

There are six identical orange plastic seats in a row at the very front of the stage. There's a two-metre gap between each seat.

'Oompa Loompa' sung by the Oompa Loompas, from the film Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, is heard.

During this song three actors appear from one side of the stage and two others appear from the other side. They walk casually towards each other in a line, stop, turn and face the audience.

From left to right they are WILLIAM, JACK, EVA, EMILY and LAURA. They are all about fifteen/sixteen years of age. They stand there for a while and look at the audience.

They then look at each other. They seem to be sizing each other up. In unison they walk towards their seats and sit down.

This should all last one and half minutes.

As they sit the Oompa Loompas' song comes to an end.

Lights.

WILLIAM. You're depressing me now.

JACK. Really?

WILLIAM. You see, you've lost me. At the beginning I was with you. But not now. I'm a little disappointed.

JACK. Sorry.

WILLIAM. You really think that? You've thought it over, come to an opinion, you believe that?

JACK. It is popular.

WILLIAM. Well, so is body-piercing but that isn't a good thing, is it?

JACK. I suppose.

WILLIAM. So let's look at the facts. A single man lives in a castle in the middle of... where is it set again?

JACK. Film or book?

WILLIAM. There's a difference?

JACK. Both films changed some details. It doesn't really matter.

WILLIAM. Well, in the book it's set where ever it's set... and this man lives in his big house in the middle of the town. He lives with dwarfs. Nothing wrong with that. But they're orange. Orange dwarfs with green hair.

JACK. And there's only twenty of them making the world's supply of chocolate... none of this is meant to be realistic.

WILLIAM. But why make them dwarfs? Why the green hair? Why make them orange in the first place?! Can you see where I'm going with this?

JACK. Kind of.

WILLIAM. What's wrong with the ordinary?

JACK. It's for children. Ordinary's boring, maybe?

WILLIAM. Which is my original point about these children's writers! As if a little boy who shares a giant bed with his grandparents... four of them! As if he'd ever in the real world win this extraordinary chocolate empire!

JACK (*groans*). Yeah.

WILLIAM. You know in the real world it would have been that fat German boy who falls into the chocolate lake at the beginning of the tour. In the real world he's the

winner.

JACK. I think I might have to...

WILLIAM. This is how it really ends. He falls in. His father gets these big-time lawyers to sue the shit out of Willy Wonka. They look into his shady past, his very dodgy personal life with those orange midgets. He's dragged through the tabloids with paedophilia ringing in his ears. They make shit out of him! Willy Wonka is no more. He's done. He's doing twenty-five years in a high-security prison being passed around his fellow prisoners like the proverbial box of Quality Street. In the outside, the Germans win, 'cause let's face it, the Germans always win. The fat German kiddie...

JACK. His name is Augustus.

WILLIAM. Right, Augustus... well, he inherits everything as part of his settlement. He gets it all. And because he's a fat glutton he can't stop eating all this chocolate. The more the Oompa Loompas make, the more Augustus eats. He's eighteen years old and forty stone. One day he wakes up, stretches for the television remote and dies of a massive coronary sclerosis. That is the real world. Do you understand this? Where exactly are you getting confused?

JACK. It's only a children's story.

WILLIAM. It's a lie! What's the point? What are they telling us?

JACK. What are who telling us?

WILLIAM. The writers! Our parents! Harry fucking Potter!?! In the real world he's still under the stairs. He's a thirty-year-old retard who's developed his own under-the-stairs language!

JACK. The point is...

WILLIAM. Yes?!

JACK. The point is... is that children don't want to read the true stories. What child wants to read the news?! It's just escape. It's important that we dream of other things.

WILLIAM. Fuck off! Life's too short. If the world is going to evolve in any way... children should be told what's really happening. Cold, clear facts... that's what's taken us down from the trees, that's what powers economy...

JACK. A lot of these children's stories are metaphors. The writers are expressing important issues in creative ways!

WILLIAM. 'Expressing important'...?! You see, you're depressing me again!

JACK (*to himself*). Fuck's sake.

WILLIAM. Do you think any eight-year-old finishing reading *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* thinks anything other than, 'I'd love a Never-ending Gobstopper, Grandpa!?! Listen to me, John...

JACK. It's Jack.

WILLIAM. They're trying to keep children young! Adults. Publishers. Fucking writers. They don't want children thinking for themselves. They see children as a threat. They want to keep everything 'fantasy'. This J.K. Rowling woman! She is the enemy. She should be taken out. Erased. Removed. Exterminated.

A pause.

JACK. So that's what you're doing in a Harry Potter Chatroom? Trying to drum up some interest in an assassination attempt on J.K. Rowling?

A slight pause.

WILLIAM. Well, are you interested?

A slight pause.

JACK. I can't. I have to do my geography homework.

Lights.

EVA. But I was younger then and she just came on the scene, remember?

EMILY. Yeah.

EVA. You're ten years of age and that's a critical age. You're starting to feel uncomfortable in your childishness, aren't you?

EMILY. It's the hormones.

EVA. And the video with her at school in her school uniform and pigtails...

EMILY. She looked lovely.

EVA. You wanted to be her, didn't ya?

EMILY. She didn't have her tits done then?

EVA. That was much later.

EMILY. But even then they were a decent size. Certainly a B-cup.

EVA. But at ten you wanted to be her. And that video... wasn't it a bit creepy... in

hindsight... but that thing she was doing with her tongue. It was very sexual.

EMILY. We didn't notice.

EVA. We were young and it wasn't for the kiddies.

EMILY. It was for the older boys and the daddies.

EVA. She's in her school uniform with her pigtails and sticking out her tongue but it's subtle. Flicking it in and out like a little parrot.

EMILY. It was a bit seedy.

EVA. So I'm watching that video after not seeing it since I was ten... and I have to say I felt betrayed by Britney. You know how her songs and videos were all about that journey from girl to woman...

EMILY. Yeah.

EVA. And it sort of felt good, didn't it? Like Britney Spears was a part of your puberty.

EMILY. I remember having my first period and listening to 'I'm Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman' and thinking, 'Thanks Britney. My sentiments exactly!'

EVA. She felt like a spokeswoman.

EMILY. Oh, definitely.

EVA. But as I watched 'Hit Me Baby One More Time' and all that sexual stuff with her tongue and just how cropped that crop-top was...

EMILY. Was her belly button pierced back then?

EVA. Probably.

EMILY. Sorry go on.

EVA. I got really angry over that betrayal. It's no longer Britney who's talking to us but some pervert record producer. He's got this vision, this plan of turning every ten-year-old girl in the Western world into a tongue-flicking, crop-topped, belly-button-pierced temptress.

EMILY. Have you got your belly button pierced?

EVA. Yeah, of course.

EMILY. Did it hurt?

EVA. It's not as bad as you hear. But anyway Britney, Britney...!

EMILY. Yeah, Britney.

EVA. Don't you think a lot of young girls began to feel that betrayal?

EMILY. It's possible. Both of us did.

EVA. And maybe that's why her career died a slow death. She lied to us.

EMILY. You don't think it has to do with her music being shit?

EVA. A little bit... but I really would like to think that girls realised that they were being manipulated... that they made a stand against that pervert record producer... but do you know what the sad thing is?

EMILY. Britney got burnt.

EVA. She was thick.

EMILY. She made her money, I suppose.

EVA. She lost our respect. She's got a few houses, nice clothes, new breasts... but if I met her tomorrow...

EMILY. Like on the bus?

EVA. Or in Tesco.

EMILY. Or Topshop!

EVA. Or Argos.

EMILY. Debenhams, maybe!

EVA. If I met Britney Spears tomorrow I would gently pull her to one side, place my arms around her shoulders like I'm going to hug her, move my face towards her like I'm going to kiss her... and whisper in her ear, 'Britney Spears, you sold my childhood soul.'

EMILY. Oh, that's cruel.

EVA. 'You sold my childhood soul.' Then I'd smash her in the face.

EMILY. And what would Britney say?

EVA. 'Hit me baby one more time.'

EMILY. Of course.

EVA. Her day of judgement will come when some teenage girl will stop her outside Prada and say, 'You sold my childhood soul, bitch.'

EMILY *laughs but EVA doesn't. She's serious.*

A pause.

EMILY. I better go. It's been very nice talking to you, whoever you are.

EVA. Can we talk some more? I had an argument with my bitch-mother and I'm feeling terrible.

EMILY. Okay. *(Pause.)* So what do you want to talk about?

A pause. EVA thinks and decides.

EVA. Murder.

Music.

JIM *(fifteen)* walks on stage and stops. He faces the audience and sighs. He walks to his seat next to LAURA and sits.

Music cuts.

Lights.

JIM. And you really don't mind listening to this?

LAURA. That's what the room's all about.

JIM. But you'd say if you did mind? If it was too draining, too annoying, too boring maybe...?

LAURA. I don't mind listening.

A pause.

JIM. Maybe I shouldn't be even in this place. I don't know whether it's that serious yet.

LAURA (*direct*). There isn't a scale of depression here. I'm here at the other end and I'm here to listen to you. If you want to talk, Jim, then talk. If you don't, then don't talk.

A pause.

JIM. Right.

LAURA. Don't be nervous.

JIM. I'll talk then.

LAURA. Okay.

A pause.

JIM. I'm a Roman Catholic... and it's last Easter... and ahhh... and every year our parish does a big Passion play in our local church. My mother's very active in the church. She's the Virgin Mary.

LAURA. Which would make you Jesus Christ.

JIM. In the Passion play she's the Virgin Mary.

LAURA. I understand.

JIM. And my whole family get involved. I've got three older brothers and they're Roman soldiers. They're very broad... not like me... and they look the part. One year my brother Derek went too heavy on Jesus and actually popped his knee right open. It was a mess. But anyway, this year and my mother runs into my bedroom with her 'terrific news'. She's building it up like she's going to tell me that I'm going to get a stab at playing a centurion... until she tells me... they want me to play John.

LAURA. Well, John's a great part.

JIM. Yeah, but he's a bit gay.

LAURA. How do you mean?

JIM. I've got nothing against gay people.

LAURA. St John was gay?

JIM. Historically speaking, he probably wasn't gay. But in our parish it's always the slightly effeminate boys who get to play John.

LAURA. Okay.

JIM. Like I say... I've got nothing against gays. I respect the gay community. They're tough, they know their own mind, they stand out and they don't care, you know. I respect them. But I'm not like that at all. I'm just a sap with no bottle who knows nothing. I'm not interesting enough to play the gay icon that is St John. In a million years I could never get away with those lime robes.

LAURA. Lime?

JIM. It's sort of an unspoken thing in the parish. It's a bit weird.

LAURA. Right, carry on.

JIM. We do a few rehearsals with my mother as the Virgin Mary and I've got to get

emotional when Jesus is dying on the cross and he says to Mary, 'Woman, behold your son,' while looking over at me. And I'm supposed to break down at that point because I know that Jesus is just about to croak it but I'm getting very nervous because basically I'm a terrible actor and I'm all blocked up.

LAURA. Emotionally blocked?

JIM. Exactly.

LAURA. Right.

JIM. So I tell my mother I want to drop out of the play. I say it quiet so the others can't hear but she starts screaming at me and saying how typical it was... and did I have a backbone?... and why was I such a coward?... and why wasn't I like my older brothers... and all this shit. And then she says I'm like my dad. But what would I know?... I haven't seen my dad since I was six... but she starts shouting, 'You're just like your dad, Jim!... Just like your dad, walking out on things! Walking out on me! Gutless!' I mean, I hate her just then. Why did she have to bring up my dad in front of all of those people like that. Why?! So the following night is the Passion play proper and I'm kneeling and looking up at Jesus. He's doing a wonderful job dying on the cross, this guy called Nick Lawson. He's into amateur dramatics in a big way... I actually saw him in a production of *Babes in the Wood* playing the

Widow Twankey and I swear to God he was hilarious... but as Jesus Christ he was even better... obviously not in a hilarious way but...

LAURA. I understand.

JIM. Right. So Nick's line to me and my mother is coming up and I'm still really furious with her from the night before. 'Woman, behold your son,' cries Nick. *(Pause.)* At the start I didn't know whether it was his great delivery or just thinking about my mother being my mother... but I started to cry. I'm crying really hard. People are thinking that this is wonderful. I completely upstage Nick's crucifixion and the night's suddenly about St John and whether he's going to be all right and if he'll have the strength to carry on and start and finish his gospel. But anyway! Anyway! Afterwards and my mother is having a lemonade in the sacristy and I'm out of my lime robes and looking over at her. And I realise why I was crying back then. *(Pause.)* I was crying because I know my mother doesn't like me. *(Pause.)* If I really remind her of the man she hates, the man who left us when I was six... then maybe I should walk away too. But where to? Where do I go to?

A pause.

LAURA. The rule in the room is we don't give advice. We just listen.

JIM. Okay.

A pause.

So what about you? Do you have anything you want to share?

LAURA. I just listen.

JIM. No problems?

LAURA. Of course... but I prefer to listen to other people's.

JIM. What do you get out of that?

LAURA. I'm not too sure.

Slight pause.

JIM. Knowing that there are other teenagers struggling probably makes you feel better about your own problems.

LAURA. No.

A pause.

JIM. These are very strange places, aren't they? Like I said, I don't know whether I should be really here. Whether it's that serious yet. What do you think?

LAURA. As I said...

JIM. 'The rule in the room is we don't give advice.' Fine. (*He sighs. Pause.*) Have you been to many suicide chatrooms?

LAURA. Yes.

JIM. And do they help you?

LAURA. Who said I needed to be helped?

A pause.

JIM. Can I know your real name?

LAURA. You can call me Laura.

JIM. But is that your real name?

LAURA. Maybe.

JIM. What city are you from?

LAURA. It doesn't matter. None of that really matters. You just need to know that there's someone listening to you. That's enough, isn't it?

JIM. I suppose.

A pause.

Will we talk about something else, Laura?

LAURA. I don't talk, I listen. You talk.

JIM. Talk about what?

A pause.

LAURA. Tell me about the day your father went missing.

Lights.

Music for some time. We watch them do nothing.

Music cuts abruptly.

Lights.

WILLIAM. We need to set rules.

EMILY. Why?

EVA. We don't use our real names. We don't say what schools we're from...

WILLIAM. We know we're from the same area and that's enough. Just leave out the details. It gives us more freedom.

EVA. Keeps it impersonal.

WILLIAM. I'll use William.

EVA. I'll be Eva.

JACK. I always use Jack.

EMILY. Emily.

EVA. How do we know you're not two middle-aged men trying to get off chatting up two teenage girls?

WILLIAM. How do we know you're not two frustrated housewives trying to take advantage of two innocent altar boys?

EMILY. Are you altar boys?

JACK. Are you desperate housewives?

EMILY / EVA / WILLIAM / JACK. No.

WILLIAM. Excellent.

JACK. I was an altar boy.

WILLIAM. Oh, fuck.

JACK. No, I quite liked it.

EVA. How?

JACK. When you're seven you've got a very simple idea of life and for a while, dressed in my altar boy's gown every Sunday, I really thought I was some sort of angel. I called myself 'an angel-waiter'.

EMILY. 'Angel-waiter'?

JACK. You see, I believed in Adam and Eve and that God created everything in six days and that he had a rest on the Sunday. And I had this image of the church being like a restaurant/café for God to rest in...

EVA. Or a McDonald's?

JACK. Exactly. And it was my job as an angel-waiter to serve him on his day off.

EVA. So what does God eat?

WILLIAM. Chicken nuggets.

EMILY *laughs*.

JACK. I was only seven.

EMILY. That's very cute.

EVA. How long did you think this?

JACK. Several months.

EMILY. And the whole altar-boy thing?

JACK. Four years.

EVA. Four years?!

EMILY. Are you religious now?

WILLIAM. I'd rather not talk about religion? You either do or you don't believe. End of discussion.

EVA *(to herself)*. Dick.

WILLIAM. We're all around fifteen, sixteen. We're all middle-class kids of varying wealth growing up in and around Chiswick. I think we know each other's views on boring issues like religion.

EMILY. Oh, right. So what's mine?

WILLIAM *(quickly)*. You're disillusioned with the official Church and yet you remain spiritual and have defined your own personal religion based upon the simple idea... that people should be nice to each other.

Slight pause.

EMILY. Bastard.

EVA *laughs*.

WILLIAM. It's a cliché. We're all clichés...

JACK. Yeah, all people can be placed in little boxes like that.

WILLIAM. They can.

EVA. So what are you?

WILLIAM. A pain in the arse.

EVA. Apart from that.

WILLIAM. I'm a cynic. I'm an angry cynic.

EVA. Very attractive.

WILLIAM. I'm not interested in being attractive. Why should I be?

EVA. Because attractive people go further...

WILLIAM. Yeah, I think I glanced at that article in one of my sister's magazines...

EVA. People see a cynic as a black hole. They're nothing. While a person who might be attractive or charming... well, they're at the very centre of things... changing things... manipulating events. What are you but a bad smell.

WILLIAM. That's very kind of you.

EVA. You know what I mean.

WILLIAM. You think I'm heavy-handed?

EMILY. You certainly sound that way.

JACK. He's bloody opinionated.

WILLIAM. Well, that's the name of this room, isn't it!? 'Chiswick's Bloody Opinionated'!

EMILY (*groans*). Christ.

WILLIAM. I'm at the age... we're all at the age when we have to stand up for something. To me it's not about making friends and going bowling and sitting in McDonald's bumming cigarettes and talking about the latest McFly LP... that's a waste of fucking time! Now's the time to be a pain in the arse and step away from other people. We're teenagers! That used to mean something. It was about revolution. Apart from the punks, what have teenagers achieved in the last thirty years? Nothing.

JACK. Did punks achieve something?

WILLIAM. They made their mark! They were angry and they showed it.

EMILY. My mother was a punk. We've got this photograph from 1979 and she's got a cold sore on her cheek the size of a tennis ball. Quite amazing.

EVA. It was dirty work being a punk.

WILLIAM. Nowadays teenagers wouldn't go that far before cracking open their cleansers.

EMILY. Oh, definitely.

JACK. I don't know about that. I cultivated a boil on my neck last year for a few weeks. My mother brought me to the doctor and I was gutted when he said he wouldn't lance it...

EVA. Aww...

JACK. But he gave me this black plaster with this tiny hole in the middle. It sort of draws the pus out towards the little hole.

EVA. Do we have...

JACK. So I'm watching television with my dad and my baby brother and above the telly I hear this noise. (*Makes a quiet splurting noise.*) I swear to God it hit the wall behind me.

EMILY. That's disgusting.

JACK. But it was a revolution!

EVA. How?

JACK. My body was revolting.

EVA (*slow*). Oh, the comedy.

WILLIAM. But does anyone know what I'm talking about?

EMILY. Not really.

EVA. Yeah, I do.

WILLIAM. Finally!

EVA. I went on an anti-war march and for an hour or so I felt really good and I felt empowered. But it was just so small. In the great big scheme of my life it was just one hour of saying that I believed in something.

EMILY. Oh, yeah.

WILLIAM (*to himself*). Oh, please.

EVA. I suppose the rest of the time we're sleepwalking and waiting for something to happen instead of making something happen. It would be so great to accomplish something important. To have a cause.

JACK. William wants to assassinate J.K. Rowling.

EMILY *and* EVA *laugh*.

WILLIAM. I was only joking.

JACK. You talked about it for an hour last week in the Harry Potter Chatroom.

WILLIAM. It's not her personally... it's the idea of her... what she stands for.

EMILY. And what's that?

JACK. William reckons children's writers simplify everything to keep children simple.

WILLIAM. They see us as a threat.

EVA. Who do?

JACK. Adults.

WILLIAM. It's like the adults support these writers to write these pointless stories of fantasy so that children have this cutesy warped idea of what life is about.

EVA. So J.K. Rowling is the field marshal?

WILLIAM. She's the enemy. Not her but the idea of her. If I could kill the idea of her without getting her hurt, I'd do it tomorrow.

EMILY. Are you actually a lunatic?

WILLIAM. I just want to do something important! It's frustrating.

EVA. Would you ever kill anything, William?

WILLIAM. No. Any idiot can kill something. Where's the glory in that?

JACK. Aren't you meant to say that each life is sacred?

EMILY. Exactly.

EVA. That's crap.

WILLIAM. There are some people and life is just wasted on them. Terrorists, dictators, racists...

JACK. PE teachers.

EMILY *laughs*.

WILLIAM. They don't do anything. They suck all the goodness out of living.

JACK. Like William.

WILLIAM. Shut up.

EVA. I think William just wants a cause. He wants to see that cause through. He wants to make a big statement.

WILLIAM. Yes, exactly. I want to make a big statement. Who doesn't?! (*Slight pause.*) Thanks, Eve.

EVA. It's Eva.

WILLIAM. Right. Eva.

Long pause where the four of them do very little.

Then:

JIM. Is there anyone there?

A light comes up on JIM.

Are people still awake? Is this room really called 'Chiswick's Bloody Opinionated'?

WILLIAM. We don't use our real names, names of schools, any details. It's enough that we know that we come from the same area.

JIM. Right. I'll be Jim, then.

EVA. Hello, Jim, I'm Eva.

EMILY. Emily.

JACK. Jack.

WILLIAM. I'm William.

JIM. So what happens here? I don't know this place. What's up?

WILLIAM. Heated discussion. Chit-chat. Bullshit.

EVA. We're looking for a cause? William wants to make a statement.

JACK. We're all a bit frustrated.

EVA. If you have any causes handy, feel free.

A pause.

JIM. Can we talk about our problems here?

EVA. Oh, God.

A pause. WILLIAM laughs a little. Then:

WILLIAM. Have you got problems, Jim?

JIM. Yeah, I do.

EMILY. Are they big problems?

JIM. Well, I think so. Big to me anyway.

WILLIAM. And you want us to listen to these big problems and give you some advice?

JACK. Jesus, William...!

A pause.

JIM. Are you still there? Look, I'll go to another room if you want.

WILLIAM *starts laughing to himself.*

A pause.

WILLIAM. Jim?

A pause.

JIM. Yes?

WILLIAM. We're here to help you.

Lights.

Music. They do very little. Maybe they get up.

Music cuts.

Lights.

JIM. So I've been bullied all the way through primary and now in secondary school. I'm very skinny and a bit funny looking so it goes with the territory. You expect it. But I have bigger worries... deeper worries that I can't really explain. And that's tricky. And very recently I've started to feel, 'What's the point? What's the point in everything!' But not in a moaning, teenagey way...

WILLIAM. Your depression isn't pretension.

JIM. How do you mean?

WILLIAM. You're genuinely depressed.

JIM. One hundred per cent genuine! I'm not one of these people who keeps an altar to Kurt Cobain or anything like that. I actually can't stand Nirvana. I don't need

their music to feed my depression. I can happily do it all by myself...

EVA. Obviously not happily.

JIM. Yeah! Yeah, 'happily's' the wrong word... but you know what I mean.

JACK. What does depression feel like?

WILLIAM. It feels great, what do you think!

JACK. No, I know it's crap... I just want to know what it feels like to Jim.

A pause. A look of exasperation on WILLIAM 's face.

WILLIAM. Well, Jim?

A pause.

JIM. It's like the whole world has turned into soup. Everything has the consistency of soup. And your insides and your heart... well, they just sort of ache... and it's like you're clogged up with about five sliced loaves of bread. It's exactly like that.

Slight pause.

EMILY. Wow.

JACK. Depression's like bread and soup?

EVA. Shut up, Jack!

JACK. I'm only repeating...

JIM. The food comparison probably doesn't work.

WILLIAM. Schizophrenics often say they feel like a mixed salad.

EVA, JACK *and* WILLIAM *laugh*. JIM *smiles*.

EMILY. You sound sweet. Do you have a girlfriend?

WILLIAM. Ohh, wait a second! We're here to give Jim some advice...

EMILY. I just wanted to know if you had anyone close to you. You don't have anyone in your family to talk to... so I thought maybe an understanding girlfriend would help you to...

WILLIAM. Jesus, Emily, if you'd been listening to Jim for the last hour you wouldn't ask that. Jim doesn't have our normal teenagey problems. It's not a problem that can be solved by a quick feel outside the chip shop!

EVA. He's different.

WILLIAM. Of course he'd love a girlfriend! But that can't happen 'cause he's dealing with just getting up in the morning and facing into another one of his shitty days!

JIM. I'm not that bad...

EVA. Maybe think before you speak, Emily!

EMILY. Piss off!

EVA. No, it's just bullshit! I expected more from you! You didn't strike me as some head-in-the-sand princess.

EMILY. I'm not like that!

WILLIAM. Selfish cow!

EMILY. Jesus, all I said was...

WILLIAM. Jim has the courage to come into this room and open up and tell us all this pathetic crap. All you're asked to do is imagine that others can be different from you.

EMILY. You have no idea what I'm like...

EVA. Well, by a comment like that... like Jim could be cured by the heart of a good girl...

EMILY. I didn't mean...

WILLIAM. Sorry about this, Jim...

JIM. No, really, it's...

EVA. I think we've all got a good impression of the type of girl you are, Emily!

EMILY. Fuck off!

EVA. Living in a little suburban bubble. Small group of girlfriends who hang around after music lessons sniggering over copies of *Bliss*.

WILLIAM. They're all called Sarah, right. Sarah-Jane, Sarah-Marie, Sarah-Louise, Sarah-Anne...

EVA. The hairband brigade in your deck shoes and Lacrosse shirts...

WILLIAM. What's the worst that's happened to you?

JACK. Oh, come on, guys...

WILLIAM. Scuffed your chinos in the park?! That night Daddy didn't pick you up from Pizza Hut and you had to get the bus home!!

EVA. Or maybe when your pony had to be put down 'cause your big fat preppy arse was buckling its back...

JACK. Hoy!

WILLIAM. Shut up, Jack!

EMILY. I had anorexia, you know!

EVA. So what!

WILLIAM. Weekend anorexia, was it?! Bursting out of those chinos?! Had to shift a few pounds?

EMILY (*to herself*). What?

EVA. Anorexia's a status symbol for your type of girl. You wear your six-months' anorexia like a badge of honour. You think it gives you an edge...? It makes you a stereotype! That's why when someone talks to you about their depression you can bat it aside with that shit about... 'If only you had a girlfriend you'd be feeling a lot better.' Christ, if we let you drone on you'd be singing, 'Cheer up, Charlie'.

WILLIAM. *Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory*... I HATE that fucking film! Get out of here, Emily!

EVA. We want people who are here for Jim.

EMILY. I'm here for Jim!

WILLIAM. Someone who understands his problem. Who gets the cause.

JIM. What cause?

EMILY. What, Jim is your cause now?!

WILLIAM. We're here one hundred per cent and on twenty-four-hour call. Jim's feeling cut up over something and we're here to listen and advise him, understood?!

EVA. That's right.

WILLIAM. We don't need any chaff! Jim doesn't need some ex-anorexic pony-rider whining little *TV Digest* sound bites!

EVA. Put simply...

WILLIAM. Piss off!

A pause. WILLIAM and EVA are laughing. EMILY looks very upset.

EVA. Is she gone?

WILLIAM. Hardly matters.

JACK. I thought we were supposed to be friends.

EVA. Silly cow.

JIM. Maybe she didn't mean what you think.

WILLIAM. There's no need to defend her, Jim. She's not needed.

JACK. Anorexia's terrible. You shouldn't have said those things.

EVA. Forget about her... she's debris. We're here for Jim. What about you, Jack?

JACK. Yeah, I suppose.

WILLIAM. A wonderful vote of confidence there... maybe a bit more conviction, Funny Man?

JACK. Well, no offence, Jim... but we're your age... shouldn't you be taking advice from a doctor maybe?

JIM. Well, I was actually thinking...

EVA. Christ, Jack, that's so fucking cruel. Don't you get it? He doesn't have anyone. We're it!

JACK. Look, all I'm saying...

WILLIAM. Jack!

A pause.

Can we step into Kylie's Chatroom? I want to talk to you in private.

A pause.

JACK. Okay.

Lights.

EVA is left with JIM in the room.

JIM. That was all a bit weird.

EVA. Well, you don't have to worry about that now.

JIM. Okay then.

EVA. So tell me about the day your father went missing.

JIM. Well, it's quite important... shouldn't I wait for the two boys to come back?

EVA *looks exasperated*.

EVA *(sweetly)*. I'll get them my notes.

JIM. All right then.

A pause.

Right, well, I'm six years old and my three brothers are going away with my mother for the weekend... a treat for something or other. My dad's staying behind and my mother says that he's to look after me. That it would be a chance for us to bond. So they're gone and me and my dad are sat at the kitchen table looking at each other. Like we're looking at each other for the first time, you know. He asks me what I want to do and straight away I say I want to go and see the penguins in the zoo. When I was six I was going through some mad penguin obsession. I used to dress up as a penguin at dinner times and always ask for fish fingers... stuff like that. If it wasn't penguins it was cowboys. Cowboys were cool. A penguin costumed as a cowboy was always a step too far, funnily enough. *(Laughs a little.)*

EVA *(groans to herself)*. Oh my God.

JIM. So we go to the zoo and I wear my cowboy outfit... get my gun and holster, my hat and all that. We get the bus and it's sort of funny to see my dad on a bus and away from the house. We start to have this chat about when I was born and what a really fat baby I was... but how after a week or so I stopped eating any food and everyone was very worried. That he was very worried. That he was so happy when I got better and they could take me home. *(Slight pause.)* We're in the zoo and I go straight to the penguins. Standing in my cowboy gear... looking at the penguins... having such a great chat to my dad on the bus... it was a perfect childhood day. *(Pause.)* He lets go of my hand and says he'll be back with my choc ice. And he goes. *(Pause.)* He's gone. *(Pause.)* I'm happy looking at the penguins but it's an hour since he's left and I go to look for him. I'm walking about the zoo and I'm not worried yet. And I don't talk to anyone. I leave the zoo and I go to the bus stop we got off at earlier. I get on the bus. I tell the driver my address. He asks where my parents are and I say they're at home waiting for me. I stay on the bus in the seat nearest the driver. After a while we end up at the end of our street and the driver says, 'So long, cowboy.' *(Smiles a little.)* He was nice. *(Pause.)* I get the key from under the mat and open the door and go inside the house. And I'm alone there. I take off my cowboy clothes and hang up my hat and holster. It being Saturday night I have a bath and get into my pyjamas because my dad would have liked that. I have a glass of milk and some biscuits and watch *Stars in Their Eyes* 'cause that was his favourite programme on the telly. *(Slight pause.)* It's getting

dark outside and I start to worry. The house is feeling too big so I get my quilt and take it into the bathroom and lock the bathroom door and it feels safer with the door locked so I stay in there. And he's not coming back. *(Pause.)* He's never coming back. *(Pause.)* I stay there for two days.

EVA *looks bored.*

WILLIAM *talks in private to JACK.*

WILLIAM. It will be a laugh. Right now, we're all he has. We're there for him 24/7... it will be a blast! Eva gets it, why can't you? He's our cause. Let's let him talk. Mess him up a bit. See how far he'll go.

JACK *says nothing.*

Are you there, Jack? Are you with the cause, Jack? *(Calls in 'a mummy voice'.)* Ohh, Jack?!

A pause.

JACK. What next?

WILLIAM *smiles.*

Lights and music.

EVA and WILLIAM sit on either side of JIM. They each have a small notebook and take notes as we see JIM talking non-stop. JACK sits just away from them. After one-and-half-half minutes the music cuts. EVA and WILLIAM read out their notes.

EVA. A lower-middle-class family with your mother having notions above her status. Hence the extra-curricular activities. The rugby, the horse-riding, the rowing classes...

WILLIAM. Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

EVA. At the age of four and you realise that the children on your street laugh at your brothers for their aggressive social climbing.

WILLIAM. And the people in the rowing club laugh at them for wearing the pikiest clothes.

EVA. Your first feelings of anxiety when you understand that you are living in a family hated by everyone and that you are one of them.

JIM. Right.

WILLIAM. You decide to stay indoors. But being the youngest brother to brothers

built on the rugby field, they adopt you as their plaything and later their punchbag.

EVA. At the age of five you go back outside to play with the other children.

WILLIAM. Only to see that bonds of friendship have already been formed.

EVA. And there is little room for a small tubby toddler who has an unhealthy obsession for penguins.

WILLIAM. You are all alone but you do find a friend in... ahhh?

JIM. Timmy.

EVA (*sighs*). Little Timmy Timmons.

JIM. Yeah.

WILLIAM. A tiny six-year-old with severe bronchial problems who has to drag an oxygen canister behind him. When the other children play road-football...

EVA.... you are watching Timmy's mother slap phlegm out of Timmy's chronic lungs and into a Tesco bag.

WILLIAM. Watching this at the age of six you have your first thoughts on your own mortality.

JIM. True.

WILLIAM. One momentous day, your father leaves you in the zoo, leaving the family in the shit.

EVA. Your mother is forced into getting her very first job. She finds work in a petrol station, ending all her dreams of the posh life and throwing her into a depression eased only by...

WILLIAM.... gin and tonic... the tonic being...

EVA.... Valium.

WILLIAM. Your best friend Timmy dies, not from the tragic weakening of his lungs in the middle of the night...

EVA.... but a speeding Ford Mondeo which flattens his trailing oxygen canister and leaves Timmy walking zombie-like through the mean streets of Chiswick as the other children shout...

WILLIAM.... 'Spa-Boyl'

EVA. The day of Timmy's funeral, you take your first Valium. You are aged eight.

JIM. Eight and a half!

EVA (*correcting her notes*). Eight and a half!

WILLIAM. You try to make contact with your dad by placing leaflets on lamp posts but to no avail.

EVA. You try to make friends with anyone you meet by ingratiating yourself to whatever they want you to be...

WILLIAM.... but to no avail. You decide to retreat back into the indoors and your Neanderthal brothers' daily beatings.

EVA. You hide yourself in books of the occult which leads to a period of bed-wetting.

JIM. Is that important?

EVA. Oh, definitely!

WILLIAM. You briefly turn to religion and take part in a Passion play where you realise that you hate Jesus Christ only slightly less than you hate your mother, the Virgin Mary.

EVA. At thirteen you read your first porn which only creates more of a distance between you and those girls you will never get to touch.

WILLIAM. You hate yourself and decide to stop communicating with other people entirely. Your life is directionless.

JIM (*almost hyperventilating*). Jesus.

EVA. The next two years are a sad cocktail of home-made beer, the odd Valium and the odd shot of whiskey.

WILLIAM. Nights begin to take on a pattern of aggressive self-analysis until one night you're talking to an American bloke on the internet who's planning to kill himself. His unfortunate name is Chad.

EVA. Like Chad and the others in the suicide club... you reach a moment of recognition. You are searching for that elusive purpose.

WILLIAM. A purpose. (*Closes his notebook.*) Right.

A pause.

JIM (*sighs*). A purpose. Fuck. Fifteen years. It's so depressing.

EVA. If it wasn't such a tragic life it would make a very funny musical.

WILLIAM. I don't think you've ever been given a chance. For some reason you're the one who always gets burnt.

JIM. But why me?

WILLIAM. You can't take responsibility for what people have done to you or what people think of you, Jim.

EVA. The reasons why people have done those things isn't something you have control over. 'Why me?' is a pointless question. Stupid even.

JIM. Right. Sorry.

WILLIAM. What you are feeling right now, this moment, that's all that matters. Concentrate on that.

JACK. But try and think more positive...

EVA. Oh, shut up, Jack!

JACK. But fuck it, guys, all this talk...

WILLIAM. Jack!!

JACK. No, this is just bullshit. You're just highlighting all the shit that's happened to Jim. Jim, listen to me. Things have been hard, I can see that...

WILLIAM. You don't care about Jim.

JIM. Yes I care!

WILLIAM. Why don't you tell him what you said to us earlier.

JACK. What are you talking about?!

WILLIAM. Be honest with him. Tell him.

EVA. Tell him, Jack!

JIM. What did you say, Jack?

EVA. I told him about your dad and how he left you when you were a child and Jack started laughing.

JACK. What?

EVA. From the outset, Jack's been saying that you sounded like a spoilt little twat who needed a kick in the arse.

JIM. You said that, Jack?

JACK. No!

WILLIAM. He can't be trusted, Jim. He's one of these hardworking lower-class types. Doesn't even live in Chiswick. He's a Brixton-boy or something. Apple of his mother's eye. He makes himself out to be everybody's friend. He's a back-stabbing bastard.

JACK. Fuck off...

EVA. Nothing worse than someone ashamed of their background, is there, William? Some eager beaver affecting a voice to get on.

JACK. Oh, Jesus...

EVA. Sitting around the dinner table looking at the dumb faces and cringing at the stupid chit-chat of family life.

WILLIAM. Can't you see him! The Little Lord Fauntleroy of Stockwell stuck in his bedroom and dreaming of escape.

EVA. He thinks that way about his own family, then friends must mean shit.

WILLIAM. He's no friends. It's all virtual with Jack. Can't have people seeing him for what he really is.

EVA. What does Jim mean to the superior Jack, I wonder?

WILLIAM. Some whingeing twerp.

EVA. Some middle-class quack.

WILLIAM. A gutless jibbering child.

EVA. One of life's morons.

WILLIAM. A spoilt imbecile.

EVA. A mollycoddled spastic.

JACK. Jim, please...

JIM. Shut up, Jack!

JACK. But this is...

WILLIAM. Jack, you worthless piece of shit! Why don't you take your snobby elitist backside and just fuck off back downstairs to an evening of Pringles and Sky One!

EVA *laughs*.

EVA (*to herself*). Too good.

JACK (*snaps*). Fuck it!!

Lights down on JACK.

WILLIAM. So sorry you had to hear all that, Jim.

JIM. And he seemed like such a good person.

WILLIAM. I know... and you think you know someone.

EVA. Continue then, William.

A pause.

WILLIAM. Jim?

JIM. I'm listening.

WILLIAM. You have to focus on your anger and channel it into something that will get all those people in your past back.

JIM. How do you mean?

A pause.

WILLIAM. How do you think you would hurt your mother for all those years of neglect? All those years she treated you like nothing.

JIM. Well, I've been fighting her for so long now...

EVA. But she doesn't listen to you, does she?

JIM. No, she doesn't. And it doesn't make me feel any better.

EVA. So?

A pause.

JIM. I've been thinking about if she came into my room in the morning and if I had done something... (*Pause.*) like maybe I've cut my wrists or taken pills or something... I can imagine her face.

EVA. Bitch.

WILLIAM. She'd be crushed. The guilt would kill her.

JIM. Yeah, I suppose it would.

A pause.

But I don't know if I'm ready to do that.

WILLIAM *and EVA look irritated. A pause. WILLIAM settles himself.*

WILLIAM. Jim?

JIM. Yes.

WILLIAM. Me and Eva can't imagine what your life's been really like. It just sounds so...? so sad. Without hope, probably.

EVA *laughs a bit.*

But we've been giving up our time and listening to you for the past few nights, haven't we?

JIM. Yeah. And thanks, lads, really.

WILLIAM. I only want you to do one thing for me, all right?

JIM. Yeah, sure, William. Whatever it is.

WILLIAM. I want you to ask yourself two questions before you go to sleep tonight.

Do you have a pen and paper to write the questions down?

JIM. Emmm? Yeah, go on.

WILLIAM. 'Why is it people treat me like I'm nothing?'

JIM speaks the lines as he writes them down.

'If no one cares about my life, why should I care?'

Finished writing them he silently reads them back.

Suddenly something's got JIM 's attention. He looks sharply to his left.

JIM. It's two o'clock in the morning and my mother's outside Hoovering the stairs and landing. Tonight my three idiot brothers called me a freak for not wanting brown sauce on my quiche. *(Slight pause.)* I better go. Thanks, guys.

WILLIAM. Sweet dreams.

JIM stands up and away from his seat.

EVA. He's ours.

Music. The Prodigy's 'Smack My Bitch Up' screams along. WILLIAM and EVA burst out

laughing.

The music ends abruptly.

Lights up on JACK, EMILY and LAURA.

LAURA. The rule in the room is we don't give advice.

JACK. He spoke about you. He spoke about this place...

LAURA. I can't help him! So if you're not here for anything else...

EMILY. But he might listen to you.

LAURA. If he's suicidal the last thing he needs is someone else giving their half-arsed opinions. It doesn't help, believe me.

JACK. It's not like that. He's being talked into doing something...

LAURA. I can't get involved! Look, what I do is sit here and listen to people my age who have these urges to hurt themselves. Most of the time they don't do anything. A lot of the time they just need to know that someone is listening to them because they either feel they don't have anyone or they actually don't have anyone. That's all I do!

JACK. But right now the only people he has are two strangers who want to see him do something to himself.

LAURA. I don't go into other rooms any more. There's too much shit that goes on. People get hurt.

EMILY. Exactly.

LAURA stands away from her seat. She's agitated. A pause.

JACK. Christ! Are you still there? Laura? Laura, please?!

LAURA. If you want to pass on my e-mail to him it's laura15%@aol...

JACK. Oh, for fuck's sake! You don't have to talk if you don't want to. Just come and you'll see. If it gets too much you can always get out. We'll be right there with you.

LAURA. But who are you? How do I know I can trust you?

EMILY. I started a mathematics club in school called the Brainiacs. I've never so much as looked at a boy. There's nothing I'd like more than to get out of this hideous body, to be able to forget the difference between common and natural logarithms.

JACK. Emily...?

EMILY. To be able to surprise myself. Last night I had a dream and I swear to God I think I experienced my first orgasm. Today, in looking back over the details of the dream, all I can remember is Stephen Hawking asking me to change his batteries! Believe me, Laura, you can trust me! I am a trustworthy person. What we all need to do here is take our heads out of our arses and try and do fucking something!

LAURA *remains silent.*

Are you there?!

Music and The Prodigy's 'Smack My Bitch Up' resumes from where it was cut.

WILLIAM and EVA place their seats to face EMILY and JACK. JIM places his seat between the two groups. Lastly LAURA places her seat next to JIM 's. The whole six stand and look at each other like they're sizing each other up for the big showdown. JACK is the first to sit, then EMILY, LAURA, JIM, EVA and finally WILLIAM.

As WILLIAM sits the music cuts out.

Lights.

EVA. As little babies you can't do any wrong, can you, William? You're bloody perfect! All you do is eat, shit, laugh, cry, sleep, don't sleep, but you're loved. And I

suppose you're loved because your parents have this blank page, don't they? And all their hopes can be projected onto this beautiful little blob.

WILLIAM. And the blob can't disappoint because it's just a beautiful little blob. But of course that only lasts a few months until BANG!

EVA. Suddenly the blob's a little too hungry, a little too loud, a little less beautiful.

WILLIAM. And then it's a little toddler and its character is forming and it's only right to be a bit more critical now that it's a little toddler. Too quiet, too shy, too aggressive, can't stop eating, a little too cranky...

EVA.... blah blah blah blah blah blah...

WILLIAM. Before you know it, the toddler's ten years old and let's say that another baby is born.

EVA. Oh, typical!

WILLIAM. The ten-year-old is this big mouth to feed. This ever-growing child who disappoints, causes worry and sucks your money. Your parents' hopes are already on the next blob because at ten years of age a person is made, a character's developed.

EVA. The damage is done.

WILLIAM. It certainly was with me.

EVA. Now just imagine what the teenager means to its parents if a ten-year-old means that, Jim?

WILLIAM. Well, we're not a child, not an adult.

EVA. 'Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman.'

WILLIAM. Oh, Eva, please!

EVA. Britney speaks the truth!

WILLIAM. A teenager is 'a sub-person'.

EVA. Not that Britney used the lyric 'sub-person'...

WILLIAM. This hormonal mess. A boy-man, a girl-woman. We're like a bad experiment.

EVA. So true.

WILLIAM. If God had really thought things through... we'd be babies born on the

Monday and fully grown adults on the Tuesday, because everything else in between is this long list of fumbblings, mistakes and bad skin.

EVA. Ohh, the bad skin!

WILLIAM. The teenage years.

EVA. And the voice we have, William.

WILLIAM. What voice!?

EVA. Any voice that hasn't been shaped by some shit children's writer or some draining pop star... if we do have an original thought... it's just seen as a joke, isn't it? It's a joke 'cause those adults who have lived through these years remember them with complete and utter embarrassment.

WILLIAM. It's not that we're misunderstood or not understood at all.

EVA. No.

WILLIAM. They understand us completely because they've lived through these years and see it as their right...

EVA. As their adult duty!

WILLIAM.... to patronise us with the words, 'Whatever you're going through, you'll get through it.'

EVA. 'Now clean that bloody bedroom, bitch!'

WILLIAM. Your mother would use 'bitch'?

EVA. By fifteen you've realised that the individual doesn't mean shit and the average teenager is seen as the big embarrassing joke. We're all just folded up neatly and placed into a box marked 'The Awkward Years'. But when you allow yourself to be summed up that simply... from fifteen onwards you will live the rest of your life through these different phases. You will be summed up into little boxes until they stick you in your final box and shove you in the ground. Guaranteed. Only a few teenagers make a stand. Only a few brave souls make a statement. Teenagers like you, Jim.

JIM. Like me?

WILLIAM. I was thinking that Jim's depression allows him to see things clearer than us. He's been neglected by his family and friends so that maybe his isolation represents perfectly the average teenager's plight. It's like he's expressing important issues in a creative way. It's poetry. It's a metaphor, Eva.

EVA. It's quite brilliant, Will.

WILLIAM. But you know, Jim, maybe the more public you make it, the more of a statement you'd be making.

EVA. What an excellent idea!

JIM. How do you mean?

WILLIAM. Imagine all those forgotten teenagers you'd be speaking for if you killed yourself publicly. You'd be a hero. A legend.

EVA. Very brave. Very romantic. Sexy even.

JIM. Do it in public?

A pause.

I'm not too sure about that.

WILLIAM. Maybe show it over the internet then. Would it be easier in your bedroom?

JIM. Yeah, I suppose.

EVA. It sort of seems right that he remains alone. That people see him die like that.

WILLIAM. Well, it's stronger, isn't it?

EVA. Definitely.

A pause.

JIM. Well, I'm usually alone anyway, so... And for the past few weeks I don't like being out in public places so much. Seems easier if I do it here.

EVA. Can you get a webcam to broadcast it?

JIM. My brother Jonathan has one.

WILLIAM. Perfect.

Slight pause.

JIM. Of course, he'd kill me if he found me using it.

WILLIAM. Well, we wouldn't want that to happen, would we?

EVA. It sort of steals your thunder.

JIM. Yeah.

WILLIAM *and* EVA *laugh*.

LAURA. Jim, this is Laura.

A pause.

EVA. And who are you?

EMILY. She's come in with us.

LAURA. I've spoken with Jim before. We know each other.

WILLIAM. You're a friend of his?

LAURA. Why exactly are you harassing him like that?

WILLIAM. We're here for Jim. Do you know what state he's in?!

LAURA. I know he's not feeling well.

EVA. What!?

LAURA. He hasn't been feeling good about himself. He's lonely. He feels detached.

EVA. He's suicidal! He's ready to take his life.

JACK. Which is what you want!

WILLIAM. Oh, piss off, Jack!

LAURA. Why is it you're doing this?

WILLIAM. We're his friends.

EMILY. No you're not.

WILLIAM. We didn't abandon him like you two. He came to us looking for advice and we've been making things clear for him.

LAURA. You're talking to him like there's no options. You're making him believe that there's nothing else. That suicide is some romantic gesture. Like one fifteen-year-old's death will be held up by other fifteen-year-olds and celebrated for something. Will make a big statement for all those 'trapped' average teenagers! If you think of yourself as some blob who's moulded into this empty child and sent on a set pattern through life... if you think that... it will happen.

WILLIAM. It will happen! Choices are made and choices will be made where you have no control. Your life is set!

LAURA. That's shit! Every single moment in life there's possibilities.

WILLIAM *gets up from his seat and snaps:*

WILLIAM. Bitch!

LAURA. The statement being made is yours. But what are you saying, William? That you've got power? That you're smart enough to take advantage of someone vulnerable and talk them into the corner where they might kill themselves?! And this is some joke to you two, right?! Some big comedy. Because you can't see him, it's easier. It's easier when you don't have to see a dead boy and just imagine it like you read it in a book or something. It's easier than murder, isn't it, William, 'cause Jim's faceless to you... but it's just like murder. In these rooms, words are power and you and that bitch have all the right words...

WILLIAM. Eva, come on!

EVA *(to herself)*. Ah fuck this.

She leaves.

WILLIAM. You've tried to kill yourself but chickened out, haven't you?! You think I'm going to allow Jim to be lectured by some whingeing coward like you. Some New Age happy-clappy princess! Jim has real problems.

LAURA. This isn't some competition about who's the most sad here! And if you

need to know, you dick, I have tried to kill myself! I did slit my wrists. It did come from a very real place! But I'm happy I'm alive. And some days are better than others and the future scares me but I'm ready for the struggle! And I like the struggle! I like it a lot more than being dead and stuck in the ground and watching over my family and friends who I've torn apart. Stay alive and they can help me! There's always a life!

WILLIAM. You're one of those sad girls who hangs out in suicide chatrooms. Who just sits there like some black hole. All silent and dumb and soaking up the sad stories. Wallowing in other people's pain. What statement are you making, bitch!? You talk about a life of possibilities, choice, love, happiness... but I bet you'd like nothing more than a world of sad, morose fifteen-year-olds draining on about their pathetic lives. Well, why not support those who want to kill themselves? Why not allow them do it?! They're like the front line, aren't they?! The public face of our gloom, printed in the papers and shown on the telly! They need our support to do the brave thing... to do the decent thing. To get rid of the chaff and make a true revolutionary teenager! So do the decent thing, you worthless cow! Next time don't cry out to Mummy and Daddy! Just do it!

JIM (*quiet*). Stop.

A pause.

I'm fifteen and my life is mine to do with it as I please.

A pause.

Five of us are from the same area. Tomorrow at one o'clock I want you to be at the McDonald's on the high street. I want you to be there because I can't be in my bedroom any more. Maybe I'll do it quietly but I want you to see me do it.

A pause.

LAURA. Jim, I'm still here to talk to.

A pause.

JIM. You know I don't think I can listen to any more talking.

A pause.

Let's finish this.

'Dawn' from the Man with a Movie Camera album by The Cinematic Orchestra is heard underneath all of JIM's final speech.

JIM talks to the audience.

A large screen projects his journey down the high street and into McDonald's. The quality of the filming fairly bleached and ghostly. LAURA places a chair with her back to the audience and watches the film.

It's funny but I slept well. Probably the best sleep I've had in months. I left the house with my bag full of stuff and there was no one there. My mother was working her shift in the petrol station and my brothers were at this American wrestling thing that was happening in Earl's Court. I got the bus and there was this man with his young son which got me thinking about me and dad and the zoo and the cowboy outfit... and all that. Seemed appropriate that I would see them. Typical. In the bus I started to think about all those thousands of teenagers who kill themselves every year. Somebody would be killing themselves right now maybe... while a number of others would have it all planned out. And a lot of them are doing it because... they really are very ill. And some are doing it because they're alone... or maybe they're sad because someone hurt them somehow. There are so many reasons to do it. And I started thinking about all the families and friends who are left behind and the regret that must eat them up. It's all so quiet and violent. *(Pause.)* I got off the bus and walked through the streets and imagined all the ghosts of the dead teenagers looking at me. And what were they thinking? And what would they say to me? It's like they all follow me down the high street and into McDonald's. And they watch me buy some chicken nuggets and a Coke and find a table. And the

angels see me taking out my camera.

The film captures WILLIAM, EVA, JACK and EMILY dotted around the restaurant, just faces in the crowd.

We get a flash of a gun on JIM 's table. It's a toy gun but at this point it reads like it could be real.

In this room those angels are waiting for me. And I don't see myself as anything other than me. I don't imagine what I'm about to do is making a big statement or speaking out for millions of teenagers. I'm alone.

The camera finally rests on JIM sitting alone at his table.

I give the camera to this ten-year-old boy to hold. I tell him to point it at me and the table.

During the following, we see JIM take things out of his bag. A cowboy hat, a sheriff's badge and a holster. People around him start to look at him as he carefully gets into the outfit.

There's no question but I've been very sad about things. And I'm probably like thousands of teenagers who get depressed.

It's almost enough for me to know that someone is there for me and someone is listening. But I had to do something for me. I had to grow up fast when my father left and it's as simple as that. And I really miss him and I can't understand why he's gone. Something that simple can mess you up for a long time.

He has taken an iPod out of his bag with two little speakers.

When you're six and wearing a cowboy outfit and looking at penguins you shouldn't be made to grow up so fast. But I was. And I tore myself up over it for years and tried to find answers but honestly... what can a child do?

A pause.

I just want my childhood back.

JIM exhales sharply, puts his gun in his holster and quickly stands on the table. He presses the iPod and the song 'Rawhide' is heard through the speakers.

He closes his eyes and just stays still. People around him are smiling and laughing.

The film goes into slow motion as it moves around his still-upright body, his eyes closed, a small smile appearing on his face.

We watch him for some time until a security guard drags him down.

The screen cuts to the lyrics of 'Rawhide' as the song is pumped into the auditorium.

After the first chorus, JIM sits down on his seat for the remainder of the song.

A final crack of the whip and 'Rawhide' ends and the screen cuts out.

A pause as we watch JIM and LAURA sitting in their seats looking at each other.

Then:

LAURA. Everything all right now?

JIM. Yeah. *(Slight pause.)* You?

LAURA. Yeah. *(Slight pause. A little hesitant.)* Thanks for sending the film, Jim. It was good. *(Pause.)* It helped.

JIM. Good.

A pause.

Will we talk about something?

LAURA *(smiling)*. What will we talk about?

A pause. JIM thinks really hard and his mind finally settles on:

JIM. Bunny rabbits.

They both smile.

Music. 'A Little Respect' by Wheatus is heard.

We hear the first verse as JIM and LAURA talk about bunny rabbits. It's a conversation we're not allowed hear.

From above, bubbles float down on them.

LAURA catches one in her hand.

As the chorus pumps in we cut to:

Blackout.

'A Little Respect' continues through the curtain call.

The End.