

Animalia

by Ian Toner

Characters:

Danielle

Sarah

Both 11.

The set is minimal and mobile. No props.

Lights slowly up on Danielle and Sarah over the following:

Both: See, see my playmate,
Come out and play with me,
And bring your dollies three,
Climb up your apple tree,
Holler down my rain barrels,
Slide down my cellar door,
And we'll be jolly friends,
Forever evermore.

Lights up. Monday.

Sarah: *(as Bridget)* WE OWN THIS YARD AND IF THE REST OF YOU COWS DON'T LIKE IT YOU CAN GO SHITE!

Danielle: So that's Bridget. Bridget is the best strategist we have. Before the battle commences she lines us up and she's like-

Sarah: *(as Bridget)* Ok ladies, the name of the game is attrition warfare. The enemy have high morale but low intellectual resources. We wear them down to the point of collapse through continuous loss of personnel-

Danielle: I mean I don't even know how she knows this stuff, but Bridget is sooooo clever-

Sarah: *(as Bridget)* Now if I know the fifth class like I think I do, they're going to launch a counter-offensive around here, right by the first class hopscotch. Mary Murphy. Thinks she's clever. We operate a pincer system, coercing them into the middle of the playground where Danielle and Lisa will lead an out-flanking manoeuvre here and here-

Danielle: Cool! What's out-flanking?

Sarah: *(as Bridget)* SHUT UP Danielle!

Danielle: Bridget's my best friend. So now we're lined up at the sixth class end of the yard and we can see Mary Murphy consulting with the fifth class troops saying like, I don't know, and then Bridget is up screaming and we look down at the fifth class girls, pinned up against the wall where we go during fire drills.

Sarah: *(as Bridget)* Hmph. Very little tactical awareness.

Danielle: And they are showing distinct signs of nervousness-

Sarah: *(as terrified fifth class girl)* Agggghhhhhh-

Danielle: And this rumble comes up through our feet, like it's shaking the ground, like it's coming up from the inside of the earth, and in a second everything is so loud that you can't hear anything at all and then I look over and see...

Sarah Walters sitting in a corner by herself.

Sarah looks up and is startled to see the audience looking at her.

Sarah: Hello.

Danielle: Just like sitting there by herself eating the chocolate off a club milk or something-

Sarah: I love sucking the chocolate off a penguin.

Danielle: -like she doesn't even notice what's going on around her and it's like she stands out or just doesn't fit in or whatever.

Sarah: *(as Bridget)* Would you look at the state of that little weirdo.

Danielle: But just then, without warning, Bridget takes a major hit to the chest.

Noooooooooo BRIIIIIIIDDD-GEEETTTT!

A tomato has been cleverly misappropriated as some form of missile. The fifth class are armed and evidently much better organised than we had anticipated. It must have been at a fairly advanced stage of ripeness because it has burst all over Bridget and I mean she is drenched red.

Sarah: *(as Bridget)* Who threw that?

Danielle: Silence in the courtyard. The fifth class remain resolute as we try to identify the mystery vegetable wielding marksman. Or is tomato a fruit? You know I can never remember-

Sarah: *(as Bridget)* Look out!

Danielle: But there's no time for that, because just then a volley of edible artillery comes flying towards us at a frightening speed. The entire contents of their collective lunchbox is

being catapulted at us. Bananas, satsumas, apples prove particularly dangerous. We are under threat of humiliation from a variety of easy peelers.

But using experience to our advantage we launch our counter attack without any need for consultation. Instinctively, we reach down for anything we can get our hands on and send it sailing back over their confused vicious little fifth class heads.

And then, the line breaks. And we just start running. Like everything's in slow-motion. Just this mass of fifth class bodies coming towards us. And I catch a glimpse of Bridget like-

Sarah: (*as Bridget, running, screaming, crying*) This wasn't part of the plan!

Danielle: And I don't know what I'm doing but I really hope that it's out-flanking, and then these two armies or packs or whatever meet in the middle where the yard dips.

The following is a choreographed animalistic movement which briefly stops for Danielle's lines to the audience. Accompanied by monkey/ early ape-man sounds.

Danielle: Someone falls.

Someone gets thrown to the ground and trampled on.

Danielle: There's scraping, there's kicking, even hair-pulling which was expressly forbidden according to the pre-fight arrangements.

There's some hair-pulling, perhaps turning into choking, perhaps turning into leg biting.

Danielle: Somebody cries.

A monkey cries, another monkey comforts and grooms them, then one monkey gets hit by some artillery. The other monkey screams to the sky in mourning.

Danielle: And just when it looks like maybe things might get a bit out of hand, the school bell rings-

School bell rings. The girls stand panting.

And everyone just stops. And looks at each other. And then...

We just go back to class.

Classroom.

Sarah: After little break, most of the class are covered in exploded produce. Ms. Hamilton sits and looks at us and stays that way for about seven minutes. I think she might be angry but then she gets back to teaching us things.

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Evolution, girls, is a process. Though we tend to think otherwise.

Sarah: Maria Jane Brennan finds an unburst grape in her hair. Aoife Sweeney is holding a tissue to her nose which I believe started bleeding after she was hit by a very fast moving Petit Filous.

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Billions of years and the extinction of 99% of all species that ever lived, from the single celled organism to us. We flew to the moon.

Sarah: Some of the girls look at each other out of the corner of their eye. They're probably confused as to why Ms. Hamilton has veered so far from the set curriculum.

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) So it is no wonder we tend to view ourselves as the finished product. But looking at you all now, I see that we are very much a work in progress.

Sarah: Ms. Hamilton is really clever but sometimes I fear she seems dispirited. I don't know why.

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Geography. Turn your books to page 43. Rebecca O'Callaghan, what is the capital of Brazil?

Sarah: (*as Rebecca, pulling something from her hair*) Em...

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Yes?

Sarah: (*as Rebecca*) Em...

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Yes?

Sarah: (*as Rebecca*) Em...

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Yes?

Sarah: (*as Rebecca*) Spain?

School bell rings.

12.30 p.m., big break, my favourite of the breaks, as those that know me will tell you. I sit in the shaded area behind the pre-fab and arrange my lunch in the usual fashion. Counter-clockwise in order of which I will devour first; crisp, crisp, satsuma, cheese sandwich, Penguin.

What's a Penguin's favourite footwear? Flipper-Floppers.

Laughs a bit, looks around, nobody there.

I'll save that one for later.

Across the yard.

Danielle: Half twelve, big break, and Bridget is absolutely fuming, understandably I think, because the big fight at little break didn't exactly live up to her expectations. Lisa is trying to console her so she's like-

Sarah: (*as Lisa*) Well, if you think about it Bridget, in many ways ours was a moral victory because we didn't resort to the unprecedented and frankly unfair use of foodstuffs as weaponry.

Danielle: And Bridget is like-

Sarah: (*as Bridget, crying*) Oh my God, shut up Lisa, you're so stupid.

Danielle: Yeah Lisa.

Lisa's like not even that good friends with us anyway, me and Bridget have been friends for much longer, but we had to be friends with Lisa after we stopped being friends with Maria Jane Brennan after she accidentally called Ms. Hamilton mom.

So anyway Lisa is all sulking now which I think makes Bridget feel a bit better and just then who should appear on the periphery of the schoolyard but Jason Simmons, strolling by BMX in hand. Jason has a stupid head, but his brother's a professional footballer and he's got a six pack and he's only eleven. So Bridget goes-

Sarah: (*as Bridget*) Alright Jason?

Danielle: And Jason's like-

Sarah: (*as Jason*) Yeah. Alright Danielle?

Danielle: Yeah.

And I can see Bridget is pretty annoyed about that and she's looking at the two of us like, 'what was that about?' and then she goes-

Sarah: (*as Bridget*) So, Jason, like how's your friend Conor?

Danielle: And Jason says-

Sarah: (*as Jason*) Eh I don't know. Grand 'spose. Why?

Danielle: And then Bridget is all like playing with her hair, she's like real casual, she's like-

Sarah: (*as Bridget*) No reason. Just, em, tell him I was asking for him, yeah?

Danielle: And now Jason is like trying to figure that out and he looks as if he's doing long division in his head or something and he says-

Sarah: (*as Jason*) Yeah. Probably not gonna do that.

Danielle: So Bridget's goes-

Sarah: (*as Bridget*) Cool. What you up to?

Danielle: So Jason says-

Sarah: (*as Jason*) Mitchin'.

Danielle: Big grin on him. And Bridget is making a big deal of rolling her eyes.

Sarah: (*as Bridget*) Eh, no-one likes a waster Jason.

Danielle: So Jason snorts up this big snot in his nose and spits it on the ground and goes-

Sarah: (*as Jason*) Would you ever fuck off Bridget Malone. You fat little whore.

Danielle: And cycles off.

Pause.

I think he likes you Bridget.

Across the yard.

Sarah: I've almost completely nibbled the edges off my Penguin when-

Danielle: (*as Elaine*) Hi Sarah.

Sarah: Elaine is my acquaintance from fourth class. She eats her lunch beneath the stairs to the junior infants' fire escape. I believe the other girls play a game where if you touch her you get the 'Elaine Disease'.

Hello.

Danielle: (*as Elaine*) Wanna trade?

Sarah: Why would I do that?

Danielle: (*as Elaine*) It's really good.

Sarah: But I have a Penguin. You have a clothes peg. A Penguin is edible and delicious. A clothes peg is not.

Danielle: (*as Elaine*) Ok. Bye.

Sarah: Despite a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of bargaining, Elaine seems to be really coming out of her shell.

Across the yard.

Danielle: So Bridget is like properly red in the face and we're walking around in virtual silence for a few minutes.

So em...

Sarah: (*as Bridget*) What was that about?

Danielle: What?

Sarah: (*as Bridget*) You and Jason. Something going on there?

Danielle: Dangerous territory. Must tread carefully.

No. Yes. What?

Sarah: (*as Bridget*) Hmph.

The story freezes.

Danielle: Ok, so I know that was pretty cool but actually that may have not been the entire truth I told just there. You see the thing is me and Jason, we actually have a bit of a history and I know like I don't want to put a label on it because he's not really into that but you know like a relationship or like whatever you want to call I don't know but you know. Anyway, the point is, I'm a little bit hesitant about telling Bridget because she likes him I think, and even though she's really like supportive and quite a caring friend, like when I was worried because of the tampon ads because you know like... (*whispers*) the periods... it's always like blue but she says it's not really and she should know because she's already had like loads of them. Anyway Bridget's the best but with this I'm afraid that she might kill me or maim or you know, badly hurt me in some way, you know that way? Anyway.

So last week I was walking outside Tesco's right and-

Sarah: (*as Jason*) Alright Danielle.

Danielle: Oh, hi Jason, yeah.

Sarah: (*as Jason*) What's that you got there?

Beat.

Danielle: It's a curly-wurly.

Sarah: (*as Jason*) Cool. So thinking of going cinema later. Might see you there, yeah?

Danielle: What?

Sarah: (*as Jason*) Might see you there. At the cinema, like.

Danielle: Why?

Sarah: (*as Jason*) Well, like just-

Danielle: I'm not going to the cinema later.

Sarah: (*as Jason*) Yeah but-

Danielle: Why would I go to the cinema later?

Sarah: (*as Jason*) Just like-

Danielle: On my own like?

Sarah: (*as Jason*) No but, I'll be there.

Danielle: What like at the same film?

Sarah: (*as Jason*) Yeah, I mean but-

Danielle: So anyway that went on for like 25 minutes or something and- Jason's so cool- and we had the best time.

Oh, that movie was so fu-

Sarah: (*as Jason*) Shite.

Danielle: Fshite. It was so fshite.

Beat.

Shite.

We had just the best conversations. And then afterwards...we kissed. For like a long time. For like about three minutes. It was a bit weird. My neck kind of hurt after a while because I wasn't sure if you could move your head. And that was it. He rode off home on his bike. But we Snapchat all the time.

So yeah that's everything.

No wait...

Ok, yeah that's everything.

The story re-animates.

So Bridget is looking at me now like she's doing long division as well except she appears to have figured out the equation in her head which, as everyone knows, is impossible, and then she spots Sarah Walters sitting across the yard talking to herself. This look descends across her face, I've seen it before, it doesn't end well. She starts marching over.

Across the yard.

Sarah: I've been scouring National Geographic in preparation for an important presentation I'm giving concerning Arachnids of the Serengeti. Did you know Hyenas will eat virtually anything? Vegetables, other animals, humans, each other and even according to some

unhappy campers, aluminium pots and pans. Nobody like Hyenas, but they don't care. They laugh about it. You would think they'd be sad. But no they are laughing because they are at the top of the food chain.

Danielle: *(as Bridget)* Hi Sarah.

Sarah: What?

Bridget Malone hasn't spoken to me in three years. I'm taken off guard to say the least.

Hello. Hi.

Danielle: *(as Bridget)* Yeah em Sarah, we were just wondering, you remember the third class talent contest?

Sarah: Meerkats live in colonies with one standing sentry at all times to warn the others of approaching predators. This would never happen to a meerkat.

Yes.

Danielle: *(as Bridget)* What was that dance you did again? It was sooooo good.

Sarah: I look over at Danielle.

Danielle: *(to herself)* Don't look at me.

Sarah: Danielle Ryan and I are next door neighbours and have been friends since we were 6. Danielle is the luckiest girl I know. One year she got the bike I wanted for Christmas but she let me play with it every day.

Danielle: *(as Bridget)* We're waiting.

Sarah does her dance. It may be Irish dancing with obvious influences of MTV hip-hop.

Danielle: *(as Bridget)* Aww. Yeah. It's not as good as I remember it.

Sarah: I won a medal.

Danielle: *(as Bridget)* Aw hun. We were 8. Everyone won a medal.

Sarah: Did you win a medal?

Danielle: *(as Bridget)* That's like...not the point. Some of us aren't kids anymore Sarah.

Sarah: And then I watch them as they leave.

Over to Danielle.

Danielle: So Bridget is looking exceptionally pleased with herself, even more so than usual, and I just can't help it, before I even know what's coming out of my mouth I just go-

Em, that was a bit mean wasn't it?

So she goes-

Sarah: (*As Bridget*) Eh, would you ever fuck off Danielle.

Danielle: Then goes to leave, but as she does she turns and says-

Sarah: (*as Bridget*) You fat little whore.

School bell rings.

Danielle: I run all the way home that day.

Sarah: Hi Danielle.

Danielle: Eh, yeah, hi Sarah.

They enter their homes.

Danielle: Hello?

Sarah: I'm home.

They drop their bags.

Danielle: Mom?

They wipe their feet.

Sarah: What's for dinner?

They hang up their coats.

Usually when I get home I turn on MTV Hits to see 'what's hot'.

She turns on the TV, we hear hip-hop, she watches, then looks shocked by what she sees. Hurries to turn it off as Grandad comes in.

Hi Grandad. What are you doing?

Danielle: *Various Grandad sounds.*

Sarah: Oh good, that things been on the blink for a while.

Danielle: *Various Grandad sounds.*

Sarah: Ok, well just don't electrocute yourself again.

Looks in another room.

Hi Granny.

Danielle: *Various Granny sounds.*

Sarah: Beans on toast please.

Danielle: *Various Granny sounds.*

Sarah: Oh well, do we have marrowfat peas?

Danielle: *Various Granny noises.*

Sarah: Marrowfat peas on toast please.

Yes!

Sarah goes to her bedroom.

Granny and Grandad smell like terriers, even though we don't have a dog. They're great. I'm the only girl I know who just has Grandparents.

This is my room. It's brilliant. This my atlas. This is my collection of National Geographics. It's brilliant. Often when I was small I would catch a glimpse of Danielle and her mom and her dad through my bedroom window here. They always looked happy. That made me feel calm.

Pause.

She's not there.

Over to Danielle's House.

Danielle: Mom?

Danielle's Mom is smiling vacantly.

Danielle: Mom?

Sarah: *(as Danielle's Mom)* Oh hi, Sweetheart.

Beat.

Oh, Dinner.

Goes to get dinner.

Danielle: I got an A on my English.

Sarah: *(as Danielle's Mom, os)* What?

Danielle: Nothing.

Danielle's mom serves dinner.

Sarah: (as Danielle's Mom) How was school?

Danielle: Em, well-

Sarah: (as Danielle's Mom) Oh there's a stain.

She starts fervently cleaning the tablecloth. Beat as Danielle watches.

Danielle: Mom used to Hoover the same spots over and over again, even if they were clean. It used to drive Dad mad. I just thought it was funny, but I heard him say once he couldn't cope. I just push my peas around my plate. I can't eat them because the peas are touching the mashed potatoes, which she knows I hate. But I don't say anything.

Bye Mom.

Sarah: (as Danielle's Mom) Oh wait how was your da-

Danielle: But I'm like halfway up the stairs at that point.

Sarah at her spider tank. The sound of muffled swing music from downstairs.

Sarah: That's Granny and Grandad practicing their swing dancing. An awful racket, but they say it keeps them young, so that's good I suppose.

This is my spider Alfred. Hi Alfred.

Alfred hisses at her.

Alfred as you can see is a Mexican Redknee belonging to the Therapsidae family of spiders. Otherwise known as a tarantula. Alfred eats crickets.

Feeds Alfred a cricket.

Danielle: (as a cricket, quiet) Oh no please don't agggghhhh -

Sarah: There you go Alfred.

Alfred eats the cricket. Burps.

I wish Alfred could talk. Sometimes I wish he was a parrot.

Danielle: I check my phone. Instagram, nothing. Snapchat, nothing. Facebook, Bridget Malone says, 'You and me Lisa Nugent best friends eva hun'. Ugh, Lisa is the worst.

Jason Simmons is online.

Thinks for a second.

Hi. No wait...delete.

Hey. Wat u up to?

“Nothin’. What u up to?”

Nothin’.

Beat.

Jason is offline.

Jason’s so funny.

Sarah: Alfred likes to be on his own. Spiders are not social creatures like say ants who are always part of a community. Some spiders live in colonies with up to 50 thousand other spiders, but some live on their own, which I think is a bit sad.

Danielle: Oh yeah, this is my room. Nobody’s allowed in here normally, especially not Mom. I keep a shoe-box under my bed full of secrets, like my letters and stuff. But nobody can see them.

Sarah is watching. Danielle reads. Silence. Then she looks up. She screams. Sarah screams, then waves. Danielle quickly puts the shoebox back then opens the window.

Danielle: What are you doing?

Sarah: I don’t know. What are you doing?

Danielle: Nothing.

Sarah: Ok.

Beat.

Wanna go bike chasing?

Danielle: No, not really.

Sarah: Ok bye.

Danielle: Thanks though.

Sarah: Ok.

Closes the window. Danielle sighs.

Danielle: I just wish there was someone around to talk to, you know?

Sarah: I think I'd rather be an ant than a spider.

Night Alfred.

They both go to bed.

Lights.

Both: Oh no my playmate
I can't come play with you
My dollies have the flu
Boo hoo boo hoo
Can't holler down rain barrels
Or slide down a cellar door
But we'll be jolly friends
Forever evermore.

Lights change. Tuesday.

Sarah: On my way to school I find a dead body.

There's nobody around so I investigate with a stick. It's eyes are open staring up at me as I turn it over on to it's back, it's feathery wings fluttering helplessly. Poor little pigeon. It could have been worse, you could have been gotten by a cat. You know, given the quantity of urban pigeons it would seem only natural we would see dead ones more often. But we don't, because they usually go somewhere to hide, probably because they are vulnerable and don't want to be eaten alive in their dying moments, but also probably because they want a little bit of privacy.

Poor little pigeon. You just didn't see that electricity pole coming.

School bell rings.

Danielle: Before school I spot Bridget and Lisa near the gates. I'm uncertain as to whether or not to approach them. They weren't at the bus stop we usually wait at this morning.

Hey guys.

Sarah: *(as Bridget)* Oh hey hun.

Danielle: You weren't at the bus. I waited for you.

Sarah: *(as Bridget)* Aw sorry hun, we got a lift. I guess we just like, forgot to tell you. Didn't we Lisa?

Danielle: And Lisa is like-

Sarah: *(as Lisa)* Yeah we just like forgot didn't we? Bridget rang me last night to remind me to forget didn't you?

Beat.

Danielle: Ok, well, what are you doing after school?

Sarah: *(as Bridget)* We are actually super busy. Aren't we?

Danielle: And Lisa goes-

Sarah: *(as Lisa)* Yeah I'm actually super busy, like I am up to here.

Beat. She doesn't do anything with her hand.

Danielle: Ok. Well, see you.

(to audience) And just then, Sarah walks by.

Sarah: Hi Danielle.

Danielle: Eh, em, hi Sarah.

And so Bridget is looking all shocked like-

Sarah: *(as Bridget)* Well, I see you're lesbianing with your next door neighbour now.

Danielle: Yeah, well, you're just- you should...yeah.

I'm disappointed with the quality of my comeback. I walk away head hanging in shame just as I hear Lisa go-

Sarah: *(as Lisa)* Ha, lesbians are the worst.

School bell rings.

Danielle: *(as Ms Hamilton)* What is the capital of Spain?

Sarah: *(as Rebecca)* Em-

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Yes?

Sarah: *(as Rebecca)* Em-

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Yes?

Sarah: *(as Rebecca)* Em-

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Yes?

Sarah: *(as Rebecca)* Spain?

School bell rings.

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Ladies, don't forget to get your permission slips signed. Sarah Walters, could I see you for a moment?

Sarah: (*to audience*) What have I done wrong?

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Sarah-

Sarah: (*to audience*) I'm nervous.

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Sarah, I'd like to talk to you about your...performance. In class.

Sarah: Arachnid is a class of joint-legged invertebrate animal-

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) What are you doing?

Sarah: My performance. My upcoming presentation on arachnids of the Serengeti.

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Oh. Don't.

Sarah: Ok.

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) No, Sarah I wanted to talk to you about your academic performance. You're, I think, a very capable girl Sarah. But recently your work has been suffering. I just wonder- is everything quite alright?

Sarah: What do you mean?

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Well, is everything ok at home?

Sarah: (*to herself*) The front pair of legs in some species has converted to a sensory function-

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Sarah?

Sarah: Yes?

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Is everything ok at home?

Sarah: Yes.

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Well, I've noticed you're not exactly...connecting with the other girls, are you?

Sarah: What do you mean?

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Well you don't seem to have any friends...

Sarah: Oh.

Danielle: (*as Ms. Hamilton*) Oh. Oh, Sarah, perhaps I shouldn't- Im-

Sarah: *(to audience)* Not all spiders have friends. Some live in colonies with 50 thousand other spiders but some live on their own which I think is a bit sad.

Can I go?

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* But I-

Sarah: I need to go. It's urgent.

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Where are you going?

Sarah: I have a funeral to get to.

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* A-a funer...

Sarah: *(to Ms. Hamilton)* Bye miss.

I run all the way home that day.

Hi Danielle.

Danielle: Oh, yeah, em, hi Sarah.

They do the getting home routine.

Mom?

Sarah: Granny, Grandad, save me some dinner, I have an important mission.

A noise of acknowledgement from Granny.

I grab some supplies from the closet and a garden trowel from the shed and head back out. There is a corner of the green near our estate that is shrouded by trees. You can't see it from the road, it's secretive, so I think I would like it if I was a pigeon.

Danielle: *(as Elaine)* Hi Sarah.

Sarah: Hi Elaine.

Danielle: *(as Elaine)* Where's the dead body?

Sarah: Oh, it's here.

Beat.

Danielle: *(as Elaine)* It's a pigeon.

Sarah: Yes. Why, what did you think?

Beat.

Danielle: (*as Elaine*) Nothing.

Sarah: Ok.

We do a hole beneath the bow of a pine tree. I shut my eyes to try to see what it might be like to be alone there forever.

I think it's time.

Danielle: (*as Elaine*) Ok.

Sarah holds the pigeon up. Elaine only sort of knows the words.

Danielle: (*as Elaine*)

Amazing Grace, How sw...the soun...

That sa...a wr...like me...

I once wa los...but now am foun...

Wa blin...bu now...I see...

Sarah:

Pigeon,

I did not know you.

Beat.

You were a feral pigeon and not a carrier pigeon.

You died, like so many of your kind,
by flying into a lamppost,
And now you are dead as the Dodo...
Who was incidentally a member of the same family.

Lays the bird to rest. Elaine lays a hand on her shoulder.

Sarah: Thanks. Do you want to go do somethin-

Danielle: (*as Elaine*) Bye Sarah.

Sarah: Ok, bye.

Elaine leaves.

I stay and watch the sun go down and the sky change from orange to purple and I think about if it's "pretty", but then I remember that I read in National Geographic that it's just molecules and em, em, small particles in the atmosphere "changing the direction of light rays and causing them to scatter."

But still.

Danielle's bedroom.

Danielle: I've been sitting here for hours literally just staring out this window and you start to think strange thoughts like what it might be like to be a ghost and then I'm like well I practically am a ghost anyway because nobody can see me except there would be obvious advantages to being a ghost like sneaking into Bridget Malone's house and just moving all her stuff around and like re-organising her sock drawer so she can't find anything or whatever. Yeah, I'm like a ghost without supernatural powers.

She takes her shoebox from under the bed.

(Reading) 'Dear Danielle, I can't wait for you to see it here...'

Dad and I built a treehouse together, but I don't go in it much anymore. Just because, you know, it's for kids.

(Reading) 'Dear Danielle, that sounds like quite an adventure...'

But that's where I used to go to think weird stuff or when there was shouting downstairs and I just wanted to go away.

(Reading) 'Dear Danielle, I miss you too...'

She sighs and sits looking out her bedroom window. Sarah enters her bedroom.

Sarah: Hi Alfred. Time for dinner.

Perhaps Danielle could remain in her window seated position but surreptitiously say the following:

Danielle: *(as cricket)* Oh no, please don't eat me agggghhhh-

Sarah turns and is shocked to see Danielle sitting at her window. Danielle, caught looking, looks away. Sarah opens the window.

Sarah: Hello.

Danielle: Hi.

Sarah: What are you doing?

Danielle: Nothing. Well, just...sitting. What are you doing?

Sarah: I'm feeding crickets to Alfred and I just came from a funeral for a pigeon.

Danielle: Oh. Cool.

Sarah: Yeah it really was.

Beat.

Danielle: *(to audience)* Sarah's lived next door to me my whole life. The other girls think she's a bit...well, let's just say, for illustrative purposes, in second class somebody sucked all the coloured glitter out of Rebecca O'Callaghan's Barbie pens, and nobody would own up to it, but then Sarah was out of school for a week and everybody said it was because she was in surgery and when they cut her open it was like a piñata bursting, like all the colours of the rainbow just spilling out of her.

Sarah: Well, I better go. I have my presentation tomorrow to prepare for.

Danielle: Yeah.

Sarah: And this homework is not going to do itself.

Danielle: No.

Sarah: Even though I sometimes wish it would.

Danielle: Yeah.

Sarah: Well...bye.

Goes to close window.

Danielle: Sarah?

Beat.

Wanna come to my treehouse?

Beat.

Sarah: What did you say?

A weeping willow marks the boundary between Danielle's garden and mine. Its willowy branches overhang both. I used to watch as, in its shadows, Danielle's dad and her would build this fortress of solitude. I never dreamed of entering its hallowed walls.

Danielle: This way.

Sarah: She leads me down a winding tunnel made of scrap wood and sheet metal and up some steps. It smells like bins. This is it. I am Magellan discovering his Strait. I am Columbus about to sail off the edge of the world. I am Hermione Granger.

Danielle: Here we are.

Sarah: A thin film of dust covers almost everything. Spiderwebs criss-cross above our heads, their silky orbs twinkling even in the darkness. There's an ant problem. It's magnificent.

Danielle: *(to audience)* Nobody comes in the treehouse. Not ever. Not since Dad was here. Dad said when I was small if anyone did step foot in it a giant forcefield would blow them into outer space. It's not true. I'm kind of glad.

Sarah: We will be very happy here.

Danielle: *(to audience)* I immediately regret this decision.

Em-

Sarah: How will you know it's me?

Danielle: What?

Sarah: How will you know it's me at the door?

Danielle: Em, well we can have a secret knock, like...

She does the secret knock. As does Sarah.

Sarah: Perfect.

(to audience) The stars stretch out over us as far as sight can see. This is a brave new world which offers infinite possibilities.

There's no roof.

Danielle: It's not finished. My dad's going to help me finish it.

Sarah: You can see the stars. It's nice.

Except for when it rains. What do you do when it rains?

Danielle: I wear a jacket.

Sarah: Sensible.

Silence.

Sarah: Perhaps we should use this time to get to know each other better.

Danielle: Like how?

Sarah: We could ask each other questions.

Danielle: *(shrugs)* Ok.

Sarah: Ok. What's your favourite food?

Danielle: That's your question?

Sarah: Yes.

Danielle: It's weird.

Sarah: Should I ask something else?

Danielle: No, it's fine. Pizza I suppose.

Sarah: Ask me.

Danielle: What's your favourite food?

Sarah: Fried eggs. The jelly kind.

Danielle: Oh.

Sarah: And penguins. The biscuit. Not the flightless amphibian bird. But I also like the bird.

Danielle: Oh. Cool.

Sarah: What's your favourite colour?

Danielle: Probably a light aqua-marine blue.

Sarah: Oh my goodness, that's specific.

Danielle: Yeah. What's yours?

Sarah: Brown.

Danielle: Just brown?

Sarah: Dark mahogany?

Danielle: That's a good one.

Sarah: Ok. What's your favourite film?

Danielle: Probably the third Hunger Games.

Sarah: Mine too.

Danielle: No way! Is it really?

Sarah: No, it's Muppets in Space.

Danielle: Mine too!

Sarah: Incredible. What's your favourite kind of music?

Danielle: Taylor Swift. What's yours?

Sarah: Gangster rap.

Danielle: What's your real favourite kind of music?

Sarah: Gangster rap.

Beat.

Danielle: Oh. Cool.

Sarah: Are you sad?

Danielle: Why do you ask that?

Sarah: Because I can't tell.

Danielle: Oh well, you see, Bridget was kind of mean to me today, I mean, she can be kind of mean all the time, like laughing at people and stuff, but usually I don't mind it so much when it's like at other people, but today was kind of hard.

Sarah: Yeah.

Beat.

You know, eh, em, hyenas...for my presentation... I was reading and learning about the Serengeti...and em, and hyenas are at the top of the food chain, and they laugh a lot too...because they make a sound but usually it's not the strongest in the pack who makes the laughing sound...it's...em...actually the lowest ranking members, and it's actually a sign of weakness or distress.

Danielle: Oh...that's...cool.

Sarah: Yeah it is.

Where did your dad go?

Beat.

Danielle: He left.

Sarah: Oh. So how is he going to help you finish the treehouse?

Danielle: He'll come back.

Sarah: Oh. Ok.

Silence.

Sarah: What's a penguin's favourite footwear? Flipper floppers.

Beat.

Danielle: It's kind of late. Maybe you should go.

Sarah: Oh. Ok. Thanks Danielle.

Goes to leave.

Danielle: Sarah-

I'll be here tomorrow night.

Sarah practices the secret knock.

Sarah: Ok.

Leaves.

Wednesday.

An alarm bell rings. Sarah is looking in the mirror. Slowly she puts on her headphones. She presses play. Inspirational music. The following is punctuated by karate moves.

Sarah: This is it. Your chance. Your opportunity. Presentation Day. No room for error. Somebody needs to educate these girls.

About Arachnids of the effing Serengeti.

She turns the music down.

Time to check supplies. Maps of the Serengeti. Check. Atlas, also featuring the Serengeti. Check. Detailed diagrams of the anatomy of various members of the arachnid family. Check. Encyclopedia Britannica. National Geographics. Picture book of the Serengeti. All check.

She struggles to pick up her bag.

Wish me luck Alfred.

Alfred hisses.

Thanks.

She leaves and starts walking steely-faced towards school as the music fades.

Danielle: That day on the way to school I'm struck by an ingenious idea. I decide to hang around the school gates, deliberately ignoring Bridget and Lisa, thereby giving them a taste of their own bitter, bitter medicine.

So I'm all-

She looks at the sky nonchalantly and whistles, poorly.

-when, of course, Jason comes by on his BMX, on his way to school I guess, big stupid look on his face and his hair is like glistening golden in the sun and it's all billowing like there's someone that follows him around especially to billow his hair for him with like a fan or something-

Sarah: *(as Jason, tossing his hair)* Alright Danielle?

Danielle: Ha, yeah.

And then he's gone off down the road doing a wheelie and I watch him for a few seconds and just kind of think about how much I'm in love with him and then I turn around...

And Bridget and Lisa are there. Bridget's face looks really red. And before I get a chance to do some grade A ignoring, they just walk past me.

Ignoring me. The absolute cheek.

(shrieks) I KNOW YOU CAN SEE ME!

Pause.

Sarah: *(as Bridget)* Oh. Sorry Danielle. Didn't notice you there.

She turns to walk away.

Danielle: The sheer injustice of existence. Sometimes, I really don't know.

Sarah: Hi Danielle.

Danielle: Hi Sarah.

Sarah: *(mumbling to herself)* Arachnid is a class of joint-legged invertebrate animal. All arachnids have eight legs-

School bell rings.

Oh my stars. Ok. I'm ready.

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Ladies, quiet down please. Today's presentation shall be given by...hmm, let me see...ah, yes, Ms. Sarah Walters and her presentation on...'Arachnids of the Serengeti'. Sarah?

Spotlight on Sarah.

Would you care to...?

Sarah stands. Silence. For quite some time.

Sarah...

As Ms. Hamilton approaches Sarah, Sarah puts her hand out to stop her. The look of steely determination falls across her face. Inspirational music. A few seconds. Then-

Sarah: *(very quickly and quietly)* Arachnid is a class of joint-legged invertebrate animal. All arachnids have eight legs. The front pair of legs...in some species...the front pair of legs in some species has converted to a sensory function...and...and-

Beat.

(to herself/audience) I don't think this is going well.

Danielle: Yeah, this isn't going well. The other girls start to giggle, and there's whispers and Bridget isn't saying anything but she's encouraging everyone by like looking at all the other girls like 'is she for real?', and Ms. Hamilton shushes the girls but every time the silence only lasts a few seconds and this goes on for minutes on end until-

Sarah: Miss?

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Yes. Yes Sarah?

Sarah: Can I sit down?

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Ok Sarah.

Ms Hamilton gives her a little round of applause.

Sarah: Thanks.

Danielle: That was brutal. Ms. Hamilton tries to take control of the situation, which is rapidly getting out of hand as the feeding frenzy escalates due to the smell of freshly spilled blood. And it's all-

The two girls do hyenas, fighting over a bit of meat and laughing.

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* LADIES!

Beat.

Thank you. Lisa Nugent, is something...funny?

Sarah: *(as Lisa)* No miss.

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Very well. Can you tell me anything about the Serengeti?

Sarah: *(as Lisa)* Eh...yeah. It's like...a place...em...on Earth...

Danielle: While the cogs turn loudly in Lisa's little brain I look over at Bridget, who's just like sitting there, getting away with as always, just like looking smug. Granted I can only see the back of her head but she has like a smug back of head. And then my arm just shoots up in the air as if independent from my brain. And I never answer questions in class because I don't want anyone to know I'm smart.

Hyenas, miss. Hyenas live there. And...they don't actually laugh. Well, they do, but it's like not real laughter, like often it's a sign of weakness or distress.

Sarah: *(as Lisa)* Aw, I was gonna say that.

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Thank you, Danielle, that's...that's excellent.

Sarah: *(as Lisa)* I was gonna say about the...the hernias...

Danielle: And actually Im feeling pretty proud of that one, and Bridget turns around and she goes-

Bridget gives a sarcastic thumbs up.

But whatever. I look over at Sarah in a display of solidarity, but she's just staring at her desk.

School bell rings. They both do getting home routine, although Sarah doesn't say anything this time.

Danielle: I'm home.

Mom?

Mom?

Danielle's mother is lying down.

Sarah: *(as Danielle's Mom)* Oh. Hi.

Danielle: What are you doing?

Sarah: *(as Danielle's Mom)* Just lying here.

Danielle: Ok.

Danielle watches for a beat, then puts a blanket over her.

On my way upstairs, it occurs to me that Sarah could probably really do with a shoulder to cry on. I mean if that was me earlier I'd just want to die.

As she says this we hear the beginning of N.W.A.'s 'Fuck da police'. She goes to her room to see Sarah practicing her dance.

Sarah.

Sarah!

Sarah hears her, shuts off her stereo. Danielle waves. Sarah waves. Treehouse.

Danielle: I hate Bridget Malone.

Sarah: Ok.

Danielle: I hate everything about her. Her stupid voice and her face and her pierced ears and her plucked eyebrows-

Sarah: -her nice hair-

Danielle: Everything.

Beat.

Somebody should do something to her.

Sarah: Like what?

Danielle: Something mean. As mean as she is. Really mean.

Like just like, write all over her journal when she's not looking saying like 'I love Ms. Hamilton' loads and loads of times and then when she hands it up to Ms. Hamilton she'll be soooo embarrassed-

Sarah: Oh so embarrassed-

Danielle: Like 'Here's my journal Ms. Hamilton'-

Sarah: 'Oh thank you Bridget. Bridget why does it say "I love Ms. Hamilton" all over your journal'??'

Danielle: 'Oh my God I didn't write that, I'm so embarrassed.'

Sarah: 'I hope you're embarrassed'.

They both laugh.

Danielle: -or just like, I don't know, tell Jason Simmons' friend Conor that she's like in love with him or whatever and then next time she's talking to him just like pull up her skirt-

Sarah: -oh my goodness-

Danielle: -and just like watch her be all like embarrassed and everyone will just laugh at her-

Sarah: 'Duh, I'm Bridget'

Danielle: No, I'm Bridget.

Sarah: Oh.

Danielle: ‘Duh, I’m Bridget. Conor I love you so much’.

Sarah: ‘Yeah but I’m not ready for a serious relationship Bridget’.

Danielle: ‘Why not Conor? You and me would be so happy together’.

Sarah sneaks around and pulls up ‘Bridget’s’ skirt.

‘Oh my God I’m so embarrassed’.

They laugh a lot.

Sarah: -or just run up to her in the middle of the yard and grab her face and then kiss her and then run off and everyone will say ‘eugh why did you get kissed you weird lesbian’ and she’ll be left there in front of everyone like aww...

Sarah laughs a lot. Beat.

So embarrassed.

Danielle: Bit weird.

Sarah: Ok.

Danielle: I wish I didn't care as much though. Like I wish I was more like you.

Sarah: Like me?

Danielle: Yeah. Like people are always like slagging you and laughing at you, like today, and you just don’t care.

Sarah looks at Danielle.

Sarah: Yeah.

Beat.

Sarah: Are you alright?

Danielle: I don’t know.

Sarah: Do you want to go bike chasing?

Danielle: No thanks. You really like bike chasing don’t you?

Sarah: You used to like bike chasing.

Danielle: When?

Sarah: When we were 6. You used to give me a go on your bike sometimes. And we would cycle around the estate and sometimes play chasing at St. Anne's playground.

Danielle: I don't remember that.

Sarah: Of course you do. One time we were up there and two older girls were there and they tried to steal your bike and I tried to stop them so they pushed me over and then you said 'nobody does that to my friend' and so you rolled over the bigger one's foot and she was screaming and we just cycled off while they were shouting at us and we cycled the whole way home and it was so funny.

Beat.

Danielle: Em, I'm pretty sure that never happened Sarah.

Sarah: I'm pretty sure it did.

Danielle: Ok.

Sarah: I always wished I was like you.

Danielle: Me?

Sarah: Yeah. Well you had a better bike.

Beat.

Danielle: Do you ever wish you were just like, a bit more...normal?

Sarah: Like how?

Danielle: How what?

Sarah: How do you be normal?

Danielle: Well...like...I don't know.

Sarah is staring at Danielle.

Danielle: What?

Sarah: You have a spider in your hair.

Danielle shrieks.

Danielle: Eugh, get it out!

Sarah plucks it out and holds it.

Eugh...

Sarah: It's ok it's of the non-poisonous variety.

Danielle: How can you hold it like that? Does it not freak you out? Look at its little legs.

Sarah: No I like spiders.

Danielle: This place is probably infested now...

Sarah: No, he's on his own. They like living on their own.

Some spiders live in colonies with about 50 thousand other spiders but some live on their own which I think is a bit-

Both: Sad.

Beat.

Sarah: I think I'd rather be an ant than a spider.

Danielle: Well I think it's gross.

Sarah looks at Danielle.

Sarah: Ok.

Sarah crushes the spider.

Danielle: Why did you do that?

Sarah looks at her.

Sarah: Because you wanted me to.

Llights/music.

Both: Say, Say my playmate
Don't come and play with me
Don't bring your dollies three
Cut down my apple tree
Fall off my rainbow
Into my cellar door
And we'll be enemies
Forever evermore.

Thursday.

Danielle: This morning I woke up to a text message, an actual text message, from Jason. 'Meet me at the shopping centre after school?'. Oh my God. Major plot twist. So I just shot back a casual 'cool', but now, in class, I can't stop thinking about the potential implications of this unexpectedly intimate communication. This is the next step. We're going to be so happy

together. Then, as the school bell draws nearer, I start to panic thinking about Sally Doyle's older sister who apparently everybody knew used to mitch off school and meet her boyfriend behind the cinema and then one day she got bitten by a rabid dog and know she's pregnant.

School bell rings.

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Girls, before you go, did anyone get those permission slips signed? No? Oh, well never mind.

Sarah: Before I go, I feel there is something that I need to address.

Miss?

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Yes Sarah? What is it?

Sarah: I feel that I should apologise for my performance yesterday and perhaps explain myself.

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Wh- oh, yes, of course.

Sarah: Well you see, it wasn't for lack of preparation, but unfortunately I was overcome with nervousness.

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Yes, Sarah. I know that. Thank you.

Sarah: You see...sometimes when I say a thing it doesn't sound like it did when I thought it. I...I think the thing and then when it comes out it's not right. It's a bit of a nuisance actually.

Anyway, bye.

Goes to leave.

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Sarah?

Sarah: Yes?

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* I've been wondering if perhaps it would be helpful for you and me to have some extra lessons. Just us. After school. I thought I might write a note to your grandparents and ask them to meet me. Would that be ok with you?

Sarah: W-why?

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Well because it would help us to...catch up, and to figure out what works best for you.

Sarah: Are the other girls doing it?

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Well...no.

Sarah: Then why?

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Why what?

Sarah: Why am I different?

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Well, it's not that Sarah it's just-

Sarah: Ok.

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Ok?

Sarah: Yes.

Danielle: *(as Ms. Hamilton)* Oh that's wonderful Sarah.

She starts writing the note.

I think you've made a very mature decision. And look- this can just be our little secret, none of the other girls need to know.

Sarah: Alright. Bye Ms. Hamilton.

Leaves.

Danielle: So once I get to the shopping centre I'm in such an advanced stage of nervousness that I start to regret the decision to reply to his text so hastily and I'm thinking I should have thought of an excuse when I feel a tap on my shoulder and turn to see-

Sarah: *(as Conor)* Hey Danielle.

Danielle: The aforementioned Conor, Jason's best friend.

What are you doing here?

Sarah: *(as Conor)* Em, Jason, he eh...

Conor clears his throat and starts reading a text message.

Danielle-

Danielle: No, no it can't be...

Sarah: *(as Conor, reading)* 'Danielle, I'm really sorry, but I don't think we should go to the cinema together agai-'

Danielle: NOOOOO!!!

Beat.

Sarah: *(as Conor)* Jesus.

Em, anyway, (*reading*) ‘Don’t think we should go to the cinema again, it’s not you, believe me, and I have really enjoyed spen-‘

Danielle: Don’t do it Jason!

Beat.

Sarah: (*as Conor*) You understand that I’m just reading the text he sent me to read you yeah? Like-

Danielle: Oh yeah no-

Sarah: (*as Conor*) Like I think...he’s already written it, you see-

Danielle: Yeah of course, sorry, go ahead.

Sarah: (*as Conor*) Thanks, eh, oh yeah, ‘I have really enjoyed spending time with you, it’s just I need to be on my own right now. You are a girl.’

Beat.

Oh sorry, ‘you are a great girl’.

Danielle: Aw. So sweet.

Sarah: (*as Conor*) Yeah, eh, listen, see you later yeah.

Danielle: I sit, shell-shocked, world turned upside down, and watch Conor cycle off on his BMX and actually I fancy him a little bit after that but that’s besides the point. I just kind of sit there for a while, and then I drift home contemplating; something so right, where did it all go wrong?

Outside Sarah’s house.

Sarah: When I was 6 I saw a bike I wanted for Christmas, it was pink and pale blue and it had a basket and tassels and a place for stickers. I told Granny, and when I came down to open it it was a yellow bike. And it was too big for me, but Granny said I’d grow into it. I still have it.

She reads the note.

‘Dear Mr. and Mrs...I was wondering if it would be possible to meet to discuss Sarah’s...’

I’m not sure I want people discussing me.

She does the getting home routine.

A few days later I saw Danielle riding the bike I wanted, except she didn’t have any stickers on it. I didn’t blame Granny, I just said ‘thanks’, she meant her best. Just like Ms. Hamilton, she means her best, but I don’t think she knows what it’s like to be 11.

Hi Grandad. What are you doing?

Danielle: *(as Sarah's Grandad)* Various Grandad sounds.

Sarah: Oh, is it broken again?

Danielle: *(as Sarah's Grandad)* Grandad laughter.

Sarah: Well, maybe if you didn't play it so loud?

Danielle: *(as Sarah's Grandad)* Confused noise.

Sarah: Never mind. I have a...

Grandad's back is to Sarah as she holds out the note.

Danielle: *(as Sarah's Grandad)* ...?

Sarah: I have a lot of homework to do. Bye.

Up in my room, panicking, practically a criminal, I look around for somewhere to hide the evidence of my crime. There is the treasure chest I got with a pirate magazine to hide my secrets in, but eventually I decide to play it safe and tear the note into as many little pieces as I can and stuff it at the bottom of my waste paper basket.

Over to Danielle's house.

Danielle: One time, in the middle of the night, I heard something from downstairs and I snuck onto the landing and down the stairs and saw Mom, on her hands and knees scrubbing the kitchen floor. I must have woken Dad up too because he came down, but he didn't say anything, he just took me back to bed. I actually haven't thought of that in ages until I walk into my room and see Mom standing there with the Hoover in one hand...

...and my box of letters in the other.

Danielle's mom may seem more 'real' here than in other scenes.

Sarah: *(as Danielle's mom)* What is this?

Danielle: What are you doing in here?

Sarah: *(as Danielle's mom)* What is this Danielle?

Danielle: You're not supposed to be in here-

Sarah: *(as Danielle's mom)* Danielle-

Danielle: There's a sign on the door-

Sarah: *(as Danielle's mom)* Where did these come from?

Danielle: What are you doing with my stuff-

Sarah: *(as Danielle's mom)* Danielle, I want to know where this came from!

Danielle: Dad.

Beat.

He sent them.

Pause.

I wrote them.

And I think she might get angry, but she doesn't she just kind of slumps down on the bed, and so I go and sit beside her. But I can feel myself all redden and stiffen up when-

Danielle's mom suddenly hugs her. Danielle is too shocked to hug back.

Sarah: *(as Danielle's mom)* I'm sorry.

Danielle: That's ok, but there is a sign on the door-

Sarah: *(as Danielle's mom)* No, not that, for- I don't know.

Beat.

We all just do our best, don't we?

Danielle: What do you mean?

But she looks at me like she does when she thinks something too hard to explain and instead of saying anything she just takes the box and puts it back under the bed. And then she leaves fast.

Beat.

Sorry, I'm just going to stay here for a minute.

Sarah: Alfred likes to hide sometimes because he is a solitary creature. I know I shouldn't, but sometimes when I want someone to play with I would lure him out with treats. It's selfish I suppose.

It's ok Alfred, you stay where you are tonight.

She goes to the window.

Danielle? Danielle?

No answer.

Friday.

School bell rings.

Danielle: I heard mom in the kitchen early this morning, so I slipped by out of the house without breakfast so I wouldn't have to see her. I choose to refrain from talking to anyone in yard the next day.

Sarah: (*as Bridget*) Hi hun.

Danielle: Oh, hi Bridget!

Sarah: (*as Bridget*) Wanna come over to my house today?

Danielle: Eh...yeah.

Sarah: (*as Bridget*) Fab. Just me and you though. Lisa can't come 'cos she's going shopping with her mom.

Danielle: And Lisa goes-

Sarah: (*as Lisa*) Yeah. I have to go shopping.

Beat.

With my mom.

Danielle: Ok. Cool.

And as if to prove she's a legitimate contender for the world championship in poor timing, Sarah pops up out of nowhere-

Sarah: Hi Danielle.

Danielle: Em, yeah, eh hi Sarah.

And she walks off.

Sarah: (*as Bridget*) Aww, she's fun isn't she?

Danielle: Yeah. She keeps like asking me to go bike chasing with her.

Sarah: (*as Bridget*) Oh my God, do you know what would be hilarious?

Danielle: Ha...what?

Across the yard.

Sarah: I'm just on the verge of devouring two penguins which I have cleverly sandwiched together when Elaine appears from beneath the emergency staircase.

Danielle: *(as Elaine)* Hi Sarah.

Sarah: Hi El-

Beat.

Hello.

Danielle: *(as Elaine)* Wanna trade?

Sarah: What is it?

Danielle: *(as Elaine)* It's a comb, but I've covered it with tin foil, so it makes a noise. See?

She demonstrates a harmonica style noise on the comb.

Sarah: No. And maybe you shouldn't do that.

Danielle: *(as Elaine)* Why not?

Sarah: Because. It isn't normal.

Danielle: *(as Elaine)* Oh. What are you doing after school?

Sarah: I'm sorry, I'm busy.

Danielle: *(as Elaine)* Ok. Bye Sarah.

Elaine goes off playing the comb.

Sarah: Grandma once put vinegar on my thumb to stop me from sucking it. I didn't like that, but she said it was for my own good.

Just then Danielle appears-

Danielle: Hi Sarah.

Sarah: Oh, hi Danielle.

Danielle: Em...

Beat.

Sarah: Yes?

Danielle: Sarah...would you like to go bike chasing after school?

Sarah: Bike chasing? With you?

Danielle: Yeah, well with me and Bridget and Lisa too.

Sarah: (*to audience*) I look over to where Bridget and Lisa stand watching and smiling and they have nice hairs.

But, what about...*the plan*.

Danielle: The plan?

Sarah: To pull up her skirt and write on her journal and not kiss her because that's weird.

Danielle: ...Oh yeah, no, forget about that. It's all fine.

Sarah: Oh.

Beat.

Well, ok then.

Beat.

Danielle: Are you sure?

Sarah: What?

Danielle: Are you sure you want to come?

Sarah: Yes. I like bike chasing.

Danielle: Em, em, ok, cool, St. Anne's playground.

Beat.

See you.

Sarah: Bye.

Hmm, I wonder if something is bothering Danielle.

Danielle: In class, Bridget actually passes me a note with one of her drawings of Ms. Hamilton. It's not very good but I like, laugh anyway. After school Sarah waves at me-

Sarah: Bye Danielle.

Danielle: And as she's going I see Ms. Hamilton call after her, but Sarah just keeps walking like she can't hear her, and I swear I nearly run after her to stop her going.

But I guess I just...didn't.

Both: Say say old enemy
Come out and fight with me,
And bring your BB gun

And we'll have lots of fun,
I'll scratch your eyes out
And make you bleed to death
And we'll be jolly enemies
Forever evermore.

Sarah stands bike in hand, looking around.

Sarah: When it starts to get dark I realise they probably aren't just a bit late. And when it starts to rain I realise they probably haven't forgotten either.

So I start wheeling my bike home. Then I meet Lisa Nugent outside Tesco-

Danielle: *(as Lisa)* Ha! Oh my God.

Sarah: -with a big family sized bag of crisps.

Danielle: *(as Lisa)* Did you actually show up?

Sarah: Cheese and Onion.

Danielle: *(as Lisa)* That is hilarious.

Sarah: She takes one look at me and starts laughing.

And I jump at her-

And just scrape, tear, claw and hit, hit, hit, and then she falls.

DON'T LAUGH AT ME! ALL OF YOU STOP LAUGHING AT ME! RIGHT?

Silence.

She lies there panting and staring up at me and the blood starts to mat in her nice hair where her head hit with a crack. I pick my bike back up. When I'm passing the canal I stop and watch the rain pelting against the surface, making the water rise.

I wonder what Ms. Hamilton will say?

I try and see if I can see the bottom, but it's too dark. And then...I don't know why...I throw my bike in and watch it sink to the bottom. And the bubbles come to the surface and burst.

Danielle: Bridget and I are friends again. So...yeah...phew... It's good because her birthday party is next month. I go over to her house that day. We try on some of her big sister's lipstick and we start making plans for going to the Presentation School next year. Then Bridget's mom makes us fish finger sandwiches, she makes the best fish finger sandwiches. I wish I lived there.

Mom picks me up.

Sarah: (*as Danielle's Mom*) Hi darling.

Danielle: Hi.

Sarah: (*as Danielle's Mom*) Did you have a nice time?

Danielle: Yeah.

Sarah: (*as Danielle's Mom*) How wonderful!

Silence.

Danielle: I sit there as Mom drives home at approximately 600 miles an hour, wondering if she'll say anything, kind of actually hoping that she will.

Mom?

Sarah: (*as Danielle's Mom*) Yes?

Danielle: Are you ok?

Sarah: (*as Danielle's Mom*) Yes!

Beat.

Danielle: Ok.

And just then, we pass by Sarah Walters walking slowly along the road, all drenched with rain. We zoom past her.

Sarah: (*as Danielle's Mom*) That poor girl. It must be very hard to have a family like hers.

Danielle looks at her mom.

Danielle: And then I realise...she's right. Because seeing Sarah I get this feeling in the pit of my stomach, and start to feel like, like it's my fault or something.

Sarah: (*as Danielle's Mom*) Bye darling.

Danielle: Where are you goi- ok, bye.

And she's gone.

Danielle does the 'getting home' routine, alone.

Treehouse.

Danielle: So I go out to the treehouse, where I sit and think weird thoughts. Like, this spider, it's over my head weaving silky criss-cross orbs. It's gross, obviously, all spindly spider legs, but what it's doing is kind of pretty. I suppose. And I have a strange thought that maybe that

spider last night was it's friend or, I don't know, husband or something. And maybe the spider didn't want to live on his own after all. And I get this urge, to just reach out and touch it. I don't know why.

She reaches. Sarah does the secret knock. Lights.