

TINDER BOX

by

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Based on true events

ACT I

BEN'S HALLWAY

It is the 23rd March 2020. ROBYN and BEN enter into the hallway of BEN's apartment. BEN stoops to pick up the pile of takeaway menus that have accumulated at the foot of the door.

BEN

Sorry it's a bit lippy... didn't really expect to be um, bringing you over tonight? First date and all...

ROBYN

Yeah, well I didn't really expect them to turf us out so quickly. They practically brought us the bill with the food.

BEN

Covid, mate.

ROBYN

*Covid.*

BEN

Mm.

Beat.

Drink?

ROBYN

Yes. Please.

BEN'S LIVING ROOM

Time has passed. ROBYN and BEN are lounging on BEN's sofa. Two empty glass tumblers sit aside an open tube of Pringles on the table in front of them. They are laughing comfortably. There is a stark difference in ease from the previous scene.

ROBYN

A musician?

BEN

Yup. I know! Catch, right? I was super intimidated until he told me what his main source of inspiration was.

ROBYN  
...please.

BEN  
Concrete.

ROBYN  
*CONCRETE.*

BEN  
Concrete.

ROBYN  
Well I guess it's pretty solid  
material.

BEN  
That's what *I* said! And do you know  
how he responded.

ROBYN  
No.

BEN  
He was like 'Yeah I know, most people  
just don't get it'

ROBYN  
He was joking, he must have been  
joking.

BEN  
Nope. DEADLY serious.

ROBYN  
And was there a second date?

BEN  
Sadly not.

ROBYN  
Not boyfriend material then.

BEN  
Hardly.

The pair laugh.

BEN  
What about you? Any horror stories?

ROBYN

So, ok. Um... oh wait, here's a good one. So, I'd been dating this guy for like a month, and I guess it was kind of getting serious. Then he got this job promotion for work. And this job came with a lot of perks, weekend bonuses, staff discount, you name it... but one of those perks was a lanyard.

We see a flashback of the ex-boyfriend sporting a bright red lanyard, brimming with pride.

ROBYN (V/O)

Bright red, with white writing and a card with his name on it. And he was so proud. And you know what he deserved it. He worked so hard.

We return to ROBYN and BEN in the present day.

ROBYN

But then I noticed I was seeing him without it less and less.

BEN shifts in his seat. He is intrigued.

It started off fine. We'd meet after work and he'd still be wearing it. Fine. We've all done it.

A montage of different settings in which ROBYN gets increasingly chagrined.

ROBYN (V/O)

Then we started meeting at weekends. Bank Holidays. Days off. Times when he'd definitely not been at work, and he'd still have it on. He wore it on date nights, to restaurants and theatres, out with friends. He wore it to my sister's wedding, his own auntie's funeral. You can see it in the photos. And I felt bad for having a problem with it right? Because that lanyard represented all he'd worked so hard to achieve. It was a symbol

wasn't it? It was his authority, his manhood. That was not just a lanyard; it was a *manyard*.

We cut back to ROBYN and BEN on the sofa, BEN snorts at the joke, ROBYN enjoys his reaction. We delve back into the flashback:

ROBYN (V/O)

And I tried to come to terms with it I really did but... it was just so strange?! Pretty soon it became the first thing he'd put on in the morning and the last thing he'd take off at night.

Sometimes I'd think he wasn't wearing it and then I'd see it poking out the back of collar, this little band of red. And I'd realise he was wearing it under the shirt. Next to the flesh. And then one night we were...

Cut back to present day, ROBYN is suddenly a little sheepish.

ROBYN

you know... and he took his top off and... there it was...

Back to the memory, we see her ex, topless, pre-coital, seductive... still wearing the lanyard.

ROBYN (V/O)

dangling down like a big old red v-neck without the jumper attached to it.

Back to the present.

And I went to take it off, tried to be a bit sexy about it, and he took my hands in his and he whispered...

Close up on ROBYN's ex's lips as he mouths the following words to her voice

ROBYN (V/O)

'No... leave it on'.

Cut to the present day, ROBYN is caught up in the memory, BEN might as well not be there at this point

And I thought... come on Rob. Let him have this. Maybe it'll be fine. And they he lay me down and I...

We see a POV shoulders-up shot of ROBYN being slapped in the forehead with the lanyard as her ex thrusts into her to a soundtrack of careless whisper

The sound and the image of ROBYN being slapped in the forehead with the lanyard blends into the present day as she slaps her hand to head in time to its imagined swing.

Beat.

BEN  
You're joking.

ROBYN  
I'm not.

BEN  
Wow. That is.

ROBYN  
Yep.

BEN  
Wow.

ROBYN  
That's not even the worst one. I am a magnet for weird guys. In fact... um.

BEN  
What?

ROBYN  
Well... look, I don't usually divulge this on a first date but I've actually got a column on it.

BEN  
A column?

ROBYN  
Yes. Online, obviously. Started this month and I've got the first few stories sorted and lined up for the start of next month, but in the meantime that's kind of why I'm on the apps. I mean not the only reason,

but... I date *a lot*.

BEN  
That's evil.

ROBYN  
Is it?

BEN  
Well I guess that depends. What will  
you be writing about me?

ROBYN  
Nothing, probably.

Good dates make bad stories.

Beat.

BEN  
Well you just wait til I show you my  
Anne Widdecombe memorial shrine

ROBYN  
You know she's still alive, right?

BEN  
Doesn't hurt to be prepared.

ROBYN  
Oh my god, don't.

The pair laugh.

BEN  
Well, I think we both need a drink  
after that. Another G&T?

He gathers the glasses and rises to leave.

ROBYN  
Actually, it's pretty late, I should  
probably get going.

BEN  
(sitting back down)  
Oh. Ok, sure.

The pair sit for a moment in silence, neither is really ready  
for the night to end.

BEN  
Or... stay?

ROBYN smiles.

BEN'S BEDROOM

It is much later. The pair have just had quite unexpected sex. They are both happy, but a little surprised (impressed?) at themselves. ROBYN rolls out of BEN's arms and starts dressing. BEN sits up and looks sadly at her.

BEN  
Where are you going?

ROBYN  
I really *should* get off now.

BEN  
Oh.

ROBYN  
I have a deadline tomorrow at 12.

BEN  
Right ok. That's fair. You probably should get off then.

ROBYN  
Yes I should.

Beat.

Or...

BEN  
Or... stay?

ROBYN hovers for a second, then dumps her stuff on the ground again and crawls back onto BEN.

BEN'S BEDROOM THE FOLLOWING MORNING

ROBYN is roused by a whooshing sound, along with the occasional pant. She groggily rouses herself to find BEN vigorously hula-hooping to a muted youtube video on his laptop. He is red-in-the-face, sweaty and engrossed.

ROBYN  
What are you doing?

She has startled him, he stumbles slightly and the hoop clatters plastically to the ground. Still panting, he pulls out an AirPods.

BEN  
Hulacize. It's big in Canada.

ROBYN  
What time is it?

BEN  
Here, or in Canada?

He chuckles at his own joke, then seeing it hasn't really resonated with the still-groggy ROBYN, comes round to the side of the bed to check his phone

It is... 8!

ROBYN  
Wow.

BEN  
Usually I'd go to the gym but...

ROBYN  
Covid.

BEN  
Yeah.

Beat.

Coffee? Toast? I make a mean slice of toast.

ROBYN  
Will Hoopy McGee be there?

BEN  
That's Doctor Hoopy McGee to you...  
and no. She gets jealous.

There is a glimmer of last night's chemistry as they both enjoy the joke.

BEN'S KITCHEN

ROBYN is scrolling through emails on her phone. She is absorbed in messages about deadlines for the blog. One message reveals that her boss finds her work 'a little too

Sex and the City' and wonders how she could make the column more relevant to a '2020 feminist audience'. BEN enters, wet from a shower. He sees ROBYN's clenched jaw.

BEN  
Everything ok?

ROBYN  
Apparently dating men is no longer feminist.

BEN  
Well to be fair it never has been.  
Coffee?

ROBYN is absorbed and does not react. BEN waits a second and then raises his eyebrows and begins to fill the kettle.

ROBYN  
Sorry, um, no thank you. I'm just replying to these and then I'll be out of your hair in a minute.

BEN  
No, no. That's fine.

BEN opens his laptop and goes to his news app. The screen is full of red banners and lockdown announcements. He glances at ROBYN, then clicks on one of the videos of Boris Johnson. He watches for a while, his anxiety swelling.

BEN  
Robyn?

ROBYN  
Just a second.

BEN  
Ok.

He continues to watch.

BEN  
Robyn, I think... I think maybe you should look at this

ROBYN looks up as Ben swivels his screen towards her and puts his sound on.

VIDEO  
...You should not be meeting friends.

If your friends ask you to meet, you should say No.

You should not be meeting family members who do not live in your home.

You should not be going shopping except for essentials like food and medicine - and you should do this as little as you can. And use food delivery services where you can.

If you don't follow the rules the police will have the powers to enforce them, including through fines and dispersing gatherings...

ROBYN

What the fuck?

BEN

It's happening. We're locking down. Like in Italy.

ROBYN

Shit. Shit, everywhere?

BEN

Looks like it.

ROBYN

Fuck. Right I need to... *Fuck*. I need to go. I need to get home.

ROBYN starts to look up a route home. BEN watches her, conflicted. Eventually she looks at him.

ROBYN

What?

BEN

(Hesitates, then:)

Or... stay?

TITLES.

BEN'S KITCHEN

No time has passed

ROBYN

What?

BEN

Stay? You could stay here, if you liked... for the lockdown

ROBYN

For all of the lockdown?

BEN

Yeah, why not? There's plenty of space, you could work in the living room, I could have the bedroom. We could get to properly know each other.

ROBYN

...are you serious?

BEN

They're reviewing in 3 weeks... wouldn't be that long.

ROBYN

Yeah but... no, that's ridiculous.

BEN

Sorry. No you're right.

ROBYN

I mean... I don't really know you. Like, at all. We only just met. On an app.

BEN

Yeah. I know.

ROBYN

And you don't know me either. I could be some axe wielding maniac.

BEN

Sorry, yeah, don't know why I suggested it.

ROBYN

Don't get me wrong I *like* you but... yeah, no. I can't *stay* here.

BEN

You're right, it was silly. I just

panicked.

Robyn's phone starts to buzz.

ROBYN

It's my boss. I should get that.

BEN

Yeah. Ok.

Throughout the following dialogue ROBYN is constantly moving, getting up, gathering her things into her bag then making her way to the door.

ROBYN

I'm going to take this on the way to the tube.

BEN rises and begins to follow her out.

BEN

Shall I walk you there?

ROBYN

No, that's ok, I remember.

BEN

Ok, well before you go, last night was-

Robyn picks up her phone

ROBYN

Hello? Hi, Margo yeah I've seen. Just give me a minute.

(to BEN)

Sorry! WhatsApp me later or something?

BEN

Yeah. Sure.

ROBYN is halfway through the door, pauses for the first time since her phone started ringing, hearing the dejection in BEN's voice.

ROBYN

(on the phone)

Margo can I call you back in just a minute? Yes, I'll be quick. Thanks.

ROBYN hangs up.

ROBYN

Sorry.

BEN

No, no. I get it.

There is a moment's silence where neither person is sure how to say goodbye. Hug? Kiss? Handshake? Dance-off? The next two lines are spoken over one another:

ROBYN

So it was great to finally-

BEN

Sorry if I made it weird just then-

The pair laugh awkwardly.

ROBYN

I really do have to go.

BEN

Yes. I know.

ROBYN

But it was great to meet you in person... I had a great time.

BEN

Me too... same again after lockdown?

ROBYN

Maybe! Yes, maybe!

BEN

Maybe.

Beat.

BEN

You need to-

ROBYN

Yes. I do. Alright then, bye!

BEN

Bye.

The door shuts, BEN leans against the wall and breaths deeply. The prospect of lockdown stretches out before him. He feels suddenly very alone.

## OUTSIDE/MARGO'S OFFICE

Once a safe distances from the flat, ROBYN shakes off the weirdness of her departure, plugs in her earphones and calls MARGO.

MARGO

Robyn

ROBYN

Hello! Yes, sorry about that, I was just on a date.

MARGO

Risky given today's news, don't you think?

ROBYN

Well, I didn't have today's news yesterday.

MARGO

Any good material?

ROBYN

Um. No, not really he was just... quite nice.

MARGO

You need to stop matching with people you're genuinely interested in, Robyn. It doesn't make for good stories

ROBYN

Oh... I mean I didn't-

MARGO

Anyway, Robyn. Probably just as well. I'm calling with a bit of bad news. In light of the current climate, as of next month, we're trying to adapt the publication to suit the modern woman in lockdown...

ROBYN

Right...

MARGO

So a weekly column on going out and meeting people for dates kind of loses its relevance when nobody can go

outside, do you get me?

ROBYN

Yes, but-

MARGO

I know you've a bit of a backlog, but the fallacy of a weekly fiasco is a little far-fetched under normal circumstances and now it's just quite obviously absolute fiction, do you get me? Your whole thing is about being relatable and funny and... sort of live? It just, doesn't fit with how we're having to adapt the blog. So! We have decided, with regret, to pause your column for the foreseeable, just until life goes back to normal, which should only take a month or so.

ROBYN

But I'm paid on commission... how am I going to-

MARGO

You're a freelance! Them's are your eggs.

ROBYN has reached the tube station, it is completely shut. Workers in PPE are pasting up a sign saying that this station among others has been closed as part of the reduced-service precautions in response to Covid.

ROBYN

Shit.

MARGO

This is not a termination of your contract Robyn, you're a brilliant writer and we still want to work with you. But it's just not... feasible.

ROBYN stares at the station, then back in the direction of BEN's flat. Her mind whirrs.

You're not the only one being paused, and lots of people have had to adapt their work, but your column just... doesn't fit. It's the theme, the story, it doesn't work. Is all of that ok, Robyn? It's just a little break.

ROBYN

What about something else?

MARGO

All of our other columns are taken care of, I can provide you with some proof-reading work in the meanti-

ROBYN

No I mean what if I kept my column, but adapted it. For lockdown.

MARGO

I promise you Robyn, we considered that but weren't sold on how much material you'd get from chatroom conversations and video calls. It's just not really-

ROBYN

Something completely different.

MARGO

Like what?

ROBYN

Um...

MARGO

Well?

ROBYN

It's. I could... OK. I've got an idea. I just need to sort some things out. I can. I could have a treatment written by the end of the day?

MARGO

Robyn...

ROBYN

Please, Margo, just let me write the treatment. I'll work it all out. I think... I think it'll be really good.

There is a pause while MARGO considers. ROBYN holds her breath.

MARGO

Fine. Write the treatment. I want it by 5. And there are no guarantees,

Robyn, it will probably be a no.

ROBYN

Yes! *Thank* you. Ok. Ok, great. Thank you. It's going to be good Margo, I promise.

MARGO

It's going to have to be.

ROBYN hangs up and turns to look in the direction of BEN's flat.

BEN'S KITCHEN

BEN is sitting in his kitchen at his laptop, there are a number of tabs open: 'How to survive lockdown when you live alone', 'do girls like hulacize?', 'I ate nothing but Pringles for ONE MONTH, click to see what happened'. After a thought, he begins to google 'What does maybe really mean?'

There is a knock on the door. He is confused. He doesn't really know his neighbours, and he isn't expecting any friends.

BEN'S HALLWAY

He goes to the door, unlocks it and opens it. It's ROBYN.

ROBYN

Or stay?

ACT II

BEN'S LIVING ROOM

It is later the same day. ROBYN is typing at her laptop. BEN knocks and enters with a plastic box full of clothes. ROBYN quickly closes the treatise document and shields the screen. BEN notices the movement but doesn't mention it.

ROBYN

Hey

BEN

Hey!

ROBYN eyes the box

BEN

Oh! I've been digging around and I've found some old clothes that look about your size... we could give them a wash and you could... I don't know, I thought you might want something to change into.

ROBYN

Very zombie apocalypse

BEN

Apocalyp-*chic*.

ROBYN

Thank you. That's kind.

BEN

Shall I... pop them on for a wash then?

ROBYN

Oh... no I can do it.

BEN

Do you want to do it?

ROBYN

Well I mean if I'm going to be wearing them I guess I should-

BEN

I don't mind doing it.

ROBYN

Well I don't mind either.

BEN

There's something a bit weird about me handing you a pile of my old clothes to wash and then wear...

ROBYN

There's also something a bit weird about you doing all of my laundry for the next three weeks.

BEN

Yeah.

Beat.

Sorry. Is this too weird? I don't really know how to-

ROBYN

No.

BEN

It's just I thought that we could- that we had... um. This is weird isn't it?

ROBYN

Do you want me to go?

BEN

No! No, obviously I want you to stay. It's just, logistically...

ROBYN

Logistically.

BEN

Well. I mean. Laundry and...

ROBYN

If you want me to go, I'll go. I just thought this was what you wanted.

BEN

It is, I think. It's just.

ROBYN

Just...

BEN

Like, ok. Where are you sleeping tonight?

ROBYN

Oh.

BEN

Because last night there was conversation and chemistry and, and... well sex and it was amazing and I thought... well, I thought it was going to go somewhere... and it really felt like you thought that too. But then today you're just... suddenly... you know.

Beat.

And I don't mind! I guess maybe it wasn't as unusual or whatever for you, but I just... If it wasn't... I don't understand why... why you're here.

ROBYN

You invited me?

BEN

Yes! Yes. I did.

ROBYN

Do you not want me here anymore?

BEN

No, I do! I just want us to both be on the same page about what that... means.

ROBYN

You mean I can't ghost you while we're locking down together.

BEN

Exactly!

ROBYN glances at the treatment tab on her screen, closes the lid and lays her laptop down on the coffee table.

ROBYN

I go on a lot of dates.

BEN

You said.

ROBYN

Right. I literally write a column on how terrible those dates are. That's a lot of people I would not want to be stuck in a house with for a month.

I'm here because I want to be. I want to know you. I like you Ben. I really like you.

BEN

Right.

ROBYN

Really.

Beat.

Look, I really have to get this in on time.

BEN

Oh shit yes, sorry. I completely forgot you had a deadline.

ROBYN

That's fine, I've got an extension til 5.

BEN

What are you working on?

ROBYN

Just a piece for the column

BEN

Oh? Can I see?

ROBYN

No! No, I mean no, it's not done.

BEN is clearly a little put out.

ROBYN

But I'll read you a bit?

BEN

Yeah, sure ok.

ROBYN

Ok... It's not finished

She opens an existing article and begins.

BEN

Noted!

ROBYN

I'm at a funeral.

BEN

Shut up.

ROBYN

Do you want me to finish or not?

BEN

Sorry, please it's just... a strong start.

We jump back in time and watch as the events unfold

ROBYN (V/O)

'I'm at a funeral, in rural Lincolnshire, nothing around this place for miles but forest and farms... and there's this pallbearer. Tall, dark, handsome, deliciously earnest. You know, the kind of guy that responds to a thanks with 'no, thank you' and who means it. The kind of guy who knows about coffee. The kind of guy my gran would describe as a 'strapping young bit of fluff'... were she not currently being shovelled into an incinerator to a soundtrack of the *Inspector Morse* theme tune.'

Cut back to present day.

BEN

Also strong

ROBYN

Shh! You're ruining the flow.

We delve back into the past.

ROBYN (V/O)

'So after the service, I figure "what

the hell" and decide to try my luck with this guy. He tells me his name is Paul. Which should in retrospect have been a big red flag, but I went with it and 20 minutes later we were getting it on in the woods by the venue.

Back to present.

BEN

Wow.

ROBYN gives him another warning glance and he playfully places a finger on his lips in submission. We jump back to the woods.

ROBYN (V/O)

This all for some reason resulted in him being in quite an extreme state of physical undress... by which I mean he was entirely, buck-ass, bollocks-to-the-breeze, where's-my-wallet naked. This- as I'm sure you can imagine- was quite the source of excitement for me and I'm unashamed to say that as any sexually-liberated twenty-something might have done in my situation, I jumped him right then and there, causing us both to topple to the forest floor in a flurry of carnal passion.

We were a tangle of limbs. All heat and lust and wild abandon... until...

Back to present.

BEN

Oh god.

Back to the past.

ROBYN (V/O)

We rolled over onto what I now know to be a squirrel's nut hoard. Which, reader, I assure you would not have deterred us one single semblance of an iota... had Paul the pallbearer not had a severe- and I mean severe- nut allergy and had promptly begun to turn

a sickly shade of purple as his lips swelled and his throat began to close. Luckily Paul had an epipen, which he'd left back in the venue... convenient in a not-at-all sort of way... and so with renewed vigour and bearing the steadily-swelling Paul in my arms I rushed back into the hall, located his backpack and then the epipen inside it and jabbed him in the leg, emitting what can only be described as an 'animalistic' scream.

Back to the living room.

BEN

Jesus.

ROBYN

Oh, I'm not done.

Flashback

ROBYN (V/O)

'As I'm sure you can imagine in such dire circumstances, clothing was hardly high on the list of priorities, which would not have been of much consequence, had since we left, another funeral service not started.'

The flashback ends abruptly and we are back in the living room.

ROBYN

And that's it... I don't really know how to end it.

BEN

Something about envying the person in the coffin?

ROBYN

That's... not bad actually.

She takes a note. BEN watches her.

BEN

Is it true?

ROBYN  
Which bit?

BEN  
Any of it.

ROBYN considers for a moment.

ROBYN  
No. No it's not. Well. Kind of. I got off with a pallbearer at a funeral. It wasn't my gran's though, it was a family friend who used to babysit my mum, no relation. But that was it. His name wasn't even Paul it was... David or Daniel or something.

BEN  
You made all that up?

ROBYN  
No, no it's based on truth it's just... elaborated.

BEN  
But not actually true.

ROBYN  
(Wincing)  
No. No actually true.

Beat.

I do this thing sometimes where I sort of dramatise stuff. Turn ordinary boring everyday things into stories.

BEN  
I think we all do that.

ROBYN  
But I do it a lot. It's bad, I know. Kind of like lying... but more fun. For everyone. It's not just for me. I'm actually a very boring person when you get to know me.

BEN  
I highly doubt that.

ROBYN  
Good, it's working.

BEN  
I don't think that's that bad. It's  
not like you're making decisions just  
for the sake of anecdote.

ROBYN  
(Guilty)  
Yeah...

BEN  
I think I'd enjoy being bored by you.

ROBYN  
That's the sweetest thing anyone's  
ever said to me.

BEN  
Sheesh, you really have been unlucky  
in love.

Beat.

(gesturing to the laptop)  
It's good. Funny.

ROBYN  
You think?

BEN  
And... honestly I'm glad it's not  
true.

ROBYN  
Oh?

BEN  
Tall, dark, strapping and earnest? How  
could I compete?

ROBYN  
In a game of Russian roulette with  
Revels?

They laugh.

Well, thank you.

BEN  
No, thank you.

Was that it? Was that alright?

ROBYN  
Excellent.

There is an awkward pause.

ROBYN  
I'm sorry... that was maybe a bit too much.

BEN  
What?

ROBYN  
The whole... truth thing. Bit much. You don't really know me well enough.

BEN  
Well I do a bit better now.

Beat.

I was thinking... do you want to maybe do a date night tonight? Get a takeaway... put it on plates so it looks like I cooked it, get some wine in? I know it's a Tuesday night but... we can celebrate your submission?

ROBYN  
Yeah... yeah that'd be nice.

BEN  
Ok! Say 6ish?

ROBYN  
6ish.

BEN  
Oh and... maybe don't come into the kitchen until then?

ROBYN looks quizzically at BEN

ROBYN  
I though you weren't cooking

BEN

Robyn. I am the fire and the wind. Do not attempt to know me.

BEN exits then immediately returns

BEN

I mean you can attempt a little bit... that is kind of the point.

BEN exits again. ROBYN is left alone, amused, warmed. She checks herself and reopens the treatment. After giving it a final once-over, she attaches it to an email and sends it to MARGO.

ACT III

## BEN'S BATHROOM

An hour or so has passed, ROBYN is preparing for the date. She checks the time on her phone; it is 5:37, she opens her emails, drags her finger to the bottom of the page to refresh her inbox. Nothing. Putting her phone to one side, she examines her face in the mirror, pulls out makeup from her bag and begins applying foundation with her fingers. As she blends, her phone vibrates. She hurriedly wipes her hands and picks up the phone to find a Hinge notification telling her she has a new match. She opens the match, scrolls absent-mindedly over his profile before opening up her settings. Her fingers hover over the delete button. She considers for a second, then chooses not to. She puts her phone down and continues to do her makeup.

## BEN'S KITCHEN

Loud music is playing. BEN is emptying a bag of fancy crisps into a bowl, behind him, ROBYN enters, looking radiant, but dressed in the same clothes as before. She pauses when she realises BEN has yet to notice her, smiles, backtracks and knocks on the open door.

BEN swivels round excitedly, and the full kitchen set-up is revealed. BEN has lit candles, laid a picnic blanket over the central table, complete with plates, glasses and cutlery and a pint glass full of tulips. Draping fairy lights line the walls and hang from shelves. He has also dressed for the occasion. Fancy shirt and shoes, maybe a subtle bit of eyeliner.

ROBYN

(Shouting over music)

Wow.

BEN

(Also shouting)

Do you like it?

ROBYN

Which part?

BEN

All of it

ROBYN

Yes. Can you-

BEN  
Oh yeah, sure

He turns the music down and puts the crisps on the table as ROBYN sits.

BEN  
You look amazing.

ROBYN  
I look amazing?

BEN  
Thought I'd make an effort.

ROBYN  
Show off. You look great.

BEN smiles. Proud, happy.

BEN  
What do you fancy then? Indian?  
Italian? Lebanese?

ROBYN  
I don't mind as long as it's not got  
dead in it.

BEN  
Wait are you a veggie?

ROBYN  
Vegan.

BEN  
How did I not know this?

ROBYN  
It didn't come up.

BEN  
Isn't that a sort of cardinal sin for  
Vegans? Not mentioning it at every  
opportunity?

ROBYN  
Easy dig.

BEN  
Sorry.

ROBYN  
Never been tempted by the bright  
lights of self-righteousness then?

BEN  
Well I'm vegetarian so...

ROBYN  
So no then.

BEN  
Yeah, no. Fuck cows.

ROBYN  
... to keep them pregnant so we can  
monetise their milk.

BEN  
Ugh I hate being wrong.

ROBYN  
But not enough to give up milk.

BEN  
But not enough to give up *cheese*

ROBYN  
There it is.

BEN  
I hate myself.

ROBYN  
Well don't.

BEN  
There's a really good deadless burger  
place near here?

ROBYN  
I could murder a burger...  
figuratively.

BEN  
So there's only one vegan option but  
it looks so good I might even order  
it.

ROBYN  
Sign me up.

BEN

Ok, two vegan burgers sans cheese,  
chips, onion rings? Yeah. And... dips.  
Anything else?

ROBYN shakes her head.

Good! It'll be here in thirty.

ROBYN

How much do I owe you

BEN

Nothing. You can get the next one.

ROBYN

You think we'll get to the third date?

BEN

I'm optimistic.

Beat.

Drink?

BEN'S KITCHEN

Time has passed. The candles have burnt lower, the plates are now slick with ketchup and mayo, and a cardboard box of leftover sides sits concealing in the centre of the table. The better part of a bottle of wine is gone.

ROBYN

So what is it you *do* again?

BEN

I thought I told you.

ROBYN

You may well have done.

BEN

I write jingles. Or... actually no I don't, I write *music*. But jingles pay my rent.

ROBYN

Ok you definitely didn't tell me that?  
I demand to hear your full portfolio.

BEN  
Ugh the embarrassing thing is you'll  
definitely have heard some of them.

ROBYN  
No way.

BEN  
Old Folk Butter?

ROBYN  
No! No you did not!

BEN  
Two years ago, yeah. It was my first  
gig.

ROBYN  
No

BEN  
Yep!

ROBYN  
'Keep it running smooth with the Old  
Folk Butter...'?

BEN  
Ugh don't remind me.

ROBYN  
Mate you're famous! Literally millions  
of people have heard your music,  
that's insane.

BEN  
Millions of people have heard my  
jingles. My Soundcloud page has like  
30 followers.

Oblivious to the fact that BEN clearly wants to talk about  
his music, ROBYN reaches over and grabs another chip.

ROBYN  
Still pretty sick.

BEN  
I guess. It's not what I thought I'd  
be doing by now.

ROBYN  
 (penny drops)  
 What else do you write?

BEN  
 I can show you if you like?

ROBYN nods enthusiastically as BEN rises to open his Soundcloud.

ROBYN  
 Hang on, I'm just going to pop to the loo while you set up.

BEN  
 Think of me.

ROBYN  
 (Giggling)  
 Gross.

BEN'S BATHROOM

ROBYN sits down on the toilet. She is feeling the wine. She pulls out her phone. She has three missed calls from MARGO.

ROBYN  
 Shit.

She clocks the time: 21:02, considers momentarily and then calls.

The following scene takes place between both MARGO's expensive looking living room and BEN's bathroom.

MARGO  
 Robyn!

ROBYN  
 Hi Margo, sorry I missed you.

MARGO  
 Robyn I've got to know, is it true?

ROBYN  
 What?

MARGO  
 Your treatment

ROBYN

Oh! Oh right. Yes. Yes it is.

MARGO

Robyn I love it, it's ridiculous.

ROBYN

Wait, really?

MARGO

Yes! Absolutely outrageous. Lockdown hitting during a one-night-stand? You couldn't write it. Well, I mean you *could*, and you're going to. This is exactly the tonic this publication needs.

ROBYN

Great! I-

MARGO

Does he know?

ROBYN

Um, no, not yet.

MARGO

Good. Keep it that way

ROBYN

Wow. Ok, so-

MARGO

I'll re-add you to the slack group and send you details about deadlines etc. But in the meantime just keep *living* it.

ROBYN

Thanks Margo.

MARGO

Ok, bye now, you crazy cat!

MARGO hangs up, ROBYN is reeling

BEN'S KITCHEN

BEN is listening to his own music, when ROBYN enters. It is clashy and busy. There are lyrics but they are indecipherable behind warped vocal effects and layering, and are

indistinguishable amid the constant tempo, time-sig and key changes. He is nodding along intently as though it makes perfect sense. As the "song" closes, he turns to see ROBYN standing wide-eyed and somewhat shellshocked in the doorway. His face falls, she clearly hates it.

ROBYN

I love it.

END OF PART ONE.