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Chatroom

A play

Enda Walsh

Samuel French — London
www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk



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CHATROOM

First presented at the Cottesloe Theatre as part of the National Theatre's Shell Connections Festival in July 2005.

Subsequently presented at the Cottesloe Theatre on 10th April 2006 with the following cast:

Laura	Naomi Bentley
Jim	Andrew Garfield
Eva	Matti Houghton
Jack	Javone Prince
Emily	Andrea Riseborough
William	Matt Smith

Directed by Anna Mackmin
Designed by Jonathan Fensom

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CHARACTERS

Laura, fifteen
Jim, fifteen
Eva, fifteen
Jack, fifteen
Emily, fifteen
William, fifteen

The action of the play takes place on a bare stage.

Time — 2004

Oompa Loompa

Words and Music by Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley

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CHATROOM

There is a movie screen US. There are six identical orange plastic seats in a row at the very front of the stage. There's a two metre gap between each seat

The Lights come up

The song "Oompa Loompa" sung by the Oompa Loompas from the film "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory" is heard

During the song William, Jack, Eva, Emily and Laura, all about fifteen to sixteen years of age, enter, three from one side of the stage, two from the other, ending up in the order from L to R as they are listed above. They walk casually towards each other in a line in front of the chairs, stop, turn and face the audience. They stand there for a while and look at the audience. They then look at each other. They seem to be sizing each other up. In unison they walk towards their seats and sit down, leaving the far R one empty. This should all last one and half minutes. They sit as the Oompa Loompas' song comes to an end

Oompa Loompas (recorded)

Oompa Loompa doompadee doo,
I've got another puzzle for you.
Oompa Loompa doompadah dee,
If you are wise you will listen to me.

Who do you blame when your kid is a brat,
Pampered and spoiled like a Siamese cat?
Blaming the kids is a lion of shame,
You know exactly who's to blame:
The mother and the father!

Oompa Loompa doompadee dah,
 If you're not spoiled then you will go far.
 You will live in happiness too,
 Like the Oompa Loompa
 Doompadee do.

The Lights go down on all but William and Jack

William You're depressing me now.

Jack Really?

William You see you've lost me. At the beginning I was with you. But not now. I'm a little disappointed.

Jack Sorry.

William You really think that? You've thought it over, came to an opinion, you believe that?

Jack It is popular.

William Well, so is body piercing but that isn't a good thing, is it?

Jack I suppose.

William So let's look at the facts. A single man lives in a castle in the middle of ... Where is it set again?

Jack Film or book?

William There's a difference?

Jack Both films changed some details. It doesn't really matter.

William Well in the book it's set wherever it's set — and this man lives in his big house in the middle of the town. He lives with dwarfs. Nothing wrong with that. But they're orange. Orange dwarfs with green hair.

Jack And there's only twenty of them making the world's supply of chocolate ... None of this is meant to be realistic.

William But why make them dwarfs? Why the green hair? Why make them orange in the first place? Can you see where I'm going with this?

Jack Kind of.

William What's wrong with the ordinary?

Jack It's for children. Ordinary's boring, maybe?

William Which is my original point about these children's writers! As if a little boy who shares a giant bed with his grandparents — four

of them! — as if he'd ever in the real world win this extraordinary chocolate empire!

Jack (*groaning*) Yeah.

William You know in the real world it would have been that fat German boy who falls into the chocolate lake at the beginning of the tour. In the real world he's the winner.

Jack I think I might have to ...

William This is how it really ends. He falls in. His father gets these big time lawyers to sue the shit out of Willy Wonka. They look into his shady past, his very dodgy personal life with those orange midgits. He's dragged through the tabloids with paedophilia ringing in his ears. They make shit out of him! Willy Wonka is no more. He's done. He's doing twenty-five years in a high security prison being passed around his fellow prisoners like the proverbial box of Quality Street. In the outside, the Germans win, 'cause let's face it the Germans always win. The fat German kiddy —

Jack His name is Augustus.

William Right, Augustus ... Well, he inherits everything as part of his settlement. He gets it all. And because he's a fat glutton he can't stop eating all this chocolate. The more the Oompa Loompas make the more Augustus eats. He's eighteen years old and forty stone. One day he wakes up, stretches for the television remote and dies of a massive coronary sclerosis. That is the real world. Do you understand this? Where exactly are you getting confused?

Jack It's only a children's story.

William It's a lie! What's the point? What are they telling us?

Jack What are who telling us?

William The writers! Our parents! Harry fucking Potter? In the real world he's still under the stairs. He's a thirty-year-old retard who's developed his own under-the-stairs language!

Jack The point is ...

William Yes?

Jack The point is — is that children don't want to read the true stories. What child wants to read the news?! It's just escape. It's important that we dream of other things.

William Fuck off! Life's too short. If the world is going to evolve in any way — children should be told what's really happening. Cold,

clear facts ... That's what's taken us down from the trees, that's what powers economy ...

Jack A lot of these children's stories are metaphors. The writers are expressing important issues in creative ways!

William "Expressing important ..."? You see, you're depressing me again!

Jack (*to himself*) Fuck sake.

William Do you think any eight-year-old finishing reading Charlie and the Chocolate Factory thinks anything other than, "I'd love a Never-ending Gob Stopper, Grandpa!"? Listen to me, John...

Jack It's Jack.

William They're trying to keep children young! Adults. Publishers. Fucking writers. They don't want children thinking for themselves. They see children as a threat. They want to keep everything "fantasy". This J.K. Rowling woman! She is the enemy. She should be taken out. Erased. Removed. Exterminated.

A pause

Jack So that's what you're doing in a Harry Potter Chatroom? Trying to drum up some interest in an assassination attempt on J.K. Rowling?

A slight pause

William Well, are you interested?

A slight pause

Jack I can't. I have to do my geography homework.

The Lights cross-fade to Eva and Emily

Eva But I was younger then and she just came on the scene, remember?

Emily Yeah.

Eva You're six years of age and that's a critical age.

Emily Of course.

Eva And the video with her at school in her school uniform and pigtails ...

Emily She looked lovely.

Eva You wanted to be her, didn't ya?

Emily She didn't have her tits done then?

Eva That was much later.

Emily But even then they were a decent size. Certainly a B-Cup.

Eva But at six you wanted to be her. And that video — wasn't it a bit creepy — in hindsight — but that thing she was doing with her tongue — it was very sexual.

Emily We didn't notice.

Eva It wasn't for the kiddies.

Emily It was for the older boys and the daddies.

Eva She's in her school uniform with her pigtails and sticking out her tongue but it's subtle. Flicking it in and out like a little parrot.

Emily It was a bit seedy.

Eva So I'm watching that video after not seeing it since I was six — and I have to say I felt betrayed by Britney. You know how her songs and videos were all about that journey from girl to woman ...

Emily Yeah.

Eva And it sort of felt good, didn't it? Like Britney Spears was a part of your puberty.

Emily I remember having my first period and listening to *I'm Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman* and thinking, "Thanks Britney. My sentiments exactly!"

Eva She felt like a spokeswoman.

Emily Oh, definitely.

Eva But as I watched *Hit Me Baby One More Time* and all that sexual stuff with her tongue and just how cropped that crop-top was ...

Emily Was her belly-button pierced back then?

Eva Probably.

Emily Sorry, go on.

Eva I got really angry over that betrayal. It's no longer Britney who's talking to us but some pervert record producer who's got this vision, this plan of turning every six-year-old girl in the western world into a tongue-flicking, crop-topped-belly-button-pierced temptress.

Emily Have you got your belly-button pierced?

Eva Yeah, of course.

Emily Did it hurt?

Eva It's not as bad as you hear. But anyway Britney, Britney ... !

Emily Yeah, Britney.

Eva Don't you think a lot of young girls began to feel that betrayal?

Emily Both of us did.

Eva And maybe that's why her career died a slow death. She lied to us.

Emily You don't think it has to do with her music being shit?

Eva A little bit —

Emily And that she's essentially a poor girl with no respect for money and that's why she's an unmarried mother with fluctuating weight problems.

Eva But don't you think the fans realized that they were being manipulated — that they made a stand against that pervert record producer ...

Emily Britney got burnt.

Eva Britney was thick.

Emily She made her money.

Eva She lost our respect. If I met Britney Spears tomorrow I would gently pull her to one side, place my arms around her shoulders like I'm going to hug her, move my face towards her like I'm going to kiss her — and whisper in her ear, "Britney Spears, you sold my childhood soul."

Emily Oh, that's cruel.

Eva "You sold my childhood soul." Then I'd smash her in the face.

Emily And what would Britney say?

Eva *Hit Me Baby One More Time.*

Emily Of course.

Eva (*seriously*) Her day of judgement will come when some teenage girl will stop her outside Burger King and say, "You sold my childhood soul, bitch."

Emily laughs but Eva doesn't. Pause

Emily I better go. It's been very nice talking to you, whoever you are.

Eva Can we talk some more? I had an argument with my bitch-mother and I'm feeling terrible.

Emily OK. *(Pause)* So what do you want to talk about?

Pause. Eva thinks and decides

Eva Murder.

Music

Jim walks on stage and stops. He faces the audience and sighs. He walks to his seat next to Laura and sits

The music cuts out and the Lights cross-fade to Jim and Laura

Jim And you really don't mind listening to this?

Laura That's what the room's all about.

Jim But you'd say if you did mind? If it was too draining, too annoying, too boring, maybe ... ?

Laura I don't mind listening.

A pause

Jim Maybe I shouldn't even be in this place. I don't know whether it's that serious yet.

Laura *(directly)* There isn't a scale of depression here. I'm here at the other end and I'm here to listen to you. If you want to talk, Jim, then talk. If you don't then don't talk.

A pause

Jim Right.

Laura Don't be nervous.

Jim I'll talk then.

Laura OK.

A pause

Jim I'm a Roman Catholic — and it's last Easter — and ahhh — and every year our parish does a big Passion play in our local church. My mother's very active in the church. She's the Virgin Mary.

Laura Which would make you Jesus Christ.

Jim In the Passion play she's the Virgin Mary.

Laura I understand.

Jim And my whole family get involved. I've got three older brothers and they're Roman soldiers. They're very broad — not like me — and they look the part. One year my brother Derek went too heavy on Jesus and actually popped his knee right open. It was a mess. But anyway, this year and my mother runs into my bedroom with her "terrific news". She's building it up like she's going to tell me that I'm going to get a stab at playing a centurion — until she tells me — they want me to play John.

Laura Well, John's a great part.

Jim Yeah, but he's a bit gay.

Laura How do you mean?

Jim I've got nothing against gay people.

Laura St John was gay?

Jim Historically speaking, he probably wasn't gay. But in our parish it's always the slightly effeminate boys who get to play John.

Laura OK.

Jim Like I say — I've got nothing against gays. I respect the gay community. They're tough, they know their own mind, they stand out and they don't care, you know. I respect them. But I'm not like that at all. I'm just a sap with no bottle who knows nothing. I'm not interesting enough to play the gay icon that is St John. In a million years I could never get away with those lime robes.

Laura Lime?

Jim It's sort of an unspoken thing in the parish. It's a bit weird.

Laura Right, carry on.

Jim We do a few rehearsals with my mother as the Virgin Mary and I've got to get emotional when Jesus is dying on the cross and she says to Mary, "Woman behold your son" while looking over at me. And I'm supposed to break down at that point because I know that

Jesus is just about to croak it but I'm getting very nervous because basically I'm a terrible actor and I'm all blocked up.

Laura Emotionally blocked?

Jim Exactly.

Laura Right.

Jim So I tell my mother I want to drop out of the play. I say it quiet so the others can't hear but she starts screaming at me and saying how typical it was — and did I have a backbone? — and why was I such a coward? — and why wasn't I like my older brothers — and all this shit. And then she says I'm like my dad. But what would I know? I haven't seen my dad since I was six — but she starts shouting, "You're just like your dad, Jim!" — "Just like your dad walking out on things! Walking out on me! Gutless!" I mean, I hate her just then. Why did she have to bring up my dad in front of all of those people like that. Why? So the following night is the Passion play proper and I'm kneeling and looking up at Jesus. He's doing a wonderful job dying on the cross, this guy called Nick Lawson. He's into amateur dramatics in a big way. I actually saw him in a production of *Aladdin* playing the Widow Twankey and I swear to God he was hilarious — but as Jesus Christ he was even better — obviously not in a hilarious way but ...

Laura I understand.

Jim Right. So Nick's line to me and my mother is coming up and I'm still really furious with her from the night before. "Woman, behold your son," cries Nick. (*Pause*) At the start I didn't know whether it was his great delivery or just thinking about my mother being my mother — but I started to cry. I'm crying really hard. People are thinking that this is wonderful. I completely upstage Nick's crucifixion and the night's suddenly about St John and whether he's going to be all right and if he'll have the strength to carry on and start and finish his gospel. But anyway! Anyway! Afterwards, and my mother is having a lemonade in the sacristy and I'm out of my lime robes and looking over at her. And I realize why I was crying back then. (*Pause*) I was crying because I know my mother doesn't like me. (*Pause*) If I really remind her of the man she hates, the man who left us when I was six — then maybe I should walk away too. But where to? Where do I go to?

A pause

Laura The rule in the room is we don't give advice. We just listen.

Jim OK.

A pause

So what about you? Do you have anything you want to share?

Laura I just listen.

Jim No problems?

Laura Of course ... but I prefer to listen to other peoples'.

Jim What do you get out of that?

Laura I'm not too sure.

A slight pause

Jim Knowing that there are other teenagers struggling probably makes you feel better about your own problems.

Laura No.

A pause

Jim These are very strange places, aren't they? Like I said, I don't know whether I should be really here. Whether it's that serious yet. What do you think?

Laura As I said ...

Jim "The rule in the room is we don't give advice." Fine. (*He sighs. Pause*) Have you been to many suicide chatrooms?

Laura Yes.

Jim And do they help you?

Laura Who said I needed to be helped?

A pause

Jim Can I know your real name?

Laura You can call me Laura.

Jim But is that your real name?

Laura Maybe.

Jim What city are you from?

Laura It doesn't matter. None of that really matters. You just need to know that there's someone listening to you. That's enough, isn't it?

Jim I suppose.

A pause

Will we talk about something else, Laura?

Laura I don't talk, I listen. You talk.

Jim Talk about what?

A pause

Laura Tell me about the day your father went missing.

The Lights change

Music plays for some time. We watch the six do nothing. The music cuts abruptly

The Lights change; William, Jack, Eva and Emily are lit

William We need to set rules.

Emily Why?

Eva We don't use our real names. We don't say what schools we're from ...

William We know we're from the same area and that's enough. Just leave out the details. It gives us more freedom.

Eva Keeps it impersonal.

William I'll use William.

Eva I'll be Eva.

Jack I always use Jack.

Emily Emily.

Eva How do we know you're not two middle-aged men trying to get off chatting up two teenage girls?

William How do we know you're not two frustrated housewives trying to take advantage of two innocent altar boys?

Emily Are you altar boys?

Jack Are you desperate housewives?

Emily

Eva

William

Jack

} (*together*) No.

William Excellent.

Jack I was an altar boy.

William Oh, fuck.

Jack No, I quite liked it.

Eva How?

Jack When you're seven you've got a very simple idea of life and for a while, dressed in my altar boy's gown every Sunday, I really thought I was some sort of angel. I called myself "an angel-waiter".

Emily Angel-waiter?

Jack You see I believed in Adam and Eve and that God created everything in six days and that he had a rest on the Sunday. And I had this image of the church being like a restaurant/café for God to rest in ...

Eva Or a McDonald's?

Jack Exactly. And it was my job as an angel-waiter to serve him on his day off.

Eva So what does God eat?

William Chicken nuggets.

Emily laughs

Jack I was only seven.

Emily That's very cute.

Eva How long did you think this?

Jack Several months.

Emily And the whole altar boy thing?

Jack Four years.

Eva Four years?

Emily Are you religious now?

William I'd rather not talk about religion. You either do or you don't believe. End of discussion.

Eva (*to herself*) Dick.

William We're all around fifteen, sixteen. We're all middle class kids of varying wealth growing up in and around Chiswick. I think we know each other's views on boring issues like religion.

Emily Oh right. So what's mine?

William (*quickly*) You're disillusioned with the official Church and yet you remain spiritual and have defined your own personal religion based upon the simple idea — that people should be nice to each other.

A slight pause

Emily Bastard.

Eva laughs

William It's a cliché. We're all clichés ...

Jack Yeah, all people can be placed in little boxes like that.

William They can.

Eva So what are you?

William A pain in the arse.

Eva Apart from that.

William I'm a cynic. I'm an angry cynic.

Eva Very attractive.

William I'm not interested in being attractive. Why should I be?

Eva Because attractive people go further ...

William Yeah I think I glanced at that article in one of my sister's magazines ...

Eva People see a cynic as a black hole. They're nothing. While a person who might be attractive or charming ... Well, they're at the very centre of things — changing things — manipulating events. What are you but a bad smell?

William That's very kind of you.

Eva You know what I mean.

William You think I'm heavy-handed?

Emily You certainly sound that way.

Jack He's bloody opinionated.

William Well that's the name of this room, isn't it? "Chiswick's Bloody Opinionated"!

Emily (*groaning*) Christ.

William I'm at the age — we're all at the age when we have to stand up for something. To me it's not about making friends and going bowling and sitting in McDonald's bumming cigarettes and talking about the latest McFly LP — that's a waste of fucking time! Now's the time to be a pain in the arse and step away from other people. We're teenagers! That used to mean something. It was about revolution. Apart from the punks what have teenagers achieved in the last thirty years? Nothing.

Jack Did punks achieve something?

William They made their mark! They were angry and they showed it.

Emily My mother was a punk. We've got this photograph from 1979 and she's got a cold sore on her cheek the size of a tennis ball. Quite amazing.

Eva It was dirty work being a punk.

William Nowadays teenagers wouldn't go that far before cracking open their cleansers.

Emily Oh, definitely.

Jack I don't know about that. I cultivated a boil on my neck last year for a few weeks. My mother brought me to the doctor and I was gutted when he said he wouldn't lance it ...

Eva Aww...

Jack But he gave me this black plaster with this tiny hole in the middle. It sort of draws the pus out towards the little hole.

Eva Do we have — ?

Jack So I'm watching television with my dad and my baby brother and above the telly I hear this noise. (*He makes a quiet splurting noise*) I swear to God it hit the wall behind me.

Emily That's disgusting.

Jack But it was a revolution!

Eva How?

Jack My body was revolting.

Eva (*slowly*) Oh, the comedy.

William But does anyone know what I'm talking about?

Emily Not really.

Eva Yeah, I do.

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