

“High Risk Zone” by John Farndon sample excerpt 1

Techno music such as Hardfloor’s acperience I begins to throb. Lights sweep across the darkness, a car alarm sounds, then a burglar alarm, then a police siren, then more car alarms, burglar alarms. Voices break in over the noise. “Security alert! Security alert!” “Will passengers please leave quickly and quietly.” and so on. A TV news bulletin breaks in, “The United Nations Security Council today expressed its concern over the build up of forces along the border...” The noise builds to a panicky crescendo then stops dead. The techno music continues to throb quietly through the opening few pages of the play before fading out.

The lights come up on Judd, sitting smoking on the edge of the bath, or on the loo.

Judd Alex reckons I only smoke ‘cos I’m insecure. Well, may be she’s right. Everyone needs acrutch. Some like to drink. Some go to church. Some like money in the bank. I just happen to feel more secure knocking a few minutes off my life with every breath... *(inhales and puffs out coolly)* Well, there goes another 30 seconds.

Alex lying on the sofa bed, reading the newspaper. She looks up.

Alex Come on, Judd. You going to be all night?

Judd Anyway, I don’t smoke all the time. Only in social situations – in the pub, in bed...Do you smoke after sex? No I just steam for a while then go very cold.

Lights up on Steve. He’s combing his hair.

Steve God, it’s my birthday tomorrow. Thirty. The Big 3-O. Thirty! It’s so fucking old. That’s twice fifteen. Three times ten. Just think. Another ten years and I’ll be 40. Forty! Huh! Then it’s only ten years until I’m 50. Fifty! Fuck. I’d better score tonight or it’ll be too late.

Judd I tried those nicotine patches a few months ago, you know.

Alex Judd?

Judd Just couldn’t get them alight, though.

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Alex It’s seven o’clock, Judd.

Judd Yees.

Steve is looking at the hairs on his comb and examining them balefully.

Steve Shit! It’s coming out by the handful. I think I’m going bald. That’s all I need.

Lights up on Phil, as Judd puts her make-up on. Phil leaps into a series of squat-jumps.

Phil One...two...three...blood pumping...four... five...six...feet thumping...seven...eight...nine...feel the power...ten...eleven...twelve...yes...yes...yes...yes...yes...yes...yes...yes...yes.

Lights down on Phil. Judd is examining her thighs.

Judd The funny thing about those patches is that they actually give you more nicotine than cigarettes. So you get addicted to the pads instead. Great.

Alex Come on, Judd.

Judd I know some people who swear they’re going to give the pads up ‘once I’ve got over this little crisis.’ Allright, coming.

Steve A little Brut, I think. That should do the trick.

He splashes lotion under his arms.

What a forest! Ugh!

He examines his armpit hairs.

Perhaps I could transplant some to my head.

Judd God I’m so fat.

She grips a bit of flab on her stomach with derisory grunt.

Lights up on Helen and Michael

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Helen I need to know, Michael. You can't go on pissing me around like this. It just isn't fair. Don't you realize?

Michael I know. I know. I'm still a little confused that's all. I'm not quite sure how I feel.

Helen What do you mean, you're not sure? Weren't you sure when you were ...fucking me last night? You seemed pretty certain, then. You said I was the best thing that had ever happened to you. You said you'd do anything for me. You said you loved me, damn you.

Michael Yes I know. It's just that I still care about Alex. I don't want to hurt her.

Helen But you can hurt me Ok, is that it?

Steve open his trousers and splashes lotion on his crotch.

Steve That should draw a girl in the right direction.

Examines the bottle.

Brute, huh. Why not Thug? Or Sex-crazed Bastard?

Lights up on Graham, carrying bag.

Graham I come here everyday, you know. Even when I'm not meeting Judd. Just to stand and think...and perhaps pray a little. Pray she might...she might...miraculously fall in love with me...About as likely as Marilyn Monroe falling for a balding playwright... Shame I'm not six foot four and oozing animal magnetism – unless that cat knows something I don't...That's her window, there...God, I've stared up it at it so many times – wondering what she's doing, what she's thinking, what she's feeling – why she keeps on playing with me like a cat with a mouse – or a labrador puppy with a toilet roll. Except it makes me feel like a piece of shit...Oh Judd, Judd, why?

Lights up on Phil. He is punching the air.

Phil Strength...power...strength...power...strength... power.

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Lights down on Phil.*

Alex Here, Judd. Did you hear about what Saddam is doing to the marsh Arabs. It doesn't go into all the details here, but you know he's abducting all their children and using them as sex slaves. Anyone who objects has their hands cut off.

Judd Oh yes?

Alex That's what I've heard anyhow. You know he really scares me, Saddam. Why didn't the CIA just assassinate him and have done with it? We'd all sleep safer in our beds then.

Helen Oh, I'm sorry, Michael. I don't want to put any pressure on you. I really don't. I know how difficult it is.

Michael That's Ok.

Helen Does she know anything, do you think?

Michael No, I told her I was at my parents last night, and working late the night before.

Graham rings on a doorbell. Alex responds.

Alex God, who's that?

She switches on the video camera. We see Graham waiting on the central video screen.

Judd Who is it?

Alex I'm not sure. But he looks a bit dubious to me.

Judd comes out and looks at the screen and laughs gently.

Judd Oh that's Graham. He's not dangerous. At least I don't think he is. Doesn't he look awkward standing there? Hi Graham.

He responds awkwardly, not knowing where to look. Judd presses the entry button. Graham is seen to try to get in, unsuccessfully.

Graham Bugger. That always happens to me. And I feel such a

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pratt ringing again. Like I've failed the basic initiative test. Look Judd, the gimp's here.

He rings the bell again. Judd answers.

Judd Graham?

Graham responds awkwardly. Judd presses the entry again. Again Graham fails to get in.

Graham Shit!

He rings again. Judd presses the button again at once, and this time Graham gets in.

Lights up on Phil. He is now running on the spot. He stops suddenly, makes a claw with his hand, then jabs the air his finger.

Phil Working out, yes. Tightening the sinews. Making your body taut. Taut like a hawser. Taut like a spring. Coiled up and ready to fly. Yes. Perfect muscle tone. Perfect bulk. Perfect strength. Perfect.

He sags for a moment, then gathers himself together, almost angry.

If your body's loose, so is your mind – and your mind has to be taut to survive. You have to be sharp, sharp as a razor. People try to do you down, rip you off, get the better of you. Women. They're all over you, trying to get inside your soul, trying to grab your heart, trying to wrench it raw and bleeding from your chest, tearing veins. Soften for a moment and your gone, your vital organ ground into the ground still palpitating, crushed blood and sinews in the dirt...Bitch!