Crawling

a one act play

by

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Set :

The characters occupy separate police cells. The occupants of each cell are unaware of one another. Each cell has a simple sleeping bench.

Cast:

Girl: a teenage girl.

Man: a man in his forties.

The girl is dressed in 'tarty' clothes. The man is dressed in a drab suit. The man is very still most of the time - withdrawn in on himself, sitting on the edge of the sleeping bench. The girl, in contrast, is more active. Lighting modulated so that when one is talking they are brightly lit and the other dimly lit.

The characters dialogue is with themselves - only the audience can see the whole picture. The lack of communication is itself a metaphor for the characters predicament. The 'cutting' between the two character's dialogue should be varied in pace, sometimes they cut in very quickly sometimes a pause between one stopping and the other starting.

As the man speaks his voice gradually grows in confidence, reaches a crisis and then starts to disintegrate. The girl starts with a fragile kind of bravado, sinks to an alarmingly exposed state, then gains in confidence (and bitterness) again.

Duration: approx 30 minutes.

(CURTAIN UP. INTENSE COLD LIGHT ON SET.
MAN SITTING ON SLEEPING BENCH, GIRL LYING FLAT OUT ON HER SLEEPING BENCH. PAUSE. LIGHTS FADE ON GIRL AND REDUCE TO NORMAL ON MAN.)

MAN: It never occurred to me I'd actually get arrested tonight. It's funny because I have worried about it other nights - when I needn't have bothered - but not tonight. I don't know why.

They'd be amazed in the office if they could see me now. Mr. Vernon in a police cell. 'Helping the police with their enquiries'.
(pause)
They wouldn't believe it.
(pause)
Me.
(pause)
I'm too ordinary.
(LIGHTS UP ON GIRL, FADE ON MAN. GIRL GRADUALLY RISES UP ONTO ELBOW, FACING AUDIENCE, AND THEN SITS UP DURING THIS SPEECH.)

GIRL: I can tell by the look on their faces what they're thinkin'. I can see right through 'em. They think they're so bloody smart but I can see right through 'em. They're thinkin' 'What a slut. I'd give 'er a good 'iding if she was my daughter.'

Yeah, they're thinking about their own daughters. They're thinking - thank God they haven't turned out like ‘er. They're looking down at me but they're thinking about sex. I can see ‘em looking at me. I can see their eyes linger. They can't get me out of their ‘eads. They're thinking they'd like to do it with me. It gets them ***hot*** under their uniforms.

(pause)

Well they can.

(pause)

(with a sense of power) If they pay.

MAN: When my mother died I said to myself, *(in a loud whisper)* very quickly, *(normal voice again)* I'm free!

(pause)

I can do what I want now. I can do what I like. No one can tell me I can't.

(pause)

When my mother died I was so lonely.

GIRL: They can't keep me ‘ere much longer. I know they can't. They can't charge me. They've got nothing on me and anyway I'm too young!

MAN: They were all very understanding at work. Even Mr. Harding, though he's a very busy man, he made a point of coming over to me, especially, to give me his condolences. They really seemed to *care.*

GIRL: They know I'm 'in care'. They'll be on the phone to 'The ‘ollys' now. They'll be arguing about who has to take me back. Then they might not. They might just let me go. They haven't got anything on me. Not really. They could just let me out. I could go back to the Common, there might still be some business. *(Shouting down the corridor.)* If you got a fuckin’ move on!

MAN: Yes, everybody was very understanding, really. But then, you see, I am very well liked. They can't say a word against me. I keep myself to myself. I always give to all the collections, whether I know the people or not. I'm always there to help out if anyone needs me, you see.
(pause)
Dependable . . .
(pause)
I'm dependable.

GIRL: I ‘ope they don't take me back to 'The ‘ollys'. Right shit-‘ole that is! They're all bastards there.

If I end up back at 'The ‘ollys' they won't ‘ang on to me for long. I'll be off. I'll be out that fucking door before they know it. They can't keep ‘old a me, I'm bloody houdini!

MAN: Of course. I do get very lonely. At times. Not that I don't have my interests. I read a lot and there's always the radio; and the television. I like History. Anything Historical and I'll be watching it.

GIRL: I've been locked up before. Last time I had a bit of trouble at 'The 'ollys' they got a court order and put me in a secure unit. Said I was outa control and 'disruptive'. Sometimes I get so mad I just 'ave to throw somethin'. Locked in a room with no fucking furniture on me own for two days. If you don't do what they want you get nothing to eat but Complan. And that stuff makes you wanna heave, I'd rather starve.

MAN: The first time I 'went out' I don't mind telling you I was very nervous. Very nervous indeed. Well, I am retiring by nature. That's my problem. I'm not really a mixer. And I was not brought up to . . . that sort of thing.

My mother would turn over in her grave. But it wasn't too bad, really. Once I got used to it. And it was the only way. I couldn't talk to the women at work; it would be so embarrassing, and they wouldn't be interested in me anyway.

GIRL: I blame me fucking Mother! She didn't want me. She was out of her fucking brains most of the time. None of 'em wanted me. That's how you end up in a fucking shit-'ole like 'The 'ollys'. No one'll touch you with a barge pole; but that's about the only bloody thing they *won't* touch you with.

MAN: Of course, I am a highly respectable man. I have a position to uphold. I'm a regular church goer. And I take the minutes at the Parochial Church Council. So I have to be circumspect.

GIRL: *(long drawn out whine) Mum*. Why'd you let them have me? Why didn't you stand up to Dad?

(pause)

I knew he was belting you long before you told me. You must both ‘ave thought I was fucking stupid! Or, more likely, just didn't care. Why should I give a toss; no one else does. But I worried about you; why didn’t you worry about me?

And when he started getting up in the night and getting into my bed an’ touching me an’ things. You said I was imagining it. You said I dreamed it! ***Well when am I going to wake up then?*** You were just glad it wasn't you!

(pleading) Mum; you stupid cow, why d'you let them get me?

Why don't you care?

MAN: At first it seems a bit strange, but after a while it becomes a sort of game.

GIRL: GIRL STARTS SOBBING, SEATED ON CHAIR, ARMS CLASPED AROUND HERSELF, ROCKING GENTLY DURING THE FOLLOWING SPEECH.

MAN: I like driving around in my car. It's a nice car. It feels nice and cosy in the car: cut off. Like you're in your own world. When you drive around in your car you're out there, in the world, but you're not, you're protected, safe, in your car.

I look after my car. I polish it every Sunday afternoon, *(proudly)* by hand. None of those automatic car washes for me. Just Turtle Wax and elbow grease. You can get up a good shine. And when it rains the water sits up on the paintwork, hundreds of glistening droplets.
(pause)
They can tell I'm a respectable man from the way I look after my car.

GIRL: *(brings sobbing under control, snorts, voice gone dead)* I didn't know what to do. Not at first. The other girls talked about it, sometimes. It kinda gives you the idea. Tricks a the Trade. They make it sound easy. But even so it's still scary, the first time.

The cars just keep going round and round the block. And they slow right down when they see a group a girls. They just glide along like a fucking merry-go-round. They take us for a ride and we take them for a ride.

MAN: I'm very choosey. I have to be in my position. I like them young. I'm not one of those paed . . . peed . . . paedophiles. I just want them innocent; before the Devil gets into them.

When I've selected one I stop and we have a little chat. I'm not very good at this. I'm not very good, you see, at this . . . talking.
(explaining) But I don't need to be, you see. That is the joy of it. All you have to say is something about ‘business’ and they tell you what they do and what they charge. It's as simple as that, really.

Of course, they're not *nice* girls. But I can't talk to nice girls. Mother used to say to me, 'Go out, Arthur. Go out and find yourself a *nice* girl. I won't be here forever to look after you.' She was so selfless, my Mother. So selfless. And she was a martyr to rheumatism.

GIRL: I was so nervous the first time I almost bottled out. But I ‘ad nowhere to go. I wasn't going back to 'the ‘ome'. Anything was better'n that.

The first one wasn't so bad. I just tossed him off. Hand relief they call it. Like a fucking *charity! (Imitating posh voice.)* 'Would you kindly give to 'Hand Relief', sir?' I said that was all I did. It was all ‘e wanted anyway. ‘e came quickly. It was all over much sooner than you'd think. ‘e was all excited before we'd even started. I think they get turned on by just being there. Some of them just cruise around and around. You never see them stop and pick anyone up. I bet the bastards are just cruising around tossing themselves off; depriving a girl of a quick fiver. Mean bastards! I ‘ope it drops off in their ‘ands.

MAN: I did try once. To meet someone suitable. I had to force myself to attend some functions. At the church. But I always found it very difficult, you see.

I'm not very outgoing by nature. I like to keep myself to myself. I find it so very . . . so very difficult . . . to . . . to . . . talk to women.

I never know what to say. I'm so scared of making a fool of myself. And I'm sure they wouldn't be very interested in me. All the other men always seem to be so much more . . . interesting.

Oh dear. I get embarrassed just thinking about those attempts to . . . to . . . talk. . . . to the girls.

(emphatically) One needs to sparkle, you see. To make an impression one must *sparkle.* But I was never very good at that.

Other people seem to find it easy to do that sort of thing. Young Slater in dispatch, for instance. He's always coming out with the most remarkable things. I really think he goes too far sometimes; he's so cheeky. But the girls lap it up. They always laugh at his jokes and he can get away with saying the sort of things that - *well*, if I'd said it there would be a right to do. But he, *sparkles*, you see.

GIRL: That's what men are like. They just want it all the time. Led around by their fucking dicks, they are. Well if they want it they've got to buy it, ‘aven't they. One way or another. It's the only thing I've got to sell. That and me trainers, and I'm not selling me trainers!

It don't get any easier though. It gets more, usual, but it don’t get easier. You have to size people up real quick. I do hand relief, blow jobs and a full fuck, but only with a condom. After all, I'm not fucking stupid, am I. Though the number of men that want it without you'd think they were. I dread to think the places some of those men have had their dicks.

Trouble is, it gets bloody cold out there. Your feet get cold, your legs get cold because you have to show a bit a leg, can't cover up the goods. But it freezes you up inside.

MAN: Mother used to chide me occasionally. But I stopped going to functions. There was no point. Everyone could think of something to say quicker than me. By the time I had constructed the correct opening sentence - in my head - attempting at the same time to rough out replies to possible answers, the person I was aiming my sentence at was already talking to someone else.

Perhaps I'm not quick witted enough. I always think talking to me must be like playing ping pong with someone who can never get the ball back over the net.

(pause)

It can't be very satisfying, can it?

But I'm not a fool. Oh no, I'm not a fool. Without boasting I think I can say I have quite a good mind.

GIRL: Me Dad was a right sod! ‘e was only ever looking out for ‘imself. ‘e didn't care about us. ‘e just used us. Like all the others.

‘e never kept a job for very long. Always ended up getting into an argument with the boss; and then ‘e'd end up getting slung out. But it was never ‘is fault; it was always a conspiracy, they were always out to get ‘im; ‘e was always right and everyone else was always wrong.

Mum was a right stupid cow for putting up with ‘im. You won't catch me getting stuck like that.

MAN: When the policeman came up to the door of my car I said I'd lost my way and was stopping to look at my A to Z. I thought it was rather quick thinking, myself - at the time.

GIRL: And the Social Workers don't want to know any more than your Mum and Dad. They know you're thrown on the scrap heap. They just want to pick up their pay packet. Bunch a fucking wankers. Think they *know* what you're going through. Try to make out they're fucking *mind* readers. They don't know a fucking thing.

Some of them are all right. But they never last long. Just when you get to know one, just when you start to trust someone, they move on. But most of them are just shits. They just want a quiet life; they don't care about *us!* Nobody cares about *us!*

MAN: I would usually go out on Thursday nights. There was never much on the television on Thursday evenings and I preferred mid-week to the weekends. It was much busier at the weekends and though the choice is, no doubt, greater there are more cars about and I don't like a crowd. I never have.

GIRL: They make out they're giving you a *'home'* but its just a fucking prison. If you annoy them they lock you up. They just want to keep you out of sight, hide the kids then they can pretend we don't exist.

I didn't want to be locked up so I ran away. They don't look for you when you run away. They just wait for you to come back. They're probably relieved you're off their 'ands for a bit. Someone else's problem, eh.

MAN: I don't always have sex. You know, intercourse type of sex. It could get very expensive and I don't really need it that often. Just a bit of relief.

GIRL: But when you run away you aint got nowhere to go. It's not too bad in the summer. If you sit in the right place with your little cardboard message you can collect quite a bit, it 'elps being a girl. But you 'ave to watch where you go because if you move in on some else's pitch they might sort you out. I usually get a MacDonalds. A Big Mac Meal and an E sets you up for the night.

MAN: I found it helped me a lot. If I was feeling particularly lonely . . . or . . . excitable I might go out on other nights . . . but it was usually Thursdays, for some reason.

(pause)

You have to watch out. You don't want it to get addictive.

GIRL: But sleeping in a box isn't right, is it? All the politicians agree about that. Kick the fuckers out, they say.

I wanted a flat. I wanted a place of me own where I could do what *I* wanted. But they said I didn't qualify for a flat. I've never fucking qualified for nothin'. They all stink! Anybody would think we've got the fucking plague, the looks we get from the neighbours. And if anything goes missing it always - 'it must have been one of those kids from 'The 'ollys'.

MAN: The girls, of course, are dirty. They wouldn't be doing it if they weren't. I can't understand it myself; how someone can do that. They have no pride. No pride at all. But I can't help it. I keep going there. Sometimes I say to myself, 'Right, Arthur, let that be the last time.' But it keeps on nagging away in my mind, and it's impossible to resist, you see, because I know it's there.

GIRL: There's always plenty a people about at the Common. I go down there a few nights a week when I'm living at 'The ‘ollys'. Some of the girls are quite friendly, but some of them are mean bitches and you have to watch out. But what you really have to watch out for is the pimps. Friend a mine got involved with a pimp, thought the sun shone outa his arse, she did, till it turned nasty. ‘e started claiming she was ‘olding money back, not passin’ on all the takins, sometimes it’s just slow, but ‘e wouldn’t believe ‘er and ‘e cut ‘er. She's still got the scar. *(Assuming martial arts poses, jabbing and kicking the air.)* You wouldn’t catch me getting’ fucked over like that. I’d soon see ‘em off with me kick boxing.

MAN: I'm quite contented, really.

I live in a nice house. I find my job quite interesting. The garden's very nice at this time of year. It's all very . . . satisfying . . . really.

The government is finally sorting out all those layabouts who don't want to work. And stopping those young good-for-nothings cluttering up the streets. I'm please to see even New Labour has seen the light and also think we shouldn't tolerate all this unnecessary begging going on: it is a veritable assault on the senses - that's what it is. There's no need for it. No need at all.

Of course visiting the Common does create some tensions in my life. I sometimes wonder what would happen if my colleagues should find out. Sometimes I imagine what would happen if I was driving around and I should see someone else from work, also driving around, Mr. Harding for instance; it would be so embarrassing, for both of us.

GIRL: I wasn't ‘aving such a bad night at first. It was mostly ‘and relief and a few blow jobs. This car kept coming round, a nice big shiny car. I was a bit worried it might be the Bill but then I recognised it. A regular; I ‘adn't done no business with ‘im but another girl ‘ad pointed out ‘is car to me one night and said ‘e was all right. Nice simple tastes. Quick too. Easy money.

Anyway, ‘is car slowed right down so I stuck me ‘ead in the window and asked if ‘e wanted business. ‘e said yes, ‘e did. So I went to get in but then I saw ‘e looked kinda ill. ‘e was sweating like mad. It was all standing out on ‘is ‘ead, it put me off. So I backed away and I looked down the road. I made out I'd seen me man coming and said sorry and walked off. I kept walking, quick like, and when I looked around the car was still sitting there but ‘e must ‘ave been right pissed off because suddenly ‘e starts off real fast, wheels squealing and off ‘e goes.

But I didn't fancy it. ‘e looked real ill and it might ‘ave been somethin’ catching. I didn't want to catch nothin’.

MAN: But it kept getting worse. I had to keep going. It was the temptation, you see. Knowing it was there. I just couldn't resist and then I thought . . . if the temptation wasn't there I would be free. I wouldn't want to do those disgusting things anymore.

(pause)

If the temptation was removed.

GIRL: But things started going down ‘ill after that. The next one was a blow job and it went on and on and the bastard didn't come, ‘e must’ve been on somethin’. We ended up ‘aving an argument and I almost lost the money.

MAN: You see, Mother brought me up to respect women. But these women they didn't behave as women should.

GIRL: Then I get this other one, and ‘e wants to go all the way. So I said all right, if ‘e was quick, and it would be thirty quid. So we drive off and then when we get to a dark spot ‘e refuses to put the fucking condom on and says ‘e wouldn't pay thirty for sex with a condom. So we end up arguing and ‘e starts getting real stroppy so I bail out. ‘e drives off and I end up ‘aving to walk back.

MAN: I think, you see, that they needed to be punished. I think you'll find scripture will bear me out on this one. They are fallen, you see. They’re swimming in a sea of filth of their own devising and they were trying to drag me down.

GIRL: By the time I'd walked back there wasn't much trade left so I thought I'll just go for one more and, hey presto, the Bill turn up. 'We know you,' they said, 'We know what your game is.' If only I'd gone with the regular with the shiny car none of this would ‘ave ‘appened.

MAN: Even so I found it very difficult to control my emotions. I felt so very peculiar. I began to wonder if I was in a State of Grace. I kept driving around and around; I found it so difficult to decide which one to pick. And then, when I did pick one of them, she seemed to sense something and she ran away.

GIRL: When me Dad lost on the ‘orses ‘e used to take a swing at Mum and *me* if I got in the way; as if it was our fault. Win or lose ‘e'd always ‘ad a few too many. ‘e was always celebrating or drowning ‘is sorrows. ‘e always ‘ad to be the big man. Always trying to impress ‘is drinking mates

You're bleeding me dry, he would yell. You fucking cows are bleeding me dry and what ‘ave I got to show for it. I'm the Boss. I'm the Boss; you do what the fuck I say. Everything was always our fault, according to ‘im.

(pacing impatiently)

They can't keep me in ‘ere much longer.

MAN: I had to exert all of my self control. It was difficult to keep going. But I persevered and, after driving around for a while, I went back to the Common and the previous girl had gone but another young one came up to the car and when she asked I said I wanted a blow job.

GIRL: They just like to keep you waiting. It gives them a sense of power. They just get off to a bit a power. That's why they're in the fuckin' police in the first place. They just want to get their rocks off.

MAN: I didn't argue about the money. It seemed reasonable and I knew I wouldn't have to pay it anyway.

GIRL: They know at 'The 'ollys' that we go down the Common. They don't even pretend they don't know. But they don't care. Don't give a toss. They know we're scum. They don't expect anything else. And because it's us their normal little set of rules don't apply. What would be *(imitating posh voice)* unthinkable for little Jemima, Samantha and Charlotte *(abrupt return to hard edged voice)* is okay for Stacey, Hayley and Kylie.

MAN: I went to the usual place. But there was already a car there. The girl said she knew a place and directed me. She had very thin wrists. One felt they would snap in one's hands, *(dreamy voice)* like a dry twig.

She had a narrow thin face which made her eyes look big though they probably weren't, really. I'm sure they were no bigger than usual.

GIRL: Because we're different. ‘cause we're good for nothing. ‘cause we have nothing to offer and are going nowhere. We haven't got anythin’ anybody wants... except our bodies. Our busy little hands and our hungry little mouths and our hidden little hearts, *(pounding fist on sleeping bench)* thumping, thumping, thumping.

MAN: She found a place. It was quite a good place. Nice and quiet. She picked it herself. I had the wrench in the map holder built into the driver's door. So convenient these modern designs. As her head went down I lifted the wrench. I told her to stop and then I hit her.

When I hit her she made a kind of grunting noise. The shock of hitting her made me lose my resolve. She was stunned but she was trying to get up and there was a lot of blood coming from her head. I should have hit her again . . . but . . . but I'm not very good at hitting. So I reached across and I opened the car door and pushed her out. It was very difficult but I did it in the end. After that I just drove around; I didn't know what to do.

GIRL: If only I'd gone with that regular I wouldn't be sitting ‘ere now. But I'll be out soon. They can't keep me ‘ere much longer. The Bill won't put me off. In any case it's all I can do. It's all I'm good for – selling me body - it's the only bit of me anybody wants.

(INTENSE STARK LIGHT ON BOTH CELLS, OCCUPANTS STARE OUT AT AUDIENCE IN SILENCE, THEN BLACKOUT.)