



THE HIGH-RISE SANDWICH

Imagine, for a moment, the cross-section of a high-rise building, in Queens perhaps or in Brixton, sliced diagonally from the uppermost storey down to the basement like a club sandwich. Imagine the people inside like assorted fillings, like the

man used to living the high life in the once-elegant penthouse apartment. He is alone now, the agency's passably pretty brunette having left with more of his money than he'd expected or can afford. He feels the after-effects of too much cheap-expensive champagne she talked him into buying. Despite the physical release (in hindsight, over-rated) he is restive. Below, he hears the muted sounds of the television belonging to the

woman who stirs briefly, like dust behind a door when it's opened. Her hand goes to the bowl, then to her mouth. She masticates metronomically. Her eyes swivel with the pixels on the screen. Horace from Miami removes his sunglasses and utters a pithy one-liner. The woman attempts a laugh. Closing credit music drowns out the

sharp slam of the door one floor away as the bull-faced man storms out for the last time, as usual. With the lightest of fingertips, the girl explores her jaw, goes to the fridge to find an ice pack. The liquid flame of her weakness blazes behind her eyes and in her throat. She sits motionless for a while, then heads for the

phone, which rings. And rings. A man lies on his bed with his eyes closed, two thin black umbilica trailing from his ears to his iPod. Between tracks, the sound of the phone penetrates. It stops ringing just as he means to pick it up. He sighs, turns over and, with a stirring he'd thought long buried and which he tells himself he's far too old for, thinks of the

boy who moved in at 512 not three days ago. He is hanging pictures. Each frame contains his father, not in subject but in memory. The funeral was three months ago. The inheritance was negligible. The ache is constant. He bangs in another nail, the noise of which makes the

woman next door groan gently to herself. On night shift this week, she finds sleep impossible to come by during the day, with the walls as thin as the pages of yesterday's paper. She tosses and turns, regrets the barren wasteland of her bedroom, makes a note to report the disturbance to the



caretaker of the building who subsists in a ground floor flat. He finds it hard to do all the menial jobs required of him these days. The arthritis in his hands is getting worse. He curses, thinking of the impending winter and all the inhabitants of the building who live so high, yet feel so low, trapped in each others' shadows, bound together by the loneliness which runs like glue through the building with its

sharp sting, the mustard in a club sandwich. Imagine, for a moment, opening your mouth and taking a bite, curling your tongue and your taste buds around every nuance, swallowing and feeling each one burn, and then imagine taking the wrapper, balling it up and throwing it in the bin behind you as though it doesn't concern you or move you at all.