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concord
theatricals

BREEDING

by Barry McStay

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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BREEDING received its world premiere on 19th April 2023 at the King's Head Theatre, Islington, London, presented by Gabriella Sills Productions in association with Mark Gatiss.

Cast

BETH Aamira Challenger
EOIN Barry McStay
ZEB Daniel Nicholson

Creative Team

Writer – Barry McStay
Director – Matthew Iliffe
Set and Costume Designer – Ceci Calf
Lighting Designer – Ryan Joseph Stafford
Sound Designer – Julian Starr
Casting Consultant – Nadine Rennie
Intimacy Co-ordinator – Jess Tucker Boyd

Production Team

Producer – Gabriella Sills
Associate Producer – Mark Gatiss
Production Manager – Carrie Croft
Assistant Production Manager – Sophy Leys Johnston
Company Stage Manager – Lamesha Ruddock
PR – Arabella Neville-Rolfe
Original Artwork – Madison Coby
Poster Photography – Ed Rees

This script may have changed during rehearsals and differ from the final production.

Cast

BARRY MCSTAY | WRITER & EOIN

Barry McStay is an Irish writer and actor based in London.

Writer – His first play *Our Island* (dir. Maisie Lee, Project Arts Centre) ran at the Dublin Fringe Festival 2015 and was nominated for five Dublin Fringe Awards and shortlisted for a Writers Guild of Ireland Award.

Vespertilio (dir. Lucy Jane Atkinson) was his UK debut play, winning a Show Of The Week Award at VAULT Festival 2019. It later ran at Smock Alley at the Dublin Fringe Festival in September 2019 before being streamed as part of King's Head Theatre 'Plays On Film' in April 2021.

Other work includes *Bir Tawil* (dir. Caitriona McLaughlin, Druid Theatre, 2017) and *The First* (dir. Emily Jenkins, VAULT Festival 2020). He has collaborated with Fishamble: The New Writing Company and has written short work for Miniaturists. His work has been performed at the Abbey Theatre, Arcola Theatre, Old Red Lion, Waterloo East and National Youth Theatre. His writing has been longlisted for the Bruntwood Prize, the Theatre 503 Playwriting Award and the Papatango Prize. Barry has a BA (English Literature & History) from Trinity College Dublin and an MA (Acting) from East 15 Acting School.

Actor – Theatre includes: *Doctor Who: Time Fracture* (Immersive LDN); *Phantom Peak* (League Of Adventure); *Libby's Eyes* (Bunker Theatre); *Five Tins and a Matter of Time* (The Yard); *Romeo and Juliet* (Rosemary Branch); *Noah's Ark* (Blue Elephant).

Screen – *EastEnders* and *A Ghost Story For Christmas: Count Magnus* (BBC).

DAN NICHOLSON | ZEB

Theatre – *Sleep No More* (Punchdrunk); *The Man Who Would Be King* (Dawn State); *The Wonderful Discovery of Witches in the County of Lancaster* (Dawn State).

Screen – *Grace* (ITV); *Doctors* (BBC); *Ghosts* (BBC); *Liar* (ITV). Dan trained at Drama Centre.

AAMIRA CHALLENGER | BETH

Theatre – *The Lavender Hill Mob* (UK Tour); *Macbeth* (US Tour); *The Great Gatsby* (US Tour); *Blithe Spirit* (Theatre Royal Bath/ UK Tour); *Romeo and Juliet* (Wales Millennium Centre); *Macbeth* (The Shakespeare Project); *The Case of the Frightened Lady* (UK Tour); *The Bacchanals* (Etcetera Theatre).

Screen – *Paper Straws* (Roundhouse); *Circle Triangle* (Bambira); *Panorama* (BBC).

Aamira trained at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London, and The American Academy, New York.

Creative Team

MATTHEW ILIFFE | DIRECTOR

Director – *Bacon* (Finborough Theatre); *Four Play* (Above The Stag); *The Niceties* (Finborough Theatre); *Maggie May* (Finborough Theatre) and *The Burnt Part Boys* (Park Theatre).

Assistant/associate director – *Assassins* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *BLACK SUPERHERO* (Royal Court); *Musik* (Leicester Square Theatre); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Changeling Theatre Company); *Romeo & Juliet* (Insane Root Theatre Company); *Brass* (National Youth Music Theatre).

Matthew graduated from the University of Bristol with a First Class Honours Degree in Theatre & Performance Studies and trained on the StoneCrabs Young Directors Programme. He won Best Director at the 2023 Off-West End Awards for his production of *Bacon* at the Finborough Theatre.

CECI CALF | DESIGNER

Ceci graduated from Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, and is now based in London working as a theatre designer and associate.

RYAN JOSEPH STAFFORD | LIGHTING DESIGNER

Ryan works internationally as a Lighting Designer for theatre, musicals, and dance. He trained at Rose Bruford College, graduating with a First Class BA Honours Degree in Lighting Design. Ryan was awarded a Masters with Distinction in Art & Politics from Goldsmiths, University of London following his research into 'Political Light'.

In 2019, Ryan received the 'Michael Northern Award for Excellence in Lighting Design' from the Association of Lighting Designers.

Recent designs – *Natalia Osipova: Force of Nature* (New York City Center); *Red Riding Hood: Rock 'n' Roll Panto* (Liverpool Everyman); *To Start With* (Sadler's Wells); *Vortex* (Russell Maliphant Dance Company); *Shades of Blue* (Sadler's Wells, Matsena Productions, BBC Arts); *Grimeboy* (Birmingham Rep); *Bacon* (Finborough); *Dance for Ukraine* (London Coliseum); *Codi* (National Dance Company of Wales); *Isla* (Theatr Clwyd & Royal Court); *Curtain Up* (Theatr Clwyd); *Greater than Lion* (Kennedy Muntanga Dance Theatre, Messums); *Generation Goldfish* (Bayerisches Staatsballett, Munich); *NYDC X Russell Maliphant* (Sadler's Wells); *Left from Write* (Norwegian National Ballet II, Linbury, Royal Opera House); *Together, Not the Same* (Sadler's Wells); *Easy Virtue, Robin Hood* (Watermill); *The Island* (Fio, UK Tour); *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (Elufowoju, Jr. Ensemble, Arcola Theatre).

Ryan is an Associate Artist of Red Oak Theatre Company and Bohemian Theatre Company.

JULIAN STARR | SOUND DESIGNER

Sound Designer and Composer – *Return to the Dirt* (Queensland Theatre Company); *Elektra/Orestes* (Brisbane Metro Arts; Blue Curtains Best Sound Design 2020); *Miss Peony The Australian Tour* (Belvoir St Theatre); *Hyperdream* (The Old Fitz Theatre; Sydney Theatre Award Best Sound Design); *ZOG* (West End & UK Tour); *Animal*, *Rose* (Offie Nominated Best Sound Design); *Never Not Once*, *Cry Havoc*, *Martha*, *Josie and the Chinese Elvis* (Park Theatre); *Lesbian Space Crime* and *You Only Live Forever* (Soho Theatre); *Sleepwalking* (Hampstead Theatre); *Axolotl* (Lithuania Tour); *How To Survive an Apocalypse*, *Scrounger* (Offie Nominated Best Sound Design); *The Wind of Heaven* (The Finborough Theatre); *The Dwarfs* (White Bear, Offie Nominated Best Sound Design); *Aisha* (Tristan Bates Theatre, Offie Nominated Best Sound Design); *Kindred Spirits*, *The Woman Who Amuses Herself* (Brockley Jack Studio; both Offie Nominated Best Sound Design); *Horse Play* (Riverside Studio); *Song From Far Away*, *Not Dying* (HOME Manchester).

Events Sound Engineer – *The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo* (Edinburgh Castle).

Site Specific – *The Comedy of Errors*, *Pericles* (17th Valtice Castle, Czech Republic); *Kings Head Theatre 50th Celebration*; *The Third* (V&A Museum).

Media – *The Fizzy Sherbet Podcast*; *White Tuesday* (The Sarah Awards New York City Best Audio Fiction). ABC/BBC/Disney Television Series *Bluey* Music Editor.

Touring Sound Engineer – *An Inspector Calls* (UK/Ireland Tour); Sound Engineer *Songs For Nobodies* (West End);

Sound Engineer – *The Tap Pack* (West End); *Richard III* (Sydney Opera House).

Associate Sound Designer to The Finborough Theatre London.

NADINE RENNIE CDG | CASTING CONSULTANT

Nadine was in-house Casting Director at Soho Theatre for over fifteen years; working on new plays by writers including Dennis Kelly, Bryony Lavery, Arinze Kene, Roy Williams, Philip Ridley, Laura Wade, Hassan Abdulrazzak, Pheobe Waller-Bridge and Oladipo Agboluaje.

Since going freelance in January 2019, Nadine has worked for theatres across London and the UK including Arcola Theatre, Orange Tree Theatre, Sheffield Crucible, Leeds Playhouse, Paines Plough, Fuel Theatre, National Theatre of Wales, Northern Stage, Pleasance Theatre London, Almeida, Lyric, Hampstead and Minack theatres. She continues to cast on a regular basis for Soho Theatre.

Recent and upcoming work – *He Said She Said* (Synergy Theatre Project & Kiln Theatre); *Es & Flo* (WMC & Kiln Theatre); *Leaves of Glass* (Park Theatre, Lidless Theatre); *Agatha* (Theatre 503); *Further Than The Furthest Thing* (Minack Theatre, Cornwall).

TV – BAFTA-winning CBBC series *Dixi*, casting the first three series.

Nadine is a member of the Casting Directors Guild and currently sits on the Committee.

Previous Set & Costume Design – *Waiting For Anya* (Barn Theatre, Cirencester); *Farm Hall* (Jermyn Street, Theatre Royal Bath); *Under The Black Rock* (Arcola); *A Skull In Connemara* (Dailes Theatre, Latvia); *Not Now* (Finborough); *Othello* (Watermill Theatre); *Twelfth Night* (Kew Gardens); *Orlando* (Jermyn Street); *Warrior Queens* (Sadler's Wells); *Tapped* (Theatre503); *The Mozart Question* (Barn Theatre, Cirencester); *To Have And To Hold* (The Hope Theatre); *Yes So I Said Yes and How To Survive An Apocalypse* (Finborough Theatre); *Rocky Road* (Jermyn Street, Stream Theatre); *Not Quite Jerusalem* (Finborough); *One Million Tiny Plays About Britain* (Jermyn Street & Watermill Theatre); *The Wind of Heaven* (Finborough); *Five Green Bottles*, Tithonus R&D (Sherman); *Cheer and Mydidæ* (The Other Room); *The Cut* (LAMDA & Lion And Unicorn); *Yellow Moon* (LAMDA).

Previous Associate Design credits – *Anything Is Possible If You Think About It Hard Enough* (Southwark Playhouse).

Production Team

GABRIELLA SILLS | PRODUCER

Gabriella is a producer whose highlights include winning Best Production at the Scottish Theatre Awards at Edinburgh Fringe 2022 and recently being awarded a Stage One Bursary. She is Director of Tethered Wits, an open-air touring company, and Gabriella Sills Productions, focusing on new writing in the Off West End. She also works in theatre marketing on Olivier Award nominated shows such as *SIX*, *The Play That Goes Wrong*, and *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*.

Producer – *Blackout* (Theatre503, Old Joint Stock); *Bits 'N' Pieces* (Best Production at the Scottish Theatre Awards, Leith Arches); *1902* (Off West End Award Winner, UK Tour); *Choose Your Fighter* (Leicester Curve Studios).

Associate Producer – *Starry* (London Workshop, The Other Palace).

Gabriella Sills Productions

Gabriella Sills Productions is the official theatre production company of Gabbie Sills, with a strong focus on bringing new writing to the Off West End and beyond. We believe in the power theatre has to inspire, educate – perhaps entertain – and take us beyond comfortable existence.

Instagram: @gabriellasillsproductions | Twitter: @GS_Prods

CARRIE CROFT | PRODUCTION MANAGER

Carrie is a Production Manager, based in London. Alongside freelance work she is the resident Production Manager for Rose Bruford Southwest (ALRA). She completed the MA Collaborative Theatre Production and Design course at Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Distinction in 2022. Carrie is particularly interested in, theatre with a sociopolitical message; particularly shows with historical, feminist or LGBTQ+ themes, as well as performances with accessibility and education at its core.

Recent theatre – *Fucking Men* (Waterloo East); *Earthquakes in London* and *Ring Ring* (Omnibus Theatre); *Under the Black Rock* (Arcola Theatre); *Sus* (Park Theatre); *Nora: A Doll's House* and *The Ballad of Maria Martin* (Pleasance Theatre); *Three Winters* (Battersea Arts Centre); *Three Sisters* (Brixton House Theatre); *It's a MotherF**cking Pleasure* (Greenwich Theatre).

SOPHY LEYS JOHNSTON | ASSISTANT PRODUCTION MANAGER

Sophy graduated from the University of Glasgow in 2020 with an MLitt in Theatre Studies.

Previous Assistant Production Manager credits – *3 Winters*, (Rose Bruford College South West, Battersea Arts Centre); *The Ballad of Maria Marten* (RBCSW, The Pleasance); *Nora: A Doll's House* (RBCSW, The Pleasance); *Three Sisters* (RBCSW, Brixton House).

Previous Stage Manager credits – *Ring Ring* (RBCSW, Omnibus Theatre); *A Christmas Carol* (Antic Disposition); *LRP Summer Season* (London Repertory Players); *Moment of Grace* (The Hope Theatre); *Mariam* (Cutpurse Theatre, also credited as Assistant Producer); *Animal Farm* (John Lyon's Theatre); *Sunflower* (Workshop Theatre Company).

LAMESHA RUDDOCK | COMPANY STAGE MANAGER

Theatre – *Baghdaddy* (Royal Court); *Hamilton* (West End); *The Cherry Orchard* (Yard).

Lamesha has also worked for the Kiln and produced at Stratford East and Battersea Arts Centre and through the Yard has undertaken extensive shadowing work at the Arcola and Young Vic.



The King's Head Theatre was established in 1970. Passionate about great theatre, we are known for our challenging work and support of early career artists.

Our artistic policy is joyful, irreverent, colourful & queer. King's Head Theatre showcases work across a wide range of performance styles: from plays to musicals, to opera & cabaret, to drag & comedy. You're always bound to find something that's entertaining, alternative & just for you.

Our theatre focuses on showcasing LGBTQ+ work which explores the full spectrum of experiences symbolised by the rainbow flag. We are a home for a new wave of diverse queer theatre makers & we love to embrace stories that haven't been told before, in ways that haven't been invented yet.

We believe in trying to find sustainable solutions to making work on the fringe, & we were the first fringe venue to develop a fringe house agreement with Equity which makes a commitment to paying all our performers & stage managers ethically. Our theatre has, and always will be, a place for new talent, on & off-stage. The future of the fringe is here.

Support King's Head Theatre

Each year we need to raise £100,000 on top of ticket sales in order to keep our doors open and to continue to produce and present artistically excellent work. We hope you become one of our supporters and join us in championing artists at every stage of their careers. To support King's Head Theatre, why not join our Friends Scheme from £25 per year. Find out more at www.kingsheadtheatre.com

For the King's Head Theatre

Guest Artistic Director*	Tom Ratcliffe
Senior Producer	Sofi Berenger
Associate Producer	Zoe Weldon
Producing Coordinator	Izzy Edwards
Marketing Coordinator	Valentina Londono
Theatre Manager	Christina Gazelidis
Duty Technician & Manager	Maria Cleasby
Box Office Supervisor	Georgie Brown
Casual Box Office Staff	Victoria Strupish, Hannah Collins
Casual Duty Tech Staff	Alex Lewer, Han Sayles
Interim Project Director	(Capital Project) Louise Chantal

Trustees

Aaron Porter, Kate Farrell, Matthew Hedges, Molly Waiting, Richard Williamson & James Seabright (Chair)

* *Breeding* was programmed as part of THE TAKEOVER at King's Head Theatre. Four LGBTQI+ guest Artistic Directors have been handed the keys to the theatre to programme and curate their own season of work. *Breeding* is part of Tom Ratcliffe's A Queer Interrogation season, focused on platforming new work from LGBTQI+ writers. Other Guest Artistic Directors as part of THE TAKEOVER are Isabel Adomakoh Young, Tania Azevedo and David Cumming.

CHARACTERS

BETH – British, thirties

EOIN – Irish, thirties

ZEB – British, thirties

SETTING

Various locations in London.

TIME

Covers a non-chronological period of about fifteen years, mainly focusing on the events of about a year in the early 2020s.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Note on the text

Line breaks within speech are intended to indicate the characters speech and thought patterns.

A dash – is used to indicate hesitation, interruption, change of mind or the unsaid.

A slash / is used to indicate overlapping lines.

Lines without a slash / may still overlap.

Scenes from the past are in *italics*, the present in regular.

Content warning: Strong language, homophobic language, sexual references. References to cancer and drug use. Themes of illness, bereavement, infertility, homophobia, relationship difficulties.

THANKS

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BETH. Odd names.

You don't have much else to go on when you take on a new case. Just the basics – name, address, marital status – and that first request, to begin the process. You know what they want – but not who they are.

So you look at the names.

And they had odd names. I remember immediately clocking that. A little “hmm”. Should that be an S – no, it's definitely a Z – I bet he gets that a lot. It is a he, isn't it? Yes, two hes – Gays! You get more and more of them now – which is. It feels a bit – yeah.

Two men. Odd names.

And from those names, you begin.

EOIN. *Zeb?*

ZEB. *Zeb.*

EOIN. *Zeb?!*

ZEB. *Zeb.*

EOIN. *Your name's Zeb?!*

ZEB. *I know.*

EOIN. *It's a bit –*

ZEB. *A bit, yeah –*

EOIN. *That's so / – weird –*

ZEB. */ It's very unusual –*

EOIN. *With a -*

ZEB. *Yes a Zed -*

EOIN. *- a Zed -*

ZEB. *- or a Zeeeeee -*

EOIN. *Not an / Ess?*

ZEB. */ No, a Zed -*

EOIN. *Zed for / Zeb -*

ZEB. */ Zeb, yes -*

EOIN. *And it's your / actual -*

ZEB. */ It's my actual / name -*

EOIN. */ Your actual fucking name, right, it's not short for -*

ZEB. *Nope -*

EOIN. *I mean, it's not / Sebastian -*

ZEB. */ Zebedee, no - or Sebastian -*

EOIN. *Or Zebastian -*

ZEB. *It's not / short for anything -*

EOIN. */ Zebbbbbbb -*

ZEB. *Just Zeb -*

EOIN. *"With a Zee" -*

ZEB. *If it was Sebastian / it would -*

EOIN. */ Yeah, it would be -*

ZEB. *Right it would be Seb -*

EOIN. *Ess for Seb -*

ZEB. *Yes -*

EOIN. *Essssssss -*

ZEB. *And it's / a Zed -*

EOIN. / *Zed, yes -*

ZEB. *And anyway, Seb is a bit of a -*

EOIN. *Oh yeah -*

ZEB. *Right? -*

EOIN. *It's a real / twat name, right -*

ZEB. / *Twat name, exactly -*

EOIN. *And you don't seem / like -*

ZEB. / *Oh I'm a total twat -*

EOIN. *Oh right?*

ZEB. *- but I don't have a twat name.*

EOIN. *Ha.*

ZEB. *Undercover twat.*

EOIN. *Sorry - you must get / it all the time -*

ZEB. / *I get it all the time -*

EOIN. *Sorry if it's -*

ZEB. *No, I'm used to it. And yours?*

EOIN. *Me?*

ZEB. *What's your name?*

EOIN. *Oh right - sorry - it's Eoin.*

ZEB. *What?*

EOIN. *Eoin -*

ZEB. *Owen! Welsh?*

EOIN. *No, Irish -*

ZEB. *Irish, great -*

EOIN. *My accent's not / very -*

ZEB. / *So is that O - W - / E -*

EOIN. / *Oh no - E - / O -*

ZEB. / *E?*

EOIN. *E, yeah it's pretty / fucking Irish -*

ZEB. / *That's fucking weird -*

EOIN. *Yeah -*

ZEB. *So E -*

EOIN. *E - O - I - N -*

ZEB. *E-O-I-N?*

EOIN. *Yep -*

ZEB. *And you thought / my name was -*

EOIN. / *Yeah, I thought your / name was -*

ZEB. / *I like Irish guys.*

EOIN. *At least it's not spelt the really weird way -*

ZEB. *There's a weirder way?*

EOIN. *E-O - G - H - A-N -*

ZEB. *G?!*

EOIN. *I know -*

ZEB. *That's fucking -*

EOIN. *Completely -*

ZEB. *Fucking bonkers - G?*

EOIN. *It's silent -*

ZEB. *I can hear that -*

EOIN. *Yeah -*

ZEB. *Eeeeeeeee / Ogggggggg Haaaaaaaaaannn -*

EOIN. / *Eeeeeee Oggggggg Haaaaaaaaan -*

ZEB. *That's mental.*

EOIN. *I agree.*

ZEB. *Stupid.*

EOIN. *Mad.*

ZEB. *I prefer your way.*

EOIN. *You do?*

ZEB. *Yeah.*

(They kiss.)

EOIN. *Zeb.*

ZEB. *Eoin.*

(They kiss again.)

EOIN. *What happens next?*

ZEB. *Jump.*

BETH. The first meeting is just a chat, to get to know you. I can answer any questions you might have, suggest various materials you can read to prepare yourselves for the long road ahead. It's quite relaxed, but it allows us to understand your situation and gives you a chance to properly understand what you're facing. If everyone is happy, you'll then fill in the Registration of Interest which grants us various powers in order to assess if you're appropriate to move on to Stage One.

(Intercom buzz.)

ZEB. Second floor!

EOIN. Are you wearing that?

ZEB. Of course I'm wearing that.

EOIN. Really?

ZEB. What's wrong with a t-shirt?

EOIN. It's an interview.

ZEB. Yes Eoin, to be parents, not CEOs – we don't want to look like we've tried too hard.

EOIN. We want to look capable.

ZEB. Of doing up our buttons? There's making an effort and there's desperate –

EOIN. Making sure the place isn't in a state is / hardly –

ZEB. / You should have baked some bread.

EOIN. What?

ZEB. The smell of fresh bread. Isn't that what you do when you want people to buy your flat?

EOIN. She's not buying the flat.

ZEB. What happens if you burn the bread?

EOIN. She'll think she's had a stroke – can you put a shirt on or something?

(Door knock.)

ZEB. I'll get it!

EOIN. No, I'll get it!

BETH. Hi, I'm Beth.

ZEB. Lovely to meet you, Beth. I'm Zeb.

EOIN. I'm Eoin, this is Zeb.

BETH. What a lovely flat.

EOIN. Thank you.

ZEB. It always looks this tidy.

EOIN. Can I get you tea, coffee, juice –

BETH. I'm fine.

EOIN. Okay.

ZEB. Sit wherever you like.

BETH. Thank you.

ZEB. That chair's a bit wobbly.

EOIN. We're going to get a new one actually.

BETH. Great.

EOIN. We own.

BETH. Oh, that was going to be one of my questions.

EOIN. Sorry, you should ask them in any order you like –

BETH. No no, it's fine –

EOIN. Please.

BETH. Do you want to just jump right in?

EOIN. Only if you want to?

BETH. It's pretty informal to begin with –

ZEB. Glad I didn't dress up for the occasion then.

BETH. So – adoption.

ZEB. Yes –

EOIN. I didn't offer you biscuits! Would you like some biscuits?

BETH. I probably shouldn't.

EOIN. Not as a bribe!

They're not a bribe. They're just biscuits.

BETH. No, I realise that.

EOIN. We've got Oreos, bourbons, chocolate-chip cookies

–

BETH. I do love a cookie but I'm fine thanks.

EOIN. Though obviously cookies aren't biscuits, they're cookies –

BETH. Great.

EOIN. Or are they?

BETH. Sorry?

EOIN. Is there a difference – like Jaffa Cakes? There's some tax reason they're cakes and not – you know? Who knows. I don't, you don't – anyway!

BETH. Yes.

So – congratulations for taking the plunge and contacting Southwark Council, first of all. It's a big decision, and we're always very proud of people who want to become adopters.

ZEB. Thank you.

BETH. Today is simply for me to meet you, you to meet me, to help you feel comfortable about what lies ahead and to help us assess if you're appropriate to continue.

ZEB. Appropriate?

BETH. Exactly. Once all the forms are filled in, we can start gathering references from family, friends, employers, significant previous partners –

ZEB. Previous partners! Well you can talk to Lloyd but he hates me.

EOIN. Zeb!

ZEB. I broke his phone –

EOIN. He dropped it.

ZEB. – he deserved it – if anything, it shows I'll be a parent who's strong on discipline.

EOIN. This isn't officially the interview yet, is it?

BETH. Not officially no – this is still the preamble.

EOIN. Okay.

BETH. I know it sounds like a lot. But if you're at this point, you're already incredibly brave. I just want you to feel good and be brilliant.

EOIN. Thank you.

ZEB. Thanks.

BETH. Great. Tell me a bit about yourselves. Eoin, you're Irish?

EOIN. Yes – the accent –

BETH. The name.

EOIN. Oh god, yes, of course, sorry –

BETH. It's very interesting. And Zeb – is that short for –?

ZEB. Nothing. It's just Zeb.

BETH. Zeb, not –

ZEB. (*Doing Liza.*) "It's Zeb with a zee not Seb with an ess 'cause Seb with an ess goes ss not zz".

Plus Seb is a real / twat name.

EOIN. / Twat name.

BETH. I was going to say, actually, my dad is a Seb.

ZEB. Present company excluded then. Or absent company.

BETH. And what do you do for work, Eoin?

EOIN. I'm studying for a business degree. Online. And I'm a painter and decorator.

BETH. Oh great. Is this all your own work?

EOIN. Yep.

BETH. Very nice.

ZEB. He's very good.

EOIN. If you need anything done up, I can give you my card.

BETH. Thanks.

EOIN. I mean, you have all my details anyway.

BETH. Yes.

EOIN. Probably won't want me poking around in your house while you're poking around in ours – not that you're poking around, it's your job and we volunteered for this.

BETH. Great. And what do you do, Zeb.

ZEB. Lawyer.

BETH. Oh.

ZEB. I don't seem like a lawyer, do I?

BETH. Well, no.

ZEB. Undercover lawyer.

BETH. I suppose that means you're detail-oriented.

ZEB. Which is a plus in a parent, right?

BETH. Of course.

ZEB. See Eoin, I'm impressing already!

BETH. Right at the beginning, it can be helpful to know your feelings and expectations about adoption. If you turn to page seven of these workbooks – there's a spider diagram for you to fill in. You can list whatever feelings you have, be they positive or negative. Maybe even add legs to the spider if there's not enough room.

ZEB. If we add more legs to it – then it's not a spider anymore.

BETH. Just – fill in as much as you need. What are your hopes, your worries –

ZEB. My main worry is that my darling husband is scared of spiders.

EOIN. It's not that bad.

ZEB. He gets paralysed with fear.

EOIN. Just to be clear, I would – if it came to it – kill a spider to save our child.

BETH. Maybe just make a list instead.

EOIN. Why did I say that?

ZEB. She liked us.

EOIN. I would kill a spider!

ZEB. I think she really liked us!

EOIN. Don't tell your social worker you'd kill anything!
Insect-murdering eejit! And insulting her dad –

ZEB. Spiders are arachnids.

EOIN. What did I say?

ZEB. Insects. Insects have six legs.

EOIN. I know that.

ZEB. Good, cos it might come up in the final exam.

EOIN. Really?

ZEB. Seriously Eoin, relax. You're like this every time you meet someone new.

EOIN. What? No I'm not.

ZEB. My parents.

EOIN. Your parents are off-putting!

ZEB. You could have been warmer.

EOIN. I'm not used to all that kissing and body contact – and crystals!

ZEB. The crystal cleanse was a lot, for your first meeting.

EOIN. They warmed up to me.

ZEB. But even with normal people – like my housemates –

EOIN. Now in fairness, I hated your housemates.

ZEB. I know –

EOIN. They were such fucking – lawyers!

ZEB. I'm a fucking lawyer.

EOIN. Yeah but you're my fucking lawyer. They always treated me like some paint-spattered Irish pleb.

ZEB. But you're my paint-spattered Irish pleb. You just get nervous and you convince yourself people don't like you. Beth liked us.

EOIN. Why did you have to mention Lloyd?

ZEB. Cos I like the idea of Beth showing up and being all like "oh hello – Lloyd Carter? We are here to ask you some questions about your ex, Zeb, who is having a child and clearly making another man very happy indeed, you gaslighting piece of shit".

EOIN. You want this child for other reasons too, right?

ZEB. Obviously. The revenge is just an added bonus.

EOIN. We're going to be parents.

ZEB. If Beth decides we're appropriate.

EOIN. You're highly appropriate.

ZEB. Suck my dick.

EOIN. OK.

(They kiss.)

BETH. Stage One is the beginning of the formal evaluation. There are all sorts of background checks, homework for you to do as well as practical things like home assessments –

EOIN. I bought a lot of those little plastic plugs to cover up the sockets –

ZEB. Electricity diaphragms.

EOIN. They're not called that.

ZEB. They told us to take the Robert Mapplethorpe print down – in the hallway –

BETH. I remember –

ZEB. I put it back up when they left.

BETH. Disclosure and Barring Service –

ZEB. Making sure we don't touch kids.

BETH. Bank checks were all good. And references – your dad was full of praise, Eoin –

ZEB. Of course he was.

BETH. As were your parents.

ZEB. Did my mum freak you out with her gong bath?

BETH. They were very – unique. Your firm was effusive in its praise too –

ZEB. I should ask for a raise.

BETH. And Eoin, there was a letter from a Mrs Allen –

EOIN. Who?

BETH. Valerie Allen of Haringey?

EOIN. Val wrote a letter?

BETH. Apparently you told her you needed references? She said that you work for her?

EOIN. I mean I just painted her kitchen.

BETH. Well she also thinks you're very kind and would be an excellent dad.

EOIN. That's – really – nice.

BETH. And you're expected to attend preparation classes –

ZEB. SO many classes –

EOIN. Four classes –

ZEB. Endless classes. Lots of people asking lots of questions –

EOIN. As you'd expect –

ZEB. Everyone just worrying about saying the wrong thing or doing the wrong thing or being the wrong thing –

EOIN. We aren't the only gay couple –

ZEB. The 'New Normal', as the teacher keeps calling us.

EOIN. It's nice to not be the only ones.

ZEB. It's just this big room of stress and hope.

BETH. And medicals – you've both had your medicals –

ZEB. It took ages to get an appointment –

BETH. My other half works in the NHS, you don't need to tell me –

ZEB. Fucking Tories –

BETH. And everything was all clear on that front – so – good.

ZEB. Good.

EOIN. Good.

ZEB. Heyyyyy.