

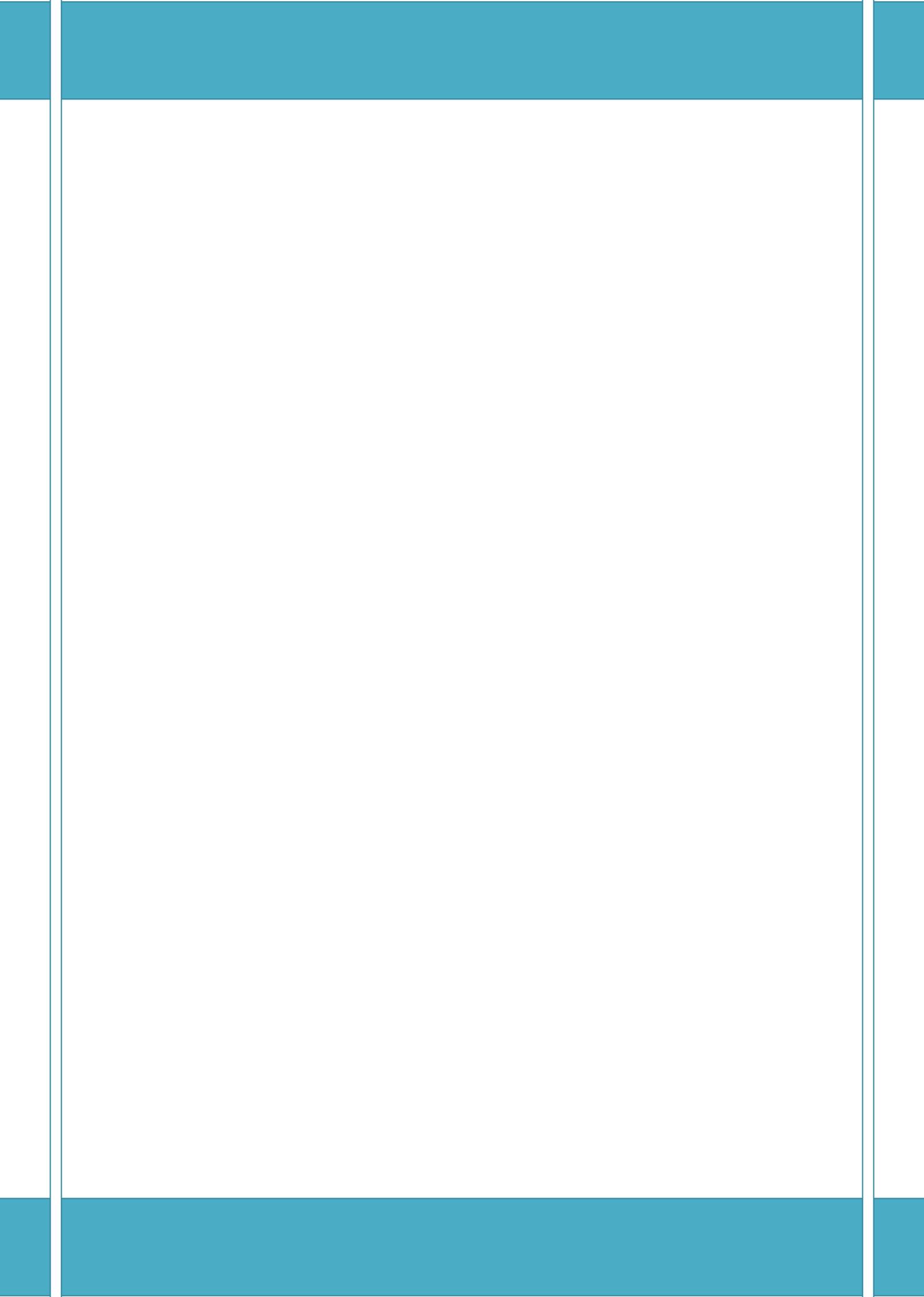


IN DENIAL
BY
JAMES WOOLF

Extract

A SMITH SCRIPT

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IN DENIAL
James Woolf

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CHARACTERS

AMELIA Mid-twenties, very (and perhaps too) slim. Intelligent face.

TOBY Approaching forty and developing a paunch. Rugged Italian looks.

PAUL Late twenties, tall, good looking, black.

JESSICA Mid thirties, attractive in an unkempt kind of way. Wears glasses.

As well as the characters who appear on stage, two characters appear only on screen.

LAURIE Mid-forties, suave.

EMMA Thirties, immaculate.

Multimedia style

IN DENIAL is a multimedia play that takes place over 2016. There are several screens. Before each scene, a newspaper headline or headlines appears on one or more of the screens.

The multimedia screens also capture what the characters see on their personal devices. E.g. when a character is having a Skype conversation, texting or using social media. We also see what characters are viewing on TV or on a computer screen.

Directly following the newspaper headlines there is a snowstorm of tiny lights, and when these lights land on the stage, the set, on objects, walls, the audience and beyond, it will become clear that each is a Tweet (or social media comment). These “snowflakes” do not only address the political events of 2016, but cover the full range of human experience, private and public. However, they remain readable for just a few seconds before melting away, allowing the real action of each scene to begin.

SCENE ONE

Multi-media: newspaper headlines

EU buckles as Merkel's migrants hit 1 million

PM warns: EU migrant crisis may force BREXIT

PM forced to give ministers free rein on EU

Multi-media: snowstorm of Tweets

WINE BAR. JANUARY.

A modern utilitarian wine bar. TOBY is sitting alone with a bottled beer. He gets out his phone and opens a long email. He scrolls down, skimming, way too fast for him (or the audience) to read.

Multi-media: email.

Paul Jonson

8 January (1 hour ago)

To me

Toby

I don't think I explained myself properly on the phone. This isn't just any old meet up in a wine bar – we do that kind of thing all the time. Thanks so much for a couple of weeks ago btw. I didn't thank you properly. Maybe we can head back to my place after we've met Amelia and you can see how things are falling into shape? Yes, to give up your whole weekend with my move. Very rare in this day and age. As my mother would say, you must have been raised by God fearing parents. "Raised by God fearing parents." That says a lot doesn't it? Nearly as bad as God fearing folk. Anyway, I digress, but it feels even more cheeky that I'm now asking you for another big favour. As I say, I wasn't clear on the phone and I'm also not sure you were actually listening. You seemed distracted. No problem, I'm not complaining. So - Amelia. I met her when we were training to be accountants, so seven years ago now. She's made a success of it – Ernst and Young – whereas I quickly realized it wasn't for me. But we were best friends when we trained and once, very early on, something actually happened between us, but we never talked about it afterwards because I'm pretty crap at these things, in fact probably the world's worst at starting relationships. And ever since then I've wondered whether I missed an opportunity. Did she actually really like me? From what you've said – and also seen at Birkbeck – you're good at picking up on the signals, I'm really bad at all that kind of stuff. So, I just wanted you to meet Amelia and

really just watch us together, not take over or anything, it doesn't need to be for terribly long, she actually likes meeting me for a quick drink, it's her de-stress after work, and then she goes running or to the gym. She's incredibly fit by the way, physically fit. So just watch us and maybe tell me whether I'm missing any obvious signals. In short whether she actually likes me. Because what happened was a long time ago. And I don't want to risk my friendship with her. And it is a risk I know that. Anyway, sorry for the long rambling message and see you soon in the wine bar.

Your friend
Paul

TOBY exhales loudly to himself and closes the email. PAUL rushes in. TOBY puts his phone on the table.

PAUL: You've read my email, yeah?

TOBY: (MAKING A POINT) Hi, buddy, how are you?

PAUL: Sorry, bit nervous. You have read it, yeah?

TOBY: Of course.

PAUL: And you're okay with it?

TOBY: Shouldn't I be?

PAUL: Look, she'll be here soon.

TOBY: Okay.

PAUL: This is because I trust you.

TOBY: How d'you mean?

PAUL: The thing I mentioned was very early on. Did all that make sense by the way?

TOBY: Perfect sense.

PAUL: I wouldn't just ask anybody to do this.

TOBY: I'm honoured.

PAUL: The clincher was that all night alcoholic film fest! The only interruption being your seventy-five minute monologue on why intellectual women don't necessarily make better lovers --

TOBY: (LAUGHING) Oh that --

PAUL: (LAUGHING) In which I THINK your conclusion was that they don't – I got lost in the anecdotal evidence --

TOBY: Well, the evidence is important. And YOU talked a hell of a lot about masturbation. Your reliance on it.

PAUL: I might have mentioned it.

TOBY: I think you might have! When you weren't talking about the referendum, of course.

PAUL: Temporary reliance.

TOBY: Whatever.

PAUL: Anyway, at some point that night, I decided to do this.

TOBY: Great! (BEAT) So what are you working on right now?

PAUL: A couple of articles – about the referendum actually.

TOBY: That's a surprise.

PAUL: In fact, this is my fourth.

TOBY nods disinterestedly.

PAUL: It's important, Toby. Very important.

TOBY: I agree.

PAUL: We have a moral obligation to take this seriously.

TOBY: Totally. And I do.

PAUL: There's this slight hysteria thing going on right now. Not sure if you've noticed... But I don't like it.

TOBY: Nor me. Are we going to have any fun tonight by the way?

PAUL: Okay, I'll stop going on about it. Today is all about Amelia.

TOBY: Yup, and it's nice of you to introduce me, buddy – although I'm not looking particularly --

PAUL: I just want your opinion, insofar as you can even judge these things. You have to be totally honest.

TOBY: Why wouldn't I be?

PAUL: Seriously, because of what I told you about in the email – I'm particularly nervous about doing this.

TOBY: Which bit of the email was that?

PAUL: All of it. Want another beer?

TOBY: You're a legend.

PAUL goes to the Bar. TOBY opens the email again

Multi-media: email.

As before.

He spends a few seconds looking and then decides he really can't be bothered to read it. This time he deletes it. After a while, PAUL returns with two bottled beers.

PAUL: You want to see some photos? Of her?

TOBY: Okay.

Multi-media: PAUL starts showing some photos of Amelia on his phone to TOBY. He skims past the first ten or fifteen images.

PAUL: (SKIMMING THROUGH PHOTOS) Nah, nah, not that one, no, no. No, No.
(HAVING STOPPED SKIMMING) I like that one.

TOBY: Yeah.

PAUL: And that one. That one's not bad too.

TOBY: (A CONCESSION) I quite like that one.

PAUL looks at one and laughs.

PAUL: Look at that!

TOBY: What about it?

PAUL: I find it funny.

TOBY: (FRUSTRATION SUDDENLY OVERFLOWS) What are we, thirteen years old? Can't we just wait for her to arrive for Christ's sake?

PAUL: Of course. No problem!

Slightly tetchily, PAUL turns his phone off.

PAUL: (PAUSE) Touchy!

PAUL puts his phone away in his man-bag, carefully zipping up the compartment.

TOBY: I'm not being touchy! Just don't degrade yourself over a few pictures of some girl.

PAUL: She's not some girl, she's a woman. And she's very smart, you know. She turned down a place at Oxford. She went to Reading instead.

TOBY: That IS smart!

PAUL: And she has this gift for language. I'm the journalist but I'm always amazed by the clever way she can put words together.

TOBY: (RIBBING HIM) Amazed by the clever way she can put words together...

PAUL: I heard it when I said it.

TOBY: How long have you known her?

PAUL: I said, didn't I? Seven years. Do you think she's pretty?

TOBY: From those terrible pictures, I'd say – probably not. Does she always wear those glasses?

PAUL: Yeah. Except when she takes them off to clean them.

TOBY: Well that's... logical.

PAUL: I'm just not sure – romantically speaking, if there's... the necessary... kindling material.

TOBY: The necessary KINDLING material? Are we about to cook some spuds on a campfire?

PAUL: Can you actually be serious for a second? You need to tell me what you think – whether there are still any feelings lurking.

TOBY: I will tell you if there's anything lurking at all, if I feel that ZING!

PAUL: You're going to tell me if there's any Zing?

TOBY: Within minutes – perhaps seconds. I will say: "ZING!"

PAUL: You'll use that word?

TOBY: If you don't mind.

PAUL: If she's not interested –will it ruin everything? We're very good friends.

TOBY: It won't make one iota of difference. Not one iota.

PAUL: How come?

TOBY: Because if your friendship is strong – it will survive.

PAUL: She won't think badly of me? For trying?

TOBY: You're doing her a favour! Trying to shore up her love life.

PAUL: I hadn't really thought of it like that.

TOBY: If it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out. Who gives a fuck?

They drink.

TOBY: Good beer. (LOOKS AT THE BOTTLE) I never knew they even brewed beer in Hackney.

TOBY looks around.

TOBY: This is a great place actually, a truly great place.

PAUL: You like it?

TOBY: What's not to like! A wine bar, on the canal! I can't believe I've never been here.

PAUL: It's a little off the beaten track.

TOBY: I'm nearly forty years old and the canal system of London has passed me by.

PAUL: You and ninety nine percent of Londoners.

TOBY: I have a theory --

PAUL starts shifting in his seat.

TOBY: No, hear me out, it's not a seventy five minute theory. We have a finite number of opportunities in life and we must be constantly vigilant. Because one may whizz by without even registering on the radar.

PAUL: That's why you find it difficult to relax.

TOBY: Could be.

PAUL: You're constantly scanning the skyline. Looking for low-flying

opportunities.

TOBY: Write that down. You can use it sometime, it's good, I promise you.

There's a pause. PAUL gets his phone out again.

Multi-media: PAUL texts and receives replies.

P: *Where are u Mly?*

A: *Nearly there*

P: *hrry up –Toby's getting on my nrvs!*

A: 

TOBY: Who's that?

PAUL: Amelia.

TOBY: What's she say?

PAUL: She's almost here.

TOBY: Anything else?

PAUL: Nope.

TOBY: Is she looking forward to meeting me?

PAUL: I doubt it.

PAUL puts his phone away again.

TOBY: Is she coming from work?

PAUL: Probably. She's usually there late.

TOBY: She's an accountant, right?

PAUL: Ernst and Young.

TOBY: Is she heading upwards? Or heading outwards?

PAUL: What do you think?

TOBY: I'd say upwards.

PAUL: No, she's heading inwards. She's here!

PAUL *waves*.

PAUL: She can't see us. Let me just –

PAUL *leaves the table*.

Multi-media: TOBY goes onto Facebook, finds Paul's profile, then his friends, then heads onto Amelia's profile, About Relationships and Status. It says "No Relationship info to show".