

take the sixth exit

*I kneel on the lawn, naked, wearing only a microphone, scooping up handfuls of wet clay from the pile in front of me. Armco crash barriers surround the perimeter of the lawn. Throughout the dialogue with a voice emanating from inside the skip filled with water behind me, I rub the clay over my body.*

Me: Will you come out of there?

Her: No.

Me: Please? For me?

Her: It's not safe out there!

Me: Its safe for now. I promise. He's gone.

Her: Why can't you come in here?

Me: That's what you always say. And then you never want us to leave. And we go right back to where we started, again.

Her: Because it's safer in here?

Me: You just think its safer. But you've never been out here. So how could you know?

Her: It just looks scary out there.

Me: Ok. Well, I'd really like to talk to you.

Her: Can I stay in here?

Me: [*slightly exasperated*] Yes. Yes. You can stay in there – as long as you can hear me.

Her: I can hear you.

Me: Good. [*Slight pause. I look down at my hands*]. That wasn't very nice, was it?

Her: No. I don't like it when he shouts.

Me: No, me neither.

Her: Did I do something wrong?

Me: No, no. You didn't do anything wrong, darling.

Her: Then why did he shout at me like that?

Me: I think he's just angry at the world. But that doesn't give him the right to treat you like that.

Her: It's ok. He doesn't mean it, really.

Me: No, no – it's not ok. It's not fair on you.

Her: But if he's not really angry with me, then he'll be nice again soon.

Me: And then what about when he stops being nice again?

Her: Well, I can hide in here.

Me: Why do you let him do this to you?

Her: Because I love him. I have to.

Me: What about the other people he hurt? Don't you love them too?

Her: Of course I love them.

Me: So why do you protect him? Why didn't you tell the police where they were?

Her: Maybe it would make him love me.

Me: You know, there are so many other people that love you.

Her: Really?

Me: Yeah.

Her: Like who?

Me: Well, there's me for a start. I know I haven't always made you feel that way, and I'm so sorry for that. But I'm really trying to show you now.

Her: [*softly*] Ok.

Me: Will you come out of there and let me show you?

Her: I can't

Me: Why?

Her: I can't leave him on his own. What if he needs me?

Me: Didn't he leave you on your own when you needed him?

Her: He had to. He had to be with her. She got poorly again.

Me: She's always going to be poorly.

Her: Is that why he's so angry? I don't remember him shouting like this before she was poorly.

Me: Yes, yes – I think that’s a big part of it.

Her: So, he’s always going to be angry?

Me: It always happens again. He seems to find it hard to listen.

Her: Can’t you just make him listen?

Me: But.. what if.. next time, he hits *us*?

Her: He’d never do that!

Me: I never thought he’d do it to them. But I saw it with my own eyes.

Her: But, but, maybe he’s poorly too! And he needs us to help make him better!

Me: I think he probably is, poppet. But he doesn’t seem to want to make himself better.

Her: Can’t you just try?

Me: I have. So many times. But it’s very difficult to help someone who doesn’t want to help themselves.

Her: So, what do we do?

Me: Well, I was thinking it might be time for me to try to help you, instead.

Her: Me!?

Me: Yeah.

Her: How?

Me: By being brave enough for the both of us! Just like when you were a big brave girl when she was poorly. You got through that all on your own.

Her: But that was so scary. I can’t do that again.

Me: I know, I know. But *I’m* here now. Look – I’m right here. Can you see me?

Her: Who are all those other people?

Me: [*Looking around at the audience*] They’re here to show you how brave I can be. I even wanted to do this naked, but they wouldn’t let me. I think some of them might even want to help you.

Her: Really?

Me: Yeah. And we haven’t hurt you. Not like he has.



Her: [softly]. Ok.

Him: Abbie. Come here now.

Her: Hide!

Me: Abbie come here, come here, quickly!

Her: I can't, he'll see me! Come in here, with me! Come and hide!

Me: Abbie, please darling, just come out here. I'll keep you safe, I promise.

Her: I can't! I'm scared!

Me: [Stuttering] Ok, ok – I'm coming to get you.

*I climb into the skip filled with water and begin to wash the clay from my body.*

Me: We need to get out of here.

Her: Why?

Me: We can't keep seeking comfort in the people that hurt us, Abbie.

Her: Will you go first and check that its safe?

Me:

Performance Day 1	Yes, yes of course. But you have to promise you'll follow me, as soon as I tell you it's safe?
Performance Day 2	Ok. But you have to promise you'll follow me, as soon as I tell you it's safe?
Performance Day 3	It will be safe, Abbie. But ok – you have to promise you'll follow me, as soon as I tell you it's safe?
Performance Day 4	It is safe, Abbie. I've checked before. But ok – you have to promise you'll follow me, as soon as I tell you it's safe?
Performance Day 5	It is safe, Abbie. I've checked before. You can trust me, you know? But ok – you have to promise you'll follow me, as soon as I tell you it's safe?
Performance Day 6	It is safe, Abbie. I've checked before. You can trust me, you know? Take my hand. [pause] Ok – you have to promise you'll follow me, as soon as I tell you it's safe?
Performance Day 6 (FINAL CYCLE ONLY)	It is safe, Abbie. I've checked before. You can trust me, you know? Take my hand. You have to promise me you won't let go.

Her: I promise.

Me: Promise, promise?

Her: I promise.

Me: Ok.

*I climb out of the skip, now clean, and kneel in front of the pile of clay, facing 22.5 degrees anticlockwise to the position I was kneeling in before. The dialogue begins again, from the beginning. This repeats all day, for each of the six days that the performance takes place.*

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*On the last day of the performance, at the end of the final cycle only, when the pile of clay has been completely used up, after the last section of dialogue:*

Iva: [Gesturing towards me from the other side of the Armco crash barriers] Abbie!

*I walk towards Iva, with her arms outstretched. I climb over the Armco crash barriers, wet and naked. She embraces me. She gestures for others in the audience to embrace me, until we become a single embrace.*