

BLIND DATE

And so the stage transforms, perhaps to the Blind Date theme music, perhaps to an appropriately themed song. A private side room in a hospital. MUMMY TO BE is lying on the bed, heavily pregnant. DADDY TO BE is sitting in a chair nearby. She looks at him with hate-filled eyes. A DOCTOR is with them.

DOCTOR: The test results are back. And I want to reassure you that everything is alright. We've been lucky, this time. It was just a false alarm. But we're going to keep you in now, because you're so close to full term. We'll do everything we can, but it's really important that you avoid any more stress from now on. It's extremely bad for you and extremely bad for your baby. I can't emphasise that seriously enough. We'll come and check on you again in a little while, okay?

DADDY TO BE: Thankyou, Doctor.

MUMMY TO BE glowers at DADDY TO BE. The DOCTOR leaves.

DADDY TO BE: That's good news, then, isn't it—?

MUMMY TO BE: This is all your fault! You're the reason this is happening!

DADDY TO BE: I told you, I keep telling you — I tried my best—!

MUMMY TO BE: Your best's not good enough, though, is it? It never is!

DADDY TO BE: I'm doing everything I can! I've been everywhere looking for it! Nobody's got any! I went to Marks and Sparks! I even went to Waitrose!

MUMMY TO BE: It's the only thing I want! The only thing I've ever asked you for! But what I want doesn't really matter to you, does it?

DADDY TO BE: That's not true, and you know it! If I could find some, I would give it to you! But I can't find any anywhere!

MUMMY TO BE: You're the reason I'm in this state! Why I'm so stressed! It's because of you and your failure! As a husband and as a father! If you really loved me — if you really cared at all about the welfare of your unborn child — if you were a real man — you'd do anything, anything, to get me some—!

DADDY TO BE: ALRIGHT! Alright... If it'll stop you shouting, if it'll stop you stressing, somehow, somehow, I will find you some bloody lamb's lettuce!

Time passes and the space readjusts. Late at night. A trendy organic nursery. Polytunnels and planters everywhere. DADDY TO BE, poorly disguised, clumsily scales the fence to get in. By the feeble light of a torch, he searches around. He disturbs a line of tinkly bells designed to act as a bird-scarers. He

gasps in terror when his torch beam finds a huge plastic owl. He keeps searching until, at length, he finds what he's looking for — one large pot of lamb's lettuce! Almost crying with relief, he starts to dig up the plants with his hands — but as soon as he has one plant in his grasp, a powerful torch beam finds him. The ECO WARRIOR has caught him out.

ECO WARRIOR: What d'you think you're doing?

DADDY TO BE: Oh God! Don't shoot me! I'm sorry! Don't shoot me!

ECO WARRIOR: I wasn't going to! This is a place for peace, not violence.

DADDY TO BE: I'm just — my wife — she's pregnant — our first baby—

ECO WARRIOR: That's beautiful. Congratulations.

DADDY TO BE: And she keeps having cravings — first it was tomato soup with strawberry jam sandwiches dipped in, then it was Big Macs with the sesame seeds picked off and then it was lamb's lettuce and I'd never heard of it and all the shops I tried had never heard of it either or they'd heard of it but didn't do it — I even went to Waitrose and they normally have everything — and it's all she wants, it's the only thing she wants and I can't give it to her and she's stressed and it's hurting her and it's hurting the baby and the harder I try, the harder it gets and then I found out about this place and

I couldn't risk you saying no if I asked you for some and I was so desperate I decided to steal it and it's wrong, I know it's wrong, but I'm so desperate, I just — please —

ECO WARRIOR: It's alright. Chill out.

DADDY TO BE: —please don't call the police, I'll pay for all the damage—

ECO WARRIOR: I said, it's alright. Chill out. I'm not gonna call the police.

DADDY TO BE: You're not? Oh, thank God...!

ECO WARRIOR: I'm not surprised you can't find it. It is still a bit of a niche crop. Everything we grow here is new or unique or precious. But that stuff's cropping really well this year. So you might as well have some for your wife, mightn't you?

DADDY TO BE: Are you serious? After what I did? I was stealing from you.

ECO WARRIOR: Ah, all property's theft, though, isn't it? And it's only a bit of lettuce. What's a bit of lettuce compared to the miracle of childbirth? You should come back, as often as you need to, as long as your wife's still craving for it.

DADDY TO BE: I don't know how to thank you! I don't know how to thank you! I really don't know how to thank you!

DADDY TO BE digs up more plants until his hands are full.

ECO WARRIOR: Come during opening hours in future, though, eh? The front door's round the front. We also have a very good selection of vegan cakes in our ethical tea room.

DADDY TO BE: I will! I will!

DADDY TO BE dashes out.

ECO WARRIOR: Make sure you give it a really good wash before she eats it, though, yeah? 'Cause of E coli and stuff like that, yeah? 'Cause we're 100% organic, so there's been no chemicals on there, right? Mate? Did you hear me?

DADDY TO BE is already well out of earshot.

Time passes and the stage readjusts. The side room at the hospital. The bed is empty. DADDY TO BE is alone. He has been crying. A NURSE comes in.

NURSE: I just wanted to let you know... He's ready. He's ready for you take him home, whenever you're ready... I also wanted to say how sorry I am, for your loss... It's just tragic—

DADDY TO BE breaks down.

DADDY TO BE: It is! It is fucking tragic! It's also completely fucking ridiculous! How can something like this happen? How can a bit of lettuce kill someone?!

DADDY TO BE sobs. The NURSE withdraws from the room.

Time passes and the stage readjusts. The eco centre. Night time. DADDY TO BE, again poorly disguised, creeps in. He is holding a carry cot. He heads over to the planter which is now entirely empty of lamb's lettuce. He places the carry cot on top of it, kisses the baby inside it, and then runs away, disturbing the plastic owl and the tinkly bells as he goes. The ECO WARRIOR appears, searching for him with her torch beam.

ECO WARRIOR: I thought you were gonna stick to daytime visits—

Her torch beam finds the carry cot. She approaches it and looks inside. She swings the torch all around, looking for DADDY TO BE.

ECO WARRIOR: Mate, you can't... You can't just leave him...

But there's no sign of him. She looks inside the carry cot and finds a letter.

ECO WARRIOR: “This nice lady looks after things which are new and unique and precious. You are all of those things. I love you but I can't look after you. I wish I could, but you remind me too much of...someone else who loved you but can't be here to

look after you, either. This nice lady will help you grow up to be just as unique and precious as I know you are. Be good. Do good. Never forget that life is short and life is special. You think you've got your whole life ahead of you, and then one lettuce leaf later, it's over. Don't settle for salad. Go straight for the steak, my beautiful boy."

The ECO WARRIOR checks on the baby and smiles. She picks up the carry cot and heads indoors, talking to him as she goes.

Time passes and the stage readjusts. The side room at the hospital. The ECO WARRIOR is in the bed. Next to her is CALVIN, her grown-up adopted son.

ECO WARRIOR: It's my own fault for forgetting my glasses. I've been picking mushrooms up there for years, and I got cocky and thought I knew what I was picking and it never occurred to me to check through the basket when I got home. Good job you don't eat anything like that else we'd both be in here.

CALVIN: Nah. Still too close to being a vegetable for me.

ECO WARRIOR: Never did get you to eat your greens, did I? Even when you've spent your whole life surrounded by them.

CALVIN: I eat the peas and sweetcorn in my Pot Noodles now. That's more than I used to. I'll do you one when you're

back home. Start building your strength up, slowly.

ECO WARRIOR: Cal... You know there's a good chance I might not come home, don't you? You know what this has done to my liver and my kidneys, don't you?

CALVIN (ignoring her): You'll be fine.

ECO WARRIOR: But if I'm not—

CALVIN: You will be.

ECO WARRIOR: If I'm not, I want you to know how much I love you, and how proud I am of you.

CALVIN gets upset. He bows his head and the ECO WARRIOR strokes his hair soothingly.

ECO WARRIOR: You've got such beautiful thick hair, sweetheart. Just like your Dad had, if I remember right. I've always loved running my fingers through your hair.

CALVIN: And you will. When you come back.

ECO WARRIOR: I've had a brush with the destroying angel, Cal. Sometimes there's no coming back after that.

CALVIN: I think that's me. I think I'm the destroying angel. First Mum. Then Dad. Now you. Everyone around me suffers.

ECO WARRIOR: No — what are you? What have I always said you are?

CALVIN: Unique and precious.

ECO WARRIOR: Yes. Oh, yes. Your Dad thought so and I think so, too. Bad things happen, sweetheart, even to good people. So don't you ever, ever, blame yourself for any of these things, do you hear me? You have to make the most of everything that comes your way. Steak, not salad, remember? And absolutely, definitely, no mushrooms.

The ECO WARRIOR strokes CALVIN's hair.

Time passes and the stage readjusts. Outdoors at CALVIN's university. JOEY is manning the barbecue. CALVIN sees him at a distance and purposefully makes his way over to the barbecue. JOEY looks up at him and smiles.

CALVIN: Hiya. Anything ready?

JOEY: I think the burgers are done. Still waiting on the sausages.

CALVIN: Burger, then. Please.

JOEY holds up a burger on his tongs and peers at it very closely.

CALVIN: You sure it's cooked? I'm funny about food poisoning.

JOEY: No, it's fine, I promise. I just...have to look to make sure.
My eyes are a bit rubbish. I can't always see what's right in front of me.

CALVIN: I'd noticed.

JOEY: Eh?

CALVIN: Can I have my burger?

JOEY: Eh? Yeah. Yeah. D'you want cheese and stuff.

CALVIN: Yes, please. Load it up.

JOEY hovers close to CALVIN's burger with some lettuce. CALVIN pulls away.

CALVIN: None of that! I don't want any of that!

JOEY: Okay... Sorry...

CALVIN: Sorry. I'm just a bit...particular about stuff like that.

JOEY: So I can see.

CALVIN: You can see that much, then, can you?

JOEY: D'you want some sauce?

CALVIN: Mayo, please.

JOEY aims for CALVIN's burger but misses and squirts mayonnaise over him.

JOEY: Oh, fuck — mate — I'm sorry—

CALVIN: It's alright — no harm done —

JOEY moves around to CALVIN and they both start wiping at the mayonnaise.

CALVIN: Weren't kidding about your dodgy eyesight, were you?

JOEY: I'm so sorry — has it stained you?

CALVIN: No. But I ought to get these dirty clothes off, though, hadn't I? If somebody had a room nearby I could do it in.

JOEY looks around, a bit nervously. CALVIN smiles very directly at him.

JOEY: I have... I mean... My room's...up there...

CALVIN: That's lucky for me, then, isn't it?

JOEY looks admiringly at CALVIN. The barbecue flares up.

CALVIN: Your sausage is burning.

JOEY: I don't care. Let it.

Time passes and the stage readjusts. The side room at the hospital. JOEY is on the bed. CALVIN is sitting beside him. A DOCTOR is with them.

DOCTOR: So, the test results are back. And they have confirmed what we already suspected...

An X-ray of JOEY's eye comes up on the lightbox.

DOCTOR: We now know you definitely do have Stargardt disease.

CALVIN: Oh, fuck... Joey...!

DOCTOR: And as we've discussed before, this means that your central, detailed vision is going to steadily get worse until there's a completely blank patch right in the middle of your field of sight, but with luck, your peripheral vision will stay strong and—

CALVIN: With luck!

JOEY: It's alright, Cal. *(to the DOCTOR)* Are you absolutely sure?

DOCTOR: We did the gene sequencing test to see if you had the recessive gene or not, which would be the surefire indicator. And the one we were looking for was there.

JOEY: But my Mum and Dad haven't got it. They're fine.

DOCTOR: That's what we'd expect to happen, in most cases. You've inherited two faulty copies of the gene, if you like, and so you don't have a normal copy to compensate for its effects.

JOEY: So it's my parents' fault, is what you're saying. I don't mean intentionally but...I've got it from them, basically.

CALVIN: No, it isn't... It's mine...

JOEY: Is there anything we can do to stop it?

DOCTOR: At the moment, unfortunately... There's nothing. We're doing the research and doing the trials, but...

JOEY: Okay.

DOCTOR: We'll go and make a follow-up appointment so we can discuss where we go from here. And I've got some information in case you'd like to talk to anyone for any advice or maybe some counselling support.

JOEY: Thankyou, Doctor... We'll be out in a minute.

DOCTOR: No problem. I'll just be out by the desk.

CALVIN: It's me! It's my fault! I'm the destroying angel! It's happening again!

The DOCTOR turns to go. CALVIN bursts into tears and grabs hold of JOEY.

The DOCTOR looks at them, rather alarmed.

Time passes and the stage readjusts. A nightclub. JOEY and CALVIN are out.

Freddie Mercury's "Living On My Own" is playing.

JOEY: Come outside so I can talk to you!

CALVIN: No! I don't want to! I just want us to get drunk until we pass out and forget about everything for as long as we can!

JOEY: Alright! If you're gonna make me do it here...

In the middle of the dancefloor, JOEY gets down on one knee and takes out a tiny box.

CALVIN: What are you doing down there, you dick? Get up!

JOEY: Calvin Stewart Edgehill — I, Joseph Anthony Lister, absolutely love the bones of you. Life is short, and for me, it's about to become a much darker place. So I say, fuck it, Cal. Keep your light shining in my life, and marry me! If you think you can still love me when I'm blind as a bat.

CALVIN is too overcome to speak. He nods furiously and kisses JOEY. JOEY puts the ring on CALVIN's finger. They kiss and dance. The music gets louder.

Time passes and the stage readjusts as the song comes to an end. The side room of the hospital. This time, CALVIN is the one in bed. JOEY is sitting next to him. CALVIN is wearing a baseball cap.

CALVIN: I'm knackered, Jojo. I can't keep doing this.

JOEY: You can. You can! You're doing so well! You're being so brave!

CALVIN: You can't marry me like this... I can't have you remembering me like this...

JOEY: This isn't you. Cancer isn't you. You will always be the beautiful boy who just appeared out of nowhere in front of that barbecue and made my heart miss a beat in my chest... The man I covered in mayonnaise—

CALVIN: Dirty.

JOEY: The man who has been holding my hand ever since we found out about this. The man whose hand I've been proud to hold ever since we found about that. Whose hand I will be proud to hold on our wedding day. And forever after that, however long forever is.

CALVIN: I'll look a right twat in the photos, though.

JOEY takes the baseball cap off CALVIN's head. He has barely any hair left.

JOEY runs his hand across CALVIN's head.

JOEY: I miss running my fingers through that. It's one of my favourite things in the world. It'll come back. I won't be able to see it the same, but it'll grow back. I'm sure of it.

CALVIN: Rose used to like doing that, as well. I wish you could have met her. She'd think it's really funny I met someone who eats as much fruit and vegetables as you do.

JOEY: I wish I could've too. I wish I could've met your Dad, as well. And your Mum. Your real Mum, I mean. I mean—

CALVIN: I know what you mean. Me, too. I don't think about Mum that much. But Dad, I do. I wonder what he'd think of me. How I've turned out.

JOEY: Unique and precious, he said you were. So I think he'd be very pleased to see you've turned out exactly the way he knew you would.

CALVIN: Come here, you dick. You beautiful big dick.

JOEY leans in and gives CALVIN a kiss. A DOCTOR knocks on the door, opens it and peers into the room.

DOCTOR: Hello, you two. Sorry to interrupt. Can I come in?

CALVIN: Of course you can. Come in.

The DOCTOR comes in, brandishing a file of papers.

DOCTOR: We've got the results back from the tests.

CALVIN: And?

JOEY squeezes CALVIN's hand and kisses it. The DOCTOR smiles.

END OF SECTION