

SONS OF THE MOTHER

Synopsis

Two brothers are tied up in the garage by their father to help them kick a deadly habit; but the drug they call 'the mother' is stronger than love.

Cast List

Andy } Brothers in their twenties

Darren }

Dad

Mum (Dead)

SONS OF THE MOTHER

Act One

Two brothers are tied up in a shed or garage. Depending on budget, this loving restraint could be elaborate steampunk machinery or wooden chairs with rope bindings. The boys are fixed in one position to begin but, as the play unfolds, this 'apparatus of cruel kindness' is upgraded, allowing them to sit/stand and lie down. They may eventually be able to swing, slide and see-saw around the equipment; while still bound hand and foot to it.

They are suffering the 'fluey symptoms' of drug withdrawal. (Some of their dialogue is stylised to sound like moans and groans.)

Darkness.

ANDY and DARREN: Born. Born.

Lights up.

ANDY: When were you born?

DARREN: 28th February, 1988.

ANDY: Bonnie. Blithe. It was a Sunday. Where were you born?

DARREN: Canterbury: where the tale begins. No, Glastonbury: where the story starts. Hang on. Was it Stonehenge, or Penge? Olympia or Mount Olympus? Where does it look like I come from?

ANDY: You must remember exactly. We need to know if we're dealing with comedy or tragedy. Morecambe, Bognor, Torquay; born there and you'll be laughing. Dunblane, Hungerford, Enniskillen; it's going to end in tears.

DARREN: Penge. It began here.

ANDY: Actually, it's Annerley, isn't it? Where Puff the magic dragon lives.

DARREN: Andy, invoking Puff right now will not help us get our lives in order. Blew my first breath on a Sunday, I was that pure.

ANDY: Not a blow, bro; it was a roar. What time were you born?

DARREN: Ten to midnight.

ANDY: If you'd come ten minutes later?

DARREN: I would have been a pumpkin.

ANDY: Push. Harder.

DARREN: It hurts.

ANDY: What is your earliest memory?

DARREN: The see-saw in the park; bright red and yellow. You at the other end, with woolly hat and mittens on elastic. Weeeee!

ANDY: What happened?

DARREN: I went too high. You were bigger. We weren't balanced.

ANDY: Wasn't my fault you fell off.

DARREN: The see-saw smacked down on my head. Red and yellow puddles of blood and brain fluid.

ANDY: It was bogies, not brain. You were snotty.

DARREN: Head cracked open, so everybody could see the hole in my soul.

ANDY: We mustn't get sucked in. Think about something else. What was in the pockets of your anorak?

DARREN: I can't remember that.

ANDY: Channel it.

Pause.

DARREN: 'Chewits'. There were sweets in my pockets, that day. Smarties, sherbet, chocolate buttons.

ANDY: Oh shit.

DARREN: They'll make me feel better. Can I pop a sweetie? A blue one.

ANDY: That's dangerous.

DARREN: It will stop me crying. Or a snort of the sherbet, a fizzy sniff.

ANDY: Let's change the subject. What do you remember about your first day at school?

DARREN: The smell of sick and sawdust.

ANDY: More.

DARREN: Teachers the size of skyscrapers.

ANDY: Give me more.

DARREN: Stickle-bricks. Play Doh. Squished together till the bricks didn't stickle anymore; and Miss had to work it out with a pencil.

ANDY: No. You're making it up, now.

DARREN: It's a story I've told before. That means it really happened.

ANDY: Tell me who you played with at playtime.

DARREN: William. Smelled of wee-wee. David. Think he's dead now.

ANDY: Don't go there.

DARREN: I never played with the girls, then. All I pulled was their hair.

Pause.

ANDY: What was your favourite subject at school?

DARREN: Science. Experiments. Explosions. Chemistry. Substances.

ANDY: Forget that.

DARREN: It will stop me crying. I could kill for a nuclear reaction, right now; a blue one, with a silver lining, and blackness at its core.

ANDY: You'll never be let back in the lab, man. What was your least favourite subject at school?

Pause.

ANDY: Darren?

Pause.

ANDY: Daz? I know you hated it. You can't even say the word. The letters won't let you.

DARREN: Literature.

ANDY: Don't try and spell it.

DARREN: It sounds like swearing, to me. From the ABC, I'd rather have stuck stickle-bricks up my bum.

ANDY: You used to like it when Miss read you stories, though.

DARREN: Yes, but I thought they were oral. I could see the pictures, like all kids, but the words; they just looked like holes in the page. Too deep for me; I thought they were dirty marks. No meaning.

ANDY: Did you ever read a line?

DARREN: One line. From the only book I ever liked the look of. 'We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold'. I never thought lines were for reading; taken in by the nose and not the eye.

ANDY: I'm not your attorney.

DARREN: If you were, I'd lick you. I'd roll you up and smoke you. I'd burn you and shoot you. I'd chop you up and snort you.

ANDY: Dad will be here soon.

DARREN: I can't stand this.

ANDY: You'd better ask the questions.

DARREN: Is it easier?

Pause.

DARREN: What is your earliest memory?

ANDY: The swings in the park; bright red and yellow. You swinging alongside, with woolly hat and mittens on elastic. Weeeee!

DARREN: What happened?

ANDY: I went too high. You encouraged me to go over the top.

DARREN: Wasn't my fault you fell off.

ANDY: The swing swung down on my head. Red and yellow puddles of blood and brain fluid.

DARREN: It was bogies, not brain. You were snotty.

ANDY: Head cracked open, so everybody could see the hole in my soul.

DARREN: We're getting sucked in.

ANDY: Dad'll be here soon.

DARREN: I can't stand it. Who was your favourite teacher at school?

ANDY: That's a hard one. Who will it be? Mr Minim the music teacher or Mr Pecs the PE teacher?

DARREN: Music or PE?

ANDY: Music. It's got rhythm and melody, tempo and harmony. From thumping to strumming, beating to blowing; from full earth-shattering orchestra to raw unplugged solo. Or sport? Which is the bigger buzz? The hole-in-one; the personal best. The beautiful goal. Every goal is beautiful. There's no ugly goal. No boring goal.

DARREN: You can score a goal accidentally.

ANDY: There are accidentals in music too.

DARREN: There's some fucking ugly music. And boring.

ANDY: But is there a musical equivalent to slalom?

DARREN: I could sing it for you.

ANDY: The high jump.

DARREN: La!

ANDY: Ooh, the triple salko. Potting the black. Hitting a googlie. The final straight.

DARREN: Sport and music, they're exactly the same.

ANDY: One in time, one in space.

DARREN: So what makes them different, then?

ANDY: One for rich, one for poor? One for peace, one for war?

DARREN: No, it can't be.

ANDY: One for business, one for pleasure? Singles, doubles, played in teams? It works both ways. There is no difference between them.

DARREN: Do ladies only like music and men only like sport?

ANDY: Dad'll be here soon.

DARREN: So who's it going to be, then? Mr Minim or Mr Pecs? Music or PE?

ANDY: I can't stand it.

DARREN: My favourite teacher was a lady.

ANDY: What?

DARREN: I can't remember her name.

ANDY: What did she teach you?

DARREN: Odysseus. His Odyssey. Odd, how he's got the same name as his trip.

ANDY: Eponymous.

DARREN: No, Odysseus. This is what she told.

ANDY: Told.

DARREN: He had to sail past the island of the Sirens, and wanted to hear them singing. Trouble was, sailors who heard their famous song before had all jumped overboard and swum ashore, teased by those temptress voices. But the Sirens turned out to be beautiful women from the waist up only.

ANDY: How old were you when you heard this?

DARREN: About fifteen. She was a supply teacher. We were the bottom class. She said Odysseus ordered his crew to fill their ears with wax, so they were immune to the tune, and tie him to the mast. He wanted to hear what had lured so many men to their death on the jagged rocks.

ANDY: Birds from the waist down?

DARREN: Ugly birds.

ANDY: With a pretty song.

DARREN: It promised to foretell the future. To prophesy what would come.

ANDY: And Odysseus heard it.

DARREN: He was bound to the mast. He told his sailors: no matter how hard he begged, even if he pleaded to be released, they must only tie him tighter, till their ship was safely out of earshot of the seductive song.

ANDY: Did he scream at them to let him go? Did he swear to give them anything if they would untie him and watch him swim?

DARREN: It was a really addictive song. Wonder what addictive sport they were into?

ANDY: If we must get to the bottom of this, music has better lyrics. That's the real difference. For wordless pleasure, non-verbal thrills, virtuoso performances; sport and music are neck and neck. Physique applies equally to each. But as soon as words come into it, sport is a geezer chanting on the terraces; while music is an opera singer.

DARREN: I don't get it.

ANDY: *(As a football chant.)* You're so shit it's unbelievable.

DARREN: I bet you're saying that writers are better than darts-players or drummers because they're good with words.

ANDY: No, because physically books are rubbish, aren't they?

Pause.

DARREN: So, Andy; when you left school, what was your first job?

ANDY: Glorified paper-round: I was editor of the local rag. No, only joking. I was a roving reporter. No, only joking. I sold advertising space.

DARREN: Sounds glamorous.

ANDY: I had a script. It was writ large on the office wall and I had to say it and sound natural. There was no way anybody could do that. 'Hi, my name is X and I'd like to make you profit.' Actually, there was always one; one guy who could get people buying without even trying.

DARREN: Is Sales not a genius, just like sport or music?

ANDY: Exactly the same. The superstar can sell something to somebody who doesn't even want it. But it wasn't like that in my first job. What we were flogging was valuable, a proper proposition.

DARREN: I can't stand it.

ANDY: Dad will be here soon. So, Darren; when you left school, what was your first job?

DARREN: It was in a factory, wasn't it? And my next job. And the one after that. Factories are fine. They are so simple, even the really, really complex ones. Every component has a place and a purpose.

ANDY: But it's a bit mechanical, isn't it?

DARREN: That's what I love about machinery. *(Pause.)* Heavy plants never have drug habits; production lines don't get hooked.

ANDY: What did you manufacture, then?

DARREN: 'Kenwood Chef' food mixers. I actually met Ken. Then I went on to assemble vacuum cleaners. There, I actually faced the void. Weird, though, the domestic theme of my career; was I secretly trying to make up for the mothering side of things?

ANDY: I thought you made talc.

DARREN: That was my third position, and my downfall.

ANDY: Weren't you a shift supervisor?

DARREN: Power corrupts. Powder corrupts absolutely.

ANDY: You could have been running that place by now.

DARREN: Let's have a quick-fire round.

ANDY: Quick fire. What's your favourite car?

DARREN: What's your favourite pet?

ANDY: Rolls Royce Phantom. Afghan Hound.

DARREN: Lamborghini Diablo. German Shepherd.

ANDY: That was too quick. What was your first car?

DARREN: Same as yours. All my cars have been the same as yours.

ANDY: And have you ever had a pet that wasn't mine?

DARREN: No. Probably never will. Too irresponsible.

ANDY: I liked the snake.

DARREN: The iguana was great.

ANDY: Those tropical fish, we would sit and watch them for hours. The warm water bubbling, the neon fins swarming.

DARREN: Andy, you're losing it, mate. Fish don't swarm. They flit. They float. They fleetly flee. They swim.

ANDY: But they weren't the best pets, were they? That was our Trixy; just a mixed-up terrier, a bit Irish, a bit Welsh; but with eyes of the deepest devotion I've ever seen.

DARREN: A man's best pet is his dog.

ANDY: We seem to favour different breeds, though, for our fantasy hound.

DARREN: You've got the Afghan look, with long flowing locks and lean flanks.

ANDY: Well, you might have been a German Shepherd in the old days, but you look more like a greyhound now. Animal built for speed. Fuel it up, drive it right, and those pups will always go the extra mile for you.

DARREN: In fact, dogs are exactly the same as cars. I've never realised that before. Love it and let it off the leash, your vehicle will fetch, wait and go walkies on your command.

ANDY: Hey. What is your favourite position for a dog to ride in a car: barking silently through the rear window; sticking its head out of a side window, ears blowing back in the breeze; or sitting in the passenger seat of a left-hand drive, so that it appears to be at the wheel?

DARREN: Bloody hell. This is like playing *Mr and Mrs* with my brother.

ANDY: What's the answer?

DARREN: Okay. I want a dog in the passenger seat while I drive my car; instead of me always having to be the bitch in yours.

ANDY: Never say that on *Mr and Mrs*. What's your favourite drink?

DARREN: Absinthe, Baileys, Cinzano, Daiquiri, Egnog, Frascati, Gin, (*pause*) Hoegaarden.

ANDY: Every single one of those drinks is inebriating, and the doubles doubly so. Still we haven't got to W, yet.

DARREN: What does that stand for, Wodka?

ANDY: Water.

DARREN: I would never drink water. It's a waste of time.

ANDY: That is the most wasted thing you've ever said. This is the wickedest we've ever been. Do you see how low we are; that we spurn the true drink of life, the one sip we actually need to survive.

DARREN: I see how low we are.

ANDY: I can't stand it.

DARREN: There's no way we can survive.

ANDY: So. What's your favourite food, then?

DARREN: It's not a simple abc; apples, broccoli, carrots.

ANDY: No? Is it a savoury artichoke, basil, caviar? Or a salty almonds, brazils and cashews? Is it a sweet abc; apricot, butterscotch, chocolate? Or maybe a random-flavoured; anchovies, bruschetta, callaloo.

DARREN: It's not an abc, you tosser.

ANDY: Is it a donut?

DARREN: You're not having my favourite; this is the worst food. This is what I'm eating now; the only thing I can ever imagine eating again.

ANDY: Cold turkey.

DARREN: I can't stand it.

ANDY: Dad will be here soon.

DARREN: Come on, think, think. How many times have you been in hospital?

ANDY: Too many to count. Half of them looking after you.

DARREN: Remember when I broke my leg.

ANDY: Arm. Ribs. Cocyx. Head, for Pete's sake!

DARREN: Remember when I was in traction and you were pinging grapes off my pulleys to make my arm go up and down, like this. Oh. I can't do it now.

ANDY: Remember when the police were sitting by your bed, waiting for you to wake up and answer some questions.

DARREN: I've visited you in hospital, too. It's not all one-sided. And at least I've only been admitted to mainstream A and E. Your ward was in a different section. Through the swing doors to mad wing, wasn't it.

ANDY: Wish I was there now.

DARREN: You felt differently then.

ANDY: At least they gave me drugs.

DARREN: Yes. That's what we need. This is intolerable.

ANDY: Dad will be here soon. Let's tell him we can't stand it. I'd rather be in any kind of hospital than here right now. I'd go back to the labour ward. The trauma of being born.

DARREN: Born. Born.

ANDY: Or, I'd rather be in the mortuary, chilled on a slab. The therapy of being dead.

DARREN: Dead. Dead.

ANDY: Dad. Dad.

The sound of keys jangling, several locks being turned. The door swings open, letting in light and an older man with a mop and bucket, toolbox and suitcase.

DAD: Hello, boys.

ANDY: Dad. Dad. You've got to get us out of here. We can't stand it.

DARREN: Untie me. Please. I'm begging you.

ANDY: Dad. We're dying. If you love us, let us go.

DARREN: Help. I need to go to the toilet.

ANDY: I've already been.

DARREN: What?

ANDY: Haven't you shat yourself, like, several times by now?

DARREN: It goes the other way with me. I keep everything inside, squidged into poison bullets. I'm dying, Dad.

DAD: This is what you said to me: No matter how hard we beg, even if we plead, do not release us. If we scream and cry that we've changed our plans, only tie us tighter. We will not know our minds when we are out of them.

He mops the floor around ANDY.

ANDY: We were out of our minds when we said that. And I am in mine, now; more than ever before.

DAD: Remember that I swore. Remember what I swore on. You know I will keep my promise to you. We would never have started this if you thought I'd chicken out at the first sign of turkey.

ANDY: This isn't the first time, though.

DAD: But you've got better support now.

He starts to change ANDY's trousers.

ANDY: The first time I tried to get clean. Two months after I started using. It was already too late. I'd been home. I'd seen 'the mother'. I'd felt bliss.

DAD: Where was this?

ANDY: A bedsit in Penge. There was a huge crack in the wall and my landlord had literally papered over it. One night, I took a pencil and scored a line along that crack, ripping the wallpaper neatly. It was Regency stripe. Do you know what that looks like, Daz? Nice.

DAD: Who were you living with?

ANDY: Adolf Hitler and Genghis Khan, there was a whole gang of us; Alastair Crowley, Myra Hindley, Mr Hyde. Saturday nights were a riot; but you should have seen the trouble I had getting the rent on Sunday mornings.

DAD: Were they all real people?

ANDY: In that bedsit, I wasn't a real person.

DARREN: Dad.

ANDY: None of the furniture matched. There was an eighteenth century armoire, faux of course, juxtaposed with state-of-the-art Scandinavian. The plumbing was like fossilised spaghetti.

DARREN: Dad.

ANDY: It was, indeed, the lavatorial arrangements that made me renounce my renouncing of the drugs, on that occasion.

DARREN: Dad! Are your ears filled with wax?

DAD finishes his ablutions of ANDY and places the bucket for DARREN to pee in.

DARREN: That's better. But still. Unbind me from this mast.

DAD: Odysseus? What if the crew had untied him? He'd have steered them onto the jagged rocks, not to be heard of again. No Odyssey.

DARREN: I never knew you knew that story. Were you ever going to tell me? Did I have to hear it from a supply teacher?

DAD: Do you want clean pants?

DARREN: What else have you got?

DAD: There are worse monsters than the Sirens, you know. Right next door, Scylla: six long necks with hideous heads, picking off six crewmen at random from every ship that passed too close. *(Beat.)* I've got water, tea, coffee, fruit juice, ham sandwiches, cheese sandwiches, crisps, biscuits, apples.

ANDY: My favourite food. It's the packed lunch I had every day at school, the picnic we had every holiday. Where's the ginger beer, that's what I want to know; and the pork pies and the ice cream?

DARREN: Is this your abc?

ANDY: It's ad; the 'Andy Diet'. I think it's working. Anyway, the second time I tried to get clean was about a year later. It seemed a lot more. I'd kind of lost the plot. It was no longer set in Penge; that mismatched flat looked luxurious now. I was squatting in a seventeenth century armoire, musty as fuck. *(Pause.)* My withdrawal went as far as the achey-shakey. I nearly cried on my straw mattress, but then I decided it would be easier to cheat and lie and steal, as previously.

DARREN: I visited you there. I never realised it was the seventeenth century.

ANDY: I can't stand it. Dad. Help.

DAD: Okay boys, I'm going to get my tools out. There's a blueprint, here, a plan to make things more comfortable for you. Obviously, you can't stand/sit and lie down in your current confinement, so I thought it might be nice to hinge your captivity, facilitating a change of posture without any danger of coming unbound. It will take a bit of banging. And some sawing.

ANDY: That's not help, Dad; that's hell.

DARREN: I'll help you. Take your mind off. Ask me anything. Anything at all.

ANDY: What do you actually like about me?

DARREN: What? Like?

ANDY: All we know so far is I'm such a loser my dad's had to tie me up in the garage so I can get off heroin.

DARREN: You're my big brother. The sun and the arse it shines out of. The dog and its unfeasibly large bollocks.

ANDY: But that's biological admiration. What would you like about me if we'd just met?

DARREN: Right this minute?

ANDY: No, before I was tied up in the garage, shivering, crapping myself, and talking off toxic steam.

DARREN: I would think you were golden. I would admire your artfully tousled hair, your twinkling eyes, your snake hips. I would like the way you lean in when we talk as if you really wanted to hear what I said. It would reassure me to discover your 'built-in bullshit detector'. It would make me laugh to learn your collection of Spoonerisms.

ANDY: You're taking the piss.

DARREN: Alright, the thing I like best about you is simple. You love your little brother, even though he's a way bigger loser than you will ever be. So what do you like about me?

ANDY: It's all biological, Daz. I just feel responsible for you: as if I'd been handed this cute kamikaze puppy and told to keep it alive at all costs. There isn't anything I actually like about you; you're selfish, bitchy, lazy, all the seven dwarfs, plus you're quite racist. (*Pause.*) And so thick. You probably didn't understand half of that.

DAD: Darren, keep still. I'm trying to adjust the angle/

DARREN: Of my dangle?

DAD: I need to see the spectrum/

DARREN: Of my rectum?

DAD: What you don't realise is, I used to be a master carpenter. Back in the day when wood was good, I could do anything with it. No, anything.

DARREN: I remember. You made me a Tardis. Little wooden model, but it really was bigger on the inside. I entered it completely.

DAD: What about the rocking horse? The six-foot stilts? What about when I started entering into metalwork? Fire and fury, it was like the clash of the Titans in this garage. I could have made armour in here that would save your life in battle. But I could have made weapons that would kill you in the same fight. So I swapped it all for the making of a bicycle.

I forged every link of its chain from melted-down coke cans and fashioned shiny handlebars out of old CDs. The crossbar was once a kitchen sink; each spoke of the wheels was previously a knitting needle. This was recycling.

DARREN: Wasn't there some problem with the saddle?

DAD: When Trixy the dog died, I wanted to line it with her fur. I thought it would be a lovely reminder.

DARREN: You are still marginally iller than Andy and me.

DAD: I want to heal your sickness. The one that got you into this mess, the one that will get you out of it. Like so.

Dad has made some improvements to the restraint system, so that the boys can now change position, from sitting to standing or from standing to sitting. It could seem to work with gears, chains, pedals like a bike.

DAD: How's that?

DARREN: Sick. Sick. Get us out of it? Just let us go.

DAD: Andy? You like?

ANDY: Thanks for the thought, Dad. You know what I liked best, though? Not the woodwork, not the metalwork, but when you got into electronics.

DAD: Then this place was the winking, blinking circuit board at the heart of my hobby. It was the control centre of my spare time.

ANDY: You invented some blinking useful things.

DAD: Remember that winking robot that never did what it was meant to?

ANDY: That was no robot: that was your wife.

Pause.

DAD: Right boys, now I've eased your bodies, let me bring peace to your minds. Are you positioned comfortably? I'm going to teach you to meditate.

ANDY and DARREN probably scream. It may be a while before we can hear what Dad is saying.

DAD: Start by seeing your mind as the sky. Look at it closely. Cloudy, huh? Overcast. Can hardly see it for the dark thoughts which permanently sit there, threatening rain? And the little fluffy white ones that flit across your brain; one random puff following another, all twisted fantasies and twittering wishes. Just lie and look at those clouds. Close your eyes and watch them pass.

Pause.

DAD: Every time you get caught up in a thought, and forget to watch it, and be carried away by it; stop. Record. What are you thinking about? Why are you thinking about that, again? Just observe it as you would a cloud passing; and that thought slowly goes away.

Pause.

DAD: And when all the clouds blow away, guess what? The sun comes out. You can bathe in this inner brightness, you can bloom in its glow.

ANDY: I'm getting an internal sun tan, man.

DAD: No, Andrew, it takes longer than that. Slowly, sit and stare with your eyes closed at every thought blowing your mind. It takes more than a day for that sunrise, but when you've seen it once, it won't ever set.

ANDY: You know I love the sun.

DAD: There's a bit of it inside you. Meditation makes it burn.

ANDY: Okay, I'll try it.

Dad takes a CD player or similar out of his suitcase and plays some meditation music.

DAD: This soundtrack will help keep your awareness in the present.

DARREN: Dad, we played in a post-punk band.

Pause.

DARREN: I don't dig the whale's mating call. Sorry, but I support Sid Vicious and he despised the Aeolian harp. Oh, sweet Sid, rotten Johnny; get me out of here.

DAD: Demon Darren, the only way out is in. Everything you've been seeking, on the legless quest of your life, is already in place; though your gaze is too squiffy to see it. Let's lose the music.

He turns off the CD player. ANDY may have been listening to it.

DAD: Close your eyes; what do you see? Nothing but darkness inside your head. Listen. What sound in your ears? Apart from the buzz, the hum; nothing. Dark and silent; a peaceful spot right there in your mind. Stand on it, like an empty stage. Your clouds will be clowns. Watch them appear; puppets of the past, shadow play from the future. You must face each one down, before the space is your own.

Pause.

Pause.

DARREN snores.

DAD: You have to stay awake. For meditation to work, you must be conscious.

ANDY: How do you know all this? Dad, have you done it?

DAD: Got to the bit where the sky is blue and the sun comes out. Got to the bit where the stage is empty and the truth appears. Wouldn't be able to keep you here if I hadn't been doing it for years.

ANDY: Who taught you? Your father and his father before him?

DAD: Not likely in Penge. I found a book, in a jumble sale. After the jumble sale, in fact; it hadn't been sold and I was helping my mum box up the leftovers, in the Women's Institute hall. The minute I saw it, I knew it was waiting for me. How could nobody have bought it; the cover was so alluring, in cerulean blue with gold curlicues. I thought it must have been hiding on the stall all that time; but, looking back, it was probably because the bald man on the front, with a third eye and a numinous smile, was black. Asian, actually; but this was the 1950s.

ANDY: Did you read it?

DAD: Not then. Years later.

ANDY: And why didn't you tell me about this before?

DAD: Same reason. Not ready.

ANDY: So what does the book say?

DAD: It taught me things I could teach you. Advanced stuff. Having no head; living from the heart; out of body experiences.

DARREN: Thanks, Dad, this is getting me high.

ANDY: I'm getting hungry.

DAD: That's better. You're starting to feel real again. I've a flask of warm vegetable soup.

DARREN gags.

DARREN: AKA, a stomachful of puke.

ANDY: Did you say sandwiches, too? Go on, I'll try one.

DAD: And a nice cup of tea.

ANDY: Dad, you're not in the women's institute now. Can't you bring us a beer? Or some whisky? Even wine?

DAD: Wouldn't be wise.

ANDY: We're not alcoholics. It's the drugs we're kicking.

DARREN: Actually, I am an alcoholic.

ANDY: What?

DARREN: Aren't you, like, emotionally dependant on the bottle?

ANDY: More of a breast man. I've been with the real mother. Accept no substitute.

DARREN: We are so fucked up. He's mad and I'm a drunkard. Both of us rely on class As and still fail every test.

DAD: No, you are not failing. Look. *(He tightens DARREN's restraints.)* You are holding firm. The sandwiches are here, within your reach; please do try to squeeze one in.

DARREN gags.

DAD: Bottle of water. I'll be back in the morning.

ANDY: Oh, is it night?

DAD: 9 pm. What did you think?

ANDY: I've lost track of the sun. The tracks in my arms show more than that orb's. I want to be shined on again.

DAD: Remember the meditation; watch your cloudy thoughts clear.

DARREN: If you try that at night, and the clouds all blow away, do you bathe in the light of the moon?

DAD: Can you please not howl. I'm worried the neighbours will hear.

ANDY: Isn't this garage sound-proof?

DAD: Not very. The Smiths at number 42 always used to say they knew when I was striking my big anvil.

ANDY: (*Loudly.*) Help! Help!

DARREN: Dickhead. If anyone hears you and calls the police we'll all be arrested and there still won't be any drugs.

ANDY: There will be in the nick.

DAD: Aim for something better than a life of addiction in prison, though, son. Right. Goodnight.

DARREN: Can we have a story?

DAD: I was going to go in and watch the football? It's the World Cup second round; England v Germany.

Both boys burst into tears.

DAD: Okay, okay. Stop crying. Look, I'm doing it. Listen, I'm saying it. The oldest story ever told.

Boys: Told. Told.

DAD: Once, there was a hero, trying to make his way home. There were so many distractions, some scary, some seductive, that it took him ten years to get there.

The Cyclops, sons of the anvil. Sent down for threatening behaviour at the beginning of the world. Traded with Hades, an eye, for foresight; so they could see the future.

Cyclops, named for the storm; they forged Zeus' thunderbolts, Poseidon's trident. Their cousins, less cultured, were who Odysseus met next.

He had got a little bit cocky. He'd broken and entered the monster's den, while the one-eyed beast was away; but then, as Homer had it, bish bash bosh, he was caught by the Cyclops. More of his crew were eaten in that cave, right in front of Odysseus.

That is the earliest plot; flesh-ripping, bone-cracking, blood-spurting action. Those are the earliest characters; brothers separated first from each other, and then limb from limb. This is the earliest theme; an eye for an eye for an eye. Odysseus blinded the Cyclops with a red-hot stick from his own fire.

Now do you remember why you never asked me for bedtime stories?

ANDY: More. More.

DAD: They were too frightening when you were small. Are you big enough for Circe now? She was a witch who lived on the next island Odysseus came to. Wrecked, the crew toured the shores and found one house, by its thin plume of smoke, thick in the wooded centre of the isle. Weird place, where lions and tigers jumped up playfully as pussy cats when the men approached: drugged by the goddess who lived in the castle. They could see her inside, weaving at a magic loom; and singing in the voice of a women, though she wasn't really.

DARREN cries.

DAD: Alright, I'll tone it down. Nice version, not nasty. She invited them in and gave such a feast; imagine, the cheese sandwiches and the ham sandwiches delicately interlaced to make cheese and ham sandwiches; with crisps adding a crunch every second layer; and the choice of apple chunks or biscuit crumbs on top. But she spiked this mixture with a poison wine that would transform half the crew into pigs. Odysseus' men on the inside, snouts and trotters freaking out in Circe's pig sty.

ANDY: Junkies. It's turned us into pigs, too.

DAD: But our hero had an antidote to her medicine, given by his good mate, the god Mercury. And guess what; it was just another drug.

DARREN: Drugs the cure, drugs the problem.

DAD: Moly; this herb with black root and milk-white flower, famously difficult to dig up. Holy immunity; all Circe's power transferred into a helpless passion for Odysseus.

In her great hall hung with purple, trimmed with silver, he got his sword out; and the goddess fell at his feet. Like mystic putty in his manly hands, he made her change the sailors back from swine before he would have sex with her. He made that sacrifice, you see.

So you don't have to stay under a medicinal spell, boys. Abstinence rules okay. Apparently, when they returned to human form, the crew were hunkier than before.

ANDY: And then they went home?

DAD: They drank and did drugs with the witch for another twelve months. But a year in story time is, what, four in yours? More? Leave her with the dopey animals. It's time to sail on.

He packs up his suitcase and picks up the mop and bucket.

That's it. Floating peacefully. Rocking gently. Let me go now, or I'll start singing lullabies. Drifting safely.

DARREN: Daddy. Why didn't you tell us this before?

DAD: I did. You blotted it out. You were blotto.

ANDY: Will you be back in the morning?

DAD: Yes, son, I always will. I'll come again. Goodnight.

He leaves. We hear him locking up.

DARREN: Dad will be here soon.

ANDY: I can't stand it.

Blackout.

ACT TWO

Darkness.

ANDY and DARREN: Born. Born.

Lights up.

DARREN: When were you born?

ANDY: 28th February, 1984.

DARREN: That was a Tuesday. You're full of grace. Where were you born?

ANDY: Canterbury: where the tale begins. No, Glastonbury: where the story starts. Hang on. Was it Stonehenge, or Penge? Isleworth or the Isle of Wight? Olympia or Mount Olympus: all myth springs from there. Mine was the birth of creation.

DARREN: So what time were you born, exactly?

ANDY: Five to midnight.

DARREN: If you'd come five minutes later?

ANDY: I'd be seven now.

DARREN: Do you think our lives would be better if we'd waited till the 29th of February. If we'd just hung on till the next morning, do you think we'd be such wastrel shite?

ANDY: We may have been more special.

DARREN: We might have been on the telly.

Pause.

ANDY: Were you asleep just then?

DARREN: Don't know. It's dark in here. How can I tell?

ANDY: You could have been dreaming.

DARREN: Did I say something?

ANDY: You're always saying things.

DARREN: I did have a dream. I'm not sure if it was last night. I don't know if this is morning. Want to hear it?

ANDY: What?

DARREN: My dream. It's not a fairy tale or nothing fancy like that. I dreamed I was a man turned into a pig; a pig turned into a man. It was a truffling snuffle at the hands of a dirty herb queen. I know pigs are meant to be cleverer than dogs; but it's still not nice to be cast as one by my own mind. *(Pause.)* Must have been asleep then, because I woke up thinking I was in the shit.

ANDY: Sick dream. Want to hear mine? I dreamt I had only one eye. The other I'd traded for a bag of drugs.

DARREN: Was it in the middle or to one side?

ANDY: What?

DARREN: The eye. Were you, like, a proper Cyclops; or were you just blind in one eye?

ANDY: I don't know.

DARREN: The left or the right?

ANDY: I didn't look in the mirror.

DARREN: You can't look in a mirror when you're asleep.

ANDY: Unless you want to see yourself from behind.

DARREN: What did happen in this dream, then? What was the plot?

ANDY: It didn't have one.

DARREN: My dream had a sub-plot too.

ANDY: Fancy.

DARREN: You were in it, my brother pig, and at the climax you decided to stay in swine form. You, and another guy called Eurylochus who had always looked uncomfortable in the toga.

ANDY: If I were not restrained, I would hurt you now.

DARREN: So, come on. Were you just standing there thinking 'I'm a one-eyed man', in your dream, or was there some action?

ANDY: I was a one-eyed man, thinking what I could sell for my next fix. I only had one kidney and was a couple of ribs short, already.

DARREN: Was I in your dream?

ANDY: You were the first thing I sold. Actually, no: I sold my soul first.

DARREN: Thanks. Do you think we both dreamed the same dirty herb queen?

ANDY: Probably. And, like with the car and the dog, it was mine first.

DARREN: Now I've got some time on my hands, I'm going to devise my own style of dreaming.

ANDY: How different can it be? We spend all day in each other's society; or if you prefer nature to nurture, we've got practically twin genes.

DARREN: So, what's the first dream you can remember having?

ANDY: That my teddy had teeth. I was cuddling it, snugly into my neck, when suddenly the bear opened its mouth and bit me.

DARREN: Terrifying. I had that dream too.

ANDY: You did after I told you. All my friends were cursed by the image; everyone I told it to had nightmares. I still have that teddy. He hasn't got a face at all, now.

DARREN: I think my earliest dream was of a box of wooden soldiers catching fire.

ANDY: No. It was mine.

DARREN: But I remember the paint pouring off them like blood. Spitting like body fat as the wood split and hissed.

ANDY: It's the way I tell them.

DARREN: Are you sure I didn't dream it first?

ANDY: I told it to you at tea-time. You woke up at midnight screaming.

DARREN: It was the baked beans.

ANDY: There is one dream, in our shared history, which you dreamed first. And I never had it, no matter how hard I wished.

DARREN: Chasing the dragon. For fuck's sake.

ANDY: Could you foresee the future at three years old?

DARREN: What did I say?

ANDY: What you said. How you looked. Pre-school prophet and everything. I was seven. I remember how you chuckled over your cereal; 'me chase dragon'. You looked like a spooky little Buddha, something I might have seen on Scooby Doo or even Doctor Who. I wanted to hide behind the sofa.

DARREN: I don't remember any of that. But I do remember the dream.

ANDY: Yes?

DARREN: In glorious technicolour. No, sepia. No, actually, like a Chinese silk tapestry. I was a boy with very black hair and sandals that made 'v's of my feet. The dragon was. Well, it was like a Chinese dragon in a street parade, with the shoes of all the guys inside; but I could see they were flying, their flip-flops weren't touching the floor. There were puffs of smoke coming from inside the costume.

ANDY: What did you do?

DARREN: I had this dream a lot. I always did something different. Grab the dragon's tail and fly really, really high; get eaten by the dragon. Turns out to be the same sensation; going inside the dragon swallow or flying to outer space on its back. Either way I saw stars.

ANDY: Now I know why I've never had that dream: I am the dragon. It represents your feelings about me.

DARREN: I thought maybe the dragon represents drugs. (*Beat.*) Chasing or being chased. I can't say I ever caught the dragon, though.

ANDY: No. So, how are you feeling this morning?

DARREN: Still turkeying my tits off. You?

ANDY: Much the same.

DARREN: What are we going to do?

ANDY: Much the same as yesterday. Q and A.

Pause.

ANDY: We ask each other questions; to keep from going insane. To save our memories from madness. To answer who we are.

DARREN: We are pigs.

ANDY: Enough of thinking heroin turns men into swine. I had hits that turned me into a god.

DARREN: What is your earliest memory of doing drugs?

ANDY: The sea-saw in the park; bright red and yellow. Bittersweet cannabis, brown chunks; like chocolate for smoking, lethal to a fourteen year old boy. I felt like I'd seen heaven from the up end; getting high was my new game. There was some surreal graffiti on that playground apparatus, I can tell you.

DARREN: I was only ten then. Who were the other boys?

ANDY: Remember Tim? He was in my year at school. He was mad for marijuana, well before he could spell it. Think he got it off his big brother; a suburban hoodie, hiding a bad hair day rather than a criminal identity. I can't remember their last name. *(Pause.)* Anyway, I smoked my first spliff on the see-saw. Tim rolled it down to me from the high end.

DARREN: Hope it wasn't raining.

ANDY: That dull afternoon in Annerley, the sun came out. My whole perspective on life lit up at that moment.

DARREN: Just like Dad's meditation. Are they the same; om, bong?

ANDY: No, this meditation holds onto the clouds. It inhales them.

He coughs.

DARREN: So if you hadn't gone to the park with Tim, that day, do you think you'd be clean now? Would you have stayed drug-free forever.

ANDY: For three months, maybe. Because then I had my second experience.

Whizz on the swings with Ali Hussain. Dark skin: white powder in Rizla bombs. We were buzzing our heads off, till we were fifteen; then this new boy started school. Swan, his surname was. I can't remember his first name. Everyone called him Donald. Like the duck. Wacky guy; Don Swan.

He took us to a rave, in a warehouse in Olympia. The pills seemed sterile at first. None of the licking and sticking, crumbling and rolling, roaching and sparking it took to make a joint. None of the whizz biz either; chopping and twisting and dropping.

And waiting for an effect was new to us, too; so exciting, that sense of a party starting. I could see a sparkle around the edges of reality as I started to come up. I could feel the transformation, surely as if it were a fairy tale.

DARREN: Which one?

ANDY: Well, my first spliff was a bit like 'I'm not an ugly duckling, after all'. And my first speed was kind of 'I'm climbing up the magic beanstalk to take on a giant.' And my first rave was sort of 'Cinderella, you shall go to the ball.'

That night my fate was sealed. I might have got over the larks in the park. But now I'd taken drugs with adults, the fairy story was real. Past midnight, I danced at the heart of the party. Surrounded by blokes who would have killed me in daylight: girls who wouldn't have looked at me twice. The chemicals were synthetic but their magic was genuine.

DARREN: You make it sound beautiful, man.

ANDY: It was ecstatic. But when we got to H it went tits up. Hang on, I forgot acid. When did we first do acid?

DARREN: That was in 1969.

ANDY: But we weren't born then.

DARREN: The power of flowers was so profound we felt it in the ether. Unborn souls danced barefoot at the welkin Woodstock.

ANDY: You're tripping now.

DARREN: How?

ANDY: It's because we keep talking about drugs.

DARREN: Let's talk about something else, then. When did you first have sex?

ANDY: You know this already.

DARREN: I knew all your other answers too. Didn't stop you shouting them out, though.

ANDY: I don't feel like talking about this now.

DARREN: Just the first three words will do. 'I don't feel'. That's you.

ANDY: I do feel, at the tip; but not all over, and not deep inside. There's nothing to say about superficial sexuality.

DARREN: Ask me, then. Ask about my sex-life and I will gush. I will overflow. I have more to say on the subject than I have sperm; and that, as you know, is loads.

ANDY: I'm doing it but I want to die: What is your earliest memory of sex?

DARREN: The first time was on the see-saw, the second time was on the swings, the next few times were on the roundabout, then we tried it on the slide. The girl was an actual angel. She was in my year at school. Her hair was halo-blonde, her eyelashes feather-fluffy. Her skin was like a peach all over, fuzzier in the creases.

ANDY: She had buck teeth, though.

DARREN: Perfect girls can't play in the park. They don't get dirty. You have to fight for perfect girls and you might only find one in a life time. Meanwhile, I've had hundreds of imperfect beauties; but she was the first and possibly the best.

ANDY: What was her name?

DARREN: I can't remember. It doesn't matter. I'll recognise her again in heaven.

ANDY: You're not into necro.

DARREN: No. But you know what; it's the only thing I'm not into. ABC. Anal, bestial, copro. No, no. Seriously; Arse, boobs, clit. Girls are genuinely all the same, but that's okay; it's the way we want them.

ANDY: You might. I'm still looking for the DEF of women.

DARREN: You'll never find it. You're wasting your time. There's more chance of hitting upon the G-spot; unless the D stands for something big, like derriere?

ANDY: Dinner. Entertainment. Freedom. That's the illusive DEF; you can see how ladies would really want something more substantial on the menu.

DARREN: Did you call me racist just now?

ANDY: You know you are. Why bring it up?

DARREN: Because, actually, you are sexist. You're a naughty sexist boy; and it's as bad as being racist, so you will pay. My price is this: a recounting of your first sexual experience without sounding like you fear or hate women.

Pause.

DARREN: You have nothing else in the world to do right now, tied to this apparatus of cruel kindness, unable to move any part of your body but your mouth.

ANDY: That's pretty much how it was my first time. You probably won't remember, but where we used to live, there was a postwoman. She was in her thirties and slightly butch.

DARREN: Don't tell me this.

ANDY: When she took her uniform off, the effect was more feminine. But she had a dungeon, in Croydon; a proper gothic basement, and she spent a lot of time in black leather.

DARREN: How the hell...?

ANDY: She just took a fancy to me. I was fourteen. The year for first memories; sex, drugs. Must have played my first gig then, too.

DARREN: But how did you meet her?

ANDY: She rang the doorbell. I was bunking off school. There was something to sign for. It led to an invitation. There are so many jokes I could make, we'd be cracking up about it, if I had some drugs or even a drink; but now I can't be arsed. You'll just get the bare facts. The truth, if you like.

DARREN: Actually, I'm good...

ANDY: Too late. I went to her semi-detached facade. Down a short flight of stairs was a suburban torture-chamber. She tied me to the wall with handcuffs. Her leather bustier thrust two thirty-year-old breasts in my face, which made sixty, by my reckoning. She undid my trousers, slid them down with my best boxers and left them round my ankles.

Loving ties, not unlike this. The situation is slightly reminiscent. I wet myself then, too. She took pity on me, and didn't use the rubber mask with a single hole for the mouth. I was scared of that. Didn't use anything off the rack of whips or spiky things.

DARREN: Was anyone else there?

ANDY: What, chained to the wall next to me? No, it was quite intimate. One-to-one sadomasochism. But I daresay she had many other men against those nail-varnished walls; and probably some women too.

DARREN: I can't believe you lost your cherry to a nutter.

ANDY: They've all been nutters. I say all, there's been four. Not like your forty flawed diamonds.

DARREN: You've only slept with four women?

ANDY: I said they were all nutters. I didn't say they were all women.

Beat.

DARREN: What's the ratio, Andy?

ANDY: One man.

DARREN: Phew, not predominantly gay, then.

ANDY: You knew this anyway.

DARREN: So after the S&M postperson there was...?

ANDY: Two ladies. Both absolutely beautiful, both utter bitches. They gave me the right royal runaround, one after the other, for years and years; and most of the time there was no sex, because they were too mean or too menstrual to give it.

DARREN: And who was the bloke, who, incidentally, I didn't know about until today?

ANDY: It was an ecstasy thing. We were out of our trees. Gurning, grinding; I'd probably have shagged an ape if the rhythm had suggested it. I saw him about five times. Never remembered him between raves; but as soon as we aligned on the dance floor I felt a profound astrological link between us.

DARREN: You saying star-crossed?

ANDY: Sexual and spiritual connections with a chav must be explained somehow.

DARREN: What a short and unattractive saga your love life is.

ANDY: Would have gone better without the crippling drug addiction.

DARREN: It's the biggest difference between us. Know how many girls I've nearly proposed to? How many times I've been just minutes away from popping the question. They're all so eligible; to me, anyway. Thirteen times I've been with a young lovely and thought, I could facilitate your babies, then sit next to you on the sofa smoking till I die.

ANDY: So why didn't you? Why aren't you married to thirteen girls next door, with rival football teams of kids?

DARREN: Well, I could only choose one. And I couldn't decide, could I; cos I knew they were all the same.

ANDY: Can you remember any of their names?

DARREN: There were a lot of Laurens.

ANDY: My first girlfriend was called Laura.

DARREN: I remember her. Gorgeous. Did she go?

ANDY: No, I've just told you. She was frigid and spiteful; her biggest thrill was withholding sex from me.

DARREN: And your second girlfriend was just the same?

ANDY: Claire. Yeah.

DARREN: Could it have been something you were doing wrong, mate? As I've always found, women want to have sex most of the time. Like, three weeks out of four.

ANDY: It was more like three weeks out of four years.

DARREN: So your true sexual preference is flogging a dead horse.

Pause.

ANDY: I don't want the horse to die.

DARREN: We cannot start talking about drugs again. Come on, let's recap the story so far, from another angle:

During this dialogue they might use the machinery of their restraint like playground apparatus.

ANDY: The see-saw. Everything began here. Brothers bonding in blood and gore.

DARREN: Girls flashing their pristine white panties.

ANDY: Boys riding the ups and downs of substance abuse.

DARREN: The swings. Everything began here. Brothers hanging in rhythm and rhyme.

ANDY: Girls flashing their grubby bondage panties.

DARREN: Boys turning into substance abusers.

ANDY: The roundabout. We keep going round and round about the same subjects. Are sex and drugs the only things we know?

DARREN: The slide. That's what we need to do. Go down the slide to a deeper level.

ANDY: Maybe we should do it as a meditation. Okay. Close your eyes and clear your mind. See yourself at the top of the slide in our old playground; the unfeasibly-high king of rides, with its red and yellow crown. Against the backdrop of a blue sky, with one little black cloud I can't get to go away, you are sitting at the top of that slide and, when I count to three, you must let yourself down.

One, two, three.

Pause.

Pause.

DARREN snores.

ANDY: Weeeee! He got to the bottom quicker than me. His slide must be slipperier than mine.

Darren's had loads of sex. I've had hardly any. I did loads of drugs. And so did he; but that was my bad. I introduced him to the darkness. Shame he couldn't have introduced me to some of the luminescent mingers he was dealing with.

DARREN: They weren't mingers. Those women were exquisitely sub-standard, in many irresistible ways.

ANDY: I thought you were asleep. Did you get to the bottom of the slide?

DARREN: Yes. Yes, I did. Sure, it seems like I was only gone a moment but I slid in slow motion down a rainbow, man. I glid; down a blade of shiniest steel. Psychoanalysts would say I was slipping into my subconscious: but I know fun when I feel it. Oh yes, I got to the bottom of the slide.

ANDY: What happened there? What was it like?

DARREN: Mum caught me.

Pause.

ANDY: Why did you say that? Why did you raise that?

DARREN: It was self-raising; I didn't mean to. I was descending rapidly and pretty much out of control. As I levelled off at the bottom of the slide, I was aware of a perfume.

ANDY: Please. Don't make me smell the perfume. All the drugs of Arabia couldn't wash it off, before.

DARREN: And those long, strong legs in tan tights; I had to slide up to them, almost through them, but they were buffers to stop me sliding off the end. Hands, gentle but firm, caught me. Mother-of-pearl fingernails, and rings of silver and gold; that is the only way to arrive at the bottom of anything.

ANDY: This is worse than drugs. Being hooked on heroin was healthy compared to whatever we're going through now.

DARREN: Brace yourself, brother. Tied to the mast, remember.

ANDY: Have you heard the Siren's song, then? Was that it, sung by mother?

DARREN: She'll be here soon. Singing it live.

ANDY: Why did you say that? Why did you raise that...

DARREN: ...From the dead?

ANDY: We don't know, do we? Whether she's dead or alive.

DARREN: Mum will be here soon. Then we'll see.

ANDY: I can't stand it. I can't stand it.

DARREN: Tied to the mast, remember, like Odysseus. You can hear the Sirens' song. You can live to tell the tale.

ANDY: I don't feel like such a big hero. Reminded more of the young princes William and Harry being so brave at their mother's funeral. Bless those boys when the siren suddenly stopped.

DARREN: It will sing again. We will hear it.

ANDY: But it's impossible. That's why we're here. You can't do heroin a little bit, just on Mondays and Wednesdays; because that's like hearing the Sirens sing and surviving. As soon as you've heard the first bars, the first line, you're hooked. Once the overture has been trilled, there's no way out till the finale.

DARREN: Listen. There's someone coming in.

ANDY: But they're not unlocking the door.

DARREN: How can someone be coming in...

ANDY: Without unlocking the door?

MUM comes in.

MUM: Hello, boys.

ANDY and DARREN probably freak out.

MUM: Sorry I'm late.

ANDY: That means she's dead.

MUM: Born. Born.

ANDY and DARREN: Dead. Dead.

MUM: I remember when you were born. You first, Andrew, two weeks past your due date. I thought you were never coming.

ANDY: Mum. We thought you were never coming.

MUM: You must have known that it was going to be worse out than in. You must have been holding on, in my pink heaven, because now that you are born, it is Hades.

ANDY: Help.

DARREN: Tell me what you remember about my birth.

MUM: I haven't finished telling Andy yet. I'd prayed for you, literally prayed for you; and when the midwife held my newborn up to me and your body unfurled I saw baby, boy and the man you'd be, all in that moment. And, I couldn't speak, but I said in my head, yes, that's the one I wanted.

DARREN: What about me?

MUM: I did want a girl next. Many women would. But as soon as I saw you, I fell in love with you, because you were you; boy or girl didn't matter.

DARREN: Well, as we've both got long hair now, perhaps you could do the ponytails and plaits you've always longed to practice.

ANDY: Daz. She is obviously a ghost, or a vision, induced by our drug withdrawal. Please don't ask her to try out different hairstyles on us.

DARREN: I'm bored.

MUM: You were always bored, even as a tiny baby; whereas Andy would stare for ages at the curtains, or the lights, you would be desperate to get to the next stage. Touching, tasting, rolling, sitting, crawling, walking, talking; you were four years behind your brother, and you wasted them wanting to be where he was.

DARREN: There must have been something I was into.

MUM: Sugar. Biggest smile you ever gave me was the first time you had sugar; sprinkled on strawberries. I wouldn't have, but they were so sharp. There wasn't any cream, just this twinkling of white powder; and your instant dependency.

ANDY: Indeed. You had a stash of sachets in your bedside drawer throughout boyhood.

DARREN: Yeah, and sometimes you nicked them.

MUM: I was always finding soggy packets in the pockets of your trousers after I'd taken them out of the washing machine.

DARREN: Did the sugar stay in?

MUM: No, it diffused through the entire family's wardrobe, sweetening every fibre.

ANDY: Did she used to talk like that?

DARREN: I'm not sure...

MUM: Born junkie. But I adored you. Remember, the cereal breakfasts, years of snap, crackle and pop at a sunny kitchen table.

DARREN: Spoonfuls of sugar on top.

MUM: But the PE kits, Darren. The football boots; they were fit. Swimming on Saturday, bikes and skates and scooters; they were healthy. Bowling, the zoo, the library, even: it was an idyllic childhood.

DARREN: Yes, yes.

MUM: Andy, too, but four years earlier. The computer games were more primitive, then. Your virtual reality was less convincing.

ANDY: It felt just as believable at the time. Tomb Raider: true.

MUM: And didn't I read bedtime stories, every night, till you could easily read them yourselves? Though, strangely, you chose not to.

DARREN: I read in bed sometimes.

ANDY: Porn doesn't count as reading. Only in the poststructuralist sense, and I don't think you subscribe to that.

DARREN: Wanker. So, mum, what else do you remember about my childhood?

MUM: Cars and trains underfoot; railway lines running along the lino, and battery operated traffic of all sorts around the skirting boards. Constructions everywhere, towers of high-tech Lego and sofa cushions; endless TV footage of engines and firemen and builders and dinosaurs. Which one did you want to be when you grew up?

DARREN: Sugar-tester. Come on, I can't believe you haven't said anything about music yet.

Pause.

DARREN: You're not really mum; we're hallucinating. Surely music was the thing that made me smile, the thing I was into, the thing I wanted to be when I grew up? Didn't music define my personality when he was staring at the wall paper?

MUM: I know; that's the myth. And yes, you practised a lot; yes, you were talented; yes, it got you many girlfriends. But I just heard you say that music and sport are the same thing, that there's no difference between them; and it confirms what I've always suspected: you play guitar like a cricketer.

There's no need for you to laugh, Andrew. You play it like an ice-dancer. And you sing like a caber-tosser.

DARREN: Remember our old drummer, Wayne?

ANDY: Dead now.

DARREN: He played drums like a boxer.

ANDY: And Scott, the saxophonist? Like the skeleton luge.

DARREN: So, does it happen the other way round? Can you play darts like a trombonist? Trampoline like an opera singer?

ANDY: I'd very much like to swim like a double-bass player.

MUM: Ah, I know where you could swim like that. Remember the beach holidays we had on the Isle of Wight. That little bay, so safe, so peaceful; you were rocked in the watery arms of nature. And the cosy cottage perched precariously on the cliff; we had to stop renting when it got too near the edge.

ANDY: What was it called?

MUM: What?

ANDY: The holiday cottage. What was its name? As seen on the sun-cracked, salt-crusted signpost outside?

DARREN: I don't even know that.

ANDY: She will. If she's really mum.

MUM: Never mind proving that I am your mother. How about some evidence that you are my sons? Tell me now why dogs are different to cars.

DARREN: One's alive in the traditional sense, one technically isn't. One is furry; one may have leather interiors.

ANDY: One is a domestic animal, the other a mechanical mode of travel. I think we were being a bit silly, earlier.

MUM: Okay, so why is music different to sport?

ANDY: What was the name of the holiday cottage?

MUM: You first.

Pause.

MUM: It was Gul's Ledge.

ANDY: Yes! I think it's about playing to win. Sport is always a competition. Even when you're training by yourself the aim is to be faster, stronger, higher; no, not that. It's always a race, a tournament, a fight; music hardly ever is.

DARREN: You can have friendly games, though.

ANDY: And cut-throat musical competitions. But you can spend an evening listening to bands without it being a battle.

DARREN: What if, when we played a gig, we just had to be the fastest or the loudest.

ANDY: That's exactly how it was in our post-punk days.

MUM: I hate to critique you, but punk was the end of music. There can't be anything after.

ANDY: You never heard us play in that band.

MUM: I know the theory; I didn't have to see the practice.

DARREN: I've been doing this thing, lately. Listening to silence. It's really weird. Wait until you think it's silent. Then listen hard. What do you hear?

Pause.

ANDY sings a snatch of something.

ANDY: There's stuff like that going on in my head all the time. Always a song in my heart. Even now, in my suffering.

MUM: My silence is so noisy. There's hissing, ringing, echoing, whining.

DARREN: White noise. Mine is a roar.

MUM: Can't hear it by day, but it's loud after dark.

ANDY: It's always night around here.

DARREN: And you are of the night, too, mum. Big part of its hum.

MUM: This is not a test of me. I want to know what happened to you. I didn't raise my sons to be tied up in a garage. I sent you to good schools, and what they couldn't teach you, I learnt you myself. Where to put apostrophes. Remember? Proper use of the semi-colon.

DARREN: Has that particular skill been valuable to you, Andrew?

ANDY: I do write grammatical song lyrics.

DARREN: With apostrophes?

ANDY: I put them in with my soul when I sing.

DARREN: The semi-colons are up your arse.

MUM: That's my boys.

DARREN: If you love us so much, why did you leave us? Now you come in here all 'darlings, I've missed you'; so why did you go?

MUM: Don't you know?

ANDY: Dad said you had an addiction.

DARREN: I thought he said an addition.

ANDY: It was 'dic'.

DARREN: That's what I thought.

ANDY: He inferred it was drink. Or drugs.

MUM: So is that why you got hooked on heroin? Because you wanted to be like your mother.

ANDY: No, it was because I was 12 and he was 8 and our mum left us. We might have been alright if you stayed, even with a monkey on your back.

MUM: It wasn't monkey; it was cock. I didn't want to leave; I had to. I made a stupid mistake and it cost me my sons, and their happiness. I made several stupid mistakes.

My life was perfect. I was fit and well. I had a nice husband. He was fit and well. We lived in a safe, comfortable house, with nice food on the table every day. And I had two children, which was all I'd ever really wanted. They were fit and well. There was nothing to worry about.

Except my own feelings of dissatisfaction. I had everything, and it wasn't enough. I was still lusting. Lusting after a lot of things; but mainly after people. Mostly lusting after men. Craving something from them; their attention, even though I had a husband and two boys at my command. Still I required another touch, another look, another listener.

My husband was very satisfactory, I was fulfilled by him; but it was like those hungry hippos who don't know when they're stuffed. I could handle more than one man at a time; needing plurality, because I was singularly insecure.

DARREN: So did you have an affair?

MUM: Yes, Darren, I'm afraid I did. I had more than that, but your Dad only needed to hear about one to kick me out completely. I lost everything for something I didn't even need.

ANDY: But you thought you needed it; and that's exactly the same.

MUM: Is it with your addiction, too?

Pause.

MUM: As you can see, boys, I'm not beautiful.

DARREN: Yes, you are...

MUM: If I wasn't your mother, you wouldn't think me beautiful. No heads turn in the street. No wolves whistle. Men don't see me and fall in love. So to have an affair takes some doing. To have more than one; well, that's clearly obsessive. What drove my desire?

When someone you've been with for a long time touches you, even if you love them a lot, you feel it less. New touch tingles more.

ANDY: Who were these men, then?

MUM: The first one was my driving instructor. You may remember the L plates.

DARREN: Loser.

MUM: I won't go into details, but it brought a whole new meaning to parallel parking.

DARREN: Sick. Sick.

ANDY: Did you pass first time?

MUM: It actually took two attempts.

ANDY: And then the touch didn't tingle any more.

MUM: Look, you're still my sons. I don't think we should be talking like this.

DARREN: You should have heard us before you came in.

MUM: I did. That's why I came.

ANDY: So do we have some 'uncles' we never knew about?

MUM: Oh, your father is your father. Don't doubt that for a moment. All this happened after. There was a neighbour. And a workmate. It was very inconvenient. Stressful. Time-consuming. But as an addict, I was worth it.

ANDY: You don't mean Mr. Purkiss.

MUM: How did you guess?

ANDY: He was too easy.

DARREN: Who?

ANDY: Summer of '93. Diamond-patterned V-neck sweater. Big black moustache curling up at the ends.

MUM: Or was he just pleased to see me?

ANDY: But that wasn't the one Dad caught you with.

MUM: No, know-all, it wasn't.

ANDY: So who then?

MUM: That was, in fact, the milkman.

DARREN: Fuck sake. He delivered other dairy products too?

ANDY: Mum. Hooked on the touch of a Milky.

MUM: He didn't really touch me. Luckily, it was him I got busted with and not the one before. The scene was out of a 70s sitcom; I wore a negligee, and he walked up the driveway with a cheery whistle and the clink of milko. Luckily, it only hurt him for a moment, when we were discovered by my husband; whereas my wound bleeds forever. Losing you two: it wasn't worth that.

DARREN: Did Dad beat him up?

MUM: A bit, yes.

ANDY: So what would he have done to the bloke before?

MUM: He would have killed him.

I loved your father. If only that single hit of sexual chemistry was enough for me; but I had to keep increasing the dose.

It wasn't Mr Purkiss, or the postman, or the plumber. It wasn't one of your schoolteachers, or one of your school friends. It wasn't the butcher or the baker; though he could turn his hand to candlestick-making.

DARREN: Sick.

ANDY: Shut up. Who was he, mum?

MUM: Your actual uncle.

ANDY and DARREN: Tony.

MUM: No. The other one.

Pause.

ANDY: Chris. Doesn't he live in Australia?

MUM: He does now.

ANDY: Did he go to get away from...

MUM: I've gone even further. You do know that, don't you?

DARREN: But we need you to help us. Untie us. Get us out of here.

MUM: What does this knob/lever do?

It gets ANDY into a standing position.

MUM: There. See. Tied to the mast. Sailing through the storm. Let's try and do the same for you. (*She gets DARREN into a standing position.*) Heroic poses. Ears clear?

ANDY: So we can hear the Sirens' song? Finally.

MUM: Well, sons, what you have with me is the Sirens and Scylla, all rolled into one. I could bite your heads off, in two ugly strikes. I could have you for breakfast.

DARREN: What about lunch?

MUM: Sure as Circe is a sorceress, I could have you for lunch. I'm that mad with you. Dope is for dopes.

DARREN: And what about afternoon tea?

MUM: That is when you'll get to hear the Siren's song. They will be serenading the top table. So why don't you try one of daddy's triangle sandwiches now.

DARREN: They're stale.

MUM: The song isn't exactly fresh. I heard it years ago. I hear it every dusk, these days...

DARREN: What's in them?

MUM: Pork, of course. Don't you recall how the sailors get turned into swine in Odysseus's Odyssey? So strange how he's 'got the same name as his story': if your life were a book it would be called the Darrethon.

ANDY: What about mine?

MUM: You're in the same epic tale. So, have a little nibble of the legendary feast, like good boys; and I'll tell you the siren's song.

Pause. ANDY and DARREN eat a mouthful.

ANDY: What makes you the mythical temptress, then?

MUM: It's my addiction. That's how the oldest stories in the book started, by trying to account for people's obsessions and compulsions. All the beauties, all the beasts; autobiography is the source. Have a drink of water.

Pause. ANDY and DARREN sip a mouthful.

DARREN: Now let's hear the song.

ANDY: I can't stand it.

DARREN: We probably know it already.

ANDY: I have to be high to hear it. I can't hear it straight.

DARREN: You're tied to the mast.

ANDY: I wish I'd put wax in my ears.

DARREN: It's too late now. You should have put wax in your ears when you were fourteen on the sea-saw, or fifteen on the swings; eighteen at a party, or twenty in prison. You should have put wax in my ears.

MUM: And that is the difference between you two and Odysseus; nobody said anything about beeswax. Circe didn't warn you. She's warning you now.

Stop worrying whether you're pigs turned into men or men turned into pigs. Her magic turns men into gods. Know what it's made of? Drugs: the mystery herb from any fairy tale. Know why she's a witch? Spells: she has the recipe for any remedy.

You don't. You overdid it, overdosed, overkilled it. The substance was abusing you. The drugs were using you.

DARREN: Is this meant to be the song?

MUM: It's more in-yer-face than operetta.

ANDY: You can't sing, can you? Just basic nursery rhymes in a breathy tone; your voice is only good for babies.

MUM: Shut up, I'm intoning. You were loved. You were never hungry. You slept well. You dreamed of great things. You had it all. What else did you want? What more could you ask for?

DARREN: Fun, mum.

MUM: The swings are fun, just by themselves; just going up and down as nature intended.

ANDY: Isn't that like sex with your husband? Why did you want more?

MUM: An artificial high.

ANDY: We're as low as each other. Plus you left us. So that makes you lower. Now, could you please return me to a relaxed position. I'd like to get some rest.

MUM: I've gone to everlasting rest. You do know that, don't you? (*She adjusts his binding.*) Darren, would you like me to leave you standing?

DARREN: No, don't go. No, no, no, don't go.

ANDY: Daz. We don't need her. There's a drug called 'the mother'. The one that got you into this mess, the one that will get you out of it.

DARREN: But when she leaves, it will be like the first time. All the light will go, the love, the soft laughter, most of the words. Everything pink, everything pretty; all velvet, silk, perfume, pearls, everything female will go. I was only eight when that went from my world; I don't want to feel it again.

Pause.

MUM: You make many sexist assumptions.

ANDY: I thought he's racist, I'm sexist.

MUM: And you dub me more motherly than I really was. I wore trousers, I smoked, your father did a lot of the cooking.

ANDY: Whatever. It's fine. You can go now.

DARREN: However, you can also stay.

ANDY: Go and our hearts will be with you; though mine is just a hologram of the letter H.

DARREN: Or stay.

MUM: For once, I can please you both at the same time. I will go now, but come back later.

Keep your peckers up, boys. Your panpipes singing. Your phallic symbols pinging. Your sticks and bats and clubs and staffs swinging. This is a man thing. You can do it.

Goddesses will only lead you astray. See, Circe says the cure for drugs is drugs; she's not the best mascot for your gritty quest. Scylla says you're doomed if you do or don't; she won't care if you're stoned or sober, as she snatches you off the quarter deck.

And as for the sirens; they can sing when you're dead. It's cheating otherwise.

Pause.

ANDY: Mum, when you come back, can you bring us some smack?

DARREN: Yes, mum, can you? Please?

MUM: Cheeky bastards.

She starts to leave.

ANDY: Mum, should we tell Dad we've seen you?

DARREN: He'll be here soon.

ANDY: I can't stand it. Promise you'll come back?

DARREN: We need the heroin. Mum. Mother.

She goes through the door without unlocking it. (Special effect!)

ANDY: Goodbye. Bring drugs, please.

DARREN: I can't stand it.

Blackout.

ACT THREE

Darkness.

ANDY and DARREN: Born. Born.

Lights up.

ANDY: When were you born?

DARREN: 28th of February, 1988. When were you born?

ANDY: 28th February, 1984.

DARREN: In Canterbury, where the tale begins? Or Glastonbury, where the story starts? Stonehenge or Penge? Olympia or Mount Olympus; all myth springs from there. Isleworth or the Isle of Wight? Where does it look like we come from?

ANDY: We must remember exactly; comedy or tragedy. Chipping Sodbury or the sodding chippy.

DARREN: Don't you think it's a coincidence? Both born on the same day, four years apart; brothers with a special bond, but not quite special enough for the leap year honours. If we'd just hung on till the next morning, would our lives be less shady?

ANDY: People should have made more of it. We could have been in the spotlight. What time, precisely?

DARREN: Ten to midnight. What time, precisely?

ANDY: Five to midnight.

DARREN: And if we'd come a few minutes later?

ANDY: Would have been pumpkins. Painful to push. Both so close to the 29th Feb. Mum might have mentioned it.

Pause.

ANDY: Were you asleep just then?

DARREN: Don't know. It's dark in here. How can I tell?

ANDY: You could have been dreaming.

DARREN: Did I say something?

ANDY: You're always saying things.

DARREN: I did have a dream. I'm not sure if it was last night. I don't know if this is morning. Want to hear it?

ANDY: What?

DARREN: My dream. It's not a fairy tale or nothing fancy like that. I dreamed mum was here.

ANDY: That was mine. My dream. My mum.

DARREN: Did we both have it? At the same time?

ANDY: I don't know what time it is. The outside world could have turned upside down while we've been hanging around like this.

DARREN: Did we both dream about mum just then?

ANDY: Was it a dream? Is she real?

DARREN: The dirty herb queen: did we imagine her?

ANDY: Will she bring us back some drugs?

DARREN: Our Q and A is all questions and no answers today.

ANDY: She stood there and called me a caber-tosser. Then she climbed up there and called you a sugar-taster.

DARREN: She's gone further than Australia: to everlasting rest. That must mean she's dead.

ANDY: Did we see something?

DARREN: We're always seeing things.

ANDY: I wonder how she died.

DARREN: Broken heart.

ANDY: Asthma.

DARREN: Hole in the soul.

ANDY: Alzheimer's

DARREN: Tainted love.

ANDY: Aids.

DARREN: Man, you're sick. Sick.

ANDY: I can't stand it. Will she bring us back some drugs?

DARREN: She won't know what to get.

ANDY: As a sex addict, she'll know the score.

DARREN: Maybe she died of an overdose.

ANDY: Probably went cold duck.

DARREN: What's that?

ANDY: The fucking junkie's turkey.

DARREN: Don't talk about mum like that. It screws with her memory.

ANDY: I didn't think I had any memories of her until you went down that slide, mate. Before that, I hadn't thought of her for... how long? Exactly the same length of time I've been sliding down heroin.

DARREN. Okay, so let's crank up the Q & A. What is your earliest memory of our mother?

ANDY: She smacked me. A cuff, it was really, like a lioness to her naughty cub. She didn't even have her claws out, but clearly it's left me with a scar. She said sorry afterwards and I think she'd been crying.

DARREN: What did you do?

ANDY: What I always do when women cry. Run away.

DARREN: What did you do to make her smack you?

ANDY: I can't remember that.

DARREN: If she comes back we'll ask her.

ANDY: What's your earliest memory of her?

DARREN: On the swings.

ANDY: Oh no, here we go.

DARREN: Pushing me. All the other parents pushed from behind, but I liked her to stand in front so I could see her long hair swinging in time to my swong. She seemed to be made of sunshine.

ANDY: Except when it rained.

DARREN: I don't remember her smacking me.

ANDY: She must have been all smacked out.

DARREN: Did mum ever tell you about her own memories?

ANDY: Only this. 'A long, long time ago, I was a stone-cutter, working a great mountain. From building blocks to grave stones, I hewed them gaily out of the mountainside; but one day, when I'd hauled this slab to a rich guy's house, and saw all his purple stuff, all the silver, I said to the mountain spirit, 'I wish I were rich, and had silk tassels on my bed'. And when I got home that night, my house was transformed into a mansion.

I still had to go to work, in the hot stone quarry and one day, as I toiled, a prince was driven past in his carriage, velvet-trimmed and jewel-studded, with a golden umbrella over his head. 'I wish I were a prince, and could sit in that luxurious shade,' I said to the mountain spirit. And the next thing I knew, I was riding along under a magnificent golden roof, very mighty indeed.

But the sun didn't stop shining; it still scorched the rocks and burnt the grass and parched the rivers. 'The sun is mightier than me,' I moaned to the mountain spirit. 'I wish I were the sun.' Bang: there I was, up in the sky, burning brighter than anything; burning the rocks and the grass and the rivers, burning the faces of the princes and the poor stone-cutters. Until the clouds came and stopped my beams reaching people or places; so I said to the mountain spirit, 'the clouds are mightier than me. I wish I were a cloud.'

And then I had the best time ever; raining. I poured on the towns, I drowned the countryside, I rushed in the rivers, which overflowed and washed the whole world away. All except the mountain, whose rock remained unmoved. 'So, stone is mightier than me,' I moaned to the spirit, 'I wish I were the mountain.' And there we were, as one, standing mightiest, until I heard a hammering sound at my feet and looked down to see this little man, chiselling great chunks off me for building blocks and gravestones.

'I wish I were human,' I said to myself, and that's how I've managed to stay.'

DARREN: When did she tell you this?

ANDY: Before you were born. I had her to myself for four years. That's a lot of 'once upon a times'.

DARREN: Does she know you went to prison?

ANDY: No, she thinks we all lived happily ever after.

DARREN: If she comes back we'll ask her.

ANDY: Actually, I just remembered something else. This is too crazy. When I was in the nick, I had a vision of her. I had more than that, but my head only needed to know about one to freak me out completely.

DARREN: Was it like we had yesterday?

ANDY: She wasn't so chatty. More floating, in diaphanous robes. When she did utter a word, her lips were not in sync.

DARREN: Were you on drugs then?

ANDY: In the slammer for doing drugs; doing drugs in the slammer. It never changed me.

DARREN: I thought it did. You were different when you came out. How long were you in for?

ANDY: Only eighteen months. A side dish of porridge, rather than a main course. It was a picnic. I got into all sorts of arts and crafts.

DARREN: And when you saw mum in there...

ANDY: Maybe that was when she died. In the vision, she smiled and waved. Like a goodbye. Didn't you get one?

DARREN: I was still at school. It was well cool, having a convict brother. So much kudos.

ANDY: No matter what I'd done?

DARREN: Everyone knew it was drugs. It was wicked. Like my big brother was Gandalf on acid. No, no, Percy Weasley on mephedrone. Respect was mine.

ANDY: I hope it would have been different if I was a paedophile?

DARREN: Yeah, probably.

ANDY: So morality still rules.

DARREN: Have you shat yourself again?

ANDY: I'm ill. I'm dying. I need heroin.

DARREN: You need to be a hero. Come on, concentrate. What is your earliest memory of prison?

Pause.

ANDY: The bag. You put all your stuff in and realise you have nothing. You have nothing and you are nothing.

DARREN: What was it like being locked up?

ANDY: Daz, look at yourself. You want to glamorise prison, you can just sprinkle your arse with glitter right now.

DARREN: Bet you met some interesting characters in there, though.

ANDY: I liked the librarian best. I measured out my sentence with her reading recommendations. It helped that I could handle the apostrophes.

DARREN: Did you have to share a cell with a deadly psycho, though?

ANDY: Yes, like now.

DARREN: Did you have to march round an exercise yard?

ANDY: Exactly like in the Ballad of Reading Gaol; it was wildly unfair, and I didn't even have long hair to toss. I'm tossing it now; it's the only part of my body that can move.

DARREN: How did you feel when you came out?

ANDY: I didn't...

DARREN: Of prison. When you minced back into civilization; an equal player in freedom city?

ANDY: I wasn't free. I still had a habit. I needed to find somewhere to score.

DARREN: Waster.

ANDY: I came to see you and Dad straight after.

DARREN: Probably gave me a little of what you fancied.

ANDY: Probably asked for it.

DARREN: Let's have another question. A starter for ten. What is your earliest memory of university?

ANDY: (*Laughs.*) What's yours?

DARREN: I went to a party there once. At the students' union. Thought it would be political, but I saw a lot of incorrect behaviour, at the bar and on the dance floor. And the students, I was expecting them to be really clever but they were just normal people; you know, stupid.

ANDY: Hot, though; some of those academic chicks.

DARREN: Oh, very hot; and hardly any clothes on. I had a couple. They taught me all I know about university, which is nothing. But you went.

ANDY: Yes. For a little while. Not long enough to get the full degree.

DARREN: Where was it?

ANDY: A grotto outside Athens. Also very hot and hardly any clothes on. We scholars, in togas, would sit in the special glade with our globes and scrolls, listening to the teachers talking all day long.

Pause.

ANDY: You did say you wanted my earliest memories? Those lecturers were root and branch and leaf; Aristotle was taught by Plato, who studied under Socrates, at this clearing in the trees where academia began.

DARREN: So what was your actual course, then?

ANDY: Philosophy. But only the first year. Something happened in the summer that meant I could never go back.

DARREN: What was that?

ANDY: My first memory of heroin. It was then. Some friends were sharing a squat for the vacation; they were much harder, streeter, wiser than me; Philly, they nicknamed me, like my subject was soft cheese. Theirs was stronger material; one read psychology, one sociology, and one was doing media studies. The real stuff.

DARREN: I thought that was science.

ANDY: Social science, they called it. Punk physics, sci-fi chemistry, soap-opera biology. They were intellectual hard nuts but they had a soft spot for snorting dope through a cut-off drinking straw. Thrice they tempted me in an Isleworth squat that summer, before I surrendered. Twice I just said no. Third time...

DARREN: Yes. So how was it? Your first time.

ANDY: I was an opiate virgin; losing something I didn't know I had, though I've spent the rest of my life trying to recapture it.

DARREN: Were you sick?

ANDY: No.

DARREN: I was.

ANDY: I know. But also stoned beyond belief.

DARREN: You bastard, let's stick to the straight and narrow. Prison, university; we're doing all the institutions today. How about church?

ANDY: Church?

DARREN: Church.

ANDY: This is church.

DARREN: Well, it's not really, is it.

ANDY: Why not?

DARREN: It's completely lacking in grace. First thing I remember about church: pillars so high they seemed to touch the sky, steps so steep they could take you the same way; statues of the gorgeous gods you'd meet when you got there.

ANDY: Yes, yes. The smell of the incense, the trance of the dancers, the roar of the sacrificial lion.

DARREN: The temple of Apollo.

ANDY: That's me.

DARREN: Okay.

ANDY: That's what I learned at university. That's what I worship in church. That's what I was in prison for. I am the god Apollo. The sun has risen.

DARREN: Why is it all about you, you, you? What about me? I'm Dionysus. Let's kneel at my altar for a while.

ANDY: No, we've got to stop worshipping you; god of drunkenness and debauchery. That's why we're tied up like this, trying to get our heads into a higher state; bodies better, souls brighter. Join Apollo's congregation: let's be clean and shiny.

DARREN: But you gave me drugs originally.

ANDY: The one that got you into this mess, the one that will get you out of it.

Pause.

ANDY: Thrice you asked me for some before I surrendered. Twice I just said no. Third time...

DARREN: Yes. You didn't try hard against temptation.

ANDY: Brother, I couldn't save myself. There was no chance for you.

DARREN: I can't stand it.

ANDY: Come on. You're doing fine.

DARREN: I can't stand it.

ANDY: Dad will be here soon. Dad or Mum.

DARREN: I can't stand it.

ANDY: Let's have another question. Extra hard. What is the difference between bacon and eggs?

DARREN: Both come from animals. Both an unusual colour for food, yellow or pink, marbled with white. Both eaten mostly on Sundays. I wish I knew what day it is. I fancy a fry up without feeling sick. Sick. Bacon and eggs are identical. They are exactly the same thing.

ANDY: I remember creating them out of play-doh. I preferred peas; they were easy. But it was too hard keeping the play-doh colours separate; yellow, pink, green for the first few goes, but soon it was all brown. Breaking down. Oh, my churning guts.

DARREN: We're beyond brown, now. What on earth are we going to do?

ANDY: Let's try another meditation.

DARREN: You cunt.

ANDY: It's dark in here and I can't reach the light switch. I don't have a miner's headlamp, right, or the stump of a candle and a matchstick. I will die and decompose in this gloom if I cannot strike an internal spark.

DARREN: I won't be here, then.

ANDY: We're both getting out of this garage/shed, clean and sane. Tied to the mast. Feel it supporting your back; pine tall, seasoned strong. Feel the ropes at your chest rise and fall with your breathing, steady as you go; breathe deeper and be lifted, as if by the waves, higher up the mast till your head is a crow's-nest. See for miles. Hear for millennia.

Pause.

Pause.

DARREN snores.

ANDY: You're going to miss the Sirens' song. Daz. Are your ears filled with wax? It's about to start. What will it be: one voice, two or three? Unison or harmony? Verses and chorus, common time, major key; or plainsong, jazz, didgeridoo anarchy? Makes me want to make music again. But making music without taking drugs; I don't remember how to.

Oh my gods. I'm playing the introduction. I'm strumming the opening chords for the Sirens' song. A-minor. Bloody would be. The A is for addiction. I'll never be able to beat this beat.

Oh-oh. The lyrics are not in English. This is no way pop. Not German or Italian; no way opera. Not rhyming, ripping, rapping; no way hip-hop.

What is that percussion, though? A rattling at the door, like Dad's keys, but softer, more shimmery. Sci-fi tambourine! Somebody's coming in; but not by unlocking. Mum. Daz, she's back.

DARREN: I know. I dreamed her.

ANDY: I meditated her.

She enters, with baggage including a 'bunting' of pearls, banners of silk and velvet, and a knitting bag.

MUM: Are you two still bickering?

ANDY: Did you bring us back some drugs?

MUM: No.

DARREN: What did he do to make you smack him?

MUM: I didn't get any, dear.

DARREN: No, I mean, his earliest memory is a wallop from you. We wondered why.

ANDY: And, more than that, we want to know why you didn't bring us any smack.

MUM: Maybe I'm not a very good mother. I brought these. I thought they were needed.

She strings decorations from the restraint machinery; depending on budget they could look spectacular or stupid, it doesn't matter which...

MUM: Hundreds of pearly beads: each one you can see yourself in, each one signifies a moment of beauty or grace in your lives. Each one, a time I didn't kiss you and could have. Each one, a time you didn't miss me but should have.

Rosy beads, each one a hail mummy. Mummy help you. Mummy heal you. Don't need drugs to be happy or sad; just swinging up and down as nature intended.

You said there was nothing pretty, nothing perfumed, nothing to reflect in when the mother left you. I bring back the pearls. I know it's too late. They are almost fossilised. Hear them clinking, chinking, like a bone xylophone.

ANDY: The fucking Sirens' song. I was listening to that.

DARREN: I was dreaming it.

ANDY: I was meditating it. What key was it in?

DARREN: No keys. It was the petrified tympani.

MUM: You said there was nothing soft, nothing silky, nothing smooth when the mother left you. I bring back the softness. I know it's too little. This is a handkerchief in the scheme of things; or even less than that, a tissue?

She is unrolling a banner of silk and velvet, probably pink/red/purple. She fixes it on knobs and screws of the machinery, festooning the boys in smoothness.

ANDY: Shroud. Shroud.

DARREN: Flounce. Flounce.

ANDY: She is going to make us gay.

DARREN: Gayer, but straight. If we get off the H.

ANDY: We wouldn't need to if she'd brought her heroes some heroin.

DARREN: Illogical, mate. Getting off it is no problem; we will do it, just have to stay here long enough. Only a few days and the flu-like nightmare will be over. But what about when we get out of here, how hard will it be to stay off? Through that door, what is the first thing we'll want to do?

ANDY: Get wasted.

DARREN: I'd also very much like to get laid. Haven't had a shag for ages.

ANDY: Does the purple velvet make you think of pussy?

DARREN: So, Mum, what did Andy do to make you smack him?

MUM: What you both did. Pushed me to the outer limits of patience, a place beyond any forbearance I'd previously known: then pushed a button, specially programmed to make me lose control.

I warned you it would happen. 'If you keep saying/doing/pressing that thing, I will lose my temper. Beware: I will shout and lash out'. But you must have wanted me to, I think, you must have required it for some reason, because you deliberately pushed that button.

Am I the drug?

ANDY: No, I am.

DARREN: Look, I'm the one whose name begins with D.

ANDY: Well, that decides it. What was the other Q we wanted her to A? The other question we wanted her to answer?

DARREN: Oh, yes. Mum, what is your earliest memory?

MUM: I can remember very early indeed. Born. Born. It was 1960. I was there when black and white changed to colour. When war turned to peace, man. When women became liberated.

ANDY: Does the red silk make you think of burning bras?

MUM: My earliest memories are knitted. Babies still wore 'matinee jackets'. They were still swaddled in crocheted blankets. That was normal then; but my own mother was unusual, even for those days. Knitted too, you see. Rosy cheeks; pink wool. Golden hair; yellow three ply, sewn to her head so you could actually see stitches in the parting. Knitted twinset and pearls when she was in her early twenties; macramé miniskirt and psychedelic muff when she was thirty. Her eyes were blue glass buttons. When that doll was a faded and frayed old lady, her fabric moth-eaten and her mind unhemmed, the bead eyes still twinkled.

Pause. (If possible, MUM should have mounted the restraint machinery and be delivering these speeches from scenic positions.)

MUM: You've never said anything as nice as that about me. Anyway, I can make up my own compliments.

Look, this is my knitting bag, with needles of many sizes, and wool of many colours. There are some choice patterns, some archetypal 'makes'; a scarf, a tank-top, a stuffed Thunderbirds Two. Something for every level of skill. Me, I'm compiling a patchwork quilt of much-loved knitwear. Your old pom-pom hats and school jumpers, the football cushion-covers, the cup-winning tea-cosies; there's a few highlights of your dad's old woolly pullies in here too.

DARREN: Needles.

ANDY: I recognise that lavender and lime stripe.

MUM: Mittens.

DARREN: Let's have a look? At the needles.

ANDY: I'll see the knitting. I'm stone cold. Can I wrap that 'uber-blankie' round me?

DARREN: I want the bag.

MUM: What, boys; no fight to the death for the same toy? Okay, then. Andrew, you can have the cuddly. But don't hug it too tightly; those squares are soft. Darren, you can have the baggy. But don't hold it too closely; those needles are sharp.

Right, are you tied up comfortably? Then I'll begin. Though this is a story you've already been told.

ANDY: Told.

DARREN: Told.

MUM: One you've already started. The original patchwork tale and still the best creation myth. It's soft and it's sharp. The Darrethon.

Today, a dilemma worse than life and death. The decision; whether to steer your ship into the reach of Scylla, who would definitely take six of the finest crewman off the deck and into her chthonic maw. Or certain death for every man, if you steer into the reach of Charybdis, the whirlpool that takes all into its chthonic core. There is barely a middle way between them, even for an experienced sailor with a following wind. Think of those crewmen as your brain cells, then consider your drug problem again.

DARREN: I can't stand it.

ANDY: Dad will be here soon.

MUM: Odysseus was caught by the Scylla. More of his mates were eaten on that cliff, right in front of him. Grab, gnash, gnaw, grind. The six cried his name as they were slaughtered, stretching arms out to their brother before being torn limb from limb.

Every day you sail your ship as a hero, not a heroin addict, you're out of Scylla's reach. Her random affliction can't touch the captain who's already re-calculated the odds. But every day you sail, a clean man, between those straits, Charybdis is waiting to suck you down. No excuses, no survivors.

ANDY: I can't stand it.

DARREN: Dad will be here soon.

ANDY: How do we go on with this saga, without wax in our ears? The screams of eaten friends are so raw.

MUM: Because of what was promised, what was threatened, in your unwaxed ears; the Siren's song.

DARREN: I never knew you knew that story. Were you ever going to tell me? Did I have to hear it from a supply teacher.

ANDY: I heard it. I heard the song just now, while you were asleep.

DARREN: So what did it say?

ANDY: I'll tell you what Odysseus said. Not until you untie me from the mast.

Pause.

DARREN: Mum, can you untie us? Why not; you can knit. You're like a ghost with tactile response.

MUM: I may deal in velvet and silk, in needles and pearls; but I cannot handle drugs or keys. Software, yes: hardware, no. Just like the crew of the Star Ship Enterprise, I must not change the course of human history.

ANDY: What about predicting the future. Can you tell how we will be unbound?

MUM: Everyone knows that. Happily ever after. As soon as your withdrawal symptoms cease, your father who released you from the addiction, will release you from the constriction.

DARREN: Mum. What's your earliest memory of Dad?

MUM: Dawn. Dawn. Stonehenge, New Year's Day, 1977. The southern counties were about to go punk, but we were still hippies. I first saw him as the sun was coming up, aligned with the key stone. Funny that.

Yes, he had long hair. Yes, he was doing tai chi, or yoga, or feng sui. No, he didn't have a girl friend. Yes, we did drugs. Only pot, like, a primitive skunk; dark and leafy and relatively odourless. Some of us may not have inhaled. But I did. And I held it down.

So do as I say, boys, not as I do.

ANDY: Mum. What was the first argument you had with dad?

MUM: Which film to see on our one month anniversary: Star Wars or Saturday Night Fever? We had a titanic struggle in the foyer of the Beckenham Odeon. It was basically a fight between good and evil, like both the plots we never watched. Luckily there was a middle way; Annie Hall was on too.

ANDY: So instead of Luke Skywalker or John Travolta, your muse of romance was Woody Allen.

MUM: Our marriage was all about compromise; an attempt to make opposites unite. On the day itself, he wore black, I wore white. He was already at the altar, I had to arrive. He made a speech, I was silent. Then we resolved our differences in the honeymoon four-poster.

ANDY: I can't stand it. Don't say Dad'll come soon.

Pause. (MUM starts to assume such a comfortable position in the constraint equipment that, by the time DAD arrives, she can't really be seen.)

ANDY: Anyway, when he gets here, we've got to make him untie us. Daz, act straight.

DARREN: Ducky, get you.

ANDY: No, I really can't stand it. We must persuade him to let us go. The madness is over; the symptoms have subsided. Daz, act clean.

DARREN: How many days has it been?

ANDY: Four? Or more?

DARREN: We could be completely recovered by now.

ANDY: Ready to resume a normal life.

DARREN: Then the minute we are released...

ANDY: Run. To Jammy Jimmy's house. He'll have some horse for us.

DARREN: I don't think I'll be able to. My legs have withered.

ANDY: Mine have atrophied.

DARREN: So has my arse.

ANDY: Sssh! He'll be here soon.

DARREN: What do we say? Thanks awfully, old man, one appears to have kicked the heroin habit. Kindly untie me; I'm gasping for a cup of tea.

ANDY: We mustn't overact. Just keep it casual. Think how you'd really feel under those circumstances.

DARREN: I've always imagined I'd go out singing alleluia.

ANDY: It's more likely to be 'agadoo'.

DARREN: Do you remember what we came in singing?

ANDY: *(Sings it. Could be something like 'Heroin' (Lou Reed)? Or Eminem's Drug Ballad!)*

DARREN: So, if we do persuade him we're over the withdrawal, these will be our last few minutes together in bondage. Our final round of Q&A.

ANDY: Austen or Bronte?

DARREN: Bugger off.

ANDY: Cars or dogs?

DARREN: I think we've ascertained that: both. Tights or stockings?

ANDY: Who would say tights?

DARREN: Spangled flip-flop or studded boot?

ANDY: Ooh, blow-dry or blow-job?

DARREN: Who would say blow-dry?

ANDY: The ladies. They love a big and bouncy hairdo. Heated rollers are better than dildos to them.

DARREN: That's your own girlfriends you're talking about. Beef or lamb?

ANDY: No, still not hungry. We'll get some crisps on the way round to Jimmy's.

DARREN: I can't stand it.

ANDY: Dad'll be here soon.

Pause.

DARREN: He can bind our bodies against the addiction but he can't bind our minds. Bag of smack is like salt and vinegar for the brain. Worcester sauce for the synapses.

ANDY: Sick. Sick. But that was why he tried to teach us meditation. To have heads like the potato instead of the snack.

DARREN: So, come on then; Quavers or Hula Hoops? Monster Munch or Pom Bear? Who wins the prize for best genetic modification?

ANDY: Wotsits; the most unrealistic colour. Frazzles; the most authentic texture. Walkers; the most inventive flavours.

DARREN: Skips; the best tingle, first time they touch your tongue.

ANDY: But your tastebuds get used it after a while. Once, those crisps brought my tongue to life. Then I grew desensitised till eventually it just felt... Dead. Dead.

ANDY: Dad. Dad.

The sound of keys jangling, several locks being turned. The door swings open, letting in light and an older man with a mop and bucket, toolbox and suitcase.

DAD: Hello, boys.

DARREN: Dad. Guess what? Great news!

ANDY: Patience, brother. Show him, don't tell him.

DARREN: We're completely cured. Spotlessly clean. Purged. Purified. Shiny as new.

Dad starts to mop the floor around him.

DAD: This is what you said to me: No matter how hard we beg, even if we plead, do not release us. If we scream and cry that we've changed our plans, only tie us tighter. We will not know our minds when we are out of them.

ANDY: No, really, we're fine. Sound. Sorted. After all, it's been how many days now? The tremors have passed, the nausea gone, the runny nose dried up.

DARREN: The feeling of desolation lifted.

ANDY: Anyway, enough about our complete recovery. On to more important matters. Who won the football last night?

DAD: England beat Germany, 4–2. It was fairly even to begin; England had more possession but didn't do anything with it. Half-way through the first half, Germany scored two goals in ten minutes; embarrassing balls that caught the centrebacks out of position. Everyone was thinking we have to get something by half-time.

Then, England are awarded a corner and Matthew Upson heads it in. Redemption. The fans are still singing when, guess what. Lampard scores. Random clearance bounces off him, no one to pass to, goalie far out; a boring, ugly goal, in fact.

But the assistant referee didn't see it and there's this long conference on the sideline; clearly it went in, because everyone else in the world saw it, so eventually yes, it was given. Can you believe that; two-all at half time. How the vuvuzelas moaned, the national anthems groaned; even where I was sitting, alone on the sofa with a can of lager.

Second half; as before, the play was even for the first quarter of an hour. Everyone was hoping it wouldn't go to penalties. Suddenly, Lampard went and scored again; with his left foot, in a goal-mouth scuffle. Rooney had just bounced it off the post and the German goalie was already down. 3-2; everyone is starting to party.

Then, a heart-stopping moment. England get a free kick, but Berry loses possession; Germany break and push forward. The strike is certain; but David James makes himself big in goal. What an amazing save.

Everyone was thinking 1966. Then came the incredible bit. In the last five minutes there was another England goal; from a cross, perfectly weighted by Ashley Cole, bombing in from the hole. Nobody saw how it went in, but in the replays, you'll never believe this, it was headed by Lampard. A hatrick. Just like Hurst's in '66; a perfect hatrick, right foot, left foot, head.

Guess who got to kiss the cup, though. Beckham. Divine heir of Bobby Moore. Shame to be tied up in the garage. You missed the best night of football ever.

DAD is changing DARREN's trousers.

ANDY: My earliest memory of football: one side of a muddy war started kicking severed heads over the frontline. They were bloody barbarians but by third century China, BCE, it was a textbook military exercise; Tsu' Chu, goal scoring under attack. The Romans called it Harpastum but they used their hands too. My first memory of rugby football was in 1863, precisely; when a public schoolboy was allowed to pick up the ball and run away.

DAD: Well, I say football started properly in 1930, with the first Fifa World Cup. Uruguay beat Argentina, 4-2, at home in Montevideo; 93,000 watching in the Centenario stadium. That tournament was dominated by South America, for Europe had to sail a long, slow Atlantic crossing to compete. Training on deck; how many balls were lost in the watery depths, by those brylcreemed boys with baggy shorts to the knee. Belgium, France, only Yugoslavia made it to the semi-finals. Tied to the goalpost on their soccer Odyssey.

DARREN: Well, my earliest memory of football was the first *Match Of The Day*, Liverpool v Arsenal at Anfield, 22nd August 1964. It started just because the BBC needed to train up its camera men for the forthcoming world cup; but that TV show changed the shape of football for our generation: bringing it into the living-room, condemning the death-trap stadiums, commodifying a premier league; turning FC into PLC.

DAD finishes changing him.

DARREN: Dad, please don't think that because I was soaked in urine, I am still addicted to heroin and must remain tied up. There was nowhere to piss but right here.

DAD: Yes, about that. I've got a blueprint, this plan to make things more comfortable for you. Obviously, you can't 'go to the gents' in your current confinement, so I thought it might be nice to upgrade your captivity, bringing the loo to you.

He demonstrates on ANDY, manually taking the bucket to him.

I can customise those shackles with a simple button, a basic switch, to bring the slop bucket right here. By rope and pulley, with whirring cogwheels, you'll be able to visit the little boys' room whenever you please. On a conveyor belt, this bucket will be at your beck and call.

Okay, I'm going to get my tools out. It will take a bit of banging. And some sawing.

DARREN: But we're not staying. You can untie us now. We're fine.

ANDY is peeing in the bucket.

DARREN: Well, I'm fine. If you think he's still hooked on heroin, so be it; but you must unlock me now. Dad. I'll never be more lucid than this. Never more cool. Never

more sensible. Come on, let me go. Or else I'll start to think that you mean to keep us here forever; then I'll panic and it will look like I'm still fucked, whereas I am not.

ANDY: Daz. Remember to tell him we did meditation.

DARREN: Several times. We've been practising it regularly. Overnight. Or however long it's been.

DAD: (*Sawing and hammering furiously.*) That's good. Did you find it helpful?

DARREN: Deeply relaxing. Highly enlightening.

ANDY: But I'm ready to get back into current affairs. So, please tell us the news; and I want international first.

DAD: Bong. The news at 10. Bong. AM, that is. Bong. Mars and Venus spent the night together. Bong. Again. Bong. They really made the earth move. Bong. Venus' husband, the blacksmith god Vulcan, had suspected her infidelity for some time; so he made a trap with chains so fine they were invisible to the lovers rolling around in his bed. Caught in this web, Venus was forced to admit her deceit. Bong. In other news, Neptune and Pluto, gods of the sea and the underworld, continue to plot against me. Bong. Conspiring, even though we drew lots for the mountain top territory and sway over thunderbolts and lightening. Bong. (*Maybe every bong is a hammer-blow.*)

DARREN: You're starting to frighten me now. Can't keep saying bong to a druggie.

ANDY: When you say you, who?

DAD: Well, if my sons are Apollo and Dionysus, I'm Zeus, init. Forsooth.

DARREN: Oh my god.

DAD: Also known as Jupiter.

DARREN: So forget the pissing machine. Upgrade our captivity so we can kneel before you.

ANDY: No, that's stupid. This is a trick. If you think he's still hooked on heroin, so be it; but you must unlock me now. Dad. I'll never be less deluded than this. Never less suggestible. Come on, let me go. Or else I'll start to think that you mean to keep us here forever; then I'll panic and it will look like I'm still fucked, whereas I am not.

DARREN: Andy. Remember to tell him we did meditation.

ANDY: Several times. We've been practising it regularly. Overnight.

DAD: That goes in your favour. I know it will cure any addiction, if used properly.

ANDY: Can't you get hooked on it? Isn't meditating moreish, the ultimate brain-buzz?

DAD: It has no harmful side effects and hundreds of natural benefits. So, tell me, which technique did you use?

ANDY: One time it was the playground method; we went down a mental slide. Another time it was epic style; we were lashed to a mast. But it made me realise, I've spent a lot of my life in meditation; lost in music, one with the melody, playing the heart's riff, whether plugged or unplugged.

DAD: A powerful method in the right fingers.

DARREN: Listen, though, all that was nothing. This is the best bit. When we meditated, Mum came. Or maybe she was there already, and we went. We saw her, Dad. She's still here.

Dad can't see her.

ANDY: Shut up. It's not going to help your case, claiming to be in contact with our dead mother. She is dead, isn't she, Dad?

DARREN: Dead. Dad.

ANDY: So how did she die?

DAD: Don't you know?

DARREN: Sorry. The supply teacher didn't tell me.

DAD: I told you.

ANDY: We don't remember.

DAD: You blotted it out. You were blotto. If I tell you know now, you'll blot it out again. But it wasn't the monkey on her back that killed her. It wasn't the lions, it wasn't the swine. Your mother was killed by a dingo. That's the only detail I know. It makes me weep most nights, that one small fact in my world of fantasy. *(Pause.)* So there. One giant leap. It's finished. I've fixed it. My patented porta-potty.

ANDY: I don't need to go now.

DARREN: No. Dad. You need to let us go. We've physically kicked the habit. You've done what you promised.

DAD: This is what you said to me: No matter how hard we beg, even if we plead, do not release us. If we scream and cry that we've changed our plans, only tie us tighter. We will not know our minds when we are out of them.

ANDY: We're fine now. Fit. Fiddles.

DAD: Remember that I swore. Remember what I swore on. You know I will keep my promise to you. We would never have started this if you thought I'd chicken out after four days of cold turkey.

ANDY: No turkey, tickety-boo.

DARREN: I can't remember what you swore on.

DAD: My life.

ANDY: Well, it's over now. I mean, our struggle. We're feeling much better.

DAD: You're hallucinating your absent mother.

ANDY: Mum. A little help?

MUM: Try singing him the Siren's song.

ANDY: I wasn't going to say those words till I get untied.

MUM: You might not get untied till you say them.

ANDY: *(To Dad.)* Did you hear that?

DAD: I've often heard an echo in this shed/garage; like the crack of distant flint, the knock on ancient wood, the drip of arcane oil. The echo of a hammer, a bicycle pump, a sander or saw; handled by the ghosts of handymen, who did it themselves before. All shed/garages are echoey places.

DARREN: Well, she can hear you. So, what is your earliest memory of Mum?

DAD: What?

DARREN: We've been whiling away the hours with a Q and A.

DAD: But it takes me days to get D and M. *(Pause.)* Deep and meaningful.

ANDY: Was it Stonehenge? Sunrise or sunset? The cinema in Penge? Grease or Star Wars?

DAD: It was Annie Hall.

DARREN: What did she look like?

DAD: Your mother? Juno in civvies. Statuesque but slouching; beautiful but scowling; butch but for the bumps and babies. She was always smoking, but hardly ever wore 'drawers'.

MUM: I've got some bloody big bloomers on, now, John. And this is where it went wrong between us. Not Juno in civilian gear, but a human girl in goddess garb, that's what I was. You had it back to front.

DARREN: He can't see you.

ANDY: Or hear you. Should we repeat it?

DAD: I can't let you go, talking like that.

DARREN: It's an unrelated matter. We happen to be victims of a haunting. We are victorious over heroin, though.

DAD: When did these hallucinations start?

DARREN: I slid down a slide in my mind. In a meditation.

DAD: You weren't supposed to do that. I thought you were tied to the mast.

DARREN: We were bored, bending, breaking. We were brave.

DAD: So what did she say to you?

ANDY: A lot. She does go on. We both heard exactly the same dialogue, Dad; it can't be a hallucination.

DAD: Nevertheless, I'm going to tie you tighter.

DARREN: No, you have to let us go.

ANDY: On your life, we are over it.

DAD: I'll test you.

ANDY: You already have.

DAD: So, what is Andrew's earliest memory?

ANDY and DARREN: Swings.

DAD: What is Darren's?

ANDY and DARREN: See-saw.

DAD: What are eight sevens?

ANDY: 56. (*Dad doesn't know...*)

DAD: Why did you start taking drugs?

ANDY: You made me.

DARREN: He made me.

ANDY: She made us.

DAD: What is the capital of Spain?

ANDY: Madrid. / DARREN: S.

DAD: What was your first experience of sex?

DARREN: Swings.

ANDY: See-saw.

ANDY and DARREN: Roundabout.

DAD: What are seven eights?

ANDY: 56. (*Dad doesn't know...*)

DAD: If you are a greengrocer, writing a sign to advertise your fruit, should you put an apostrophe in melons and bananas?

ANDY: No.

DARREN: What he said.

DAD: When would you put an apostrophe in 'its'?

DARREN: In its what?

ANDY: When you're saying it is; not belonging to it.

DARREN: What?

DAD: Do you think I should let him go and not you?

DARREN: Because of a grammatical error? I can't stand it.

DAD: So kneel then. Worship your father who art in Olympus.

DARREN: Aren't we in South London anymore?

DAD: I could upgrade your confinement, so you can downsize to kneeling. Your longstanding problems would disappear.

ANDY: Or we can convince you we're clean; and safe to untie. Where are the keys?

DAD: Here. They're clipped onto my utility belt; it's more loaded than Action Man's, better endowed than Bob the Builder's. It does creation and destruction equally; the 'earth father's' girdle.

ANDY: Okay. We admit you are the ruling deity. Now give us your toughest test. Ask us the hardest Q you can. If we get the right A, set us free.

DAD: You won't be free, though, will you? You know you won't.

ANDY: Four days or forty days. Four years, Zeus forbid. When we leave this shed/garage there'll still be two paths to take, clearly signposted. Only two possible directions, ever. To Jammy Jimmy's. All other routes.

You're welcome to stick around, try to steer us, keep me on the straight and narrow. But you might as well untie us now.

Pause.

ANDY: I mainly want to watch some football.

DARREN: I want sex. I want to smell a girl's hair as she flicks it in my face. I want a handful of tits. I want to not see my dick for the pretty lady sitting on it. She doesn't have to be facing me; a rear-view is acceptable...

Pause.

DARREN: Come on, Dad, give us your hardest question.

DAD: It's easy. (*To ANDY*) I just want to hear what the Sirens sang.

ANDY sings. A Cappella. Ancient Greek. Perhaps the original Odyssey lyrics set to a haunting, hypnotic tune. As he intones it, DAD moves closer to DARREN.

DAD: What's he saying?

DARREN: I don't know.

DAD: It's all ancient Greek, init. What's he mean?

DARREN: I don't know.

DAD: Didn't they teach you anything at school?

DARREN: I could do the two times table.

DAD: Yes, but you're twenty something now. Time to learn some higher maths. Some finer points of English.

ANDY: (*Stops singing.*) It was mum who embroidered the language with punctuation, for us. Mum who fathomed past and present tense with her tape-measure, for us. Mum who neatly hemmed a few French verbs, for us. Nice enough compliment, for you? Mum knitted us, from silken thread; by our own hands we are unknotted.

DARREN: But it was you, Dad, who hammered out our personalities, soldering musical instruments to our fingers, oiling the spark plugs of our souls. You hardwired us for happiness and success; by our own hands we are undone. We are the scions of lightening and language. Now, Dad. Give me the key.

DAD: Sod off, son. I'm going to measure up for this kneeling down. There'll be a lever around about here. You'll be able to reach it yourself.

DARREN: I've reached it. I'm holding the key. Andy. I've got it.

DAD: But it's still attached to my utility belt. That's heftier than Hercules'.

ANDY: Let him have it.

DAD: No.

DARREN: Release me. I'm not raving.

DAD: You are.

DARREN: I've got solid evidence that the mother is here.

ANDY: Let him have it.

DAD: What's that?

DARREN: Her knitting needle.

ANDY: Let him have it.

DARREN stabs DAD in the heart with it. He still holds the bunch of keys on DAD's belt in his other hand, but as DAD staggers backward DARREN loses his grip on the key fob; and DAD falls out of reach. Long pause.

DARREN: Dead. Dead.

ANDY: What did you do?

DARREN: The knitting needle. It was sharper than I thought. I slipped it up and under his ribs. It was only meant to poke him. I was pulling the keys. The whole bunch was in my grasp; they cut my hand, I was squeezing so hard. Fob dangling from his belt like an iron scrotum. The keys.

ANDY: They're out of our reach. He's dead and the keys are out of our reach.

DARREN: I was pulling them and pushing him, and the needle; it was, like, sucked in. I didn't jab or thrust or twist. A junkie's precision shooting. Pearl one.

ANDY: Darren. How are we going to get the keys?

DARREN: Let's ask mum. Mum. Can you help us? Can you unclip the keys from Dad's utility belt and bring them over here?

ANDY: She won't be able to. She's a ghost who obeys the laws of Star Trek; she can drip crystals and shimmer silk, but she can't deal in the hard stuff, like metals or chemicals.

DARREN: Wasn't the knitting needle made of metal?

MUM: It comes into the soft category, linked to pink lamb's wool and ribboned booties, though it's shaped like a tool.

ANDY: There must be some way you can help us.

MUM: The thing is, Andrew, it's not you I'm here for today. It's your father; I'm here to help him. The best I can offer my sons, today, is a translation of the Sirens' song into English. Basically, it tells you when you're going to die.

ANDY: It'll be, what, a week from now, tops, if we don't get those keys.

DARREN: She might as well tell us. Then we'll know whether or not to try and get out of here. If she says we'll live longer, there'll be no need to struggle.

ANDY: No, if she says we'll live longer, it'll be because we struggle.

DARREN: That's why you can't hear the Sirens and survive.

ANDY: That's why you can't love heroin and walk away unscathed.

MUM: That's why I won't tell you. But don't worry; you won't ask me. You'll talk about it for hours before concluding what you knew in the beginning; you don't really want to know when it will end.

Rest assured, though, that when the time comes I'll be with you. Singing optional.

She approaches DAD, lying dead on the floor. She pulls the knitting needle out of his chest and gives it back to DARREN.

DAD rises up. He can see her now.

MUM: Who underestimated the needle's deadly power, then? I could have told you, you were doomed. That drug is stronger than love. All the heroes together couldn't beat the heroin habit. No matter how much they love their father, my boys always choose the mother.

DAD: You're here?

MUM: No, we're there.

DAD: Dead. Dead. When did I die? In 1510 with Botticelli, in 1616 with Shakespeare, in 1791 with Mozart? Or in 1977 with Elvis Presley? No, I know; in 1170 with Thomas A Becket? Waiting for Godot forever. Only kidding; I died in the year dot, with jolly Jupiter.

MUM: He lives, and so does his Mrs.

DAD: The unfaithful Juno.

MUM: Faithfully waiting for you at death's door.

DAD: Do we need a key?

DARREN: Yes. Yes. Give it to me.

DAD: Are we still in Penge, or Stonehenge? Is the key sandstone or sarsen?

MUM: We don't need one. This is not death's door. We've already been through that.

DAD: So what about those other men, then? Do you meet them all at this portal?

MUM: They were fleshy associations; I only mix with the spiritual now.

DARREN: Mum. Dad. Don't go.

MUM: We're both dead, darling.

DAD: Dead.

MUM: It'll be best if we leave ASAP.

DAD: Is there any football on?

MUM: *(As a football chant.)* 'You're going home in a St John's ambulance'. Come on.

(To the boys.) We're off to the soft side. You two have got it hard. Goodbye.

ANDY: Stop. If you're not even going to leave his body, at least let us have the keys. We've got to get out of here.

DAD: A key, no. A clue, yes. Listen carefully, it's in ancient Greek. *(He actually says this line in modern Greek:)* It's not a knitting needle, it's a screwdriver.

ANDY: Say that again.

DAD: *(In Greek.)* It's not a knitting needle, it's a screwdriver. *(In English.)* I love you, boys; even if you did kill me for diacetylmorphine hydrochloride. Now, my true wife. How do we get out of here?

MUM: Through there.

DAD: But I locked it when I came in, you know, in real life, just a few minutes ago. I no longer recall which of these keys will unlock it, though; they've all gone soft...

MUM: We don't need one. This is not death's door. We've already been through that.

They seem to walk through the door without opening it. (Special effect.)

MUM: See you on the other side, boys.

Pause.

DARREN: Dead. Dead.

ANDY: We are. Penge 2013. And nobody will know.

DARREN: My mates will miss me.

ANDY: They're junkies, too; grind your bones into powder, soon as their regular supply dries up.

DARREN: A lot of old girlfriends will google me.

ANDY: All mine told me to blog off.

DARREN: Does that include your gay lover? I wish I had one now. Now that I'm going to die, I wish I lived faster...

ANDY: Sorry. I can't wait for your third wish. I am actually getting out of here.

DARREN: How?

ANDY: Plan A. Make like the big anvil. Dad said it was the only thing that could be heard from inside this shed/garage; by the Smiths at number 42. We just have to shout that loud.

DARREN: I wish I had my electric guitar. Man, that could raise the roof.

ANDY: I don't know how many decibels we need. Enough so they can hear us next door but one.

DARREN: They might be out.

ANDY: Yes, walking past our house; to the corner shop for fags, imagine that. Or to the sodding chippy, it must be nearly lunchtime. Right. This is it. This will be the loudest I have ever shouted in my whole life.

Help!

DARREN: I've heard you shout much louder than that.

ANDY: You try it then.

DARREN: Help. *(Maybe he pouts it, seductively.)* That's how I normally say it.

ANDY: Come on, do it like me. Like your life depends on it.

They both shout help once at the tops of their voices.

Pause.

DARREN: There's no point asking, anyway. The Smiths wouldn't urinate on me if I was ablaze.

ANDY: Why not?

DARREN: It's my earliest memory of getting a girl pregnant, isn't it? I shagged their mythical daughter and she had to have an abortion. We were 16.

ANDY: What?

DARREN: I thought you knew. It was practically in the papers.

ANDY: I was in prison, then.

DARREN: She was pretty. And pliant. Her parents had a magnificently stocked cocktail cabinet. Dionysus was honoured.

ANDY: Dick.

DARREN: No, I did like her. I genuinely wanted to marry her. The Smiths wouldn't let me: Dad had several stand-up fights with those terminators in the driveway. Then they lobbed an injunction over the garden wall; I must never speak to little Miss brandy-nips again. It wasn't difficult: I think she went away to college.

ANDY: Her parents still live there, though. Representing our main hope, now dashed.

DARREN: One summer I saw her out, at a top night spot in town. She didn't see me. And I was with this bird I was going to propose to, so I let it be.

Pause.

DARREN: I'd have loads of kids, by now, if all the eggs I'd ever fertilised had come to fruition. If I'd borne a Darren-fruit, I bet I wouldn't be dying like this. If I'd been the daddy, maybe I wouldn't have relied on the mother.

ANDY: Instead of all those single mothers not being able to rely on the father.

DARREN: There aren't that many... that I know of. But I am ashamed to admit there's been more than one abortion. If those angel babies were with me now I wouldn't be in this mess.

ANDY: That is the drug you are talking about; every cherub hit, a shot of venom. I can't believe we're no purer now than when this whole thing started. Our agony has been in vain. No pun intended.

DARREN: Pun, no. Clue, yes. What was it that Dad said just before he left?

ANDY: Clue, yes. (*Approximates the Greek without knowing what it means:*) 'It's not a knitting needle, it's a screwdriver'. What does it mean? What does it mean?

DARREN: How should I know? I can't hardly speak English; never mind sentences, I don't do whole words. It's why I was hooked on a thing called H. Ain't got no GCSEs,

no Jesus, no internet access. Apart from the bloody Odyssey, I didn't learn shit at school.

ANDY: This is a university challenge.

DARREN: Do you know the answer, then?

ANDY: No, but I can look it up. Follow me, for one last meditation; this time, to save our skins. No swings or slides; just a guided visualisation of academia, a rhetorical lesson, in the sacred glade outside Athens. The mood will be Socratic.

DARREN: The tone will be suck-my-dick.

ANDY: You won't have to learn anything; you can rest under a laurel bush.

DARREN: And if you say Platonic, I'll say plonker. If you say Aristotle, I'll say asshole. If we could transport ourselves back to golden-age Greece, we wouldn't really be stuck here, would we?

ANDY: Whether I sit, stand or lie, there are pins and needles in my hands and feet.

DARREN: At least you didn't get one in the heart.

ANDY: At least his body isn't still lying there, accusing you.

DARREN: Maybe he never came. It was all a dream. Maybe Dad will be here, soon.

ANDY: I can't stand it. Let's try to solve the one clue we have, even if we heard it in a hallucination.

The only way out is in. I will now enter a meditative state.

DARREN: Bro. Wait. I'm coming too.

Pause. ANDY breathes deeply. Pause. DARREN snores.

ANDY: *(In Greek)* It's not a knitting needle, it's a screwdriver. *(In English)* Education was the same thing as religion, once; learning was an act of worship. Just like football was an act of war. Still, in this Athenian academy, stories, songs and sermons all sound similar. It's the essays of Odysseus. For homework, pagan prayer...

Pause. DARREN snores.

ANDY: Yeah. Om. That's what he tells the sailors, once they've untied him from the mast. The words of the Sirens' song: when you're going to die. The date, the time, the place on a pinpoint. But the lyrics are the same for every mortal man who hears them; unoriginal as hell, though no one ever lives to criticise. You're going to die right here, right now; that's all the 'talent with talons' ever have to say.

So, I'm still bound. Wriggling in the rigging. Because I heard the Sirens singing, maybe I will never be free. At least, in my trance-like state, I can now understand the lingo.

(In Greek.) It's not a knitting needle, it's a screwdriver. *(In English)* It's not a knitting needle, it's a screwdriver. It's not a knitting needle, it's a screwdriver.

Daz. Wake up. What are you holding?

DARREN: Huh? It's not a knitting needle, it's a screwdriver.

ANDY: Now you're a man. You have a crude tool. Though I've just seen us in our original forms, and truly I am Apollo and you Dionysus.

It was a great meditation; five star, in my new rating system. I had a revelation: we've got it all wrong. Never mind the transformation into swine. Drugs don't turn men into pigs. Never mind the moments when we seemed to be gods; when the bovine geezers glimpse the divine. No, heroin is what we deities became human for. Drugs turned gods into men.

We were so thinly veiled. How could they never see; through the dope-smoke, our divinity? Behind the human failings, between the playground railings; we were sliding into depravity, swinging along to insanity, see-sawing the heights a hero can know, see-sawing as low as he can go. Never solo, though, bro?

I am fire; but my light has nearly gone out in this garage. Your lust for life has survived; and it's just saved mine too. I saw you snoring drunkenly on the grass of that first school, and you still looked heavenly. But now you need to be a handyman.

DARREN: I was dreaming of doing a GCSE in metalwork.

ANDY: My vision was more, like, cyber caveman striking the postmodern flint. I saw sparks come off your celestial body while you slept. But it's the manual labour I'm looking for now. It's not a knitting needle, it's a screwdriver. Can you unscrew us out of here?

DARREN: It's hard with my hands in this position, but I will try.

A long pause. DARREN fiddles with screws. There's a sense that this is going to take hours.

DARREN: And, if I can unscrew us out of here, then we will be new born.

ANDY: Born.

DARREN: Basic breathing will be drug enough for me; fresh air will get us high.

ANDY: I would very much like to walk without chasing the dragon. To sleep without trying to score drugs in my dreams.

DARREN: Born.

ANDY: Every morning will be like the twenty ninth of February. Born on the all-time Sabbath day.

DARREN: I knew you were good and gay. (*He is busily unscrewing the machinery.*) My background is more manly. Heavyweight; a metallic ring to it.

Take an anvil. The ancient Greeks thought it would take an anvil, thrown out of heaven, nine days to fall to Earth. Science later proved that, if heaven was at the end of our atmosphere, the start of outer space, then this would indeed be the case.

Let's pick up that anvil and throw it back. Men to gods; clean as creation. Strong and shining as we were before the fall.

ANDY: You just chucked a fucking chunk of iron into the stone age.

DARREN: Sorry, did it hurt you?

ANDY: The blow to my head dislodged an earlier memory than my earliest memory. An older story than we started with: pre-dating the swings and see-saw. Pre-verbal, but post-pleistocene; more primitive than mice and men, more primordial than slime.

I remember making it all, like peas from playdoh. I recall the rolling of grass; and I surely molded the trees. I spat the springs, pissed the streams; the tinkle came from my winkle. The hills were of my humping. The valleys impressed by my dingle.

It was gods like us who extruded the animals. Pooing the cruelty, the cuddles, the cleverness out like plasticene. We made the beautiful world, then we messed with it.

DARREN: Andy, that's more cheesy than the garden of Edam. This is what actually happened. Our almighty father Zeus, may he rest in peace, put us in his paradise and boomed this dire warning: 'Eat all the apples you like. They're good for you. Just don't touch the poppy, the magic mushroom, the weed. Say no to drugs.'

But remember making the apple out of playdoh? I fed it to a snake. Remember making the poppy? When we realised that if you score the seed pod just after it flowers, the pus that seeps out is opium? Apple or Poppy: one is forbidden. One is vitamins, one is wisdom.

Saying no to drugs is like saying no to sunsets, to roast lamb, to the industrial revolution. It's what we turned into men for.

ANDY: It's a myth, mate. Your god-like knowledge is obsolete. The Darrethon is out of print.

DARREN: But the story is still told.

ANDY: Told. By the sons of the anvil.

DARREN: Pearly knaves with scabby knees and poppy petal hankies.

ANDY: Seraphim with fluey symptoms. What kind of gods are we? Impotent but omnipotent, out-of-it but omnipresent.

DARREN: Don't worry, Andy, I will save you.

ANDY: Or else, there's nothing left but what we say now. Our Q and A. We'll be omniscient. But unknown.

DARREN: It's okay. I can do it. I think.

ANDY: Have you even got one screw loose, yet?

DARREN: Nearly. We need to keep talking to pass the time. Let's have another 'what's the difference?'

ANDY: We've done them all. We've done every 'what's the difference' and they're all the same.

DARREN: Can't be. Try this. What is the difference between life and death?

ANDY: Ooh, let me see now. They're identical. One in time, one in space.

DARREN: One for rich, one for poor. One for peace, one for war.

ANDY: One for business, one for pleasure. There is no difference between them.

DARREN: Do ladies only like life and men only like death? Seems that way, sometimes.

ANDY: Try this. Life: I'm imprisoned and the sentence is getting longer. Death: a full stop?

DARREN: Life: our story turns out to be comedy. Death: it's a tragedy, after all?

ANDY: Death: four. Life: two. That's the final score.

DARREN: Clever shit, Apollo, but I'm up to my neck, actually, I'm over my head in it... If I am Dionysus, then I was a deep, deep drinker before I ever did drugs. So, even if I get off heroin I'll be back on the beer, I mean, wine. The god of intoxication will never be sober. I have to stop unscrewing.

ANDY: No, listen, undo yourself. Undo yourself and then undo me. Undo me then I'll do you up again, if you insist, while I go free. But please don't stop untying us from the mast. I'm not Odysseus. This is not my Odyssey. We are just heroes who can't have heroin.

DARREN: It's going to take ages. I'm not saying forever. But a bloody long time.

ANDY: Sons of the mother. I can't stand it. Help. *(He shouts louder than before.)*

DARREN: Help.

(They might look at the audience.)

Darkness.