

BLUE MOON RISING

by

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CHARACTERS

The Woman (30s)

The Man (50s)

SETTING

A trashed suburban house

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PROLOGUE

It's nightttime in an overgrown rose garden in front of a large house. A figure becomes visible in the dark. She is digging a hole. A large hole.

Lights go in the house. On the top floor. A window is thrown open.

MAN

Oy! Who's down there! [beat] I'll set the dog on you!

A door opens, and a dog starts barking. The woman stands and looks at the window, before entering the house.

SCENE 1

A living room in a sizeable house that has not been redecorated since about 1972. Hideous dated floral wallpaper, which is faded and ripped. Two doors: an internal door leading to the kitchen, and a set of French Windows leading out to the dark garden. The room is filthy, and has been trashed. Drawers have been pulled out and turned upside down and books thrown off shelves, as though someone turned the place apart looking for something. On top of this carnage is the detritus of every day life: discarded pizza boxes, empty beer cans, and dirty clothes. Some expensive china ornaments are marooned, safe but alone, on the untouched upper bookshelves. A single coat hook contains a women's sensible coat over a handbag.

The man and the woman face each other. The man is in his mid-50s, a gone to seed tough guy, a former biker, a failed actor, a wannabe Stanley Kowalski. He thinks he's a scary guy, a real tough. He sits collapsed in a dingy lounge, a walking stick by his side. Blankets and a pillow indicate he sleeps in his chair. There's a mug by his side but it might not contain tea.

The woman is in her early thirties but looks much younger, skinny as a rake and looking barely post-pubescent. She is wearing jeans and a hoody, scared shitless, a shovel and a pair of secateurs under her arm. She is clutching blue/purple roses. A scared little cornered rat.

WOMAN

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

MAN

What you doing in my house?

WOMAN

I don't mean any harm. I never mean any harm.

MAN

Did you take those from my front garden?

WOMAN

Yes. I'm sorry. I wanted to take some rose cuttings -- I grow roses. Or I'm trying to. [beat] I'm sorry.

MAN

That's the most middle class theft I've ever heard of.

WOMAN

Is it? God, it is. I'm sorry. I can pay you?

MAN

Not like you walked off with the fine china.

WOMAN

Do you know what these are?

MAN

I know they're flowers.

WOMAN

They're a rare rose breed. You hardly ever see them, because they're so difficult to grow. Usually they grow purple or even pink, but a really clever breeder, if they tend to them just right, cross breed the right plants, can get them to grow pure blue. [beat] Sorry, I'm a plant nerd. [beat] Plant mom. [beat] It's an Internet thing. Instagram. Oh God, I'm sorry I'm rambling, I always do this.

MAN

[beat] Worth anything?

WOMAN

Not really in terms of money.

MAN

Huh. [beat] My ex was obsessed with roses.

WOMAN

Did she grow these?

MAN

Yeah, that's Lynda's work. Out in that garden for hours she'd be, working on those bloody roses.

WOMAN

Wow, her garden is incredible. She must have had an amazing touch.

(MORE)

WOMAN (cont'd)
Such an eye for the gentle
harmonies of colour.

MAN
Sure.

WOMAN
[beat] Um, is she at home?

MAN
No.

WOMAN
I'd love to meet her.

MAN
Live local, do you?

The woman waves her secateurs around, vaguely indicating which direction she lives in, then realises the gesture could come across as menacing, and sheepishly lies the secateurs down on the mantelpiece.

MAN
What's with the spade?

WOMAN
Came as a set.

MAN
So you brought both?

WOMAN
No, I bought it today, in Wilko on
the high street.

She drops the spade down on the carpet, between them.

MAN
Lynda's not here. It's just me. All
alone.

WOMAN
Having a night away or...? My mum
loved a mini-break. Obsessed with
mini-breaks. France. Dorset.
Hayling Island. I went with her
once, it was advertised as 18+ and
she was worried that was code for
like swingers or something and then
we were the only ones there under
70. [beat] Prunes featured heavily
on the breakfast buffet. [beat] I
love a breakfast buffet. [beat] I
guess they could still have been
swingers. [laughs nervously]

MAN

She's gone.

WOMAN

Oh God I'm so sorry! I didn't mean/

MAN

Stop bloody apologising.

WOMAN

Sorry! Oh shit, sorry! Fuck. Sorry.
Sorry! Agh.

MAN

Maybe you should stop talking now.

WOMAN

Okay. [long pause while they stare
at each other] I can go, if you
like? I don't want to intrude.

He stares at her. Gestures to a chair. She moves towards it
but doesn't sit.

WOMAN

Nice to have company sometimes.

MAN

[Indicating the dog] He's not much
of a conversationalist.

WOMAN

Not sure if I'm much better.

MAN

I don't mind doing the heavy
lifting.

WOMAN

I'm used to heavy lifting.

MAN

All that gardening.

WOMAN

I'm surprised she didn't dig up the
bushes and take them with her, some
of them must have been nurtured for
years.

MAN

[beat] What's your name?

WOMAN

I'm sorry I bothered you. I should
leave. I didn't want to cause any
trouble. I was passing and I saw
them, and they were so beautiful I

(MORE)

WOMAN (cont'd)
couldn't resist sneaking back and
trying to take some cuttings.

MAN
Want a cuppa?

WOMAN
What? Sorry. Excuse me?

MAN
Cuppa tea? I don't get much
company.

WOMAN
I really don't want to intrude.

MAN
You broke onto my property, stole
my plants. Waved a pair of giant
scissors at me. The least you owe
me is a little company. [beat] I'm
not gonna call the police but that
is technically breaking and
entering.

WOMAN
Technically it's trespass, which is
a civil matter. But thank you, I'd
love a cup of tea.

He grabs his walking stick and struggles to his feet,
breathing hard. She stands and watches him struggle.

WOMAN
Actually I'm not that thirsty. I
had one before I came out.

He pauses halfway up from his chair, and side-eyes her.
Resenting her pity but still amused by her. He sits back
down and puts his stick down.

MAN
You want to be careful.

She starts.

WOMAN
Why?

MAN
Drinking tea this late at night.
It'll stop you sleeping.

WOMAN
You were going to have one.

MAN
I'm used to it.

WOMAN

Maybe I'm used to it too.

MAN

[beat] How come someone your age is into roses?

WOMAN

My mum grew roses.

MAN

Why don't you take some of her cuttings?

WOMAN

She's dead.

MAN

Oh. [beat] I'm sorry.

WOMAN

Stop saying sorry.

A beat. He stares at her, unsure what to make of her uncharacteristic cheekiness. She smiles, laughs it off. He does the same. She finally sits.

SCENE 2

WOMAN

Breeding rare roses was her passion.

MAN

Never understood the appeal myself. They make the place look nice, but gardening? Dirty work.

WOMAN

Makes you sweat.

MAN

Not very ladylike.

WOMAN

I never got it either. I loved the results though. Our garden was a fairytale. It had rose beds all along the sides of a huge long lawn, leading to a play area with swings and a blue plastic sandpit in the shape of a seashell. The top opened up to create a paddling pool, which has lain abandoned for such a long time frogs had colonised it to use as their moon base for the great Frog-Toad war of 1996. Behind the swings was a

(MORE)

WOMAN (cont'd)
meadow full of wildflowers with
hammocks hanging from the acacias
and horse chestnut trees marking
the boundary with the garden
behind. I used to lie in the long
grass and read.

Beat.

MAN
I grew up in a council flat. We had
a window box with two dead
geraniums in it.

WOMAN
I've lived in a council flat too,
since I was 16.

MAN
What council?

WOMAN
[a pause that's slightly too long]
Birmingham.

MAN
[snorts] Southern.

WOMAN
It's not, it's the heart of the
Midlands. It's in the name:
Midlands.

MAN
Try growing up in Durham, that's
proper North.

WOMAN
Posh university town?

MAN
Never went. Left after A Levels.

WOMAN
I didn't even sit my GCSEs.

MAN
Trained as a plumber.

WOMAN
Oh you have a Trade!

MAN
I've done a lot of things.

WOMAN
So have I.

MAN

Come a long way.

WOMAN

You or me?

MAN

You tell me.

WOMAN

Big fancy house in West London.

MAN

Big fancy house in West London.

WOMAN

Long way from a council house.

MAN

With a dead geranium in a window box.

WOMAN

I aspired to a dead geranium.

A beat. They've found a level together.

MAN

This love of gardening is new-found, then?

WOMAN

God yeah. Growing up I was always being press-ganged into weeding this, dead-heading that. God forbid you get them mixed up! Felt like so much effort to turn something natural and beautiful into work. Why not just enjoy life?

MAN

I am very dedicated to enjoying life.

WOMAN

[Ignoring the flirtatious undertone, and carrying on as though he has not spoken] But when my mum died, I felt like I had to honour her, you know? Do something to prove her death hadn't been in vain.

MAN

What you're going to do with them [indicating the rose cuttings]

WOMAN

I'm trying to grow all her favourite roses. I wrote to all her friends asking for cuttings. My little kitchen's covered in them, all these chipped Easter Egg mugs filled with water, little orphaned baby roselets trying to grow new roots.

MAN

Bit sad, you coming alone and chopping their heads off.

WOMAN

But they can re-grow. And start a new life.

MAN

Lazarus rising from the ashes.

WOMAN

Not a great analogy. Lazarus actually died. In the real world you don't come back from being dead.

MAN

How about... Viola starting a new life as a pageboy after losing everything in a shipwreck? That's a pretty good analogy for being ripped out of your environment and cut down to size.

WOMAN

How did a plumber from a council flat get such a fine classical education?

He chuckles and slurps from his mug.

MAN

She been dead long, your ma?

WOMAN

I lost her when I was 14.

MAN

Took your time honouring her memory.

WOMAN

These things do, sometimes. [beat]
Do you have any children?

MAN

No, no. Might have been nice.
Missus was a lot older than me, she
already had a kid, so didn't seem
much point trying again.

WOMAN

You had Charley. [Indicates dog]

MAN

How'd you know his name?

WOMAN

[without a pause] I saw it on his
collar.

MAN

You've got good eyes.

WOMAN

How old is he?

MAN

Dunno, Lynda adopted him. Brought
him home from, Romania or
somewhere. Years ago.

WOMAN

She must have really loved him.

MAN

Yeah - yeah she did love him.

SCENE 3

The woman stands and ruffles the dog's fur. Suddenly she
looks very tall standing over the man in his chair.

WOMAN

Why didn't she take him? Why didn't
Lynda take Charley with her?

The Man shifts uncomfortably in his seat. Grimaces in pain.

MAN

She died. My partner didn't leave,
she died.

WOMAN

Oh. [beat] God. [beat] Oh God I'm
so sorry. I put my foot in my mouth
again, I'm always doing that.
That's awful. [beat] When?

MAN

'Bout a month ago.

WOMAN

Was she elderly?

MAN

65. Not very.

WOMAN

Heart, was it?

MAN

No.

WOMAN

It's usually heart. Heart or cancer, that's what my mum used to say, and it goes in families.

MAN

It wasn't heart and it wasn't cancer.

WOMAN

I'm sure you don't want to talk about it.

MAN

I don't mind.

WOMAN

I know what you're going through. I've been there.

MAN

[laughs] You really don't.

WOMAN

No, of course not. Stupid thing to say. [beat] What about that tea? I'll make it.

MAN

Nah, you're grand.

He struggles to his feet and exits. He should be gone for the realistic amount of time it would take someone a little slow on their feet to make tea. While he's gone the woman plays with the dog, before idly but carefully examining the room. She searches through the woman's coat then carefully lifts it off the peg, discovering the handbag hanging up underneath it. She goes through the handbag, pulling out a wodge of cash, and a mobile phone. She switches the phone on to check something before switching it off and hiding it in her pocket, then counts the cash which she replaces in the handbag before returning the handbag and coat to the peg, checking that it's in the same position as before. When she hears him returning, she casually and unhurriedly returns to her seat. Calm and in control the entire time.

The man returns with two overfilled cups of extremely milky tea.

MAN

Nice and milky.

WOMAN

Yum.

As he hands her a cup, a tiny bit spills onto her top from the over-filled cup. He whips a clean handkerchief out of his pocket - a old school pocket square - and gently dabs the tea from her body. Too close to her. Briefly.

WOMAN

Thank you.

MAN

You're welcome.

He sits. They sit in silence. The man slurps his tea, while the woman blows on hers but doesn't drink it.

WOMAN

Forgive me for being rude, but this place is in a pretty bad state.

MAN

Wondered how long it would take you to acknowledge that. [beat] I'm redecorating.

WOMAN

Looks like a hurricane passed through.

MAN

Not easy, keeping the place clean. You know. [He indicates his stick.]

She puts her tea down and jumps to her feet, going to one of the many drawers which is face-down on the floor, the contents (mainly paperwork) splayed out on the grubby carpet. She sweeps everything back inside and slots the drawer neatly back into place. Somehow only one drawer being in place makes the fact all the other drawers are abandoned on the floor look even worse.

WOMAN

I like to be helpful.

MAN

I don't have any money.

WOMAN

Sorry?

MAN

If you're angling for... a job?

WOMAN

Oh God no!

MAN
You got a job?

WOMAN
Yeah, yeah.

MAN
You married?

WOMAN
Not yet.

MAN
Boyfriend?

WOMAN
Not really.

MAN
Oh.

WOMAN
Lot of friends.

MAN
Had loads of friends when I was
your age. Girlfriends. All gone
now.

WOMAN
That's a shame.

MAN
You drift away from people. Me and
Lynda we were our own little world.

WOMAN
And now she's gone.

MAN
Now she's gone.

WOMAN
I'm not apologising anymore. But I
am genuinely sorry. It sounds very
lonely.

MAN
It is.

MAN
[Tearful]

WOMAN
At least you've got your
stepdaughter to help.

The man pauses, momentarily confused.

MAN

Eh?

WOMAN

Your partner's daughter. It must be a huge help to have someone else around, family around, who knew and loved Lynda.

He shakes his head, assuming he mentioned her.

MAN

Oh. Her. No. They fell out years ago.

WOMAN

Why?

MAN

Are you lonely?

WOMAN

Sometimes.

MAN

It's nice to find someone you can talk to.

WOMAN

Yes, it is.

MAN

Funny. You never know when a lovely young woman will walk into your life.

He reaches out and briefly rests a hand on her knee. She looks at it.

WOMAN

Clutching a bunch of roses.

MAN

It's like something out of a rom-com.

WOMAN

Yeah. [she laughs nervously]

MAN

Cake?

WOMAN

What?

MAN

Want some cake with that?

WOMAN

No thank you. [beat] Are you ready to talk about your wife? [beat] It helps to talk about things.

MAN

You tell me about yourself.

WOMAN

There's nothing to tell.

MAN

What's your job?

WOMAN

Teacher.

MAN

With no GCSEs?

WOMAN

I went back later.

MAN

What age do you teach?

WOMAN

Sixth form.

MAN

Must be a nightmare dealing with teenagers.

WOMAN

They're good kids.

MAN

Bet the boys are all in love with you.

WOMAN

Posh kids. They don't look at me.

MAN

I'd have looked at you, if you was my teacher. All I did at that age was chase girls.

WOMAN

Surprised you settled down with an older woman.

MAN

I don't see age.

WOMAN

You must really miss her.

WOMAN

Of course I miss her.

WOMAN

How did she die? You might feel better if you talk about it.

MAN

Your mam. How did she die?

WOMAN

[beat] Poisoning.

MAN

[Jumps] She was murdered?

She stares at him.

WOMAN

Tetanus poisoning. [beat] From her roses.

MAN

Didn't think that still happened.

WOMAN

It's extremely rare. People get jabs, but it wears off, apparently. She got a bad scratch on her arm and it got dirt in it, got infected. It wasn't even a big scratch, just deep. We saw the dirt inside it but we didn't think it was big enough to cause any problems. But it got under her skin and took over without us seeing. [beat] She loved those roses so much. [beat] Stupid, isn't it? You take something in to your home, love it, nurture it, and it ends up killing you.

MAN

Death by Roses. Sounds like a murder mystery.

WOMAN

The butler did it.

MAN

What?

WOMAN

That's the cliché, isn't it? Though I think there's only one Christie where the butler actually did do it.

MAN

More of a Rebus fan.

WOMAN

Gritty realism.

MAN

The violence is proper. None of this wishy washy stuff, cyanide in the champagne and that.

WOMAN

I hate violence.

MAN

Well, that's 'cause you're a girl.

WOMAN

Agatha Christie had loads of female killers.

MAN

Not many of them were butlers.

WOMAN

Well, that's gender normativity for you. Women haven't smashed the patent leather ceiling of butlerdom yet.

MAN

You should check out Rebus, you'd like it. Loads of actresses - women actors - in that. [beat] I was in that once.

WOMAN

What?

MAN

Rebus. The TV series.

WOMAN

As an extra? Some of my mates did that/

MAN

Recurring guest lead. Five episodes.

WOMAN

[Sounding impressed] Oh, you were an actor?

MAN

I was a bloody good one. Lynda used to say I was exactly like Marlon Brando. At drama schoo/

WOMAN

/That's not a very flattering comparison.

MAN

A young Marlon Brando. When he was in On the Waterfront. I would have killed in that part. [He impersonated Brando]

WOMAN

[beat] Get many acting jobs nowadays?

MAN

You're joking, are you?

WOMAN

Marlon Brando kept acting till he could barely walk.

MAN

All about who you know though, isn't it?

WOMAN

Who did you know?

MAN

I knew people.

WOMAN

The right people?

MAN

That's the question, isn't it?
[chuckles]

WOMAN

You must've done all right, this is a nice gaff.

They both take in the trashed living room.

MAN

Yeah, it's not bad.

WOMAN

That wallpaper's going back a bit.

MAN

Where you living? You say you were local?

WOMAN

Not far.

MAN

I'll walk you home. Once you finish your tea.

WOMAN

You don't have to do that.

MAN

You don't have to leave yet. I'm enjoying our chat.

WOMAN

It's late.

MAN

Want to see my Rebus? [He indicates the TV] See the old man in action.

WOMAN

Not right now.

MAN

The night's still young.

WOMAN

I should probably get going. I could come back another day?

MAN

Don't be silly. You've not touched your tea.

WOMAN

It's late.

MAN

It's not a school night.

She stands. The dog barks.

WOMAN

Shall I take him out for you? Must be nearly his bedtime.

MAN

He's fine.

WOMAN

Take him out so he can go to beddy byes.

MAN

Sit down.

She goes to the French Windows. They're locked. She pulls at the door handle and notices the key is gone. He watches her try to get the door open.

MAN

I keep the key in my pocket. In case of trespassers. [beat] Sit down.

She stares at him with her hand still on the door.

MAN

SIT. [beat] We're having such a lovely chat. Be a shame to end things prematurely.

WOMAN

I could come back. I would come back.

MAN

I want to talk now. You come into my home, prod me into talking about my dead wife. Make you tea, which you don't drink.

WOMAN

I'm sorry.

She sits. He stares at her.

MAN

That's better. Drink up.

WOMAN

[beat] I ... I don't really like it milky?

MAN

Why don't I go and see if I've got something you will like. Then we can resume our nice little chat?

He stands and leaves. She stands and tries the door again. Breaths. Glances towards the kitchen. She starts going through the room again, but this time in a more panicked and less measured and in control way. She goes through the drawers, the ones left on the floor. Stops dead. Stares into shoe box she has taken from one of the discarded drawers. A partner to the one she replaced earlier. The one she might easily have picked up instead. She picks up a gun. She breaks down into a sudden summer rainburst of silent tears. Then stops as quickly as she started. Pulls herself together. Hides the gun under the sofa, replaces the drawer, and sits down. Waiting for him to return.

SCENE 5

He returns, with two glasses of wine. He's walking more easily now. She takes it and drinks some, making eye contact.

WOMAN

That wallpaper really is dreadful.

MAN

[Imitating her suddenly posh accent] "Frightfully dreadful."

WOMAN

Your choice or hers?

MAN

Came with the house.

WOMAN

You didn't put it up?

MAN

What, in 1972?

WOMAN

Not been here that long?

MAN

Ten years or so.

WOMAN

That's not so long.

MAN

Lynda's ex sold her house from under her, she had to move. She had a huge house when we met, over in Pinner. Big yellow house. Bastard.

WOMAN

Rich bastard?

MAN

Yeah. Yeah, rich bastard.

WOMAN

He should've bought her a new house.

MAN

He did. [laughs] She even got him to write a cheque to the moving company.

WOMAN

[surprised] So this was Lynda's house, then?

MAN

You don't quibble about these things when you've been together as long as Lyn and me had.

WOMAN

Still, must be nice to have someone else... To have security.

MAN

I used to live in Central.

WOMAN

Flatshare?

MAN

Yeah... Camden. Proper London. Not the suburbs.

WOMAN

And you gave up all that for love? [long pause] How did you meet?

MAN

Evening classes.

WOMAN

Pottery, or Italian cooking?

MAN

Acting.

WOMAN

You teach acting? Must come in handy between jobs, a way to keep the bills paid.

He shifts uncomfortably.

MAN

Nah, tutor was a mate... Kept the skills fresh, you know. Like a pianist still doing scales.

WOMAN

Sure. Sure.

MAN

Lyn... She was fresh off the divorce. Wanted to do something new.

WOMAN

Like you?

MAN

[Laughs] I gave her what she wanted.

WOMAN

How romantic.

MAN

We used to go to this little boozier round the back of the car park. Landlord knew me so he'd let us do lock-ins.

WOMAN

How old was her daughter?

MAN

Dunno, 14, 15.

WOMAN

And you were?

MAN

Thirty ei... four. What's with the third degree?

WOMAN

Why'd you fall out?

MAN

She was a bad kid. Tearaway. Left home when she was 18, which is far too old to still be living at home in my opinion.

WOMAN

And they never got back in touch?

MAN

No. [beat] She was a bad influence. I had to protect Lynda from her.

WOMAN

What did she do, this girl?

MAN

You don't want to know.

WOMAN

Sounds like all Lynda had was you.

MAN

She used to walk Charley every afternoon. She went to yoga. Had mates there. Something called "Rock Choir", I dunno.

WOMAN

Sounds like she was healthier than you.

MAN

Yeah, she was! [laughs] She used to eat branflakes for breakfast every morning. Bloody hated them. But

(MORE)

MAN (cont'd)

still 7am, every morning, forcing them down. Kept trying to get me onto her various health kicks, but she gave up on all that in the end. [beat] Before all this [gestures to legs]

WOMAN

What's wrong with you? If you don't mind me asking.

MAN

Some neurological thing. The doctors don't know. All the tests come back negative. But what do doctors know?

WOMAN

Is it terminal?

MAN

Fuck's sake.

WOMAN

Sorry.

MAN

It might be.

WOMAN

I'm so sorry.

MAN

They don't know it's not.

WOMAN

You never know, you might get lucky.

MAN

I don't feel lucky.

WOMAN

My mum always said people make their own luck.

MAN

Did she?

WOMAN

Not really. People are bad at taking their own advice.

MAN

Lyn couldn't even take advice about wallpaper.

SCENE 6

WOMAN

May I make some suggestions? My mum always said I had a good eye.

MAN

Sure.

She walks around, gingerly picking her way around the piles of stuff. She picks things up, gradually getting more confident. Acting like she owns the place. Desperate but she's got nothing to lose.

WOMAN

Not blue. Never cool colours in a living room, unless it's south-facing. [beat] Maybe pink? [beat] Sorry, is that too girly for you? Ah well. Maybe someone else would do this room pink. [beat] Yellow? I can see it yellow. Gold curtains and matching soft furnishings. With burgundy accents.

He starts: there is something in the room she is describing that she recognises.

MAN

Not a fan of yello/

She grabs his chair and spins it across the room with him inside.

WOMAN

The chair should really be on this side, facing the windows, not the TV.

MAN

I paid for the flatscreen. It was my birthday present to Lynda.

WOMAN

We'll knock down that wall, put in floor to ceiling windows overlooking the canal.

MAN

Why don't you go the whole hog and put in a swimming pool and a helipad? [laughs]

WOMAN

I might. [She smiles at him] Retractable double doors to create a through-space to the dining room for parties.

MAN

I use that as my workspace.

WOMAN

Now that room can have wallpaper.
Maybe an accent wall. Maybe
something vintage: William Morris?
Something green, with trees and
birds.

MAN

Fuck you.

She runs her nail down the existing wallpaper, judging it.

WOMAN

God, textured wallpaper. Lynda
really did have bad taste
sometimes, didn't she?

MAN

You cunt. I knew it was you.

WOMAN

Then why did you let me in?

MAN

I felt sorry for you.

WOMAN

You should. My mum's just died.

MAN

Where'd that bullshit about tetanus
come from? I should have known.
Tetanus!? Who dies from tetanus
nowadays? You always were a liar.

WOMAN

I thought it was poetic.

MAN

You waltz in here like you own the
place, after what you did to us?
After what you did to your mum?

WOMAN

I didn't do anything to her. And
what's with this "18" business, you
know I wasn't 18.

MAN

I never paid that much attention to
you.

WOMAN

You know that's not true.

MAN

Your mum never forgave you.

WOMAN

I didn't do anything to her.

MAN

Why are you here?

WOMAN

Why wouldn't I be here? This's my house.

MAN

This was never your home! Lyn moved to this house years after she kicked you out. You've never even been here before.

WOMAN

You sure about that? [beat] Not keeping the place very well, are you?

MAN

I'm disabled.

WOMAN

My mum did all the cleaning.

MAN

She didn't mind. She was used to it.

WOMAN

All those years cleaning up after me?

MAN

You were a fucking nightmare. State of your bedroom.

WOMAN

You spent enough time in it.

MAN

Fuck off, you know I never.

WOMAN

All fourteen year olds have messy bedrooms, what's your excuse?

MAN

I'm in mourning, my wife just died.

WOMAN

Girlfriend. You never made it legal.

MAN

Life partner.

WOMAN

Her life. Not yours.

WOMAN

Want me to tidy up? [beat] I'm very tidy now.

MAN

They say miracles never happen.

WOMAN

You never know.

MAN

Do your worst. [Indicates clutter.]

She starts to tidy the mess. He sits back and stares at her. She openly pries, reading the paperwork.

MAN

All the photos are in the attic. She didn't want to have to look at them. Can't remember where the stepladder is.

WOMAN

You didn't find it, did you?

MAN

What?

WOMAN

You know what.

MAN

I found it.

WOMAN

Must've made you happy.

MAN

[beat] Jane.

WOMAN

Don't.

MAN

I was planning to pop round tomorrow morning. You could come with me, if you want? Your mum would like that.

WOMAN

What's their name again?

MAN

[beat] I honestly can't think of it off the top of my head. [beat] God! [beat] It's on the tip of my tongue. You know how it is. They're right around the corner.

WOMAN

I could google.

MAN

Nah, there's loads around here. It's a couple of miles away.

WOMAN

Not that around the corner.

MAN

Near. Really near. Friendly.

WOMAN

Give me their phone number and I'll book an appointment.

MAN

No need to do that, they said to just pop round.

WOMAN

Without an appointment? That's unusual.

MAN

We're in the sticks.

WOMAN

I wouldn't know. It's been a while since I've been back.

MAN

Where you living now?

WOMAN

Kennington.

MAN

Must have some dosh.

WOMAN

I do okay.

MAN

Yeah. Yeah. You and me. We'll go together. Put the past behind us. [beat] She was your mum too.

WOMAN

Bloody hell, I knew there was an age gap but I didn't know you considered her your mum?

MAN

Stop it, Jane.

Jane continues to search through the papers.

MAN

There's a nice church the other side of the allotments. Your mum used to walk Charley there. Might be a nice place to bury her. [beat] She'd like that.

WOMAN

We're Jewish.

MAN

Aren't you supposed to have buried her by now?

WOMAN

Since when do you know anything about Jewish customs?

MAN

Picked up a few things.

WOMAN

About Judaism or about death?

MAN

Stop being a cunt.

WOMAN

My mum just fucking died a month ago.

MAN

Your estranged mum you'd not spoken to since you were 15.

WOMAN

The hospital won't release the body. Have you tried?

MAN

How do you know that?

WOMAN

Because I told them not to. [beat] There's going to be an inquest. An autopsy.

MAN

Jane, no, you know your mum
wouldn't want that.

WOMAN

Nothing to do with me.

MAN

Lying pig.

WOMAN

Yeah, you're right. Yeah. I am
lying. I got a court order stopping
you from taking her body.

MAN

What do you want? [Her hand happens
to brush the TV as she continues
searching the paperwork] I told you
I paid for that flatscreen!

She stops. Straightens. Looks at him.

WOMAN

How did she die?

MAN

She had a stroke. [beat] I called
an ambulance.

WOMAN

She was going to leave you.

MAN

Liar.

WOMAN

It's true. She'd been planning it
for months. She'd hired a
solicitor. Two solicitors. One to
do the will and the property stuff,
one to issue an eviction order.

MAN

It's my house!

WOMAN

Is it?

MAN

I don't believe you.

WOMAN

Check her email. [beat] Wait, you
already did? Even before she died?
That's why she had a second account
on her phone you didn't know about.

MAN

Lyn would never do that. She wasn't sneaky and manipulative like you. You got it from your father.

WOMAN

How do you think he became a rich bastard in the first place?

MAN

I made her happy. We would have been happy if it'd not been for you.

WOMAN

She was frightened of you. That's the other half of it. Two solicitors. Her GP. Someone at the citizen's advice bureau. A therapist. And a charity specialising in helping domestic violence survivors.

MAN

Lyn couldn't wipe her own arse without a team of cheerleaders.

WOMAN

Don't talk that way about my mother.

MAN

I never touched her.

WOMAN

I know.

MAN

What??

WOMAN

I know you didn't hit her. There's other ways to control people.

MAN

You didn't even know her.

WOMAN

I think it's pretty clear that I did.

MAN

When did you come sniffing back round? After she bought this place.

WOMAN

I never left.

MAN

Liar. She knew what a nasty little liar you were. That's why she took my side over yours. She saw what you were and she wanted no part in what she'd created.

WOMAN

She wasn't bloody Doctor Frankenstein.

MAN

She hated you.

WOMAN

I hated her.

MAN

Maybe if you'd not been such a little bra/

WOMAN

I was a child!

MAN

You were 15, stop playing the victim card.

WOMAN

You're 55, you stop playing the victim card.

MAN

Oh like it's "domestic violence survivor" not "domestic violence victim" now? Some survivor your mum is, she's dead. Can you be a survivor if you're dead?

WOMAN

You're acting very nice to be all of a sudden, wanting me to go to the solicitors with you, asking me about funeral plans.

MAN

Your mum might have left you a trinket or two.

WOMAN

Cut it out, I know you found it.

MAN

She left you all her jewelery. You might as well know.

WOMAN

She left me a lot more than that.

MAN

It's mostly costume, but it's the thought that counts.

WOMAN

Where did she hide it?

MAN

Might sell the old place, pack off to Spain.

WOMAN

Can't have been in the filing cabinet, or you wouldn't have had to tear the place apart.

MAN

Your mum was a messy cow.

WOMAN

Not that messy to leave a will under the mattress. [beat] Why do you think she did that, if she left everything to you? I assume that's what it says.

MAN

Like I said, you get the costume jewelery. Some lovely pieces from Claire's Accessories. You'll want to hang on to those for your own daughter if you ever have one.

WOMAN

Then why do we need to go to the solicitor?

MAN

What?

WOMAN

If you've got the will, and it leaves you everything, why are you trying so hard to get me to go to the solicitors with you?

MAN

Next of kin.

WOMAN

Until five minutes ago you thought Lyn hadn't spoken to me in twenty years.

MAN

Got more of a mouth on you than she did.

WOMAN

What did you think, when you saw my name in the will?

MAN

Just cheap jewelery.

WOMAN

Even so, must have given you a shock. The long-estranged, forgotten child popping up.

MAN

Lynda was always sentimental.

WOMAN

I talked to Christine next door, she said you were up all night Tuesday, banging and swearing. Sounded like you were tearing the place apart, she said.

MAN

How do you know Christine?

WOMAN

We text quite a bit.

MAN

She's an interfering cow an' all.

WOMAN

Tuesday, that was, what, an hour after my mum died? Didn't even wait till she was cold, did you, you couldn't wait to see what you'd be getting.

MAN

I supported her for twenty years.

WOMAN

You never supported her.

MAN

Emotionally supported her. Someone had to. Do you know what you did to her?

WOMAN

Did she know what you did to me?

MAN

I never touched you, you lying bitch.

WOMAN

You didn't need to. Sometimes words are enough.

MAN

I was never interested in you, you were just some stupid kid.

WOMAN

You told me you'd killed my hamster, once, do you remember that? [Impersonates him] "Jane, your hamster is dead. I stomped it under my boot."

MAN

It was just a joke, I didn't touch the stupid thing. I'm an animal lover.

WOMAN

That wasn't the worst thing you said.

MAN

Just words.

WOMAN

She asked me that six months before she died. I told her I never lied to her. [beat] Dog park.

MAN

Wha?

WOMAN

That's how she did it. Fake name in her phone. Text her in code when I wanted to talk. She'd take Charlie to the dog park, call from her mobile. She made all her phone calls there. It was the only place she could get privacy. [beat] I had to remember to keep all my good news and emotional breakdowns for sunny days.

MAN

Bet you had plenty of those.

WOMAN

I was Sectioned when I was 19.

MAN

My fault, I suppose.

WOMAN

You destroyed my life.

MAN

You destroyed mine!

WOMAN

How exactly did I destroy your life? You spent one night in a cell. I was sleeping under bushes and in shop doorways for four months.

MAN

You think that's what your mum wanted for you? It broke her heart.

WOMAN

I forgave her.

MAN

You forgave her? That's bloody rich.

WOMAN

Don't you want to know what we talked about?

MAN

Lynda was always sentimental where you were concerned.

WOMAN

You know it took her five years to get pregnant with me? Three rounds of IVF. Finally she put a note in the Wailing Wall asking God to give her a daughter.

MAN

And God gave her you, shit, no wonder I'm an atheist.

WOMAN

She was talking to a therapist.

MAN

I never hit her.

WOMAN

You wouldn't let her go to the supermarket unsupervised. She had to pretend the dog had diarrhea so she could sneak off to the solicitor to change her will.

MAN

I never laid a finger on her.

WOMAN

You didn't have to. Just like you didn't have to/

MAN

/You're always been a liar. After everything/

WOMAN

/You know it's true. Otherwise why were you trying so hard to make me go to the solicitor with you? Don't need to make an appointment? Don't make me laugh. They already sent you away with a flea in your ear.

MAN

I told you, Lyn left you her jewelery/

WOMAN

Who keeps their will under their mattress? God, how stupid are you?

MAN

Lyn would never, she was a decent, honest person.

WOMAN

Then why'd she make two wills, two weeks apart? [beat] I'll let you keep the fucking flatscreen.

SCENE 7

He collapses back into the chair. Starts calling weakly for the dog. Pets the dog. She watches him.

MAN

He'll have to go to the RSPCA. They'll have him destroyed, I won't be able to keep him.

WOMAN

Didn't think you'd give up that easily.

MAN

Where am I supposed to go? I'm an old man. I haven't worked in years...

WOMAN

Ever.

MAN

I was an Actor!

WOMAN

Four episodes of Rebus!

MAN

We talked about it once. I suggested she leave me the lifelong usage of the property, and ownership would revert to you after I'd died.

WOMAN

I don't think my mother would want to put me in a position where I'd benefit financially from your death. [beat] Too tempting.

MAN

When she changed her will. Five years ago.

WOMAN

Wills.

MAN

She said she wanted to leave you her stuff. Her nice necklace from your nan, and the rings your dad got her. That stuff should have gone to you, I said so. Encouraged her to get back in touch.

WOMAN

We already were. For years and years before that.

MAN

What?

WOMAN

Maybe a year after I moved out. We met for coffee. You were at home nursing a hangover.

MAN

[beat] I thought she was having an affair.

WOMAN

No you didn't. You never noticed a thing.

MAN

I thought she was meeting her friends.

WOMAN

Before you scared them off?

MAN

I used to encourage her. Go get a cup of tea and a cake. [beat] She used to work so hard.

WOMAN

It was pretty good cake, to be fair.

MAN

I don't be-fucking-lieve this.

WOMAN

I'm the ghost that's haunted your entire relationship.

MAN

You were a child. Fuck's sake. You were a child and you destroyed my life, tried to destroy our relationship. You turned your mum into the kind of woman who lies and sneaks around.

WOMAN

No, you did that to her.

MAN

How can a child be so manipulative?

WOMAN

I was never a child.

MAN

No, you weren't.

WOMAN

You'd know.

MAN

Knock it off. We're alone. We both know what happened.

WOMAN

You certainly didn't treat me like a child. All those videos? Helpful suggestions of ways I could earn some money to pay rent?

MAN

I was paying rent when I were 15!

WOMAN

[beat] I had to clean up after you, in the mornings. Like a fucking brothel maid. So my friend's mum wouldn't see and call social services when she collected me for school.

MAN

That doesn't justify what you did.

WOMAN

Sometimes a lie is more accurate than the truth.

MAN

So you admit you lied?

WOMAN

You think the police would have understood the truth?

MAN

Did your mum?

WOMAN

I told her I never lied and in my heart that's the truth.

MAN

You know it's not. You let her go to her grave believing a lie. And you turned her into the kind of person who puts fake names in her phone, and texts code words, and pretends to be walking the dog so she can have secret meetings.

WOMAN

She was so much smarter than you ever gave her credit.

MAN

I tried to tell the police that, you know that? The night they arrested me. I tried to tell them how clever you were, that you weren't like an ordinary child. They didn't understand. They willfully misunderstood. [beat] Backfired on you, didn't it?

WOMAN

What are you talking about?

MAN

Your dear old mum chose me, not you.

WOMAN

When I went on Birthright, at the very end you all have to stand in a circle and avow your newfound appreciation for your Jewish faith, and it's supposed to be this really profound moment, or as profound as a bunch of nineteen-year-olds who have been drinking and visiting mass graves for ten days can

(MORE)

WOMAN (cont'd)
handle, and the Israeli girl
soldier next to me started touching
me up. Groped my bum. I froze.

MAN
Did you cry rape then too?

WOMAN
Get out of my fucking house, Gary.

An impasse. They stare at each other.

MAN
I'll fight it.

WOMAN
I'll win. You can't afford a
lawyer.

MAN
Why did you come here tonight?

WOMAN
I want to know how she died.

MAN
Death certificate said a stroke.

WOMAN
What happened? No one will tell me.

MAN
Ye-es, I'm her official next of kin
at the hospital.

WOMAN
I'm getting it overturned. I
already got the court order.

MAN
Why'd you do that?

WOMAN
So you couldn't sneak off and have
her cremated, dispose of the
evidence.

MAN
Evidence? You think I killed her.

WOMAN
She goes to see a solicitor to file
eviction paperwork, and two months
later she'd dead. No one has that
bad timing.

He laughs

WOMAN

Did you see her body after she died?

MAN

No.

WOMAN

Too busy tearing my house apart looking for her will. [beat] They'd put a duvet in a floral duvet cover over her, but I could see the black body bag underneath. I wanted to cut a lock of her hair to remember her, but I didn't have any scissors. I touched it and her hair slid right out from the roots, like the skin off an over-baked butternut squash. [beat] It was really, really fucking gross. [beat] I've still got it in this locket. [She displays heart-shaped locket around her neck]

MAN

Why are you telling me this?

WOMAN

How did she die?

He's silent for a long time.

MAN

I'll make you a deal. [beat] Go and feed the dog first, please.

She exits, to feed the dog.

He stands, slowly and painfully, but with more ease than before. Surveys his lost kingdom. Picks a crystal ornament from the mantelpiece and puts it in his dressing gown pocket, before chuckling briefly and replacing it. He kicks some of the discarded drawers over. Sits. Stares. Maybe spins in his armchair. Again, this should take the length of time it would realistically take someone to feed a dog.

She returns.

WOMAN

Don't bother.

MAN

What?

WOMAN

I found it.

She opens the cardboard box that contained the gun and shows that it's empty.

MAN

It's a fake gun, you numpty. A prop
from one of my old TV shows/

WOMAN

/Four episodes

MAN

We're in Middlesex who the fuck has
guns here?

WOMAN

Technically Middlesex doesn't exist
anymore.

A pause.

MAN

I'll tell you the truth, and you
tell me the truth.

WOMAN

Deal.

They both sit. Both glug some wine. Breath.

MAN

It was late Saturday night. Lynda
had been at one of her choir
practices. She got home late, and
we had a fight. I never touched
her. She went to bed and I stayed
up and played X-Box. Around 2am I
heard moaning. I went into the
bedroom and she was lying on the
floor, and she'd wet herself. Your
mum had wet herself. I dialled 999.
When they got her to hospital, the
doctor said she'd had a massive
stroke. He said she only had 10%
chance of surviving, and that if
she did she'd be disabled. He asked
me what I wanted to do, what
Lynda's wishes had been. Next of
kin, you see. I told him she
wouldn't have wanted to live like
this. They stopped giving her
oxygen. And she died.

She sits on the floor. Cries silently.

He sits down on the floor next to her. Gently.

MAN

Why did you lie?

WOMAN

The porn you used to watch. Not even normal porn, weird porn. All the time. And the noises. I used to go to sleep with my walkman on every night. Dashed to the loo to avoid seeing you. Peed in a fucking jug to avoid seeing you. You told me I could earn money. You told me you'd make me earn money. [beat] I didn't say you raped me, I didn't say you sodomised me, all I said was you touched me once because that's was enough to make them listen when they wouldn't listen to any of the other stuff about and yes it was a lie and maybe I am a liar but I loved my mum and I know right from wrong?

At last he is satisfied. After twenty years, she's finally admitted that she faked her accusation. He's exonerated.

MAN

Your mum was proud of you, and she loved you.

WOMAN

Someone I love told me once that it's better to live in the truth, not an invented truth, because the truth is much better - that people care about me. My mum cared about me. All I wanted to do was help her get rid of you, and I failed. [beat] I'm still failing her now. [beat] I'm sorry.

MAN

I don't have anywhere to go. I've got no one left.

WOMAN

Yes, you do.

She picks up the secateurs.

Blackout as the sound of digging fills the stage - she's finishing the hole she was digging at the start of the play.