

Runaways
by David Ellis

'Not Going Anywhere' by Gavin Osbourne plays. The music fades. Lights up.

Bedford. 2012. A park bench in Russell Park. The boy sitting on the bench is Ricky. He's half English half Indian. He is around 16 but tall for his age. He wears a parka. Joanna enters. 18. Angry. She is dressed somewhere between a farmer and scene kid. She stares at him. He observes her curiously. She leaves. She re-enters.

Joanna - Right. First of all ...

Ricky - Hi?

Joanna - I don't know where you get off...

Ricky - Sorry?

Joanna - I don't know what you think you're doing.

Ricky - I'm not doing anything.

Joanna - Well you are.

Ricky - Yeah?

Joanna - You bloody are though.

Ricky - I'm sitting ...

Joanna - Yeah that's right.

Ricky - That's about it.

Joanna - You think you're really bloody clever don't you.

Ricky - Can I help you?

Joanna - You've got some fucking nerve.

She leaves. Ricky is stunned.

Ricky - I'm ...not sure what that was.

She re-enters. She is shaking with rage, genuinely choked up.

Joanna - That's my bench ok? Alright, that is my bench and you have no right to be sitting there. Everyone round here, you ask anyone, they'll tell you that's my bench. I know that may sound weird but that's just it ok? I kinda need that bench. I need to sit somewhere that's not in my stupid fucking house with my stupid fucking...

She tries to catch her breath. Ricky stands to go towards her.

Joanna - Don't you fucking come near me.

Ricky - I'm sorry you just looked ...

Joanna - What? What did I look like?

Ricky - You kinda looked like you were faint or something.

Joanna - I'm not gonna faint. What do you think this is some Victorian novel where the women go round fainting all the time and men have to run around catching them. Fuck off Emily Bronte.

Ricky - You were just speaking really fast without breathing and you kinda stumbled...

She stares at him.

Ricky - Do you want to sit down?

Johanna - Very much so.

She barges past him and sits. He goes to sit.

Joanna - What are you doing?

Ricky - Look, I'm not quite sure why feel the need to sit *here* but this bench is big enough for two people and I was here first. So I'm just gonna continue to sit.

He sits. He sits and stares straight ahead. She glares at him. He is trying with all of his might not to look at her. She tries a few tactics to make him look. She pulls headphones and a cd player out of her backpack and hits play. Refused's New Noise plays. He finally turns to look at her.

Ricky - New Noise?

Joanna - You know this?

Ricky - 'The Shape of Punk to Come' by the Swedish band Refused released October 1998 and widely regarded to be one of the most influential alternative rock albums of all time. Yeah I know it.

A beat.

Joanna - I'm Joanna by the way. What's your name?

Ricky - Ricky.

Joanna - Ricky?

Ricky - Yeah ...

Joanna - Right. Is that like ... Ricardo?

Ricky - What? You think I'm like Italian or something.

Joanna - One in every seven people from Bedford is of Italian descent, that's a fact, so yeah, yeah I thought you might be.

Ricky - One in every seven, that many?

Joanna - They all came over during the 50's to work in the brickworks industry.

Ricky - Right. Is that why? I never knew that.

Joanna - So where are you from?

Ricky - I'm from here.

Joanna - Right ...

Ricky - You saying 'coz I'm a bit brown and you're white, I'm not "from here".

Joanna - No, I'm not saying that.

Ricky - Right. Because I *am* from here. I'm half indian if that's what you want.

Joanna - Right.

Ricky - And before you ask, no I do not live in Queen's Park.

Joanna - I wasn't guna ask that.

Ricky - But you were thinking it though.

Joanna - I wasn't.

Ricky - Right.

Joanna - I'm not a fucking racist, mate.

Ricky - You and everyone else in this town. This town is so fucking racist, you know that? Which is a huge fuckin' irony considering John Bunyan came from here. You'll tell me all about him of course...

Joanna - Wrote Pilgrim's Progress and campaigned for religious freedom in the UK.

Ricky - Campaigned for religious freedom in the UK that's right. Welcome to Bedford, where you can pray to whatever God you like, as long as you're white.

A beat.

Ricky - So where are you from?

Joanna - I'm from here.

Ricky - From here? From Bedford? You don't sound like people I know from round here.

Joanna - What, like 'coz of my accent?

Ricky - I mean ... yeah. What else?

Joanna - I don't even notice that I have an accent. It's everyone else that has an accent. All my friends tell me I sound like a proper carrot muncher.

Ricky - (laughing) a carrot muncher?

Joanna - You know, like a bumpkin. Is that what I sound like?

Ricky - (laughing more) A CARROT MUNCHER!

Joanna - Thing is it though, this is what we're meant to sound like. If you're from Bedford. You're part of East Anglia and this is what you're meant to sound like. This is what my dad sounds like and he's from Bedford and so was his dad and his dad's dad. It's all the people from London.

It's a commuter town now. All the people from London moving out to have families and they come here and then they make us feel stupid for talking the way we do and then we give up talking how we should. We lose our identity.

Ricky - Is that what your dad says?

Joanna - That's what I say.

Ricky - But you're saying it because that's what he's told you.

Joanna - I can make my own mind up.

Ricky - Yeah but I can tell.

Joanna - What can you tell?

Ricky - When someone young is repeating something that someone old has told them and they're just taking their word as gospel. I know people like that. Indoctrinated.

Joanna - Yeah?

Ricky - Yeah, that's what I'd call it.

Joanna - Indoctrination.

Ricky - Yeah.

Joanna - Know a thing or two about that do you?

Ricky - I do.

A beat.

Joanna - You like rock music.

Ricky - I do.

Joanna - Do you play an instrument?

Ricky - I play piano.

Joanna - Do you play in a band?

Ricky - I wasn't allowed.

Joanna - That's shit.

Ricky - Do you play?

Joanna - I play guitar.

Ricky - Nice.

Joanna - And I play in a band.

Ricky - Very cool, you played Esquires?

Joanna - Obviously.

Ricky - What are you called?

Joanna - Dreamt I Was a Robot.

Ricky - And did you?

Joanna - Did I what?

Ricky - Did you dream you was a robot?

Joanna suddenly begins to cry.

Ricky - Woah woah woah! What did I say?

Joanna - Nothing. I just. Sorry.

Ricky - You're ok, don't apologise. You're fine.

Joanna - Shit. Shit. Fucking shit.

Ricky - Joanna right? Joanna it's ok. Whatever's ... yeah ... sometimes we all ... well ... I ... thing's probably ... you ... er ... it's ... yeah

Joanna - You are proper shit at this.

Ricky - Sorry.

Joanna - Fuck.

Ricky - Are you alright?

Joanna - No I'm not alright she's fucking left me.

Ricky - Oh, wow. Erm ... your girlfriend?

Joanna - Not my fucking girlfriend. My lead singer.

Ricky - Right. Got ya.

Joanna - But if I'm honest. I do also ... sort of love her.

Ricky - Right.

Joanna - And she's left me to go to university.

Ricky - Right.

Joanna - She's gone to study politics at Loughborough. I don't know what I'm more offended about. The fact she's in a punk band and now she's studying politics or the fact she left me to go fucking LOUGHBOROUGH!

Ricky - Does this mean the band is over.

Joanna - I reckon so.

Ricky - I'm sorry.

Joanna - It was all I had really. The only thing I'm really good at is guitar. It was my only way out of this stupid, stupid town.

Ricky - I thought you loved it here.

Joanna - I don't. I know a lot about it but I hate it. It's fucked up. People are racist and there are some messed up things that happen round here. There are cults. Did you know that? Did you hear about that room in Midland Road? Landlady hadn't heard anything in a while and when she had a guy break into it she just found this room full of people hacked up with a machete ... like 10 of them.

Ricky - Jesus.

Joanna - There's no one good from here either. There's Paula Radcliffe and she shat herself during a marathon.

Ricky - I thought she just went for a piss?

Joanna - That's not what my Dad said.

Ricky - Ronnie Barker's from here. He's pretty great. You seen the Two Ronnies?

Joanna - No.

Ricky - You should. They're very funny.

Joanna - Tell me one of their jokes then.

Ricky - Doesn't really work like that.

Joanna - So are they funny or are they not funny.

Ricky - (Awful cockney accent) Fork 'andles.

Joanna - What?

Ricky - I'll 'ave Fork 'andles.

Joanna - Why are you using that weird voice. I can't tell whether you're saying four candles or fork handles.

Ricky - That's sort of the point.

Joanna - Right. And that's one of their jokes is it?

Ricky - Yeah.

Joanna - They sound shit.

A beat.

Ricky - So what are you gonna do?

Joanna - Duno. Probably run away. Go to London.

A beat.

Ricky - I'm running away.

Joanna - Yeah?

Ricky - I might go further though. Like America or something.

Joanna - I'd love to go to America.

Ricky - I need to get away from my family.

Joanna - What's so bad about your family?

Ricky - You promise you won't laugh.

Joanna - I promise to *try* not to laugh.

Ricky - My family were part of the Panacea Society.

Joanna - What??

Ricky - You heard.

Joanna - YOU'RE PART OF THE CULT!

Ricky - It's not a cult. It's a religious movement.

Joanna - Mate, you believe that the allotment on Castle Road is the original sight for the garden of Eden. Not only that but when Jesus Chirst comes back to save us ... HE'S COMING BACK TO BEDFORD!

Ricky - I guess when you say it like that.

Joanna - IT'S A CULT.

Ricky - I guess it's kind of a cult.

Joanna - Oh my God. This is massive. I've never met anyone from the Panacea Society before.

Ricky - And I don't think you will again. We're done. The last official members are me and my Aunty. And she died this morning.

Joanna - I'm sorry.

Ricky - That's ok. She was very sick. It was a long time coming. I'm glad she's not in pain anymore.

Joanna - My mum died when I was 11. This is her bench. Look, there's a plaque. That's why I wanted to sit here.

Ricky - I'm sorry. I can leave.

Joanna - No it's ok. You can stay.

Ricky - Thank you.

Joanna - Do you really think he's coming back?

Ricky - Who?

Joanna - Jesus. To Bedford.

Ricky - I used to when I was a kid.

Joanna - You were indoctrinated.

Ricky - Indoctrination. Yeah.

Joanna - Now?

Ricky - I don't think so. I think I have to save myself now.

Joanna - Me too.

Ricky - So you're going to run away.

Joanna - Maybe. You?

Ricky - Maybe.

Joanna - I might just wait here for a while ...

Ricky - Me too. I'll wait too.

They sit. Both staring straight ahead. 'Not Going Anywhere' plays again. Lights down.

