

Libretto

Dark and ominous, as a group of teenagers begin to assemble on stage. Piano starts to play...

ENSEMBLE This soundtracked our childhood, and will end our story
As we stand in the rubble of a vengeance
Vindictive and gory.
But as life ends in death
All built will be destroyed
And fae this rubble
The shattered bricks
The fireplace in bits
The cracked Belfast sink
This broken doon, broken doon hell
We may finally dare to dream
That the sins fae this house
Might be wiped clean.

Findenterran Farm
A once holy Hoose for weans
Weans too wild
Fur weans forgotten
For weans unloved
Fur weans who've been spat upon, shat upon
For weans who've been left behind
Like spare change doon the back ae the couch

DONNIE I came here on a Monday with nuhin but the claes I wis in

ANGELA The polis rushed me in here, not even shoes on my feet

DIANA I wis dropped aff by a mother who promised, 'she'd be back'

CALLUM A smashed a few windaes, called the lollipop man a bawbag

ENSEMBLE The next thing I know I'm in a hoose fur weans
who've been spat upon, shat upon,
fur weans who've bin left behind.
We'd turn up on the doorstep wi aw oor possessions.
Different day, different year, but the same old shit.

CHARLIE I can picture the day
the social worker led me in there

ENSEMBLE

“You’re gonna like it here Charlie.
That much I can tell
A bit of discipline and routine
It’ll do you well.
Bairns yer ain age
This is your home
Not a cage
This type of place
It sorts you, sorts you oot
It sorts you oot”

CHARLIE

Through that raven black door
Across that creaky floor.
The walls filled with icons on plates
Moses parts the red sea
St Francis of Assisi
And Christ on his cross! Christ on his cross! And Christ on his cross.
And there from the piano
A voice said to me...

ENSEMBLE

“You must be the new girl. My name’s Lee”

Lee, with a furrowed brow and stick oot ears
Lee with a smile that never seemed sincere
Lee with his pudding bowl hair and his denim flairs
Lee, with hawns on the keys at the piano under the stairs

For hawf his ten years
He watched weans come and go
They didn’t always stay long
While Lee sat at the piano

—

ENSEMBLE

The tour was pretty much the same, regardless of the guide
Whether it was Charlie or Lee or Marianne McBride
They’d take you round the place, telling you whits whit
The rooms smelt of detol, sadness, feet and sick

They’d tell you ‘bout the staff, who to try an’ avoid
They’d tell you who could smuggle stuff,
Who best not to annoy
They’d tell you when the football’s on and when wis movie night
But you never got a sense that
You never got a sense that

A sense that
That something wasn't right.
Naw, cos maybe here you'll be safe and sound
Maybe here's where the lost are found.

*A sting as the piano lights up. The kids stop singing. They look at the piano for a moment.
A silhouetted figure comes into view – a soloist who is going to take on the role of Mrs Pearson.*

DIANA Her name was Missus Pearson, Comma M
The M stood for Moira
We didn't know that then.

DONNIE She had the most immaculate nails
And kept her glasses on a string
She always smelt of polo mints
And she never wore a wedding ring.

DIANA It wis said she was once married,
Big hoose near Seeton Sands

ENSEMBLE But then her fella went and got himself in debt
He ran off with the lassie in the ice cream van
The ice cream van, the ice cream van.

ANGELA Dougie said you have to start my music lesson now.

PEARSON "Dougie?" I think you'll find it's Mister Anderson.

ANGELA Mister Anderson.
It's Lee. He's kicking off again.
Dougie said the sound ae the piano is the only thing that
calms him doon.

PEARSON Angela, I hardly think that your rendition
of the Moonlight Sonata would calm anyone down.

CHARLIE Lee was always kicking aff
We somehow got used tae it.

—

ENSEMBLE He'd be watching TV,
laughing over lunch
Then the devil stirred
and his anger would lurch.

Tables would be turned,
he'd throw chairs like grenades
He'd spit in your food,
And scream and cry and rage.
This wee guy with the soft spoken tone
Seemed to lose his mind,
trapped in his own cyclone.

PEARSON 'Mister Anderson, assistance please'

ENSEMBLE His rage would turn to panic and he'd scream 'I'm fine',
Knowing he'd be taken to Room Number Nine.
Where the sinner was left to simmer
Where he'd 'reap what he'd sow'
And his screams would be drowned out
By the piano below.

Mrs Pearson shifts one of the children from the piano.

—

PEARSON Let's begin.
1, 2, 3,
1, 2, 3, 4,
1, 2, 3,
1, 2, 3, 4, 5

ENSEMBLE But I'm not wanting to learn to play the piano..
You have to! Its compulsory.
Compulsory! Get tae f-

PEARSON Learning the piano
builds both the mind and the soul
Learning the piano helps a child to grow.
Music separates the condensed from the semi-skimmed
Music ensures you will always fit in.
People judge and exploit
kids like you, brought up in care
People can be so unfair.

ENSEMBLE Because with music we soar
As we rise from the dirt
A simple chord takes away the hurt
Because with music we soar
As long as we lengthen the spine

PEARSON And?

ENSEMBLE Soften the knees.

PEARSON Look at this beauty, golden hinges, golden lock
Strike the black keys, you could be in Bangkok.
Feet on the pedals, legs loose and apart
Though you're riding a Harley Davidson,
Except it's art!

ENSEMBLE Because with music we soar
As we rise from the dirt
A simple chord
Takes away the hurt
Because with music we soar
Keep your hands on the ivories

PEARSON AND?

ENSEMBLE Keep your eyes on the keys!

PEARSON Greatness, takes practice
Master, the basics
And your light shall glow
And your talent shall grow

ENSEMBLE Because with music we soar
As we rise from the dirt
A simple chord
Takes away the hurt
Because with music we soar

—

ENSEMBLE Here he comes
The jingle jangle jingle jangle of his keys.
Who's that?
Mister Anderson
He's aw right
"Ah Missus P!" he'd say
"Playing messages straight from God."

CHARLIE Excuse me, Is Lee awright?

ENSEMBLE "The wee man just needs space
And God's good grace
Now, who's for spag bol?"
And dinner time would be
Calm and serene
As Lee hid upstairs
Wi ghosts we'd never seen.

ENSEMBLE The door creaks open
Like Gabriel breaking out of heaven
Revealing the frame of
Jude Lindsay McPherson

CHARLIE He's a ride!

ENSEMBLE Jude Lindsay McPherson
Aged 15 and two thirds
Eyes brown as the Clyde
Smile wide as the Firth.
Jude Lindsay McPherson
With a fag hingin' oot his mooth
With his flat top hair
His t-shirt of Sonic Youth.

CHARLIE My stomach's just done a back flip.

ENSEMBLE That'll be the bolognese...

CHARLIE Naw! I'm in love.

ENSEMBLE Ya don't even know him.

CHARLIE I can see him.

ENSEMBLE As he moves into the room
Jude with all the banter
Charlie's face turned the colour of Fanta
She fancied him, for sure, who widnae
But there was something else
Something else.
In this boy framed by light streaming through the windae
There was somethin' in his stance
Somethin' in his shoulders

Somethin' in his eyes
Somethin' in his eyes
What it might have been?
Damned if she knew!
But Jude Lindsay McPherson
Was gonna change things round here
That much was true.

JUDE D'you want tae get aff with me?

CHARLIE Nae danger!

ENSEMBLE Course she bloody does.
Its aw she's thought about these last two weeks.
Since Jude Lindsay McPherson arrived
With his smouldering looks
And his size ten feet.
Stirring up something she hadnae dare felt.
Maybe abandoned and alone
Weren't the only cards she's dealt.

JUDE Don't leave me hangin' I'm tryin' to say I like you.

CHARLIE You don't even know me.

JUDE I know that everytime I come intae the room
You find an excuse to leave
And when I'm in the garden
You act so tough
But I don't believe
you're hard as nails

ENSEMBLE She's hard as nails.

JUDE I think you want to kiss me
I think you want to kiss me
I think you want to kiss me
Right here, at the piano under the stairs.

CHARLIE I've never done it before.
I mean, I've done it, I've practiced it, course I have.
On the back ae my hawn
Tae the George Michael poster in my room.
Diana offered tae practice
Sorry I'm rabbiting on,

Basically
Maybes, aye. Maybes naw.

ENSEMBLE

And so they move closer
He puts his hand on her cheek
She moves hers straight tae his arse
And they look intae each other's eyes.
From the outside you'd see,
Two daft weans, playing at shops
But that's not what they be
That's not what they be
They see
Fifteen long years, fifteen long years,
Fifteen long years, fifteen long years,
Fifteen long years, fifteen long years
Where naebody touched the side ae their face wi anything but spite
They see fifteen long years of pillows wet with tears
And whispered pleas for help that never came.
And they say:
Maybe's aye, maybes naw.
And they say:
Maybes aye, maybe's naw.
A flicker, an ember, a flicker, an ember
Of hope, of hope, of hope

PEARSON

Mister Anderson, Assistance please!

ENSEMBLE

Wee Lee, only ten years old
Yet again he doesn't do what he's told.
Jude looks away, disgusted at the sight
Of wee Lee dragged off to Room Number Nine.

JUDE

They're not supposed to touch us like that.

ENSEMBLE

The wee man just needs time and space

JUDE

It's supposed to be better here.

CHARLIE

It is.

ENSEMBLE

To breathe God's good grace.

PEARSON

Mister McPherson, time for your piano lesson.

ENSEMBLE The wee man just needs a chance to calm
To the sounds of our Chopin

PEARSON It's not a request.

ENSEMBLE Then we all felt the chill in the air,
From the look firing outta Jude's starin' eyes
The way Mister Anderson moves on the stairs
Gives Jude the creeps, the creeps, the creeps.

CHARLIE No way, Anderson's no like that, I'd know. I've been here for years!

ENSEMBLE The creeps, the creeps, the creeps, the creeps, the creeps, the creeps
But she suddenly sees it different now, CREEP!

JUDE I'm gonna go upstairs and ask Lee ma sel.

ENSEMBLE Anderson watches Jude go,
Charlie watches Anderson.
Gives her the creeps, the creeps, the creeps, the creeps, creeps

Jude is now outside Room 9. He puts his ear against the door. Nothing.

—

JUDE Wee man?
Are you in there?
Lee man,
It's Jude
Open the door.
Wee man
Are you in there?
Open the door.

I know what it's like
This part's the worst
The other part
When they lay down their hands
And caw you names yer too wee tae understand.

When they hurt ye
There's something about the pain
There's something about them puffing away in yer ear
They think they've got you trapped
But you're no longer even here

You're flying off

As they're squashing your ribs
You're crashing through the ceiling
As they're pulling back the sheets
You're getting far from this street
Higher and higher you soar.
To the place you go
They won't follow
To the place you know
They won't follow

Mine was a beach
Not like one of them roon here.
Like a proper beach from the movies
Pure yellow sands
As far as the eye could see
And just hunners and hunners of babes in bikinis and me

They'd say 'all right there Jude, looking good.
How's about one of them cocktails out of coconuts?
Then you're sipping on rum,
and the sun's beating down on your skin
And you begin to feel good in the sunlight
Cos they can't follow
Into the daylight
They can't follow

And the sound of the surf gives away
To the sound of a belt picked up off the floor
And a whispered voice says
Good boy
And you face down in the bed
And the light from the hall floods the room with shame
Of knowing this man that did it
Had the same name.

But I get up fur school
Ate my frosties and
Smile at my mam,
Cos all I wanted was quiet
All I wanted was calm
In the silence I could pretend
That last night didn't happen
That last night didn't happen

And the night before
And the night before

So I know wee man
You want tae be alone
Yes I know Lee man
You think you're better off on your own
But if you open the door
They can't follow
If you open the door
They can't follow

CHARLIE He couldnae open it, even if he wanted tae.
Anderson has the key.

**DIANA &
DONNIE** Jude wipes a tear,
Charlie pretends she didn't hear
And Jude smiles
Thankful for her lies.
He knows she's heard every word
He can see it in her eyes.

JUDE We can't just leave him in there.

CHARLIE I know.

Charlie takes Jude's hand.

—

ENSEMBLE We were called tae the dining room
Charlie said it was games night
I wisnae fussed on gaun
Am no one for board games
I think monopoly, buckaroo and scrabble are shite.
Jude said there was no choice
And there was anger in his voice.
So we went along
Fine, we said, fine, we said, we'll be there!

CHARLIE I've been staying here five years

ENSEMBLE Haven't we all?

CHARLIE Since I walked through the door
And met Lee!

ENSEMBLE Lee! with his toothy smile and his Velcro shoes
Lee! with his fire, rage and awful short fuse.

CHARLIE And has he always just kicked aff?

ENSEMBLE Of course he has.

CHARLIE A danger to himself they say
But maybe what if

**CHARLIE &
ENSEMBLE** Lee arrived here shining, full of joy?
Lee was a bright eyed, just a daft wee boy.

CHARLIE What if the rot set in?
The very first time
Anderson dragged him upstairs
We all played piano and it drowned out the cries
Of a wee boy greetin for help to come

**JUDE &
CHARLIE** Now tell me, is he the only one?

—

DIANA All stayed silent,
And they straightened their backs
No-one wished to walk doon a memory lane that was cracked.
Closed piano lid and the key turned right
The shame and guilt all hidden from sight.

ENSEMBLE Until

**JUDE &
CHARLIE** Is he the only one?

ENSEMBLE Until

**JUDE &
CHARLIE** Is he the only one?

ENSEMBLE Until..
A hand did rise.

And another,
And another
And another
And another.

DONNIE

It wisnae just oor hands roon that table rising
All oor the country the same thing was happening.
Maybe not on this same night
Maybe not in this same year

ENSEMBLE

But hands would rise
Saying no more
No shame
We're not the ones to blame.

CALLUM

Whether it be nuns with canes

ENSEMBLE

Our hands will rise

CALLUM

The fear ae god makin' us pish oor beds

ENSEMBLE

Our hands will rise
Saying no more,
No shame,
We're not the ones to blame

ANGELA

Weans who got away but pushed it down

ENSEMBLE

Our hands will rise

ANGELA

Weans who grew up but stayed alone

ENSEMBLE

Our hands will rise
Saying no more,
No shame,
We're not the ones to blame

DIANA

Fifteen weans round that table

ENSEMBLE

Seven hands did rise

DIANA

Nearly half those hands up

ENSEMBLE

Our hands did rise

DONNIE The polis won't believe wee radge and thieves

ENSEMBLE But our hands will rise

ANGELA Missus Pearson's held in high affection

CALLUM And Anderson's up for local election

ENSEMBLE But our hands must rise

CALLUM So we stuffed our carrier bags, and got ready to leave

ANGELA Yoyo's in pockets, cassettes shoved up sleeves

CALLUM Where we're going, we had no clue
But that locked door, we'd go through

ENSEMBLE To somewhere where
there's no more, no shame,
We're not the ones to blame
no more, no shame,
We're not the ones to blame.

JUDE We get Lee.
We get the key
Then we leave

ENSEMBLE Then we leave.

—

ENSEMBLE That Anderson bastard slept
In room number eight
With a sign on the door saying
'five minutes is on time,
on time means you're late'.
Jude entered the room on tiptoe
Sees Anderson asleep in his bed
His mouth agape
His hairy belly on show.

JUDE How many weans?
Another man lies sleeping
While a wean muffles their cries down the hall
How many weans?

Praying to a God they don't believe in
that he never wakes up

ENSEMBLE How many weans?

CHARLIE The judges and the social workers
The neighbours and the teachers
And the lollipop wummin
And the postie

**JUDE &
CHARLIE** Sleep like the dead

ENSEMBLE How many weans?

CHARLIE They never wake to realise the monster's real
It just doesn't stay under oor beds.

**JUDE &
CHARLIE** How many weans?

ENSEMBLE Have had to live with all this rage.

**JUDE &
CHARLIE** How many weans?

ENSEMBLE Had to keep it bottled up

**JUDE &
CHARLIE** How many weans?

ENSEMBLE Resist the urge to strike a match?

**JUDE &
CHARLIE** How many weans?

ENSEMBLE And burn this shit down.

JUDE How many weans
have watched a man like this and thought,
Thank god he's asleep
Thank god I'm safe now

CHARLIE (quiet, almost a whisper) Jude. Jude.... We have to go get Lee.

Jude and Charlie move quickly now, they run to get Lee.

—

PEARSON

Sip, then a swig, then a gulp, repour drink
Sip, then a swig, then a gulp, repour drink

Noises down the hall
Children up late
I should go check
That can wait

First a sip
Then a swig, then a gulp
Repour drink
Sip, then a swig
Then a gulp, repour drink
Sip, then a swig
Then a gulp, repour drink.

A pain in my chest
My heart's beating fast
Calm the beast
Let the panic pass with a

Sip, then a swig, then a gulp
Repour drink
Sip then a swig
Then a gulp, repour drink
Sip, then a swig
Then a gulp, repour drink

Don't go opening doors
To worlds you don't wish to see
Keep your eyes on the keys
Keep your eyes on the ivories.

ENSEMBLE

Lee tries to stand but his legs buckle and twist
Jude reaches out his hand, and takes him by the wrist
'Lee, let's get out of here, let's get out of here
Let's get out of here.'

Mrs Pearson hears noises, looks up, decides not to bother investigating.

PEARSON

It's been a cold life
But I've kept on playing
Drown out the noise
Can't hear what they're saying

With a sip
Then a swig, then a gulp
Repour drink
Sip, then a swig

I don't ask, don't think
I stick to my drink
Sip

The noises are louder now from upstairs, more difficult to ignore.

Swig
And a gulp

Don't go looking for trouble
Let the chords be a bubble around you.
Keep your eyes on the keys
Keep your eyes on the ivories.
Keep your eyes on the keys
Let your ears be deceived
But maybe tonight

Another sip
And a swig
And a gulp
And a melody
Can wait.

Mrs Pearson stands, she's going to investigate the noises from upstairs.

Meanwhile back in room nine –

ENSEMBLE

Lee! Let's get outta of here,
Let's get outta of here,
Let's get outta of here.

Lee, let's get you on your feet,
Let's get you on your feet,
Let's get you on your feet.

Lee, let's get you outta of here
Let's get you outta of here
Let's get you outta of here

Charlie and him make to the door when –

PEARSON You shouldn't be in here.

ENSEMBLE Missus P, stinking ae drink
Her eyes boring through our skulls

JUDE No-one dare even fucking blink.

ENSEMBLE And she takes in the view
And her eyes cast to the corner of the room
Lee's clothes in a pile
And she opens her mooth to speak
But after years of covering the sounds of tears
What words can you speak?
What words can you speak to make it better?

Come on Lee! Let's get you outta of here,
Let's get you outta of here,
Let's get you outta of here.

Lee! Let's get you on your feet,
Let's get you on your feet,
Let's get you on your feet

Lee! Let's get you outta of here,
Let's get you outta of here,
Let's get you out a -

A shadow looms on the floor. It's Mr Anderson. The full ensemble talk in unison as Mr Anderson.

ENSEMBLE "What's going on?"

JUDE We're leaving. We... I... I know what you did to Lee.
To Michael, to Jordan, to Cami, to Desi, to Tam.

ENSEMBLE "It's okay Jude. I understand what happened to you,
what your father did, that was wrong,
but that doesn't excuse you making up these lies...
Not everyone's life is as... misplaced and twisted as yours."

JUDE Lee told me.

ENSEMBLE "Lee? Tell them it's all lies. Isn't it?"

CHARLIE Lee can't even look, can't even raise his eyes
Lee all he can do is try not to cry

PEARSON Mister Anderson asked you a question Lee.
I suggest you answer immediately.

ENSEMBLE "The poor boy's exhausted Moira!
The last thing he needs is an interrogation."

PEARSON Answer the question, Lee.
Did Mister Anderson touch you?
Answer the question.

CHARLIE Lee, shaking in my arms, like a fallen leaf
Anderson just stares in disbelief.
Lee, he blinks, a final moments doubt
He reaches over, whispers,
Lets the truth pour out.

PEARSON There are 24 of you in my care.
Charlie, Jude - get everyone out.
Go to the Police Station.

Go! Lock the door behind you
And go!
Now!
Go!

ENSEMBLE "Moira! Have you lost your mind?"

Charlie, Lee, Jude (and the rest of the children) run out the door.

ENSEMBLE We were ready to go
Ready to go
Grabbed our yoyos
And ran doon the stairs
Grabbed out photos and tapes
And rushed for the door!

PEARSON So many children
So many years

ENSEMBLE "I'm a good man Moira!"

PEARSON So many scales
And arpeggios
So many sonatas
And concertos
While you fooled
Upstairs
And I sat there like a fool

I've drowned out the screams for years
I've played through the cries and tears
I've drowned out the sounds
Every single night

ENSEMBLE 1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 1, 2, 3

"They won't believe them! They won't believe you!"

PEARSON I know, I know, you're right, you're right.

—

**JUDE &
CHARLIE** We were the last to leave,
Head count twenty-three, twenty-four,
Turn the key
Lock the door!
We looked back through the letter box
Mister Anderson charging at us in his socks

ENSEMBLE "Open the door you little snitch!
Open the door you little bitch!"
Missus Pearson's busy in the kitchen.
Turning the hob on
The smell of gas is in the air!

"Open the fuckin door! Open it now you fuckin"
She finds the matches
As we ran, for oor lives!
From the smell of gas
And the sound of that piano
Past the gate
Away from this hoose
For weans too wild and unloved!
For weans who were left behind!

"Come back here you little snitches,
come back here you little bitches!"

PEARSON I've drowned out the screams for years

ENSEMBLE You drowned out the screams for years

PEARSON I've drowned out the cries and tears

ENSEMBLE You drowned out the cries and tears

PEARSON I've drowned out the cries and tears

ENSEMBLE You drowned out the cries and tears

At the bottom of the hill
We turn around and watch the flames
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

PEARSON I will let it out
All that fury
That shame
All that pain
I have lit a fire
I will lit a fire
I have lit a fire
I have lit a funeral pyre

I will burn it down!
I will burn it down!
I will burn it down!
I must burn it down!

Light the way
Light the way
Make it burn
Light the way
Make it burn
Let it burn

And the flames continue ever higher.

ENSEMBLE

Only this is just a story
Some made up words that rhyme
Set to music
Which we've rehearsed in time
Because in our world
Which is your world
Which is my world
Which is this world

These children still walk the streets
Silent, in pain, in shame
Cause fiery justice never came
It got lost in he said, she said, he said, she said
No fire will be lit, no piano will be played
Because the monster's not dead
It's still at the top of the stairs

Until we say
There is no shame, no pain
No shame, no pain
We are not the ones to blame.