

**BREAKING IN*****Adrian Reynolds***

*GREG and JILL stand in a hotel lobby.*

JILL I'm not sure I like the look of this. *(Pause.)* I said I'm not sure I -

GREG I heard.

JILL Well why didn't you say? *(Pause.)* You shoulda said.

GREG I did.

JILL When did you say?

GREG To myself. On the way here. In the taxi. I thought 'Don't know about this'.

JILL You shoulda said.

GREG Didn't want to spoil it for you.

JILL It's too late now.

GREG Give it a chance. We just got here.

JILL It's not right.

GREG We just got here. Give it a chance.

JILL That taxi driver.

GREG Nice bloke.

JILL The size of his hands.

GREG Holds a wheel all day. Course he's got big hands.

JILL All the same.

GREG All the same, what?

JILL Hands like that, could choke the life out of you.

GREG He was a nice bloke.

JILL Throttle you. *(She makes choking sounds.)*

GREG Jill.

JILL Shake you about like -

GREG Jill.

JILL I was glad you was with me.

GREG Taxi drivers have big hands. Stands to reason. Evolution. And they're nice blokes. I've always said that. You've never heard me say a harsh word where taxi drivers are concerned.

JILL But those gloves.

GREG All day he's got that wheel in his hands. Gloves help.

JILL No fingerprints.

GREG I give up.

JILL And he wouldn't let us look in the boot. Did you notice that?

GREG He's a taxi driver. He takes care of the luggage. At the start of the journey, he puts it in the boot for you. And at the end, he takes it out. It's what he does. He's a taxi driver.

JILL You're too trusting.

GREG Christ.

JILL Don't be so negative.

GREG You what?

JILL I listen you know. When you think I'm not listening. You might think you're going to drag me down to your level, infect me with your negativity, but it won't work. I'm here to have a good time. I'm going to have one. You do what you want, but I'm going to have a good time. *(Pause.)* It's my honeymoon.

GREG Don't start that again.

JILL It's like a honeymoon.

GREG Honeymoons are for if you're married.

JILL Aren't you excited? *(Pause.)* You can't fool me. I can see you're excited.

GREG Over the fucking moon.

JILL Not here.

GREG I'll use language if I want. Arm and a leg, we paid. Rates like that, I'm entitled to a few words.

JILL Who paid?

GREG Arm and a fucking leg.

JILL Greg.

GREG It was your idea.

JILL I've heard enough. You take the bags up to the room. I'm going to have a spritzer out on the terrace. And I want to see you in a better mood when you come back.

GREG They've got people for bags. It's a hotel. Wear gloves, sometimes.

JILL Just go.

GREG What do you take me for, a taxi driver? Enjoy your spritzer.

*GREG leaves with the luggage.*

*JILL sits for a while, settling in to her new surroundings, and reads the preamble to the drinks list.*

JILL 'The Major Ron Ferguson Cocktail Terrace is the most recent addition to the hotel, built to commemorate the engagement of Sarah Ferguson to His Highness Prince Andrew, Duke of York. The naming of the bar in no way indicates favouritism for either side of what subsequently transpired to be a most unfortunate coupling. Indeed, the management extends the utmost sympathy to both parties, and would like to take this opportunity to wish Sarah and Andrew every happiness in the future, however it unfolds. A selection of light snacks is available.'

*Later: GREG appears. JILL assesses his mood in silence.*

JILL That's more like it.

GREG There's a sauna, but it costs extra.

JILL Extra?

GREG And tonight it's shoulder of lamb.

JILL How much extra?

GREG With a morel mushroom sauce. And a reduction of leeks.

JILL No one said anything about nothing being extra.

GREG Or rainbow trout on a pillow of wild rice. With pistachios for eyes.

JILL I probably wouldn't want one anyway. But there's no call for things to be extra.

GREG For vegetarians, a medley of seasonable vegetables in a filo case.

JILL A medley?

GREG Peas, carrots, and broccoli. How was your spritzer?

JILL I had an orange.

GREG We had a coffee, the chef and me.

JILL You talked to a chef?

GREG Carol, her name is.

JILL What did you talk about?

GREG She's a large woman. Very pleasant.

JILL I went out with a chef once. I don't know that I've told you about Ramesh.

GREG Carol trained in Zurich.

JILL Ramesh was a gentleman.

GREG She's booked to appear on Ready Steady Cook. Three episodes next series.

JILL Tell her about your TV appearance, did we?

GREG Puddings is her speciality. She's got a signature dish.

JILL Did you? Did you tell her? Tell her how you were on television?

GREG Apricot mousse. With a syrup of lemon zest. In a glove of sugar pastry.

*Pause. JILL exits in silence.*

GREG First time I saw Jill, she was wearing a shiny blue basque, sat on the edge of a bed with staples between her legs. I didn't know she was called Jill. She was in a magazine this bloke showed me. 'Look,' he says. 'I took that.' I didn't know what to say. We've only just met, and there he is, showing me pictures of this woman looking like something out The Sweeney. 'What do you think?' he says. I tell him he could have exposed it better. Bring out the flesh tones a bit more. Thing is, when you're sharing a cell, you've got to establish what's what early on so there's no assumptions made. Starts off with assumptions, and then you're on the slippery slope. Next they'll be taking the piss, and if you don't stop it there they'll be taking liberties. And you do not want anyone taking liberties in the nick. *(Pause.)* After that, we got on fine, me and my pornographer friend. The Birdman of Winson Green we called him - prison humour being of the basic sort, so's everyone feels involved in the camaraderie of it all. Ramesh McGillicuddy. The Birdman of Winson Green.

*Later: JILL comes back.*

JILL Just so you know, I've forgotten what was said earlier. Alright?

GREG What?

JILL It's over. In the past now. Been and gone. Water under the bridge. I don't want any atmosphere, a time like this.

GREG You've lost me.

JILL You know very well.

GREG I'm hearing words. No sense, just sound.

JILL Don't, Greg. I know it's just a pretend honeymoon, but can't you make an effort?

GREG I don't believe this.

JILL There's a lighthouse in the garden.

GREG You what?

JILL I went for a walk. In the grounds. It was nice. Fresh. All green and yellow. You follow this path. Weeds everywhere. Crazy paving with grass poking up between. Goes into this forest. So cool. All you can hear is the trees breathing. Smells like mushrooms when they're starting to turn. I took my shoes off. Springy and damp, and ever so soft.

GREG You took your shoes off?

JILL Look at my feet.

GREG Where's these woods?

JILL Out the back.

GREG And there's a lighthouse.

JILL Big stone thing.

GREG We're fifty miles inland.

JILL The man who built the hotel used to be a captain on a ship.

GREG Maybe it's me. I don't know. But someone is losing it big time.

JILL I know it's not a honeymoon. Not really. I'll call it something else if you want. Our weekend break.

GREG That's not the point.

JILL           He reckoned he saw a mermaid.

GREG           In the woods?

JILL           In the sea.

GREG           Who told you all this? There's a pixie is there, doing the guided tour?

JILL           There's a plaque.

GREG           And he saw a mermaid.

JILL           Reckoned he did.

GREG           And that's when they pensioned him off. So he could build his hotel with a fairy grotto and a lighthouse.

JILL           I just want things to be nice.

GREG           You don't make it easy. The way you blow up when I tell you I've talked to the chef.

JILL           Why you even had to tell me -

GREG           I've got nothing to hide.

JILL           I'm here with you.

GREG           And if we'd been at dinner, and the chef pops out after the meal and says 'Hello Greg', what then?

JILL           I just want things to be nice.

GREG           I'll see you at dinner, alright? Shoulder of lamb. With a morel mushroom sauce. And a reduction of leeks. Her name's Carol. She was having a break. We had a coffee. Sat out in the kitchen with the door open to the back, had a coffee and a cigarette, watched the smoke escape. We talked about food.

JILL I thought you'd stopped smoking.

GREG It's a stress thing. *(Pause.)* I'll see you at dinner, alright?

*Exit GREG.*

JILL Soon as I seen his face I knew he'd got a story to tell. Stressed out, and a bit fuzzy, but I've never known a security camera do anyone justice. Make you look...seedy. But when I saw him, I could see he'd got something. *(Eight grand, he said.)* And this look. Vulnerable. Haunted. I watched it, over and again. Every day that week. Normally, I tape over Crimewatch so I can record next week's. Only I couldn't. Something told me. Something inside. In the end I taped over Riverdance.

*Later: GREG reappears. They stay silent for a while.*

GREG What's for dinner then?

JILL What you having?

GREG Think I'll go for the lamb like I said.

JILL With the moral mushrooms.

GREG And reduced leeks. You?

JILL The same.

GREG Two shoulders. And a nice bottle of red. Carol says they do a very good Merlot, and it's one of the cheaper ones.

JILL You don't think he saw a mermaid, do you?

GREG You what?

JILL The mermaid -

GREG Stop. Rewind. Run that by me again.

JILL You don't think he saw a mermaid, do you?

GREG That's what I thought you said.

JILL Well?

GREG What sort of question is that?

JILL But you don't.

GREG If you have to put it like that, no. I don't think he saw a mermaid. But for that matter I don't suppose there was a mermaid for him to see.

JILL It was on the plaque.

GREG There was moss on the plaque.

JILL You saw.

GREG I saw the moss. I didn't see no mermaid. Mermaids is made-up, and it's sailors make them up. Stay out at sea too long in the sun and it does funny things to their heads. All cooped up together like that.

JILL Says he.

GREG Says he. But think carefully. I've talked to you about screws. I've talked to you about snout. God forbid, I even talked to you about the showers. But did you ever once hear me say anything about mermaids?

JILL You were at Winson Green.

GREG And that lighthouse is in the middle of a fucking forest.

JILL But it says he did.

GREG           It's bollocks.

JILL            So why d'you go and have a look?

GREG           I wanted to go for a walk.

JILL            So why go there, to see?

GREG           Because it was there. You told me about it. And I thought, 'That sounds interesting. It's not often you get to see a lighthouse in a forest.' So I went to find out for myself.

JILL            And you saw it.

GREG           I saw a lighthouse. And I saw a plaque. I saw moss on the plaque. I even took my shoes off. I did not see a mermaid.

JILL            But you looked.

GREG           I look at all sorts of things.

JILL            And why would someone lie about a thing like that?

GREG           Sweet Jesus. Do you always believe what people tell you?

JILL            You know I don't.

GREG           So why pick on this?

JILL            You looked. You must have thought there was something in it.

GREG           So if I showed you something in a magazine say, you'd believe that's all there was to it?

*Pause. There's a silence.*

GREG           Well?

JILL I'm more interested in menus at the minute.

GREG What's real. That's what matters. There isn't any room for the rest.

JILL Coming?

*JILL exits.*

GREG I was small when I was little. That's when it started. My life of crime. We was over in Spain at this hotel. Mam spent most of her time with this German waiter, and no way could she get me into waterwings so the pool's out and I take to robbing. I could get through the window into this office where they keep all the valuables. In a safe, but they must have lost the key cos it's always open...Mam's wicked into her earrings and there's this pair of silver hoops. Do her a treat. She had a beehive then. Six foot two it made her, ducking through doors and keeping an eye out for low hanging bus stops. Stayed in when it was windy. Mam with the flappy head. Sends me out for ten Embassy and a chip cob. Spanish can't get the hang of chips. Fucking don't ask me. You get your oil on, good and hot. Peel your spuds, and bang them in. Where's the problem? I'd had omelette that day. Omelette twice a day every fucking day since we'd got there. Three dozen eggs I'd had that week, no word of a lie, and your Spanish chicken is not a happy bird. Britain, we keep them all together nice and cosy in a shed, yeah, and all they have to do is sit there and chill out with their mates and lay eggs. Spain, they make them live outside and find their own food, so they eat leftovers, and what's left over from a Spanish meal after they've finished with the squid I don't want to know about but that's what the chicken gets and by the time it gets to me it's half a hundredweight of greasy omelette and there I am squeezing through that window thinking sweet Jesus my fucking arse. Busting for a crap like you wouldn't believe and wondering if mam'll treat us to some proper chips if she likes the earrings. Down from the window and up the corridor jingling the hoops behind my back thinking how chuffed

she's going to be, laying a trail of evil eggy depth charges chuff chuff chuff behind me the whole way...

And I don't think, do I? Up the stairs, straight into the bedroom and there they are. Well I didn't know. Mam and Fritz. And me with the earrings. Fritz turns bright red but mam just laughs.

'Like father like son.'

And puts the hoops in.

*(Pause.)*

Me and the Birdman got stoned one night and it all came out. Mam and me. Jill and him. Stories you tell. 'One day,' he says. 'You and Jill should meet up.' Pissing himself laughing.

They found him dangling there, her picture open on the wall. He'd got a cell of his own by then. 'Moving up in the world matey.' Turning round and round with her staring out at him.

There's no Birdman any more, but she wants her mermaid. There's no room for mermaids. It's fucked enough as it is.

*JILL reads from a letter she's been writing. She reappeared in the latter part of GREG's monologue.*

JILL            You wouldn't believe the meal we had. Roast lamb, with this herby stuff on the outside. Yummy. And leeks to go with it, done with white wine. Roast potatoes, done to a treat. Olive oil, I think they used. And these mushrooms. They get them from the grounds of the hotel, proper wild ones. Quite meaty. We had a walk out there earlier. Just me and Greg. No one else for miles. Even Greg had to admit it was romantic, the pair of us having a stroll out into this forest. We must have looked quite something, especially with it being a full moon. A real picture. Pity you weren't there to take it. There's something about being outside on a night like that. A bit misty, and nice and soft. We took our shoes off. You'd like Greg. He's a real gentleman. I told him about you today. I thought he should know - no secrets between a husband and wife they say. You'd get on, you two. But I didn't tell him about - you know. I told him you were a chef. Greg's an actor. He's been on telly a few times, crime programmes mostly. He really looks the part. You'll have to come and stay with us some time. When you're in the area. It's been ages now. And I haven't said a word about you not writing. I might send a postcard tomorrow. The hotel

does all sorts. There's a lovely one of this lighthouse that's in the woods where me and Greg went. Really. The man who built the hotel used to be a captain on a ship, and I suppose the lighthouse reminded him of the sea. It says on this plaque how he reckons he saw a mermaid. Between you, me, and the garden gate, I'm not so sure. But it's a sweet thought. Lots of love, Jill. No kisses for you this time - I'm saving them for loverboy.

*JILL leaves the stage, taking the letter with her.*

*Next morning: GREG appears, shoeless and relaxed. Then JILL enters.*

JILL           The wanderer returns.

GREG           Don't.

JILL           Pardon me.

GREG           Just give it a rest.

JILL           How am I supposed to rest, you disappearing like that?

GREG           We're having a weekend away. A relaxing break.

JILL           Together.

GREG           A man can do his own thing, can't he?

JILL           On his wedding night?

GREG           Don't start that again.

JILL           I think you'll find I'm being lenient.

GREG           I think you'll find we are not married.

JILL           We have an understanding.

GREG Explain it to me.

JILL In my book, we're as good as married.

GREG First I knew about it was when you told the taxi driver we was on honeymoon.

JILL I wanted it to be a surprise.

GREG And I'm supposed to go along with it.

JILL Well where's the harm? *(Pause.)* You can pretend things is real, and that's as good as.

GREG Well pretend I'm chuffed.

JILL All I want is things to be nice.

GREG Things like me?

JILL You're being horrible. Twisting my words.

GREG They was twisted before they left your mouth. Twisted up in that head of yours.

JILL Just go. Go, before I say something we'll both regret. And don't think I haven't noticed your feet.

*Both leave. JILL reappears with the letter.*

JILL He won't read it. Won't even open it. I know him. But sometimes I like to write. Makes things easier. He was a shit, when all's said and done. A worthless perverted shit. Not the photos. They never hurt anyone. Just silly, they were. The way he'd make you see things. That's what was perverted. He knew the words, had all the patter. Could charm the birds out the trees, Ramesh.

*Enter GREG alongside JILL. They're not aware of each other.*

GREG           Talk your granny's pants off, that boy. And she'd love every minute. If it's all bollocks anyway, it might as well be bollocks that's fun. When it's grim, I pretend the Birdman's there and listen to what he says. It's not real. I know it's not real. But it helps. There's not a day goes by I don't think of him. Wishing I could have sorted him out like he done for me.

*GREG puts one shoe on and they become aware of each other.*

GREG           Know how many steps there is in that lighthouse?

*JILL does not respond.*

GREG           Seventy eight. I counted.

*JILL stays silent.*

GREG           Door's stiff, but it gives with a push.

JILL           Broke in, you mean.

GREG           I mean it gives.

JILL           If you say.

GREG           When you get to the top, it opens out into this room. Where they'd have the light. Only there isn't. No light, I mean. But you can go up there and look all around.

JILL           What did you see?

GREG           It was dark.

JILL           You went all the way up there in the dark?

GREG           It spirals up. You can see from the moon.

*GREG freezes.*

JILL            That was it. The spiral and the moon. Just like in my dream. Like I was hearing an echo. Like there was two of me there at once. Me there in the room with him, talking. And me in the dream. And there we were. Both of us. At the same time. When I was little I played a game. I'd look in the mirror, till I didn't know who was me and who was the reflection. Look out my eyes and catch me staring back at myself. And Greg was there in the dream and I was angry at him but we got talking and I was saying something about -

*GREG comes back to life, and they both behave as if the preceding sequence didn't happen.*

JILL            You went all the way up there in the dark?

GREG           It spirals up. You can see from the moon.

JILL            Light must have been good.

GREG           It's a full moon.

JILL            That's a lot, seventy eight steps.

*JILL freezes.*

GREG           When I shared a cell with Birdman I'd have this dream. There I am, stopping at this hotel with this woman he's took the picture of and eating top food and everything, but something's not right. All looks sound, but I can feel the carpet under my toes, and I realise I'm not wearing any shoes. I'm dreaming. And it's like I'm back there. Just me and Jill having a bit of to-do, and at the same time I'm back in the dream. Too scared to look down at my feet, and all I can think is I know just what we're going to say, me and her both -

*JILL comes back, and they both behave as if the preceding didn't happen.*

JILL            You went all the way up there in the dark?

GREG           It spirals up. You can see from the moon.

JILL           Light must have been good.

GREG           It's a full moon.

JILL           That's a lot, seventy eight steps.

GREG           There's a sort of landing, half way up. I had a rest.

JILL           You do right.

GREG           Yourself - you sleep alright?

JILL           Considering.

GREG           It was cold, at the top of the stairs.

JILL           You could have been in bed with me.

GREG           I know. I know.

JILL           Worried sick, I was.

GREG           I'm sorry.

JILL           Sorry.

GREG           I said I was sorry and I am.

JILL           Fat lot of good sorry is.

GREG           Jill.

JILL           The embarrassment.

GREG           What's to be embarrassed about?

JILL           Coming down to breakfast feeling all conspicuous, everyone looking at me over the toast. What are people to think?

GREG About you having breakfast on your tod?

JILL It's not that.

GREG What then?

JILL Me up there in that bedroom on my own. You curled up on a lighthouse landing. It's not natural.

GREG Let's discuss it later eh? Before anything else, I need a shower.

*JILL looks hopeful at this.*

GREG I'll see you down here. We'll have a coffee.

*GREG goes.*

JILL I counted. 'After a coffee.' 'After a shower.' 'After I've got things straight.' 'After this programme.' 'After things have settled.' One day, I sat down and counted all the afters. And I couldn't keep up. I tried. If everyone did the things later they said was going to do, they'd never get round to what they're doing now. He'd never get round to getting married. Spends all his time waiting for things to turn out. So I thought I'd make the decision for him. See how it settles. Find out if it's a good idea. And if not, it doesn't matter anyway. It's only pretend.

*GREG reappears, both shoes on.*

GREG Alright?

JILL I had one without you.

GREG A coffee?

JILL Cappuccino.

GREG What about me?

JILL I was thinking. If we was to do something after the coffee, then we might not get round to it. So I'll save you the wait, and we can just get on with it now.

GREG What?

JILL Having a row maybe.

GREG You've lost me.

JILL You went up. Had a shower. Said we'd deal with things when you came back. You're back.

GREG I don't want a row.

JILL You've changed your tune.

GREG What would I want to row about?

JILL For instance, what's this about me telling a taxi driver we're married when I haven't had the grace to mention it to you. Then I'd come back with you sloping off to a lighthouse when I've paid perfectly good money for a room in a hotel. After that, we'd probably take a tangent. You and the cook. Me and the waiter. Mermaids. And so on, up to me having a coffee without you being there to have one.

GREG What about you and the waiter?

JILL Nothing.

GREG You can't say something like that and expect me to -

JILL It was an example.

GREG What sort of example?

JILL An example of how we keep having a pop at one another.

GREG           And what's the waiter got to do with it?

JILL            He hasn't.

GREG           What were you doing last night?

JILL            When last night?

GREG           When you was with the waiter.

JILL            I wasn't with any waiter.

GREG           You don't waste time, I'll give you that.

JILL            All night you spent in that lighthouse, and all you can conjure up is me copping off with a waiter. You're sad.

GREG           When I should be thinking about mermaids I suppose.

JILL            I knew it.

GREG           It's bollocks, is what it is.

JILL            Do you ever stop and listen to yourself?

GREG           Coffee before I get down. You didn't want me to meet him.

JILL            I'm staying right where I am.

*GREG storms off.*

JILL            There are occasions when I wonder whether us getting married is a good idea. Silly I know, but I've always liked that fairy tale idea of a wedding, all dressed in white and everybody smiling and toasting the happy couple with champagne. Let's pretend. A big day where you're the centre of attention and everyone has to be nice to you. Whether it works out is another thing.

*Enter GREG. He and JILL aren't aware of one another.*

GREG        'You and Jill,' he says. 'I can see you two getting it together.' And like a twat, I take him at his word. When you're inside, anything that even half reminds you of women gives you the horn. Four nights on the trot, I dreamed about the rabbit in the Caramel advert. Screw goes past whistling Sade and I can't do a thing all morning. So when Birdman says me and this woman in a jazz mag could get it together, I can't help but fantasise.

*GREG and JILL become aware of each other.*

GREG        We need to talk.

JILL         Excuse me?

GREG        Talk. A proper talk.

JILL         Like grown ups.

GREG        If you like.

JILL         Don't hold with growing up.

GREG        Jill.

JILL         Greg.

GREG        Listen. Please.

JILL         Say something.

GREG        You and me...

JILL         Yes?

GREG        Me and you...

JILL            Bloody hell.

GREG           You don't make it easy.

JILL            Go on.

GREG           Us...

JILL            Haven't we been here before?

GREG           What is it with us?

JILL            You tell me.

GREG           It's not working, is it?

JILL            Depends.

GREG           Depends?

JILL            Twelve years my dad had his shop. Sold second hand furniture. Office chairs. Occasional tables. Filing cabinets he got off the Ministry of Defence. Used to sell just enough to keep the roof over our head.

GREG           I don't follow.

JILL            He had this globe. Polished wooden globe, with an old-fashioned map of the world. Rubbed linseed oil into it to give it a good shine. There was dragons and angels painted on it, and a mermaid in the Pacific. Twelve years he had that shop, and all that time he'd got the globe. Kept it right at the back, where he could see it. When he thought no one was looking, he'd go over to it, and spin it round, ever so slowly. Catch the light on the shine of it, and listen to it purr as it went round and round. He was over Leicester way chasing up some kitchen units from a borstal that was being shut down, and while he was gone mum sold it to this bloke for fifty quid.

GREG           Fifty quid?

JILL            Didn't even know what he was going to do with it.

GREG            Bloke pays fifty quid for a globe, and he doesn't know what he's going to do with it?

JILL            Said he was doing this play, and it might come in handy.

GREG            He's taking the piss.

JILL            He didn't know what. But he thought it would come in handy.

GREG            Well out of order.

JILL            Dad was distraught.

GREG            Fucking nonce.

JILL            Mum had one of her friends round when he came back. The woman from the florist next door. Dad comes back all happy with a van load of formica and shelving he's picked up, and sees it's missing. Mum tells him all chirpy how she's sold it. He sits down and has a cigarette. Doesn't even take his gloves off. Puts them on in case of the edges on the units. But he just sits there, smoking his cigarette, keeps them on the whole time, mum and her friend keeping it breezy and having a bit of a giggle.

GREG            You just don't do something like that.

JILL            He done it.

GREG            There's...standards. Manners.

JILL            What you getting so upset for?

GREG            I'm not upset. I'm pissed off. For your old man.

JILL            That finished it for mum and him.

GREG Divorce?

JILL They stopped talking. He had the upstairs, she had the downstairs. Kids running up and down between them.

GREG I'd have divorced her. Kids or no kids.

JILL They weren't married. Not properly.

GREG Hark at her.

*Pause.*

JILL I made it up. About the waiter. There was a waiter. But there wasn't. Not like that.

GREG You what?

JILL You heard.

GREG In plain English.

JILL I made it up about the waiter.

GREG It's all a game to you. Set me up, knock me down. Doesn't matter. Other people aren't real. Not really. You can do what you want. And if you pretend, it can't hurt. Is that it?

JILL I'm not pretending now.

GREG Till you change your mind. Maybe there was a waiter. Maybe there wasn't. You know what? I don't care. Don't give a shit. Might not be a real waiter, but it was a real dig.

JILL I just wanted to show how it is with us. I say something. You say something back. We draw conclusions. All the things we could say or do, but all we're bothered about is making things turn out to hurt each

other. Like the bloke who bought the globe. He might have done something nice with it. But all you can think is how he ripped dad off, and they never even met.

GREG        So why do you want to wind me up for? *(Pause.)* Eh?

JILL         You haven't listened, have you?

GREG        You what?

JILL         It's just what I was talking about. You hear the little bit you want to hear and then make something out of it to throw back at me.

GREG        You can't tango on your own.

JILL         Are you dancing? *(Pause.)* This could work. If we want. Doesn't matter whether it's a honeymoon or what it is. It's you and me, that's all. You and me.

GREG        You, me, and all the fucking mermaids in la-la land.

JILL         This is where you go off. To get your head together.

*GREG leaves.*

JILL         We think we're transparent. But we're not. We think we're just as see-through as everyone else, but we're not. And nor are they. Mirrors and smoke. And as hard as you peer, all you ever really see is reflections of yourself. Ramesh said that to me, the last night we were together. I'd been thinking it, in my own way, but Ramesh said the words. Sometimes you need other people to say what you've been feeling, and they've got the right ones. Might not even realise what they've said sometimes, but you just hear what they're saying and it's like listening to yourself speak. Not your everyday you. A Sunday best you who puts someone else's voice on to say something you'd never even realised you needed to hear.

*GREG comes back.*

GREG       What's happening?

JILL        You tell me.

GREG       Tonight, I mean. What are we going to do?

JILL        What's Carol cooking up?

GREG       We could go somewhere else.

JILL        The meals are inclusive.

GREG       But we don't have to stay.

JILL        We don't have to do anything.

GREG       But we could.

JILL        Stay?

GREG       If we wanted.

JILL        What do you want?

*Pause.*

GREG       I don't want to eat off the menu.

JILL        Shoulder was nice.

GREG       It was alright.

JILL        You don't make it easy. The way you blow up when I -

GREG       It's been said.

JILL        Not for the first time.

GREG Not for the first time. When I was inside, I shared a cell with this bloke. He...helped keep my head together. Confined space like that, you lose it over the stupidest fucking things. David Bowie lyrics. What biscuit's the best. Sean Connery or Roger Moore. I'm all ready to slice his face open with a pencil stub about how many people's in a basketball team, but he just refuses to take me seriously. And the more wound up I get, the more he laughs. There I am, ready to kill the bastard with an HB pencil, and he will not give me the time of day. Ends up with the pair of us laughing on the floor, asking him why he wouldn't take me seriously. 'You don't make it easy' he says. 'Threatening to knife me with a pencil, standing there in your y-fronts, your todger hanging out.'

JILL You must have been a sight.

GREG It was the middle of the summer. Bastard hot. Spent the best part of the day in the cell. Best way to cool down was to strip down to your pants.

*JILL laughs.*

GREG You're right. I was a sight. A bloody disgrace.

JILL But you didn't kill him.

GREG Didn't need to.

JILL What are we going to do? Tonight I mean.

GREG I thought we might stay in the lighthouse. Keep an eye out for mermaids.

JILL Stay in the lighthouse?

GREG There's nothing to be scared of. Be fun. Like being a kid again. An adventure.

JILL I don't know.

GREG I thought you liked pretending.

JILL I don't know. All this time it's me makes the effort, and now I've had enough you decide you want us to traipse off to a lighthouse together.

GREG Be fun.

JILL I don't know.

GREG So let's find out.

JILL What have I got to lose?

GREG Exactly.

JILL He's right. There's seventy eight steps. And it does give with a push. Seventy eight steps. Loops up and up, and half way up there's a landing. Just me and Greg standing there, breathing together, thinking of him lying there asleep, and all the time breathing in and out and in and out. Going round and up till we're at the top, where it opens out. Into the middle of this circular room, where the light would be. Just me and him in the glow of the moon. Breathing together, holding hands, and just looking at each other. Trying not to laugh and not even sure what the joke is. And it takes a while but then I remember what it reminds

GREG Climbing up the steps, all puffed out and I'm straight back to the hotel in Spain, running up the stairs with the silver hoops in my hand, thinking how chuffed mam's going to be. Breath going in and out and in and out and remembering what the light looked like on the earrings when she put them on. Her and Fritz together, holding hands and just looking at each other. And now I think of it I realise it wasn't Fritz went red. It was me. But it's over now and it's just funny really. Like mam's beehive was funny, and she knew it as well as anyone else

me of. Going up stairs with my brother to see dad, knowing he's going to be sat there just looking out the window, a whole world out there and wishing he had his globe. Sat there so serious we can't help ourselves laughing. Mum at the bottom in her world, dad at the top in his, the pair of them linked by stairs and each pretending the other isn't there. Not really. If I pretend she's not there, that means she isn't, and the same goes for her. It's no wonder they never saw any mermaid thinking like that. The captain saw a lighthouse in a forest before it was there, and that's the sort of mind you need to see a mermaid. Not the sort of mind I had anything to do with till I met Ramesh. He saw something in me that I never let myself see, and it was something beautiful. But you don't get that on the menu. There's room for average and 'think about it' and all those afters but there's never any mermaids or beauty. We're even scared of the words. And since then I've only seen glimpses of what it can be like. You've got to be brave to make it work. Take the gloves off and let the magic in, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Get in the driving seat or spend all your life in the back of someone else's taxi.

but as long as she had her hair up she had her pride. Makes no sense, but that's how it was with her. Hair like that, you can do what you want, and no bugger's going to tell you otherwise, whoever he thinks he is. People saw her coming, that beehive like a figurehead on the front of a ship, cutting through the waves and bearing down on them. She'd not give any mermaid the time of day. No time for anything that wasn't useful for her. Captain might have seen a mermaid for all I know, but he bloody wouldn't if mam was with him. She'd have no time for a captain who sees mermaids. And what use is a lighthouse in a forest? She just wouldn't get it. And neither did I, before I met the Birdman. Had to get myself locked up before I'd let my head free. Realise that even prison food can be something special if you look at it the right way. If it's dull on the outside, what's it going to do to you inside? Make it special. Every mouthful the Birdman ate was magic. And then the bastard flew away. Bang. He's gone. And if the Birdman does that, what hope is there for the rest of us? Was it all bollocks? And if it's all bollocks why does so much of it work? Eh? Or maybe he was flying somewhere special, somewhere where everything's magic, and there's mermaids in the fountains at the

Arndale and no one gives a shit if you don't wear shoes. Maybe. And then I think of him in the cell, just hanging there, turning round and round and round.

*Pause.*

JILL I froze when I saw him. I'd just stopped for a drink on the way back from town and there he was. Sat at the back with a pint and a sandwich. I knew it was him straight off. Sitting there without a care in the world smiling to himself like he'd just remembered something special. I counted to ten and went over. It's hard to know what to say. The same old words, again and again. But I needed to say something. To find out what he'd done with the globe in the end.

GREG 'Looks like you two have some catching up to do,' he says. And just clears off and leaves us to it. Fine by me, pal. Your average little corner boozier, just like Birdman said. Jill sat just where he said she'd be. *(Pause.)* We talked. Didn't sound like I thought she would. But I liked her straight off. 'I don't know about you,' I tell her. 'But I'm on for a bit of dinner. I quite fancy an Indian. Could give it a whirl. *(Pause.)* What do you reckon? *(Pause.)* What do you reckon?'

**- ends -**