

A NEW OPERA BY JAGO THORNTON AND ANASTASIA BRUCE-JONES

THE LOST BOY



Wales • London • Kent
11-19 September 2026

A NEW OPERA BY JAGO THORNTON AND ANASTASIA BRUCE-JONES

THE LOST BOY

Commissioned by **JAM on the Marsh**
in collaboration with the **North Wales International Music Festival**

Wales

FRIDAY · 11 SEPTEMBER · 9:30PM
St Asaph Parish Church
1 High Street · St Asaph · LL17 0RG

London

FRIDAY · 18 SEPTEMBER · 7PM
Brunel Museum · Tunnel Shaft
Rotherhithe · London · SE16 4LF

Kent

SATURDAY · 19 SEPTEMBER · 7PM
St George · Ivychurch
Romney Marsh · Kent · TN29 0AL

70 minutes
(no interval)

Contains themes of suicide and depression, strong language
and homophobic language. Recommended 14+.

WELCOME

John Frederick Hudson

Artistic Director of JAM

The Lost Boy has been some years in the making, and its story begins well before the first note was written.

In 2023 JAM launched its Composer Residency: four exciting composers living and working on Kent's Romney Marsh for a fortnight in the middle of the JAM on the Marsh festival, writing for the Sacconi Quartet and hearing their music performed at the conclusion of the festival. Jago Thornton was in that inaugural cohort. The residency has grown every year since. In 2024 the composers wrote short operas in Derek Jarman's Prospect Cottage; and this summer they wrote for the accordionist Ryan Corbett. It is now a core element that defines JAM.

Jago's path runs directly through that story. From his string quartet came a commission for the London Mozart Players, premiered at the 2024 festival, and that same year he returned for the opera residency. *The Lost Boy* grew directly out of that experience. It was conceived at Ivychurch, and it is fitting that this is where it receives its final performance.

That journey is, in short, what JAM does. Immersive composer residencies of this kind barely exist in the UK. We believe it is precisely this combination of dedicated composition time in an atmospheric place like Romney Marsh, collaboration with amazing musicians, guidance from leading industry expertise and a guaranteed performance platform that allows a composer to move from a string quartet to a new opera in the space of two years.

JAM exists to celebrate new music and to champion UK composers. That has been our mission since 2000, and *The Lost Boy* is among its proudest outcomes. It is also a reminder that this work has to be paid forward. Every composer who has come through the residency inspires the next, and each new generation needs the same time, mentoring and opportunity that Jago was given.

We owe a great debt of thanks to the mentors who gave so generously of their time and expertise on the opera residency: Paul Meallor LVO, Jonathan Dove CBE, Shirley Thompson OBE, Grahame Davies CVO and Nicholas Cleobury. Their work is woven into the fabric of this piece. Our thanks also go to Creative Folkestone, for opening Prospect Cottage to our composers, and to the North Wales International Music Festival, whose collaboration as co-producer has been fantastic in bringing *The Lost Boy* to the stage.

Finally, thank you for being here. Please continue to support new music in the UK, whether by giving to the residency or simply by being in the audience at a performance like this one. It matters more than you might think. Now sit back and enjoy the opera.



THE LOST BOY

by Jago Thornton and Anastasia Bruce-Jones

70 minutes (no interval)

MUSICIANS | CREATIVE TEAM

Jago Thornton · Composer & Musical Director

Anastasia Bruce-Jones · Librettist & Director

Ian Kerr · Production Designer

Patricia Auchterlonie · Soprano | Mary

Collin Shay · Countertenor | Harrison

Jonathan Eyers · Baritone | John

Wallis Power · Cello

Olivia Jageurs · Harp

SETTING

Set in a small fishing village between 1984 and 1985. The traditional way of life grows increasingly unsustainable: financial and cultural instability leads to restlessness and resentment among the townsfolk.

CHARACTERS

HARRISON, a quiet, dutiful, 16-year-old who adores his mother. Gripped by low self-esteem and depression following his father's death, he has resigned himself to life as a fisherman. It is only with John, his childhood friend and secret lover, that he feels truly seen, alive and free.

JOHN, a strong, charismatic and well-liked 17-year-old. A gifted fisherman, he harbours a rare and secret passion for playing the flute. Determined to gain a conservatoire scholarship in London, John believes his talent offers him the chance to escape village life and live more freely as a gay man.

MARY, Harrison's mother. Recently widowed and rooted in village life, she clings to her son in the wake of loss and hardship. Fiercely protective, she keeps Harrison close, mistaking proximity for care. Love and fear cloud her sight: she senses the depth of his bond with John but cannot see the full extent of her son's unhappiness, or her role in it.

SCENES

SCENE 1

1984

Harrison is drowning. Mary is quick to blame John for Harrison's disappearance, but John has no idea how or why Harrison chose to take his father's boat out during the greatest tempest their small village has ever seen.

SCENE 2

1985

One year after Harrison's death, John still refuses to give up the search. He combs the shore for signs of his lost lover every day – even today on his 18th birthday. Stuck in an eternal limbo of guilt and grief, John obsessively charts the events which led to Harrison's death...

SCENE 3

One year earlier (1984)

John plays his audition piece for Harrison in the privacy of his bedroom. Days from a prestigious London conservatoire audition, John asks Harrison to come with him; he agrees. Later, Harrison asks his mother if he may go to London. Mary refuses: London is dangerous and she couldn't survive another loss after his father. Crushed, Harrison buries his hopes and, out of guilt, submits to staying.

SCENE 4

The next day:

John arrives with an offer letter from the conservatoire. Determined not to dim John's joy, Harrison lies, promising a future. They dance through the night. At dawn, Harrison breaks down and confesses the truth: he cannot leave. Devastated, John rips up the letter and swears he won't go without him. John confronts Mary; she denies interference, warns their "friendship" is stirring rumours, and urges John to leave before both are destroyed.

SCENE 5

Later that day

Mary confronts Harrison about John, who has spread their secret to the town. Two arguments unfold in parallel: Harrison begs John to leave for London without him – he refuses, turning down his offer at the conservatoire. Meanwhile, Mary forbids Harrison to leave. At the climax of these arguments, torn between love and duty, Harrison chooses the only escape he can see...

SCENE 6

The storm returns: we witness Harrison's drowning again. Mary narrates the events of the subsequent year as a folk ballad.

SCENE 7

1985

Night falls; John lights a fire on the shore. Mary arrives a changed woman. John tells her of the promise he made to Harrison. Gently, Mary releases him from that vow, urging him to live for her son rather than die for him. John understands at last that Harrison is gone, that he must let himself live.

BIOGRAPHIES



JAGO THORNTON

Composer & Musical Director

Jago Thornton is a composer, producer and teacher from London. His music is characterised by Celtic-inflected melody and shimmering instrumental colour, in a style that is both fresh and highly approachable. Jago's recent work explores themes such as the natural environment, ecological decline and queer identity. Jago's music is performed in the UK and abroad by a wide variety of choirs and instrumental groups, including on BBC Radio 3 and BBC 4.

Jago teaches composition and music technology at Westminster School, KCS, Wimbledon and the JRCM. Jago facilitates composition projects with a wide variety of schools and groups from diverse backgrounds, including a major education project this year with Vox Urbane in South-East London.

@jagothornton
www.jagothornton.com



IAN KERR

Production Designer

Ian Kerr is a Production Designer who believes design should be embedded in a project from the earliest stages of development. With experience spanning micro-budget independents to studio features, he is known for finding inventive, cost-effective solutions that maximise production value. Creativity has been at the heart of Ian's work from the beginning of his career. At Beamish Museum, he designed, wrote and directed six consecutive years of large-scale Halloween events, creating multiple immersive experiences each year for audiences of over 2,500 people per night. Ian enjoys working across all genres but has a particular love for horror and projects that combine bold visual storytelling with practical ingenuity.

@ikerrcreative
www.ikerrcreative.com



ANASTASIA BRUCE-JONES

Librettist & Director

Anastasia Bruce-Jones is an award-winning writer and director. Their work in theatre has received exclusively 4 and 5* reviews and won both OnComm and OffComm awards. Their films have screened at festivals internationally and have been nominated for multiple awards, including Best Director at Women X Film Festival. Anastasia's debut feature is slated to begin shooting in Q2 2027. Their work examines lonely, messy and morally reckless characters, often by way of folklore, horror and magic realism.

@anastasiabeej
www.anastasiabrucejones.co.uk



COLLIN SHAY

Countertenor | Harrison

Collin Shay is a French-American countertenor and multi-instrumentalist living in London. World premieres: *bodies* by Michael Betteridge with Britten Sinfonia, *The Great Wave* by Dai Fujikura at Scottish Opera, *The Faggots and their Friends Between Revolutions* by Phil Venables and Ted Huffman at Manchester International Festival, *Mamzer | Bastard* by Na'ama Zisser at Hackney Empire / Royal Opera House, *The Lost Thing* by Jules Maxwell at the Linbury Theatre. Chamber music: London Handel Festival, MA Festival Bruges, Bordeaux Fêtes Baroques, Stour Festival, Les Jardins de William Christie. Training: The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, The Juilliard School, McGill University.

www.collinshay.com



PATRICIA AUCHTERLONIE

Soprano | Mary

Patricia Auchterlonie is a singer and maker, interested in exploring all that is colourful and unexpected. Singing and operatic work includes Lucia Il Beat Furrer's *Das grosse Feuer* (Zurich Opera), Superfan in Oliver Leith & Matt Copson's *Last Days* (Royal Opera House and LA Philharmonic), Child in *The Devil's Den* by Isabella Gellis (Shadwell Opera & Nevil Holt Festival), *Where the Wild Things Are* by Knussen (Bamberger Symphoniker & Shadwell Opera), among others.

Patricia makes craft, textiles and writes music. She is interested in non-traditional ways of working, encompassing a wide variety of collaboration and devising. She is fascinated with the human voice and with textile media, especially the possible intertwinings of sound and thread.

@patriciaauchterlonie
www.patriciaauchterlonie.com



WALLIS POWER

Cello

A cellist who is equally at home as a soloist, chamber musician and orchestral player, Wallis has carved out a multifaceted performing career in London. In July 2025, she became a member of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Alongside this role, Wallis maintains a busy freelance career, regularly playing with leading orchestral and chamber ensembles including The Philharmonia, London Sinfonietta, 12 Ensemble, London Mozart Players, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Orchestra of the English National Opera, among others. In April 2022, Wallis made her concerto debut at the Easter Endellion Festival with a performance of Errollyn Wallen's *Cello Concerto*. She has since appeared as a soloist with Her Ensemble, the English Baroque Choir and has performed the Bach Cello Suites at venues across London. Wallis plays a cello by William Forster Senior.

@wandering_cellist



JONATHAN EYERS

Baritone | John

Jonathan Eyers is a baritone from the Bay of Plenty, New Zealand, based in London, UK.

Jonathan recently won the inaugural Rebecca Clarke Song Competition, was a finalist and prizewinner at the 2025 Cesti Competition, and was awarded Third Prize at the 2024 Wigmore Hall/Bollinger International Song Competition. He is an Oxford Song Young Artist, a City Music Foundation Artist, a Britten-Pears Young Artist, and a founding member of Whānau Voices. He has performed at the Oxford International Song, London Song, Aldeburgh, Glasperlenspiel, and Edinburgh International Festivals.

Jonathan trained at the National Opera Studio, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and the University of Waikato.

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OLIVIA JAGEURS

Harp

Harpist Olivia Jageurs is in demand as a collaborator with the UK's top musicians and composers. She has played with the UK's major orchestras including The Hallé, Aurora Orchestra, The Glyndebourne Sinfonia, Britten Sinfonia, London Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Symphony & Concert Orchestras, Royal Northern Sinfonia and plays regularly with the 12 Ensemble.

In 2021, she became an RPS Trailblazer for her online concert series Harpy Hour. With a particular love of contemporary music, she has played with the London Sinfonietta, Riot Ensemble and Explore Ensemble. 2026 chamber music engagements include recitals with horn player Ben Goldscheider, trumpeter Imogen Whitehead, tenor Allan Clayton, and with her trio The Erda Ensemble (with mezzo-soprano Marta Fontanals-Simmons and flautist Chloe Vincent).

@15secondharp
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LIBRETTO

SCENE 1

1984

Harrison is drowning. Mary is quick to blame John for Harrison's disappearance, but John has no idea how or why Harrison chose to take his father's boat out during the greatest tempest their small village has ever seen.

MARY Harrison?

MARY Harrison?

MARY Harrison...

The storm breaks overhead, shattering Mary's dream-state. She runs towards John.

MARY What have you done?

JOHN What?

MARY My Harrison. What have you done?

JOHN Nothing! I don't know anything.

MARY Liar!

JOHN Stop, just –

MARY – get *off* me! –

JOHN Mary –

MARY – you did this –

JOHN Mary –

MARY It's your fault!

JOHN What's going on?

MARY Harrison's boat washed ashore.

JOHN Harrison...

MARY They're saying he's – lost.

JOHN

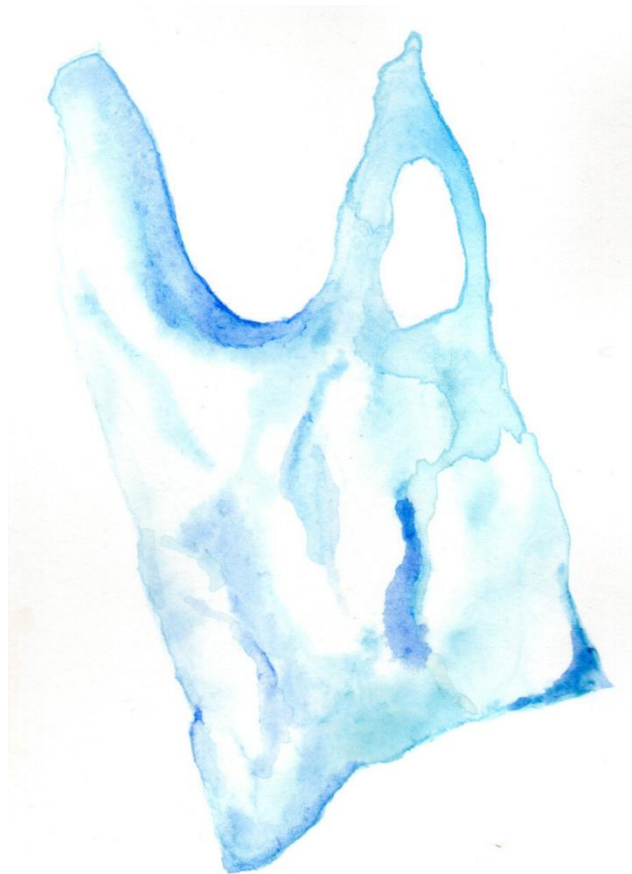
Lost...

MARY

My boy – lost.

JOHN

HARRISON! HARRISON! HARRISON!



SCENE 2

1985:

One year after Harrison's death, John still refuses to give up the search. He combs the shore for signs of his lost lover every day – even today on his 18th birthday. Stuck in an eternal limbo of guilt and grief, John obsessively charts the events which led to Harrison's death...

JOHN

That night
One year ago, today
Meaning came unstuck.

Untethered ever since,
I'm drifting.

Asking.

Kiss me if you can,
With coral lips.
For you I'd dive down deeper than the light,
To the gloom.
Pouting marble lips
That taste like yours.

I will not call you lost,
You are only un-found
And I am searching,
Anchored by a promise.
To your heavy ghost.

I will stay:
Until I feel your cool arms
around me once again
Crushing images of death,
Drowning deeper in grief.

Until then
Only silence
Listening for your call
Across the waves.

John spots something metal in the sand. He begins to dig. A silver flute emerges. He holds it.

There was music, once

It spoke to me
In your voice...

John lifts the flute but cannot play.

I can't hear it anymore
Only an echo from another life
One year ago today...

John closes his eyes, remembering – and now we hear faint notes echoing from far away. John keeps his eyes shut as the playing gets stronger. He raises the flute again.

SCENE 3

One year earlier (1984):

John plays his audition piece for Harrison in the privacy of his bedroom. Days from a prestigious London conservatoire audition, John asks Harrison to come with him; he agrees. Later, Harrison asks his mother if he may go to London. Mary refuses: London is dangerous and she couldn't survive another loss after his father. Crushed, Harrison buries his hopes and, out of guilt, submits to staying.

HARRISON John,
Your music floods my soul with light
Each glancing note a sunbeam
Bright shafts in the dark
Brave reasons to live.

John
Even here in my bedroom,
You are the instrument
Of my salvation;
Rescued from the hopeless deep
By your music
A shining rope
Made tangible by sweet breath.

But today
There's shadow in the woven light.
You're not yourself.
What's on your mind?

JOHN I'm just nervous. Tell me what I can improve and I'll be fine.

HARRISON Your playing's perfect. It's your mind that's out of tune.

JOHN Focus. Harrison, I need notes. Criticism. In just three days, my whole future gets decided in the time it takes to rig a sail. This audition has to be perfect, –

HARRISON Stop. You're spiralling. Breathe.

We've known each other our whole lives. You've never doubted your ability before.

JOHN This is different. It could be a way out. For both of us.

HARRISON Out of what?

JOHN Out of this town. I want a life where I can kiss you on the street, where I can proudly hold your hand. That will never happen here. But in London... *If* I get into The Conservatoire.

HARRISON You will. I know you will.

JOHN Who am I, Harrison? The village loves their champion son, but now I'm scared.

 I don't know who I am anymore.

HARRISON My John...
 You are the lisping child
 Who stood between
 When older boys
 Towered cruel threats,

JOHN Taunting your silence.

HARRISON You spoke for me

JOHN They were only children.

HARRISON And later you're the man – just seventeen
 Who rose one Friday night

BOTH Proud flute in hand, to jeers from older men
 Who slapped your (my) back and called you (me) queer

HARRISON A ringing silence fell
 Crowning your melody
 As you reduced those men to tears.

JOHN The only place I've ever found myself is here.
 In your bedroom. In your gaze.

HARRISON John... you're brilliant and kind and brave.
 The man I love.

JOHN ...What if I fail you?

HARRISON Impossible.

BOTH I love you to your soul.

MARY *Harrison!*
Boys?!
I'm not hearing much practice going on right now.

HARRISON Just passing notes, Mum!
Go on, play.
You're getting out of here. I feel it. You'll be gone before the summer dies.

JOHN Listen, Harrison. If I get in to The Conservatoire –

HARRISON *When* you get in to The Conservatoire –

JOHN Come with me. I *need* you to come with me.

HARRISON That's ridiculous. Wherever you go people love you. You don't need me.
I'm nobody.

JOHN Then nobody has ever known me. Nobody has ever seen me until you. I'd be lost without you.

MARY *BOYS!*
It's awfully quiet up there!

JOHN I'm serious. If you won't come, I cannot go.

HARRISON John, you must!

JOHN I will not. Unless... you don't want to?

MARY *BOYS!*

HARRISON I want to come so badly I could die. But –

JOHN Then say you will.

MARY *BOYS!*

HARRISON John...

JOHN Please say you will.

HARRISON I will. I'll come. I'll follow you forever.

JOHN Harrison!

HARRISON John!

BOTH Forever!

MARY *BOYS!*

The look at each other in breathless wonder. They are about to kiss, Mary appears in the doorway and they spring apart.

MARY If you're done practicing, you can come down and help me.
Your brother called for you. They need an extra pair of hands getting the boats in.

JOHN Right you are. Thanks for having me again, Mrs B.

MARY Good luck with your audition. I hope you get in. I really do.

JOHN Thanks. Me too.

John's eyes meet Harrison's – and then he's gone.

MARY Right, you. Come and give your old Mother a hand. Lord above, your hair!
Has it ever even seen a brush?
You know what this room smells of? Stale teenage boy.

HARRISON Mother...

MARY You could clean in here, you know. Or have you got names for all the spiders?
And I'll need your help tomorrow.

HARRISON Mother can I ...

MARY Father Richard's asked me to help him with a bake sale, raising money to feed the little African children. So I'll need you after church to help me run the stall.

HARRISON Mother, can I go to London?

MARY I don't see why not, we could take a trip at Christmas.

HARRISON	What I mean is... can I move there?
MARY	Someday, maybe. Why?
HARRISON	Mother... I'm lost here. This town, these people... Was never solid ground for me. I've been treading water All my life. John asked me to go with him when he joins the conservatoire I think maybe in London I'll reach firm ground at last. So? What do you think?
MARY	I wish I knew what I did wrong.
HARRISON	Mother... it's not your fault...
MARY	Did I not make you my whole world?
HARRISON	That's not what I'm saying –
MARY	Did I not give you everything I had?
HARRISON	I know, I know! I'm so grateful.
MARY	Even when your father – drowned
HARRISON	I... No – I don't know. I don't know what to say.
MARY	But not one year <i>Not a single year since</i> You ask to leave? To take away The one thing I have left?

MARY
My son,
You are my breath,
You are the ocean of my life,
And if you go
so far away from home,
You'll take the very air with you.
I'll die alone.
Harrison!
Promise me
You won't leave.

HARRISON
There's twenty leagues of ocean
In my throat
My upturned face was warmed
By dancing light.
But now my mouth
is full of wax
And John,
I wanted to grow old with you
Mother,
Please.

HARRISON Yes. OK.

MARY You'll stay?

HARRISON Yeah, I'll stay.

MARY Oh, thank God. Thank God. Thank you, my sweet boy.

HARRISON I'll have to tell John. He was – so happy.

MARY Oh darling... you and John have a wonderful friendship. I'm sure he'll
come to visit when he can.

Harrison leaves.

Mary watches from above as the boys head off along the shore.

I'm not completely blind you know
And I was young once too
That first love is the sweetest fruit
Ripened by the dizzy rising thrill
Singing,
"We two
are the first alive
who ever felt this way!"

But yellow rot festers in the flesh
Cheating you of deeper joys ahead:
A woman's steadfast love;
Community and faith;
Your children laughing,
"Daddy come and look at me!

We found a feather in the sand!”

I’m not the one
Who’d rob you of your future.

Remember who it was
Made you believe
That wax and feathers
Set you free.

SCENE 4

The next day:

John arrives with an offer letter from the conservatoire. Determined not to dim John's joy, Harrison lies, promising a future. They dance through the night. At dawn, Harrison breaks down and confesses the truth: he cannot leave. Devastated, John rips up the letter and swears he won't go without him. John confronts Mary; she denies interference, warns their "friendship" is stirring rumours, and urges John to leave before both are destroyed.

HARRISON Apart from him, nothing lives.
 He is the sun that melts me
 With the warmth of hope.

 But he is making joyful plans
 For a life together that will
 Never be, while I am dying;
 Lying to his face with every smile.

 Still, he loves me. Night ends.
 Maybe even now there's cause for hope.

John approaches over the sand.

He's here! John. John!

John turns, revealing that he's carrying a letter.

So this is it.
I dreamt we had more time.

I kept a bottle from Dad's wake. We'll take it to the beach, light a driftwood fire and drink and talk together until dawn. And when the new day comes, I'll tell him he must go alone.

One last good day. A lifetime pressed into one summer night.

John enters and the boys embrace.

Have you opened it?

JOHN Not yet.
 Would you do it? I can't.

HARRISON Dear Mr. Ellis.

It is with great pleasure that we offer you a place to study at the conservatoire. Furthermore, having taken your financial needs into account, we offer you a full scholarship, to cover study, travel, food and board. ...John!

You did it. You're free.

JOHN

You mean *we're* free.

Harrison, our lives begin right now. Come on! To tomorrow!

John grabs Harrison's hand. Harrison just manages to snatch the bottle of wine as he is pulled out of the door, and down to the beach.

HARRISON

To this everlasting night.

JOHN

No more lies.

HARRISON

No more lies once the sun rises.

JOHN

I know who I am.

Harrison, we'll never feel ashamed again.

Just think, one day I'll play the Albert Hall –
– you'll be glowing in the front row as I bow –

HARRISON

Just drink.

Keep smiling.

He'll be happy – he won't be alone.

JOHN

I'll pull you up on stage, to show the world;

No music could exist without my muse.

HARRISON

Another man will glow for him. I'd only cast a shadow.

JOHN

No more hiding in the shadows:

Ours is the light.

HARRISON

I'll live until the light.

JOHN

We're gonna be free.

No more shame.

HARRISON

No more hope.

JOHN I'll love you in the light.

HARRISON I have been loved by the light.

JOHN I love you, Harrison.

HARRISON Keep drinking.

JOHN The sea looks like black velvet. Like a carpet spread out just for us, to walk to the horizon...

HARRISON The stars are bright. They say you don't see stars in London.

JOHN They're fading over there. It's getting light.

HARRISON No! I need more time.

JOHN The future's ours. Our lives are like the sea, expanding to the rising sun.

HARRISON So darkness rolls in on the wings of dawn. It's not here yet. I still have time.

JOHN Harrison?

HARRISON There's still time.

JOHN Harrison...
I love you.

HARRISON I'll make it last forever.

JOHN Harrison? I love you...

HARRISON Or even five more minutes.

JOHN Harrison?
What's going on?
What's wrong?

HARRISON I see the sun.
I'm sorry.

John draws back as though burnt.

JOHN You're not coming.
I know that face too well; You love your mother more than our future. So
it all dies here, a fire extinguished by a single wave.
Well, it's simple. I will not go.

HARRISON No! You must! You'll never get this chance again!
This is your *future*, your whole life! I won't let you –

JOHN I didn't try to change your mind. You won't change mine.
Listen to me, Harrison, listen well. I would not leave you for a thousand
futures full of hope. I swear, on everything I am, all I hold dear, on *you*: I'll
never leave this place while you are here.

John throws the letter into the fire and leaves.

HARRISON John. *John. John!*

Everything I touch will rust...
No matter what, John cannot stay.
I'll die before I see his talent go to waste.

*Harrison plunges his hand into the fire. He screams as the flames lick up his arm. Gasping, he pulls
his hand back. He holds the blackened letter. He exits, cradling it to his heart.*

Mary stands on the jetty, worried, looking out. John approaches. She rushes to greet him.

MARY Where is he? Is he safe?

JOHN He's fine. We were down the beach.

MARY All night?! Your mother and I were worried sick!

JOHN You have to let him go. I know you love him, Mrs B, but he's dying. And I
think that you see why. I think you've guessed. I think you know –

MARY Enough. How dare you lecture me on my own son? You're just a friend –

JOHN We're *not just friends*.

MARY I don't know what you're talking about.

JOHN Yes. You do. And if you don't let him go, everyone else will too. I'm not
hiding anymore.

MARY

There's a disease spreading among boys like you, John Ellis. I know what you are. Your life's your own. Throw it away if you like. But you won't take my boy.

I know you care for him. But do you care enough to save him? Leave and let him live free of this degeneracy.

Mary holds John's gaze for a moment longer, then turns and disappears into the house. John is left helpless on the beach.



SCENE 5

Later that day:

Mary confronts Harrison about John, who has spread their secret to the town. Two arguments unfold in parallel: Harrison begs John to leave for London without him – he refuses, turning down his offer at the conservatoire. Meanwhile, Mary forbids Harrison to leave. At the climax of these arguments, torn between love and duty, Harrison chooses the only escape he can see...

Harrison appears on the jetty. He walks to the edge, hovers a moment as if about to jump, and then sits.

HARRISON I have to make him go.
 I am the anchor
 That will drag him down
 Freefalling titanic iron
 Spreading demolition
 Like an STD: with love.

 Perverse Icarus
 Clinging to the glorious sun
 Even as I plunge, crying,
 Flailing, To the sea,
 Never to rise again.
 An everlasting night
 So my selfish love will last.

 No. He must rise
 As he was born to do.
 I have to make him go.

Mary appears.

MARY John isn't your friend.

HARRISON Mother, I can explain –

MARY He's been spreading obscene lies about you.

HARRISON What? He wouldn't, John wouldn't!

MARY A man I don't know spat at me this morning.
 I thought he must be mad,

but when I got to church
nobody would look me in the eye.

BOTH Friends. People I've known my whole life.

MARY
I couldn't understand it.
But Father Richard took pity on me.
He told me all about my son.
He told me I'm not welcome
at church anymore,
God and my village turned their backs on me.

HARRISON
No! He wouldn't -
John wouldn't!
John wouldn't, please!
Will this failing never end?
Will I never stop
Destroying what I love?

MARY I can hardly breathe for shame.

HARRISON I have to see John.
I have to know he didn't do this,

*Harrison hurries towards the sea. John approaches from behind and wraps his arms around him.
Harrison flinches away.*

What are you doing? Anyone could see.

JOHN So what?

HARRISON Mum was right. What have you done?

JOHN I don't care who knows anymore.

HARRISON *But I do!*

MARY I am the gasping fish
Crushed at the bottom
Of the heaving net

JOHN I hate this town. If we have to stay here, fine. But I can't keep lying,
Harrison..

HARRISON Then listen to me! I'm asking you, I'm *begging* you to leave –

JOHN Never without you.
I'll never leave without you.

HARRISON
Nothing I can say
Will make him go
Spiralling down to
Mutually assured destruction
Dizzy with the weight
Of my colossal impotence

MARY
Gasping
Heaving
Shame
Crushed
I can't breathe
I can't breathe

Harrison goes to Mary, distraught.

HARRISON Mother... I'm so sorry.

MARY I don't blame you, my son. John can be persuasive when he likes.

HARRISON Mum, please. It wasn't like that.

MARY You mustn't see that boy again. He's rotten to the core. He'll drag you down without a second thought.

HARRISON Don't make me live without him.

JOHN You found me when
I could not find myself
I'll dive into the dark with you
Though falling, yet together

MARY We'll find a pretty girl for you.

HARRISON Mum, no. I can't.

MARY And when you're married everyone will understand.
One bad apple can corrupt the lot.

Harrison pulls away from Mary.

HARRISON
She's carved
A marble dream of me
Just now her real son
Slipped below the waves

JOHN
Found
Diving
Fallen
In the dark

MARY
Sin festers
in the heart
and lungs

Harrison, dead-eyed, looks to John.

HARRISON I've one last breath

I can still save him
With a lie

MARY One rotten fruit
Will damn us all

JOHN I won't abandon you. I love you.

HARRISON And what if I don't?
I don't love you. I lied. I – came to say goodbye.

JOHN I don't believe you.

HARRISON Living this way makes me sick.

JOHN I won't listen to you lie to both of us.

HARRISON I want a normal life. I want to be a real man.

JOHN Fuck you.
Hurt me if you like. I turned my offer down.

HARRISON No! I can't breathe.

JOHN
I've known you too long,
I see what you're
Trying to do.
It only makes me love you
more.
I'll dive into the dark
Falling together
with you

HARRISON
And if I stay,
I'll drag them both down too
The anchor twists
Around my neck
And if I stay,
I'll drag them both down too,
I'll cut the cancer out,
I'll let the anchor fall

MARY
Gasping,
Shame,
Crushed,
Heaving,
I can't breathe...

I can't breathe.

I can't breathe.

I can't breathe

Harrison breaks away from both conversations with a strangled cry. He stumbles forward, crashing down in the sand.

Eventually, Harrison raises his head. He is alone, poised on the edge of the ocean. A storm is coming.

He takes a step forward.

HARRISON

Gentle dark,
Familiar friend,
You've waited for me
All these years.
I'll follow you down now.

When I am lost, the ones I love
Will find their way

O blue oblivion,
Redeem my rotten soul,
With your dark water,
Where my cloud
Will cloud no love

My Mother and my Heart
will live unburdened

As John said:
Our lives are like the sea,
Expanding to the rising sun.



SCENE 6

The storm returns: we witness Harrison's drowning again. Mary narrates the events of the subsequent year as a folk ballad.

MARY Harrison? Harrison? Harrison!
 What have you done?
 My son. Where is he? What have you done?

JOHN What?
 Nothing! I don't know anything –

MARY Liar! He *must* be here – Harrison!

JOHN Stop, just –

MARY – you did this –

JOHN Mary –

MARY – get *off* me! –

JOHN Mary –

MARY It's your fault!

JOHN What's going on?

MARY – you want to take him from me –

JOHN For god's sake, talk to me! What's going on?

MARY Harrison's boat – the boat his father gave him – washed ashore.
 They're saying he's – lost.

JOHN Lost...

MARY Lost....

JOHN HARRISON! HARRISON! HARRISON!

HARRISON *JOHN! JOHN! JOHN –*

MARY

At storm's full height, our John pushes out
His boat into the firmament,
And through the dark he holds his course,
On love or death his mind is bent.

As evening gathers round once more,
The village climbs the height,
To watch a speck weave to and fro
Against the fading light

And all the sea is running red
Beneath the setting sun,
As far beyond the cliff and foam
That lonely craft moves on.

On Sunday Father Richard prays
A special mass upon that day,
And I am welcomed through the door
With open arms once more,

That night at last young John comes in,
Four days from when he'd gone,
His boat scrapes softly on the shore,
But he returns alone.

A year goes by, both long and hard,
And John misses not a day,
Before the sun and after dark
He searches shore and bay.

SCENE 7

1985

Night falls; John lights a fire on the shore. Mary arrives a changed woman. John tells her of the promise he made to Harrison. Gently, Mary releases him from that vow, urging him to live for her son rather than die for him. John understands at last that Harrison is gone, that he must let himself live.

JOHN

You were here
But this is not the shore you walked on
A thousand tonnes of pale gold sand
Have washed away
Traded in for gravel
Like new cells

How much of me is still the man you loved?

In the end
Everyone fails in love

All I asked
Was that you live forever

MARY

He walks the sands, the cliffs, the rocks,
He sleeps beside the sea,
Still searching where the tide withdraws,
and searching endlessly.

And now he stands a grown young man,
Eighteen years today,
I cannot bear the sight of him,
I cannot turn away.

The man you loved washed on your shore
I will make him whole again

Mary approaches John, holding a cupcake with a single candle. She stops just behind him.

MARY

Happy birthday.
Can I sit?

JOHN

Why are you here?

MARY

He wouldn't have wanted you to be alone today.
Why are you still here?

JOHN

You might have given up, but I haven't. He's so close, I can almost... feel him.

MARY

And what if you're wrong?

JOHN

I swore I'd never leave this place without him.

MARY

He'd be furious with you for wasting your gift. He loved to hear you play.
...we both did.

JOHN Well, I can't now. It's gone.

MARY Don't let it be lost with him.

JOHN He's not lost—!

MARY You're right you know, I feel him too. That's why you have to go. This time, when you leave, he'll go with you. He'll be free if you let him. So I give you my blessing. Both of you.

JOHN Mary? I don't know who I am without him.

MARY He loved you more than anything. That's a person worth finding. Come visit me, when you do. I'd like to hear you play again.

John nods. Mary leaves.

JOHN I miss you so much.

 In the end
 Everyone fails in love

 All I ever asked
 Was that you live forever.



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