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EIGHT

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Premise

Eight monologues of fifteen minutes each. On arrival, the audience is provided with a brief character outline of all eight characters, and a voting slip. The audience selects the four of the eight characters that they wish to see. As the audience enter the auditorium all eight characters are lined up across the front of the stage. Once house lights dim the cast take their seats and face the back of the stage. An over-head projector shuffles cartoon images of each character on the back wall, landing on the selected character. The selection of characters should appear entirely random and the audience should be convinced that the cast are not aware who is playing next.

EIGHT was first performed at Bedlam Theatre, August 2 – August 23, 2008 during The Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2008. It was directed by Ella Hickson.

Original open/close music: ‘Leaf House’ – Animal Collective
Technical Director – Xander Macmillan

The cast was as follows:

DANNY	Henry Peters
JUDE	Simon Ginty
ANDRÉ	Michael Whitham
BOBBY	Holly McLay
MONA	Alice Bonifacio
MILES	Solomon Mousley
MILLIE	Ishbel McFarlane
ASTRID	Gwendolen von Einsiedel

EIGHT

DANNY

Danny is a well built man in his early twenties. He sits on a black box in the centre of the stage with a corpse's head lain across his knee, he is feeding water to the corpse. He is wearing jeans, a black wife-beater and black boots. Danny is 23 years old but he appears much younger; his learnt manner is one of faux aggression, however, he fails to disguise an underlying vulnerability. Danny is a little slow and essentially sweet.

Danny, hushed, talks to the corpse.

Here you go little one – head up, ‘ave some water, come on, your lips are all crackin’, come on. Look, I can’t be doin’ everyfing for you, it’s ‘ard enough sneakin’ in for nights, that fat bastard porter is gunna see me one a these days and I’ll get fuckin’ nailed. Now come on darlin’.

You’re a nightmare in’t you? I used to be the same. Mum always said I was a pain in the neck, always bawling when she was tryin’ to get stuff done.

Danny walks forward and begins to address the audience.

Mum used to work for one of them poncey magazines; it’s why we had to move up north, to Preston; it’s newest city in England you know? I was dead excited, shouldn’t have been...borin’ as fuck here. Mum’s job was to make sure all the people on the front-cover of the magazine looked right. I used to watch her, it was like magic, she’d give ‘em big old smiles and scrape off all their fat, anything not perfect she’d jus’ rub out, make it disappear. When she was done all them people looked beautiful, like, like - dolls. The problem was it made me sort a sad to look at all the ugly people after that; all them people who look fat or spotty or just sort a strange, when mum made it seem real easy to look just right.

At school, Hutton Grammar, I was never bright so sports were always my thing and I was always big, like my Dad has been. They used to call him Monster Cox, which I always though was ‘cos he was built like a tank but it turned out it was ‘cos he had a massive dick. He died in the Falklands, he was a Sapper, part ‘a the Royal Engineers, had a bit more up top than me. *Laughs – self deprecating.* Mum always seemed a bit afraid after Dad had gone, she seemed sort a smaller, she didn’t look ‘right’. I guess that was why I wanted to get big, like Dad had been, to make things better – protect her, like.

JUDE

One large black block, centre stage, acts as bed/dinner table – navigated around in the opening sections. Jude is dressed in school trousers, shirt and a tie.

This time last summer, Dad sent me to the south of France. The day I left he stood on the front step and saluted my departure, like some bloody sergeant major, pair of baggy corduroys, copy of the Guardian wedged under his arm.

‘Off you go my son’ he yelled, ‘you will walk away a boy and return a man!’

Except I could barely hear him ‘cos he had Haydn’s farewell symphony booming out of every window. *Moves to sit on block.* When I stepped off the plane, the first thing I felt was the heat – it smacked me in the face, the stair burned my feet through my shoes; I strained to see the city in the distance, but I couldn’t see a thing, I was shitting myself.

Taxi dropped me off at boulevard Victor Hugo. Now my Dad would have been in his element, I could hear his voice in my head: ‘did you know Jude that without Victor Hugo, I strongly doubt we would’ve ever had Dickens’. Really Dad, that’s fascinating. I felt for the sandwiches he’d put in the bottom of my bag, but I’d eaten them on the plane.

Starts moving behind block down ‘street’.

Twenty-three, twenty-four – fuck a duck... It was huge. Wrought-iron gates squeaked open, I carried my suitcase up to this big green door; the paint was all cracking off it in the heat. There were old fashioned shutters and yellow walls. It looked like all the Rivera photos that Dad had showed me before I left, all those stories about *sits, imitates Dad, talking down to imaginary Jude* Fitzgerald, Picasso and Hemingway, when genius was valued, Jude, and the women, oh the women, beautiful muses with wild eyes and, oh what did he say?...oh yeah, ‘reckless abandon’, as if he was a hundred years old and he had been there himself – sad act.

I breathed in. I knocked. I was shown to my room by a crazy and crooked looking woman with fag-breath who kept scowling as my bag slammed against the stairs; ‘pardon’ I whispered weakly, with this pathetic smile like I’d just peed myself. *smiles.* She growled *growly French accent*, ‘Mme Clara will return later little boy, for the dinner’, alright. *Sits on the side of his bed and looks around agog.* As much as I wanted to be back in Poynton my French room was...pretty

ANDRÉ

André, originally Andrew, is a 28 year old gallery owner. He enters his gallery, clearly shaken, takes a moment to catch his breath and positions himself on a high stool.

I have to say, this wasn't the ending that I had in mind. I'm not sure what I did have in mind. Probably a whisper of a happy ever after, you know, wearing matching cardis, sharing digestives, but I hadn't thought I'd been stupid enough to pin anything on it actually happening. It's easy for the Cinderellas and Sleeping Beauties of this world, but we're a little low on route planners for Prince Charming and....Prince Charming; Serious lack of 'fairy' tales.

This certainly isn't one, is it? I think we can all agree that coming into work half an hour late on a Monday morning and finding your boyfriend hanging from the rafters by a Hèrmes scarf, well...it's not exactly happy ever after, is it?

That bloody scarf; I've always maintained that a high price means high quality but who knew Hèrmes could take a man's weight - and let's be clear he was no skinny little fag, he was a big fat chunky. He was never going to wear it; I don't know what I was playing at giving it to him. He wasn't the scarf type, you see, Hèrmes or otherwise - never had been. I spent my teenage years trying my very hardest to look like Cindy Lauper, him? No, going with a button fly over a zip was his idea of outrageous.

Where's that sodding ambulance? He can't just be, up there, like that. I guess the rush isn't on once they know resuscitation heroics are out. More or less a removal job now - heavy load lads, mind your backs. His big, purple face is dribbling all over an Emin print. Why he chose the bloody stock room? It's not like he was being shy, putting a Hèrmes noose round your neck, it's not quite the same as popping a few pills and drifting off, is it? He might as well have done it in the front fucking window, nice bit of performance art... No, he wanted to save this one just for me, one man show.

I bet I'm not insured for suicidal dribble either - that's five k down the shitter.

They're bound to judge aren't they, snoopy little paramedics? One art gallery, two queers, one corpse, that's never going to look good, is it? They'll look for syringes and...hamsters and expect some paid-by-the-hour twelve year old to pop out with a dummy in his gob. I wish we'd ever been that bloody exciting.

BOBBY

Lights up on Bobby, 22yr old mother of two – wearing a red Addidas tracksuit, she is seated on a table. We imagine her kids, Kyle and Chloe, 4 and 6, at her feet in front of the telly. She's reading down to them with enthusiasm. Bobby has a strong, working-class Edinburgh accent, she mimics an upper-middle class English accent when impersonating Mrs. Beeton.

'Twas the night afore Christmas, an aw through the hoose,
No a creature was stirrin, no even a moose',

Chloe will you shut up and listen!

'The stockins were hung by the chimney wi care, in the hope
that St. Nicholas soon wud be there'.

I know we dinnae hae a chimney, Chloe...but we do have a lovely plasma-screen telly. We can hang our stockings b'that, right? – Yes, Santa will know where to find 'em - They have so got televisions in the north pole... How else d'ye think Santa got so fat if he wasnae watchin telly aw the time, eh? Now enough, you two, bed, now scram.

Imaginary Chloe leaves; smaller Kyle turns around to

Bobby,

Kyle darling, what's wrong wee man? Off you go with your sister.

She pulls him up onto her knee, wipes imaginary tears

Big boy like you's no scared of Santa is he? What is it?

Listens in to him. Oh darlin, I dae ken if yir Dad's gonna be here in the mornin. Who knows, eh? But what I do know is that he loves you very, very much and he's sent me the biggest, bestest present in the world for you to open in the mornin. But he wrote me a wee note to say that you werenae to get it unless you were in bed by twelve... there's that grin, go on – awa you go, oot like a light – ye've got ten minutes afore I'm coming to check!

Bobby moves to behind a small table where she is packing stockings. She addresses the audience from here on in.

He's got them the biggest, bestest present in the world?

What cack. That selfish cunt costs me double every fuckin year, just makin sure they dinnae realise what a pathetic shite he is. I'm too skint. I got caught by work, back in November; fiddling gift vouchers oot on the scheme. I was nicking the odd bundle, and sellin 'em on for half the price, everyone's happy – 'cept Mr. Tesco's, o course, he wasnae too pleased. Smug bitch in management caught me, gave

MONA

A small dark haired girl has a mild pregnancy bump that is not seen immediately. Her hair is loose around her face; she holds the innocence of youth and yet acts with disquieting intensity. The stage is set with a central block and one chair placed at its side.

She stands, hums quietly a child's nursery rhyme and climbs into the centre of the central box.

This is the house that my mother built. This is the house that lets the outside in and kept the inside out. There are no rules, no don't or can't, no time to get up, no time to be home; just in and out, always in and out and everything open. This is because when I was six mum discovered what Dad had done, what closed doors were really for - she called a builder man and told him to take all the doors away, every last one. The house became a big, toothless mouth, with gaping gaps where all the doors had been. Soon mum found strangers to fill up all those gummy gaps. She filled the house right up with people, like grains of multi-coloured sand; in they'd pour and out they'd run, rivers of funny-looking faces and brightly coloured clothes.

Mother has a hundred Gods; she makes idols of them all; money, sex, beauty – she had the strongest, wildest laugh, as if nothing will ever matter ever again. She is the spoilt kind, the hair, the nails, the men, she takes what she wants. Nothing matters. She is, what you call...young.

Freedom, she said, that was my blessing. She said that I was part of the luckiest generation ever because girls like me had knowledge and knowledge is freedom. My mother made sure that I knew all the truths before the world even began to speak to me. She made sure that I saw everything that there was to be seen.

But there was just one thing that was mine. *She clambers to fetch the box, excited.* A small box that I kept beneath my bed, for all the thoughts that hadn't been hers first; I'd whisper my secrets onto tiny pieces of paper and roll them into little balls, I'd blow them into the hole in the top of the box *blow* and plug my hand over it *slap* in case they ever grew legs and escaped. But they did escape, right out through the gaps where all the doors had been. Mother found my box and took it to her friends – they tipped out all my secrets, the tiny paper balls scurried across the table-top searching for somewhere to hide, but there wasn't anywhere. Those bohemians, with their red-wine mouths, laughed all my

MILES

Miles is an American man in his mid-twenties. He is dressed in a sharp suit and is attractive due to a corporate aesthetic. He should carry himself with ultimate bodily and vocal composure. The cracks in this composure should be perfectly synchronized with the glimpses of weakness in his performative façade.

Voiceover: 'This is the final call for all passengers to board flight BA192 to Washington, this is the final call, can all passengers go straight to gate 13'.

Pause.

July 7th 2005, ten second snap-shot; a goofy young Asian guy is in front of me buying a Mars bar, I'm in a drug store, King's Cross Station, London. He turns to me, he's short ten pence, I give it to him. *He mimes.*

'Take it easy'.

It's early morning. I'm in a suit, I look down, I have slick shoes on. I walk out to the front of the station, it's summer, it's bright. I see the big white letters scroll across the top and I board a number 30 bus to Hackney Wick.

This is all that I have of that afternoon; Snapshots, shards, flickers, facts.

Here's the facts: My name is Miles Cooper, born in Washington DC, 1982. I've won everything I've ever touched. At 24 I was the most successful broker Merrill Lynch had ever seen. I was the glory boy of the trading floor, making more money than I knew what to do with. My father was planning my biography before I was out of my teens; he always used to say to me, 'Miles, fifteen to fifty, make sure there's not a blank page, you're going to hit the top and keep on going, boy.' In April 2005 the DC office decided my skill was good enough to export, so I was going to London.

He sits, stares front – sinister -

Tick tick tick ...boom.

I had lent Hasib Mir Hussain ten pence to buy a Mars bar ten minutes before he boarded a bus to Hackney Wick and pressed detonate. He killed himself and thirteen other people that day. I, the one American on board, got out alive. I figure that would have pissed him off, right? Maybe he didn't catch the accent or maybe he was grateful for his final Mars Bar so he gave me some space.

MILLIE

An apparently well-to-do lady, in her early thirties is dressed in tennis whites and wielding a tennis racket, she is mid-mime, straddling a non-existent middle-aged man, flailing wildly....

‘Miss. J. Hunter Dunn, Miss J. Hunter Dunn
Furnish’d and burnish’d by Aldershot sun,
What strenuous singles we played after tea,
We in the tournament you against me’

She smiles a motherly smile down at her ‘tennis’ partner and dismounts.

There we go Robert, all done. Gosh, I always forget how much the old tetrameter really sets a pace, I’m puffed! *Brushes herself down*, Well, you better be getting back to your wife then – parents’ evening tonight, isn’t it? Well...luck to Amber and don’t be beastly to her – *turns and accidentally sees him in some sort of state of undress, and turns prudishly back to face forward, stumbling over her words* – oh, sorry, don’t be beastly to her, I’m sure she’s just creative rather than academic, we can’t all go to – oh, you’re done, excellent! If you could pop the cheque on the table by the door as usual and I’ll see you Tuesday. Bye now! Bye, bye.

Waves, smiling, until he leaves.

Robert Kendrick, lovely chap, massive fan of Betjeman, hats and slacks and fifties sensibilities. He hasn’t dealt with the end of it all one little bit. Still longs for the soft twilight of a Surrey evening, cricket on warm afternoons, cardigans, and Pimms. He’s quite the old romantic actually – *gets a cup of tea* – demands I recite Betjeman every time we ‘have a cup of tea’. Robert shares Betjeman’s passion for the robust lady, ‘the strongly adorable tennis-girl’s hand’ – I try my best but I’m no Sharapova. It’s so difficult keeping the scansion straight with all that flailing, and when he demands I climax on those bloody dactyls, well, it’s a tricky business, I can tell you. But Betjemen it is, he can’t get enough of it. It’s so hard for him, he despairs of his eldest, Amber, she’s doing some sort of Gender Politics nonsense. He can’t understand all that. No, Robert’s education is more of the classical genre: Homer, Vigil, Plato *pronounced with a hard ‘G’ and ‘plah-toh’ respectively* who I always get mixed up with pilates, but they’re totally different. That’s where we started, actually, with the classics. Then we tip-toed on up, through Donne, where we ‘sucked on country pleasures’, then a little Raunchy Rochester, got

ASTRID

Astrid enters up stage left. There is a bed in the centre of the stage - the audience can see a man sleeping in it. She slowly climbs into bed next to the man - desperately trying not to wake him. She lies there, restless for several seconds, then sits up -

People talk about guilt as if it's an instinct. That the second you do something wrong, you feel guilty. I don't; what I'm feeling is power. You always join the story at the bit where they're sorry, when they're desperately begging for forgiveness. But there's something before that, there's now. In the space after the act and before the consequences, when you've got away with it; when you're walking out of an unknown door, back down unknown streets and it's still thumping in you - dawn's breaking, dew's settling and you're skipping back home, flying on thrill of it, you can taste it. Even back here, the quiet click of the door, the tiptoe in - the alcohol's wearing off too quickly, I want it back - our bed and all the stuff that makes up life, our life - and- I don't feel like a traitor; I can lie here whilst another man's saliva dries off my lips and I can remember another man's face bearing over me - and I enjoy it, I enjoy that all this seems new again.

His alarm's going off in ten minutes. He'll roll over and grunt, curl himself round me like a monkey with its bloody mum. Just like every morning. He won't notice that anything's different - he won't see that I have mascara down my face or that my hair is wet, because I've been running in the rain to get back before he wakes up, he won't notice that I haven't been here, that I'm drunk, no - for him, I became invisible a long time ago.

She jumps up on to the bed and starts to inspect him, creeping around him as if he's an anthropological specimen.

That's not even snoring is it? Listen? It's definitely more aggravating than breathing, but it doesn't quite have the conviction of a snore. Nope...just a slow dribble of air, as if it was engineered to be as aggravating as humanly possible; sort of like a tiny pony having a tantrum.

He snuffles slightly.

Oop - oh that's nice isn't it, a little wind from the baby. Having been with someone else, it's like I've left the room for the first time in years, and come back in and realised...this is the man that I once thought I might marry.