

RED BALLOONS AND ROLLERCOASTERS

By

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FADE IN:

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - LATE MORNING

BEN, 28, is sprawled on the sofa, asleep in a shirt and boxer shorts. Reasonably good looking, reasonably trendy, he's outclassed by this uber-cool bachelor's pad.

The sound of post being delivered rouses him. Clearly hungover, he struggles into a sitting position... causing the red, helium-filled "Happy Birthday" balloon that is tied to his ankle by a length of ribbon to bob into his face.

He recoils in panic, crashing to the floor and flailing his leg at full length to try and shake it free...

Unsuccessful and terrified, he keeps his leg extended and the balloon away from his face and shuffles backwards into...

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ben pulls himself over to the cutlery drawer and reaches blindly above his head to remove a knife.

He jabs at the balloon, trying to burst it... but with his leg extended it's too far away and he can't bear bringing it closer to his face.

In desperation he throws the knife... but it glances off the balloon.

Ben halts his frantic attempts as SOPH, 28 and radiant even in pyjama bottoms and vest top, appears in the doorway.

A beat as they stare at each other.

SOPH  
Hey. Happy Birthday.

BEN  
Thanks.

SOPH  
I'm Soph.

BEN  
Hi.

Fear replaces his bewilderment as he remembers the balloon...

BEN

Would you burst that, please?

Soph picks up the knife and bursts the balloon.

SOPH

Are you OK?

BEN

Yeah. I have a thing about balloons... sort of a phobia.

SOPH

Oh my God, I'm so sorry. I can't believe Matt let me do that. Where is he?

BEN

Matt's in Zurich.

SOPH

We got back last night.

BEN

Oh, Zurich Soph.

She helps him up as the front door SLAMS (O.S.)...

SOPH

Just Soph.

MATT, 29, handsome and trendily dressed, appears in the doorway with a bag of shopping and the post.

MATT

Morning kids.

SOPH

(in German, subtitled)

You didn't tell me he's scared of balloons.

MATT

(in German, subtitled)

No, I know.

He grins roguishly. Soph punches his arm in admonishment.

SOPH

(in German, subtitled)

Did you tell him I was moving back with you?

MATT  
Soph's moving in.

SOPH  
Matt! Ben, I'm so sorry. He was  
meant to check that it's OK with  
you.

MATT  
Is it... or are you moving out?

BEN  
(deadpan)  
I've missed you, mate.

Matt dumps the shopping and post on the table and hugs Ben.

MATT  
You too, buddy... (beat)... So it's  
cool?

BEN  
She'll find out what a dick you  
are.

SOPH  
Too late. But he's pretty rich,  
so...

Ben and Soph exchange a smile.

Matt reaches into the shopping bag and pretends to search  
for something... before whipping his hands out, fingers  
extended in "the Vs".

He then reaches back in and produces a bottle of champagne.

MATT  
To the birthday boy.

BEN  
You know it's tomorrow?

MATT  
Oh. Welcome home me, then... and  
Soph. Hey, where's his present?

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - SOMETIME LATER

The Champagne is finished and Ben is now dressed in genuine Swiss Lederhosen. He and Matt sit drinking tea.

BEN

The Ems? "Emma Baker" Ems? The woman against whom all others are measured?

MATT

Were measured... Soph's got her beat.

BEN

Wow... (beat)... What about...?

MATT

So does Soph.

BEN

And she likes...?

MATT

Yep.

Matt takes a swig of tea and assesses how much he has left...

MATT

Stick the kettle on.

Ben stares at him... then raises his fist. Matt does the same and they play "scissors, paper, stone"...

Ben loses and rises compliantly to boil the kettle.

MATT

And unlike Ems, she knows who The Beastie Boys are.

Ben chuckles... before he and Matt launch into The Beach Boys' "Get Around" in the style of The Beastie Boys.

BEN / MATT / BOTH

I'm getting bugged driving up and down the same old strip... I gotta find a new place where the kids are hip.

They high-five and burst out laughing.

MATT

Ten years and that's still funny.  
To the end of her reign.

He raises his mug of tea in a toast. Ben raises the kettle.

BEN

Farewell to Ems.

SOPH (O.S.)

You're toasting Hemmingway?

Soph creeps in, freshly showered and grinning at her own joke. Matt looks confused but Ben chuckles appreciatively.

SOPH

Didn't mean to interrupt, I just  
need a drink.

MATT

We're done, if you want to head  
into town.

SOPH

You haven't seen each other in a  
year.

MATT

Nine months... he came over for my  
birthday.

Soph looks from Matt to Ben and back again in sheer disbelief...

MATT

What? Men communicate more  
efficiently than women.

BEN

We have a natural understanding.

Matt points at Ben...

MATT

Exactly.

Ben shakes his head and pulls Matt's finger... Matt breaks  
wind, noisily.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - MOMENTS LATER

Ben wanders in with the post and a cup of tea and switches on the stereo - "Jumpin' Jack Flash" by The Rolling Stones starts up.

He flops down onto the sofa and sorts through the post.

Soph enters to collect her handbag.

SOPH  
This is good. Who is it?

BEN  
You don't know The Stones?

Soph cringes at her ignorance...

SOPH  
No, sorry. Wait, didn't they do  
"Get Around"?

BEN  
(laughing)  
Nice save. Matt can't stand them...  
he has terrible taste.

SOPH  
Thanks.

BEN  
No, I didn't mean...

SOPH  
See you later.

She grins and bounces out... the front door SLAMS (O.S.)

Ben smiles and turns his attention back to the post...

But his grin fades as he comes to a birthday card. His jaw tightens as he studies the handwriting on the envelope...

Before he drops it, UNOPENED, into the waste paper bin and sits back, brooding.

EXT. BRIGHTON PIER - DAY (EIGHT YEARS AGO)

SUPER: T MINUS 6 MINUTES 31 SECONDS (across the bottom of the screen with the time counting down)

DAVID, then 24 and with a vague resemblance to Ben and KAREN, then 22 and more handsome than pretty, pose at the start of the pier - behind them it bustles in the glorious summer sunshine. They speak through forced smiles...

KAREN  
This is horrible.

DAVID  
I know. I'm sorry.

A camera WHIRRS (O.S.)... David turns to Karen...

DAVID  
Please? For me?

She offers a begrudging half-smile of agreement.

BEN (O.S.)  
Donkey ride, Day-day.

David instinctively braces himself as Ben appears and leaps onto his back. David races off along the pier, WHOOPING.

The distant CLATTER of a ROLLERCOASTER and SHRIEKS of joy and terror (OVER)...

INT. SUPERMARKET - LATE MORNING (PRESENT)

Mix into the RATTLE of supermarket trolleys and the WAILING of a young CHILD throwing a tantrum.

He drops to the floor as his MOTHER tries to calm him.

SOPH  
Next aisle... or shall I just run  
it over?

BEN  
You're a girl, you're meant to find  
that adorable.

The Child pulls packets of biscuits from the shelves. Ben and Soph retreat to...

THE NEXT AISLE

SOPH  
I'm more of a cat person. So... oh  
yeah, my birthday... same as  
Matt's.

Soph pushes off and "rides" the trolley down the aisle.

BEN

Twelfth of October? Must be fate.

SOPH

I like to think so but guess what  
he came out with?

She adds baking ingredients to the trolley as Ben thinks.

BEN

Lots of people have sex on New  
Years' Eve?

SOPH

Word for word. And they say romance  
is dead.

BEN

Yeah, Man killed it and made Woman  
clean up the mess.

SOPH

(laughing)

So I thought I'd make you a  
birthday cake... belatedly. What  
sort would you like?

BEN

Oh... (beat)... That's very nice of  
you. Erm... surprise me.

SOPH

Yeah, 'cause that worked real well  
with the balloon.

Matt appears, laden down with arms-full of wine.

MATT

Aren't you guys done yet?

SOPH

We're getting to know each other.

MATT

He's a dick, you're a fox... done.  
What else do we need?

Ben and Soph exchange a look - "charming"

MATT

We're going to be late.

SOPH

Alright... Jammy Dodgers.

MATT

Ben, Jammy Dodgers.

He points towards the previous aisle, snapping his fingers.

BEN

"Jammy Dodgers"... what?

MATT

Jammy Dodgers, bitch?

Ben chuckles and shakes his head as he ambles back to...

THE PREVIOUS AISLE

A few packets of biscuits still lie on the floor from the Child's tantrum. Ben stops to return them to the shelves.

As he does so, Matt jogs past pushing the trolley - Soph clings to the front, giggling.

MATT

Too slow, amigo.

Soph reaches out and grabs a packet of Jammy Dodgers as they pass. Matt WHOOPS at her success.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. HALL - LATER

Ben, Soph and Matt struggle through the front door with armfuls of shopping. Matt drops his bags...

MATT

Come on, we've got to go.

SOPH

What about this lot?

BEN

I'll sort it out.

Soph looks at Matt, who's itching to go, and back to Ben...

SOPH

Thanks. We owe you a pint.

She and Matt race back out. Ben shouts after them...

BEN

Two.

He picks up another bag - it rips, haemorrhaging food...

BEN

And some pork scratchings.

INT. BAR - EVENING

The BARMAID hands Ben his change - a tenner and some coins...

BEN

I only gave you a tenner.

He hands her back the note. She returns it to the till without a word of thanks... and serves the next customer.

Disgruntled at her lack of gratitude, Ben grabs his round...

And heads back to POOLEY, 29 and scruffy despite his suit.

POOLEY

Cheers. So what's she like?

BEN

She's nice. I've hardly seen them, to be honest... they're out, constantly.

Pooley stares at him like he's an idiot.

POOLEY

Is she hot?

BEN

Yes, Pooley, she's hot.

POOLEY

You lucky bastard.

Ben looks at him, wearily awaiting the explanation...

POOLEY

You're housemates... you're bound to see her naked at some point.

BEN  
(deadpan)  
Right. Well she does owe me.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - EVENING (PREVIOUS WEEK)

Soph sits on the floor, surrounded by a sea of photographs, as she works on a photo-diary.

BEN (O.S.)  
So I do still have housemates.

He enters and freezes at the sight...

BEN  
Holy-moly.

SOPH  
Sorry. I thought I'd be done before  
you guys got home.

BEN  
You're into photography, then?

SOPH  
Not really, just keeping track of  
what I've got up to.

Ben tip-toes around the edge of the photographic mass.

BEN  
Cool. Are these from Zurich?

SOPH  
Mostly London.

BEN  
Woah... you've only been here a  
fortnight.

SOPH  
(defensively)  
There's a lot to see.

BEN  
Sorry, I didn't mean...

Ben trails off awkwardly.

SOPH  
And not all of it's pretty.

She grins and hands him a photograph...

INSERT: PHOTOGRAPH

Of Ben asleep on the sofa with his hand down his boxer shorts and a stupid smile on his face.

BEN (O.S.)  
What the hell's this?

BACK TO SCENE

SOPH  
That is what Matt and I came back  
to from Zurich.

BEN  
Oh God... really?

SOPH  
So if you're worried about the  
balloon thing creating a bad first  
impression, don't be.

BEN  
That's good to know, thanks.

They share a smile.

INT. CLIMBING CENTRE. CLIMBING WALL - EVENING (PRESENT)

INSERT: DIGITAL CAMERA DISPLAY

Shows Soph making her way up the climbing wall. She calls down over her shoulder...

SOPH  
Make sure you get some good shots  
of this.

MATT (O.S.)  
Don't worry, I'm an artist.

The picture zooms in on Soph's bum...

MATT (O.S.)  
Give me cheeky... that's it.

The scene freezes momentarily as a photo is taken.

EXT. CLIMBING CENTRE CAR PARK - LATER

Matt and Soph walk through the car park.

MATT

So... do you want the good news or  
the bad news?

SOPH

Uh-oh. Just the good news, please.

Matt walks a few more paces and pauses by a Mini Cooper.

MATT

I've bought you a present. It's in  
my pocket.

SOPH

Oh yeah... it better not be a hole  
in the lining.

Matt grins suggestively. Soph chuckles and reaches into his  
trouser pocket...

To produce a set of Mini Cooper car keys.

SOPH

Oh my God.

MATT

That's the wrong pocket.

Soph punches him playfully and then hugs him...

MATT

I thought it'd be good for when you  
start work.

SOPH

And for visiting Helen. Thank you  
so much, Matt.

She hugs him again and kisses him repeatedly.

INT. BAR - LATER

Ben pulls his mobile phone from his pocket...

INSERT: MOBILE PHONE DISPLAY SHOWING A MESSAGE FROM MATT

"You're only supposed to blow the bloody doors off!!"

Underneath is a photo of Matt posing on the Mini's hood.

BACK TO SCENE

Ben shakes his head and offers the phone to Pooley...

BEN

He's finally cracked and bought  
one.

Who is leaning back in his chair as he eavesdrops on the two women behind him. He holds up his hand to silence Ben.

A moment later they notice Pooley's antics.

SARAH

Are you listening in to our  
conversation?

POOLEY

Yes.

KERRY

Don't you think that's rude?

POOLEY

Yes... but I'm a rude man. Piss,  
wank, twatty-bollocks... see?  
Drink?

The women look at one another incredulously.

BEN

How can you think that's going to  
work?

EXT. BAR - LATER

Ben, Pooley, Sarah and Kerry stand on the street.

KERRY

So... we're meeting some friends in  
Club Starlight if you fancy it.

Ben grimaces at the mention of the venue.

POOLEY  
Don't be a cock.

Ben glances at Sarah, who shoots him an encouraging smile.

BEN  
Thanks for the offer but I'm...

POOLEY  
Being a cock.

BEN  
Being a cock. On principle, sorry.  
They were extremely rude to a  
friend of mine in there... a friend  
of ours.

A beat as they all stare at Pooley.

POOLEY  
OK, see you later.

He slaps Ben on the arm... then offers his own arm to Kerry  
- she threads hers through his.

Sarah shrugs at Ben and wanders away with the other two.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. MATT & SOPH'S BEDROOM - SAME

Soph and Matt lie in bed, post-coitus.

SOPH  
What's the bad news? You never told  
me.

MATT  
Ah... (beat)... Just remember that  
I've bought you a car...

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - LATER

Ben pokes his head around the door. Soph is baking in pyjama  
bottoms and a vest top. She sees Ben and stifles a scream.

BEN  
(deadpan)  
Boo.

SOPH  
You're not funny. Good night?

BEN  
Are you baking or am I exceedingly  
drunk?

SOPH  
Both?

Ben holds his arms out sideways and touches first his left  
and then his right index fingers to his nose.

BEN  
Aha. You are baking.

SOPH  
You're an idiot... (beat)... I  
can't sleep.

Ben picks up on her troubled tone.

BEN  
I was planning on a whiskey  
nightcap... mind if I join you?

SOPH  
More alcohol, is that wise?

Ben grins and rapidly touches alternating index fingers to  
his nose - left, right, left, right, left... flawlessly.

Soph laughs and Ben disappears into the lounge...

Reappearing with a bottle of whiskey. He grabs a glass from  
the cupboard... then a second, gesturing to Soph.

SOPH  
Just a small one.

Ben pours them both a measure. Soph takes a sip of hers and  
continues beating the cake mix...

The action jiggles her cleavage, drawing Ben's attention...  
he quickly refocuses on her face.

BEN  
Is it anything I can help with?

Soph pauses... then hands him the cake mix and a spoon.

SOPH  
You can fold while I add the flour.

BEN

I meant whatever it is that's on  
your mind.

Soph pours a little flour into the mix. Ben folds it in.

SOPH

I know you did... (beat)... I don't  
think I know you well enough.

BEN

OK.

He folds the mixture a few more times then looks at Soph...

BEN

So what do you need to know about  
me?

Soph can't help but smile.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - LATER

Ben and Soph sit on the sofa, giggling. Ben pours them both  
another measure from the now depleted whiskey bottle.

Soph scrambles off the sofa and over to her handbag.  
Producing a digital camera, she settles back next to Ben.

SOPH

Try and keep your hands out of your  
pants this time.

BEN

Ho ho, I'll try.

The camera FLASHES. Soph studies the photo...

SOPH

Can a digital camera be out of  
focus?

BEN

If you're extremely drunk.

Soph hands him the camera and then holds her arms out  
sideways as Ben had done earlier. She slowly touches her  
left index finger... to Ben's nose.

BEN

Very cute.

She grins and tries to do the same with her right... but pokes Ben in the eye.

SOPH  
Oh my god, are you OK?

She instinctively moves to help but Ben pulls back.

BEN  
Mercy. No more.

SOPH  
I'm so sorry. Let me have a look.

Ben lowers his hands and Soph moves in to study his eye... kneeling him in the groin in the process.

BEN  
My man bits.

Soph jumps up and Ben topples sideways on the sofa...

BEN  
I think I'm going to be sick.

Soph rushes out into the kitchen...

And returns with the washing up bowl. She places it on the floor beneath Ben's head and he dry-retchs into it.

SOPH  
I'm so sorry. Are you OK?

Ben GRUNTS and rolls onto his back. Soph grabs a cushion and places it under his head, then kneels beside him.

SOPH  
I've sobered right up, I promise.  
Can I look at your eye?

Ben removes the cushion from beneath his head and holds it over his groin. With his other hand he covers his undamaged eye.

Soph smiles and bends over him to inspect his eye...

SOPH  
Look up... (beat)... down...  
(beat)... left... (beat)... right.

Ben struggles to ignore her intoxicating proximity...

SOPH

If it still hurts in the morning  
you should get it checked out.

She sits back and glances at his groin...

SOPH

Same goes for those.

BEN

That might freak out my optician.

Soph laughs. Ben smiles and closes his eyes.

Soph studies him, weighing something up.

SOPH

Will you come with me to Helen's  
tomorrow... today?

Ben looks at her in surprise...

SOPH

You'd get on really well and it'd  
be nice to have someone else  
there... for her, I mean.

BEN

I thought Matt's going?

SOPH

He can't make it. Again.

Ben is lost for words...

SOPH

Oh God, sorry... too much whiskey.  
Ignore me.

She lies back on the floor. Ben leans over the side of the  
sofa so that he can see her.

BEN

No, it's just... I'm surprised  
you'd want me to.

SOPH

Well this has been really fun  
and... I like sharing the good bits  
of my life with her.

She gives an embarrassed smile.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - MORNING

Ben awakes on the sofa, grimacing against his hangover...

Until Soph's strangely laidback version of The Rolling Stones' "Jumpin' Jack Flash" [*complete with guitar riff*] steals his attention. He listens, entranced...

SOPH (O.S.)

I was crowned... with a spike right through my... head... yeah, yeah, yeah... but it's all... [*dad-da-dar*]... right... [*dad-da-dar*]... now... in fact... Ouch! Hot!

A CLINKING... then she resumes, humming the tune. Ben smiles.

Soph enters, already dressed and carrying a bacon sandwich.

SOPH

Ah... it's alive.

BEN

It doesn't want to be. Are you one of those annoying people who don't get hangovers?

SOPH

Definitely not. Please don't feed me that much whiskey again.

BEN

Oh I won't.

He WINCES, pretending to rearrange his balls. Soph laughs.

SOPH

Sorry, it's not funny.

She offers him the sandwich. He stares at it in surprise...

SOPH

You eat it.

BEN

What are you after?

SOPH

Fine.

She moves to eat the sandwich herself. Ben lurches up.

BEN

Woah. Mine.

He grabs the sandwich and licks each half in turn, staking his claim. Soph chuckles and hands him the plate.

SOPH

You're welcome.

Matt appears behind her, eyeing the sandwich.

MATT

Hey, I'm your boyfriend, what do I get?

SOPH

You get to sleep with me?

MATT

Is that bacon? I'll swap it for a go on Soph.

Soph punches his arm. Ben smiles awkwardly...

BEN

Well I've already licked it.

MATT

Same here.

He wiggles his tongue suggestively. Soph GASPS and punches him again. They wrestle playfully, knocking over the waste paper bin in the process, until...

Matt subdues Soph and forces a kiss on her giggling mouth.

Ben turns away from the spectacle.

A smoke alarm BEEPS (O.S.)... Soph breaks free from Matt...

SOPH

Oh... crap.

And dashes out. Matt watches her go then beckons to Ben...

MATT

Fancy coming to the cricket? I scored some free tickets yesterday.

BEN

I thought you're working.

Matt taps his nose conspiratorially...

MATT  
Yes, I'm working. So?

BEN  
I said I'd go with Soph to Helen's.

MATT  
Why?

Soph reappears, having dealt with the smoke alarm.

SOPH  
Anyone for a charcoal...?

MATT  
(in German, subtitled)  
Why are you taking Ben to Helen's?

SOPH  
(in German, subtitled)  
Because I want her to meet him. I think they'll get on really well.

MATT  
(in German, subtitled)  
Don't try and guilt-trip me.

SOPH  
(in German, subtitled)  
I'm not.

Matt stares coolly at her... before marching out.

Soph smiles awkwardly at Ben and busies herself picking up the rubbish that spilled from the waste paper bin.

BEN  
Maybe I shouldn't go to Helen's.

Soph looks up with a cautionary glare...

BEN  
Maybe I should.

Soph grins and nods and collects the last bits of paper, including the unopened birthday card binned weeks earlier.

SOPH  
Bonus card. Happy Birthday.

BEN  
Thanks.

He takes it and drops it in the bin, stoney-faced.

SOPH  
Aren't you going to open it?

BEN  
Nope... (beat)... I'd better go  
make myself beautiful.

He dumps his sandwich and strides out.

Soph stares after him... then fishes the card back out of the bin. A sticker on the back shows the senders' details...

INSERT: STICKER

DAVID AND KAREN PEARCE and an address in BRIGHTON.

EXT. BRIGHTON PIER - DAY (EIGHT YEARS AGO)

SUPER: T MINUS 5 MINUTES 17 SECONDS (across the bottom of the screen with the time counting down)

David slows as two scantily clad women pass by. He turns so that he and Ben, still on his back, can gaze after them. Ben pats his shoulder...

BEN  
Good donkey.

Karen walks up, arms folded. She looks from Ben to David...

KAREN  
Excuse me? Hello?

Ben dismounts and indicates David, grinning...

BEN  
Sorry, did you want a go?

Karen and David share an awkward glance.

KAREN  
I'll settle for an ice cream.

She continues past them along the pier.

The CLATTER of a ROLLERCOASTER and SHRIEKS of joy and terror, sounding slightly closer than before (OVER)...

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - MIDDAY (PRESENT)

Mix into the RATTLE of skateboards - a number of youths fly past Ben and Soph as they wait at the front door.

The door opens to reveal HELEN, 32 but looking older with the gaunt and pale appearance of a cancer sufferer. Her eyes and smile sparkle, however, as Soph hugs her fiercely.

SOPH

You're putting on weight.

HELEN

What woman wants to hear that? And in front of a man.

SOPH

This is Ben.

BEN

Hi.

Despite his best efforts Ben is clearly shocked by Helen's appearance. She "whispers" loudly to Soph behind her hand...

HELEN

Did you forget to tell him I have cancer?

BEN

Sorry, I... it's just Soph told me you were her older sister.

HELEN

Oh we like him. It's nice to meet you, Ben. Come in.

She ushers Ben in, checking out his bum as he passes. Soph shoots her a disapproving look... Helen returns a thumbs-up.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - LATER

Soph sits on the sofa, an open photo-diary on her knee.

Ben sits next to her, eyeing one of the pictures, postcards and ornaments of ceremonially dressed Grenadier Guards (red tunic and bearskin) that are scattered around the room.

BEN

So she's got a thing for soldiers, then?

SOPH  
It's a holistic exercise. She  
visualises them fighting the cancer  
cells.

She avoids his gaze, clearly uncomfortable with the topic.

BEN  
The mind's an amazing thing...  
(beat)... You know sometimes, if I  
clear my head and really focus on  
what a woman's saying... I can  
almost convince myself she's making  
sense.

Soph shoots him a look of disbelief...

BEN  
I know... because it sounds like  
blah, blah, Jimmy Choo, bitch,  
bitch, chocolate.

SOPH  
You think you're funny?

BEN  
(mock concentration)  
Something about Heat magazine?

SOPH  
When have you ever seen me read  
Heat?

She punches him playfully. He grabs the photo-diary to  
shield himself as she continues the attack...

BEN  
You're breaking my concentration. I  
can see your lips moving but it's  
just... [blarrrr].

Helen stands in the doorway with a tray of tea and cake,  
smiling at the spectacle.

Ben notices her first...

BEN  
Please call off your sister.

Soph relents but waves a menacing finger at him.

SOPH

I know where you live.

Ben laughs and accepts a slice of cake from Helen.

Soph settles back, flicking through the photo-diary to find the place they'd got up to. Helen sits next to Soph, handing her a slice of cake and taking a bite of her own.

HELEN

Good cake.

SOPH

Make sure you finish this one.

HELEN

I finished the sponge... Herr  
Commandant.

Soph accepts this grudgingly and points to the photo-dairy.

SOPH

OK, these are from the climbing  
lesson last week. I'm about sixty  
feet up there... on the advanced  
wall.

She looks from Helen to Ben with mock smugness. Helen points to a number of photographs.

HELEN

There's a lot of your arse.

SOPH

Yes. Matt had the camera.

BEN

Soph... I think she meant there's a  
lot of your arse.

He holds his hands apart, exaggerating how wide her bum is. Soph GASPS indignantly and holds her cake over his head.

SOPH

Do you want to wear this?

HELEN

Well your hips don't need it.

Helen grins and high-fives Ben. Soph folds her arms and pretends to sulk.

HELEN

You've got a great arse, you bitch.  
When's it climbing a real cliff?

SOPH

I don't know yet. We've only just  
finished the course.

HELEN

That'll be amazing. Holding on by  
your fingertips a hundred feet up,  
the wind whipping past you...

SOPH

I think there are clubs that do  
away weekends. I'll look into it.

She takes a bite of cake and turns the page in the photo-diary to avoid further discussion.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - LATER

Soph collects the various bits of dirty crockery.

HELEN

Stop that. I'll sort it out when  
you've gone.

SOPH

Shut up.

Soph exits with her load. Helen pulls a face of exaggerated frustration at Ben.

HELEN

She wanted to move in when I was  
first diagnosed... I nearly changed  
the locks. Don't ever get ill  
around her.

SOPH

(shouting from O.S.)  
Err... why is there half a sponge  
cake in the bin?

Helen flashes Ben a look - "whoops... rumbled."

HELEN

Is there?

Soph can just about be heard muttering something (O.S.)...

HELEN

Love you too.

(to Ben)

How do you stop a woman fussing over you?

BEN

I'm a man... we don't.

HELEN

You're too good to us... (beat)...

I just want her to be happy. She shouldn't have to worry about me.

Ben offers a sympathetic smile...

HELEN

Has she said anything to you?

BEN

About what?

HELEN

I don't know.

Ben hesitates.

BEN

I don't really know her that well.

HELEN

Yeah, I wasn't quite sure why she asked you here. Or why you accepted.

Ben opens his mouth to reply... but then simply exhales.

HELEN

(grinning knowingly)

Well... no pressure but I haven't seen her laugh so much in ages. Keep it up.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ben and Soph wander back towards the Mini.

SOPH

Thank you for coming.

BEN

I enjoyed it. Really. She's great.

Soph trudges to the passenger side of the car. The energy she had in the house has dissipated - she's exhausted.

SOPH

Do you mind driving? I could do  
with a nap, I'm working tonight.

Ben smiles and holds out his hand... she throws him the keys. He unlocks the Mini.

Soph waves an enthusiastic farewell towards the house before collapsing into the passenger seat.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. MATT & SOPH'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Matt removes a designer top from the chest of drawers and pulls it on. As his head emerges something catches his eye...

MATT

What's this?

He inspects the unopened birthday card that was sitting atop the chest of drawers. Soph looks up from straightening her nurse's uniform.

SOPH

Oh... yes... Ben threw it away.

Matt looks at her disapprovingly...

SOPH

Who are David and Karen?

MATT

Ben's brother.

He pads over to the waste paper bin and drops the card in.

SOPH

Don't they get on?

MATT

No.

Soph watches him expectantly but he doesn't expound.

SOPH  
That's so sad. What happened?

MATT  
It's taboo... so zip it.

He pinches her mouth closed. Soph stares back, unappeased. Matt gives her a peck on the lips and wanders out.

Soph retrieves the card from the bin, thinks for a moment... then crosses to the chest of drawers and hides it in amongst her underwear.

EXT. LONDON STREET - NIGHT

Late night revellers fill the street. Ben and Matt walk past a young woman, fake-tanned flesh bulging from her skimpy outfit as she vomits in a doorway.

MATT  
There you go, mate... all tanked-up and ready to drive.

BEN  
I think I'll walk.

MATT  
Come on, you're ugly, she's wasted... it's perfect. How long since you got any?

BEN  
A while. How is your mum?

MATT  
Oh... I'm gonna bust you up. I'm gonna bust you up bad.

They start to spar...

Scuffling playfully...

Until they almost stagger into a group of women - Ben apologises as he and Matt straighten themselves out.

An unlicensed minicab driver approaches them...

DODGY CABBIE  
Taxi?

Matt grins at Ben... then turns to the Cabbie...

MATT

Can we see a copy of your tax  
return or a P60 or something?

The Cabbie stares at him. Matt gestures towards Ben...

MATT

He's got this crazy notion that  
because you drive an illegal cab  
for cash, you don't pay any income  
tax.

The Cabbie turns to leave but Matt puts his arm around  
him...

MATT

Woah, hold on mate.  
(to Ben)  
My shout. Come on, I'm tired.

BEN

Take it. I'll ride my moral high  
horse home.

MATT

You're such a dick... (beat)...  
Well I have my principles too. I  
won't give in to peer pressure.

BEN

Guess I'll race you, then.

INT. NIGHT BUS - LATER

Ben sits by a window. The FAT MAN in glasses next to him  
munches on a large kebab. Ben watches uneasily as cabbage  
and chilli sauce escape with each drunken bite.

BETH, 28, pretty and self-assured, manages to sway down the  
crowded aisle. She smiles flirtatiously at the Fat Man who  
staggers unsteadily to his feet and offers his seat.

She glances at the debris left in his wake. The Fat Man  
takes the hint and wipes the seat clean with his sleeve.

Beth winks her gratitude. The Fat Man tries to maintain eye  
contact as she sits but she produces a book and begins  
reading.

Ben watches, amused and appalled in equal measure. Beth  
senses his stare without looking up from her novel.

BETH  
What?

BEN  
Nothing.

He turns to gaze out of the window. Beth glances sideways.

BETH  
You don't approve?

Ben meets her eyes and shrugs - "not really"...

BETH  
He was hardly being chivalrous  
himself.

She turns to the Fat Man...

BETH  
You thought you might get a shag,  
right?

The Fat Man nods drunkenly and takes another mouthful of kebab. Chilli sauce drips down the front of his shirt.

Beth turns back to Ben with a look - "see?"

Ben returns a wry grin.

BETH  
And you'd never do that?

BEN  
I'd happily give up my seat to  
someone who's pregnant or ill. Or  
elderly.

BETH  
In the hopes of getting laid? And  
you're judging me?

Ben smiles, genuinely amused.

BEN  
Out of the goodness of my heart.

BETH  
You'd feel bad sitting while a  
pregnant woman stands, then?

Ben eyes her warily, sensing some kind of trap...

BETH

So really you'd be doing it to make yourself feel better. Sounds pretty selfish to me.

BEN

Having a conscience makes you selfish?

BETH

I guess so.

She points to the title of her book - Joseph Heller's "Catch 22". Ben can't help but smile.

BEN

So you're a lawyer, then?

Beth grins in acknowledgement and turns back to her novel.

Ben studies her for a moment...

Then rises and excuses himself as he squeezes past her into the aisle. He claps the Fat Man on the shoulder...

BEN

Have a seat.

Beth stares at him in surprise... then smirks in defeat and shuffles along the seat to the window. The Fat Man sits down, obscuring Beth from view.

Ben smiles to himself and turns away.

BETH (O.S.)

Hey Scruples.

Ben turns back to see Beth reaching past the Fat Man to offer him a small piece of card. He takes it...

INSERT: BETH'S BUSINESS CARD

Which shows that Beth Newton is indeed a solicitor. A mobile phone number has been scrawled across the card in black eye-liner, followed by a "X" (kiss).

BACK TO SCENE

Ben glances back at Beth but she's engrossed in her book.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - MORNING

Ben is pulled from his slumber on the sofa by the sound of keys RATTLING and the front door CLICKING shut (O.S.)

He drags himself up and staggers through to...

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

As Soph, in her nurse's uniform, hangs up her coat.

SOPH

You slept on the sofa again?

BEN

Yeah, well... it's not like there's anyone waiting for me up there.

SOPH

Ah, poor baby. You're more than welcome to Matt...

She breaks into a massive yawn and rubs her eyes.

BEN

You look exhausted. Bed. Now.

SOPH

You don't need to tell me twice.

She looks around, feigning nonchalance. Ben chuckles.

BEN

Bed. Now.

She grins and winks and heads up the stairs. Ben follows.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. LANDING - CONTINUOUS

SOPH

Good morning.

She disappears into her and Matt's bedroom. Ben chuckles.

BEN  
Yeah, sleep tight.

He pulls Beth's business card from his pocket and inspects it... then stares after Soph.

He crumples the card in his fist as he steps into...

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. BEN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

And drops it in the waste paper bin.

EXT. MATT'S HOUSE - EVENING

Ben approaches the house...

As Soph emerges from the front door, dragging a large bag which she dumps in the Mini. She looks exhausted and sick.

BEN  
Are you OK?

SOPH  
(almost shouting)  
Yes.

She marches around the car and gets in the passenger seat.

Ben continues, reaching the front door as Matt strides out.

BEN  
Hey, mate. You guys off?

MATT  
No.

Matt grabs the bag out of the Mini and heads back towards the house. Soph emerges from the car.

SOPH  
Matt!

MATT  
Ben, please tell the stubborn cow  
how ill she looks.

BEN  
You do look awful, Soph.

SOPH  
Who's the nurse here?

MATT  
Look... we lose a couple of quid on  
the deposits, it's no big deal.

SOPH  
I don't care about the money.

MATT  
Good, I'll cancel the room.

Matt disappears into the house. Soph climbs back in the Mini, SLAMMING the door.

Ben glances after Matt... then walks over to the car.

INT. MINI - CONTINUOUS

Ben clambers into the driver's seat and shuts the door.

Soph stares straight ahead, ignoring his presence.

BEN  
They won't let you climb anyway,  
looking like that.

SOPH  
I know.

She still doesn't look at Ben. He waits patiently...

Until she finally glances across.

SOPH  
I don't know when we'll get to go,  
now.

BEN  
Well... the rocks aren't going  
anywhere.

Soph starts to say something but stops. She shakes her head faintly and turns away to gaze out of the window.

BEN  
You need a weekend in bed, Soph. I  
don't think you've stopped since we  
met.

Soph gives no indication of having heard him...

BEN

Matt can make you chicken soup.

Soph turns back with a wry smile, her eyebrows raised...

BEN

Good point. Well, I'll make you chicken soup, then. He can fluff your pillows.

Soph grins and covers her breasts protectively.

SOPH

Not until I'm better he can't.

Ben smiles as Soph's grin fades...

She looks pensive.

SOPH

Don't you miss your brother?

Ben's smile vanishes. He stares at her coldly...

SOPH

I can't imagine my life without Helen.

Ben's jaw clenches as he fights to control his anger.

BEN

Well Helen hasn't fucked you over.

She meets his stare, her eyes pleading for understanding.

Ben turns away and climbs out of the car...

BEN

Don't mention him again, OK?

...SLAMMING the door behind him.

EXT. BRIGHTON PIER. ICE CREAM STALL - DAY (EIGHT YEARS AGO)

SUPER: T MINUS 3 MINUTES 45 SECONDS (across the bottom of the screen with the time counting down)

Ben steps away from the stall with three cones. He hands one each to David and Karen and licks at the third...

As a passing child trails a red balloon past his face. Ben recoils, dislodging the ice cream from his cone - it splats on the floor.

David and Karen struggle not to laugh.

BEN

See how you've scarred me? I can't function in society.

DAVID

You bit it.

BEN

Who gives a baby a balloon to play with?

Karen smiles at their faux bickering...

BEN

My own brother, that's what really hurts.

Karen's smile fades. She looks at David, whose face mirrors her own.

David fishes a tenner from his pocket and hands it to Ben...

DAVID

Here, get yourself another.

The CLATTER of a ROLLERCOASTER and SHRIEKS of joy and terror, sounding closer still (OVER)...

INT. ROLLER-DISCO. DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Mix into the RATTLE of "old skool" roller-skates as hip young twenty-somethings weave about to cutting edge BEATS.

In one corner Soph films Ben and Matt on her digital camera. Both men are braced in a semi-crouch.

SOPH

Go.

Ben and Matt tense, trying to skate backwards.

No movement. They strain harder. Ben grunts.

MATT

Don't shit yourself.

Ben's concentration breaks as he bursts out laughing. Matt begins to roll slowly backwards. He WHOOPS victoriously.

Ben refocuses and he too starts to crawl backwards...

Gaining on Matt...

Until he's within a foot. Matt reaches out and pushes Ben away, simultaneously boosting his own backwards motion.

SOPH  
Interference. Penalty.

Soph glides gracefully behind Matt and uses her momentum to push him forwards, past Ben.

MATT  
Hey! You want interference?

He reaches backwards and grabs Soph's bum with both hands. She SCREAMS and starts giggling.

SOPH  
You're going to lose.

MATT  
I have your ass in my hands... that makes me a winner.

SOPH  
That is so romantic.

MATT  
I know.

They coast to a stop. Matt shuffles around...

MATT  
But I mean it.

He puts his arms around Soph's waist and smiles.

INT. ROLLER-DISCO. MEN'S ROOM - LATER

Matt empties his bladder, one hand braced against the wall. Ben stands behind, hands on Matt's back to prevent him rolling away from the trough-like urinal.

Matt removes his hand from the wall and begins to "shake down". He trundles ominously forwards and YELLS in alarm.

Ben grabs Matt's shoulders to halt his advance.

Matt finishes up and he and Ben perform a spastic ballet as they change places.

Ben takes his turn.

MATT  
Can I ask you a favour?

BEN  
Now's the time.

Matt hesitates. Ben glances back over his shoulder...

BEN  
What is it?

MATT  
Will you move out?

Ben's jaw drops...

MATT  
I'm sorry. It's just Soph's  
amazing...

He unconsciously removes his hands from Ben's back as he speaks. Ben begins to roll away from the urinal. Matt quickly catches him.

MATT  
Sorry... (beat)... She's amazing  
and I want us to live together.  
Properly. Just us.

Ben stares straight ahead...

BEN  
Um... OK. I mean, that's great. I'm  
really happy for you.

MATT  
Yeah?

BEN  
Of course.

INT. ROLLER-DISCO. BAR AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Ben and Matt weave unsteadily back to Soph.

SOPH  
Ah... that's so sweet. Did you hold  
each other's willies?

Matt cups her cheeks in his hands...

MATT

Yes. And I didn't wash my hands.

He kisses Soph before she can react. She struggles free...

SOPH

You're disgusting.

And Matt goes down, windmilling. Ben helps him back up.

BEN

He's lying... we used those little blue soaps they leave in the urinals.

Soph stares blankly at him...

BEN

I'm wasted here. You'll be sorry when I'm gone.

SOPH

Oh devastated. Where exactly are you going?

Ben looks at Matt.

BEN

I'm moving out.

SOPH

What? Why?

Matt pulls a face - "help me out here, mate."

BEN

You guys need your own space.

SOPH

No we don't. You can't move out. Tell him, Matt.

MATT

It's his choice.

SOPH

Matt... (beat)... Ben, we don't want you to. Please stay.

MATT

(in German, subtitled)  
Why are you so bothered?

Soph shoots him an incredulous look. She starts to respond...

BEN

Soph... the truth is... it's a bit awkward sharing with a couple.

She looks at Ben, a mixture of shock and disappointment.

MATT

I'm going to the bar.

Matt skalks off into the crowd.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. BEN'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Half-packed cardboard boxes everywhere. Soph wanders in.

SOPH

Need a hand?

BEN

I think I can manage.

SOPH

Scared I'll find your dirty magazines?

BEN

I'm more worried about the women's underwear.

SOPH

As long as none of it's mine.

Ben pretends to look sheepish. Soph chuckles and sits down on a spare corner of the bed. Ben goes back to packing.

Soph flicks idly through the top layer of the nearest box.

SOPH

You've got a lot of books. I love reading, I just never have the time. Astrology?

She pulls out a book on Astrology.

BEN

I was curious. Turns out it is a load of bollocks.

SOPH

It's been around for thousands of years, there must be something to it.

BEN

Right, like tarot cards and palm reading?

SOPH

Hey. I palm read.

Ben shoots her a look - "of course you do". She smiles at the challenge and crosses to him, gesturing for his hand.

BEN

Actually there is this freaky thing about hands... what was it? Oh yeah, if your hand is bigger than your face...

He holds his hand in front of his face, fingers spread wide and palm almost touching his nose. Soph does the same...

Ben knocks her hand so that she slaps herself in the face.

SOPH

I can't believe I fell for that.

Ben grins and Soph grabs his right hand. She starts gently squeezing various sections of his palm. Ben's breath catches... he looks away...

SOPH

Well despite recent evidence to the contrary, you've got a well developed mount of Luna, which suggests a warm and sympathetic nature. And Upper Mars and Jupiter are showing strong moral principles...

BEN

Wrong. This hand has crushed a puppy's skull.

Soph grins and begins stroking his thumb and manipulating the joints. Ben closes his eyes and grits his teeth.

SOPH

You've definitely got a stubborn thumb... very strong willed... dogged...

BEN

It's like you've been living with me for three months.

SOPH

Alright, smartarse. Well seeing as you haven't had a date in that time do you want to know when you'll meet the girl of your dreams?

Ben's flippancy evaporates. He offers a faint shrug.

Soph runs her fingers lightly across the main lines on his palm. He loses himself in curves of her face...

Until she looks up with a mixture of awkwardness and sympathy and releases his hand.

BEN

What?

SOPH

I'm sorry.

Ben stares at her apprehensively...

SOPH

Your... bad relationship.

Ben breaks eye contact and stares down at his palm.

BEN

Show me.

Soph hesitates... then takes his right hand and traces the horizontal line that runs from the left edge of his palm...

SOPH

This is your heart line... so emotions and relationships. This is your head line...

She indicates the line below it that runs from the right...

SOPH (CONT'D)

Which represents life as a whole. See this line that travels down from the heart line... that's a failed relationship, a major emotional disappointment... and because it meets the head line it's impacted your wider life as well.

She tries to gauge Ben's reaction. When he looks up there's anger in his eyes that he's trying to conceal.

BEN

Well that's something to look forward to.

SOPH

What? I thought it already...

She trails off, guilt and regret flooding her face...

SOPH

Ignore me then, I'm talking rubbish.

She looks down, unable to meet Ben's steely gaze.

An awkward silence.

SOPH

Let me have another look...

BEN

I need to finish packing.

SOPH

OK.

Ben watches her skulk out.

He closes his eyes and SIGHS heavily...

Then roots through the nearby waste paper bin to produce...

INSERT: BETH'S CRUMPLED BUSINESS CARD

BACK TO SCENE

Ben grabs his mobile phone and dials Beth's number. He shuts the bedroom door as he waits for her to pick up.

BETH (ON PHONE)

Hello?

BEN

Beth? Hi, it's Ben Pearce. We met on the night bus. There was a kebab and a fat man.

BETH (ON PHONE)  
Hmmm... Harry Potter, the Vegas years?

BEN  
That's him.

BETH (ON PHONE)  
No... sorry, I don't remember. It must have been a long time ago.

BEN  
Yeah, sorry I didn't call sooner... um... I was... err...

BETH (ON PHONE)  
Seeing someone? Every girl likes to hear she's second choice. Keep digging.

BEN  
Top three, that's not bad.

BETH (ON PHONE)  
Right, so you've got a third choice lined up as well?

Ben hesitates as he tries to work out whether she's joking.

BEN  
Actually that's you, my second choice blew me out.

SILENCE

Then CHUCKLING from Beth's end of the phone.

BETH (ON PHONE)  
OK. Have you seen "Stomp"?

BEN  
No. But I've read the book.

BETH (ON PHONE)  
(laughing)  
Well I'll let you take me if you promise not to spoil the ending. You can buy me dinner afterwards.

INT. MINI - LATE MORNING

Soph drives, concentrating on the road as she speaks...

SOPH  
Has she got nice tits?

She senses Ben's surprise without looking across...

SOPH  
What? I'm just trying to have a  
blokey chat with you.

BEN  
Firstly, blokes don't "chat" and  
secondly, we're not all that  
crass... (beat)... It's "has she  
got a killer rack?"

SOPH  
Ah, right. And?

BEN  
Yes.

SOPH  
Then please tell me she's got a fat  
arse.

BEN  
You don't get this man talk, do  
you?

He studies Soph's grinning profile...

BEN  
She has the perfect arse.

Soph gives a GRUNT of faux jealousy. Ben gazes at her...

BEN  
It hasn't been that long but...  
she's so funny. And her IQ's  
something stupid like one- fifty.

He stares at Soph, angling for a reaction...

BEN  
I've never met anyone like her...  
she's like... the dream woman.

SOPH  
Oh... (beat)... Ben, I don't know  
how to say this...

She glances across. He stares back imploringly...

SOPH  
What the hell's she doing with you?

Ben's face falls... as Soph grins widely...

SOPH  
Kidding. That's great, Ben. I'm so  
happy for you.

Ben forces an unconvincing smile...

SOPH  
When do we get to meet her? You  
can't keep her hidden forever.

BEN  
Yeah... soon.

He leans forwards and switches on the radio.

INT. / EXT. MINI - MIDDAY

They crawl towards Helen's house, passing...

A police car...

Then an ambulance, back doors wide open. Two PARAMEDICS  
appear, wheeling a trolley... bearing a covered body...

Then Helen's house. The front door stands wide open.

Soph emits a strangled GASP...

And stops the Mini in the middle of the road a few metres  
on. She and Ben stare back at the scene in stunned silence.

Soph breaks from her trance and scrabbles at her seatbelt.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Soph bursts out of the car - the engine is still running.

SOPH  
Helen.

She sprints towards the open front door...

As a POLICEMEN exits, eating a piece of cake...

Followed by Helen, who carries another slice of cake.

Soph almost knocks her over with her embrace.

HELEN

Bad journey?

Soph manages to laugh and cry at the same time. Helen hands the cake to the Policeman and hugs her back.

Ben arrives... as the Policeman notices the Mini blocking the road. He takes a bite of cake and indicates the car.

POLICEMAN

Could you park a bit closer to the curb please, sir?

INT. MINI - LATER

Soph drives. Rain splatters against the windscreen.

A speed camera FLASHES as they zoom past.

BEN

Whoops.

A tear breaks free from Soph's eye and runs down her cheek. She wipes it away.

More tears follow. She slows the car... and stops.

BEN

What are you...?

Soph cries fully, uncontrollably...

BEN

What's wrong? Soph?

A HORN BLAST from a car forced to swerve past them. Ben fumbles to turn on their hazard lights.

He puts an arm around Soph and she crumples into his chest.

EXT. MOTORWAY - CONTINUOUS

The Mini sits on the motorway. A few yards away a sign indicates that there are Motorway Services in 1 mile.

INT. MOTORWAY SERVICE STATION. CAFE - LATER

Soph sits at a table staring out of a rain-streaked window.

Ben sits opposite, sipping a coffee as he waits patiently for her to speak.

She turns to her own cup and gazes into the black liquid.

SOPH

I thought she was dead. I don't know why, she's not at that stage... yet.

BEN

It's because you love her, Soph and you worry about her.

Soph shakes her head as new tears trickle down her cheeks.

SOPH

The worst thing is, somewhere deep inside... I was glad.

She looks up at Ben with tormented eyes. Seeing his surprise she lowers her head into her hands.

Ben hesitates... then reaches across and gently takes her hands in his own. She looks up again - this time his eyes are full of sympathy.

SOPH

I was glad that I wouldn't have to spend every other day off being stupidly cheerful... or keep filling every spare second of my life with something worthwhile... or carry on justifying... (beat)... Justifying all the sacrifices she's made for me.

The tears stream down her cheeks. She makes no move to wipe them away, instead gripping Ben's hands tighter.

BEN

Soph... (beat)... Do you feel you have to live like that for her? She'd slap you silly if she knew.

He lifts his hands. She continues to clutch his fingers so he's forced to wipe her cheeks with his thumbs.

BEN

She wants you to be happy. That's the only duty you have to her.

SOPH

No. Because I'm so lucky. I can go anywhere, I can do anything and she's... (beat)... She was eighteen when Mum and Dad died. She was going to be a nurse... (beat)... And then the cancer struck. She's never been free to do anything...

BEN

So she wants you to suffer as well?

Soph stares at him in confusion...

BEN

No, of course she doesn't, but isn't that what's happening?

Soph swallows as she allows herself to hear Ben's argument...

BEN

How you've been living... Soph, look what it's doing to you. You can't think this is right?... (beat)... Helen certainly wouldn't.

Soph offers a faint smile...

BEN

She's your sister and she loves you... more than anything. Talk to her, she'll understand.

SOPH

I don't want to worry...

BEN

You need to talk to her, Soph.

Soph stares down at her coffee...

Then looks back up at Ben with a smile of thanks. She squeezes his hands before letting go to wipe her eyes.

SOPH

Do you think they've got any...?

Ben grins and produces a packet of two chocolate Bourbons.

BEN

Only Bourbons, I'm afraid.

Soph stares in surprise... then smiles with appreciation.

INT. MINI / EXT. POOLEY'S HOUSE - EVENING

Ben gazes unseeing out of the window as Soph pulls up.

SOPH

Are you OK? You've been very quiet.

BEN

So have you.

SOPH

What... I'm going to talk to myself?

Ben smiles and opens the door. He climbs out...

SOPH

Hey.

Soph beckons him to lean back in... and kisses his cheek...

SOPH

Thank you. If she disowns me I'm coming after you.

She grins and winks. Ben's smile is more of a grimace as he shuts the door.

Soph drives off. Ben watches her go, sober-faced.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE. BATHROOM - LATER

Karen, now 30, bathes JAMES, 4. Both are giggling as they splash various toys through the water. A phone RINGS (O.S.)

KAREN

If that's Becky, I'll call her back.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

DAVID

OK.

David, now 32, answers the RINGING phone.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. BEN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ben sinks down onto his bed, his mobile phone pressed to his ear. He closes his eyes and draws in a deep breath.

DAVID (ON PHONE)

Hello?

Ben opens his eyes but holds the breath in...

DAVID (ON PHONE)

Hello?

Ben lowers his head away from the phone and exhales a defeated SIGH...

And hangs up.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A DIALLING TONE (OVER)...

David looks puzzled as he hangs up... then jabs "1471" on the handset.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. BEN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

BEN

Fuck!

Ben hurls his mobile phone across the room and flops backwards onto his bed.

He lies still, gazing up at the ceiling.

BEN

It's not the same.

His mobile phone RINGS. He sits up and stares uneasily at it before creeping over and checking the caller's number.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

David hangs up the phone... and immediately redials.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. BEN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ben watches his phone as it starts RINGING again. He clenches his jaw and rejects the call.

EXT. BRIGHTON PIER - DAY (EIGHT YEARS AGO)

SUPER: T MINUS 2 MINUTES 27 SECONDS (across the bottom of the screen with the time counting down)

Ben, Karen and David amble along, eating their ice creams. Ben offers David the change from the tenner but he refuses...

DAVID

Stick it in your beer fund.

BEN

Oh... thanks, you've just doubled it.

DAVID

Do you need money? I'll lend you some if you do.

BEN

What are you after?

Ben and Karen walk a few more paces before noticing David has stopped.

DAVID

I'm your brother, Ben. I care about you.

BEN

I know you do... (beat)... I was joking...

DAVID

Don't ever doubt that I love you.

David turns his gaze to Karen...

Then strides past them, along the pier. Ahead of him, in the distance, is the Galaxia rollercoaster...

The CLATTER of a ROLLERCOASTER and SHRIEKS of joy and terror, again louder than before (OVER)...

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - PRESENT

Mixes into the RATTLE of Matt's mobile phone as it vibrates on the kitchen table...

Matt answers it - intercut between him and Ben...

MATT

Speak.

BEN

Hey mate. Are you guys free to meet Beth tomorrow?

INT. PUB. MAIN ROOM - EVENING

Ben follows Beth through the pub, pointing to where...

Soph and Matt sit at a table with two spare chairs.

Ben performs the introductions.

SOPH

It's great to meet you, Beth.  
(to Ben)  
Finally.

BETH

It's my fault. I'm ashamed to be seen with him.

MATT

We understand.

SOPH

I usually wear sunglasses and hope no one will recognise me.

Ben leans to towards Soph, pretending to study her top lip...

BEN

But you went for the false 'tache tonight.

Soph GASPS and tries to punch him but he pulls back out of reach. Beth cuffs him round the head and winks at Soph.

MATT

And it's your round.

Ben grins at him and raises his fist. Matt does the same and they play "scissors, paper, stone"... Ben loses.

BEN

Damn it.

INT. PUB. BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Ben and Matt are waiting to be served...

BEN

Soph's OK, is she?

MATT

Yeah. Why?

BEN

After yesterday...

Matt stares blankly back. At Ben's obvious surprise, his face clouds with anger...

MATT

What happened?

BEN

Oh... I don't know, really.  
Something to do with Helen, I think.

Matt stares daggers at him. Ben shifts uneasily...

BEN

Shall I get some crisps?

Matt turns away...

MATT'S P.O.V.

Soph and Beth sit, chatting and laughing easily (M.O.S.)...

MATT (O.S.)

Not Cheese and Onion... but I'm  
sure you know that as well.

INT. LONDON UNDERGROUND STATION. PLATFORM - LATER

Ben and Beth stroll to the end of the platform.

BEN

You were great tonight. They really like you.

BETH

Soph's nice... (beat)... Is it hell being in love with her?

BEN

What?

BETH

I'd like to hear that it is.

Ben appraises her expression - there's no point bluffing.

BEN

Yes... (beat)... Is it that obvious?

Beth shrugs and looks away down the tunnel...

BEN

I'm sorry. I wish I wasn't.

Beth turns back to study his face.

BETH

So...

She leaves the sentence hanging but it's clear from her expression - "... what are you going to do about it?"

Ben stares back.

BETH

This is where I dump you, then.

BEN

I'm sorry. You're fantastic...

BETH

Ben, sweetie, I'm dumping you, that's my speech. And "fantastic" isn't the word I'm looking for.

Ben hangs his head.

A train RATTLES into the station.

The doors HISS open... a few people disembark.

BETH

Well it was nice meeting you.

She shakes Ben's hand and boards the train... then sticks her head back out of the open doorway.

BETH

And thanks for the sex... you tried really hard.

A number of the passengers LAUGH. She steps back from the doors as they BEEP closed.

Giggling faces watch Ben from the train as it pulls away.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - EVENING

Matt enters to find Soph cooking. He kisses her "hello".

MATT

Good day?

SOPH

OK... I couldn't really concentrate...

Matt's attention wanders to the box of chocolates that sits on the table.

MATT

Secret admirer? Am I going to have to get heavy on his ass?

He tosses a chocolate in the air and catches it in his mouth. Soph points to a child's drawing on the fridge.

SOPH

If you don't mind roughing up a five year old.

MATT

Not a problem.

He removes the picture and studies it...

MATT

What is it?

SOPH  
You know it's an ambulance.

Matt indicates the excessive rays from the various lights...

MATT  
Why's it got hair?

SOPH  
You're not funny.

Matt walks towards her holding the picture in front of him...

MATT  
[Nee-nar nee-nar]... Here comes the  
shit mobile.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - LATER

Ben smirks as he places two cups of tea on the table.

SOPH  
It's not funny.

Soph adds sugar to one tea and takes the other for herself.

Ben hands her a brand new packet of Jammy Dodgers and wipes his hands theatrically on his jeans. Soph smiles and bites into a biscuit.

BEN  
Freak.

SOPH  
Philistine... (beat)... He's such a  
wanker sometimes. That picture  
really cheered me up... it's so  
sweet. And Joe is the most gorgeous  
little boy...

Ben raises his eyebrows and offers a wry grin...

SOPH  
Shut up.

BEN  
What about your cats?

SOPH  
I'm a woman, I'm allowed to change  
my mind... (beat)... I can't  
believe how self-centred he is.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - EARLIER IN THE EVENING

Matt checks the fridge looking for a snack.

MATT

(shouting to Soph - O.S.)  
An hour? I'm wasting away...

He notices an elaborate homemade chocolate cake on the side unit and grins like a mischievous child.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - PRESENT

Ben grimaces at Soph - "he didn't?"... Soph looks coolly back - "of course he fucking did."

BEN

And it's tomorrow she's getting the test results?

SOPH

(nodding)  
I'm staying over and, fingers crossed, we're celebrating... with half a cake.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - EARLIER IN THE EVENING

The cake now has a large slice missing. Matt stands by it holding two theatre tickets. Soph is furious.

MATT

But you've been wanting to see it for ages. It doesn't start 'til eight, you could spend the day with Helen and come back...

He trails off as Soph is about to erupt.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - PRESENT

SOPH

It's like he doesn't know me at all. Christ, thirteen months... I'm not that bloody complicated am I?

She toys with the Jammy Dodgers... then looks up at Ben with a sudden sense of appreciation... and maybe something more.

The sound of the DOORBELL breaks the moment.

POOLEY (O.S. BUT VERY CLOSE)  
I'll get it.

BEN  
Are you listening in?

POOLEY (O.S.)  
Just passing by. Slowly.

Ben shakes his head and turns his attention back to Soph.

BEN  
His heart's in the right place. He  
was trying to do something nice for  
you...

MATT (O.S.)  
What are you doing here?

Matt stands in the doorway. Pooley's inquisitive face  
suddenly peaks over his shoulder.

SOPH  
Telling Ben what a self-centred  
wanker you are.

MATT  
(in German, subtitled)  
What's it got to do with him?  
What's it ever got to do with him?

Pooley squeezes past him, into the room, for a better view.

SOPH  
He understands me, Matt. He  
actually listens to what I say...  
as I've told you before.

MATT  
(in German, subtitled)  
Speak in German.

SOPH  
(in German, subtitled)  
No.

MATT  
Fine. You'd tell him everything  
later, anyway.

SOPH  
(in German, subtitled)  
Yes.

Matt glares at her, grinding his jaw in absolute fury.

MATT

Before or after you fuck him?

Soph and Matt lock stares.

She slaps him...

And again... before pushing past him and out.

EXT. POOLEY'S HOUSE / MINI - MOMENTS LATER

Soph marches out. Matt follows... and then Ben

Soph climbs into the Mini, SLAMMING the door. Matt bangs on the window...

But she ignores him and starts the engine. She pulls away...

Matt jumps in front of the car to stop her.

She exits the Mini and without pausing scrapes the ignition key down the length of the car... then throws it at Matt.

SOPH

Don't you ever accuse me of something like that again.

She storms off down the street. Matt stares after her...

Then checks the scratch in the car's paintwork.

BEN

How could you say that to her?

MATT

It's none of your fucking business.

BEN

If you're accusing her of fucking me then yes, it is.

MATT

Is she?

BEN

No.

Matt detects something in Ben's reply - disappointment? He grabs Ben and pushes him against the LATTICE OF SCAFFOLDING that covers the house next door to Pooley's.

He stares into Ben's eyes, searching. Ben meets his gaze...

But eventually cracks and looks away. Matt releases his shirt, utterly shocked.

BEN

It's completely one-sided. She has no idea.

Matt is speechless...

BEN

Nothing's happened... and nothing will, she loves you.

Matt simply stares at him...

BEN

Matt, you're my best mate. You know I'd never do that to you.

Matt laughs, a deeply unsettling sound... that's interrupted by the HISS of a beer can being opened...

Pooley sits on the doorstep of his house watching the show.

MATT

Piss off, Pooley!

Pooley scrambles inside and shuts the door...

MATT

Fuck! You stupid twat... (beat)... You don't see her, you don't speak to her, you don't text or email or fucking... send smoke signals, OK?

Ben nods. The scaffolding towers over him...

MATT

Just like that? She's out of your life... you're not going to argue?

BEN

It's... a relief.

Matt scoffs in disbelief... then eyes Ben, appraising him.

MATT

Alright, so how do I get back in her good books?

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. MATT & SOPH'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Soph is asleep. She smiles and murmurs with satisfaction.

The front door SLAMMING (O.S.) pulls her from her dream...

She sits bolt upright, eyes-wide at the image still fresh in her head. She glances guiltily at Matt's side of the bed - it's empty and hasn't been slept in.

As the memories of last night come crawling back, her guilt turns to anger... until a strange smell steals her attention.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - MOMENTS LATER

Soph wanders through, noting the blanket on the sofa.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Soph enters to find five homemade cakes on the table. Looking like a child's handiwork, each misshapen mound bears a letter in icing, collectively spelling S-O-R-R-Y.

She's overcome by the unexpected gesture...

Until logic kicks in. The dirty baking equipment piled high in the sink confirms her suspicions... and disappointment.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - LATER

Soph, now dressed, sits at the table. She phones Matt.

INT. OFFICE. MATT'S DESK - CONTINUOUS

Matt's mobile rings. He sees Soph is calling and answers - intercut between them.

MATT

I'm really sorry, I was bang out of order. Am I forgiven?

SOPH

Where did you get the idea for the cakes?

MATT

Oh, well... you know, I ruined the cake you made for Helen...

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

MATT (CONT'D, ON PHONE)  
 ...And you always take her one  
 so... you know. I'm not quite Mr  
 Kipling... are they OK?

Soph grabs one of the cakes and dumps it in the bin.

SOPH  
 It was a beautiful thought.

INT. OFFICE. MATT'S DESK - CONTINUOUS

MATT  
 Good. Listen I've booked us a week  
 in Zurich as well. We can visit the  
 old haunts, relive a few  
 memories... I've checked with the  
 hospital and got you the time off.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

SOPH  
 Zurich... was that really us?

MATT (ON PHONE)  
 I know, it seems ages ago. Look,  
 I've got to jump into a meeting now  
 but I love you and I'll see you  
 tonight, OK?

SOPH  
 I'm staying with Helen toni...

But Matt has already hung up. Soph stares at her phone.

INT. ANOTHER OFFICE. BEN'S DESK - MOMENTS LATER

Ben watches his mobile until it rings off.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ben's voicemail kicks in (OVER)...

Soph waits for the BEEP... but then doesn't know what to  
 say.

She hangs up after a few seconds and instantly regrets it.

She re-dials Ben's number.

INT. ANOTHER OFFICE. BEN'S DESK - CONTINUOUS

Ben watches his mobile, clearly concerned. With a supreme effort he turns back to his PC.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

SOPH (INTO PHONE)

Hey, it's me. Sorry about that last message, I hung up by mistake... whoops. Anyway, I just wanted to thank you for the cakes. I know it was your idea and it was really sweet. You might have told Matt to wash up afterwards, though.

She picks nervously at one of the remaining cakes...

SOPH (INTO PHONE)

Listen, I didn't get to finish moaning about him last night so I might pop round tomorrow, if that's OK. Don't wait in especially or anything. In fact, maybe we should meet in public somewhere in case I can't keep my hands off you.

She winces at the awkward joke - where did that come from?...

SOPH (INTO PHONE)

OK, maybe see you tomorrow... (beat)... I really appreciate your support, Ben. Thank you.

She hangs up... and tears begin to run down her cheeks.

SOPH

Stop it.

She wipes them away but more follow. She ignores them as she dumps the remaining cakes in the bin.

INT. HOSPITAL. CONSULTANT'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

A tear rolls down Soph's cheek. Helen holds her hand.

The CONSULTANT offers Soph a tissue...

But she wipes the tear away with her hand and hugs Helen fiercely, both of them smiling.

INT. HOSPITAL. HALLWAY OUTSIDE CONSULTANT'S ROOM - LATER

SOPH

I was so scared it would be bad news.

Helen nods back at the Consultant's room as they walk away.

HELEN

You heard what Uri Geller said... keep a positive mental attitude, it can make all the difference. Plays havoc with your cutlery, though.

SOPH

He meant that for you. I'm allowed to worry.

HELEN

Well I worry about you worrying, so stop it.

SOPH

Please don't worry about me.

HELEN

So now you're worrying about me worrying about you worrying about me? That worries me.

Soph stops as Helen walks off, grinning.

SOPH

I hate you, you know that?

Soph's voice is light-hearted but her eyes are troubled.

INT. ANOTHER OFFICE. BEN'S DESK - MINUTES LATER

Ben's mobile phone BEEPS. He checks the display and sees...

INSERT: PHONE DISPLAY SHOWING A TEXT MESSAGE FROM SOPH

BACK TO SCENE

His face lights up as he reads it. He starts to reply...

INSERT: PHONE DISPLAY

"Fantastic news"...

BACK TO SCENE

But pauses... and then cancels the message. He thinks... then turns to his PC and googles

INSERT: PC MONITOR SHOWING GOOGLE WEBSITE

"GIFT+SOLDIER".

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. HALL - EVENING

Pooley pads in and opens the door to... David.

DAVID

Oh... hi. Is Ben in?

POOLEY

Maybe. Where's Soph?

DAVID

Who?

Pooley eyes David suspiciously... then looks past him to scan the scene outside.

POOLEY

Alright, you're clean. He's in the kitchen.

He hustles David in and points him down the hall.

After closing the front door, he makes to follow David... pauses... then crouches to peer out through the letterbox.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

David enters. Ben looks up from the cup of tea he's making...

BEN  
Get out.

DAVID  
Why did you call?

Pooley ambles in and Ben turns on him...

BEN  
You fucking let him in?

POOLEY  
How many people am I meant to keep out?

DAVID  
Do you need help, Ben?

POOLEY (CONT'D)  
I'm going to need a list...

BEN  
You think I'd come to you?

POOLEY (CONT'D)  
Names... known aliases...  
descriptions...

DAVID  
You always used to.

Pooley slides out of the room... as Ben SNORTS in disbelief.

DAVID  
Well then you must have wanted to apologise.

BEN  
You want me to apologise? After what you did to me?

DAVID  
I said you must have wanted to apologise.

Ben stares at David, his jaw clenched.

A sudden FLASH... Pooley stands in the doorway with a camera.

BEN

Pooley!

POOLEY

I'll need mug-shots.

Ben stares at him... then hurls his cup of tea against the wall - it explodes, chipping and staining the paint.

SILENCE

BEN

I'm a better man than you, David.  
I've got nothing to apologise for.

He storms out... and the front door SLAMS (O.S.)

EXT. BRIGHTON PIER. ROLLERCOASTER - DAY (EIGHT YEARS AGO)

SUPER: T MINUS 1 MINUTE 38 SECONDS (across the bottom of the screen with the time counting down)

David and Karen stand near the steps to the Galaxia rollercoaster. In the b.g. Ben purchases tokens for the ride...

KAREN

Are you OK?

DAVID

Not really. You?

KAREN

Not really.

They share a smile as Ben strolls up and offers David a token...

BEN

Here. My shout.

DAVID

With my change.

BEN

Technically.

DAVID

I can't, mate... too much ice cream.

BEN

OK... (beat)... But we're cool?

David gives him the thumbs-up. Ben grins at Karen...

BEN

I won't even bother asking.

Before turning and mounting the steps to join the queue...

The CLATTER of a ROLLERCOASTER and SHRIEKS of joy and terror, louder than ever (OVER)...

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - AFTERNOON (PRESENT)

Mixes into the CLINKING of crockery as Helen stacks empty cake plates and tea cups onto a tray. Soph chooses books from Helen's bookcase.

HELEN

Matt'll be thrilled.

SOPH

Yeah, well... I'll read in the nude, that'll keep him happy.

HELEN

Ah, so he does appreciate a literary buff.

Soph doesn't hear, instead picking up a teddy bear dressed as a Grenadier Guard in ceremonial uniform.

HELEN

It's from your other bloke...  
Ben... to congratulate me on acing  
my test.

SOPH

I didn't think he got my text.  
That's sweet of him.

HELEN

Did you say he's single again?

SOPH

I don't think he's your type.

Helen shoots her a look - "I didn't mean for me, idiot"...

SOPH  
We're just friends.

Helen nods in mock acceptance - "of course you are"...

SOPH  
We are. Stop it.

Soph throws the bear at Helen, who bursts out laughing...

SOPH  
I'm not above beating a sick woman,  
you know.

Helen picks up the bear.

HELEN  
Whatever Trevor.

SOPH  
(suddenly serious)  
Why do you think that?

HELEN  
He didn't buy this for me,  
honey-bun.

She hands Soph the bear and exits.

BEN'S VOICEMAIL (V.O.)  
You have three saved messages.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. BEN'S BEDROOM - EVENING

BEN'S VOICEMAIL (V.O. CONT'D)  
First saved message.

Ben stares out of the window at the Mini parked below. Soph appears and climbs into the car...

SOPH (V.O.)  
Hey stranger, I'm starting to worry  
about you. Is everything OK? Pooley  
says you're fine but... you know  
you can talk to me... about  
anything. Anyway you owe me a call,  
so call.

INT. MINI - CONTINUOUS

Soph smiles at the teddy bear soldier that is now sitting in the passenger seat. She pulls away from the curb...

SOPH (V.O. CONT'D)

Oh and Helen says thanks for the bear. That was so sweet of you, Ben... (beat)... OK, speak soon. Bye.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - EVENING

Soph lies on the sofa reading a book, her head resting on Matt's leg. Matt jiggles his other leg...

SOPH

Do you need the toilet?

MATT

No. Sorry.

He looks around, obviously bored. The dregs of a mug of tea sit on the coffee table next to a magazine.

He rolls the magazine into a tight tube, hooks it through the handle of the mug and allows it to unroll to give a snug fit. He then lifts the mug back towards himself and tries to tip the tea into his mouth...

But the mug slips, bounces off his chest and onto Soph's head. She YELLS, in shock more than pain.

MATT

Shit! Are you OK?

SOPH

Christ Matt.

MATT

Are you alright?

She swats away his hand.

SOPH

I just want to finish this book without getting bloody...

MATT

Mugged?

Soph smiles despite herself. Matt grins and tenderly kisses the red mark on her forehead... then moves down to her ear... and neck. She pushes him gently away and curls into the corner of the sofa.

SOPH  
I'm tired, Matt.

She takes in his petulant reaction...

SOPH  
Dropping crockery on my head  
doesn't get me going, sorry.

MATT  
Well I've tried everything else.

SOPH  
Oh for God's sake...

MATT  
What? I want to have sex with my  
girlfriend sometime this month...  
how unreasonable of me.

Soph gives an incredulous laugh... then wrenches off her top, unbuttons her jeans and lies back on the sofa, arms open...

SOPH  
Fine. Help yourself.

Matt storms out.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. BEN'S BEDROOM - EVENING

BEN'S VOICEMAIL (V.O.)  
Second saved message.

Ben stares out of the window at the Mini parked below. Soph walks into view. As she opens the car door she glances up at the window and sees Ben watching. She stares back...

SOPH (V.O.)  
It's me... (beat)... Ben why are  
you ignoring me? If I've done  
something... if I've upset you  
please tell me because I really  
don't understand. I would never  
intentionally hurt you, you must  
know that... don't you?

Soph climbs into the Mini and drives away.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - LATER

Soph enters teary-eyed. She dumps her handbag, kicks-off her shoes and exits, past the teddy bear soldier on a shelf in the b.g...

SOPH (V.O. CONT'D)

Whatever it is... I'm sorry. Please call me back and we can sort it out... we have to... things with Matt are... (beat)... I really miss talking to you, Ben. Please.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - NIGHT

Matt enters, bleary-eyed, to find Soph looking through some old photographs of their time in Zurich.

MATT

What are you doing?

SOPH

Things were so much simpler in Zurich.

MATT

Simpler? It was all in German... (beat)... What's up?

SOPH

Matt, I'm so confused.

MATT

About what?

SOPH

Everything.

MATT

Oh. Can you stay confused until the morning?

SOPH

I didn't ask you to get up.

Matt tenses... then sits, brushing the hair from her face.

MATT

There's a lot of everything... where do we start?

SOPH

Are you happy, Matt?

MATT

Of course. I've got a great job, my own house... the most beautiful girlfriend in the world. Why wouldn't I be happy?

Soph sags and turns back to the photographs, clearly disappointed by his lack of understanding.

SOPH

Do you know why Ben's ignoring me?

She can sense Matt bristling but she doesn't look up...

SOPH

Please don't get angry. It's important to me, Matt. It's really upsetting me.

She looks at him and sees the conflict on his face...

SOPH

He's said something to you.

MATT

I'm sorry, Soph... (beat)... He... he's... (beat)... He can't stand your moaning about me anymore.

SOPH

He said that?

MATT

He said you never see the nice things I do for you, just the times I fuck up... which is a lot, I know, but it's never intentional. And he knows I try so hard to make you happy but I don't always know how... and when we end up shouting instead of laughing it kills me, Soph, it really does. I'd do anything for you. Anything. He understands that.

SOPH

I... I didn't...

She trails off, utterly shocked.

MATT

I'm sorry.

She starts to cry. Matt wraps his arms around her...

MATT

I'm so sorry.

He holds her tighter as she weeps into his chest...

MATT

It's going to be OK.

SOPH

You do love me, don't you?

MATT

Yes. More than anything.

SOPH

That's enough then, isn't it?

MATT

Enough for what?

SOPH

To be happy. I'm so tired.

Matt rocks her back and forth as she sobs silently.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

BEN'S VOICEMAIL (V.O.)

Third saved message.

Ben stares out of the window at the deserted street below as he listens to the voicemail on his mobile phone...

SOPH (V.O.)

Matt's told me everything. I don't know what to say, Ben... (beat)... How could you let me keep pouring my heart out when that's how you felt?

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - MORNING (EARLIER THAT DAY)

Soph, in her dressing gown, tidies away the photo albums from the previous night. She notices the teddy bear soldier on the shelf... and drops it into the waste paper bin...

SOPH (V.O. CONT'D)  
 I feel like such an idiot...  
 (beat)... I'm sorry, it must have  
 been horrible for you. I obviously  
 misinterpreted our relationship...  
 really misinterpreted it.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Ben continues to stare out of the window...

SOPH (V.O. CONT'D)  
 Anyway, I feel really awkward about  
 the whole thing so steering clear  
 of each other for a while suits me.  
 I hope... well, we'll see. OK, bye.

BEN'S VOICEMAIL (V.O.)  
 End of saved messages. Main menu...  
 to listen to your saved messages,  
 press one now...

Ben presses "1" on his phone and collapses on his bed as the  
 messages start over.

BEN'S VOICEMAIL (V.O.)  
 You have three saved messages.  
 First saved message...

SOPH (V.O.)  
 Hey stranger, I'm starting to worry  
 about you. Is everything OK?...

INT. PUB - EVENING

Ben stares at the ENGAGEMENT RING sitting in front of him.

MATT  
 I'm sorry mate but... you know what  
 sort of thing she likes.

BEN  
 I gather you told her.

He misinterprets Matt's alarmed expression...

BEN  
 I didn't speak to her. She left a  
 voicemail... saying she feels  
 really awkward and doesn't want to  
 see me.

MATT

I'm sorry.

BEN

It's not your fault.

Ben picks up the ring and inspects it...

BEN

Good choice, I think she'll like it.

Pooley clicks his fingers. Ben passes him the ring and box.

MATT

I shouldn't have...

BEN

It's OK. It's probably for the best, anyway.

Matt nods and gives him a tight-lipped smile of thanks.

MATT

So... assuming she says "yes", will you be my best man?

Ben stares at him, amazed by his tactless enthusiasm...

MATT

Don't make me ask Pooley.

Pooley looks up sheepishly, hiding his hands beneath the table. Matt reaches over, closes the ring box that's in front of Pooley and returns it to his jacket.

BEN

Sure, why not.

MATT

Alright, then. Champagne.

Matt starts towards the bar but hesitates and turns back...

MATT

What if she says "no"? Do you think I'm making a mistake?

Ben stares at him for a moment.

BEN

Why would she say "no"?

Matt slaps Ben on the arm and strides off, beaming.

Pooley raises his eyebrows... Ben avoids his gaze and downs the remainder of his pint.

POOLEY

Well, I guess it's academic given I can't get this ring off.

He holds up his hand to show the ring wedged tight on his little finger.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. MATT & SOPH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Matt tosses a large box of condoms into a half-packed suitcase.

SOPH

Oh yeah, think you might get lucky?

MATT

Girl, you're going to be walking like John Wayne.

He swaggers over, bow-legged, and picks her up...

MATT

Ride'em, cowgirl.

They spin around and collapse on the bed, Matt rubbing his face in Soph's cleavage whilst "Yee-hawing", cowboy-style. Soph laughs and tries half-heartedly to push him off... and notices that her bracelet has snapped in the tussle.

SOPH

Matt, stop it.

Matt climbs off her. She inspects the ruined bracelet...

SOPH

Oh... and it's the one you bought from that little place opposite Sandrine's.

MATT

Well I screwed up there, it's horrible. Good riddance.

SOPH

I chose it.

MATT

We'll go back this weekend and get a replacement.

SOPH  
Do you even remember buying it?

MATT  
Yes.

Soph stares at him, annoyed further by the obvious lie.

SOPH  
It was the day after we first made love. We had breakfast at Sandrine's...

MATT  
And I insisted I buy you something from that jeweller's... to say thank you for having me.  
(off Soph's reaction)  
Joke... sorry.

SOPH  
I'm not laughing, Matt.

MATT  
I'm sorry. I forgot about the bracelet, I hold my hands up.

Soph drops her head. Matt tries to put his arm around her but she shrugs him off and stands up, fire in her eyes.

MATT  
What's the matter?

SOPH  
That question is, Matt. Fourteen months and you still don't know me.

Matt stares back defiantly.

MATT  
OK, let me have another go. You're a moody bitch who, once upon a time, was fun to be around but now sucks the joy out of my life like a giant... fucking... (beat)... Mosquito... with your constant buzzing... [bzzzz]... I don't want to do that... [bzzzz]... why didn't you do that... [bzzzz]... what am I fucking thinking... [bzzzzzzzz]...

Matt ends the tirade with a ROAR of frustration. They stare at each other.

SOPH  
Well right now I'm finding you  
quite repellent.

MATT  
It's you that's changed, Soph...  
don't go blaming me.

SOPH  
[Bzzzz]... You're right.

MATT  
Thank you.

Soph strides out.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. SPARE ROOM (BEN'S BEDROOM) - CONTINUOUS

Soph enters and grabs two large sports bags from the wardrobe. Matt enters. Soph pushes past him and exits.

MATT  
There's a baggage allowance.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. MATT & SOPH'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Soph enters and starts emptying clothes from her chest of drawers into the sports bags. Matt enters.

MATT  
We're only going for a week.

SOPH  
Matt, I'm leaving... for good.

MATT  
You're over-reacting.

Matt grabs the bag from her. She starts packing the second bag. He grabs that as well.

SOPH  
Matt, it's not working and it's not  
going to. You're right, I have  
changed. My outlook on life has  
shifted completely.

She's working through this for her own understanding...

SOPH

What's important to me and what's important to you are just so different now... we'll never make each other happy. It's not right for either of us.

Matt studies her face... then retrieves his wash-bag from the case.

He removes a ring box and hands it to her.

MATT

It's right for me.

Soph opens the box and stares at the engagement ring.

SOPH

Matt... it's beautiful... (double beat)... I'm so sorry.

She gives him back the box, kissing him tenderly on the cheek... and continues packing.

MATT

Is there someone else?

SOPH

No.

MATT

Is it Ben?

SOPH

Yeah, I'm dumping you for the guy who despises the way I treat you. Nice work Columbo.

She stares defiantly at Matt, angry and hurt. Matt's mouth twitches into an almost smile. He strides out.

Soph grabs handful of underwear from the chest of drawers and rams into the bag... before she notices the unopened birthday card in amongst the garments.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - LATER

Soph sits on the sofa, lost in thought. A suitcase and two large sports bag stand nearby.

She rises to rummage through the waste paper bin... and finds the teddy bear soldier. She studies it...

The doorbell BUZZES (O.S.)... pulling Soph from her musings. She stuffs the bear into one of the bags and struggles out with her luggage.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. MATT & SOPH'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Soph pokes her head around the doorway.

Matt sits on the bed with his back to the door.

SOPH  
The taxi's here.

Matt gives no indication that he's heard...

SOPH  
I've got everything I want, you can  
do what you like with the rest.

Matt continues to ignore her...

SOPH  
I'm sorry... (beat)... Take care.

Still no response. Soph disappears from the doorway.

Matt flops back on the bed and stares at the ceiling.

The front door SLAMS (O.S.)...

EXT. / INT. MATT'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Matt bursts through the front door in time to see a taxi pull away.

He grabs his car keys from the hall and sprints to the Mini.

He fumbles to open the car door, scratching the paint round the keyhole.

EXT. MINI - CONTINUOUS

Matt guns the car down the road, bouncing and SCRAPING over speed bumps.

INT. / EXT. MINI - LATER

Matt cranes his neck to see the taxi three cars ahead.

MATT  
Do not turn right.

The taxi signals and then turns right.

Matt turns after it into Pooley's road...

He pulls into the kerb and watches the taxi park further up the street, near Pooley's house.

Matt grabs his phone and calls Ben.

BEN (ON PHONE)  
Hey ma...

MATT  
When did you last speak to her?

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ben sets down his mug of tea on the table.

BEN  
Who?

MATT (ON PHONE)  
Soph.

BEN  
Not since... that night. Is everything OK?

INT. / EXT. MINI - CONTINUOUS

Matt watches...

MATT'S P.O.V.

SOPH exit the taxi and walk towards POOLEY's house.

MATT (O.S.)  
Let her in and leave me on speaker phone... I want to hear this.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ben looks around at the sound of the DOORBELL.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ben enters apprehensively, setting his mobile to speaker phone. He braces himself... and opens to door to Soph.

BEN

Hi.

A beat as they stare at each other.

SOPH

Have you spoken to Matt?

BEN

What's happened?

SOPH

Can I come in?

Ben steps aside. He glances nervously at his phone as he follows Soph into...

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Soph sits at the table. Ben indicates his tea, offering her the same. She shakes her head. Ben starts to sit...

SOPH

I've left Matt.

Ben hesitates... then finishes sitting. He places his phone on the table, using the mug of tea to hide it from Soph.

BEN

He was going to propose.

SOPH

I know, he showed me the ring. It was beautiful.

Ben looks down to hide his emotions...

SOPH

It's terrible, I know, but the thought of marrying him... he can't give me what I want, not anymore. You were right about how I was living, it was wrong...

Ben looks up in panic...

BEN

What I meant was...

SOPH

Oh God, I didn't mean it's your fault. It's not... you mustn't feel guilty...

Ben drops his head again at the undeserved sympathy.

Soph trails off. She refocuses herself.

SOPH

Why have you been ignoring me?

BEN

I thought Matt told you.

SOPH

He said you felt that I didn't appreciate him and you couldn't stand it anymore.

Ben struggles to hide his surprise and anger.

BEN

Yeah, that's right.

Soph reads his eyes and shakes her head faintly.

SOPH

It's because he was jealous, isn't it? Did he think you have feelings for me?

BEN

I felt you didn't appreciate...

SOPH

Do you have feelings for me?

Ben swallows. He rises and takes a step towards the door...

BEN

You need to leave. I'm going round to check on Matt.

Soph smiles. His eyes have answered all her questions...

SOPH  
 What if I told you I love you?

INT. MINI - CONTINUOUS

Matt listens on the phone, barely containing his anger.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

SOPH  
 I know how much Matt means to you.  
 I don't want to hurt him either,  
 Ben. We could wait... however long  
 you think, that's OK...

INT. MINI - CONTINUOUS

Matt erupts, HOWLING and POUNDING on the steering wheel.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The sound of Matt's tantrum fills the room (OVER)...

Ben goes for his phone... but Soph, still at the table, gets there first.

As she realises what has happened she stares at Ben with a mixture of anger and disappointment.

She hangs up on Matt and drops the phone onto the table.

INT. / EXT. MINI - CONTINUOUS

A DIALLING TONE (OVER)... as Matt stares at his phone.

He jumps out of the car, SLAMS the door and races towards Pooley's house.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Soph rises slowly from the table and collects herself.

SOPH  
 You need to decide now.

Ben stares at her, longingly.

The sound of Matt YELLING and HAMMERING at the front door breaks the silence (OVER)...

Soph takes a deep breath and then a step...

SOPH

Ben, I'm leaving. Please stop me.

She paces slowly and deliberately towards the door...

Ben watches her pass him... and the damaged spot on the wall against which he'd hurled the cup. His gaze stops there...

She arrives at the doorway... and Ben sits down at the table, his back to her and tears in his eyes.

Soph barely slows as she steps into...

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Soph holds back the tears as she continues steadily to the door. She opens it and...

EXT. POOLEY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Soph steps past Matt and towards her taxi, maintaining the same measured pace as he rants after her...

MATT

Fucking slut. Why don't you try it on with Pooley as well while you're here? Fuck-off.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Matt bursts in and advances on Ben...

MATT

What the fuck was that?

BEN

She's not coming back.

MATT

I thought we were friends.

Matt grabs Ben's phone and waves it in his face...

MATT

If I hadn't been listening you'd be screwing her right now.

Ben snatches the phone and smashes it to pieces against the table.

BEN

She's gone, you prick. I turned her down.

MATT

Because I was outside. If I...

BEN

You ungrateful shit...

MATT

You want me to thank you? For trying to worm your way into my girlfriend's pants? You should've run a fucking mile when you got the urge to stick your dick in her not cosy up close and play Mr Sensitive.

Ben hesitates.

BEN

I was trying to cover for all your fuck-ups...

MATT

Screwing people over must run in the family.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - LATER

Ben sits at the table with a half empty bottle of whiskey. He sports an impressive black eye.

BEN (V.O.)

What's that supposed to mean?

He pours himself a shot and downs it...

MATT (V.O.)

You're a cunt, not an idiot... you know exactly what I mean.

He pours another shot...

BEN (V.O.)  
I love Soph and I let her go for  
you. My conscience is clear.

And downs it...

He tries to place the glass back on the table but misses...  
it smashes on the floor.

Ben stares into space... then carefully picks up the pieces  
and places them on table.

He studies the broken glass... before slamming his hand down  
onto it. Blood wells from a cut on his palm and he watches  
it drip onto the table, hypnotised.

Trancelike, he rises and wraps a tea-towel around his hand.

His body finally rebels against the whiskey and he vomits  
into the sink.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Soph lies curled on the bed. Her tear-filled eyes stare into  
space, past the mobile phone she clutches in her hand...

SILENCE

Then the phone RINGS. She eagerly checks the display...

INSERT: PHONE DISPLAY SHOWING MATT IS CALLING

BACK TO SCENE

She rejects the call and curls up tighter, crying anew.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE. MATT'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Matt holds his phone to his ear, his BREATHING RAGGED as he  
struggles not to cry. He manages to speak...

MATT (INTO PHONE)  
(utterly heartbroken)  
I love you.

He hangs up, moving as if in shock...

To pick up a jumper of Soph's that is lying on the bed.

He buries his face in it as he starts to weep.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. LOUNGE - MORNING

Ben is passed out on the sofa, fully clothed. The sound of something dropping through the letterbox rouses him.

He rubs his face and sees his bloodied palm. He checks his watch and struggles to rise.

He staggers into...

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ben lurches through and starts to pull himself up the stairs... before he registers the A4 envelope on the floor.

He picks it up... it simply bears his name. A surge of adrenaline...

He wrenches open the front door and stumbles outside...

EXT. POOLEY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ben checks up and down the street... it's empty.

He retreats back inside.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Ben collapses at the table - the whiskey bottle and bloodied glass are still there. He studies the envelope...

Then takes a long swig of whiskey straight from the bottle and almost retches at the taste...

But takes a second swig.

Fortified, he opens the envelope and pulls out a letter... but there's something else in there...

He tips the envelope and the birthday card, still UNOPENED, falls out, along with a train ticket, which Ben inspects...

INSERT: TRAIN TICKET FROM LONDON TO BRIGHTON

BACK TO SCENE

Ben picks up the letter and begins reading...

SOPH (V.O.)  
Goodbye Ben...

He closes his eyes. Composing himself, he starts again...

SOPH (V.O.)  
Goodbye Ben. I suppose that was implied last night but I needed to say it for myself. It hurts so much but it's the only way of ending this mess.

INT. POOLEY'S HOUSE. HALLWAY - LATE MORNING

Ben dons a coat and opens the front door.

SOPH (V.O. CONT'D)  
I'm returning David's card. I shouldn't have taken it, I'm sorry. I wanted to help.

EXT. MATT'S HOUSE - LATE MORNING

Matt exits, dragging a bag and suitcase to a waiting taxi.

SOPH (V.O. CONT'D)  
The thought of you disowning him was just so sad... and it's even sadder now because it's made me write this letter.

INT. TRAIN - MORNING

Soph stares, unseeing, out of the window.

SOPH (V.O. CONT'D)  
I know what happened and I really feel for you, Ben, but you need to let go. Be honest with yourself... why did you let me leave last night?

INT. BRIGHTON STATION. PLATFORM - MIDDAY

Ben disembarks from a train and walks along the platform.

SOPH (V.O. CONT'D)

You know the answer. "Pride precludes forgiveness, pain blunts pride... in suffering we find clarity." I forget who said that but it's true.

INT. AIRPORT. CHECK IN - MIDDAY

Matt checks in for the flight to Zurich.

SOPH (V.O. CONT'D)

There's a train ticket in the envelope, that's as much as I can do. You have to decide to use it... and to forgive David.

INT. TAXI - LATE MORNING

Soph toys with the teddy bear soldier... then gazes out of the window.

SOPH (V.O. CONT'D)

We've all lost so much, Ben, don't let it be for nothing. I'll try to forgive you too. "Forgiveness smothers pain"...

INT. TAXI - EARLY AFTERNOON

Ben toys with the birthday card... eventually ripping open the envelope.

SOPH (V.O. CONT'D)

...That's my own addition to the quote, like scissors, paper, stone... I thought you'd like it. Anyway, I hope it's true...

INT. AEROPLANE - EARLY AFTERNOON

After removing Soph's jumper, Matt stores his bag overhead. He cradles the jumper as he sits in the window seat.

SOPH (V.O. CONT'D)  
...Because when I finish writing  
this you'll be out of my life. I so  
want to end on the perfect phrase,  
something momentous and  
beautiful... but I can't.

INT. TAXI - MIDDAY

Soph holds her head next to the open window, eyes closed and  
hair billowing. Her hands are empty, the bear is gone.

SOPH (V.O. CONT'D)  
It's not beautiful and it shouldn't  
be commemorated... it's just sad  
and ugly and real. And it's  
goodbye, Ben.

INT. TAXI - EARLY AFTERNOON

Ben opens the birthday card to study the message inside...

INSERT: MESSAGE INSIDE THE CARD (ALL THE SAME HANDWRITING)

"With love, always... David, Karen and James"

BACK TO SCENE

As Ben returns the card to its envelope he notices a smear  
of blood on it - the cut on his palm has re-opened.

He presses the cut closed until it stops bleeding...

Then licks his finger and wipes the blood from his palm. The  
cut is slightly further from his thumb but otherwise  
identical to the line joining his heart and head lines that  
Soph pointed out months earlier...

He manages a melancholic smile.

EXT. DAVID & KAREN'S HOUSE - LATER

A bunch of red balloons adorns to the front door. Ben  
approaches and is forced to crouch to one side to ring the  
doorbell without getting too close to them.

He retreats and stands as Karen opens the door.

They stare at each other...

And Ben suddenly barks a laugh of realisation.

KAREN  
You're drunk.

Ben becomes aware of his appearance... and odour...

BEN  
No... no I just...

James, sporting a cardboard party hat, rushes up to Karen.

JAMES  
Is it him? Is it him?

He sees Ben and cowers behind Karen.

KAREN  
It's his birthday.

BEN  
I'm sorry, I didn't... I should  
have called. I'm... I'll go...

KAREN  
David wants to see you.

She half shuts the door. Ben recoils from the balloons.  
Karen smiles slightly at this as she leads James away...

JAMES (O.S.)  
Who was that horrible man?

Ben swallows. He turns and takes a few steps... but pulls  
himself up and takes a deep breath.

DAVID (O.S.)  
Ben?

David stands in the doorway. Ben turns to face him.

DAVID  
You're looking well.

Ben manages a weak smile. An awkward beat as David waits for  
Ben to speak... but he doesn't.

DAVID  
Let's go for walk, there's a dozen  
screaming kids in here. I'll just  
let Karen know.

He turns and disappears through a side door.

Ben stares down the hallway into the lounge where James and his friends race around, utterly carefree. One of the children plays with a teddy bear soldier...

As the sound of a hushed but heated exchange between David and Karen floats from the side room (OVER)...

David reappears with a tight lipped smile. He grabs a jacket and steps outside, pulling the door shut behind him... but something stops it closing...

Karen opens the door and reclaims David's jacket, handing him a thicker winter coat instead. She kisses him tenderly on the cheek... and shoots Ben an ice cold stare.

EXT. BRIGHTON PIER - LATER

Ben and David stand at the start of the pier, staring along its length at the vacant booths and empty walkways.

BEN

Have you been back since?

His eyes don't leave the pier... but he senses David shaking his head in reply.

Ben takes a deep breath and steps onto the walkway. After a few measured paces he stops and closes his eyes, bracing himself for the emotional onslaught...

David follows and stops beside him, watching. Ben opens his eyes, tears in them.

DAVID

Old war wounds playing up?

BEN

No. It's too easy.

He continues along the pier. David heads after him...

They walk in silence...

Past deserted stalls boarded up for the winter...

It's utterly desolate.

EXT. BRIGHTON PIER - MINUTES LATER

Ben is lost in thought. David walks beside him, watching...

DAVID

You want to talk about her?

Ben looks at David, who indicates Ben's appearance...

DAVID

That's a woman's handiwork.

BEN

This was all me.

DAVID

If it's love... don't give up on her.

David continues for a few more paces before realising Ben has stopped.

BEN

Love... (beat)... How does Karen make you feel?

DAVID

Make me feel? Happy, I guess... grateful, proud... frustrated, anxious... everything... everything times a hundred, like my emotions are playing through a giant amp.

BEN

And it goes up to eleven?

DAVID

(smiling)

Yeah, she turns everything up to eleven.

Ben nods and looks away, lost in his own thoughts again.

BEN

I never felt that with her.

He turns back to David...

BEN

What the fuck have I been doing?

DAVID

Time to let go.

Ben extends his arm horizontally, fist clenched... then opens his hand, letting an imaginary object fall to the floor.

DAVID

And the other one, come on.

Ben repeats the motion with this other arm. He holds both hands up to show they are empty. David grins and slaps Ben's hands with his own in mock celebration...

DAVID

High ten... alright!

Ben is taken aback by the unexpected frivolity. He manages a weak smile. David WHOOPS as he grabs Ben by the shoulders and shakes him... then WHOOPS again, louder and longer...

EXT. BRIGHTON PIER. ROLLERCOASTER - DAY (EIGHT YEARS AGO)

SUPER: T MINUS 0 MINUTES 29 SECONDS (across the bottom of the screen with the time counting down)

David's SHOUTS mix into the CLATTER of a ROLLERCOASTER and SHRIEKS of joy and terror, which drown out all other sound (OVER)...

Ben sits in the lead car of the rollercoaster. The safety bar descends and they creep up the first section of track.

AT GROUND LEVEL

Karen and David stare up at the rollercoaster with troubled expressions.

EXT. BRIGHTON PIER. ROLLERCOASTER - PRESENT

The NOISE continues for a few seconds (OVER)...

Ben and David stare up at the rollercoaster, now a lifeless skeleton waiting out the winter.

BEN

I remember that first drop going on for ever but... (beat)... it's nothing.

David's ringtone starts to play - "99 Red Balloons"...

DAVID

Karen.

He answers the phone...

DAVID (INTO PHONE)

Hiya... (beat)... Alright, I'm on my way.

He looks at Ben, eyes smiling, as he listens to Karen...

DAVID (INTO PHONE)

Not yet, I'll text her now.

The look turns sad, regretful...

DAVID (INTO PHONE)

Right, OK. Bye.

David avoids Ben's gaze as he sends a quick text message.

BEN

Summoned home?

DAVID

Yeah... listen... um... it might be a while before... um... Karen...

Ben looks around at the hibernating fairground rides...

BEN

I'm going to stay here for a bit. I like the atmosphere... empty but... (beat)... Full of potential. I'll call you when I get back to London.

Ben offers his hand. David takes it, smiling his relief and gratitude. They shake... then hug...

BEN

I'm so sorry.

They pull apart...

BEN

Thank you... for not giving up on me.

DAVID

Well you still owe me that tenner, remember?

BEN

Yeah, OK... but you owe me a girlfriend.

DAVID

Right, fair enough.

David holds out his hand, gesturing for the money. Ben looks unimpressed. David grins and nods behind Ben...

To where Soph stands watching the two of them.

Ben stares at her in disbelief... to the sound of the voicemail on Soph's phone kicking in (OVER)...

SOPH (V.O.)

Hey, leave me a message. Thanks...  
Bye.

Ben walks slowly towards Soph...

To the BEEP of Soph's voicemail, followed by RAGGED BREATHING (OVER)... then...

MATT (V.O.)

This is about Ben so please  
don't... um... please just listen.  
What happened earlier...

Ben starts to ask Soph what she's doing here (M.O.S.) but she places her hand gently on his mouth to silence him...

MATT (V.O. CONT'D)

...he does love you, really love  
you but... I don't know... this  
thing with his brother... he's  
trapped himself.

EXT. BRIGHTON PIER. ROLLERCOASTER - DAY (EIGHT YEARS AGO)

SUPER: T MINUS 0 MINUTES 10 SECONDS (across the bottom of the screen with the time counting down to ZERO)

SILENCE apart from MATT's continuing V.O.

David smiles sympathetically at Karen and reaches across to hold her hand...

MATT (V.O. CONT'D)

You know Ben and Karen were going  
out? I don't know, maybe he told  
you.

## ON THE ROLLERCOASTER

The lead car reaches the first drop of the track. Ben glances down to the pier and a look of horror crosses his face... before it falls from view as the rollercoaster dives.

MATT (V.O. CONT'D)  
He's never forgiven David for  
stealing her away.

## EXT. BRIGHTON PIER. ROLLERCOASTER - PRESENT

In the b.g. a plane creeps across the sky, appearing to teeter on the edge of the first drop of the rollercoaster...

MATT (V.O. CONT'D)  
I love you so much... I want you to  
be happy, Soph... (beat)... anyway  
I'm going away for a while...  
longer.

Ben lifts his hand to brush some hair from Soph's face... she sees the cut on his palm...

MATT (V.O. CONT'D)  
I was just thinking maybe... if you  
can help him to... well, things...  
(double beat)... things might...

Ben looks at it as well and smiles...

MATT (V.O. CONT'D)  
...work out for you.

And kisses her.

The sound of Matt's RAGGED BREATHING as he struggles not to cry (OVER)...

A young couple walk past Ben and Soph... then a group of teenagers...

A family coming the other way... more couples...

MATT (V.O. CONT'D)  
(utterly heartbroken)  
I love you.

As the camera pulls slowly back and around to show the pier, magically, in the height of summer. It teems with people, the rides flashing and spinning in the glorious sunshine.

103.

FADE OUT.