

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS INVESTIGATING THE PROCESS
OF A PLAYWRIGHT WITH REFERENCE TO *JELLYFISH*,
AN ORIGINAL WORK FOR THE STAGE.**

by

Rowena Catherine Wilson

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Department of Humanities
College of Drama and Theatre Arts
The University of Birmingham
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“I don’t care how beautiful, ritzy, dazzly or weird anything looks, I want to be intellectually and emotionally involved in it.’ I want to engage with it on a gut level.”
(Daniels, 6, 1997.)

As an audience member, I want to see characters that represent real people, plots that represent real situations. Over the year, I have seen a number of plays that have aroused only one emotion: distinct indifference. Amongst such plays, there have also been exceptional pieces of theatre, but on the whole, I felt I had seen outdated plays that I cared little for and about. ‘Who goes to the theatre nowadays?’ is a question I have been asked on a number of occasions while writing *Jellyfish*, and for good reason. The theatre is no longer an accepted pastime because too often, it fails to entertain. As a writer, it is my responsibility to create the kind of theatre that I would want to see. I want to use playwriting as a mirror for reality. I want to make people laugh. I want to write plays that are so personal, they become universal.

1. THE INFLUENCE OF PLAYWRITING THEORY

“The word playwright suggests that plays are *wrought* rather than written... It suggests that raw materials must be shaped and formed into a working whole by following precise specification... If a play is made wrong, it will quickly fall apart once running on the stage.” (McLaughlin, 11, 1997.)

Playwriting is a curious mix of creativity and discipline. On the one hand, a playwright must be able to rely on his imagination, readily making use of his personal experiences and switching easily from his subconscious mind to his conscious. On the other, he must be persistent, making use of prescribed tasks to aid him when he is stuck. Above all, he must be aware of particular rules - even if he intends to

disregard them later. “There is always that sense of not knowing where you’re going” (Pinnock, 46, 1997) and thus it would be foolish of a writer to disregard the views of others more experienced than he. I will be discussing the elements I found crucial in the writing of *Jellyfish*, as there are innumerable factors to be considered when writing.

Impulse

Every writer must have a need to write: what Spencer dubs “the impulse” (2002, 127). McLaughlin calls it “the seed of an idea that can grow into a brilliant play” (1997, 21) – but the meaning is the same. The impulse might be an idea, a strong opinion on a certain matter or, as it was in my case, an image. The word impulse is a wise choice; it is implicit of spontaneous thought and an inability to source the root of said thought. As Ayckbourn puts it, ideas “simply arrive and present themselves” (2002, 6); we are unlikely to ever understand where they came from, although writers are also inspired by articles and photographs.

There are three “energies” in writing: raw, first-hand experience; secondary experience, discovered through family stories or research; and, finally, the writer’s imagination (Eldridge, 2008). For new writers, it is likely that their impulse will stem from their own experience (although Eldridge’s argument still stands, as the writer will inevitably combine the three). “You have a lot to say about the world you inhabit, which you feel hasn’t been told, especially in the theatre” (Pinnock, 1997, 46). A prime example of this is the range of work displayed on the workshop day, and the

manifestos we wrote when the course commenced. In my own manifesto (2008), I declared that I wanted to write theatre for and about my peers in my hometown.

Importantly, McLaughlin states that a new writer must write “something you feel passionately about” (1997, 37); of course, a writer will surely have an invested interest in their own experiences. There is little room for objectivity in the theatre: “plays are not journalism” (Nagy in Edgar, 1999, 125). Note that even verbatim plays such as Norton-Taylor’s *The Colour of Justice* (1999) are indicative of the writer’s beliefs through the way in which they are structured – in this instance, Norton has prime suspect Jamie Acourt enter towards the end of the play, following various statements that describe Acourt’s vocal racism, which leaves the audience with a sense of moral outrage. Writing from past experience enables a new writer to employ the subjectivity necessary in writing an engaging piece of theatre.

Egri gives little mention to impulse. While he acknowledges that a writer is first and foremost struck by an idea (2004, 6), it appears that he considers premise the initial impulse: “the premise is the conception, the beginning of the play” (2004, 28). While we will see that a premise is clearly invaluable, Spencer (2002) and McLaughlin (1997) argue that an impulse, in most cases, comes first. The impulse forces the writer to sit down and write; perhaps it has troubled them for some time before they even put pen to paper.

Premise

“Every play must have a well-formulated premise.” (Egri, 2004, 6)

Once the impulse has been established, it is then that a writer must develop his premise. A clear premise is vital to every playwright, regardless of genre or structure. It has largely been prized above every other element of playwriting, dating from Aristotle’s *Poetics*: “The plot is the source... character is second.” (1996, 12.) Egri’s theories on premise imply that the premise is the basis for the plot and therefore we cannot entirely separate the two. “The premise will show you the road.” (Egri, 2004, 2). Furthermore, Egri argues that without a basic premise a writer cannot fully develop his characters (2004, 17), which in turn will have a detrimental effect on the plot. Vitally, he acknowledges that “Neither the premise nor any other part of a play has a separate life of its own.” (2004, 30) For Egri, the premise is the backbone. Without it, the rest of the play would fall apart.

Egri concedes that some writers may work on a draft for some time before discovering they need a premise. Playwright April De Angelis agrees (2008), reminding us that sometimes a playwright must “try and discover it after [they’ve] started”. McLaughlin (1997, 32), on the other hand, stresses that a writer must take the time to “state simply and clearly the primary, universal truth” they wish to communicate before even attempting to write any semblance of a first draft, a suggestion which I was to learn the value of.

To merely find a premise is not enough. A writer must “instil it with forward motion” (McLaughlin, 1997, 35), making the premise active and dramatic. Egri’s influence on

dramatic writing is evident as McLaughlin uses Egri's own examples to illustrate active premise: "Great love defies even death" (Egri, 2004, 3) being the basic premise for *Romeo and Juliet*. In five words he summarises the full plot: the beginning, 'great love'; the middle, 'defiance'; and the end, 'death'. To ascertain an active premise is a priceless tool that should not be underestimated by any writer.

McLaughlin (1997) and Egri (2004) both argue that the fundamental rule in defining the premise of a play is that the writer should have conviction. If the premise is not something that the writer believes in, it will be utterly ineffective. This is immediately reminiscent of Nagy's argument in her article (1999). "Until [the author] takes sides, there will be no play" (Egri: 2004, 9). In taking sides, the writer is able to find his own voice and can then communicate the premise to his audience and, should he want to, persuade them to understand his point of view. The writer's convictions are necessary to underline the premise. This is true regardless of genre and no matter how serious the premise.

Structure

Once a premise is formulated, it is generally accepted that structure must follow. It is "a foundation, a framework" (Spencer: 2002, 33.) The structure chosen by the playwright is dependent on what exactly he is attempting to communicate, and the reaction he wants to provoke. The act-structures most commonly used at present consist of the three act, the two act and the one act. The reputable three act structure is considered by many as a form that creates a "totally satisfying play it is neat, concisely enfolding thesis, antithesis and synthesis" (Waters, 2008). While

this is still a common tool, writers have become more experimental with structure. One act plays have become increasingly popular, providing audiences with a whole story in one hit (Waters, 2008). In between these two forms sits the two-act play, which is extremely popular with audiences and writers alike. These may seem less complete than a three-act, leaving the audience with unanswered questions, focusing more on cause and effect than resolution. I find this the most interesting way of structuring plays, as it implies a mutual collaboration between audience and writer.

“There is a temptation to want to start [a play] with the biggest imaginable bang” warns Ayckbourn (2002, 25), going on to explain that to do so would be a mistake. Starting a play with an explosive beginning puts enormous pressure on a writer, as they risk the rest of their play becoming anticlimactic. This is invaluable advice from Ayckbourn, and something I was to learn during the initial writing process of *Jellyfish*. In a similar vein, Spencer reminds us that “it’s a good idea to give [the audience] some significant event at the end of Act One that will persuade them that it is worthwhile to come back into the theatre” (2002, 106). As Waters (2009) puts it, without that significant event, “I probably won’t gain anything from going back in and I kind of know where it’s going” and I was wary of this when I was writing.

Character

“Which is more important, plot or character? Let us trade brooding, sensitive Hamlet for a pleasure-loving prince, whose one reason for living is the privileges his princehood affords him. Would he avenge his father’s death? Hardly. He would turn the tragedy to comedy.” (Egri: 98, 2004)

Egri values character almost as much as premise. Along with Spencer (2002) he argues that Aristotle's theories on character were misguided – or, at least, mistaken; “Character was the great factor in Aristotle's time, and no fine play ever was or will be written without it.” (2004, 100) Importantly, Egri proposes that “character creates plot” (2004, 98) – plot and character are mutually influential. He stresses, however, that it is the central, or pivotal, character that is the driving force of the plot. Yet before we can analyse the role of the central character, we must first look at character development.

McLaughlin (1997) and McKee (1998) describe the value of a writer basing one or more characters on people they know. What better source of inspiration than a family member or close friend? However, both McKee and McLaughlin explain that a better developed character will in fact be an amalgamation of a few different personalities. “Few individuals are as clear in their complexity and as well delineated as a character... We build characters out of parts found.” (McKee: 1998, 386.)

McLaughlin advises that, in order to create an interesting and volatile character, a writer should marry various personality traits from various sources. It can also be worthwhile to subvert stereotype and release a character from their generic role, i.e. a princess that is not a victim (Edgar, 2008), which is something I hoped to achieve with *Jellyfish*.

Regardless of a writer's inspiration for a character, it is vital that they truly understand their characters. Egri declares “you must know them not only as they are now, but as

they will be tomorrow or years from now.” (2004, 68.) He suggests that it is necessary for a writer to understand precisely what his characters will do, given any circumstances. He must know what his characters want; in short, he must know their action and their motivation. McKee furthers this school of thought, suggesting that there were two means of developing a character: characterization and what he calls ‘True Character’.

“Characterization is the sum of all the observable qualities, a combination that makes the character unique: physical appearance coupled with mannerisms, style of speech and gesture, sexuality, age, IQ, occupation, personality, values, where he lives, how he lives.”

(McKee: 1998, 375.)

These are the elements of a character that will become immediately apparent to an audience. Some will be communicated through the casting of the play (and by any character description provided in the text). Others will become clear through the dialogue and the language the character uses. “‘True Character’ waits behind this mask [of characterization]. Despite his characterization, at heart who is this person?” (McKee: 1998, 375.)

This depth of character will become clear to an audience through the character’s action and will either compliment or contrast with the character the audience has got to know through characterization. The ‘True Character’, McKee suggests, will be expressed through a character’s choices: “How the person chooses to act under pressure is who he is – the greater the pressure, the truer and deeper the choice to character.” (1998, 375). This appears to underline Egri’s demand that a character

must grow through the choices they make, whether it is the correct decision or the incorrect one – “he must make it.” (2004, 69).

Conversely, Spencer argues that growth occurs when “a character either gets what she wants or definitively does not get it” (2002, 87). Either way, it seems to be generally accepted that ‘True Character’ is expressed by a character’s actions and reactions. McKee also asks that a writer leave room for a collaborative process with the audience, creating a fully rounded character that the audience can enhance with their own imagination and life experience. (1998, 376).

It is Egri that seems to best understand and articulate the role of the pivotal character. It is the pivotal character that drives the plot; “without the pivotal character, there is no play” (Egri: 2004, 110.) Where every character in the play must want to gain something, the pivotal character must want it so badly that “he will destroy or be destroyed in the effort to attain his goal.” (Egri: 110.) Although he may be weak in temperament, he must be a strong enough character to fight for his desires. If he is not, Egri argues, “it is because the author has not found the psychological moment when he is not only ready, but eager to fight.” (2004, 86); there are no weak characters. It could be more likely a writer is choosing the wrong point in a character’s timeline to form the plot of the play. Such a play is likely to provoke indifference from the audience. Spencer explains:

“When a character has much to gain and lose, he will care deeply. If there is little to gain or lose, then he will tend to be indifferent to the outcome. And that indifference will almost surely be matched by the audience.” (2002, 81.)

We can see, therefore, that it is imperative the pivotal character is, as Egri puts it, “eager”. This is something I believe I failed to fully understand when it came to writing and re-drafting my play.

For every pivotal character, there must be an antagonist. It is prudent that they are as strong as the protagonist and that they will hold them back from what they want (Egri: 2002, 116). This creates the conflict that is so necessary in a play. I have previously mentioned the importance of subjectivity when constructing a premise. In developing the protagonist and the antagonist, a writer must remember to retain a certain level of objectivity. A character always acts according to their own moral compass – after all, “Do people do what they think is wrong? More often than not they do what they think is right.” (McDonald in Stephenson and Langridge: 1997, 66) I found this an important precept to remember when I was developing the character of Lucie-Jo, who I knew would be a divisive character for an audience considering her actions in the play.

Dialogue

It is commonly accepted among playwrights and drama theorists alike that dialogue is one of the most crucial elements of playwriting (Spencer, 2002; Egri, 2004; Eldridge, 2008) because it is the writer’s primary mode of communicating all of his ideas to his audience. Where cinema relies on the visual, the theatre is unable to do this; there is no effective way to draw the eye of the audience to a particular object, or at least, no equivalent way that can match the effect of the camera in cinema.

“Dialogue, put simply, is characters conveying information verbally – about themselves, about each other, about events.” (Ayckbourn: 2002, 48) The writer is equipped with dialogue and must use it. As Spencer reminds us, it is the “one solitary means by which you have to express everything you have to say: theme, character, story, plot. Everything.” (2002, 195.) It is so important that there are a few universally accepted ‘guidelines’ to assist the writer in creating believable dialogue. ‘Believable’ is the key word here; audiences will forgive a lot of things, but if something seems too far-fetched, they will soon distance themselves from it. I strove to write dialogue that was as believable as possible in writing *Jellyfish*.

It is useful at this point to discuss expository dialogue. “There’s nothing less convincing than characters who spend the first ten minutes telling each other things they obviously must have known.” (Ayckbourn: 2002, 50) There is, however, a fine balance. There are things that the audience needs to know – for example, the character relationships, or the back story. The characters on stage, however, will already know some of these, and there will be no need to repeat them to one another. Because the characters of my play are all related, this was something I needed to be particularly careful about. The dialogue in the opening of Norman’s *Night, Mother* (1983) manages to achieve subtext on a multitude of levels: setting up the plot, conveying their relationship, and indicating back story.

“Dialogue generally has to perform a triple function

1. To establish plot and develop character
2. To set the plot running
3. To include sufficient information to allow the above to happen.”
(Ayckbourn: 2002, 50)

Norman expertly manages to maintain this triple function (and indeed does so throughout the rest of her play). I found this inspirational, and I tried to emulate it in my own play through the way Eleanor and Karen speak to one another.

The way the audience read a character is directly correspondent to the language and dialogue employed by the writer – Ayckbourn puts it bluntly: “You are as you speak” (2002, 69). Through dialogue, the characterization referred to by McKee (1998) is communicated. “Through [a character’s] manner of speech, we learn just as much about the character as we do from what they’re saying.” (Ayckbourn: 2002, 93) This is exemplified in *Jellyfish* in Lucie-Jo’s ‘verbal diarrhoea’; what she says is often not of consequence, but it is indicative of her morals and beliefs, as well as her class.

“Our choice of words can betray class origin, attitude and mood” (Ayckbourn, 2002, 48). Often, a writer will write dialogue that is well-observed and witty. However, this does not mean anything if it does not fit the character who is speaking. Egri maintains that “really fine dialogue is impossible unless it follows clearly and validly from the character that uses it” (2004, 254). Such a comment must not be ignored. I have already established the significance of character and the adverse effect a character has on the plot and the premise. Therefore, the character – particularly the central character – must not be undermined by dialogue that does not fit their characterisation. Egri re-iterates: “Dialogue must come from the character.” (2002, 256) This is something I believe strongly in as a playwright, and thus in *Jellyfish*, I tried to give each character their own distinct voice.

2. METHODOLOGY AND SUCCESSES OF THE PLAY

The impulse to write *Jellyfish* stemmed from my own family history: specifically, rivalry between sisters (my grandmother and great-aunt) and how two people related by blood can be fundamentally different. Initially, I was also interested in writing what Edgar dubs a ‘funny time’ play to juxtapose key events in two sisters’ lives. I decided to incorporate Alzheimer’s Disease into my play, to create a fragmented and disjointed time structure, and to add what Edgar (2008) calls “a bomb under the seat”. How would the loss of one sister’s memory affect the other, if the other had decided that she wanted to attempt to restore the relationship?

The result of this was a play I did not want to write: a historical drama. I was writing about a world I knew nothing about, with characters that were indistinguishable from one another in their ‘quaint-ness’. Furthermore, I was utterly indifferent to what I had written. I had not written the play for me, but instead was guided by the sense of duty I felt in regard to the family members the play was inspired by. My imagination was bound by this duty because I feared casting my family in an unfavourable light. No amount of re-writing or re-drafting seemed to help. I was stuck.

Spencer (2002) suggests that to re-write effectively, a writer needs distance from his work in order to attain perspective. I decided to take respite from the play for a fortnight, instead spending my time rethinking my idea and reading. I read Sebold’s novel *The Almost Moon*, which is about matricide, and toyed with the idea of adapting it for theatre. Some time later, I had an image in my head that did not come directly from the novel but was definitely inspired by it: an old, terminally ill woman

resting onstage before another character, hidden in half-light, comes onto the stage and smothers her. I dismissed this image initially, intending to perhaps play with it should I decide to adapt *The Almost Moon*, but the image would not disappear from my thoughts: “the ultimate test of an idea is simply not being able to get it out of your head” (McLaughlin: 1997, 67.)

Intrigued by this ‘seed of an idea’ (McLaughlin, 1997), I began to write. Gupta (2008) advises “Know your stuff” and I therefore used the new image to write a draft set in the present day and in North Yorkshire, which is where I grew up and currently live. This new draft was, I felt, a vast improvement. My family were indeed still part of my initial inspiration, but now I was writing about a world relevant to me, and from my own experience. Furthermore, my imagination had been freed (Hampton, 82, 1999) and therefore I was no longer anxious about how I was portraying my family. The play still focused on two sisters, and there were elements of my relatives’ personalities, but the characters were now wholly my own.

At this point, I became acquainted with Egri’s theories. It was imperative, I understood, that I spent time considering what it was that intrigued me about sibling relationships before I could continue writing the next draft. As Egri notes, “A playwright might work on a play for weeks before discovering that he really needs a premise” (2004, 14). I finally managed to focus my impulse by using an exercise provided by Edgar in his supervision (2008) and came up with the premise *Nature may be inherent, but one is a product of one’s nurture*. In one sentence, I had

summarised exactly what I wanted to say about siblings and, furthermore, families and I found writing much easier with this in mind.

It was clear to me when I started writing that my play needed to be in two acts. I did not feel synthesis in the form of a third act (Waters, 2008) was relevant for my play considering the plot. I want my audience to be left with unanswered questions regarding Lucie-Jo's crime, as I knew that, depending on the audience, she would be read in different ways. Some audience members may want her to be punished for her crime, others would hope she remained at home with her mother. By using a two act structure, the audience are free to debate what may happen to her alongside the questions raised about family relationships.

I had originally planned to have the murder opening my play, with Eleanor appearing briefly at the end of Act One in a flashback scene, but such an explosive beginning (Ayckbourn, 2002) was doubly problematic. Firstly, the scene I wrote in which Eleanor appeared was by far the best scene of the play at that point. Although she was only on stage for a few pages, she was the most developed character and as a result, the most interesting. By placing her death at the beginning of the play, I had killed off my strongest character. Furthermore, I felt the audience would be indifferent to her death as they had not been given the opportunity to build a relationship with her. Secondly, the rest of the first act was very anti-climactic because it followed such an intense opening. I resolved to heed Spencer's guidance (2002) and move Eleanor's murder to the end of the first act, where it would serve as

a cliff-hanger. This structure is much more pleasing, from my own perspective and that of the audience's.

Having established the key elements of a play that are necessary, I was free to think creatively. It was important for me to convey a very clear sense of setting, to build a whole world for my play. I concentrated on the minor details that help create such a world. This was not only for dramatic purposes but to aid my own process as a playwright: I needed to be able to picture the world of my characters before I could focus on the characters themselves. "Settings can be powerful stimuli... Places that reek with mood and family history, where blood and sweat have worn into the woodwork." (McLaughlin, 1997, 55-56) There seemed to be no more fitting place to set the play than the family's front room, where two sisters grew up together and where the ailing matriarch resides, presiding over the whole family and every event that occurs in the house. I wanted the audience to understand that while Eleanor is not yet so close to dying, she is very ill and highly dependent on Karen, who should be viewed in a sympathetic light considering the pressure she is under.

I was encouraged by my director for the workshop to remove the detailed stage directions at the beginning of the play. There has long been debate regarding the use of stage directions, some believing that only what is essential ought to be described (Eldridge, 2008) and others viewing them as a springboard of inspiration for a potential director (Weigh, 2008). As a writer, I generally use stage directions when I feel they are essential, although I appreciate a director may view them merely as inspiration for their own ideas. That being said, I strongly feel that *Jellyfish* needs

to be in the setting I have placed it. It is very much a 'Yorkshire' play and additionally, I had very specific ideas on how the setting should be. Everything described in the opening scene is important, whether it is merely there to help create mood and atmosphere or to serve an explicit purpose. As McLaughlin comments, "Good plays, like all good fiction, are built detail on top of detail, minutia on top of minutia." (1997, 43) The more personal and detailed a play, he argues, the more universal its appeal. This was one of my aims in writing the play, and I felt that to remove my stage directions would diminish this.

In my own writing, I firmly prize character over plot. The characters are the audience's way in to the play and therefore they must be able to relate to at least one character on stage. Thus, I devoted time to developing the characters so that they would become universally recognised emblems: Eleanor stands for every matriarch; Karen and Yvonne for every sisterly relationship; Lucie-Jo for every seventeen year old girl. Equally, I wanted to subvert type (Edgar, 2008), encouraging the audience to view characters in one light before forcing them to reconsider. I made extensive use of Coghlan's 'twenty questions' exercise, where the writer asks his characters twenty questions and attempts to answer them in the character's voice. It was enormously helpful in the initial development stages for each character, but I returned to it time and time again to ensure I could still capture, say, Yvonne's voice or to learn something surprising about Kieran, for example.

Yvonne took rather more thought than the other characters, due to my own close-mindedness. I was almost considering her to be a pantomime villain, and therefore

could find no way to empathise with her. “You can’t divide [characters] into good and bad... It’s much more complicated than that.” (McDonald, 64, 1997). I found it useful to partake in a biography exercise (McLaughlin, 1997, Egri, 2004, Spencer, 2002). In prose, I wrote Yvonne’s life story – her childhood and adolescence, the circumstances under which she met her husband Jeremy, her decision to leave her hometown and her family, her life overseas, moving from one country to another and so on. Only a small portion of this prose has made it into the plot of the play, but I found it helped me understand her better. Before I used this exercise, I was favouring Karen; my subjectivity was hindering my creative process. By forcing myself to look deeper into Yvonne’s life, the things that have made this character the way she is, I found there was more balance in my writing. I understood all of my characters to the level Egri recommends (2004).

As Edgar prescribes, “almost everyone in a play has some sort of status or office” (2008) and I think this is something *Jellyfish* achieves quite well. I wanted the status of the play’s characters to continually shift, depending who else is on stage with them. For example, Eleanor is clearly the family matriarch and will speak her mind with little thought of how what she says affects her family. She is impatient and often unkind (see her treatment of Karen throughout the first act). However, when Lucie-Jo enters, it is clear that Eleanor puts her on a pedestal; Eleanor tries to curry favour with her:

ELEANOR You wait, Lucie-Jo. You and Yvonne will get on like a house on fire.

LUCIE-JO Do you think?

ELEANOR She's very into her fashion and beauty. Just like you.

LUCIE-JO Oh, wow, is she? Cool.

ELEANOR Not like your mum at all.

(page 9)

This works on a number of levels. Firstly, Eleanor is trying to win Lucie-Jo over by referencing her passion – fashion and beauty. Secondly, she is inflating Yvonne, displaying the seeming favouritism occurring between Eleanor and her two daughters. Finally, she manages to provoke Karen by stinging her with a snide comment. Therefore we can see the seeming family pecking order from Eleanor's point of view.

The characters of *Jellyfish* are defined by their dialogue. This allows us to see two of *Jellyfish*'s strengths: characterization and the dialogue. Mindful of Egri (2004) and Ayckbourn (2002), I was careful to write dialogue that was true to my characters' own values and beliefs. A prime example of this is Lucie-Jo's racism that occurs on page 32. Originally, I had her use the provocative slur "paki" as a means of displaying this. However, I soon realised that I had not fully considered exactly how provocative such a word is. The workshop day brought up an interesting – and heated – debate between the director and the actors, who openly responded to the word in disgust. The actor playing Karen felt that she could not justify playing Lucie-Jo's mother as there was no dialogue in which Karen reprimands her daughter for her casual use of the word. Indeed, the use of the word was rather throw-away. I was advised by the director that "the characters need to react to each other to contextualise what they

say” (Sutcliffe, 2009) and therefore changed the scene. “It’s always worth taking the time to consider your target audience and what will be tolerated” (McLaughlin, 1997, 176.) In changing the scene, I still felt it important to convey to an audience the ignorance that may still occur in 21st century North Yorkshire. However, I rewrote Yvonne’s dialogue to contextualise what Lucie-Jo was saying and to display that such ignorance cannot be tolerated. As a result, I am much happier with that moment of the play and furthermore, I feel I have stayed true to both Lucie-Jo’s character and that of Yvonne. There was a similar problem with the use of vulgarity in my play as I had every character but Eleanor using it. During the reading prior to the workshop day, it became apparent to me that I had over-used vulgarity; “its impact diminished” (McLaughlin, 1997, 175). So I went back to the dialogue and edited the vulgarity so that it is used primarily by the two younger characters.

3. CONSTRAINTS OF THE PLAY AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Jellyfish’s major downfall is that it is initially difficult to define who the central character is and their motivation behind their actions. It is indubitably the chief problem in the draft as it stands now. From a large portion of the first act, it seems that Eleanor is the play’s central character, and that she is probably to learn that her seeming favourite daughter, Yvonne, is not actually as kind or selfless as Karen. She is then killed. With Eleanor removed, who, then, is the central character? I argue Lucie-Jo, with Yvonne as her antagonist. But then what is Lucie-Jo’s motivation? It is to look after her mother’s best interests, as Karen has looked after Eleanor, and her own. From Lucie-Jo’s point of view, she murders her grandmother because it means that she and her mother are able to continue living in the family

home and she can justify her actions, knowing it is what Eleanor wants. This may work as her motivation, but I do not believe that the stakes are high enough for the audience to accept it. My initial spark, that image, had burrowed so deep into my brain that I do not think I considered the gravity of the crime Lucie-Jo is committing: murder. When I come to re-draft *Jellyfish* again, I need to confront this. Perhaps, in a later draft, Lucie-Jo could be pregnant. If she were, then her need to ensure that she and Karen can remain living in Eleanor's home would be much stronger and, I believe, much more believable. As a result, Yvonne would seem a stronger and more selfish antagonist and the play would work much better. Additionally, it provides a nice cyclical quality to the play, with Lucie-Jo and Karen respectively reprising the roles taken in the past by Karen and Eleanor.

As I mentioned earlier, I found my writing process was made easier after I had taken the time to establish a premise. However, it is vital that a premise is active (Egri, 2004) and it is now clear to me that *Nature may be inherent, but one is a product of one's nurture* is not a dramatic premise. It may be one of the messages communicated to the audience, but it is not active; it is too passive. Therefore it was unhelpful to use this premise as a basis for writing my play. I believe it is clear that I have struggled tremendously writing the second act and this is because I had no useful premise to go back to when I was stuck. A better premise for *Jellyfish* would be *selfishness leads to isolation from one's family* but even this is problematic because this implies that the central character is Yvonne, which, as I have established, is not the case. This indicates one of two things. Firstly, if Lucie-Jo is the central character, have I started the play at the wrong point? Perhaps Lucie-Jo is

not yet eager enough to kill her grandmother. If she were to become pregnant in the next draft, we could meet her when she is seven or eight months pregnant, when she has bonded with the coming baby and therefore is desperate to provide a home for it. The other alternative is that Lucie-Jo is not the central character at all and that Karen is my pivotal character. Many of the play's problems could be solved instantly if it were Karen that killed Eleanor. Again, it is not the right time for Karen, so I would have to look at where in Karen's life the play begins. In considering these problems, it is obvious that character and premise are mutually influential. The choices I make before re-drafting will have an adverse affect on what I write.

According to Ayckbourn (2002), the key things to look for when re-writing are "repetitions, unclear moments, overstatements or maybe excessively favouring one character's point of view". This was relatively straightforward when re-drafting the first act but the second act proved to be much more challenging; it is filled with repetitive and expository dialogue. I have tried to combat this in re-drafts and re-writing but the larger problems with character and premise must be confronted first. Until that point, any major editing of the script will be inconsequential.

At the beginning of this dissertation, I commented that a playwright must be aware of the rules of writing, even if he intends to disregard them. Through my own process, I have come to the conclusion that there are some key aspects to playwriting that cannot be disregarded. Every writer must have a premise because this will be the crux of what they write. It might not be apparent in the final draft of the play, but they must know what it is. Equally, it is helpful if a writer has a clear structure in mind

before they commence writing, as this will make their process far simpler. I have also established that a writer must know the world of their play inside out – whether this is from first-hand experience or months of research is irrelevant, but they must know it. “As playwrights, then, we must write the best plays we can.” (Spencer, 14, 2002.)

JELLYFISH

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Eleanor. 70. The family matriarch.

Yvonne. 43. Worldly.

Karen. 36. Tired.

Lucie-Jo. 17. Karen's daughter. Misleadingly perceptive.

Kieran. 24. Lucie-Jo's boyfriend. Bored.

NOTE

/ indicates when the next character interrupts.

The setting of the play is very specific. The other stage directions can be used at the director's discretion.

act one, scene one

A summer evening in the present day.

A cluttered living room. Centre stage, a large sofa bed dominates. ELEANOR is asleep in it, the duvet slipping off and half-swamped in TK Maxx carrier bags. Next to the bed, a stuffed Yorkshire terrier stares up at ELEANOR, in worship. There are two doors to the back of the stage, the one on the left leading to the hallway and the one on the right to the kitchen. Between the two doors, there is a foreboding oak sideboard that holds various bottles of Scotch. To the left of the sofa bed, a tatty armchair that has seen better days, spruced up with antimacassars. Next to it, there is a dark oak side table covered in trinkets and ornaments. Stage left is a window.

The walls are covered in needlework depictions of random things: spitfires, Tutankhamen, dogs – specifically, of course, Yorkshire terriers.

Outside, the low whistle of a steam train.

The church clock strikes seven.

Enter KAREN.

KAREN Oh, shit. Shit, shit, shit.

She is rushing round, attempting to make the dark living room less cluttered, cleaner

KAREN For God's sake.

ELEANOR rouses.

ELEANOR What on earth are you doing?

KAREN Sorry, Mum.

ELEANOR I'll thank you not to blaspheme in my house either.

KAREN I didn't.

ELEANOR How long was I out for?

KAREN How am I supposed to know? I've just got in.

ELEANOR This place is a tip.

KAREN I know, I've noticed. I'm trying to tidy up now.

ELEANOR Why didn't you do it earlier? What time is it?

KAREN Seven.

ELEANOR Seven?

KAREN Yes.

ELEANOR In the evening?

KAREN Yes.

ELEANOR Where have you been?

KAREN Take a wild guess.

ELEANOR Looks to me like you've been shopping. *(to the dog)* Doesn't it, Monty?

KAREN Penny took me into town this morning.

ELEANOR Haven't you been at work?

KAREN Of course I've been at work. If I'm not here, I'm there.

ELEANOR And in town, apparently.

KAREN I haven't been in to Scarborough for months.

ELEANOR Lord knows why you picked today, of all days.

KAREN Now who's blaspheming? Besides, I didn't start work until twelve today anyway.

ELEANOR Selfish of you, really. You've enough to do here without wasting time and money on yourself.

KAREN I just wanted to get a few bits.

ELEANOR Did you get me anything?

KAREN No, I didn't.

ELEANOR Typical. Sort out your own wardrobe, leave your mother festering in the same old nightgown for days on end.

KAREN I thought you'd want to pick something out yourself.

ELEANOR Oh yes? And how were you expecting me to do that? In case you've failed to notice, I'm having a little difficulty getting out and about..

KAREN Which is why I've brought you a Next directory.

ELEANOR Oh.

KAREN I knew whatever I picked wouldn't be good enough... You can order over the phone.

ELEANOR I hate Next.

KAREN Since when?

ELEANOR Since always.

KAREN I can go upstairs right now and find at least five items of your clothing that have come from Next.

ELEANOR Unwanted gifts.

KAREN These jeans I'm wearing are from Next.

ELEANOR You can tell. It's cheap tat. The cut isn't very flattering.

KAREN Thanks.

ELEANOR You should have brought me a Marks' catalogue.

KAREN It'll have to wait now, then.

ELEANOR I don't have the time to wait.

KAREN Mum.

ELEANOR I'm just saying. Let me see what you've bought.

KAREN I'm busy.

ELEANOR Oh, come on. It'll only take a couple of minutes.

KAREN No, it's alright. Nowt that interesting anyway – just a bracelet and a couple of tops.

ELEANOR What colour tops?

KAREN Why?

ELEANOR I'm interested. No need to be so suspicious, Karen.

KAREN Black.

ELEANOR just looks at her.

KAREN What?

ELEANOR My daughter, the walking monochrome. You've always had a tendency to play it safe.

KAREN I like black.

ELEANOR Boring.

KAREN You used to wear a lot of black.

ELEANOR Well of course I did, after your father passed. Could hardly swan around in electric blue, could I?

KAREN Even before that, though.

ELEANOR I did no such thing.

KAREN You did. I remember.

ELEANOR You do right to wear a lot of black, anyway. You ought to avoid it really – you're very sallow – but black can be forgiving too.

KAREN Slimming, you mean.

ELEANOR I never said that.

KAREN ignores her and continues to clean.

ELEANOR Where's Lucie-Jo?

KAREN I thought she was here.

ELEANOR I haven't seen her all afternoon.

KAREN I asked her to sit with you.

ELEANOR Mind you, I've been asleep most of the day. Even living's becoming quite tiring now. She probably got bored of sitting watching her old nan sleep when she should be off enjoying herself.

KAREN That's beside the point. I rarely ask her to do anything. The least she can do is mind you occasionally.

ELEANOR I'm not a child, Karen.

KAREN I know that.

ELEANOR I can take care of myself.

KAREN You're not well.

ELEANOR Is the kettle on?

KAREN Not yet.

ELEANOR Why on earth not?

KAREN Because I've more pressing matters to attend to. Like sorting this house out. Not to mention myself. Look at the state of me.

ELEANOR I'm thirsty.

KAREN Alright, I'll go pop the kettle on in a tick. Let me finish off in here and then we'll have a brew.

She bustles round. ELEANOR starts squirming in her bed, trying to get out.

KAREN Mum, what are you doing?

KAREN goes to her.

ELEANOR I was going to go and make myself a cup of tea.

KAREN Don't be daft, I said I'd go make you one in a couple of minutes!

ELEANOR I don't have two minutes, Karen. Are you really going to deny your old mother a cup of tea when I'm dying of thirst?

KAREN No, of course not. I thought you could wait, that's all.

ELEANOR I'll get up and make it myself.

KAREN You're supposed to be resting.

ELEANOR gets a foot on the floor.

KAREN Oh for God's sake.

She storms out to the kitchen.

ELEANOR laughs a little.

ELEANOR Always works, eh Monty?

Something out of the window catches her eye. She watches intently, getting increasingly outraged.

KAREN comes back in.

KAREN There you go, kettle's on. What are you nosying at now?

ELEANOR That vile woman from next door again.

KAREN Mum! Caroline's lovely.

ELEANOR Oh, she's horrendous!

KAREN No she isn't! Don't be awful.

ELEANOR Do you know, I'm sure she must be running a brothel.

KAREN You what?

ELEANOR I've got half a mind to write to the council and complain.

KAREN You're being silly.

ELEANOR I most certainly am not.

KAREN You most certainly are.

ELEANOR You don't spend as much time in this room as I do. You don't see all the goings on.

KAREN What "goings on"?

ELEANOR A constant parade of lotharios, that's what! Every night there's a different man round – once, there was even two in one night! You should hear the noises coming through that wall.

KAREN She just has a lot of male friends, that's all. It's not a crime.

ELEANOR Well, I'll never look at our postman in the same way, I can tell you that much. And what on earth does she think she looks like, in that get up?

KAREN I think she looks good.

ELEANOR You would.

KAREN She's only trying to keep young.

ELEANOR Mutton, that's all she is. Displaying all her wares for the whole town to see. It's disgusting. Those poor kids, no wonder they're out of control.

KAREN Stop it now, Mum. The window's open. She'll hear.

ELEANOR I don't care if she does! She needs telling anyway.

KAREN Enough.

ELEANOR I see you've had your hair done.

KAREN No.

ELEANOR You have.

KAREN When do I have time to get my hair done?

ELEANOR Come on, Karen. There's no need to lie to me. You deserve a treat once in a while.

KAREN Debbie did it for me a couple of nights ago. I went round after work. I thought you hadn't noticed.

ELEANOR Of course I noticed.

KAREN Oh, well, thanks. It was only fifteen.

ELEANOR Fifteen pounds?!

KAREN Half price.

ELEANOR And there was me, assuming she mustn't have charged you.

KAREN Why?

ELEANOR She's given you a square head!

KAREN I'm sorry?

ELEANOR Fringes always did make you look quadrilateral.

KAREN No they didn't. Don't.

ELEANOR You ought to ask for your money back.

KAREN I like it.

ELEANOR Well, I suppose it's not her fault you got all the wrong genes. From your father's side, I might add.

KAREN I'm dead pleased with it. She's done a lovely job.

But she goes to a mirror to look.

ELEANOR Ah, look at you. Getting all defensive now.

KAREN No, I'm not.

ELEANOR Just like your father. He could never take constructive criticism either.

KAREN What exactly was constructive about what you've just said?

ELEANOR I'm telling you for your own benefit. You ought to be making the most of yourself before you hit the change. It's all down-hill from there, you know.

KAREN I'm thirty-seven.

ELEANOR Sshhh.

KAREN What? Oh, not this.

ELEANOR In my day, women like you had sense and lied about their age.

KAREN Women like me. Unmarried women, I take it?

ELEANOR Thirty-seven. Who wants a thirty-seven year old, eh, Monty?

KAREN There's nothing wrong with how old I am.

ELEANOR To you, perhaps not. But to a prospective husband... you're not only on the shelf, you're pushed right to the back and coated in dust!

KAREN Thank you very much.

ELEANOR Oh, there she goes again, getting defensive. Again!

KAREN I'm not defensive!

ELEANOR You know, Karen, you really need to start thinking about your attitude. No man wants to come home to a defensive old shrew with a square head.

KAREN I think the kettle will have boiled.

She goes off to the kitchen.

The front door slams.

Enter LUCIE-JO.

LUCIE-JO Hiya, Nan.

ELEANOR Hello, love.

LUCIE-JO Mum's not back yet, is she?

ELEANOR In the kitchen.

LUCIE-JO Bloody hell. She's gonna give me right ball ache. She wanted me to stay in today.

ELEANOR So she tells me.

LUCIE-JO Oh, you're not mad as well are you? I checked on you before I left and you seemed okay. Dead to the world. I mean – oh shit. Sorry. Wrong choice of words.

ELEANOR It's alright, Lucie-Jo. I told her I didn't need a minder.

LUCIE-JO That's what I said! You're seventy, not pissing seven!

KAREN *(off)* Is that Lucie-Jo back?

LUCIE-JO Yes it's me.

KAREN comes back in, carrying a cup of tea for ELEANOR.

KAREN There you go, Mum. *(to Lucie-Jo)* And where have you been? Shoes.

LUCIE-JO obliges and takes off her shoes.

LUCIE-JO Just round at Kieran's. I texted you.

KAREN Don't give me that.

LUCIE-JO I thought it'd be okay. He only lives down the road and I took the baby monitor with me anyway.

She slings it onto the oak table.

ELEANOR Ugh, that atrocious contraption.

KAREN We need it, Mum.

LUCIE-JO It was dead boring here. Nan was alright, weren't you Nan?

KAREN I thought you had college work to do.

LUCIE-JO Oh give over, I've got bags of time to get all that done – I'm gonna do some tonight anyway – and Kieran got finished early so I thought I'd pop round there for a bit. I wasn't out long. Only a couple of hours, max.

KAREN That's not the point. I asked you to do something and I trusted you to do it.

LUCIE-JO Oh, give it a rest, Mum. What time's Yvonne getting here?

KAREN Auntie Yvonne.

LUCIE-JO I don't feel right calling her that.

ELEANOR What on earth do you mean?

LUCIE-JO Well, I know she's my auntie. But she's not like Auntie Joyce.

ELEANOR You're not even related to Joyce.

LUCIE-JO I wish I were.

ELEANOR You wait, Lucie-Jo. You and Yvonne will get on like a house on fire.

LUCIE-JO Do you think?

ELEANOR She's very into her fashion and beauty. Just like you.

LUCIE-JO Oh, wow, is she? Cool.

ELEANOR Not like your mum at all.

KAREN I'm into fashion and beauty, I just never have the time for it.

ELEANOR Yvonne always made the time to make the best of herself.

KAREN That's because she always had the time. Has nothing else to do, does she?

LUCIE-JO What does she do, like?

KAREN Nothing. Never has done, never will.

LUCIE-JO Why not?

KAREN No need.

ELEANOR When Yvonne was growing up, your granddad was still in the army.

LUCIE-JO So?

ELEANOR Oh, Lucie-Jo, they were my glory days. Husband away, money in the bank, only one child to care for... I miss those days. And Yvonne was always so well-mannered.

LUCIE-JO What, were we proper rich or something?

ELEANOR Wealthy.

KAREN They lived up on Beacon Road for a bit.

LUCIE-JO Really? So what happened? How come it all changed?

KAREN I was born. Isn't that right, Mum?

ELEANOR In a word, yes. As soon as your mum was born, Lucie-Jo, your granddad couldn't bear to be away from home so much. He got a job in the butcher's and that was it. He went from bringing home the bacon to bringing home... well, bacon.

LUCIE-JO You must have been happier though. Mum was born!

ELEANOR Everything went so wrong.

LUCIE-JO Otherwise, I wouldn't be here either. God, it creeps me out thinking like that sometimes. Life's all about timing, isn't it? Like, if you and Dad had been doing it at any other time, Mum, I would never have been born.

KAREN And what a tragedy that would have been...

LUCIE-JO Oi!

KAREN I'm only teasing, love, you know that. Where's Kieran tonight?

LUCIE-JO He's coming over later. He's nearly as excited to see her as I am!

KAREN God knows where we're all going to fit, with this bloody bed in the way.

ELEANOR I know. I'm an awful burden, getting in everyone's way.

KAREN Did I say that?

ELEANOR You inferred.

LUCIE-JO Nobody thinks you're a burden, Nan.

ELEANOR I know you don't.

KAREN Why do you do that?

ELEANOR Do what?

KAREN Say it like that. "I know you don't."

ELEANOR She doesn't think I'm a burden.

KAREN Well, neither do I.

ELEANOR Of course you do. I never asked to end up like this you know.

KAREN I know you didn't.

ELEANOR I'd be perfectly happy upstairs.

KAREN When we had you upstairs, you complained that nobody came up to check on you. Now you're downstairs, you moan that you'd rather be up there. There's no pleasing you.

ELEANOR You were happier with me out of sight, out of mind.

KAREN Be fair.

LUCIE-JO You two are doing my head in. When's she getting here?

KAREN Eight o'clock, she said. Though she'll probably be late.

ELEANOR What do you mean by that?

KAREN You know what she's like. She was always late, for everything.

ELEANOR Actually, Yvonne's very punctual. She was even born a week early. You were the late one. That's what did my back in, lugging you about, and it's probably why you carry so much weight now. Got an appetite, feasting off all the nutrients in my womb. Like a little succubus.

LUCIE-JO A what?

ELEANOR Never mind.

KAREN Well, I can't sit here listening to this all night. She'll be here soon and I've still loads to do.

LUCIE-JO Nan, shall I do your nails?

KAREN Lucie-Jo, please.

LUCIE-JO What?

KAREN They're a nightmare to sort out once you've been at them, love.

LUCIE-JO I'm getting quite good now!

KAREN I know you are, I'm not doubting your manicure skills, but remember last time?

LUCIE-JO That's only cos I put them acrylics on her. If I just paint them, we won't need to arse on with the acetone like last time.

ELEANOR I'd love to have my nails done again. That's all I have left now. The only reminder of my fading femininity.

LUCIE-JO They are in really good condition, Nan. Better than Mum's even, maybe even better than mine. Specially considering you're old and that. Best to make the most of them now, before...

ELEANOR Before I'm dead?

LUCIE-JO Well, yeah.

KAREN Lucie-Jo.

LUCIE-JO Well, it's true, isn't it?

ELEANOR Of course it is. No use having pretty nails when you're pushing daisies.

LUCIE-JO I'll just go and get my toolbox, I'll be back in a sec.

She scampers out.

KAREN I wish you wouldn't be so blunt with her.

ELEANOR She's almost a grown-up now. There's no need to sugar coat everything. No point.

KAREN I know that. But you'll have her thinking you're on death's door.

ELEANOR I am on death's door. I can barely get out of bed.

KAREN That's your arthritis. Not the cancer.

ELEANOR There's no harm in preparing her for the worst. I could be gone tomorrow.

KAREN Knowing you, you'll still be clinging on this time next year.

ELEANOR Wouldn't that be terrible.

KAREN I don't mean it like that.

ELEANOR Course you do. You can't wait to get your porky little fingers on my savings.

KAREN You haven't got any savings.

ELEANOR None that you know about.

KAREN I don't want to talk like this.

ELEANOR You'll have to face up to it sooner or later. Have you thought about what you'll say?

KAREN To who?

ELEANOR At my funeral.

KAREN Mum!

ELEANOR I spoke to Mave from the florists the other day. She's bringing some books round with all the wreaths in. I think I'll go for lilies. Traditional.

KAREN Good to see you're looking on the positive side.

ELEANOR I've put a note in the back of the Yellow Pages about how I'd like things done. I want you to do my eulogy.

KAREN This again.

ELEANOR I mean it.

KAREN I thought you might've asked Yvonne.

ELEANOR Well, of course I'd rather she did it, but she's awfully busy.

KAREN She doesn't do anything!

ELEANOR Being the wife of a businessman is a full time job in itself, Karen. I've decided you should do it. There won't be that many people there anyhow, so you might as well. Most of my friends are dead.

KAREN Oh, Mum.

ELEANOR And make sure you burn me, and all. Can't stick the thought of being buried. Trapped in that little box, waiting for the worms to fill me up.

LUCIE-JO re-enters, carrying a pink tool box.

KAREN No more.

LUCIE-JO Fucking hell, I thought I'd lost it for a moment.

KAREN Lucie-Jo, language!

LUCIE-JO It was under my bed.

ELEANOR That was lucky.

LUCIE-JO I know, I started panicking that I'd maybe left it on the 128 or summat. What colour are we going for then, Nan?

ELEANOR I don't mind. You choose.

LUCIE-JO Oh mint, I was hoping you'd say that, cos I just bought a brand new one at the chemists the other day, wait a minute, let me find it, it's in here somewhere... I've got so many, it's hard to find anything in here now – ah, here we go, got it! It's really gonna suit you, Nan.

It is Day-Glo yellow.

LUCIE-JO What do you think?

ELEANOR Lovely.

KAREN Don't you think that's slightly... inappropriate for your Nan?

LUCIE-JO Why?

ELEANOR Yes, Karen, why?

LUCIE-JO It glows in the dark and everything!

KAREN Well, you're hardly going to be going out raving, are you Mum?

LUCIE-JO How do you know? Don't be so ageist! Nan can wear whatever she likes on her nails. And you hear all about these gravers!

KAREN Gravers?

LUCIE-JO You know, pensioners that tow up at these squat parties and that...

KAREN Bloody hell.

ELEANOR I will have that one, Lucie-Jo, please.

KAREN What are people going to think?

LUCIE-JO How awesome that colour is?

KAREN The doctor'll think we're using you as some sort of guinea pig for makeup disasters. What about a nice coral pink?

LUCIE-JO I don't have any boring colours like that. Mum. Closest I've got is acid pink. That do anything for you?

KAREN What on earth is acid pink?

LUCIE-JO It knackers your eyes to look at.

KAREN Maybe we should stick with the yellow then.

LUCIE-JO I agree. Pink's not really Nan's thing anyway, is it Nan?

ELEANOR No.

KAREN Well do it quickly then, Lucie-Jo, please. I don't want all your kit cluttering up the living room when Yvonne gets here. I'm just going to go and sort out upstairs.

She goes out and LUCIE-JO makes a start on painting ELEANOR's nails.

LUCIE-JO She doesn't half witter on.

ELEANOR I know. She wants to make a good impression.

LUCIE-JO Why?

ELEANOR For Yvonne.

LUCIE-JO She doesn't talk very fondly of her.

ELEANOR What does she say?

LUCIE-JO Oh... I can't remember now. But she always sounds proper pissed off whenever she mentions her. Her voice gets that tone... You know, like, "Y-Vonne."

ELEANOR Jealous.

LUCIE-JO Do you think?

ELEANOR Yvonne has lived a spectacular life. Made more opportunities for herself than your mum has.

LUCIE-JO That's probably my fault.

ELEANOR A lot of single mums do a lot more than your mum, Lucie-Jo. It just depends on how hard you want to work. It's not as if she was entirely alone.

LUCIE-JO Yeah, but then you started getting ill.

Pause. The church clock strikes eight o'clock.

LUCIE-JO It's been ages since we've done this, hasn't it?

ELEANOR I suppose it has.

LUCIE-JO I wanted to do it earlier, before I went out, but then I thought I should leave you to it.

ELEANOR You could have woke me. I get too much sleep nowadays anyway.

LUCIE-JO No such thing as too much sleep. I feel like I could sleep forever sometimes.

ELEANOR You're young. You need your sleep.

LUCIE-JO Tell Mum that. Every Saturday morning she's battering that Hoover against my bedroom door.

Voices outside, loud, maybe drunk. ELEANOR looks out the window.

ELEANOR Is something going on tonight?

LUCIE-JO Yeah, last night of the sad act sixties weekend.

ELEANOR Didn't you want to go?

LUCIE-JO Ugh, hell no. Me and Kieran went down for a bit last night but I hate all that old-fashioned shit. Not my scene at all.

ELEANOR No good?

LUCIE-JO It was alright. Loads of old people though, dressed up in like mini skirts and flared jeans and all that crap. All of them wasted. It was fucking embarrassing more than anything else. I'm glad my mum never goes to anything like that, it's tragic really.

ELEANOR Your mother never goes out.

LUCIE-JO She reckons she can't leave you or the neighbours would complain to Age Concern or something. There were loads of tourists here, and all. Where the hell do they all come from? And why? Like, is it some big national event and they just forget to tell us what live here about it?

ELEANOR I don't know.

LUCIE-JO Cos like, seriously, the market place was rammed. Could barely move.

ELEANOR It's good for the town though.

LUCIE-JO It's not good for my sanity. They were doing my head in.

ELEANOR You're not the most patient of people though. Take after me in that department I'm afraid.

LUCIE-JO True. There we are, all done. They just need to dry now.

ELEANOR That was quick.

LUCIE-JO I know, I've been practicing. Done two coats too.

ELEANOR You'll make a good beautician.

LUCIE-JO No.

ELEANOR Yes, you will, love. You put your mind to it, you'll do anything. Conquer the world.

LUCIE-JO No, I know I'll be bloody mint. It's just we're called beauty therapists now.

ELEANOR Oh, I see.

LUCIE-JO You were alright while I was out? I feel bad now, I should have stayed in.

ELEANOR Don't be soft. I told you, I was fine.

LUCIE-JO Well, I know, but... we have a laugh, me and you, don't we? Could have had a right afternoon together today, if I'd been in.

ELEANOR I was asleep anyway, pet. Another time.

LUCIE-JO If there is another time...

A knock at the door.

ELEANOR What did I say? I knew she'd be here when she said, I said she'd be here on time. Get your mum.

LUCIE-JO Shit, I need to put all this shit away or Mum'll go ape shit. Shit. Don't you move, Nan, your nails.

ELEANOR Karen! Karen!

LUCIE-JO Mum!

KAREN comes through.

KAREN Alright, alright, I heard you both the first time. Lucie-Jo, get that stuff put away and just shove it under your Nan's bed.

LUCIE-JO That's what I'm doing.

KAREN goes out to the hallway.

ELEANOR Oh, Monty, I'm so excited!

LUCIE-JO Bloody hell.

KAREN comes back in.

KAREN False alarm. It was only Kieran.

ELEANOR Only Kieran?

KIERAN comes in.

KIERAN Alright, ladies.

ELEANOR Hello, Kieran.

LUCIE-JO You're here early, I thought you were coming round later on?

KIERAN I just couldn't bear to be away from you all.

LUCIE-JO Careful, Kier, you'll get a brown tongue.

KIERAN Now then, Nan. How's it hanging today?

ELEANOR Oh, not too bad thank you. I'm struggling along.

KIERAN Better now I'm here though, am I right?

ELEANOR Of course.

KIERAN Lucie-Jo said you've been asleep all day.

ELEANOR Most of it, yes.

KIERAN Lazy cow. Where's this other lass then? She here?

KAREN Not yet. We thought you were her.

KIERAN Oh, sorry to be a disappointment.

ELEANOR Of course not.

KAREN You know we're always happy to have you here, Kieran.

LUCIE-JO Just done me Nan's nails, look.

KIERAN 'kin hell, Lucie-Jo, could you get any brighter?

LUCIE-JO What you talking about, they look mint!

KIERAN They're fluorescent fucking yellow!

KAREN Language. Honestly, you two.

LUCIE-JO Yellow's en vogue at the moment. Colleen Rooney wears yellow.

KIERAN Well, if Colleen Rooney wears yellow then I suppose it's good enough for Nan.

KAREN How's work, Kieran?

KIERAN Ah, she's alright. Picking up more hours now.

KAREN I read in the Gazette they've been laying people off.

KIERAN Aye, a couple of people, like. Not me though. As long as you get your head down and just get on with it, there's no bother.

KAREN That's good. Have a seat, love.

ELEANOR Yes, there's room next to me.

KIERAN No, ta.

ELEANOR Don't be silly, come and have a sit down.

KIERAN I would, but that bloody dog creeps me the fuck out.

KAREN We can turn it round – Lucie-Jo, turn that dog round so it's not staring at him when he sits down.

LUCIE-JO Er, I'm not touching it.

ELEANOR Don't talk about Monty like that. He's lovely. *(to the dog)* Yes you are.

KAREN I'll do it then.

She moves the stuffed dog so he is facing away from them.

ELEANOR Poor Monty.

KAREN That better?

KIERAN A bit. I suppose.

ELEANOR Come sit down then.

He does, but he gives the dog a wide berth.

ELEANOR You are all silly, being afraid of a little dog. He's harmless.

KIERAN It's his eyes.

ELEANOR His eyes aren't even real!

KIERAN That's the problem.

LUCIE-JO Kieran's a right pussy.

KIERAN I am not! I'm proper hard, me.

LUCIE-JO Yeah, right, that's why you start malling every time a bloke approaches me in the pub.

ELEANOR Oh, he's protective is he? Bless him.

KIERAN Only because Lucie-Jo tells all the dirty old men around here that she's gonna be on Page Three.

LUCIE-JO Yeah, they believe me and all. Sad old sods. Every time I tell them that, you see them queuing up outside the paper shop, all desperate for a piece.

KIERAN It's disgusting. They should be on that sex offender list.

KAREN I wish you wouldn't do things like that, Lucie-Jo. I'm ashamed of you.

LUCIE-JO My mouth runs away with me.

KIERAN Compulsive liar.

LUCIE-JO I can't help it, it's just the way I am. And it gets me loads more drinks than you'd ever buy me, you cheapskate.

KAREN Stop it you two.

LUCIE-JO We're only messing! God, you're a right old nag nowadays.

KAREN And what's that supposed to mean?

LUCIE-JO Can never have a laugh round here anymore, can we? Everything's so serious with you.

KAREN I'm under a lot of pressure.

LUCIE-JO I don't care. I'm sick of living here. It's like a bloody funeral home and nobody's even dead yet! I can't wait 'til I can afford to move out.

KAREN You're not the only one love.

LUCIE-JO Ugh!

KAREN Lucie-Jo, please calm down. Don't do this in front of Kieran.

LUCIE-JO Knackers to this.

ELEANOR Where are you going?

LUCIE-JO Out.

KAREN Your auntie will be here soon.

LUCIE-JO Then you'll have to explain that, as always, you ruined everything.
Ugh!

She goes out.

KAREN Sorry, Kieran.

LUCIE-JO *(off)* Kieran!

KIERAN Best be off. See you later, Karen.

He follows her out.

ELEANOR opens one eye.

ELEANOR Well-handled, as usual, Karen. Honestly, your parenting skills beggar belief.

KAREN Oh, give it a rest, will you Mum?

ELEANOR Winding her up when we have a guest coming.

KAREN Me, winding her up? You're joking, aren't you?

ELEANOR Should I be?

KAREN Lucie-Jo winds herself up, with all her histrionics. She ought to be doing drama at college, not beauty therapy.

ELEANOR I hope she's coming back.

KAREN Why?

ELEANOR Don't you want your daughter to meet Yvonne?

KAREN I'm past caring, to be honest.

ELEANOR I've been looking forward to this. Please don't ruin it for me.

KAREN There's a car pulled up outside.

ELEANOR A car? What sort of car? Is it her?

KAREN It's just a taxi. Doesn't look like her. Might be someone for across the road.

ELEANOR Quickly, Karen, help me sit up properly, just in case.

KAREN It won't be her.

ELEANOR I could do with sitting up anyway. I'm getting a pain.

KAREN What kind of pain?

ELEANOR Just a cramp.

KAREN A cramp? A cramp where?

ELEANOR In my bottom, if you must know. Is nothing sacred anymore?

KAREN Right. Sorry.

KAREN goes to her mother and helps her adjust her position.

Doorbell.

ELEANOR It's her! Don't keep her waiting, Karen, it's awfully cold out. She won't be used to the English climate!

KAREN I'm sure she'll cope. Let me sort you out first.

ELEANOR Oh, never mind me! Go, go!

KAREN goes off to get the door.

ELEANOR She'll think she has the wrong house at this rate!

KAREN comes back, followed by YVONNE, who is dressed exotically, with a scarf wrapped around her head and a large pair of sunglasses covering almost all of her face.

KAREN It's her.

YVONNE Oh my, it's barely changed.

KAREN What has?

YVONNE Well... everything. The town... this house...

KAREN We've a new sofa, actually.

YVONNE And this old carpet. This is the old carpet?

KAREN It might be.

YVONNE Mmm, vintage.

ELEANOR Yvonne.

YVONNE Gosh, look at you. Are they feeding you? How about your medicine, are they keeping on top of that? How are you feeling?

ELEANOR Not too bad, today. Much better since I stopped the treatment. I'm getting by.

YVONNE You're getting by? *(to Karen)* I thought the point of you keeping her here was so that we both knew she would get the best care possible?

KAREN It was.

YVONNE I see.

KAREN Go on Yvonne. Say it. Say exactly what's on your mind.

YVONNE No. No. Come on now, little sis. We oughtn't to be getting into rows.

KAREN Quite.

YVONNE Good.

ELEANOR How was your journey?

YVONNE Long. I always forget quite how far... North you are.

KAREN It's a good four hours up to Scotland from here.

YVONNE Yes, but a good four hours to London too.

KAREN London.

YVONNE Ever been?

KAREN I went with school once.

YVONNE Of course.

KAREN glares at her sister.

YVONNE Well, isn't the neighbourhood going downhill?

ELEANOR Isn't it just. I keep telling your sister, Yvonne, but she won't have a bar of it.

KAREN It's no worse now than it was twenty years ago. It's all the same families that live here.

ELEANOR It must be the fault of the younger generation then. Tell Yvonne about her next door.

KAREN Mum, we've been through this.

YVONNE What about her, Mother?

ELEANOR She's one of them prostitutes!

YVONNE Never!

ELEANOR She is.

YVONNE Didn't your friend Carol used to live next door, Karen?

KAREN Caroline, yes.

ELEANOR She still does.

YVONNE Wait a minute – surely you're not insinuating that Caroline is...?

KAREN I know. It's ridiculous, isn't it?

YVONNE Well... actually... it sort of makes sense. I saw another young lady as the taxi driver was bringing me in. She looked rather cheap. You know the type. *(Unknowingly, she is describing LUCIE-JO)* That awful long, strawy fake hair, fake nails. Clothes too tight. I've seen a lot of them since I arrived here.

KAREN It's the fashion over here now. Women here aren't encouraged to keep covered like they are where you live.

ELEANOR Well, they should be, in my opinion. Look at your sister, Karen, doesn't she look elegant?

KAREN If you like that kind of thing.

ELEANOR I do.

YVONNE Could I possibly have a drink? I'm rather parched.

ELEANOR I was just about to say, offer the girl a drink!

YVONNE Mother, I'm hardly a girl! I'm forty-three!

ELEANOR But you look so youthful. Doesn't she, Karen?

KAREN I don't know. I can't see her face.

YVONNE Well, I can assure you, the sun has done my skin a world of good. All that Vitamin D.

KAREN I bet.

YVONNE It has.

KAREN I'm agreeing with you.

ELEANOR You always did tan well, Yvonne. I remember that holiday we had in France, you came out all golden brown.

KAREN What about me?

ELEANOR Oh, Karen, you know this, you always burn. Even when we took you to Skipsea, you burnt to a crisp. You've got your father's colouring.

KAREN I thought as much.

YVONNE Are you going to put the kettle on?

KAREN Yes.

YVONNE Actually, shall I do it?

KAREN If you want.

ELEANOR You'll do no such thing, Yvonne. You're our guest. You'll make the drinks, Karen.

YVONNE Don't be silly. I'm not a guest!

KAREN You lived her long enough.

YVONNE At least I moved out. Now, where's the kitchen again?

KAREN Through that door.

YVONNE Ah yes, of course.

She sweeps out.

ELEANOR Watch your tone, Karen.

KAREN What are you talking about?

ELEANOR You're doing a rather good impersonation of a Rottweiler. Be nice.

KAREN It always comes down to dogs with you.

ELEANOR We don't know what you're talking about, do we, Monty?

KAREN Oh, never mind. Anyway, I'm being perfectly civil.

ELEANOR Doesn't she look fabulous?

KAREN I don't know. I can't see her face properly under all that fabric.

ELEANOR All those scarves. They look wonderful. She'll be the talk of the town.

KAREN Some things never change.

ELEANOR I'm so proud of her. I can't wait for people to start asking after her.

KAREN Nobody's going to be asking you. You never leave the bloody house!

ELEANOR Why must you always rain on my parade?

KAREN I'm being realistic.

ELEANOR Well, don't be.

KAREN Fine.

YVONNE comes back in.

YVONNE Don't you have any coffee, Karen?

KAREN There's some Gold Blend at the back of the cupboard I think.

YVONNE Yes, I saw that.

KAREN That is proper coffee, isn't it?

YVONNE Oh heavens, no.

KAREN Well nobody really drinks coffee in this house. We've only got it in for the nurses.

YVONNE You have a lot to learn, little sister.

KAREN You'll have to make do with tea if the coffee's not good enough for you I'm afraid. I didn't know what to get in.

YVONNE Well, that's no problem at all. I'll have a refreshing Yogi tea instead.

She goes back out.

KAREN Yogi tea? Good luck finding that here.

ELEANOR What's Yogi tea?

KAREN This sort of herbal nonsense. I've never had it myself – one of the lasses from work brought some in when she was pregnant, but I couldn't stomach the smell of it.

ELEANOR How exotic! I shall have to ask Yvonne to make me some while she's here.

KAREN You won't like it. It'll be too alien for you.

ELEANOR You don't know that.

KAREN It's an educated guess. You won't even eat a bloody korma from the Indian.

ELEANOR I just don't like spicy food.

KAREN Kormas aren't spicy!

ELEANOR I think you should give Lucie-Jo a ring and tell her Yvonne's here.

KAREN In a bit. No point ringing her now; she'll stay out all night to spite me.

ELEANOR She's not a spiteful girl, Karen. She wants to come home. She hasn't seen Yvonne since she was knee-high to a grass hopper!

KAREN And whose fault is that?

ELEANOR Well it's not Yvonne's.

KAREN So it's mine, then?

ELEANOR You're very sensitive.

KAREN How was I supposed to find the money to get the three of us over there?

ELEANOR I can't take this, I'm not well.

KAREN Come off it. You're fine. Nothing wrong with you!

ELEANOR I am not fine!

KAREN You sit in that bed like the Queen of bloody Sheba! Passing judgment on all who set foot in here!

ELEANOR Well there's nothing else to do.

Yvonne comes back in.

KAREN Don't go playing the sick card on me, that's all I'm saying.

YVONNE Karen!

ELEANOR See what it's like for me, Yvonne? She always treats me like this.

YVONNE Do you?

KAREN Of course not! I'm just sick of being told how useless I am.

ELEANOR I would never say such a thing. I was only saying earlier, Yvonne, how I hate to be such a burden on Karen. And it's only going to get worse. I don't know how any of you will cope in my final weeks.

YVONNE Karen, you're getting Mother all worked up. It isn't fair.

KAREN I'm getting her worked up? That's a new one.

YVONNE She's very unwell.

KAREN Oh for God's sake.

ELEANOR Is the kettle on, Yvonne?

YVONNE Yes. I just popped back in to see if you had a tea pot?

KAREN Oh, don't bother with a tea pot. There's only the three of us.

YVONNE All the more reason to use a pot. Tea tastes different somehow, from a pot.

KAREN You what?

YVONNE It's quite scientific, actually. The pot allows the tea the room it requires to breathe, lets it stew, creating a rather much more enjoyable brew.

KAREN There is no tea pot.

ELEANOR Liar.

KAREN I'm sorry?

ELEANOR I think you'll find we have a lovely tea pot in the cupboard next to the oven.

KAREN What tea pot?

ELEANOR The elephant one!

YVONNE The elephant one?

ELEANOR Of course! You must remember it –

KAREN No point trying to remind Yvonne, Mum, she's probably forgotten she even sent it.

ELEANOR Christmas three years ago.

YVONNE Of course I remember it! Yes, I picked it myself.

KAREN What an achievement!

ELEANOR We always use it when there's guests round.

KAREN Do we heckers.

ELEANOR Well I always used to. Before. I used to have a lot of visitors you know. Not so many anymore.

YVONNE Why not? Karen, you really ought to encourage Mother to socialize.

ELEANOR They're all dead now.

YVONNE Oh.

KAREN I'll go and make the brews then.

She goes off.

YVONNE So.

Pause.

YVONNE You're looking surprisingly well.

ELEANOR Am I?

YVONNE When I was told what the doctor said, I was imagining you to be much worse.

ELEANOR Can't get much worse than 'terminal'.

YVONNE Well, of course. But you have colour in your cheeks. You're very lucid. I thought you'd be slipping in and out.

ELEANOR Sometimes I do.

YVONNE I'm sure. I'm glad you're still the same old you.

ELEANOR And you've not changed a bit.

YVONNE Oh I think I have.

ELEANOR No, you're still the same.

YVONNE How can you tell?

ELEANOR You're my daughter. Of course I can tell.

YVONNE Perhaps.

ELEANOR Definitely.

YVONNE Is my niece here?

ELEANOR Lucie-Jo? She'll be back soon. Karen scared her off with her nagging.

YVONNE What's she like?

ELEANOR She's wonderful. More than any grandmother could expect, given her circumstances. Very bonny girl, ambitious. And she's courting now.

YVONNE Oh?

ELEANOR Kieran. Lovely young man. I expect he'll be with her when she comes back.

YVONNE What does he do?

ELEANOR He's a factory worker. At first I thought our Lucie-Jo could do better but he's a real charmer. We all love him. I think you'll get on well with both of them.

YVONNE Good.

ELEANOR She did my nails for me. Specially.

YVONNE Who did?

ELEANOR Lucie-Jo. Look. *(she shows them)*

YVONNE How lovely.

ELEANOR I'm sorry I'm not able to get out of bed.

YVONNE It's alright, Mother. I understand. You must be shattered.

ELEANOR I'm just old. It's very frustrating.

YVONNE I can imagine.

ELEANOR No you can't. Nobody knows what it's like until they're in the same situation. It's very lonely.

YVONNE Now that I can empathise with.

ELEANOR How do you mean?

YVONNE Oh, nothing. We all feel alone sometimes.

ELEANOR I suppose.

Front door goes. KAREN comes into living room from kitchen.

KAREN That'll be my daughter.

YVONNE adjusts her scarves.

LUCIE-JO and KIERAN enter.

LUCIE-JO We're back.

KAREN Your auntie's here.

LUCIE-JO Didn't come back for you, did I?

YVONNE Hello. You must be Lucie.

LUCIE-JO Jo.

YVONNE Oh, I'm sorry. Hi, Jo, I'm Yvonne.

KAREN No, it's Lucie-Jo.

LUCIE-JO Calling me Lucie is like me calling you Yv.

KAREN Please, Lucie-Jo...

YVONNE My apologies, Lucie-Jo.

LUCIE-JO No bother, I'm just playing. I've been dead excited to meet you, Auntie Yvonne.

YVONNE Don't call me Auntie. Please. It makes me sound awfully old.

LUCIE-JO Right.

ELEANOR And this charming young gentleman is Kieran.

KIERAN Now do.

YVONNE Lovely to meet you.

KIERAN Likewise, lass, likewise.

LUCIE-JO Sorry about before, Mum.

KAREN Don't worry, love.

ELEANOR You're not the one who should be apologising.

LUCIE-JO I feel a bit better now I've had a little tippie.

ELEANOR You've been drinking?

LUCIE-JO Yeah, just a couple of voddies round at Kieran's.

KIERAN My brother started banging this Polski bird who was staying here with her sister.

LUCIE-JO 'Kin hell Kier, you might want to explain a bit more than that – we have a guest here, you know. His brother had this Polish lass but she had to move home... week later, package full of vod gets sent to Kieran's house. How mint is that?

YVONNE Erm... I'm afraid I'm not conversant in modern slang.

LUCIE-JO Mint means like, dead good.

YVONNE Ah, I see. Yes, awfully mint.

LUCIE-JO Bloody hell, you're as bad as Mum.

KAREN Kettle's just boiled. Do you two want a brew?

LUCIE-JO Nah I'm fine, ta.

KIERAN Got any wife beater?

YVONNE Pardon?

KAREN More slang.

KIERAN For my old friend Stella Artois. She's a classy bird. How long have you been out of the country?

YVONNE Fifteen years almost. Why?

ELEANOR Fifteen years in August.

YVONNE Gosh. Doesn't time fly.

KAREN When you're having fun.

YVONNE Which I certainly have been.

KAREN How's Jeremy?

YVONNE Jeremy? Jeremy's wonderful, as always.

ELEANOR Still in the oil business?

YVONNE Of course. He's thriving.

LUCIE-JO You must be loaded.

KAREN Lucie-Jo, don't be so rude!

LUCIE-JO What? It's a compliment!

YVONNE We do alright, yes.

LUCIE-JO Do you have a swimming pool and that?

YVONNE Yes.

LUCIE-JO Bloody hell.

ELEANOR Tea, Karen.

KAREN Alright, alright.

She goes off.

LUCIE-JO What's it like in Tenerife? (*she pronounces it Tenerifee*)

YVONNE Pardon?

LUCIE-JO (*slowly, loudly*) What's it like in Tenerife?

YVONNE Tenerif-ee?

LUCIE-JO That's where your house is, isn't it? I've always fancied a holiday. Furthest I've been is Center-pissing-Parcs, and even that got cut short cos of Nan – no offence, Nan, I know it's not your fault. I don't even have a passport. Could get one though. Bet it's dead hot there.

YVONNE I wouldn't know.

LUCIE-JO What do you mean, you don't know?

YVONNE I don't live in Tenerife.

LUCIE-JO Yeah you do. I'm sure my mum said Tenerife.

YVONNE No.

LUCIE-JO Oh. Shame that. Where do you live then, Yvonne?

YVONNE I've lived all over, but my husband and I are based in Dubai currently.

LUCIE-JO Dubai?

YVONNE Why?

LUCIE-JO My mate's dad's moving out there, maybe. You can't drink over there can you?

YVONNE Who told you that?

LUCIE-JO He's been looking it up online you see – do you have the Internet in Dubai? Apparently like you're not supposed to have a drink or anything, which I think is frankly ridiculous cos why would anybody want to live anywhere where you're not allowed to have a sly one every now and then? Anyway, my mate reckons that if her dad does move over there, she's gonna sack him off – she's a right alky, she won't be going anywhere with no booze!

YVONNE She sounds very enlightened.

LUCIE-JO I'd probably still come though. Free holiday, isn't it?

ELEANOR You've never had me out to stay.

YVONNE I know, it's a real pity.

ELEANOR I'm too old though, to make a flight like that. Especially now.

YVONNE You probably wouldn't get the insurance now either, Mother. That's why I've never invited you.

ELEANOR You always were very considerate.

LUCIE-JO Have you seen Nan's nails?

YVONNE Yes, she showed me them.

LUCIE-JO What do you think?

YVONNE They're very... original.

LUCIE-JO You don't like them.

YVONNE I do.

LUCIE-JO It's obvious you don't. Is it against your religion or something?

YVONNE My religion? No, why would you think that?

LUCIE-JO With your scarves and all that. I thought maybe they disagree with nail varnish.

YVONNE They?

KIERAN She means Islams.

YVONNE You mean Muslims?

KIERAN Aye, that's it.

LUCIE-JO How come you're one of them, anyway? I didn't know they let white people in.

YVONNE A lot of people choose to be Muslim now, you know.

LUCIE-JO Like who?

YVONNE I don't know. A lot of people.

LUCIE-JO Why?

YVONNE It's a very peaceful faith.

LUCIE-JO Are you shitting me?

YVONNE I beg your pardon!

LUCIE-JO You are, you're shitting me. Muslims and that are all terrorists!

YVONNE Lucie-Jo, you can't say that.

LUCIE-JO I just did.

YVONNE Did you know the root of the word Islam is 'salam'? It means peace.

LUCIE-JO Well, I've got two words for you: Nine eleven.

YVONNE My Lord! You can't just generalise like that. Some people distort religion to serve their own purpose.

LUCIE-JO You don't see white people doing that.

YVONNE You see it every day.

LUCIE-JO Well, I don't care. I wouldn't be a Muslim if you paid me and I don't see why you want to be one of them either.

YVONNE I'm not Muslim.

LUCIE-JO How come you've got all that foreign garb on then?

YVONNE My scarves?

LUCIE-JO Aye.

YVONNE It wouldn't do to be showing my skin at every available opportunity. I respect the values of the country where I live.

LUCIE-JO Well you're not there now, are you?

KAREN comes back in with the elephant tea pot and three cups.

ELEANOR In my day, it was considered rude to discuss religion or politics you know. Let's change the subject

LUCIE-JO I was only asking. Taking an interest.

KAREN What have you said?

LUCIE-JO Nothing!

ELEANOR You look very worldly, Yvonne. I bet you like the scarves, don't you Kieran?

KIERAN They're alright.

KAREN You're talking to Kieran the way you talk to Monty.

ELEANOR No I'm not, am I Monty?

YVONNE Oh, how lovely, is Monty still on the go? He must be – what? –
seventeen, eighteen now?

She crosses over to the dog.

KIERAN Monty? He's a fucking stiff, isn't he.

YVONNE Pardon?

KIERAN You never thought he was still alive?

YVONNE Of course not.

KAREN Mum insisted we had him stuffed.

ELEANOR And why not? He's as much a part of this family as the rest of you.

YVONNE What a lovely idea!

KAREN You don't have to live with him.

ELEANOR He was such a rock for me when your father passed.

KAREN We know, Mum.

ELEANOR Yvonne doesn't know.

KAREN I'm sure she remembers.

YVONNE I remember.

ELEANOR He used to let me weep into his little shoulders. Took the whole weight
of my world, he did.

YVONNE He was very good.

ELEANOR I couldn't bear to throw him out like yesterday's papers. He would
never have forgiven me!

KAREN He was just a dog.

ELEANOR He was much more than just a dog to me.

Pause. YVONNE clocks the baby monitor.

YVONNE Is somebody... expecting?

KAREN Pardon?

YVONNE Why didn't anybody tell me?

KAREN I'm not following you.

YVONNE My warmest congratulations, Lucie-Jo. And Karen, you must be so proud of her, following in your footsteps.

LUCIE-JO What are you talking about?

YVONNE The baby monitor.

KAREN Oh, that! We use it to keep an eye on Mum when we can't sit with her.

YVONNE Creative.

LUCIE-JO I use it to spy. When the nurses are round and that, see what Nan says about us.

KAREN Lucie-Jo, I won't tell you about that again.

LUCIE-JO Oh give over, she never says anything bad! Heard you slagging me off a few times though.

KAREN So, who's for tea?

She pours out the tea and passes it out.

YVONNE How did you two meet, then?

KIERAN Oh, it's a funny story actually.

LUCIE-JO Aye. Met at the fucking trakky, didn't we?

YVONNE I'm sorry?

KIERAN You know, the trakky.

LUCIE-JO Traction engine rally.

KAREN I think they call it the steam fair now.

KIERAN Aye, getting a bit big for their boots.

LUCIE-JO You must have heard of it, Yvonne. It's world famous!

YVONNE I'm afraid I never have.

LUCIE-JO You have. It's in Wilky's field?

KAREN Ah, so it is! Colin Wilkinson.

YVONNE Wilky?

KAREN Colin Wilkinson, Yvonne. Although you might know him as 'Col'.

LUCIE-JO Do you know him, like?

KAREN Does she know him! She knows him alright.

YVONNE No.

KAREN You do.

YVONNE No, no. I thought the name rang a bell, that's all.

KAREN Yvonne had a little fling with him in her hey-day.

YVONNE I did not! I have never been flung!

KAREN Caused a right scandal. What with him being married and everything.

YVONNE He wasn't married. He was engaged.

KAREN Is there a difference?

KIERAN Oh, Yvonne, you sly old dog!

LUCIE-JO He was never engaged!

KAREN It gets better. Tell your niece who he was engaged to.

YVONNE Oh, I'm afraid I can't possibly remember.

KAREN I can.

YVONNE Why does that not surprise me? You always did have an excellent memory when it came to my foibles.

LUCIE-JO What the fuck's a foible?

KAREN Belinda Bradshaw.

LUCIE-JO Belinda Bradshaw, Belinda Bradshaw...

KIERAN English teacher Bradshaw?

LUCIE-JO Oh fuck! Miss Bradshaw, from school?

KAREN The one and the same.

LUCIE-JO Home-wrecker, are you?

YVONNE Can we please change the subject? I don't appreciate having my dirty laundry aired so publicly and *(to KAREN)* I'll thank you not to do it again!

LUCIE-JO Come on, don't be like that. If you can't talk to us, who can you talk to?

KIERAN Yeah. We're your family.

YVONNE So back to you two. This traction thing?

LUCIE-JO Oh yeah. So even though you've never heard of it, it's a BFD round here, mainly cos there's nowt else to do and the police are all busy with the out-of-townners, so they leave the rest of us alone. I'd gone with Sal, you know her what I mentioned earlier, she's like my BFF – best fucking friend – cos it's only a twenty minute walk out to Wilky's field and it's pretty easy to get served.

YVONNE Served?

LUCIE-JO You know, have a drink. Cos since them Steads have started brawling round town at the weekends, the pubs have proper cracked down on ID-ing everyone, and with me and Sal being jailbait, we don't have a cat's chance in hell!

KIERAN And I'd gone with the lads. We wouldn't usually bother with kid's stuff, but one of my lads Johnno, he'd just broken up with his fiancée.

YVONNE I see.

LUCIE-JO Anyway, it had been a proper shit night that night. Me and Sal were stuck sharing a pissing bottle of blue bloody wickeds, cos one of the bouncers was her next door neighbour so we had no chance of getting into the beer tent. Then we shared half a shimmy to try and brighten things up but I couldn't feel anything from it – it was probably a fucking paracetamol to be honest – and Sal was high as a kite so I was just pretending to be loved up to join in.

YVONNE What's a shimmy?

KAREN I don't want to know.

LUCIE-JO No, you don't.

YVONNE And what about you Kieran?

KIERAN Well, I was in the beer tent, being that bit older and that. We'd all set about the task of getting Johnno arse-holed, take his mind off his troubles.

YVONNE Lovely.

KIERAN Believe me, it wasn't pretty. He's a big lad is Johnno, and after a few Jagerbombs, he was up on the table.

LUCIE-JO Dancing, wasn't he?

KIERAN I suppose you might call it that like, yeah. Needless to say, it wasn't long before the bouncers kicked us out.

LUCIE-JO And that's when I saw him.

YVONNE How sweet.

LUCIE-JO Not really. He was going in for Sal first, weren't you Kier?

KIERAN Only because I thought I didn't have a chance with you!

KAREN Likely story!

LUCIE-JO No, no, it's true. He was talking to Sal but then she threw up on his shoes and went home cos she was dead embarrassed. He turned to me and I wasn't talking to him cos I was well upset he was into Sal – and she knew I liked him – but then he explained it was me he was after all along. What was it you said, Kier?

KIERAN Why go for silver medal when you can have gold?

LUCIE-JO That's what I love about you, you're dead poetic. *(beat)* Say it back!

KIERAN You're not poetic, though.

LUCIE-JO You're supposed to say 'I love you too'.

KIERAN Oh, right, sorry. Love you too.

The church clock strikes nine.

LUCIE-JO Fuck, it's never nine o'clock.

KAREN Sounds like it.

LUCIE-JO Oh for fuck's sake. Big bloody Brother's on at nine!

KIERAN Oh we are not watching that shite.

LUCIE-JO It's not shite. There's a surprise eviction tonight!

KIERAN Well I'm not watching it.

LUCIE-JO Yes you are.

KIERAN It's gay.

LUCIE-JO You're gay.

KIERAN Fuck off.

KAREN Your auntie's here, Lucie-Jo.

LUCIE-JO I know that.

YVONNE It's fine. Go and enjoy your programme.

KAREN I was more bothered about the swearing.

LUCIE-JO Ta, Yvonne.

She scurries out.

A loud snore from ELEANOR; she has been asleep.

KIERAN Oh thank fuck for that. I thought she was maybe... well, dead.

LUCIE-JO (*off*) Kieran, come on! You're missing Davina!

KIERAN I suppose that's my cue. Catch you ladies in a little while.

He goes out.

YVONNE They seem delightful.

KAREN What do you mean by that?

YVONNE I suppose they're much like the rest of English youth today.

KAREN Go on.

YVONNE Well-spoken. Mild-mannered. You must be so proud.

KAREN I am, actually, yes.

YVONNE Lucie-Jo seems a little... out-of-control.

KAREN No more than any other seventeen year old.

YVONNE You do know that a shimmy is a drug.

KAREN How do you know that?

YVONNE Educated guess.

KAREN Educated guess? As you keep reminding us, you've been out of England for fifteen years.

YVONNE Oh, it's all about context, Karen. I think you ought to keep her on tighter rein for a while. It can't be good for her having a boyfriend so much older than she is.

KAREN It's been very good for her. You didn't know her before, what I had to put up with.

YVONNE She must have been horrific if this is good.

KAREN She's turned out alright seeing as I've been coping on my own.

YVONNE Mother was practically a single parent until you were born, and I never spoke out of turn or did anything to shame the family.

KAREN "Mother" was getting a steady income from Dad. You never wanted for anything. Lucie-Jo's always had to make the best of a bad situation.

YVONNE Well so did I. Yes, there was money, but Father was never around.

KAREN You're contradicting yourself now. Besides, I can see right through you.

YVONNE What?

KAREN You're using our parents to criticise my parenting.

YVONNE You're very sensitive. We're just having a conversation, that's all.

KAREN Don't give me that bull.

YVONNE The language in this household is appalling. No wonder Lucie-Jo's is in the gutter. I've half a mind to wash her mouth out with soap.

KAREN Are you gonna take them glasses off?

YVONNE Why? Are they bothering you?

KAREN I just find it hard to have a conversation with someone when I can't see their face.

YVONNE Oh, alright then.

She removes her glasses.

YVONNE How do I look?

KAREN Older.

YVONNE The years have treated me quite kindly, I think.

KAREN How modest of you.

YVONNE And you're looking much better than I thought you would.

Pause.

YVONNE Oh come on. I can speak frankly with my own sister, can I not?

KAREN I suppose. If you'll allow me the same privilege.

YVONNE Of course.

KAREN Why have you come back, Yvonne?

YVONNE To say goodbye to Mother.

KAREN There's nowt wrong with her.

YVONNE You know that's not true.

KAREN Well, of course there's something wrong with her. But not yet. She's got months left. She's fine. Why come home now to say goodbye?

YVONNE You never know when her time will be up.

KAREN Then why did you stay away so long?

YVONNE I know. I was selfish.

KAREN Was?

YVONNE I didn't want to think about it.

KAREN None of us do. Some of us have to.

YVONNE Oh, you've coped alright, haven't you?

KAREN It could have been worse, I'll admit that.

YVONNE There you go.

KAREN But I'll also say that it could have been a lot better, Yvonne. Maybe you were right. We should have had her put in a home.

YVONNE Karen, how can you say that? Our own mother!

KAREN I was adamant not to put her in a home - I wanted to know she was going to get the best care. But... the best care isn't here.

YVONNE Better here than some clinical NHS run thing, with staff that beat her!

KAREN I thought you might understand where I'm coming from. You were the one that wanted to put her in one of those in the first place.

YVONNE That was before I knew how awful those places are.

KAREN They can't all be like that.

ELEANOR wakes up.

YVONNE Feel better for that, Mother?

ELEANOR Not particularly.

KAREN Maybe you should get some more sleep.

ELEANOR Maybe you two could have kept the noise down.

YVONNE Do you have any lavender oil here? It might help Mother.

KAREN How?

YVONNE It has calming properties.

KAREN We don't have any. Mum hates lavender.

YVONNE Since when?

KAREN Since always.

YVONNE Then why do I send her a set of lavender bath oils every year for her birthday?

KAREN You tell me, because she hates lavenders.

ELEANOR I adore lavender!

KAREN Oh, really?

ELEANOR Yes, you must be mistaking me for your Aunty Gladys. She couldn't stand lavender.

KAREN Then why did you ask me to stash all those lavender baskets under the stairs? What was it you said, Mum? Something about how 'cloying' it was, how you 'hate the bloomin' stuff'?

ELEANOR If it's all under the stairs, why are you pretending we've none in the house?

YVONNE Yes, Karen, why?

KAREN I forgot.

ELEANOR Go and get it. Your sister's right. It might help me sleep a little easier.

KAREN But I'm sure –

ELEANOR Stop being so lazy, Karen, and get on with it!

KAREN obeys.

ELEANOR Honestly, that girl...

YVONNE What about her?

ELEANOR Oh, you know.

YVONNE No, I don't. Tell me. Is she treating you badly?

ELEANOR No, no. Nothing like that.

YVONNE Then what?

ELEANOR Well, she's not like you, is she?

YVONNE I don't suppose she is, no. She's let herself go, I can see that much.

ELEANOR She never did have time for beautifying.

YVONNE Not like me.

ELEANOR No wonder you managed to get yourself such a nice young husband. When are we going to meet the elusive Jeremy?

YVONNE Well...

ELEANOR He can't be working all the time, surely.

YVONNE He does work a lot.

ELEANOR Does he never take a holiday?

YVONNE Well, yes, but he likes to stay warm. He thinks it's a waste using up his holiday to come somewhere colder.

ELEANOR I don't have much time left.

YVONNE I know.

ELEANOR I'd love to meet him. I've got a big favour to ask him.

YVONNE Really? What's that?

ELEANOR I'd like him to be one of the pall-bearers. I know I've never met him, but I do think fondly of him, and he's part of this family too.

YVONNE A pall-bearer where?

KAREN comes back in with a lavender boxed set and hands it to YVONNE.

ELEANOR Where? Where do you think? At my funeral, of course.

KAREN Oh, bloody hell.

YVONNE At your funeral?

KAREN She's got grand designs for this funeral of hers. It's all she'll talk about. It's the party of the bloody season, this funeral.

YVONNE That's rather bad taste, don't you think?

KAREN Bad taste would be having her stuffed. Like Monty.

YVONNE Karen.

ELEANOR Don't mind her. She's always very glib.

YVONNE How can you be so clinical about the whole thing?

ELEANOR I'm not being clinical. I just want to know that everything will be seen to the way I'd like. Is that so wrong?

YVONNE Not when you put it like that.

KAREN It might seem shocking to you, sister dear, but round here we've had to get used to the idea of death. There's no room for being sentimental.

ELEANOR How about it?

YVONNE What, sorry?

ELEANOR Do you think Jeremy will go for helping with the coffin?

YVONNE I'm not sure – I don't think it's really his cup of tea... I will have to ask him.

ELEANOR From everything you've told me, he doesn't sound like the kind of man who would deny a dying woman one of her last requests.

YVONNE That is asking rather a lot!

ELEANOR Oh. I didn't think you would mind helping me out. There aren't many men in our family, you see. Oh well. I suppose someone from Macmillan might do it.

YVONNE I'll ask him, Mother, I'm just not committing him to something.

ELEANOR It's fine, Yvonne. Don't worry about it. It's not important.

KAREN Kieran's agreed.

ELEANOR He's a very good man.

KAREN And he's only twenty-four. A child, compared to your Jeremy.

YVONNE Oh.

KAREN He didn't even hesitate, did he Mum?

ELEANOR Stop trying to show your sister up, Karen. But no, he didn't. He has a heart of gold, that lad.

YVONNE I'm sure Jeremy won't mind.

ELEANOR Don't worry about it.

YVONNE No, no, really. You can count on us.

ELEANOR Can I?

YVONNE Yes.

ELEANOR Really?

YVONNE Of course!

ELEANOR It means a lot to hear you say that Yvonne.

YVONNE Thank you, Mother.

ELEANOR It's good to know that your family will go above and beyond the call of duty to help you out.

KAREN Excuse me, I go above and beyond the call of duty every single day!

ELEANOR That wasn't a dig.

KAREN It sounded like one.

YVONNE It clearly wasn't.

KAREN Keep your haughty little nose out of this!

ELEANOR Enough!

KAREN What? You started it.

YVONNE Have we really regressed to this already? How old are you, Karen, for goodness sake?

KAREN It's you two. You've always ganged up on me.

YVONNE Jesus.

KAREN No blaspheming in this house.

ELEANOR It's okay Yvonne. I know you don't mean it the same way as Karen.

YVONNE No. My cry was a genuine appeal to the Lord.

KAREN Oh for God's sake.

ELEANOR Karen! What have I told you?

KAREN Oh bollocks to this. I'm off to bed. Yvonne, you're in Mum's old room.

YVONNE Where is that again?

KAREN I'm sure you'll work it out.

YVONNE Why is Mother not in Mother's old room?

KAREN Because the bathroom is downstairs.

YVONNE And?

KAREN So in the middle of the night when she was near soiling herself, who do you think had to carry her downstairs?

YVONNE She's our mother.

KAREN I know that. She's also very heavy and it was very dangerous to be struggling with her on the stairs in the black of night. Besides, we've got them baby monitors that she uses if she needs me.

ELEANOR It's like I'm on display in here. I've said to her. I'm a caged animal. No, an ancient artefact!

KAREN It's just easier.

ELEANOR I hate it. I'd love a real bed.

KAREN You told me that bed was comfy!

ELEANOR This heinous thing?

YVONNE Don't you get lonely?

KAREN How can she get lonely? There's always someone down here for her to talk at.

ELEANOR I'm always lonely. First your father left me, then Monty. I'm looking forward to joining them in the next phase.

KAREN Give me strength.

YVONNE Have some sympathy for her. It must be hard getting old.

ELEANOR Oh it is.

YVONNE I'll sleep down here with you tonight then.

ELEANOR Oh, would you?

YVONNE It would be my pleasure. We can catch up on all those lost years. It will be like a slumber party!

ELEANOR A what?

YVONNE You know, a sleepover.

KAREN Good God, I need a drink.

YVONNE You're not still drinking are you?

KAREN What of it?

YVONNE You know, if you stopped your skin would clear right up.

KAREN What's wrong with my skin?

YVONNE Oh, nothing, nothing. I'm just saying. Most people are over acne by the time they reach our age.

KAREN Mum, do you want your Scotch before I head up?

ELEANOR Yes.

YVONNE Are you sure you should be letting her have alcohol?

KAREN I've tried to tell her, but she won't go down without it.

YVONNE But with the painkillers too?

KAREN Look, I've been through all this with her – haven't I Mum?

ELEANOR Of course you have. You love nothing better than to be nagging at somebody. Look at your poor daughter. You're a right old harridan.

KAREN See?

YVONNE I'm not sure about this. Perhaps I should give the doctor a ring in the morning.

KAREN If you want.

ELEANOR Really, Yvonne, it doesn't matter. I'm good as dead anyway.

KAREN goes to the dresser at the back and pours two Scotches.

KAREN Yvonne?

YVONNE No, not for me, thank you. There are far too many calories in that. If I must drink, I stick to vodka-tonics – only sixty calories per glass!

KAREN Fascinating.

She necks her drink and brings one downstage to her mother, waiting patiently for ELEANOR to finish it before returning the glasses to the sideboard.

KAREN Better?

ELEANOR Much.

KAREN Right then, I'm off up. See you both in the morning.

YVONNE Goodnight, Karen. Sweet dreams.

KAREN Aye. Night Mum.

ELEANOR N'night. God bless.

KAREN leaves.

Pause.

YVONNE Well, I'm glad it's just the two of us at last. I feel like we've barely had chance to talk all night.

ELEANOR I know the feeling.

YVONNE I feel rather silly telling you this but... I was scared of coming back here.

ELEANOR I'm not surprised.

YVONNE I thought you'd still be awfully cross with me.

ELEANOR Really? Why's that?

YVONNE Well, you know... the way we left things.

ELEANOR The way you left things, you mean.

YVONNE Perhaps – well, I mean, at least we're over it now.

ELEANOR We are, are we?

YVONNE Sorry?

ELEANOR Oh come on Yvonne. I was nearly deceived by all those veils you wear, very nearly, but not quite.

YVONNE What do you mean?

ELEANOR Still playing dumb, are we? That might have washed with your father but it never did wash with me.

YVONNE You know very well it never washed with Father.

ELEANOR No, I suppose that's true.

YVONNE Parents aren't supposed to have favourites.

ELEANOR You never complained when I favoured you over Karen.

YVONNE That's because it made things fair.

ELEANOR The favour was never returned though, was it?

YVONNE What are you talking about?

ELEANOR You had no qualms about leaving me high and dry, did you?

YVONNE I wasn't leaving you. We spoke about it – and at length, I might add!

ELEANOR Do you think I wanted to be trapped in this little hell hole with your sister and her bastard child?

YVONNE Mother!

ELEANOR Oh, don't get me wrong, I love Lucie-Jo but I wanted a normal grandchild – a grandchild I could hand back. You and Jeremy could have rescued me.

YVONNE Please, don't start all this again.

ELEANOR You skipped off to America without so much as a backward glance. No regard for me, stuck here with nobody to talk to but your wanton sister and her unwanted baby!

YVONNE You're so bitter.

ELEANOR Of course I'm bitter. My life has come full circle. Fifteen years on, I'm still trapped. But this time there'll be no respite until I'm dead and gone!

YVONNE Come now.

ELEANOR No! In three short months – maybe less – I'm going to be dependent on everyone. Drip feeding and drip shitting, fading in and out of consciousness. That's no way for a woman to die. I used to be somebody!

YVONNE Not really.

ELEANOR I was one of the Atkinsons!

YVONNE That's just a name. Everyone has to die.

ELEANOR It was a name that meant something round here. A name that would guarantee you a table at Levisham along with a half price discount. A name that would get you to the front of the queue in the greengrocers!

YVONNE I really think you ought to calm down. You'll have Karen coming straight back down.

ELEANOR Or Lucie-Jo ear-wiggling through the monitor. You're right. Let's change the subject.

YVONNE Good idea.

ELEANOR So. Tell me. How is Jeremy? How's the marriage? Going well?

YVONNE Never been better.

ELEANOR And you're happy to commit to the pair of you being at my funeral?

YVONNE I said earlier, didn't I?

ELEANOR Of course you did. Silly me.

YVONNE You're acting very oddly. That drink's giving you a funny turn.

ELEANOR There's nowt wrong with my head yet, Yvonne, make no mistake of that.

YVONNE Alright. Sorry.

ELEANOR Jeremy wrote to me once.

YVONNE Oh. Did he? He didn't mention it.

ELEANOR He wouldn't have. It was after your divorce.

YVONNE You know?

ELEANOR Of course I know Yvonne. It's bleeding obvious. Regardless of whether or not you choose to tell me.

YVONNE How did he know where to find you?

ELEANOR He looked it up, I suppose. People have their ways of getting hold of people when they need to. He felt I should know, in case you got back in touch.

YVONNE Right.

ELEANOR But you didn't get back in touch.

YVONNE No.

ELEANOR Not once. Not even to see how I was doing. I waited months.

YVONNE I didn't know. Not for a while anyway.

ELEANOR It's been six years since I was first diagnosed.

YVONNE I know, but I didn't know what to say. I told you how scared I was. It's always hard, coming back.

ELEANOR Not as difficult as dying though, wouldn't you say?

YVONNE I don't know about that.

ELEANOR You're much harder now.

YVONNE Do you think?

ELEANOR It's a good thing. Considering.

YVONNE Considering what?

ELEANOR You must have wondered why we sent for you.

YVONNE I assumed you wanted to make amends before things got worse.

ELEANOR Close.

YVONNE How did you find me?

ELEANOR That's not my story. You got the letter, didn't you?

YVONNE That's why I'm here.

ELEANOR You're here for me.

YVONNE What do you want?

ELEANOR Pour me another drink and I'll tell you.

YVONNE I really don't think it's a good idea.

ELEANOR Pour me another.

YVONNE goes to the back, pours another Scotch. Deliberates, pours one for herself and brings them both back down. ELEANOR savours hers.

ELEANOR Yvonne, I have a favour to ask you.

YVONNE Wow, you're really calling in the favours tonight, aren't you? First Jeremy, now me. Go on then.

ELEANOR I want you to help me die.

YVONNE Pardon?

ELEANOR Don't make me say it again.

YVONNE I don't understand.

ELEANOR You commented earlier how well I look, better than you'd imagined.

YVONNE I know, it was a real relief to find you like this.

ELEANOR It's more of a relief for me, believe me. I'm never sure when it might catch up with me.

YVONNE You're doing well. You've got a good few months left, Karen says.

ELEANOR It's not death I'm scared of. It's dying.

YVONNE If we're optimistic, you might even have years left before you need to worry about dying.

ELEANOR God forbid!

Outside there is a scream, then laughter. The baby monitor crackles.

ELEANOR Ugh, there she is again. The whore next door.

YVONNE Who?

ELEANOR Do you remember Wendy?

YVONNE I'm really not following you. Sorry.

ELEANOR You must remember her. Dinner lady at the infant's school. Lived in Middlebrook. Fat Wendy, all the kids called her. Bless her. Anyway, she died. Four years ago last March. I visited her a bit – I was more able then, on my good days. Still driving here and there, lots of time on my hands. I visited her a bit.

YVONNE That was very good of you.

ELEANOR You're right. It was. Because she fucking stank – pardon my French, you know I don't really swear but... Lucie-Jo came with me a couple of times, started to refer to poor Wendy as the Foisty Lady.

YVONNE Foisty Lady?

ELEANOR Well, Lucie-Jo was only twelve then bless her, she couldn't articulate herself properly. It was her way of pointing out the stench of death.

YVONNE I see.

ELEANOR I don't want that following me round before I go. I want to go with dignity. I don't want to be lying here, on this sofa bed, in a puddle of my own piss

and shit, tongue lolling out for Karen – or worse, Lucie-Jo – to come in and find. I want to die with dignity.

YVONNE Assisted suicide.

ELEANOR Yes, I suppose that would be the politically correct term.

YVONNE It's not time to even be thinking about that.

ELEANOR Of course it is. Why prolong my life for a few sodding months when the quality of that life is just going to deteriorate?

YVONNE You never know, with modern medicine – Lord knows that's the one thing this country's doing right!

ELEANOR Yvonne, I'm tired. I'm seventy. I don't want to wait around for a miracle cure. There's nowt left for me here anyway. I'm ready now. I'm asking you.

YVONNE What about – oh, what's it called – that place in Switzerland...?

ELEANOR You expect me to die in Switzerland! Of all places!

YVONNE Dignitas, I believe it's called.

ELEANOR No good, anyway. Passport's expired.

YVONNE Renew it.

ELEANOR Renew it, she says. Do you know how much them things cost? I'm not wasting seventy quid of my pension on that!

YVONNE Ask your doctor then... Maybe he'll be sympathetic to your case, you never know... You do hear of these things.

ELEANOR Unfortunately, his name's Doctor Goulding not Doctor Shipman.

YVONNE Now who's callous?

ELEANOR The fact of the matter is – don't you think I've been through all this? Hundreds of times. I've exhausted every option. You, my dear, are my last resort.

YVONNE Charming.

ELEANOR Well it's true. Do you really think I wanted you to come back? Bringing shame on the family again with your scarlet ways? Me, stroking your ego and currying favour when you and I both know you would leave me here to rot, given the choice.

YVONNE That's not true.

ELEANOR Darling, your actions always have spoken far louder than your words.

YVONNE Why don't you ask Karen?

ELEANOR I can't ask that of her. She would never do it anyway and then she'd be up on suicide watch every night. She does enough for me.

YVONNE But you'll happily ask me.

ELEANOR You were happy enough to skip off and forget about me before. This is no different.

YVONNE Except it involves a mild case of murder.

ELEANOR Karen would never let me be if I asked her, if she had an inkling I might top myself.

YVONNE Why don't you do that?

ELEANOR Stupid as it sounds, Yvonne, I'm afraid. What if I did it wrong and I didn't die? That'd be even worse. Nobody wants to end up a cancerous cabbage.

YVONNE Well, tough. You're just going to have to deal with it.

ELEANOR Deal with it? How on earth do you expect me to do that?

YVONNE I'm not helping you. If you want to die so desperately, do it yourself. Do you know how long I'd be put away for if they ever found out?

ELEANOR They wouldn't find out. If an old crone like me kicks it, they don't bother with a thorough post mortem.

YVONNE You don't know that. No, I shan't. You living through a few months of pain and indignity beats me going to prison.

ELEANOR You selfish little witch.

YVONNE No, Mother, you're selfish! Do you think I'd last an hour in prison?

ELEANOR I should have known you wouldn't dare.

YVONNE Yes, perhaps you should have.

ELEANOR I'll tell Karen.

YVONNE Tell her what?

ELEANOR Your nasty little secret.

YVONNE Oh, tell away. I'm surprised she hasn't worked it out herself but then, she never was the brightest flower in the bunch.

ELEANOR Please, Yvonne. Don't make me beg. Help me out.

YVONNE No. It's not worth it.

ELEANOR Please.

YVONNE What's it worth?

ELEANOR Everything.

YVONNE Financially, I mean. In the will.

ELEANOR Well, of course there'd be something.

YVONNE How much, though?

ELEANOR Five grand. It's not a lot, but it's all I have left after I've seen to the other two.

YVONNE No, sorry. No good to me. Third place was never my style.

ELEANOR You need any money you can get.

YVONNE You have no idea what I do and do not need.

ELEANOR I know exactly what you need.

YVONNE The house.

ELEANOR What?

YVONNE Leave me the house and I'll think about it.

ELEANOR It's Karen's home. Lucie-Jo's home.

YVONNE By rights, this is my home too. I lived here longer than Lucie-Jo has. They'll find somewhere. I'm sure the housing association are sat just waiting for something to do around here.

ELEANOR You're heartless. Think of your niece.

YVONNE It's up to you. Take it or leave it.

Pause.

ELEANOR If I leave you the house, you'll do it?

YVONNE I'll think about doing it.

ELEANOR That's not good enough. That's not even fair. How can you guarantee...?

YVONNE Like I said, it's up to you. Me thinking about it is more than you've got at the moment.

Pause.

ELEANOR I'll leave you the house.

YVONNE Really?

ELEANOR I'm not happy about it, and I think you're being very, very unkind. But the house is yours. Everything else will go to Karen and Lucie-Jo.

YVONNE They can have everything else. Who would want all your old junk, anyway? Shake my hand, Mother. Make a deal a deal.

They shake hands. As they do so, the baby monitor crackles again.

YVONNE I'm going to bed. I have a lot to think about. Goodnight, Mother.

ELEANOR Goodnight.

Black out.

act one, scene two

Later that same evening. ELEANOR is sleeping.

In the orange dark, a figure comes on stage. They sink slowly into the bed next to the old woman and pick up a pillow. They play with it, flip it in their hands and murmur something to ELEANOR, unheard by the audience.

As the clock strikes three outside, they bring the pillow up and push it down into ELEANOR's face. She doesn't struggle.

The person removes the pillow and relaxes.

Fade to black.

act two, scene one

Early morning the next day.

Lights up on KAREN, in a dressing gown and pyjamas. She is sitting in the same position as the figure from Act One, Scene Two, her head in her hands.

Enter YVONNE.

YVONNE Good morning!

KAREN Oh, good morning. Cup of tea?

YVONNE Go on then.

KAREN Mum's gone.

YVONNE What? Where?

KAREN Have a seat. She's dead.

YVONNE When?

KAREN I only came down five minutes ago.

YVONNE Have you called anyone yet?

KAREN No. Not yet.

YVONNE I see.

KAREN I don't understand it. She was fine last night – you saw her, she was fine, wasn't she?

YVONNE She was a little bit agitated before she went to sleep, but other than that, yes, she was fine. She was fine.

KAREN Why weren't you with her? I thought you were staying with her.

YVONNE That was the plan, but as I say, she was getting herself very worked up. I thought she'd be better on her own.

KAREN Obviously she wasn't.

YVONNE It's not my fault.

KAREN I know that, I'm not... God, I don't even know who we're supposed to ring – I wanted to ask the nurses all this, I kept putting it off. I thought we'd have loads of time.

YVONNE I think we all did. Mother included.

KAREN I bet she was in so much pain, I didn't even realise... She didn't say anything though, did she? I should have paid her more attention last night.

YVONNE Maybe she went quite peacefully. I know I'd prefer to think that.

KAREN I don't think she would have liked to have said anything, though. With you being here and all. She probably suffered in silence.

YVONNE Well, that doesn't sound like Mother now, does it?

KAREN I suppose not. She's tough as old boots. Was. And she seemed relatively happy last night. For Mum.

YVONNE She looks very calm.

KAREN God, how can you stand it?

YVONNE What?

KAREN Looking at – at a corpse!

She shudders

YVONNE It's not a corpse. She's our mother. Look. She looks younger. Some of the wrinkles have ironed out.

KAREN Ugh, I can't.

She flicks the duvet over her mother's face.

KAREN Sorry.

YVONNE We ought to phone an ambulance, I think.

KAREN An ambulance? What's the point? She's dead!

YVONNE They'll know what to do. And at least the body will be... disposed of for us.

KAREN Jesus Yvonne, it's not a crime scene!

YVONNE Who said it was?

KAREN You – talking of body disposal and that... Makes it sound like a murder. We're not the bloody Mafia!

YVONNE Sorry.

KAREN No, no, sorry, it's me. I don't mean to pick at you. I'm just all shaken up. Walking in here, finding her like that. It's not what you expect first thing Monday morning.

YVONNE No.

KAREN Gives a whole new meaning to "I don't like Mondays".

YVONNE Ha ha, yes.

KAREN It's not funny!

YVONNE Where's the phone? To call an ambulance?

KAREN Don't have a landline anymore. We got cut off. BT are robbing bastards. My mobile's on the stairs though. Oh fuck, I don't know if I've any credit.

YVONNE I don't think you need it for calling – what number do I need?

KAREN 999, I suppose. Does it count as an emergency when the body's already cold?

YVONNE I'll just nip out.

KAREN I'll stay here, then. With Mum.

YVONNE slips out. KAREN reaches forward and flips the duvet back again to study her mother's face. She touches it.

KAREN Sorry, Mum.

act two, scene two

Same set, different day. The bed no longer dominates the room – it has been folded back into a sofa. In fact, much of ELEANOR's mark has been wiped clean. The only obvious thing remaining is the oak table and the baby monitor. There is no sign of Monty. There is only one framed piece of needlework remaining, of a Yorkshire terrier. The room looks brighter, altogether cleaner. Gone are the antimacassars, bright throws in their place.

There are a few empty or half-empty wine bottles dotted around.

YVONNE is worse for wear.

KAREN (off) Ta for coming, Reverend. See you Thursday, then.

She comes in.

KAREN Thank the flamin' Lord! I thought he'd never leave!

YVONNE What's England coming to? Vicars drinking the strong stuff!

KAREN Vicars are worse than anybody! I hope he's alright.

She looks out of the window.

KAREN Eh up!

YVONNE What am I missing?

KAREN Vicar wobbling off his bike! Bit of a sight for sore eyes. He's got his robes tangled up in the spokes on his wheels now.

LUCIE-JO and KIERAN come in and sit down on the sofa.

LUCIE-JO Sorted?

KAREN Thursday.

LUCIE-JO Funeral?

KAREN Yes.

LUCIE-JO That's soon.

KAREN Well, that's assuming everything's alright with the post mortem.

LUCIE-JO Do they bother with them when someone dies of old age?

KAREN I think they have to do post mortems nowadays. Make sure everything's as it should be – they have to be sure it was the cancer and not anything else that they might not have picked up... I'm not really sure. But the vicar was very good about it all actually. Said there's no use in waiting around – the sooner we have the funeral, the easier it will be for us to say goodbye.

LUCIE-JO Will you be able to get time off, Kier?

KIERAN Yeah, no probs. I'll ring the gaffer in the morning and let him know.

KAREN You're a diamond, Kieran.

YVONNE A diamond.

KAREN What about Jeremy then?

YVONNE What about him?

KAREN Do you think he'll be able to fly over?

YVONNE I don't know.

KAREN Plane tickets must be expensive at such short notice.

YVONNE The expense won't be the problem.

KAREN Well, you best ring him and ask him.

YVONNE I'll do that in the morning too.

KAREN Why not now? You haven't called him once while you've been here.

YVONNE Time difference.

KAREN Surely you want to tell him about Mum, though.

YVONNE I'll ring him in the morning, Karen.

KAREN Alright. I was just saying.

YVONNE Well, don't.

KAREN Touchy.

LUCIE-JO Are we getting one of them cars for Thursday then?

KAREN You mean a hearse.

LUCIE-JO Is that what they're called?

KAREN Well, we won't be travelling in the hearse...

KIERAN Fuck me, I bloody hope not!

KAREN But yes, we will be in a funeral car.

LUCIE-JO Mint!

KAREN Lucie-Jo!

LUCIE-JO I don't mean it bad or anything. It's just those cars are usually pretty decent aren't they.

YVONNE That's what I like about you, Lucie-Jo. You're so sensitive and thoughtful.

LUCIE-JO What's that supposed to mean?

YVONNE Never mind.

LUCIE-JO No, go on, tell me.

KAREN Stop it.

LUCIE-JO No, she's making out like I'm happy Nan's dead or something!

YVONNE I am not!

LUCIE-JO You know I'd rather she be here than not.

YVONNE You seem awfully excited about some of the finer details.

LUCIE-JO I'm looking for the silver lining is all.

YVONNE Good for you.

LUCIE-JO Bring it on, then!

KAREN Come on. We're all feeling a bit emotional. Let's drop it.

KIERAN Still can't believe she's gone. Gonna miss the old bat.

KAREN We all are, in our own way.

YVONNE Any more wine?

KAREN You've had enough.

YVONNE I'll be the judge of that.

KAREN There's Mum's Scotch, then.

YVONNE That'll do.

KAREN When did you turn into such a hard drinker?

LUCIE-JO It's what all them lot do.

YVONNE I beg your pardon? Which "lot"?

LUCIE-JO You know, English people what live abroad.

YVONNE Expatriates, you mean.

LUCIE-JO If you like. Read about you lot in *Woman* magazine.

KAREN *Woman* magazine? What are you doing reading that?

LUCIE-JO It's a good read actually. Lots of real life stuff. I like stuff like that.

KAREN Beats the *Gazette*, I suppose.

YVONNE And why's that?

KAREN Should have seen the headline last week. "Man steals courgette". I know we live in the sticks, but really. Front page news "man steals courgette".

KIERAN That was my old man's uncle's allotment. He was dead upset.

KAREN Oh dear.

LUCIE-JO Anyway, what were we saying? Oh yeah... I read about them ex-pats in *Woman* and it says all they do is get drunk and have parties and that.

KIERAN Sounds like my kind of lifestyle.

LUCIE-JO They called it a "champagne" lifestyle. In some countries, it really upsets the locals.

KIERAN Can't say the locals round here are too happy when I've been on the champers. Now then though, did you hear about the lass from the Mucky Duck?

YVONNE The Mucky Duck?

KAREN I think he means The Grey Goose. It's a pub on the high street.

YVONNE I see.

LUCIE-JO What happened to her?

KIERAN She was opening a bottle of fizz for Vicky from the bakery – cork went straight into her eye.

LUCIE-JO Oh yeah, I did hear about this. She's bloody blind now, isn't she? Has to have an operation and everything!

KAREN Who knew champagne could be so dangerous?

LUCIE-JO Did anything happen like that while you were in Tenerife, Yvonne?

YVONNE For the last time, I have never lived in Tenerife!

KAREN She's winding you up.

YVONNE Well, it's working. And no, nothing like that ever happens.

LUCIE-JO But I bet you drink a fair bit, don't you?

YVONNE I've been known to, the odd time.

LUCIE-JO Bet there's nowt else to do over there.

YVONNE Yes, it's a hard life.

KAREN Sitting by the pool, drinking wine, waiting for the chef to cook your next meal...

YVONNE It's not quite like that.

KAREN That's a direct quote from the last time you wrote to us. I can find the letter if you'd like...

YVONNE Well then, I suppose it is quite like that.

LUCIE-JO Do you miss it?

YVONNE How do you mean?

LUCIE-JO Now you're not there.

YVONNE I live there.

LUCIE-JO Well, you're not there now, are you? You're here!

YVONNE Oh, right, I see.

KAREN Wine getting to you?

YVONNE Perhaps I will have a Scotch to take the edge off.

She goes to the back of the stage and pours herself a Scotch.

YVONNE We're almost out of that too.

KAREN What?

YVONNE The Scotch. It's nearly all gone.

KAREN But the bottle was nearly full the other night.

YVONNE It sounds like you used to give Mother a lot.

KAREN Well, it never did her any harm. Used to give Lucie-Jo the odd toddy too when she was a baby. Got her straight to sleep.

YVONNE Oh.

KAREN Well, someone's been drinking it.

LUCIE-JO Not me, can't stand the stuff. Tastes like fire.

YVONNE That's why I like it.

KAREN Kieran?

KIERAN Karen?

KAREN You had any?

KIERAN Only the glass you gave me the other night.

KAREN How odd.

LUCIE-JO So we burning her or burying her?

KIERAN That's a bit brash, like.

LUCIE-JO What? I'm only saying it like it is.

KAREN She's being cremated.

KIERAN Wise choice.

YVONNE Why are we having her cremated?

KAREN Mum always wanted to be cremated.

YVONNE That's not true.

KAREN Yes it is.

YVONNE No, it isn't.

KAREN How do you know?

YVONNE The night before she died, she made it clear to me that she wanted to be buried. Next to Father.

KAREN Did she really?

YVONNE Why would I lie?

KAREN Well, it's just she never liked the idea of being trapped in a coffin six feet under.

YVONNE She told me she wanted to be buried with Monty.

KAREN It's a bit too late for that!

LUCIE-JO Oh, did you find somebody to get rid of him?

KAREN Yeah, slipped the vet in Thornton twenty quid. Ashes are in the garage.

YVONNE You could have asked! I thought I might keep him

KAREN You never said you wanted to.

YVONNE I didn't know I'd need to.

KAREN I didn't know anybody would want that mangy mutt, or I'd've checked with you before I took him. Sorry Yvonne.

YVONNE Not to worry. I suppose I should have expected it from you.

KAREN Why?

YVONNE You always took my stuff without checking.

KAREN I did not. Why didn't you tell me Mum wanted to be buried when the vicar was still here?

YVONNE I didn't like to interrupt you.

KAREN But this is important, Yvonne. These are our mother's last wishes.

YVONNE Too late now, isn't it?

LUCIE-JO Yeah, everything's arranged isn't it?

KAREN Arrangements can be unarranged. I'd hate to think we gave Mum the wrong send-off. She was so pleased to be able to arrange most of it herself, I don't want the one thing we do to be wrong. She'd never forgive us.

YVONNE She won't know anyway.

KAREN She might.

YVONNE Don't worry your little head about it, Karen. You did what you thought was best.

Pause.

KAREN I'll go and see the vicar. It might not be too late to change things. Though I don't know how we'll afford it all.

LUCIE-JO Why, what's to pay for?

KAREN Well, if we change it to a burial, we've the plot and the headstone to pay for. And if everyone's going to be looking at it, we should probably get her a nicer coffin. There's just so much to do.

YVONNE Oh, just leave it, Karen. I shouldn't have said anything.

KAREN I almost wish you hadn't. Either way I'm going to feel like I've done the wrong thing.

YVONNE Oh well.

LUCIE-JO Shit.

KAREN What now?

LUCIE-JO I don't know if I've got anything black to wear. I never wear black. It's one of my rules.

KAREN You must have something.

LUCIE-JO Think it's a stupid idea anyway, wearing black to a funeral. Nan never saw me in black, why would she want me to wear it to her send-off?

KAREN People wear black to show they're in mourning.

LUCIE-JO I'll just have to go shopping then, won't I?

KAREN With whose money?

KIERAN My sister might have something you can wear.

LUCIE-JO Your sister? No offence, Kieran, but your sister looks like she took a stroll through Primark and every flaming item of clothing stuck!

KAREN He was only offering to help.

LUCIE-JO Well, if his sister learnt how to dress herself, I might accept it.

YVONNE Karen, I've finished the Scotch. What's next?

KAREN Do you really need another?

YVONNE We all have to cope in our own ways.

KAREN There might be something in the garage. Kieran, would you mind?

KIERAN Didn't you say Monty was in there?

KAREN Yes.

KIERAN Then, no.

KAREN Kieran, he's just powder now. In a little box. No eyes.

KIERAN No way. No way. I'm sorry, Karen, I just can't. There's just something about that dog and he's probably really mad now he's been cremated...

KAREN Fine. I'll go.

She goes out.

KIERAN I feel bad now.

LUCIE-JO Oh, go help her, Kier. She has to do everything around here.

KIERAN just looks at her.

LUCIE-JO I promise Monty won't get you. You won't even need to look at him.

KIERAN Alright.

He goes.

Silence. The birds outside are singing.

YVONNE Are you going to tell your mother you've been downing the Scotch?

LUCIE-JO Are you going to tell her?

YVONNE I don't know.

LUCIE-JO How did you know?

YVONNE I noticed the lipstick marks around the neck. Only you would wear that lovely shade of purple.

LUCIE-JO I thought I'd wiped it all off.

YVONNE I'm very observant.

LUCIE-JO I'll keep your secret if you keep mine.

YVONNE I don't have any secrets.

LUCIE-JO She couldn't cope with it on her own.

YVONNE Yes, she needed somebody to help her.

LUCIE-JO When are you going to tell Mum then?

YVONNE I wasn't going to.

LUCIE-JO That's not fair, is it?

YVONNE Why not?

LUCIE-JO You've been living here for over a year. You could have really helped us. I was going to tell her, once we'd found you, but I thought you might want to.

YVONNE Spare me the lecture, Lucie-Jo. I've already had it from your grandmother.

LUCIE-JO You can't expect nobody to be angry with you. Do you know what a struggle it's been?

YVONNE Oh, come on, it hasn't been that bad.

LUCIE-JO It's been terrible. And long.

YVONNE Six years?

LUCIE-JO Yes.

YVONNE It's not as if she was ill the entire time, though.

LUCIE-JO Of course she was! Why do you think she chose not to have any more treatment?

YVONNE I thought it was untreatable. She told me it was untreatable.

LUCIE-JO I've spent the last four years watching her having all that treatment – the chemo, the radiotherapy, all that shit. All my teenage life, really. Messed up me and my mum too.

YVONNE You seem very close.

LUCIE-JO Well, we are, in some ways. But in others... She's constantly tired out, constantly having a go, always under pressure. She's no fun any more.

YVONNE And why is all of this my fault?

LUCIE-JO Because if you'd come back, there'd've been someone else to help! If my mum wasn't at home, tending to Nan, then she was out at work to try and pay all the bills. Even if you couldn't be arsed to come back up and actually be here, you could have sent some money our way!

YVONNE No I couldn't.

LUCIE-JO Course you could. You're loaded.

YVONNE No, Lucie-Jo, Jeremy is loaded. I have nothing.

LUCIE-JO Yeah right.

KAREN and KIERAN come back in.

KAREN Found some beers at the back of the garage. What are you two talking about?

LUCIE-JO Just filling Yvonne in on our amazing life.

KAREN Oh God, can we not? Let's just forget about that for now.

YVONNE I must say, Karen, you're coping with the loss of our mother very well.

KAREN Am I?

YVONNE I haven't seen you cry once.

LUCIE-JO Of course she has! She's probably relieved that she only has herself to think of now, anyway. Did you not listen to everything I just told you?

KAREN What did you tell her?

LUCIE-JO Not even half of it, Mum, don't worry.

YVONNE It sounds like you've led a very difficult life in my absence.

KAREN Well, you know.

YVONNE Did Mother make you aware of her final wish?

KAREN We've been through this, Yvonne, I told you – as far as I was aware, she wanted a cremation not a burial.

YVONNE Oh, I don't mean that.

KAREN Well then, what do you mean?

YVONNE You needn't play dumb with me, Karen. It won't work.

KAREN Yvonne, I have no idea what you're talking about! What was Mum's final wish? Is it anything I can do?

YVONNE No, no, it's too late for that now. It's already been fulfilled anyway.

KIERAN What's she on with, like?

LUCIE-JO I don't know. Why do you have to talk in riddles for fuck's sake?

KAREN Yvonne, please explain.

LUCIE-JO Don't worry about it Mum. She's probably bull shitting you anyway.

KAREN Bull shitting me? Why do you say that?

LUCIE-JO It's not my place to say. Come on Kier, let's have a walk to the shop and see if we can find something a little stronger than bloody beer.

KIERAN I want to know what's going on though.

LUCIE-JO I'll fill you in on the way, alright?

They go out. The door slams behind them.

KAREN What's going on, Yvonne? You seem very... on edge.

YVONNE Me, on edge? I have every reason to be on edge, our Mother is dead.

KAREN It's more than that.

YVONNE Is it?

KAREN What's this about Mum's last wish?

YVONNE Oh, Karen. You already know.

KAREN What, that she wanted to be buried?

YVONNE Good grief, you can be so dense! No, not that.

KAREN Then I don't know.

YVONNE You must.

KAREN This is getting silly. Why don't you just tell me what you're on about? Why don't we act like adults, for once?

YVONNE The night before Mother died, you went to bed early. Remember?

KAREN I think so – it's all a bit foggy since she died...

YVONNE I stayed up a while with Mother, poured her another drink, tried to get her to relax.

KAREN Fair enough, you said the other day she was uptight. What's your point?

YVONNE I'm getting to it.

KAREN Alright.

YVONNE Did Mother ever make any strange requests?

KAREN Not really. The strangest thing she ever asked for was to put a stop to all the chemo and that.

YVONNE And did you never question that choice?

KAREN I wasn't happy with it, but I suppose I sort of understood. It was very draining for her. Not to mention the rest of us.

YVONNE She was obviously prepared to die.

KAREN I don't know if I'd go that far, Yvonne. I know she spoke about death a lot, maybe even too much from an outsider's point of view, but I don't think she was ready for it!

YVONNE Really?

KAREN Yes, really! What, do you think different?

YVONNE You could say that.

KAREN Well, why?

YVONNE Right. There's no easy way to bring this up, so I shall just have to come out with it. The night before Mother died, she asked me to kill her.

KAREN You what?

YVONNE She wanted me to end her life for her.

KAREN And... did you? Is that what Lucie-Jo was getting at?

YVONNE How can you even ask that? Knowing what you've done?

KAREN What I've done?!

YVONNE Well, you surely don't think I did it!

KAREN And you think I did?

YVONNE Somebody must have done. You saw how healthy she was on Sunday. You said so yourself. How can somebody still so full of life just die like that?

KAREN It happens all the time, Yvonne. Come on, you've had a lot to drink and it's been a very tough couple of days, but there's no need to jump to such crazy conclusions!

YVONNE Rather coincidental though, don't you think? That my mother, still reasonably healthy and definitely sound of mind, would ask me to assist her suicide? I refuse and the next morning we discover she's dead.

KAREN Life's full of strange coincidences.

YVONNE Listen, I'm asking you about this while we're alone to give you the opportunity to own up to me before the coroner notices something 'off'. I know we have our differences but you're my sister, the last remnant of our family, and I'd hate to see you put away. If we put our heads together, we might be able to come up with a plausible / excuse.

KAREN I don't believe this. Are you seriously suggesting that I / killed Mum?

YVONNE I'm giving you a chance here, Karen.

KAREN I don't need a chance. I didn't do anything! You saw me the morning I found her. I was completely shell-shocked.

YVONNE You always were good at acting.

KAREN Honestly, Yvonne, your suspicions don't even make sense. If I was going to do anything like that, don't you think I would have done it ages ago?

YVONNE I don't know. You've been under a lot of pressure with her.

KAREN Yes, I have. But there's no way I'd do anything like that. I wouldn't even put her in a home!

YVONNE And you've made it clear you regret that decision.

KAREN I know what I said, but I'd never have actually had her put away!

YVONNE Oh come on, Karen, there's no longer any need to pretend. Let's just be honest with each other.

KAREN Yes, sometimes I wished we'd had her put in a home. She was a bloody nightmare. Nothing I did was ever good enough. But I wouldn't have been able to send her away from this house, and I certainly didn't kill her! Alright?

YVONNE Calm down.

KAREN Don't you dare tell me to calm down, Yvonne. That woman treated me like I was nothing, but I would never have crossed any boundaries like that.

YVONNE She didn't treat you like you were nothing. You're being silly now.

KAREN Am I? Funny that, because she spent the last year telling me how she wished I had buggered off instead of you.

YVONNE But you didn't bugger off, did you?

KAREN No, you did!

YVONNE Do you honestly think I was ever let off the hook for that?

KAREN I don't know. All I know is I tried to give Mum a decent quality of life, even after she'd decided to stop the treatment. But it was never enough. I was not in enough, or in too much, or fussing, or not caring.

YVONNE You're exaggerating.

KAREN Oh, yes, of course I am. That's why my social life's gone to shit, my career's gone down the pan and my daughter spends her life getting off her face on drink – or worse.

YVONNE So it would be understandable if you just flipped one night.

KAREN Is that what you think happened?

YVONNE I don't know.

KAREN Why wouldn't I wait for a night when it was just me and her? Why wait for you to be visiting, for Kieran to be staying?

YVONNE Sometimes... you read about it or see it in films... People just flip. They don't think logically.

KAREN Have you ever known me to think unlogically?

YVONNE Illogically.

KAREN Whatever.

YVONNE I don't know... You're right... It just seems so strange that Mother's gone.

KAREN Death's a funny thing to grasp. Look at me, with Dad. It takes time. You and Mum were very close.

YVONNE Once.

KAREN Oh God, Yvonne, even in your absence you and Mum had your own little clique.

YVONNE You and Father used to leave us out.

KAREN We didn't!

YVONNE You and Father were always off in the car, laughing and joking together, with your little secrets. It used to make Mother and I sick.

KAREN Dad would've loved it if you and Mum had wanted to join in. He only spent so much time with me because Mum never took an interest in him!

YVONNE How dare you? They were so happy before you came along and spoilt it.

KAREN I've heard all this before. Did Mum brainwash you or something?

YVONNE I'm saying this because it's true.

KAREN Mum was only happier before because there was more money and less Dad around the house! There was only you and her and that's the way she liked it. I don't know why she bothered trying for another baby in the first place.

YVONNE She didn't. You were Father's little afterthought.

KAREN What?

YVONNE Has she never told you?

KAREN Apparently not.

YVONNE You were a mistake, Karen. She never wanted you. The only reason you're here today is because Father begged her not to get rid. Of course, that was when he thought you were going to be a son.

KAREN Shut up!

YVONNE Mind you, Mother was probably thankful to have you around in her later years. Beats paying for a private nurse.

KAREN I didn't have a choice did I? You didn't give a toss about her.

YVONNE Oh, Karen, of course I cared about her. I just always had that bit more ambition than you, that's all. I couldn't bear to be stuck in this same dead-end town for the rest of my life, resigned to a life of looking after our parents. That might have been a happy path for you to take, but never for me.

KAREN I never chose this path. I had Lucie-Jo to consider too.

YVONNE Can you blame me, then? You were stuck here so I didn't have to be. What can I say? Finding true love makes you selfish.

KAREN Give me strength! Where's your true love tonight then, when you need him?

YVONNE He has a very demanding career.

KAREN Our mother's dead and you won't talk to him, you won't talk about him. Does he even exist?

YVONNE Of course he exists.

KAREN Then I bet he kicked you out a long time ago. Who could stick you for fifteen years? It's bad enough being your sister but at least we never shared a bed!

YVONNE Well.

KAREN Oh God, he did, didn't he? He kicked you out!

YVONNE I left, actually.

KAREN Fat load of difference that makes. No wonder you've come crawling back here, needing somewhere / to live!

YVONNE I've already got a place.

KAREN Where? Not round here?

YVONNE Not yet.

KAREN Thank God for small mercies.

YVONNE I'm living in London.

KAREN London? Since when?

YVONNE Not that long.

KAREN Since when, Yvonne?

YVONNE April.

KAREN This April? April just gone?

YVONNE Not quite. April last year.

KAREN That's when Mum started her second round of chemo.

YVONNE Is it?

KAREN You've been back in England for - (*pause, as she counts*) sixteen months! – and you don't even know that!

YVONNE I didn't want to get sucked in to all that.

KAREN Who does want to be involved in 'all that'?

YVONNE Well, you always did enjoy playing the martyr.

KAREN Don't turn this round on me.

YVONNE I refuse to be blamed for your hardships. There's always a choice, Karen, and I chose wisely.

KAREN I can't believe you would move back here and not even tell me! Did Mum know?

YVONNE Oh, of course she didn't. Not at first anyway. Do you really think she'd let me get away with leaving her to it? She wanted me to be as miserable as the rest of you.

KAREN What do you mean, not at first?

YVONNE Jeremy wrote her a little letter. Spoilsport.

KAREN I never saw any letter.

YVONNE I doubt Mother would have wanted you to know. Too much stress for her favourite daughter. She got her precious little grand-daughter to track me down.

KAREN Lucie-Jo knew about this?

YVONNE And there was me having her pegged as stupid.

KAREN I'm sorry, I still haven't got my head around this. You moved back to England without so much as a thought towards us, your family? Not one phone call to see how we were all doing?

YVONNE I didn't want to get in the way. I thought you'd have it covered.

KAREN I can't believe you.

YVONNE Oh come on Karen, it's done now. Get over it.

KAREN Not one word of an apology?

YVONNE I don't think I have anything to apologise for. I came back to see Mother before it was too late. I did what was expected of me. That's more than a lot of daughters do for their mothers.

KAREN What about sisterly loyalty?

YVONNE You're joking, aren't you? I mean, it would have been nice, but sometimes it's just a case of too little, too late.

KAREN Too little? I used to idolise you!

YVONNE Used to steal my clothes, more like.

KAREN This again! They were hand-me-downs.

YVONNE A spade's a spade, Karen.

YVONNE takes a beer, chugs it down.

KAREN I want you out of my house.

YVONNE It's not your house. It's Mother's.

KAREN It's my home, and I want you out.

YVONNE It'll be my home soon anyway.

KAREN What, you reckon?

YVONNE Didn't she tell you?

KAREN I know Mum. She might have had the odd grievance with me, but she loved Lucie-Jo. She would never screw Lucie-Jo over.

YVONNE I'm only warning you, Karen. It's up to you whether you want to listen.

KAREN Well, until we have the will reading, it is my house and I want you gone first thing tomorrow morning.

YVONNE You don't even have the guts to put me out on the street now.

KAREN Oh I have the guts alright. I'm just trying to be nice.

YVONNE Typical Karen. Always so spineless. Just like Dad.

KAREN Me being like Dad is not a bad thing.

YVONNE I hate nice people.

The front door slams.

KAREN Look, the kids are back. You'd better calm it.

YVONNE You can hardly call Kieran a kid. What is he, twenty-six, twenty-seven?

KAREN He's twenty-four.

YVONNE He likes them young, then.

KAREN Bloody hell, look at the pot calling the kettle black. How old was Jeremy?

YVONNE He's thirty-one now, but that's beside the point. It's different when the woman's older than the man. More glamorous.

KIERAN and LUCIE-JO enter.

LUCIE-JO Got some vod. Well, Kieran did. I got ID'd. Again.

KIERAN Thought we all needed a nice stiff drink.

LUCIE-JO You always need a nice stiff drink, Kier. Any excuse.

KIERAN That's why they call me Party Boy.

LUCIE-JO I'm so proud.

LUCIE-JO takes note of the atmosphere.

LUCIE-JO What's going on?

KAREN Yvonne and I have just been catching up.

LUCIE-JO She's told you what she's been up to then?

KAREN Sort of, yes.

LUCIE-JO Torn her a new one yet?

KAREN Not quite.

YVONNE I'm her big sister. And we're all for sisterly loyalty, aren't we Karen?

KAREN (to LUCIE-JO) I'm too tired for a big to-do, that's all.

YVONNE I'm to move out in the morning, Lucie-Jo, but as I informed your mother a few moments ago, I will be taking the house in the near future.

LUCIE-JO Eh?

YVONNE Your "Nan" wanted me to have the house.

LUCIE-JO Don't be daft.

YVONNE I'm serious.

LUCIE-JO She's left the house to Mum. It's in her Will.

YVONNE I think you'll find there have been a few amendments.

LUCIE-JO Oh really? Correct me if I'm wrong, but I thought you needed a solicitor for stuff like that, and I didn't see Nan skip off anywhere.

KAREN She's right, Yvonne. Don't be too cocksure about any changes to the Will.

YVONNE Then I'll contest it.

LUCIE-JO But this is our home.

YVONNE I deserve a home too.

LUCIE-JO You've got a home.

YVONNE Oh, I'd hardly call it that. It's a bedsit, for crying out loud.

LUCIE-JO It's still a roof over your head.

YVONNE I share with six foreign students. And they don't even have any drugs to sell me! Honestly, what good is it living with students if they can't hook me up with the appropriate goods to get me through to the next week?

KAREN Mum'd be so proud if she could hear you.

KIERAN My brother could get you something. Charlie's a bit thin on the ground at the moment, but he's got shit loads of Tamazepam.

KAREN I thought your brother's name was John?

LUCIE-JO Kieran, not helping.

KIERAN Oh, sorry.

LUCIE-JO drinks the vodka neat from the bottle and offers it around.

Mobile phone rings.

LUCIE-JO Mum, that's yours?

KAREN Is it?

LUCIE-JO Fuck's sake, don't you even know your own ring tone?

KAREN Where is it?

LUCIE-JO How am I supposed to know? It's your phone!

KAREN It's going to stop in a minute!

KIERAN Sounds like it's coming from the sofa bed.

KAREN Oh shit, I bet it's fallen down the cushions. Help me out, somebody, would you?

KIERAN goes to help her. They find it.

KAREN Shit. I knew I'd miss it.

LUCIE-JO Give them a ring back.

KAREN I have no credit still. I've not really had chance since Nan.

The phone rings again.

KAREN Unknown number.

She answers.

KAREN Hello? ... Yes, speaking ... Oh, hello there ... Yes, just one sec, the signal's not very good in my living room. *(To the others)* I'm just going upstairs to take this one.

LUCIE-JO Who is it?

KAREN No-one love, don't worry. I'll be back.

KAREN exits, talking on the phone.

LUCIE-JO I can't believe you're still sat here.

YVONNE Nowhere else to go.

LUCIE-JO Find somewhere.

YVONNE No. I'm alright here.

LUCIE-JO Nobody wants you.

YVONNE Kieran wants me here, don't you?

LUCIE-JO You having a laugh?

KIERAN Well, it's been nice to meet you and that...

LUCIE-JO Kieran!

KIERAN What? I'm trying to be polite. She's your auntie.

LUCIE-JO She's no auntie of mine. Nothing like Joyce.

KIERAN Sorry.

LUCIE-JO Don't apologise to her!

YVONNE I believe he was apologising to you.

KIERAN Yeah, I was.

LUCIE-JO Oh right.

YVONNE Why is everyone in this family so stupid?

LUCIE-JO I'm not stupid. I'm at college.

YVONNE To learn how to become a beautician.

LUCIE-JO Beauty therapist! And there's nothing wrong with that! Tell her, Kieran, there's nothing wrong with that, is there?

KIERAN There's nothing wrong with that.

YVONNE Ah. Another family trait.

LUCIE-JO What's that?

YVONNE Seeking validation. From a man.

LUCIE-JO I don't even know what you're on about.

YVONNE To be honest, it amazes me that you even had the gumption to locate me.

LUCIE-JO Gumption? What the fuck's that?

YVONNE Initiative. Good sense.

LUCIE-JO Why? It wasn't hard.

YVONNE Oh, do share the story, Lucie-Jo.

LUCIE-JO I'd love to!

YVONNE Go on.

LUCIE-JO But it's more Kieran's than my own. Kieran, tell her.

KIERAN I don't want to be rude or anything, Lucie-Jo. You tell it.

LUCIE-JO Fine. Remember a little... what shall we call it?... dalliance you had a few weeks ago, Yvonne?

YVONNE A dalliance? I have no idea what you're talking about.

LUCIE-JO Oh I think you do. I'm surprised this never came up before, actually. Kieran went on a stag do to London a few months back. Before he met me.

YVONNE Lovely, but what does this have to do with me?

LUCIE-JO His friend, Johnno – I think we told you about him? It was his stag do. It all went a bit wrong.

YVONNE How so?

LUCIE-JO He got with some woman.

YVONNE I see.

LUCIE-JO Thing is, that wouldn't have been a problem. What happens on a stag night, stays on a stag night, right Kier?

KIERAN Right. Except this time, there was photographic evidence to incriminate the poor bastard. Bloody Facebook.

LUCIE-JO Johnno's fiancée – well, ex-fiancée, her name's Lisa – she does my hair for me sometimes when I can't be arsed to do it myself. Went round her house a few weeks ago – didn't really need my hair doing but wanted to get the gossip cos I hate being out of the loop – and there was a picture of this Other Woman on a dart board in her house. Bit over the top but then you can't blame her, can you? She had to cancel her wedding and try and sell her wedding dress on eBay and all that.

YVONNE I think I see where this is going.

LUCIE-JO She looks familiar, I thought to myself, and the whole time Lisa was doing my highlights, I was racking my brain. How would I know her, I thought. Then a couple of nights later, I was spending some time with Nan and she was going through her old photos. There you were. After that everything sort of fell into place. And here you are in my living room now.

YVONNE Not so clever, after all then. More serendipitous than anything.

LUCIE-JO I don't know what that means, but yeah.

KIERAN You were proper going for it, like, Yvonne. No offence.

YVONNE Why didn't you say anything before?

KIERAN Me? I had no idea like, I was off me box that night!

YVONNE Convenient.

KAREN comes back in. She is off the phone.

YVONNE Everything okay?

KAREN Yes, yes... it's fine...

LUCIE-JO Who was on the phone?

KAREN Nobody... Just another well-wisher. I said I'd ring them back actually, the connection wasn't very good, the mast must be down.

LUCIE-JO Want to borrow my mobile?

KAREN No thanks, love. I thought I'd go and use the payphone at the bottom of the road, bit more privacy that way.

LUCIE-JO Privacy? Who was it?

KAREN Mind your own business. I'll be back in a few minutes.

She goes out.

LUCIE-JO Well, that was odd.

YVONNE Sounds like your mother has a man in her life that you don't know about.

LUCIE-JO Doubtful, she's not had time these last few years.

YVONNE She might have made time.

LUCIE-JO She would have told me. I have a right to know.

YVONNE Parents don't tell their children everything.

LUCIE-JO And what would you know about being somebody's parent?

YVONNE Nothing.

LUCIE-JO Then shut it. I'm going after Mum, I want to know who she's talking to.

She goes out.

YVONNE So...

KIERAN Yeah.

YVONNE Johnno didn't get married.

KIERAN Nah. The women round here – they're all a bit... you know, a bit off their heads. Must be something in the water.

YVONNE Charming.

KIERAN She was too good for him anyway. She's going places is that one.

YVONNE Really?

KIERAN Oh yeah. She's opening a new salon in Leeds. Got a right little franchise going.

YVONNE Very good.

KIERAN Johno still talks about you though.

YVONNE Does he now?

KIERAN Oh yeah.

YVONNE Really?

KIERAN Yeah, reckons you were a right minx – in a good way. No offence.

YVONNE None taken.

KIERAN Wish Lucie-Jo was as seasoned as you.

YVONNE That's the problem being with young girls. They're all Juliets.

KIERAN Eh?

YVONNE You know... virginal.

KIERAN She's not a virgin. Bloody hell, what do you take me for? I have my needs, you know.

YVONNE I don't want to know.

KIERAN Oh shit. Yeah, sorry. Don't say anything to Karen.

YVONNE I won't.

KIERAN Oh good. Don't want to get into trouble with Karen or anything.

YVONNE Oh no, don't worry. I'm not quite the heartless bitch my sister and niece have painted me to be, you know.

KIERAN They don't think you're a heartless bitch.

YVONNE Of course they do. I mean, I know how it looks, me leaving them to cope with Mother. I've always been useless at situations like that. I always make things worse.

KIERAN Why?

YVONNE I was doing them a favour by keeping out of the way.

KIERAN Have you told them how you feel, like?

YVONNE I've tried, Kieran, but they don't want to listen to me.

KIERAN Maybe I could talk to Lucie-Jo, test the water for you.

YVONNE That's very sweet of you, but I don't think it would be any help.

KIERAN Oh, I don't know. She listens to me. Sometimes.

YVONNE Have you not learnt about young women yet?

KIERAN What lesson?

YVONNE They're stubborn. They won't listen to reason; they'll hear only what they want to.

KIERAN Lucie-Jo's not really like that though. She's got her head screwed on, she's not tapped like some of her mates.

YVONNE It might seem that way, but women are masters of disguise.

KIERAN They are?

YVONNE Take me, for example. I may look exotic, with all these scarves and all this jewellery, but underneath, I am just like everyone else.

She removes a scarf, drops it to the floor.

KIERAN Oh, there's nowt regular about you, Yvonne.

YVONNE Why, whatever do you mean?

KIERAN Well, you're pretty fit.

YVONNE Do you really think so?

KIERAN Oh yeah. For an old bird.

YVONNE Thanks. I think.

KIERAN It's alright.

YVONNE How sweet.

KIERAN Don't tell Lucie-Jo I said that though. Gotta keep these woman happy, haven't you?

YVONNE Yes, yes. That was where my ex-husband went wrong.

KIERAN From what you've said, he sounds like he was a workaholic, was he?

YVONNE You could say that. God, I've been so lonely.

KIERAN Oh dear.

KAREN appears at the living room door.

YVONNE Kieran, just like you, I have needs too.

KIERAN You do?

YVONNE It's only natural.

KIERAN Is it?

YVONNE Yes. I'm in the prime of womanhood.

KIERAN I'm not sure I even know what that means.

YVONNE I can show you. Kiss me, Kieran!

KIERAN I don't want to.

YVONNE I've seen the way you've been looking at me.

KIERAN You're Lucie-Jo's auntie.

YVONNE Don't call me that!

KIERAN Sorry.

YVONNE And didn't you just say I'm fit... for an old bird?

LUCIE-JO joins KAREN at the door. Again, she remains unnoticed.

KIERAN Are you coming on to me, like?

YVONNE You tell me.

KIERAN 'Cos if you are, that's pretty bad.

YVONNE Think how bad it is, Kieran...

KIERAN That's exactly what I'm talking about! It's bloody wrong!

YVONNE A stolen kiss with an experienced older woman...

YVONNE crosses to him, kisses him.

KIERAN Why?

YVONNE Ssshhh.

She kisses him again.

YVONNE How does that feel?

KIERAN Alright.

YVONNE A little experience goes a long way.

KIERAN You're telling me.

YVONNE Did that feel wrong?

KIERAN No... it felt pretty right, to be fair.

LUCIE-JO storms in.

LUCIE-JO What the fucking fuck?

KIERAN Lucie-Jo.

LUCIE-JO Don't you Lucie-Jo me!

KIERAN That's your name.

LUCIE-JO You don't have the right to use my name! You were just getting with my bloody auntie!

KIERAN I didn't know –

LUCIE-JO Don't you be playing dumb with me Kieran Lonsdale. I know exactly what you're like.

KIERAN Lucie-Jo, she / was messing with -

LUCIE-JO That's it, point the finger at her. Just because she's the bloody black sheep already doesn't mean you can get off scot-free. My friends warned me about you. You're sick.

KIERAN Why am I?

LUCIE-JO What, do you have some sort of sick fetish for families? Who are you, Virginia pissing Andrews? You gonna move on to my mother next?

KIERAN *(trying to joke)* Well, you know that they say. Incest is best.

LUCIE-JO You disgust me!

KIERAN Lucie-Jo, I don't want us to be like this

LUCIE-JO Should have thought about that before you started playing tongue tornado with that sad old slagbag over there, shouldn't you? Just go, Kieran, I can't be arsed with this on top of everything else.

KIERAN just stands there.

LUCIE-JO Go on, get out! Before I throw you out.

He looks at her for a while, before leaving.

As he goes:

YVONNE Bye, Kieran. Nice to meet you.

KIERAN Yeah, see ya, Yvonne.

LUCIE-JO And you, "Auntie" Yvonne: What is your problem? What gives you the right to come back here and fuck everything up?! I love him!

YVONNE Lucie-Jo, calm down. I didn't know what I was doing – I've had too much to drink, he took advantage of me.

LUCIE-JO Oh, give it a rest. Mum was right about you.

She leaves. KAREN steps in.

YVONNE Kids. They can be so dramatic.

KAREN Why, Yvonne? What did you get out of going after Kieran?

YVONNE Oh, Karen, calm down. You must know better than anybody what it's like to be alone at our age. And Kieran's a grown man, he could have said no.

KAREN It didn't look like you gave him much choice. Why did you even bother coming back?

YVONNE Because I was invited by your daughter and my mother wanted me to.

KAREN She would have been happier if you'd stayed away.

YVONNE That's not for you to say, is it?

KAREN She loved Lucie-Jo more than she ever loved either of us, you know. If she'd known you came here with the intent to seduce Kieran, she would have preferred you to have left well alone.

YVONNE I didn't come here with the intent to seduce anybody. I just came here to say goodbye to Mother. Why is that so wrong?

KAREN Because you're leaving a path of destruction in your wake that neither Lucie-Jo or myself need at the moment. You're destroying this family.

YVONNE Good!

KAREN Why?

YVONNE You, Mother and Lucie-Jo have had such a perfect little trio, haven't you? When I left, Lucie-Jo just slotted neatly into the hole I left.

KAREN She took Mother's mind off you, I can say that much.

YVONNE When I left, I was sure I'd get a call, a letter, maybe even a visit, one of you begging me to come back.

KAREN You didn't.

YVONNE Obviously.

KAREN You seemed happy enough to have seen the back of us.

YVONNE Of course I wasn't. I was pasting a smile on so that nobody would even guess how unhappy / I was.

KAREN I'm sorry you were unhappy but you didn't need to come back and make such a bloody mess of everything.

YVONNE That's a bit strong, don't you / think?

KAREN You're not the one who has to console a seventeen year old through her first heartbreak.

YVONNE She's young. She'll get over it. You did.

KAREN Please, Yvonne. Just go.

YVONNE This is my / house.

KAREN Not yet, it isn't. I appreciate you tried to convince Mum that you deserved this house more than Lucie-Jo and I – and if she fell for that, well, it's upsetting for us, but we'll move on. Please, just go.

YVONNE Where shall I go?

KAREN I don't give a fuck. If you believed Mum, Caroline's running a brothel next door. I imagine you'd fit in quite nicely there.

YVONNE Oh, don't be so snide, Karen.

KAREN I won't ask you again.

YVONNE heads to the door.

YVONNE Alright, I'll go. But that's not going to solve any of your problems, Karen. You'll have to face me again on Thursday.

KAREN If you know what's good for you, you won't show your face at that funeral.

YVONNE I'm her daughter! Your sister!

KAREN Then, like the rest of us, you'll do what's right for the family. Now please. Get out.

YVONNE exits, closing the door behind her.

act two, scene three

Later.

LUCIE-JO is wearing pyjamas. She would look much younger than seventeen if not for the bottle of vodka she is slugging.

LUCIE-JO I'm proud of you, Mum.

KAREN I'm proud of you, Lucie-Jo. When did you get so grown up?

LUCIE-JO Oh bollocks to that. Kieran's just a lad. There'll be another one along soon. Men are just like buses.

KAREN Very philosophical.

LUCIE-JO What's that mean?

KAREN Never mind.

LUCIE-JO You stuck up for us, Mum – for me, but for you too. For once in your life.

KAREN Hey, I can defend myself.

LUCIE-JO Can you? Cos I was starting to doubt that. With Nan and that.

KAREN It was different with Nan, Lucie-Jo. She was ill. That's what was making her such a...

LUCIE-JO Such a bitch?

KAREN Well, yes.

LUCIE-JO She was awful to you, Mum.

KAREN That's just how me and your Nan were, though, Lucie-Jo.

LUCIE-JO Maybe. You were like a different person though, she made you different.

KAREN Yeah?

LUCIE-JO Yeah! You were so moody all the time, so mean... It was like living with Hitler or something.

KAREN It wasn't that bad!

LUCIE-JO It was. You two constantly stinging at each other... it was like living in a sea of jellyfish. All the time. It was bloody tiring.

KAREN How do you think I felt?

LUCIE-JO swigs the vodka.

LUCIE-JO She wasn't well, though, was she?

KAREN Not at all.

LUCIE-JO Do you think she did the right thing? Choosing not to have any more treatment?

KAREN I don't know. I think she was probably very tired. Very lonely.

LUCIE-JO She had us.

KAREN You aside, she'd lost the people she loved the most. Granddad died, Monty died, Yvonne left...

LUCIE-JO God knows why she liked Yvonne so much.

KAREN They went through a lot together.

LUCIE-JO So do you think Nan was ready to die?

KAREN Erm... *(pause)* Yes, actually, I think she probably was. She's in a better place now.

LUCIE-JO OK. OK, good.

LUCIE-JO Are you going to tell me who was on the phone?

KAREN Promise you'll stay calm?

LUCIE-JO Don't tell me Yvonne was right when she said you had a fella!

KAREN Did she think that? No. Unfortunately, I don't.

LUCIE-JO Then I'll stay calm.

KAREN It was someone from the police station.

LUCIE-JO What did they want?

KAREN I have to go in first thing. Something came up on your Nan's post mortem.

LUCIE-JO Oh?

KAREN Yeah.

LUCIE-JO Oh.

Pause.

KAREN Just the two of us now.

LUCIE-JO Yeah.

The baby monitor, still on the oak table and since forgotten, crackles.

act two, scene four

The night of Eleanor's death.

ELEANOR is sleeping.

In the orange dark, a figure comes on stage.

We see now it is LUCIE-JO.

She sinks slowly into the bed next to the old woman and picks up a pillow. She plays with it, deliberating, flipping it in her hands.

LUCIE-JO *(quietly)* I heard you. I know what to do now.

As the clock strikes three outside, she brings the pillow up and pushes it down into ELEANOR's face. She doesn't struggle.

LUCIE-JO removes the pillow and relaxes.

LUCIE-JO Freedom.

Fade to black.

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