

Between Courses

Characters

IZZY, ALFIE, TIBBY, FREDIE, BELLA - All early thirties, all dress and look very similar. Like if they cast *Friends* in 2022.

RICK - Early thirties, tall and strong, his clothes not quite as discreetly tasteful as the others'.

AL - mid thirties. Shirt, rolled up sleeves.

HARPER - Early twenties, youthful, pretty. Wears baggy sweats.

Setting

The living room of Izzy and Alfie's small but Instagram-perfect London flat. A dining table in the middle. Around the walls of the room are strategically placed photos and piles of books. A big toy chest in the corner, covered by a long sheet/tablecloth.

Behind the table is a very large black and white portrait of a stern looking MALCOLM X propped against the wall on a cabinet. Stage right leads out to the kitchen and front door. Stage left leads further into the flat.

Throughout the play, should characters find themselves at the edges of the conversation, they shuffle around the room, reading, or pulling out a range of kid's toys or games from the chest, and play around with them.

Blackness. The muffled giggles and amorous whispers of a man and a woman growing more excited. The female voice becomes serious, then panicked.

WOMAN: No!

Crashing and smashing and silence.

LIGHTS UP.

IZZY and AL stand at opposite ends of the table, upon which the tablecloth sits bunched at one end, and shattered plates, glasses and candleholders scattered around it.

IZZY: Al, what the bloody hell?!

AL: Why did you turn the light on?

IZZY: Look at this! Why?

She dashes to the kitchen and returns with a brush and pan, and begins to tidy up.

AL: Thought it would be romantic is all. A kind of grand gesture.

IZZY: I could give you a grand fucking gesture.

AL: I was going to pick you up and lay you on the table, I didn't want to impale you on a flute.

IZZY: This is domestic violence!

AL: That, Izzy my love, is an overstatement. It's ro-man-tic!

IZZY: It's all smashed to hell, look. My good plates. My. Good. Plates!

AL: They're lovely.

IZZY: They were lovely, yes, thank you! Now they're my good shards.

AL: Let me help you.

He walks over to the tablecloth. Izzy swats him away.

IZZY: No, no, it's fine, don't touch it.

Resigned, Al leans against the wall, checking his phone, while Izzy bustles around.

AL: Doesn't it bother you that we have the same name?

IZZY: What? No you don't.

AL: Alright. I am sorry. *(beat)* Did you see the news about down the road?

IZZY: Yes. What happened?

AL: Murder. Two blocks from here. Two blocks. Some poor kid in the wrong place at the wrong time. Stabbed by two or three grown men. They were probably each twice his size.

IZZY: Where?

AL: Two blocks that way.

IZZY: Oh yes, the house prices take a nosedive down that way.

AL: That's hardly relevant.

IZZY: I expect it is.

AL: Can you imagine it? Can you imagine his parents? His mother?

IZZY: Did you make it?

AL: I raced down there as soon as I heard. She'd just ordered dessert. Lucy Watson at ITV got down there first. Interviewed his dad.

IZZY: Oh!

AL: He was in bits. It's the most terrible feeling. Never again. I'll be like lightning on the next one.

IZZY: Mm.

AL: *(beat)* You look stressed.

IZZY looks up at him.

AL: All I'm saying is why do you feel you should allow yourself to get so worked up for these people?

IZZY: I have anxiety. You know that. I've told you that.

AL: I know, I know you have anxiety. So why, you know, stir it for... them?

IZZY: My friends you mean? Is that - a - serious - question?

She starts to hyperventilate. Al rushes over. He takes the pan and brush from her, resting it on the table, and pulls her close. He strokes her hair.

AL: Alright it's alright, I'm sorry. *(beat)* God in Heaven I adore you.

IZZY: Can I ask you something?

AL: Of course you can ask me something.

IZZY: It's a serious question. The answer you give must be serious.

AL: Yes, what would you like to know?

IZZY: Could we ever just... get out of here?

AL: What do you mean here? To another room?

IZZY: No, could we leave? Just leave. I can't stand it anymore. This place, this life. It isn't mine. This is not me. I mean... I have "good plates"?

AL: Shards.

IZZY: I have good shards? I don't know when exactly I started ascribing hierarchical value to different patterns of crockery but I can't believe it's actually happened to me. Flat, marriage, cream carpets, creamier table, more chairs than cohabitants. Disney Plus. Any more of a cliché and I could be on a fucking Christmas card. Let's run away.

AL: What are you talking about?

IZZY: Why not? What's stopping us?

AL: Where would we go?

IZZY: Somewhere bloody different, Al. Somewhere nobody goes. We could make our own way and our own decisions. Not gagged or blindfolded. Not a stumbling attempt to stay a course on the baseless assurance that it is the best approximate path, all things considered. Not doing things because - spare me - "it's what you do".

AL: Somewhere different.

IZZY: Yes.

AL: Like Estonia.

IZZY: Why Estonia?

AL: It's the least visited country in Europe.

IZZY: What is there to do in Estonia?

AL: Dunno. Never been. No one has.

IZZY: I don't think I want to go to Estonia. But yes, somewhere like that! I mean, what is stopping us when you think about it? What stops us walking out that door right now?

AL: Well.

IZZY: Really, what is? What could?

AL: I have dinner.

IZZY: Oh.

AL: She wants me to stay for dessert this time. She actually made a point of telling me that.

IZZY: Yes, that's only fair.

AL: Don't want to be late.

IZZY: No.

AL: I guess you're not the only one stuck in a cliché.

IZZY: No.

Al kisses her on the cheek as he picks up his jacket.

AL: I better go. I'll see you soon.

IZZY: Yeah.

Al exits. Izzy is left alone for a moment, and sinks to her knees, wailing silently. A knock on the door. Almost immediately she regains her composure and answers it. Al rushes back in, taking her up in his arms.

AL: I am a rabid sort for a grand gesture - fuck it.

IZZY: Fuck it?

AL: Fuck it I tell you! You're right baby! What are we doing? This is mad! All of it! What happens to people that makes them decide staying miserable for the rest of your life is a worthy moral undertaking?

IZZY: People are insane.

AL: Not like we are. Let's do it.

IZZY: Yes, yes, let's do it, I love you! Let's do it!

AL: After dinner.

IZZY: Sorry?

AL: I've got to go to dinner first, it wouldn't be right.

IZZY: Will you tell her?

AL: I think so. Seems the proper thing to do, right?

IZZY: I didn't realise "fucking it" involved any etiquette.

AL: You have company.

IZZY: Yes. God. When do you think you'll be done?

AL: The moment she's licked her spoon clean. When can you be done by?

IZZY: Let's see... if I'm quick, which I fully intended to be in any case... ten o'clock?

AL: I'll be here. Throwing stones at your window. How's that for cliché?

IZZY: I love you.

AL: I love you, I love you, I love you. Goodbye. Good luck.

Al exits again. Izzy spins around the room. She picks up the brush and dances with it.

IZZY: Goodbye! Goodbye! Goodbye carpet, goodbye table! Goodbye you entire fucking Swedish foldaway fucking pen!

She stops as a key rattles in the lock.

IZZY: Bollocks.

Flustered, she shoves pan, brush and shards under the table. She pulls the cloth off the toy chest and covers the table, concealing the evidence below. Just as she finishes smoothing it out, ALFIE and HARPER enter to find Izzy standing attentively.

IZZY: Hello!

HARPER: Hi Izzy.

IZZY: Harper, come here, sweetheart.

They hug. Alfie pockets his keys and drops his coat on a chair.

ALFIE: Sorry we're late.

IZZY: Look at you. You look absolutely gorgeous. I mean really, it's the height of bad manners. God, look how tall you are. You are blooming, kiddo! You can't know how old you make me feel, every time I see you it's a whole new person looking back.

HARPER: Every five years or so. Bound to happen.

IZZY: Yes, of course...

(Beat.)

HARPER: Hope you've not been waiting too long.

IZZY: My darling, it is worth it to see you. Come talk to me, it has been so long. How is your mum?

HARPER: She's--

IZZY: What is the problem exactly? She was quite vague on the phone. She can be like that, she's always had trouble expressing herself, ever since we were little. We were really very different. At school I loved music class and art class. We still are quite different, as you know. So what was it? Did she not approve?

HARPER: Of what?

IZZY: Of you coming to London, chicken! Your exposure to the totality of existence condensed into six hundred square miles of everything. It was never in her I suppose. Me, I was like you. First chance I got I was high tailing it to the big city. Like I always say, it's not something you want to do, it's something you have to do, like breathing or walking - I mean, unless you are otherly abled, obviously, in which case--

HARPER: You can't come to London if you're disabled?

IZZY: Of course you can! What a question! They all should!

HARPER: They all should? All disabled people?

IZZY: Well you would probably like to unpack your things. We should be having dinner soon and our friends are all dying to meet you, I mean really. You're on the left.

Harper walks in the direction Izzy is pointing, unsure what to make of this. Before exiting, she looks at Malcolm X, but makes no comment. Silence falls between Izzy and Alfie, who taps his feet and looks at his phone. Izzy goes to his chair and takes his jacket to hang up.

ALFIE: Oh, sorry. I should have done that.

IZZY: That's alright. So what happened?

ALFIE: Sorry?

IZZY: Do you remember that I told you this morning that I would appreciate your leaving a little ahead of schedule to collect Harper and avoid any chance of hitting the traffic?

ALFIE: I do.

IZZY: You do?

ALFIE: Yes I do.

IZZY: Then, I have to tell you it hurts me that you wouldn't treat my input with enough respect to take it into account when making your decisions today. I really don't consider it asking very much to leave the university slightly earlier than you typically do.

ALFIE: I understand. Would you prefer to talk about this later?

IZZY: I hope she wasn't waiting very long. It's not exactly the safest area. Haven't you seen the news?

ALFIE: I left thirty minutes early in order to beat the traffic, which, you were right, would have been a problem had I not.

IZZY: Why the delay? I know we promised to stop using unconstructive language towards each other, but when I try to put together a sentence with the subject *you* and the predicate *late* I find it consistently challenging to avoid inclusion of the adverb *always*--

ALFIE: It wasn't Harper's fault. Her train was--

IZZY: I didn't say it was Harper's fault. Please don't put words in my mouth, Alfie.

ALFIE: I am sorry that you feel that's what I was doing. The train was obstructed.

IZZY: Obstructed?

ALFIE: Haven't *you* seen the news?

IZZY: Oh God, like I don't see enough of the news. What happened?

ALFIE: The protest.

IZZY: What protest?

Alfie approaches Izzy while swiping through his phone.

ALFIE: Expiration Revolt. Climate activists. They're lining themselves up on the tracks. Look. They started an hour ago. Ironically it looks quite a lot like littering.

IZZY: God, look at them all.

ALFIE: Waited for the commuters going home after a long day's work.

IZZY: I'm sure that will go over very nicely for them.

ALFIE: Honestly, just, I don't know... it won't be long, you know.

IZZY: What won't be.

ALFIE: Until... you know?

Harper returns.

IZZY: Oh kitten, you look wonderful.

HARPER: I didn't change or anything.

IZZY: No, no, I know. You look just perfect.

HARPER: Perfect?

IZZY: Alfie was telling me what the hold up was with your train. I'm so sorry you had to be subjected to that. It must have been terribly frustrating for everyone on board.

HARPER: The protest? My partner is involved in it.

IZZY: Awww.

(Beat.)

HARPER: How are they looking over there?

ALFIE: Ahem, well. There are a lot of people.

An awkward silence is broken by a knock at the door.

IZZY: Alfie honey! They're here. Go answer the door. I must dash to the kitchen.

ALFIE: Don't you want to wait until we've greeted our guests, dear?

IZZY: No, that's not right. Everyone knows that at a proper dinner party the food is already on the go when the guests arrive. I'm not a short order cook in a New Jersey diner.

Izzy exits to the kitchen. Alfie drags himself to the door.

ALFIE: Remember your training in the car.

HARPER: I've braced myself.

ALFIE: Ready?

HARPER: Are you?

Alfie's small grin turns into a big false smile as he opens the door to FREDDIE and TIBBY.

ALFIE & FREDDIE & TIBBY: Hello!

ALFIE: Come in, come in.

TIBBY: How are you, peach?

Air kisses are exchanged. Harper glances at her phone before pocketing it.

ALFIE: Oh mustn't complain. How are you?

TIBBY: Great, really great. Wow, the place looks great.

She glances at Malcolm, while Freddie embraces Alfie.

TIBBY: Yeah, beautiful table. Hi!

FREDDIE: Good to see you, old boy.

ALFIE: Please allow me to introduce Harper, Izzy's niece. Harper, Tibby, Freddie. Freddie, Tibby, Harper.

FREDDIE: Well, pardon my pedantry, but unless the terms of your marriage preclude the added blessing of in-laws that would make her *your* niece too, wouldn't it Alfie? Mustn't forget.

ALFIE: She is going to be starting university in September, at the very college where we all met.

FREDDIE: And one might say the one you never left. Hi Harper, lovely to meet you.

ALFIE: I will in fact be one of her lecturers.

TIBBY: Sooo been looking forward to meeting you.

HARPER: Is that right?

TIBBY: Oh I love your trainers!

HARPER: Oh thanks.

TIBBY: They're totally dirty, I love them. You must think I've tried so desperately hard.

HARPER: No, I don't.

FREDDIE: Munchkin, give Alfie our present.

ALFIE: Oh you shouldn't have.

TIBBY: Don't be silly, it's the done thing.

Tibby reaches into her bag and gives Alfie a small package wrapped in expensive paper.

ALFIE: Bread.

TIBBY: Banana bread.

FREDDIE: She baked it herself. It's so good. She's so good.

TIBBY: Thank you very much.

Freddie and Tibby share a peck.

TIBBY: Everyone needs a hobby. I know, I'm such a loser. Like, who bakes, right? I don't know where it comes from but I just love it. God knows how I find the time.

ALFIE: Well thank you, that's very sweet of you.

FREDDIE: So Harper, where are you coming from?

HARPER: Hitchin.

FREDDIE: You get the train in?

HARPER: Well yes.

TIBBY: Oh you must have been held up by the protest!

HARPER: Yes I was, Tibby.

TIBBY: That must have been quite, well... you know.

HARPER: Quite what?

FREDDIE: That is to say, while you were stuck on the train. You must have felt pretty... yeah. Not that, that is to say, not that it's wrong, exactly...

ALFIE: *(beat)* Harper's partner is currently spread across the tracks with the other protestors.

TIBBY: Your *partner*.

FREDDIE: You didn't say your *partner* was one of the protestors.

HARPER: When should I have mentioned it?

TIBBY: Oh your *partner*, how fantastic! And how are you and your *partner*?

HARPER: Good, thanks.

TIBBY: Is it like a monogamous thing? Or are you more poly... poly-thingy?

ALFIE: Tibby...

TIBBY: Oh, sorry. You're right. Guest. I'm a guest. House rules.

Izzy re-enters.

IZZY: Hello!

TIBBY & FREDDIE: Oh hello!

More air kisses.

TIBBY: Oh so good to see you!

IZZY: And you, you look divine.

TIBBY: Oh stop it, I look like a snail someone pulled out of an abandoned bath drain.

HARPER: Wow.

TIBBY: Doesn't Freddie look handsome though? He can pull it off when he tries.

FREDDIE: Play your cards right and you might find out.

Freddie nuzzles her neck. Alfie takes his seat. Harper stands near him.

TIBBY: Bunny, house rules, please!

ALFIE: What is "house rules"? You keep saying it. House rules.

FREDDIE: We are guests in your home. So we promised we would be good enough to remember we are under someone else's roof who might not be comfortable with expressions of sensuality or affection.

(Beat.)

ALFIE: Not comfortable.

FREDDIE: Yes, we're sorry.

TIBBY: Sorry.

IZZY: With expressions of sensuality.

TIBBY: Or affection.

IZZY: I'm not uncomfortable.

TIBBY: No?

IZZY: Babe, are you--

ALFIE: I could be in a hammock made of coconut milk and napping koalas and I would be as equally relaxed as I am now.

FREDDIE: Alfie, bro, I hope you're not feeling competitive.

IZZY: Why would you think that, Freddie sweetie?

FREDDIE: Oh but it is so good to see you both again. And this place! You know what it reminds me of? Glasshouse Yard.

IZZY: Oh dear. I would like to think I've gotten a bit more house proud since those days.

FREDDIE: Not overly I hope.

IZZY: Stop it you.

TIBBY: No, I know what you mean. It's like... a young person's home.

IZZY: Thank you.

FREDDIE: Shit guys, I mean, do you remember those days?

IZZY: A handful of them. Oh Tibby, do sit down. Can I get you anything?

TIBBY: Oh I don't know. Freddie, are you?

FREDDIE: I don't mind.

Izzy gets Tibby a glass of wine.

TIBBY: He's taken up jiu jitsu. Gone all health kick on me. Thank you petal.

FREDDIE: Now now, it's you who reaps the rewards at night.

ALFIE: I'm sure. Must put him out like a light.

FREDDIE: Those days though. Apologies in advance Harper. You're about to hear a gaggle of old fogies talking through misty eyes about their former greatness.

HARPER: I don't mind. I'd like to hear about it.

FREDDIE: Well, let me tell you. Your aunt - Alfie's cool with this by the way - was a firestarter sack-banshee from hell.

Harper looks on as the adults burst into loud laughter.

ALFIE: Don't I know it.

FREDDIE: You are a good sport, pal. Don't get me wrong, she was the mother hen. We had a cleaning rota in that squalid little nest of ours. Tasks assigned to each of us on a weekly rotation. Izzy invariably ended up doing everything on the list.

TIBBY: Not true. Four times I took the bins out. Four.

ALFIE: Sometimes I would empty the litter tray.

IZZY: I think what you've inadvertently reminded us of Freddie is that you contributed exactly nothing to that flat.

FREDDIE: I resent that. In fact I repudiate it. I provided a substantial portion of my parents' monthly earnings. If you think about it I was sub-letting the place to you squatters for nothing.

TIBBY: For squat.

IZZY: That's true. We were really your live-in staff.

FREDDIE: My concubines. And Alfie.

ALFIE: Don't pretend you never considered it.

HARPER: Sorry, I'm getting a call.

TIBBY: Ooh, is it the revolutionary lover?

HARPER: I'll go take it in my room.

Tibby exits. Freddie strolls around, holding court.

TIBBY: She's adorable.

IZZY: Isn't she perfect?

FREDDIE: Oh weren't those just the days though?

IZZY: Pardon?

FREDDIE: Uni, what do you think? Can you think of anything else you've done in life that actually lived up to its billing like that? We were like rebel poets with tax exemptions. Young adults, old children, free from concerned outsiders' interests for the first time in our lives. Free to experiment, to dare, to shag, to learn, to talk - really talk - and really shag.

ALFIE: You got something on your mind, Freddie?

TIBBY: Only always.

IZZY: You are very candid.

FREDDIE: Why ever be untransparent? People are so meek and fearful talking about one of the few things they can reasonably expect to have in common with each other.

TIBBY: People are insane.

FREDDIE: People are insane, ducky. We always promised each other not to be that way. And look, it's not about being better than everyone else.

ALFIE: We didn't say--

FREDDIE: It's just about, you know, being the best we can for each other. And that demands honesty. Always. But, like we say, we appreciate that we are in your home, and--

IZZY: Oh Freddie, stop! You've not popped round for tea with the vicar here. There's nothing you can say that is going to make us blush.

FREDDIE: What do you think, sugar plum?

TIBBY: I don't know, my love. Should we?

FREDDIE: Should we though?

IZZY: Should you what?

ALFIE: Yes. Please put us out of our misery.

FREDDIE: Go on.

TIBBY: So we did this quiz online.

ALFIE: How filthy.

TIBBY: It tells you how kinky you are.

IZZY: Really?

FREDDIE: It's good fun.

ALFIE: How does an algorithm on BuzzFeed give you deeper insight into your own carnal idiosyncrasies than your own mind?

IZZY: I think it sounds fun.

FREDDIE: I knew you would.

ALFIE: So do I. I think it sounds fun.

FREDDIE: The Buzzfeed algorithm?

ALFIE: Yeah, sounds interesting.

TIBBY: Oh it is. What is really interesting about it is that you can see how compatible your answers are with your partners. See if they dovetail, fit. It's not always about having the same answers, more the corresponding answer that will facilitate the most satisfying physical relationship.

ALFIE: I'd love to try it.

FREDDIE: You can try it right now.

IZZY: Where has that girl gotten to?

ALFIE: Yes, I would like that.

IZZY: Do excuse me, I'm going to go find her.

FREDDIE: I'll help.

IZZY: Help?

FREDDIE: Yes, well you made me feel bad for not contributing when we lived together. I'll make it up to you.

IZZY: You're a silly man.

FREDDIE: The silliest.

Freddie follows Izzy off stage. Tibby takes a big gulp of her wine. Alfie strolls around, hands in pockets.

ALFIE: Oh sorry, how rude of me.

He fills up her glass.

TIBBY: Oh really, don't trouble yourself.

ALFIE: Never leave a guest with an empty glass. House rules, you might say.

TIBBY: Thank you.

ALFIE: Cheers.

Silence.

TIBBY: You seem different. I always mean to tell you that when we see each other.

ALFIE: How d'you mean?

TIBBY: I remember you used to look... so haggard all the time.

ALFIE: Oh thank you.

TIBBY: You'd stagger out of Izzy's room, cheeks sunken, bags under your eyes, which were red because you hadn't taken your contacts out the night before.

ALFIE: Yeah, I used to be really bad for that.

TIBBY: Not anymore.

ALFIE: No not anymore.

TIBBY: I bet you always take them out now, every night. Never miss a night.

ALFIE: Never miss a night.

TIBBY: Never miss a second of sleep.

ALFIE: Not one wink will I concede.

TIBBY: No.

ALFIE: No.

TIBBY: Jesus.

ALFIE: I know.

TIBBY: Where have they gone looking for her, the neighbours'?

ALFIE: Been a little while.

TIBBY: When are lovely Bella and Rick getting here?

ALFIE: There's no hurry.

Izzy returns, looking flustered.

Alfie: Hi.

IZZY: Hi. Where are Bella and Rick? Starters won't be very long at all.

Izzy walks towards the kitchen.

TIBBY: Did you find her?

IZZY: *(turning around)* Yes. She won't be long.

Freddie returns. Izzy meets his eyes, and swivels, going into the kitchen.

FREDDIE: Harper's just finishing her call.

ALFIE: Okay.

TIBBY: Freddie-bear, are you sure you won't have a drink?

FREDDIE: I'm on a health kick, my little hummus dip.

TIBBY: That's right.

FREDDIE: What were you two talking about?

TIBBY: Sex.

FREDDIE: I'm a fan.

TIBBY: Liar.

Freddie laughs heartily and kisses his wife on the head while he rubs her back.

FREDDIE: Oh yes, you're a husk of a woman, aren't you?

TIBBY: An empty vessel.

FREDDIE: Waiting to be filled.

TIBBY: You have never satisfied me!

FREDDIE: I've never even tried, have I?

TIBBY: No! You're so selfish!

FREDDIE: I know! I am!

TIBBY: But hush, lovely, Alfie doesn't want to hear about our so called sex lives.

FREDDIE: He's not embarrassed. Look at him! He's not embarrassed. Are you?

ALFIE: Of course not.

TIBBY: It is so healthy to talk about these things. So healthy.

ALFIE: So healthy. So very healthy.

Harper returns.

ALFIE: How are things at Tiananmen Square?

HARPER: It sounds amazing.

TIBBY: Oh, I bet. I would have loved to have been there.

HARPER: Tiananmen Square?

TIBBY: Sure, I love Asia. Have you been?

HARPER: No.

TIBBY: Oh you must go, it's beautiful. Although I think it's awful what they're doing to the Uygurs.

HARPER: You think so?

ALFIE: Controversial.

TIBBY: I do. I think it's appalling.

FREDDIE: Well now you're back, Harper, we were talking about a little online game we found on the Internet.

HARPER: That is where you'll find them.

ALFIE: Are we still on this?

FREDDIE: You'd rather not?

ALFIE: I've bloody told you I don't care. I don't care.

FREDDIE: Well let's play then. Izzy? Izzy! Get in here.

Izzy returns.

IZZY: We really will be ready soon. Where are they?

FREDDIE: Never mind all that, sit down. Tibbs.

TIBBY (*reading from her phone*): I like to be dominated in the bedroom.

IZZY: I beg your pardon?

HARPER: What's going on?

FREDDIE: You can answer with strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree.

TIBBY: Or strongly disagree.

FREDDIE: No, she won't say that.

IZZY: No opinion.

TIBBY: Oh, boo! Alfie?

ALFIE: Strongly disagree.

FREDDIE: Yes, yes, we look on your mighty testosterone and despair! Methinks you doth protest too much - not that there's anything wrong with that, Harper.

ALFIE: Am I to assume that there will be running commentary on every answer we give?

TIBBY: No, sorry you're right. Freddie, wind your neck in. Question two. I don't like making sexual decisions, I prefer my partner to make them for me.

ALFIE: Agree. IZZY Agree.

(Beat.)

IZZY: Sorry, I thought that was for me.

ALFIE: No, no, I did too. That was what I thought *you'd* say. Disagree. My answer would be disagree. No wait. No opinion.

TIBBY: Alright--

ALFIE: Disagree.

FREDDIE: Final answer?

ALFIE: Next question, come on.

IZZY: Harper, are you comfortable with this?

FREDDIE: Don't be daft, she's having the time of her life. How many kids her age have an aunt and uncle this cool?

HARPER: I mean, yeah.

TIBBY: I am willing to try anything once, even if I don't think I'll like it.

ALFIE: Strongly agree.

IZZY: Yes, of course. Try anything once, agree.

FREDDIE: Yup.

TIBBY: Receiving care and comfort are the most important things I am looking for in a sexual relationship?

IZZY: Hm.

TIBBY: Disagree? No wrong answers.

IZZY: Well. There are many aspects to consider. Care and comfort, great, sure. Familiarity and trust. Excitement, too. Danger, novelty, energy.

ALFIE: No opinion.

TIBBY: Harper, you haven't answered a single question.

HARPER: I'm quite private really about this stuff.

FREDDIE: That won't last. I remember this Methodist girl at our first fresher's week--

ALFIE: Tibby.

FREDDIE: Let's just say she wasn't at Church that first Sunday.

ALFIE: Go ahead.

TIBBY: I am kinkier than most of my peers.

ALFIE: Strongly agreed. IZZY: Strongly agreed.

TIBBY: *(half-beat)* Question six. I am currently in a long-term relationship, agreed obviously. Question seven - I am totally fine with my partner having sex with other people.

(Beat.)

IZZY: Did you want to go?

ALFIE: I thought you were...

IZZY: Do you not want to go?

ALFIE: I don't mind--

IZZY I don't. I don't.

ALFIE: I... no, yeah, I'll go. Strongly disagreed.

IZZY: Strongly disagreed.

Knock at the door. Izzy goes to answer it.

IZZY: About bloody time, here they are.

HARPER: What did you answer for these questions?

FREDDIE: I can't tell you that. Based on the flavour of the answers so far I reckon your uncle might cast us out into the street.

ALFIE: Question eight?

Izzy opens the door. Bella and Rick enter.

IZZY: Hello--

TIBBY: Living in a group of slaves owned by me and serving me would be my ultimate life goal.

BELLA: Hello.

FREDDIE: Rick! Bella!

Greetings all round.

RICK: *(points to Malcolm X)* Cover his ears at least. Christ.

Awkward and embarrassed glances around the room.

RICK: Alfie, good to see you mate.

ALFIE: How are you Rick?

RICK: Top fucking form, son.

BELLA: Here, this is for you.

Bella hands Izzy a familiar looking small gift.

IZZY: Oh stop it Bella, I told you not to!

BELLA: I couldn't not and you know it, don't start.

ALFIE: Is it banana bread?

BELLA: Alfie. That is spooky.

IZZY: Thank you very much.

RICK: Take it, please. Anything to get it out of my kitchen. The bread, I mean. Who's this?

TIBBY: Rick, Bella, this is Harper.

IZZY: Thank you Tibbs.

HARPER: Hi.

FREDDIE: Yes, she is going to be attending our old academic haunt in September.

BELLA: Wonderful, you must be thrilled.

HARPER: Oh. You know.

RICK: I bet you love that eh Freddie? Ample opportunity for you to bore the bollocks off everyone about the good old days that no one else can bring themselves to recall.

FREDDIE: Ha. Great.

RICK: I'm only joking, kid. You lot seen all this on the news? These people putting their heads under a train or whatever?

TIBBY: Well, actually Rick-

RICK: Let me guess. Your comrades are all down there are they?

HARPER: Yes, actually.

IZZY: Anyone for a drink?

BELLA: Oh yes please.

TIBBY: I will as well moosh, but Rick, it's her *partner* that is involved in the protest.

HARPER: That's right.

RICK: Well, great. Young minds, eh?

TIBBY: It is great.

FREDDIE: It is.

IZZY: Sit down everyone, sit, sit, sit.

Rick strolls around the room while Izzy usher the rest into chairs. Tibby, Freddie and Bella all linger near Harper, hoping for a neighbouring seat. Tibby and Bella manage to secure one either side of her.

RICK: I'll take a drink, Izzy. Look at this place, eh? I tell you, it would not be a bad time at all for you to stick this one up. The market is especially caca right now.

FREDDIE: Well, no surprise, is it? With everything that's going on.

IZZY: Yes, what with everything, yes of course.

RICK: People are paying through the nose for any old kennel with a semi-decent postcode.

TIBBY: You must be very busy.

RICK: Jesus, you're not wrong. Very rewarding though.

HARPER: What do you do?

RICK: I'm an estate agent.

ALFIE: It's rewarding work.

RICK: Well, not the kind of rewarding an esteemed academic such as yourself would enjoy, prof. It's money and cars, mostly. Top of the board last month. Brand new A4. What's all the slave talk anyway?

IZZY: It's nothing, just a silly game.

BELLA: Well, I understand why it might seem like nothing to you Izzy but I have a lot of friends who would not feel very welcome walking into a conversation like that.

RICK: Do you?

HARPER: They were doing, like, a kinky test. It was weird.

RICK: Who won?

TIBBY: You can't *win*--

RICK: I bet I would.

FREDDIE: I don't think you quite understand.

TIBBY: It's about understanding and communicating.

BELLA: I completely get it.

TIBBY: Do you?

BELLA: Oh yeah, yeah. I put stuff like that in the magazine all the time.

HARPER: You run a magazine?

BELLA: I run Thoth.

RICK: You won't have heard of it.

BELLA: *Merci mon cœur.*

RICK: Ha?

BELLA: Nothing.

HARPER: Thoth?

BELLA: An ancient Egyptian deity--

RICK: The scribe of the gods--

FREDDIE: Yes, and of course the moon, and science--

BELLA: And obviously magic, art--

FREDDIE: He was also the god of judgement.

ALFIE: You know Hermes? Him, but in Egypt.

RICK: That's right. Excuse me.

ALFIE: Second on your right.

Rick exits to the bathroom.

BELLA: Yah, those quizzes really have a draw on people. Personality quizzes, Enneagrams and all that. I think, Tibbs, understanding and communication is right. But I think too, it's something about wanting to be able to place yourself in a group, categorise yourself and in doing so, remove yourself from all other categories. Find your place. And therefore find all the places that aren't yours as well. All the people you aren't. Yeah. A big draw. Lots of traffic.

IZZY: *(beat)* How is the magazine doing, Bella?

BELLA: Amazing, yeah. We smashed our plateau for clicks last edition.

IZZY: No way. Your dad must be so proud of you.

BELLA: Like I give a fuck about that.

Rick returns. Sniffs.

HARPER: That was fast.

No one responds to this.

IZZY: Everyone's here! Take a seat, I'll be plating up very soon.

FREDDIE: Can't wait.

HARPER: Sorry. Tibby, Freddie. I never asked what you did.

TIBBY: Oh don't be sorry!

ALFIE: She's not really sorry. It's what you say. He's a management consultant and she's a brand manager.

FREDDIE: That's pretty reductive.

ALFIE: But, you *are* a management consultant.

FREDDIE: I'm not like all the other management consultants though.

TIBBY: It's true. He really cares about trying to narrow the gap between the top and base of the management pyramid.

FREDDIE: I'm a flat structure guy. I'm all about flattening it out. You let a chasm open up between the workers and the bosses and you risk losing all the good stuff.

BELLA: Karl Marx would be proud.

HARPER: Ha!

FREDDIE: And when radicals fail to build a movement, they start a magazine.

TIBBY: Irving Howe.

FREDDIE: He was a--

BELLA: A literary critic, yeah totally. That was good.

RICK: Social Democrat of course.

BELLA: No sweetheart, he was a Democratic Socialist.

RICK: Excuse me.

Rick leaves for the bathroom again.

TIBBY: He must have forgotten to flush.

BELLA: He's terrible for that.

ALFIE: I heard a story about him once.

HARPER: Rick forgetting to flush?

ALFIE: No. Irving Howe. The story goes that he was walking across the sun soaked quadrant of Stanford University, where he worked in the Sixties, when a young radical leapt at him from between the palm trees. The student began to berate him, labelling him an old man who had abandoned his revolutionary positions to become part of the oppressive status quo. Betrayed the cause, gone soft, lost his edge. Old Man Irving, never shy of a fight, turned and said to him "You know what you're gonna be? You're gonna be a dentist."

HARPER: That's funny.

ALFIE: I think so.

Silence. Izzy returns bearing plates of food. Everyone breaks into oohs, aahs and applause.

IZZY: Stop that, stop it. You're embarrassing me.

ALFIE: *(rising)* Oh--

FREDDIE: Let me help you, Izzy.

Freddie rushes to get the remaining plates from the kitchen before Alfie is halfway out his seat. He places plates down by Harper, Bella and at Izzy's seat. Izzy fills in the gaps.

BELLA: Thank you, Freddie.

TIBBY: Would you look at that? Izzy, it looks so good, I dare not touch it!

BELLA: Lovely plates.

IZZY: Is that a joke?

BELLA: No.

FREDDIE: Here, let me.

Freddie pulls Izzy's chair out for her. Tibby and Bella look at him.

HARPER: Alfie, I was wondering if at some point I could talk to you about the course? I was just curious about some of the reading.

ALFIE: Well, I mean sure. Maybe later we can--

Rick charges back in and sits down.

RICK: Wow this looks the shizz, Iz. You know, you missed it, we were talking about Howe.

IZZY: Who?

RICK: Howe, Irving Howe. You know, the literary critic slash Democratic Socialist? Born in the Bronx in 1920? You know, his dad, he ran a small grocers that went tits up during the Great Depression? Wrote a biography of Trotsky, who was, you know, one of his heroes?

FREDDIE: Good to know the wifi works in your bathroom.

IZZY: What about him, Rick?

RICK: I heard this funny story about him once. He was walking across the quadrant of a sun soaked--

ALFIE: Aren't you going to talk us through this, Izzy?

BELLA: Please do.

TIBBY: It's veggie gyoza. Isn't it, Izzy?

IZZY: Yes. You know that market down the road? I went there to source the filling.

BELLA: What was it like?

IZZY: Do you know it was actually lovely. So vibrant. Look (*pulls out her phone*), these are the stalls. This man, he was Carribean. He told me people think he's African all the time but I asked him if he was Carribean so I think he liked that. Look how happy he is. And she was from... uhm... not Poland... Latvia! She was adorable, although I couldn't stay by her stall very long. You know.

TIBBY: Sourced the fillings? You made this from scratch? Queen, high five!

BELLA: It's delicious. So Freddie.

FREDDIE: Mm?

BELLA: What the hell was all that about with the chair?

FREDDIE: The chair?

BELLA: Do you think Izzy needs assistance lowering herself into a seat?

FREDDIE: No.

TIBBY: I don't think so either.

FREDDIE: It's how I was raised.

RICK: Bollocks. You were born in the nineteen-nineties, how can that be how you were raised?

FREDDIE: What can I say?

RICK: What else were you raised to do, put tights on table legs? Does Tibby have to wait in the car until you can walk round and open the door for her?

FREDDIE: We cycle. And I may be fringe here but I don't think there is anything sexist about pulling a chair out for a friend.

RICK: Would you do it for me?

FREDDIE: That wouldn't meet the requirements I described.

RICK: Very good.

FREDDIE: Look, don't get me wrong. We still have a long way to go as a society before we can look at ourselves and say sexism is gone. And it breaks my heart. But the minutiae of little traits that make up the social etiquette we all participate in is not the battleground on which the war will be won.

RICK: It *is* the battleground where the war will be won. I think you are wrong to call *the things we actually do* minutiae. It is precisely the fact that these things are so ingrained in our collective cultural consciousness and feel so normal despite being absurd and arbitrary as all fuck that makes them a real obstacle to equality.

BELLA: That's right. We had an article a few weeks ago--

RICK: It's like - think of it this way Freddie. If Izzy thanked you for pulling out her chair for her - which she didn't by the way - what does it say about her own self-perception? It tacitly implies her acceptance of herself as a fragile, physically limited "non-man", and places the onus on her to feel gratitude where it should not be accepted as legitimately earned.

IZZY: *(beat)* I don't mind.

RICK: Oh no?

IZZY: I mean, like, there's sexism and there's sexism, you know? Like, the idea of being swept off my feet doesn't sound all that bad, for example.

ALFIE: Glad to hear it.

Silence.

RICK: Listen, what does it say that none of you have even thought to ask Harper what she thinks?

HARPER: Well--

BELLA: Gyoza, did you say Izzy?

RICK: Go on. In fact, hang on a sec.

Rick shimmies his chair round to sit between Harper and Bella, who takes her phone out and starts tapping.

RICK: I think we would all benefit from hearing your perspective on this. I'm listening.

HARPER: I mean... I personally would feel slightly patronised.

RICK: It's totally patronising!

HARPER: I mean I can pull out my own chair.

RICK: Right!

FREDDIE: Harper, I hear you, totally. But--

ALFIE: Anyone needing topped up?

FREDDIE: I wasn't pulling Izzy's chair out as a man to a woman--

TIBBY: Thank you Alfie.

FREDDIE: But as an old friend. You know, me and your aunt go back a long way--

BELLA: *(gasps)* Oh! Oh Izzy.

ALFIE: Are you alright?

BELLA: Izzy, did you use wheat for this?

IZZY: What?

BELLA: Did you use wheat for this? When you were rolling the dumpling pastry did you use wheat?

RICK: Oh shit, did you use wheat?

IZZY: Oh no Bella...

ALFIE: Does that mean... are you..?

RICK: She is. She found out the other week.

BELLA: It strikes at any age.

TIBBY: Is there wheat in this then?

IZZY: I, I don't know.

BELLA: What?

IZZY: I can't...

Izzy dashes to the kitchen.

BELLA: Did you or did you not make gluten-free pastry? It's fried, isn't it?

Izzy returns holding some torn up Waitrose packaging. She runs her finger down the ingredients.

IZZY: Why is the font so fucking small?

FREDDIE: Fun fact - they list the ingredients from greatest to smallest by weight. I never knew that.

TIBBY: Check the allergens.

Izzy continues to scan. She gets to the bottom and pauses, before looking up at Bella.

BELLA: Please excuse me.

Bella runs out to the bathroom.

IZZY: Oh my God.

FREDDIE: I'll make sure she's okay.

Freddie runs off after her.

FREDDIE: *(off)* Bella!

TIBBY: Isn't he helpful?

IZZY: Oh my God.

TIBBY: Mind if I fetch another?

Rick goes to Izzy while Tibby heads to the kitchen. He takes the packaging from her hand and chucks it away as he eases her into a seat.

RICK: Alright, everybody relax.

HARPER: Is she alright?

RICK: She'll be fine. Food with gluten makes her a bit sick is all.

IZZY: I should go check on her.

RICK: You need to sit down. All of you, come on. It has no bearing on you. Come on. Dinner talk.

Tibby returns and fills a glass for Harper.

TIBBY: You must be feeling it now.

HARPER: Feeling it?

TIBBY: The absence. You must miss each other every second you're apart.

HARPER: Oh yeah. I do.

TIBBY: It must be a relief. It must be better, your way. I wish I was wired the same.

HARPER: What?

RICK: Eat, everyone, eat. Wheat or no wheat, it's honestly very good, Iz.

IZZY: I really think I should go check on Bella.

Alfie gets up and takes the packaging out of sight to the kitchen before returning to his seat.

RICK: What can you do now, a glutenoscopy? Alfie. Tell Izzy how good her food is. Alfie. Hey, do you ever offer to help out by the way? In the kitchen? I would love to see that. I bet you'd look hilarious. Standing behind her clutching a sieve. Eh?

TIBBY: You're always very quiet when Rick talks to you, Alfie, my sweet.

RICK: Nah he's just thinking of a wicked-smart zinger to throw back at me, aren't you boy? Doesn't take guff from no man. Come on. Hit me.

ALFIE: The food's delicious.

TIBBY: Cheer up, Alfie, honestly.

RICK: Alfie, tell us a story.

TIBBY: Tell us a story about lecturing Alfie. Do you remember a favourite one?

RICK: Yeah, tell us about a time you brought the house down, Alfie.

HARPER: Oh my God. What are you even talking about? Leave him alone, Jesus.

Rick and Tibby sit, cowed. Alfie looks up at Harper briefly, before returning to his dumplings. Izzy stands up.

TIBBY: Oh, sit down Izzy. She'll be fine. She's looked after.

IZZY: I can't believe I made her sick. Do you think she'll want to go home? Will you go home?

TIBBY: Have another drink.

IZZY: I haven't finished mine, thanks.

TIBBY: Oh.

Tibby takes Izzy's glass and drains it, before refilling it and her own empty glass, while lowering Izzy back into a seat. Rick stands and walks over to sit by Alfie.

RICK: I'm sorry if I picked on you.

ALFIE: You don't pick on me Rick.

Rick swivels in his seat to face Harper.

RICK: That was very good of you to stand up for Alfie like that. Seriously. You seem like a really good person. It's refreshing.

HARPER: Excuse me a second.

Harper takes up her phone and turns away from him. Rick spreads his legs wide in his seat.

TIBBY: Why isn't there any music?

IZZY: Are you finished?

TIBBY: Yes. Is there a speaker?

Izzy stands to clear the plates.

RICK: Give us that, mucka.

He takes Alfie's plate. He and Izzy go about collecting the remaining knives, forks and plates from the table.

TIBBY: What music do you like Harper?

They each grab the last plate at the same time.

RICK: Woops.

IZZY: It's okay, I'll take it.

RICK: I'll take it.

IZZY: No really, it's fine.

Rick starts pushing and pulling the plate in what he thinks is a fun, flirtatious manner.

RICK: To me, to you.

IZZY: Come on, Rick, let go.

TIBBY: There must be a speaker around here somewhere.

Tibby gets out of her seat and starts crawling in the corner of the room, searching.

IZZY: Let go.

RICK: You let go, I had it first.

IZZY: Come on.

RICK: Why are you playing tug-o-war with me? Think you've got a chance eh?

He yanks the plate, pulling Izzy towards him.

IZZY: Rick!

Rick starts waltzing her around the room. Izzy giggles accommodatingly.

IZZY: Come on! Stop it, I'm trying to get cleared up.

Giggles subside. Rick waltzes on.

IZZY: Rick, come on. Rick. Rick. Rick, get the fuck off me!

She pushes him away.

RICK: Jesus, sorry. *(sniff)* Sorry Alfie.

ALFIE: What are you apologising to me for?

Izzy looks at him before picking up the rest of the plates and marching to the kitchen, ALMOST slamming the door behind her. Rick and Harper look at Alfie. He sighs, and heads off after her.

TIBBY: Found it.

Loud pop music blares. The kind of thing you'd find in a TikTok dance challenge. Tibby dances back to her drink.

TIBBY: C'mon bitch. Put your phone down.

She tries to pull Harper up for a dance.

HARPER: I'm alright, thanks.

TIBBY: You know this one?

HARPER: Yeah.

TIBBY: I've gotten pretty good at it. Look.

Tibby breaks into her choreographed sequence. She is stopped in her tracks when her music cuts out.

TIBBY: Oh, put it back on!

RICK: I didn't do anything.

TIBBY: Put it back on. Harper and I were having fun.

HARPER: I'm trying my best.

Tibby stalks back to inspect the speaker. Harper checks her phone.

RICK: I swear this had nothing to do with me. It must be divine intervention.

HARPER: Wifi's down. I'm not getting any signal.

TIBBY: Why would the wifi be down?

HARPER: Don't know. Is that the router there?

RICK: Let's have a look.

Rick crouches in the opposite corner from Tibby.

RICK: Yep. That's the router.

HARPER: I know it is.

RICK: Stand back.

HARPER: It's a router, not a stroke victim.

RICK: I'll sort it out.

HARPER: It doesn't need room to breathe. How will you sort it out?

RICK: Come on, let's have a look at you.

HARPER: I need to reply to someone.

Alfie comes back without Izzy.

ALFIE: What's going on? Why are you all in corners?

TIBBY: The wifi's down.

ALFIE: Oh no. Well I'll have a look at the router.

RICK: I've got it.

ALFIE: What does that mean?

HARPER: It means he's already claimed it.

ALFIE: Budge up, let's have a look.

RICK: See that? I think that should be on.

ALFIE: Yeah, it's normally a green light.

RICK: Does it flash usually? Ours does.

ALFIE: No, I think it's a steady green light.

RICK: No, it definitely flashes.

TIBBY: Harper, pumpkin. I can't get up.

Harper pulls Tibby to her feet.

TIBBY: You're so strong. Kind of soft-butch aren't you, but also high-femme, would you say?

HARPER: Pardon?

TIBBY: There you are!

Tibby spots Bella and Freddie returning. She walks towards them and gives Bella a big hug.

BELLA: Oh, okay.

TIBBY: Awwh, how are you feeling, peaches?

BELLA: A bit better.

TIBBY: A bit better. Good, great. You should take it slow though, petal, here.

Tibby puts Bella down in a seat facing away from her and Freddie. Tibby's hand rests on Bella's shoulder a moment.

TIBBY: Where is my music? Where is my wine?

She turns sharply away from Freddie, who notices Alfie and Rick on the floor.

FREDDIE: Music?

HARPER: The wifi's down. It stopped Tibby dancing. We're trying to fix it anyway.

ALFIE & RICK: We're on it!

FREDDIE: The wifi?

HARPER: Down.

FREDDIE: Let's have a look then.

He takes his jacket off and stoops with the other two.

TIBBY: Oh, look, he's taking his jacket off. That'll show that pesky broadband.

Tibby and Bella are once again sitting either side of Harper.

HARPER: You good?

BELLA: Yes, thanks. Actually I'm still feeling a little bit--

TIBBY: Bella.

BELLA: Yes?

TIBBY: I'm so happy for you and your magazine.

BELLA: Thank you very much, Tibbs.

TIBBY: I'm so glad that Moth is such a success.

BELLA: Thoth.

TIBBY: How many visits did you get this month again?

BELLA: We are tracking very close to a thousand.

TIBBY: A thousand! And that's just in London! Cause that's what you write about isn't it? It's London, mainly.

BELLA: A lot of the time, yeah.

TIBBY: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Where to eat and where to drink and who's eating and drinking where.

BELLA: We do a lot on local culture, yeah.

TIBBY: Culture. Absolutely. A lot on technology and stuff as well, right? Like Big Tech.

BELLA: Oh sure. Big on Big Tech. We have a Twitter section.

TIBBY: You do?

BELLA: Yeah. Showing what people have tweeted and stuff.

TIBBY: That is so clever! People love Twitter!

BELLA: The metrics show that's where we're getting our longest engagement sessions.

TIBBY: You are... killing it.

BELLA: It's hard work, but you know me. Workaholic.

TIBBY: Do you know, I've noticed that about you. I was thinking about what you said earlier. How, like, people enjoy those quizzes because it puts them into one category at the expense of any other.

BELLA: Yeah.

TIBBY: I dunno. I don't think you have to stay in one category. I think it's fine to, you know, be trucking along, quite happy in the category you picked, and then you see another category on the horizon you'd quite like to squeeze into. So you just hop out of your old category and cuddle up with someone else's category. And I think that's fine. What do you think?

FREDDIE: Ow!

ALFIE: Alright?

RICK: Did it zap you?

FREDDIE: No, it's my knees on the floorboards - no it didn't fucking zap me!

HARPER: Is it working yet?

RICK: No, still trying to crack it.

HARPER: What exactly are you all doing to fix this?

RICK: Just give us a minute, Harper, we're exploring the terrain.

HARPER: I used all my data when my train was held up. I need online to reply to people.
Exploring the terrain?

FREDDIE: We all need online to reply to people.

HARPER: No but I actually do.

RICK: Alfie what's the password?

ALFIE: For the wifi?

RICK: No, for the nuclear fucking codes. I'll put it into my phone, see if that does anything.

ALFIE: It's... oh yes, it's our anniversary.

BELLA: Your wedding anniversary or first date anniversary?

RICK: What's it to you? What-what an inane question.

BELLA: I just know that some couples count both.

RICK: What's the date Alfie?

ALFIE: I'm thinking.

HARPER: You can't remember your anniversary? Is that like a real thing guys do?

ALFIE: No, no, I'm trying to remember what's uppercase and lowercase.

RICK: Give me the date and I'll try some variations.

ALFIE: Okay. October nine, all one word. The nine is a number.

RICK: I fucking know nine is a number.

ALFIE: No, but I mean--

TIBBY: How kinky are you, Bella?

BELLA: I'm sorry?

TIBBY: Would you like to test to see how kinky you are? Do you think you're kinkier than me?

BELLA: I'm sure I'm not.

TIBBY: Oh really, are you quite boring?

FREDDIE: Tibbs...

TIBBY: What? Her magazine has sex stuff in it all the time. Advice and stuff. Fifty ways to introduce fruit. She's an expert. So come on. Tell us what you like.

BELLA: I honestly think that the specifics of individuals' sexuality are best kept between intimate couples.

TIBBY: Oh do you?

FREDDIE: Hey! Hey, guys, this is reminding me of something.

RICK: Is it something that happened at "yooney", perchance?

FREDDIE: Why sir, yes it is.

RICK: Take over Alfie.

Rick hands Alfie his phone and heads to the bathroom again. Tibby also stands up.

TIBBY: Wait, wait. Ladies first. Rick might not care for such archaic customs, but it's either that or I mess on the rug like a naughty little puppy.

As Tibby passes Rick at the exit, we just about see him hand her something from his pocket. Off they both go.

FREDDIE: She's having so much fun. Anyway, I remember the last party we all had at Glasshouse, and there was a power cut - not quite the same as this but, you know. So we're all

bumping around in the dark, you know, finding it quite fun, and I'm trying to find you all when someone grabs my hand and pulls me around. Naturally, I think it's Tibbs at first. But - Alfie, have I ever told you this? Well anyway, the funniest mix up--

HARPER: Have you got it yet?

ALFIE: No, I've tried all upper, all lower, capital O, even tried capital OCTO, as a kind of Hail Mary... oh.

Trying to laugh off the interruption, Freddie takes a seat next to Bella.

BELLA: Is that a capital oh?

Alfie sheepishly types something into the phone.

ALFIE: Got it.

HARPER: Thank God.

BELLA: What was it, Alfie?

ALFIE: A variation.

BELLA: Your anniversary is the fourteenth.

ALFIE: A slight variation.

HARPER: It's still not working.

ALFIE: No. *(His phone buzzes)* Izzy says the main course won't be long.

HARPER: How are you talking to her? I'm not getting anything. How are you doing that, tell me.

ALFIE: This thing called texting. We don't use social media. Don't you have any actual phone numbers on your phone?

HARPER: What's the point?

ALFIE: Well, other than the issue of your private conversations remaining as such, not to mention the burden on your mental health fuelled by the deluge of meaningless trends and pernicious ads wearing the cross-eyed shitgrin mask of trite, stupid, so-called “news”, situations such as the one you find yourself in now would be the point.

BELLA: It has its uses.

ALFIE: It objectively doesn't.

BELLA: Would remind you that you were wed on the fourteenth.

ALFIE: Well, that wouldn't be much use with the wif off.

BELLA: How's work, Alfie?

ALFIE: Oh, you know.

BELLA: I'm not blown away by the enthusiasm.

ALFIE: Neither you are.

BELLA: It simply breaks my heart to see people doing something they don't really love. I mean, what's the point?

ALFIE: Stupid isn't it? I should just quit.

BELLA: You should!

ALFIE: I do like my job, Bella. Sorry. You caught me on a bad day. I got passed over for an extra course I felt I could do some good work in.

BELLA: Oh I am sorry.

ALFIE: S'fine. It is, I mean it's totally okay. Saanvi will do a great job with it. She knows her stuff. I just feel... well anyway it's probably for the best. I'm busy enough as it is.

BELLA: Busy is good. Are you getting enough sleep? It's hugely important, you know.

ALFIE: I am, thank you. Tonnes.

BELLA: Are you sure? You need eight hours a night. Even an hour less will quickly start to mess with your neurobiology. Anxiety, depression--

ALFIE: Yes--

BELLA: Bipolar disorder, Alzheimers, stroke, suicide, chronic pain. Only an hour less per night and it all becomes exponentially more likely.

HARPER: Is anyone still looking at the wife?

BELLA: And that's just the mental aspect.

ALFIE: Trying to.

BELLA: Your body gets put on the rack too. Cancer, diabetes, weight gain, infertility.

ALFIE: I get plenty of sleep. I really do.

BELLA: I read this great book about it--

ALFIE: Yes I read it too.

BELLA: You did?

ALFIE: Matthew Walker, "Why We Sleep". It was a bestseller. Freddie, you read it?

FREDDIE: Walker, yeah. Really interesting stuff.

ALFIE: Chances are anyone you've graced with your somnolent sermon since you memorised it has probably also read the book. Almost feels like it was a waste of time I bet. What's the point of knowing something everyone else knows, right?

Harper laughs.

BELLA: That shouldn't be a problem for you, poppet.

HARPER: Sorry?

BELLA: I imagine you'll be provided all the extra tutoring you will need, seeing as you'll be having dinner with the faculty most nights. Doesn't seem very fair, does it, Alfie?

ALFIE: I'm sure all the other small magazine editors would say the same about you and your dad. And I'm sure you would agree - them's the breaks.

BELLA: We ran this story a while back.

ALFIE: Was it your spotlight department?

BELLA: No, we lifted it from a broadsheet. It was local news, so it's fair game as I see it. It was about this lecturer at South Bank who was run out of the university after it emerged that he was sleeping with one of his students. Can you imagine? Can you imagine it, Alfie?

ALFIE: No, that's disgraceful. I can't.

BELLA: Only, well, do you know how they outed him?

ALFIE: How?

BELLA: Girl came forward on Twitter. Like I say, it has its uses.

(Beat)

Izzy pops her head in through the door.

IZZY: Alfie?

ALFIE: Yes petal?

IZZY: What's wrong with our wifi?

ALFIE: The wifi?

IZZY: Yes, Alfie. My messages aren't sending.

No one looks at Alfie. Instead they all avert their gaze from husband and wife.

ALFIE: Um, well, it's not working.

HARPER: It's fucked.

ALFIE: But I'm trying my best to fix it.

HARPER: I think that might be true.

IZZY: Let's see.

ALFIE: I've got this honey.

IZZY: Move.

Izzy jostles Alfie to his feet and fiddles with the router. After not very long she stands next to him.

IZZY: That should be it.

HARPER: Thank you, God.

ALFIE: What did you do?

FREDDIE: Burn her Alfie! She has dark powers beyond your ken.

IZZY: Reconfigured it. Restored factory settings.

HARPER: I still can't get in, aunt Izzy!

IZZY: The password's been deleted.

BELLA: It's not October nine anymore?

IZZY: Oct- no. *(looks at Alfie)* No, that's gone.

ALFIE: That doesn't really solve the problem.

IZZY: I don't know what went wrong, but a reset was the best solution.

ALFIE: Practical. Okay.

IZZY: So the password has reverted to the default. It'll be on the label on the side of the router.

HARPER: Can someone read it out?

Freddie kneels by the router.

FREDDIE: Christ, okay. Ormskirk.

IZZY: No it's not.

FREDDIE: That's what it says. Ormskirk.

IZZY: 0-R-M-S-K-1-R-K.

HARPER: Thank you.

BELLA: Ormskirk.

HARPER: I'm in.

Harper gets up, eyes on her phone and heads towards her room. She nearly bumps into Tibby and Rick coming the other way. Alfie watches her go.

HARPER: Sorry.

They hardly seem to notice as she veers around them. Tibby wipes Rick's nose, her hand lingering a moment.

FREDDIE: A round of applause for Iz the whiz.

Freddie and Bella clap. Rick and Tibby join in, confused. Alfie pours himself a drink.

TIBBY: Wooh! Alright!

Izzy sits down to look at her phone. Alfie sits at the opposite end of the table from her. Rick manoeuvres Bella to sit on his knee.

BELLA: And a round of applause for the good people of Ormskirk.

TIBBY: Where?

BELLA: You know what it reminds me of? A town you'd see in one of those Scandi-noir shows.

FREDDIE: We adore scandi-noir.

Tibby is struggling to hold it together.

RICK: We adore scandi-noir.

FREDDIE: No we *adore* it though, we're addicted. It's a real problem.

RICK: No, we have the problem. We're fucked up on it. Aren't we?

BELLA: It's true. We're main-lining it. Every night.

RICK: Every. Fucking. Night. What are you watching now?

FREDDIE: We've nearly finished *The Cold Black Dark Night*.

BELLA: Oh, uh-mazing.

RICK: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's a good one. Accessible. We binged that in a week. Have you seen *Smorgasborder*?

FREDDIE: I've heard it's great.

RICK: It's the best one by far. Universally agreed, the best one. All the papers say so. The proper ones.

FREDDIE: There's just no other TV worth watching these days.

BELLA: So true.

FREDDIE: The premises, the plots, the twists.

RICK: The scenery, the landscapes, the mountains, the fjords.

FREDDIE: Oh the fjords.

BELLA: So many fjords.

ALFIE: I've been. Anyone here been? Finland? Norway? Anybody?

BELLA: And just so dark.

ALFIE: Never managed to make it to Ormskirk.

FREDDIE: I don't think dark. It's real, you know? Real life. Gritty. Hard.

BELLA: Exactly.

Alfie looks over his shoulder to the hallway.

RICK: Not like the piss fountain here that the Great British Public is so enchanted by. The shite people watch, honestly.

BELLA: People are insane.

RICK: People are insane. Fucking "Bake Off". Fantasy.

BELLA: Tot-totally.

Alfie gets up and walks out after Harper. Only Izzy watches him go.

FREDDIE: If more people watched grisly murder shows rather than frothy cheesy slackjawed Strictly glittershit, the world would literally be a better place. Are you alright, Bella?

BELLA: Yes, just my intolerance.

FREDDIE: These shows, they're just excuses for people to turn their cheeks from the suffering which is the reality of their existence. Emotional procrastination.

RICK: It's cowardice is what it is. A truly self-actualized person, should confront an hour of snowy fields and wanton graphic sexual violence at least once a week. An adult. Don't you think, Izzy?

IZZY: I don't know. Ask Tibby.

TIBBY: I don't know what the fuck you're all talking about. What happened to the music?

RICK: I asked you. Come on, we're all friends here.

IZZY: I don't know. I mean it's escapism, isn't it?

RICK: Exactly. You're right.

IZZY: I can understand that.

RICK: Understand what?

IZZY: You know. Sitting and watching something with someone because there is nothing left to say. Why not look at something pretty and simple for a while? After a certain age... everybody does in one way or another. It reminds them of being pretty and simple themselves.

FREDDIE: Bella?

BELLA: Mm?

FREDDIE: Does Thoth have a review section?

BELLA: Yes.

FREDDIE: You hiring? I reckon the traffic would be like a London rush hour if you had Izzy writing for you, paying lip service to the mainstream.

Laughter.

RICK: Yeah you've really captured the voice of Little England, Iz. Christ alive. That's the most depressing thing I ever heard.

IZZY: Yeah. You got me. I am average scum.

RICK: Is that what you and Alfie are going to do later tonight? Turn the lights down low and laugh along to Keith Lemon eating orca balls?

IZZY: Alright.

FREDDIE: Do you vote on Britain's Got Talent? How much does it cost?

More laughter.

IZZY: I was obviously joking.

RICK: Isn't Simon funny? Do you like it when he insults the mentally ill?

IZZY: Like I say I was joking so shut up. Shut the fuck up. Shut-the-fuck-up.

Izzy begins to hyperventilate again.

RICK: Hey, hey, hey. Alright. You were joking.

TIBBY: You alright, jellybean?

IZZY: I'm fine.

RICK: Oh Izzy. I'm sorry, we were teasing.

IZZY: I'm fine. Really, I'm fine.

RICK: No seriously. Sorry. We were being arseholes.

FREDDIE: Sorry Izzy. *(beat)* I'm having such a fun night.

TIBBY: So much fun.

FREDDIE: I feel like I'm in a time machine. Look at you all. Nothing's changed. Other than a most welcome addition of course, Rick.

RICK: Most convincing.

FREDDIE: A toast.

Tibby pulls out her phone as Freddie raises a glass.

FREDDIE: To old, old friends. As the saying goes, they know you well, and like you all the same. And we really are all just the same. Cheers.

As they drink (except Tibby, still looking at her phone), Alfie slinks back in, looking ashen.

BELLA: Where did you go?

Izzy looks away.

ALFIE: *(beat)* I...

Tibby lets out a yelp. Everyone turns to look at her.

IZZY: Tibbs?

TIBBY: It's the protest.

IZZY: What, what about it?

TIBBY: Oh, this is awful.

Rick walks over to look at her phone.

RICK: Fuck.

ALFIE: What does it say?

Freddie, Rick and Izzy pull out their phones.

FREDDIE: Shit, it's all over the socials.

IZZY: I've found it. ITV News. Controversial protest movement's latest stunt spills over into bloody chaos as civilians clash with protestors, reports Lucy Watson. Blah, blah, blah, victim has been identified...

RICK: ITV News?

IZZY: Oh my God.

ALFIE: What?

IZZY: It's Izzy's boyfriend.

ALFIE: Oh no. No, no. Oh Iz.

(Beat)

RICK: Fuck. Fuck.

FREDDIE: Oh. Ah.

BELLA: No, really.

TIBBY: Boyfriend?

IZZY: Jesus. Jesus, Harper.

Izzy runs out of the room to find her.

FREDDIE: One of us should go too.

ALFIE: Why?

TIBBY: I'll go.

FREDDIE: It's alright, hummus, you stay here.

Off Freddie goes.

TIBBY: I'm right behind you darling-dearest-doveling! Just so you know!

Tibby follows.

BELLA: God. God.

RICK: You good, angel cake?

BELLA: Yeah. It's just... What are the odds? This could be an exclusive, you know?

Bella follows Tibby and Freddie. Rick potters about, scuffing the floor. Alfie slides into a chair.

RICK: Fucking hell, dude.

ALFIE: Yeah.

RICK: *(sniffs)* No but *fuuuucking hell*, right? This is mad.

ALFIE: Right.

RICK: Fucking bound to happen though eh? Fuck were they thinking? Not like, deserved, but you know - sooner or later.

ALFIE: For God's sake Rick.

RICK: No, no, it's horrendous! I know! I mean that poor fucking girl. She doesn't deserve this. She's, I mean, she's wonderful, isn't she?

(Beat)

RICK: Isn't she? A real credit would you agree? Charming, intelligent.

Rick takes a seat behind Alfie.

RICK: Pretty girl.

ALFIE: I can't talk about it. I don't want to imagine.

RICK: Of course. What do you want to talk about? The weather? The deficit? Some fucking erudite whimsical back and forth about the state of the nation? That's dinner party chat, isn't it?

ALFIE: No.

RICK: Or do you want to talk about the offer?

ALFIE: Well?

RICK: Well. Yeah. Well, they want more.

ALFIE: They want more?

RICK: More money, yeah.

ALFIE: Oh good, not more heroin or fucking banana bread recipes.

RICK: No, more money.

ALFIE: Christ, how can they want more? It's not Bal-fucking-moral, it's a one bedroom bungalow in the fucking backwaters of Southeast England.

RICK: I told you things have been going really great. It's all a bit over my head as to the reasons why, admittedly. Happy to benefit in ignorance.

ALFIE: Did you talk to them?

RICK: To be honest, fella, it's not really in my interests to dampen their expectations. You wouldn't want that, upstanding guy like you. You've got a degree and everything.

ALFIE: Christ, what am I going to do? What's the next move?

RICK: Have you considered looking further out of London?

ALFIE: Any further out of London I'll be viewing property in a fucking scuba suit!

RICK: Yeah. I suppose Izzy wouldn't really want that. Away from all her friends.

ALFIE: No.

RICK: No one but you for company. Her worst nightmare probably.

ALFIE: What can you do Rick?

RICK: What do you mean? There's nothing I can do. They think they can get more and they're right. They won't have to wait long.

ALFIE: You could tell them they should accept. Tell them not to wait, that the market, blah, blah, estate agent spiel, it's the best they're going to get.

RICK: You're asking me to lie for you?

ALFIE: I'm pulling the friend card here, mate. I'm pulling it and I'm asking you to stamp it. Please.

RICK: Friend card. Hm.

ALFIE: Yes. Please, mate.

RICK: Let's just, for once tonight, let's just cut the bollocks. Full fucking orchiectomy. You have never, ever liked me.

ALFIE: W-what? How can you--

RICK: “Wha, wha what? How can you say that, mate?” I do like hearing you fumble with that word. It comes off as natural as a stripper’s tits. You’d be a rubbish actor. The lot of you, you think you’re so fucking cute. Like you aren’t the most transparent, clumsy, oblivious peddlers of your own PR on planet Earth. I see it in your eyes every time I speak, you brace for the sound of my voice, girding yourself until it’s over and you can smile and nod and privately filter what I say into some mental catalogue of confirmation for my ignorance and stupidity and total absence of any fucking intellectual rigour. You practically flinch at the sight of me, I see it.

ALFIE: You’re high.

RICK: High, yeah I’m fucking high, how you do get through dinner parties? These things are traumatising. But I know I’m right. You never wanted anything to do with me. Your entire life, before you ever met me you wanted nothing to do with me, with what you’ve decided I am. I’m the Mongol horde, on the wrong side of the Wall. But of course, you want something. And that means an armistice right? A coalition.

ALFIE: Rick, what are you talking about?

RICK: Yeah, yeah, talking, we’re talking here, really talking now, really getting down to it. See me, I’m an honest man, Alfie. I appreciate honest men.

ALFIE: Right.

RICK: So tell me.

ALFIE: Tell you what?

RICK: Come on.

ALFIE: I don’t...

RICK: I’d appreciate it. No repercussions.

ALFIE: *(beat)* I don’t like you, Rick.

RICK: That feels good, doesn't it?

ALFIE: But you misunderstand why. It's a very specific dislike of your words and actions, rather than what you believe my assumptions are about you.

RICK: This is progress now, my guy. Seriously, this is the best I've felt all night.

ALFIE: I'm happy to indulge you.

RICK: Let's keep going - Freddie? Tibbs?

ALFIE: Freddie's scared of you and you know it. Tibby likes your drugs I think.

RICK: Fucking brilliant, bruv. And Izzy?

ALFIE: Izzy what?

RICK: You're being honest with me now. Do you think she likes me?

ALFIE: No, I don't.

RICK: Nah, see. You're doing it again. I can tell, man, I can always tell. There's no point. But really, you've done very well, I've no doubt that was a big effort for you and you're probably pretty spent. So look - I think I can help you.

ALFIE: You'll talk to them.

RICK: I feel like it's important to you.

ALFIE: Yes.

RICK: Why?

ALFIE: Why? I want the house.

RICK: Yeah, but why?

ALFIE: You're high, you're not making sense.

RICK: Come on. One more time. Talk straight to me. You want the house, right?

ALFIE: I want the house... Rick, we need it.

RICK: Ah. We.

ALFIE: We... we can't stay here. It's like we walk around in glass boxes. I can see her in the room with me but, I'm not anywhere near her, you know? We run parallel, and never cross paths. I can *observe* her, that's all. I don't know what else to do. We need out. I can't tell her without something solid to pitch. It's for me to fix.

RICK: You want to be a man for her. Fair play. You want a drink?

ALFIE: Yes.

Rick pours two.

RICK: I want to help you.

ALFIE: Good.

RICK: Now that I know that it's important.

ALFIE: It is.

RICK: Tell me how important.

ALFIE: What do you mean?

RICK: What would you do? What would you... permit?

ALFIE: Look, there's clearly something you want. That's what you're getting at. So don't ask me to name what I'd be willing to do for the house. Say what you mean, Rick. Just say what you mean. Fucking say it!

RICK: She likes me. I know she likes me. You know it too.

ALFIE: Nobody likes you. You everyday fucking chav.

RICK: One night. All I ask. I'll get her back to you. I'll give her a lift in the Audi.

ALFIE: Get out. Get out of my house, Rick, or I swear--

RICK: What's she worth to you? If you cared you'd say yes. For the record I don't really need your permission.

Alfie leaps from his seat to square up with Rick. Rick has a good four inches on him.

ALFIE: I'd kill you first. Like I'd actually kill you.

RICK: Oh don't be so sensational. I told you you're no actor. Sorry, I'm just not buying it.

ALFIE: What do you think Bella's going to say when I tell her?

RICK: Come on now, tiger. We both know you're not going to make a scene at dinner. Same reason you're going to do exactly nothing to me right now. Izzy would hate you for it. And besides, no offence, but I'm just not buying it. You're not all that pissed off. Not really. I think you just believe this is what you ought to feel. What you're supposed to feel. But you don't feel anything one way or the other. And you have no idea what you want to do.

Alfie slumps in his chair. Rick chinks their glasses.

RICK: Let me ask you something. As a friend. Why are you trying so hard to save a marriage you don't know you want to save?

ALFIE: I... it's... it's what you do.

RICK: Top night, Alfie. Cheers.

Bella returns.

RICK: Hey sexy head.

BELLA: Hi. Christ.

ALFIE: How is she?

RICK: She's definitely still a bit peaky. Bit puffy.

ALFIE: I meant Harper.

BELLA: No you're right. I think I'd quite like to get home and into bed, baba.

She clambers into a seat.

RICK: Oh no, Bella, really? Things were just picking up.

Freddie returns, supporting the wilting Tibby.

FREDDIE: She won't open the door to any of us.

ALFIE: Do you want some water Tibby?

FREDDIE: That would be an idea.

TIBBY: No, I don't want any water. You can't possibly begrudge me a drink after all this mess.

FREDDIE: She won't open the door to any of us. Izzy's sitting in the hall waiting for her.

TIBBY: And if you had a heart to care you'd have a drink with me.

FREDDIE: I'm on a health kick, my wildflower.

BELLA: There's nothing we can do. Iz will wait there as long as it takes.

ALFIE: That's good. She'll sort her out.

RICK: She's great, that one.

FREDDIE: Anyone else smell that? Smells like something's--

The sound of a smoke alarm bleating. Izzy runs past all of them into the kitchen.

IZZY: Shit, shit, shit, bollocks!

ALFIE: Ah.

RICK: It's alright, I've got this.

FREDDIE: I've got it Rick. Someone find a broom or something.

Rick and Freddie search the room for something to use.

RICK: Bella, get up and help.

BELLA: I'm sick, Rick!

RICK: Come on, up, up, up.

Rick pulls her to her feet to join the search. Freddie grabs a box of toys and jumps up to reach the ceiling, holding them aloft.

FREDDIE: It's fine. I'm on it, everybody, don't trouble yourselves!

Tibby sighs and wobbles to her feet. She totters around Freddie.

TIBBY: Having difficulties getting up there, my little muller corner?

FREDDIE: What?

TIBBY: Nothing. Let me help you.

Tibby reaches out for the Malcolm X poster.

ALFIE: No, Tibbs!

Tibby jumps back, startled. Alfie grabs each of the vacated chairs and, standing on one, reaches out with the other to bash at the ceiling until the smoke alarm drops to the floor with a clatter.

TIBBY: What you shout at me for, Alfie?

ALFIE: Sorry.

TIBBY: Give me back my chair.

Alfie clambers down. Izzy comes out of the kitchen.

IZZY: The main is burnt.

FREDDIE: We thought it might be.

IZZY: It was vegetable risotto.

BELLA: Sounded lovely.

RICK: It does. It did. Good call.

FREDDIE: Well done.

IZZY: The rice stuck to the bottom of the pan.

BELLA: That must have been a while ago.

RICK: *(beat)* What was the point of that remark?

BELLA: All I'm saying is that it would take a while for rice to create enough smoke to trigger the alarm.

IZZY: Really? What time is it?

ALFIE: Quarter past ten.

IZZY: Oh. Oh. Alright then. Okay. Quarter *past*, did you say?

ALFIE: Quarter past.

IZZY: Okay. Good.

FREDDIE: Never mind, eh? As you know I've been on a health kick and am keen for something a bit naughtier than risotto. I think I deserve it. What say we skip right to dessert?

ALFIE: We've, uhm, we've cut out desserts.

FREDDIE: Oh.

ALFIE: Sugar, you know. It's basically a drug. We read it... I dunno. Somewhere.

RICK: It's true. Very addictive. Should be illegal.

Silence. Freddie starts to laugh.

FREDDIE: D'you know, it's terrible. I shouldn't. This reminds me though, Alfie, that time at Glasshouse Yard when you put a pizza in the oven--

TIBBY: My husband is on a health kick to try and revive his flagging erections.

No one moves or says a word. Tibby looks around.

TIBBY: We got 'em, daddy. Look at their faces.

FREDDIE: *(beat)* You are terrible. That's classic. She got you, didn't she? Rick, Alfie, admit it, she had you going.

RICK: Very nearly. Good one, Tibbs.

FREDDIE: Come here, you menace, I love you.

Freddie pulls Tibby in for a hug. His head lingers near hers slightly too long, as if whispering something we can't hear, before pulling away with a big smile on his face.

FREDDIE: Oh, I'll need to remember that one. That'll be a good one to look back on.

BELLA: I think I might throw up.

IZZY: Oh Bella. Oh I can't believe this.

BELLA: My angel, please don't punish yourself. I have a very delicate biosystem. I do think I need to go home now though. Boopy? I need to go home.

RICK: Home? Now?

BELLA: Yes, if that's alright. I feel very unwell, so if that's alright, I would like to go home.

RICK: I mean - I just poured this.

FREDDIE: I could take you.

BELLA: Oh no, don't be silly.

FREDDIE: I don't mind. I'm driving, let me take you.

TIBBY: Go on Bella, Freddie will get you home safe. You're right, you should be home, you look really quite shit.

BELLA: That's very sweet Freddie. Thanks.

Freddie helps Bella out of her seat. Everyone kisses each other goodbye.

BELLA: Izzy, thank you so much for tonight.

IZZY: Yeah.

BELLA: No really, it was great. And listen, with Harper - whatever you need.

IZZY: Yeah.

BELLA: And whenever she's ready. A phone call away.

IZZY: Yes.

Freddie and Bella walk to the exit.

TIBBY: See you back home precious one!

FREDDIE: Goodbye. Hey Bella, do you remember the last time I had to walk you home from a party...

They exit.

IZZY: Excuse me.

RICK: Where are you going?

IZZY: I just need to make a call.

Izzy returns to the kitchen.

RICK: Last woman standing, eh, Tibbs?

TIBBY: I'm clearly sitting down. But yes. I'm just a bit more game than most. Hope Bella feels better, poor creature.

RICK: She'll be fine. Cheers.

As he drinks, Rick pushes Tibby's drink up to her mouth and tilts it in. Alfie starts to tidy away all the toys, turning his back on them. Rick and Tibbs drain their drinks, spluttering slightly.

TIBBS: You choked!

RICK: I never choke.

TIBBS: No?

RICK: Fuck no.

TIBBS: Hm.

Rick takes his phone out and starts tapping. He reaches out his other hand to Tibby, who takes it and staggers to her feet.

RICK: Watch yourself, there you go. Okay, let's see. three minutes. You want to wait outside with me for three minutes?

TIBBS: I think - hick! - I think the fresh air might be good.

RICK: Alfie, mate.

Alfie turns around to face them. Rick gives him a big thumbs up.

RICK: I'll see what I can do, yeah? See if I can't make them see sense. Rein in their ambitions.

ALFIE: Yeah. Thanks.

Rick ushers Tibby to the exit. Tibby turns round for one last look at the poster.

TIBBY: Alfie?

ALFIE: Yes, Tibbs?

TIBBY: Why - hick! - the fuck have you two put that up there? I mean who are you trying to - hick! - be?

Rick clicks his tongue at her. Exit.

Alfie returns to his tidying. As he collects all the glasses, his foot brushes under the tablecloth, making a noise. He stops. He gently kicks under the cloth for a louder noise. Putting the glasses down, he bends over to pull the cloth away. He sees the shards piled up. After a moment thinking, he lets the cloth drop, and stands up.

The sound of a car arriving outside and beeping. Izzy hurries in, stopping at the sight of Alfie alone.

IZZY: Oh. Hi. I heard a car horn.

ALFIE: It's for Alfie.

IZZY: Okay.

She looks around.

ALFIE: Tibby's with him.

IZZY: Yes, of course. *(beat)* How do you know if your phone number has been blocked?

ALFIE: Rings once then straight to voicemail.

IZZY: *(beat)* Right. Well. That's that then.

ALFIE: What's that then?

IZZY: They're gone. Party over, I mean.

ALFIE: Yep. Listen. Let's tidy this up later.

IZZY: Okay. Do you want a drink?

ALFIE: No. Come on.

Alfie walks over to Malcolm X. Izzy follows him and stands at the other side. She pulls as he pushes, and then she runs round to help him carry out a TV from behind the poster. They heave it past the table and set it down in a corner, facing into the room. While Alfie plugs it in and sets it up, Izzy sticks her head in the toy chest.

IZZY: What was that story Freddie was telling?

ALFIE: The story Freddie was telling?

IZZY: Yes.

ALFIE: You'll forgive me if I ask which one.

IZZY: *(laughs)* The one about the pizza.

ALFIE: Oh. Remember in our third year, after we started properly going out? You were feeling homesick again. You went to visit your mum and your sister.

IZZY: Uh huh.

ALFIE: You got the train back and I told you I'd pick you up at the station. I put a pizza in the oven before remembering you were due back, and I didn't want to be late so I just left. I figured if I drove fast enough we'd get back in time but when I got it out the pizza was pure carbon. Stupid. It's lucky I didn't burn the whole house down.

Izzy emerges from the chest.

IZZY: I don't remember that.

ALFIE: I probably never told you.

IZZY: Why not?

ALFIE: It was embarrassing. We'd only just got together. You hide stuff from each other at the beginning.

IZZY: Did you meet me on time?

ALFIE: I was early. It was really some very irresponsible driving on my part.

Izzy pulls out two cushions and sets them down in front of the TV. They each sit on one, close together, but not touching.

ALFIE: *(nodding towards the hall)* How do you think she's doing?

IZZY: What will we do if the wifi drops again?

ALFIE: What will we do? I suppose we'll go get an early night.

IZZY: Right.

ALFIE: Hang on.

He gets up and goes to the kitchen. Izzy pulls out her phone. She looks at it for a moment, before putting it behind her, under the tablecloth. Alfie returns with the banana bread.

ALFIE: Who do you imagine bakes better banana bread?

IZZY: Oh, don't, I'd rather just go in blind.

Izzy takes one from Alfie and he sits down. They tear the ends off the bread and pick at the sponge like popcorn. Alfie picks up the remote.

ALFIE: What do you want?

IZZY: Something sweet and stupid.

He clicks the control. Cheesy theme music and audience cheers ring out.

ALFIE: Can I ask you something?

IZZY: If you want to.

ALFIE: *(beat)* That's alright.

*They stare at the TV, chewing their bread in silence.
End.*