

# **Wide Open Spaces**

by Jane Wainwright

**Characters in order of appearance:**

**Samuel** – 29, male. London.

**May** – 28, female. Northern.

*There are also a number of very small parts, which could be doubled up. These include the Tube Worker, Train Driver, Aoife, Midwife, Random Man, Phone Operator, Woman, Bus Driver, Random Girl, Dad, and Girl.*

*The present action takes place on a journey across London, from Mansion House to Plaistow.*

**1. A small flat in Mansion House. Summer.**

**Samuel:** Phone. Check. Water. Check. Ipod. Check. Paper bag...

**He looks around the house. Opens and closes drawers, cupboards etc.**

Paper bag. Paper bag.

**He grabs the paper bag from the drawer.**

Paper bag. Check.

Okay.

**PAUSE**

Okay.

**He takes a deep breath.**

**He opens the door, steps out, pulls the door shut behind him.**

**A MOMENT.**

**The sound of keys in the lock. The door opens.**

Care Bear. Forgot the....

**He grabs the Care Bear from the desk.**

Care Bear. Check.

**He takes another deep breath.**

**PAUSE**

Here goes.

**He exits, slamming the door behind him.**

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**2. Weekday, 10am. Queen Victoria Street. The sound of traffic.**

**Samuel walks quickly. He is slightly out of breath.**

**Samuel:** [Queen Victoria Street. I'm walking towards the station and it's... fine. It's fine. I'm... I'm walking fast because I need the exercise and it gives me less time to think about turning round. Which I am. I'm already thinking about turning round and going back to the flat and crawling under the covers and...

Shut up shup up shut up.

I'm sweating already. But then I am wearing a hoody and a winter coat in the middle of July. That's part of the... the thing... the condition ... so...

Today's the day I earn my dad stripes.

Happy birthday! Have I said that yet? I should have... Today is your first birthday. Or it would've been. Instead it's the one year since you died. Which still deserves a present, hence the...

**Care Bear:** Hello. I'm bedtime Bear.

**Samuel:** And it's also the day I meet you for the first time... Your grave for the first time. I missed you being born, I missed your funeral... but today... today I'll be there. Because...

**Care Bear:** Like a Care Bear, your dad's always there.

**Samuel:** That. And the fact that I promised. My first official dad promise. And dad's, no matter what, can never break those.

All I have to do is get from Mansion House to Plaistow. Which is... well... it's actually a lot harder than it sounds because...

I can't travel.]

**A car horn sounds. He jumps.**

\*

### **3. Samuel enters Mansion House Tube Station.**

**Samuel:** [Not many people know that. It's not a secret it's just, it's pretty hard for people to understand. I haven't even told my parents – your grandparents. No point worrying them. Besides, dad would think it was his duty to fix me. Which would probably involve his version of tough love where he locks me in a car and drives me round and round till I'm better. Or possibly, dead.

Of course, not telling people means quite a few of them think I'm a total shi[t] –

Sorry. Still getting used to this whole dad thing.

I've missed birthdays, weddings... I missed your great grandad's funeral– I missed yours... And after a while, my excuses - work deadline, food poisoning - just start to... to make me sound like a complete and utter...]

#### **He stops himself.**

[I censored that one.

Still it's better than people saying 'have a go' or 'what's the worst that could happen?' Or trying to reassure me that I'm not going to die. Which I know. I know getting on a bus or travelling a few tube stops isn't going to kill me. But I might wet myself. I might stand in the middle of everyone screaming and crying. I might even in that particular moment, feel like I'm going to die. And whether I do or not, the feeling is enough to make me want to.]

#### **A quiet murmur of a few people walking through the barriers.**

[But even that I can cope with... It's the... the other thing which is the the worry. The... the big fear... that this panic attack might be...

Well...

It might be the one that makes me never leave the flat again.]

#### **He beeps his Oyster card on the barrier. He walks through.**

**Samuel:** But you're worth it.

#### **The barrier shuts after him.**

**Samuel:** Oh god.

4. **District Line platform at Mansion House Station. Samuel walks down the stairs as a train pulls out of the station.**

**Samuel:** [I've been training for this moment for three hundred and forty two days. Since I made my dad promise. I've cut out caffeine, started exercising, walked right up to the Big Sainsbury's on my own. Once during daylight. I've printed out every possible route using every possible mode of transport including journey times, excluding escalators and avoiding heavily congested areas. And today is the day I finally do it.]

I've been coming to this platform, District Line platform 3, for a whole week. I bring my lunch, eat it on the bench... just to get used to it all again. The sounds, the trains, the people. Learn when it's busy, when it's quiet. That sort of thing. Cost me a fortune beeping in and out.]

**The sound of people from the platform starts to trickle through as Samuel walks down the steps towards it.**

**Samuel:** [And it hasn't worked because nine minutes and three missed trains later I'm still working up the courage to get on.]

**We can hear Samuel's breathing**

**Tube Worker:** Hello, you okay?

**Samuel:** Um. Yeah. Thanks.

[One of the station staff has come over.]

**Tube Worker:** You've been hanging around a lot this week, haven't you?

**Samuel:** I...um...

**Tube Worker:** Any reason?

**Samuel:** Um... I just...

[Honestly, if I don't have to go into the whole travelling thing, I don't]

**Tube Worker:** Why don't you come with me and we'll grab a tea?

**Samuel:** Um. [Bit weird].

## 5. Train Station Office

**AWKWARD PAUSE.**

**Samuel:** It's a nice office.

**BEAT.**

**Samuel:** Bigger than you think. Y'know, from the outside.

**Tube Worker:** Yeah.

**Samuel:** Bit of a Tardis.

**BEAT.**

[Turns out 'Chat' isn't his strong point. If this is a service they're bringing in, they should probably –]

**Tube Worker:** Do you er take sugar?

**Samuel:** [He won't stop staring at your Care Bear]

Sweetener would be -

**Over the radio:** Hi Phil. Any news on the potential jumper?

**BEAT.**

**Tube Worker:** (*Embarrassed*) Sorry. Open radio.

**Samuel:** [Apparently complimentary tea is reserved for people feeling suicidal. They think I'm here to y'know... There's a chocolate wafer on the desk. I don't know what you have to do to get one of those.]

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6. **District Line platform at Mansion House Station. The distant sound of a train leaving from another platform.**

**Samuel:** [Half an hour later and I've convinced them that your dad is emotionally stable. Well, I am as much as anyone. There's only seven people on the platform now. Which is okay actually. Doable.

I wait down the far side. The end carriage is usually the quietest.

Your mum liked being at the end too. She thought she was less likely to be bombed.

Townies always think city folk spend their weekends dodging bombs. I told her, thinking everyone in London is going to be blown up is like me thinking everyone in Northern towns loses their virginity round the back of McDonalds.

She said that was a typical London response.]

**BEAT.**

[And it was Burger King. Apparently.]

**A train approaches.**

**Samuel checks his trouser pockets.**

Water. Paper bag. Iphone. Check.

**The train doors open.**

[Did I mention that this is the first time I've been on the tube on my own for six years?]

7. **He takes a deep breath and steps on.**

**Samuel:** [I squeeze my eyes shut and think of you.]

**Train driver: (Announcement)** This is a District Line train to Upminster calling at all stations to Upminster. The next station is Cannon Street. Mind the doors please.

**The train doors beep**

[Those beeps right before the doors close are the worst bit. In my head they sound like this... ]

**Samuel:** [Cannon Street always reminds me of your Mum.]

**8. A residential street in East London. Outside a house of flats.**

**A buzzer sounds**

**Samuel:** (*Over the intercom*) Hello?

**May:** Oh. Yes. Hi. I'm here to see...

**Samuel:** [It was the first place we met.]

**May rustles through her papers**

**May:** Are you flat...

**Samuel:** (*Over the intercom*) Three.

**May:** Right. I'm May. I'm here to see... Sorry, I can't find where it says the name.

**Samuel:** (*Over the intercom*) Samuel?

**May:** Yes. Samuel!

**The buzzer sounds again. May opens the front door and enters the flat.**

**Samuel:** [I was living above a newsagents with a colleague. His dad owned the flat so the rent was pretty cheap.

I'd just left the studio where we worked and gone freelance. Partially because I was already getting commissions, mostly because I was finding it harder to travel in.

I edit music videos for a living. Did I say that? I was making a trailer for a new exhibition they had on at the gallery where your mum worked.

She was fifteen minutes late.]

**May:** Sorry I'm a bit. I think I took a wrong turn when I got off the tube.

**Samuel:** [And I'm pretty sure she was hungover. When I opened the door she was resting her forehead on the wall.]

Hi. That's alright. I'm afraid we're in the kitchen. I don't have an actual office yet. But we do have a very lovely view of the um neighbour's wall.

Can I get you a drink?

**May:** Coffee would be amazing.

**Samuel:** Um. I can do tea?

**May:** White two sugars.

**Samuel:** Black two sugars? Sorry. Or I've got... water. Dandelion and burdock? I've just found a shop that—

[She was looking at my manky toe. That's the problem with working from home. You sometimes forget to wear socks.]

**May:** Shall we just get started?

**Samuel:** I've still got to do a few tweaks. I think it works well with the soundtrack. It's quite edgy without being -

**BEAT**

May?

[She'd shut her eyes.]

**May:** (*Suddenly, waking*) Er. Yes. Looks great.

**Samuel:** Okay. Um. Well, I've started off with a few close ups of the gallery cut with some of the backstage footage you gave me. Just to give a bit of a flavour of the place before we start on the –

May?

**BEAT.**

[She fell asleep a couple more times and eventually it felt cruel to keep waking her so I left her there and got on with some work. She must've been tired because she slept for a good hour and a half with her head on the table.]

**May wakes up. Takes her head off of the table.**

Hi.

**May:** Uh.

**Samuel:** You fell asleep.

**May:** Oh –

**Samuel:** It looked like you needed it.

**May:** I'm so sorry. I'm not normally like this. It's just been one of those months you know?

**BEAT**

What?

**Samuel:** Um. You've still got a... a pen lid stuck to your head.

**May grunts slightly as she feels for the pen lid. It drops onto the table**

**May:** What time is it? Argh, I've got another meeting. I'm so sorry. I can come back. Whenever you like. Tomorrow morning, afternoon –

**Samuel:** Tomorrow night?

[Dad lesson number one. Take your opportunities where you can.]

There's a little wine bar, tea shop type thing just on the corner that's open till late. We could go there.

**May:** Great.

**Samuel:** [I know, I know. Completely unprofessional.]

\*

### **9. Inside the tube carriage. The sound of Tetris.**

**Samuel:** Once you're on the train, the key to staying on is distraction. Hence the Iphone. I am now officially number six in the UK for Tetris. You're too busy panicking about where you're going to put the T, to panic about not being able to get off. The tube is kind of like Tetris at rush hour. The way you all cram on and try to fit together.

It actually doesn't help to think that.

Music helps.

And well... counting fingers. That's normally where your mum would sit, right next to me, and I'd hold two fingers up.

And she'd go. 'You're a two.'

Or 'Two and a half.'

Or I'd show three fingers. And she'd say, 'Three.'

And we'd carry on like that until I got up to something like six, and then she'd know that we really needed to get off.

Superman might be able to fly, Spiderman might shoot stuff out of his hands, but that's nothing compared to your dad making it across London alone.

\*

### **10. Inside the wine bar/teashop**

**Samuel:** Thanks for coming.

**May:** No that's... Am I late?

**Samuel:** [I was actually early. It helps me to have a little time to settle in. Breathe.]

**May:** My hairdryer blew up so I had to run to my gym and use theirs.

**Samuel:** [It's not just travelling that's hard. There are lots of things that make me worse. Meetings in particular because it's still seen as 'unprofessional' for grown ups to run out of them screaming.]

**May:** Sorry about last time.

**Samuel:** Really it's... What would you like to drink?

**May:** No, I'm getting you one to apologise. What's that?

**Samuel:** Dandelion and Burdock.

### **A few minutes later**

**May sits back down with a wine.**

**May:** Apparently one glass of red wine a day is good for you. It's my New Year's Resolution.

**Samuel:** [Mine was to brave one tube stop a day.]

**May:** I'm really excited to see the video. Properly this time. It's the first thing I've been given full control over so...

**Samuel:** No pressure?

**May:** No. There's only my pride, my job, and my entire future at stake.

**Samuel:** Maybe I should have a wine too.

[Social joke. I actually don't drink. I really don't like feeling out of control.]

**Passing her the headphones.**

If you just want to put these headphones on. Let me know if it's loud enough.

**May:** (*Shouting*) Perfect.

**Samuel:** [God she was hot.

Sorry I shouldn't talk about your mum to you like that.

But she really was.]

**May:** (*Shouting over the video*) I don't believe it, is that...

Richard?!

**Samuel:** [Some guy had just walked in with a small blonde girl.]

**May:** (*Louder*) Richard!

**Samuel:** [He came over. I don't think he wanted to but she was so loud.]

**May:** I thought you were in Leeds?

**Samuel:** [I pressed stop on the video.]

**BEAT**

**May:** (*Too loud*) Hi...

(*Readjusting her volume*) Hi, I'm May.

**Samuel:** [She said that to the blonde girl. The girl didn't say anything back. Neither did Richard. It was actually all a bit...]

**May:** (*Forced joviality*) Are you on a date?

**Samuel:** [...awkward]

**May:** Oh.

**BEAT.**

You are. No that's... I mean we never said we were 'exclusive'. I'm on one too. This is Sam. Sam say hi.

**Samuel:** Hi. I'm... Sam.

[It must've looked a bit weird that I'd brought my laptop on a date but Richard didn't say anything. In fact, he high fived me and then walked off with the blonde girl. He certainly didn't seem upset. May on the other hand.]

**Sound of May downing her wine and slamming the glass on the table.**

**May:** You wanna another drink? I'm gonna get another drink.

**May pushes her chair back and goes to the bar.**

**Samuel:** Hang on. You're still wearing the...

[I managed to pull the headphones out of the computer before she took the laptop with her.]

**A few minutes later**

**She sits back down and slams her drink on the table.**

**May:** We've been seeing each other for three months. That's not nothing, is it? Three months is... is pretty...

**Samuel:** [Out of the corner of my eye I could see Richard's hand on the blonde girl's arse]

**May starts to cry**

**Samuel:** Oh. Hey. Don't cry.

[Crying women do not help anxiety.]

The video kind of went out of the window after that. Five dandelion and burdocks and six red wines later she says...]

**May:** You wanna come back to mine? My flatmate's away.

**Samuel:** Um.

**May:** I live in Angel.

**Samuel:** Um.

[I wanted to go back more than anything but...]

**May:** You don't want to.

**Samuel:** No, no I do it's just...

[She was so drunk. I can't handle myself on a tube, never mind someone else. What if she left me somewhere? How would I get back? Besides Angel has the longest escalator in London.]

**May:** Forget it.

**Samuel:** [If you want to know what sucks about agoraphobia, it's this. Not missing out on foreign holidays or your mate's wedding. It's getting an invitation from a really hot girl, and having to turn it down. I thought about inviting her to mine, but my flatmate was going through a bad breakup and he'd declared the flat a no-girl zone.]

It's just I feel a bit sick. One too many Dandelion and Burdocks.

[She didn't believe me.

I insisted on walking her to the station which was next door. The barriers were open, which was a bonus because I'd stopped carrying an Oyster. I waited with her on the platform.]

I've had a really nice night.

**The train pulls in.**

[She didn't reply. She just burst into tears, and jumped on the train. She was still wearing my headphones.]

\*

### **11. On the train. Moving.**

**Samuel:** [District Line. Always a severe risk of dinosaur grabbers. Y'know those plastic dinosaur heads, where you press the lever and they bite. They're the cheapest thing you can buy from the Natural History Museum, apart from a pencil or a rubber. And way more fun. Unless you're the person sitting next to them.]

#### **The sound of a dinosaur grabber biting**

[I close my eyes and try to pretend I'm somewhere else.]

#### **The dinosaur grabber bites again.**

[It's okay. Only ten more stops to go.

Only ten more stops that *it would be nice*, if I could go.

Decatastrophising. That's part of C B T. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. I read a lot of books on it. Anything to stop me actually doing it. They're supposed to help agoraphobics. Or agoraphobi. Which I guess is what I am. I prefer to think that I'm just a sufferer of it, rather than entirely defined by it, but maybe you should ask your mum.]

#### **The dinosaur grabber bites.**

[I put my headphones in.]

#### **He presses play. 'Relight My Fire' by Take That plays.**

**Samuel:** [Your mum made this playlist for me.]

\*

### **11. A pub. Mildly busy. The same track as the previous scene, is playing.**

[Take That I know. But it was sort of a big song of our generation. I used to play it to you when you were still in the belly. You'd kick every time Barlow did the high bit.

It was a week after the drunken night. Your mum and me had met up again to discuss the final edit and so I could retrieve my headphones. She'd suggested this pub in Covent Garden. I think she was too embarrassed to go back to the same place. It was actually a bit far for me but I didn't say anything. I really didn't want to have *that* conversation yet.

It had taken over an hour to walk there.]

**May:** Can I reassure you that I don't do this in all my business meetings? You just seem to be...

**Samuel:** (*Distracted*) Sorry?

[I was really on edge.]

**May:** I'm saying you're unlucky. Me falling asleep on you, and then inviting you to... argh... I swear, today I'll be normal.

**Samuel:** Red wine?

**May:** After last time? No. My new New Year's Resolution is to stay sober. Around men. Or at least men I work with.

**Samuel:** [I liked her. Sometimes there's just a thing... a spark... or an understanding between you and a stranger and you think... Yeah. That's her. I know, that sounds really... But I could tell she liked me too. Which was great, except the only thing I could think about was getting home.]

**May:** It's so sexy.

**Samuel:** [She was talking about the video. Not me.]

**May:** Really atmospheric and the music... wow. It really gets you, doesn't it?

**Samuel:** I'm glad you / like it.

**May:** /I love it. It captures the whole feel of the exhibition.

**Samuel:** [There was definitely some flirting. From both of us. And it was working. Because an hour and a half later I was still there. Despite hitting a six and frequently having to disappear to the loo to pull myself together. But just when I was starting to think I'd got a handle on myself...]

**May:** Look out the window!

**Samuel:** [All these people with placards had started to come down the street.]

**May:** I think I read about this. This is the pub that kicked those guys out for kissing. They must be doing a 'kiss in'.

**Samuel:** [I'm all for gay rights. Really. Kiss who you want, when you want. I love kissing. Just not when it blocks my route home.]

**May:** I've always fancied been part of a kiss in.

**Samuel:** [There were hundreds of them heading towards us. I was praying that they weren't going to come in when – ]

**May kisses Samuel. He instinctively pushes her off.**

**Samuel:** Oh.

**May:** Sorry I thought...

**Samuel:** [She kissed me.]

**May:** Okay. I read that wrong.

**Samuel:** [I'll say this for your mum, she's unpredictable.]

Sorry. No I just... I wasn't expecting...

[My heart was beating. My hands were starting to sweat.]

**May:** I've done it again, haven't I?

**May gets herself ready to leave**

**Samuel:** [Arghhhhhhhhhhh. Agoraphobia is so F.U.C...

Dad censor.]

**May:** The video needs to be signed off by Thursday so I'll make sure that I send over any revisions before then.

**Samuel:** [She'd reverted to business talk. Never a good sign.]

**May:** If you need anything just drop me an email.

**Samuel:** [My heart, and certain other areas, wanted to tell her that I liked her. That I wanted to kiss her again. But all my head was saying was "Please don't leave me alone. /Please don't leave me alone. Please don't – ]

**May:** / Can you pass my bag... I'll see you–

*(Unnaturally loud)* Please don't leave me alone!

**BEAT.**

[I am aware that desperation is not really the thing you should lead with.]

Um. I mean... Could you maybe walk me part way back to mine? Or somewhere nearer to mine?

**May:** Look Sam, I'm sure girls throw themselves at you all the time but, contrary to the evidence, I don't make a habit of it. And I'm embarrassed. So I'm gonna go home and eat my bodyweight in Crunchies so...

**Samuel:** No could you um..

**BEAT.**

**Samuel:** Could you sit back down? Just for a minute.

**BEAT.**

**Samuel:** Please.

[That's something you should know. One way or another, all things lead to THE conversation.]

## **12. Tube station platform**

**Samuel:** [I've got off the train. I had to.]

**He breathes.**

[I don't think I've eaten enough.

Sometimes if I don't have enough.... enough energy... my body just sort of... resists. For me, travelling is a bit like running a marathon.

When we used to go out, even for an hour or so, I'd have to blank the rest of the day so I could sleep. The journey used to wipe me out. Nervous energy is like the best body work out ever. I don't know why I haven't got a six pack.

A particularly bad journey, or a really important event where I'd had to hold it together, could keep me out of it for days.

There's a little kiosk on the platform.]

**Samuel:** Just the cereal bar thanks.

**The sound of the cash register.**

[I'll eat this and then I'll get straight back on. Okay?]

**BEAT.**

[Dad promise.]

\*

**13. Walking along a quieter street**

**May:** I thought agoraphobics couldn't leave the house?

**Samuel:** Some can't.

**May:** You can't go on trains?

**Samuel:** No. Well not without...

**May:** What about a bike?

**Samuel:** Well...

**May:** A rickshaw? They don't go that fast.

**Samuel:** That's not really the... It's not the mode of transport, sometimes it is, but it's more the the um distance from your safe place, home, or the ability to get off. Y'know, like on a tube you're trapped until the next stop. Or sometimes it's crowds. Bridges. I can't do escalators.

Sorry. It's weird. I hate telling people.

**May:** I love anything that makes me feel less screwed up.

**Samuel laughs.**

**May:** Not that you're –

**Samuel:** Well...

The technical definition is someone who is scared of wide open spaces but that just makes people think I can't stand in fields. I sometimes call it claustrophobia for ease, but that's not true either. I could stand in a cupboard all day, as long as I was by myself. To be honest, it's quite difficult to / explain

**May:** /So you just woke up one day and - pow – you couldn't get on the bus?

**Samuel:** It was more of a gradual thing. First I couldn't do the tube, then I gave up the bus and then I couldn't get in a taxi.

**May:** Is there a cure?

**Samuel:** There are drugs you can take but... they didn't work. There's books. There's people you can see. Y'know... therapists.

[A CBT therapist is not much different from reading a book, except they're like your personal cheerleader. Maybe if my therapist had looked like May and worn a little skirt and jumped with a couple of pom poms...]

**May:** Have you been to one?

**Samuel:** For a bit.

**May:** Why d'you stop?

**Samuel:** I couldn't get there anymore. I used to go in a taxi, but after a couple of months that became... harder.

**May:** Bit of a flaw in their business plan.

**Samuel laughs.**

**They stop outside Samuel's Flat.**

**Samuel:** Well... this is me. It's supposed to be the man that walks the girl home.

**May:** I never went in for gender roles.

**Samuel:** Thanks for... y'know...

[There was, is, something about your mum. She's just so.... so...]

**They kiss.**

[That time *I* kissed her. For the next two years, I never really stopped.]

\*

**14. On the tube train. It's moving.**

**Samuel:** [I'm back on. And I'm only a four. Which is not bad considering. There's a couple fighting in the middle of the carriage, which is helping... it takes the heat off me. The woman has an uncanny resemblance to your Auntie Sarah. The way she slurs her words.]

**He listens.**

[I love domestics. People losing control. Which is ironic really, but it sorta takes the heat off me.

No one's really sure what they're arguing about but we're all having a great time until...]

**A tut.**

**Samuel:** [...someone tuts. Dad lesson number two, everyone hates a tutter.]

**Aoife:** Sam?

**Samuel:** [Make that a five. This is one of the problems with the whole 'agro' thing. You live in fear of bumping into people you know. Friends, acquaintances, family members, anyone who might start talking.

Even Fit Irish Girl. Who is really nice and well... fit.]

**Aoife:** I thought it was you.

**Samuel:** [Anyone you don't know well enough to tell them to shut up]

**Aoife:** Aren't you hot in that coat?

**Samuel:** [She gets up. She's walking down the carriage and... she sits RIGHT NEXT TO ME.]

**Aoife sits down next to Samuel.**

**Aoife:** (*Whispering*) I love a good fight. Means you get to have all the makeup sex.

**Samuel:** Ha. Right.

[Your mum would call that flirting.

Me and your mum usually skipped the arguments and went straight to the sex. Which you probably don't want to think about, but it's how we made you. I do remember one huge row, in the early days. I can't remember what it was about but we were near Oxford Street. Way out of my safety zone.]

## **15. London Street**

**May:** If that's what you think. Don't text me. Don't call me. Don't –

**Samuel:** [I'm pretty sure she was gonna say 'don't come round to mine' but she stopped herself. I remember closing my eyes, and preparing for her to walk off. But instead...

**May grabs Samuel's hand.**

**Samuel:** Where are we going?

**The walk quickly.**

**Samuel:** [She walked me to the bus stop. She didn't bring up the argument on the bus. She did my counting. ]

**May:** Three. Three and a half.

**The sound of the bus stopping. They get off.**

[In fact, it wasn't until she got me safely back to mine that...]

**Quiet residential street in London.**

**Samuel:** D' you want come inside and make up?

**May:** Go to hell.

**May walks off.**

**BEAT.**

[That's when I knew.]

## **16. Tube**

**Aoife:** So how are you, stranger? I haven't seen you for a while.

**Samuel:** [For the record, I didn't name Fit Irish Girl 'Fit Irish Girl'. Your mum did and it just sort of... stuck]

No no I... I found a little coffee shop nearer to mine and –

**Aoife:** You've been cheating on us?

**Samuel:** No. Ha. Well.

[She works at our local Starbucks. Your mum used to think that she liked me cause she always drew a smiley face and a heart on my cup.]

**Aoife:** You still drinking everything in a take away cup?

**Samuel:** Um...

**Aoife:** We have this theory that people who drink from paper cups have commitment issues. They can't commit to staying somewhere long enough to drink their coffee.

I think you might be the exception to the rule though. You're always with the same girlfriend.

**Samuel:** Well um... we actually...

**Aoife:** No?! You guys seemed so happy together. Sorry. I bet you hate it when people say that.

**Samuel:** No no. It's fine, it's... it's...

[It's not fine.]

**Aoife:** You look really well.

**Samuel:** [The ironic thing is, when you try so hard to keep yourself together, you come across as perfectly okay.]

Are you getting off at the next stop?

[Please say yes. Please say yes. Please say - ]

**Aoife:** No. I'm going all the way to Upminster.

**Samuel:** [Dad censor]

\*

### **17. The hallway of May and Samuel's flat.**

**Samuel:** Twenty one months, three thousand take aways and a successful cohabitation later...

**May:** *(Through a closed bathroom door)* Don't listen!

*He listens.*

**May:** I can't go if you're listening. I need some water.

**Samuel:** Won't that dilute the reading? I'm sure I read that somewhere.

**May:** What do you want me to do? Keep straining till I squeeze out an organ?

**Samuel:** That would be pretty amazing.

**May:** (*Snapping*) Yeah? Then you do it?

**Samuel:** [Judging by your mum's hormones, I'm not sure we needed the test.]

**Samuel opens a packet of crisps.**

**May:** Are you eating?

**Samuel:** (*With his mouth full*) No.

**May:** How can you eat at a time like this?

**Samuel:** [I always eat when I'm nervous.]

**May:** (*Getting nervous*) Are you nervous?

**Samuel:** (*With his mouth full*) No.

**May:** Tell me something.

**Samuel:** Um. Today I created a video for –

**May:** Not about work. This is a potentially momentous occasion. Tell me something... momentous.

**BEAT.**

**Samuel:** Do you know astronauts can't cry in space?

**May:** What?

**Samuel:** Yeah. Something to do with gravity. There's nothing to pull the tears down. I'd never actually thought about –

**May urinates**

**May:** Can you hear that?

**Samuel rams more crisps into his mouth**

**Samuel:** (*With a mouth full of crisps*) Uh hu.

**May's still urinating.**

**May:** Should I have a glass of wine before we find out? Cause if it's positive that'll be it. Sober. For nine months.

**BEAT.**

Sam?

**Samuel:** (*Between crunches*) Hm?

**May:** If this test is positive we'll go from being a couple to a family in less than a second. Isn't that insane?

**Samuel pours the rest of the crisps in his mouth and crunches loudly.**

**After three minutes, the door creaks open.**

**Samuel:** Well...

**May:** Looks like we're on.

**18. On the train. Moving.**

[I'm deleting emails off of my phone.]

**The beep of text messages being deleted.**

[Rude, I know. But it occupies my mind. I'm probably the only man in Britain who likes spam. Delete. Delete. Delete.

Crap.

I think that one was important.]

**Aoife:** You sexting some hot new girl?

**Samuel:** No. Ha. Nothing like...

[When the signal goes I move on to texts.

Your mum used to think that by deleting all her messages I was saying something about us. That's the thing though about this... disease. It's really not about anyone but you. It's incredibly selfish. The majority of your headspace is dedicated to working out escape routes. Or safe places. Or mindless tasks that might stop you thinking.

**BEAT.**

[I click the next message and you're there... Looking up at me.

It's a photo your mum texted me straight after you were born.

They handed you to her after they'd cleaned you up. You fit exactly into the crook of her arm. She is kissing your head. I wished I could've done that. I wish that some part of me could have touched some part of you. You had her eyes, and mouth. Your bottom lip just slightly bigger than your top. Like you were pouting. You had my nose. The beginnings of it.

You were...

You are...]

**Train Driver:** The next station is Aldgate East.

**Aoife:** We should swap numbers. Go for a drink or something.

**Samuel:** [How can I love you this much when we've never met?]

**Aoife:** Shall I put it in your phone?

**Samuel:** Um.

**Sam's breathing is high. His heart is beating louder.**

**Aoife:** Why don't you give me yours instead?

**Samuel:** [I zoom in on your eyes... There, in the corner, is what looks like the start of a tear]

**Aoife:** What shall I put you in as, Sam or Fit English Boy?

**Samuel:** [My head's starting to feel...]

**The train stops. The doors open.**

**Samuel:** I don't think I can do this.

**Fit Irish Girl:** Sam?

**Sam's breathing is high. His heart is beating louder.**

**Samuel rushes to the door.**

**Samuel:** Sorry.

**Aoife:** *[Calling after him]* Sam?

### **19. On the platform**

**He runs up the stairs. He beeps his oyster card on the outgoing barriers.**

### **20. Outside the tube station, on the street. The sound of people and traffic**

**Samuels breathes heavily for a few seconds in both panic and relief from being in the open.**

**Samuel:** [I'm outside... I'm in the air...]

I've... I've no idea where I...

**He looks around.**

[I must've come out of a different exit.]

**His breathing is still heavy.**

Where is is the...

[What am I doing? A grown man, with a Care Bear stuffed in my pocket, like I'm a dad. Only I can't even get there to let you have it.]

**He takes his phone out and tries to load it**

The internet isn't isn't...

[I'm trying to bring the map up on my phone and...]

**He hits the phone.**

Come on come on come on.

GPS error.

[Even GPS can't find me.]

**He shakes his phone**

[I'm shaking my phone. I'm doing the figure eight.]

Why can't you find me? Find me find me please...

\*

**On the street.**

**Samuel:** I thought I could do it but I can't.

**The sound of Sam walking quickly through the street.**

**Samuel:** Sorry I'm sorry I'm...

**The Care Bear hits the floor.**

**Woman:** [Shouting] Excuse me.

**Samuel:** I've got to... to

**Samuel walks quicker. His breath is getting louder.**

**Sound of a women in heels, running.**

**Woman:** (*Shouting*) Sorry. Hi.

**Samuel stops.**

**Woman:** You dropped your bear.

**She passes him the Care Bear.**

**Woman:** I know how upset they get

**Samuel:** Um thanks.

**Woman:** Buy a back up or three. It's worth it for the sleep you'll save.

**The woman walks off. Samuel stays still.**

[I want to tell her I haven't slept for days. Months. A whole year.]

**21. His breath starts up again.**

[I want to go home but I don't know where that is anymore. Because you're not there and neither is she.

I wish I could ring your mum. Hear her voice. If I could dial the...]

## **22. In the hospital.**

**May:** (*Disgusted*) Flora?

**Samuel:** [Your mum was thirty eight weeks pregnant when we went to the hospital. Just for a routine appointment with the midwife. I didn't really need to be there, but I liked to be. Unfortunately I'd made us miss the appointment because it was busy and I'd had to get on and off the train four times. We were waiting to see if they could squeeze us in.]

**May:** Flora? As in the margarine?

**Samuel:** We were halfway through a disagreement about names.

**May:** Think how many jokes there'll be about her spreading her –

**Samuel:** [We were ready for you in every other way. We'd painted the nursery, aka my office, green. We'd bought the cot, the mobile, even baby grows, but the name was proving–

**May:** There will never be a Prime Minister called Flora. We're her parents, we've got to think of stuff like that.

**Samuel:** Actually Flora Macdonald was Canada's first female foreign –

**May:** I veto Flora.

**BEAT.**

**Samuel:** [She'd been a bit snippy the whole journey. I guess reality was starting to hit. The truth is, if agoraphobia makes a rubbish boyfriend, as a dad it'd be even worse.]

**May:** What if they can't fit us in?

**Samuel:** They will. Listen, I know you're worried about the whole travelling thing, but there are benefits to being with an agoraphobic.

**May:** Yeah?

**Samuel:** Yeah. You don't have to worry about me disappearing with the lads every weekend. I'll always be at home, so very hands on dad. I stay up working into the early hours, so I can do all the night feed. Plus, logistically, I can't cheat on you even if I wanted to.

**May:** That's reassuring.

**Samuel:** Which I don't. Because... well... this is um... y'know... the happiest I've ever been.

**BEAT.**

**Samuel:** Okay. I actually thought you were gonna follow that up with a 'me too' but anyway.

**May:** (*Laughing*) Me too.

**BEAT.**

**Samuel:** Yeah?

**May:** Yeah.

**BEAT.**

**May:** I mean, okay... sometimes when all our mates are travelling the world and we're still debating whether we can get to the cinema... I feel a bit... or when I think about the future and that I'll have to take her to all her classes, and appointments... and then take you to all yours... and we won't be able to go on day trips, or family holidays then.... yeah, I worry that we'll be missing out on the best years of our /life

**Samuel:** /Wow. Okay.

**May:** But I'd rather spend my life sat drinking dandelion and burdock on the doorstep with you than–

**Midwife:** May? If you'd like to come through.

### **23. Private room.**

**Midwife:** So no weird cravings?

**May:** None. Sam on the other hand –

**Samuel:** They're sympathy cravings. I Googled it, it's a real thing.

**May:** By the time I drop he won't be able to fit through the door.

**Samuel:** That works. I don't go out much. I plan on teaching our daughter all her life skills from day time chat shows.

**May:** Like don't date men without teeth.

**Samuel:** (*Quickly*) Like don't date any men.

**May:** Is every guy like this when they find out they're having a daughter?

**Midwife:** Okay. I'm going to have a quick listen to the heartbeat and then we're done.

**Samuel:** [I don't know why I'm telling you about this. But as your dad I feel it's my duty to tell you everything.]

**SILENCE.**

**May:** I can't hear anything.

**Midwife:** Sometimes it's how they're lying. I'm just going to get another midwife to pop in.

**May:** Has something happened? Is she okay?

**Midwife:** Try to relax.

**The MIDWIFE leaves.**

**May:** Why do we need another midwife to pop in?

**Samuel:** [In my experience 'pop in' is not a medical term. It's a cover up. It's desperation.]

**May:** Sam?

**Samuel:** [*To May*] I'm sure it's fine.

**BEAT.**

**Samuel:** Absolutely fine.

[Except it wasn't.

Two more midwives, and an emergency scan later]

**Midwife:** I'm afraid we can't find a heartbeat.

**May:** But she was fine. Last night she was kicking.

**Midwife:** Sometimes these things happen.

[They couldn't be exactly sure why it had happened but you'd 'fallen asleep' the night before.]

**May:** Can't you get her out. Save her.

**Midwife:** I'm really very sorry.

**May breaks.**

**Samuel:** Okay.

[That's all I said.]

“Okay.”

[Cause what else can you say to that. And that's my job, as your dad. To make whatever happens, okay.]

**Midwife:** I'll leave you on your own for a few minutes. When you're ready, someone will come around and discuss what happens next.

**The MIDWIFE leaves**

[I remember I placed my hand on your mum's shoulder. I wanted to move towards her but I couldn't. So we stayed like that. Touching each other but somehow entirely separate.

The next day your Auntie Sarah came and took your mum back in to be induced. We'd planned to have a home birth so I could be there - it's not like she could jump off the table mid labour, half drugged up to take me home if I panicked - but it wasn't mentioned now and... your mum had enough to deal with. So I stayed at home.

We called you Ruth when you were born. After the midwife that delivered you. I liked it. It sounded strong. And it was biblical, which went down well with your Gran. I'm not religious but I downloaded an e-bible that night and there you were. The Book of Ruth snuggled right before The Book of Samuel.]

\*

**24. At a bus stop. Moderately busy London road.**

**Samuel:** [I'm back down to a four. It does this. If you can ride it out you eventually come out the other side. Except it's exhausting.]

**A bus pulls up in front of Samuel. The doors open.**

**Samuel:** [A bus stop probably wasn't the best place to sit.]

**Bus Driver:** *[Shouting]* Gettin' on mate?

**Samuel:** *[Shouting back]* Um. No. Sorry.

[It's the 323. That one goes right by the cemetery. It's the one I would've got if...

Your mum gave me a map of the cemetery once and showed me where you are... you're right in the middle. Which is the hardest part for me. A cemetery is like a... a... bridge. Once you're in you have to go all the way through, or all the way back. You can't veer off to the side. Does that make sense? You're too far in to go back, but not far enough.

Kind of how I feel about being your dad. My life isn't like other dad's. I'm sort of somewhere in-between.]

**The bus doors shut.**

**Samuel:** [Too far in to go back and...]

**BEAT.**

**Samuel runs towards the bus just as it pulls off.**

**Samuel:** Wait!

**He bangs on the window. The bus stops. The doors open.**

**Samuel:** Sorry. I... I actually...

**25. Samuel boards the bus.**

**He beeps his Oyster card.**

**Samuel:** People say that if you love someone enough you can conquer anything. But that's not true. It just means you keep trying.

**BEAT.**

**Samuel:** And what's the worst that could happen?

**The bus doors shut. The bus pulls away.**

Don't answer that.

\*

**26. Samuel and May's flat**

**The front door opens and closes.**

**Samuel:** Hey.

**BEAT.**

How how did it..?

[It was the day of your funeral and I was still wearing my suit, even though I'd spent the day at home. I'd tried so hard to get there ... but when the car eventually came...]

**May:** My dad carried the coffin.

**Samuel:** Good. Good that's...

[That was my job. Your mum had carried you for almost eight months and it was going to finally be my turn.]

**Samuel:** I tried to call.

**May:** My phone was off.

**Samuel:** I forgot to give you the Care Bear.

[I'd been holding him since the car left. We'd got you a teddy from both of us, but this was a special one from me. I'd spent ages finding it. He's blue with a moon and star on his belly. It's Bedtime Bear's job to help you sleep. I'd recorded my own phrases for him to speak. Which is a bit weird, but I wanted you to know you weren't in there alone.]

**May:** [*Suddenly*] How could you not be there?

**Samuel:** I...

**May:** I know... I know it's not your fault but... You're her dad.

**PAUSE.**

**May:** Look, Sam I'm...

**BEAT.**

I'm going to go and stay with my sister for a bit. For a few weeks or. I know it's not ideal with your... but I can't be here with the nursery and the cot and...

**Samuel:** And the agoraphobia.

**SILENCE.**

**May:** I'll go to the supermarket before I go. Stock you up.

**Samuel:** [An hour later, every cupboard in the kitchen was full and everything else was empty.]

**27. Outside May and Samuel's flat. On the doorstep.**

**May:** You'll be alright? You've got enough food?

**Samuel:** Yeah.

**May:** What if you need to get / somewhere...

**Samuel:** /I won't.

**May:** But if there was an emergency? Maybe I should take you to your mum and dad's.

**Samuel:** I'll be fine.

*They go to kiss each other on the cheek. They clash heads. It's awkward.*

**May:** Sorry I...

**They kiss each other on the cheek properly.**

**Samuel:** I'm sorry.

**May:** Sam...

**Samuel:** I know you're sick of hearing me say that. I know I haven't been there. But on her first birthday... Three hundred and forty two days from now, I'll be at that cemetery. With the Care Bear. No excuses. Even if it means I never leave the house again.

**May:** Sam.

**Samuel:** Ruth, are you listening? I promise your dad's gonna be there.

**A car horn beeps twice.**

**May:** That's Sarah. I'd better -

**Samuel:** Yeah.

**May starts to walk down the steps.**

She didn't say she wouldn't be back, but we both knew it. For one, she'd bought me a twenty four pack of baked beans.

Which is why I should've said something. About how much I loved her. Still love her. That I'd do anything to have our little family back. That I was sorry for everything and wished we could do it all over again.]

**Samuel:** May...

**May's footsteps stop.**

**May:** Yeah?

**Samuel:** [But the words wouldn't come. So that's how it ended – me, you, your mum – half way through a conversation.]

\*

**28. On the bus. It is moving. The bus is rammed. The noise of the people is overwhelming.**

**Samuel:** [I'm sat in the Priority Seat in the middle. Which is my favourite - or least worst - because it's right by the door. I like to see the exit at all times. The bus is rammed now and I'm trying to avoid eye contact in case –]

**Dad:** Excuse me. Could I have your seat?

**Samuel:** [Too late]

**Dad:** Only with the baby, and my son.

**Samuel:** [This is the problem with priority seats. They only show photos of old people with sticks and pregnant women. They don't have a symbol for people like me.]

Um... I don't know if I... Um.

**Dad:** There's no seats, and you are sat in a priority one.

**Samuel:** [If we're playing that card, they don't have a symbol for a man with a baby strapped to his front, and a small person clinging to his leg either.]

Sorry. It's just I'm...

[That that was a crappy thing to say.]

I'm actually not feeling too well.

[The whole bus has gone quiet. Everyone's looking at me like I'm a total...]

**Someone tuts.**

[Screw them. Screw the tutters. I need this seat.]

**PAUSE**

I I I need to be near the door.

**Dad:** You can stand by the door.

**Samuel:** I I have to sit. I mean... standing... particularly when it's busy...

[His face is blank]

I'm agoraphobic.

**Dad:** Come on man. I've got two kids.

**Samuel:** [That worked. I should've said I'd got diarrhoea. Then people leave you alone.]

**Random Girl:** Excuse me, you can sit here if you want?

**Dad:** Thanks.

**Samuel:** [Great]

**The Girl and Dad swap seats.**

**Samuel:** [He sits down next to me. The kids climbing up on his knee.

The way you would have climbed on to mine.]

**We can hear Samuel breathing, just slightly.**

**The bus doors close. The bus sets off.**

**Samuel:** [All I can smell is the baby.

I climb up to a seven... an eight.]

Just a tiny bit further.

**Samuel:** The baby starts to cry.

**A baby starts to cry.**

**The sound of traffic.**

**The sound of crowds.**

**A faint, tinny 'Relight My Fire' starts to play.**

**Samuel:** [My hands are sweating. Care Bear slips to the floor.]

**Care Bear:** Like a Care Bear, your dad's always there.

**Over it all we hear Samuel's breath get shallower.**

**Eventually the sounds merge together, until they become faint and the only distinct sound is Samuel's heart beating.**

**The bus bell is pressed.**

**Dad:** Watch it.

**Samuel:** Sorry. I I I need to...

**He presses the bell over and over again.**

**Samuel:** Can you you let me off... now... please... I need to get...

**Samuel's breath is short and shallow. His heart is beating loud. The other noise suddenly seems very distant.**

**The bus stops. The doors open. Samuel rushes out.**

### **29. On the street**

**Samuel:** I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry...

[I'm an eight. Pushing nine.]

**Samuel's breathing has hit an all time high.**

**Samuel:** [My head is swimming.]

**[Realising]** I left your your your Care Bear on the...

**Samuel:** I don't deserve to be your dad. Little girls need dads who are invincible... strong...

**Samuel is almost hyperventilating.**

**Samuel:** Dad's who can travel ten stops.

**Samuel tries to breathe.**

**Samuel:** You deserve... you and your mum deserve...

Paper bag. Paper bag.

**May:** Sam?

**All the previous noise stops.**

**BEAT.**

**Samuel looks up.**

**Samuel:** [I I look up and I... I I realise I'm sat in the entrance to the cemetery... I made it... Your dad  
-]

**May:** Hi.

**Samuel's breathing starts to come under control. The world starts to become clearer.**

**Samuel:** [Your mum is stood less than a foot away from me.

**A LONG PAUSE.**

I hold up my fingers.]

**May:** Six.

**PAUSE.**

Five.

**PAUSE.**

Four.

**PAUSE.**

Three and a half.

**PAUSE.**

Three.

**His breathing comes back to normal.**

**For a moment we hear them breathe in unison.**

**May:** *(Smiling)* You took your time.

**Samuel breathes and smiles at the same time.**

**End.**