

RULE 43

By

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CAST: 1 Male 1 Female

CHARACTERS

MALE

John Smith

Smith's Dad

Governor

FEMALE

Officer

Smith's Mam

Smith's Wife

Teacher

Prison Chaplain

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SCENE 1 – THE VISIT

SMITH’S CELL IN THE SEGREGATION UNIT. THIS IS THE PUNISHMENT BLOCK SO THE CELL IS MINIMAL WITH REINFORCED CARDBOARD TABLE, CHAIR AND BED.

PLAY OPENS WITH SMITH DRUMMING ON HIS INVERTED BED-PAN. HE STOPS DRUMMING. TIDIES HIS CELL. RE-ARRANGES THE FURNITURE AND THE ITEMS ON HIS TABLE, INCLUDING AN EMPTY PHOTO-FRAME. HE LAYS OUT LETTERS, AFFECTIONATELY, ON THE TABLE, IN THE SHAPE OF A CRUCIFIX. HE TAKES OUT A FRAGMENT OF MIRROR HIDDEN ABOUT HIS PERSON. HE CHECKS HIS APPEARANCE.

SMITH

She’ll be here soon. Well, tomorrow actually. I’ve been getting ready ever since I heard she was coming. I’ve sent her a Visitor’s Order so there shouldn’t be any problems. Look at this room: you wouldn’t think I’d been tidying it for hours, would you? (CHECKING THE SPY-HOLE IN THE DOOR) I’ve shoved a piece of cloth in the Judas Hole so we won’t be disturbed. (GOING BACK TO THE TABLE) I call this my altar. It’s not much, I know. I wonder what she’ll be wearing? I hope she wears the necklace I stole for her. I was always a bad thief. And she was always good at stealing men’s hearts. I wonder what we’ll talk about this time? I’ve had some visitors over the years, me. At first, I couldn’t get enough. One visit every four weeks for less than an hour.

There was that Quaker fella used to come and see me, said he was trying to help me find a new life. He's dead now.

There's been a few women send me photos, you know, in all the gear: red basques and black suspenders. None of them ever came visiting, of course; but I'd get the dirtiest letters with these photos. What makes a woman do that, I wonder?

The screws were pleased.

After a few years, I didn't want visitors or mail. I remember refusing a visit from an old schoolmate. I don't know how he got wind of where I was or even what he wanted from me; but I wouldn't see him. I've done that time. I can do without having me nose rubbed in it. This is my world – in here.

When you wake up in the morning, that day is over. It's one less to do. The number of years repeat in your head, over and over in an attempt to understand them. Have you ever tried counting to a million? Have you ever tried imagining a million?

You divide the day into finite parts:

5.30am. Wake up. Stare. First smoke, despite promising yourself you'd wait 'til breakfast.

6.30. Ablutions.

7.00. Collect breakfast, return to cell. Eat breakfast. Or pull faces at it. Second smoke, despite promising yourself you'd wait 'til brew-time.

7.30. Prepare flask of diesel for brew-time and drink half contents of flask with third smoke.

8.15. Work, education or space-out.

10.00 Brew-time. No smokes. Scrounge smoke.

11.30. Return to cell and plan how to get more smokes.

12.00. Collect dinner. Return to cell. Eat dinner. Or make little models with it.

12.59. Have a shit, whether you've eaten or not. Wonder if you'll ever be able to shit at any other time when released.

Observe colour of turds: red means trouble again with piles, black means aim to reduce consumption of cannabis, normal colour means make application to see Hospital staff immediately.

1.15. Return to work, education or space-out for second time.

4.30. Return to cell and plan how to get some blow to help you sit through "Top of the Pops".

5.00. Collect tea. Clean bed-pan with diesel left from flask.

5.45. Head straight for tv room. Try unsuccessfully to scrounge a smoke. Prefer "National News" to "Neighbours", but more smoke to inhale in Neighbours' room. It's a blur of nicotine.

7.30. No blow. "Top of the Pops" hurts, it really hurts.

8.30. Bang-up. Radio 4.

10.30. Lights out. No blow. No smokes. Think about day's events, conversations. Every detail up on the ramp for inspection.

Midnight. Stare myself to sleep.

(GOING BACK TO HIS TABLE) Now there's you. I've not really changed my mind about visitors. You're an exception. A visit from you is a joy to anticipate, a pleasure to experience and, afterwards, an event to savour for days, weeks, months until it loses its taste and word arrives you will return. I suspect you love me for who I am; but I cannot be sure until you visit me again. I wonder what will become of us? Why don't you come? Why don't you come?

FEMALE OFFICER APPROACHES HIS CELL.

Piss off!

OFFICER

Now then, Smith, there's no need to be like that.

SMITH

I want to be left alone.

OFFICER

You can't expect to make a fuss and then be ignored. The Governor's waiting to see you for Adjudication.

SMITH

What for? I haven't done anything wrong.

OFFICER

You're not playing the game, Smith. The entire prison service is creaking its way through a crisis and we're doing our best to hold it together. We can well do without awkward inmates making unnecessary waves.

OFFICER OPENS HIS DOOR, PEERS INTO HIS CELL BUT DOESN'T GO IN.

What's all this?

SMITH

Nothing.

OFFICER

I hope you're not hiding anything from us, Smith. You're not on the wing now, you'll find we're more regular with our searches down the block.

SMITH

I'll refuse to recognise the Adjudication.

OFFICER

You're only making trouble for yourself.

SMITH

I'll refuse to communicate.

OFFICER

You will, eventually.

OFFICER ESCORTS HIM TO ADJUDICATION

SCENE 2 – ADJUDICATION

OFFICER

Name and number to the Governor.

NO RESPONSE

It's Smith, sir, 123456. He's refusing to acknowledge the
Adjudication, sir.

GOVERNOR

Nature of the offence, please, Officer?

OFFICER

No offence as such, sir. Yesterday, Prisoner 123456 Smith
requested admittance to the Segregation Unit under Rule 43,
sir.

GOVERNOR

Reasons for request?

OFFICER

He won't say, sir.

GOVERNOR

No prisoners are allowed solitary confinement unless they
give their reasons why – you know that, Smith. Take him back
to the wing.

OFFICER

Sorry, sir, Smith has threatened to rear up if the request was
denied.

GOVERNOR

Since when did we respond to threats, Officer?

OFFICER

Never, sir. It seemed an appropriate course of action, given the prisoner's history, sir.

GOVERNOR

What are your reasons, Smith, for wanting protection? Who else is involved in this? No more games, Smith, just give us a name. Officer, has this man fallen into debt with anyone on the wing?

OFFICER

Not according to the other inmates, sir.

GOVERNOR

Has anyone been harassing him?

OFFICER

Not as far as I'm aware. sir.

GOVERNOR

You're not a nonce, are you Smith?

Is it a transfer, is that what you're after? Because you won't be transferred to a cushy open prison, you know? There's only one way out of here from the seg and that's backwards to a Category B prison, I hope you realise that, Smith?

I'm sorry, but I don't believe that no one else is involved.

Officer, I'm holding you responsible for finding out why this man has Rule 43'd.

OFFICER

Why me, sir?

GOVERNOR

You are the Officer who brought the initial charge?

OFFICER

Yes, sir, but –

GOVERNOR

I don't wish to discuss the matter in front of the prisoner.

OFFICER

Permission to see you in private afterwards, sir?

GOVERNOR

If you must.

OFFICER

Thank you, sir.

GOVERNOR

Meanwhile, keep Smith in solitary until we decide what to do with him. No privileges. Make sure his bed is up against the wall during the day along with those men on punishment.

OFFICER

I'll see to it, sir.

SMITH IS MARCHED TO HIS CELL.

SMITH

You never answer him back, do you mother?

OFFICER PUSHES HIM INSIDE.

SMITH

(IMITATING THE GOVERNOR) "You're not a nonce, are you Smith?" I'll tell you what a nonce is: a "nonsense" criminal, not

a proper criminal. Not your armed robber but your non-payment of fines, your debtor, your alcoholic, your smackhead, your pervert, your nutter, your domestic murderer and your innocent – in short, at least half of all those banged up in here are “nonsense” criminals, so don’t talk to me about nonces.

OFFICER

I’ll find out what you’re up to, you little bastard, locking yourself away like this and getting me into trouble. And don’t call me mum!

SMITH

Why don’t they just read my card on the door?

Number: 123456

Name: Smith

Date of Location: At birth.

Date of Release: Never.

You see, it’s all there on my card, what more do they need to know? I’m all right ‘til they come in. You can forget yourself in here. They can’t do anything more to me now I’m down the block. I’m as free as I possibly can be. Not that it’s freedom I’m after. You can steal freedom. I gave up on that a long time ago.

OFFICER UNLOCKS CELL DOOR BUT DOESN’T GO INSIDE. SMITH REMAINS INSIDE.

OFFICER

(RECITING) "Inmates are responsible for keeping their own cells clean and will be issued the necessary materials..."

SHE SLAMS A BUCKET DOWN.

"...every day for that purpose. During working hours a good standard of tidiness is required."

SMITH

As if I don't know the rules by now. She thinks prison is about cleaning cells, slopping out, no fresh fruit and no sunlight.

OFFICER

(RECITING) "Cells will be checked before inmates leave the Segregation Unit and disciplinary action will be taken against anyone found to have caused wilful damage to fabric or furniture. Graffiti is wilful damage."

SMITH

Truth is, I'd welcome hard labour: a chance to lose the skin on me fingers, to lose meself. If society says we are to be punished then we must be punished.

OFFICER

(RECITING) "All rubbish is to be disposed of in the appropriate manner and nothing is to be thrown out of the cell window."

SMITH

I know what you're thinking: should we allow ourselves to feel sorry for him? What's he in for? We need to know what awful

crime he committed first? He could be a mugger or a rapist or a serial killer? What if he's abused children? What do you think? If you really want to know what I'm in for, look in my file. It's open to everyone except me. Will it affect how you judge me? Does it matter that much what crime I have committed? We're all the same, aren't we? Locked up. Inside. Inside these walls. Outside we're different, inside we're the same. Let's just say, I'm doing a long stretch. Or at least, that's how it appears from where I'm standing. It's not sympathy I'm after. Every prisoner learns eventually how to do his time without whinging, even the innocent ones. It's the only way you can –

HE BEATS HIS DRUM.

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE.

GOVERNOR

(DELIBERATELY AMBIGUOUS) What was all that about?

OFFICER

Will you tell me what I've done wrong, sir?

GOVERNOR

I'm not sure if that one's right in the head.

OFFICER

Is this some sort of test, sir?

GOVERNOR

On the contrary, Officer, this is a delicate situation. I'm trusting you to rise to the challenge.

OFFICER

And nothing to do with me being a female Officer, sir?

GOVERNOR

For pity's sake, will you stop feeling guilty about being a woman?

OFFICER

It's not that easy in all-male company, sir.

GOVERNOR

I'm trying to help you learn what you have to do to survive.

OFFICER

Very well, sir. If I can find out why Smith has requested solitary, will I have finally proven myself?

GOVERNOR

I expect you to do your job; nothing more, nothing less.

Now, why on earth would anyone want to be locked away on their own?

OFFICER

Perhaps he's work-shy, sir?

GOVERNOR

There are easier ways.

OFFICER

A bit of peace-and-quiet, sir?

GOVERNOR

For an afternoon, maybe even a couple of days; but I've seen what solitary can do to a man. Most inmates would sooner be

horse-whipped.

OFFICER

A cry for attention, sir?

GOVERNOR

It's unnatural to want to hurt yourself.

OFFICER

Yes, sir, unless you don't like yourself, sir.

GOVERNOR

We can't afford to be soft with them or they take advantage
and that's not teaching them anything, is it?

OFFICER

No, sir.

GOVERNOR

It's up to us to give them a bloody hard time so they don't
come back, that's what the public wants.

OFFICER

Yes, sir.

GOVERNOR

We musn't allow ourselves to feel guilty for disciplining the
men.

OFFICER

No, sir.

GOVERNOR

It's them or us, remember that.

SCENE 3 – FAMILY

IN SMITH'S CELL.

SMITH

One day, you look over your shoulder. No reason, just... no matter. Next time, you find yourself thinking: if they were to hide a secret camera in here, where would it be? Under the white cardboard table, perhaps? The white cardboard chair? In the bed-pan? In the light? Ah, the bell, it must be in the bell. Before long, you've convinced yourself there's a secret camera in the alarm bell. You begin to turn your back on it to undress. You lean your bed in its way before you dare masturbate. And soon, you'll only ever stand in those parts of your pad not in direct view of the bell. I could tell you what happens when –

HE STOPS MID-SENTENCE, FETCHES HIS DRUM AND BEATS IT.

A very democratic instrument, the drum. You can make one out of next-to-nothing and almost anyone can learn to play it. Sometimes, I beat the drum until my fingers bleed.

HE BEATS AGAIN FURIOUSLY.

The biggest mistake I ever made, as a boy, was to run away from home. I thought my mam would be beside herself. And dad, I thought, would come to his senses and lead an expedition to find me. I spent five nights shivering in an allotment shed, sneaking back by day to steal food from the kitchen.

SMITH STEPS OUT OF HIS CELL.

AT PARENTS' HOME.

MAM

What we going t' do about this lad?

DAD

Leave him to come back when he's a mind to. He'll soon realise he's hurting nobody but himself.

MAM

Whatever you say, father.

SMITH

By the sixth day, I had realised my mistake. I was persecuting myself instead of them. They didn't give a damn about my condition. I should have stayed at home; that way I could've taken it out on them. When I got back, mam gave me a good hiding. It was usually the wooden spoon, but this time it was the rolling pin. He always made mam do the hitting. She's batter me and feel really bad about it afterwards. He said he daren't hit the kids himself for fear of killing us by mistake; but I know he was trying to teach mam.

MAM

John, have you stopped crying? Good lad. I had to punish you, you know that? I don't enjoy hitting you, you know that, don't you? I wanted to ask you to come home, you know that, don't you?

SMITH

She was so full of self-loathing, my mother, so lacking in self-respect. This galled me dad more than anything. When one of the kids had been beaten, he'd end up hitting her.

DAD

You shouldn't feel guilty about disciplining the children. It's them or us, remember that. I can't stand these feelings of guilt you have as a woman.

HE GRABS HER AND THROWS HER TO THE GROUND.

I came to this country, 17 years old. I was forced into labour camps in Essex, working all day on construction of new towns. There were hundreds of us: Irish, Polish, Czechs and Ukrainians. We would stick to our own kind. We had to. Everything was so very different here. We worked together and we slept together. Row upon row of men, no women allowed. We ate together and we toilet together. There was no privacy for anything. I might as well have been in prison. So I ran. I ran away to Burnley where I'd heard there were other Ukrainians who had found a better way to live than the camps. I never had proper documents. I was discovered and given the choice of being sent back myself or sending others back. I had suffered enough. So I named names. I don't know what happened to them, I don't want to know. I do not blame myself. Life has taught me to abuse others if the only alternative is to abuse yourself.

MAM

When I first met you in Burnley, I had a job and a personality of me own. I was a woman. I had blue eyes and you turned them grey. You wanted me hard, you said. I denied my femininity for you. I was flesh and blood and you turned me into stone. You old bastard. You enslaved me and had the gall to blame for behaving like a slave. You blamed me for having to live in this country, you blamed me for what happened to John. Truth is, I became a better man than you.

SMITH

She martyred herself for me dad. I think she was proud of the fact. There was little else to be proud of. Anyroad, she stayed with him until he died. Smith wasn't our real name. He never told us our real name. He was forced out of his homeland on pain of death. He wouldn't tell us why. He wouldn't talk about the Ukraine, not to us. At the Club, I'd get one of his old cronies to teach us a little Russian – "Ukranian!" he'd bawl, "Not Russian!" All I remember is: "Menya zovut John" (my name is John) –

OFFICER

Smith!

SMITH RETURNS TO HIS CELL.

SMITH

I'd been thieving for years. I thought by getting myself into trouble it would reflect badly on him; but whenever they came

'round, he'd have mam hand me over. I was taken into care at twelve. At last, I thought, this'll show them not to take me for granted. It was just like running away from home. He wouldn't allow mam to visit me. I didn't see them again 'til I was eighteen. Now I don't see her at all. I never really did much wrong in them days. Apart from thieving, all I ever did was run away. I ran away from care and they put me in approved school. I absconded from approved school and they put me in borstal. And when I did a runner from borstal, they put me in my first adult nick.

Prison was much worse than I'd expected. I never realised how good-looking I was. I was approached by this big crazy in the showers, carrying a cut-throat in one hand a ½ oz of tobacco in the other, asking which way did I want it? I didn't have the cool to ask if the smoke was Old Holborn? I was so scared, I bent over the sink for him. At least I didn't have far to go to throw up.

I fell into favour with this "Face" at the nick who gave me protection in exchange for little errands for him. On one occasion, he told me to do this old con for debt. I felt I'd suffered enough. You can get over a good hiding, can't you? It was pitiful. I kicked this old guy around his pad until I enjoyed it. I relished in the power of it. I made him strip bollock-naked and I made him beg. Then I beat him until he shit himself which probably saved his life. Screws whisked

him off to an outside hospital. No charges were ever brought. I don't know what became of him, I don't want to know. I don't blame meself. Afterwards, I bent over the sink and threw up. I vowed I'd never get sent down again. I was released shortly after my eighteenth birthday.

I decided to go home to see if I could make it work. After all, I hadn't tried since I was twelve. The reception from mam and dad wasn't exactly a re-run of the Prodigal Son.

SMITH STEPS OUT OF HIS CELL.

AT PARENTS' HOME.

DAD

What does he want?

MAM

He's come to see us.

DAD

He must be after something, he's never been to see us before.

MAM

He's had a hard time of it.

DAD

So has half the world, but they don't come to my front door looking for handouts.

MAM

We ought to help him.

DAD

You could best help him by not giving in to him.

MAM

He is our son. He has no one else.

DAD

He's work-shy, that's his trouble. He'd rather thief than put in an honest day's labour.

MAM

Can I tell him he can stay for a while?

DAD

Only if he pays his way.

SMITH

I didn't recognise my sister, she was nearly fifteen. She thought I was dead. I knew who she'd got that from. She wanted to live with me. I promised her she could soon as I got me own place. She asked if I could get her something to eat. I wondered why she couldn't help herself? Apparently, she wasn't allowed to eat until the Friday as a punishment. It was Wednesday. On Tuesday, she'd spent her dinner-money on fags. They were starving her for three days. She blamed mam, calling her every name under the sun. I took her out straight away for some fish-and-chips. And bought her some smokes. When we got back, all hell broke loose. Sis ran to her room, crying. Dad sat in the front room, giving orders. And mam –

MAM

John? I hope you didn't buy her anything?

SMITH

You shouldn't use food as a weapon, especially not with girls.

MAM

She stole her dinner-money.

SMITH

It's not a major crime, mam.

MAM

No, and I don't suppose you started with major crimes, did you? Look where you've ended up?

SMITH

I'm not going back.

MAM

I wish I could believe you.

SMITH

Sis is different, she's not like me.

MAM

She needs to lose a few pounds, anyway. Your dad says she's overweight.

SMITH

Don't you think she should be the judge of that? What right does he have, eh?

MAM

Your dad's only thinking of her welfare.

SMITH

Oh yeah, like when he shopped me to the police.

MAM

Don't let him here you talking like that.

SMITH

I'm going in there and having this out with him.

SMITH RETURNS TO HIS CELL.

SCENE 4 – MARRIAGE

SMITH

And that was that. The last I saw of mam and dad. Sis needed me there, I should have helped. She became anorexic. I could have helped; but I couldn't live in that crazy house.

Apparently, she sank to under six stone in weight before she latched onto the first fella who showed an interest and left home. She's never been to visit me. Not that I expected – she did write to me once; but I didn't reply. She couldn't have no kids of her own because she'd knackered her insides so she'd adopted two kids – a proper family. If her letter was anything to go by, she was as happy as a screw on bang-up. She wanted to know why she still had a food problem. I wrote several letters – never posted them. You see, if I started up a friendship again, it was only one more thing I could lose. Like Sis, I suppose I jumped at the first opportunity that came along as well. I met my missus while robbing a petrol station.

SMITH STEPS OUT OF THE CELL.

HIS WIFE SITS BEHIND THE SERVING HATCH WINDOW OF A PETROL STATION. SMITH PULLS UP.

SMITH

(ASIDE) Mmm, now that's the kind of girl I'd like to cash my cheques.

WIFE

(ASIDE) Calls that a car?

(TO SMITH) Pump number, please?

SMITH

Phone number, please?

WIFE

You haven't had any juice yet?

SMITH

Fill her up, will you?

WIFE

What with, horse manure?

SMITH

Fill her up with "lurv."

WIFE

Lead-free, is it?

SMITH

Four-star, 'til it overflows.

WIFE

Self-service only at this station.

SMITH

I'd better help myself then.

WIFE

(ASIDE) Not exactly what you'd call sophisticated.

SMITH

(ASIDE) After that, I called 'round every night to talk to her
through the judas hole in her window.

WIFE

I can't stand it in here. The money's crap and the boss is a right bastard. I'm just waiting for a chance to get away.

SMITH

Come away with me?

WIFE

In that shed? Get yourself a decent motor first.

SMITH

(ASIDE) So I did. I stole this really smart Nissan. That night she let me into the shop.

WIFE

What you doing?

SMITH

I'm taking the cash and the fags, we're going on holiday.

WIFE

What about the police?

SMITH

I'm not taking them. Look, report it when I've gone and I'll come back for you later.

WIFE

(ASIDE) So I did. It worked like a film.

THEY CUDDLE UP IN THE NISSAN

SMITH

Hold tight and we'll be there before sunrise.

Even the sea came in for us at Southport.

WIFE

He was especially handsome that night.

SMITH

I like the sea. No matter who you are, next to the sea you're just a pimple on a gnat's knacker.

WIFE

He said, I made him feel special: as though a light shone out of me, he said.

SMITH

For once in me life I felt balanced: unique and insignificant at the same time.

WIFE

So we got married.

THEY ADOPT A WEDDING-PHOTO POSE.

SMITH

Her mam and dad wouldn't come and I didn't invite mine.

There was only Sis at the registry office. It didn't bother us.

We didn't need anyone else. I tried to provide for us.

SMITH RETURNS TO HIS CELL

WIFE

They kept locking him away. Living with him was like a prison sentence for me. He expected me to change to suit him; but I resisted. The one thing you protect most is your identity. Don't let the bastards change you. I told him, I wasn't going to give in like his mother. He wasn't going to mould me. He became

more and more like his dad each time he got sent down. I had to fight back, even though it meant being hit.

SMITH STEPS OUT OF HIS CELL

SMITH

What do you want your own bank account for?

WIFE

So you can't spend it. It's money I've earned.

SMITH

I share my earnings with you.

WIFE

When you're here, yeah; but what about when you're not?

How do you think I manage?

SMITH

A wife of mine shouldn't have to go out t' work.

WIFE

I can't afford to rely on you, John.

SMITH

(ASIDE) I thought things would be different when we had a child. I expected her to settle into her role as wife and mother.

WIFE

(ASIDE) The next stage was to campaign for certain basic rights. If only I could get him to recognise my rights, I could cope with the system.

SMITH

Where are you going?

WIFE

Out.

SMITH

What about the baby?

WIFE

You look after her for a change.

SMITH

That's your job.

WIFE

I am entitled to go out occasionally, you know?

SMITH

Not on your own, you're not.

WIFE

I need to, John. If I don't get out the odd time, I'll crack up.

SMITH

What about me?

WIFE

You go out on your own.

SMITH

I want us to go out together.

WIFE

Look, we can't always get a baby-sitter. Besides, I need some time on me own.

SMITH

What for?

WIFE

Why do you think you need time on your own when you're treated like a prisoner?

(ASIDE) When you've exhausted yourself campaigning for certain basic rights they won't ever recognise, that's when thoughts of escape dominate your mind. You threaten to leave him, he takes no notice. You run away to your mum's, he still doesn't change his attitude. And when you're particularly down, you consider suicide.

SMITH

How could you do that? What about the baby?

WIFE

She was at my mum's.

SMITH

How do you think I felt, banged-up 24 hours a day, knowing you were out here trying to kill yourself?

WIFE

How do you think I felt coming 'round in the hospital?

SMITH

I know what a stomach-pump feels like.

WIFE

Then you know how low you can get, don't you? When you feel so lonely it hurts. When your guts are twisted like a steel rope and your mind buckles under the sheer weight of it and the only way to stop the pain is to...

SMITH

(ASIDE) I remember only too well how I thought her loneliness was as low as a person could get. But in here, it goes deeper still. Over the years, that loneliness becomes too familiar to be frightening. In fact, you start to crave it.

WIFE

(ASIDE) My last weapon was non-cooperation and non-communication: I stopped making his dinner and I stopped making love and we both stopped talking to each other. I'd come home from work, with the baby on one arm and carrier-bags full of shopping on the other to find a note:

SMITH

(ASIDE) "I'll be back soon – don't wait up".

WIFE

(ASIDE) It got to the point where I'd leave messages like: "I'm in the bath if anyone wants me".

He's read my mail to find out what I was up to and I'd read his address book to find out where he was and who he was with.

We pretended that we knew nothing about each other's whereabouts when, in fact, we knew everything. At least, that's what I thought until he got sent down for this.

SMITH

(ASIDE) You can't see it coming. And no one can tell you. A history of prison, yet you don't face the fact that you're a recidivist. Until it's too late. You do something really stupid or

something unforgiveable and they hit you with a big one.

WIFE

(ASIDE) Pregnant? The worst possible time to become pregnant. I can't tell him. I can't go through with it. I can't think straight.

SMITH

(ASIDE) And suddenly, there's all this heavy talk at the trial about life and death, about right and wrong. You can't ignore it. You feel remorse and you know you're lucky to be alive, but that doesn't help.

WIFE

(ASIDE) And you're forced to play God. You have to decide. It's the female burden.

SMITH

(ASIDE) Afterwards, you remember the good times. Things weren't so bad between you, really. She does love you. And, you might have found it difficult to say it in the past, but you do love her. Prison kind of concentrates your mind on things like that. Nothing is taken for granted.

WIFE

(ASIDE) It's too late, the damage has been done.

SMITH

(ASIDE) You have to brace yourself for a "Dear John",

SMITH RETURNS TO HIS CELL

WIFE

(ASIDE) John, this is my final note to you. I was always able to cope somehow with your lifestyle, in and out of prison a couple of years or so at a time; but this stretch is different. They sent me to see a Psychiatrist. I needed to know if I was going mad. She wouldn't tell me. She just said, no prisoner's wife has a normal life; but that, in myself, I am sane. I don't know who I am anymore? She said I was undergoing some kind of identity crisis. If I'm lucky, she says I'll rebuild a new identity for myself, but only if I can shrug off the person I was with you. If I'm not so lucky, well, they say men are sent down while women have breakdowns.

SMITH

Her sentence had ended, but mine carried on...

HE BEATS HIS DRUM

SCENE 5 – ART

SMITH'S CELL. SOME TIME LATER.

SMITH

They say, "crime pays". I'm a great believer in that. Crime pays for the coppers, crime pays for the prisons, crime pays for the judiciary and most of the legal profession, crime provides the media with most of its stories and it's the theme for at least half the programmes on tv and film. And crime paid for my education.

OFFICER APPROACHES HIS CELL WITH A LARGE BAG OF USED MATCHSTICKS.

Are you back for more?

OFFICER

(ASIDE) They get to recognise you by the way you walk.

SMITH

Where should we start today, mother?

OFFICER

(ASIDE) He's taken to calling me "mother". Some of them are like that, it's pitiful. I wouldn't mind but he's old enough to be my, well, husband, I suppose, in age; father in looks.

SMITH

Is it the jackboot approach, today, or the counsellor approach?

OFFICER

(ASIDE) When I first started, I was quite... concerned, if not

exactly sympathetic. I suppose they thought female officers would bring a gentle touch, you know, a civilising effect on a male world. As a female officer in a male prison, you have to be harder, more manly than the male officers or they blank you, worse still, patronise you. I'm constantly having to prove myself. Like this latest task the Governor has set me with Smith.

SMITH

Me dad always leaves you to do his dirty work, doesn't he mam?

OFFICER

(ASIDE) He's taken to calling the Governor his dad, which is worrying.

SMITH

I bet you talk about prison when you get home, don't you? You're serving time as much as I am.

OFFICER

(ASIDE) I've denied my femininity for this job. Abused my nature and my body. I weight train every day, you know, to build up my muscles. Governor approves of that – seems to like his women butch. Some of the officers think I'm gay, most of the prisoners do. If you're not fluttering your eyelashes and swinging your hips, as a woman in a male world, then you're gay. I'll show the Governor he can't get rid of me that easily. Truth is, I've become a better man than him and he knows it;

that's what he's scared of.

SMITH

I knew it was you by your soap.

OFFICER THROWS BAG OF MATCHSTICKS AT HIM

What are these?

OFFICER

Matchsticks.

SMITH

What for?

OFFICER

I thought you might like –

SMITH

What is it you want making?

OFFICER

Not for me, for yourself.

SMITH

Why?

OFFICER

Why not?

SMITH

You people usually like us to make you cheap Christmas presents for the family, don't you? Buy me some paints and I'll do you a nice portrait of your kids.

OFFICER

I'm not looking for bargains.

SMITH

No? Not even a long phallic truncheon for your trophies cabinet?

OFFICER

Sorry I offered.

SMITH

(ASIDE) If you have any skill at all, you have to sell it inside. And if you don't have a skill, you have to make one up. No talents are wasted in here, only lives.

OFFICER

I just thought that some kind of art and craft might give you something to do.

SMITH

Help me pass my time?

OFFICER

Yes.

SMITH

Occupy my mind?

OFFICER

Well –

SMITH

Keep me quiet?

OFFICER

Not exactly –

SMITH

Come off Rule 43, perhaps?

SMITH THROWS BACK THE BAG OF MATCHSTICKS AND OFFICER
LEAVES.

I used to paint. Trains. Each of those trains took me further down the track towards self-respect. When every decision is made for you, when your identity is denied, that little bit of control and self-expression you get from painting is a wonderful feeling. I used to give some of them away like a prat. Some even got stolen, would you believe? But what really got to me was this one screw, you know the sort – steals chips off your dinner plate. Well, I'd arranged with this screw to do him a painting for his local, "Railway Inn" or something. In exchange, he was to supply me with a battery for me radio. That's all, just a battery. Anyway, I delivered the painting on time, but no battery. Days passed, weeks passed, still no battery. Months passed. Lots of excuses, no battery. Until he actually forgot about it. It was obviously history to him. He was on to some fresh scam. Prisoners, of course, forget nothing. Not while you're inside anyway. I did nothing. It was one of those things. You get used to being cheated by the system. You get used to not being able to do anything about it. Until, one day, I learned that the painting was, in fact, hanging in the Officers' Club and that this screw had sold it without so much as a "do you mind?" to me. There are only so

many times you can bite your tongue. Occasionally, you say to yourself, I'm swallowing no more... Of course, I got a good kicking afterwards from a gang of them and a lengthy spell down the block. I stopped painting. I've not painted since.

SCENE 6 – POLITICS AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

SMITH'S CELL.

SMITH

I had to find a way to control time.

SMITH STEPS OUT OF HIS CELL

TEACHER

Mr. Smith, I wish you would reconsider the Open University course? I'm convinced you could achieve a credit, at the very least.

SMITH

I know I'm not thick. What should I study?

TEACHER

I think a foundation course in Social Sciences.

SMITH

Do I have to sit in class and take notes?

TEACHER

It's a self-study course. You'll join the men in Room 6, they're working on their own together.

SMITH

Are you the tutor?

TEACHER

Yes. I'll be available to help you one day a week with specific essay problems. I'll supply you with the necessary text-books.

SMITH

(ASIDE) She doesn't half fancy me. It's all there in her body

language.

TEACHER

(ASIDE) Oh no, he's looking at me in that funny way prisoners do – jaw dropped slightly, eyes squinting like he was constipated.

SMITH

(ASIDE) Notice the angle of the posture. She definitely rates me, I mean, why else would she be so keen to teach me?

TEACHER

(ASIDE) Why is it that prisoners imagine every woman fancies them? I like to think I might inspire them to become more involved in education. I'm just doing my job, is that a crime? I

SMITH

(ASIDE) There's no future in the relationship, I know that. It'd be different if I was on my way out. I could have broke parole, we could have absconded together, sent the jail a postcard from Morocco. It could never be between us. Don't get me wrong, it feels good to be fancied; but those kind of emotions in here are dangerous. You can't allow yourself the luxury of fancying a teacher or you start fantasising about her. Next thing you know, you're obsessive about her, jealous and protective about her, getting into fights with other cons about her, and then, before long, you're in a classroom together and it gets the better of you and... And then you're never getting out.

So you abuse yourself. It's not easy on the old libido. You need a regulation wank a day to convince yourself you're not going impotent. Twice a day now I'm getting on a bit. What I do, is sit on me hand 'til it goes numb and I can't feel it. Then I do it. That way, it feels like someone else is doing it for you. You daren't think about her or anyone else you're in regular contact with. So it's hard to get your fantasies going. Once you've done it with the same women you can remember and you've exhausted the dirty pictures on the walls and all the women on the telly, there's not a lot left. It's dangerous to feed your imagination; but it's even more dangerous to starve it.

(TO TEACHER) You got a husband, have you?

TEACHER

Yes.

SMITH

Family?

TEACHER

Two lovely children.

SMITH

A proper family, that's nice.

TEACHER

Thank you. Why do you ask?

SMITH

Happy, are you?

TEACHER

Well, yes, I suppose so.

(ASIDE) Here we go again, trying to suss if I'm eligible or not.

SMITH

(ASIDE) I have to try and think of her more as me sister than as a woman.

TEACHER

Will you give the O.U. a try?

SMITH

All right, sis, I'll give it a go, see what happens.

(ASIDE) I couldn't bear the thought of letting her down. So I studied. I studied until it hurt. Everything and anything I could lay me hands on. I studied and I learned how to articulate what I already knew.

First year course title: "Politics and the English Language".

TEACHER

(ASIDE) I taught him everything I knew about the power of words, how to enjoy them and how to use them.

SMITH

(ASIDE) I learned how those in power abuse our language to disguise their real intentions.

TEACHER

(ASIDE) I'd play at being the Politician and he'd reveal the meaning behind my words:

(TO SMITH) we seek only to rationalise this industry.

SMITH

Put thousands of people out of work.

TEACHER

Make this service more efficient.

SMITH

Cut its budget.

TEACHER

Encourage this service to seek sponsorship from private industry.

SMITH

Cut its budget.

TEACHER

Allow the workforce the opportunity to buy shares and invest in their own company.

SMITH

Privatise it.

TEACHER

Freedom to choose one's health care.

SMITH

Dismantle the welfare state.

TEACHER

Freedom to choose one's education.

SMITH

Dismantle the welfare state.

TEACHER

Freedom to choose one's pension scheme and personal insurance.

SMITH

Steal people's savings.

TEACHER

Protect freedom of speech.

SMITH

Extend the official secrets act.

TEACHER

Protect the individual.

SMITH

Increase police powers.

TEACHER

Address the need for penal reform.

SMITH

Build more prisons. Lock more people away.

TEACHER

Economical with the truth.

SMITH

Lying bastards.

(ASIDE) That's when I started to apply my knowledge to this place. She didn't like that.

TEACHER

We understand the needs of this particular sub-culture.

SMITH

That's us, the convict classes.

TEACHER

The Board of Visitors is empowered to investigate all complaints.

SMITH

None of whom are actual visitors, by the way.

TEACHER

Or you can petition the Home Secretary.

SMITH

Petition: a sort of chain-letter which is passed to everyone except the Home Secretary.

TEACHER

The Local Review Committee can recommend an E.D.R.,
Earliest Date of Release, following a satisfactory discussion
with the prisoner.

SMITH

Mind-games.

TEACHER

Everyone submits a report about prisoner 123456 Smith: his
Senior Officer, the Psychologist, Probation, the Chaplain –

SMITH

You.

TEACHER

(ASIDE) Everyone seems to have more of a say than I do.
They don't seem to have considered my report. I protest that I
probably know the prisoner better than my own husband.
They're not impressed. We have to go through the proper
procedure for assessment.

SMITH

More abuse of the English language.

TEACHER

Any signs of institutionalisation?

SMITH

That's cabbaging.

TEACHER

Deterioration?

SMITH

Means "nuttled off".

TEACHER

Homosexual activity?

SMITH

(ASIDE) I bet they're getting a kick out of this. Okay, let's tell
them straight. Hit them with the words, right between the
eyes:

(TO TEACHER) It's not like being really gay. I'm not into
buggery or anything like that. Just the occasional mutual
hand-job. I always revert back to heterosexual when I'm out.

TEACHER

Unfortunately, those aren't the words the Committee want to hear. Paranoia?

SMITH

What are they putting in the diesel?

TEACHER

Hypochondria?

SMITH

Did you know that a cold sore is the first sure sign of AIDS?

TEACHER

Is the prisoner experiencing ontological insecurity?

SMITH

Who am I?

TEACHER

Cosmological insecurity?

SMITH

What the fuck am I doing here?

TEACHER

Might I suggest an existential approach?

SMITH

Get on with your bird, do your time and stop whining.

(ASIDE) The real trouble comes when you've sussed their little mind-games.

TEACHER

(ASIDE) You remind the Committee of the prisoner's

outstanding progress on the O.U.

SMITH

(ASIDE) Too clever by half, they conclude, at playing the system. Suspected of knowing the right answers.

TEACHER

(ASIDE) I felt the wording of their reply was important.

SHE HANDS SMITH A WRITTEN REPLY.

“No Release Date recommended at this stage”.

(TO SMITH) I’m sorry, I tried.

SMITH

You can’t win, you can’t fucking win.

TEACHER

You musn’t hold anyone personally responsible.

SMITH

Where did I go wrong, eh? Should I have flirted with you, is that it?

TEACHER

I did my best for you.

SMITH

(ASIDE) She’s a nice person really, they’re all nice people.

TEACHER

Will you carry on with your studies? What do you think?

SMITH

I think I’ll make you eat your fucking words.

EXIT TEACHER. SMITH RETURNS TO HIS CELL.

SCENE 7 - HOME LEAVE

SMITH

So the Committee gives you a knock-back. Okay, that's happened before, you can handle that. But this time it's coincided with a long-termie you're friendly with getting out and "IT" surfaces...

And IT wants out. Everything else is bollocks. As the date of his release draws nearer, everyone's conversation consciously avoids the event. But IT won't be ignored. You see IT in the corridor when his walk becomes dizzy and he has to spread his arms to balance himself. You smell IT on his clothes and you taste IT in his cigarettes. You hear IT in his voice. You daren't touch IT and you swear you're gonna damage some fucker if they don't let IT out soon. And you're up before the insects every morning, pumping iron, working IT off. And "This plaque was unveiled by". And there are mahogany truncheons in the screws' trophy cabinet. And "Prisoners are to be properly dressed at all times". And you're out on the landing, bollock-naked, ordering the next boat south. And the entire prison is knee-deep in cling-film. And IT's in your mouth. And IT's up your arse. And IT wants out.

HE BEATS THE DRUM FURIOUSLY

(VERY MATTER OF FACT) And then he's released and everything's back to normal again – until the next time.

I remember how Home Leave used to feel. One pint and

you're gone for the first night. Two pints on the second night and you've paid for a fuck you can't cash in. Three pints on the third night, you're on the train back to the nick and you can't remember a thing about the Home Leave. You've got some draw for the troops but no memories to savour for yourself.

Next time, you've got it all worked out. Don't bother with the drink and the fuck and the drink and the fuck will come to you. Sit in a park. Eat rum-and-raisin ice-cream. Play football with the children. Talk to the park attendant. Dip your feet into the lake. Let life wash over you, make love to the world with your senses – and don't forget the draw for the troops.

Returning to the nick sober is a very purgatorial business. You smell of the street so the long-termers won't have anything to do with you; but you know you can make it now. You've recharged your batteries enough to see you through to release.

One going-out kit: one "spot-the-con" suit, a few quid in your pocket and a warning not to associate with any villains.

You've rehearsed what to say, in advance, if a copper pulls you. You've promised yourself you won't be back. But no one accepts they're gonna get caught and, well, it's difficult not to go back to the same town and your frinds are still at it and they're glad to see you and when you've settled in they've got just the sweet temptation for you to break into the action again

and, although you wouldn't admit it to anyone, you miss your big blue mug of diesel. Let's face it, how many times in your life have you felt a sense of belonging? Even if it is to a motley group of villains? You didn't serve that long last time and it wasn't that bad. The memories fade and, pretty soon, you're back in again; but this time...

HE BEATS THE DRUM

SCENE 8 – RELIGION

SMITH'S CELL

SMITH

What do you want, preacher?

CHAPLAIN

How on earth did you know it was me?

SMITH

I can smell religion. Did she send you?

CHAPLAIN

The Officer? Yes.

SMITH

You're wasting your time.

CHAPLAIN

Which is a privilege I can enjoy.

SMITH

This isn't exactly Death Row.

CHAPLAIN

I'm more into conversions than Last Rites.

SMITH

I like that: con-versions. I suppose you want me to purge
meself of all me sins?

CHAPLAIN

I've not come here to make you feel guilty.

SMITH

I'm not very good at right and wrong; but I do a great line in

self-abuse.

CHAPLAIN

I don't find words like "right and wrong" very useful in my line of work. I much prefer "compassion and tolerance".

SMITH

What do you want from me?

CHAPLAIN

I don't want anything, I've come to offer you something.

SMITH

Like what? A place in the choir?

CHAPLAIN

What do people want most of all from life?

SMITH

I dunno. Money?

CHAPLAIN

No.

SMITH

A drink?

CHAPLAIN

No.

SMITH

A fuck?

CHAPLAIN

No.

SMITH

What else is there?

CHAPLAIN

Tell me, does anyone ever relish the thought of dying?

SMITH

Most of us have in here at times.

CHAPLAIN

I don't mean suicide. Suicide isn't wanting to die, it's not wanting to live, there is a difference.

SMITH

So nobody really wants to die.

CHAPLAIN

Ideally, we all want to live forever, right?

SMITH

So?

CHAPLAIN

But that in itself isn't enough.

SMITH

Tell me about it.

CHAPLAIN

There's no point being eternally miserable, for example.

People want to be eternally happy. It's no use having one without the other.

SMITH

Simple.

CHAPLAIN

But even that is not enough.

SMITH

Not to an alcoholic, no.

CHAPLAIN

You can't be completely happy without omniscience.

SMITH

Knowledge.

CHAPLAIN

Exactly.

SMITH

Oh, I don't know, I find I can get along quite happily without fully understanding Einstein's Theory of Relativity.

CHAPLAIN

If you were immortal, you couldn't be completely happy unless you knew what life was all about? Am I right?

SMITH

If I was immortal, I wouldn't need Life Insurance.

CHAPLAIN

So the three things humankind wants most of all are: to live forever, to be happy and to know why they exist.

SMITH

I still say you should add a drink and a fuck.

CHAPLAIN

Very well, but let's put the drink and the fuck under

“happiness”, shall we?

SMITH

Agreed.

CHAPLAIN

There is only one thing required of you before you can have all these things.

SMITH

Don't tell me: American Express?

CHAPLAIN

Belief in God. All you have to do is make that one leap of faith.

SMITH

I have a visitor comes to see me. In my pad. For me, she's real. For others, she's like a unicorn. I believe in her and she's there. She tempts me, like you. Come with me, she says, and forget about prison bars. I enjoy her visits but I can't go with her. That one small leap of faith would be to deny what it is to be human: to suffer anxiety about not living forever, never achieving happiness and not knowing why I exist. I can't deny what it is to be human, I will not live that lie.

CHAPLAIN

I have found it to be a truth.

SMITH

I don't find words like “truth” very useful in my line of work.

EXIT CHAPLAIN

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

GOVERNOR

We can't keep him on Rule 43 indefinitely.

OFFICER

It's only a question of time, sir.

GOVERNOR

Is he still refusing to name names?

OFFICER

I'm convinced that isn't the problem, sir.

GOVERNOR

Do you know yet what the problem is, Officer?

OFFICER

It's a process of elimination, sir.

GOVERNOR

If you're finding the task too difficult –

OFFICER

I'm very close to revealing Smith's little secret.

GOVERNOR

We can't have inmates with secrets. Information is our means of control.

OFFICER

The Chaplain has discovered something which could provide the answer, sir.

GOVERNOR

It has been suggested by some of your colleagues that, for

your own sake, I should hand over the case to a more experienced Officer?

OFFICER

If I could have just a little more time with Smith, sir, I'm sure I could break him down.

GOVERNOR

If you fail, Officer, one of you will have to be transferred.

OFFICER GOES TO SMITH'S CELL.

SCENE 9 - PRIVACY

SMITH

What's wrong, mother? You do realise that all this time in solitary has developed my psychic powers? You can tell me all about your love-life.

OFFICER

If you're so intuitive, Smith, how come you don't know you're being transferred?

SMITH

What? They can't do that.

OFFICER

You can't stay on Rule 43 forever.

SMITH

If you transfer me, I'll go Rule 43 again, wherever they send me, so what's the point?

OFFICER

Not if they nut you off, Smith, there's no 43 for shop-eggs.

SMITH

You can't do that.

OFFICER

No?

SMITH

I'm not crazy. You know I'm not crazy. The Governor knows I'm not crazy.

OFFICER

All we have to do is catch you talking to your “visitor” friend
and –

SMITH

What do you know about her?

OFFICER

I’ve heard you, Smith, talking to her like she was in your cell.

SMITH

She does come into my cell, but –

OFFICER

See, you’re committing yourself.

SMITH

You know the pattern with solitary? It’s not unusual to talk to
yourself. Even the Home Office recognises that.

OFFICER

Then there’s the letters.

SMITH

I never send letters.

OFFICER

Not through us, no. But I’ve read a few of those your visitor
friend writes to you. Only I’ve noticed the different
handwriting. Very impressive. I didn’t know you were
ambidextrous?

SMITH

What do you want? I’ve no smokes, no blow, I refuse to paint,

I hate matchstick modelling, -

OFFICER

I need to know what why, Smith?

SMITH

What about this transfer?

OFFICER

That's up to you.

SMITH

If I tell you?

OFFICER

No transfer.

SMITH

In writing.

OFFICER

What?

SMITH

Write it down.

OFFICER

If you wish.

SMITH

Now.

OFFICER

All right.

OFFICER OBLIGES

SMITH

Sign and date it.

OFFICER OBLIGES. SMITH TAKES THE PAPER. SMITH ALLOWS
OFFICER INTO HIS CELL (THE FIRST TIME ANYONE HAS INHABITED
THE CELL AREA ON STAGE OTHER THAN SMITH).

SMITH

It's no big deal, really. All I want is a little privacy. I know that
sounds paradoxical: here I am, banged-up in solitary
confinement. That's privacy used as a punishment. I'm talking
about solitude, secrecy, anonymity.

OFFICER

You've got anonymity: 123456 Smith, what more do you
want?

SMITH

When I used to abscond as a kid, the thing I loved most was
running through crowded streets. I always used to run to
Manchester because it was the nearest city. It was big
enough to lose myself in. I could wander around the shopping
precinct without anyone recognising me. Sweet anonymity.

OFFICER

What do you mean by secrecy?

SMITH

When I was a child, I had a tiny plastic suitcase, no bigger
than a finger-nail. Inside that suitcase was girl's name. No one
knew that name. Not even the girl. Don't you see? My visitor

is my secret. Now you've confiscated her.

OFFICER

Solitude you do have. Too much of it.

SMITH

As a punishment, yes. Do you have a room where you retire,
if things are getting you down? Did you have a den as a child?
Somewhere you could escape to? To be alone for a while? To
Rule 43?

OFFICER

Thank you.

OFFICER LEAVES

SMITH

What about my transfer?

OFFICER

There never was any transfer.

SMITH GRABS HER (POSITION SHOULD ECHO MOMENT EARLIER
WHEN SMITH'S DAD GRABBED SMITH'S MAM).

OFFICER

I'm sorry, please.

SMITH

I can destroy you or I can destroy myself.

OFFICER

I had to find out. He made me do it.

SMITH

Which is it to be, mother?

OFFICER

Let me go, John. You wouldn't hurt your mother.

SMITH

You always do what he says, don't you?

OFFICER

John, your sister, what about your sister? Think of her.

SMITH

She always blamed you; but I knew it was really him.

OFFICER

That's right, it was him. He's the one you should destroy.

SMITH

I fought him that day for starving Sis. I rained down blows
onto his old Ukranian head and all the while he was smiling.
Smiling because, at last, I was fighting back.

HE LETS HER GO. ALARM SOUNDS.

You see, dad, I'm not really a people-hater, that's the
difference between us.

SMITH RETURNS TO HIS CELL

SCENE 10 – ADJUDICATION

SMITH DISMANTLES THE PERSONAL BELONGINGS ON HIS TABLE. HE TAKES ONE LAST LOOK AT THE EMPTY PHOTO FRAME AND PLACES IT FACE DOWN ON THE TABLE. HE TAKES UP HIS DRUM AND SLOWLY TAPS A MONOTONOUS BEAT.

SMITH

Corrosion.

That's what it is.

Prison fatigue.

You don't resign.

Resignation enters you

and says, rest.

PLAY ENDS