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HOME STORAGE AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Dedication

To my parents for their continual support, and to Jen for her love and encouragement.

Contents

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Page Number</u>
1. A Critical Analysis of <i>Home Storage</i>	1
Objectives	1
Tone and Style	5
Characterisation	11
Setting	18
Conclusion	20
Works Cited	22
2. <i>Home Storage</i>, a play in three acts	24
Act 1	27
Act 2	62
Act 3	97

1. A Critical Analysis of *Home Storage*

Objectives

In the development of *Home Storage*, I faced a number of challenges as a writer, especially due to my choice of subject matter. The initial impulse for the play came from reports in 2008 of Josef Fritzl, who kept his daughter locked in his basement for twenty four years. During that time, he raped her numerous times and had seven children by her. This story was widely covered by the media at the time, allowing details of the case to be revealed. What interested me about the story was the mental justification and processes for such a horrific act, and how he could keep it hidden for so long from the rest of the family. Further research revealed similar stories of forced imprisonment, such as the cases of Natasha Kampusch and Jaycee Lee Dugard. As such, I did not want to forensically examine and reconstruct the Fritzl case, but to construct a play that was reminiscent of all of the cases. As such, I rejected verbatim as a form for the play, not wishing to look in explicit detail at a specific case but instead consider the wider implications of such acts, through a fictionalised version of events. I also faced moral issues of dramatization, and showing horror on stage. As the play was linked to real events, I felt I could not create a farce out of other's suffering. The right balance of tone was therefore important, as it could not be too frivolous, but neither could it be too serious and descend into cheap melodrama. My objective was to write characters that seemed realistic, and depict the minutia of their domestic lives, so the tone of the play needed to reflect this realism. Furthermore, I needed to make the characters work on a dramatic level; they needed to have needs, objectives and desires, and be situated in a plausible world for the drama to take place.

In an early supervision about the play, Steve Waters asked: ‘Why should we want to go on the journey of horror with you? What insights can you provide through the play?’ (Waters 2010) This raised issues of the moral justification of putting such a scenario on stage. Instead of merely providing shock to the audience, the play needed to provide insights into the character of the abuser, and why he would go to such lengths. However, Steve’s comment also highlighted that the play needed to have a deeper insight into the society around the psychopath or humanity as a whole, in order to justify the extreme horror. I was recommended Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, which was helpful in forming my thinking, and pertinent to the underlying theme of the play. Arendt focuses on how evil acts can be committed by seemingly ordinary, mundane people. In the final chapter, she describes Eichmann’s execution, saying: ‘He was in complete command of himself, nay, he was more; he was completely himself. Nothing could have demonstrated this so clearly than the grotesque silliness of his last words’ (Arendt 252, 1963). Instead of obviously evil, Eichmann in Arendt’s description is almost a figure of fun, unaware of his words, but yet completely sane and normal. This highlighted that good and evil is not a simple binary opposition, but rather a more complex moral issue. I felt Arendt’s analysis could be applied to a smaller scale, domestic form of abuse, and as such I wished to highlight the complexity of evil actions, and show the complexity of any single person. Eichmann appeared perfectly normal, yet assisted in the holocaust. I wished to avoid melodrama and to make the villain a complex character to humanize the hysterical media stories of the Fritzl case.

I also saw the play as a reaction against the in-yer-face theatre of the nineties. This movement frequently dealt with taboo subjects, with the violence often shown on stage, creating a gratuitous effect. Aleks Sierz provides a simple definition in his study of the movement, saying: 'How can you tell if a play is in-yer-face? It isn't really difficult: The language is usually filthy, characters talk about unmentionable subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each other, experience unpleasant emotions, become suddenly violent' (Sierz 2001,5). Although used effectively in a number of plays, this approach can be gratuitous, little more than using the tactics simply to shock. If I applied this aesthetic to the controversial subject matter, I would be simply using the story for outrage with little justification for it. I also felt this approach was not appropriate, as instead of confronting the characters and their actions, this type of theatre tends focus on external forces acting upon the characters through explicit violence on stage. For example, in the stage directions to Sarah Kane's *Blasted* there is an example of onstage violence:

*The **Soldier** grips Ian's head in his hands*

He puts his mouth over one of Ian's eyes, sucks it out, bites it off and eats it.

He does the same to the other eye

(Kane 50, 2001)

The soldier's actions are almost motiveless, but become an external force acting upon Ian. Although the level of onstage horror and violence is entirely appropriate for the bleak world Kane creates, I felt it would detract from the exploration of character I hoped the play would provide. The representation of onstage violence would be removed from the domestic evil I hoped to explore, and drive it into the level of

gratuitous horror. I decided to reduce the violence as much as possible, focusing on the banal details of the everyday life, and leave the horror to the imagination of the audience. In this way, the binary of good and evil could be broken down, whereas with shock tactics the ambiguity is removed. It is much more difficult to portray the subtleties of how people act in an ordinary domestic situation whilst simultaneously portraying extreme violence. By making all the violent acts happen offstage, such as Marie's rape, the events instead work in the audience's imagination.

As such, the challenge as a writer was to explore the emotionally charged situation without resorting to violence or shock tactics. Through this approach, I also hoped to avoid characters acting without motivation, as in melodrama. Although initially the play involved more characters, I wished to restrict myself to the essential of the story, deciding on three central characters, the father, mother and the daughter. This restriction would allow for more ambiguity and contradictions in their behaviour and actions, whilst allowing for in an depth exploration of their motivations. Furthermore, I also wished to restrict myself spatially, limiting the action to two spaces, the home and the prison. I felt these were the essential spaces for the action. David Edgar argues for a unity of time and space in the theatre. I wished to restrict the time period of the action as well, creating what Edgar calls: 'a single time cycle in one place'. He emphasises this may not be in one space, saying: 'Expanding time also provides the possibility of changing setting, but again, within the confines of a single milieu (a house, an estate, perhaps a town)' (Both Edgar 2009, 100). By imposing these restrictions on the action of the play, I could focus on the characters, and develop the detail within each situation.

Tone and Style

In practise, I found the tone of the play was difficult to balance. Whilst I attempted to explore the situation without resorting to shock tactics, in the initial drafts this approach was not apparent. The climax of the play descended into baseless violence, with the characters acting without justification or motivation. It became a clichéd explosion of violence as the two separate stories combined. For example, an extract from the third act of the first draft:

JOHN:	She is my world.
ELEANOR:	Get out of my way.
JOHN:	You can't take her.
ELEANOR:	MOVE.
JOHN:	No. I love her, and I will protect her from a mad-woman like you.

(Lewis 2010a)

The names in the first draft were generic. John and Amy were changed in later drafts to Nigel and Marie, as I felt the names were more representative of their characters. Similarly, instead of portraying an understated view of the reality of the situation, the characters speak in clichés, eschewing genuine feeling for buzz phrases. The explicit anger and violence in the third act was in opposition to the slow build-up of the other two acts. This leap stretched the plausibility of an already difficult situation, distracting from the exploration of morality. The severe tonal shift happened because I was treating

the subject with too much reverence, and attempting to be completely serious. There was too much focus on the effect I wished to enact on the audience, instead of focusing on the characters and story. Overall, the first draft was too serious in tone throughout, too relentlessly bleak with no respite from the horrors of the situation, which was not sustainable for the entire length of the play. Although I was attempting to portray the situation realistically, I was told in feedback sessions with the other writers on the course that it was 'difficult to get through'. It was essential to vary the tone, to provide greater ambiguity within the story.

This tone of bleakness was impractical, as it made the situation seem removed from reality. I decided to examine the play from the perspective of farce. Whilst it was not my intention to undermine the seriousness of the situation, or make it ridiculous, I felt that this genre was relevant to provide tonal variety. In supervisions, Steve Waters highlighted this issue to me, saying: 'It could be a black farce, a man running around behind his wife's back, keeping a home hidden from the other woman'. (Waters 2010) The adulterous man is indeed a staple of the genre, providing the central tension in Alan Ayckbourn's trilogy *The Norman Conquests* for example. Similarly, this set up also forms the basis of the frantic action of *What the Butler Saw*, but Joe Orton uses the farcical form to shock. In the climax of the play, Mrs. Prentice says: 'My son has a collection of photographs which prove beyond doubt that he made free with me in the same hotel-indeed in the same linen cupboard where his conception took place'. (Orton 1976, 446). Orton uses the humour of farce to shock with the reveal of incest, challenging the preconceptions of the genre to mock what society would usually consider morally corrupt. Instead of taking the situation seriously and showing the

misery of incest, through farce Joe Orton uses it as a source of humour. Although the situation of *Home Storage* was grim, examining this genre showed that even in the most serious situation it is possible to have humour, meaning the tone of the play did not have to be overwhelmingly bleak. In a later draft, I used a farcical device of the dress as a means for Eleanor to discover the affair. At a key point in the action, Eleanor is left alone on stage, and finds a bag: *'Finds a plastic bag. Inside is a dress. It isn't hers. Looks at it for a long time, then stuff it back into the bag.'* (Lewis 2010b). By using this device, it misleads the audience and implies a more farcical tone, but also masks the truth of Nigel's psychopathic tendencies. The humour also allowed me to portray Nigel and Eleanor's relationship with greater variation, showing that the emotional abuse is not constant, but has moments of laughter and tenderness as well. In this way, the humour increases the plausibility of their situation, but also makes the darker moments more intense by contrast. Alan Ayckbourn argues for this contrast in tone, saying:

But a useful tip, I've found, is that the darker the drama, the more you need to search for the comedy. If you don't let the audience off the hook occasionally to laugh when you want them to, you'll find them roaring with laughter during moments you didn't intend.

(Ayckbourn 2002, 5)

This was especially relevant to the development of this play, as the situation was so dark and grim I needed comic relief throughout to balance the seriousness. By examining farce and how it deals with shocking ideas, I was able to incorporate more humour into the play.

Although the overall tone was increasingly varied, by draft three the third act of the play was still problematic. It remained clichéd with excessive violence in an attempt to bring the drama to a climax. After my third draft, I was directed in supervisions towards the work of Franz Xaver Kroetz, German playwright in the socio-realism style. In *Through the Leaves*, Kroetz portrays a working class couple's relationship in a butcher's shop. It is characterised by a clipped, understated dialogue style. For example, in Act One Scene Two:

OTTO: What're you paying?

MARTHA: We'd just share everything together.

OTTO: I earn more the way I am.

MARTHA: How much?

OTTO: Fourteen hundred minimum.

(Kroetz 1992, 14)

The play is stripped of significant plot and character development. There is no confrontational climax or resolution, although it is explicit in its portrayal of sex. Instead, the audience simply observe a relationship that reflects reality. It is simultaneously funny and painful, but Kroetz does not offer solutions to their situation. Instead, Otto disappears, and is only allowed a reported exit. Kroetz uses a form of extreme realism, meticulously observed but with little significant onstage action. However, his aim was to alter people's behaviour, showing their lives in detail to show how painful they are. His perspective is a Marxist one, attempting to improve the

society around him. Denis Calandra argues for the political element in all Kroetz's work, saying: '...he tried consciously to break from a fixed writing scheme, concentrating on the problems of 'average' people, whilst also trying to present 'models' which showed 'paths to follow' or to suggest the 'vision of a better society'. (Calandra 1983, 92). Whilst the form and tone of Kroetz's plays is closer to the understatement I was attempting to achieve, I did not agree with his political intentions. I did not wish to show different paths or visions of how the situation could be improved, but instead wished to show people trapped in a situation of their own making whilst struggling to escape from it. Also, I wished to reflect on character instead of demonstrating a 'model' for improvement.

The idea of characters trapped in a situation from which there is no escape is reminiscent of Beckett's *Endgame*. I looked at this play during the development of *Home Storage*, as it features a co-dependent relationship in a hermetically sealed world. Hamm and Clov are unable to leave each other because of the destruction outside. This helped form the action in the second act where Nigel has created a fantasy world of a wasteland, filled with un-named monsters in order to keep Marie from leaving a hut in the woods. Similarly, in *Endgame*, Clov and Hamm cannot leave their shelter because of the outside conditions:

HAMM: The waves, how are the waves?

CLOV: The waves? (*He turns the telescope on the waves.*) Lead.

HAMM: And the sun?

CLOV (*looking*): Zero

(Beckett 1986, 106)

Beckett creates an offstage apocalyptic wasteland, through reported speech. The audience never see outside the space shown, but the sparse reports means the audience can create the detail with their imaginations. In Act Two, I subvert this idea as the audience have already seen a more recognisable reality in Act One. The destruction and horrors that Nigel has indoctrinated Marie in are obviously a fiction used to brainwash his daughter and keep her trapped and obedient. By examining Beckett, I was able to allude to the wasteland instead of describing it directly, using the humour and rhythms of absurdist speech to suggest an apocalyptic world. This was reflected in the increasingly stichomythic and sparse dialogue, such as this extract from draft three:

MARIE: They frighten me.

NIGEL: I know they do. I know.

MARIE: Are you going to stay the night?

NIGEL: No. I can't.

(Lewis 2010b)

By reducing the amount of information in the dialogue, I was paradoxically able to create a richer fantasy world. Because these lies had been told to Marie for ten years, there was a great amount of fantastical elements that could be alluded to. Unlike Beckett however, Nigel is able to move freely between the two worlds of the first and second act, and is the bridge between them. Similarly, the situation is not completely static, as Eleanor is able to escape at the end.

The eventual genre and overall style of the play is not social-realism, or absurdist theatre, but rather a combination of the two, drawing elements from both. During the rehearsals for the staged reading, one of the actors dubbed it 'hyper-realism', a term I feel is appropriate, as the play does not emulate reality, but instead uses understated dialogue to go beyond it. The central relationships and characters are based in a style of realism, and are recognisable psychologically. However, the situation and their actions are absurd, and go beyond the 'normal' reactions of people. The relationships are unsettling but hopefully understated. Like Kroetz's work, the action is muted, with no violent confrontation at the climax, or throughout the play. Instead, we observe the painful relationships between the central characters, and watch them fall apart as they attempt to escape their imprisonment. In this way, there is little justice for the psychopathic actions of Nigel, because to do so would shatter the illusion of the hyper-realism. Instead, the ending is left deliberately ambiguous, with little punishment for his actions.

Characterisation

One of the greater challenges I faced in the writing of the play was making the characters appear multi-dimensional. For the close observation of the relationships to feel authentic, Nigel could not purely be a monster, and the women could not solely be victims of his psychopathic tendencies. The audience needed to understand Nigel's contradictions, especially if they were repulsed by his actions. He would have different qualities with different people, as he would need to maintain the lie over several years. This was reflected in the initial reports of the Fritzl case, for example from BBC News: 'In public he appeared to be a respectable member of the community, living in the small

Lower Austria town of Amstetten with his wife with whom he had seven grown-up children' (BBC News 2009). Fritzl clearly lead a double life, as he appeared to be charming and well respected in his community. For Nigel, these characteristics were important, but he also needed to be a good liar in order to maintain the fiction over multiple years. These were the base characteristics I worked on in the initial draft. However, as I continued writing I found more contradictions in his character. Instead of the sexual predator I initially conceived him as; his relationship with Eleanor suggested instead more sexual repression. His abduction of Marie forces him into conflict with his conscious mind and his own sexual desires, and her growing sexuality is a threat to his ordered way of life. For this aspect of his personality, I examine Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, specifically the character of Brick. An alcoholic, he does not respond to his wife's sexual advances in the first scene:

BRICK: Don't make a fool of yourself.

MARGARET: I don't mind makin' a fool of myself over you!

BRICK: I mind, Maggie. I feel embarrassed for you.

(Williams 1956, 24)

Brick is a much more sympathetic character than Nigel, as his repression comes from his denial of his own homosexuality, and his inability to live in a society that denies it. He is not psychopathic, and unlike Nigel in every other respect, yet I felt Williams' study of a man attempting to deny his own sexuality was applicable to Nigel. Nigel is less passive and more aggressively manipulative, yet I found the sexual repression to be a useful character trait in developing his character.

Although this helped me to explore his contradictions, I still struggled with his objectives and desires. I needed to find what Stanislavski calls the super-objective, the sole desire that carries the character throughout the entire action of the play. In *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski says: ‘If [the super objective] is human and directed toward the basic purpose of the play it will be like a main artery, providing both nourishment and life to both it and the directors’ (Stanislavski 1980, 271) Although directed toward actors, this was also relevant to the writing process, as I did not know Nigel’s main objective. As the central character, Nigel embodied the ‘basic purpose’ of the play, but did not have any motivation for his actions. By working on his repression, I realised this could be his main objective- to seduce his daughter. However, as he was so repressed and controlled, I realised this could be an unconscious desire, whereas consciously he is just attempting to keep his daughter shielded from what he sees as an unforgiving world. In this way, I found an ultimate super-objective, but also another layer of conflict in his personality that he is struggling with. His conflict is between his subconscious unnatural impulses, and his conscious struggle to retain control of them. This gives his more dimensions to his personality, but does not necessarily make him more sympathetic. The audience can understand his conflict without empathising with him.

If Nigel’s central conflict is attempting to retain control, then Eleanor’s is almost the opposite. Eleanor developed through the writing to be very impulsive, as a contrast to Nigel’s measured, controlled actions. By necessity Nigel had to think through every action to maintain his lie, whereas Eleanor acts much more on impulse. This characterisation came through the plot, as there needed to be a justifiable reason

is still grieving for the loss of her daughter. It was a challenge to bring together these contradictory elements of her character, to make sure her excesses did not seem gratuitous or ridiculous.

In order to unite the contradictions of the character, Eleanor needed to have objectives like Nigel. Her objectives were easier to determine than Nigel's, as her grief for her daughter gave her a strong desire to find Marie once again, and be re-united with her. Apart than that, she has a desire to find out the truth from Nigel, and wishes to confront him with evidence about his supposed infidelities. From this comes the opposing desire to seduce him in the initial act, as she wishes to save her marriage, and force the repressed Nigel into a confession. I utilized this objective as an examination of their different attitudes to sexuality, to demonstrate how far their relationship has been corrupted. Ultimately though, Eleanor's objective is to expose Nigel's secret, although this takes her further than she initially thought. She can thus be seen as paralleling the audience's curiosity in finding out Nigel's alternate life, making her the most sympathetic character. By making her an active participant in the drama, and giving her objectives, it avoids making her a passive victim

The final character was the most difficult to write. Whereas Nigel is a repressed psychopath, and Eleanor is deeply in grief for her daughter, they both still exist and function in a relatable environment. As such, their speech generally follows the rhythm of everyday life. However, Marie has been imprisoned for ten years and had limited social contact except with her father, so her learning would be stunted. Her character was much more of a challenge to write convincingly because she was the most removed from reality, believing in a fantasy world filled with monsters. In the initial draft, I

developed a stuttering from of speech which suggested a limited, broken vocabulary.

For example, in Act One:

AMY: If...

JOHN: Go on.

AMY: If she hurts you...why...why do you stay?

(Lewis 2010a)

Whilst appropriate, and close to the final elliptical speech, I felt it dealt with the imprisonment in a superficial way. I was focusing on a single speech defect and using it as the basis for her character. To make Nigel's other world believable, Marie needed to be more than just a characteristic. I wished to capture more of her arrested development, but also avoid making her just a victim of the imprisonment. To develop beyond simple characterization therefore, she needed to be an active participant in her capture, with desires and objectives. It was important for the drama for her to be active; as if she was passive she could participate in the story, and would just seem to be just a victim. The challenge was to make her more active in a static situation, as well as communicate more the feral aspect of her existence.

To achieve the later, Steve Waters pointed me in the direction of Werner Herzog's film *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, based around the real story. The film depicts Kaspar Hauser, who was kept locked up in a cellar for the first years of his life, and his attempting education in society. Further research into the story revealed his vocabulary was extremely limited, and he seemingly lacked all social skills when

initially discovered, with little mental development. Martin Kitchin has studied the story, and described his mental state:

‘He had no idea of the difference between night and day, the sun and the moon. He was obviously unfamiliar with fire...Apart from ‘I dunno’ all he could say was ‘wanna go ‘ome where I were’ and ‘I wanna be a cavalryman, a sixer like my father were.’

(Kitchen 2001, 29)

This extremely limited vocabulary was a result of sustained imprisonment, and a lack of social contact with other people. It was obviously relevant to Marie’s situation, yet I felt I could not reduce her language to such extremes, as to do so would increase her victimhood and remove her participation in the drama. Instead, I developed the elliptical, clipped form of speech in the final play. It allows her to speak freely, but the broken rhythms and lack of personal pronouns such as ‘I’ allude to an arrested development. It was difficult to find the balance between the restricted language of actual feral children such as Kaspar Hauser, and allowing her to be understood by an audience, and able to engage with other characters.

I felt it was especially important for Marie to have an objective, as she ran the risk of being the most passive character, controlled by Nigel and not participating in the drama at all. She could not fight or rebel against Nigel in the same way Eleanor could, because years of brainwashing would mean that she would not be able to actively desire it. I still felt she needed to add more pressure onto Nigel, so her rebellion would be necessarily small. Instead of wishing to escape, she simply desires to go monster

hunting with Nigel. This objective made her complicit in her captivity, as it demonstrates she believes in the fantasy world he has created around her. It means she has an active role in the drama, and emphasises her childish desire to imitate her father. For Marie, it is simple and uncomplicated, but for Nigel it becomes a problem, as he cannot release her from her cage without destroying his illusion. Simultaneously, her desire parallels Eleanor's, as she wishes to seduce Nigel, although she doesn't actually understand what that involves. It is more an expression of her development. This puts pressure onto the relationship between her and Nigel, as her desire is in direct conflict with Nigel's repression of his sexual feelings, challenging his attempted control. By giving Marie these objectives, she becomes a participant in the drama, helps to put pressure on Nigel, and provides an extra impetus for the action of the play.

Setting

In order to make the drama believable, I needed to situate the characters in a detailed, relatable setting, in order to generate the hyper-realism I was aiming for. These settings needed to be realistic, but also help define the thematic action of the play. Initially, I decided on two locations, the domestic setting of Eleanor and Nigel, and the prison where Marie is locked away. However, in initial drafts, these locations were clichéd and generic. For example, the opening stage direction for the first draft was basic, and without detail, saying: 'A kitchen with a table in. Eleanor on one side. John enters' (Lewis 2010a). The kitchen setting was undefined, but also clichéd for an argument between husband and wife. Their world was too vague for the action to seem authentic. Instead, I moved the action to the living room, a setting which developed from the characters. I felt Nigel was sectioning his life off into two distinct areas, and

his obsession with control could also be an obsession with order. This was then linked to a symbolic action of building a cabinet to organise his music and films, in the same way he has objectified and organised the women in his life. From this, the setting of the living room developed, with the sofa taken out in order to facilitate the boxes of CD's, and the building of the cabinet. It also increased the pressure on Nigel, and showed Eleanor's growing awareness, as it is disorder and chaos introduced into a highly ordered world. In the panel after the staged reading, one of the panellists noted that: 'The objects take on a metaphorical significance, the characters speak through them'. In this way, the boxes and the cabinet became symbolic of the relationship between Eleanor and Nigel, and allowed them to communicate through their actions. This was partly inspired by David Eldridge's *Under the Blue Sky*, where during the first act the characters are cooking a chilli, allowing for the relationship to be demonstrated through action.

I decided to use boxes in the other setting as well, keeping a similar set but using it to suggest a different space. The cardboard boxes full of CDs in the first act became boxes of supplies for Marie's survival. The disorder of the first setting became ordered in the second. To enrich this setting, I returned to the original media reports of the Fritzl case, in order to find details of the survival aspect of the basement. *The Daily Mail* gave precise details of the basement in its reports, saying: 'A television, video recorder and a large radio were their only contacts with the outside world - apart from the hatch through which Fritzl passed them food that was cooked on 'small hot plates' on an ancient cooker, and clothes.' (*Daily Mail*, 2009). These details were useful, as I did not use them directly, but were indicative of the basic survival tactics needed for

continued imprisonment. The food would need to be tinned to maintain Nigel's illusion of a wasteland, and Marie would need large bottles of water to sustain her. The whole situation would have to be constructed to ensure Marie's survival.

For both settings, I needed to define the world outside the scenes. The detail within the locations shown on stage needed to be accurate, but I also needed to situate them within a realistic framework. I decided the action of the play could not be in a large city, but would be better situated in a small rural town. It would make the action plausible, and Nigel would have less chance of being discovered, but would also isolate the female characters from the larger world. The disappearance of a young child in a small community would serve to isolate the characters from the rest of the town, as scandal and rumours would surround the couple. Similarly, it would be easier for Eleanor to seal herself into the house more than in a city, where there would be constant pressure from outside. The rural setting also allows for the details of the woods to be more plausible, as it would be more accessible from the small village. This setting also allowed for the development of the visual metaphors throughout the play, such as the bluebells which occur in Act II and III. These were developed from the situation, symbolising freedom for the female characters, but also providing detail for the woods.

Conclusion

In creating *Home Storage*, I have sought to normalise what is seen as evil and disgusting. By removing the hyperbolic descriptions of these acts, and examining the people involved, it breaks down the binary distinctions between good and evil. This does not justify the actions, but instead makes the horror and repulsion worse. By increasing the mundanity of the situation, and situating the characters in a realistic

world, I have attempted not to sympathise with a psychopath, but instead demonstrate how complicated the situation is around him, and how complex the psychology is. Initially, I wished to confront the audience with the shocking reality, but by removing the violence and not offering a melodramatic climax, I have avoided any easy answers to a situation. The play features characters that are trapped in negative relationships and actions, who find it difficult to escape. The understatement increases the focus on the relationships between the characters, and violence is replaced with sustained tension. In this way, it normalises the situation, and increases the horror of Nigel's acts as it becomes closer to the audience's experience.

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2. Home Storage

by David Lewis

A play in three acts

Characters

Nigel Atkinson

42

Eleanor Atkinson

34

Marie Atkinson

15

Setting

Act One

The family home, outside a small rural village.

Act Two

A hidden hut in Foxglove Woods

Act Three

The action alternates between both settings.

Time

The Present. A rainy May Sunday, moving from afternoon to night.

Act I

(A rainy Sunday afternoon.

Cardboard boxes and piles of CDs and DVDs clutter the stage.

NIGEL struggles to put up a flat pack cabinet.

ELEANOR enters in a smart dress with a cup of tea.)

NIGEL

About twenty minutes before you have to take it.

ELEANOR

Doesn't have to be exact.

NIGEL

Still. Should take it at roughly the right time. Good to have a routine.

ELEANOR

How's the battle going?

NIGEL

This? Fine, fine.

ELEANOR

Struggling?

NIGEL

Never.

ELEANOR

I can help if you need me.

NIGEL

Should have built it myself. Would have been easier. And the right dimensions.

ELEANOR

Tea's up.

(He takes it, but she keeps hold. Their eyes meet, then she lets go.)

ELEANOR I'd forgotten about half this stuff. There's so much.

NIGEL You don't have to build this.

ELEANOR Thanks though.

NIGEL Alright. But you know what I mean. By the time we drove to IKEA, chose exactly the right one, then drove back, I might as well have done it myself.

ELEANOR This was easier.

NIGEL Could have got the lads at work to get me some wood. Then, a little bit of measuring and we have a cabinet. Easy.

ELEANOR Nigel! That's stealing!

NIGEL Would have taken less time. Living room wouldn't be in this state.

ELEANOR I'm shocked.

NIGEL Are you?

ELEANOR Shocked to my very core.

NIGEL Really?

ELEANOR How smooth...feel it. After all this time. Just one touch of the silk and everything comes flooding back. Like when we first met. I feel seventeen again. Don't you? Like ...I don't know, like we're young...and we're in the woods again. Just us. No-one else around.

(Beat.)

NIGEL All this could have stayed in the attic you know. Not sure why you wanted to drag it all down.

ELEANOR Our memories.

NIGEL It's junk.

ELEANOR It's not. Good times...the bad. They're all here.

NIGEL Well. I haven't missed any single thing. Been getting on fine with it all stored away. Look at all this rubbish, just messing up the living room. There's no reason in bringing it down. Might as well bin it all. Did you at least find whatever it was you were looking for?

ELEANOR This.

NIGEL You dragged everything down just to wear one dress?

ELEANOR It was worth it. I feel young... full of energy. *(Does a spin.)*

NIGEL Well, I would have preferred not to move the sofa.

ELEANOR Oh, be fun for once in your life.

NIGEL I am fun. This just needs to be done.

ELEANOR All this stuff is hidden away, not doing anything but gathering dust. Might as well spend an afternoon putting everything in order. That is, if you don't have to go out...

NIGEL No.

ELEANOR Not to the pub or anything?

NIGEL Got the whole day free. I'm staying here, and I'm going to finish this.

ELEANOR Wow. I'm honoured. I won't know what to do with you here. I mean, you always seem to be out...

NIGEL Just the way it happens sometimes.

ELEANOR I guess.

(Beat.)

NIGEL How do you think we should arrange everything?

ELEANOR Don't really mind.

NIGEL Has to be an order.

ELEANOR Everything in its right place?

NIGEL Exactly. Otherwise it's just clutter.

ELEANOR Dunno. Alphabetical.

NIGEL God, how obvious. *(They smile.)*

ELEANOR What should I do then, when I have you all to myself for a whole day?

NIGEL Sure you'll think of something.

ELEANOR I can probably think of a few things...

NIGEL There's problems with the alphabetical system of course. Do we mix the films and music up together, or keep them separate? That's assuming this MDF monstrosity can handle both. Then, do you organise by artist? Or album if we're talking music? By director or title? Then how do you subdivide?

ELEANOR Subdivide.

NIGEL Yes, by year, or order released or by...I don't know. Colour. Or personal preference.

ELEANOR This is fascinating. Really.

NIGEL The whole point is that we'll be able to find music and films when we want them.

ELEANOR I'll leave that to you.

NIGEL We should do it together.

ELEANOR You seem much more interested in it all than I am. Do it yourself. You want to do it all. You want every-

(Beat.)

It will be nice to display everything here.

NIGEL I bet you don't end up watching or listening to anything. And this whole mess will just gather dust. But instead of gathering dust in the attic, it's going to gather dust here.

ELEANOR I will.

NIGEL For the first couple of weeks maybe...

ELEANOR What did you feel when you touched the dress?

NIGEL Silk.

ELEANOR Well obviously, but what did you think of?

NIGEL Nothing really.

ELEANOR You must have had some thoughts. Memories or feelings.

NIGEL You look good in it. Really...smart. Why don't you save it for a special occasion? Next time we go out for dinner. Something / like that.

ELEANOR So put it away, never to be seen again then?

NIGEL We'll go out / sometime.

ELEANOR Sure, sure. You know what I remember?

NIGEL No, but I'm sure you're going to tell me.

ELEANOR I won't then.

NIGEL Suits me.

(Beat.)

ELEANOR Fine, you win. The day we went to Foxglove woods.

NIGEL I don't remember.

ELEANOR You must. A glorious summer day.

NIGEL Oh, a lot like today then.

ELEANOR Well yes. Only it was sunny.

NIGEL Sunny in summer? Never...

ELEANOR When we first started going out.

NIGEL Our first date was the Italian in town. Wasn't it?

ELEANOR No, this was after then. I think.

NIGEL Really?

ELEANOR Near the start anyway. When we were first 'getting to know' each other. You must remember. We walked

through the village to get there. You remember the woods?

NIGEL

Sure.

ELEANOR

About three miles from here.

NIGEL

I know where they are.

ELEANOR

Really? Well. Yes. We went up there. For a date. Just the two of us... you must remember.

NIGEL

I think so. We had a picnic?

ELEANOR

That's right, by the stream. In the middle of all those bluebells. God, so young...

NIGEL

I wasn't.

ELEANOR

You were still fun.

NIGEL

When we were first courting.

ELEANOR

'Courting'! Are you from the 1920's?

NIGEL

Alright, alright. Going out. Whatever you called it.

ELEANOR

Can we go back?

NIGEL

Why?

ELEANOR

Right now. Let's go. Nothing else to do...

NIGEL I would, but I need to get this done. What with work and that new estate, I'm going to have no time in the coming weeks. Besides, you don't want the living room like this, do you? You want to be able to sit down. Get some order back to this room. I need to bring the sofa in before the afternoon is out.

ELEANOR Please. It'll be great.

NIGEL There's nothing there. And it's raining.

ELEANOR Be fun for once. You never take me anywhere, always going out. Even in the evenings you go the...pub, and leave me here on my own. I want to go out. Be fun. We can take an umbrella. Or just kiss in the rain, be romantic.

NIGEL You'll catch a cold.

ELEANOR So? I would have done something to justify it. Besides, what's a cold? Only a little thing. Not like I have to work.

NIGEL Well I do. I do take you out by / the way

ELEANOR Name the last time.

NIGEL ...I've been busy. You wouldn't like Foxglove woods anymore. Half the trees are cut down. There's litter, broken bottles, even used needles everywhere. Almost

destroyed. Since the village started expanding it's just been ruined. You wouldn't recognise it.

ELEANOR

I'm sure it's not that bad.

NIGEL

It is. The teenagers go up there, have sex and take drugs.

They have no respect for the natural environment.

Probably crushed all the bluebells, then chopped up the trees for firewood.

ELEANOR

And how do you know what it's like? When did you last go up there?

NIGEL

We're not going anyway. It's raining. That's that.

ELEANOR

No, you must have been up there fairly recently to see all this destruction. See how much it's been ruined. You must have seen the ashes and rubbish.

NIGEL

They've given us the wrong nails.

ELEANOR

No, but you must / have seen –

NIGEL

I haven't been up there, just heard from other people. The lads at work.

ELEANOR

Really?

NIGEL

One of them lives near there. He's seen it. Typical, rubbish / instructions.

ELEANOR But you don't know until you go up there yourself.

NIGEL End of discussion El.

ELEANOR / But-

NIGEL No more. Leave it.

(Beat.)

ELEANOR Do you have any nails from work?

NIGEL Not these specific ones.

ELEANOR Use some others.

NIGEL We need the right nails. The whole thing might collapse.

ELEANOR You don't have to do that now.

NIGEL Find the right nails?

ELEANOR No. You don't have to put that up.

NIGEL While I have the time.

ELEANOR Put the tools down.

NIGEL All the boxes will clutter up / the living room...

ELEANOR *(Drawing him close.)* Oh bloody hell... You like the dress?

NIGEL I said I did. Very nice.

ELEANOR Like when we first met. Only seventeen...

NIGEL So?

ELEANOR Maybe you could... take it off?

NIGEL Need to do this.

ELEANOR It can wait.

NIGEL You want to sit around in a room like this? With all the mess?

ELEANOR Rip it off me. Like in Foxglove Woods. Like you used to.

NIGEL Wrong nails.

ELEANOR Pretend we're young again. Touch me.

NIGEL You shouldn't talk like a whore. It never suited you.

(She pushes him away with force.

Long pause.)

NIGEL El? Ellie? You know I didn't mean that. I should never speak to you like that. I never meant that word. You know I didn't... I just lost control for a brief moment. But there was no meaning behind it. No malice. I'm sorry.

ELEANOR You were thinking it though.

NIGEL That's not true / I never...

ELEANOR I don't know what's worse the fact you think I'm a /
whore for wanting to -

NIGEL I don't.

ELEANOR - love my husband, or the hypocrisy of it.

NIGEL What do you mean?

ELEANOR Doesn't matter. I'm fine. Look. I'm dealing with what
you said in a mature and adult way.

*(ELEANOR breathes deeply. Starts to look through boxes
NIGEL goes back to the flat pack.)*

ELEANOR I thought flat pack didn't need nails.

NIGEL This one does.

ELEANOR Right. I want to arrange everything by colour.

NIGEL Colour?

ELEANOR Or by font size. Something like that. Or both

NIGEL Right.

ELEANOR You can help me, if you want. So it would go red then
orange, / yellow, green... *(Stops on one CD.)*

NIGEL I know the colour order Eleanor.

ELEANOR Do you remember this one?

(Pause.)

ELEANOR I should have remembered. So should you.

NIGEL Don't feel bad... We got her that story tape, didn't we?

ELEANOR That's right. She wouldn't listen to it.

NIGEL Well she did. But she liked this one more.

ELEANOR She used to dance around.

NIGEL She loved motown. For some reason.

ELEANOR One time, I hid it. Because I was sick of hearing "Ain't No Mountain" over and over again. She threw a tantrum. Screamed. I offered to play the story tape, but she was having none of it. Eventually, I had to cave in and put it on again for the rest of the afternoon.

NIGEL Where was I?

ELEANOR Oh, probably at work or something. It was only when she was 3. She would have been home most of the time.

(Beat.)

Don't just stand there.

(NIGEL hugs ELEANOR. It is very awkward.)

Do you think she's...?

NIGEL I don't know. I hope...

(NIGEL goes back to building the cabinet.)

ELEANOR Is that it? *(No response.)* Right. You haven't touched your tea.

NIGEL I know.

ELEANOR I made it for you.

NIGEL Just letting it cool.

ELEANOR Great, must be stone cold by now.

NIGEL Probably lukewarm.

ELEANOR Can I arrange the CDs then?

NIGEL Sure.

ELEANOR Just random. Doesn't really matter, does it, the order, not like it's important. Most listened, or favourite, or maybe I should just shove them in any which way.

NIGEL Some sort of order.

ELEANOR I'll put this one on top. Pride of place.

NIGEL Hmm.

ELEANOR Do you agree?

NIGEL Of course.

ELEANOR What did I just say?

NIGEL You're putting the motown CD on the top.

ELEANOR To remember her. You never listen to me.

NIGEL I do.

ELEANOR Not properly. Even now you're fiddling with the cabinet.

NIGEL I'm listening.

ELEANOR You just stare right past me most of the time.

NIGEL That's not true.

ELEANOR Nigel...Do you ever feel...worried. About us /...about...

NIGEL No. I don't. We're good.

ELEANOR You still love me.

NIGEL You shouldn't need to ask.

ELEANOR And if anything happened, you would tell me. Wouldn't you?

NIGEL Like what?

ELEANOR I don't know. I don't know what I'm saying. I try not to have these thoughts. I know they're irrational. I try to

block them out, but they always come creeping back in.
and...you know I don't mean them. But things happen. I
think the worse. Always. About you. Evil things...I don't
want to think them...They're always present.

NIGEL Maybe you should have the pills now.

ELEANOR Not yet. Say it. Tell me again.

NIGEL You know I do.

ELEANOR I need to hear it. Just humour me. Please.

NIGEL I...I care about you. So much. You are my life.

ELEANOR Right. *(Sits on a box.)*

NIGEL Don't sit there

ELEANOR Office rang Wednesday.

NIGEL Things inside might be crushed.

ELEANOR Some young idiot with a stupid high little voice.

Receptionist for the firm.

NIGEL Jane yes. I don't think / you should be sitting there.

ELEANOR Ooh Jane. I bet she has blond hair and / perky little tits.

NIGEL She's got / brown hair.

NIGEL That was different. I was younger then.

ELEANOR But I'm older now. / She isn't.

NIGEL And I'm married to you. For years. It's a commitment.
I'm not going to just throw that away.

ELEANOR Right.

(Pause. She gets up, picks up a CD without looking and smashes it on the ground. She stamps on it, keeping eye contact with NIGEL all the time.)

NIGEL Mature El. Very adult.

ELEANOR You never notice me. I wore this for you. This dress. You disgusting man. Don't just talk about how you hate IKEA or the CD rack or your rubbish job for once in your life you / stupid stupid STUPID little pathetic...

NIGEL Please calm down. Please. It's OK. It's alright. Shhh....

ELEANOR Fuck me.

NIGEL What?

ELEANOR Like we used to. In the woods.

NIGEL The cabinet...

ELEANOR Doesn't matter. Now. Right here.

(She has his hand down his trousers.)

You like that? Feels good. You like it. Make me feel that good. In the woods. Foxglove woods. Touch me. Like we used to.

(They Kiss. Pause.)

It'll happen. Like we used to. Don't worry.

NIGEL

No.

ELEANOR

It'll happen.

NIGEL

It's really. No...Um. It's not. I need ...I need ...I'll get some more tea. Must be cold by now.

ELEANOR

Stone cold.

(He exits. Pause.)

ELEANOR starts to look in the boxes. Finds a plastic bag. Inside is a dress. It isn't hers. Looks at it for a long time, and then stuffs back into the bag.

NIGEL re-enters.)

NIGEL

Kettle's boiling.

(ELEANOR runs off past him. We hear retching. NIGEL sighs and goes back to the cabinet. ELEANOR enters after a moment.)

NIGEL

Sorry.

ELEANOR

Well. Business as usual, isn't it?

(NIGEL goes to kiss her.)

ELEANOR

Don't.

NIGEL

If that's what you want.

I should have built this thing myself. I should have taken responsibility. MDF is such a useless material. I mean, it's cheap. But in terms of how long it lasts... not great. And it never has the same feel as wood. It just feels artificial...

ELEANOR

You don't have to be like that.

NIGEL

We need some sort of order around here at least. Are you going to clean that up?

ELEANOR

What?

NIGEL

The CD you smashed.

ELEANOR

Sure. Sure.

(Beat.)

Oh no.

NIGEL

What?

ELEANOR

I didn't think it was that one. I really didn't.

NIGEL Which one El?

ELEANOR Marie's favourite.

NIGEL Well.

ELEANOR She loved it. I didn't mean to. I'm sorry

NIGEL Well. You've done it now.

ELEANOR We should have kept that one. In memory of her.

NIGEL We can't keep everything...I'll help you clean it up.
(Together they clean up the smashed CD shards.)

ELEANOR We kept it. All of her stuff. Tell me we kept it. In one of these boxes. Somewhere.

NIGEL One of them.

ELEANOR Her clothes. Her toys.

NIGEL It'll be around.

ELEANOR Are you...I'm sorry. Are you angry?

NIGEL No. Not angry exactly.

ELEANOR Disappointed.
(Pause.)
I feel like I've trampled all over her memory. Like I'm not respecting my daughter.

NIGEL Still.

ELEANOR Stay with me today. Don't go out. Don't go to the pub.
Stay here and we can arrange the music and films
together.

NIGEL I already told you, I'm not going anywhere today.

ELEANOR Nigel? Nigel. Look at me. You'd tell me, wouldn't you?

NIGEL If what?

ELEANOR If you were having a...

NIGEL Depends. I might, I might not.

ELEANOR On what?

NIGEL On how many times you make me drive all the way to
IKEA.

ELEANOR It's not funny.

NIGEL I know, I hate MDF.

ELEANOR Oi. It's important. You'd tell me. Wouldn't you? You'd
be honest and...and...

NIGEL For the record, I'm not. But if I ever dared to look at
another woman, I'd come back and throw myself at your
feet, begging you to forgive me.

ELEANOR So Jane is /...

NIGEL Is just the receptionist. That's all

ELEANOR Your young, attractive receptionist.

NIGEL Hardly attractive, but yes. And she's not mine. She's the firms. Besides, she was probably just chasing a bad form or something like that. I'm hardly at the office anyway. I'm usually at the sites.

ELEANOR Right. So there's nothing going on.

NIGEL Of course not.

(ELEANOR gets the dress out of the bag, throws it at him.)

ELEANOR Well?

(Pause.)

NIGEL I can explain.

ELEANOR *(Calmly.)* The way I see it, you're screwing someone behind my back. I'm not good enough for you anymore. Too old. So you thought you'd get a younger model on the side. Like your receptionist.

What do you have to say?

NIGEL You weren't meant to see that.

ELEANOR Obviously.

NIGEL No, I mean...I can't explain. / I was embarrassed.

ELEANOR Nowhere near Christmas. Or my birthday. You can't claim it as / a present.

NIGEL I wasn't / going to.

ELEANOR Whatever.

NIGEL I wasn't.

ELEANOR So who did you buy it for?

NIGEL If you'd just let me / explain.

ELEANOR I am letting you / explain.

NIGEL You're not. You're talking / over me.

ELEANOR Go on then / I'm listening.

NIGEL Look / I was in town and-

ELEANOR Who are you / sleeping with?

NIGEL Just let / me speak.

ELEANOR Speak. Explain yourself.

NIGEL I got it for Marie.

(Beat.)

ELEANOR

I...I don't...

NIGEL

See? I knew you wouldn't understand.

ELEANOR

You...for...Why?

NIGEL

To honour her.

ELEANOR

Do you...do you know where she might...

NIGEL

No. Nothing like that. To honour her memory. To....

It doesn't make any sense I know. It's irrational. Like I lost control for a moment.

I was in town, coming back from a job on the other side.

One of the sites. I just passed this shop, and for some reason... I went inside. I don't know why.

I bought this. And walked out of the shop before I realised what I had done. And I was clasping this dress in my hands.

I just thought. For a moment...If she...I don't know. It doesn't make sense.

I sat in the park afterwards. Just stared at it, wondering why I'd done that. It was almost a...like a spell. If I bought it for her. Maybe she...she would appear back, like nothing had happened. Or we'd get some more information. There would be a lead. Someone would

come forward. We would know...

Like I said. Irrational. Doesn't make sense.

ELEANOR

You could have returned it to the shop.

NIGEL

I didn't want to face their stares as I shuffled in. So I took it back here. Hid it.

ELEANOR

You still miss her.

NIGEL

Of course.

ELEANOR

Still.

NIGEL

She is my first thought when I wake up.

ELEANOR

It's been so hard.

NIGEL

My last at night.

ELEANOR

You should have said.

NIGEL

It's been difficult.

ELEANOR

Talk to me.

NIGEL

It's...it's so hard.

ELEANOR

I'm right here. Your wife. Talk to me.

(Pause.)

NIGEL

We would have been happy.

ELEANOR One loving family. If she was here.

(They embrace. Touch foreheads. Pause.)

ELEANOR I've been...

NIGEL You haven't been yourself.

ELEANOR I never meant...

NIGEL It's history.

ELEANOR I've been terrible.

(Pause.)

NIGEL Time to take your pill.

ELEANOR You aren't going out tonight.

NIGEL I promise.

ELEANOR I'd like you here.

NIGEL I'm not going anywhere.

Do you want to take the medicine? I'll...I'll get it.

(He exits. ELEANOR stares at the dress, and crumples to the floor. NIGEL re-enters with pills and water.)

NIGEL I was thinking, maybe arrange the music chronologically.

There might be some gaps...the last few years... Our life... We can find things by year. I might mark them on

the cabinet.

I'm sure we can fix the CD. I'm sure there's no damage to the actual disc

ELEANOR I'm not taking that.

NIGEL The doctor said.

ELEANOR I know what he prescribed. But that was a few years ago. I don't want to take them anymore.

NIGEL OK. OK. Just a small little pill. That's all. I think you should take it.

ELEANOR Keep your little wife subdued, is that it?

NIGEL Just one of your moods.

ELEANOR I haven't even got started.

NIGEL It's alright

ELEANOR I don't need your pills. I'm sick of being numb to everything... I want to be able to feel something. They just block me off.

...I haven't. For a week.

NIGEL Eleanor...

ELEANOR I feel fantastic.

NIGEL You need to take them. You're ill, and these will make you better. They control the nasty thoughts

ELEANOR I can feel again.

NIGEL Why would you do this to me? I'm so worried. About you. The pills are better than nothing. You go like this without them.

ELEANOR Crazy? You think I'm crazy and old and a / whore and a...

NIGEL Not crazy. You are definitely not crazy. Just a bit...out of control.

ELEANOR I want to grieve for her. That's all. Can't you let me?

NIGEL You need them. Don't you feel stressed? Paranoid. You thought I was having an affair. You become irrational. Don't you feel anxious all the time?

ELEANOR No.

NIGEL I'll let you sort out the music.

ELEANOR I don't care.

NIGEL Films?

ELEANOR I don't care. Doesn't affect me. Do what you want.

NIGEL I will. Just please. Take it.

ELEANOR Ok. Fine. What his majesty wants. On one question.

NIGEL Of course.

ELEANOR Is there anyone else?

NIGEL You should know the answer to that already.

(Pause. ELEANOR 'takes' the pill and puts her hands behind her back.)

NIGEL Let me see your hands.

ELEANOR What am I, a child?

NIGEL If you've got nothing to hide.

ELEANOR Don't even trust me to take my own medication.

NIGEL Well then, let me see / what-

ELEANOR *(Opens her left hand.)* See?

NIGEL Other?

ELEANOR *(Swaps hands behind back, holds out her right.)* There /
you go.

NIGEL And both at the same time?

ELEANOR Can't believe you don't trust me.

NIGEL

Both. Same time.

(ELEANOR pops the pill into her mouth, then holds up both hands.

Pause.

They both start to laugh.)

NIGEL

You honestly thought you'd get away with it?

ELEANOR

Was it so obvious?

NIGEL

Incredibly.

ELEANOR

I thought I was quite subtle.

NIGEL

Really?

ELEANOR

Maybe not....Look, I'm sorry.

NIGEL

No need to be.

ELEANOR

I've been a nightmare.

NIGEL

All done now

ELEANOR

I still miss her.

NIGEL

I know. We both do.

ELEANOR

I feel like...maybe she's ...somewhere...I'm woozy.

NIGEL

It's just the pills. They're taking effect. Sit down.

ELEANOR

Here?

NIGEL

There's a box. Sit.

ELEANOR

It might be crushed.

NIGEL

Doesn't matter.

ELEANOR

Nigel?

NIGEL

Yes?

ELEANOR

Don't go...stay with. Tonight. When I wake up... I want...

NIGEL

Get some sleep.

(Pause. NIGEL strokes ELEANOR's hair. He checks she's asleep, and then picks up the bag containing the girls dress. He exits, careful not to wake her.

Pause.

ELEANOR wakes up, spits out the pill concealed under her tongue, and follows NIGEL out.

Blackout.)

Act II

Scene One

(A ramshackle shed in Foxglove Woods. Boxes of tinned food and a rudimentary bath are all present, as well as piles of books. MARIE sits reading.)

MARIE The...ther...there...o...once...w...w...a...s a...a.
P...Prin...Princ....

NIGEL *(Off.)* Cover your eyes! *(Enters and slams the door behind him.)* Be very quiet.

MARIE Nigel!

NIGEL I ran, but was followed.

MARIE Nono!

NIGEL Shhh! Very close.

MARIE Nono- Bzzz? Do not like.

NIGEL Oh no. I rushed in and didn't think to set it. Sorry. I didn't have time.

MARIE Don't like. No no.

NIGEL Quiet.

MARIE Where?

NIGEL Just outside. Followed me. Shh. Stay very still. Very quiet.

(Silence. MARIE puts her hands over her head.)

MARIE *(To herself.)* Nono. Don't like. Don't like.

(NIGEL bursts out laughing.)

NIGEL I'm only joking!

MARIE What?

NIGEL You know They can't get in.

MARIE Don't know.

NIGEL They aren't out there Princess. I wasn't followed. No-one. Just me. I set the force field. I had plenty of time.

MARIE Meanie!

NIGEL Should have seen your face. So worried!

MARIE Bad man. A mean meanie.

NIGEL Keep you on your toes.

MARIE Don't like. Nasty, nasty evil.

NIGEL It was only a joke.

MARIE Them. Nasty evil.

NIGEL They eat people like you for breakfast.

MARIE Nasty. Nono. Go away.

NIGEL Om. Delicious. Munch on your bones.

MARIE Don't like, don't like.

NIGEL Grrr!

MARIE *(Screams.)* Go away!

NIGEL Don't you want me here?

MARIE No. Meanie.

NIGEL You want me to just leave. After I spent ages walking across all the fields to get food for you. Under the hot hot sun. Just for you.

MARIE Know.

NIGEL So if you don't want me to come back, if you want me to leave, I can. I will take all of the food, which I carefully collected. I risked my life to get everything, but if that's what you want...

MARIE Don't care. Lots all here.

NIGEL But it will run out.

MARIE Meanie, meanie go away. Come again another day.

NIGEL Guess I'll just leave then. You'll be left all alone. Just you, alone. But I guess if you don't love me... After all I've done for you. The books. The food.

MARIE Do love.

NIGEL But you said I was a meanie. You never want to see me again.

MARIE Do.

NIGEL Well if you aren't going to be nice to me...Guess I'll just head off. Take all this yummy food with me.

MARIE Lots. All in boxes.

NIGEL I just hope it's enough. You will run out.

MARIE Won't ever nono.

NIGEL Shame really.

MARIE Why?

NIGEL You won't ever know.

MARIE Tell.

NIGEL I'll be on my way.

MARIE Tell. Please. Tell

NIGEL I shouldn't.

MARIE Please.

NIGEL Well... Since you asked so nicely... I have some presents for you. But...oh well. You won't get them now. You really hurt my feelings.

MARIE Presents?

NIGEL Got them especially for you. Rare, and very hard to track down.

MARIE What are they?

NIGEL That would be telling. Well. Guess this is goodbye. I'm heading back out, again. Not sure if I'll be back. *(Gathers his bags. Goes to exit. Stops.)*

Bye.

MARIE Don't go. Don't go, Don't.

NIGEL But you don't want me here.

MARIE Do.

NIGEL I'm confused. First, you tell me that I'm a meanie because I made a little joke, now you want me to stay. Which is it?

MARIE Stay. Here. Don't go, don't go.

NIGEL You want me here?

MARIE Know you were funny, make a joke. Hahahaha. Funny.
Ha. See? Not a meanie. Stay. With me. Here. Funny?
Don't go. Don't.

NIGEL This isn't just because of the presents, is it?

MARIE Nono. Want you. Stay.

NIGEL Well OK, I guess I can stay just a bit longer.

MARIE Like.

(NIGEL puts his bags down. MARIE touches his arm for a moment.)

NIGEL I guess you better have the food then.

MARIE Present?

NIGEL Are you greedy?

MARIE Not.

NIGEL Help me with food first, then maybe you can have your present. If you're good. *(Getting tins out.)*
Can you put this away?

MARIE Yes.

NIGEL Have you kept it all organised?

MARIE Tomatoes, beef...umm...

NIGEL That's good. You must know where everything is at all times.

MARIE Do. Where...where have you...? Four...five times sleep? Since been here.

NIGEL I had to get to the new food source. It was miles and miles away.

MARIE That's far!

NIGEL Very far! But worth it to get all this for you. Had to out to the old motorway. Completely empty. But there was this building. Twice the size of this place. Big empty windows, the size of walls. Filled with yummy food, just for you. Floor to ceiling. I carried as much as I could, but there's still lots left. The walk home was very difficult, I had to carry everything.

MARIE Did you hunt? Them?

NIGEL No.

MARIE Next time hunted...could...?

NIGEL No.

MARIE But please!

NIGEL You're safe here. I will never put you anywhere near them.

MARIE Want to go with you.

NIGEL You hate Them. You're safe here. Besides. They'll boil your bones.

MARIE Bread from flesh.

NIGEL Slice your fingers. Slowly pull your eyeballs out so you can see the inside of their purple mouths, and see all their sharp teeth as they bite down on your eye.

MARIE Nono...don't like...no

NIGEL Is that where the tomatoes go?

MARIE ...Yes?

NIGEL Are you sure about that? They don't live there at all.

MARIE Do.

NIGEL No. Tomatoes live in this box. You know this.
Concentrate on what you're doing.

MARIE Don't.

NIGEL Right. Stew then. Where does that go?

MARIE Umm...

(He kisses her forehead. She looks up, and kisses his lips.)

NIGEL What are you doing?

MARIE Missed.

NIGEL No. Don't do this.

MARIE Love.

NIGEL You cannot do this.

(She goes to kiss him again. He pushes her away.)

NIGEL How can you want to do that? It is disgusting.

MARIE Sorry.

NIGEL Repulsive, bad and evil. We do not kiss on the mouth, ever, Ok? This is basic. What's got into you today? We do not do it because it's wrong. And if you want to do it you are bad. Very very bad. So no. Don't do it. At all. Ok? Never again.

MARIE Didn't...Nono...didn't mean...

(Pause.)

NIGEL Hey, hey...I didn't want to scare you.

MARIE Meanie. Shouted...You're mean. MEAN!

NIGEL I know. I'm sorry. I just lost my temper. I got angry, that's all.

MARIE You don't like.

NIGEL Hey, of course I do. You're my little princess, aren't you? My little fighter. You're always so good to me. And I love you so much. I just got angry, that's all. You should understand, some things are simply wrong. That is one of them.

MARIE Feels nice.

NIGEL I know. The evil things often do. Don't listen to the bad thoughts. You don't want to be evil, you want to be good. I still love you Princess.

MARIE Don't.

NIGEL I do. Are you feeling alright? What's got into you?

MARIE Had....

NIGEL Go on.

MARIE Dream. Think... Was think...thought...that...Last sleep.
..There...is...was...

NIGEL It's not real. I'm here. You can tell me.

MARIE Felt...you don't like...nono...bad dream.

(Pause.)

NIGEL Tell you what. You keep unpacking the food. I'll clean out...I'll clean out everything else. Then you can sit down and tell me all about it. Ok? Hey, let me see that beautiful smile.

(She smiles.)

There you go. There's my beautiful girl. I'm going to clean the bucket. Just don't open that bag, ok?

MARIE Why?

NIGEL Secret.

MARIE Why? Tell.

NIGEL I can't. It's a secret.

MARIE Present

NIGEL Maybe Princess. But it's a surprise. Promise not to look?

MARIE Why not? Want want want.

NIGEL Tell me your dream. Your nightmare. Tell me. Then you can have your present.

MARIE It...was in...It...

(Pause.)

NIGEL Don't look. Promise.

MARIE Ok. Won't look.

(NIGEL finds a bucket, and goes to exit.)

NIGEL Cover your eyes.

Well done. Good girl.

(He opens the door, carries the bucket out. The door shuts behind him.)

MARIE opens her eyes, but decides against it. Closes them.

She peeks again. Looks around, then opens the bag. Takes out the dress from Act I.)

MARIE Oh!

(NIGEL enters with an empty bucket.)

NIGEL Cleaned it.

MARIE Light. So bright. So cold and bright.

NIGEL Sorry.

(NIGEL closes the door, puts the bucket back.)

MARIE Cold. Big and scary. And / and and.

NIGEL All done now. All gone.

MARIE Gone.

NIGEL All gone. Did you look in the bag?

MARIE Nono!

NIGEL What's this then? Didn't just appear, did it?

MARIE Didn't look.

NIGEL Don't lie to me. You were curious, weren't you?

MARIE Nono...

NIGEL Then what?

MARIE When you...opened... was blowy. Wind....Yes! Wind came in and whoosh! Smack! Bag flew open and...looked....not angry?

NIGEL Maybe.

MARIE Don't be... sorry... never...nono didn't mean but the wind...whoosh! And I might...maybe ...peeked, but never meant to...it just...I never... didn't...

NIGEL Do you like the dress?

MARIE Beautiful and lovely and and and...nono...

NIGEL That's good. But it's not your present.

MARIE It is?

NIGEL No. That's just another thing for you to wear. Your old dress is getting a bit tatty and worn. So this is just your replacement. It's not your main present.

MARIE Nono...love this...

NIGEL You can have it. Do you want your main present?

MARIE Yes...yes...

NIGEL Magic word?

MARIE Please! Please?

NIGEL Oooh...I don't know...

MARIE Please!

NIGEL Since you asked so nicely... *(Offers MARIE a Bluebell. Pause.)*

NIGEL Well? Do you like it?
(Pause.)

MARIE So...so so small...colours...the...it's so so so...beautiful.

NIGEL Incredibly rare.

MARIE Purples...blues...the ones in-between.

NIGEL I found it growing through a crack in the road. On the road, close to the food. I've haven't seen anything like it.

Well, not for a while at least. There used to be hundreds and thousands of them...But they don't grow any more.

MARIE Love. Love. The petals...shape...Amazing. Beautiful.

NIGEL Of course, I had to pick it for you. I saw it, and immediately decided you would like to have it.

MARIE Thank

NIGEL It's alright.

MARIE Love it. Love.

NIGEL Glad you like it.

MARIE Do. Very much. Love.

NIGEL Good.

(Pause. MARIE slowly strokes NIGEL's face, then kisses him gently. He does not pull away.)

NIGEL I can't.

MARIE Please.

NIGEL There are things that are wrong.

MARIE When...kiss...feels nice...good.

NIGEL It's important... You need to keep control of ...you can't let the bad thoughts...you can't let them take control, however much you want them to...however good..

MARIE Please.

NIGEL I can't let...I cant.

MARIE Want to. Want kisses. Want you to kiss.

(Beat.)

NIGEL No more Marie.

(Silence.)

You need to put the flower in some water. It needs water to live.

MARIE Ok.

NIGEL It needs light to live as well, otherwise it'll wither and die. It needs nutrition.

MARIE Nutrition?

NIGEL How you need food. This needs water

MARIE No food?

NIGEL This only lives on water. And light. I'll put it in some.

(He gets out a massive bottle, pours it into a glass.)

So what was your dream about?

MARIE

Nono.

NIGEL

You can tell me.

MARIE

Hunt. Please.

NIGEL

You know I can't let you do that.

MARIE

Go outside...maybe They aren't bad....maybe think they're...

NIGEL

They're worse than you can ever imagine. I never hunt. I try to avoid Them as much as possible

MARIE

Please...don't like...so cold when not here. Take...go see.

NIGEL

You're safe here.

MARIE

But but but...want to see....go and see and kill and BANG! Dead!

NIGEL

There. That looks nice, doesn't it? Where shall I put it? On this box? How about over here?

MARIE

Want to hurt Them.

NIGEL

They will eat you up. I can fight them if I need to. Because I'm big. But you're small. You Wouldn't stand a

chance. But even if I did it, it would be dangerous. Which is why I don't.

MARIE Want to...

NIGEL No. That's it.

(Pause. NIGEL picks up a painting from the floor.)

NIGEL When did you do this? It's very good.

(Beat.)

That's me. And you. And that's this place. It's very realistic.

MARIE Was... was here...and thought was awake...nono...awake...awake lying on the floor...thought awake...

NIGEL It's really good. I love it.

MARIE The walls...around...walls just fell...they weren't....BOOM! and fell, and was outside...

NIGEL You really captured the detail.

MARIE So bright...all alone. Just one...under...under this huge sky...Could see miles and miles and miles...went on forever.

NIGEL Then what happened?

MARIE There was...felt something behind...didn't want to look...just felt...something.

NIGEL It's alright.

MARIE This thing...nono...umm...right behind...

NIGEL Hey, Princess. I'm here.

MARIE I...you...outside...you like the painting?

NIGEL I love it.

MARIE Not finished yet.

NIGEL It looks really good.

MARIE Ages and ages...three, four sleeps...just that...ages...

NIGEL It shows. You're so talented.

MARIE Thank.

NIGEL I hope you've been doing your reading and writing at the same time.

MARIE Have.

NIGEL What books?

MARIE This. And the cat one and and ...lots.

NIGEL Good. What happened in the dream?

MARIE Don't...always stay. Here...

NIGEL It's alright. You can tell me.

MARIE Don't like, don't like.

NIGEL Hey, if you just say, I can look after you. I promise I can help you, can make it all better.

MARIE Nono.

NIGEL Please? For me?

MARIE Didn't mean to...didn't mean....nono.

NIGEL I know. I won't be angry. Just bad thoughts.

MARIE But...

NIGEL Please. Let me know. There was something behind you?

MARIE A thing and / and and-

NIGEL I'll be right here. You were outside?

MARIE Yes yes yes....Knew there was something ...Them. But if turned and looked and stared it would eat up...

One of it wasbehind me....Knew would be gobbled up if turned my bones gobble gobble picked clean....

Nono. Don't like.

So just stared to walk forward. Never looked back. For miles and miles and miles...Nothing. Black land. Cracked. Nono other people. Nono thing like...no flowers no. Empty. The land died. Dead. Nothing.

Wanted to turn around. Wanted to look. Knew was there. It.

A circle of Them. All gathered around something...in a circle...all ugly. Piles of eyes, hundreds and hundreds. Twisty claws, shiny metal. Huge spikes all over. Pointy. And They looked big and and and twice, three four times me.

When got close...They laughed...As one. Like tins being crushed. Food falling. All together. Louder when got closer...nono...don't like don't like.

They... licked rows of teeth with big purple tongues.

Stood around something...they were...on floor...blood.

Nono. Blood. Not person. Meat. Meaty blood nonono...don't like.

Walking to it. Saw it. On the floor...you...you blood...nono...don't like was you / and and and...

NIGEL

I'm here. Don't worry / I'm here.

MARIE

Was you. Was you. Only twisted and bloody and and
messed up...they eat you, going to eat and munch your
bones, rip apart.

Scream. Wanted...wanted to stop them take you
run...But one ...Right behind. Crunch crunch, would
gobble me up. Had to keep looking and staring. You.
Blood. Meat. Got closer and closer, big teeth. Still
laughing. And big rows of teeth, big purple tongue
Couldn't look away. Nono stopping / nono couldn't...

NIGEL

Only a bad dream.

MARIE

...Had claws...big sharp claws could slice through
anything...Going to eat you...
Was...I ...Turned into One. Was Them...claws tail
spikes eyes teeth. Sharp. Eat you...Nono...Wanted to tear
you apart pick your flesh remove your arms...You
scream...hear it and and / and nono...

NIGEL

Not real.

MARIE

Don't want! Do not like! Don't nono no- not hurt you No
I don't know kill.

But but one of Them and hungry and why did think that?

Why did think that and and nono...

DON'T WANT TO kill or eat or not one of them, not one of them but was and wanted to / why would never want to...

NIGEL It's not real. It's not real.

MARIE Felt so true...you were with them felt real felt real. Nonono
nono

Do not want do not like

NIGEL Look. I'm here. Unharmed.

MARIE But but but you said They are outside. There. Followed.

NIGEL That was a joke.

MARIE Make them go away..make ...hide them hunt
the....TAKE THEM AWAY...

(NIGEL grabs the bluebell.)

NIGEL Hold this.

MARIE Why want to be them? Don't understand...nono

NIGEL Just look at the flower.

MARIE Right outside sharp teeth big. Teeth.

NIGEL Just look at the flower Princess. Keep staring at it. Stare at all the colours. All the beautiful colours...The blues

and purples...Look how green the stem is and how strong, how the blues and purples are delicate and light. Keep staring at it. Just keep looking. I'm counting to 5 and all the nasty thoughts will be gone.

MARIE

But but but...

NIGEL

Just keep staring at the flower. Keep looking. This is real. Your dream is just bad thoughts. Nasty thoughts. Not real. When I count to five. They will all be gone. And you'll have control again. Ok.

One. Two. Three.

Four.

Five.

(Beat.)

There. All gone. No bad thoughts. All gone.

(Pause.)

MARIE

Sorry.

NIGEL

It's ok. We all have bad dreams.

MARIE

But...

NIGEL

Even I have horrible dreams sometime. It's not like you really wanted to. It just shows what you're scared of.

MARIE Never...

NIGEL I know you don't. Don't worry. I'm here to protect you.

MARIE Not mad.

NIGEL Of course not. I'm glad you got it all out. It's Ok. I'm here.

(Pause.)

Why don't we read a book? You can show me how well you've been practising.

MARIE Don't want.

NIGEL Go on. Just a few pages.

MARIE Nono.

NIGEL I'll start you off. Look "There once was a princess, who had an evil step-mother.' Now you.

MARIE Stay.

NIGEL Go on. You can read this, I know you can.

MARIE Want you here.

NIGEL 'And she...'

MARIE Stay.

(Pause.)

NIGEL No. I have to get back to the food.

MARIE Lots here...

NIGEL If I don't get to it soon, They might.

MARIE Want you hold. Tight. Keep safe. Look after.

NIGEL I can't. I need to go.

MARIE Kisses?

NIGEL No. I've told you. It's wrong.

MARIE Don't love...

NIGEL I do...That's...it's just bad thoughts.

MARIE Please. Hold tight. Look after

NIGEL I can't stay.

MARIE So scared. So scared so...blood nono. They are outside.
Waiting. Nono. Don't go. Teeth

NIGEL The forcefield will protect you.

MARIE No! Stay! Please! Here. Me.

NIGEL I have to get there soon.

MARIE Scared scared scared. Cold. Frightened

NIGEL No Marie.

MARIE

Please.

(Pause. She strokes his face.)

NIGEL

A little while longer. But I can't promise to stay forever.

MARIE

Kisses.

NIGEL

No. It's wrong...I told you... I can't

MARIE

Don't leave.

NIGEL

I do...I just...can't...Please.

MARIE

Please?

NIGEL

It's wrong...

MARIE

Make feel better. Stop bad thoughts

(She leans in to kiss him.)

NIGEL

You have to want to. You have to.

MARIE

Want to.

NIGEL

Say 'I want to kiss'

MARIE

'I want...'

NIGEL

To.

MARIE

'To'

NIGEL

Kiss.

MARIE

‘Kiss.’

NIGEL

‘I want to kiss.’

MARIE

‘I want to kiss.’

NIGEL

Again.

MARIE

‘I want to kiss.’

(Pause.)

NIGEL

I can’t. I want to but...I...

MARIE

Please?

(She kisses him. He does not pull away.)

NIGEL

Princess...

MARIE

‘I want to kiss’

(He kisses her. It becomes more violent. He grabs her and forces her to the ground.

Blackout.)

Scene Two

(The same. MARIE sits unmoving, not looking at NIGEL.)

NIGEL

I should get back to the food source. Before They get to it again...I should go.

It was fine. You said you wanted to. You said...

(Pause.)

You're alright. Aren't you? That's all I ever wanted, was for you to be happy. You are fine, I know you are. You enjoyed...

(Pause.)

Because if you weren't. It would break my heart. It really would. Your dream. It would be like that. You would do that to me. Rip out my heart. Might as well leave me for dead

I couldn't bear to have hurt you. I couldn't. That was what you wanted. What you said you wanted...

(Pause.)

If I ever found out I hurt you, I would have to leave. I might never come back. Go, live outside. Maybe never return. Maybe I'll just leave and start walking. For miles and miles. Not eating or drinking, until I collapse. Maybe They would find me. Because I couldn't bear to see you in pain. To look at you all the time and know that I hurt you.

(Pause.)

If I learnt that I hurt you... I might die. Do you understand? The shock... I couldn't live with myself.

You'd be all alone here. You wouldn't be happy. I'm not sure what else would happen. Your food wouldn't last long. If I just started walking, I'm not sure I would remember to set the force field. Even if I did, maybe it would stop working. Maybe it wouldn't. They could find you. You might not be safe anymore.

I don't know. I don't know what would happen. But I know I wouldn't be here. At the very least, I could never return here. I'd want to. But I'd be so full of shame.

(Pause.)

It was what you wanted. You said that. You said it before. That was what you wanted. You enjoyed it, were happy. Your bad thoughts tried to stop it. But the good ones won out. That was what you wanted. I know it was. Say it. Or I might think I hurt you

(Pause. MARIE puts her hand to her head, and a large clump of hair comes out.)

MARIE

(Flat.) Wanted. What I wanted.

NIGEL

Good. I'm glad. Your decision.

(Beat.)

I'm going to get you some more food. More supplies.

Look after you.

Going out to the new food source. Miles and miles away.

It's very dangerous. But I'm willing to walk there for you.

MARIE

Let me come with.

NIGEL

No. it's dangerous. Really dangerous. They don't want me. I'm old. Not much meat on me. But you. You're young. More tasty. They'd be attracted to you. Want to devour you.

(Beat.)

I can take you to the limit of the force field. That's all.

Just outside to look around. See what's its like. But I

can't take you further.

MARIE

Last time...so bright. Could not see... for...for minutes...blind blind blind.

Then grey. But light. And black and green and shapes.

Twisted shapes. Lots. All standing up. Like tall men. Lots of arms.

NIGEL

Trees, Marie. Nothing to be scared of.

MARIE Trees trees. Wasn't scared. Nono. Wasn't. Not scary.
Peaceful. Thought before would be scared, but nice, cold
and too bright...but no Them. Quiet. Peace. Nice.

NIGEL I can show you that again. Not much more.

MARIE Further.

NIGEL No. That's final.

MARIE Stay. Promised.

NIGEL I'm not going forever. I want you to do some reading, ok?
When I get back, I want to see you read that whole book
to me.

MARIE Promised. Longer.

NIGEL Can you do that for me?

MARIE Forever.

NIGEL I'll be back. I promise.

MARIE Hurt.

NIGEL I'm not getting angry about this.

MARIE Angry.

NIGEL No. I love you.

MARIE Hurt. Angry. Hurt me.

NIGEL We've been through this. You wanted to. I didn't hurt you. I didn't.

MARIE Hurt.

NIGEL No. You're lying. And little girls who lie get eaten up. They will hunt you down and eat you. Slowly. They like munching on liars.

MARIE Me. Hurt.

NIGEL Don't you dare lie to me. How can you? You hurt yourself. It's all your fault. You do it to yourself. You wanted it. You gave in. All your fault.

MARIE Not.

NIGEL Stop lying.

(Beat.)

I'll be back soon.

MARIE Don't go. Don't go.

NIGEL Three or four sleeps. I'll be back as soon as I can.

MARIE Don't go.

NIGEL I'm leaving now.

MARIE Nono. Don't go. Don't

NIGEL

Goodbye.

(He exits. MARIE picks up the bluebell. Sits on the floor cross-legged.)

Slowly, she shreds the bluebell into pieces, before throwing the petals above her head.

(She picks up a book.)

MARIE

T...T...h...e...r...e...Th...The...There....

(ELEANOR enters.)

ELEANOR

Marie?

(Blackout.)

Act III

Scene One

(The same as the end of Act II. ELEANOR in the open doorway, MARIE sat on the floor.)

ELEANOR Marie? It is you...

MARIE Bright. So bright.

ELEANOR I...Marie...I...

MARIE Close close

ELEANOR Just the sunset. That's all.

MARIE Bright. Cold cold cold.

ELEANOR Ok. For you.

(ELEANOR closes the door.)

ELEANOR Marie...

MARIE No-one left. No-one just us.

ELEANOR I never lost ... I never...

MARIE Just us. Not real. You. Don't exist. Dream dream. You aren't here.

ELEANOR Marie...

MARIE Wake up. And you go. Not real. Dream. Know name,
know name, not true.

ELEANOR It's...you don't...Maire...

MARIE Go away. Away.

ELEANOR I'm here to help... This / is real.

MARIE NONO you say that would...not real. Dream. If don't
think, poof! Gone. You don't...you won't...

ELEANOR Marie. I'm your mummy. / I'm here to...

MARIE No mummy. None. No

ELEANOR I...I never knew, I...I'm so sorry...

MARIE Go away away away go!

ELEANOR I'm...I'm not going to hurt...

MARIE Will bite and slice and...

ELEANOR Marie...oh, my Marie...My little girl...Who is keeping
you here? Not...

MARIE No-one...no...want to be...

ELEANOR He couldn't...he couldn't...

MARIE Us together...us...just...

ELEANOR

He...

(Pause.)

No...he...

(Pause.)

I don't know what he's done / ...done to you, but...

MARIE

Came out there. But all broken. All dead. No-one. Just us.

ELEANOR

I'm here now...My...my baby... My darling.

(Goes to hug her. MARIE runs to the other side of the room in fright.)

MARIE

Nono...no touch...dream don't...can't.

ELEANOR

He can't...

MARIE

No-one. Must be them must be. Know name. Know...

But no teeth spikes hidden hidden. Nono don't like. Don't eat.

Daddy! ...Where? ...where... No bright light, no cold, just warm. In bed. Lying asleep. Dream. Not real. No you...Not... Nigel!

Stay back! Back! Powers...big powers...

Got through force field, meant to stop, meant to BZZZZ!

...all around...How are here? Dream. Must be. Everyone

dead. Daddy... didn't set. Not set. To punish. Wants to hurt. Left and never coming back. Started walking, never coming back. Been bad. Bad girl. To hit and strike and all fault. All mine.

Gone. Said it was all fault Didn't set force field. Gone. Never come back.

ELEANOR

Marie. I'm not going to hurt you.

MARIE

Rip out eyes, much bones, stab and stab and nono...don't. No stab.

Evilevil.

Why why?

Glad ripped...destroyed it ruined...No blues and purples and...flower gone. No flower.

Bye bye.

But can't ruin. You can't destroy. Can't get it. No attack.

Don't look...no spikes...Don't look evil...No sharp teeth.

No spikes...No large tongue....One...two eyes. Not hundreds...

(Pause. ELEANOR picks up a book.)

ELEANOR

He can't...no...Is this yours Marie?

MARIE Won't tell.

ELEANOR I knew one of these stories once.

MARIE Lies.

ELEANOR Do you want me to tell you?

MARIE Nono...Go away. Go away...

ELEANOR I will anyway. You will want to hear it. Ready?

MARIE Just a dream, dream dream.

ELEANOR Once upon a time, there was a Princess. She was so beautiful and clever that everyone in the kingdom loved her. They gave so many presents. Because they loved her so much. And she was happy. And she looked exactly like you.

MARIE Me?

ELEANOR That's right. Just like you. But she was so beautiful and so lovely that an evil wizard...an evil wizard decided to lock her away. Because...because... he took away from the world and started to lie to her. And the princess was locked up for so long she started to believe the wizard's tales. He told her she was ugly and that no-one wanted her...

MARIE

Oh no!

ELEANOR

Until one day, a fairy Godmother arrived, and magicked the Princess out of the prison. She took her back to the Kingdom, and everyone was so pleased to see her. And she showed the princess that the world was not cold and dead, but full of life.

(Pause. She goes to hug her.)

MARIE

Nono

ELEANOR

My baby.

MARIE

Stay back.

ELEANOR

My little girl.

MARIE

Want to eat me. Want to boil my flesh and kill. Kill and eat and munch...do it do it...kill and eat. Go on...will fight. Will hit you down...want to destroy me... go on. Do it...

(Silence. ELEANOR approaches MARIE, and slowly embraces her. MARIE resists at first, but slowly softens, then returns the embrace. Pause.)

ELEANOR

My baby...

MARIE

Who...who...

ELEANOR I'm going to keep you safe. I will look after you. Always.

MARIE Soft...warm...not Them...can't...

(Silence. Fade down.)

Scene Two

(The home. NIGEL is dismantling the cabinet. ELEANOR enters with an armful of bluebells.)

NIGEL Evening.

ELEANOR Hello.

NIGEL How's it going?

ELEANOR Fine. What are you doing?

NIGEL Useless piece of junk. It wouldn't fit half the stuff anyway.

ELEANOR Oh.

NIGEL The wrong dimensions you see. We have too much. So tear it down, start again.

ELEANOR You spent ages putting that up.

NIGEL I'll try again next weekend. Get some wood, measure the wall here. Work out how big to build it.

ELEANOR A shame. I liked this one.

NIGEL Well. It's nice, but it's not right. Doesn't fit the room.

ELEANOR What will you do with it?

NIGEL Take it to the dump probably. Maybe a skip.

ELEANOR Not going to return it?

NIGEL No point really. IKEA's too far away. Besides, not sure if they take it back once you've tried to put it up.

ELEANOR Makes sense.

NIGEL I think so. Might try and move the sofa back in this evening.

ELEANOR That's good.

NIGEL At least then we'll have somewhere to sit down.

ELEANOR Of course.

NIGEL Might have to pile up some of those boxes on top of each other.

ELEANOR Sure. Need to make room.

NIGEL That's the plan.

(Pause.)

What do you have there?

ELEANOR Bluebells. Aren't they pretty?

NIGEL Very nice.

ELEANOR I picked them while I was out. I just saw them and couldn't resist bringing them back. Do we have a jug anywhere?

NIGEL I'm not sure. Probably.

ELEANOR I just thought it would be nice to bring some colour in here.

NIGEL Of course. Brighten it up a bit.

ELEANOR Yes. I found them on my walk.

NIGEL Very nice. Put them down, you can find the vase easier without your hands full.

ELEANOR Where did you go?

NIGEL Hmm?

ELEANOR I woke up after a bit. Wasn't sure how long I'd been
asleep. It was cold. You weren't here.

NIGEL Oh right.

ELEANOR It's just...I did ask you to stay. I wanted you to be there
when I woke up.

NIGEL I know. Sorry.

ELEANOR It's alright. Just...where did you go?

NIGEL I ...

ELEANOR What?

NIGEL Had to go into town.

ELEANOR Oh. I see.

NIGEL I needed the right nails for this useless thing. Went to the
village first. Of course, the little shop there was closed.

ELEANOR It is a Sunday.

NIGEL Well, fair enough, I suppose. So I drove into town. Went to Homebase first. All the shop assistants just stared at me when I asked them where these nails were.

ELEANOR Very helpful.

NIGEL Tell me about it. So I went over town to that other place...you know the one. Down in the valley...um...DIY Warehouse or something. That's it. DIY Warehouse. Because I got there about quarter to five, and by the time I'd parked and everything, I only had about five minutes. Sunday opening, it's ridiculous. So I rushed about. Grabbed a packet of nails, but of course it was the wrong type. Got 30mm instead of 45. Didn't check the packet. So I came back here and decided it wasn't worth the effort. Not to build something that won't even fit all of this stuff into it.

ELEANOR Makes sense.

NIGEL I thought so. Anyway, what do you want for dinner?

ELEANOR I don't know.

NIGEL I'll cook. My treat.

ELEANOR Gosh. Can't remember the last time you did that.

NIGEL Might only be a frozen pizza. But still.

ELEANOR That's good enough I suppose.

NIGEL Depends on what we have in.

ELEANOR Can't remember.

NIGEL Should have gone shopping this weekend.

ELEANOR Forgot. What with IKEA and everything. Should have swung by the supermarket.

NIGEL And I'll take you out to dinner this week. I promise.

ELEANOR Really?

NIGEL Well, like you said, we haven't been out in a while.

ELEANOR You're very generous all of a sudden.

NIGEL Well, I'm sorry.

ELEANOR What for?

NIGEL Earlier.

ELEANOR Oh. Well we both said some things...

NIGEL I know. But I'm sorry. I really am.

ELEANOR Ok.

NIGEL So we'll go out for dinner this week. Into town. I saw a nice Indian we could go to. Haven't had curry in ages. Or there's the Italian. It's not the one we went to years ago, but I'm sure it could be quite nice. Anything you want. We'll dress up smart. Make a night of it.

ELEANOR Sounds ideal.

NIGEL Where do you want to go then?

ELEANOR I'm not sure. Too tired.

NIGEL Despite the sleep?

ELEANOR Well, yes. Drained. Besides, it's not proper sleep really, it's medicated.

NIGEL Oh fair enough. You seem better for having taking it though. Calmer. Back to your usual self.

ELEANOR Yes. The walk cleared things up.

NIGEL Good, just what you needed.

ELEANOR Swept out the cobwebs.

NIGEL I thought we were under the trees.

ELEANOR I can't quite remember.

NIGEL How hungry are you?

ELEANOR Fairly.

NIGEL I'll see what we've got.

ELEANOR It was the oddest thing.

NIGEL What was?

ELEANOR Oh, nothing. Just something I saw in the woods.

NIGEL What was it?

ELEANOR Right in the middle of them. A good fifteen minute walk in. Right in the centre.

NIGEL What?

ELEANOR Just really odd.

NIGEL I'm sure it's nothing.

ELEANOR Probably.

NIGEL I'll go put the pizza on.

ELEANOR

It's just...someone had built a little hut.

NIGEL

Really?

ELEANOR

Well not that little. Fairly big, the size of a couple of rooms. All made of wood. Falling apart a bit.

NIGEL

Weird. The lads never mentioned anything about that.

ELEANOR

They probably didn't think it was important. Or they didn't see it. Fairly deep in the woods... Quite well camouflaged as well. Branches all over it. The surrounding trees. Almost didn't see it myself.

NIGEL

Did you have a look inside?

ELEANOR

Cup of tea?

NIGEL

No thanks.

ELEANOR

Well, I'll fill the kettle if you change your mind.

NIGEL

Thanks.

(ELEANOR exits to the kitchen. NIGEL stops dismantling the cabinet. Takes a deep breath. And again. Stares into space.)

NIGEL

(To himself.) No bad...calm.

(Pause. He breathes deeply. ELEANOR enters with a pile of clothes.)

NIGEL You put the kettle on then?

ELEANOR Where's the suitcase?

NIGEL Which one?

ELEANOR Brown, leather. Old.

NIGEL Don't remember.

ELEANOR Used to be at the bottom of the wardrobe, but it isn't there now.

NIGEL I think I threw that out years ago.

ELEANOR I'll use one of these boxes. *(She empties out a box onto the floor.)*

NIGEL Going somewhere?

(Silence.)

So.

ELEANOR So.

NIGEL

So what are you going to do for money? For work? All the savings are in my name. I just can't see how you're going to make a living. 8 years on a sofa won't look good on a CV. They won't like that... I'm just concerned. I want you to be happy, that's all.

Besides. You're sick. I want you to get better. I want to look after you, help nurse you back to health. Where will you get the prescription from? Will you ever leave the house? I just don't want you to be in a squat, alone.

ELEANOR

I'm taking the car.

NIGEL

Oh. Of course. Add theft and dangerous driving to the list.

(Pause.)

Look, I'm sorry. I just don't understand...

(Pause.)

You aren't thinking things through at the moment.

ELEANOR

Where are the keys?

NIGEL

One more night can't hurt. It can't. Just stay for one more night, that's all I'm asking.

ELEANOR

They must be here somewhere.

NIGEL

Here it's warm and comfortable... Besides. It's late now. Stay here. You can sleep on the sofa if you want. But it'll be nice to have one night here before you leave. Wouldn't it? And in the morning, you might have calmed down a bit. But if you still wanted to leave, if you'd thought about it rationally, I would let you leave.

ELEANOR

I'm going right now.

NIGEL

Eleanor...El. I'm just worried about you, is all. I'm worried that if you go out there on your own, these delusions will just get worse. You've been getting worse these last few weeks. And without my love and support... out there...

ELEANOR

I'm fine.

NIGEL

You may think you are...

(Pause.)

NIGEL

You should take some of this music.

ELEANOR

No.

NIGEL

It's mostly yours.

ELEANOR

Just stuff. Meaningless junk.

NIGEL You'll need something to pass the time.

ELEANOR Not important.

NIGEL Take the motown CD at least.

ELEANOR It's broken. Just smashed plastic, not important.

NIGEL You'll need petrol. Car is running low.

ELEANOR I'll get some.

NIGEL What will you do if you get pulled over?

ELEANOR I won't.

NIGEL I mean, you don't have a full licence. Could be an issue,
is all.

(Pause.)

Let me take your stuff to the car.

ELEANOR I can manage.

NIGEL I just want to give you a hand.

ELEANOR No.

NIGEL It looks heavy.

ELEANOR

I can carry it.

NIGEL

Are you sure?

ELEANOR

Perfectly.

(Silence.)

NIGEL

Why are you doing this to me? We're fine. Together.

(Pause.)

ELEANOR

I found her.

(Pause.)

NIGEL

Marie? Where is she?

ELEANOR

I found her.

NIGEL

But..but this is amazing. Where is she? My baby girl. You should have said.

ELEANOR

I found her.

NIGEL

Where is she? Is she close?

ELEANOR

Stop.

NIGEL

After all this time...are you sure...?

ELEANOR

Right.

NIGEL

You might not be thinking right. It could be someone else. Another, different girl. Because you're ill, you might have mistaken her for Marie.

ELEANOR

I know.

NIGEL

I'm just...

ELEANOR

I know.

(Silence.)

NIGEL

Is she safe?

(Pause.)

Where are you taking her?

(Pause.)

You have a right to tell me. I'm her father.

(Pause.)

I'll find you both.

ELEANOR

Let me past.

(Pause.)

NIGEL

We could be a family again. The three of us. Bring her back here, we can start again. I'll look after you both. Help you get over your illness. You can't survive on your own. Not without me. Too fragile.

ELEANOR

I could kill you.

(Long silence.)

NIGEL

It's a mistake.

(Pause.)

ELEANOR goes to exit. NIGEL grabs her.)

You were a terrible mother. When she was young. A terrible, awful parent. Out of control. Abusive. Violent mood swings. This time isn't going to be any different. You're a monster. You will destroy her.

(Silence.)

NIGEL lets her go. ELEANOR walks out, not looking back.

Silence.

We hear a car pulling away.

Silence.

NIGEL smashes one of the pieces of MDF under his foot.

Silence.

Fade down.)

Scene Three

(Foxglove Woods at night. ELEANOR leads MARIE, who has her eyes closed.)

ELEANOR Are they closed?

MARIE Yes.

ELEANOR No peeking now.

MARIE Nono...peeking. Not. Not peeking.

ELEANOR Almost.

MARIE Almost.

ELEANOR Ready. Open your eyes.

(MARIE does.)

ELEANOR Well?

MARIE So dark.

ELEANOR It's night.

MARIE So big and cold...shapes...Dark shapes...

ELEANOR Trees.

MARIE So many colours...and shades and light and and....

ELEANOR Are you scared?

MARIE Nono. No. Thought would be...but no. Too beautiful. Too much. Can't be scared. So big. Miles and miles and miles.

ELEANOR This is just a small part. I'll take you away. I'll show you everything. We'll travel together, just us. We're free to go anywhere we want.

MARIE So beautiful...
(Beat.)
Where...where's daddy?

ELEANOR He...he won't come with us.

MARIE Why not?
(Pause.)

ELEANOR There's no monsters out here Marie. There's life. I'll show you it all. You don't need to be scared. You'll be safe with me. I'll be here. I'll be here.
(Pause.)

MARIE Take back now. Inside. Take back. Wait for daddy.
(Lights down.)