



theatre alibi **One in a Million** Education Pack

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Written by Daniel Jamieson

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theatre alibi

One in a Million

by Daniel Jamieson

The Story

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A Nightingale sang.

Sometimes life seems a rare orchid that blooms unseen in the corner of a bog... before being trampled by a goat.

A Saturday afternoon in the High Street - so many people passing, the sheer variety of physical form on display is magnificent, a deft ringing of changes in the flesh. The frizzy, the sleek, the corpulent, the pencil gaunt, the mighty, the mousey, the pallid, the sallow, the glossy brown...

Here comes a funny looking chap. Bottle-bottom specs, mole paws out of grubby shirt cuffs, beaver teeth, a shiny bottomed suit, a bow tie, thick, greasy pubic-seeming hair parted down one side topped off with a battered brown felt trilby, scuffed old hush puppies, splayed duck walk, short arsed...

He may look nothing special, but he's got "one in a million" written right through him.

How exactly, "one in a million"?

Is it some gift he has?

He certainly has a beautiful voice, a thousand generations in the making, ripened through centuries.

Is he one in a million because he exists at all?

Well, you could say that, because he can claim an unbroken lineage right, right back to the pioneers of the primordial swamp. His great grandfather to the power of so many million was one of those fish who flipped out of the ooze and struck out for mammalhood, humanity and the High Street today. He stands on the shoulders of a tottering, towering column of his forebears rising out of the millennia. Think of the millions of other families who fell childless into the chasm around his.

Does "one in a million" refer to the scale of his handicap in life? The chance of him attracting a mate are one in a million, the chance of him being happy are one in a million?

Maybe.

Or is his one in a million status to do with some bizarre twist fate has singled out for his life?

I don't know, just enjoy the orchid before that goat comes along.

The object of our attention steps back into an alcove off the High Street, genuflects to lay down his felt hat and his tape machine, and presses play. He composes himself during the opening bars of the song. He adjusts his glasses

fractionally on the bridge of his nose, tweaks his bowtie into line, clasps his hands in front of him, raises his face, closes his eyes, smiles beatifically and begins to sing. A woman with a six-month-old baby in her arms sits on a bench nearby to allow her baby to listen.

*“That certain night, the night we met, there was magic abroad in the air
And a nightingale sang in Berk’ley Square”*

A mobile phone rings in the vicinity. The ring tone is the theme tune of the Simpsons and it gets louder and louder. When it reaches a crescendo of annoyingness, the woman with a baby snaps out of her reverie, pulls the phone out of her bag and answers it. “Who’s that?... Oh! Hello!... I’m in Berk’ley Square! With Boo-boo!... No, not really. A man’s singing it...” She holds up the phone to the singer. “...Here, in the high street. Yes, near the new Tesco’s... Senior IAMS? Major’s not old enough for senior is he?...” The baby had been asleep, but the disturbance of the phone call has woken it and now it starts to kick up a stink.

Twenty yards along to the singer’s left, a grizzled old boy with a limp has stopped in the next alcove. He opens a battered case and lifts out a cheap, Czechoslovakian squeezebox with chipped keys. He sets the instrument down, closes the box, turns it on end and sits a grubby, yellow furry pot on it, with a smiley face and dangly legs – his money pot. Warily, he heaves the squeezebox onto his chest for the ten thousandth time, and releasing the bellows with an asthmatic gasp, limps into “Abide with Me.” Being self-taught, he’s never quite mastered the correct modulation of the chords under his tunes. This gives them a lugubrious monotony. But he worked out long ago that if he stared into space in a particularly vacant manner while he played, people assumed he was blind and put a few pence in his fluffy pot anyway.

Twenty yards to the right of the singer a student with hugely flared trousers has sat cross-legged on the pavement. He’s pulled a bazooka-like didgeridoo out of a cylindrical sack and started puffing on it like he’s smoking it. The resultant noise has no musical merit to it, only weirdness goes in its favour.

And a Securicor van is reversing up the high street. “Boo doo deep. Boo doo deep. Warning! Securicor vehicle reversing!” says the woman’s voice in the recorded warning. It sounds suspiciously like Dorothy Tutin, but surely she can’t have resorted to recording reversing warnings for Securicor vans at this stage in her career?

And a gull screams in triumph over a discarded burger on the pavement.

And two play-fighting homeless dogs fight a little harder, shaking each other by the throat.

All of these other sounds seem to belong together, and form an impenetrable mesh around the singer’s “Nightingale in Berk’ley Square”, enclosing it in indifferent cacophony. But from one moment to the next, all of these other sounds conclude for a moment coincidentally. The baby, purple and spent,

stops wailing for a moment and takes deep breaths in preparation for the next onslaught. "Abide with Me" had abided its allotted span and the accordion puffs out its terminal, pedestrian chord. The didgeridoo player, an amateur, has come over light-headed and rests a while. The van has parked. The gull has swallowed the entire burger and stands mute and complacent with a bulging gullet. The two dogs are licking their scrotums.

Suddenly, too late, the song is released in its concluding line –

*"... and as we kissed and said goodnight,
A nightingale sang in Berk'ley Square."*

"Was that nice? Uh? Boo-boo? Was that nice?" Says the woman to her baby.

The Boo-boo in question opens its mouth in a cavernous yawn. "Yes! It was! Shall we give the man a sherbet lemon?" The mother gets a paper bag of sherbet lemons out of her handbag and puts one in her daughter's hand to give to the singer. "Give it to the nice man... Boo-boo... no, naughty." The child desperately tries to put the sweet in its own mouth. "You're too young, sweetie, you might choke. When you're older you can have sherbet lemons." She takes the sweet out of the child's hand and gives it to the singer herself. The child pulls a face like a letterbox and howls with frustration. "Say bye-bye. Bye-bye!" The mother tries to force a wave out of the child for the singer, but her little arm is stiffened with fury. The baby's faint screams can still be heard several hundred yards away through the evening traffic as her mother carries her away.

The singer looks at the fruit of his labour between his thumb and forefinger – the sherbet lemon is tacky with baby spit. He smiles to himself and shakes his head, then pops it in his mouth – buskers can't be choosers. The crowd has thinned considerably now the shops have shut, so the singer decides to rally his spirits with something a little upbeat. Riffing through his little box of cassettes, he finds just the thing.

*"The people gather round when he gets on the stand,
Then when he plays he gets a hand,
The rhythm he beats puts the cats in a trance,
Nobody there bothers to dance,
But when he jams with the bass and guitar, they holler,
"Beat me, daddy, eight to the bar!"*

Singing and sucking simultaneously, swept up in the swing of the song, the singer takes a deep breath to start his favourite part of the song, the part where it goes, "A plink, a plank..." Instead, he inhales his sherbet lemon and chokes. His eyes bulge as he clutches at his throat, but the music carries on relentlessly. Several passers-by simply pass on by in spite of his desperate, wordless pleas for help. The music gives his actions a pantomimic feel and the people assume it's an obscure, dark piece of street theatre they'd rather not get involved with.

When the singer is purple in the face and fallen on his knees, a passing pair of bouncers on their way to work, identifiable by their uniform bomber jackets, finally recognise his plight. "He's choking!"

"You alright mate?"

"Course he isn't, you knob, he's choking! Help me get him up. I'll try the Heimlich Manoeuvre." They get him on his feet and one of the bouncers squeezes him well-meaningly but with a vigour characteristic of his profession.

"It's not working. Let me try a Holger-Nielson." They pass the singer between them like a rag-doll and the other one squeezes him in an even more violent fashion.

"That's no good. What about a fireman's lift?" The other throws him over his shoulder and bounces him like he's burping an outsized, rubber baby. The other looks in his face shaking his head. "It's no good. They shake kids upside down, don't they?" They shake him by the ankles to no avail.

"We're losing him. Here, you hold him, I'll give him the old tummy rub." In desperation, they resort to a manoeuvre well-practised between them in the alley by their club every Saturday night. One holds the singer by the arms while the other punches him once, twice, three times harder and harder in the stomach until finally the obstruction shoots onto the pavement.

"Gotcha!" The puncher picks up the sweet delicately. "Bloody sherbet lemon! Here you are mate. Souvenir for you."

"You want to lay off those when you're yodelling, mate. Definite choking hazard."

"We might not be here for you next time."

"So long, bud." After bidding him farewell, they set off for work with the glow of Samaritans about them.

The singer crawls to a bench. The music is drawing to a close and the singer croaks to himself,

*"And when he jams with the bass and guitar, they holler,
"Aw beat me, daddy, eight to the bar."*

Trapping the Finger

Into a neon lit room comes a woman with grey hair, a tweed overcoat, baggy tights, brown brogues and a Zimmer frame slung casually over one shoulder. She pulls a plastic chair from a stack, throws her Zimmer down and sits waiting, looking at her nails. Soon she's joined by a man with a flat cap, Eric Morecambe glasses, a Burberry muffler, a dirty body-warmer, beige slacks and brown hush puppies. He pulls a plastic chair from the stack and sits next to the woman without looking at her. After a moment he takes off his cap and his ill-fitting wig comes with it. He scratches his head with both hands. She takes the wig from his lap and looks at it thoughtfully, then starts to stroke it, making it pant and yap. Suddenly she feigns it leaping at the man's throat. He snatches it off her and puts it back on, saying, "Grow up will you. Anyway, yours isn't much better."

"Why've we suddenly got to wear wigs?"

“New Head of Covert is a wig man. Apparently he’s got a background in theatrical costumery.”

“Seriously?”

“Yep. And he’s in charge of this job.”

“I’m gonna laugh. I know it.”

The door opens behind them and a priest comes in. He has an air of authority about him, a fat dossier under one arm and a bright ginger, curly wig on his head. “Morning lads and lasses.”

“Morning,” they say without looking round, for fear of setting themselves off laughing. The priest comes and puts his folder on the table in front of them. They can’t suppress a snigger when they catch sight of him.

“Everything OK?” he says, looking up from his papers.

“Sorry sir, this air conditioning is playing hell with my sinuses”, says the woman.

“Me too, sir”, says the man lamely.

“Right. Let’s get started. I’m Brian Conglebury, new head of covert ops and I’m in charge of this one today. And you two jokers are?”

“Louise Johnson.”

“Jim Tozer.”

“Well, Jim, Louise, today we’re going after “The Finger”. As you might know, this guy is a significant player in an international terror network. Also known as “Trigger” and “Ronald”, he always operates alone and is a master of disguise.” Conglebury switches on an OHP and shows them some photos.

“Here he is as a traffic warden, Ronald MacDonald and one of those street performers who stands still ‘til you put money in their hat. We’ve been tipped off he’s about to strike in the city we’ve come to today. He normally goes for places where hundreds of people pass through or congregate. He waits for large public events - a state visit, a major sporting event, a street festival. Then he leaves a device on the street and detonates it remotely. As you may be aware, there’s a royal visit taking place to this city next month. We believe “The Finger” is setting up in a street at the heart of the city in anticipation of that event. We want to take him alive if possible. Naturally we have full firearms backup. Either way, we want to take him out of the equation in plenty of time before next month. Here’s a picture of him working on the street.” He flashes up a picture of the singer. “Any questions?”

“He looks pretty harmless to me”, says Louise.

“Don’t be fooled,” says Conglebury, “He’s as ruthless as they come.”

“Why’s he called “The Finger”?” asks Jim.

“He has a strangely elongated middle finger. It’s unmistakable. Ghoulish, people say.”



It’s brass-monkey weather in the high street today and the singer is just pulling on his woolly mittens. He’s working through his Fats Waller tape and is coming to the end of “The Joint is Jumping”. He’s jumping too, and stamping and clapping his hands together to stay warm.

*“...We’re all bums when the wagon comes.
I mean this joint is jumping.
Don’t give you’re right name, no, no, no!”*

A kid on a skateboard whizzes past eating Burger King fries out of a paper bag. As he passes the singer he drops the remainder in the singer’s hat without stopping. The singer crouches to pick them up, then watches the skateboarder disappear as he munches them gratefully, picking them out of the bag with difficulty because of his mittens. The next song begins and the singer sings as he munches.

*“No-one to talk with, all by myself,
No-one to walk with, but I’m happy on the shelf.
Ain’t misbehavin’, I’m savin’ my love for you...”*

And now a woman with grey hair, a tweed coat and brown brogues walks with tiny steps towards the singer leaning heavily on a Zimmer frame.

*“I know for certain, the one I love,
I’m thru with flirtin’, It’s just you I’m thinkin’ of...”*

And now a man in a flat cap and a Burberry muffler comes along from the other direction with a bucket and starts to clean the shop window just to the singer’s right. The elderly lady has arrived by the singer and takes a rest to listen to him. She taps her foot in time to the music. The singer gratefully addresses the song to her.

“Ain’t misbehavin’, I’m savin’ my love for you!”

And now a priest with curly ginger hair wanders circuitously from the other side of the street, preaching a psalm into a megaphone. He has a sandwich board saying, “REPENT!” “He lies in wait like a lion in cover, “ goes the psalm, “He catches the helpless and drags them off in his net...”

*“Like Jack Horner, in a corner,
Don’t go nowhere, what do I care...”*

The window cleaner is cleaning the pane of glass directly behind the singer now but he is singing so intently to the old lady, he doesn’t notice particularly. She bends stiffly to put some coins in his hat. The singer picks it up to make it easier for her. The priest is just passing now. “His victims are crushed, they collapse, they fall under his strength! They fall under his strength!”

This is the sign. The window cleaner grabs the singer and locks him in a half-nelson. The old lady straightens up, holding a handgun in the singer’s face, screaming, “Hands in the air! Hands in the air!” The priest is pointing a gun at the singer’s head too, and screams through his megaphone,

“Hand’s in the air!” Sirens are rushing through the neighbouring streets towards the scene, but here and now the only sound is the end of “Ain’t Misbehavin’” playing out on the tape.

The priest approaches extremely nervously. He waves at the singer’s left hand with his gun. “Off with the glove!” The singer looks completely paralysed with fear and confusion. “Take it off!” The singer reaches his right hand to his left in a panic. “Slowly!” Slowly he pulls off his left mitten to reveal his normally proportioned, if rather trembling left hand. “It’s not him! It’s fucking not him!” screams Conglebury, lowering his gun and snatching off his ginger wig. The window cleaner releases the singer from the half-nelson and straightens out his clothing. The old lady lowers her gun.

“Sorry love. We thought you were someone else.”

Dummy Show

*“Moonlight and magnolia, starlight on your hair,
All the world a dream come true...”*

Much later that same day, the singer is at work again. He addresses a girl stopped at the cashpoint just by him.

*“...did it really happen, was I really there, was I really there with you?
We’ve lived our little drama, we kissed in a field of white...”*

Unfortunately she misconstrues his showmanship for something more seedy. “Fuck off!” she shrieks, shrinking back from him, then gratefully grabbing her cash, she runs off. The singer looks sad but carries on anyway,

“...and stars fell on Alabama last night.”

With a loud tap, a large, white spot suddenly appears on the singer’s left shoulder. He looks at it, bewildered, as if it might be one of the stars that fell on Alabama last night.

“I can’t forget the glamour, your eyes held a tender light...”

Tap-tap. Another two white spots appear on his other shoulder.

“...and stars fell on Alabama last night.”

The singer looks up just in time to see the bird shit leaving the pigeon’s fluffy bottom above him before it hits his glasses. Still singing but rather distractedly, he pulls out his handkerchief and cleans his glasses. He looks up cautiously whilst brushing at his shoulders. The pigeon is strutting along the bracket that holds a large clock out from the wall above the alcove in which the singer stands. In an effort to avoid its next strike, the singer edges to the forward end of the bracket. But the pigeon is restless and stays still for just a moment before turning about face and marching back along the support. The singer moves backwards and forwards, glancing up at the pigeon, trying to

second-guess its every movement, bowel or otherwise. He continues to sing as best he can.

“...a situation so heavenly, a fairy land...”

Plop-plop. The singer presses himself right into the corner of the alcove to present as minimal target as possible. So engaged in this game of battleships does he become, he doesn't particularly notice when a woman walks down the street and sits on a bench nearby. It's Louise, wigless now, in her own shoes and coat, on her way to the station with her overnight bag to travel back to London. She carries a bunch of flowers, which she puts on her lap when she sits down. When he finally turns and sees her, she waves and says, "Hello!" The singer continues to sing, wondering who this woman might be, failing to recognise her without her grey wig.

“...stars fell on Alabama last night,”

With great timing, style and aim, the pigeon lands one last star on the singer's head before flying to the park to start filling its little stomach again.

The next song on the tape starts - "In a Sentimental Mood" and the singer begins to sing automatically, as if on some relentless musical conveyor belt. Louise listens to him intently, smiling encouragingly. Behind him in a shop window a window dresser carries a half-dressed, male dummy into position and starts to put a tie and jacket on it. He works in a bored way and half watches the singer outside the window.

“...on the wings of ev'ry kiss drifts a melody so strange and sweet.”

The window dresser also watches Louise watching the singer, wondering why she might be interested in such a nerd. As the singer gets into the song he embellishes it with sentimental gestures, which the window dresser begins to imitate with the dummy.

“...My heart's a lighter thing since you make this night a thing divine...”

The singer clutches his heart and the dummy clutches its heart.

“...In a sentimental mood. I'm within a world so heavenly...”

The singer throws his arms out and the dummy throws its arms out.

“For I never dreamt you'd be loving sentimental me!”

Finally, as the singer builds to the climax of the song, the window dresser turns the dummy round, bends it over and at the crucial moment, drops its trousers and flashes its pale plastic bum at the world.

Louise claps and cheers for the singer and a little for the window dresser who bows and goes for a cup of tea, leaving the dummy in its final pose. "I'm

Louise. I was one of the people who tried to arrest you this morning. The old lady? With a gun?" The singer looks upset and starts to pack up his things. "I'm sorry. It must've been pretty scary. I can't tell you what we were doing but it was a matter of national security. If it's any consolation, I knew we'd got the wrong man from the moment you sang to me..." The singer is on the point of leaving. "...and I brought you these." She holds out the flowers to him. He turns and looks at them to see if he's heard right. It's transparent that this is the first bunch of flowers a woman has ever given him. "I wondered... I'm not supposed to do this sort of thing, but will you come and sing with me on Friday night? I'm a bit of a karaoke addict and they do a really nice one in a pub round the corner apparently. I've got to go back to London tonight but my sister lives here and I'm coming back to see her this weekend..."

Phrases from all the sentimental songs he's sung pop and fizz in the singer's head with a novel authenticity of understanding as he gazes at the lovely flowers. "Well... think about it hey? I'll walk by here at seven on Friday. If you want to come, just be here, under the clock." Overhead the pigeon has landed on the bracket of the clock again. They both look up at it. "Well, maybe not right under the clock. OK? Oh! What's your name?" David looks momentarily shocked, as if he hasn't been required to speak for a while and he's not sure he can remember how.

"David." He says quietly.

"Bye David." Now she walks down the street, forcing herself not to turn and see if the singer is watching her, puzzled at herself for having given a man a bunch of flowers for the first time in her life.

Clang, clang, clang...

The singer gazes after Louise, the flowers clutched to his breast as if someone might try to take them off him if he wasn't careful. A van pulls up. The driver jumps down, lifts a temporary bus-stop from the back and places in next to the singer, then jumps in the van again and drives away. A new song starts on his tape and the singer begins singing on cue automatically, although he continues to look along the street after Louise.

*"With her high starched collar and her high topped shoes,
And her hair piled high upon her head,
She went to find a jolly hour on the trolley
And found my heart instead..."*

A man arrives with a newspaper tucked under his arm and assumes the singer is waiting for the bus, so he stands behind him to form a queue at the bus stop, reading his paper and chewing gum. The singer continues to sing, looking at his flowers ecstatically. Soon a bus arrives. The door opens. The driver looks at the singer expectantly – so does newspaper man. "You getting on or what?" he says. The singer picks up his hat and his tape machine and steps on the bus – the driver takes his fare from the hat. He chooses a seat near the front. Newspaper man sits on the back seat. The singer continues to sing as the bus pulls away and now the driver joins him to sing,

"Clang, clang, clang..."

“...went the trolley,” picks up the singer.
“Ding, ding, ding...” chimes newspaper man without looking up from the page.
“...went the bell. Zing, zing, zing went my heart strings, for the moment I saw her I fell.”

“Chug, chug, chug...” sings the driver matter-of-factly as he changes gear.
“...went the motor,”
“Bump, bump, bump...”
“...went the brake.” The bus stops at the next stop and the man with a newspaper gets off. A woman with too much shopping gets on, puffing from running for the bus. She can't find the right change in her purse.
“Thump, thump, thump went my heartstrings,
When she smiled I could feel the car shake.” The singer helps the woman carry her shopping to her seat, singing to her conversationally.

“I tipped my hat and took a seat,
I said I hoped I hadn't stood upon her feet...” The bus pulls away and they both lose their balance.
“I asked her name then lost my breath
She looked so lovely that it scared me half to death.”
“Buzz, buzz, buzz...” sings the woman, pushing the buzzer, mopping her forehead and her armpits with a tissue.
“...Went the buzzer.”
“Plop, plop, plop...” sings the driver.
“...Went the wheels. Stop, stop, stop went my heartstrings,
As she started to leave, I took hold of her sleeve with my hand.”

The bus slows down and stops. The woman carries her shopping laboriously down the steps. The bus sits still with the engine idling.

“And as if it were planned she stayed on with me and it was grand,
Just to stand with her hand holding mine to the end of the line.”

The singer is looking out of the windows, puzzled, his bright tone faltering. The driver leans over the barrier to his cab and shouts,
“Come on, hop it. This's as far as you've paid.” The singer gets off forlornly and the bus drives away. He's in a quiet suburban street on a hill overlooking the city. They're starting bell-ringing practice at the cathedral – the first irregular peal carries uninterrupted through the evening air to the singer where he stands but he doesn't notice. He's transfixed by the house outside which he's been dropped. It's as familiar and inescapably personal as the smell of his own breath when he wakes in the middle of the night.

“David!” The singer jumps to hear himself called by his name – it hasn't happened for a while before today. A middle-aged man in a khaki bush-hat and gardening gloves has called to him. He's cutting the hedge of the house next door. *“Fancy that! I was thinking of you just the other day. You're a rare visitor to these parts nowadays.”* David stands behind his flowers dumbly. *“Oh, you shouldn't have! Irises too. I still grow them, you know.”* He sees David looking at the house next door. *“It's changed a bit since... since then*

hasn't it? The lot who went in straight after took down the lime tree. Said it made their car all sticky." Now he whispers conspiratorially, "This lot put those funny windows in."

David swallows and continues to look at the house with his mouth slightly open. "You look parched. Come and have a glass of squash. I can put those in some water. They look parched too!" The man lays down his shears, takes the flowers from David and leads the way into the house. "How've you been? Mrs Staunton said she saw you in town, singing for your supper." He talks from the kitchen – David has stopped in the hall. "She said your voice still brings a tear to her eye... In the best possible way, that is! Shame really, man of your talents David, singing in the street." He brings the glasses of squash into the hall.

David is looking through a door at a highly polished, upright piano. "Spotted the old Josianah then! Go on, go in". David goes into the room and looks at the piano. "Do you remember when you started to learn..." he starts to wind the piano stool up and up, "...I had to wind the stool right up to here for you?! Course, then you couldn't reach the pedals so your dad made these for you." He pulls two carefully shaped wooden blocks and wipes the dust off them. "'Pedal extremities", he called them, from that Fats Waller song, what was it called?" He looks through a song book from the top of the piano. "I used to play it and he used to sing it. "Your Feet's too Big"! That's it!" he chuckles, puts the music on the music stand, winds down the piano stool, sits and plays a bit of the chorus. David sings it automatically, but quietly, frowning.

The man stops in the middle of the chorus and drinks some of his squash, looking at David. "I went over to see your mum and dad the other week. Don't you ever go David? It looked a terrible mess – grass all grown up, there's that much lichen on the stone you could hardly read their names. It looked like Stonehenge or something. Made me feel like an ancient monument myself, 'cause it only seems like yesterday to me. "Yesterday"! You used to love singing that. It used to make your little eyes water!" He looks through a Beatles songbook from the top of the piano. "I used to say, "David, are you crying?" and you used to say, "I've got something in my eye!" He plays a snatch of "Yesterday" and again, David joins in automatically, through the force of old habit.

*"Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away,
Now it looks as if they're here to stay..."*

The man breaks off playing again and drinks some more squash, then speaks to himself as much as David. "I warned them about the fibreglass cars. Crunch like an eggshell in a crash, I told them, quite apart from the fact they look ridiculous. Your dad wouldn't listen, of course. Always drove a Kitten. "Mike, it's got the fuel consumption of a scooter! You know what your problem is?" he used to say to me, "You worry too much about what other people think. Who cares what other people think, what do you think, Mike?" Such a strong man. One in a million. Of course, they'd've needed a tank to withstand an impact like that. I'll never understand why someone had to take a steam

engine from A to B by road. A miracle, they said, the police, how you came out of it alive. They said on the local telly what a little soldier you were – never cried. Took it on the chin. You were singing, “The Way you Look Tonight” when they pulled you out, they said. I’ve always wondered why.”

He starts to play it absent-mindedly. David hears his father singing it to his mother in the car. She laughs and hums along.

*“Someday, when I’m awfully low,
When the world is cold,
I will feel a glow just thinking of you
Just the way you look tonight... Come on David, sing for your mother!”* A child’s voice sings,

*“Oh but you’re lovely, with your smile so warm,
And your cheek so soft,
There is nothing for me but to love you,
Just the way you look tonight.”*

David walks out of the house. The man continues to play to himself without noticing, swept along by the irresistible beauty of the melody.

David walks into a hospital room un-noticed and watches a doctor and a junior doctor examining a child.

“Who’ve we got here then?”

“David Eglos, nine years old, RTA, vehicle crushed, sustained lacerations to the inner thighs and perineum from the transmission tunnel of a Reliant Kitten.”

“David? Can you hear me? We’re just going to check you over to see where you’re hurt. Have we contacted the parents?”

“They were in the car too. DOA I’m afraid. Poor little chap. He’s been singing like a lark since they pulled him out. He’s been sedated but it doesn’t seem to’ve made any difference.”

“There’s some nasty cuts on the left inner thigh, lucky to miss an artery... Good Lord!”

“What?”

“There’s no mention of this on his medical record...”

“What?”

“He’s as much Dawn as David.”

“Sorry?”

“He’s got both sets of tackle.”

“Pardon?”

“Hermaphrodite. Look.”

“Good Lord! I’ve never seen that before!”

“Neither have I. One’s read about it, of course. Extraordinary!”

“How did they miss it at birth?”

“Easily I imagine. It’s not that apparent.”

“I wonder if the parents knew?”

“I should think so. Think of all those nappy changes.”

“Why wouldn’t they have told anyone?”

“Maybe they thought he’d have a quieter life if they kept it a secret.”
“Poor... thing.”
“We shall have to tell social services. Any prospective adopters will have to know what they’re getting under the bonnet.”
“You know, they say there’s another half for all of us out there, but where’s the other half for something like this?”
They notice that David has stopped singing.
“David? Can you hear me?”
“You don’t suppose, you don’t suppose he doesn’t know?”
“Everything’s going to be fine! Don’t you worry about a thing...”



It’s evening and darkness has fallen. We look in through a large, rectangular window to a brightly-lit kitchen. Louise is stood at the sink washing up, listening to “The Way You Look Tonight.” She’s alone and sings along, looking dreamily into the air. She’s more involved with the music than the washing up, and pauses for long moments, brush dripping in her hand, tears dripping from her face.

A man comes into the kitchen looking at a magazine. He puts an arm round Louise from behind for a moment but carries on looking at the magazine. She wipes the tears from her face with the dry part of the back of her wrist. It’s not a big secret that she’s been crying, she’d just prefer the man not to see. He goes to the CD player in the corner of the room and turns the music right down ‘til it’s virtually inaudible. Louise looks at the ceiling, still leaning up against the sink and sighs with exasperation. He starts to read out loud from the magazine, as if to prove something he’s already said.

“For the one household in five that owns one, a dishwasher tends to be seen as an essential, not a luxury. Not surprising, given the manufacturer’s claim that a dishwasher can save about 300 hours a year you’d otherwise spend toiling over a suds-filled sink...”

As if for the thousandth time, Louise says, “I don’t want a dishwasher.”

“You claim to care about the environment, don’t you? Listen to this. Seven of these they’ve tested use less than half the water you use washing up by hand. 16 litres compared to 40... 40!”

Louise has dried her hands on the tea towel, gone to the CD player and now turns the music up louder than it was to begin with, as if to drown the man out. Then she returns to the sink and continues washing up. He turns it back down again.

“It’s not like you’re here much. Then you come home and do this obsessive music thing.”

“Can’t I listen to a bit of music in my own kitchen?”

“It’s not just a bit of music though, is it? It’s some weird, fucked-up emotional masturbation thing.”

“So. I’m a wanker.”

“It’s not healthy.”

“Listen to you! Next you’ll be telling me I’ll go blind.”

“Why were you crying?”

“Because the music moved me”

“I don’t know, it’s just... It really shuts me out.”

“It’s a bit of Gershwin, not the Berlin Wall! Join me if you like, just let’s listen together quietly.”

She turns the music up again. He turns it down again.

He says, “300 hours you spend sobbing in the dishwater with your precious, sappy music. 300 hours we could spend together. We could be playing a board game. You used to love Scrabble. And Backgammon. We could join a sports club, play squash, go swimming together. It’s coming up for evening class time of year again. I don’t know, we could learn Spanish together. Or just go to the pub, make some friends, have a social life. Maybe we could even talk to each other...”

An internal restraint parts suddenly in Louise and she finds herself throwing plates, something she’s not done before. She throws plates at the man ‘til he leaves the room. Then she smashes a few more.

“You’re a bloody looper, you are!” shouts the man from the safety of the other side of the door. Louise throws a few more plates at the door. Finding how much she’s enjoying it she throws some more on the floor, even taking the dirty plates out of the washing-up bowl. Realising it’s doing her a power of good, she smashes some glasses and some mugs. Her eyes light on the huge ceramic fruit bowl on the kitchen table and she dashes it on the ground. It won’t break, so she hits it with a chair. It still won’t break so she stops.

The music has continued unheard. Now the noise has stopped, Louise can hear that “Night and Day” is beginning. She turns it up and listens to the introduction thoughtfully. Suddenly she starts to sketch a dance movement in the air with her hands and feet, repeating it over and over, perfecting it, crunching on the broken crockery obliviously.

Solitude

David waits under the clock near the shop window. It’s almost seven – he’s in a frenzy of nervousness. Every second that the big, old clock ticks off with its second hand to the hour, he becomes more nervous. He clutches a single red bloom, a flower a child might draw, its stem wrapped in foil. Time becomes a song endlessly modulating nervously up and down. David smells his own breath, combs his hair with his fingers, wipes his sweaty palms on his trousers.

The clock starts to strike the hour. One – he ducks with shock at the loudness of the chime from overhead – two – he starts to hop from foot to foot, craning along the street to see if he can see her coming – three – he starts to whimper – four – he starts to pray – five – she appears from the other direction and

walks up behind him – six – she taps him on the shoulder – seven – David turns and sees Louise... Time stops, suspended on threads of silence.

She's stood still, frozen in the gap between a tick and a tock, or so it seems to David, so distended is this moment. She's dressed more glamorously than the last time he saw her and she has some glossy substance on her lips. He could run away – he thinks about it. Instead he gazes at her face. Its loveliness to him is irresistible and he kisses her. His lips stay on hers for a long time – once they've arrived they don't want to leave. A calm spreads from his lips through his whole body such as he has never experienced before. Then, slowly, he takes his lips from hers and stands with his eyes shut, savouring the sensation. When he opens his eyes she's still stood still.

Time starts again, underscored with a muted but insistent refrain of "Night and Day". "Hello. It's me, Louise!" she says with a grin. He offers her his flower. "Gerberas! I love gerberas! Thank you." She gives him a quick, chaste kiss on the cheek. "We'd better go. We haven't got much time before we have to be there. There's a little park just along here where we can be private. Oh my God! Listen to me! I just want to say, I've never done anything like this before. I bet you haven't either. Just trust me, alright? Once you get the hang of it you'll really enjoy it..." They stand opposite each other on the grass now. She throws down her bag and her jacket, she kicks off her shoes and takes hold of his hands. "Do you know "Night and Day"?"

"Night and day, you are the one..." David kicks in automatically. "That's it!" she cuts in to stop him singing the whole song. "Now, can you dance?" David pushes his glasses up on the bridge of his nose and adjusts his heart, then shakes his head. "Never mind. My idea's not too complicated. I just don't want to stand there singing like a pair of puddings. Do you want to give it a go?" David hesitates – he's terrified of dancing. Louise can tell. "Alright, never mind." She starts to pick up her bag. "It was a crazy idea..." David catches her by the hands and smiles. She smiles too. "OK. Put your arms like this. This is how it starts..."



"Night and Day, you are the one..."

There's a hubbub of voices around them now, and glasses clinking together, and people laughing, some singing along. David and Louise find themselves on a little stage in a pub singing an upbeat version of "Night and Day" in the karaoke.

"Only you beneath the moon and under the sun."

There are dance steps too, that Louise has taught David, that he follows now with a startled expression on his face. Every now and again she glances at him to check he's alright and smiles to encourage him.

"Whether near to me or far,

*It's no matter darling where you are,
I think of you, night and day."*

Louise sings and dances with a passionate abandon. The dance gets more frenetic as the song gathers pace.

*"Day and night, why is it so
That this longing for you follows wherever I go?
In the roaring traffic's boom
In the silence of my lonely room
I think of you, night and day."*

And David begins to throw himself into the song too, inflamed by Louise and her performance.

*"Night and day, under the hide of me,
There's an, oh, such a hungry yearning burning inside of me.
And its torment won't be through
'Til you let me spend my life making love to you..."*

The frenzied pattern of steps brings David and Louise face to face at this climactic moment in the song. Again, time seems to hesitate a moment – everyone in the pub falls silent, struck dumb by the obvious electricity of the moment, as if David and Louise's faces were two terminals between which a huge blue spark had leapt.

"Day and night, night and day!"

The song concludes triumphantly. There's a roar of boisterous applause. David and Louise take their shy, amateur bows but it's obvious they're both thrilled. They come down off the stage and Louise leads David by the hand through the pub "Do you want to come out for a breath of fresh air? It's boiling in here." She leads David by the hand out of the pub. Outside she suddenly kisses him on the mouth. "Thanks." She says when she's finished, and runs over the road, kicks off her shoes, throws them over some railings and climbs after them. "Come on. I love parks at night." Looking nervously to see if they are being watched, David climbs after her with some difficulty.

Louise flops down on the grass and leans her back against a tree. David sits against the other side of the tree and looks up at the stars he can see peeping down through the leaves of the tree.

"You don't exactly say much, do you? It's like you're in your own silent film. I like that." After a pause she says, "Do you ever feel like, who you really are is wrapped up in newspaper in a cardboard box like glass balls for the Christmas tree? Only Christmas never seems to arrive, or it's a house where they don't bother to decorate the tree anymore. So you've got to sneak a look every now and again. Just sneak a look at a few bits from the box of who you really are." Louise sniggers to herself. "Jesus! Will you listen to me! "

She looks up into the tree and starts to climb out of sight into the leafy heart of it. David stands up and tries to see where she's gone through the moonlight and the leaves. "Are you coming up or not?" And now her blouse flutters down and lands on David's head. "I'll show you my decorations if you show me yours!"

David frets at the bottom of the tree to the point where he's about to leave, but he turns at the last moment and throws off his jacket at the base of the tree before leaping into its lower branches.

Louise pops through the canopy half way up the tree with her skirt in her hand. David sticks his head out lower down, looking for Louise, abandoning his trousers into the leaves. "Woo-oo!" She waves her skirt then throws it at him before disappearing back into the tree. Its branches shiver and sway as Louise and David move through it like fleas in cat fur, popping out now and again to discard a vest here, pants there. The tree is alive with commotion, Louise squealing and giggling, and David singing "Louise" –

*"Wonderful! Oh it's wonderful, to be in love with you.
Beautiful! You're so beautiful, you haunt me all day through.
Evr'y little breeze seems to whisper "Louise",
Birds in the trees seem to twitter "Louise"..."*

When they've abandoned every last stitch and the tree is festooned with their clothes like a giant Christmas tree, they both find themselves at the top of the tree, head and shoulders out of the leaves, face to face, swaying on the same spindly limb, their hair ruffled by a light air. A bird starts to sing nearby up there in the treetops. Louise is delighted. "There's a bird singing! I didn't think they sang at night." She puts an arm round David's neck. "Touch me." She says. He touches her breast as carefully as a bird turns an egg in a nest. "Do you mind if I touch you?" She says. He looks at her face and the fear melts from his heart. Surely, up here, he is finally above scorn. He nods. Her free hand travels down from his neck to find his body under the leaves.

"Oh!" It is more with surprise than disgust that Louise recoils now, but this is enough to unsettle their precarious equilibrium on the fragile branch. The sudden movement cracks the branch where it joins the body of the tree and they are both pitched down, bumping from limb to limb towards the ground. They fall in an undignified heap at the bottom of the tree. David is first up, and clutching his assorted genitalia, he runs into the night without retrieving his clothing.

"Wait! It was just a shock. David! It doesn't matter... Nothing matters... I... I've got inverted nipples! Wait..." Louise calls after him covering herself with her skirt and his trousers. "Shit."

Two Fingers

"Perdido, I look for my heart it's perdido,

*I lost it way down in Torrido
The day the fiesta started...*

David is singing glumly under the clock in the High Street once more. His mood is in direct contrast to the bright sunshine. It's just coming up to twelve noon. There's more crowd noise than usual – the High Street is chocker with people excited about something other than shopping. A child skips in front of David waving a little plastic union jack. She stands and watches him for a moment. "Are you going to sing for the Queen?" David replies with his graceful shrug and continues to sing. The little girl's dad pushes her pushchair past, festooned with flags.
"Come on poppet."

The clock starts to chime midday. It gives David as much of a shock as it did the other evening – he flinches violently. "One... two... three..." counts out the little girl.

*"High was the sun when I held her close.
Low was the moon when we said Adios."*

David valiantly continues to sing. The girl's dad comes back to take her by the hand and lead her away but she won't have it as she's determined to count out the chimes. "Seven... eight... nine..."

"Perdido, my heart ever since is perdido..."

"Ten... eleven... twelve..." There's a peculiar grinding from the clock, like the grinding of metal teeth, and then the clock chimes once more, loudly, defiantly. "Thirteen!" shouts the little girl and skips on. David stops singing and looks up at the clock as if it's just pronounced sentence over him. Along the street behind him comes a man in a boiler suit carrying a ladder, looking up at the clock. He leans it over David and climbs up to the clock. When David turns back to the street he gets a shock to find himself suddenly stood under a ladder. He moves his things a little to the side, so he's no longer directly under the ladder, but the mechanic finds that he needs to reach into the clock from another angle to fix it, so he comes down and re-positions his ladder over David's head again. David is just moving his stuff again when he's startled to see, here in the crowded High Street, a black cat threading towards him, and on past him. The mechanic has discovered he hasn't got the right tools for the job and has come down and carried his ladder away for now. The street has been darkening. Suddenly there's a lightning flash followed seconds after by a clap of thunder. The black cat scuttles away.

David watches the cat run away. While he's looking along the street after it, another apparition comes along the street behind him. Although slightly more jowly, heavier in the frame, somehow darker, a man appears who resembles David in every last detail – the same bottle-bottom specs, grubby shirt cuffs, the same shiny-bottomed suit, bowtie and scuffed Hush Puppies. Even the same, greasy, thick, side-parted hair. For long, strange moments David doesn't notice his doppelganger, and his doppelganger doesn't notice him.

They co-exist on the street as comfortably as a novelty, twin, busking act. The double has a very heavy tape machine that he sets down very gently on the pavement. He presses play. His system seems to have a karaoke function because he gets a handheld microphone out of his pocket. Strangely though, it seems to operate remotely because he doesn't plug it in, but starts to sing into it distractedly, with a voice like gravel in a cement mixer.

Turning to see where this awful sound is coming from, David nearly falls down with shock when he sees his double. He approaches him in disbelief, as if he might be a mirage that will evaporate on closer scrutiny. The double is so busy looking around him into the crowd that he doesn't notice David approaching, and he, too, is physically shaken when he finally sees his mirror image standing in front of him. He's a cool customer though, and assimilates this bizarre, unwelcome coincidence swiftly. He looks David up and down, nodding his head slightly, his face as hard and expressionless as a concrete patio. He looks past David at his little tape player, and, putting his microphone carefully in his pocket, he walks casually over to it. David follows. His double squats, takes out the tape in the machine, stands, looks David in the eye and snaps the cassette in half between their faces. Then having returned to his own machine and got out his microphone again, he turns to David and gives him "the Finger" before starting to sing again, confident that David poses not the faintest threat.

But "the Finger" that David's double has held up at him is no ordinary finger. David would have been shocked enough by this inexplicably aggressive behaviour, but now he sees that his double's middle finger is disturbingly elongated. Already, further up the High Street can be heard the cheering of the crowd as the royal entourage slowly approaches on its visit to the city centre. The Finger looks at his watch, and seems to decide that, yes, now is the moment to get going. He crouches by his player and carefully throws a small switch on the back of it, then he walks away from it without looking back, taking his microphone with him.

David approaches the tape machine, which continues to play. He tries to pick it up and finds it is bizarrely heavy. Suddenly Louise's words come back to him, "I can't tell you much but it is a matter of national security." David realises it's a bomb. He panics. He covers his mouth. He goes to warn the crowd, he kneels and frantically fiddles with the machine – he doesn't know what to do. He decides to follow the Finger. Down the narrow alley where the Finger disappeared goes David, under an old archway and into an empty square – all the people are on the High Street for the Royal visit. The Finger is nowhere in sight but a pigeon flies up, startled by the closing of a church door. It's one of those ancient city centre churches, forgotten and free of congregation nowadays, full only of deep, dusty silence. David goes in, shutting the door quietly behind him. A group of old men with their backs to David are preparing to ring a peal for the royal visit. "...nice and measured lads. Mr Soanes, no running away with yourself..."

A spiral staircase to the belfry rises inside a narrow doorway to David's left. He sticks his head through the door and he can just hear footsteps climbing

the tower. He slips into the doorway, un-noticed by the bell-ringers and starts to creep up the stairs himself.

The belfry is dim when David peeps in through the door at the top of the steps – the only light bounces up through the louvres in the great ogive arches that let the sound of the bells out of the tower. He can just make out the colossal masses of the bells hanging between wheels on great timber frames as sturdily proportioned as railway sleepers. The sound of the crowd gathers up through the louvres too, seems amplified by them – the cheers sound closer now – the Royal Walkabout must be approaching the foot of the bell tower in the High Street. Then David sees the Finger crouched by the louvres, peering down at the crowd. He tip-toes closer in the gloom until he can see down over the Finger's shoulder. There, clearly in his line of view is the heavy, squat tape machine, with hundreds of people milling around it. The cheers are very close now. The Finger delicately flips open the top of his microphone to expose a red button as he waits for precisely the most devastating moment.

Behind them both, without either knowing, the bells have started to swing in their cradles further and further in their oscillations but still silent, silent before the critical moment when the sledgehammer-heavy clappers will meet the lips of the bells. As the first strikes home both men literally jump off their feet. The pigeons that have made the belfry their home fill the air in panic now. The Finger reels to his left and looks at the bell in deafened disbelief. Standing behind his right shoulder, David remains unseen. He recognises his chance – no question of valour, only the momentary glimpse of an opportunity and the reflex to take it – and he dives for the detonator, snatching it from the Finger's grasp.

The Finger is so stunned by the double impact of these two surprises, he hesitates for a crucial fraction of a second as David crashes to the ground in front of him before reaching for his gun. By this time David just manages to scuttle among the thundering bells. The Finger fires a volley after him, which ricochets off the bells and sends a flurry of sparks into the darkness. The bells continue to pound, and swallow the noise of gunfire completely. The Finger creeps after David. A pigeon flies up – David steps backwards around the corner just as the Finger fires along the aisle he's just left. The Finger backs round the other side of the bell. So the two men are back to back, three steps apart. Unknowingly mirroring each other's movements they turn, scanning the edge of the belfry until they are face to face. Both are hypnotised momentarily by the sensation of standing in front of a mirror rather than another human being.

They scream simultaneously. David grabs the gun, the Finger grabs the detonator and they wrestle for control, their arms in the air, waving from side to side, twisting round and round, the gun firing into the air at every swing, moving as if in some infernal dance routine. Their arms swing in wider and faster arcs until they topple over and apart, sending the gun in one direction and the detonator in the other. The Finger scuttles after the gun, David after the detonator, which unfortunately rolls right under one of the bells. He darts to the other side of the bell and crouches there. He can see the detonator but

the bell sweeps just above it on each of its downward swings, so close it would crush any arm reaching for it. There is a second on either side of the swing to reach under and make a grab for the detonator. Little does David know, The Finger has seen the detonator too, and crouches on the other side of the bell, daring himself to retrieve it as well. In fact neither can see the other. David reaches under first but fails to grasp the detonator before having to snatch back his hand. Then the Finger reaches and fails. David tries again and fails again. So does the Finger. Then they both steel themselves and reach simultaneously, finding each other's grasp rather than the detonator, making them cry out with shock. The Finger fires his gun repeatedly under the bell. David jumps up and down in terror to avoid the bullets. But now there's a dry click-click-click as the hammer of the gun falls repeatedly on an empty chamber – he has run out of bullets. "FUCK!" he screams and frantically reloads the gun. David knows he can't have much time. He scrabbles desperately in and out under the bell until, at last, he finds the microphone and dashes into the doorway to the stairs.

Unfortunately, the Finger is waiting for him there, knowing David would have to take that route to escape. He backs David out into the belfry, the gun in his chest, and takes the detonator from him. He backs David closer and closer to the nearest huge bell until he is so close he can feel the rush of turbulent air disturbed by the scything motion of the bell. The Finger is going to push him into the path of bell. David screws his eyes shut and braces himself for the impact...

Instead, there is a single, devastating blast from the darkness of the stairwell. The Finger gasps and falls to his knees. He fumbles to open the lid to the detonator, but another two shots ring out and he slumps on the floor.

Louise steps out of the shadows, still training her gun on the Finger. She prises the detonator and the gun from his hands. David watches, still frozen with terror, his arms still in the air. Louise straightens up and looks at him, then they both look at the Finger, who writhes slowly on the floor, his lungs filling with blood, his mouth spilling whispers. David kneels by him, takes his hand and strokes his hair. The finger is trying to say something to him, repeating a word something like, "Amagda, amagda..." Maybe a name, or a warning. David puts his face close to hear him as best he can, but the Finger gasps and dies. David gets up slowly and looks at Louise, then shakes his head. Very gently, she puts her arms around him. Slowly he puts his arms round her and they stand amid the bells as they stop ringing one by one and the sound of the cheering crowd reaches up to them once more.

One in a million-million-million

It's pouring with rain in the High Street, and yet there's music in the air, the introduction to "Just the Two of Us" to be precise. People rush to and fro, running for shelter or trying to walk along occupying exactly the space under their umbrellas where no rain is reaching. They move with a choreographic bounce to their step, a certain brio, a pep. It's hard to tell whether this is due

to the electricity in the air (there are frequent flashes of lightning and their attendant thunderclaps), or the brimming sentimental joy of the number.

And here come David and Louise, arm in arm, sharing an umbrella, singing to each other:

*“I see the crystal raindrops fall, and the beauty of it all
Is when the sun comes shining through
To make these rainbows in my mind, when I think of you sometime
And I want to spend some time with you...”*

They prospect for a spot to sing on the street. David nods at a corner, Louise surveys it briefly, then turns up her nose and shakes her head. David nods at another. Louise shakes her head again. The third place is good enough. They set up together. David holds the umbrella while Louise takes the hat off his head, straightens his parting and places the hat on the street. Then she holds the umbrella while he sets up the tape player. There’s a sense of house-pride as they make themselves at home on the street, singing as they work.

*“Just the two of us, we can make it if we try.
Just the two of us, just the two of us.
Just the two of us, building castles in the sky,
Just the two of us, just the two of us.”*

They finish their preparations, join each other arm in arm under the umbrella and sing out to the street, swaying to the music.

*“We look for love; no time for tears;
Wasted water’s all that is, and it don’t make no flowers grow.
Good things might come to those who wait
But not for those who wait too late;
We’ve got to go for all we know.”*

One or two people rush by – David and Louise follow them hopefully with their eyes, but the rain is getting heavier and no-one is inclined to notice them, let alone put any money in their hat. By the time they finish the verse, the street is deserted. They’re alone together. There’s literally just the two of them. They look either way along the empty street, then at each other, then they close their umbrella and let the rain soak them. David picks up his hat, which has filled with water and puts it on Louise’s head. Louise pushes David backwards until he’s stood under a gurgling down pipe. They run up and down the street kicking puddles at each other.

Standing in their own puddles, they stop splashing each other, stop singing even, although the music carries on and look at each other grinning. They both realise that they have never been happier in their lives than at this moment.

Slowly they approach each other and kiss, a lingering kiss of arrival, of welcome...

And they are struck by lightning.

They stand smoking, blackened, frazzled, still lip to lip.

And they are struck by lightning again.

Still they stand and kiss.

theatre alibi

One in a Million

by Daniel Jamieson

The Script

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1. A Nightingale sang.

(We hear the throng of crowds passing. Three watchers stand and watch the world going by. After some moments, they notice the audience and share their perspective with them.)

Watcher 1: Sometimes life seems a rare orchid that blooms unseen in the corner of a bog...

Watcher 2: before being trampled by a goat.

Watcher 3: A Saturday afternoon in the High Street - so many people passing, the sheer variety of physical form on display is magnificent, a deft ringing of changes in the flesh.

Watcher 1: The frizzy... the sleek.

Watcher 2: The corpulent... the pencil gaunt.

Watcher 3: The mighty... the mousey.

Watcher 2: The pallid...

Watcher 3: the sallow...

Watcher 1: the glossy brown... **(They notice someone approaching.)**

Watcher 2: Here comes a funny looking chap.

(It's a young man with bottle-bottom specs, mole paws out of grubby shirt cuffs, beaver teeth, a shiny bottomed suit, a bow tie, thick, greasy pubic-seeming hair parted down one side topped off with a battered brown felt trilby and scuffed hush puppies. He has with him a tape player.)

Watcher 1: He may look nothing special, but he's got "one in a million" written right through him.

Watcher 3: How exactly, "one in a million"?

Watcher 2: Is it some gift he has?

Watcher 1: He certainly knows how to deliver a song.

Watcher 3: Is he one in a million because he exists at all?

Watcher 1: Well, you could say that, because he can claim an unbroken lineage right, right back to the pioneers of the primordial swamp. His great grandfather to the power of so many million was one of those fish who flippered out of the ooze.

Watcher 2: Does "one in a million" refer to the scale of his handicap in life? The chance of him attracting a mate are one in a million, the chance of him being happy are one in a million?

Watcher 1: Maybe.

Watcher 3: Or is his one in a million status to do with some bizarre twist fate has singled out for his life?

Watcher 1: I don't know, just enjoy the orchid before that goat comes along.

(The object of our attention puts his hat on the ground in front of him, presses the "play" button on his tape machine and begins to sing along to it. The watchers melt into the imaginary crowd, putting coins in the singer's hat as they pass him.)

David: ***(Singing)** That certain night, the night we met, there was magic abroad in the air. There were angels dining at the Ritz and a nightingale sang in Berk'ley Square.*

(A woman with a six-month-old baby in her arms stops to listen. Her mobile phone rings. The ring tone is the theme tune of the Simpsons and it gets louder and louder. She pulls the phone out of her bag and answers it.)

Woman: Who's that?... Hello!... I'm in Berk'ley Square! No, not really. A man's singing it... **(She holds up the phone to the singer.)** Here, in the high street. By Tesco's... Yes. What do you need? Senior IAMS. He's not old enough for senior is he?

(The baby has been peaceful, but the phone call has disturbed it and now it starts to kick up a stink. A youth goes by, bouncing a basket-ball. A canvasser passes, soliciting opinion as she goes. A drunk staggers past singing "Mull of Kintyre". A Securicor van reverses past David. A woman ties a barking dog right by him. A workman sets up with a pneumatic drill and starts hammering away... All of these other sounds seem to belong together, and form an impenetrable mesh around the singer's "Nightingale in Berk'ley Square", enclosing it in indifferent cacophony. But from one moment to the next, all of these other sounds stop coincidentally. Suddenly, too late, the song is released in its last line.)

David **(Singing)** *...and as we kissed and said goodnight,
A nightingale sang in Berk'ley Square.*

Woman: **(The woman with a baby is still stood by David.)** Was that nice? Uh? Was that nice? **(Baby yawns.)** Yes! It was! Shall we give the man a sherbet lemon? **(She puts one in her daughter's hand to give to the singer. The child desperately tries to put the sweet in its own mouth.)** Give it to the nice man... no, naughty. You're too young, sweetie, you might choke. When you're older you can have sherbet lemons. **(She takes the sweet out of the child's hand and gives it to the singer herself. The child howls with frustration. Her mother carries her away.)** Say bye-bye. Bye-bye!

Watcher: The singer looks at the fruit of his labour. It's all sticky with baby spit. **(David puts the sweet in his mouth.)** Buskers can't be choosers. **(David rifles through his little box of cassettes and finds just the thing. He puts it on and starts to sing to it.)**

David: *The people gather round when he gets on the stand,
Then when he plays he gets a hand,
The rhythm he beats puts the cats in a trance,
Nobody there bothers to dance,
But when he jams with the bass and guitar, they holler,
“Beat me, daddy, eight to the bar!”*

(A passing pair of bouncers on their way to work, identifiable by their uniform bomber jackets, stop to enjoy David’s performance. Singing and sucking simultaneously, swept up in the swing of the song, David takes a deep breath to start his favourite part of the song, the part where it goes, “A plink, a plank...” and inhales his sherbet lemon. His eyes bulge as he clutches at his throat, but the music carries on relentlessly. When he’s purple in the face and fallen on his knees, the bouncers finally recognise his plight.)

Bouncer 1: He’s choking!

Bouncer 2: You alright mate?

Bouncer 1: Course he’s not, you nob, he’s choking! Help me get him up. I’ll give him the Heimlich Manoeuvre. **(They get him on his feet and one of them squeezes him well-meaningly but with a vigour characteristic of his profession.)** It’s not working.

Bouncer 2: Let’s do the Holger-Nielson. **(They pass the singer between them like a rag-doll and the other one squeezes him in an even more violent fashion.)** It’s not working.

Both: Butterfly! **(They swing him by his arms and legs higher and higher.)** One – two – three... It’s not working.

Bouncer 2: Gentleman’s excuse me! **(He turns him upside down.)** Excuse me. **(And shakes him.)** One – two – three... We’re losing him.

Bouncer 1: Time for the old tummy rub. **(One holds the singer by the arms while the other punches him once, twice, three times harder and harder in the stomach until finally the sherbet lemon**

shoots onto the pavement.) Bloody sherbet lemon! Here you are mate. Souvenir for you.

Bouncer 2: You want to lay off those when you're yodelling, mate. Definite choking hazard.

Bouncer 1: We might not be here for you next time.

Bouncer 2: So long, bud. **(They set off for work with the glow of Samaritans about them. The singer crawls to a bench. The music is drawing to a close and he croaks to himself)**

David: *"And when he jams with the bass and guitar, they holler,
"Aw beat me, daddy, eight to the bar."*

2.Trapping the Finger

(Into a neon lit room comes a woman with grey hair, a tweed overcoat, baggy tights, brown brogues and a zimmer frame slung casually over one shoulder. Soon she's joined by a man with a flat cap, Eric Morecombe glasses, a burberry muffler, a dirty body-warmer, beige slacks and brown hush puppies. He looks round for a chair.)

Jim: No chairs.

(The woman perches on her zimmer frame. The man leans against the wall. After a moment he takes off his cap and his ill-fitting wig comes with it. He scratches his head with both hands. She takes the wig from him and looks at it thoughtfully, then starts to stroke it, making it pant and yap. Suddenly she feigns it leaping at the man's throat. He snatches it off her and puts it back on.)

Jim: Grow up will you. Anyway, yours isn't much better.

Louise: Why've we suddenly got to wear wigs?

Jim: New head of covert is a wig man. Apparently he's got a background in theatrical costumery.

Louise: Seriously?

Jim: Yep. And he's in charge of this job.

Louise: I'm gonna laugh. I know it.

(A priest comes in. He has an air of authority about him, a fat dossier under one arm and a bright ginger, curly wig on his head.)

Conglebury: Morning lads and lasses.

Jim/Louise: Morning. **(They don't look up, for fear of setting themselves off laughing. They can't suppress a snigger when they catch sight of him.)**

Conglebury: Everything OK?

Louise: Sorry sir, this air conditioning is playing hell with my sinuses.

Jim: Me too, sir.

Conglebury: Right. Let's get started. I'm Brian Conglebury, new head of covert ops and I'm in charge of this one today. And you two jokers are?

Louise: Louise Johnson, sir.

Jim: Jim Tozer, sir.

Conglebury: Well, Jim, Louise, today we're going after "The Finger". As you might know, this guy is a significant player in an international terror network. He always operates alone and is a master of disguise. **(Conglebury shows them some photos.)** Here he is as a lollypop man, a newspaper vendor, and one of those street performers who stands still 'til you put money in their hat. We've been tipped off he's about to strike in the city we've come to today. He normally goes for places where hundreds of people pass through or congregate. He

waits for large public events - a state visit, a major sporting event, a street festival. Then he leaves a device on the street and detonates it remotely. As you may be aware, there's a royal visit taking place to this city next month. We believe "The Finger" is setting up in a street at the heart of the city in anticipation of that event. We want to take him alive if possible. Naturally we have full firearms backup. Either way, we want to take him out of the equation which is why we're here today. Here's our latest photograph of him working on the street. **(Conglebury flashes up a picture of David, the singer, busking on the street.)** Any questions?

Louise: He looks pretty harmless to me.

Conglebury: Don't be fooled. He's as ruthless as they come.

Jim: Why's he called "The Finger"?"

Conglebury: He has a strangely elongated middle finger. It's unmistakable. Ghoulish, people say.



(It's brass-monkey weather in the high street today and the singer is just pulling on his woolly mittens. He's working through his "Fats Waller" tape and is coming to the end of "The Joint is Jumping". He's jumping too, and stamping and clapping his hands together to stay warm.)

David: *...We're all bums when the wagon comes.
I mean this joint is jumping.
Don't give you're right name, no, no, no! (The next song begins –
"Ain't Misbehavin".)*

*No-one to talk with, all by myself,
No-one to walk with, but I'm happy on the shelf.
Ain't misbehavin', I'm savin' my love for you..."*

(And now a woman with grey hair, a tweed coat and brown brogues walks with tiny steps towards the singer leaning heavily on a zimmer frame.)

*I know for certain, the one I love,
I'm thru with flirtin', It's just you I'm thinkin' of..."*

(And now a man in a flat cap and a burberry muffler comes along from the other direction with a bucket and starts to clean the shop window just to the singer's right. The elderly lady has arrived by the singer and takes a rest to listen to him. She taps her foot in time to the music. The singer gratefully addresses the song to her.)

Ain't misbehavin', I'm savin' my love for you!

(And now a priest with curly ginger hair wanders circuitously from the other side of the street, preaching a psalm into a megaphone. He has a sandwich board saying, "REPENT!")

Conglebury: He lies in wait like a lion in cover, He catches the helpless and drags them off in his net...

David: *Like Jack Horner, in a corner,
Don't go nowhere, what do I care...*

(The window cleaner is cleaning the pane of glass directly behind the singer now but he is singing so intently to the old lady, he doesn't notice particularly. She bends stiffly to put some coins in his hat. The singer picks it up to make it easier for her. The priest is just passing now.)

Conglebury: His victims are crushed, they collapse, they fall under his strength!
They fall under his strength!

(This is the sign. The window cleaner pulls a gun and points it at David's head. The old lady straightens up, holding a handgun in the singer's face Everyone is screaming, "Hands in the air! Hands in the air!" The priest is pointing a gun at the singer's head too, and screams through his megaphone,)

Conglebury: Hand's in the air!

(Conglebury approaches extremely nervously. He waves at David's left hand with his gun.)

Conglebury: Off with the glove! **(David looks completely paralysed with fear and confusion.)** Take it off! **(The singer reaches his right hand to his left in a panic.)** Slowly! **(Slowly he pulls off his left mitten to reveal his normally proportioned, if rather trembling left hand.)** It's not him! It's fucking not him! **(Conglebury storms off. Jim snatches off his wig, muttering with frustration, and leaves the scene too. Louise lowers her gun.)**

Louise: Sorry love. We thought you were someone else.

3. Dummy Show

(Much later that same day, the singer is at work again. He's singing "In a Sentimental Mood". He doesn't particularly notice when a woman walks down the street and sits on a bench nearby. It's Louise, wigless now, in her own shoes and coat, on her way to the station with her overnight bag to travel back to London. She carries a bunch of flowers, which she puts on her lap when she sits down. When he finally turns and sees her, she waves. The singer continues to sing, wondering who this woman might be, failing to recognise her without her grey wig. Louise listens to him intently, smiling encouragingly. Behind him in a shop window a window dresser carries a half-dressed, male dummy into position and starts to put a tie and jacket on it. He works in a bored way and half watches the singer outside the window.)

...on the wings of ev'ry kiss drifts a melody so strange and sweet.

(The window dresser also watches Louise watching David, wondering why she might be interested in such a nerd. As David gets into the song he embellishes it with sentimental gestures, which the window dresser begins to imitate with the dummy.)

*...My heart's a lighter thing since you make this night a thing
divine...*

(David clutches his heart and the dummy clutches its heart.)

...In a sentimental mood. I'm within a world so heavenly...

(David throws his arms out and the dummy throws its arms out.)

For I never dreamt you'd be loving sentimental me!

(Louise claps and cheers for the singer and a little for the window dresser who bows and goes for a cup of tea.)

Louise: I'm Louise. The old lady? With a gun? **(The singer looks upset and starts to pack up his things.)** Sorry. It must've been pretty scary. I can't tell you what we were doing but it was a matter of national security. If it's any consolation, I knew we'd got the wrong man from the moment I heard you singing... and I brought you these. **(She gives him the flowers.)**

Watcher: She's never done this before – given flowers to a total stranger.

Louise: I wondered... I'm not supposed to do this sort of thing, but will you come and sing with me on Friday night? I'm a bit of a karaoke addict and they do a really nice one in a pub round the corner. I've got to go back to London tonight but my sister lives here and I'm coming back to see her this weekend... **(David gazes at the flowers.)** Well... think about it hey? I'll walk by here at seven on Friday. If you want to come, just be here, under the clock. Oh! What's your name?

David: David.

Louise: Bye David.

Watcher: This is the first bunch of flowers anyone has ever given him.

4. Clang, clang, clang...

(David gazes after Louise, the flowers clutched to his breast as if someone might try to take them off him if he wasn't careful. Suddenly, a workman appears from nowhere and places a temporary bus-stop next to him. David begins to sing, still looking at his flowers.)

David: *With her high starched collar and her high topped shoes,
 And her hair piled high upon her head,
 She went to find a jolly hour on the trolley
 And found my heart instead...*

(A man arrives with a newspaper tucked under his arm and assumes the singer is waiting for the bus. He stands behind him to form a queue at the bus stop, reading his paper. The singer continues to sing, looking at his flowers ecstatically. A bus arrives. The door opens. The driver looks at the singer expectantly – so does newspaper man.)

Driver: You getting on or what?

(The singer picks up his hat and his tape machine and steps on the bus – the driver takes his fare from the hat. He chooses a seat near the front. Newspaper man sits on the back seat. The singer continues to sing as the bus pulls away and now the driver joins him to sing.)

Driver: *Clang, clang, clang...*

David: *...went the trolley,*

Man: *Ding, ding, ding...*

David: *...went the bell. Zing, zing, zing went my heart strings, for the
 moment I saw her I fell.*

Driver: *Chug, chug, chug...*

David: *...went the motor,*

Man: *Bump, bump, bump...*

David: *...went the brake. (The bus stops at the next stop. A woman with too much shopping gets on, puffing from running for the bus.)*

David: *Thump, thump, thump went my heartstrings,
When she smiled I could feel the car shake. (David sings to the woman conversationally.)
I tipped my hat and took a seat,
I said I hoped I hadn't stood upon her feet
I asked her name then lost my breath
She looked so lovely that it scared me half to death.*

Woman: *Buzz, buzz, buzz... (Sings the woman, pushing the buzzer, mopping her forehead and her armpits with a tissue.)*

David: *...Went the buzzer.*

Driver: *Plop, plop, plop...*

David: *...Went the wheels. Stop, stop, stop went my heartstrings,
As she started to leave, I took hold of her sleeve with my hand.*

(The bus slows down and stops. The bus sits still with the engine idling.)

*And as if it were planned she stayed on with me and it was grand
Just to stand with her hand holding mine to the end of the line.*

(The singer is looking out of the windows, puzzled, his bright tone faltering.)

Driver: Come on, hop it. This's as far as you've paid. **(The singer gets off and the bus drives away.)**

Watcher: A quiet suburban street on a hill overlooking the city. They're starting bell-ringing practice at the cathedral – the first irregular peal carries through the evening air to David but he doesn't notice. He stares at

the house he's been dropped by. It's as familiar and inescapable as the smell of his own breath when he wakes in the middle of the night.

Mike: David! **(A middle-aged man in a khaki bush-hat and gardening gloves has called to him. He's cutting the hedge of the house next door.)** Fancy that! I was thinking of you just the other day. You're a rare visitor to these parts. **(David stands behind his flowers dumbly.)** Flowers! You shouldn't have! **(He sees David looking at the house over the road.)** It's changed a bit since... since then hasn't it? The lot who went in straight after took down the lime tree. Said it made their car all sticky. **(Whispering.)** The new lot put those funny windows in. You look parched. Come and have a glass of squash. I can put those in some water. They look pretty parched too! **(He leads the way into his house.)** How've you been? Mrs Staunton said she saw you in town, singing for your supper. She said your voice still brings a tear to her eye... In the best possible way, that is! Shame really, man of your talents David, singing in the street... **(David is looking through a door at a highly polished, upright piano.)** Spotted the old Joanna then! Go on, go in. Do you remember when you started to learn... **(He winds the piano stool up and up,)** ...I had to wind the stool right up to here for you?! Course, then you couldn't reach the pedals so your dad made these for you. **(He pulls two carefully shaped wooden blocks from behind the piano and wipes the dust off them.)** "Pedal extremities", he called them, from that Fats Waller song, what was it called? **(He looks through a song book from the top of the piano.)** I used to play it and he used to sing it...

Dad : Your Feet's too Big!

Mike: Your Feet's too Big! That's it! **(He starts playing it on the piano. David sings it automatically, but quietly, frowning. David's mum and dad emerge out of the piano and dance quietly round the room. David watches them.)** I went over to see your mum and dad the other week. Don't you ever go David? It looked a terrible mess – grass all grown up, there's that much lichen on the stone you could

hardly read their names. It looked like Stonehenge or something. Made me feel like an ancient monument myself, 'cause it only seems like yesterday to me. I warned them about the fibreglass cars. Crunch like an eggshell in a crash, I told them, quite apart from the fact they look ridiculous. Your dad wouldn't listen, of course. Always drove a Kitten.

Dad: Mike, it's got the fuel consumption of a scooter! You know what your problem is? You worry too much about what other people think. Who cares what other people think, what do you think, Mike?

Mike: Such a strong man. One in a million. Of course, they'd've needed a tank to withstand an impact like that. I'll never understand why someone had to take a steam engine from A to B by road. A miracle, they said, the police, how you came out of it alive. They said on the local telly what a little soldier you were – never cried. Took it on the chin. You were singing, "Just The Way you Look Tonight" when they pulled you out, they said. I've always wondered why.

(Mike starts to play "The Way You Look Tonight" absent-mindedly. David hears his father singing it to his mother in the car. She laughs and hums along.)

Dad: *Someday, when I'm awfully low,
When the world is cold,
I will feel a glow just thinking of you
Just the way you look tonight... Come on David, sing for your mother!*

David: *Oh but you're lovely, with your smile so warm,
And your cheek so soft,
There is nothing for me but to love you,
Just the way you look tonight.*

(David goes back through the years to a hospital room where he watches a doctor and a junior doctor examining a child.)

Doctor 1: Who've we got here then?

Doctor 2: David Eglos, nine years old, RTA, vehicle crushed, sustained lacerations to the inner thighs and perineum from the transmission tunnel of a Reliant Kitten.

Doctor 1: David? Can you hear me? We're just going to check you over to see where you're hurt. Have we contacted the parents?

Doctor 2: They were in the car too. DOA I'm afraid. Poor little chap. He's been singing like a lark since they pulled him out. He's been sedated but it doesn't seem to've made any difference.

Doctor 1: There's some nasty cuts on the left inner thigh, lucky to miss an artery... Good Lord!

Doctor 2: What?

Doctor 1: There's no mention of this on his medical record...

Doctor 2: What?

Doctor 1: He's as much Dawn as David.

Doctor 2: Sorry?

Doctor 1: He's got both sets of tackle.

Doctor 2: Pardon?

Doctor 1: Hermaphrodite. Look.

Doctor 2: Good Lord! I've never seen that before!

Doctor 1: Neither have I. One's read about it, of course. Extraordinary!

Doctor 2: How did they miss it at birth?

Doctor 1: Easily I imagine. It's not that apparent.

Doctor 2: I wonder if the parents knew?

Doctor 1: I should think so. Think of all those nappy changes.

Doctor 2: Why wouldn't they have told anyone?

Doctor 1: Maybe they thought he'd have a quieter life if they kept it a secret.

Doctor 2: Poor... thing.

Doctor 1: We shall have to tell social services. Any prospective adopters will have to know what they're getting under the bonnet.

Doctor 2: You know, they say there's another half for all of us out there, but where's the other half for someone like this?

(They notice that David has stopped singing.)

Doctor 1: David? Can you hear me?

Doctor 2: You don't suppose, you don't suppose he doesn't know?

Doctor 1: **(To David.)** Everything's going to be fine! Don't you worry about a thing...



(It's evening and darkness has fallen. We look in through a large, rectangular window to a brightly-lit kitchen. Louise is stood at the sink washing up, listening to "The Way you Look Tonight." She's alone and sings along, looking dreamily into the air. She's more involved with the music than the washing up, and pauses for long moments, brush dripping in her hand, tears dripping from her face.

A man comes into the kitchen looking at a magazine. He puts an arm round Louise from behind for a moment but carries on looking at the magazine. She

wipes the tears from her face with the dry part of the back of her wrist. It's not a big secret that she's been crying, she'd just prefer the man not to see. He goes to the CD player in the corner of the room and turns the music right down 'til it's virtually inaudible. Louise looks at the ceiling, still leaning up against the sink and sighs with exasperation. He starts to read out loud from the magazine, as if to prove something he's already said.)

Partner: "For the one household in five that owns one, a dishwasher tends to be seen as an essential, not a luxury. Not surprising, given the manufacturer's claim that a dishwasher can save about 300 hours a year you'd otherwise spend toiling over a suds-filled sink..."

Louise: I don't want a dishwasher."

Partner: You care about the environment, don't you? Listen to this. Seven of these they've tested use less than half the water you use washing up by hand. 16 litres compared to 40... 40!... **(Louise has dried her hands on the teatowel, gone to the CD player and now turns the music up louder than it was to begin with, as if to drown the man out. Then she returns to the sink and continues washing up. He turns it back down again.)** It's not like you're here much. Then you come home and do this obsessive music thing.

Louise: Can't I listen to a bit of music in my own kitchen?

Partner: It's not just a bit of music though, is it? It's some weird, fucked-up emotional masturbation thing. It's not healthy.

Louise: Listen to you! Next you'll be telling me I'll go blind.

Partner: Why were you crying?

Louise: Because the music moved me.

Partner: I don't know, it's just... It really shuts me out.

Louise: It's a bit of Jerome Kern, not the Berlin Wall! Join me if you like, just let's listen together quietly.

(She turns the music up again. He turns it down again.)

Partner: 300 hours you spend sobbing in the dishwasher with your precious, soppy music. 300 hours we could spend together. We could be playing a board game. You used to love scrabble. And backgammon. We could join a sports club, play squash, go swimming together. It's coming up for evening class time of year again. I don't know, we could learn Spanish together. Or just go to the pub, make some friends, have a social life. Maybe we could even talk to each other...

(An internal restraint parts suddenly in Louise and she finds herself throwing plates, something she's not done before. She throws plates at her partner 'til he leaves the room. Then she smashes a few more.)

Partner: **(Shouting from the safety of the other side of the door.)** You're a bloody looper, you are!

(Louise throws a few more plates at the door. Finding how much she's enjoying it she throws some more on the floor, even taking the dirty plates out of the washing-up bowl. Realising it's doing her a power of good, she smashes some glasses and some mugs. Her eyes light on the huge ceramic fruit bowl on the kitchen table and she dashes it on the ground. It won't break, so she throws it on the ground harder. It still won't break so she throws it at the ceiling. It bounces on to the floor and breaks with a resounding crash. The music has continued unheard. Now "Night and Day" is beginning. Louise turns it up and listens to the introduction. Suddenly she starts to sketch a dance movement in the air with her hands and feet, repeating it over and over, perfecting it, crunching on the broken crockery obliviously.)

5. Solitude

(David paces up and down on the street under the clock clutching a bunch of daffodils. He smells his own breath, combs his hair with his fingers, wipes his sweaty palms on his trousers. The clock starts to strike the hour. He frets more and more, anxiously peering along the street to see if he can see Louise coming. Suddenly she appears from the other direction and walks up behind him. Finally David turns and sees her...)

Watcher: Time stops, suspended on threads of silence. Louise is frozen between a tick and a tock, or so it seems to David. He could run away – he thinks about it. Instead he gazes at her face. Its loveliness to him is irresistible. **(He kisses her. His lips stay on hers for a long time. Then, slowly, he takes his lips from hers. Time starts again, underscored with a muted but insistent refrain of “Night and Day”.)**

Louise: Hello. It’s me, Louise! **(He offers her his flowers.)** Daffodils! I love daffodils! Thankyou. We’d better go. We haven’t got much time before we have to be there. There’s a little park just along here where we can be private. Oh my God! Listen to me! I just want to say, I’ve never done anything like this before. I bet you haven’t either. Just trust me, alright? Once you get the hang of it you’ll really enjoy it...

(They stand opposite each other on the grass now. She throws down her bag and her jacket, kicks off her shoes and takes hold of his hands.)

Louise: Do you know “Night and Day”?”

David: **(Starts singing automatically.)**
Night and day, you are the one...

Louise: That’s it. Can you dance? **(David shakes his head.)** Never mind. My idea’s not too complicated. I just don’t want to stand there singing like a pair of puddings. Do you want to give it a go? **(David hesitates – he’s terrified of dancing. Louise can tell.)** Alright, never mind. It was a crazy idea... **(David catches her by the**

hands and smiles. She smiles too.) OK. Put your arms like this.
This is how it starts...



Louise/David: *Night and Day, you are the one...*

(There's a hubbub of voices around them now, and glasses clinking together, and people laughing, some singing along. David and Louise find themselves on a little stage in a pub singing an upbeat version of "Night and Day" in the karaoke.)

Louise/David: *Only you beneath the moon and under the sun.*

(There are dance steps too, that Louise has taught David, that he follows now with a startled expression on his face. Every now and again she glances at him to check he's alright and smiles to encourage him.)

Louise/David: *Whether near to me or far,
It's no matter darling where you are,
I think of you, night and day."*

(Louise sings and dances with a passionate abandon. The dance gets more frenetic as the song gathers pace.)

Louise/David: *Day and night, why is it so
That this longing for you follows wherever I go?
In the roaring traffic's boom
In the silence of my lonely room
I think of you, night and day.*

(And David begins to throw himself into the song too, inflamed by Louise.)

Louise/David: *Night and day, under the hide of me,
There's an, oh, such a hungry yearning burning inside of me.
And its torment won't be through
'Til you let me spend my life making love to you...*

(The frenzied pattern of steps brings David and Louise face to face at this climactic moment in the song. Again, time seems to hesitate a moment – everyone in the pub falls silent, struck dumb by the obvious electricity of the moment.)

Louise/David: *Day and night, night and day!*

(There's a roar of applause. David and Louise take their shy, amateur bows but it's obvious they're both thrilled. They come down off the stage and Louise leads David by the hand through the pub.)

Louise: Do you want to come out for a breath of fresh air? It's boiling in here. **(She leads David by the hand out of the pub. Outside she suddenly kisses him on the mouth.)** Thanks. **(She runs over the road, kicks off her shoes, throws them over some railings and climbs after them.)** Come on. I love parks at night.

(David climbs after her with some difficulty. Louise flops down on the grass and leans her back against a tree. David sits against the other side of the tree and looks up at the stars he can see peeping down through the leaves of the tree.)

Watcher: David and Louise look up at the stars through the leaves of the tree.

Louise: You don't exactly say much, do you? I like that. Do you ever feel like, who you really are, is wrapped up in newspaper in a cardboard box like glass balls for the Christmas tree? Only Christmas never seems to arrive, or it's a house where they don't bother to decorate the tree anymore. So you've got to sneak a look every now and again, just sneak a look at a few bits from the box of who you really are. Huh! Will you listen to me!

(She looks up into the tree and starts to climb out of sight into the leafy heart of it. David stands up and tries to see where she's gone.)

Louise: Are you coming up or not? **(Her blouse flutters down and lands on David's head.)** I'll show you my decorations if you show me yours!

(David frets at the bottom of the tree to the point where he's about to leave, but he turns at the last moment and throws off his jacket at the base of the tree before leaping into its lower branches. Louise pops through the canopy half way up the tree with her skirt in her hand. David sticks his head out lower down, looking for Louise, abandoning his trousers into the leaves. She waves her skirt then throws it at him before disappearing back into the tree. It's branches shiver and sway as Louise and David move through it like fleas in cat fur, popping out now and again to discard a vest here, pants there. The tree is alive with commotion, Louise squealing and giggling, and David singing "Louise".)

David: *Wonderful! Oh it's wonderful, to be in love with you.
Beautiful! You're so beautiful, you haunt me all day through.
Evr'y little breeze seems to whisper "Louise",
Birds in the trees seem to twitter "Louise"..."*

Watcher: They find themselves together at the top of the tree. **(Birdsong begins.)**

Louise: There's a bird singing!

Watcher: A nightingale.

Louise: I didn't think they sang at night. **(She puts an arm round David's neck.)** Touch me. **(He touches her.)** Can I touch you?

Watcher: Surely, up here, he is finally above scorn. **(David nods. Her free hand travels down from his neck to find his body under the leaves.)**

Louise: Oh!

(More with surprise than disgust, Louise recoils, but this is enough to unsettle their precarious equilibrium. The sudden movement cracks the branch where it joins the body of the tree and they are both pitched down, bumping from limb to limb towards the ground. They fall in an undignified heap at the bottom of the tree. David is first up, and clutching his assorted genitalia, he runs off into the night.)

Louise: Wait! It was just a shock. David! It doesn't matter... Nothing matters... I... I've got inverted nipples! Wait... Shit. **(She gathers her clothes and staggers off.)**

6. All Washed Up.

(Louise stands at the station with her overnight bag in her hand. Sound of a train arriving at the platform.)

Tannoy: The train now arriving at Platform 5 is the thirteen thirteen service to London Paddington...

(Louise gets on the train and finds a seat. After a moment staring out of the window she gets out her mobile phone and dials a number. It rings. Someone answers it.)

Louise: It's me.

Partner: I've been so worried! Are you ok?

Louise: I'm fine.

Partner: **(Pause)** I s'pose you and your sister had a nice time slagging me off.

Louise: Why?

Partner: 'Cause of the row.

Louise: No. I didn't tell her.

Partner: You didn't?

Louise: No.

Partner: Thanks. That means a lot to me. Thankyou.

Louise: Good. **(Louise starts to frown and shift with discomfort.)**

Partner: Listen, everything's fine.

Louise: Yes. **(She starts scratching her chest through her clothes.)**

Partner: I've just filled the dents with polyfilla. It looks fine.

Louise: What? **(She looks down the inside of her cleavage.)**

Partner: The dents in the wall. From the plates. You wouldn't know anything'd happened. I had some of the paint left in the shed so I painted over it too. **(Pause.)** The dustmen might be a bit surprised.

Louise: Why? **(She rummages in her bra.)**

Partner: There's six bags of broken crockery.

Louise: **(She pulls out a leaf and looks at it.)** Sorry. **(She starts to get tearful.)**

Partner: I'll leave a couple of quid on the bin. They'll take it. **(Pause)** I hope you don't mind - the sale was still on at Habitat so I bought some more plates. They didn't have the same ones but I'll think you'll like these. They're sort of swirly. Anyway. You'll see them.

Louise: **(Crying.)** I'm sorry.

Partner: Hey, hey hey... **(Misunderstanding her, he gets a bit tearful too.)** Honestly. It doesn't matter. I'm sorry. **(Trying to be cheerful.)** I got

some swirly mugs too. I think you'll like them. And I got some new glasses. And a new salad bowl. And a sugar bowl. And...**(Pause.)**

Louise: What?

Partner: You've got to trust me. I know what you said, but I just know, when you get used to it, you'll wonder how you ever managed without it. I got a great deal – it was the last one in the sale...

Louise: What is it?

Partner: Listen... **(Holds phone out so she can hear the throbbing of the new dishwasher.)**

Louise: **(To herself, letting the phone fall from her ear.)** A dishwasher.

(Louise notices, out of the train window, a figure with his back to her dressed exactly like David.)

Louise: David? **(The figure turns to look along the platform and she sees that it's not David.)** Who are you...? Oh my God. Oh my God. **(Something dawns on Louise and she starts banging on the window in a futile attempt to attract his attention.)** Stop! Stop!

(But the engine is screaming and the train is pulling away from the platform. The man walks off without noticing Louise. He's carrying a large, heavy tape machine very carefully.)

7. Two Fingers

(David is singing glumly under the clock in the High Street once more. It's coming up to midday. There's more crowd noise than normally. His mood is in direct contrast to the bright sunshine.)

Watcher: Today the High Street is full of people excited about something other than shopping. A royal visit, no less. Not that David's bothered.

David: *Perdido, I look for my heart it's perdido,
I lost it way down in Torrido
The day the fiesta started...*

(A child skips in front of David waving a little plastic union jack. She stands and watches him for a moment.)

Little girl: Are you going to sing for the Queen? **(David replies with a graceful shrug and continues to sing. The clock starts to chime midday.)**

Little girl: **(Counting out the chimes.)** One... two... three...

David: *High was the sun when I held her close.
Low was the moon when we said Adios.*

Little girl: Seven... eight... nine...

David: *Perdido, my heart ever since is perdido...*

Little girl: Ten... eleven... twelve... **(There's a peculiar grinding from the clock, and then it chimes once more, loudly, defiantly.)** Thirteen!

(The little girl skips on. David stops singing and looks up at the clock. While he's looking at it, an apparition comes along the street behind him. Although slightly jowlier, heavier in the frame, somehow darker, a man appears who resembles David in every last detail. For long, strange moments David doesn't notice his doppelganger, and his doppelganger doesn't notice him. The double has a very heavy tape machine that he sets down very gently on the pavement. He presses play. His system seems to have a karaoke function because he gets a handheld microphone out of his pocket. Strangely though, it seems to operate remotely because he doesn't plug it in, but starts to sing into it distractedly, with a voice like gravel in a cement mixer.

Turning to see where this awful sound is coming from, David nearly falls down with shock when he sees his double. The double is so busy looking around him into the crowd that he doesn't notice David approaching, and he, too, is

physically shaken when he finally sees his mirror image standing in front of him. He's a cool customer though. He looks David up and down, nodding his head slightly, his face as hard and expressionless as a concrete patio. He looks past David at his little tape player, and, putting his microphone carefully in his pocket, he walks casually over to it. David follows. His double squats, takes out the tape in the machine, stands, looks David in the eye and snaps the cassette in half between their faces. Then having returned to his own machine and got out his microphone again, he turns to David and gives him "the Finger" before starting to sing again.

But "the Finger" that David's double has held up at him is no ordinary finger. It is disturbingly elongated. Already, further up the High Street can be heard the cheering of the crowd as the royal entourage slowly approaches on its visit to the city centre. The Finger looks at his watch, and seems to decide that, yes, now is the moment to get going. He crouches by his player and carefully throws a small switch on the back of it, then he walks away from it without looking back, taking his microphone with him.

David approaches the tape machine, which continues to play. He tries to pick it up and finds it is bizarrely heavy. Suddenly Louise's words come back to him,)

Louise's voice: (all echoey.) I can't tell you much but it is a matter of national security...

(David realises the tape machine is a bomb. He panics. He covers his mouth. He goes to warn the crowd, he kneels and frantically fiddles with the machine – he doesn't know what to do. He decides to follow the Finger. Now we see the Finger going into a church through a heavy, creaking door. He finds the spiral staircase to the belfry and disappears up it. David creeps through the creaky door. He can just hear footsteps climbing the tower. He creeps up the stairs himself. Now we see the Finger entering the bell tower. He goes to one of the louvres overlooking the street and peers down at the crowd.)

Watcher 1: The belfry is dim. The massive bells can just be seen in the gloom.

Watcher 2: The royal walkabout must be approaching the foot of the tower.
(David peeps round the corner into the belfry and sees the

Finger peering down at the crowd. He tiptoes closer until he is looking down over the Finger's shoulder.) There, on the street far below, with hundreds of people milling around it, is the Finger's tape machine.

(The Finger delicately flips open the top of his microphone to expose a red button. But now the bells begin to creak into motion, ready to ring a peal for the Queen. As the first bell strikes home the Finger reels to his left and looks round in deafened disbelief. Standing behind his right shoulder, David remains unseen. He recognises his chance and dives for the detonator and the Finger's finger, holding the two apart so the bomb can't be detonated. The two of them stagger perilously among the bells. Finally, David bites the Finger's finger, grabs the detonator and scuttles off among the thundering bells. The Finger fires a volley after him. The bells continue to pound. The Finger creeps after David. David steps backwards around the corner just as the Finger fires along the aisle he's just left. They chase each other to and from among the bells. Suddenly, the Finger disappears. When he realises he's not being chased anymore, David can't believe his luck. He runs down the stairs back into the church and into the doorway. Unfortunately, the Finger is waiting for him there, knowing David would have to take that route to escape. He backs David out into the church, the gun in his chest, and takes the detonator from him. David screws his eyes shut and braces himself for the blast...

Instead, there is a shot from the darkness of the doorway. The Finger gasps and falls to his knees. He fumbles to open the lid to the detonator, but another two shots ring out and he slumps on the floor.

Louise steps out of the shadows, still training her gun on the Finger. She prises the detonator and the gun from his hands. David watches, still frozen with terror, his arms still in the air. Louise goes to David and puts her arms around him. He puts his arms round her and they stand like that as the bells stop ringing one by one and the sound of the cheering crowd reaches them once more.

8. One in a million-million-million

(We can hear the sound of steady rain and every now and again a rumble of thunder, getting a little closer every time.)

Watcher 1: Sunday afternoon in the High Street. Not many people about.

Watcher 2: It's tipping down.

Watcher 1: **(Looking up.)** The sound of rain. The sounds of raindrops hitting the ground. The sounds of each and every countless drop thronging in our ears, if only we had the power to discern them.

Watcher 2: **(David and Louise walk along the street, arm in arm, sharing an umbrella.)** Here they come, David and Louise. An unlikely looking pair, it has to be said. **(They prospect for a spot on the street to busk together and set up the tape machine and David's box. David holds the umbrella while Louise takes the hat off his head, straightens his parting and places the hat on the pavement. Then they step up onto the box together, sheltering under the umbrella and sing out to the street, swaying to the music.)**

David/Louise: *You work and work for years and years
You're always on the go.
You never take a minute off
Too busy making dough...*

*Someday you say you'll have your turn
When you're a millionaire
Imagine all the fun you'll have
In your old rocking chair...*

*Enjoy yourself, it's later than you think.
Enjoy yourself, while you're still in the pink.
Though years go by as quickly as a wink,
Enjoy yourself, enjoy yourself, it's later than you think.*

(The song finishes on the tape. The sound of rain and thunder is very loud now, and getting louder – the storm is approaching its height. David and Louise look either way along the empty street, then at each other, then they close their umbrella and let the rain soak them. They step off the box and walk around the street in circles, whooping and enjoying the heaviness of the rain. Suddenly they stop still and grin at each other. They approach each other and kiss... There is a blinding flash... and they are struck by lightning. They stand apart and look at each other in mute astonishment. Then, without a word, they kiss each other again. There is another blinding flash and they are struck by lightning again. They stand apart and look at each other again. They go to each other and kiss again.)

(Blackout. End.)

THEATRE ALIBI'S STYLE OF WORK

Why tell stories?

We think humans need to tell stories. More than that, we think this need to tell stories is part of what makes us human, part of the unique intelligence that makes us different from other animals. Telling stories, listening to them, watching them, talking about them, thinking about them... without necessarily realising it, we're processing our experience in a very sophisticated way when we're doing these things. When watching an episode of **Eastenders** and wondering whether Little Mo and Billy will ever get back together, we might be chewing over our own urges and inclinations. When we reach such a moment in real life we might not immediately think of Mo and Billy, but in some tiny way we might have used their story to expand what we think about that aspect of reality.

If we're constantly using stories to get an angle on a chaotic world, then as the world changes, so must our angle. Theatre Alibi is always searching for the right stories to tell and the right way to tell them to best question the world as it is.

The way we've chosen to tell stories is through theatre. Here's why. In theatre the actor is right there in the same room with the audience. As a result, and this is absolutely unique to theatre, a split reality is presented to the audience in which the actor is both himself, here and now, and someone else in another time and place, a character in a fictional world. When we approach our work, we try to take advantage of this split reality. We often begin shows with the actors talking directly to the audience, beginning to tell a story and then slipping from describing a character into becoming them. So unlike many theatre companies we choose to reveal to our audience the moment when the actor takes on their role.

"So what?" you might ask. But wait. This actor is here in the room with you, and then suddenly they step through an invisible wall into a realm where anything, anything imaginable, can happen and if they're doing their job well, they've taken you with them! It's like someone's taken you by the hand and led you through the back of the wardrobe, or through the looking-glass, or whatever.... You're not watching it happen on telly, it's happening right there in front of you.

In keeping with these thoughts, here are some of the ways we choose to work:

- We reveal transformations: actors leap from being themselves to being a character (or several) and back again before the eyes of the audience. Simple props and set are taken up by the actors and used to suggest places and things that weren't there before (a duvet becomes a field of snow, a walking stick becomes the rail of an ocean liner).
- We develop our actors' resources to help them suggest other characters, things and places: their voices, dance skills, puppetry skills etc.
- We enjoy working in unconventional theatre spaces, from shopping centres to warehouses, where audiences are made especially aware of the "here and now".
- We incorporate other artforms into our theatre to make it more effective at whisking people from the "here and now" to the realm of the imagination: music, sculpture, photography, film etc.
- We work from stories rather than scripts. This helps us remember to ask certain questions such as why are we telling these stories, and how should we be telling them? This lets us experiment in rehearsal with how the actors can best bring the audience to the particular imaginary world in question.

IDEAS BEHIND *ONE IN A MILLION*

The inspiration for **One in a Million** came from watching people busking. There's something in their vulnerability that seems emblematic of the human condition to me. Living sometimes feels a bit like busking. We sing our lives with a sense that they have a shape – verses, a chorus – and a certain key, a mood, an appropriate tempo. We try to articulate our song appropriately, to sing our life sweetly. But we're singing on the street – the context of our existence is harsh. The noise and the aggro constantly threaten to overwhelm our song.

This gave me the idea of making a busker the central character of **One in a Million**. David is a busker whose only form of expression is a repertoire of sentimental songs from the 1930's, 40's and 50's. In exploring David's character and predicament, certain themes arose around the notion of human vulnerability:

- The sense of the miracle of us being here at all. Every living person is the ultimate link in a chain of life stretching back through millions of generations to the most primitive life forms. And these chains that we each hang from could have been broken at any moment over millions of years by any careless bus driver or passing hungry dinosaur.
- The feeling of the fragility of our existence once we are alive. Fate seems to have a terrifying arsenal of adversity to throw at us from plagues and wars to badly cooked seafood and choking on boiled sweets.
- The notion of the unlikeliness of love. Procreation relies on individuals finding mates. But it seems so unlikely that the motley collection of individuals we start out as ever get it together to forge the next generation. And yet we do.
- The possibility of heroic action. When, by an act of extreme willpower, someone overcomes a fate that seems pre-ordained for them.

At the beginning of the show, the watchers - the detached commentators who observe the action - reflect that, "...life seems a rare orchid that blooms unseen in the corner of a bog... before being trampled by a goat." There's a fear expressed in the show that life might pass without its transient beauty being fully savoured. David's singing might be so crowded out by all the din around him that no-one will ever truly hear it and appreciate it. Louise, stifled in an unhappy relationship, expresses the fear that her true self will be forever hidden like Christmas decorations forgotten in a box in the attic. But out of that fear arises a determination to grasp what is precious in life while it can be. As one of the watchers concludes, "Just enjoy the orchid before that goat comes along."

DANIEL JAMIESON (Writer)

effectively pretend to climb about on. If they looked downwards, it gave the impression they were high up.

So, the final solution to depicting the tree and the climbing of it is a mixture of successful elements from all the various things we tried out. The tree trunk is made from the bodies of the storytellers standing side by side. They look up into the imaginary branches of the tree to suggest its scale. David and Louise climb along the frame of the set at ground level as if clambering about the branches of the tree. They look downwards to suggest they are up high. At the top of the tree the storytellers cloak David and Louise in mock foliage. When they fall, the storytellers wave the branches in front of them to suggest their downward movement. David and Louise mime falling and scream on the way down. The storytellers make the noise of them hitting the branches as they fall.

Why did you choose to be an actor?

I had an interest in literature when I was at junior school. That's when I first got involved with drama. I joined the drama group, which was an out-of-school club. I suppose it was from that point that I got the bug. When I got into secondary school, I joined a youth theatre.

How old were you?

I think I was about fourteen when I realised that theatre was what I wanted to do with my life. That was when I joined the youth theatre. The first thing I did with the company was a play called **Dark of the Moon**. I played the priest in it.

Where did you train?

I didn't train in theatre. When I left school I went to college and trained to be a chef. I really wanted to be an actor but my family didn't like the idea very much. It was a few years after I left school when I finally got round to it. I joined an amateur company that used to write its own material. I was with them for a year or two and we just churned out loads of shows, which was a really good grounding. And I got a job with a props company making sets and a guy came in one day who wanted a set making, and he said he was auditioning for an actor. I said, "Oh, I can do that...!" He said come along and audition, so I did, and he gave me the job as a stage manager and an actor. I was with that company for about twelve months touring round the West Country. I joined another company after that doing a similar sort of thing. It was hard graft for no money, but really good training on the job. It must have been similar to those small travelling companies from 400 years ago which took Shakespeare round the country.

What's your role in the process of making *One in a Million*?

Initially it was to receive the story from the writer and go through it. The read-throughs at the beginning of rehearsals are really useful, because that's the point at which a show first comes alive, when you hear everyone's voice and see how all the moments fit together, how the story works. I enjoy that initial part of the process. I suppose it's that journey of discovery that we all go through together, pulling the thing apart, making sure that the story is driven through. The exciting thing about devising is somebody having an initial idea and that idea evolving as other people contribute to it. It allows other things to happen that hadn't initially been in that story. Ideas develop and also you understand the material more as you become more familiar with it. The devising process is about the whole team working together to create a picture, whether with sound, movement or set – everyone's ideas are working together. It's exciting.

What particular challenges does this show present you as an actor?

The one thing that's always a challenge for me is singing. I'm never confident with singing, because I've never had any formal training. Singing scares me. Acting is one thing, but having to be out there in front of people singing,

especially if you're doing it on your own - that's a big challenge for me. But the songs in this show are fun. Also, I get to play quite a few interesting characters in this show, which is always a challenge. Because the company is always producing work with a handful of actors, you have to create a whole world and populate it with all these people using only two, three or four performers. And each character has to be an individual. You have to create them – how they walk, how they talk, what they are thinking. So that's always a challenge, but not a scary challenge for me, because that's what I love.

What is particular about working for Alibi?

There's a particular feeling about working for Alibi because the work's always new. People have never seen it before, so when you're going out on stage, whether it's to schools or theatres, nobody's seen this show before. Inevitably you've got a group of people coming to see the show because it's an Alibi show. But whatever interpretation you've given it, it's yours and the audience have got nothing to compare it with. If you're doing Shakespeare or Ibsen, people come along with a fixed idea of what it should be. But at Alibi you can create all this stuff that nobody's ever seen before. It's a magical world that we're bringing them into, a place that no-one has explored before. I find that exciting. It's lively. It's physical.

Why did you choose to be a writer?

I got interested in drama when I was at primary school but I didn't know I wanted to be a writer for almost another twenty years... I went to a Saturday drama club from the age of eight. We did speech exams and crappy plays. The drama club was run by a glamorous ex-actress who still had contacts in the business. One Saturday she took a group of us up to London to audition for **Oliver** in the West End. Loads of us got parts in the show. I was nine, going up to London three or four nights a week on my own and having a ball. I was addicted to the excitement of theatre then.

How old were you?

I was nine when I got interested in theatre. I was eighteen when I chose to do drama at university and about 26 when I wrote my first play.

Where did you train?

I did a drama degree at Exeter University. I'd applied to a mixture of English and Drama courses, but when I did the interview weekend I was hooked, and prayed I'd get into Exeter. The course was very practical and a lot about making new work, not just interpreting existing plays. It made you think, "What do I want to say?" I learnt a hell of a lot in my first job as an actor at Theatre Alibi though. I'd been working for five years as an actor when three of us, who'd all started out as actors, decided we'd had enough of being told what to do and that we wanted to make some work of our own. I offered to write something for us to work on, to see if I could do it, I suppose. I wrote a lot of poetry at the time, love poems, the sort of thing that doesn't rhyme and you only show to one person. The first play I wrote was a sort of long love poem. It was called **Birthday**, about the relationship between Marc and Bella Chagall. It was the most difficult and rewarding thing I've ever done. So I've carried on writing.

What's your role in the process of making *One in a Million*?

More than a year ago, Nikki (the director) and I talked about several ideas I had for shows and we focussed in on the one that seemed most promising. Then I wrote a short story based on this idea called **One in a Million**, and that formed the basis of the show. Most of our shows start from prose stories like this. It helps us think more clearly about the shape of the story and the tone. Looking at what I'd written, I had another go at it, filling it out where I wanted to know more about the characters. Nikki read it, made a few observations, nothing major, and I made some tiny changes before the research and development week. This is when we try things out with the actors. Our shows are always full of these impossible-to-stage images like climbing a tree or getting struck by lightning - the R&D week is a lot about how to do those bits, but also it helps me know if I've got the tone of the dialogue right and if we know enough about the characters. After the R&D week I converted the story into a script, telling the actors exactly what they'll be saying. In the past, we've always left this until we're in the rehearsal room, but I've done it in advance this time to make the director's and actors' lives easier, and the rehearsals quicker. They can change what they like, but it gives them a head start.

What particular challenges does this show present to you as a writer?

Once the show is in rehearsal, I can't re-write the whole thing, just tinker with it and help with the devising. That's a good thing about Alibi's process though, that the writer is in the rehearsal room throughout rehearsals. That isn't the case with every company. The difficulties with this show, I think, are making the audience care about the characters and their situation when the central character only speaks once, to say his name. There's a lot of comedy, a lot of singing, a lot of action, but the audience must connect with the characters to get something worthwhile from the show. Also, the balance between humour and seriousness feels finer than ever. In that sense, **One in a Million** is an experiment. Can we be funnier and more resonant at the same time? I hope so.

What is particular about working for Alibi?

For me, as a writer, the artistic freedom is wonderful at Alibi. There is an interest in staging extraordinary things. For example, a few years ago we did a show called **Shelf Life** and it had a cow and a calf in it. They were represented by ingenious puppets. The cow was worn by an actor, a very minimal representation, the essence of a cow. The calf was built on a leather doctor's case so it could be carried around and operated just by holding the handle, but it was also a poignant reminder that leather is actually the skin of a cow. I love Alibi because they're brave enough to have cows in a show without batting an eyelid. I've sent my writing to some other theatre companies and they've sent it back saying, "HOW THE HELL COULD WE DO THIS? IT'S IMPOSSIBLE!" But nobody ever says that at Alibi. Also, there's a wonderful team of people working at Alibi, a lot of talent. It's exciting to be involved when everybody is contributing from their own discipline to make a show work.

Why did you choose to be a director?

I was more interested initially in being a performer. But at university everyone got a chance to direct and it was then that I discovered that I could do it and I liked it, and that my interest in performing informed my directing. I carried on performing when I left university, but I think the lifestyle of a director began to appeal to me more and more – having to sell yourself day to day as a performer didn't appeal to me very much. I would have found it difficult. Also, it's easier as a director to follow your own path artistically. I'm now the artistic director of Theatre Alibi.

How old were you?

I went to a drama group once a week from the age of seven to eighteen. I decided to be a performer then! It was at university when I was about twenty that the question of directing entered my head, although I was given a bit of Twelfth Night at school to direct when I was fifteen and I really enjoyed that.

Where/how did you train?

As I said, I belonged to a drama group, which was run by an inspirational woman. I was in school plays, did Drama O Level, Theatre Studies A level, and a degree in Drama at Exeter University. My training as a performer continued at Alibi – we got the opportunity to work with an inspirational Polish theatre company called Gardzienice, and I learnt on the job from Alibi's artistic directors at the time.

What's your role in the process of making *One in a Million*?

Right at the beginning, before he began to write, I talked to the writer about what the idea for the show might be. Then I read initial versions of the script and commented on them. After that, I started thinking about what means we would use to tell that story - what sort of music we might draw on, what the set should be like, how we would present the show, what sort of actors we ought to be using. Then I went and found the actors. You find actors in a mixture of ways. Sometimes you're lucky enough to have worked with people that you think will be just right. Sometimes you see someone in a show who you think will be just right. The actor playing *David* in **One in a Million** we saw at the Circomedia graduation show at the Bristol Old Vic. So, I bring things together prior to rehearsal – people and resources.

Before we go into rehearsals, there's a research and development process. It's a bit like a playtime. We spend a week working on an early draft of the script with the actors, the writer and the designer when we try out ideas to see if they will work. It's a really nice time ahead of rehearsals when we can try things out and if they fail miserably, it doesn't matter at all. You can take risks and try things that you've never tried before. It's a scary job making a piece of theatre. That fear can be unhelpful creatively. So, a research and development week is a way of freeing things up and allowing yourself to make more exciting and interesting decisions. As a director, I select which bits we're going to work on. I choose what seem to be key, defining moments, for example, the moment we first see the character, *David*, because that sets the tone for the whole show. Also we tackle moments that beg a theatrical solution, things that you wouldn't imagine could be put on stage, like the scene when David is chasing The Finger around the bell tower.

Between the R&D and the rehearsal process I discuss things with the writer that came up in the R&D. This time, we decided together that it would be really useful for Dan, the writer, to

move the show from story form to script before rehearsals began. Normally, we do it during rehearsals. The other key bit of work that happens between the R&D and rehearsals is working with the designer to develop the design. It's helpful to have the designer on board from very early on in the process. Our particular style of work means that the action on stage is very integrated with the set. This requires close collaboration between the director and the designer. As a director, I have to think very practically about what has to happen on stage. That's a good input to the design process.

With the rehearsal process itself, a lot of the things I do are the same as in the R&D. I'm selecting what to work on and when, making sure we get through the material in time. I'm co-ordinating and bringing together all the elements, keeping my eye on the whole picture. Although people are throwing in ideas all the time, it's me who gets to say yes or no to them, because it's helpful to have one person doing that. In the end I would probably never say no to an idea if lots of people were saying yes, because I trust the people that I work with. Also, it's my job to put my own ideas in. The other thing that I do in the rehearsals is to develop performances – I help the actors to access a performance, to find the ways that characters show how they are feeling, and to discover who the characters are. My job is also to stage the scenes, to work out how to show someone climbing a tree, but also basic things like how to get a chair off stage at the end of a scene.

Toward the end of rehearsals you have the tech week when you add the technical elements to the show. I make decisions with the lighting designer and the sound designer about how sound and light will work from moment to moment. Because I've been in rehearsals with the actors I know and understand the scenes. The lighting designer will have a very particular skill in terms of, say, having a sense of colour on stage but he doesn't know the show as well as I do. So, in the tech, we marry the two things together - it's a very intense and hefty job.

Once the show's opened, my job is a matter of looking at how it works with the whole additional element of audience response. You learn a huge amount from having an audience there. Often they respond in an entirely different way to how you expect. I'm in the luxurious position of being able to watch the audience and the show. I'll watch and make notes over several nights, then we give ourselves time to make some changes in response to those first few performances. After that, I'll be a baby-sitter for the show – I'll go out and see it several times on tour. Often shows get better and better as actors get to know it. It's also possible for things to go off the boil. So I go out on the tour now and again and give notes to the actors, which helps keep the show alive for them.

What particular challenges does this show present to you as a director?

I don't think I've ever worked on a show that is so closely tied to songs and music, and that's lovely. But it also raises questions about how to synchronise action very closely with music. That's quite a particular way of working, which gives a particular shape and rhythm to the show. But it's a matter of letting the story work together with all those songs, or, more particularly, through those songs. You don't want the audience to have the feeling that they're primarily listening to the songs and that the story is getting in the way!

Another challenge is having a central character who doesn't say anything. I've never had that before. It's really exciting. But the audience won't watch the play if they don't empathise with, and understand, the central character. You have to do a huge amount of communication through the music, and visually, both in what happens around the central character and how

he responds to it. So, giving the audience a handle on that character is a particular challenge. Obviously that's a lot down to Tom, the actor.

One of the things that I find really interesting about this show, which isn't untypical of our work, is that it's funny. There's quite broad humour in it. It's quite farcical, it's not naturalistic - it doesn't pretend to be real life. It relishes the ridiculousness of the situation that the central character finds himself in. But against that, you have to access the real feelings that David and Louise experience. It's a love story, and a story of survival on David's part. The audience have to relate to that in a real way. We mustn't allow them to dismiss all the farcical stuff that happens to him. So it's a question of getting a balance between the comedy and the delicate feelings, and enjoying the shift between the two. It's a fine line to tread.

What is particular about working for Alibi?

How the work is generated in the rehearsal room feels very particular. The storytelling is very particular too, if not unique. We try to make shows where we enjoy what live theatre can offer us. You often see images being constructed rather than it happening in secret. We never switch off the lights to change the set (which often makes life difficult!). We really enjoy revealing the transformations from actor to character and from location to location. We also draw on a particularly wide breadth of forms – music, film, puppetry, our set designs are quite sculptural.

PRACTITIONER FACT FILE – THE COMPOSER / MUSICAL DIRECTOR

Name: Tom Johnson

Why did you choose to be a composer/MD?

I studied English Literature at university. I'd specialised in Drama, but completely from an academic point of view. And I hadn't actually done any theatre at all prior to that. But I've been a musician since I was six years old. I came out of university thinking, "What the hell do I do now?" By pure chance my cousin was working with a touring circus that summer and he said, "Do you fancy just joining in for a laugh for the summer?" My cousin and I had been playing music together since we were children so I thought yeah, why not, it'll be a good craic to do that for a while after college. So I went and toured the South West of England with the circus, with my cousin, playing mad music. At the end of that summer it just came together in my mind that I'd been really interested in Drama from an academic perspective at University for three years and I'd been a musician since I was six, but doing music with this circus just made something happen in my brain. I thought, this is what I want to do - I want to do theatre in a practical sense but bring my musical skills and experience to bear.

How old were you?

I was twenty-four, something like that.

Where did you train?

I did English at Oxford University, but I had no formal music training as a composer. I started on the violin at the age of six. I went through the process of a classical training. Then, when I was twelve, I bought a guitar and taught myself how to play. Much later when I was 24 or so, I learnt the accordion for a theatre show, and I've ended up playing the accordion quite a lot since then. But fiddle is my first instrument still.

What's your role in the process of making *One in a Million*?

My job is two jobs really. I'm a composer and a musical director. And I have to juggle those two things all the time. The process begins for me by helping the director cast the actors and employ the musicians. That's way before the rehearsals start. That's with my musical director's hat on. The first thing I do as a composer is read the script to get a general idea about the flavour of the piece and then I read it again in a very detailed way, word by word almost. In the film business it's called spotting. Basically I go through the script, targeting exactly where I think music will be. Also, first impressions of what the music might be. So I might write, "I want music to start on this word and I want it to have a slightly cold, clammy feel." I might write down a basic rhythm I'm after. That process takes about two days and it's quite hard, quite intense. But by the end of that I feel like I know the script quite well. In a way that's the most important part of the process, because that's my blueprint and I work from that for the rest of the rehearsals. I find that often my first impressions are the right ones. Not always but often.

Then I go into rehearsals and I will sit and watch the actors and the director working a scene, and then I'll go away and write the music for that scene

based on what I've seen, but also, on what I've already thought about musically. Throughout rehearsals it's a process of watching something, going away and writing some music, then coming back and putting it into the play. And that'll change the way things happen a bit. So it's an organic, ongoing process with the director and the actors. I generally hope to write the music during rehearsals, in about two and a half weeks. Then that leaves the second half of rehearsals for me to be in the room the entire time, twiddling with the music, changing it, if it needs changing.

Then the other bit of my job, which is being a musical director, is coaching the actors if there's any singing, making sure they're singing in tune, with the right intention. Also it's my job to direct the musicians. That's quite a practical job.

What particular challenges does this show present to you as a composer/MD?

For me, the biggest challenge is the recorded music in the show. Because of the way I've developed over the years, I'm generally a composer for live instruments, real musicians, live on stage. I haven't made a soundtrack for ten years. I feel a bit like a fish out of water because I haven't got much of that experience. But that's great because it's a learning process and my aim is that every job teaches me something. With this show, I'm learning big time!

What is particular about working for Alibi?

I've only done two shows with Alibi so in a way it's hard to say. It's a lovely company to work with. Very friendly. Very organised. There's a lot of technical support, a lot of people around to help you. Sometimes I'm working with a company and I feel in a bit of a vacuum. There might not be anyone who can go out and find me CDs or a piece of music I want to hear, for example. There's a lot of support at Alibi.

Stylistically, I suppose, Alibi is much more a storytelling company than most companies I've worked with. Which is interesting for me, because it's subtly different to what I'm used to. I find that exciting.

Why did you choose to be a theatre designer?

I got interested in art at school, which led in a natural progression to A Level Art and then a Foundation Course at art school. On a Foundation Course you have one year to choose a medium to specialise in. I was interested in clothing bodies, sculpture and spatial design. The three together pointed to theatre (I wasn't particularly interested in doing fashion). Also the lighting of spaces excites me. Theatre design combined all the things I'm interested in.

How old were you?

I left school at 18 and did a year's Foundation, so 18 or 19.

Where did you train?

I did a 3 year BA Hons degree course in Theatre Design at Nottingham Trent University. You can do separate degree courses in costume, lighting etc. but I wanted to do it all together. At Nottingham we even did sound design and some directing.

What's your role in the process of making *One in a Million*?

I began by reading the story. I always make a mental list of strong images and environments right from the start. Then I went into the week of research and development, which gives us time to experiment with no pressure. With **One in a Million** the R&D allowed us to look at the harder images like the tree and explore what it could be without actually building a tree. Another thing that came up in the R&D was that a lot of the show would be very physical, with four actors and a musician, four bodies – the space would be very busy. The show seemed very fluid, the action very constant, so that already gave me the idea of designing a set with a very open framework for the actors to place pictures within. Then I had time away between the R&D and rehearsals when I could develop the design further in my own mind. During that time I had two more meetings with Nikki (the Director). For the first I made a rough model of the framework. But it did give us a sense visually of what an empty framework would do. Then I made a more refined model for the second meeting. Then when I went away at Christmas I made a very developed model. I made it all work. It was on a scale of 1:25.

The next stage was to post (from Australia, which is where I live most of the time) the model and technical drawings, also on a scale of 1:25, to Allan Veal who makes the set here in Devon. That was just before New Year. He started making it early in January, a week before rehearsals. We like to get the set in relatively early to give the actors and directors as much time to work with it as possible.

I arrived four days before rehearsals and started working with Allan immediately, looking at what the problems with the set might be, and what we had to solve. As soon as rehearsals start, it becomes more about the detail of the show. I start concentrating on costumes, props and images that take place within the framework. And talking to the lighting designer about creating other images with light and shadow. As a designer, you're responsible for co-

ordinating a team of people. I work with a production manager who organises the budgets, materials, the practical side of things. I work with a construction manager, the person who builds the set. I work with a costume maker, who will make any costumes that I can't buy. And a set-painter, although as a designer, you often do a lot of that yourself. On this show I'm very lucky to have a design assistant/prop maker. She makes more specific props, puppets etc.

After four weeks of rehearsal you're into Tech Week when you start to rehearse with all the technical bits of the show, lighting, sound, all the costumes, all the props. Then you move into the theatre from the rehearsal room. Everything comes together. You're still rehearsing but with everything. So the rehearsals are about getting everything together for that week as far as I'm concerned.

What particular challenges does this show present you as a designer?

It's to do with the key images that jump out at you from the script. Like being struck by lightning at the end. Like climbing the tree and taking your clothes off and not revealing yourself totally. Things like creating a bus on stage and making it look interesting. Most of these problems seem to be being solved in a physical way through what the actors are doing on stage. Some of the more difficult ones we're yet to come to in the rehearsals. If those images require elaborate props it's difficult for the design team and can involve long hours towards the end of rehearsals. It's a real, tangible, physical object that has to be made, so you need time to make it. It isn't just an idea.

I think a lot of the challenges within Alibi's work are to do with the fluidity of the images. It's not just because the show is a devised piece, it's in the essence of the stories and the way it's been translated into a script - there's a fluidity to how effortlessly it moves between scenes, and that's a challenge as a designer. But it's become less of a problem for me because it's the way I've worked with this company for the last twelve years. So it's never a surprise, but certainly in terms of costume and indicators of different characters, when you've got four people playing all of them, you really have to take that into account doing props and costume.

What is particular about working for Alibi?

The changeability of the process – it flutters between being a nightmare and an exciting challenge. Devising happens so fast, so many ideas are coming at you at once from everybody, and then sometimes not at all. You have to think on your feet. Things can be changed or cut in a moment. You might have spent a long time making something and it gets cut, but you just get used to it. Everything could change tomorrow. It's exciting to be part of.

Solving a moment in *ONE IN A MILLION* : *Climbing a tree on stage*

“She looks up into the tree and starts to climb out of sight into the leafy heart of it... Its branches shiver and sway as David and Louise move through it like fleas in cat fur...”

In one scene of **One in a Million**, Louise and David are sitting at the foot of a tree in a park at night. Louise has just been telling David how she never feels she has the opportunity to be her real self. In a fit of recklessness, she climbs into the tree and starts to throw off her clothes. David follows suit, nervously at first, then with matching enthusiasm. They find each other at the top of the tree for a brief moment of tenderness before they lose their balance and fall all the way back down to the bottom.

This seemed to be one of the more difficult moments in the show to stage. Theatre Alibi tends away from literal depictions of images like this, and anyway, bringing a life-sized tree onto the stage was obviously impossible. However, the story demanded that the audience get the sense of a tree in order to understand David and Louise’s brief, ecstatic feeling of escape when they climb it. Here are some of the solutions we tried along the way.

First of all, we had David and Louise climbing up stepladders to get the sense of the height of a tree. Also, the other two actors held leafy branches in front of them to suggest the canopy of the tree. But strangely, climbing six feet off the ground actually seemed to diminish the tree’s height rather than making it feel higher.

So, rather than using ladders to depict the tree, we decided to use two actors. This worked well when David and Louise sat on the ground with the two actors behind them, side by side, forming the trunk of the tree for them to lean against. At first these actors held canopies of fabric supported with sticks over David and Louise to represent the lower branches of the tree. But again, a more minimal approach seemed more effective – if the actors being the tree trunk just looked up into the branches, this gave a clear sense of the tree.

But how to climb the tree? The actors spent hours struggling to mime tree-climbing. This was moderately successful when the actors’ limbs became the limbs of the tree, moving down at each step that David and Louise climbed up. But the image felt rather crowded and messy, particularly when the storytellers held coats as foliage for the tree. This was a shame because the coats worked well as leaves at the top of the tree – there was something protective and embracing about the coats being held around David and Louise with just their heads sticking out. Also, it allowed the other two actors to be present as storytellers with David and Louise at the top of the tree without seeming to intrude on their intimacy. When the set arrived in the rehearsal room it provided the solution to the climbing. It offered a framework of horizontal and vertical bars at ground level, which David and Louise could

effectively pretend to climb about on. If they looked downwards, it gave the impression they were high up.

So, the final solution to depicting the tree and the climbing of it is a mixture of successful elements from all the various things we tried out. The tree trunk is made from the bodies of the storytellers standing side by side. They look up into the imaginary branches of the tree to suggest its scale. David and Louise climb along the frame of the set at ground level as if clambering about the branches of the tree. They look downwards to suggest they are up high. At the top of the tree the storytellers cloak David and Louise in mock foliage. When they fall, the storytellers wave the branches in front of them to suggest their downward movement. David and Louise mime falling and scream on the way down. The storytellers make the noise of them hitting the branches as they fall.

STAGECRAFT: *Making the Bells*

In a climactic moment of **One in a Million**, David follows a terrorist called The Finger to the bell-tower of a church to prevent him from remotely detonating a bomb on the street below. Unexpectedly, the bells begin to ring as David and The Finger struggle for control of the detonator. This scene obviously presented huge challenges from the outset, the sheer feat of representing the bells being the foremost. But also, the action of the scene had an inherent style to it, that of an action-thriller on film. How to translate that flavour on to the stage was a big question.

Before the research and development week, various people had different ideas floating in their heads about how we might solve this scene. There was the idea of having a large, lightweight bell made out of foam or something similar that would be swung from the set by the actors. Also, there was the thought of an actor actually wearing a bell costume like a large, rigid dress, which they could swing to and fro on their body. Both these ideas immediately seemed impractical however, because where on a small, touring theatre set was one supposed to hide a large foam bell until it was needed on stage?

During the research and development week, several more down-to-earth solutions were tried. These involved actors as storytellers making the bells, which the characters mimed reactions to. The storytellers sat up a stepladder, watching David and The Finger creep into the bell tower below them. Then the storytellers used their voices to make the noises of the bells creaking into motion and ringing. They also made the sound of gunshots. The storytellers indicated the motion of a bell swinging to and fro with their hands, and followed it with their eyes. David and The Finger edged around this imaginary bell, pretending to avoid the arc of its movement and acting as if deafened by its ringing. At one point in the action the remote detonator of the bomb rolled under the bell. David and The Finger scabbled under the bell to retrieve it, snatching their arms out of the way on each downward swing to avoid being crushed. These solutions were certainly simple and fairly evocative but there were problems. The action of David and The Finger wriggling on the floor to retrieve the detonator was rather unimpressive and possible hard for all the audience to see, because of sightlines. The sound of bells made with the storytellers' voices was rather thin, and gave no sense of the scale of real bells.

When the set arrived in the rehearsal room, the actors and director discovered that it offered a gift when it came to depicting bells. It featured two large, swinging metal doors. Through playing with these doors, they discovered that while they swung horizontally rather than vertically, they could be made to suggest the swinging of bells very effectively. The movement certainly felt big and dangerous, and when David and The Finger scuttled between the doors, it looked appropriately scary. The action in the story was changed to accommodate these horizontally swinging bells. The action of scabbling under the bell was cut and the chasing between the bells was extended.

The musical director/composer provided the sound of the bells and the feel of a thriller with his music. The pealing of bells is woven into the electronic soundtrack, which is loud, rhythmic and very exciting.