

# *Talking to a Stranger*

*Part One*

*Sally, hauling a heavy pack and dumping it onto the stage. She takes a drink, looks up at a hill before her, puts on the pack and trudges away.*

*Re-emerges, tired, and takes a key, trying it in the lock of a door. Is confused by this, having trouble with the lock, when the door is opened from the inside. Sally is clearly startled in this moment, not expecting anybody to be here. It is Chris. He smiles, both puzzled and curious, but not sharing her shock.*

Chris            Hello.  
Sally            Um, who are you?  
Chris            Chris.  
Sally            No, I meant, what are you doing here?  
Chris            Ah, just, you know... not much really. I'm sorry, who are...

*Sally offers her hand.*

Sally            Right. Sally.  
Chris            Are you all right?  
Sally            Yes... No.  
Chris            How did you get here?  
Sally            Boat. It just dropped me off.  
Chris            I heard a boat.  
Sally            That was me.  
Chris            Right.

*Awkward silence*

Chris            This is the only bach -  
Sally            I know.  
Chris            For miles. In the whole bay, I think.  
Sally            That's right.  
Chris            It's just, you don't look dressed for tramping.  
Sally            I booked it. I booked this bach.  
Chris            Oh.  
Sally            I think you know that.  
Chris            I'm booked in here.  
Sally            How?  
Chris            What do you mean?  
Sally            How did you book the bach?  
Chris            Online.

Sally           What site?  
Chris           I don... Book-a-bach. You sure it's for tonight?  
Sally           The 8th. And tomorrow night, too, out on the 10th.  
Chris           Okay, that's... Damn.  
Sally           I have a confirmation email. I'll just...

*Sally takes out her phone. Scrolls, frowns.*

Chris           Yeah, no coverage.  
Sally           I....  
Chris           It said that, on the site. That there was no coverage. How did you book?  
Sally           You think I'm lying?  
Chris           I got a signal up on the ridge, a couple of days ago, but it's patchy.  
Sally           I'm not lying.  
Chris           I meant we could try to ring a boat.  
Sally           You don't have to -  
Chris           For you. A boat for you.  
Sally           I'm not going.  
Chris           I'm here for another three days.  
Sally           What if I don't believe you?  
Chris           I just think you might have made a mistake with the dates.  
Sally           Maybe you made the mistake.  
Chris           I didn't.  
Sally           Then you're lying.  
Chris           Okay.  
Sally           How can you know you didn't make a mistake? Everybody makes mistakes.  
Chris           Because I... okay, maybe I made a mistake.  
Sally           So now you're changing your story?  
Chris           Are you always this aggressive?  
Sally           It's is an unusual situation.  
Chris           Yeah, fair enough. Sorry.

*Pause, as both assess the situation.*

Sally           Okay, I'm going.  
Chris           Where?  
Sally           What do you care?

*Sally heaves on her pack and staggers off. Chris sits and waits, patiently. The sound of rain.  
Sally hurries back.*

Chris           Nice walk?

*She sits in sulky silence beneath the shelter of the doorway.*

Chris            Come inside, before you're soaked through.

*Lights up on the main area of the stage, a bach that is clearly well lived in - Clothes strewn everywhere. Half-empty food containers, unwashed coffee mugs. Chris has been here a while.*

Chris            Sorry. If I'd known you were coming...  
Sally            You didn't think it might get booked at some stage?  
Chris            Have a seat.  
Sally            Where?

*Chris clears a space on the couch, Sally sits cautiously.*

Chris            Coffee?

*He picks up a cup, examines its state.*

Sally            I'm fine.  
Chris            I was going to wash it.  
Sally            Just a matter of locating the sink.

*Chris looks around, seeing the space through another's eyes.*

Sally            How long have you been here?  
Chris            This is day seven,  
Sally            And I'm the first person to have booked it?  
Chris            I get you don't believe me.  
Sally            Would you?  
Chris            Mistakes happen.  
Sally            Okay.  
Chris            Would you like me to go?  
Sally            So there's a way out?  
Chris            There's an old track across to the next bay where the main walk goes through.  
Sally            A track to where?  
Chris            Get to a phone at Portage, and road access.  
Sally            How long?  
Chris            If you didn't get lost bush bashing the first bit, maybe seven hours all up.  
Sally            It'll be dark in three.  
Chris            Yeah, longer in the dark. But if you really want...

*Sally considers this, understanding that somehow the stakes are high.*

Sally No. One of us can go in the morning.  
Chris You don't have to be scared of me.  
Sally I believe you.  
Chris But you don't believe I have a booking?  
Sally Dishonest, dangerous - different categories.  
Chris Okay. Well, make yourself at home.  
Sally I'll just make this my area.  
Chris You can have the bedroom. I don't mind sleeping on the couch.  
Sally *Looking at the state of the lounge.* Do I want to see the bedroom?  
Chris I could tidy it.

*Sally moves to the bedroom door, looking offstage.*

Sally Yeah, I'm happier out here.  
Chris Fair enough. You're sure I can't get you anything?  
Sally I'm fine.

*Chris lingers a moment.*

Chris Sorry, silly. Can't remember your name.  
Sally Sally.  
Chris I'm -  
Sally Chris. It was only five minutes ago.

*Sally goes about unpacking some of her things and moving Chris' belongings off the couch, sweeping them to the floor without ceremony. He watches on, unable to object even though he is clearly pained by this.*

Chris I get distracted, when people tell me their names. I tell myself not to be distracted, to really concentrate, and that panics me, so I'm thinking about how to stop panicking, instead of, you know, listening to the name.  
Sally Okay.  
Chris That never happens to you?  
Sally Not really, no.  
Chris You're lucky.  
Sally Feeling it tonight.  
Chris I'll just get back to...  
Sally Sure.

*Chris moves back to a table covered, amongst other things, with scribbled-on papers. He sits, staring at an unfinished sentence.*

*Sally takes out a book and begins to read. We hold the moment for longer than is instinctively comfortable, conscious of a room of unformed stories. Lights slowly down.*

## *Part Two*

*Lights back up on the identical scene. Chris is scribbling, stops suddenly.*

Chris           Is it paranoid?  
Sally           I'm not paranoid. I just didn't expect -  
Chris           The word. Is paranoid the right word?  
Sally           *Takes a moment to understand.* It's a word. P.A.R.A -  
Chris           I can spell.  
Sally           Sorry, I just -  
Chris           I suddenly thought it was paranoiac. I've heard that. I think I've heard that.  
Sally           They're both words.  
Chris           So which one do I mean?  
Sally           What's the sentence?  
Chris           '...Paranoid thoughts pulled at the edges of his sleep.'  
Sally           Tugged would be nicer. It's more insistent, and shorter, sharper. Not sure you need the 'his'.  
Chris           And paranoid?  
Sally           What are you writing?  
Chris           Which is it?  
Sally           They're pretty much interchangeable. Paranoiac is more correct, paranoid refers to having the actual psychological condition. Or it used to. Not any more.  
Chris           How do you know that?  
Sally           Maybe I don't. Maybe I'm lying.  
Chris           You want dinner?  
Sally           You didn't tell me what you're writing.  
Chris           *Hesitates, embarrassed.* A creative writing portfolio. I'm applying for a programme in Melbourne. There's a deadline, so I came here to get it done. Why did you come here?  
Sally           Sick of people.  
Chris           Bummer.  
Sally           Paranoiac's got a better rhythm for you, allows you to pause after thoughts; it's percussive.

*Chris reads the sentence back under his breath, crosses out on his document, rewrites. Sally smiles.*

Sally           And yes, I would like dinner. But I'm cooking... There'll be plenty for two.

Chris Oh, okay. Do you want me to clear away the -  
Sally Yes please.

*Chris begins to clean, uncovers his speaker, puts on a song. Sally doesn't object. She goes to her pack and pulls out a bag of vegetables - cabbage, carrots, capisicum, zucchini, broccoli... Chris looks at the colourful spread.*

Chris What's that?  
Sally Vegetables.  
Chris You're funny.  
Sally Plant-based food form. There's also fruit, nuts, grains -  
Chris And getting funnier.  
Sally You want to help cut them up?  
Chris Okay.

*He begins to cut the vegetables, watching Sally who herself is simply standing.*

Chris We're going to have something with these, right? We're not just, you know...

*Sally makes him suffer.*

Chris I've got a frozen curry in the freezer. They'd be all right with a curry.

*Sally walks to the freezer to check.*

Sally You have ten frozen curries in the freezer.  
Chris They're a good shape, you can squeeze a lot in a small space.  
Sally Geometry-based diet; it's original.  
Chris I'm a fresh thinker.  
Sally Without the actual freshness.  
Chris I'm having a curry. If this is all you're having, I'm having it with curry.  
Sally There's noodles.  
Chris Okay.  
Sally And sauce. I pre-made the sauce. Smell it. I know, round container, didn't think it through. Could've got twenty of them in there.  
Chris You going to take the piss all night?  
Sally Thought I'd sleep some of it.  
Chris There's going to be meat, right?  
Sally You going to catch me something?  
Chris Don't need to. I've got a curry.  
Sally I've cut up double vegetables.  
Chris Save some for breakfast.

*Chris moves to the freezer, and from there to the microwave. Sally moves to the stove then freezes, looks at him.*

Sally           Where's your key?  
Chris            What?  
Sally            The key. The key you used to get in here.

*Chris pauses, as if thinking... Looks around and shrugs.*

Chris            I don't know.  
Sally            You don't know where the key is?  
Chris            What do you need my key for? You've got your own.  
Sally            Which I picked up, in town, before I got on the boat, when I showed them my booking confirmation.  
Chris            We're back on not believing me?  
Sally            I never got off it. Where's your key?  
Chris            It'll be in here somewhere.  
Sally            You weren't worried about losing it?  
Chris            It's not lost. It's just, you know, there are quite a few things I can't locate right now... I'll find it when I tidy.  
Sally            Okay.

*Chris looks at the microwave.*

Chris            Three more minutes.  
Sally            I'm very pleased for you.

*Sally busies herself in silence. Chris waits, watching the clock count down... slowly. Moves into the main space and begins to self-consciously tidy. When the microwave sounds, it comes as a great relief, like an anxious athlete finally afforded the starter's pistol.*

*Chris removes the hot dish too hastily, getting a faceful of steam. Retreats to his table, wiping a fork on his shirt. Begins to eat.*

Sally            Good?  
Chris            Had worse.  
Sally            Tell me more about this writing.  
Chris            Just, you know, creative arts degree, writing major. And Melbourne's a great city. You have to submit three pieces... I won't get in.  
Sally            That's the spirit.  
Chris            I just...I want to know I'm not good enough, and then I can put it behind me and... you know.  
Sally            What?

Chris Just, do something sensible.  
Sally You could work as a cleaner.  
Chris I think that's burning.  
Sally It's meant to smell like that.  
Chris You could be a chef.  
Sally You're eating out of a plastic container.  
Chris How do you know I didn't cook these?  
Sally Oh, look, I found your key.  
Chris Where?  
Sally Oh no, my mistake... You looked surprised.  
Chris I was.  
Sally Uncomfortable surprised.  
Chris You're good at making people feel uncomfortable.  
Sally Read me a piece.  
Chris What?  
Sally Read me a piece of your writing.  
Chris Okay, so that would make me more uncomfortable.  
Sally You don't know me. Nobody you know knows me. I'm like a figment of your imagination.  
Chris I would have imagined someone less frightening.  
Sally Men do that, don't they?  
Chris What?  
Sally Imagine into existence the submissive form. Trouble is, when you meet a real woman we scare you.  
Chris You a feminist?  
Sally You haven't already worked that out?  
Chris There a secret sign?  
Sally If you meet a smart woman, she's a feminist. It's not that secret.

*Sally's meal is plated. She sits on the couch. Chris looks across, somewhat envious of the meal.*

Sally There's plenty if you want some.  
Chris I'm fine.  
Sally Read me something you've been working on.  
Chris It's not ready for that... They're not very developed yet.  
Sally You've been here a week.  
Chris I've done a lot of swimming. I was hoping panic would set in and propel me over the line.  
Sally And then I arrived.  
Chris No plan's perfect.

*Lights slowly down on their eating.*



### Part Three

*In the darkness, the voice of Sally, reading Chris' work. As the lights come up (mid-passage) we see his back to her, agitated by the special ordeal of hearing his own writing read back to him.*

Sally            The young man walks towards the cameras. To his left, trees line the driveway. To his right, just out of shot, another teen moves easily towards a group of friends. A ball bounces at their feet; they exchange abuse wrapped in affection. One waves out to him. The young man smiles, walks on. She comes to him from behind the screen, determined in her movement, out of focus. He looks up and smiles. The light catches his eyes and for a moment he is beautiful. His hand slips easily into hers: captured, uploaded, sent packaged into the world. They like him, his friends, they like the world he posts into existence, envy his stepping stone life. The smells hit him all at once, as if up until this point he has had no sense of them. Fresh cut grass twisting dry and thin in the heat of the sun. Decorative blossom, white on the tree, bruised brown underfoot, innocent to broken, the way of the world. The unmistakable top-of-the-nose hit of two stroke fuel: a chainsaw in the neighbouring property, devouring the interested tree that leaned too far over the lives of others. The young man is struck not by the smells but by the absence that preceded them, by how easily the lens has neutered him. She squeezes his hand, pinky to the other's palm, their secret sign that they are content: now just a habit. An empty, scentless habit. There is a discarded profile somewhere, where this gesture remains forever third on the list of things he loves. Petrified...

Chris            Okay, you can stop now.

Sally            I already had.

Chris            Why did you stop there?

Sally            You just told me to.

Chris            Do people ever tell you're really annoying?

Sally            Not to my face. You want to know why?

Chris            I think it's all a bluff. I think deep down you're really terrified.

Sally            Of what?

Chris            I don't know. But we have all have something.

Sally            I might go back to my book. Is that all right?

Chris            Mi casa es tu casa.

Sally            We should split the bill. How much are you paying?

*Chris doesn't respond. Sally picks up her book. Chris clears the table, taking Sally's plate back to the kitchen along with his own. He returns, now with nothing to do. Hovers.*

Chris            You going to tell me what you think?

Sally            Friendly enough, a little untidy, accustomed to lying. Mostly harmless.

Chris            Of my writing.

Sally I'm not an expert.  
Chris Doesn't stop you having an opinion.  
Sally Not usually, no.  
Chris You can't say you want to see my writing and then not tell me what you think of it.  
Sally What if I didn't like it? Wouldn't it be better just not knowing?  
Chris Did you?  
Sally See, once I've said, you can't go back.  
Chris Maybe next time, before you ask somebody to expose themselves, you might think -  
Sally I liked it, okay? It's very good. I was just teasing.  
Chris Really?  
Sally Yeah, really.  
Chris Okay, I think you're just saying that.  
Sally I can't stop you being paranoiac.  
Chris What did you like?  
Sally There are some beautiful phrases. 'The interested tree that leaned too far over the lives of others.' That's beautiful.  
Chris I liked it too.  
Sally It's interesting, the lens as a filter. That's a strong metaphor, an important metaphor, I think.  
Chris So what don't you like? What should I change?  
Sally I'm honestly not an expert.  
Chris I'm just asking.  
Sally I say something, you get offended and for the rest of the evening I've got pissed off sulky boy sharing a room with me. I don't want to sound judgemental, but I can not handle sulky boys. Just get over it, you know.  
Chris I'm not sulky.  
Sally I think you might be.  
Chris What if I promise?  
Sally Sulky boys are always good at promising they won't sulk.  
Chris Okay, well now I am going to sulk. I'm going to sulk because you wouldn't tell me.  
Sally I'm not in love with the present tense, eye of the camera thing.  
Chris That's the whole point.  
Sally It actually isn't. It's a device, that brought you to the story, and now, if I were you, I'd dump the device and try the same thing without it. I think good story telling should always be freed of its gimmicks. Ultimately, the gimmick gets in the way.  
Chris You said you liked the lens metaphor.  
Sally I do, but you can be subtle with it.  
Chris Okay, well that's bullshit.  
Sally You asked for my opinion, I gave it to you.  
Chris Yeah, fair enough. Thank you.

*Chris returns to his table, begins to doodle listlessly.*

Sally Really?  
Chris What?  
Sally You're sulking.  
Chris I'm just thinking.  
Sally About what?  
Chris Why you would say you liked what I wrote, and then rip it to pieces.  
Sally Here's the thing about sulking, it doesn't make you feel any better.  
Chris So you're not content just criticising my writing -  
Sally You asked me to criticise it.  
Chris I didn't mean it. It's like like asking someone if they like your haircut. There's only one answer.  
Sally I prefer not to lie.  
Chris But you're avoid telling the truth.  
Sally Is that right?  
Chris You haven't told me why you're here. I've told you about my writing, I've shown you my writing, I've let you criticise my writing, and you still haven't told me why you're here.  
Sally To get away from the world for a weekend. It's no big secret.  
Chris Why do you want to get away from the world?  
Sally Because sometimes the world's a bit shit, okay?

*Chris is about to push her on this point, when he sees she is attempting to hide her tears. At first, he doesn't know what to do.*

Chris Sorry, none of my business.  
Sally No, it isn't.

*He stands, uncertain, moves towards the couch. She doesn't object.*

Chris I didn't...  
Sally I think I'd like to get some sleep now, if that's all right with you?  
Chris It's pretty early.  
Sally I came here to rest.  
Chris I'll work in my room. *Stands Bathroom's through there.*  
Sally Thank you.

*Sally takes a bag offstage. Chris looks at the rest of her belongings, as if considering searching them. Thinks better of it. Moves to the table and collects up a few pages of his writing. Makes a token attempt at tidying.*

*Sally returns, wearing pyjamas. She spreads out a sleeping bag on the couch. Finds a cushion for a pillow.*

Chris            There's a spare pillow in -  
Sally            I'm fine.  
Chris            Okay, well, goodnight then.  
Sally            Goodnight.  
Chris            I'll find a phone signal in the morning.  
Sally            Okay.  
Chris            Nice to have met you.  
Sally            Thank you.

*Chris hesitates, looks around, then moves into the bedroom. Sally stares at the ceiling, clearly not ready for sleep.*

*Chris returns, apologetic, points towards the bathroom.*

Chris            I just need to...

*He heads offstage. The sound of pissing. Toilet flushes.*

*Chris walks back through.*

Chris            Goodnight then.  
Sally            Tell me you didn't leave the seat up.  
Chris            Of course I...

*He heads back to check. We hear the seat lowered.*

*Chris comes back in, moves through the space without eye contact or comment. Sally sighs, closes her eyes. Lights down.*

*In the darkness, a sound of rustling, like movement within a plastic bag. This goes on for a while. Sally sits up, listens. The sound stops. She lies back down and after a brief pause, the sound resumes.*

*This time Sally finds a torch in her bag and shines it about the debris-strewn floor. The sound again. She steps onto the floor, shoe in hand, and moves cautiously towards the source of the noise. As she nears, the noise stops. She bends, pulls back a towel - lets out a mighty scream.*

*Chris comes crashing into the room, only half dressed.*

Sally            Rat. There's a rat. It went there, into that corner.

*She hands him the shoe and pushes him forward. He stops.*

Chris            Yeah, sorry, meant to say about them.  
Sally            There's more than one?  
Chris            I imagine so. They're prolific breeders.  
Sally            Well do something!  
Chris            Like what?  
Sally            Get rid of it.  
Chris            What, give it a stern talking to?  
Sally            Hit it, with my shoe.

*Chris hands the shoe back.*

Chris            You hit it.  
Sally            I didn't cause the problem.  
Chris            Neither did I.

*Sally looks around the room.*

Sally            What you've created here is basically a rat hotel. Food, drink, shelter: you're like the Pied Piper without the music.  
Chris            Okay, give me the shoe. Take this. I'll flush it out, if it comes near you, whack it.

*Chris hands Sally a broom. She stands, comically prepared both for sleep and battle. Chris stalks the place of last sighting. With an unannounced lunge, he sets about beating the rubbish in the corner to a pulp. Suddenly Sally leaps backwards, thrashing about with her broom. Chris turns, screams, leaps onto a chair. They track the vermin with their eyes.*

Chris            I think went out the back.  
Sally            It's under the fridge.  
Chris            You sure?  
Sally            One of them went under the fridge. I'm not saying there aren't more.

*Chris steps carefully off the chair.*

Chris            Okay, well that's probably fine then. It'll stay there now... It's, you know, warm, by the motor. Probably already asleep.

*Sally stares in disbelief.*

Chris            What?  
Sally            Okay, much as I admire the way you almost caused the rat to die of laughter, what I need you to do now is move the fridge, and I'm going to be standing here and hitting it with the broom when it comes out. You hold the torch.

Chris            You know there's a light switch, right?  
Sally            Okay. Forget the torch.

*Chris turns on the light, then moves to the fridge. After a prolonged countdown, the fridge is moved. At first it appears there is nothing behind it. They relax, and at this point the rat scoots free. They scream in unison, stopping just short of jumping into one another's arms.*

Sally            Okay, so now it's in the bedroom.  
Chris            It's in the bedroom... What are you doing?  
Sally            Shutting the door.  
Chris            Okay, cool. Thank you. Problem solved.  
Sally            My problem's solved.  
Chris            You mind if I sit up for a bit?  
Sally            If you want to.

*Sally returns to the couch, gets back into her sleeping bag.*

Sally            Turn the light off. Use my torch if you want to read.

*Chris considers his options, walks back to the bedroom door, loses his nerve, turns off the light, finds a towel on the floor to wrap around himself and sits at the table, torch on. A long pause, until he can stay silent no longer.*

Chris            I think the couch folds out. We could top and tail.  
Sally            You'd be too cold.  
Chris            I can get my sleeping bag from next door.  
Sally            At the point we open that door, we no longer know which room the rat's in, do we?  
Chris            So what do you suggest?  
Sally            Kill the rat and you can sleep wherever you want.  
Chris            With exceptions.  
Sally            We don't know each other well enough for that not to sound creepy.  
Chris            Funny in my head.  
Sally            You screaming on the chair was funny in real life.  
Chris            You screamed too.  
Sally            It was pretty big.  
Chris            More like a cat.  
Sally            A small dog.  
Chris            You don't think it was a cat, do you? I like cats.  
Sally            It had a scaly tail.  
Chris            Perhaps the fur fell off.  
Sally            A bad curry can do that.  
Chris            You haven't even tasted it.  
Sally            You didn't finish yours.

Chris Yeah, getting kind of sick of them.

*Silence, as Sally makes her decision. It takes a while, perhaps a false start along the way.*

Sally You know how you asked why I'm here?

Chris You don't have to tell me.

Sally I know... There was a party. People started playing this game. There's a thing, I don't know if you've heard of it, started online, maybe in Canada, actually I don't think that's right. Started somewhere. It's kind of a gross out drinking challenge. And of course it gets filmed and so, you know, you wake up with a hangover and your mother freaking out because someone else's parent has sent her a link. You have any idea what I'm talking about?

Chris Maybe.

Sally Two teams of two, a boy and a girl.

Chris Yeah, saw a clip, not in...

Sally Okay.

Chris Just, someone showed it to me, I didn't really...

Sally So yeah, someone thinks of the grossest thing the two boys can do to each other, and whoever flinches first, that team loses and they have to drink, and the girl from the losing team has to do the same thing to the winning boy - I don't have to say any more right?

Chris Please don't.

Sally And I wasn't drinking, I had the car, and - do you ever have those moments where it's like you've just stepped into the world as a visitor, and it all just appears so mightily fucked up?

Chris I remember once when I was little, I don't know how old, but you know, still holding my mother's hand and we walked into a shopping mall. Maybe four. And there was a department store with a big sale on, it must have been huge, maybe it was just opening, I'm not sure, but the queues for the counter had to stretch back out into the mall itself, and I looked up at all these tired, depressed people stuck in this line that was barely moving, and I realised that every one of them was holding some shit they didn't actually want. My Mum used to say that to me: 'you want it now, but you'll get it home, play with it once and then forget all about it, and it'll just be one more thing for me to trip over.' And in that moment I got it. I got why the world was full of angry grown-ups, it was because they were spending all their time working to earn money to buy things they didn't really want. And this was depressing them, so to cheer themselves up, they were, you know -  
Sally Going back to the mall.

Chris Yeah. I had this picture of them leaving the counter dumping their purchase in a bin outside and then going to rejoin the queue from the back.

Sally That's a pretty sophisticated image for a small boy.

Chris I may have embellished.

Sally What was your mother doing in the mall, do you remember?

Chris She used to take me in there to buy me a hot chocolate.  
Sally That's a good mother.  
Chris Sorry, I interrupted you.  
Sally I'm a woman, I'm used to it. But sure, like that. I walked into the room, and where everybody else was standing round with their mouths open and their phones out, shouting out their caveman suggestions and thinking they were hilarious, I basically just saw two drunk women being sexually abused.  
Chris What did you do?  
Sally I walked into the middle of it and started shouting at them, and then someone pushed me, and I pushed back, and it all turned bat shit crazy. Of course the whole thing was filmed thirty different ways and by the time I got home it was everywhere - a constant stream of people explaining exactly what is wrong with me.  
Chris Helpful.  
Sally And I made a mistake...  
Chris You didn't turn off the device and walk away.  
Sally No, I did not.  
Chris Ouch.  
Sally I unloaded: five hundred words of self-righteous adrenaline-fuelled anger. And every word I wrote I stand by, I made a solid argument, but...  
Chris The troll is not moved by solid argument?  
Sally Not so much.  
Chris Who'd have thought?  
Sally And overnight, I swear those hateful little fuckers had been fornicating, because their numbers had swelled along with their hatred. The nameless majority, silent no longer, tapping out their frustrations and hurling them at strangers. And it sounds like the sort of thing you should just be able to ignore, but you have to experience it, it's... The next day at school everybody was watching me, whispering about me, or avoiding me, which was worse... it's the relentlessness, you know, I felt so small and getting smaller, hollowing from the inside out. Surrounded by all the people I knew and yet I'd never felt so lonely. On the third day I turned my phone off, the fourth day I spent curled up in bed. And on the fifth day I booked this.  
Chris An escape from the world.  
Sally Yeah.  
Chris Sorry... Your parents know about it?

*Sally shakes her head.*

Sally They think I'm staying at a friend's sister's place. She's covering for me.  
Chris That's shit.  
Sally Yeah it is.  
Chris Sorry.

Sally Not your fault.  
Chris And then my story before being...  
Sally It wasn't a thing.  
Chris You know, if I thought there was anything...  
Sally You can put some music on.  
Chris What do you feel like?  
Sally Anything.

*Chris starts a song, then walks to the couch. Sally has sat up and now moves over to make room for him. They listen.*

Sally Beautiful song.  
Chris Yeah.  
Sally What's it mean?  
Chris No idea.

*Lights down*

Part Four

*When the lights come back up it is morning, Sally and Chris waking slowly, having top and tailed on the small couch, self-conscious of the position in which they now find themselves.*

Chris           Morning.  
Sally           Can you maybe get off my leg?  
Chris           Sorry.  
Sally           And get some clothes on.

*Chris stumbles out from beneath his makeshift blanket and walks shrouded to the bedroom door. There he hesitates.*

Sally           What are you waiting for?  
Chris           You know, the rat.  
Sally           You're waiting for the rat?  
Chris           Just getting myself psyched.  
Sally           It won't still be in here.  
Chris           The door's shut.  
Sally           They can squeeze through a tiny gap.  
Chris           You could have told me this last night.  
Sally           Would you have believed me?  
Chris           First you pretend to have a booking, then you trick me into sleeping with you.  
Sally           Okay, way too far.  
Chris           I haven't had my coffee yet.  
Sally           Get some clothes on.  
Chris           Okay, okay!

*Chris opens the door, stepping back quickly as if expecting to be overrun by vermin - nothing. He moves cautiously off-stage. Sally climbs out of her sleeping bag, gets some clothes together and disappears into the bathroom.*

*The following conversation shouted between two off-stage characters, each on the opposite side of the space.*

Sally           Does the shower work?  
Chris           Dunno.  
Sally           How long have you been here?  
Chris           I swim.  
Sally           Okay, something here's not right.  
Chris           You need help?  
Sally           No!... The water's brown.

Chris            That'll be rust in the pipes. Probably no one uses it. It's rain water, you should try to conserve it.  
Sally            That why you don't do dishes?  
Chris            What would the rats eat?  
Sally            So now you're big brave guy making rat jokes?  
Chris            Pretended to be scared of them to make you feel better.  
Sally            You catching a boat would make me feel better.

*No reply. Chris enters, dressed now, carrying his writing papers, clearly hurt by the last jibe. Goes through the motions of making a coffee.*

*Sally enters, also dressed, looks at him.*

Sally            It was just a joke.  
Chris            Want a coffee?  
Sally            What have you got?  
Chris            Coffee.  
Sally            I don't drink instant.  
Chris            Plunger.  
Sally            Okay, I guess. Sure... Thank you.  
Chris            I'll just drink this and get my gear together. I don't have to walk the whole way round. Should be able to get coverage along the way and then get picked up at a jetty somewhere. Actually, shit...

*He rushes back to his room, returns with his charger, plugs the phone in.*

Chris            Might need a couple of hours, the battery's a bit average.

*Sally makes an unconvincing show of looking out the window at the weather.*

Sally            There's cloud on those hills. It might rain.

*Chris looks out, doubtfully.*

Chris            Yeah, doesn't look good.  
Sally            I wouldn't want you going in the wet.  
Chris            I don't really have any plastic to wrap stuff in.  
Sally            You can't get your writing wet, I mean it's your -  
Chris            Future really.  
Sally            Might not come to anything.  
Chris            Thanks for your support.  
Sally            The weather.  
Chris            Looks pretty set in over there.

Sally It's where the wind's coming from.  
Chris Your gear waterproof?  
Sally Nah, not at all.  
Chris That's a shit.  
Sally Yeah.  
Chris Sorry.  
Sally What are you going to do?  
Chris What did you have planned for breakfast?  
Sally Thought I might have a curry.  
Chris It's an acquired taste right, your comedy?  
Sally It's what people say.  
Chris How long does it take to get used to it?  
Sally Depends. You smart?  
Chris Not really, no.  
Sally You might never get it.  
Chris I've got eggs.  
Sally Really?  
Chris Why does that surprise you?  
Sally Well, you know, they require effort.  
Chris I could scramble some.  
Sally Would you think it strange if I told you I had vanilla?  
Chris Yeah.  
Sally Okay.  
Chris Why would you bring vanilla?  
Sally I add it to things.  
Chris Like?  
Sally Vodka, sometimes.  
Chris You have vodka?  
Sally Not for breakfast.  
Chris Not always clear to me where you're going with things.  
Sally Eggs, vanilla, bread, milk. We could have French Toast. Coffee and French Toast, rain on an iron roof - how good's that?  
Chris And a swim to finish... You know, swimming in the rain...  
Sally Not always clear to me where you're going with things.  
Chris Sometimes a swim just a swim.  
Sally Yeah, sometimes.

*Sally leaves this unresolved and moves into the kitchen, getting the ingredients together, a bowl, a frying pan.*

Chris For the record, I find you kind of terrifying, so you have absolutely nothing to worry about.  
Sally I wasn't worried.

Chris Cool.  
Sally You going to help?  
Chris I'm doing the coffee.  
Sally And the dishes, when this is done.  
Chris What's that?  
Sally What?  
Chris Listen... It's a boat, coming into the bay. This way, by the sounds of it. I think it's coming to the jetty.  
Sally Right.

*Both realise this represents a potential escape, and neither wants to suggest it.*

Chris We should run down and get the driver to wait, right?  
Sally Yeah. You go.  
Chris Why me?  
Sally Just before you were volunteering to walk in the rain.  
Chris Because I thought you wanted me to go.  
Sally Maybe I do.  
Chris I've got my writing to finish.  
Sally I booked this.  
Chris Me too.  
Sally I'm not going.  
Chris Neither am I.  
Sally Fine.  
Chris Yeah, fine.

*They return to their tasks, each secretly pleased. Then Chris looks out the window.*

Chris What the hell?  
Sally What?  
Chris There's someone coming up the track, with a bag. Looks like they're...  
Sally Man or woman?  
Chris Another woman.  
Sally Okay, that's too many.  
Chris Yeah.

*Sally has a sudden thought.*

Sally What does she look like?  
Chris Red hair, tied up, green coat, you could just -

*She moves the pan aside and rushes to the window.*

Chris            Just turned behind those bushes. You'll see her in a moment.

*On Sally's face we see the response of one who both recognises the newcomer, and is completely panicked by her presence. Frozen.*

Chris            You okay?

Sally            Yeah, um, I'm not here. I wasn't here. You never saw me.

Chris            What are you...

*Sally is a blur of activity, stuffing all her belongings in her bag and rushing blindly into the bathroom, exiting just as we hear the first knock on the door.*

Part Five

*Chris, completely fazed now, moves towards the door, opens it. Emma stands there, clearly not expecting to see him.*

Emma           Hi.  
Chris           Hello... I'm Chris.  
Emma           Right.  
Chris           Pleased to meet you, ah...  
Emma           Emma.  
Chris           Emma. Hey look, I'm not sure if you realise, but this is the only bach in the bay, so you might have come to the wrong...  
Emma           No, I checked.  
Chris           Okay. Um, you might want to run down and stop the boat before it...

*Sound of a boat motoring away from the jetty.*

Chris           Right, so, um... Shit. Short version - No phone signal, possible up on the ridge, bush bash, next bay, lodge, seven hours, couch spare, kind of, rats, lots of curry, I'm here writing, how do you feel about swimming in the rain?  
Emma           There's something burning.  
Chris           What?  
Emma           In the kitchen, smoke.

*Chris turns, rushes inside to where detritus on the still heated element has caught alight. A small flame, easily extinguished. He turns to see Emma standing just behind him.*

Chris           Shit, you gave me a fright.  
Emma           At the door?  
Chris           Just then. You shouldn't creep around behind people.  
Emma           I thought you might need help. Is that French Toast?  
Chris           Um, yeah. You want some?  
Emma           I don't want to eat your breakfast.  
Chris           There's plenty. I just need to...

*He's not at all sure what finishing the toast entails. Emma jumps in.*

Emma           I've got it.  
Chris           You want a coffee?  
Emma           That'd be lovely.  
Chris           You're not going to say anything about the mess?  
Emma           Tidiness freaks me out. It's the sign of a person who hasn't understood the world is fundamentally beyond our control. You brought vanilla with you?

Chris           The little things make all the difference.  
Emma           You sure there's enough coffee?  
Chris           Made it for two.  
Emma           I'm sorry, is there... am I...  
Chris           No, just me... There was a rat, in the night, kept me awake. So I needed a kick start.  
Emma           Well I don't want to -  
Chris           No, no. Turns out adrenaline trumps caffeine, so I'm fine.  
Emma           Right.

*Emma walks to the table with two plates of French Toast.*

Emma           Voila. Swap.

*They begin to eat Sally's breakfast.*

Emma           French toast and coffee. Brilliant.  
Chris           All we need now is rain on the roof.  
Emma           Love it by the way, swimming in the rain. Best thing.  
Chris           It is. So, um... what are you doing here?  
Emma           Long story. Can I just use the bathroom?  
Chris           Right, um, funny story... I was the first person here in a while, there had been rust from the water tank, building up in the cistern, and it clogged up the... I thought I'd fixed it, I had fixed it, but this morning... Can you give me... it'll just take five minutes.  
Emma           It's fine. It's just a pee. I can go outside.

*Emma cheerfully leaves by the front door.*

*Immediately upon her exit, Sally appears, desperate.*

Chris           Okay, what the -  
Sally           You have to get rid of her.  
Chris           Yeah, in case you haven't noticed, getting rid of people is really not my strong point.  
Sally           Just... lie to her.  
Chris           About what?  
Sally           Tell her you're ill. Contagious. It's why you're here, in quarantine.  
Chris           Yeah, I'm not saying that.  
Sally           Just get her out of here long enough for me to leave.  
Chris           That's not as easy as -

*Sally hears Emma coming back.*

Sally            Don't ask. Don't ask her why she's here!

*Sally returns to her hiding place just as Emma walks back in - The sound of a small collision in the bathroom. Emma looks up.*

Chris            Plumbing here's shocking.  
Emma            Leave a comment on the site. People should know.  
Chris            So... don't let it go cold.  
Emma            Thank you.

*Emma and Chris begin to eat. It is plain both that Chris has no idea how to get rid of Emma, and that she is not going to let food get in the way of talking.*

Emma            So, funny thing, I wasn't expecting to see you here.  
Chris            Happens a lot.  
Emma            Really?  
Chris            Sure. Booking mix-ups. Sometimes people put a house with more than one site, even though they say not to, and then try to juggle it, but if they're not -  
Emma            Oh, I didn't book.  
Chris            Okay. Fair enough. Points for honesty. That's the rain back.  
Emma            Looks set in this time.  
Chris            We should swim.  
Emma            I didn't bring togs.  
Chris            You could...  
Emma            What?  
Chris            I actually don't know... Wear mine?  
Emma            Maybe this evening.  
Chris            You're staying all day?  
Emma            Maybe. Look I really should explain why I'm here.

*Chris is determined to keep his word to Sally and cuts her off.*

Chris            I'm writing.  
Emma            Okay.  
Chris            I booked the bach, for ten days, to get a writing portfolio finished, to apply for a course in Melbourne. I could read you something, if you like. There's a poem. Do you like poems? We could sit outside if you want. There's a spot up the hill where I wrote it, with a lovely view. It's not about the view, but it's inspired by the view. The view's a metaphor. It's called The View from Here.  
Emma            You want to go outside in this?  
Chris            It's just water.  
Emma            Read it to me here. I'll imagine the view.

Chris            Okay. Um, I just have to find it. It's in here somewhere. Yeah, here we go. It's Emily, right?

Emma            Emma.

Chris            Sorry, I'm shit with names. Not remembering them, but you know, paying attention when I first hear them.

Emma            And you tell yourself not to be distracted. You say 'I will not be distracted. I will not be distracted.' And then you're so busy doing that -

Chris            You miss the name.

Emma            Like 'don't think of a polar bear.'

Chris            It's Chris.

Emma            Chris. Hello Chris.

Chris            Hello Emma.

Emma            *Calling out* Hello Sally!

*Chris, clearly startled, tries desperately to hide his reaction. A long silence, in which Sally wisely makes no sound.*

Chris            Okay, just to say, that was a very strange thing to do.

Emma            It'll make sense when I explain why I'm here.

Chris            Sally's your grandmother. You used to come here when you were little. She's dead now. But this is how you think of her spirit, being here. You called out to her spirit. Or, you've come here to spread her ashes. You've got one of those little... what's the word?

Emma            Ossuary?

Chris            Never heard of it.

Emma            Didn't want to make it too easy. You have to earn it.

Chris            Earn what?

Emma            The word. The word you want is urn. It was a pun.

Chris            You have an urn.

Emma            I don't.

Chris            Okay.

Emma            You don't really forget people's names, do you?

Chris            No. It's just a thing I pretend, to break the ice. If you make stupid mistakes and then admit to them you appear less threatening.

Emma            You might be overthinking this.

Chris            You forget names?

Emma            Not really. I just like to agree with what other people are saying. I'm sort of like a mirror. Makes them feel good, so they like me, which makes me feel good, until I remember I don't really know who I am or what I believe in.

Chris            No plan's perfect. You don't seem like that sort of person to me.

Emma            I'm not, but that's the fun of meeting someone new: leaves room for invention.

Chris            You don't even like swimming in the rain, do you?

Emma Don't know, never actually done it. Sounds good though... So anyway, there's this thing online, I don't know if you've seen it, where teams of two, a man and a woman, compete in this sort of gross out competition.

*A loud crash from the bathroom. Emma is up from her seat, heading to investigate. Chris immediately attempts to head her off.*

Chris Don't go in there.  
Emma That wasn't plumbing.  
Chris Exactly.  
Emma So what was it?  
Chris I don't know. So you shouldn't go in there. It might be something dangerous.  
Emma Like what?  
Chris I don't know... I'll go.  
Emma You got a black belt in tae kwon do?  
Chris No.  
Emma So I should go. Don't feel threatened, we all have our thing. You make a good coffee.

*Emma moves forward, Chris close behind. Sally dives through a window back into the lounge, making more noise. Emma comes running out, strategically blocked by Chris. Sally dives behind the couch just in time.*

Emma Did you see what it was?  
Chris A person, a man I think, dressed in black. Just saw him going out the front door. We should lock the door. Lock the door, check the latches on all the windows.  
Emma Is there something you're not telling me?  
Chris Lots of things, we've only just met. But no, I'm not deliberately keeping anything from you.  
Emma I didn't hear the door shut.  
Chris Adrenaline again. Heightens the visual senses, but the hearing becomes less acute.  
Emma I hadn't heard that.  
Chris That another pun?  
Emma What?  
Chris Hadn't heard.

*Emma moves thoughtfully to the front door.*

Emma Wasn't deliberate. You got your key?  
Chris Yeah, I lost it.  
Emma So we can't actually lock the door?  
Chris No.

Emma            We should sit, facing the door.

*Emma sits on the couch, behind which Sally is hiding. Chris stands, at a complete loss now.*

Chris            Okay, well I'll, um, check the latches on the windows.

*He moves about, doing this, moves offstage first to the bathroom, reappears, then offstage into the bedroom, comes back in.*

Chris            All good.

Emma            Okay, so I was saying before, about how there's this gross out challenge. It started online, and now...

Chris            I think I remember it.

Emma            Sorry?

Chris            The poem. I think I remember the poem.

*Chris stands before her. Emma has no choice but to listen. Chris, for his part, would rather be doing anything other than reciting his bad poetry to a stranger.*

Chris            It's kind of a love poem, but about love gone stale, I suppose. Goes like this:

I remember the promises  
We gave each other  
Sweet and light as candy  
From the fair  
Forgotten now  
The way cheap things always are  
First that we'd made them  
Then that we'd meant them  
Then that we'd ever felt  
We had something worth holding onto  
Now we give each other vouchers  
On our birthdays  
Redeemable for whatever shit  
Might fill the hole  
That love has left

*A silent reception.*

Chris            So, what do you think?

Emma            I think I don't have to worry about you hitting on me.

Chris            Okay, well that's true... What about the poem?

Emma That was about the poem. Love feels great at first but that soon passes - not a great chat up line.

Chris It's not meant to be a chat up line.

Emma My point.

Chris Right.

Emma It was really called The View from Here?

Chris No, I couldn't remember how that one ended, so I swapped. Should have explained that.

Emma Can you promise me something?

Chris Maybe.

Emma If I try to tell you why I'm here, for the third time, can you promise not to interrupt me?

Chris I don't think I've been -

Emma I don't want to suggest you're always this way - it's strange, meeting someone like this for the first time, it's hard to be natural - but interrupting all the time makes you come across as a little bit self-absorbed.

Chris I know it does, and normally I wouldn't... I can't explain it right now but let's just say -

Emma You're doing it again.

Chris Sorry... Fine.

Emma Thank you. So, there's this competition, which we've covered already, twice - sort of gross, in fact, totally gross. And, a lot of time when there's bullshit happening you don't say anything, because if you did then that would pretty much be the only thing you ever got time for, you'd become a joyless bundle of disapproval and resentment and people would basically hate you for trying to suck the fun out of life. But that doesn't mean you should never stand up, right? It's not an either or situation. So the moment I picked was at a party, when this competition started. They were all there, people I'd normally think of as my friends, watching and laughing, because it was funny, it's not like I don't have a sense of humour. It is funny watching people feel uncomfortable and challenging taboos and you know, just failing at shit because they're drunk.

But there's this trick we pull, where as long as there's humour involved you're not allowed to challenge it, because that would mean having no sense of humour. They try to make you choose between having a sense of humour and having a moral compass, and so comedy, which seems so harmless and friendly, becomes an instrument of power. See, I think something can be both very funny, and completely wrong. It's why you shouldn't say 'that's not funny,' that's just playing into their hands. Instead you should say, hey, getting girls drunk and then involving them in a challenge of a sexual nature is basically abuse. That's what I said. I walked right into the middle of the game and said 'this is sexual abuse and you're all part of it, so you have to stop.'

Chris And did they stop?

Emma            Yeah. They started playing as new game instead, which involved thinking up as many ways as they could of calling me a feminist lesbian, which is, you know, at least half true, so I can live with that. I mean, having a whole room of people turn on you and shout abuse is frightening, I'm human, but if that was all it was I could have gone home, had a bit of a cry, cleaned up my make-up and slept it off. But it was more complicated than that.

Chris            Guessing it might have been.

Emma            One of the girls playing the game was my best friend, and she was completely offended, like she thought I was accusing her of something, when in fact she was the victim, but anyway, I felt bad about upsetting her, so I went online to let her know, and it was already everywhere, footage of me having my little tantrum and then about a thousand angry comments telling me what should happen to people like me, and I'm not very good at backing down, is the thing, I get aggressive and I'm articulate so I enjoy the format. I start typing back, hitting them with these witty, ironic rejoinders, which they don't understand, and that offends them even more, and next thing the whole thing's gone thermonuclear... Are you all right?

Chris            Yeah, fine. Um, sorry to hear it.

Emma            You look strange.

Chris            Genetics, what are you going to do?

Emma            The worst bit is my friend got completely angry with me and said things she shouldn't have said, and so did I - she felt betrayed is the thing, and I understand that. But then she went so over the top that people started turning on her. Think how bullshit that is, one moment they're attacking me, next they're attacking her for attacking me, it's a not a smart world we live in... Anyway, my friend's not as, how do I say this, she's more fragile. It broke her. She didn't front up the next day, she disappeared, ran away, told her parents she was at my place. They rang me and I covered for her, for some reason, and then felt shit about lying to them, so a little bit of detective work brought me here. I thought she was staying here. I thought she booked the place. So I came here to clear the air with her and bring her home. But instead, I meet a poet who makes me French Toast and likes swimming in the rain, which sounds more like a line from a really bad song than something that actually happens... You haven't like, you know, killed her have you?

Chris            Of course I haven't -

Emma            I'm joking. She'd kick your arse.

Chris            Okay, not funny, offensive.

Emma            It can be both.

*Chris pauses, makes his decision, flinching as he does so.*

Chris            She's behind the couch.

Emma            Sorry?

Chris            Your friend, Sally, she's hiding behind the couch.



Part Six

*Sally emerges, enraged, and begins hitting Chris. He covers himself with his arms and backs away, stumbling over rubbish and falling in a heap. Sally falls on top of him but quickly regains her feet.*

Sally            You complete traitor.  
Emma           Hello Sally.  
Sally           I'll get to you.  
Chris           How am I traitor?  
Sally           I told you not to let her tell you why she was here.

*Chris stands, brushing himself off.*

Chris           Yeah, it's not easy to stop her talking.  
Sally           Think I don't know that?  
Chris           So let's stop blaming me.  
Sally           I said to get rid of her.  
Chris           You lied to me.  
Sally           That's not the point.  
Emma           Lied to him about what?  
Sally           This has nothing to do with you.

*Emma looks to Chris*

Emma           Is that right? This has nothing to do with me?  
Chris           That might be overstating it.  
Sally           You have got to be the most disloyal person I have ever met.  
Chris           Well I'm either disloyal to you or disloyal to her. What I am meant to do?  
Sally           You met me first.  
Chris           Since when has that been the rule?  
Sally           For as long as there've been people.  
Chris           Still a shit rule.  
Emma           Okay, doesn't matter. Worked it out for myself.

*Sally turns on her friend.*

Sally           Worked what out?  
Emma           What you told him.  
Sally           I didn't tell -  
Emma           He wanted to know why you were here, and you told the story of the party, except you knew how shitty that would make you sound, so instead, you told it like you

were me. That's why he had that look on his face, like he was watching The Force Awakens - a part of his brain going 'I already know this story.'

Sally

I -

Emma

It's all right. You don't have to apologise.

Sally

That's how you intend to make this all right, is it? By humiliating me again?

Emma

So why didn't you tell him the truth?

Sally

Because we were a man and a woman alone in a house together, miles from anywhere, and I figured if I played the part of the uptight, joyless, self-victimising hell-bitch, it would stop him bothering me.

Chris

You thought I would bother you?

Sally

You're saying you didn't think about it?

Chris

Okay, so not only do you lie to me, but you have the arrogance to -

Emma

So you still think it was okay?

Sally

I said some things online I shouldn't have said. So did you.

Emma

That's not what I'm talking about.

Sally

Then yeah, I do. All I did is go to a party, have a laugh with my friends, willingly involve myself in a game, knowing exactly what was involved before I volunteered, because I actually think it's okay to have a laugh sometimes. So shoot me.

Emma

You were drunk.

Sally

I knew what I was doing. I was perfectly capable of -

Emma

Objectifying yourself.

Sally

If you saw me as an object, that says more about you than me.

Emma

And what does it say about the roomful of people with their phones out and their mouths hanging open? I assure you it was not your personality they were recording.

Sally

Whereas your personality was quite the hit, as I remember it.

Emma

I wasn't trying to be popular.

Sally

Success then.

Emma

I was trying to help you.

Sally

No, you were trying to humiliate me.

Emma

You were doing a fine job of that all by yourself.

Sally

When are you going to start being honest about this, do you think, Emma? When are we going to get past this bullshit and talk about what's really upsetting you?

Emma

What upsets me is the fact that it's 2018 and still a smart woman like you thinks she has to use her body to get herself noticed.

Sally

I didn't feel like I had to. It's the choice I made. I do still get to make choices, right?

Emma

Do you even want this shit to change?

Sally

And have everyone end up like you?

Emma

I could live with that.

Sally

It's what we'd have to live without that worries me.

Emma

And what would that be?

Sally

A sense of humour for starters.

*Emma turns to Chris, triumphant.*

Emma           What did I say? Isn't this exactly what I said?  
Chris           Um, yeah, I suppose so.  
Sally           You're siding with her again?  
Chris           I just answered a question.  
Emma           You might be better off with her actually, I mean, you get her drunk enough, who knows?  
Sally           See, this is where you shit on your own argument.  
Emma           I'd shit on yours, but it's already covered.  
Sally           You resent the fact I'm comfortable enough with my body to use it any way I please.  
Emma           From where I stood you weren't the one being pleased.  
Sally           So walk away if you don't like what you're seeing. But you can't can you? You have to tell everybody else how to live their life. Can you not see the irony there?  
Emma           I can't walk away. That's the point. Because every time someone like you auditions for the role of sexually active Barbie, it reinforces the message that's all we are; it's just one more dismal layer on the slagheap of objectification and ownership we're all trying to crawl out from under.  
Sally           So now I'm a slag?  
Emma           Slag heap. As in mining waste.  
Sally           Like you're not smart enough to notice the double meaning.  
Emma           And that's what makes you uncomfortable isn't it, that I'm both smart and disagreeing with you?  
Sally           I don't mind you're smart; I mind that you wear it like a badge of honour, so that everybody who doesn't quite measure up is relegated to feeling inadequate and disapproved of. You're so desperate to feel good about yourself you can't resist taking that thing you have and flaunting it, which almost sounds familiar to me, oh, wait a sec, having my own Force Awakens moment here, desperation to belong, flaunting of what we have, making others feel inadequate...  
Emma           Okay, well this worked out real well.  
Sally           You didn't come here to make peace.  
Emma           Didn't you hear what I -  
Sally           I heard you lie to him.  
Emma           Well, you know, follow the leader.  
Sally           You're not staying here.  
Emma           I don't want to.  
Sally           Good.  
Emma           Fine. Goodbye then. Nice to have met you Chris. Watch this one, she'll turn on you.

*Chris is still reeling, trying to process all that's been said.*

Chris Um, how are you getting back?  
Emma Boat's coming in half an hour.  
Chris But you said -  
Sally She's not always reliable.  
Emma Because you never lied to him.  
Chris Okay, enough of this. I'm over the screaming thing.  
Sally Screaming?  
Emma Really?  
Chris Yeah.  
Emma If two men raise their voices, you say they're shouting, which sounds powerful and commanding.  
Sally Two women speak assertively and you say screaming, which makes it sound like we've completely lost our shit.  
Chris You did completely lose your shit.  
Sally I knew exactly I was saying.  
Chris She's your friend, she's come all this way to find you and you just told her to piss off.  
Sally Were you not listening to what she said to me?  
Emma He's right. You should come back with me.  
Sally Are you going all the way back tonight?  
Chris I didn't say you should go.  
Emma I'm getting back in time for the 5 o'clock sailing. My parents think I'm in the library doing a history assignment. I'm not lying to yours if they start freaking out.

*Chris collapses on the couch.*

Chris Really? So now your friends again, just like that?  
Emma No, because she's still being a dick. But she'll get over it. Meantime I'm over covering for her, so you know, her choice.  
Sally I'm just here. You can talk to me.  
Emma Sorry Sally. I'm going back to the jetty now, to leave my bag there so the boat doesn't go past. You can do whatever you like. Up to you. That clear enough for you?  
Sally You're the one being a dick.  
Emma Bye Chris. Good luck with the writing. I liked the poem.  
Chris Thank you... Bye.

Part Seven

*Chris looks at Sally, who avoids his eyes. She moves about, checking for those items not picked up in the earlier packing frenzy. Chris puts on a song.*

Chris            Coffee?  
Sally            You owe me French Toast.  
Chris            Emma ate it, not me.  
Sally            Because you offered it.

*Still struggling with the frying pan.*

Chris            I'm not really sure what you -  
Sally            You're useless.  
Chris            Yeah, a little bit.

*Chris makes another coffee. Sally moves beside him in the kitchen, and silently sets about making another batch of French Toast. Awkward - clear sense of an opportunity lost.*

Chris            How long did she say until the boat comes?  
Sally            Half an hour.  
Chris            Yeah, that's what I heard.  
Sally            She'll be back up soon.  
Chris            I don't think she said she was coming back up.  
Sally            She implied it when she said she was leaving her bag there.  
Chris            Suppose. She said goodbye though.  
Sally            I liked the poem too.  
Chris            You listened?  
Sally            You were pretty much sitting on top of me.  
Chris            Wouldn't she be back by now, if...  
Sally            She's a bit of a daydreamer, gets distracted.  
Chris            Here you go.  
Sally            You're not having one?  
Chris            I'm fine.

*Silence while Sally finishes preparing the French Toast. A sadness to this serving up. Still no sign of Emma. They sit at the table together. Chris checks the time - twice.*

Chris            So, you're booked back on tomorrow's ferry, right?  
Sally            Yeah.  
Chris            You think you'll be able to change the sailing at the last minute? It's Easter.  
Sally            Hadn't thought of that.  
Chris            Probably be all right.  
Sally            Yeah.

*Silence*

Sally I brought Easter eggs with me. For tomorrow.  
Chris Chocolate or marshmallow?  
Sally Marshmallow.  
Chris I like the chocolate ones.  
Sally These are different - No, these ones are.  
Chris Take your word for it.  
Sally You angry with me?  
Chris For what?  
Sally Lying to you.  
Chris What's that?

*They listen. Sound of an approaching boat.*

Sally It's the boat.  
Chris Shouldn't you be...  
Sally Yeah. Um, okay.

*Sally shoves in the last of her toast, picks up her pack. Stands beside it. Chris moves forward.*

Chris So, um, great to have met you.  
Sally Yeah, same. Thank you for... You know.  
Chris Yeah... You should be going.  
Sally Right.

*They hug, holding it longer than is necessary. Sally leaves. Chris watches her out the window, waves.*

*Chris sits, puts on music, picks up a pen, begins to write - is clearly kidding himself. Stops. Listens. The sound of the boat departing. Chris returns to the window. Waits. Finally, a relieved smile.*

*Sally bustles back into the bach.*

Sally Missed it. I called out, but... Sorry.  
Chris She should have been watching for you.  
Sally You'd think.

*Chris looks around.*

Chris So, um, I'll tidy up and lock all the food away, you know, for the rat.  
Sally I'll help.

Chris No, it's my mess.  
Sally Give me something to do.  
Chris You can read your book.  
Sally It's not very good.  
Chris Not as good as tidying - not much of recommendation..  
Sally Got to have a thick skin to be a writer.  
Chris So I'm discovering.

*Music back on. Sally collects the plates, moves to the kitchen to begin tidying from there. Chris starts at the other side of the room, treating the task as one might a police search, dealing with each square metre at a time: folding, collecting, stacking and sweeping up debris with his hand.*

Sally Who is she?  
Chris Who?  
Sally The girl you wrote the poem about.  
Chris It's just a poem.  
Sally A break up poem.  
Chris Writers make stuff up.  
Sally They write better when they don't. I liked the poem.  
Chris You really didn't like the story did you?  
Sally I say I like one thing, and you turn it straight into me disliking something else?  
Chris You're not denying it.  
Sally You're hiding something.  
Chris Pretty sure that's you.  
Sally So we're back to this.  
Chris You could have caught the boat if you'd wanted to.  
Sally You think I missed it deliberately?

*Chris feels he's made mistake here. Backtracks.*

Chris Might have been subconscious.  
Sally Because a night on a shitty couch with a wannabe writer and an infestation of vermin is irresistible.  
Chris Is this a bad time to say I'm pleased you missed the boat?  
Sally Yes.  
Chris Okay.  
Sally It makes me look like the asshole.  
Chris Can't have that.

*Back to their tidying. Chris builds up to his question.*

Chris You really think I was going to bother you?  
Sally You say things, when you're arguing.

Chris            So why did you lie to me?  
Sally            You haven't told me who the girl is.  
Chris            If I do, you'll explain?  
Sally            What do you want, a diagram?  
Chris            I am better with pictures.  
Sally            I'm better with straight answers.  
Chris            The poem's about my girlfriend. And me, of course.

*Sally hurls a cup at Chris' head. He ducks. It smashes against the wall.*

Chris            Okay, so you took that well.  
Sally            Looks like you missed a bit.  
Chris            Are you insane?  
Sally            Dunno. Does angry count?

*Chris is speechless, moves to the broken cup, begins to pick up the pieces. Sally has stopped cleaning and watches him.*

Sally            How could you not tell me that?  
Chris            I don't know. How could you not tell me you're left handed?  
Sally            I swear if you think cute answers are going to -  
Chris            I'm sorry. I didn't think you needed to know.  
Sally            If I had measles, I would have told you.  
Chris            She's not contagious.

*Sally makes to launch a second cup.*

Chris            - I didn't think it mattered.  
Sally            No, no, no. This is the bit where we stop lying.  
Chris            I'm not lying.  
Sally            I asked you why you were here, and you said it was to get your writing done.  
Chris            It is.  
Sally            It's not the only reason.  
Chris            I don't know what you're talking about.  
Sally            And I know you're talking shit.  
Chris            Okay shouty girl, I'm going back to the cleaning now. But, before I turn my back on you, are you going to be throwing any more mugs at me?  
Sally            Haven't decided.

*The cleaning takes on a more aggressive tone, with Sally choosing the soundtrack. She stands without warning. Instinctively Chris flinches, looks up. Nothing is thrown. She shouts over the music.*

Sally            The boat didn't miss me. I more... hid from it.

Chris           Why?  
Sally           Because I didn't think you had a girlfriend. Does that make you happy? Is your ego sufficiently stroked now?  
Chris           So you lied because -  
Sally           I am feeling plenty shit already, okay?

*Chris thinks about this, nods, walks across the room to put the pieces of the broken mug in the bin, an excuse to approach her. He stays in the kitchen, preparing to speak. It takes him a while.*

Chris           You did notice it's a break up poem, right?  
Sally           You broke up?  
Chris           Yes.  
Sally           Recently.  
Chris           Yes.  
Sally           She doesn't know, does she?  
Chris           What?  
Sally           That in your head, you've broken up.  
Chris           It's complicated.  
Sally           Stop talking now.  
Chris           I'm being gentle.  
Sally           See, you'd be shit at crosswords.  
Chris           Where do you even...  
Sally           Cowardly is not a synonym for gentle.  
Chris           You don't know anything about -  
Sally           Good place to run. No phone coverage.  
Chris           So I can finish the portfolio.  
Sally           At what point are we going to stop pretending to be people we're not?  
Chris           Thought I'd wait 'til my funeral.  
Sally           You leave the wrapping on too long, the contents decay.  
Chris           Take it off too early and they get consumed.  
Sally           Not saying it isn't a difficult balance.

*Silence, in which Chris concedes.*

Chris           I'm not saying I'm proud of it.  
Sally           You could have told me. I would have admired your honesty.  
Chris           And people who say that are often lying.  
Sally           I'm not. I'd trade a lot for honesty.

*Long pause*

Chris           Okay, honesty. I'm here, I'm lonely and I'm scared. It's not just a girlfriend I ran away from, but I do feel shit about that part, I really do. And I don't like writing.

That was meant to be the thing, it was meant to be my escape, but it's just... really hard. And then you turn up here, just when I desperately need someone to turn up, and that would be bad enough, but then you have to be interesting, when in my experience most people aren't. You have to be smart, and someone who doesn't take any shit, and beneath your irrational hatred of mess and vermin, I think you're kind. And I think we all have a vague sense of the world we want to live in, the personal world we're somehow inching our way towards, and in my ideal world people like you think people like me are okay. So I didn't tell you some things, same as you didn't tell me some things, because, you know...

Sally You were staggering under the influence of hope.

Chris Not just me.

Sally Hope and loneliness. That never ends badly.

Chris You lonely?

Sally We're all lonely.

*Chris moves away, sits on the couch.*

Sally Okay, I have a question for you, and you have to answer it honestly.

Chris Sure.

Sally If it had been Emma who had turned up first, would you have felt the same way about her?

Chris That's a good question.

Sally I know it is.

Chris Can I think about it?

Sally Interesting, smart, independent, kind... You know that describes her better than me, right?

Chris I'd try lying, but I don't even know which is the right answer.

Sally That's what makes it a good question.

Chris Maybe. Probably. The one you meet first, that's your team, right?

Sally It's a shit rule.

Chris It's growing on me.

Sally So, right place right time - they're my qualifying characteristics?

Chris No.

Sally See, I was flattered when you talked about 'people like me liking people like you.' But what you meant is any one of a thousand young women who are passably smart and presentable and meet some minimal bar of giving a shit?

Chris Sure. Okay. What do you want, people to immediately realise what makes you uniquely precious? We can't do that. We have to get know people first. So to start that's all we have; hope, generosity and an open spirit. You don't get to make an insult of that.

Sally Good point Then again... you have girlfriend.

Chris Past tense.

Sally I don't know, I'm still feeling some tension.

Chris You asked for honesty.  
Sally Would have been good a bit earlier.  
Chris You always have to feel better than other people?  
Sally Thank you for explaining my motivations back to me - I can see there would real benefits in having a man round to help me in this way.  
Chris I'm sorry you're lonely. It won't last.  
Sally Why won't it last?  
Chris Because you are better than other people.  
Sally I never feel it.

*Silence. When they speak again, the mood has softened.*

Chris So, those Easter eggs...  
Sally Now you want one of my Easter eggs?  
Chris You said they were great.  
Sally Perhaps I was lying.  
Chris It's why I want to try them, to find out.  
Sally I've got a feeling any chunk of chocolate and marshmallow would do the job just as well for you right now.  
Chris Life gives you marshmallow, eat it.  
Sally Just for the record, I liked you more when I didn't know you.  
Chris It's always the risk, isn't it? How about that vodka?  
Sally Yeah, funny thing... Lied about the vodka - Trying to impress you.  
Chris You didn't have to.  
Sally I see that now.  
Chris I meant I was already impressed.  
Sally It's raining again.  
Chris We could swim... You can swim, right? You wouldn't just pretend to impress me? 'Cos that could backfire.  
Sally See, you should be getting your togs on, before I change my mind.

*Chris hurries from the room. Lights down.*

Part Eight

*Lights up on evening: candles lit, Chris and Sally together on the couch, close and comfortable, night approaching, undeniable and unmentioned. Easter eggs opened.*

Chris            Okay, better than your average egg.  
Sally            You're going to have to learn to listen to me.  
Chris            Is it always like that, with you and Emma?  
Sally            Like what?  
Chris            Got a little vicious there.  
Sally            Different this time. Harder.  
Chris            How come?  
Sally            We both knew she was right.

*Chris waits for the story.*

Sally            I remember someone grabbed my arm and pulled me forward, and everyone was cheering, and I just didn't want it to become a thing.  
Chris            Well that worked out.  
Sally            It was an easy lie to tell you... I want to feel the outrage, but I just don't. I think it's because the feeling's so normal, being dissected by strangers - then written off because you don't conform to some fucked up mother/cheerleader/servant/whore paradigm. It takes the edge off it, somehow, the familiarity.  
                    And Emma, she's a good person, I'm not saying she's not good, but she depends upon that goodness, as a way of setting her apart. Being her friend is always one part about being not quite as good as she is. And she never says that, that's part of her goodness, to keep it to herself, and some days I swear I want to take her by the throat and squeeze that smugness to the surface. At Christmas her family buy each other goats for struggling villages - I got a new phone and ate a lot of chocolate.  
                    That's where my fury came from - that she would use me to make her look better. Like I wasn't already feeling small. Like that isn't exactly how I got there.  
Chris            That is shit.  
Sally            It actually is.  
Chris            I think sometimes fighting things just makes them stronger.  
Sally            First rule of horror: don't provoke the beast if you're not prepared to kill it.  
Chris            Thought that was the first rule of love.  
Sally            Could be the first line for a poem: **Don't fight love, it only makes it stronger** - continue.  
Chris            **Don't fight hope, it never meant you harm.**  
Sally            Nice - **Don't fight forgiveness, it makes you smaller** - Last line, bring it home.  
Chris            **Don't fight winter, learn to ski.**  
Sally            Ruining the mood's sort of your thing, right?

Chris It's a nervous habit.  
Sally Do I make you nervous?  
Chris Only since you arrived... Would it be awful if we finished the eggs?  
Sally Then how would we celebrate Easter?

*Awkwardly unanswered. A moment's discomfort.*

Chris I've got a thing for eighties music at the moment, and there's this line in a song that goes: 'was our love too strong to die, or were we just too weak to kill it?' I don't know, I...

Sally You don't have to explain.

Chris We were together a year and a half, right through the end of school. I didn't love her, you know, but it felt like I did. But mostly that was just the newness, and shit, the gratitude. It's quite the thing you know, when someone gives you the impression you're worthy of their attention. And it becomes easy, comfortable, and there's sex... that's pretty good too... But, I thought we both knew it had an end date, you know. I was going to Otago to study Medicine, she was staying in Wellington to do theatre -

Sally She's an actor?

Chris Wants to be.

Sally Bad luck.

Chris Hers or mine?

Sally Both.

Chris I sort of imagined one day, just hugging and saying goodbye and then moving happily on.

Sally So you're an idiot then?

Chris Yeah. But then one day she tells me she's enrolled at Otago too - she gets accepted for the same hostel... You know what, my father's a lawyer, my mother's a doctor, my brother's a dentist, my sister, she's younger, but you know, never failed a thing in her life.

Sally Apart from the national chill-the-fuck-out test.

Chris Nah, she swatted for that. They loved her, you know, my parents. They thought Natalie was perfect for me, just like they thought med school was perfect for me. I'm not sure that's my job, you know, to make my family feel good about their choices. Shouldn't they be prepared to deal with that shit themselves?

Sally So you're running away from your career, your girlfriend, your family and your country?

Chris I like the idea of starting over.

Sally Doesn't work like that.

Chris Might.

Sally Run towards them or run away from them: either way they're still the frame of reference.

Chris You think I should go back?

Sally Just don't, you know, expect miracles.  
Chris This is pretty miraculous.  
Sally Don't say that.  
Chris Why not?  
Sally You know why.  
Chris Okay, this is shit then. Meeting a person I can talk to like this, bullshit.  
Sally Don't make it more than it is, is all I'm saying.  
Chris What is it?  
Sally It's not anything.  
Chris It's not nothing either.

*Silence.*

Chris Life's just a succession of moments, you know. How many of them do you plan to leave uninhabited?  
Sally Just the right amount.

*Sally offers him the Easter egg packet.*

Sally Have the last one if you want.  
Chris That the consolation prize?  
Sally Better than nothing.

*Chris reaches for the packet. Their hands meet. Their eyes too. For a moment, this could go either way.*

Sally It's getting late, I might...  
Chris Yeah, of course. You want the bed?  
Sally Fine here, thanks.  
Chris Okay, um, yell out if, you know...  
Sally I won't.  
Chris Rat, I meant. If there's a rat... I'll just use the bathroom.

*Chris moves off-stage. Sally alone, pensive, not at all certain about this. Stands, moves towards the bathroom, changes her mind. Chris returns.*

Chris All yours. Hey, um, thanks for today. That was amazing. I had an amazing day.  
Sally Yeah, me too.

*They hug, warm and long. Sally sits. Chris moves to his room, turns back.*

Chris I just want to say I haven't had many days like this. Maybe none. Thank you.

Sally            Good night.  
Chris            Good night.

*As Chris leaves...*

Sally            It wasn't nothing.

*Music up as both visible to us, but in their two rooms, sit, think about moving on, get into their sleeping bags, the whole ritual choreographed in time. Music up, lights slowly down.*