

# The Girls Get Younger Every Year

Philippa Thomas, 2015<sup>1</sup>

## Characters

L: Leanna (female, MA student)

D: Professor David 'Dave' Beatnik (male, lecturer)

C: Charlie (female, MA student)

S: Stu (male, PhD student and MA seminar tutor)

SS: Student Support Services Manager (female)

## [SCENE ONE: LEANNA ADDRESSES AUDIENCE]

L I'm in the dark and he's so far ahead of me, haloed, the professor in the spot-light.

A shape shifter, all crocheting fingers, reaching now, then collapsing full onto the lectern like he'd been shot. His fall is a fake, a temporary settling, he's an arrow pulled back, quaking-full of life and up again! Bristling with excitement, lust almost, about what he's about to teach us, teach me.

It's funny, for a middle-aged-

D [FROM OFFSTAGE] mid-40s!

L lecturer, he's like a young girl conscious of being watched. Like a precocious young girl at a party full of adults who knows that her presence brings the fun, a moment away from the social tangle. She's a gift, shared light, like a fag break at the back of the building, she can take liberties, be indulged in her outrageous statements. She's a simple idea, a charmer, a joker. Professor David Beatnik - even his name is perfect, poetic. I thought he was just like a young girl.



<sup>1</sup> Philippa Thomas, 2015

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**[SCENE TWO: THE PUB – STUDENTS AND LECTURERS DRINKING TOGETHER]**

L I mean Zizek's an academic superstar isn't he? People queue for hours to hear him speak and then they can't even fit in the room.

C I don't know why, he just says the same things again and again, "blah blah ideology, blah blah pussy riot, blah blah racist Jewish joke, blah blah stupid PC women."

S [TO CHARLIE, JOKILY] of course you have a problem with him Lieutenant Judith Butler, you big dyke!

...

Er, anyway, he's a superstar who can't be bothered with deodorant, seriously, how did he convince a lingerie model to marry his sweaty arse?

L Maybe she's a very smart lingerie model?

C She was one of his students anyway.

L Gross!

S Well it's his power isn't it? Girls love men with a bit of power, bit of cash –

L Maybe he's good in bed?!

[PROF. DAVE ENTERS, CARRYING CRISPS AND BEER, STANDS NEXT TO LEANNA]

D Who's good in bed?

C Er, Slavoj Zizek, Professor Beatnik... David.

D Christ, you're MA students, call me Dave, please!

L What do you think about Zizek, Dave?

D He's a brilliant jester, nothing more.

S Exactly.

D He's got only one trick really, the Lacanian switcheroo – you think you want this, but you actually want the opposite... you know, *Blue Velvet* isn't really about violence towards women, but about how women secretly desire this violence, this humiliation

[TO LEANNA, SOFTLY] my fist bruising your open mouth

[LOUDLY, TO THE GROUP] but he's way out of his depth on International politics.

[ROBIN THICKE'S *BLURRED LINES* STARTS PLAYING ON THE JUKEBOX]

D Oh my god, this awful song! We might well be in the only pub in Southshift Park that's so-far escaped gentrification, but I'll admit the downside is having to listen to the music of the deluded masses.

Right! I can't listen to this crap, I'm off. Leanna, you live near me right? Going my way? I'll walk you home, I want to get your views on this really fantastic book on the philosophy of love by Alain Badiou. I thought maybe I could get you to review it for *Thought Magnum*, the editor's an old mate of mine.

L That'd be amazing Dave!

[QUIETLY] Doesn't Stu work on Badiou?

D Yes, but I think you probably know much more about love, we've got to give hot young talent a chance, ey?

L Charl, Stu, you wanna come?

C Nah pool table's almost free.

S [CROONING TO CHARLIE] "You're the hottest bitch in this place."

[CHARLIE PLAYFULLY PUNCHES STU IN THE RIBS, SHE WATCHES DAVE AND LEANNA WALK OUT].

C Call me, Lea!

**[SCENE THREE: STU AND LEANNA ARE CHATTING AFTER A SEMINAR WHICH STU HAS TAUGHT].**

L Hey, thanks Stu, your seminar really helped me get my head around Foucault's pendulum.

S No problem, how's the essay going?

L I dunno, I feel like I might have fucked myself a bit, I read too much and now I'm running out of time and I don't know what I'm arguing. I'm not sure it matters anymore if Rihanna's a feminist icon or not, or why I might have wanted her to be, I think the most significant thing is that she's a capitalist – a capitalist icon.

S Sounds like something Dave would say!

L Fuck off!

S Easy tiger, I'm joking. I'm not sure Professor Beatnik knows who Ri Ri is despite his efforts to be "current." What I mean is, it's really great to meet a girl who's able to look beyond the gender thing and see the bigger issues at hand. I know you're quite new to all this stuff but you pick things up so quickly. I wish I could talk to my girlfriend about Gramsci the way I can talk about him with you.

L Why don't you try her?

S She's a secondary school teacher, I mean, she's really bright and everything, but she spends her whole day talking to kids.

L I'd love to meet her.

S Ha, well, she says she's intimidated by my high-flying academic friends... and I don't think she likes Dave very much.

L Why not?

S She thinks he's a leech, he kept getting her name wrong and interrupted what she was saying to tell her she had "astonishing tits"

L He can be very direct.

S *And* I'd already told her that he'd stolen my girlfriend when I was doing my MA, sorry, I shouldn't say "stolen" like I owned her, I didn't, I loved her. It just really messed with my head. Dave's great and all that, he recommended me for this seminar tutor job, helped me with the PhD stuff, but yeah, that was a weird time... I just couldn't compete, she thought he was a genius... I was so out of my depth.

L I'm sorry Stu, that's shit.

...

S I need to be with someone that I can introduce to my friends.

**[SCENE FOUR: CHARLIE AND LEANNA ARE WALKING AT A PROTEST, THEY ARE HOLDING PLACARDS, LEANNA'S SAYS "BOMBING FOR PEACE IS LIKE FUCKING FOR VIRGINITY"]**

C Great slogan! Did you make that up?

L No, Dave sent me a photo on Facebook of some women at an anti-Vietnam protest, I thought it was really cool.

[A SHORT, PAUSE, CHARLIE IS THINKING OF HOW TO ASK SOMETHING].

L I'm glad you like it-

C Don't freak out at me, but is there something going on between you and Professor Beatnik?

L What, like...

C It's just the way he looks at you sometimes, or in lectures he's staring at you, like you're sharing a secret joke... has he tried anything on with you?

L No! I mean, I feel like we've got quite close... he's my course tutor, but he's more like a friend... He helped me with my funding application, I mean, without that money I wouldn't be here, I owe him a lot.

C Yeah, well, make sure he doesn't act like you owe him...  
Do you fancy him?

L No! I don't fancy him... it's more like, I just kind of want to be him!

C Look, I'll allow it that he's quite sexy for an old man, and really smart and knowledgeable, but he knows it. *And* he has a really bad reputation for trying to fuck

anything that moves. Remember that miserable looking Kurdish girl who came in to do a guest lecture on Hegel?

L [AGREEING] Um.

C She was his student, he shagged her, got a native informant on Kurdish culture, wrote a well-received paper on Hegel and Kurdish thought, dumped her, and she got really depressed, gave up her PhD and left the country.

L Okay, well maybe she had some issues of her own.

[SCENE CHANGES AS THEY TALK, DROP THE PLACARDS, PUT ON SWEATBANDS TO SYBOLISE THE GYM, THEY WORK OUT AS THEY TALK]

C He banged Rose from politics, Hannah the administrator, Lucy in our new critical gender class, he's a fucking pig! You know how I know about all this?

L 'cause you're a gossip?

C Because he brags about it in the pub. First time I met him was in the pub after one of his lectures, he was sitting there with his hand down a girl's top, he was fondling her tits in front of us whilst encouraging me to take his 'radical politics in everyday life' course, I was like, what the fuck *is* this place?!

L He believes in open-relationships, I do too. It's just more honest, anything to be less miserable than our parents.

C Whatever.

L That's all in the past anyway, he's having a kid.

C What, with Bex?

L Yeah, she's looked pretty big when I saw her last.

C His ex-student Bex?

L Yeah, why?

C Just be careful.

...

L He makes me mix-tapes... on actual cassettes... I don't have a player so I have to Spotify all the tracks!

**[SCENE FIVE: DAVE HAS WALKED LEANNA HOME AGAIN. HE PUSHES HER BACKWARDS ONTO THE STAGE, KISSING HER FORCEFULLY AND HOLDING ON TO HER HEAD. SHE'S KISSING HIM BACK, BUT NOT WITH MUCH ENTHUSIASM. SHE PULLS AWAY FROM HIM AND SAYS:**

L Dave, come on, we need to stop this.

D I'm sorry, what do you want me to do? I want to fuck you so much, it's driving me crazy.

L Bex is literally about to give birth to your child.

D I "literally" don't give a fuck. It's not my fault she's keeping the baby, that's her choice as a woman. *You* should respect that.

L But you're her partner, you live together, why don't you leave if you're unhappy?

D I'm not unhappy, Bex is brilliant, we work together, we're activists together, and colleagues... but that doesn't mean I can't be with you too.... Fuck! You're so sexy, you



have no idea Leanna! It's so refreshing to talk to a woman who's not an academic, they're such cold, difficult, self-absorbed bitches.

L But I want to be an academic!

D And that's great! [PUTTING ON A SEXY, BABYISH VOICE] Now please let me fuck you my clever girl... I know you want me, it's so obvious.

L Dave, I -

D I know what I'm doing -

L don't -

D I'll eat your pussy -

L think we -

D Don't be a little prude, celebrate your vagina! I will, and then you can read me *Das Kapital* whilst you bounce on my cock!

L [LAUGHING] Sounds challenging!

D I *am* challenging. Not like those silly boys in your class.  
No one would know about us if that's what you're worried about.

L Dave.  
Go home.

**[SCENE SIX: CHARLIE AND LEANNA, COFFEE SHOP, SOME TIME LATER]**

C I can't believe this!

L I'm sorry.

C Why didn't you tell me about it? All the time I've been saying what a dick he is and taking the piss out of his Chairman Mao suits and Star Trek references, and you've laughed with me, but secretly all this time you've been getting off with him!?

L It only happened a few times.

C Did you sleep with him?

L No, I mean, we did other stuff, we fooled around, but I stopped it before it got serious.

C I can't believe you lied to my face. I asked you so many times whether he was trying it on.

...

Wait, that time he asked me if my mum was better, that was you wasn't it? You told him she was sick, I certainly never mentioned it so how would he know?

L It was important, you seemed unhappy in class and he asked me, I'm sorry, it just slipped out, he's your tutor, he should know.

C I didn't want him to know, I didn't trust him to know! How could you be so stupid Leanna? And now he's threatening you!?! Jesus.

L I know, I know, I was stupid, I didn't... I'm sorry, I was lonely and, we can't all be as saintly and virginal as you.

C [ANGRILY] what now?

L I just don't think it's fair how you're judging me, I mean, this *isn't* a problem for you. Guys don't hit on you in the same way, you're lucky they think you're gay.

C Most guys don't hit on me because I don't give them a chance, although some are pretty persistent, some love a "challenge." Look, I work really fucking hard to manage *my* behaviour all the time, so I don't have to deal with their shit. Do you think the dear professor hasn't invited me to dinner at his house?

L but-

C [FURIOUS, BREATHING OUT SLOWLY] Wait.

Okay. This is not how I imagined having this conversation with you Lea.

When I started my BA I hadn't really got out much, I'd been a very good girl... never been out clubbing, I'd never really even been drunk. I moved into halls to make friends, it was fresher's week so we all went out to the "Cheese" night in the Union. I felt like I was finally free from home, sophisticated.

The person I got on best with was called Ben, like you say - I've always been one of the lads.... I don't know if he put something in my drink, or if it was just the effects of the alcohol, but anyway, I woke up cold, and blurry and bleeding in his bed. I had no idea where I was. I didn't remember anything. I have never ever in my life, been so frightened as when I work up that morning and saw him, a stranger.

...

Everyone said, I'd been all over him in the club, everyone said Ben's a lovely bloke, why are you trying to ruin his life? Everyone said you're an adult, so act like one. Take responsibility for your actions, don't be a victim, don't get bitter. He still thinks he did nothing wrong.

L I'm sorry Charls, I had no idea.

C Yeah? Well go tell Dave about it [SHE LEAVES THE SCENE].

**[SCENE SEVEN: STUDENT SERVICES OFFICE, LEANNA AND STUDENT SERVICES MANAGER]**

SS I've got to say, I'm really impressed Leanna, you clearly have an aptitude for research, I mean, [FLICKING THROUGH FOLDER] dated print-outs of emails, text messages, it's clear you really want to nail this guy!

L Do you deal with a lot of stuff like this in Student Services?

SS Are you implying that the university is a simmering hotbed of vice?

L No, um, have there been complaints about Professor Beatnik before?

SS I'm afraid I can't tell you that, it would breach student confidentiality.

L It's just that I know... now, that there's been other girls who have tried to talk to the college about it and-

SS Well, that's speculation isn't it? It's our job to take your complaint seriously and really you need to focus on that, yes? Not listen to rumours.

L Okay, sorry... what will happen with my complaint?

SS An internal board will meet, internally with the accused to assess the truth of your allegations.

L Will I, okay, so I'm not expected to be there, right?

SS Of course not, we're not out to punish you.

L I know, but, will the stuff I've said be anonymised?

SS Yes if you'd like, but he might still guess your identity based on your evidence, unless he really has been intimate with as many students as you seem to be suggesting.

L Yeah, I -

SS It's not forbidden for staff to get involved with students you know. I mean, he should have informed us, of course, so he's been a bit naughty, but you know how useless male academics are with paperwork!

L I know, it's not that... it's just that now it's really hard to get him to supervise my work, I applied to switch tutors but they said it was too late in the year... he doesn't read anything I give him and he keeps trying to grope me in front of people, and making little comments about me when I'm in ear-shot, and blogging thinly veiled stuff about a new breed of twisted, sex-hating, female students who've destroyed the sexual freedoms our mother's fought for, and, and, turning up to things where he knows I'll be, like my gym even, he's started coming to my f-ing yoga class!

SS Well the campus is small, it might be a coincidence, I think you might be feeling a little paranoid.

L I just think it's funny that he would suddenly develop an interest in yoga, and the student film society that I organize, and the greasy spoon that's opposite my halls-

SS Okay, okay, Leanna I can see you're really upset about this. I'm going to refer you to the college counselling service so you can talk to someone who's qualified to listen, I'm really not the right person.

L I don't need counselling, I'm fine.

SS It can't do any harm to be referred. We'll also try and find you a new supervisor if you're really keen.

...

L Thanks... can I see the report you're going to give him?

SS I'm afraid not. You'll have to trust us on this one.

**[SCENE EIGHT: LEANNA ALONE WITH THE AUDIENCE].**

L He's so far ahead of me, the professor, the screen a halo, his vindication. A slapped wrist you old devil, a new baby in the pub, gurgling on his chest when he lectures, new eyes adoring the milk vomit on his Chinese suit. Leader of an impassioned campaign to 'get more women in to university,' a modern man, radical politics in everyday life.

I fucked myself, I couldn't see the whole picture, I thought I was a different sort of girl, better, not this vicious-feminist-student-leads-doomed-witch-hunt-against-our-most-beloved-radical-professor. Bex started crying when she bumped into me in the supermarket and everyone stared at me. Stu said that I almost lost him his job, and that I was a soulless puppet of the red-hating, neo-liberal education-factory. That I have bad politics, I don't know the meaning of solidarity, didn't deserve to be here.

I quit uni before the year was through, backing away from the light.

**[THE END]**

## **Author Notes**

I wrote this play several years after the experiences that inspired it had passed. I never expected to write about this time in my life, but once I began it came very quickly. It was liberating to write and I hope that it is cathartic to watch and perform.

It's loosely structured on the form of Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre – which necessitates a depressing ending that acts as a springboard for a discussion of the issues it raises, and how to tackle them. My hope is that in supplying an audience with characters to use as proxies, they can then talk about related experiences without having to “out” themselves or others.

Thanks to Jim Kaufman, Sarah Woods and Adrian Jackson for feedback on the script. Thanks to Cardboard Citizens for prompting me to dramatise an issue that was “unresolved,” and creating a space where I could write it and we could laugh about it. Thanks to Anna Bull, Tiffany Page, Mijke van der Drift, and Leila Whitley for inviting me to workshop the play at their conference on Sexual Harassment in Higher Education (02/12/15), and to Goldsmiths College for supplying the materials.

Phil Thomas, 2017