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BULLRING TECHNO MAKEOUT JAMZ

by Nathan Queeley-Dennis

SAMUEL FRENCH

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BULLRING TECHNO MAKEOUT JAMZ was first produced by Ellie Keel for Ellie Keel Productions in Paines Plough's Roundabout at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August 2023. The play was part of Ellie Keel's *Fearlessly Imaginative // Endlessly Exciting* Summer Season. It was an Ellie Keel Productions, Paines Plough, and Belgrade Theatre co-production, in association with the Royal Exchange Theatre. The cast was as follows:

NATHANIEL . . . . . Nathan Queeley-Dennis

CREATIVE TEAM

Writer | Nathan Queeley-Dennis

Director | Dermot Daly

Designer | Caitlin Mawhinney

Lighting Designer | David Doyle

Composer & Sound Designer | Tom Foskett-Barnes

Company Stage Manager | Aime Neeme

Dramaturgy | Dermot Daly, Suzanne Bell, and Tommo Fowler

EKP

Founded in 2019, Ellie Keel Productions (EKP) specialises in producing fearlessly imaginative new plays by outstanding writers and creative teams. Previous EKP productions include the multi-award-winning *SAP* by Rafaella Marcus (Roundabout, followed by Soho Theatre and national tour), *Collapsible* by Margaret Perry (HighTide Festival at Assembly, then Dublin's Abbey Theatre Dublin and Bush Theatre), and *HOTTER* by Mary Higgins and Ell Potter (Underbelly, 2019, then Soho Theatre and national tour). Ellie Keel's other credits include *The Swell* by Isley Lynn (Orange Tree Theatre, London), *You Bury Me* by Ahlam (Bristol Old Vic, Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, and Orange Tree Theatre, London), *Reasons You Should(n't) Love Me* by Amy Trigg (Kiln Theatre and national tour), *Still No Idea* by Lisa Hammond and Rachael Spence (Traverse Theatre, Southbank Centre and tour), *FITTER* by Mary Higgins and Ell Potter (Soho Theatre), and *Redefining Juliet* (Barbican). Ellie Keel is the Founder Director of the Women's Prize for Playwriting.



Paines Plough is the national theatre of new plays. A touring company dedicated entirely to developing and producing exceptional new writing, the work we create connects with artists and communities across the UK.

"The lifeblood of the UK's theatre ecosystem." – The Guardian

Since 1974 Paines Plough has worked with over 300 world renowned playwrights including James Graham, Sarah Kane, Dennis Kelly, Kae Tempest, Vinay Patel, Mike Bartlett, Sam Steiner, Elinor Cook, and Zia Ahmed.

Our plays are nationally identified and locally heard. We tour to over 40 places a year and are committed to bringing work to communities who might not otherwise have the opportunity to experience much new writing or theatre. We reach over 30,000 people annually from Cornwall to the Orkney Islands, in village halls, off-Broadway, and in our own pop-up theatre Roundabout; a state of the art, in the round auditorium which travels the length and breadth of the country.

"That noble company Paines Plough, de facto national theatre of new writing." – The Telegraph

Furthering our reach beyond theatre walls, our audio app Come to Where I'm From hosts 180 original mini plays about home and our digital projects connect with audiences via WhatsApp, phone, email, and even by post.

Wherever you are, you can experience a Paines Plough production.

"I think some theatre just saved my life." – @kate_clement on Twitter

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Deputy Artistic Director (Maternity Cover) | Debo Adebayo

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The Big Room Playwright Fellow | Mufaro Makubika

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PAINES PLOUGH BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ankur Bahl, Corey Campbell, Lauren Dark, Asma Hussain (Interim Chair), Tarek Iskander, Olivier Pierre-Noël, Farha Quadri, Carolyn Saunders, and Laura Wade.

Kully Thiarai is Chair Designate and will join the Board from Autumn 2023.

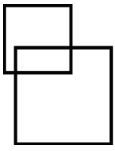
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The Belgrade is Coventry's largest professional theatre, producing and presenting a diverse range of shows, events, and ground-breaking community and education initiatives. In its landmark building, across the region, the UK, and online, it uses theatre to entertain, inspire, share the city's stories, uncover hidden histories, and unleash the creativity of diverse communities.

64 years ago, critic Kenneth Tynan saw the theatre's completion as the beginning of a new era. "Enter most theatres and it's the gilded, cupidaceous past," he wrote. "Enter this one, and you enter the future.' The theatre is now 18 months into a new future, led by CEO Laura Elliot and Creative Director Corey Campbell. These leaders have ambitious plans to build on the Theatre"s rich history of pioneering theatre, participation, and talent development – to realise a lasting place of sanctuary for creatives and communities.

Through values of **COLLABORATION**, **EVOLUTION**, and **AUTHENTICITY**, their working mission is to **USE THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF THEATRE TO ENRICH THE PEOPLE OF COVENTRY** and **BEYOND**.

Over the next three years, they will lead a people first approach; prioritising co-creation and cultural democracy; aiming to be a leading example of a regional inclusive learning theatre that sits at the heart of its community.

EXECUTIVE AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

CEO | Laura Elliot

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Director of Finance | Neil Harris

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Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre Company transforms the way people see theatre, each other, and the world around them. Our historic building was taken over by artists in 1976. Today it is an award-winning cultural charity that produces new theatre in-the-round, in communities, on the road, and online.

Exchange remains at the heart of everything we make and do. Now our currency is brand new drama and reinvigorated classics, the boldest artists and a company of highly skilled makers – all brought together in a shared imaginative endeavour to trade ideas and experiences with the people of Greater Manchester (and beyond).

The Exchange's unique auditorium is powerfully democratic, a space where audiences and performers meet as equals, entering and exiting through the same doors. It is the inspiration for all we do; inviting everyone to understand the past, engage in today's big questions, collectively imagine a better future, and lose themselves in the moment of a great night out.

The Royal Exchange was named Regional Theatre of the Year in 2016 and School of the Year at The Stage Awards 2018. Our work, developed with an incredible array of artists and theatre makers, includes *Hamlet* with Maxine Peake (for stage and film), *The Skriker* (with the Manchester International Festival), *King Lear* (co-produced with Talawa Theatre Company, filmed for BBC iPlayer and BBC Four), *The House of Bernarda Alba* (a co-production with Graeae), *Light Falls* (a world-premiere from Simon Stephens directed by Sarah Frankcom with original music by Jarvis Cocker), *Wuthering Heights* (directed by Joint Artistic Director Bryony Shanahan), *Rockets and Blue Lights* (by award-winning writer Winsome Pinnock and directed by Miranda Cromwell), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Mountaintop* (Digital Streaming directed by Joint Artistic Director Roy Alexander Weise), *All I Want For Christmas* (digital commission for December 2020), *Bloody Elle – A Gig Musical*, and *Let The Right One In* (directed by Bryony Shanahan).

Find out more on our website and social media channels
royalexchange.co.uk
@rxtheatre

The Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting 2022

in partnership with the **Royal Exchange Theatre**

A partnership between the Royal Exchange Theatre and property company Bruntwood, the Prize is an opportunity for writers of any background and experience to enter unperformed plays for the chance to win part of a prize fund totalling £40,000.

At the heart of the Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting is the principle that anyone and everyone can enter – it is entirely anonymous and scripts are judged purely on the basis of the work alone, with no knowledge of the identity of the playwright. Since its inception in 2005, over 15,000 scripts have been entered, £304,000 has been awarded to 34 prize winning writers, and 26 winning productions have been staged in 38 UK-wide venues.

Each winner enters into a development process with the Royal Exchange Theatre in an endeavour to bring their work to production. It is not guaranteed but we aspire to produce each play and find co-producers to give the plays a longer life and further reach. There have been co-productions with Lyric Hammersmith, Live Theatre, Soho Theatre, Bush Theatre, Orange Tree Theatre, Sherman Theatre, High Tide, and the Royal Court Theatre. Work has also gone on to be produced internationally from Australia, USA, Germany, France, to Canada and Sweden. The Bruntwood Prize International Award was launched in 2019 and, through partnerships with theatres and organisations in Australia, Canada, and the US, accepts submissions from playwrights.

The Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting is a genuine endeavour to discover new stories and help playwrights develop their craft, providing everybody and anybody with the opportunity to write a play. It offers a fantastic opportunity to hone your writing skills, whether or not you have written for the stage before.

More information can be found at www.writeaplay.co.uk

CREATIVE TEAM

NATHAN QUEELEY-DENNIS | WRITER AND PERFORMER

Nathan is an actor and writer from Birmingham. Acting credits include *As You Like It* (@sohoplace); *Black Love* (Kiln Theatre/tiata fahodzi); *A Taste of Honey* (National Theatre); *Really Big and Really Loud* (Paines Plough); *Little Baby Jesus* (Birmingham REP); *Rebel Music* (Middle Child); *Pinocchio* (Orange Tree Theatre); *The War Inside* (VAULT Festival/The Albany); *Girls Like That* (Birmingham REP; World Premiere); *Mittwoch Aus Licht* (Birmingham Opera Company; World Premiere) *Les Misérables in Concert: The 25th Anniversary* (Cameron Mackintosh Ltd) and *Doctors* (BBC).

As a writer he is the overall winner of the Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting 2022 with his debut play *Bullring Techno Makeout Jamz* and is currently working on various projects for Theatre, TV, and Film.

DERMOT DALY | DIRECTOR

Recent directorial credits include: *My Voice Was Heard But It Was Ignored* (Red Ladder Theatre Company; Black British Theatre Awards 2022 winner; Lustrum Winner 2022), *At What A Price* (Leeds Playhouse/British Library), *Aaliyah (after Antigone)* (Freedom Studios), *Kafka's Dick* (Naked Productions/BBC Radio 3), *Initiation* (Audible/LAMDA), *Rise* (Naked Productions/BBC Radio 4).

Dermot has read for the Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting, The Alfred Fagon Award (also as a member of the Jury from 2022), The Mustapha Matura Award, Women's Prize for Playwriting, and Theatre Uncut Political Playwriting Award.

Dermot is a Creative Associate of the Geraldine Connor Foundation, Associate Artist of Arts at the Arms, and has been the (Associate) Artistic director of Freedom Studios. He currently, proudly, serves on the boards of One Tenth Human, Mikron Theatre Company, and Wrongsemble.

CAITLIN MAWHINNEY | DESIGNER

Caitlin was double nominated for Best Designer at The Stage Debut Awards 2022 and awarded the Evening Standard Future Theatre Fund for Visual Design in 2021. She was recently a Creative Associate at Jermyn Street Theatre and a Resident Designer at New Diorama Broadgate.

Caitlin's work has seen main stages and un-conventional spaces across the country.

Recent credits as Set/Costume Designer include: *Dream School* (The Space), *The Island of The Sun* (National Theatre Public Acts, Sunderland

Culture), *The Cyclops* (National Theatre Public Acts, CAST), *Acid's Reign* (Relish Theatre Co.), *The Children's Country House* (Co-design/ Sudbury Hall, National Trust), *Ladies Unleashed*, *Teechers Leavers '22* (Hull Truck Theatre), *The Anarchist* (Jermyn Street Theatre), *Shake The City*, *The Sh*t* (Leeds Playhouse/UK Tour), *My Voice Was Heard But It Was Ignored* (Red Ladder Theatre Co./UK Tour), *My Old Man*, *Is Anyone There?* (imagine if Theatre Co.), *Frisky And Mannish: Popcorn* (Lawrence Batley Theatre), *Our Gate* (Harrogate Theatre)

DAVID DOYLE | LIGHTING DESIGN

David is a multi-award-winning lighting designer working across the UK and Ireland as well as internationally. His work has been seen in Ireland, the UK, The Netherlands, France, Czechia, Switzerland, the USA, and Australia. He was nominated for an Offie for Best Lighting Design for *EAST* at the Kings Head Theatre. Other recent credits include *SAP*, *Outlying Islands* (Atticist), *We Were Promised Honey* (YESYESNONO), *Carmen* (Kings Head Theatre), *Confirmation* (Xnthony), and *The Cat's Mother* (Wildcard). David also works as a producer and is the Executive Producer for Jermyn Street Theatre. www.davidmjtdoyle.com.

TOM FOSKETT-BARNES | COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGN

Tom Foskett-Barnes is a composer and sound designer working predominantly across film, theatre, and sound art. Film credits include Academy Award-nominated documentary *BLACK SHEEP* and BAFTA-nominated short *TONI_WITH_AN_I*. Theatre credits include *SAP* (Roundabout/UK Tour), *WORK.TXT* (Soho Theatre/Staatstheater Mainz), *ANNA BELLA EEMA* (Arcola Theatre), *HOTTER/FITTER* (Soho Theatre) and *THE BEAT OF OUR HEARTS* (Exeter Northcott).

In 2016 Tom was Sound and Music Composer in Residence with ROLI as part of the Embedded_Innovate Scheme and in 2017 Tom was selected as part of the Old Vic 12. Tom trained at the Royal College of Music as a Soirée d'Or Scholar generously supported by a Clifton Parker Award and was the recipient of a BAFTA UK Scholarship.

AIME NEEME | COMPANY STAGE MANAGER

Aime is an Australian stage manager and theatre maker, who likes long walks on the beach, deep chats over a chilled glass of rosé, and whirlwind romances. When she's not looking for love and her house keys, she's travelling around the UK working on the best new writing. Past credits include; *Hungry*, *Black Love*, *May Queen*, *Really Big and Really Loud* (Roundabout Summer Tour 2021), *How to Save the Planet When You're a Young Carer and Broke*, *Parakeet* (Boundless Theatre), *Dennis of Penge* (Ovalhouse).

CHARACTER

NATHANIEL – He/Him, Black Male from Birmingham of Caribbean descent, twenty-something years old.

SETTING

Birmingham, Brum, 0121, The Second City, Brummagem.

TIME

Is a social construct. *Bullring Techno Makeout Jamz* doesn't exist in a specific time, it's a nostalgic but timeless place.

WRITER'S NOTE

The first question I usually get asked and I get it a lot is if *Bullring Techno Makeout Jamz* is an autobiographical story. It's not at all, although it doesn't help that the character is called Nathaniel, so I sort of brought that on myself. I just named him Nathaniel as a placeholder but then I never changed it.

Although the story is not autobiographical, I always say the feelings and emotions within the play are. My journey with *Bullring Techno Makeout Jamz* is a long one. It started in 2018 as a three-minute monologue way before it even crossed my mind to start developing it into a full play.

I believe the industry ignores Birmingham and the Midlands. I very rarely see plays, TV shows, and films where people sound like me and the people around me growing up unless they're one character of many that's the butt of the jokes. So, I began developing the monologue into a play and it was from a place of frustration.

What stemmed from that was really therapeutic, it eventually became a creative release for me. Five years sounds like a long time, but I'd look at it for thirty minutes then not go back to it again for up to nine months. I'd revisit it in moments where I felt lost, confused, hurt, or angry and it really helped me. As I matured as a person throughout the writing process, I think the story and character matured, or I could just see the story and character way clearer, I've not figured that part out yet.

I'm really glad it came to light the way it did, I never knew how it was going to end when I started, and I don't think it would be the play we have right now if I finished it three or four years ago. It's that idea that everything happens for a reason.

Winning the Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting 2022 was life-changing and I'm so grateful to be in the position I'm in. If you do decide to do this play as a professional production, for drama school auditions, amateur productions etc., just have as much fun as I did writing it, there aren't any rules and theatre is way better when you break its traditional form so please carry that with you.

Bullring Techno Makeout Jamz is an amalgamation of all my fears, anger, frustration, joy, friendships, and failures from my first ten years of life as an adult. All those aspects are sewn into the DNA of the play but ultimately the play is about love. Platonic, Romantic and Self Love.

It's always about love.

NQD.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Due to the creative process a lot of people have had an impact on myself and *Bullring Techno Makeout Jamz*. Firstly all of the love in the world to my family, my Mom, Dad, Nan, my Brother Marvin and my Auntie Maria who is probably the biggest factor as to why I even work in theatre today.

Producer Jade Samuels and her work for TriForce Creative Network where I first got a chance to perform this play as a monologue which set the wheels in motion to where we are today. Matt Maltby, Nick Oliver, and their work for Pint-Sized, who were the first to believe in the play and my voice and really allowed me to view myself as a writer.

Robert Awosusi and Simeon Blake-Hall for bringing a short extract of it to life with joy and detail, I'll never forget the first time I got to see *Bullring* in front of an audience. Wildcard Theatre and Andy Twyman, unfortunately due to COVID we never got a chance to really start our journey, however the time and free space I was offered in their HQ was invaluable!

Free Hand Scripts for offering free dramaturgical support, for writers who are new their work is so vital. Anna Himali Howard who was my dramaturg and offered thoughtful, detailed feedback and those notes were the springboard to me entering the Bruntwood Prize.

Luke Wilson for the amazing performance at the Prize and beautiful openness and generosity working through our R&D. My friends from back home in all my different group chats also Adaya Henry who initially empowered me to write. Alice Finn for keeping me sane, levelheaded, and being my own secret in-house dramaturg, copywriter, and editor.

Rebecca Need-Menear for the amazing artwork and Manwah Siu and Mrin Roy for standing in the most awkward of positions to elegantly throw roses around me. Tom Finn from Regular Practice for his skill, detail and care in creating the typeface.

My brilliant acting agents at Denton Brierley, Suzy & Sabrina for their support and understanding and my wonderful writing agents at Curtis Brown, Camilla and Katie, for their guidance and care as I've navigated this exciting new journey of my career. The Unicorn Theatre and Theatre Deli for being spaces that are more than just my part time jobs.

Dermot for his amazing passion and belief in the piece and all of the creative team for their endless work on the play. The team at Concord Theatricals, the judges and readers from the Bruntwood Prize, Suzanne Bell and the team at the Royal Exchange for their endless support, the whole team at Paines Plough for the opportunity, Corey Campbell and The Belgrade Theatre team for their essential support and Ellie Keel for truly believing in myself, the play, helping us all to realise its potential and working so hard to get us to this amazing moment we find ourselves in.

Finally shout outs to Birmingham, growing up there played a big part in who I am today and if I was from somewhere else there's no way this play is the same play.

0121 to di worldddd

Part One

(Birmingham. Brum. 0121. The Jewellery Quarter. A small underwhelming studio flat. On the walls are family photos and retro Aston Villa posters. Ashley Young and John Carew. IYKYK. As the audience walk in, we see **NATHANIEL**, *smug and cheeky. He's getting ready to go out for…something. We are unsure as to what at this moment.)*

(Music playing out of a speaker. [Music from Birmingham.])

NATHANIEL. I get off the phone to my mom and she all like "you're a lovely, handsome, charming young man." Now if that's true…and my mom would never lie to me…and you know…it's true, then I can't be shit at dating because I'm a gift from God enit.

So maybe what my mom is tryna say is I'm not shit at dating just everyone I meet is shit at dating me.

A few people have said that my date history is weird and tragic, by a few I mean the mandem, my dad, the guy in the nightclub toilet who gives me a lollipop when I give him a pound.

Like…listen so I'm on a first date in Bella Italia with LeToya who said she likes Disney, now I don't love Disney like that so I'm thinking outside of the box. So, when she goes for a bite of her spaghetti bolognaise and I meet her at the other end of her piece of spaghetti to recreate that scene from the *Lady and the Tramp*, that is not weird and tragic. That is wholesome. That is romantic.

It is weird and tragic however to draw attention to us in the restaurant by screaming "OH MY GOD WHAT'RE YOU DOING YOU WEIRDO" then watch as I'm escorted out of the restaurant and banned from Bella Italias for life! Who even goes to Bella Italia anymo-

Anyway...today is a new day and I have a new date! There is nothing quite like getting back on the dating scene after a two-week sabbatical. I love everything about first dates...meeting a new person, getting to know more about them, the first time you touch, the eye contact, do you go for the first kiss or do you not...

(Awkward silence.)

The awkward silences.

I'm not picky either I just want someone like me, a nice personality, a good sense of humour and nice elbows.

I met her on a dating app and on her profile, it says "I'M THE BEYONCÉ OF KINGSTANDING" so I was smooth with it and said could I be the Jay-Z to your Beyoncé, HOV!

You know minus the whole cheating thing, fighting the sister in the lift thing and obviously I'm 100 times more handsome than Jay-Z we ain't got the same lip situation, you know his lips come like this?

To be 100% with you this girl seems like she could be the ONE, and hold on a second, let me land, I'm not being crazy, I've been through this process A LOT. I think there's a genuine potential for love...and I don't mean that getting married shit or "Oooh we went around the canals of Venice" relationship stint. There are more canals in Birmingham than Venice!

I'm talking real love, I'm talking 90s RnB music video outside in the rain kind of love. I'm saying in ten years' time we're having a massive argument in IKEA because she wants the Pysslingar but I want the Kryddnejlika

and we can't afford both because the government have set up our society so that our generation are constantly struggling. You know that kind of love.

I'm meeting up with her tonight for the first time, I'm gonna treat her so nice, she deserves the world. Honestly, I feel truly privileged, nay, blessed to be in her presence, let alone be able to speak to her…wow, she really is Beyoncé.

So, I've got a full plan in place for tonight…but before I even consider meeting Beyoncé later, I have a very important meeting.

You see in life there is only one person who's always there for you, nurtures you through some of the toughest times in your life, someone who is always there to talk to about anything and will always make you feel your absolute best.

(Beat.)

That's why a man's relationship with his barber is one of the most sacred relationships on earth.

You see this trim?

You see the detail?

You see the TLC put into this trim?!

I love no person on this earth more than my barber and I ain't afraid to say that. We go through our ups and downs, but he is always there… Apart from today, the most important day of my life, when he goes on holiday, now barbers don't go on holidays often they've got a business to run but when they do its back to the Caribbean for eighteen weeks!

Why can't they just do up like an old white lady?

Ooh long weekend getaway to Benidorm with Frank.

A long weekend is three, maybe four days. Eighteen weeks is 126 days. That's officially four months pregnant. A whole child could be brewing inside of me.

I get a trim once every two weeks that means I'm missing nine trims and I can't not get a trim, I'm not a monster.

So that means I have to go to a new barber...do you know how dirty I feel just sleeping around with next man all willy nilly? My head belongs to my barber and when he's giving me a trim? I sit back and close my eyes and let him do his artistry. It's like our mind, bodies and soul intertwine and our chakras align with one another and we are one.

So, I urgently need a trim, and on a Saturday it's mythlehem tryna get a booking and nearby there's only really the three wise men in terms of barbers whilst mine is away.

Number One. **Hand Of God Barbers**

So, pros and cons. A con is everyone in there looks like their favourite pet has just died, sad. Another con is it smells like jollof rice. Don't get me wrong jollof rice is calm, I just don't mix it with my follicles. Another con is everyone goes in there clapped and comes out even more clapped. A pro is that they're also a phone shop, so I can get my screen repaired while I'm there, which is cool... I guess. There aren't really any other pros to be honest.

Number Two. **Turkish Barber & Shisha Lounge**

A pro is they treat you like a king when you're in there, they do the hot towel and that, they light that ball on a stick thing on fire that burns the hairs in your ear, the shop is presentable, and all types of ethnicities go in there so they're a versatile people. A con? Fuck me do they love to talk, I talk to my barber but he's been cutting my hair for years! We had to crawl before we

could walk and walk before we could run. These man are here asking me about where I shop. You don't go on a first date and full on kiss the person before saying hello do you? That first kiss is the moment. It solidifies everything. Some people literally have zero social awareness and even when the convo dies down it's like they have to resuscitate it. Let it rest in peace my guy!

My third and final option. **Renegade Gentlemen's Club**

I know it sounds a bit like a strip club but actually the strip club is next door. So yeah, the more you know. Pros about this place it's clean, nice, kinda boujee and I'm a boujee guy. They also have pictures of famous brummies they've done over the years, the guy who set up Gymshark, Joe Lycett and Jack Grealish. A con is I look nothing like them man, they probably would look at my 'fro and try to approach it with scissors and I'm not paying £50 excluding VAT for a haircut.

I guess it's the Turkish barbers then, I just won't brush my teeth and hopefully they'll not want me to talk back to them.

Google Maps says it's a fifteen-minute walk which is the other side of town so that's a calm walk for a Saturday. As I'm about to leave I get a message from the group chat

(Phone notification buzzer.)

GROUP CHAT MEMBER 1. What you man on

GROUP CHAT MEMBER 3. Nothing still uno

GROUP CHAT MEMBER 4. Mmm man are just ouchea

GROUP CHAT MEMBER 2. I hear dat uno

NATHANIEL. *(Aside.)* What was anyone gaining from that interaction?

Yo, you man I'm about to get a trim at this barbers and I'm a bit uncertain. I've got a date and I don't want to get wigged.

GROUP CHAT MEMBER 3. You linking another girl again?!

NATHANIEL. Don't watch that.

GROUP CHAT MEMBER 1. Yo why don't you try out Shape Upz Barbers?

GROUP CHAT MEMBER 4. Mmm I went with them the other day did me up quick still and they do some celebs and footballers and dat

GROUP CHAT MEMBER 2. I hear dat uno fam

NATHANIEL. I get the link and I see they're based on Instagram and the only way to book an appointment is through Instagram DMs. I've never really slid in another man's DMs before, especially behind my main barber's back, doesn't feel right.

(Phone notification buzzer.)

yo what's good bro, I'm looking to get a trim for later tonight.

BARBER. Yeah bruddah I just had a cancellation so I can see you in 15 minutes if you can make it

*(*Flame emoji*.)*

*(*Praising hands emoji*.)*

*(*Flame emoji*.)*

NATHANIEL. *(Aside.)* Bare emojis and that. Okay…

Yeah bro that's calm I'll see you there. Ermmm

*(*Fist emoji?*.)*

BARBER. Yes fam! You're about to get the sharpest trim from the best barber in the 0121

*(*Barber pole emoji*.)*

I've done some of the most high profile people in this country fam

*(*100 emoji*.)*

This is about to be a movie bro

*(*Praising hands emoji*.)*

*(*Fist emoji*.)*

*(*Collision emoji*.)*

*(*Flame emoji*.)*

drip will be real my g

*(*Water emoji*.)*

*(*Water emoji*.)*

*(*Water emoji*.)*

see you in a hot sec bro

*(*Kissing face emoji*.)*

…

That last emoji was an accident my g, it was in my recently used. Sorry.

*(*Frown emoji*.)*

NATHANIEL. I walk into the city centre; I live in a studio flat in the jewellery quarter so kinda gentrified but it's a part of the city dedicated to jewellery, so it was already gentrified before gentrification was a word.

I reach the barbers. My heart is pounding fast, why am I so nervous? It can't be because of Beyoncé, I guess I've never really done "It" this blatantly with another man before especially one who's sending me kissy face emojis.

We lock eyes, I give him a firms and he gestures at me to sit down, he's dressed in chef whites...including the hat, has a head lamp as if he's mining or reading in the dark and a badge that says "Follicle Engineering Technician."

Asks me if I want anything to drink. *(Kisses teeth.)* Tryna be all smooth and that... I say yeah 'cause my mouth's dry.

The barber cape goes over me and it's clipped on. I'm in it now, there is no turning back, I'm a faithful young black man and here I am sitting in another man's chair. This new breddah knows I'm doing something dirty as well, this hairline isn't his piece of work, I'm not his Mona Lisa. He knows how important this trim is for the both of us, he could have a new customer, I could have a new man... I mean barber, I could have a new barber.

The décor is rah nice, they've got some Donald Rodney artwork and old pictures of Birmingham taken by Vanley Burke. I think I see my dad in one of the pictures but then I see other customers who are obviously regulars here staring at me and I know what they're thinking, you sket. In this day and age, I'm getting slutshamed, sad.

Before we begin, he asks if he can take a before picture for his Instagram page. Now I'm a progressive and forward-thinking person but Rule 101 in life, you can never be seen on your sideting's Instagram! And it's always the sidetings that wanna post you on there. I politely decline whilst covering my face "Ah nah fam I'm not really trying to go public like that, just like to keep a low profile." He's cool and turns on his clippers.

I just try and close my eyes think about my date with Beyoncé and let him proceed with his workmanship, but how am I meant to relax when some stranger is gripsing up my head top, with his slimy E.T. fingers.

A couple minutes pass and it's seemingly going okay. He's faced me away from the mirror, smart I can't critique his every move this way.

He puts down the clippers and brings up the smaller one with the sharper buzzing sound, like a bee on helium, I don't know the name of them, but I know this means he's about to start the shape up. The most integral part to any haircut, this is where the barber earns their dough, throughout this whole time we haven't even spoke one word.

Silence.

You could cut the tension with a razor blade.

He's tapped the clipper into some baby powder and shaped up the main front of my hairline, and now he's hitting the vertical line on one of my corners.

(Beat.)

That's when I notice the noise of the clipper closer to my ear than I've ever heard it before.

Then I feel a sudden breeze that I've never experienced on the side of my head.

It clicked… This dickhead went back on my hairline. I freak out, can't breathe, panic attack.

"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE I'M SEEING BEYONCÉ TODAY AND YOU'VE GONE BACK ON MY HAIRLINE."

I run out the barber's chair and run straight back to my apartment… That's why the cape is in my house in case anyone was wondering.

Thing is with a new barber sometimes you don't click it's like when you meet one of your parents' friends for the first time in a few years and you don't have a clue who they are and they're like "Wow I haven't see you since you were this big" and you give them the no teeth smile.

(Phone notification buzzer.)

BARBER. Yo my bro I'm sorry it ended like that

*(*Frown emoji*.)*

That's not how the Birmingham Mail's barber of the year likes his clientele to feel

*(*Fist emoji*.)*

Next time I swear I'll nice you up my g free of charge.

I didn't realise you were part of the Beyhive

*(*Bee emoji*.)*

*(*Black heart emoji*.)*

NATHANIEL. Some man use the black heart emoji 'cause for whatever reason it's a harder kind of man love, whereas if it was a red heart I'd suddenly assume that he wanted to marry me…

I mean I use it sometimes, when you don't know what to say but you wanna show the mandem you care, it's useful.

Love is love, we all need it.

(Beat.)

I get the rest of my hairline resurrected at the Turkish barbers but now time is of the essence. Get my head back in the game as I get ready for the most important date of my life.

Big rule with me, no two dates are the same 'cause no two people are the same. A bespoke service and I've got the whole evening mapped out.

First, we meet…maybe a lil hug kinda greeting and I'll try and hold it for around three or four Mississippis 'cause I don't want to seem too keen.

Then she might compliment my shirt 'cause it's a nice shirt and everyone always does, then she may say I smell wonderful because I always use great aftershave.

Then my skin? Glowing. Complexion is freeeeesshhhh… I did have a bath with this bath bomb I got from Lush, and it smells amazing but it's given my skin this shimmery shine because I think it had glitter in it. I hope she doesn't notice that.

Some people like to go for food but after Bella Italia I'm not really tryna be caught in any restaurant 'cause you know they all chat to each other.

There's a bar that has loads of board games and things like ping pong, pool, mini arcade section. She said she likes to drink cocktails, she's competitive but also wants to be able talk so it's perfect for the gaming competitive aspect but also not like a nightclub bar so we can still hear each other properly. The cocktails are meant to be the best around. It's the perfect spot.

We initially connected over our love of rum so provided things go well after the gaming bar I know this sick underground rum bar with rums from all over the world.

That's so in her head she's like "this is so nice I love this gaming bar" then I'm like BLAOW! Hit her with the even nicer.

Then hopefully she's feeling like "wow this is really nice I've enjoyed my time" and I'll say, "I've had a good time maybe we should call it a night, until next time?"

I don't even want to reveal too much 'cause a couple people here will start teefing man's methods.

(To the audience.) Like you fam, I see you.

(Whispers.) So most people nowadays will be winning on a date and then push their luck a bit too far. "ah babes you should come mine you know" I go hard down the gentleman route I'll take her to her taxi and