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Opening extract from **It's About Love**

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INT. EMERGENCY ROOM — NIGHT

Black.

Hum of a strip light and radio static as a dial tries to find a station.

Fade up to a face. YOUNG MAN. Wheat-coloured skin. Dark hair cropped close. Radio static settles on 'Fly Me to the Moon'.

Cut to wide shot. Emergency Room. Moulded red plastic chairs and cream walls. YOUNG MAN stares straight ahead, thick shoulders slumped, dark butterfly of blood spread across the chest of his white shirt. A POLICEWOMAN sits in the chair to his right, her body turned towards him.

POLICEWOMAN: Do you understand me?

YOUNG MAN just stares out. Circular clock on the wall above them says eleven thirty. Sinatra sings.

POLICEWOMAN: I need you to tell me what happened.

YOUNG MAN frowns.

Cut to black.

YOUNG MAN (VOICEOVER): Start where it matters, he said. Start in a moment where things hang in the balance. Start with a question. Then you can go back to wherever you like.

That's fine, but you show me one moment where things don't hang in the balance. Go on. Exactly.

So where to start?

PART I.
Waiting.

I.

EXT. — DAY

Diagonal rain.

I'm standing under the bus shelter outside the crappy little shopping arcade. I'm wearing my battered blue hand-me-down Carhartt, but I'm gonna get soaked walking up the hill.

It's Friday morning, last day of my first week.

Wait for the rain to stop and be late, or walk into the room like a drowned rat? Either way, I'm getting stared at.

It's been a week of sitting in circles wearing sticky labels with our names on. Most of them seem to already know each other from schools around here. Kids who look like money. Who speak with words my brain uses but my mouth runs a mile from. Kids not like me.

"No umbrella?"

The voice is scratchy, but well spoken. I turn.

She's wearing one of those long black North Face coats that

cost like a hundred and fifty quid. The top half of her face is hidden by the massive white umbrella she's holding on her shoulder, but I can see her mouth and her chin and chunky plaits of dark hair either side of her neck.

I look over my shoulder, then back at her. "You talking to me?"

She tilts her umbrella and I see her face properly. She's mixed race. Dark shining eyes. Tiny freckles dot her cheeks. And she's smiling.

No, she's staring.

"Yeah, Travis, I'm talking to you."

Rain trickles off the edges of the umbrella, her safe and dry underneath.

I feel to look away.

She frowns. "Travis Bickle? *Taxi Driver*?"

I know who she means, but I don't move.

She holds her left hand out in front of her like a gun, pointing at me. I watch the rain hit her fingers and notice a ring that looks like a mini snow-dome made of amber.

I look down. Tight black jeans and black All Stars stick out from the bottom of her coat.

"You're doing film studies, right?" she says.

I look up, turning my head slightly, trying not to seem

uncomfortable.

She's staring.

Her eyebrows are raised. "I saw you in the circle the other day," she says. My stomach and shoulders tighten.

She points at her umbrella. "You want to share?"

I look past her, but feel her eyes on me as I shake my head. "Nah, I'm good."

She stares for a second, then shrugs. "OK. See you in class, Travis."

And she walks away.

I watch her white umbrella float through the rain to the traffic lights, cross the road, then turn into the church graveyard and out of sight.

Good choice. Not here for mates, remember.

I look at my phone. 8.50 a.m., Friday 6th September. Seven sleeps left.

What's he doing right now?

An old woman walks under the shelter to my right, pumping her little purple umbrella like a Super Soaker.

"It's not dry, is it?" she says, as she opens her bag and starts looking for something. I watch the rain fall off the edge of the shelter roof.