LEIGH

Don't know how I'm gonna manage without me dad?

NELSON

Call yourself a Manager!

LEIGH

We gave me dad a good send-off, din't we?

NELSON

Woe, send him off, ref!

SCREEN OFF. EXIT LEIGH.

CLEAN

NELSON’S HOME.

NELSON PLACES JUICE AND TWO GLASSES ON A
TABLE. THEN HE PLACES SOME CUTLERY. PENDLE IS
PREPARING TO GO OUT.

NELSON

(CALLING) Will you eat something?

PENDLE

(CALLING) Not hungry.

NELSON

(CALLING) Go on, I’ve made it ‘specially.

PENDLE

(CALLING) I’ve eaten already.

NELSON

You can’t live on ice-cream and chocolate.

PENDLE JOINS HIM AND TAKES SOME JUICE.

PENDLE

(OFFERING HIM HER GLASS) Do you want some juice?

NELSON

I’ll use my glass.

PENDLE

What’s the matter with this one?

NELSON

I prefer my own.

PENDLE

Frightened you might catch something? I've told you I'm clean.

NELSON

Where's *he* tonight?

PENDLE

You banned him.

NELSON

I want you to stop seeing him.

PENDLE

I can see who I like.

NELSON

Not in this house, you can't.

PENDLE

That's why I'm going out.

NELSON

Don't. Stay in tonight. Please?

EXIT PENDLE.

NELSON OPENS A BEER.

A BLACK&WHITE CCTV IMAGE OF NELSON'S FRONT DOOR APPEARS ON SCREEN (PRE-RECORDED).

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) Don't go out much now. More trouble than it's worth. Never quite know what I'll be coming home to. I stay in and watch the footie. Some of the lads used to come 'round; but I put a stop to that.

I've thought about going on the sick, but what would I tell the doctor? I'm being lied to all the time? I feel like murdering someone? I'm having nightmares about finding me daughter lying dead in her room? I'm under siege in me own house? I sleep with a kosh under me pillow. I'm constantly searching everywhere in the house that looks like a good hiding place for needles. I go through the bins everyday looking for evidence. I open her mail, I check her phone calls, I keep an inventory of everything worth selling: jewellery, electrical goods. I count the spoons everyday.

I record everything. When I come home from work, I play the tape back to see if anyone's been 'round. I check to see if the tape's been tampered with, if there's any break in the recording. I sit in my front room and look at the monitor, watching the front door, for hours.

SCREEN OFF.

FIREFLIES 3

MUSIC. ON SCREEN IS ANOTHER FLASH FORWARD TO A POSSIBLE FUTURE WHERE NELSON IS STROKING AND BRUSHING LEIGH’S HAIR IN FRONT OF A REAL FIRE.

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LIFTS

NELSON'S HOME

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) When I was on the lorries, I was always a soft touch when it came to giving people a lift. It's a bit of company on long-distance, breaks up the journey. I used to enjoy dipping into the human traffic, finding out where someone's going, where they've been. I gave up the lorries eventually. It wasn't the driving, I've always loved it behind the wheel. I got fed up sleeping in the cab; can be a lonely business.

NELSON GETS INTO HIS CAR.

I never used to stop for hitchhikers in my own car. Except for one night. I've been out clubbing and I'm driving home. It's maybe three in the morning and it's raining, when I pass this woman with a toddler in a pushchair, bags of shopping slung over the handle, and a big dog. I'm not far from the 24-hour Tesco's so it doesn't seem especially weird to me, at that precise moment. I'm thinking, it can't be right, that, having to walk home at this time of night, on her own with all that baggage and a little kiddie. So I pull over and offer her a lift.

ON SCREEN THE WOMAN APPEARS AND GETS IN TO THE BACK OF HIS CAR (PRE-RECORDED).

She gets in: pushchair, shopping, Alsatian plus toddler; only

the toddler isn't really a toddler, it's a doll with a bottle of whiskey shoved up its arse. And most of the whisky has gone. She's convinced herself I'm a taxi. No sooner have we set off than she starts:

WOMAN (ON SCREEN)

Hey, driver, I've been in faster fucking hearses than this. I could have had a lie down in the back if it were a fucking hearse.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) I lean back to suggest she walks, but the Alsatian is up with the full curled lip, saliva everywhere. I drive in circles. She doesn't seem to know where she lives?

WOMAN (ON SCREEN)

Call yourself a fucking taxi driver? Don't you know where you're going? Take me home, you cunt.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) That's it. I stop the car and open the rear door. The Alsatian bolts, thankfully; I drag her out, she's still clinging to her shopping, and I spill her across the grass verge, followed by a drop-kick to the doll which sends her staggering off in search of her baby.

SCREEN OFF.

I think to meself, next time I want paying for this. That's when I first think about becoming a taxi-driver.

EXIT NELSON

STORIES

ON SCREEN, NELSON’S EYES IN REAR-VIEW MIRROR.

ON STAGE, NELSON IS DRIVING HIS TAXI.

LEIGH IS HIS PASSENGER. THEY ARE BOTH FACING
THE AUDIENCE.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) I always sit in the back of a cab ‘cause you
never know where the driver’s at. This one’s very quiet.

Interesting eyes. I’d say this one’s a listener. Probably sick of
telling the same old stories, day in and day out.

(TO NELSON) Did you hear about that murder at a car-boot
sale? Two women arguing over a plot. One of them drove
straight at the other. Turf wars at a car-boot, what’s the world
coming to, eh?

I saw a lad the other day walk into Oxfam, take a shirt off the
peg and replace it with the scruffy one he was wearing. I
thought, good-on-you; if you’re gonna thieve, try ‘n’ recycle
something in exchange.

Hey, Mr. Cabdriver, tell me a story, go on?

(PAUSE)

There was this girl and she had this boyfriend. She loved her
boyfriend and she loved to travel. So they went to Italy for
their honeymoon and they went to Pompei. She saw the
volcano. It was quiet and beautiful. She saw fossils of people,
their very last moments preserved for all time. When they

came back, her husband started to rumble, one complaint after another. For years, his rumblings got worse. She never knew if he would erupt one day. She had nightmares about Pompei. What might archaeologists find her doing in her final moment? Hoovering, probably. She wanted them to find her dancing in the front room with a man she loves or eating ice-cream on a beach with a complete stranger.

NELSON

There was this boy and he had this girlfriend.

He loved this girlfriend and he loved football. One of his friends was picked for a trial for Bolton Wanderers. He went along to cheer for him. The coach said they were a man short for the game and he asked the spectators if anyone had brought their boots? This boy who had come to cheer his friend put his hand up and they let him play. At the end of the game they signed him up as an apprentice. His friend was sent home. This boy was asked to stay and work for a few months. He was in digs. He missed his girlfriend. He went home to see her and never went back to Bolton again. He married his girlfriend and they had a little girl.

EXIT LEIGH.

DEPENDENCE

NELSON'S HOME. BLACK&WHITE CCTV IMAGE OF HIS FRONT DOOR IS ON SCREEN (PRE-RECORDED). HE IS DRINKING HEAVILY.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) I don't know why she has to have it. In her room, on her own. She takes an old belt and straps it around her arm; then she grips the end of the belt with her teeth, pulling on it like a dog until a vein swells like one of those long, thin party balloons when you first try to blow it up. Then in goes the needle. And her frightened of needles, ever since I can remember. I look around her room at the silver cooking foil creased and stained with a sticky black residue like bitumen, a spoon brown and twisted from the flame, a syringe like a used condom discarded where it falls and the debris of a beautiful daughter, pupils pinned to the back of her eyes, gauching in the corner.

ENTER PENDLE.

PENDLE

You don't know me at all, do you?

NELSON

I know 'feeling sorry for myself' when I hear it.

PENDLE

See, you understand nothing.

NELSON

What is it with your lot that makes you so unhappy? Eh?

The ‘easy-peel generation’ where everything’s too much
fucking trouble.

PENDLE

Oh please, buy a different magazine.

NELSON

Why can’t you just neck the odd tab and dance all night?

Whatever happened to taking drugs for fun?

PENDLE

Listen to ‘Mr. Party Animal’. Has a few mad club-nights
and thinks he’s an expert on drugs. Took you long enough to
realise I was injecting, didn’t it? You should have read the
signs, you should have helped me sooner.

NELSON

You’re the expert.

PENDLE

Go back to your bottle and get pissed like you normally do.

Fucking hypocrite.

NELSON

I’m drinking ‘cause you’ve made me a nervous wreck. And I’m
at home ‘cause I don’t have no social life any more ‘cause I
spend all me time looking out for you.

PENDLE

That’s your problem.

NELSON

How do you think I feel, having to search me own daughter
every time she comes in the house?

PENDLE

I don't give a fuck how you feel.

NELSON

You were unconscious, you could have killed yourself.

PENDLE

That bastard, I hate him, he robbed my purse.

NELSON

If you mix with low-life, what else do you expect?

Why do you want to punish me?

PENDLE

Now who's self-pitying?

NELSON

I've never hurt you.

PENDLE

You were never there for me.

NELSON

I couldn't stand the pain.

PENDLE

What, so you gave it me? I was a child.

NELSON

I've said, 'I'm sorry'.

PENDLE

It wasn't my job to be a parent to grown-ups who couldn't even deal with splitting up properly. It was your job to look after me.

NELSON

I'm doing that now, aren't I?

EXIT NELSON AND PENDLE.

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COUNTRYSIDE

LEIGH'S HOME.

MUSIC. ON SCREEN, IMAGES OF ROLLING HILLS

(ARCHIVE). ENTER LEIGH.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) The bloody doctor's only gone and put big Tommy the Yeti on Seroxat. As if he isn't mental enough, they have to prescribe him psychotic nightmares. I'm waiting for the headline, any day now.

That new cashier, Kearsley, at the petrol station, she's only gone and given her kids away. This new fella in her life says, "It's them or me: choose." So she's handed them on to the grandparents like cast-off bits of furniture.

Winston's daughter, Sandra, she's long-term agoraphobic. Hasn't left the house since she reached puberty. She has a teacher comes to the house once a week. I told Winston, I said, you should buy Sandra a nice pair of binoculars, like yours.

Ribble, down the road, apparently somebody dug up his lawn, broke into his house and laid the lawn in his front room. He woke up the other day to find his outside had moved inside. Word has it, he's the street grasser.

And here's me with a 'For Sale' sign. As if. Who's gonna buy this? I can't sell it and I can't afford the repayments, something's gotta give. I've written to the council, suggesting

they Compulsory Purchase before the tv crews arrive for the Yeti scoop.

People on this estate shouldn't complain so much. If they only looked up once in a while, instead of dragging their emotional baggage through the gutter, they'd see the hills all around us.

A bit of a walk and you're away from the security cameras and the alarms, the streets paved with chewy, the used condoms and syringes, the muggings and the fights – what have we got to fight about, eh? When we're surrounded by beautiful countryside. Why don't they go up there and get trolled?

Instead of hanging around the estate, doing an endless circuit of the shops, clusters of them rattling and gauching, thieving and dealing, with their runny noses and anaemic faces, a mess of open sores and makeshift bandages, waiting for their man, Trainspotting video in hand. If they have to have a bag, why don't they have it up on the hills with the birds and the sheep, not a crazy or a cop car in sight? Is that all my boys have to look forward to?

There's this lad outside the supermarket in a bit of a bad way. He's wearing a baseball cap under his hood so I can't see his face clearly but you can tell his eyes are pinned. His girlfriend's trying to get him up and away, she seems to sense something bad is going to happen. This totally wired guy appears from nowhere, screaming abuse at this lad, “Where's me fucking money, Surfer?”

The girl tries to squeeze between them, but the guy lets fly with a baseball bat on the back of this lad’s head. He doesn’t even fall down, just screams and holds his head. His girlfriend’s cursing at this guy running away and trying to stop the blood pouring from her boyfriend’s head. I feel sick and have to sit on the concrete. The supermarket staff are out on the pavement, offering to help. The lad keeps saying, “No ambulance, no doctors, no police...”

He staggers away, his girlfriend taking his full weight on her shoulders.

EXIT LEIGH

MAD SANDRA

NELSON’S HOME. FOOTBALL ON THE SCREEN WITHOUT THE SOUND (ARCHIVE). ENTER NELSON WHO IS WATCHING BUT FACES THE AUDIENCE. SANDRA IS A VOICE-OVER.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) It’s Sunday night, the football’s on with the sound off. I’ve opened a few cans early and I’m alone again, feeling a proper sadbastard, when the moby starts vibrating across me posh purple coffee-table. Caller unknown, but not withheld.

(PICKING UP HIS PHONE) Hello.

SANDRA

Which way do you like your cream-eggs?

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) She hangs up. I laugh. The phone rings again:

(INTO THE PHONE) Hello?

SANDRA

Hello, Nelson, would you like to come and lie down with me on my new shag-pile carpet?

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) She hangs up again. I laugh again. Phone rings again:

(TO PHONE) Who is this?

(TO AUDIENCE) Six times this happens, each message more suggestive than the last. Then it stops, as suddenly as it had started. She knows my name, my number, she knows I’m a cab-driver, what else does she know? I know her number, a mobile, nothing else. I wait as long as I can bear, then phone her back.

HE PHONES.

(TO PHONE) Hello, it’s Nelson.

(TO AUDIENCE) Silence.

(TO PHONE) Oh right, is this part of the game as well?

(TO AUDIENCE) Silence.

(TO PHONE) This is fun. Call me again when you’re ready to tell me who you are?

(TO AUDIENCE) Man, am I cool or what?

(PAUSE) She doesn’t ring back.

SCREEN OFF.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) Next night I phone her again.

(TO PHONE) It’s Nelson.

SANDRA

I know.

NELSON

Who are you?

SANDRA

Sandra.

NELSON

I don't know any Sandras.

SANDRA

Short for 'Cassandra'.

NELSON

Have we ever met?

SANDRA

You don't remember, do you?

NELSON

Does that sound really bad?

SANDRA

You were pissed.

NELSON

Was I? Where?

SANDRA

In a bar in town, you gave me your number.

NELSON

Damn. Wish I could remember. Which bar?

SANDRA

Why? Do you want to know what I look like?

NELSON

Yes, please.

SANDRA

I'm 21, long, dark hair, nice figure, I'm a student nurse, I used to be a part-time model but I couldn't earn enough.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) I take it back, there is a God and he has spoken to me.

(TO PHONE) I can't believe I don't remember.

SANDRA

I have to go now, get ready for work, I'm on nights. Call me sometime.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) Five minutes later, I'm texting her and she texts straight back:

ALL TEXTS APPEAR ON THE LARGE SCREEN AND ARE NOT SPOKEN BY THE CHARACTERS (PRE-RECORDED).

NOTE: TEXTS BELOW ARE IN ITALICS.

SANDRA

Just come out of the shower.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) Seriously horny. I'm texting her back:

Wot r u wearing?

SANDRA

Birthday-suit. Wot r u wearing?

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) Before you can say 'the future's Orange', it's exploded into phone-sex. Classic, male fantasy come true: drop-dead gorgeous stranger phones you up, out of the blue, wanting full-on sex. I double-check it's not an 0906 number.

Panic over. Final text:

Let's meet.

(TO AUDIENCE) This time, no reply.

(DIALLING) Next day, I phone, she answers.

SANDRA

Nelson, I lied to you: I'm not a nurse. I'm a lap-dancer. I didn't think you'd talk to me if I told you.

NELSON

(TO PHONE) Do you think that bothers me?

(TO AUDIENCE) All the time, thinking 'Holy shit, a lap-dancer – yesss!'

(TO PHONE) Let's meet.

SANDRA

We will, soon.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) Next day, more phone sex, then:

(TO PHONE) Look, Sandra, this might be enough for you but, if you're not prepared to meet, forget it.

SANDRA

(CRYING) Don't leave me, Nelson, please don't leave me.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) What?

SANDRA

You seem such a decent man?

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) Decent?

(TO PHONE) I'm sorry, Sandra; but I want more than phone-sex.

SANDRA

Okay, we'll meet. Only don't leave me.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) As if we'd been married for years. We arrange a place, a time, a date. At last. I turn up. She doesn't.

A few days pass, the phone rings:

SANDRA

Hiya, it's Sandra.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) All cheerful and horny as fuck.

(TO PHONE) Where were you?

SANDRA

I'm sorry, I...

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) More excuses.

(TO PHONE) Don't phone me again.

SANDRA

(CRYING) Don't leave me, Nelson. I want a baby.

NELSON

(TO PHONE) Woe. We haven't even met and you want a baby?

(TO AUDIENCE) Alarm bells. More tears, lots of them.

(TO PHONE) It's best if you don't phone me again. Try the Samaritans.

(TO AUDIENCE) She won't ring off. I have to put the phone down. Then it really kicks off. Full-on fatal attraction. Text messages, voicemail, abuse like you've never heard from a woman, threats to my property, to my gonads, to my life. Every time the mobile rings, I check the display for 'Mad Sandra'. This time it's 'caller unknown' so I answer – she's borrowed a mate's moby:

SANDRA

Hiya, it's Sandra.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) All cheerful and horny again, acting as if nothing has happened.

(TO PHONE) I am not the answer to your problems. Stop phoning me.

SANDRA

Why are you being like this?

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) More tears. I hang up. More threats, hatred. The phone won't stop ringing, I have to switch it off. Her last text, before I have to change my number, reads:

SANDRA

U r a fuckin pedophile u wanker.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) I text her back:

u spelt paedophile wrong.

(TO AUDIENCE) I still think, one night I'll be on the taxis
outside some sleazy club and this young thing'll slip into the
back of the cab with a bread-knife, saying:

SANDRA

Hiya, it's Sandra.

EXIT NELSON

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THE VISIT

LEIGH IS AT HOME. SEFFI IS A VOICE-OVER UNTIL HE APPEARS IN THE SCENE.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) So here I am again, on a Sunday night.

PHONE RINGS.

SEFFI

(VO) Leigh?

LEIGH

(TO PHONE) I recognise that voice: is that Seffi?

SEFFI

(VO) Yeah, how are you, darlin’?

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) Bloody hell, I’ve not seen him for years.

(TO PHONE) I’m fine and dandy, what you up to?

SEFFI

(VO) I’m coming to see you, if that’s all right?

LEIGH

‘Course it is, love, d’you wanna stay? I can make you up a sofa.

SEFFI

(VO) We’ll see.

LEIGH

When are you thinkin’ of? Are you still in London?

SEFFI

(VO) I'm 'round the corner at the old man's.

LEIGH

(TO PHONE) How is the old bastard? Anybody parked in his space lately?

SEFFI

(VO) They wouldn't dare. I'll be 'round in a few minutes.

LEIGH

Great, I'll get t'kettle on and skin-up.

SEFFI

(VO) Leigh?

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) Sounds serious.

(TO PHONE) Yeah?

SEFFI

(VO) Has anything weird happened to you recently?

LEIGH

(TO PHONE) What? Like weirder than what passes for normal 'round 'ere? Not that I can think of, why?

SEFFI

(VO) I'm on my way.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) Seffi's the only childhood friend I still see. Years might pass with no contact but we're always close again when we get together.

ENTER SEFFI. THEY HUG.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) Big hug, tea, spliff, niceties out of the way,
he starts to open up.

SEFFI

When I ‘phoned, I was kind of expecting you to say ‘I know,
Seffi’.

LEIGH

I know what?

SEFFI

I don’t know how to put this?

LEIGH

Spit it out.

SEFFI

I was in a library, I opened this book and this voice, clear as
a bell, said ‘Go and see Leigh’.

LEIGH

Wow, the voice mentioned me by name? What was the book?

SEFFI

The voice, it was God.

LEIGH

God?

SEFFI

Don’t laugh at me.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) I know he’s telling me the truth because his eyes wrinkle when he smiles.

(TO SEFFI) You’re sure it was God calling? I mean, that’s like more impressive than Graham Norton?

SEFFI

It’s happened three times. Last time I was in a public toilet.

LEIGH

God spoke to you in the Gents?

SEFFI

I knew you’d think I was crazy.

LEIGH

Did I say that? If God said, ‘Murder prostitutes’ or ‘I’ve decided to make you Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police’, then I’d think you were crazy. But why me? Why not, ‘Go and see the Citizens’ Advice Bureau’?

SEFFI

Maybe he knows you’ll listen?

LEIGH

The Samaritans listen, Seffi; there’s more to it than that. Look, I’d love to have said, ‘I know, Seffi, I’ve had a message too’; but I’ve heard nothing.

SEFFI

You can’t help me then?

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) Bloody hell, I've got the Yeti dancing with the devil on one side and the archangel Gabriel delivering messages from God on the other.

(TO SEFFI) Remember how, when we were kids, you seemed fascinated by our family going to church?

SEFFI

Dad hates all that shit.

LEIGH

I mean, we had to go, mortal sin if we didn't; but you, sometimes you'd actually volunteer to come along with us.

I thought you was nuts. Who in their right mind would ask to go to church? You even knelt down with us at home to say The Rosary.

SEFFI

Is that what's happening? I'm being 'born again'?

LEIGH

It's looking that way.

Blood will out. You're Polish for fuck's sake.

SEFFI

I don't feel Polish, I'm British.

LEIGH

Go home. To Poland. Go to a church there, see how that feels.

SEFFI

I don't know anybody there.

LEIGH

You will. You'll know your ancestors.

EXIT SEFFI.

(TO AUDIENCE) And off he trots, all the way to Poland. He

sends me a text not long after:

TEXT APPEARS ON SCREEN (PRE-RECORDED):

Thank you for advice. Not coming back. Your turn next?

SCREEN OFF.

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EXIST

LEIGH'S HOME.

NELSON IS AT HOME WATCHING HIS CCTV OF THE FRONT DOOR, WHICH APPEARS ON SCREEN.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) I suppose I knew with my first born, I'd have to trace my blood parents one day. Something kicks in when you have kids of your own: it isn't just about you any more. I couldn't do it while ever dad was alive. But when the cancer did for him, I found myself down the Records office in Ancoats, searching through endless microfiche until I found an address.

I don't tell mam, at first; but she knows. I ask if she'll look after the boys for the day. She tells me I'm making a big mistake.

I ask mam again what she knows? She only knows what's on the Birth Certificate: I was born Sofia, not Leigh. 1972. My mother was 18 years old – Lorraine Blackburn, a barmaid.

Father – blank. Mam suspects she was protecting someone.

Mam only met her once, at the hospital, when she promised

to take good care of me. I try on the names for size: Leigh

Blackburn, Sofia Blackburn, Sofia Tyldesley, Leigh Tyldesley,

Leigh – that's me. Wonder what my father's name is?

Eventually, I trace my mother to a probation hostel in Bolton.

She agrees to meet. How will I know it's you?

“I'll recognise you,” she says.

And she does. I call her Lorraine, she calls me Leigh, as a mark of respect, I guess. She looks older than her years.

I could have been stood next to her for an hour and I wouldn't have recognised her as family. Same shape face, though, and hips. Her eyes are wrinkled like cooking foil, but they don't wrinkle when she smiles. She offers me a swig from her flask. I'm worried what I might catch. She doesn't offer again. I ask if that's the reason she's been to prison? She stares at me, trying to suss if I've come to look after her or to gloat? There are certain mannerisms we share. I couldn't explain them before but they make sense now, it's as if I've copied her. She introduces me to pictures of her estranged family. I can't seem to work up any genuine enthusiasm for half-brothers and half-sisters she isn't in contact with.

I make her tell me about the night of my birth.

“There was a thunderstorm and lightning flashed across the sky. Whenever there's a storm, I think of you.”

I stop her in her tracks. Who's my real father?

I regret the word “real” instantly. This dreamy expression takes over her face:

“I was a Bolton Wanderers fan. I had a job behind the official club bar, at the old stadium.”

She was young and attractive, she used to have a laugh with players, she was popular.

“Bolton was a down-to-earth sort of club then, not exotic like it

is now. There was a friendly match with an Italian side,
Bologna.”

Her face lights up. The players were in the bar afterwards.

The Italians took a shine to her, one of them she didn't want
to resist. Why not? Where else would she get the chance to
meet a man like that? With real silver buckles on his shoes?

I crack a joke: s'pose that makes me 'Bolognese' – like the
Spaghetti?

She makes no excuses for having me adopted; I expect none.

“Alfredo. His name's Alfredo Andretti.”

I hear a whisper in my head: “Sofia Andretti. Lives in Bologna,
married to an art dealer who treats her like one of his
treasures, in the Summer she rides around on a little white
scooter, her boys all wear blue cotton suits to church on
Sundays...”

Lorraine's head hangs from her neck like a ball and chain. I
don't know if it's the alcohol or the medication. But she knows
what I'm thinking:

“He doesn't know you exist.”

My head feels like a window smashing. Don't know why it
should bother me, I mean, there's plenty of people all over the
world don't know I exist. There's people on this estate don't
know I exist. Why should it matter?

ITALIANS

ON SCREEN, NELSON’S EYES IN REAR-VIEW MIRROR.

ON STAGE, NELSON IS DRIVING HIS TAXI.

LEIGH IS HIS PASSENGER. THEY ARE BOTH FACING
THE AUDIENCE.

LEIGH

I recognise those eyes? You’re the footballer, aren’t you?

NELSON

More of a “might have been”, me.

How’s life in Pompei?

LEIGH

I left him.

NELSON

My ex locked me out one day and told me through the
letterbox, I’d left home. All I could see were her eyes.

LEIGH

Did you watch the football?

NELSON

I heard it on the radio. I’ve never seen so many Italians in
Manchester. There was more in town than there was at Old
Trafford.

LEIGH

I know, I was sat with most of them.

NELSON

Should have been United playing. Champions League Final at

Old Trafford between two Italian clubs? Doesn't seem right somehow.

LEIGH

The English weren't even watching the game. It was as if the Italians in the pub didn't exist.

NELSON

So what was in it for you?

LEIGH

I wanted to sit with them.

NELSON

Why? Do you speak their lingo?

LEIGH

No. I found out this week me real dad's Italian. I just wanted to be around them, feel what that means.

NELSON

Have you met him?

LEIGH

No. *He* was a footballer – for Bologna. Met my real mum when they played Bolton in a friendly.

NELSON

Oh aye, when was that then?

LEIGH

Must have been 1971.

NELSON

Who told you that?

LEIGH

My real mum.

NELSON

Don't take me wrong, but there's not much I don't know about Bolton Wanderers and I'm telling you, Bolton have never played Bologna, in a friendly or otherwise.

EXIT LEIGH AND NELSON.

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THE MESSAGE

NELSON’S HOME. ENTER NELSON, CARRYING A BASEBALL BAT. HE HAS JUST RETURNED FROM A VISIT TO THE BROWN HOUSE AND HE’S WIRED.

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) The message will go out now, loud and clear. Don’t mess with this nutter. I don’t care who I take out. Let him wake up in hospital. Or the fucking morgue, I don’t give a shit. They can send me down, I’ve had enough. The word’ll spread. Nobody hits my little girl. No more threats. If anybody comes to this house, they know what to expect.

ENTER PENDLE

PENDLE

What do you think you’re doing?

NELSON

What I should have done a long time ago.

PENDLE

You stupid fuck, you’ve hit the wrong person.

NELSON

Do you think I’m bothered? They’re all the fucking same.

PENDLE

They’re not all the same.

NELSON

One of them scumbags hit you.

PENDLE

You don't know the half of it.

NELSON

You mean they've hurt you before?

PENDLE

I don't go to the Brown House, you fucking moron. I wouldn't score gear on me own doorstep.

NELSON

Like I care where you get it from?

PENDLE

You don't realise what you've done, do you?

NELSON

What you defending them for?

PENDLE

It wasn't them.

NELSON

Then you should have told me who it was?

PENDLE

You've made everything worse. They'll be after you and they'll be after me now.

NELSON

I'll batter them all.

PENDLE

Oh yeah, the big hard man.

HE RAISES THE BAT TO HER.

NELSON

I did it for you.

PENDLE

I never asked you.

PENDLE GRABS HER THINGS AND EXITS.

NELSON

(CALLING AFTER) This is your doing. All this is on top
because you can't say 'no' to a bag of shit.

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VIRUS

LEIGH AND NELSON ARE IN A CINEMA IN RELATIVE DARKNESS, ROWS APART AND UNAWARE OF EACH OTHER, WITH POPCORN ETC. THEY ARE BOTH FACING THE AUDIENCE. THE SCREEN IS ON, BUT THERE IS NO ACTUAL FILM PLAYING.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) There's this woman and this man, right, and they're trying *not* to fall in love – it's a romantic comedy, you know?

NELSON

(TO AUDIENCE) These terrorists, you see, they've released this virus on the West that makes people fall in love. Which sounds great, but nobody's got any time for anything else.

LEIGH

The buses have stopped running and there's no more pizza deliveries; but there's parties on the beach and in the park, the supermarkets have turned into restaurants and the shopping precincts into playgrounds, city centres into amusement parks, peaceful demonstrations are breaking out in every town and city, all the hospital beds are full –

NELSON

Of people shagging. The House of Commons has turned into one big televised orgy, the prisons are overflowing 'cause no one wants to leave, police and criminals are dancing to the

same tune –

LEIGH

But there’s just too many Christmases and birthdays all at once.

NELSON

Those that haven’t got the virus are trying to inject themselves with it –

LEIGH

And those that have got it are trying to kick the habit. There’s only the hero and the heroine who seem to realise what’s going on. They’re trying really hard to resist each other. I don’t know how much longer their hormones can hold out –

NELSON

Woe, hang on a minute, here we go, they’re about to get their kit off –

NELSON’S MOBILE FONE RINGS. HE FUMBLES TO ANSWER IT.

LEIGH

Don’t you just hate it when that happens? Always at a choice moment in the film. Whoever he is, I hope he dies of embarrassment.

NELSON

I can hear it’s Pendle. She doesn’t seem to realise she’s phoned me, she must have pressed a button by mistake.

VOICE-OVER OF MOBY: A MUFFLED ARGUMENT IS

TAKING PLACE (NOTE: PRE-RECORDED).

LEIGH

(TO WHOEVER IS RESPONSIBLE) Switch it off, you tosser,
we can't hear the film.

NELSON

(TO PHONE) What's goin' on ? Who's there? Answer me!

(TO AUDIENCE) I can hear Sofa-Surfer in the background,
threatening somebody with a syringe. They're mugging
somebody in the street. I can hear Pendle shouting -

LEIGH

Piss off out the cinema, will you?

NELSON AND LEIGH STAND UP SIMULTANEOUSLY AND
LOOK AT EACH OTHER ACROSS THE CINEMA.

SIEGE

OUTSIDE LEIGH’S HOME. IT IS LATE AT NIGHT.

FLASHING BLUE POLICE LIGHTS IN BACKGROUND.

NELSON IS PART OF THE CROWD WHO HAVE

GATHERED. THEY BOTH SHARE THE STORY-TELLING.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) The tv cameras have been camped outside next door’s all day and into the night. There’s armed police everywhere. Tommy the Yeti’s refusing to come out. A proper siege situation he’s got himself into. They’re blaming him for a fire in a derelict house on the other end of the estate. I heard -

LEIGH & NELSON

There’s only a cat lives there. What’s it matter?

LEIGH

I’ve tried telling the coppers not to wind him up. It says on his medication: *avoid contact with the eyes...*

NELSON

... avoid contact with the police.

LEIGH

I call over the back fence:

LEIGH & NELSON

(CALLING) Tommy? Tommy?

LEIGH

(CALLING) Do you want me to walk out with you?

(TO AUDIENCE) The police warn me again not to interfere,

they’ve reason to believe he’s armed with a machete.

LEIGH & NELSON

(CALLING TO POLICE) That’s his magic wand, you tossers;
he can’t cast his spells without his wand.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) They won’t listen. Bollocks to them, they’ve
stalked him long enough. I jump over the fence and through
the back door before they can say “rapid response unit”.

(CALLING) Take your coat off, Tommy, you won’t look so big.

LEIGH & NELSON

(CALLING) They’re frightened of you, that’s what it is.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) He shows me the manky cat under his coat.

(TO TOMMY) I’ll take care of it, Tommy, I promise.

(TO AUDIENCE) He hands me the cat. It has open wounds
where the fleas have half-eaten it alive. I try to stroke it, but
me fingers get caught in its dreads and pull its hair by
mistake. The cat bolts through a window and Tommy’s out the
back door after it. All I can see is a shower of truncheons
raining down on him. The tv cameras turn away. I’m
screaming at them to -

LEIGH & NELSON

(CALLING) Leave him alone.

LEIGH

I’m screaming at Tommy to stay down. I throw myself on him

to make them stop.

LEIGH & NELSON

A thin red line twists along the path as they drag him away to
a van.

EXIT LEIGH.

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PRISON

NELSON IS VISITING PENDLE IN PRISON.

SHE IS ON STAGE AND THERE IS ALSO A LIVE CCTV

IMAGE OF HER ON THE SCREEN.

NELSON

I thought it'd be me end up in here?

PENDLE

In a women's prison?

NELSON

Take a tip from me – get yourself a clamshell fone.

PENDLE

I'm sorry you had to hear that.

(PAUSE) Dad, I'm clean.

NELSON

Are you? At least I know where you are. Being in here's one thing you can't lie about.

PENDLE

It's for the best I got sent down.

NELSON

How can you say that?

PENDLE

I've had to straighten myself out. I'm not goin' back on the gear, I swear.

NELSON

I could be a bit more sympathetic if you had something wrong

with you.

PENDLE

Sorry I don't have your choice of social problem.

NELSON

If I kill *him*, will that stop you taking gear?

PENDLE

You're not listening. I'm clean. I can see things for what they are. I won't be seeing him again, ever.

NELSON

You'll be back on it again.

PENDLE

Don't bring me down. Stay away if you're gonna bring me down.

NELSON

I'd like to believe you. But I've heard too many stories.

I might not be there when you get out.

PENDLE

I don't blame you.

NELSON

Don't you?

PENDLE

Not any more.

NELSON

I can't save you.

SCREEN OFF. EXIT NELSON AND PENDLE.

SIGNALS

LEIGH IS AT HOME, AS IN FIRST SCENE, WAITING FOR HER TAXI.

PRE-RECORDED ON SCREEN, AS IN OPENING TO SECOND SCENE, NELSON IS WAITING IN HIS TAXI FOR HIS NEXT CALL. IMAGE OF HIS EYES IN REAR-VIEW MIRROR, WITH CB LIGHT FLASHING. NELSON PICKS UP THE RECEIVER AND ANSWERS.

NELSON (ON SCREEN)

Yeah, this is Nelson. (PAUSE). I've been here all the time.

LEIGH PICKS UP AN OFFICIAL LETTER, LOOKS AT IT BRIEFLY AND THROWS IT AWAY.

LEIGH

(TO AUDIENCE) Fuck it, If the Building Society wants the house that much, they can have it. They can repossess the house, I'll repossess my life.

NELSON (ON SCREEN)

'Course I know it; it's on the other side of the estate. Where is she going? (PAUSE). Airport? I'm on my way.

LEIGH

SHE PICKS UP ANOTHER OFFICIAL LETTER AND DOES THE SAME.

What do I care? I'm Leigh Tyldesley, I'm divorced, it's official. I told the boys: you'll have to go and live with your dad for a while. If he won't have you, the council will. You should have

seen his face at the door when I dropped them off. He thought he'd never see them again.

NELSON (ON SCREEN)

This is my last call. (PAUSE) No, forever. (PAUSE)

Yeah, you heard, I quit.

SCREEN OFF.

LEIGH

Plane flies in two hours. Taxi's booked. Not long now. The boys will come back to me one day. I'll find work. Learn the language. Buy a little house on a hill. Let the rumours spread in the village. Enjoy the mystery. And in the Summer, I'll walk in my bare feet with the fireflies.

NELSON ENTERS AND WALKS OVER TO LEIGH AND TAKES HER SUITCASE.

NELSON

Sorry I'm late, is this your case?

PAUSE AS THEY LOOK DIRECTLY AT EACH OTHER FOR A MOMENT. FLASH OF FIREFLIES ON SCREEN.

I didn't realise it was you.

If I'm honest, I wasn't gonna answer the call.

LEIGH

You were right: Alfredo Andretti – he's the ice-cream man.

NELSON

I know.

LEIGH

I probably bought a lolly off him as a little girl. He could have said hello any time he wanted.

NELSON

I'm sorry.

LEIGH

Not your problem. You're not on earth to save me, are you?

NELSON

You're only 'round the corner from me and I didn't even know you existed.

LEIGH

Will you listen to my story?

NELSON

If you help me tell mine?

NELSON TOUCHES HER FACE. LEIGH TOUCHES HIS FACE. NELSON PICKS HER UP AND SPINS HER ROUND MUSIC. THEY DANCE.
PLAY ENDS.