

methuen | drama

JONATHAN HARVEY

PLAYS: 1

BEAUTIFUL THING • BABIES

BOOM BANG-A-BANG

RUPERT STREET LONELY

HEARTS CLUB



Introduced by the author

B L O O M S B U R Y

Jonathan Harvey

Plays: 1

Beautiful Thing, Babies, Boom Bang-A-Bang, Rupert Street Lonely Hearts Club

Beautiful Thing: 'Harvey's sensitive comedy about love flowering between two adolescent boys in the precincts of a Thamesmead housing estate – a play that charmingly opens the doors between docu-drama, affectionate social satire and the stuff that dreams are made of.' *The Times*

Babies: 'Is bursting with vividly drawn characters and excellent jokes, and it reveals a dramatist with his own engaging view of the world.' *Daily Telegraph*

Boom Bang-A-Bang: 'This play proves him a funny, humane and human observer of feelings that cross borders of sex and sexuality.' *Evening Standard*

'... a dark glitter in his dialogue which is the mark of a truly creative writer.' *Daily Mail*

'It's a delight, but a delight with real bite.' *Independent*

Rupert Street Lonely Hearts Club: 'Yet, as ever, this brave, young and inventive writer is not holding his characters up for our ridicule or scorn. He draws them with a rare compassion, and our laughter spills out almost involuntarily from the sheer surprise of his mercurial verbal manoeuvres.' *Daily Mail*

Jonathan Harvey was born in Liverpool in 1968 and now lives in London. He studied Psychology and Education at Hull University and was a Special Needs teacher at Abbey Wood Secondary School in London for three years. His plays include *The Cherry Blossom Tree* (Liverpool Playhouse Studio, 1987) which won him the 1987 National Girobank Young Writer of the Year Award; *Mohar* (Royal Court Young Writers' Festival, London/International Festival of Young Playwrights, Sydney, 1988); *Wildfire* (Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, 1992); *Beautiful Thing* (Bush Theatre London, 1993 and Donmar Warehouse, London/Duke of York's Theatre, London, 1994) winner of the John Whiting Award 1994; *Babies* (Royal National Theatre Studio/Royal Court Theatre, 1994), winner George Devine Award 1993 and Evening Standard's Most Promising Playwright Award 1994; *Boom Bang-A-Bang* (Bush Theatre, 1995); *Rupert Street Lonely Hearts Club* (English Touring Theatre/Contact Theatre Company, then Criterion Theatre 1995); *Swan Song* (Pleasance, Edinburgh/Hampstead Theatre, London 1997). He is currently working on a sitcom, called *Gimme Gimme Gimme*, for BBC2, transmission late 1998, two feature films *Gone Shopping* and *The Hairdresser's Apprentice*, and a stage musical with Pet Shop Boys. He has recently finished two new plays, *Hushabye Mountain* for English Touring Theatre and *Guiding Star* for the Royal National Theatre.

This page intentionally left blank

JONATHAN HARVEY

Plays: 1

Beautiful Thing
Babies
Boom Bang-A-Bang
Rupert Street Lonely Hearts Club

introduced by the author

B L O O M S B U R Y
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Methuen Drama
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

Bloomsbury is a registered trade mark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

This collection first published in Great Britain 1999 by Methuen Drama

Beautiful Thing first published in *Gay Plays: Five* by Methuen Drama 1994

© 1994 by Jonathan Harvey

Babies first published in the Royal Court Writers series in 1994 by Methuen Drama

© 1994 by Jonathan Harvey

Boom-Bang-A-Bang first published in 1995 by Methuen Drama

© 1995 by Jonathan Harvey

Rupert Street Lonely Hearts Club first published in 1995 by Methuen Drama

© 1995 by Jonathan Harvey

Introduction © 1999 by Jonathan Harvey

This collection © 1999 by Jonathan Harvey

Jonathan Harvey has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Bloomsbury or the author.

All rights whatsoever in this play are strictly reserved and application for performance etc. should be made before rehearsals by professionals and by amateurs to Alan Radcliffe, ICM, 3rd Floor, Marlborough House, 10 Earlham Street, London, WC2H 9LN.

No performance may be given unless a licence has been obtained.

No rights in incidental music or songs contained in the work are hereby granted and performance rights for any performance/presentation whatsoever must be obtained from the respective copyright owners.

Visit www.bloomsbury.com to find out more about our authors and their books. You will find extracts, author interviews, author events and you can sign up for newsletters to be the first to hear about our latest releases and special offers.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: PB: 978-0-4137-2450-2

ePDF: 978-1-4725-3842-0

ePUB: 978-1-4081-7772-3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Contents

Chronology	vi
Introduction	ix
BEAUTIFUL THING	1
BABIES	91
BOOM BANG-A-BANG	185
RUPERT STREET LONELY HEARTS CLUB	279

Jonathan Harvey: A Chronology

- 1987 *The Cherry Blossom Tree*, winner of Liverpool Playhouse/National Girobank Young Writers' Award, produced at Liverpool Playhouse Studio, Liverpool.
- 1988 *Mohair*, produced at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London, and represented the UK at the International Festival of Young Playwrights in Sydney, Australia.
- 1989 *Catch*, produced at Spring Street Theatre, Hull.
- 1990 *Tripping and Falling* produced by Glasshouse Theatre Company, Manchester.
- 1991 *Lady Snogs the Blues*, produced at Lincoln Theatre Festival.
- 1992 *Wildfire* produced at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs.
- 1993 *Beautiful Thing* produced at the Bush Theatre, London.
West End Girls produced by Carlton Television
- 1994 *Beautiful Thing* on UK tour, then at the Donmar Warehouse, London, then Duke of York's Theatre, London. Winner of John Whiting Award, nominated for an Olivier Award and a Writers' Guild Award.
Babies produced at the Royal Court Theatre. Winner of the Evening Standard Award for Most Promising Playwright, nominated for Lloyds Bank Playwright of the Year Award. Winner of 1993 George Devine Award.

- 1995 Thames Television Writer-in-Residence, Bush Theatre.
Boom Bang-A-Bang produced at the Bush Theatre.
- 1995/6 *Rupert Street Lonely Hearts Club* produced at Contact Theatre, Manchester, prior to UK, tour then Donmar Warehouse. Transferred to Criterion Theatre, London. Winner of Manchester Evening News Award, Best New Play.
- 1996 *Beautiful Thing* released as feature film, winner of Best Film at the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival.
- 1997 *Swan Song* produced at Pleasance, Edinburgh, then Hampstead Theatre, London.
- 1998 *Guiding Star* produced at Liverpool Everyman Theatre and subsequently at Royal National Theatre in a co-production.
Gimme Gimme Gimme, six-part sitcom for Tiger Aspect/BBC recorded.

For Richard

Introduction

I didn't always want to write plays. From an early age I foresaw a successful career for myself *on* the boards. I was an eager member of the Merseyside Youth Theatre during my primary school years, and perhaps my proudest moment was playing the Coroner of the Munchkins in *The Wizard of Oz* at the Neptune Theatre, Liverpool in 1978. In fact I was singled out at the dress rehearsal by the drama teacher as being the only cast member to attempt an American accent. And I only had one line, and that was sung. Because I was a 'featured' Munchkin, I got my own bow in the curtain call, but on opening night I ripped my satin bloomers and was too embarrassed to bow in case the people standing behind me (the Munchkins with no lines) caught a glimpse of my undies as I bent over to bow, so I ran away and bought an ice cream and went and watched the second half from the Gods. This was almost enough to deter me from my chosen path as an actor, but not quite. What finally put an end to my aspirations was a severe case of teenage acne several years later. I couldn't stand people looking at me, never mind paying good money to stare at me, because my face had taken on the aesthetics of a deep-pan pepperoni pizza – hold the chilli! My final acting part was as a jellyfish in a school production of *Robinson Crusoe*. In an underwater sequence I had to jump across the stage with a washing-up bowl on my head, which had old pairs of tights hanging off it. It was all done with ultra-violet light and special paints on the bowl and tights ... my grandmother said it was spectacular, she should know, she provided the tights.

I feel lucky to have grown up in Liverpool in the eighties. It never really crossed my mind that I couldn't be a writer. Everywhere you turned there seemed to be a renaissance of Liverpool-based drama, and I lapped it up. On television there was *Boys from the Blackstuff*, and the early days of *Brookside* (when the Patron Saint of writers, Jimmy McGovern, was a regular contributor). On the big screen there was *Letter*

to *Brezhnev* and *Educating Rita*. And my local theatre was presenting plays in its Studio by local writers like Jim Hitchmough and Heidi Thomas. If you didn't know these writers personally, you always knew someone who was taught by Jimmy McGovern, or whose house was used as a location in *Boys from the Blackstuff*. It was an exciting time.

In 1987 the Playhouse ran a competition for young writers and I begged my parents for an electric typewriter and got scribbling. I came second originally, but when they discovered that the fella who'd come first had nicked someone else's play, ('That's so Liverpudlian!' I hear you say. Well let me tell you, he was from Burnley, Lancs.), I was promoted to first place. The play, *The Cherry Blossom Tree*, was a sell-out. I went to every performance. Mind you, it was only on for about a week.

Beautiful Thing was something like my seventh play. I hadn't done too badly with the previous six. Two of them had been on at the Royal Court in London, and one had been done in Australia. But in my heart of hearts I know that all those plays prior to the first one in this volume were part of my apprenticeship. They were done as part of young writers' festivals, or with youth theatres. *Beautiful Thing* was my first 'proper' play, performed in a 'proper' theatre, and not billed as being written by a 'young person'.

That's not to say that I wasn't young when I wrote it. I was twenty-four; though because I'd started so young I felt incredibly old and experienced. Ah, the naïveté of youth! But *Beautiful Thing* was also the first time I'd written anything with a gay theme. The timing felt right for me.

I wrote *Beautiful Thing* during the summer holiday from my teaching job in 1992. I was bored with teaching by then and wanted to be a full-time writer. However I'd just been got rid of by my agent and thought that I couldn't make the break without a new one. I sat on my bed and wrote it in about two weeks, then typed it up in two weeks. The last two weeks I spent using it to get a new agent and succeeded. I went back to school, handed in my notice and took frantic calls in the staff room from Alan, my new agent, arranging

to meet various theatres who had liked the play. I met these people, but they kept turning the play down as they didn't like the ending. It was only later that I realised that Alan's assistant at the time was sending the scripts out with the last forty pages missing. She was fired, the pages were reinstated and before you know it *The Bush* was programming it for the following summer.

When writing the play I wanted to challenge the myth that if you're working class and a gay man, you get kicked out of the house and end up selling your body for twenty Woodbines down Piccadilly Circus. Yes it happens, but it never happened to me, and I suppose I wanted to tell my story. I'd seen several images of gay people on TV and film as I was growing up, and although I felt excited and empowered by them, I never fully identified with them. I also wanted to give young people who'd see the play some hope. I knew that in theatre you're usually preaching to the converted, so I was delighted that Channel Four then made it into a feature film. I was even more delighted that Hettie Macdonald was able to direct both the play and the film. She has a real knack of encouraging writers to knock their scripts into shape, and without her guidance the play would never have been the success that it was . . . and the film would never have even been written, never mind made.

Before I left teaching I had been badgering away at John Burgess to give me a residency at the National Theatre Studio. At the time John was in charge of New Writing at the National and he'd got me into a writers' group there when my second play *Mohair* had been on at the Royal Court. I think he thought the play was quite melodramatic and immature, because everyone went around killing everyone else in it and getting quite worked up about it, but I think he thought that one day I'd write a good play. I sent him *Beautiful Thing*, which he thought was very rose-tinted (it is, so what?) but he'd made the mistake of telling me about the Studio's eight-week residencies for writers. They gave you an office, plays to read, a typewriter, access to the National's lovely canteen and £200 a week. I phoned him

every week saying things like; 'I'm leaving teaching in three weeks' time and won't be able to get dole coz I've left of my own accord. Any vacancies?'. Finally he relented. I did my eight-week residency, and then got my dole because that job had run its course! During my eight weeks he encouraged me to write something based on my experiences as a teacher. I wrote *Babies*, mercilessly robbed from a particular night when I arrived at a pupil's birthday party to be entertained by a drag queen dressed as the Queen, where the mother had obviously taken a bit of a shine to me, and where the uncle of the pupil . . . oh read the play, it's far more interesting.

I heard nothing about *Babies*, and *Beautiful Thing* still hadn't been taken up by anyone so I took myself off to Brighton for a *Birds of a Feather* sitcom writers' course. I loved it. We were brainwashed from eight in the morning 'til midnight with all things sitcomy. I came away thinking my life would only be worth living if only I could write a fabulous script for those hilarious *Birds*. They must have liked me on the course because I was given a *Birds of a Feather* bible – i.e. 'Linda Robson has given up smoking so keep cigarettes to a minimum in scripts.' – and I read through it on the train on the way home. When I got indoors there was a message on my answer phone telling me I had won the George Devine Award with *Babies*, and The Bush had finally said yes to *Beautiful Thing*. The *Birds of a Feather Bible* went in the bin!

By the time *Babies* was produced at the Royal Court, *Beautiful Thing* had transferred to the West End. It was brilliant – I was never stuck for people to go drinking with. There were so many people in the Royal Court production, that I could go out with different actors each night, then go out with the gang from the other show, then start all over again with the *Babies* cast.

The next play I wrote was *Rupert Street Lonely Hearts Club*, which the National commissioned. It might have been all those hangovers from my time in the West End, but this is much more bittersweet in tone. All the characters are so

lost, so lonely, and all of them looking for love. I was fed up that so many critics thought I could only write plays with happy endings, so I thought 'I'll show you!'. (Handy hint: If you can't be bothered to read the play, just turn to the last page, you'll understand what I'm talking about.) It was quite a depressing play to write, when your head's full of people on the verge of suicide all day it's quite hard to shake off.

I love the character of Marti. That gay man of a certain age, who can't believe that anyone might fancy him, but who covers it up with an outrageous sense of humour that is at once cutting and desperate. I've met many Martis in my time, and hope he's something of a warning. I certainly hope I don't turn into him. He's a warning about what you can become if you don't learn to love yourself. I'm also proud of Clarine. When I wrote the play I lived in a lovely flat on Streatham Common, and a couple of doors down there was a half-way house for people who were mentally ill. There was one particular woman who used to go to Sainsbury's in a midnight blue ball gown and tiara, and she had a heart of gold. She told me once that she loved Sainsbury's because there were so many people to talk to. I was quite shocked that audiences then found Clarine so funny on stage. Still, I think you laugh despite yourself, then feel guilty about it. And that sounds remarkably like a learning experience.

To shake off the depression of *Rupert Street* I decided to write something that was an out and out farce. I'd read a lot about a play called *An Evening with Gary Lineker*, where a group of friends get together to watch a football match on TV. I wondered what the gay equivalent would be. If I went on Mastermind my specialised subject would be The Eurovision Song Contest, so I soon had my answer. *Boom Bang-A-Bang* was quite an easy play to write, as I had no research to do. Again, I was blessed with another fantastic director in Kathy Burke, who told me which jokes weren't funny and which jokes were. I adored my second time at the Bush, with possibly the naughtiest bunch of actors I've ever worked with – many of whom are now firm friends. It was

quite ironic that because *Rupert Street* was produced after this play the critics assumed that my writing was becoming darker. It's a good lesson for all writers, because it shows how much the critics know.

I'd like to thank all the actors, directors, designers and stage managers mentioned in this book, for giving me such happy memories and for making the written word really breathe on the stage. I'm as egotistical as the next writer, and will often be heard harping on about 'it'd be nothing without the writing' . . . but of course theatre is such a collaborative experience, and without their knowledge and expertise these plays would never have been deemed good enough to publish.

I'd also like to say a special thank you to my agent Alan Radcliffe, the only heterosexual man I've ever met who throws fantastic Eurovision parties. He's always given me good advice, and along with his assistant Michael, has always been able to organise an advance for me just before my bills need paying.

And finally, I'd like to dedicate this volume of plays to my boyfriend Richard Foord. He's held my hand through all of these productions, and is my most loyal fan, and staunchest critic. He stops my head getting too big, and when I'm feeling down has the ability to make me feel I'm walking on air.

Jonathan Harvey
February 1998

Beautiful Thing

This page intentionally left blank

Beautiful Thing was first performed at the Bush Theatre, London, on 28 July 1993, with the following cast:

Jamie	Mark Letheren
Leah	Sophie Stanton
Sandra	Patricia Kerrigan
Ste	Johnny Lee Miller
Tony	Philip Glenister

Directed by Hettie Macdonald

Designed by Robin Don

Lighting by Johanna Town

Sound by Paul Bull

The play was revived and toured in 1994, ending with a run at the Donmar Warehouse, London. Sandra was played by Amelda Brown, Ste by Shaun Dingwall and Tony by Richard Bonneville. All other credits as above.

In September 1994, the play opened in the West End at the Duke of York's Theatre, with the following cast:

Jamie	Zubin Varla
Leah	Diane Parish
Sandra	Amelda Brown
Ste	Richard Dormer
Tony	Rhys Ifans

Characters

Jamie, nearly sixteen, a plain looking lad.

Leah, Jamie's neighbour, sixteen. Attractive in a rough way.

Sandra, Jamie's mother, thirty-five.

Ste, another neighbour, also sixteen. Attractive in a scally way.

Tony, Sandra's young man, twenty-seven. Middle class trying to rough up.

All the characters in the play except Tony have broad south-east London accents. Also heard, but not seen, is Ste's dad Ronnie, who is Irish. This part can be doubled by the actor playing Tony. Tony speaks with an irritating middle-class, trying to have street-cred, accent.

Setting

The play is set on the landing walkway in front of three flats in a low-rise block in Thamesmead, south-east London, May 1993.

This walkway is referred to in the script sometimes as balcony, landing or walkway. Ste's flat is on the left, facing us. Quite run-down. A clothes'-horse with dry washing hanging on it stands outside. Ste changes these clothes during Scene Four. There is a window with frosted glass in, beside the front door, which is Ste's bathroom. This is also a feature of Scene One. Sandra's flat sits in the middle, a rose between two thorns. Her door has recently been painted and there is a hanging basket next to it. Either side, on the ground, are two tubs, also of flowers. On her bathroom window hangs a net curtain which rises in the middle. Leah's flat is to the right of Sandra's facing us. It should be pretty nondescript. A child's rusty tricycle sits outside.

Also onstage we can see Jamie's bedroom, represented by a single bed and a bedside light. This could be located to the side of the flats. A *Hello!* magazine lies on the floor, along with a small Body Shop bottle.

When actors enter they either enter from a flat or from the right side of the flats, along the walkway. This should give the impression that Ste's flat is at the end of a row.

Act One

Scene One

*'It's Getting Better' by Mama Cass blares out before the lights come up. As they do, the song fades. We find **Jamie** and **Leah** sitting on their respective doorsteps in the sun. **Jamie** is wearing school uniform, **Leah** is not. Their front doors are open. **Leah** is smoking, **Jamie** has a can of coke. They are both looking out in front of them, up at the sky . . .*

Jamie Richard of York gained battle in vain.

Leah *tuts.*

Jamie Richard of York gained battle in vain.

Leah *tuts.*

Jamie Oright, oright!

Leah If you don't shut up I'm gonna get a brick and smash it right in your face.

***Sandra** comes to the doorway of her and **Jamie's** flat. She is holding a black bin bag full of rubbish, which she is taking out to the chute. She kicks **Jamie** out of the way and walks down the walkway and off.*

Jamie What you thinkin'?

Leah *tuts.*

Jamie Eh?

Leah 'Bout that brick.

Jamie Nah go on.

Leah **Jamie!**

Jamie (*tuts*) Oright. (*Pause.*) Hot, innit?

Sandra *comes back empty-handed. She doesn't stop, but goes straight back into her flat, passing them an Exocet glance as she does.*

Leah Oright, Sandra?

Sandra Slag.

Jamie *shifts and she disappears inside.*

Leah Who's Richard of York?

Jamie Dunno. Gained battle in vain though, dinn'e?

Leah He would, bloody toff.

Sandra *comes out with another bin bag. This time she stops.*

Sandra You know what they'll do, don't you? They'll put you into care. They'll say, 'She's an unfit mother, bang 'im into one o'them 'omes. Coz I mean, she can't even get him to do his PE.' That's what they'll do.

She exits with the bag.

Leah She's such a liar.

Jamie I know.

Leah You're sixteen, for God's sake.

Jamie Fifteen.

Leah (*tuts*) Shut up.

Sandra *enters again, from the chute, empty-handed.*

Sandra I was a brilliant netball player when I was at school. 'Watch out for the girl in the plaits,' the other schools used to say. I could run as fast as anything.

Leah Did you have plaits?!

Sandra I'm talkina my son!

Leah Did you?

Sandra Yes! (*Exits to flat.*)

Jamie She's taking it out on the cupboard. Throwin' away everything I was saving for my kids. Books, toys. I don't want kids.

Leah Kids are cunts.

Jamie You're not looking.

Leah *tuts, then returns her gaze to the sky.* **Sandra** *comes to the door, brushing her hair.*

Sandra *(to Jamie)* Anyone been calling you names?

Jamie Like what?

Sandra I dunno.

Jamie No.

Sandra Stumpy? Anyone called you that?

Jamie No.

Sandra I told you it'd stop.

Jamie I know.

Sandra I told you you'd grow. You never take the blindest bit o' notice to me.

Jamie I do.

Sandra Oh yeah?

Jamie Yeah!

Sandra Well, how comes every Wednesday afternoon without fail you're sittin' there?!

Jamie I've told you.

Sandra I'm gonna ring Miss Ellis.

Sandra *goes back in.*

Jamie Is your mum like this?

Leah I hate my mum.

Pause.

Jamie What d'you think?

8 Beautiful Thing

Leah When?

Jamie When you're doing this?

Leah I sing. Helps me concentrate.

Jamie I can't hear ya.

Leah In me head; you stupid git.

Jamie What d'you sing? What sort o' songs?

Sandra (*off*) I'm just a girl who can't say no!! (*Laughs.*)

Leah You heard of Mama Cass?

Jamie Mighta done.

Leah It's by her, innit?

Jamie What's it called?

Leah 'It's Getting Better'.

Jamie Oh.

Leah You see. Mama Cass, helps me concentrate.

Jamie Fair enough. (*Pause.*) Sing it.

Leah What?

Jamie Go on.

Leah No.

Jamie I won't laugh.

Pause. Leah looks up at the sky, then sings. She drops her south London accent and adopts the American tones of Mama Cass. She has quite a good voice.

Leah (*sings*) I don't feel all turned on and starry-eyed.
I just feel a sweet contentment deep inside.
Holding you at night
Just seems kind of natural and right.

And it's not hard to see
That it isn't haff of what it's going to be.

Jamie Haff?

Leah Coz it's getting better
Growing stronger
Warm and wilder
Getting better every day
Better every day.

During the song Sandra has come to the door. She watches Leah with a quizzical look. Leah stops.

Sandra Keep goin'. Might persuade him to go back to school.

Leah Libs!

Sandra It's not natural.

Jamie What aint?

Sandra For a girl of her age to be into Mama Cass.

Leah She's got a really beautiful voice!

Sandra Whassamatter with Madonna?

Leah She's a slag!

Sandra Hypocrite! (*Goes back in.*)

Jamie Take no notice.

Leah Fat chance.

Enter Ste, in school uniform and carrying schoolbag.

Jamie Oright, Ste?!

Leah Ste! Oright?

Ste Yous two been bunkin' off together, have you?

Leah Not together, no.

Jamie We've been watching rainbows.

Leah No we haven't. We haven't. I didn't even know there was a rainbow in the sky. I hate rainbows.

Sandra *comes out with another bin bag.*

Sandra Hello, Ste.

Ste Oright, Mrs Gangel?

Sandra Well, it's nice to see someone can stay at school for the full day.

Ste We done football today.

Sandra It's the wrong season for football, innit?

Ste Student teacher.

Sandra *(to Jamie)* Is that the problem?

Jamie No.

Leah You get all dirty playing football, don't you?

Ste Yeah.

Jamie Muddy.

Sandra Nothing wrong with a bit o' mud.

Leah Did you win, Ste?

Ste As always.

Leah Ah.

Sandra Hippopotamuses have baths in mud.

Jamie Takes one to know one.

Sandra *(cuffs him round the earhole)* You're just scared of a bit o' rain! That's all! Fifteen minutes o' bloody rain and you come running home! And look at it now! I'm bloody roastin'!

Jamie I hate games.

Leah Well, that's the difference between you and me Jamie, see, coz I love games.

Jamie Well, why don't you go and bloody try it?!

Sandra Yeah, put your money where your mouth is, madam!

Ste See, I'm gonna use me sport when I'm older. Fancy workin' at the sports centre. So I gotta put the hours in, you know.

Sandra I know, Ste, I know. And it's a bloody good centre actually, coz I go step classes there. (*To Jamie.*) You don't!

Ste Swimming's my favourite sport.

Leah Yeah?

Ste Yeah.

Sandra (*to Jamie*) You can swim.

Leah I bet you look blindin' in your trunks Ste.

Sandra The pair o' you, you wanna get down them step classes, get a bit o' life into ya!

Leah You're not my mother!

Sandra Thank God for that!

Sandra *exits with bin bag in direction of the chute.*

Ste Anyway, gotta get in.

Leah Stay out here, Ste.

Ste I'm doin' the tea.

Leah Stick it on then come out here.

Ste Bubble and squeak, Leah. You can't leave bubble and squeak. Gotta watch it, like a hawk.

Leah Don't that make you fart. Bubble and squeak?

Jamie (*to Leah*) Only if you've got a fat arse.

Ste 'Ere, Jamie, you wanna do football, you know. It's all right. People'll talk to you then.

Leah What you having for afters, Ste? (*Looks at Jamie.*)
Spotted Dick?

Jamie (*to Ste*) I don't like it.

Ste You joined in in juniors.

Jamie Juniors is different.

Ste How is it?

Jamie I dunno it just is.

Leah People talked to you in juniors.

Jamie What would you know? You aint been a' school in six months!

Leah I'm psychic!

Jamie Psychotic!

Ste She's only tryina help.

Leah Tell him, Ste!

Jamie Yeah, well, I don't need fuckin' 'elp.

Enter Sandra, empty-handed.

Sandra Language, Jamie! An' anyway, Leah, you couldn't go back to school if you wanted.

Jamie Yeah, you're excluded.

Leah Aint my fault.

Sandra Whose fault is it then?

Leah The system. Me mum said.

Ste Oh, I'm goin' in.

Jamie See you, Ste.

Ste Yeah. Later, Jay.

Ste lets himself into his flat.

Sandra Face facts, Leah, no bugger wants you.

Leah That bloke from the telly wants me.

Sandra Shut up.

Leah He does so there! He's doin' a documentary called 'Victims of the System'.

Sandra He's already made it, Leah. Your mother told me. He said he couldn't have you on it (**Jamie joins in.**) coz you were such a cow.

Leah He was a pervert anyway.

Sandra (*to Jamie*) I want you inside. She's a bad influence.

Leah (*to Jamie*) She's a bad influence.

Sandra Jamie!

Jamie I'm staying out here!

Sandra Right. I'm ringing your teacher.

Jamie (*tuts*) Leave Miss Ellis alone, she must hate you.

Sandra Shift your arse.

Jamie *shifts and Sandra goes indoors.*

Jamie (*tuts*) I wish I was on home tuition.

Leah I wish I was at school.

Jamie You only wanna go coz Ste goes.

Leah I don't.

Jamie D'you fancy him?

Leah *tuts.*

Jamie Everyone fancies Ste.

Leah No they don't.

Jamie Even Señorita Pilar de Moreno.

Leah Do what?

Jamie The new Spanish teacher. She run her fingers through his hair today and said untold things in fuckin' dago talk.

Leah I shoulda been Spanish.

Jamie You shoulda been somin'.

Leah When we used to watch that *Digame* programme with Miss Seale, I thought, 'That's me. Siestas, mini-faldas, discotecas'.

They adopt the husky Spanish tones of the programmes they have seen.

Jamie Me llamo Marcus, y me gusta ir al cine.

Leah Me gusta los platanos, me gusta los discotecas, y la musica pop.

Jamie Tengo diezinueve años.

Leah Mama Cass done a song about a Spanish garden. 'Ere!

Jamie What?

Leah There's someone in Ste's bathroom.

Jamie Yeah?

Leah *gets the rusty old trike.*

Jamie What you doin'?

Leah You hold it steady while I get up.

Jamie Leah!

Leah He's just won a game of football, he's covered in mud. Said so hisself. Well, what d'you do when you're covered in mud? Have a bath. Hold it. Steady, Jay.

He holds the tricycle steady while she climbs up and attempts to peer through the window and into Ste's bathroom.

Jamie Can you see anythin'?

Leah Yeah.

Ronnie *(off)* What the fuck?!

Leah Ooh, sorry, mate!

Laughing her head off, and trying to get down from the tricycle, she goes flying.

Ronnie (*off*) Y'dirty slot!

Leah It's his dad! Takin' a dump!

Ronnie (*off*) Y'dirty slot!

Jamie Oh no!

Sandra *comes out, dressed for work. She is buttoning up a light jacket as she speaks.*

Sandra Miss Ellis has gone home. Secretary says I can speak to her in the morning. Now. There's a cheese salad in the fridge.

Jamie I aint hungry.

Sandra I can always throw it down the chute with the rest of your crap, Jamie Gangel.

Jamie Salad's fine.

Sandra It's good for ya. There was a phone-in on 'Richard and Judy' this mornin' about the bonus of a well-planned diet.

Jamie I bet you rang in an' all. You can't keep off that bloody phone.

Leah (*to Sandra*) D'you fancy that Richard Madeley, Sandra?

Sandra Oooh no!

Jamie She fancies the copper in *Crimewatch*.

Sandra Don't you knock 'im!

Jamie She phones in saying she recognises the photofits off the incident desk, only she don't, she just does it coz she thinks she'll get through to the copper.

Jamie and Leah *laugh.*

Sandra Oh, you can laugh. I've only done it the once, don't exaggerate. And if you must know, Jamie, I only did it coz it looked like your dad.

Leah What?

Sandra The bloke who done the post office in Plumstead. I'm convinced.

Leah *laughs even more, Jamie is subdued.*

Sandra And for your information, Jamie, love, I've gone off that copper.

Leah My mum fancies Bill Beaumont off *Question of Sport*.

Sandra He's cuddly.

Leah That's not the word I'd use.

Sandra Well, I don't know as many foul words as you. Now. The salad with the beetroot's for Tony.

Jamie Tony?

Sandra He'll be round in a bit.

Jamie But you're goin' work.

Sandra He's comina see you.

Jamie Me?

Leah This your new man, Sandra?

Sandra So you're not on your own.

Jamie I don't need a baby-sitter.

Sandra I know.

Leah I wouldn't mind meetin' him as it goes.

Sandra Eh! Hands off!

Leah I'm not into sloppy seconds, any more.

Sandra What about the blokes we see knocking at your door? Very sloppy. (*To Jamie.*) And I shall be checking your homework when I get in, so be warned.

Leah Oh, and just when he was thinkin' of having a sex orgy.

Sandra My son's got taste, love. See you, Jay.

Jamie Yeah.

Sandra exits. *A toilet flushes in Ste's flat.*

Leah (*sings*) Sing for your supper and you'll get breakfast
Dine with wine of choice,
If romance is in your voice.

I heard from a wise canary
Trillin' makes a fella willin'
So little swallow, swallow now.

Now is the time to sing for your luncheon and you'll get
dinner

Dine with wine of your choice . . .

(*Spoken.*) Fancy liking that bloke off *Crimewatch*. He's ancient.

Jamie She's ancient.

Leah D'you reckon it was your dad what done the post office in Plumstead?

Jamie How should I know?

Leah I hate old people.

Jamie You like Mama Cass.

Leah It's allowed if they're dead. Oh, I dunno what to do.

Jamie Watch your rainbow.

Leah It's gone now. (*Pause.*) I dunno whether to go the park.

Jamie Don't look at me.

Leah I'll go in.

Jamie You do that.

Leah I will.

Jamie Give us all a break.

Leah You and your mother. Two peas in a fuckin' pod, mate, I'm tellin' ya.

Jamie See you, slagbag.

Leah *wallops him one.*

Leah You asked for that!

Jamie I know.

Leah *goes indoors. Jamie sits there. Presently Mama Cass's 'It's Getting Better' comes blaring out of Leah's flat. Jamie winces. Shortly Ste's front door comes flying open and Ste pops his head out. A dog starts to bark somewhere.*

Ste Me dad's tryina get some kip!

Jamie Knock her up, Ste, go on. Go on, Ste, knock her up.

Ste *goes to Leah's front door and hammers it with his fist. It opens slowly and Leah appears, hairbrush in hand like a microphone, singing to the song.*

Ste Turn it down, Leah, me ole man's tryina get some kip in there.

Jamie Go on, Ste, tell 'er.

Leah *sings louder, raunchier, and waves two fingers in the air.*

Ste Don't mess me about, Leah.

Leah That's my idol!

Ste I couldn't give a shit who it is.

Leah You could learn a lot from 'er!

Ste Leah!

Leah *sings even louder.*

Ste Leah, I'm warning you!

Leah Do I look scared?

Ste Turn it down or I'll fuckin' brain ya!

Leah Go back to your bubble an' squeak!

Ste Not until you do that!

Leah Oh yeah? Gonna make me?

Jamie Leah . . .

Leah You can shut up an' all.

Jamie You know what his dad's like.

Ste (*to Jamie*) Oh, don't start.

Jamie Who's startin'?

Leah I like this bit.

Ste Leah, he'll kill you if he don't get his kip.

Leah God, it's only on volume six.

Jamie You know what happened the last time.

Ste (*to Jamie*) Shut up!

At this point Tony enters. He carries a plastic bag.

Leah Your dad might scare you, Ste, but he don't scare me.

Ste I'll fuckin' scare you in a minute.

Tony Afternoon, all!

Jamie (*tuts*) Oright?

Ste (*nods*) Afternoon.

Leah Evening.

Tony Okay, Jamie?

Jamie S'pose.

Ste Leah!

Tony (*to Leah, recognising the music*) Mamas and Papas?

Leah (*tuts*) Mama Cass, you thick git.

Leah swings round and goes back in. *The door slams. The music gets turned down.* **Ste** looks at **Tony**.

Ste I owe you one, mate.

Jamie Me mum ain' in.

Tony Yeah. Just bumped into her. In the parking lot.

Ste You got wheels?

Tony Four.

Ste Let's have a look?

They look over the edge of the balcony.

Jamie Which one is it?

Tony Volkswagen Camper. Gravy-brown. Left-hand drive. Picked it up at an auction. Four hundred notes.

Ste (*not impressed*) See you, Jay.

Jamie Mm.

Ste makes his way back to his door.

Tony (*to Jamie*) Close your eyes.

Jamie What?

Ste stops on his step to watch.

Tony Close your eyes, Jamie, coz I got something.

Jamie, closing them reluctantly, tuts.

Tony gets a brand-new football out of the plastic bag. He slips it into **Jamie's** hands. He opens his eyes.

Jamie Oh.

Ste Say thank you.

Jamie Oh, thanks, Tony.

Ste Thassa good one.

Ste goes indoors.

Tony Your mum told me straight. You know. Problems. Been there. Mm. Walking through the park, game going on, my heart, you know, races. Scared, Jamie. Scared of the ball coming, you know, near me. Hey, we can fight this one together. Fancy a knockabout?

Jamie Not really.

Tony No, me neither. But some time, yeah?

Jamie Yeah.

Tony (*looking at his watch*) You watch *Grange Hill*?

Jamie No.

Tony Oh. Great.

Jamie You can.

Tony Oh. What you gonna do?

Jamie (*sighs*) Homework.

Tony Bit of a problem at the moment. New kid in the class. Think they're gonna follow a bullying storyline, you know? Don't quote me.

Jamie Don't worry, I won't.

Tony Great weather.

Jamie Blindin' weather.

Tony D'you mind if I go in? Only, I think, you know, something wrong with my retinas. Keep having to squint.

Jamie You wanna get a pair o'sunglasses.

Tony Shades, great.

Jamie *takes the football in. Tony follows him.*

Scene Two

Some sort of row is going on in Ste's flat. This is heard quite distantly throughout the scene. Tony sits on the step of Sandra's flat later that

night. It's still quite warm and he is topless. His shirt lies on the ground before him. He is smoking a joint. The door of the flat is ajar, and a faint murmur of a television can be heard. Jamie comes out holding a plate of salad.

Jamie Aren't you gonna eat this?

Tony Sure. (*Jamie passes him the salad and he looks at it.*) Your mother, she's . . . she's amazing. She's, you know, something else. You joining me?

Jamie comes out on the walkway.

Jamie I done me maths homework.

Tony Yeah?

Jamie Pythagoras' theorem. Wasn't Pythagoras a cunt?

Tony Yeah.

Jamie You're supposed to tell me off if I swear.

Tony Right.

Jamie I hate beetroot.

Tony How d'you spell 'offensive vegetable', right?

Jamie Where did you meet my mum?

Tony Planet earth.

Jamie Where?

Tony Oh, you know, out and about, here and there. What's a place? It's somewhere where, you know, shit happens.

Jamie Yeah, but where?

Tony Gateways.

Jamie You aint the first. She's not a slag or nothin', but you aint the first.

Tony I'm the fourth, right? (*Chuckles, annoyed at Jamie's choice of word.*) Slag?!

Jamie There was Colin the barber, Alfie the long-distance lorry driver, and Richard the barman:

Tony I just, you know, took a shine to her. She's got . . . charisma.

Jamie She turn you on?

Tony (*gives a neurotic, what-sort-of-a-question-is-this? look to his left, then up at Jamie*) Sure.

Jamie She's thirty-five!

Tony What's age? Age is just . . . just number. You know?

Pause.

Jamie Mum said you was a painter.

Tony Right.

Jamie I know why she chose you. She wants the lounge doing. Only put the paper up last year and she already hates it. Bloke what solded it her said it got velvet in it, but it aint, it's imitation velvet. She feels gutted. Like that, my mum, goes off things fast. (**Tony laughs.**) What's so funny? She might go off you. You won't be laughing then, will ya?

Tony (*short pause*) Jamie, how old are you?

Jamie Fifteen. How old are you?

Tony Twenty-seven. Not old enough to be your dad, right?

Jamie What?

Tony You know. (*Pause.*) Sure.

Jamie What?

Tony It's just shit, isn't it?

Jamie What?

Tony The whole concept. Yeah. Anyway. I think we should, like, move towards getting away from that. Right?

Jamie Is that a spliff?

Pause. Tony doesn't know how to reply.

Give us some.

He passes him the joint. Jamie has a big drag on it.

(Looks out to Canary Wharf.) When I was ten, me mum met this bloke called Richard. He was a barman like her. I used to . . . pretend he was my dad. Didn't realise he was only about eighteen. I used to tell people . . . and that.

Pause.

And then one night. I went in the kitchen for a glass of water. And there's me mum, sat on the floor, tears pouring down her face. Two black eyes. I never saw Richard again.

Pause.

I used to sit on his knee. He used to put his arm round me when we walked down the street and that. Called me trouble. And then . . . it's weird, innit? When somin' can just stop like that.

Tony That's cool.

Jamie Just . . .

Tony Hey . . .

Jamie What?

Tony Your mum's gonna be all right.

Jamie But things do, don't they? They just stop happening. Don't they? Feelings and that. The way . . . the way you feel.

Tony Some carry on.

Jamie She stopped crying. That's good, innit?

Tony Good. You're sensitive. (*Jamie shrugs his shoulder and passes back the joint.*) I'm sensitive. Sometimes I just. Kind of. Cry. You ever done that?

Jamie Yeah.

Tony Yeah, it's called release. Famous people cry. Gazza.

Jamie Anne Diamond.

Tony Thatcher. (*Spits on floor.*)

Jamie Princess Di.

Tony Princess Di.

Sandra *enters from work.*

Sandra This little princess is fuckin' knackered. 'Scuse language. Has he been behaving hisself?

Tony *stubs the joint out with his foot.*

Tony Sandra! You look great.

Sandra Oh, Tony!

Tony What?

Sandra You haven't eaten your little cheese salad.

Tony Think I've got an ulcer. Or a gallstone. Right off my food.

Sandra My feet. Someone's sticking swords in my feet.

Tony I get that, it's got a name.

Jamie It's them heels.

Sandra It's your bedtime, Jamie.

Jamie Aren't you gonna check me homework?

Sandra (*sitting on step, taking shoes off*) Ooh, sod that, I'm knackered. All I fancy now is a cup o'tea and me bloody bed. Cor.

Jamie I had maths and art.

Tony Painting by numbers.

Sandra *sniggers, rubbing her weary feet.*