

I'm not like other girls.

Audience enters. They find a stage littered with clothes, a single chair, and an open suitcase. The background music fades and the performer enters holding a summer dress up to her body. It is clearly too small.

During the piece she picks up, folds, and places the scattered clothes in the suitcase.

This will probably have to go. Every bit of me is just a little too big. My arms, my tummy, my hips, my breasts. I'm kidding myself with about half that pile over there. But, you know, it's hard to accept going up a dress size. Even when I go through shops, I still look for several sizes too small and then turn my head the other way as I "accidentally" pick up the wrong one or I say loudly, 'Oh, no my size is sold out, I guess I'll have to try on a bigger one'.

I've been trapped in dresses before. I'm sure I'm not the only one. I squeeze it on, over the shoulders, scraping past the bust and I think 'Yes! Amazing! Look at me!' and then I look at me and I look ridiculous and I try to take it off and I start to sweat because the zip really does only go down to there and I tug it one way and the other and the seams strain and I maybe hear a tiny tear that I choose to ignore and after about ten minutes of calling out to the shop assistant that 'I'm fine and I'm just seeing how it looks from every angle', it's finally lying, defeated, on the floor, and I'm pink and panting and I make a mental note that the dresses in that particular shop must not be sized properly.

I suppose I should be glad. It's womanly. I'm woman shaped; something I desperately wanted to be during my flat-chested teens. I think I first noticed I was flat-chested, that I could be categorised as flat-chested, that I lacked something that I hadn't lacked before, when, age 12, my friend Emily announced to the boy I had a crush on that I was probably the most flat-chested girl in the year. Yeah, she was a great friend. At the time I laughed and said, 'so what?', but it was the moment that I started thinking that maybe I didn't deserve to be called a girl, a woman, or something, and I began avoiding mentioning my gender, or anything that might suggest that I was claiming to be feminine.

This wasn't really helped by the fact that this was also the year that I decided to shave my hair off to raise money for an orphanage in China. Now you may think, 'wow, what a brave person to have done that just before becoming a teenager and going through one of the most self-conscious periods of her life', but really, when I think about it now, it was a kind of deceptively noble self-sabotage. If I made myself deliberately unattractive then no one could fault me for it, do you know what I mean? I made it so I didn't look like a girl because I had chosen not to look like a girl. It stopped it from being something that was happening to me, I think. I was accused of being attention-seeking a lot at the time by a couple of boys in my class and, if I'm honest, I probably was. I enjoyed being noticed by the whole school, being on the radio, in the papers. It was a splash of the dramatic and I was already a bit addicted to being different, doing the unexpected.

Maybe that came from being raised in the middle of three very noisy brothers. One of the first interactions I can remember with them was encouraging my two older brothers to compete for my affections. They would perform all kinds of tasks and favours and at regular intervals I would announce a change in my order of preference, just to keep them on their toes. My dad thought this was unhealthy and banned me from playing favourites. That was a great move. My brothers went

from adoring to antagonistic in about sixty seconds. No longer a princess in their eyes, I was just a rubbish younger sister who cried and squawked even when they hit her gently.

Fortunately, at this stage, the only difference between our relative strengths and abilities was determined by our ages rather than gender, so having a younger brother proved invaluable in my development as a fighter. We used to play a game we called *Power Rangers Fighting Game*, which involved all of us stripping down to our underpants, placing a duvet on the floor, and fighting each other to the death...or thereabouts. I was scrappy and determined. I used to have a pre-fight ritual in the bathroom where I would spit on my hands, rub it through my hair and shout motivating slogans at myself in the mirror, like, 'COME ON!!' I was usually able to beat my younger brother, an achievement which validated my involvement in the games.

I saw myself as tough and never doubted that I was the equal of any boy. I wasn't afraid of mud or insects – I kept worms and slugs as pets. I chopped off my Barbie's hair and sliced off the limbs of my teddy bears so as to sellotape them back on in my doctor's surgery, before rushing out to build a den in a nearby field. We would play pirates together and I would always play the cabin boy, who I knew, from Captain Pugwash, was the smartest. I collected Pokemon cards and played Golden Eye. I wore hand-me-downs from my brothers and grew increasingly frustrated with my hair, which was always tangled and in the way. At school, I would challenge all the boys in my class and chased them round the playground, not to kiss them, but to give them a proper beating. I was proud to be proclaimed the toughest girl in the year.

Then, in year five I got glasses and started wearing my hair in pigtails and settled into being unattractive. I was underweight and self-righteous and pale and pedantic and wore the wrong clothes and sucked up to teachers and didn't know who the Backstreet Boys were and was really just not at all cool. I was past the age where I could reasonably wrestle with boys and so now, whereas previously they had begrudgingly given me their respect, they were free to treat me with disdain, to sneer at me while courting my friends. I became ashamed and afraid of my feelings, my secret attractions, lest I be found out and mercilessly teased. Teased for being so presumptuous, to think that they would ever be interested, that they even saw me as a girl. It wasn't too farfetched to think so – I remember one of my overweight friends being mocked for weeks and I became even more protective and careful and adamant that I didn't fancy anyone, ergh no, of course not. I remember retreating from games like 'Spin the bottle' because I couldn't stand the idea of seeing the boy's face drop at the prospect of doing something with me. I remember I started justifying myself, my reasons for not playing, more and more ridiculously, to the point where I snootily announced that it was a form of prostitution and I would have nothing to do with it.

That was at secondary school actually. In case you were thinking I was saying that sort of thing aged nine. Yeah, so, basically, anyway, what I'm trying to say is I didn't develop friendships with boys for several years after I realised I wasn't what they were after. I didn't have much trouble making friends with girls, although I think, and this is going to sound really bad, even though I cared for them a lot, I usually thought I was better than them, on some level. I don't think this was really helped by my dad and my brothers who would always pick out some flaw in whatever female friend I brought home because they were fat or slow, or fussy with their food, or something and I think this got into my head a little and I would always see that flaw from then on and be a little bit ashamed of them. That's awful isn't it? I actually stopped bringing friends home, but that was also because in year

seven I invited Emily over for the first time and it was so excruciatingly awkward because we didn't really know each other well enough and we couldn't play children's games like I had with my primary school friends and I had such a horrible time that I only invited people over for one or two sleepovers after that.

Oh, but, actually, even those had to come to an end because, oh, this one time, I had a sleepover with Emily and this other girl, Becky and we did a really bad thing. So, to set the scene, in my year 9 class (although we were kind of all basically friends) there were the typical three female friendship groups. The 'cool' girls who knew about make-up and magazines and things, the 'loser' girls who had weird laughs and lunchboxes, and the 'in-between' girls, which was my group, with Emily, Becky, and Jenny. This was all fine and in balance, until one day this girl Lydia had a falling out with her group, the loser group, and decided to 'upgrade' to my group. This fundamentally couldn't work because we were a group of four and desks were set up in pairs. She was also quite clingy and used to hover just next to you wherever you went. She was actually really cool and funny and clever and I secretly really liked her and had a lot of fun with her whenever we were together, but I felt threatened by her academically and so I relished having bitch sessions with the other members of the group. We sniggered as we figured out new ways to exclude her or ensure that we wouldn't be paired with her, and made crude cartoons of her and her weird hair and weird interests.

This reached its peak during a special, uncharacteristic Saturday night sleepover at my house. We were staying in this shed thing that my dad converted into an office space, and we got hysterical over being allowed to stay up and eat loads of sweets. We left several prank calls on Lydia's answer phone and then went on a classmate's website, where Becky (who was the most mental at this point) wrote a frantic, expletive-ridden post about how much we hated Lydia and her weird hair and weird interests and wished that she would stay the fuck away from us.

The following Monday, Lydia decided not to come to school. We were summoned to the Lower Head's office and interviewed individually. We all broke down and were fully repentant for what we had done but the damage was irreversible. The teacher asked me if I wanted to be expelled and I said, 'no' and so I wasn't. The one thing I can feel vaguely proud of is that I told the teacher that I was the ringleader and that Becky and Emily hadn't wanted to do any of it, that I was fully to blame, but it doesn't really change any of the rest of it. We wrote Lydia apology letters, but she switched classes and we didn't see much of her after that.

Looking back, I went through quite a busy transition from age 12 to 13. I shaved my hair off, momentarily destroyed the emotional integrity of another girl, realised I was flat-chested, and fell in love. I fell in love with a boy in my class called Will who hated me. He was in an on/off relationship with my friend Becky, which meant he was forced to spend a lot of time with me; during which he would draw illustrations of all the ways he wanted to kill me. I thought he was wonderful. He was skinny and charming and funny and dangerous, but he looked at me and saw a shrill, whiny, weird bespectacled girl who looked like a boy. And when I say I was weird, I mean I was pretty weird. One time I went a whole lunchtime pretending to be blind and feeling people's faces (without their permission), and then I went round the class saying I was giving birth to twins and got them to vote on their favourite names for them.

In year 10, things got a little easier. My hair started to grow out again and I got contact lenses and our classes were all mixed up so we were with new people and Will had been through an interesting

summer texting all the girls he could, asking for phone sex...including me! It was really strange. I didn't know what to do at the time. Here was the boy I had decided to be in love with asking me to talk dirty to him while I was away at a Christian Theatre summer camp. I was too prudish for any of that though. I was waiting for marriage, obviously. It's a good thing I didn't because it was all bollocks and meant that he was the only one who embarrassed himself. We were still in the same class though and I was still in love with him. I made it my life. Looking at him, thinking about him, writing his name in secret places, taking home sweet wrappers he'd dropped, dreaming of the moment when he would realise that I was actually super cool.

Then on the 23rd February 2004, it happened. He was made to sit next to me in a Maths class and suddenly it just clicked! I couldn't believe it. His hatred evaporated and we spent the whole lesson laughing and messing around and teasing the poor boy sat on the adjacent table, firing paper clips around the room. I was glowing and could not stop smiling for the rest of the day. Over the next couple of years our friendship became stronger and stronger and we would spend every lunchtime together, making fun of everyone else. I continued to hide my feelings of course. I couldn't. I was too ugly. It would ruin everything. I couldn't. I became more distant with Becky and Emily and Jenny, my old group. Everything became about Will. I didn't even mind when we persecuted Jenny. Told her she was fat, even though she was like a breadstick. Threw her rucksack down the stairs. We laughed, we laughed at everyone; especially the girls. I re-shaped myself. I was laid back, relaxed, wild, free, all of that. What was the point of being offended by anything? What was wrong with racist jokes, sexist jokes, jokes about disabled people, jokes about rape, jokes about everything? They were thrilling and unexpected. They broke taboos and made us feel like we were the ones in control.

Then at the end of year 11, Will left the school. He was restless and on anti-depressants and wanted to go to college instead. I remember his last day. He hugged me for the first time since we'd known each other. He also insisted that various girls let him touch their breasts. I remember he cornered Emily in the locker room. I was there. She was laughing. He was scrambling over her trying to grab at them. He got on to her back. She was shrieking with laughter. I joked that I didn't know which one of them to help. They both laughed. Eventually he got a satisfactory feel and we all panted the event away. Thinking about it now, I suppose that was a kind of sexual assault. Maybe? I don't know. I don't know if I should feel bad about it. It was fine. She was fine. It was a joke.

I told Will I loved him. On MSN I think it was. I wasn't brave enough to tell him in person. We didn't talk much after that. More because he was interested in his college friends and wanted to distance himself from my school as much as possible, rather than because of what I said. He told me he still liked me. I would text him weird, bursting messages every so often, but I knew that we probably wouldn't see each other for a long time. I didn't know what I would do during my lunchtimes now. I resolved to spend them working. I would work all the time. I would start doing my homework on time. I would hand in my coursework on time. I wouldn't have friends. I didn't need them. I was in love. All I needed was love. My dad told me I should be a doctor. Ok yeah. I would be a doctor. I would go to the best place, Cambridge, Oxford, the best place, I would go there and I would be a doctor and then I would be able to support Will. I would send him money. I would keep him alive and ok and that would be my life. This boy, man, he would be my life. And that's pretty much what I did. I mean, I didn't totally cut myself off from people, I still interacted with everyone in class and had fun and made jokes and had friends, but no close friends, I never saw anyone outside of school or during lunchtimes, during lunchtimes I would work.

I decided to cut my hair short again. Oh and then I got breasts. Ha, bet you were thinking about the dramatic irony here, because I kept saying I was flat-chested and obviously (*picks up large bra*) I am not flat-chested now. I didn't even get a bra until quite late actually. It used to make me so self-conscious in the changing rooms because everyone could see each other. Everyone could see what the other girls had got. My friend Emily was well-endowed early on and we could all see. She was a woman from the age of 11. But I had to come up with new and inventive ways of slipping off my school shirt and slipping on my P.E. top without anyone noticing I wasn't wearing a bra. Eventually it got to the point where I cut up one of my vests so it looked like a crop top and wore that. My mum noticed what I'd done and realised that it was time for her to get involved. She took me for a fitting and I finally had a set of bras. One plain white bra and one plain white sports bra. Size AA. It was such a relief. But then, of course, I had a new problem, because nothing was growing. I couldn't deal with this. I was losing the puberty race by quite a margin, so, like many good losers before me, I decided to cheat. I folded up a few sheets of loo roll, the old cliché, and moulded them into the shape I wanted. Nothing big, nothing dramatic. Just enough to create a shadow.

This took the pressure off for a while, but the illusion became increasingly difficult to maintain. I remember going on a German Exchange trip in year nine and that, at the time, I had just made a deal with God that if I never ate chocolate again then he would give me breasts. Yeah, it's in the Bible somewhere... Anyway, during the trip we were scheduled to go to a water park. This had me panicked. I obviously couldn't wear the tissue under my swimming costume because it would just go soggy and I would be humiliated. So I...so I constructed this, this thing, under my costume, using sanitary towels. Honestly, I used the sticky side to attach them to the material and arranged them into a suitable shape. I figured they were absorbent so that would solve the water problem. I tried it on and, although it looked a bit peculiar, it was better than the alternative, it was better than people seeing the unnatural shape of my body.

That night, I couldn't sleep. I kept worrying about the pads falling off and everyone seeing and then a small part of me piped up and told me that my chocolate deal wasn't really with God. It was with the devil! Seriously, that is what I thought. Something about this revelation made me think, 'right, that's it! I am not going to care about how big my breasts are anymore. They are what they are and it doesn't matter what anyone else has, this is what I've got'. So first thing in the morning I ripped out the pads and ate a big chunk of dairy milk. I stopped stuffing my bra and just felt a lot better about things.

I don't know when my breasts actually started to grow and I don't know how quickly they grew. I mean, you probably don't want to know by this point. But I just carried on wearing my (now greying) AA sports bra, which must have grown with them somehow. All I do know is that, in year 12 of sixth form, I saw a picture of a girl with a decent rack and suddenly realised it was me. I thought maybe it was about time I went up a cup size. I couldn't bear the idea of looking at bras on my own, but I plucked up the courage and went to Next and quickly grabbed a load of B cup bras and rushed into the changing room only to find I couldn't do them up. I was spilling out. I didn't understand. Finally, my mother took me in hand again and we went to Bravissimo for a proper fitting. Turned out I wasn't a B cup. I was a double D. I couldn't believe it. I was a little in shock. This didn't make any sense to me. I was going to have to rethink myself. My body. I started looking at other women's bodies differently. No longer envious, but proud. I started comparing myself favourably. I had status. I was still not great facially, but at least I had something. At least I had this.

In the end, my obsessive work ethic, endless placements, and practice interviews paid off and I had my place to study Medicine at Magdalen College Oxford. Over the summer before I was due to start I finally met up with Will again. It all happened through incredibly bizarre and unexpected circumstances, which I am not yet in a position to disclose here, but the main things that came out of it were: I had my first kiss and I started wearing make-up.

I noticed a change almost immediately. Boys started to notice me. Boys started to talk to me. Boys started to be interested in what I had to say. I was now worthy of their attention. I now had something to offer. When I arrived at Oxford, I was helped with my bags, I was escorted to where I had to go, I was given advice, and all from boys who seemed to want to do it; they weren't just there out of obligation. I was subdued and flustered all at the same time for about two minutes and then I took it into my stride. I made it me. I became me. I was excited. I forgot about Will.

That first week was one of the most exhilarating in my life. I went out every night (even though I don't drink) and had about two hours sleep for the whole week. I talked to everyone. Girls and boys, but it was the boys, men, who gave me a real thrill, made me think I'd really achieved something, that I'd made it. They were funny and charming and handsome and interested in me, for the first time. It wasn't that they were all romantically interested, I think it was more that I was worthy of their time, their efforts, worth the risk of getting to know me.

I quickly lost interest in girls. I remember a couple of us discussing our favourite people in the year and thinking how strange it was that my top ten only had one female on the list and I remember thinking something like, 'oh that's probably because I get on with boys better, that makes sense, yes, I just like boys better, that's just me, other girls can stick with girls, but I'll stick with boys' and that's basically what I did. I started to forget that I'd ever had female friends, I started to think I'd always been this way, or at least, I'd always wanted to be this way but had only just been given permission.

I also felt free to be as weird as I liked. In part because it was Oxford and there's a higher concentration of eccentricity there as it is and in part because I was a pretty girl being weird, which was more acceptable somehow than an ugly girl being weird. I started a nudist society. I wrote this A4 manifesto about it and pushed it under everyone's door, explaining that I just wanted to try it out, to see if we could do it safely and non-sexually, and that I didn't agree with sex before marriage and so it was obviously just for the fun of it. I'll admit that didn't get the most enthusiastic response and even for the ones who wanted to join; we just couldn't find the time to meet and so it became more of an initiation thing. They would have to come and knock on my door naked and then, in return I would go and knock on their door naked and then we would have both seen each other naked. Which was...good. It was supposed to make them feel liberated. I even printed out membership cards.

I only had male subscribers in the end.

During the first term, I had my first proper boyfriend. His name was James. At first I wasn't really interested. I didn't find him attractive or as exciting as all the others, but he was persistent. We wrote to each other over facebook and he sent me small presents and played catchphrase, where he would draw a picture and leave it in my pigeonhole for me to guess the phrase. I remember we watched a film together and had fun and then I was lying there and he was kissing the back of my neck while I stared into space and I thought 'ok, fine, yeah' and turned around and kissed him back.

And then he was my boyfriend and I got used to the idea and then we decided we were in love and then he started pressuring me to have sex with him and I was all 'no, I want to be married first' and then he was all 'oh please' and I was all 'maybe you should marry me then' and then he broke up with me and we became close friends instead.

My relationships after this seemed to follow a similar pattern, only a lot quicker. I think I got it down to an hour at one point. Either they'd find out I wanted to wait for marriage and would give up straight away, or they'd try and coax me into it and I would resist and then either I or they would end things.

During this term, I'd also realised that I didn't really want to do Medicine after all. Well, in fact I realised that within the first week and then spent the rest of the year figuring out what I would want to do instead. I remember someone asked me in summer term what was the most important thing in the world to me and I answered immediately 'theatre' and I felt puzzled because I wasn't doing theatre. And then I dropped out.

It must have been around this time that I started wearing summer dresses. Every day. All the time. And then I started panicking that people would see me in the same dress too many times and so I started buying a seemingly endless number of them and only wearing them twice. It was a bit absurd, but I liked the way they made me look and feel and the way people would comment on them and me. I was moulding myself into a hyper-feminine doll. I'd dyed my hair platinum blonde, I'd started wearing eyeliner and blusher and lipstick and I was wearing these beautiful dresses that emphasised my cleavage and my waist and my legs and I liked having a safe protective shell of appearance within which to do my business. I liked it when men leered at me in the streets, when they asked me to come home with them and I kept walking, when I had a stalker who would appear on the same corner every time I walked by. It made me feel valid, like I was wanted in the world, like I was some kind of treasure. I didn't even stop wearing them in winter. I wore these dresses in the middle of snowstorms. I was suddenly immune to the cold.

In the meantime, I had worked out that I wanted to work in theatre – as an actor, a writer, a director, anything, and so I joined all the societies in my local area. I remember living at home with my parents and reading the Daily Telegraph and seeing the daily woman on the front and I remember saying things to my parents like, 'Feminism has caused most of the problems in modern society'. I remember thinking women were selfish for having divorces, for sleeping around, for getting jobs they weren't capable of carrying out to a high enough standard. I remember feeling confused about the fact that I wanted to do things in the world, that my parents wanted me to do things in the world, but I also wanted to have children and be a housewife, and that my parents wanted me to have children and be a housewife. I occasionally worked as a teaching assistant in schools and I would look at the number of female teachers and I would shake my head and I would think, 'that's why the primary school system is screwed', 'children need male role models', 'they won't look up to them', 'women are too fussy, too strict, too nice', and so on. I think at one point I even said that women should be grateful for beauty pageants because it was a chance for at least one of their qualities to be recognised. This wasn't me being mean or patronising; this was just me accepting the facts, accepting the differences, the scientific differences.

Of course, I was different, of course, I thought more like a man, of course it was just the product of being brought up in a male dominated household. I could be funny or clever or laid back or fun or in

control or anything because I was special. Men weren't better than me, they were just better than women.

Picks up shorts. Moves to sit on chair.

In the summer of 2010, I met a boy called Tom. He was an artist. He was exciting and I liked him a lot. We had an adventurous night together, which made such an impression on me that I wrote a monologue about it. However, as I said before, once it was clear I wasn't really going to sleep with him, he lost interest. I figured maybe we could be good friends – that way I would still get to hang out with a brilliant guy and maybe something could happen sometime in the future. I was in a play at the time called *She Stoops to Conquer* and we had a two day break between a set of performances, so I thought I'd use the time to go to London and visit Tom. I messaged him about it, but he didn't really reply, so, in a spirit of madness (and because it had worked once before), I thought I'd go anyway and just turn up at his house. I knew where it was from the last time I'd been there. It was opposite where George Orwell used to live. I just had to look for the plaque. So I got the train and then the tube over to Leicester Square, just to hang out and see if Tom texted me to say where he would be. I had a lovely chat with some street dancers and enjoyed the hot buzz of the summer night. It got to 11pm and I still hadn't heard from him and I knew that I would miss the last train if I didn't go home but I didn't want the trip to have been fruitless so I got the tube over to Camden and decided that if I didn't find his house then I would just hide out in a club or something until morning. I walked up and down the streets with occasional flickers of recognition, but no solid leads. I was tempted to message him saying it would be his fault if I was raped or killed or anything, but I thought maybe that would be a bit far. I rang but it went straight to voicemail. I remember I stopped by a tube map and tried to see if there were any familiar names on it when a man approached me. He was over 60 and Jamaican and dressed head to toe in black leather and was handing out little white tickets for some deal to passers-by. He told me the tube was shut. 'Oh, no, I don't need the tube; I'm just trying to find somewhere'. He asked me where I needed to go and said he knew where it was and that he would show me and I said, 'no, no, that's ok' but he began insisting that he would show me the way. I figured I would humour him and let him show me (even though I didn't think he knew the place) because he looked fairly harmless and I always wanted to give people a chance and be nice and treat them like a human being even if they seemed super weird. So we started walking together and chatted about all kinds of things and we discovered that his birthday was 24th July and mine was 26th, and he was excited that we were both Leos and said he would send me a birthday card. We talked about our plans for the future; about how I wanted to go into the theatre and how he wanted to set up an arts space in London and that maybe it was fate that we had met. We got on a bus and I thought, 'I don't remember getting on a bus the last time I was here'. I should say that I was suspicious of him, I kept saying to him that I should not be letting a stranger guide me like this and he was saying that I should be grateful that he was going out his way that we needed to get the bus because he was too old to walk and I was too polite to say no, to walk away, to run away.

Eventually we arrived outside a building. I remember something orange about it. He told me his offices were upstairs and he just needed to check on his computer that we were going the right way. I told him I would wait outside. I wanted to wait outside, but again he said that was silly, too dangerous, I should be grateful, that he wasn't 'interested in the pussy', I remember those were his exact words. I could sit in the kitchen if I wanted. So I agreed and went inside and looked directly at the security camera as we went in, you know, just in case he killed me. And then I sat in the kitchen

as the minutes ticked by and he kept leaving the apartment or something and I remember looking at the clock and thinking to myself that I would leave when it said ten past two or something, but, of course, at nine minutes past he came back in. He told me I could watch TV for a bit, he was sorting things. I went in the next room only to find that, obviously, it wasn't just a sitting room, it was his bedroom. I perched on the edge of the bed and stared at the TV screen. It was playing a news clip of this mother who had been able to tell, just from a photo of a dead soldier's hand that it was her son. It seemed to play over and over again as the screen flickered a kind of pale green colour. The man came back and he seemed a little out of it. I asked him to get me a taxi. He took £20 from me and said he would arrange it, but instead he came back and took out some strange white lumps and started to melt them on a pipe. He started asking me why I was so tense, so nervous. I didn't say much. He asked me if I was a virgin. I nodded. He got excited, 'How can you be a virgin at nineteen? How is that even possible?' I was frozen. He left for a minute. I got up to leave but he came back and shut the door and locked the door and took my purse and my phone out of my hands and told me he was going to give me an experience and told me that I should relax. I pulled away but he grabbed my arm and with surprising strength he threw me down and slapped me and told me not to make a sound that he would cut me up if I made a sound. So, I started to cry and pulled myself into the tightest bundle I could. He said he was going to make me streetwise. I was wearing this beautiful summer dress with shorts underneath so that I could run around without worrying about my dress blowing up in the wind. I remember the terror I felt as he started pulling off my shorts, as I realised that he was going to get them off. He ordered me to open my legs but I couldn't move so he broke them open. I remember saying the Lord's Prayer over and over in my head and I remember getting stuck on the bit where it goes 'forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us' and I remember forgiving him for raping me while he was raping me and I remember forgiving him for killing me, which I thought he would do next. And, I remember thinking, 'At least I can really make rape jokes now'

Afterwards he said he hadn't done anything wrong. I stared at the wall as he talked to me. He talked to me for what must have been hours about his childhood and his upbringing and how his wife had died and how he was in prison for a while and his magic powers and he performed a ceremony over me to give me strength and he told me I belonged to him and that I should stay with him and that he loved me that he loved everything about me. I told him things about my life too and tried to return everything to normal. I knew I had to be normal. I needed to get out of there somehow and so I brushed away the trauma and was normal. I asked if I could have a shower and cleaned him out of me. I let him watch me put on my make-up. He told me I was beautiful without it. It was sometime around 7am now and so I asked him to help me get a bus and told him my plans for the day and he took me to the bus stop and got on the bus with me. I stared at the pole in front of me for the entire journey and when we arrived at where I needed to be, I stood up (*stands up*) and said 'It was nice to meet you' and left.

Continues to fold clothes.

I spent a few more hours trying to find George Orwell's house. I texted Tom, but got no answer. I went up and down on the tube and tried to get some sleep. I couldn't cry or break down because I was in public. I decided to go back to Leicester Square. Toy Story 3 was showing so I went to see that. I walked past a TGI Friday so I had a meal there. I felt like a child again. I was grasping at having control over myself. Tom finally got my text and called and said he hadn't had his phone with him

until now and apologised and asked how I was and persuaded me to call my parents. I called my parents and they persuaded me to go straight to the police.

I was actually treated very well by the police. They were surprised at my normality, but they all believed me. I was chipper and chatty and honest about everything that had happened. Maybe it's because it was in London and I was white and educated and middle class and polite and confident. I was swabbed and tested and gave statements and, although a little shaky about things at times, I was able to pull it in. I would be different, unusual, my favourite things. My dad and I broke down a little together but then we fell into a good rhythm with jokes. All of the jokes.

I remember realising then that virginity was a made-up thing, that it was invented, that it was mine and that I could give it away or take it back if I wanted to. No one else could take it, could own it, not without me saying so. It wasn't as irreversible as I had been led to believe. It wouldn't change me as I had been led to believe. It wasn't really anything to do with me. This isn't to say that I understood or understand what virginity is or what it means, but simply that it is not what I had been led to believe.

The case went to court that January and I bossed it. I know that sounds like an inappropriate way of putting it because a man's life was in the balance and it was a horrific act and obviously I was just being honest about things, but the defence lawyer kept trying to catch me out and I outdid her every time. I actually quite enjoyed the whole experience and didn't mind that it went on longer than it was supposed to. My favourite memory was when I got to the bit outside the building and the judge said, 'sorry what was that last word' and I said, 'the pussy, your honour'. The one part that did surprise me was when they played CCTV footage of my going into his building and I saw my cleavage and I thought, 'woah that's too much cleavage'. No one at any point during my trial made any comments about what I was wearing when it happened, but I was a little shocked. (*Moves to pick up coat*) One of the first things I did afterwards was buy a big coat. I could feel the cold again.

It was now 2011. I had applied for and been offered a place to study Theatre and Performance at The University of Warwick. During that summer I had struck up a relationship with the brother of someone who lived next door to me at Oxford. I had decided before anything happened that I would quite like to marry him and within an hour of our first kiss he told me he would quite like to marry me and it was all very convenient. We would wait a couple of years though and, in the meantime, I left for university for the second time.

I was a little apprehensive about my course. I had been told that, while there were approximately 40 students, roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of them would be female. Who would I make friends with? How would I create high quality pieces of theatre? I remember walking into the department building on the introduction day and sitting on the sofas outside the studios and seeing Emer McDaid; a fiery Irish-woman with red hair and dungarees. She was sat on the back of one sofa and she was being funny, exuberant, outspoken. I was mesmerised. She was talking to Lily, who was loud and bold. Throughout the day I just kept encountering interesting, dynamic, confident women. They were individuals. They were their own person. They were nothing like the simple, demure, mirror-like construction I had built up in my head. They had not been silenced.

Now all of this, everything I have said so far, none of it was anywhere nearly as explicit or clearly laid out or understood as I have made out. It was a dull kind of blur at the back of my mind. Yes, I did say

that women weren't funny and that the most intelligent woman could never be as intelligent as the most intelligent man and that they didn't have a place in politics or positions of power and that I thought more like a man, but it wasn't until I actually began looking at feminist discourse, exploring the constructions of everyday life, that I realised and recognised that I had been being sexist and, more importantly, that I had been wrong. My course worked on the basic premise that we are all performing all of the time and that any aspect of life is relevant to the creation of theatre and consequently I was able to take modules in subjects as diverse as the history of pantomime and the study of exile and immigration. At the end of my first year I had to write an essay on the performance of food and eating rituals and somehow it led me to Germaine Greer's book *The Whole Woman*, and I know there are problems with Greer and radical feminism and transphobia, but this book led me to other books, other places. These opened my eyes to all the ways in which women were still being screwed over. How women are shaped by the world. How they are silenced, how they are moulded, how they are encouraged to be the image I had created in my mind. How they are reduced to objects, props in the lives of men. How their subjectivity is routinely taken from them in world narratives. How patriarchal structures have led to a world that favours male traits. How there is no fundamental rule that means that these are actually any more valid than female traits. How women don't seem funny because they are discouraged from making jokes, because we are discouraged from laughing at them, because bell curves distort the whole picture. How they are not listened to. How their mistakes are shouted louder than their successes. How they are fed by media messages to focus on their appearance and not their studies or their other interests. How they are trained to think of men as their destiny and their love life as the only story. How they see more men on television, in film, doing the important jobs, taking on the typecast roles of power, of influence. How female friendships are side-lined and limited to 'women's channels' and chick flicks. How being human is more synonymous with being male. How women like me can believe all the lies, the messages that tell us that women are inferior. How women like me can decide to undermine other women, to vote for men, to disparage female workers, to criticise their choices, to repeat the lies, the messages to our friends, our families, our children. How women like me can internalise misogyny.

During following, puts on big, zip-up hoodie.

In my second year, I took a module on performing masculinities and, after reading one of the recommended texts, I decided to dress and act as a man for the duration of the course, which would last ten weeks. I re-styled my hair, I took off my make-up, I bought a new wardrobe and I became Jack. Jack was a bit of a dweeb really. Not fully through puberty, he was skinny and had a high voice and wore glasses and used too much gel and wore clothes from Tesco. But he was still a boy; recognised as such in the street, in shops, in pubs. He took long, slow strides. He sat with his legs apart, taking up space, space that he'd earned. He checked out girls. He tried grinding on a girl in a club once, but she didn't seem to enjoy it all that much. He thought that they were beautiful. Once, on the bus, he saw a tanned brunette with frayed denim shorts that showed a glimpse of a perfect bum cheek and he thought how he would like to pin her down, hold her to the floor while he tore into her. How she wanted it. How he could never get it. How he could get it. How he deserved it. He walked through the streets late at night with a swagger that said I am safe and if you try anything then you won't be. Men, men he didn't know, would call him 'mate', would make sure he was being served, would treat him with a subtle kind of respect, would leave him alone, would hurry away when they saw the pretty engagement ring on his feminine finger.

Takes off hoodie.

It was a pretty draining experience, but I have never seen people perform gender in the same way since. Yes there are differences, it's in our DNA, it's a whole chromosome, but we smother it in all this unnecessary extra gloop that has nothing to do with it. We say that this difference is better than this difference. We allow one small advantage to dominate, to take over, to get more credit than it merits. We forget that it's all made up, subjective.

And we're told 'it doesn't matter', 'it's silly', 'it's not important', 'calm down, dear', 'lololol', and it's funny, and weird, and sad because the fact that feminism is often seen as not important or worked up over nothing is because of the patriarchal viewpoint, the belittling and undermining of women, which is the thing that feminism is fighting against. It's important because it's about lives, whole lives, and that's all any of us know. It's as important as anything is.

I am like other girls and I am not like other girls.

Same as you.

Performer exits the stage as music plays.