

*“Hard House” by John Farndon sample excerpt 1*

*It is dark. By the glow of light reflected from walls and from a dim blue all-weather bulb, the back yard of a large building is visible. In the gloom stand two giant dustbins on wheels. A little rubbish is strewn around on the ground, but otherwise the area is bare. The throb of hard house music is clearly audible, coming from behind a double-exit door up a short flight of steps towards the back of the stage.*

*A man slips out through the doors, shuts them quietly behind him and comes down the steps. When he is in the middle of the yard, he pauses, lights a cigarette and stares intently into the night. After a few moments, the door rattles a few times. He looks round, then slides quietly into the shadows behind the dustbins as...*

*Suddenly, the double-door bursts open and the sound of the music rises. Silhouetted in the entrance for a while is JO, gyrating to the music. Jo has long dark hair and is dressed up, tastefully glam, for a night out on the town, with a short, quite stylish black mini-dress, black-silver tights and heavy lace-up boots. She stops for a moment, clutches the door and peers out into the night. After a little while, her eyes become accustomed to the dark, and she surveys the yard for moment or two before beckoning with her head and skipping down the steps, still moving with the rhythm.*

*As she reaches the foot of the steps, HAL appears in the door, hesitates momentarily as her eyes adjust to the dark, then follows. Hal has short brownish hair and is also dressed up for the night, wearing black lycra leggings, a short blue jacket and Italian boots, but the effect is more restrained than Jo's.*

*Jo whirls out into the yard and flings her arms wide, as Hal dances lightly down and sits on the bottom step and leans back against the wall.*

Jo            Yes! Feel that air! Oh yes! It's so cold and sweet.

*She gulps in a breath.*

Take that, mouth!

*She breathes in further.*

Take that, larynx!

*She spread her arms and breathes in further still.*

Take that, lungs! Oh, there's something so pure about night air...Even here, even in filthy, revolting London...smoggy, foggy... boggy...

Hal ...cloggy, groggy, doggy...

Jo ...froggy...

Hal ...snoggy...

Jo Snoggy?

Hal ...huggy...

Jo Snoggy?

Hal ...snuggly...

Jo You're sex mad, Hal, aren't you?

Hal ...shaggy...

Jo An insatiable, unstoppable, raving, ravenous, don't-hold-me-back-baby, chapaholic.

Hal ...London.

*Hal smiles wryly.*

...Yes, sure am... That's probably why I've got cold turkey...and not...(she begins to giggle)... hot cock.

They both laugh then fall silent, Hal momentarily earlier.

Brief silence.

Jo You alright?

Hal Fine.

*Silence. Then the door swings open briefly allowing the music to spill out, and swings shut again with a bang.*

Jo I just wondered if...

Hal No I'm fine.

*Silence.*

Jo Odd name, isn't it?

Hal What?

Jo Schizoid. For a club. That's what it's called tonight.

Hal Mmm, I suppose it is.

Hal gets out a cigarette and slowly lights up.

Jo Can't make much money, though. One person buys a ticket and another dozen get in free. Hi guys, mind if I bring in Jesus, and Napoleon, and Julius Caesar, and Cleopatra, and my mate Kevin? Sure go ahead...Hey, perhaps we should've said I was one of your alter egos and got in free.

Hal It's a myth, you know.

Jo Of course, if they were really mean they'd charge extra for your alter egos...What's a myth?

Hal That schizophrenics have split personalities.

Jo I know.

Hal A schizoid personality is just someone who can't relate to other people, a bit of a loner, a bit of an eccentric.

Jo That covers just about everyone.

- Hal A schizophrenic’s personality split isn’t all these alter egos; they just can’t relate thoughts and feelings.
- Jo That still covers just about everyone.
- Hal Did you know schizophrenia is rising in inner cities, especially among young people?
- Jo So they called this club ‘Schizoid’ to make us all feel at home.
- Hal I suppose it’s all about alienation.
- Jo That’s the modern world for you.
- Hal There was this schizophrenic girl I knew at school who was always turning round and round in circles. When we asked her why, she said, “I’m in a terrible knot, and I’m trying to untie myself”.
- Jo Spooky.
- Hal It’s so literal, so obvious, so physical. You know, you’ve got this tangle of problems in your head, and how do you unravel them? By running around.
- Jo Solve your problems the literal way. Screwed up? Get a screwdriver. Too many hang-ups? Empty your wardrobe.
- Hal Feeling low? Climb a mountain.

*A new track booms out through the door.*

Hey, listen, it’s Transglobal Underground. I love this one.

*Hal starts beating time on the steps. Jo starts beating time on one of the dustbins. Hal gets up and joins her on the other one. Soon they start dancing around, developing a hand-slapping routine with each other. Suddenly, Hal breaks off and hauls herself on to the hand-rail. Jo is a little taken aback and looks at her quizzically. Hal shrugs and Jo carries on dancing quietly at first but getting wilder and wilder until the track stops. Immediately she flops down on the steps.*

Jo Brilliant. What’s it called?

Hal Sirius B.

Jo As in you cannot be serious.

Hal As in the big dog. Sirius is the brightest star in the sky – in the constellation of Canis Major.

Jo You’re a mine of information tonight.

Hal Look, you can just see it now – up there.

*Hal gets points high into the sky. Jo follows her gaze.*

Jo Where?

Hal There. That bright one next to the Milky Way, that white smear.

*Jo goes and looks along Hal’s arm.*

Jo Where?

Hal There. Just above the horizon.

Jo Yes, I see it.

Hal Sirius B is its companion. They spin round together – two little stars keeping each other company in the lonely dark, soulmates locked in a permanent embrace, clinging together for comfort as they whirl forever through the void.

Jo How terribly sad.

Hal They have each other.

Jo I was thinking of all the other stars – those who don’t have companions.

Hal The stars that burn alone then grow cold and die.

Jo Yes.