

Broadway draft

February 2026

# **EVERY BRILLIANT THING**

by  
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with  
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c/o Rachel Taylor  
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## Note

*The play can be performed by a person of any age, socio-economic background, ethnicity, sexuality or gender identity, and references should be amended to reflect this and to make it local to the country it's being performed in.*

*This version of the script was published in March 2026 to coincide with the play's opening on Broadway, starring Daniel Radcliffe, following a run in London's West End with five other performers – Lenny Henry, Ambika Mod, Sue Perkins, Minnie Driver and the play's original performer, Jonny Donahoe. At time of publication, it's been more than a decade since the play premiered and, in that time, it has been performed in 62 countries and translated into 44 languages. I've included footnotes throughout to explain how elements of the text were changed for each of the five performers in London, and how the various variables and moments of planned spontaneity have worked in performance, both in London and New York and around the world.*

*The word NARRATOR is included for ease of reading and is never heard by the audience and shouldn't appear in production materials.*

*There is no interval.*

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*For Dad*

## **Every Brilliant Thing**

*The NARRATOR is in the auditorium when the house opens, greeting people as they enter, and giving out numbered cards. The NARRATOR explains that when a number is called, the person with the corresponding entry has to shout it out.<sup>1</sup>*

*Music is playing, some upbeat instrumental jazz – Les McCann, Art Blakey, Hank Mobley or Duke Ellington perhaps.*

*The houselights are on full and will remain so throughout. There is no set. The AUDIENCE are seated in the most democratic way possible, ideally in the round. It is vital that everyone can see and hear each other.*

*Eventually, when everyone is seated, the NARRATOR indicates to the operator for the music to fade out.*

NARRATOR            The List began after her first attempt. A list of everything brilliant about the world. Everything worth living for.

1. Ice cream.<sup>2</sup>
2. Water fights.
3. Staying up past your bedtime and being allowed to watch TV.
4. Things with stripes.<sup>3</sup>
5. Rollercoasters.
6. Super Mario.<sup>4</sup>
7. People falling over.

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<sup>1</sup> The AUDIENCE will be involved throughout and need to feel relaxed and safe. Greeting them also helps the NARRATOR cast the play. On Broadway, Daniel got to all three levels of the theatre, running up and down stairs trying to meet everybody and remember where each entry ended up. It's great when there's a lot of activity happening in the auditorium as people enter – the NARRATOR speaking with members of the AUDIENCE, consulting with their Associate, convening with Stage Management and Front of House etc. Every performer had at least one Associate who helps hand out entries during the preshow, and helps the performer to decide who to cast in the show. This role emerged with Paddy Gervers, who did so many different roles in Edinburgh, including stage management, sound design and assistant directing, that when we tried to find other people to do the job in London we referred to the role as 'the Paddy.' It is a crucial role in the success of the production – helping to learn lines and practice interactions, reading out all the entries in the rehearsal room, being present with the performer for every performance.

<sup>2</sup> The person with 'Ice Cream' has a responsibility to set the audience volume so it's a good idea to give this first entry to someone enthusiastic and loud.

<sup>3</sup> It's quite fun to give this to someone wearing stripes.

<sup>4</sup> These entries should be accurate to the performer's age. For Ambika Mod who was in her late twenties when she performed the play in London, 4, 5, and 6 became 'Anything multicoloured', 'Vending machines' and 'Club Penguin.' For Lenny Henry, who was in his late sixties, 6 became 'Mr Potato Head', for Sue Perkins it was 'Hungry Hippos' and for Minnie Driver, it was 'Findus Crispy Pancakes' – an evocatively '70s meal.

All things that, at seven years-old, I thought were brilliant but not necessarily things *Mum* would agree with.

I started *The List* on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, 1996.<sup>5</sup> I'd been picked up late from school and taken to hospital, which is where my Mum was.

Up until this moment, my only experience of death was that of my dog, *Indiana Bones*.<sup>6</sup>

*Indiana Bones* was older than me – I'd known him my whole life and he was my best friend. But he was really sick and so the Vet come around to put him down.

*The NARRATOR speaks to someone in the AUDIENCE.*

Would you mind, I'm going to ask you to be the Vet for me, it's just you seem to have an immediate... 'veterinary' quality.

*The NARRATOR brings someone from the AUDIENCE onstage.*<sup>7</sup>

Does anyone have a coat or jacket I could borrow?

*The NARRATOR takes a coat from someone else.*

Thank you.

Okay, so – you're the Vet, I'm me as a seven-year-old, and this here...

*The NARRATOR holds the coat carefully, as if it's a docile animal.*

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<sup>5</sup> This date should be amended to correspond to the NARRATOR's age.

<sup>6</sup> In the very first version of the play this was 'Ronnie Barker' – an English actor and comedian. In the US, Ronnie Barker was less known, so we changed the dog's name to 'Sherlock Bones', which was adopted by Minnie Driver when she performed in London, while Ambika Mod went with 'Woofi Goldberg' and changed the dog's pronouns. Other names we tried were Charles Barkley and Edwoof Woofwoof, which is just fun to say. 'Indiana Bones' was Daniel Radcliffe's suggestion and was an immediate yes.

<sup>7</sup> Throughout the play, AUDIENCE members will be invited to play characters. They are allowed to say whatever they wish and the NARRATOR has to work with what they're given. Though improvisations shouldn't go on too long, the spontaneity of these interactions is a central element of the show. The Vet can be any gender.

...this is Indiana Bones. And I know you because you're one of the parents from school. And you say something reassuring, like:

*'You're doing the kind thing. It's not a moment too soon.'*

VET

You're doing the kind thing. It's not a moment too soon.

NARRATOR

And I don't know what that means: I've no real concept of 'mercy' or 'humanely intervening to alleviate the suffering of irreversible decline.' I'm *seven*.

But I can immediately tell that you are clearly a very kind person, so I trust you.

Does anyone have a pencil or pen?

*The NARRATOR gets a pen or pencil from the AUDIENCE, then gives it to the VET.<sup>8</sup>*

*(to the AUDIENCE)* So, that pencil is the needle.

And inside that needle is an anaesthetic called pentobarbital. The dose is large enough to make the dog unconscious and then depress his brain, respiratory and circulatory systems and, within thirty seconds, put him to sleep, forever.

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So – *(to the VET)* when *you're* ready, come over here and inject Indiana Bones in the thigh.

*The VET approaches the NARRATOR and attempts the task.*

No, the thigh.<sup>9</sup>

*If the VET is smiling or laughing:*

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<sup>8</sup> Props will also be sourced from the AUDIENCE.

<sup>9</sup> It's important that the VET makes a mistake here, partly because it's a good moment to relieve the tension and establish that comedy and tragedy are going to coexist in this play, but also to let the AUDIENCE know that they can't go wrong if they're called on to interact because even if they mess up, it's going to be okay. It may be that the 'hard and fast rule' is that they shouldn't be *this keen* to euthanise the beloved pet, or they shouldn't make it *quite this suspenseful*, or, as often happens, *shouldn't ask the child questions about basic animal anatomy*.

Now I'm going to stop you for a moment there. You're doing brilliantly, but do you mind if I give you a note? There is one hard and fast rule while euthanising a child's pet and that is you really mustn't *laugh* as you do it. Totally changes the tone of the situation.

So um, no... let's do this again. Go back to the start and try to respect the solemnity of the occasion. Maybe take a breath. In fact, let's *all* take a breath, alright?

*They encourage the AUDIENCE to take a deep breath together.*

Okay. Let's try this again.

*The VET completes the task.*

Does anyone have a watch?

*The NARRATOR enlists an AUDIENCE MEMBER with a watch.*

Could you raise your hand when thirty seconds has passed?

*The NARRATOR looks at the coat, stroking it gently.*

I held Indiana Bones, who I'd known my entire life. I held him as he died.

And I thought about the walk we'd had that morning. And about the smell of him in my room. His toys in the garden. The recently opened packet of dry food. His bed under the stairs. All things that could now be thrown away.

*The NARRATOR looks at the coat for a little longer.*

And he became lighter. Or heavier, I'm not sure. But different.

*The AUDIENCE MEMBER with the watch raises their hand. The NARRATOR nods to them in acknowledgment.*

And that was my experience of death.

A loved one, becoming an object ...

*The NARRATOR returns the coat to its owner.*

...and being taken away forever.

*The NARRATOR takes the pencil, thanks the VET and sends them back to their seat.*

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It's the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, 1996. It's dark and it's late. All the other kids had gone home long ago.

And eventually, my Dad arrived.

*The NARRATOR speaks to someone in the AUDIENCE.*

I'm going to ask you to be my Dad if that's okay. You won't have to do much.<sup>10</sup>

Now, normally it's my Mum who picks me up, and normally she's on time and normally I travel in the back because I am seven and I make things sticky.

But this time it's *Dad*.

And he's late.

And he opens the door to the *front passenger seat*.

When something bad happens, your body feels it before your brain can know what's happening. It's a survival mechanism. The stress hormones cortisol and adrenalin flood your system. It feels like a trapdoor opening beneath you. Fight or flight or stand as still as you can.

*The NARRATOR stands still for a moment.*

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I got into the car.

*The NARRATOR sits down next to DAD.*<sup>11</sup>

Dad had the radio on and he'd been smoking with the window down.

Actually, what we'll do is I'll be my Dad, and you be me as a seven year-old. Okay? Great, let's swap seats.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Sue Perkins would sometimes cheekily make this: 'You won't have to do much. You know, like Dads.'

<sup>11</sup> If DAD can be seen by everyone, and if the NARRATOR can sit beside him, there's no need for him to be moved.

<sup>12</sup> In New York, Daniel Radcliffe sometimes said 'so let's swap seats because this is a British car and you're too young to drive.'

*The NARRATOR and the DAD swap seats.*

All you have to do is say 'why.' Okay?

*The NARRATOR speaks as the DAD without altering their voice.*

DAD	Put on your seatbelt. <sup>13</sup>
AUDIENCE	Why?
DAD	Because cars can be dangerous.
AUDIENCE	Why?
DAD	Because other drivers don't always pay attention.
AUDIENCE	Why?
DAD	Well, because there's lots to think about when you're a grown up. There are bills to pay and work to do and family and friends to see and relationships to sustain and there's never enough time to do it all.
AUDIENCE	Why?
DAD	Because there are only twenty-four hours in a day.
AUDIENCE	Why?
DAD	Well, because that's how long it takes for the Earth to rotate.
AUDIENCE	Why?
DAD	Because... I don't know.
AUDIENCE	Why?
DAD	Because I don't know everything.
AUDIENCE	Why?
DAD	Because that's impossible.
AUDIENCE	Why?

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<sup>13</sup> Often, DADs mime putting their seatbelt on here. The NARRATOR would then thank them for the offer, but reassure them that there is no expectation to mime.

DAD Because there's only so much anyone can know.

AUDIENCE Why?

DAD Because if you were able to know everything then life would be unlivable.

AUDIENCE Why?

DAD Because then there would be no mystery, no curiosity, no creativity, no conversation, no discovery. Nothing would be new and we'd have no need to use our imaginations and it's our imaginations that make life worth living.

AUDIENCE Why?

DAD Because in order to live in the present we have to be able to imagine a future that will be better than the past.

AUDIENCE Why?

DAD Because that's what hope is and without hope we can't go on.

AUDIENCE Why?

DAD Because...can you just put your seatbelt on and stop asking 'why'?

AUDIENCE Why?

DAD Because we're going to the hospital.

AUDIENCE Why?

DAD Because that's where your mother is.

AUDIENCE Why?

DAD Because she hurt herself.

AUDIENCE Why?

DAD Because she's sad.

AUDIENCE Why?

DAD I don't know.

AUDIENCE Why?

DAD I just don't.

AUDIENCE Why?

DAD Put on your seatbelt.

AUDIENCE Why?

DAD Because your mother is in hospital.

AUDIENCE Why?

DAD Because –

*The NARRATOR struggles to find the right words.*

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Because she can't see anything worth living for.

AUDIENCE Why?

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NARRATOR At least, that's how I like to remember it. But we actually sat in silence. The truth is, Dad was a man of few words. The only thing he said to me was:

*The NARRATOR feeds DAD the following line:*

DAD Your Mother's done something stupid.

NARRATOR And I didn't know what that meant.

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At the hospital, Mum saw me and said 'not him.' So I sat in the corridor next to a nice old couple...

*(to the OLD COUPLE) Hello!*

*The NARRATOR sits next to an OLD COUPLE in the audience.*

...who bought me a carton of juice and some chocolate from the machine.

*The NARRATOR acquires a drink and some chocolate from them.*<sup>14</sup>

*(to the OLD COUPLE)* Thank you!

I don't know at what point I had the idea for The List but I know it was here, with the Old People, that I started to write it down.

*The NARRATOR eats and calls out numbers.*

1. Ice cream.
2. Water fights.
3. Staying up past your bedtime and being allowed to watch TV.
4. Things with stripes.
5. Rollercoasters.
6. Super Mario.
7. People falling over.

*The NARRATOR does the following entries themselves:*

8. Chocolate.
9. Juice.
10. Kind old people who aren't weird and don't smell unusual.

*The NARRATOR screws up their face.*

I don't like it.

*The NARRATOR hands the drink and chocolate back to the OLD COUPLE.*

Dad was in with Mum for ages. When he finally came out I followed him down the corridor, I followed him out of the hospital, I followed him to the car park, I followed him into the car, I followed him up the driveway, I followed him in through the front door, I followed him down the hallway, I followed him up the stairs until we reached his study, where he went inside and closed the door, before I could follow him any further.

I waited to see what music he put on.

I knew the rules:

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<sup>14</sup> In performance 'chocolate and juice from a machine' changed depending on what could be acquired from the AUDIENCE - 'a cup of tea and a sandwich' for instance, or 'some water and an apple.' These then have to be included as items 9 and 10. Sometimes the 'juice' that Jonny took from the Old Couple would be wine, which he'd sip, screw-up his face and say something like '*spicy*' before handing it back. Alternatively, the NARRATOR can just hand them the chocolate and juice and immediately take them back again, which is fun.

If it was this woman singing I could go into the room:

*'Stars' by Nina Simone plays, beginning with her vocal.*

If it was the sort of music you could dance to, it was okay to go in but I ran the risk of being hugged and spun around in his chair.

*Some upbeat vocal jazz plays – Cab Calloway perhaps.*

If no one was singing it meant Dad was working, so could go in but I only if I was quiet.

*Some melodic instrumental jazz plays, John Coltrane or Bill Evans perhaps.*

And I should definitely leave him alone if it sounded like all the instruments were just *falling down the stairs*.

*FREE JAZZ by Ornette Coleman plays – loud and chaotic. After a moment it fades to silence.*

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So, standing outside his door, I waited to see what he put on.

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*FREE JAZZ by Ornette Coleman plays. After a moment it fades.*

I went downstairs and made myself some dinner. A ham and mayo sandwich. Just without the ham.<sup>15</sup> I sat down in front of the TV and continued with The List.

It occurred to me The List should be presented in no particular order. There was no way of saying that, for example, *Miss Piggy* was objectively better than Spaghetti Bolognaise.

23. Miss Piggy.<sup>16</sup>
24. Spaghetti Bolognaise.
25. Wearing a cape.
26. Peeing in the sea and nobody knows.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Alternatively – *'an egg mayonnaise sandwich. Just without the egg.'*

<sup>16</sup> For Lenny this became *'Fred Flintstone'*, for Daniel this was *'Bart Simpson.'*

<sup>17</sup> For Ambika these became *'The Powerpuff Girls, The Toy Section of the Argos Catalogue', 'Bouncy Castles'* and *'When the car drives through a big puddle and it feels like you're on a water ride.'*

I stayed up late and fell asleep on the rug in the living room. Dad must have carried me upstairs.

That week was tough.

I was sent to the school counsellor, who was actually just Mrs Patterson from the Library.<sup>18</sup> She was a wonderful woman, the sort of person you looked at and immediately trusted.

*The NARRATOR smiles at a woman in the AUDIENCE.*

I'm going to ask you to be Mrs Patterson if that's okay.

I settled onto a beanbag in her room and she asked me how I was feeling.

MRS PATTERSON How are you feeling?

NARRATOR And I said...

*'My Mother's done something stupid.'*

...then turned my back on her.

For a moment everything was silent.  
And then she did a truly remarkable thing.  
A very unexpected, incredibly unusual thing.  
*Even now, I can't quite believe she did it.*

What she did was, she took off her shoe...

*The NARRATOR waits for MRS PATTERSON to take off her shoe.<sup>19</sup>*

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<sup>18</sup> I reworked this section for Lenny to more accurately capture his experience. It became: *In those days, we didn't have 'school counsellors.' 'Pastoral care' wasn't part of the educational culture of the '60s. If you did anything other than sit still and stay quiet you were put on lunchtime detention in the library. Lucky for me, the Librarian at our school was Mrs Patterson. A wonderful woman. The sort of person you looked at and immediately trusted. (The NARRATOR looks at a woman in the AUDIENCE) I'm going to ask you to be Mrs Patterson if that's okay. I'd never been given detention before and I expected a bollocking. But instead, she asked me how I was feeling. (For non-British readers 'bollocking' is a slightly rude word for being really told-off.)*

<sup>19</sup> At one performance it took an incredibly long time for Mrs Patterson to take off her shoe. Jonny acknowledged this, saying *'she liked to create a real sense of dramatic tension. She was a double knoter, that's one of the things we always liked about her, very thorough.'* At another, Mrs Patterson explained that she had a bad toe. Jonny added *'I remember her telling me how worried she was about her toe. It was a skydiving accident wasn't it?'* Mrs Patterson replied *'Yes that's right.'* Jonny then included her in The List: *'165, Mrs Patterson and her extreme sports hobbies.'*

Then she took off her sock.

*The NARRATOR waits for her to take off her sock.*<sup>20</sup>

Then she put the sock on her hand...and it magically became a friendly puppet dog she called – what did you call the sock-dog?

MRS PATTERSON (*says a name, for instance 'Mostyn'*)<sup>21</sup>

NARRATOR Yes! Mostyn! That's it! I remember now! And Mostyn had a last name too, what was Mostyn's last name?<sup>22</sup>

MRS PATTERSON (*says a second name, for instance 'Fitzcarraldo'*)

NARRATOR Mostyn Fitzcarraldo! Of course! How could I forget?

And Mostyn Fitzcarraldo didn't ask annoying questions like '*how are you feeling?*' What Mostyn Fitzcarraldo did was...he *told a joke*.

PUPPET (*tells joke*)<sup>23</sup>

NARRATOR It was hard to stay grumpy after that.

*(to the Puppet)* What kind of dog are you?

PUPPET (*specifies breed of dog*)

NARRATOR No way! I used to have a dog. He was called Indiana Bones, and he was my best friend. He was a cross between a [*breed Puppet specified*] and a [*funny breed to combine with that breed*], so he was [*characteristic of the first breed*] but also

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<sup>20</sup> So far, almost nobody has refused to do this. In climates where socks are less common, Mrs Patterson makes the puppet from something else, like in India and Bangladesh where they sometimes use the material from a saree.

<sup>21</sup> Depending on the name, the pronouns should change.

<sup>22</sup> When practicing this interaction in London, our brilliant associate Munotida Chinyanga would always give her sock dog both a first and last name, and Minnie Driver loved this so insisted her Mrs Patterson's puppets also had a first and last name. We took this on with Daniel on Broadway too and the combination of names was always vivid and ridiculous – '*Sparky Blumenthal*', '*Dougie Pupperton*', '*Fluff McGuinness*'... I've mentioned the importance of the Associates (the 'Paddys') previously but want to use the rest of this footnote to namecheck the team from London and New York as their work was fundamental to the success of the show and there were also all just incredibly wonderful people – Paddy Gervers, Joe Lichtenstein, Munotida Chinyanga, David Hull, Laura Dupper. Legends, all.

<sup>23</sup> Most people have at least one joke memorised, but if they struggle, others around them will usually help out.

[*characteristic of second breed*].<sup>24</sup> He's 164 on The List. Even though he isn't alive anymore, he's still a brilliant thing. Have I told you about my list?

PUPPET No, tell me about it.<sup>25</sup>

NARRATOR I'm making a list of everything that's brilliant about the world. I'm not certain but I think I might be a genius. What do you think?

*The conversation lasts as long as feels right.*<sup>26</sup>

At the end of that session, I got sad again. I'd loved talking with Mrs Patterson and Mostyn Fitzcarraldo, and I didn't know if I'd be allowed to come back. But Mrs Patterson said:

MRS PATTERSON You can come back any time.

NARRATOR By the time Mum came home from the hospital, The List was eight pages long and had over three hundred things on it. I left it on her pillow with the title:

*'Every Brilliant Thing.'*

She never mentioned it to me, but I knew she'd read it because she'd corrected my spelling.

When I next saw Mrs Patterson, she gave me a library card and a stack of books she hoped I'd like. And I did. I loved every one of them. I'd go to the library and talk with Mostyn Fitzcarraldo every lunchtime. Then it became once week. Then every few

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<sup>24</sup> Daniel had a real gift for this – *'He was a cross between a German Shepard and a Pug, so he was regal like a German Shepard but also squished like a Pug.'* Jonny would relish making the oddest possible combination, often of animals of incredibly different sizes or temperaments - a Dachshund and a Great Dane, or a Poodle and a Bernese Mountain Dog, for example, then try to describe what the dog looked like and struggle, allowing us to try to imagine it for ourselves. He'd also sometimes tell a story about the dog's parents – *'he was a cross between a Border Collie and a Doberman, because a Border Collie and a Doberman lived next door in our street and there was a very low hedge.'*

<sup>25</sup> Or occasionally *'yes, you've told me all about it'* to which the NARRATOR can reply with something like *'well, I'd still like to recap.'*

<sup>26</sup> Daniel would often ask *'If you could be a genius of anything, what would you be a genius of?'* Often Mrs Patterson would say something that he could refer back to later in the play.

months. And, eventually, I left the school and didn't see her or Mostyn Fitzcarraldo again.

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I don't want it to sound like Mum was a monster or that my childhood was miserable because it *wasn't*.

We had a piano in our kitchen! And we'd gather around it and sing old soul songs.

*Ray Charles' song 'DROWN IN MY OWN TEARS' fades up slowly as the NARRATOR talks.*

There's a Ray Charles song that Mum loved to play, purely for the way he sings the word 'YOU.'

*We hear this moment – the drums building and Ray Charles singing 'why can't YOU...' The song continues, quieter.*

It gets me every time. We'd all stand around the piano and howl it like wolves.

313. Having a piano in the kitchen.

314. The way Ray Charles sings the word 'You.'<sup>27</sup>

*Ray Charles continues to play for a few moments longer. The NARRATOR listens. It fades to silence.*

I forgot about The List until her second attempt, just over ten years later.

Dad showed up at school, halfway through Chemistry. The same trapdoor feeling. Fight or flight or stay still as you can. The same wordless drive to the hospital.

As a teenager I dealt with it *less well*. I wore my heart on my sleeve.

The night she came home, she sat at the kitchen table and said that if it wasn't for the ham and pineapple pizza lining her stomach from the night before she'd be dead. And I said:

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<sup>27</sup> Sometimes the reader of 314 will voluntarily sing the word 'YOU', which should be rewarded.

*'Mum – you took everything in the medicine cabinet, including supplements and antihistamines – you're probably now healthier than I am. If you're going to kill yourself, go jump off a cliff.'*

And I didn't storm off. I just sat there and started to shovel food into my mouth. I'd spent ages making this meal for her and I was furious that she was sitting there, wishing she was dead and letting it go cold.

There was a moment of absolute, deafening silence. And then she started to laugh. It was such a genuine laugh that after a while I found myself joining in. It was *Dad* who left the table, going into his study to listen to records.

I couldn't sleep that night. I started to clear out my room, packing up the things I wanted to keep and throwing away the things I didn't.

I started shaking. Have you ever had that?<sup>28</sup> Where you notice your hands are shaking and your breathing is deeper and you're surrounded by bin bags full of your things and you realise that, you know, *I'm upset*. I must be *really* upset.

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And then, inside a box under my bed, underneath some Calvin and Hobbes books and a Beanie Baby<sup>29</sup>, I found – *The List*. I sat on the floor and I read it through.

1. Ice cream.

The younger me had dealt with this so much better. The younger me wasn't self-righteous. They were hopeful. Naïve, of course. But, hopeful.

Once I got to the end of *The List* I picked up a pen and continued from where that little boy had left off.

315. The smell of old books.

316. Michael J. Fox.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> It's nice to ask this question to someone specific in the audience.

<sup>29</sup> This was Daniel's addition. We liked the detail that it is *one* Beanie Baby. Other performers found *The List* underneath some stickers or seashells, an Action Man, a Tamagotchi or a Boba Fett.

<sup>30</sup> Or anyone who is uncontroversially, universally loved. Keanu Reeves? Dolly Parton? David Attenborough? Meryl Streep? Sigourney Weaver? Michael J. Fox was Daniel's

- 317. Toasted sandwich makers.<sup>31</sup>
- 318. The even-numbered Star Trek films.
- 319. A much-needed sneeze.
- 320. Making up after an argument.

The next morning I sat at the end of Mum’s bed and I read The List to her, and she got up and left the room. I followed her and read louder.

- 516. Winning something.
- 517. Knowing someone well enough to get them to check your teeth for broccoli.

Over the next few days and weeks I would leave messages on the answering machine. I would turn off the radio or stand in front of the TV. I spent a lot of time talking to her back.

- 518. When idioms coincide with real-life occurrences, for instance: waking up, realising something and simultaneously smelling coffee.
- 521. The word ‘blurb.’<sup>32</sup>

I began leaving Post-It notes around the house, stuck to various things. On her mirror was:

- 575. When a concert crowd keeps singing the melody after the band have left the stage.

On the kettle:

- 654. The uncanny sensation of being on a train and absent-mindedly watching the world go by as you pull out of the station only to realise it was the train *next* to yours that was moving and you’re back in the station, were *always* in the station, haven’t moved at all, and for a disorienting moment you fully comprehend the fallibility of the mind, how our perception of reality is nothing but a flawed, patchwork interpretation based on assumptions

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addition – someone who was very meaningful during his childhood and continued to be an inspiring force for good in the world.

<sup>31</sup> Or ‘Bank Holidays’ or ‘Homemade Walkie-Talkies’ or, for Lenny who is the child of Caribbean immigrants, ‘Saturday Soup’. We also changed Lenny’s 318 to ‘Lieutenant Uhura’ who was a significant character in his teenage years. Brilliantly performed by Nichelle Nichols, Uhura was groundbreaking for representation of Black people on TV.

<sup>32</sup> Or ‘goggles.’ For Daniel, it became ‘pumpnickel.’ Ambika suggested ‘blurb’ and it’s pay-off later in the play. See 28.

and prejudices and that we can never be truly certain of *anything*, which should be terrifying but is actually strangely liberating and feels like the mind being able to see itself, yet came from a moment of its own failure.

And on her bed:

11. Bed.

Every morning I would open my door and I would see a small stack of yellow squares of paper.

I became more inventive, writing on the inside of cereal packets or shoes, carving words into fruit or rearranging the fridge magnets.

201. Hammocks.

...inside the lid of some mustard. And, stenciled onto a hairbrush:

324. The look on a dog's face as it leans out of the window of a moving car.<sup>33</sup>

It became my aim to reach a thousand, so I set myself some rules:

- a. *No repetition.*
- b. *Things had to be genuinely wonderful and life affirming.*
- c. *Not too many material items.*

For a few months The List became my sole focus.

761. The etymology of the word *'helicopter'*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Or *'The point in a friendship when it becomes okay for someone to take chips off your plate without asking.'* Another Ambika alternate: *'Parents Evening, because if you're good at school, it's literally just an evening of scheduled compliments.'* This was a controversial entry in rehearsal – my co-director, Jeremy Herrin, was convinced that we should cut it. His experience of parents evening was not so great and he felt it wouldn't resonate with an audience. When, on first preview, the entry received a round of applause, Ambika turned to Jeremy in triumph, something she managed to do at every single preview, no matter where Jeremy was sitting in the house. On press night, she gave the entry to him to read.

<sup>34</sup> And another. For some performers, this was *'Deciding you're not too old to climb trees'* but during rehearsal Ambika talked about this and we decided to include it, partly because *'The etymology of the word 'helicopter''* is a satisfying sentence, and partly because it was a fun moment to ask the audience if anyone knew the etymology. If someone said yes, they were invited to explain it to everyone, if not, Ambika would explain herself that, while you

823. Skinny-dipping.

Then, the week before I left for University:

992. Knowing to jangle keys at the wildlife park if you want the otters to come out.

993. Having dessert as a main course.

994. Hairdressers who listen to what you want.

995. Buster Keaton, oblivious as a house falls towards him, but standing in the perfect spot to pass safely through a window.

996. Really good oranges.

I started to be bothered by the thought that my Mum no longer loved my Dad. I put the thought out of my mind and returned to The List.

997. Being on a dancefloor when they activate a disco-ball.

998. Cycling downhill.

It's natural to want to find a *reason* – a simple explanation why someone would try to end their life.

999. Sunlight.

But can it ever be reduced to a simple reason '*why?*'

,

In the first week of University, I posted The List to my Mum. *Anonymously*.<sup>35</sup> When I returned home that Christmas I found it on my desk, neatly folded back in its envelope. I still don't know whether or not she had read it. It certainly hadn't seemed to change her outlook.

I put The List between the pages of one of my favourite books – one I'd been given by Mrs Patterson – and I forgot about it.

That Christmas was quiet. Difficult.

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may assume that the word is a combination of 'heli' and 'copter' its origins are actually in the Greek words 'helico' (spiral) and 'pter' (one with wings – which also forms the beginning of 'pterodactyl'). Brilliant, right?

<sup>35</sup> This is one of my favourite jokes in the show, despite the fact it doesn't always get a laugh. In evening shows Jonny sometimes added '*they don't laugh at that in the matinees.*'

In the New Year, Dad drove me back to University. He gave me a box of his records.

I wanted to ask him 'why?' But I knew better than that.

*Music plays – Erroll Garner's 'MISTY.' The NARRATOR sits next to DAD.*

The whole journey we didn't say a word. We just listened to the radio.

*They listen for a while.*

At University, I was quite shy. I didn't socialise. I'd mostly just sit alone in my room, listening to records.

*He listens to the music for a moment, before it fades to silence.*

I would even avoid lectures and seminars. But there was one teacher whose lectures I never missed. It was actually reading their book reviews and articles that lead me to choose the course I did. I knew that they would be inspiring the moment I first saw their author's photo.

*The NARRATOR describes the LECTURER, first with general observations 'they were younger than you'd expect' or 'they were approachable but authoritative' then getting more and more specific – 'they were academic yet fashion-forward', or 'they looked like they belonged more at a Phish concert than in the fusty halls of academia', then describing something very specific about their appearance – 'they had a devil-may-care attitude to colour-coordination, which is so refreshing in academia', or 'they wore leopard-print leggings and had the kind of posture that said, sure I can deliver a treatise on early romantic fiction, but I also run a Pilates class five times a week' or 'famously amongst their students, they were never without their pastel-coloured sweater and their Sesame Street themed scarf' etc. They should do all this without looking at the person who perfectly matches the description, then be astonished when they spot them, to the point of doing a double-take.*

I'm sorry, but – would you mind being my Lecturer? It's just because you really look like them.<sup>36</sup>

*The NARRATOR gives them a copy of 'The Sorrows of Young Werther' and gets them to stand.*

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<sup>36</sup> If the audience is in-the-round, it will dawn on them by the end of the description who is about to be called-upon. In a more end-on proscenium set-up, such as the Hudson Theatre on Broadway where Dan performed the play, the laugh comes as the LECTURER is brought up onstage and the audience sees, for the first time, how accurately they fit the description. The LECTURER can be any gender.

This particular lecture was on ‘The Sorrows of Young Werther’ by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. And they began the way they always did, by holding the book aloft...

*The LECTURER holds up the book.*

...leaving a long, dramatic pause as they made eye-contact with everyone in the room, and when they were sure they had everyone’s full attention...they would give a very accurate and detailed précis<sup>37</sup> of the entire novel.

*The NARRATOR sits in the audience and waits. Eventually, the LECTURER realises they can simply read the back of the book.<sup>38</sup>*

LECTURER        *The Sorrows of Young Werther is a key work of early Romanticism. It was an immediate bestseller, but was also banned in several countries after it was blamed for a rise in suicides. It influenced writers from Mary Shelley to Thomas Mann...*

NARRATOR        Excuse me?

*The NARRATOR puts their hand up to ask a question.*

I’m sorry to interrupt. But – did you just say that this book was blamed for a *rise in suicides*?

LECTURER        Yes.

NARRATOR        Okay. Wow. Okay. Sorry for interrupting, please carry on.

LECTURER        *While visiting an idyllic German village, Werther, a sensitive young man, meets and...*

*The NARRATOR’S hand is up again.*

NARRATOR        Sorry, me again! It’s just that...are you really saying that this book, that *books in general*, actually have that power?

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<sup>37</sup> Or ‘synopsis’ if ‘précis’ is too European.

<sup>38</sup> If they got really desperate, Dan would sometimes bound back onto stage and just turn their book around so they could read off the back. Or, in Ambika’s version, she would shout out ‘521’ and the AUDIENCE member with that card would repeat ‘*the word ‘blurb’.*’ On more than one occasion the person selected to be the LECTURER did, in fact, have a detailed knowledge of the book and was able to give a lengthy and detailed summary of the plot and main themes of the novella.

LECTURER Yes.

NARRATOR Wow. Okay. Please, carry on.

LECTURER *Werther, a sensitive young man, meets and falls in love with sweet-natured Charlotte. But Charlotte is to marry Albert, and Werther's unrequited passion torments him to the point of despair.*

*The NARRATOR'S hand is up again.*

NARRATOR So, presumably, films, tv shows, songs, the media and public figures can also all negatively impact us without us even realising – causing us to make decisions that aren't purely our own, and which might be harmful to us?

LECTURER Yes.

NARRATOR *(to the AUDIENCE)* My mind was fizzing! Ever since I was little I'd wanted to understand *why* my mum had done what she did. And here was a possible answer. Or, at least, part of one. *(to the LECTURER)* Sorry, go ahead.

LECTURER *Werther's –*

NARRATOR I left the lecture...

*The NARRATOR takes the novel back, thanks the LECTURER and indicates for them to sit down.*

And I ran straight to the library *(in a stage whisper)* sorry! I ran straight to the library *(stops whispering)* and read-up on 'social contagions'; divorce, bullying, suicide – they're all things we can be subconsciously influenced into doing.

It is vital that we talk about mental health. To remove the stigma around depression and suicide. But we must be very cautious about how we talk about it.

Did you know, in the month after Marilyn Monroe's death by overdose, the number of suicides among Americans increased by *twelve percent*? Every time suicide is front-page news, every time a celebrity or even a fictional character in a mainstream tv series takes their own life there is a spike in the number of suicides.

*Suicide is contagious.*

It's called the 'Werther Effect', named after Goethe's protagonist.

Discovering this fact really scared me. Then I felt *empowered*. If everyone knew how easily influenced we are, we might question our certainty at a moment that could *save our lives*.

Then, I got angry. I looked at the way suicide is presented in films and on TV, how it's reported in the news, how we talk to each other online. And it seemed so *careless*.

I found that the Samaritans had published a set of guidelines for how the media can report suicide responsibly. But it's shocking how rarely their advice is followed.<sup>39</sup>

The guidelines are really simple, I'd like to read a few of them to you.

*The NARRATOR takes out a piece of paper.*

Avoid dramatic headlines, terms like 'suicide epidemic' or 'hot spot.'

Avoid sensationalist pictures or video. Avoid excessive detail.

Avoid using the word 'commit.' Don't describe deaths by suicide as 'successful.'

Don't publish suicide notes.

Don't publish on the front page.

Don't ignore the complex realities of suicide and its impacts on those left behind.

Include references to support groups, such as the Samaritans.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The Samaritans published their guidelines (available to read in full on their website) in 1994. When the NARRATOR is played by someone who would've been at university or college before then, and who wants to be very accurate about the timeline, this section becomes:

*...we might question our certainty at a moment that could save our lives. But, despite us knowing about this phenomenon since the 1700s, as I sat there in the library, there was almost no research I could find on it. It was [insert number] years before the Samaritans published a set of guidelines for how the media can report suicide responsibly. Even then, it's astonishing how rarely their advice is followed. The guidelines are really simple...*

<sup>40</sup> In America we would add 'or 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.'

Don't speculate on the reason. That's crucial. Don't supply simplistic reasons such as 'he'd lost his job' or 'she'd recently become bankrupt.'

We can never truly know 'why.'

*The NARRATOR pauses, considering this last statement. Having rushed to the library in the hope of finding an answer, they struggle with this conclusion.*

I read the book. *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. It was shit.<sup>41</sup> Well, I didn't connect with it. I'd never been very interested in romance. Or at least, I hadn't been. Until I locked eyes with the only other person who was always in the library.

*'At Last' by Etta James begins to play and the NARRATOR locks eyes with an AUDIENCE MEMBER. This is now SAM.<sup>42</sup> The music continues.<sup>43</sup>*

For weeks we had found ourselves sitting opposite one another. Occasionally we'd make eye-contact but then immediately look away as if we'd been blinded by the sun.

*The NARRATOR demonstrates this, ideally in a way that encourages SAM to do the same.*

For the first time in my life I understood the lyrics of pop songs.

And then finally, after weeks, I summoned-up the courage to say hello.

*The NARRATOR slowly makes their way towards SAM, pausing mid-way to ask the person who read 517 to check their teeth for broccoli, then offloading 'The Sorrows of Young Werther' to someone else, because it's a buzz-kill.*

Can you just...deal with this?<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Perhaps the NARRATOR apologises to the LECTURER here.

<sup>42</sup> SAM can be any gender. For the purpose of this I've use she/her pronouns. Jonny and Dan would cast both men and women and non-binary people in the role, depending on who they thought would be the best for that performance.

<sup>43</sup> There's a lot of fun to be had here for delaying the reveal of who will play Sam, then flirtatious glances, bashful waving, sharing their excitement and nervousness with other people in the audience etc.

<sup>44</sup> Dan would also ask someone how his hair was and invite them to fix it for him. When asking if there was broccoli in his teeth he'd sometimes add *'they're still English, so there's only so much I can do.'*

*The NARRATOR reaches SAM and is about to say something, then suddenly turns to the person sitting next to them.*

Can I move you?

*The NARRATOR gets the person next to SAM (ideally their real-life partner) to vacate their seat and move to the other side of the room. Once relocated, the NARRATOR turns to SAM.<sup>45</sup>*

Is anyone sitting here?

SAM Not anymore.

NARRATOR Oh good!

*The NARRATOR sits down in the empty seat, perhaps giving a wink/thumbs-up to the relocated partner.*

Hello.

SAM Hello.

NARRATOR What's your name?

*The AUDIENCE MEMBER says their name.*

No, it's Sam.

SAM Sam.

NARRATOR Nice to meet you Sam! What are you reading?

*The NARRATOR addresses the AUDIENCE.*

Oh, I forgot, does anyone have a book? We're in the library so I need a couple of books.

*If someone offers 'The Sorrows of Young Werther':*

Not that one.

*The NARRATOR gets a couple of books from the AUDIENCE and hands one to SAM.*

What are you reading?

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<sup>45</sup> Lenny would do a hilariously confident slow walk to SAM. Ambika would do a little hop off the stage and lean on the back of the absent chair flirtatiously.

*SAM reads the title of the book.*<sup>46</sup>

What's it about?

*SAM reads the back of the book or guesses from context clues.*

Sounds really good. I'm reading...

*The NARRATOR tells SAM what he's reading, trying really hard to flirt.*

It's really...it's great. You really should read it. In fact, why don't I lend it to you? And I could read...

*The NARRATOR says the title of SAM's book.*

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<sup>46</sup> The book that SAM is reading does a lot to establish their character. Books that have been contributed by the AUDIENCE include *God's Gift To Women*, *The Catcher In The Rye*, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, *The Denial of Death* and *The Bible*. The best-case scenario for this sequence is if SAM is reading the perfect book to start a flirtatious conversation – *Jane Eyre* or *Romeo and Juliet* or *All About Love* for instance - and the NARRATOR is reading something that is the exact opposite. Performers can then interact with the people who had supplied the books to comment on their suitability for seduction – giving them a big thumbs-up or a look of exasperation. In Edinburgh, 2024, Jonny was given Michiko Aoyama's *What You Are Looking For Is in the Library* – a title so perfect for this moment it got a round of applause. Most often though, performers have a real struggle to make the book they've been given sound exciting or romantic, which is always funny to watch. Real buzz-kill books have included *In My Dreams I Hold a Knife* and *The Psychopath Test* and an academic textbook on cement. In one performance in New York he was given an *enormous* hardback history of Manhattan's sewage system. 'It's really...great' he enthused: 'You'd be surprised just how much there is to say about the history of Manhattan's sewage system. If you're going to read one book about the history of Manhattan's sewage system, it really should be this one.' He asked SAM if he had read the book and when he said he hadn't he replied 'no, of course not. no one has.' At one performance, Jonny was given *Nana* by Émile Zola, in French, prompting him to turn to the person who'd contributed it and say 'aren't you clever?' and then add 'it's funny, for a minute I forgot I could speak French.' He then turned to the person who had contributed the book and began to discuss it with them *in French*, a language he can actually speak fluently. In the moment it felt like a moment of pure magic – as if the play's internal logic – his character has a book in French, so he must be a French speaker – enabled him to actually speak it. The conversation was cut short, however, by the sign-interpreter who was translating the performance and having a tough enough time as it was. During a press night performance he was given a copy of *Macbeth*, giving him a dilemma of whether or not to say the title out loud, given the circumstances. Once, Jonny was given a copy of my play *Lungs* which was playing in the same theatre. Aware that I was sitting directly behind him he explained 'his plays are okay I suppose but, for me, they're all about the central performance.' Sometimes, contributed books are hilariously on-the-nose, thematically, such as *The Bell Jar* and *You're Not Crazy It's Your Mother* and *My Mother's Funeral* – a play by Kelly Jones which was performed after this one in Edinburgh. Daniel was frequently offered books from a film franchise he'd been in, but always declined them.

...and then we could meet up and talk about them? Perhaps over coffee or something? Only if you'd like to.

SAM

Okay.

NARRATOR

I had a date! We said we'd get coffee but she took me for *waffles!* We talked and talked until the place closed, then I walked her back to her student house – but we were *still talking* so *she* walked *me* back to my halls of residence – but we were still talking so I walked her back to her place again and I can't remember how I finally got home but I think I must have floated.

For the next few months it became a ritual – meeting at the library, swapping our favourite books, sharing waffles. I read things I would *never* have chosen myself but which made me see the world in all these new, unexpected, extraordinary ways. I probably learned more from the books Sam gave me than from any of my course texts.<sup>47</sup>

Then one day, Sam returned a book to me and said:

*The NARRATOR encourages SAM to repeat the following.*

*Really* interesting read

SAM

*Really* interesting read.

NARRATOR

There's something *really interesting* in this book.

SAM

There's something *really interesting* in this book.

NARRATOR

That I want you to read.

SAM

That I want you to read.

NARRATOR

And I didn't know what that meant. I'd already read the book. It was one of my childhood favourites, given to me by Mrs Patterson! *I'd* lent it to *her*. Because I was so new to this, I didn't work out that it was *code* until *weeks later*, when I opened the book and The List dropped out.

I was mortified. I'd never told anyone about my Mum. Ever. As a kid there were times when I'd have nothing in my lunchbox or I wouldn't have socks on or something and I...I didn't want people to think because my Mum was...I don't know. And out of context this was just a stupid, childish list. The idea that *a list of nice*

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<sup>47</sup> Perhaps another moment to apologise to the LECTURER.

*things* could combat hardwired depression was embarrassingly naïve. Sam was going to run a mile. And I was only just realising how lonely I'd been without her. I got so upset I went to rip The List in half, and then...I noticed someone else's handwriting.

*The NARRATOR says each number.<sup>48</sup> SAM reads all the entries.*

- 1000. When someone lends you books.
- 1001. When someone actually reads the books you give them.
- 1002. When you learn something about someone that surprises you but which makes complete sense.
- 1003. Realising that for the first time in your life someone is occupying your every waking thought, making it hard to eat or sleep or concentrate, and that they feel familiar to you even though they're brand new.
- 1004. Finding an opportunity to say this without having to be in the same room at the same time, because you're both painfully shy and if you don't say something now, your heart is going to burst.
- 1005. Writing about *yourself* in the Second Person.

*The NARRATOR takes the paper from SAM.*

If anyone here, now or in the future, feels like they have truly lost all hope, please – don't give up.<sup>49</sup>

The moment you are in won't last forever. Things *can* get better.

They might not always get brilliant.

*The NARRATOR indicates SAM.*

But they can get better.

,

I stared at what Sam had written. For, like, three hours.

Eventually, I continued from where they'd left off.

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<sup>48</sup> It's nice if '1000' is called out to the room and it's only when SAM starts speaking that the NARRATOR realises that it's them.

<sup>49</sup> At one performance in Chicago, before Jessie Fisher (who was playing the NARRATOR) began to give this advice and an audience member beat her to it, shouting 'don't do it!' Jessie looked at her and said 'that's right.' The woman was in tears and Jessie went to sit with her and asked if anyone had any Kleenex or snacks or even wine that they could share and offerings came from all around the room.

1006. Surprises.  
1007. The fact that sometimes there is a perfect song to match how you're feeling.

*Music begins: 'MOVE ON UP' by Curtis Mayfield.*

1008. Dancing in private.  
1009. Dancing in public, fearlessly.  
1010. Reading something which articulates exactly how you feel but lacked the words to express yourself.

I wrote late into the night.

1427. Not worrying about how much you're spending on holiday because all international currency looks like Monopoly money.

I wanted to get to 2000 and kept writing as the sun came up.

1654. When you think about someone random and they message you out of the blue.  
1655. The expression 'out of the blue'.<sup>50</sup>

So much to include that my hand cramped up.

1857. Planning a declaration of love.

My morning alarm went off but I'd not slept. I passed –

2000. Coffee.

With:

2001. The film '2001: A Space Odyssey'.<sup>51</sup>

And I kept going.

*The NARRATOR does the following entries themselves, at speed:*

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<sup>50</sup> These two were always 'Christopher Walken's voice. Christopher Walken's hair' but these are two alternates some performers used in the West End.

<sup>51</sup> For a long time this was 'Films that are better than the books they are based on' which was a too-clever reference to the Stanley Kubrick film '2001: A Space Odyssey' and the Arthur C. Clark short story 'The Sentinel' that it was based on. It was so subtle even Jonny didn't get it in the hundreds of performances he gave of the play, so we changed it to simply '2001. The Film 2001: A Space Odyssey.' I was tempted to reinstate it here because, unlike during performance, I have these increasingly arduous footnotes where I can painstakingly explain jokes that only I seem to find funny.

2002. Seeing someone make it onto the train just as the doors are closing, making eye-contact and sharing in this little victory.
2003. This song. Especially the drums on this track, the single ends at around four minutes but the album version continues for another five minutes and has the most insane drum break involving a full kit, bongos and cowbell. In fact...
2004. Any song with an extended drum break involving a full kit, bongos and cowbell, have you heard *'I'm a Man'* by Chicago?
2005. *'I'm a Man'* by Chicago.
2006. Vinyl records. I'm not being pretentious, the sound quality is better, it isn't compressed and it's tactile, you get to feel the weight of it in your hands. You can't skip or shuffle, you listen through to the entire album. Dad's room had records on every surface and I loved the gatefold artwork, reading through the acknowledgments and the sleeve notes, the story of the making of the music.

Later that morning, I took *The List* and I ran to the library and Sam and I kissed for the very first time.<sup>52</sup>

From that moment on we spent every second with each other. I kept writing new list entries, every day as a gift for Sam.

*The NARRATOR continues with The List entries themselves:*

2389. Hedgehogs.<sup>53</sup>

*The NARRATOR places their hand on someone's shoulder, as if the following entry is about them.*

2390. People who can't sing but either don't know or don't care.

Pages and pages of it.

4997. Gifts that you actually want and didn't ask for.

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<sup>52</sup> Kakki Teodoro, who performed this play in the Philippines, took this line literally – non-verbally getting her 'Sams' consent for an actual kiss. If she felt they weren't into it, she'd just blow them an air kiss. But more often than not (she tells me 'at least 90% of the time') they'd *really* go for it.

<sup>53</sup> For Ambika, this became 'Tiny Tattoos.'

4998. Falling asleep as soon as you get on a plane,  
waking up when you land and feeling like you've  
teleported.

Everywhere I looked, everything I thought about...

9,993. Waffles.  
9,994. Smiling so much your cheeks ache.  
9,995. Falling in love.  
9,996. Sex.  
9,997. Being cooked for.  
9,998. Watching someone watching your favourite film.  
9,999. Staying up all night talking.  
10,000. Waking up late with someone you LOVE!

*The drum-break kicks in.*

This is the drum break I was telling you about! I know what  
you're thinking: 'how many *limbs* does this drummer have?'  
'There is no earthly way this can get even better!' But wait for it,  
because you're about to hear...

*The NARRATOR waits for it.*

...*BONGOS!* You are not getting into this the way I anticipated.  
Alright, here's what we're going to do – ACTIVATE THE DISCO  
BALL!<sup>54</sup>

*A disco ball is activated.*

Now everyone put your right hand in the air!

*Everyone raises their right hand.*

I'm going to HIGH-FIVE THE ENTIRE ROOM!

*The NARRATOR high-fives as many people as possible.*<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> (paying off 997). It's nice for the NARRATOR to call to the Stage Manager by name here. In London it was either Mary or Morag, in New York it was Jhanaë. While it is a one-person play, there is a whole team around them from rehearsal onwards and everyone gets involved in shouting out entries in rehearsal and being called upon to be the VET, SAM etc. Shout out to the production team.

<sup>55</sup> Performers can find their own version of this. The aim is to bring the whole audience together in a collective moment of euphoria which then tips precariously close to mania. Some initiate a Mexican Wave, others encourage a stage invasion a spontaneous dance party, others dance solo, joyfully, then a little manically. Confetti cannons? Throwing sweets into the balcony like a UK panto? Wavy Arm men? All of these could be included as List entries

Eventually, the NARRATOR signals to the STAGE MANAGER to stop the music.

No, that was a mistake. Much *much* harder than I anticipated.

The NARRATOR is out of breath.

My Mum...

She would do this sort of thing. Get carried away. Lose control.

Big ups. Crashing downs.

,

I read somewhere that children with depressed parents often have a heightened reactivity to stress. That growing-up in a home with parents who are emotionally unavailable or inconsistent can actually change the chemistry of the brain.

But that's not what I'm trying to say.

What I'm trying to say is this:

I wasn't just 'shy.' I'd been trying to stay *constant*. Level. Happiness scared me because it was usually followed by...

...you know.

And this was all very new. Feeling like this.

The NARRATOR looks at SAM.

,

I took Sam home to meet my parents. And they were wonderful. They were amazing. They were fantastic. It was awful. It made it look like I'd exaggerated my entire childhood. Mum laughed a lot and told a story about breaking a guy's nose on a train in Egypt. Dad made lasagna, *from scratch*, and played Cab Calloway records. At the end of the night, for the first time in years, we sat around the piano and sang old soul songs.

---

to set them up before this moment. Daniel would leap off the stage at this moment and run down the aisles and all the way around the auditorium, high-fiving everyone, causing absolute pandemonium.

*The NARRATOR produces an electric keyboard and stands with it in the centre of the room, unsure of how to play it as it doesn't have a stand. Two people from the AUDIENCE are recruited to hold either end of the keyboard.<sup>56</sup> The NARRATOR considers the logistics of the room.*

Um, because we're in the round, we're just going to do a very slow revolve.

Clockwise, obviously.

*The two people from the AUDIENCE do as instructed.*

Mum would always sing first. She sang Ray Charles...

*(SINGS) I'm so blue here without you  
it keeps raining more and more.  
Why can't YOU...<sup>57</sup>*

Dad wouldn't normally sing. But he did this night. It was amazing. I'd never seen anything like it. He sang:

*(SINGS) That's Life. That's what all the people say.  
You're riding high in April, shot down in May.*

oh... and:

*(SINGS) And now the end is near,  
and so I face the final curtain.*

Which, for me, was a little too on the nose.

And then, quite spectacularly:

*(SINGS) Wake me up before you go-go,  
don't leave me hangin' on like a yo-yo.*

Which because he'd clearly never heard it before actually sounded like:

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<sup>56</sup> Daniel would recruit the AUDIENCE members then add 'we could have got a stand but we thought this was more fun.' Neither Ambika or Dan could play piano before rehearsals so learned these pieces using coloured markings. They would point out the markings and confide in the people holding the keyboard that they didn't actually know how to play. Dan would then ask them to 'keep that between us.'

<sup>57</sup> It's nice to encourage the AUDIENCE to sing along with 'YOU' – maybe singing the final line then asking them to join in on it a second time. Dan got the two people holding the keyboard to sing with him here.



777,777. The prospect of dressing-up as a Mexican Wrestler.<sup>61</sup>

Not the *action* of dressing-up as a Mexican Wrestler, but the *prospect* of it.

Sam and I got engaged. A year after university. Sam proposed. Got down on one knee. The whole thing. It was beautiful, it was really – you know what, let's just do it.

*The NARRATOR gets SAM out of their seat.*

We were walking in a park near my parents' house and I was telling her how I used to walk Indiana Bones here when I was little. I thought she'd stopped to tie a shoelace because, when I turned around, she was on one knee.

*The NARRATOR turns around to look at SAM, who is down on one knee.*<sup>62</sup>

She took my hands and said...

SAM Will you marry me?

NARRATOR And I said yes.

Let's kiss later.<sup>63</sup>

We had a wedding!

*Some AUDIENCE MEMBERS throw confetti.*<sup>64</sup> *SAM returns to their seat.*

We picked a date. Hired a hall. Caterers. Band.

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<sup>61</sup> This moment, for Ambika, became *'The prospect of running away to a remote cabin and renouncing Capitalism.'*

<sup>62</sup> In one performance in Edinburgh, the wonderful stand-up Josie Long was chosen to play Sam. At this point, she took a receipt from her pocket, fashioned it into a ring and used it to propose to Jonny. Jonny wore the ring for the rest of the performance.

<sup>63</sup> This line was cut by Kakki in the Philippines, who would, again (with consent), kiss her Sam.

<sup>64</sup> Dhrumil Mavani, who performed the play in Western India told me at this point the entire audience would join in with the Gujarati folk dance 'Garba.' The proposal/wedding plays very differently around the world, of course, particularly regarding women's agency and marriage rights for same-sex couples. Jonny performed the play in New York shortly after same-sex marriage was legalised in all 50 States and when his male Sam proposed there was a spontaneous ovation that halted the show for several minutes.

Everyone was there. Even the Vet. We hadn't invited them, but they still came.<sup>65</sup>

Mum was, thankfully, on great form. Danced with absolutely everyone.

Dad did a speech. It was the most wonderful, beautiful speech I'd heard in my entire life.

And you know Dad, he was a man of few words. I said to him, Dad, you really don't have to say anything. But he said, *no, I really want to. ...*

*The NARRATOR gets a microphone and guides DAD to the centre of the room.*

*...I want to take this opportunity to talk to everyone, so...*

*The NARRATOR speaks into the microphone.*

Without further ado, in a break from tradition, the Father of the Groom!<sup>66</sup>

*The NARRATOR hands the microphone to their DAD, then goes and sits next to SAM.*

Say what's in your heart Dad.

*DAD improvises a speech, after which the NARRATOR hugs them and returns them to their seat.<sup>67</sup>*

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<sup>65</sup> It could be the LECTURER that crashes the wedding, whichever seems more amusing for that particular audience. I really enjoy when SAM is encouraged to wave to the VET, or they shake hands. Ambika and Dan would then have a little private conversation with SAM as they guided them back to their seat, something along the lines of *'they killed my dog, honestly it's so weird that they're here.'*

<sup>66</sup> It's only a break from tradition if the NARRATOR is performed by a man marrying a woman. Jonny and Daniel would often cast male SAMs, so would introduce DAD as *'The Father of a Groom.'*

<sup>67</sup> This is probably the most unpredictable moment of the play. Sometimes it's very brief – *'let's raise a toast to the happy couple'* – sometimes it can last for several minutes. It can be very funny or very emotional, such as the occasion when the DAD ended his speech with the words *'son, you used to always ask me 'why?' and I never had an answer for you. Well, today I know that you have found your answer.'* Despite being impromptu, the speech was the best written thing in the whole play and made the Dad seem like he was a plant – a particular problem as that was the show we were filming for HBO. I spoke to him after the show and asked him how he was so calm and articulate and he said *'oh, I give speeches like this every day.'* Turns out he was a Rabbi.

I remember every word.<sup>68</sup>

After the reception, when most of the guests had gone home,<sup>69</sup>  
Mum sat at the piano and played old soul songs.<sup>70</sup>

*The same snippet of Ray Charles' 'DROWN IN MY OWN TEARS.'*

Sam and I had our honeymoon in Whitstable. We ate the most incredible seafood. We swam every day. Even in the rain.

With our parents help, we bought a little flat above a launderette in Kentish Town.<sup>71</sup> Sam planted window boxes and learned DIY from YouTube tutorials.<sup>72</sup>

I'd sit in the spare room, listening to records and reading through the sleeve notes. The lives of other people have always fascinated me, and the liner notes in record sleeves often detail the trials and traumas behind the music.

Weldon Irvine. Albert Ayler. Ronnie Singer. *Donny Hathaway*. Amazing musicians. All took their own lives.

I was so grateful to be ordinary.

Sam asked what I was doing, sitting all alone. She used the word 'wallowing.' It was our first big fight.

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<sup>68</sup> There's an opportunity here to refer back to something in the speech, particularly if it went a little off-piste. At one London performance, DAD said to Ambika 'we never thought this day would come' and when she took the mic back she asked '*why did you think the day would never come, Dad? What do you mean by that?*' At another performance, the DAD's speech included a breakdown of how much various aspects of the wedding had cost and who was going to pay for it. Jonny took the mic and said '*I remember every word. There was a surprising amount of financial administration.*' At one early performance of the play, the wonderful actor and national treasure Richard Wilson was cast as DAD. Richard included in his speech that if he knew there was going to be audience participation involved, he would've stayed at home. Jonny said '*it was a beautiful speech, albeit pretty 'meta'.*'

<sup>69</sup> Depending on the DAD's speech, this sometimes became '*After the speeches, once we'd all recovered...*'

<sup>70</sup> For Lenny and Daniel, this became '*At the end of the night, Mum joined the wedding band and we all sang together.*' They both then encouraged the audience to sing the word 'You' together.

<sup>71</sup> This should be changed to a specific place in the city/town it's being performed in – ideally somewhere not too posh.

<sup>72</sup> Or, simply: '*taught herself DIY*' if YouTube wouldn't've existed for the performer's timeline.

We were able to navigate all the big, difficult conversations – Money. Whether we should stay in the city or move to the countryside. If we were ready to start a family.

But *this* – this always ended in an argument. Because, honestly, *how dare she?* Knowing what I'd grown up with, how *dare* she try to tell *me* about depression? *ME!*

She said she was walking on eggshells trying to talk to me about it, and I said that's only because, unlike her, I knew what depression really looked like and I knew that I was *fine*.

We got jobs. A car. A joint bank account. A Labrador. Big black dog that followed me everywhere. Which Sam named '*Metaphor*.'

Friends would come over. Sam would organise trips and dates but I just – I didn't always feel up to it. I preferred to stay home.

Sam said *please*, please talk to someone. If not for you, then for *us*.

But I didn't.

She encouraged me to carry on with The List. But I found it hard to notice new things:

826,978.

,

826,978.

,

826,978.

,

The List stalled. Just one-hundred-and-seventy-three-thousand-and-twenty-two short of a million. It was finished. So, I boxed it all up and I threw it away.

,

I sat in my room while Sam packed her things. I helped her carry bags to the car.

That familiar trapdoor feeling. Fight or flight or stand as still as you can.

,

I watched her drive away.

,

She left me a letter, inside a record sleeve. She knew that if I wanted to remember the good times, I'd look for that the Daniel Johnston song she sang at my parents' house and, as always, I'd sit and read through the liner notes.

Her letter said that she loved me, and that when I was ready we could try again.

But I didn't find it for seven years.

,

Perhaps Sam had been right. Perhaps I'd been difficult to live with. Difficult to love. Perhaps there were things I should confront about myself. Try to understand.

But I couldn't hear it from her. I needed to talk to someone else.

So, the night I found Sam's note, I did one of the strangest things I've ever done.

,

Mrs Patterson?

MRS PATTERSON Yes.

NARRATOR I hope you don't mind me calling you so late. I know you've retired, I know this is really inappropriate but – I'm an ex-pupil of yours. I was the little boy with The List. I don't know if you'll remember me...

MRS PATTERSON I remember you.

,

NARRATOR You do?

MRS PATTERSON Yes.

,  
NARRATOR You used to have a puppet, do you remember?

MRS PATTERSON Yes.

NARRATOR Mostyn Fitzcarraldo, wasn't it?

MRS PATTERSON Yes.

NARRATOR I was always able to talk to Mostyn Fitzcarraldo.

,<sup>73</sup>

This may sound strange, but...

Would it be possible to talk to Mostyn Fitzcarraldo now?

*MRS PATTERSON takes off her shoe and sock once again and puts the sock on her hand.*

PUPPET Hello.

NARRATOR Hello Mostyn Fitzcarraldo. How are you?

PUPPET I'm fine, how're you?

,

NARRATOR Well, I'm talking to a sock puppet over the phone, so apparently not great.

,

I'm sad.

I'm really sad, Mostyn Fitzcarraldo and I don't know how to change that.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> It's good to let this moment hang for a moment, to let it dawn on the AUDIENCE what's coming and to give MRS PATTERSON the chance to volunteer to get the PUPPET. Unbelievably, they would, nearly always, take off their sock again at this point, often without being asked. Some would even begin the process as soon as the performer called on them.

<sup>74</sup> This is one of Jeremy's favourite moments in the play – the performer committing to the authentic emotion of the line but also saying the sock puppet's full name. Nanda Mohammad, who performs the play in Arabic in Cairo, told me that at one show, when she said this line she found herself suddenly overwhelmed by emotion and unable to say the next line and her Mrs Patterson said '*remember your List*' then called out '*number 1.*' The person with number

Know any jokes?

*Perhaps the PUPPET tells a joke, perhaps they can't remember any in this moment.*

You knew me better than anyone. Was I always like this or is it new? Do you remember what I was like when I was little?

PUPPET Yes.<sup>75</sup>

NARRATOR Was I happy?

*The NARRATOR leads the PUPPET through a brief conversation until a conclusion is reached that allows the NARRATOR to take the next step.*

Thank you, Mostyn Fitzcarraldo.<sup>76</sup> Could you put Mrs Patterson back on the phone?

MRS PATTERSON Hello.

NARRATOR Hi.

I never thanked you. For being there when I was little. For your patience. For listening.

I've been avoiding talking to someone. Professionally. But I'm starting to think I should give it a try. What do you think?

*MRS PATTERSON gives some advice.*

Thank you. I'm sorry I called so late. I won't call you again.

MRS PATTERSON You can call any time.<sup>77</sup>

NARRATOR Thank you.

---

I yelled 'Ice Cream' and the rest of the audience spontaneously started shouting out their entries. When they got to the end, Mrs Patterson said 'you have to keep going with your List. You have to finish it.' People can be wonderful.

<sup>75</sup> Sometimes MRS PATTERSON describes how the NARRATOR was as a child, which can be really moving.

<sup>76</sup> A 'I was hoping you'd say that' or 'I needed to hear that' often helps here.

<sup>77</sup> There's no guarantee that MRS PATTERSON will say this of course, but when it does happen it's really moving – an unscripted audience member perfectly expressing a core idea of the play: if you need help then ask for it, if you're asked for help then give it. Whatever they say in this moment, the NARRATOR can move on to the next bit.

Good night.

MRS PATTERSON Good night.

,

NARRATOR I did talk to someone.

A group. A support group.

,

Hello everyone.

*The NARRATOR indicates for everyone to respond.*

AUDIENCE Hello.

NARRATOR This is my first session. I've resisted doing this.

I'm –

you know,

,

*British.*<sup>78</sup>

No. Sorry. I do that. Make jokes. Use facts. Anything to avoid saying how I really feel. But I'm starting to realise that it's important to talk about things. Particularly the things that are hardest to talk about.

When I was younger I was much better at being happy.

At noticing little things worth living for.

I even made a list! Everything that was brilliant about the world.

I started making it as a present for my Mum. The List began after her first attempt...it's kind of a long story.

---

<sup>78</sup> Or 'A man', if the performer is a man. Lenny occasionally went for 'Jamaican.' Wherever it's being performed, there will be some demographic or cultural or generational thing the performer can refer to about themselves that would explain their character's hesitance to pursue therapy.

I threw The List away, years ago.

But, unbeknownst to me, my partner at the time rescued it...

*The NARRATOR looks at SAM.*

...and hid it in the attic under an old tablecloth.<sup>79</sup>

*The NARRATOR exits the stage, then returns with a trolley on which sit several large, heavy, worn boxes.*

I found a note about it in the sleeve of a Curtis Mayfield record...

*They open one of the boxes. It is full of scraps of paper – The List – written on pages of colouring books, on receipts and beer mats, on the backs of envelopes etc. The NARRATOR takes a moment to just look at it, then carefully takes out a stack and reads an entry at random.<sup>80</sup>*

Peeling off a sheet of wallpaper in one intact piece.<sup>81</sup>

*The NARRATOR drops the stack, letting The List scatter onto the floor, then takes out more and reads.*

Swearwords used as a term of endearment.

‘Thumbs.’

*The NARRATOR lets those scatter to the floor, then holds up a sleeve from a shirt and reads what’s written on it:*

My new sleeveless top.<sup>82</sup>

*Drops it onto the floor. Reads more.*

Thunderstorms.

---

<sup>79</sup> Or – ‘in a cupboard behind some paint cans.’

<sup>80</sup> There’s an opportunity here to respond in the moment to the entries they’re finding and not to plan what will be read out.

<sup>81</sup> Perhaps this is written on an intact sheet of wallpaper.

<sup>82</sup> An early version of this was taken to Latitude Festival and people there were encouraged to add things to The List. During a performance, years later, Jonny pulled the sleeve out of the box and read it out – clearly a contribution from a stranger during that festival, and we liked it so much we kept it. Alternative entries for this section in New York included: ‘*the look on a dog’s face as it leans out the window of a moving car*’ or ‘*pretending you love cilantro because the person you love loves cilantro*’ or ‘*when the windshield wipers wipe to the beat of the song.*’

Birdsong.

Old people holding hands.<sup>83</sup>

,

*The NARRATOR looks at us.*

If you live a long life and get to the end of it without ever once feeling crushingly depressed, then you probably weren't paying attention.

,

I wasn't around for the last time. I was in Australia with work and, when I got the call, I was on the beach.

Back home, it was the middle of the night. Before Dad said a word, I knew.

I'll spare you the details. The 'how' isn't important. And the 'why', it turns out, is unknowable.

I flew home. I drove Dad to the funeral. We sat in silence. He smoked with the window down. I helped him tie his tie.

At the service, meeting my Mum's friends and colleagues, I realised how much The List had changed the way I see the world.

45.	Freshly cut flowers.
333.	Tea and biscuits.
1092.	The awkward dance of non-verbally negotiating whether it's to be a hug or a handshake.
577.	Alcohol.
2440.	The fact that any group of strangers can, albeit briefly, become a choir.

The List hadn't stopped her. Hadn't saved her. Of course it hadn't.

,

I got a text from Sam.

---

<sup>83</sup> Sometimes the 'Old People' from the start of the play spontaneously hold hands at this moment, so it's nice for the NARRATOR to provide the opportunity for this to happen with a little glance, without suggesting it.

*The NARRATOR gives SAM his phone to read.*

SAM                    I heard about your Mum.  
                         I'm so sorry.  
                         Give me a call.  
                         Anytime.  
                         I'd love to hear your voice.  
                         Love,  
                         Sam x

Ps. I heard the other day that Beyonce is related to the composer Gustaf Mahler. It occurred to me that this is a fact that should be on The List. Truly a brilliant thing.

NARRATOR           I stayed with my Dad for a while after the funeral. We'd spend the days walking or reading or listening to records. He'd fall asleep in his armchair and I'd sit at his desk and type up The List, starting at the very beginning.

1.                    Ice cream.

It was a lot of work. Months and months of sleepless nights. And, when I got to the end, I kept going from where I'd left off.

*The NARRATOR approaches the person who they'd moved away from SAM, hands them the entry and says the number for them to read out the entry...*

826,978.            The fact that Beyonce is Gustaf Mahler's eighth cousin, four times removed.

*...then indicates for them to return to their seat next to SAM.*

I completed The List.

I printed it out and left it in Dad's chair. I drove back home.

He never mentioned it directly, but when we next spoke, he said: 'Thank you.'

DAD                    Thank you.

NARRATOR           And he said 'I love you.'

DAD                    I love you.

NARRATOR           And I said ‘sentimentality doesn’t suit you, Dad.’

,

999,997.       The alphabet.  
999,998.       Inappropriate songs played at emotional moments.  
999,999.       Completing a task.

*The NARRATOR says the final entry.*

1,000,000.    Listening to a record for the first time. Turning it  
                  over in your hands, placing it on the deck and  
                  putting the needle down, hearing the faint hiss and  
                  crackle of the sharp metal point on the wax before  
                  the music begins, then sitting and listening while  
                  reading through the sleeve notes.

,

*Music plays: Nina Simone’s version of ‘O-o-h Child.’<sup>84</sup>*

*The NARRATOR bows.*

*The NARRATOR indicates for applause to be directed members of the  
AUDIENCE who played the VET, MRS PATTERSON, DAD and SAM perhaps  
they shake hands or hug if it feels appropriate, perhaps they even bow.*

*The NARRATOR then bows again, applauds the AUDIENCE and leaves.*

*The List remains scattered around the stage so that the AUDIENCE can look  
through the box and read the entries.*

*The music continues to play as they exit.<sup>85</sup>*

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<sup>84</sup> In production we’d trim the drum intro from this track for the sole reason that it sounds exactly like the intro to ‘Two Princes’ by the Spin Doctors which, though a brilliant thing, is not at all the vibe we’re going for in this moment.

<sup>85</sup> We always provide resources for organisations such as The Samaritans or The Healthy Minds Initiative or 988 Suicide and Crisis Helpline in the theatre and foyer and in the programme. If you feel you could benefit from speaking to someone, there is always help available.