

Every little hope you ever dreamed (but didn't want to mention)

A story by Sam Freeman

Standing still is cowardice.

Intro

Hello. This isn't a play really, it's a solo show (or, *arguably*, a play) written for me to perform. That's not to say I will. Maybe* I'll chicken out. But for reference, I'm very funny, horribly accomplished, devilishly handsome and uncannily humble.

There's a few things you should know before you dive into the meat of this piece (this being the shortcrust pastry entree), before starting.

- There are bits where I'll chat to the audiences that won't be scripted and will seem improvised. They're not but they are pretty loose and will rely on me being likeable and funny. These are indicated by notes in *italics*. Hopefully I'll be both likeable and, crucially, funny.

The show is performed with me reading the story element from a book while sound effects and projection are controlled by the tech.

- The plot.
Ultimately it's about love, truth, loss, unrequited feelings, standing in the rain hoping things will turn out better and possibility (isn't everything), if that's not appealing then I'd stop reading now.

Finally.

I'm not looking for a commission, nor am I looking for a huge team to develop it - I'm looking for faith, faith that this *might* be brilliant, that it *might* excite, confuse and delight people, that this *could* be an interesting start of something and you're willing to support it in kind with space, cups of tea, feedback, criticism and relentless enthusiasm (and ideally a 60/40 split).

I want my work to be seen – not in two years time but in the next 6 months – we've no time to waste. Thanks and speak soon**,

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*probably

**unless you hate it all, in which case, bye

Set

In the centre stage is an old wooden desk – the type you might pick up cheaply from a second hand shop – quality-made but definitely rustic rather than antique – there are a number of plug sockets built into the desk.

The floor is a dark grey or maybe a dark wood. There are a series of lights – some floor lamps, some desk lamps, some other types of lamps – all represent moments in the play and all connected to the desk with red fabric cable and connected to each other aesthetically.

On the desk will be a red angle poise light and a top loading tape player (the type with fake wood effect on it) – answerphone sections are recorded cues and the sounds should emanate from the tape player. There *may* be a projector screen leaning against the desk (there *may* be projection). Probably a few books too – one of which will be a battered copy of Andy McNabb's seminal classic "*Bravo Two Zero*".

1 - Man On Stage

Actor starts onstage from when the house opens, drinking a mug of tea (two sugars) and chatting to the audience as they enter. House lights dim slightly, but don't go off.

Actor apologises that for 50% of the audience who expected comedy this won't be that funny and for 49% expecting drama it won't be that dramatic. He starts to set up the room, explaining that he really should have done this while we were waiting to start but he got distracted by a nice cup of tea and some interesting conversations.

The remaining 1% are people who have come because it's a special anniversary, which is, from this moment onwards is irrevocably going to be associated with disappointment. If it's a couple they might reference this day in years to come as 'the mistake'. More likely it'll become a weapon to win argument along the lines of 'well we both know what happens when you choose the show we go to see'. Probably closely followed by the other person retorting 'I've never like theatre anyway.' It's also worth saying that there's a chance that this, happening now, may be shit - but I've got your money now and to be honest, the arts need all the help they can get. Also it's not action packed, this isn't an Andy McNabb novel, it's long, tedious and whatever the opposite of concise is.

Mention a balding man and also having worries about hair loss. Probably some stuff about being scared of my uber-trendy barber, Brad, who keeps telling me I'm receding, and also, with no shame, suggesting a toupee or hair implants. For those of you wondering I don't have either.

He will move the lamps into the various positions and put up the projector screen. A few graphs about the process making the show to 'test' the projector is working. He was told that shows with projection have it because a) people haven't enough to say or b) the show's not interesting enough visually to sustain it. There is in fact an option c) just a fan of graphs – there's little that can't be enhanced with a graph (here's a graph that shows this show with and without projection...) or, sometimes Venn Diagram.

A good Venn diagram can prove or disprove anything (example).

Mention that there's ground rules to this - switch your phone off, or at least put it on silent, or if you're an A&E Surgeon or Lonely man, then vibrate. If you did come to this show hoping for eroticism and an erection then you've chosen badly.

As an aside when I sent the title to the venue they thought it was a bit long and wondered if I had anything snappier. The first time I went into a big debate about the artistic value of the title and how it was incredibly relevant. When the fifth person asked me I replied that the only alternative title I had was "Hamlet" but they seemed to think that might be fundamentally confusing to audiences.

He sits down eventually, and tells everyone that the show will start, just, about, now.

There is an unexpectedly major lighting change.

2 – Man On Stage

Seven stories start here, in Chester, on Saturday 16th December at 7:35pm.

Not, of course, that anyone was aware that stories were starting, people are very rarely aware of such things, life, after all isn't as well structured as a play or film. For most people stories are merely a continuation of things, a treadmill of events, all of which are neither beginnings or middles, but instead, stepping stones to the inevitable sweet relief of death.

There are stories.

In this very room there are stories.

Look around you, look, people here have stories.

Not good stories of course, or interesting stories, after all you only get good and interesting stories in good and interesting company, no they are largely stories that, without this unnecessary preamble would never even be mentioned.

Story number six is about a balding man scratching his head where once there was hair and suddenly contemplating his own mortality and the purchase of inexplicably caffeinated shampoo.

Short, concise and to the point.

You might think that story number six might go somewhere, perhaps turn into an extended metaphor where hair is merely the catalyst for a deeper exploration of the human psyche. In fact story number six would end, three days later with the man googling the words "mail order toupee".

Story number two however is very different. A lady in her mid 30s wearing a blue jumper with red hair, sat uncomfortably on a chair she suspects was designed by a sadist, is considering murder. That's not to say that she will murder, she's just considering it as an option. Why, how and where, well they're questions that at this point – who however is firmly locked down.

Story number seven is the story of a man in a red t-shirt seduced by the articulacy of the show's marketing materials, enticed with the promise of an all-singing, all-dancing, nudity-filled fuck-fest, rammed full of hilarious one-liners, anecdotes and potential nudity, who is quickly realising that he's booked for the wrong show.

Will he enjoy this show? Probably not.
 How much full-frontal nudity will it contain? Eight percent.
 Should he leave his phone on vibrate? Absolutely.

Little did he know how long this lazy, shit-storm of narrative storytelling would last. The man had been close already to walking out, had it not been for an attractive woman in her mid 30s wearing a blue jumper with red hair currently occupying his thoughts.

Then there was number three.

Altogether a more audacious story, story number three, starts at approximately 7:43pm on Saturday 16th December in Chester, some eleven meters from the follically challenged star of story number six, 10 meters from the potentially murderous woman and 6 meters from a man desperately hoping everyone will put their keys in a bowl.

A man in a red checked shirt, black jeans, red converse and decidedly wonky glasses and face is performing to an audience of 25 or so people in a theatre that quickly draining of atmosphere and goodwill.

The man was fully aware that the show had started slightly late fully aware of the catastrophic side effect of starting a show late.

For one it would go into a report, a serious show report about timings and punctuality, that report would go from the technician who was already feeling they'd been given the world's shortest straw to a manager, that in turn would go to another manager, and then finally a meeting, where he'd be labelled as poorly organised.

As it happens he wasn't generally poorly organised and had a graph to prove it.

[Graph image pops up]

Secondly, his late start would mean a late finish he desperately wanted to avoid the audience complaining that not only had this flimflam of a performer started late, he'd also dragged this shitshow on long past any sort of acceptable length, and now, now they'd be all getting home marginally later than they'd initially planned.

As a result they'd go to sleep past their standard bedtime, would wake angry and confused the following morning and would be forced, forced to write, a letter, not an e-mail, a letter, by hand, a matter-of-fact handwritten letter to the management of

the venue about a) being misinformed about the length of this so-called show, b) the lack of common courtesy shown by the “alleged” performer in failing to learn the show and instead reading the entire thing and c) the fact that they'd specifically asked what time the show ended, and it'd been different, and that's a breach of trade descriptions, underlined, capitals, and their human rights, underlined, all capitals, and they were angry, severely, underlined, angry, the type of anger that could only be abated by an apology, a full refund and tickets to a show they'd more likely enjoy, like pantomime, or a comedian who makes jokes and can remember things.

And partly, the man continued pondering, he had stuff to do, outside of here, in the real world, and he had a list of things to do - admittedly it involved largely just driving home alone, listening to his voicemails and checking if anyone had tweeted about the show, but still, things to do.

Anyone use twitter? I've just started on Instagram, but don't really understand it

No, time was against him, that much was clear, he'd have to get on with it, none of his usual preamble this evening, none of the kind of loose mise-en-scene setting that he'd usually engage with, the dance scene, that'd go, so would the physical theatre, not that anyone ever liked that shit, as would the moments of arbitrarily picking audience members and asking them questions in a desperate attempt to seem contemporary and relevant, fuck the feedback from Battersea Arts Centre, and, certainly, and the biggest loss of all with time at a premium, all the nudity would have to be cut – this would be a cock, ball and almost arsehole free show.

A man in the audience sighs disappointedly.

Of course it'd be difficult, and there was no guarantee it'd even work, after all and unbeknownst to the audience the story he was about to tell was already compromised, already he'd taken what could have legitimately been titled *'The Greatest Love Story Ever Told'* and reduced it, watered it down, taken liberties. Now, at best, the most accurate version of the show title would be *'The. Story. Ever'*.

No, there wasn't time for this, enough of this needless twaddle that one theatre had described as 'unnecessary' and another had pointed out was 'largely superfluous'. They must get on, the audience has places to be, even if we're honest, the man didn't.

And so the technician looks at their watch for the sixth time, looks at the man, waits for the affirmative nod and then, and then, with a flick of the switch the story begins.

3 - Man On Stage

To begin at nearly the end.

A man stands at the end of a long cul-de-sac in front of a closed red door on a rain-filled dark and stormy night, soaked to the skin.

122 miles south west of that man, in a city full of tower blocks and traffic, a young woman with ginger hair and a green knitted hat, forces a smile, skips two steps forward, heart racing, head filled with a million and one conflicting thoughts and kisses firm lips and the stubble surrounding them.

142 miles to the south east of that ginger girl and those firm lips, a woman hugs her fiancée, instinctively replacing the words "it's good to see you" with "would you like a cup of tea" – neither of them would really like a cup of tea.

282 miles north west of the young man and his fiancée, 150 miles north of the ginger girl and 114 miles north west of the man in front of the closed red door, a husband and wife in their sixties walk through the front door. Shedding damp coats and hats the man asks his wife as he always had for the previous 42 years if she'd like a cup of tea. She replies as she always had that "yes, that'd be lovely" as, seeing a flashing red light on the ancient tape answer phone box beside the phone, picks up the receiver and presses play.

Finally, far from red doors, tower blocks, cold embraces and barely functional answerphone machines, a young boy sits on a red bike. It's an old bike, a little too small for his nearly seven year old frame, 3 gears, no big deal, brakes on the front and back, and fully inflated tyres, fully inflated, because if you're going to go big he says, go prepared. He sits looking down from his mountain, the biggest hill in the town, possibly the world - he pulls on his helmet, and he releases the brake.

4 – The Red Bike

Or he will. He will release the brake. But not yet, not now, for now he sits on a shiny red bike looking at the sky.

The bike is new, brand spanking new, black saddle, 3 gears, stabilisers, black tyres with white spokes and a red frame, that was important, everyone knew red bikes were ridden by legends, speed legends, and now here he was, sat on his red bike, a speed flipping legend.

The bike, a present from parents keen he spend more time outdoors has, at present, been in his possession for 37 minutes and at present this present been ridden for exactly 36 of those 37 minutes.

The red bike was exactly what the boy had hoped for on an occasion as monumental as a sixth birthday. "You are" his mum said pointedly "only six once", which to him seemed incredibly naïve and closed minded. He for one was very much considering remaining six longer than usual, perhaps a year, maybe longer.

Despite this the boy was sure, absolutely sure, that this bike, this machine, this precise piece of Raleigh engineered engineering was designed for one thing and one thing alone - speed. Everyone knew that if you're going to be burning rubber and casually ripping up the pavement then you can't have a substandard instrument - you need a good saddle, stabilisers obviously, he's no fool, three gears, one for going quite fast, one for cruising at a high speed and one so fast that it should only be used for emergencies, where only him and his bike, moving in a blur would suffice - and of course red, red bikes are, as everyone knows, faster.

The sky is clear, not a cloud in the sky, at end of the road the church with its veritable playground of graves, free flowers and an increasingly irate verger, next door the care home and blocks of flats occupied by elderly people mostly called Margaret. To the other end, past semi-detached houses with faux-Elizabethan facades, past the bald man who had a bought a brand new Vauxhall Cavalier that he washed and polished daily without ever driving and past the house outside which 6 or 7 cats sunbathed waiting to be allowed back inside, beyond all that was the mountain, or hill, probably a mountain, the steep slope that extended miles into the valley below- the most dangerous slope in the world.

This was it, his kingdom, the boundaries to his empire, the streets were his, the sun was shining, life truly begins at 6.

5 – An Answerphone

"Hello, you've come through to the voicemail of Marie (and John), we're away for the next few days, but if you'd like to leave a message, (then please do after the tone). Beep."

Hey, it's me, just wanted to say thanks for such a great weekend, really was a nice break, and good to see you both, I know I keep saying that I don't get back regularly enough but, yeah, I don't, maybe a new year resolution, visit more. The meeting's tomorrow so I'll get the train straight after, drop you a call when I'm on, weather forecast isn't great but, I've got a scarf so I'll be fine, no need to worry... I think that's...

Oh, you should change your voicemail, anyone could ring and then they'd know you weren't in and then they'd break in... Not to worry you, but it happens, in the city at least, all the time... Then again lots of people don't have landlines, or change their recordings...

So yeah, train and I'll call when I'm on and let you know how I got on.

See you soon.

That's it, yep.

Love you.

Bye.

6 – The Man in the Rain

Exactly 110 miles from that voice message and 114 miles from the boy sat on a red bike, a man looks down at the dead screen of his mobile phone before peering out the window into his grey, dull surroundings.

The bus journey had been long and damp, the young man had been the first person to get on, sat three rows from the back and was, at this point, certain he'd be uncomfortable the entire way.

Heavy rain drums against the windows, while inside passengers, all caught in apocalyptic rain are drying off.

A bald man removes his coat and spreads it on the back of the seats in front of him where the water drips into a small stream flowing to the front of the bus where it pools around the drivers feet. He has a carrier bag containing caffeinated shampoo and a magazine that would be described as *fruity* in polite company and *hard-core animal-based pornography* in less polite company. He is unaware that the rain has welded the magazine pages together which will, in 77 minutes, leave him both disappointed and flaccid.

An older, wiser looking man with **[description]** wiggles his toes which steam in the open air of the bus, beside him socks draped across a heating vent sending plumes of noxious fumes, around the bus which the other passengers have dismissed as "*normal bus smell*". He is unaware that one passenger roughly XX meters from where he is sat finds this smell murderously erotic. He is fully aware that draping damp socks across the heating vent of a bus is borderline sociopathic behaviour.

The man however has just one thought in his head – her.

It'd been six years since he'd last seen her, the girl, the one, who he'd thought about consistently for all 2,190 days since they'd parted, including the 436 days he'd been engaged, and including the 14 separate individual days where he'd decided to pull himself together and forget about her. Now suddenly, now, in this moment, with the possibility of a reunion emerging from the gloom and into sight he feels physically sick.

The problem, the root of that gnarling, sickly faint feeling in the pit of his stomach, is time.

Over those 2,190 days he'd thought about her consistently but that girl, that girl, woman he'd fallen for so hard, of course, didn't really exist anymore, like a photograph she'd be forever locked in that moment of time - trapped for posterity, unable to move on, change and grow until he saw her again.

Change is, of course, inevitable. In 2,190 days he'd changed, matured, changed, inexorably. He no longer wore hats. He used to be a big hat wearer, flat caps and, for one misjudged year, fedoras, that had all ended. And she'd possibly have changed too, she might have renounced hats as well, or become a high-powered lawyer, or been injured in a house fire or...

He opens the book on his lap, a crumpled post-it note between the pages, her smudged address written in biro years ago now, unceremoniously shoved between the pages of a book, lost for so long.

The problem is time.

The bus shudders as the driver applies the brakes and a bus stop veers into view. The man panics shoving his things into his bag, striding to the front past steaming feet and damp coats, doors squeak open, through them and out, out into the cold, damp air...

He was here.

7 – On The Train

But while the man from the bus had arrived at his destination, exactly 545 miles away, through snow clouds and icy fingers of cold, across a vacant forecourt, beyond entrance gates where the wind whistles and snow piles against protruding walls, a young man waits for a train.

The station platform is cold, icy cold, the kind of cold where you say "fuck me it's cold" and your balls seek meaty sanctuary in your scrotum. Plumes of warm air are exhaled in clouds from the few passengers waiting, briefly checking the departures board they turn their faces from the biting wind for respite, glancing at fellow passengers, all stood far apart, unsociable penguins in an artificial arctic tundra.

In the waiting room, ancient iron radiators create a dry heat that smells of burning paint and drying clothes. An elderly man with **description**, assured that he would be going nowhere fast snoozes in the corner, a strand of saliva stretching from lips to chin to the chest of his jumper where it seeps through loose knit wool.

The train was delayed, very delayed, almost 3 hours, or, as one particularly irate man had phrased it, "fucking late". Experienced travellers had settled in for the long haul, taking out flasks of tea, biscuits (Rich Tea and Custard Creams) and, in one case, a neck bracing travel pillow - an act that felt less than good planning and more of fulfilment of a travel-based prophecy.

Like all delayed trains it had started, optimistically some might say, on time. The delays had then appeared, all accurate, all fair and truthful, but all increasingly seeming like a middle-aged leather jacket wearing man in a nightclub, hanging on to his fading youth by the fingertips, dyed hair, repeating that "actually it's fine".

One minute had turned to three, ten, ten minutes had passed, a countdown to deliverance before the delay had increased, an hour, then two, and now three. Gradually, as the hours had past, more people had surrendered the possibility of the journey happening leaving the last resolute few with nowhere else to go. Amid the nearly **XX** dishevelled, lost-looking stragglers, from the **[description]** drooling man, currently dreaming of being a spy and reporting directly to Margaret Thatcher, but a slightly sexy Margaret Thatcher - a dream he would never share - to the increasingly confused and dismayed rows of travellers, from the woman with the **[description]** to the balding man with a toupee secured in a box by his ankles - sits a young man with thick rim glasses, a flat cap sat on top of a side-parting he'd maintained since the age of four.

He sits with a notebook, scribbling ideas, phrases, words - a creative force, lost deep in the writing of not a good story, not a great story, but, in fact, "The Greatest Love Story Ever Written".

Or at least that's what he wanted people to think.

In fact he had nothing, absolutely nothing, writer's block hitting him so strongly that at the moment all the page had written on it was "ideas", circled then underlined in the middle of a page, linked to a single word, hope.

And as he stares at the page, the door clicks, the wind howls in, rustling the pages of his notebook, and in she walks.

8 – The Red Bike

419 miles away, on a day with blue skies, warm wind and the smell of freshly-cut grass a bike abruptly draws to a halt scattering the dust of faded tarmac into a mushroom cloud. A white trainer, Gola, two speed stripes, rests on the floor, the other trainer pedal mounted, ready for a quick escape. The young boy surveys the crazy-paved driveway beneath him with disdain.

He pondered, why was the paving crazy, it was, it seemed to him, a mature and world-weary six and a quarter year old anything but crazy, if anything it was well structured and ordered. It should he'd tell his mum later that day, to deserve the title of crazy, at bare minimum, be made of kittens, glue and shortbread. This poor faking imitation was, by contrast, simply paving.

In the six months since getting the bike the boy had biked (which is the proper verb for someone using a bike), he'd estimated, over 300,000 miles. This was a rough estimate of course - but taking into account daily patrols up and down the street, the holiday to Wales where he and Dad had been on an adventure entirely for Dad's benefit and 4 days of extensive skidding practice when, accompanying the acquisition of a red coat with wool insides, mittens designed for racing and/or conducting patrols, it had unexpectedly snowed.

And now here, here he was, house-to-house patrols, checking nothing had changed, checking nothing new had arisen, keeping a lid on... What the fudge! Outside number eight a lorry blocks road, grassy verge and pavement, the back filled with an eclectic assortment of furniture, lamps, boxes and houseplants, the drive littered with boxes, wrapping tape gently flapping in the breeze, and there, leaning on the garage door, without written permission, authority, leaning as if that was entirely fine, a bright blue bike.

9 - An Answerphone

"Hello, you've come through to the voicemail of Marie (and John), we've popped out momentarily and will be back very soon, (but if you'd like to leave a message), then please do after the tone. (Beep)."

Hey it's me, just to let you know, we're caught in snow and, oh, your voicemail, it sounds like you'll be back in five minutes not away long enough to really leave a message, I nearly didn't leave a message that's... Also should you be using your first names on the greeting, people might be ringing, fraudsters, to get your personal details and you're just giving out...

The meeting went well by the way, I think, you never really know I suppose, I might have come across as a murderer, or right wing or a massive, ermmm, yeah, hopefully not but you don't know.

I'm safe anyway, and warm, and I've my hat on, and yeah, okay that's the message.

Oh, how do you and dad eat KitKats?

Right, so...

If you have popped out momentarily then drop me a line, if you're out for a week then, well, I guess I could ring back in twenty minutes and work out which it is...

So, yeah, love to you both.

Bye.

10 – The Man in the Rain

Exactly 118 miles away from the offending blue bike and in infinitely worse weather a man had stepped off the bus and arrived. He was, as he'd mentally said to himself, here.

The doors squeak closed behind him.

He. Was. Here.

The bus drives away, accelerating into the dusk, rain bouncing from windows, splashing over the verge as it cuts through puddles and newly emerging lakes.

And then nothing, nothing but the rain, the wind and the sound of inevitability.

Aside – someone from BAC asked me what, precisely, that sound was before they could progress this show. Safe to say that this venue, less picky.

The man stands at the bus stop surrounded by gloom. He'd of course researched every intricate part the journey in forensic detail before setting off - after all, he'd reasoned, if you're going to pronounce your undying love for someone you met six years ago and haven't seen since, it's better to know where you're going.

He'd examined maps, checked bus routes and virtually walked the route from this very bus stop to the end of the long driveway down which google's prying eyes were yet to venture.

He'd even been on trip advisor to search for appropriate food and drink locations nearby, should his proclamation of love be met by *"yes, but I'm quite hungry."*

There were, he'd discovered three principle places to go nearby - a pub, "The Bull and Cock" which was closed Tuesday to Saturday and claimed to serve only the best real ales while also proclaiming that it was a John Smith's pub. There was the local Chinese Take Away, "Simon's Plaice", that coincidentally also served Fish 'n' Chips, and which one reviewer had given a one star review and the single word "no". Finally "Barry's", a small bar, presumably owned by the eponymous Barry which had closed down after links to bouts of gastroenteritis on its premises and, presumably, in the eponymous "Barry".

Of course, now he was here, sky rumbling, darkness falling and a light mist on the ground he realises he's got off at the wrong stop.

5 miles too early as it happens.

He looks along the road, not a pavement to be seen, and starts walking.

11 – On The Train

Exactly 543 miles from that fearsome thunderclap ricocheting above the man on that darkened road, a flap clock spins from 10:59 to 11 o'clock, the sound of the numbered flaps sounding like a book being skimmed open in search of potential treasures inside.

The young man with thick rim glasses, flat cap and a side-parting he'd maintained since the age of four shivers, checks the clock slowly counting away time and looks at the departures board, listing delay after delay.

Over the previous hours the waiting room had got quieter and quieter, people either giving up on their plans, or boarding trains that appeared through the mist, pulling into the platform, like ancient explorers who'd safely made it home having eaten only four of the party's loyal sled dogs and the expedition's doctor.

Just two remained, himself and, in the corner, the girl who sits beside damp discarded outer layers all precariously balanced on burning hot radiators - black mittens on top, a thick black coat steaming gently, scarf now on the floor and oversized green loose-knit woollen hat on her lap.

The young man had made no progress on "the greatest love story ever written" - three hours of underlining the word idea, then writing down "hope", "girl", "radiators" and "train" - it had become clear that nothing of artistic substance would emerge. Instead he'd put the notebook back in his bag, taken out a well-thumbed book and started to read.

Or tried to.

If he was honest, his mind had wandered from the moment she'd walked in. It shouldn't have, after all he was an artist, or at least had pretensions of artistry, he should be above such things, he should be focused, focused on truth, justice, on mining the core of humanity to find the meaning of life - and instead he was distracted by a young woman waiting for a train.

It's moments like that where every tiny action and inaction acquire greater meaning than could ever be possible. Caught glances, flickering eyes never quite meeting. He tried to focus on the book in front of him, annoyed in his selection of literature, if only his book was by Sylvia Plath, Germaine Greer, Margaret Atwood, something that

said, "I'm not a prick" - instead a battered excessively read of Andy McNabb's Bravo Two Zero sits in his hands, folded page corners logging progress old and new.

"Excuse me"

"Excuse me" the girl asked standing putting on said loose-knit green hat of indeterminate origin, "I'm getting a hot drink from the cafe round the corner, do you want anything?"

He did want a hot drink, more than that he wanted to put down Andy McNabb's Bravo Two Zero, throw his things into his bag and walk round the corner to the cafe with the girl. Then who knows what would happen.

Maybe the snow would fall as they supped their caramel decaf lattes, maybe she'd offer to pay like a hero, but he'd insist and she would insist on going 50/50, maybe, just maybe they'd sit in the window seat watching people pass by, a couple in their late 80s maybe, slowly walking home from the shops as they had every week for 62 years, where, upon entering their house and shedding snow covered clothes the old man would ask his wife as he always had for the previous 62 years if she'd like a cup of tea, and she would retort, as she always had for the previous 62 years that she would like a cup of tea, but if that cup of tea wasn't accompanied by a biscuit then there would be hell to play.

The boy and the girl would laugh about his choice of book until, it turned out in a bizarre twist of fate they discovered that Andy McNabb's seminal classic Bravo Two Zero was both of their favourite books and they would fall, hopelessly, wrecklessly in love.

Instead while the boy thought all this, he hadn't spoken, the girl had assumed that he was either a) rude, b) shy or c) rudely shy and so, as he turned to reply that yes, that sounded lovely, she walked out the door and that as they say, was that.

12 – The Man in the Rain

Exactly 544 miles from that being that, along a road with no pavement in semi-darkness a man is jogging awkwardly from area of tree covered dryness to area of tree covered dryness, attempting to avoid the drenching droplets of rainwater cascading down from above.

The road thankfully wasn't exceptionally busy. Half an hour into the walk the bus had returned in the opposite direction, the driver peering through the steamed up windscreen with a sombre wave, a wave that says "I'm glad I'm not you".

Four miles further on, as the wind had started to pick up and he'd drawn his long collar close an old car had pulled up, window partially down, smoke plumes escaping from the opening and inside a tall, sickly looking man with description, the stub of a roll up cigarette between yellowed fingers, pork scratching wedged between his thighs and scratching crumbs cascading down his description top.

The man's offer of a lift, half coughed as he inhaled a lungful of smoke past yellowed teeth filled with decaying scratchings had, for a fleeting second, seemed like a worthwhile risk until, senses recovered he decided that, on balance, he'd prefer to meet the love of his life in real life rather than on a missing poster three weeks later, or, best case, on the news as the newsreader describes how his body was found in five different places, in seven different pieces and his penis remained missing.

So he continued his trudged jog through the dark until he arrived at the start of the long driveway, the junction leading to her house, or, as he'd now mentally renamed it, destiny.

Despite the rain, the thunder and occasional lightning, despite the occasional traffic sending plumes of water over the grass verge, against the odd's as the rain finally showed signs of stopping he was relatively dry, damp hair giving a mildly dishevelled look that, he'd decided, on balance, was a definite improvement.

Maybe, just maybe this wasn't the terrible idea all his friends had told him it was as a large SUV with blacked out windows and low-profile tyres hits a pothole ten yards from him. In slow motion water smashes into his face, rinses his hair with dirty road juice, sprays his jeans predominantly in the crotch area and... and the post it note with the address on squirms from his grasp, flies through the air, lands next to a manhole cover and...in super slow motion, balances precariously on the edge of infinity before tilting and falling deep into the sewer below.

He was fucked.