

*The stage is bare except for two black pillars arranged a doorway width apart USL, a black table with a washing bowl on it DSR, and a black box about a metre cube DSL. As the house lights dim, we hear a succession of noises: the sound of a football match with crowd cheering, a car engine being revved, a dog barking, a plane taking off, repetitive drum and bass music, a baby crying. All these sounds overlay one on top of the other until the volume is very loud. As the volume increases, so does the lighting. It is spotlighting a girl – Megan – dressed in track suit bottoms and t-shirt who is huddled up on the stage her hands clasped around her knees. She is rocking back and forward more and more violently as the sound increases. Megan screams above the sound:*

MEGAN: Will you shut

*The sound cuts suddenly, making her voice appear even louder.*

up!

*She looks up and around her as she begins to rock slower and slower then gradually unwinds herself. She shakes her head then gets to her knees and says, quietly, almost whispering:*

Will you go away? Will you just leave me alone?

*The lighting changes from intense spotlighting to a softer overall wash of quite cool light. Megan looks up, takes a breath, and speaks in a normal voice:*

I haven't always been like this you know. There was a time when I, when – It was OK then. Peter was OK too. We were all OK. We thought we'd all be OK. Even Mum. I tried my best.

*She gets up and begins walking in a figure of eight pattern*

If you make a figure of eight like this...

*She retraces her steps*

And then back again, like this... That's lucky.

*She stops and faces forward again*

Peter says it's shit. But I know he doesn't know what he's talking about. When I was six I used to walk to school on my own. Didn't mind. Mum said got to be careful. She couldn't come with me cos she had to get to work, so I had to take special care. Things could happen to me. But she never said what. Just said it's not always safe.

*She walks slowly and purposefully across the stage*

MEGAN: Sometimes I went with Peter, but mostly he didn't want to be seen with his kid sister, so he ran off and left me. Still I was safe if I didn't step on the cracks. Everyone knows that.

*She walks upstage and stops, back to the audience. She turns round*

And if I cross the road and I'm on the pavement before that bike passes, it'll be OK.

*We hear a bicycle bell. She walks quickly downstage all the time watching SR. Then, when she has reached 'the pavement' she turns round following the imaginary bicycle as it passes*

Mr Stevens said I had what was coming to me when I fell over and split my lip, when I slipped because it was icy. He said if I walked like a normal human being I wouldn't have slipped. He didn't care what happened to me. I hated him. I was glad when he fell off his ladder and broke his leg. That'll teach him. If he climbed a ladder like a normal human being he wouldn't have fallen off, that's what I say. Mum said he was a miserable old sod anyway and glad it was quieter next door with him laid up. And then he took to playing this music really loudly. I mean really loudly. Taking it out on us cos he couldn't go anywhere, without having to drag his stupid leg around behind him. It wasn't as if it was decent music either. It was some classical stuff.

*The lighting changes to a more directional, warmer 'morning' light. Peter, her brother, appears. He is wearing jeans and a scruffy shirt and carrying an old battered leather briefcase*

PETER: There you are.

MEGAN: Where wouldn't I be?

PETER: Could have come with me if you liked.

MEGAN: Where?

PETER: Down by the point.

MEGAN: You been there again? Shouldn't you be at work?

PETER: Shouldn't you be at school?

MEGAN: Been ill.

PETER: You're always ill.

MEGAN: So why haven't you been at work?

PETER: Don't want me. Told me to leave.

MEGAN: You been sacked you mean?

PETER: If that's what you want to call it?

MEGAN: What would you call it?

PETER: They don't understand.

MEGAN: No 'course not.

PETER: Said I was lucky they didn't report me. Said I could be done. Just having a quiet smoke, nothing more. I was outside anyway. Wasn't as if I was lighting up in the warehouse.

MEGAN: You had a fag?

PETER: Don't do fags. Bad for you. It was a spliff. But only a tiny one. Nothing outrageous.

MEGAN: So you've been sacked. Again. Do I sound surprised?

PETER: I like it down by the point. It's good. Went right out to where the cliff drops into the sea. There's a little beach there, cut off from the rest. You can sit there and no one bothers you. No one bothers me anyhow. So I can sit watching the waves drag shingle in and take it out again – dragging life in and out. You know? It's like breathing. Making a breathing noise. And I saw this wader bird. It was an oystercatcher. Couldn't mistake those black and white feathers and that bright red bill. It's so long, it's amazing. And the thing was it came right up to me you know, as if I wasn't there. And just hopped around in front of me. It was – like really beautiful, sort of vulnerable, but tough too, you know?

MEGAN: And that's all you did?

PETER: No. See, that's not all I did. I did some writing.

*He puts the briefcase down and undoes the leather buckle*

*See.*

*He extracts an old notebook, opens it and begins reading from it:*

“Here on this tall cliff / we are strung out like / paper cut-out people / perched on the edge / of the world / shaping the sky with our hands / Here we trace our futures and our past. / And only when the sun sinks / and the clouds falter / will we realise all that we have lost.”

Well, what do you think?

MEGAN: Hardly pays the bills does it? You know we need your wages. We can't live on what mum gets.

PETER: What about you doing something for a change then?

MEGAN: What? What can I do?

PETER: I don't know. I just don't see why everyone relies on me.

MEGAN: They don't. That's the point.

PETER: Maybe if she found a bloke with a bit of money it'd be useful. She thought the last one was loaded.

MEGAN: Yeah, and what a sod he turned out to be.

PETER: She should have known. You could tell –

MEGAN: How could you tell? You couldn't tell. You're just saying that. He looked like he had a stash. Nice car and that.

PETER: Doesn't mean anything that. Not a thing. He was a flash bastard and no mistake. Flash car, flash suit. Didn't see him flashing the cash though, did you? And mum was totally taken in by him. Spreads her legs too easily, that's her trouble.

MEGAN: How dare you say that! How dare you! That's our mother you're talking about.

PETER: I know.

MEGAN: You know nothing. Nothing.

PETER: Shows what you know then.

*He stuffs his notebook back in his bag and wanders off. Megan addresses the audience. The lighting reverts back to the overall cool state as before*

MEGAN: Peter's not my real brother. He's like a step brother or something. Except Mum's not his mum. He came to live with us when I was four or five, when there was just Mum and me and this bloke – Andy I think his name was – he came to live with us and brought his son. That was Peter. I never knew my Dad. Didn't know what dads were until Andy came to live with us. And he was no Dad. He used to scream at me to shut up all the time. Still he was fair, he didn't just treat me like I was something on the bottom of his shoe, he treated Peter the same way. And Peter was his son. Supposed to be. He wasn't with us long, thank Christ. Even Mum saw through him eventually. I think she just wanted

someone, anyone, to look after her. So off Andy goes and leaves the three of us to it. I don't think Peter could have cared less. Well rid of him.

Mum was only 16 when I was born. That's the same age I am now. So she's exactly twice my age. And as we grow older the difference between our ages will be less. When she's 46 I'll be 30 and that's only half as much again. And when she's 96 I'll be 80. That's hardly any difference. How can anyone be *that* old? If I had grandparents even they wouldn't be that old. I wonder if we'll grow closer as the difference between our ages grows less? Isn't that how it's supposed to be?

Did I tell you I used to have this nightmare? I would wake up sweating and cold at the same time, you know. I was being chased by this – alien – I think it was, but it looked like red riding hood. I would run away, but as fast as I ran, I wouldn't go anywhere, like being on one of those running machines they have in the gym. But the red riding hood alien wasn't going anywhere either. And then suddenly it would and I could feel it grabbing me and throwing me on the ground and that's when I would wake up.

I don't have those nightmares anymore. Correction: I haven't had those nightmares for a bit. My mum says you only get one chance at this life, so you better make the most of it. Don't see her making the best of it though. It's like loads of things she comes out with. It's just words. sometimes I don't know how I believe anything she says. But I want to. I have to to. I've got to have something to believe in, haven't I? Well, haven't all of us got to have something to believe in?

*On one side of the stage is a table with a bowl of water on it. Megan goes over to it and puts her hands in, rubbing them vigorously.*

They can't stand it when I do this at school you know. Between lessons I nip into the loo. I have to. It's important. Mum said I was stupid and I should stop it. then she took me to the doctor and now I've got to go an see this bloke once a week. He's supposed to sort me out. 'Sort your head out Megan', says mum, 'otherwise you'll grow up a complete nutter. And you don't want that do you?' Well I'm not so sure. Maybe growing up a complete nutter wouldn't be so bad. If Mum thinks Peter and her are normal I'd rather be a nutter thank you very much. What's normal anyway? I'll be OK just so long as...

*She walks across the stage towards the black cube, once again treading in a very deliberate way to avoid the cracks. As she reaches the cube, the lighting becomes more localised on it. A young man enters carrying two black chairs. He places one either side of the cube*

IAN: Won't you sit down?

MEGAN: I'd rather stand.

IAN: That's up to you. I'm Ian.

MEGAN: Hello.

IAN: And what's your name?

MEGAN: You know what my name is. My mum made an appointment with you.

IAN: I'd like you to tell me what your name is.

MEGAN: Candice.

IAN: No it's not, it's Megan.

MEGAN: So why ask?

IAN: I want you to talk about yourself. I want you to know who you are.

MEGAN: I know who I am.

IAN: I don't think so.

MEGAN: Who are you to say I don't know who I am. What is this? A waste of f-ing time as far as I can see.

IAN: That attitude is not going to help anyone.

MEGAN: Talking crap is not going to help anyone neither.

IAN: Do you want to be helped?

MEGAN: Not really, I only came here because Mum said I had to.

IAN: That's not a very good reason.

MEGAN: Tell that to me mum.

IAN: She's worried about you.

MEGAN: I'm worried about her.

IAN: Oh really? In what way?

MEGAN: Can't say.

IAN: Of course you can. Look, why don't you sit down? More comfortable than standing.

*With exaggerated gestures, Megan sits*

You can say anything to me you know. I won't be upset. Or offended.

MEGAN: I'm not worried about that. I just don't want to say anything to you, that's all.

IAN: Fair enough. We'll just sit here for half an hour and look at each other shall we?

MEGAN: That's stupid.

IAN: You're booked in for a half hour session. And half an hour is what you're going to get.

*They both sit facing each other. Megan puts on a sulky look and tries to out-stare Ian. After 30 secs she gives up.*

MEGAN: This is stupid. Stupid!

IAN: I agree. So what shall we talk about?

MEGAN: Dancing.

IAN: Dancing?

MEGAN: Yeah, I like dancing. I'd like to be a dancer.

IAN: Any particular type of dancing? Ballet perhaps?

MEGAN: No.

IAN: What then?

MEGAN: Eurythmics.

IAN: The band?

MEGAN: No, not the band. Eurythmic dancing.

IAN: Is that like ballet or something?

MEGAN: No.

IAN: So tell me.

MEGAN: You know, it's about harmony... It's like you make body movements like musical notes.

IAN: You've lost me.

MEGAN: Yeah well anyway I enjoy it. It's something I enjoy. I do it down at Albermarle hall. They have classes there. I suppose you're going to say it's weird.

IAN: Not at all. Why should I?

MEGAN: You're just here to make me out to be some sort of freak that's why. That's what my mum thinks.

IAN: Not at all. I'm here to help you. I told you that.

MEGAN: You're not old enough.

IAN: How old do I have to be?

MEGAN: You don't look no older than me brother. Doctors are supposed to be older.

IAN: I'm not a doctor.

MEGAN: So what are you?

IAN: A therapist.

MEGAN: I don't want no therapy.

IAN: I suspect you do.

MEGAN: What do you know about it?

IAN: Quite a bit as it happens. But if necessary I can always refer you on to someone else with more experience, but for the moment, let's see how we get on shall we? And see if we can do something about your – what shall we call it?

MEGAN: Whatever you like.

IAN: Let's call it OCD, shall we?

MEGAN: I told you. Call it what you like.

IAN: Do you know what OCD is?

MEGAN: I know what *LCD* is – it's a telly. One we haven't got, cos mum's got no money and Peter's a lazy sod who sits around writing poetry.

IAN: It seems to me you're a bit angry?

MEGAN: Wouldn't you be?



IAN: Why would I?

MEGAN: If you didn't have no money and your mum was always shagging some tosser or other and your brother couldn't get his head together, I bet you'd be pretty pissed off too.

IAN: You're probably right.

MEGAN: Good, I'm glad we've got that one settled.

IAN: So do you know what OCD is?

MEGAN: Obsessive compulsive disorder.

IAN: Very good! And do you think you have it?

MEGAN: Don't know. Probably. But I don't care.

IAN: It's a kind of anxiety thing. Let me tell you a few things about it and see if some of them are things that maybe you do.

MEGAN: Please yourself.

IAN: Well do you, for instance, get an urge to do certain things repeatedly?

MEGAN: Depends what it is.

IAN: Like going back and checking you've done something, like putting a switch off. Or maybe having to do something before something else happens?

MEGAN: What you mean?

IAN: Doing things in a certain way, or certain order – to make things come right, or make sure bad things don't happen?

MEGAN: I don't know what you're on about.

IAN: Well, do you have a lucky number?

MEGAN: Doesn't everyone?

IAN: Yes, mine's five. What's yours?

MEGAN: Eight.

IAN: There we are then!

MEGAN: Where are we? So we've both got lucky numbers, what's so amazing about that? *How* much are they paying you exactly?

IAN: That's hardly relevant.

MEGAN: Well, it strikes me that your lucky number's come up. Money for old rope this therapist business isn't it? Piece of piss – *therarpiss*.

IAN: Yes, very good. Could we talk about you perhaps?

MEGAN: If you like.

IAN: So these little rituals you have...

MEGAN: What rituals?

IAN: Going to the loo so often?

MEGAN: Did Mum tell you that?

IAN: Do you?

MEGAN: Back to therapiss again are we?

IAN: Are you saying you have a weak bladder?

MEGAN: None of your business.

IAN: It's to wash your hands isn't it?

MEGAN: Can't be too careful. Diseases get spread with hands. Everyone knows that.

IAN: Yes, but there are perhaps limits.

MEGAN: So you say.

IAN: What about sound? Do you feel as if your head fills up with sound sometimes and you want to shut it off?

MEGAN: Like now you mean?

*Ian laughs*

IAN: I had that one coming to me!

MEGAN: You said it.

*She laughs too*

IAN: Well, what about it? Do you feel as if your head will explode sometimes?

MEGAN: Sometimes.

IAN: What about collecting things that other people might throw away?

MEGAN: Like what?

IAN: I don't know – hair or nail clippings, that sort of thing.

MEGAN: Don't be stupid.

IAN: I'm just trying to find out a bit more about you. Then we can look at ways of helping you.

MEGAN: Maybe I don't want no help.

IAN: Maybe not. But at least let's see if we can.

MEGAN: Please yourself. What sort of things can you do?