

The Big One

by John Doona

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John Doona
58 Newlands Avenue, Stockport, SK8 6ND
0161 486 6532 / 07746 554237
john@northwestdramaservices.co.uk

Characters

Old Man

The remnants of the Old Man's family....

Rob, mid-40s, the Old Man's scheming grandson

Jan, 56, the Old Man's estranged niece

Mel, 23, the Old Man's attractive, distant niece's daughter

Mickey, 21, the Old Man's young nephew's son, a soldier

Ern, 68, the Old Man's ex-army pal, a junior member of the Old Man's platoon

The Staff...

Mo, a doctor, late 30s perhaps, owner of the building and care home.

Sharpe, late 40s, the particular Care Home Manager

Moniq, a motherly nurse, Gloria's 'sponsor', came here from Africa several years ago

Gloria, a nurse, a recently arrived and uncomfortable African nurse.

A young woman.

Setting

Contemporary.

A first floor nursing home,

Part One

Scene One

A sparsely-furnished medical suite cum day room that includes plastic chairs and a chrome mirror on a long multi-angled arm.

In the distance we hear the sound of a contained but incessant protest. Every now and again an indistinct mega-phone call.

An old, old man is sitting centre stage in a wheel chair. He is naked but for a pair of paper knickers and his body is covered in soap suds. A bowl of steaming, soapy water on the floor. A sponge poised precariously on his shoulder. He is holding a small spanner pointing up.

A nurse, Moniq, enters pushing a child's buggy. She leaves it so the child is facing the old man.

Moniq Mr Dav, you and him'll be the death of me.

She exits.

The child looks at the old man.

After a while the old man looks briefly at the child. Then away again.

Moniq **(Entering)** That water still warm, Mr Dav?

(She dips in her elbow)

We'll persevere till the suds are flat.

She looks at the child looking at the old man. Turns the chair away so that he has his back to them both.

You shouldn't stare. And I don't care if you cry.

Now, Mr Dav. Let's warm you up and slice you clean.

She washes him, singing softly as she does.

Half way through she stops and listens with great attention to sounds coming from above. Then to the mega-phone calls. She carries on washing without singing.

Theres no peace in this life, sir. **(Shouting out.)** Not a moment here without someone shoutin' the world to right, squakin', demanding, **(Shouting up)** Riding Hell's lift until all hours of the morning! Rattle, then silent. I heard armies gather before. Never so silent. **(Stops)** There a peace around you, sir. You're a pleasure to wash.

Wait.

You wouldn't think a woman get your "man flu", Mr Dav. My sister does. **(She presses fingers to her forehead)** "Got a burning ache, Moniq. Sister!" That's why **(nodding towards the child)** No choice given. I can't say "No" to her. Always been the case, Mr Dav. She the one with stardust in her hair. Me just got treacle. It's a miracle the child's as wise as he is. I don't mind. You don't mind, do you Mr Dav? 1,2,3....

She lifts him over herself to clean his bottom. Tearing off the paper briefs as she does. He seems weightless. She eases him back into the chair.

(Imagining he has spoken) Mr Dav! Listen to you. You were a man in your time?

She exits and returns with a large white towel that she holds open in out-stretched arms.

Quick, Mr Dav. Whilst it's warm.

She approaches him. Lifts him. 'Swaddles' him. Sits him back in the chair. He's almost lost in the towel.

Ooh, Mr Dav. Look at you. I wish I had your life.

She goes for a small towel. The old man looks towards the child. Moniq returns. Turns the child to face them again. She kneels and washes the old man's feet.

Mr Dav likes his feet washed, Jeremiah. Simple pleasures, Jeremiah. Worth their weight in.... in spanners, Jeremiah.

She dries his feet.

The old names are all the fashion, Mr Dav. She cast the line a fierce long way back for that one, sir. "The Prophet Jeremiah". You gonna be a prophet, little Jerry. Thin on the ground round here, Mr Dav. Probably for the best. Who needs a prophet when things r' staring you in the face.

She listens above again.

Sharp enters.

Sharp **(The child.)** Again, Moniq?

Moniq I....

Sharp No steam. Suds are flat. Standards, Moniq, standards. We may be as yet unlicensed but our soap will lather and our tending-water steam.

Moniq We're finished.

Sharp Don't tempt me, Moniq. He is our only guest Moniq. Visitors at one. See the child is gone by then.
Moniq Or hidden.
Sharp Gone or hidden. This floor is sodden Moniq.
Moniq I'll.....
Sharpe Dress him!

Moniq takes the old man out.

Sharpe turns sharply to the audience snapping her fingers.

Sharpe Standards. Let them slip at your peril! The hoards of filth are pounding on the gates. Listen. It might slip out of your hands in a blink. Whatever your standards; be it cleanliness, obedience, time-management.... Keep them. Snap-straight.

That is all I have to say on the matter. Good day.

She makes as if to go. Stops. Turns again

Your elderly. We have spaces. Think on. They may be only 55 now.... But the way time flies when age settles in. We have an active waiting list. A5 information chitees in the foyer. We are worth your consideration.

She makes as if to go. Stops again.

My staff? Fantastic. Hand-picked for their sense of servility. **(Behind a hand)** Foreign. The gratitude! Almost unpleasant. O, and our facility. First rate. Not a year old. Look at the shine on that floor. You don't get that kind of shine with 'public sector' facilities. No. This is a facility I am proud to be associated with. Personal care *par excellence*. One to one at least. Of course... we only have the one gentleman. It's early days. What can I say? I recommend it. Bring me your own and pissy sweethearts.... And we shall give them peace!.... and clean sheeting every other day.

Good day to you all.

She goes.

Black.

Scene Two

Later. The Old man's family are seated around him at a distance. He is dressed in a dinner jacket and bow-tie. Still in his chair.

Rob, Mel and Mickey have their attention firmly fixed on digital devices. Jan is absently eating chocolates from a box one after another.

Mickey is in military dress and has a back pack beside him.

**Ern is sitting with his eyes closed and his head angled up to heaven. Two fingers discreetly massaging his forehead.
Elsewhere the child is crying.
Eventually.**

Ern They should be off.
Rob It's a myth that Ernie, mate.
Mel Me friend Susan's a nurse. Always on it.
Jan **(Still eating)** Not a hospital anyway.
Mickey Care home
Ern Still have life support.
Jan I don't think they bother much, Ern.

They all raise their heads as if the Old Man had spoken.

Jan Don't he look smart? I think he's got a date. You got a date?
Mickey Is that HIS monkey suite?
Rob I think they hired it for the special occasion
Jan What?
Rob Us visiting.
Ern Well, it is an occasion when you lot show your faces. **(Closing his eyes again)**

The others put heads down again to their gadgets.

(Looking at the Old Man) They say the lights are on but there's nobody in. I know he's in. Seen him at the window. Aren't ya, Captain?

Ern receives a text. There is a moment before he reacts. The other look at him. To Old Man... Do you mind....? (He takes out his big old phone. Drops his head to the screen.)

Jan Mickey's off today
Mickey **(Looking up)** Sarge says, breakfast at mums, war-zone by tea.
Jan We're very proud. He's like a son already.
Mickey And you're like a mum.
Ern Like one big gruesome happy family! Like.
Jan That's why we've all come. To see you. We're going for a carvery. You like to come? We could ask, For an hour or so. Nice to get out.
Rob He'll be slobbering...
Ern He doesn't slobber.
Mel You seen him eat?
Rob Mushed. Through a tube. Probably.
Jan Well, if you want to come, we can ask.
Rob He's their only patient. They'll not let him out of their sight. 'Case he heads for the hills.

She looks at him.

Mel I know you don't slobber

Ern I wish I could take you home
Rob He's better off here. He gets proper care. Professionals.
Jan Sure about that?
Ern If he had a home to go to...
Rob We had to sell. It's me that get the bills.
Ern I'm only saying.
Rob He's got his friends and.... family around him. That love him.
Ern Blimey!
Mel Only met him....
Rob But blood....
Jan I'd seen him.

Enter the doctor, Mo.

Mel Got doctors. Must have life support.
Mo I wondered if you had any questions? About the care we offer. About his general well-being.

The family put their gadgets aside.

Rob There's a baby crying. It's distressing. Must be for him.
Mo Staff's external family responsibilities. We have good staff. Caring staff. I'll see what I can do.
Jan Are they all foreign? Your staff.
Mo They are all trained. Trained and caring.
Mickey So you're the doctor?
Mo Yes
Mickey What sort?
Mo **(A joke)** A busy one!
Mickey But what sort?
Jan Are you a specialist in geriatric medicine, he means?
Mo I'm a GP.
Mickey A GP!
Rob This a side-line then?
Mel Pay the school fees.
Mo There is a dearth of local quality care for the elderly. We are building capacity.
Mickey It's a hobby!
Mel Why you only got one patient?
Mo We specialise in quality personalised care.
Rob At the right price.
Mo Quality is never cheap. We have the best staff...
Mel Foreign staff.

Pause

Mo We hope to build a quality client base. **(Wait)**. I have examined this fine gentleman this very morning. A thorough top to toe MOT. He is of fine stock. The heart of a farm boy. He is comfortable and content. If you have no more question about his care or any other 'contractual' enquiries I shall bid you adieu. The world waits for healing hands.

Ern You find him 'comfortable and content', doctor. I don't mean to....
'comfortable and content' Where do you see that in him, doctor? Is that a medical judgement? 'Comfortable and content'! Only. I don't know what such a judgement could be based on. I see more of him than almost anyone.... But for your fine ladies. I often sit with him. Just sit. I have fed him through a spout, doctor! Comfortable and content' is not a medical judgement. Surely. With respect doctor.

Quiet.

Mickey Whose is the monkey suit?
Mo His own. The chest he brought. His own. We find our guests like to....
Jan He looks very smart, doctor. Thank you to you and your staff.
Mel Do you run the clinic downstairs?
Mo I am a partner.
Mel O.
Ern We thought we might take him out.
Mickey Carvery
Ern him being dressed for it...
Mo I would advise against it. Clinically speaking.
Mel Does he slobber?
Mo I am not present at meal times.
Rob Thank you doctor. We shan't be taking him.
Jan We're celebrating. Mickey's flying out.
Mickey Mum's for breakfast. War zone by tea. Sarge says....
Rob The baby.
Mo I'll see to it.
Jan Thank you doctor
Mo No, thank you. And good luck.

He exits.

Mel He's growing a beard!

The lift clicks into service – going up.

Quiet.

Rob That carvery.
Ern Count me out.
Jan O Ernie...
Ern Count me out. I never said... you just assumed.
Mickey Me last supper Ern!
Ern I've got business to attend to.
Jan Business, eh!
Mickey It's only up the road if you decide...
Jan Come for pudding. I fancy a drink.
Mel We know you like your pudding.... **(She attempts to pat his stomach)**
Ern You know nothing, young lady.
Mickey S'only up the road....

They get up to leave. Jan and Mel gingerly kiss the Old Man. Mickey salutes him. Rob hesitates over what to do and does nothing. They leave.

Ern is alone for a little while with the Old Man. A little awkward. He stands and also salutes.

He then takes out the plastic bag which is lying under his chair. He takes out a small bag of objects, a tape-machine and tapes and a folded suit-hanger. He looks for somewhere to hang it. As he unfolds it its contents jingle. He shows them to the Old Man with a smile.

Ern Yes, I know, any opportunity.

Quiet.

They always bawl out when you come into the building. I held the door for a young lady going downstairs. I held the door for her. Well brought up. We exchanged a look. A smile. Then she cast her eyes down. Like I cared. Little more than a child... but clearly a woman. If I can..... I'll see her at the door again.... Could've been my grand-daughter.

Moniq returns. Behind her is a second nurse, Gloria, still in her coat. Moniq helps Ernie arrange two chairs together. She sits in one and Gloria, still in her coat slowly takes the other.

Ernie lays the tape recorder, tape and bag on a small table close to him. He clears his throat.

Ern Lesson Four, ladies

Moniq Thank you for this, Mr Ernie. We are thankful. Aren't we Gloria?

Gloria nods.

Ern It is my duty as an Englishman. If you are going to be living amongst us... you need to know about our silly ways. Anyway. I've brought some postcards to day... and then questions... and then a little treat..... if we have the time...

Moniq Shall you dance for us at last. Mr Ernie?

Ern If you're good pupils. Start with the quick fire....

Moniq We are eager as beavers

Ern Lovely idiom, Moniq. **((Waits.))** Why don't you take your coat off, Gloria?

She doesn't.

Ern **(Flashing a postcard)** Start off easy. Who's this?

Moniq **(Waiting a moment for Gloria to reply)** The queen.

Ern Who's this?

Moniq **(After a moment)** The queen's husband

Ern Very good.... Who's this?

Moniq **(This time she doesn't know)** The queen's mother?

Ern Dame Edna Everidge. An Australian comedian... not to be confused...

Gloria An ugly, course old man in women's clothing

Ern Like I say, not to be confused. What's this?

Moniq (Waiting for Gloria again) The Houses of Parliament (Eyes Gloria)
Ern And this?
Gloria Blackpool Tower
Ern Well done, Gloria..
Gloria A plain copy of the Eiffel Tower.
Ern I don't think our Lancastrian friends will thank you for that.. This?
Gloria A plate of fish and chips.
Ern And we went over this last week..... what do we put on fish and chips....?
Ern and Moniq (After a moment for Gloria to answer) Salt and vinegar!
Gloria My lord, salt and vinegar!
Ern (Continuing regardless) Some questions now, ladies. On what side of the road do all right thinking Englishmen drive?
Both The left.
Ern And who is our greatest Englishman?
Gloria William Shakespeare
Ern Who taught us?
Both "To be or not to be..."
Ern You're speaking Shakespeare, Ladies. Not much call for such talk in ordinary parlance... but hang on to it.... Might come a time you can... slip it in.
Moniq Yes, sir.
Ern And who do we dislike before all others?
Gloria The French
Moniq The Germans
Ern and....?
Both The Argies!
Ern What do you need to watch a television?
Gloria A licence.
Ern And what does the licence fee pay for?
Gloria The BBC
Ern And what does 'BBC' stand for?
Gloria The British..... (Stumbling)
Ern The British...
Gloria The British...
Ern Broad....
Gloria Broadcasting Company
Ern Easy now, my love, "Corporation" not "Company"... we wouldn't like that..... not 'Company'.
Gloria (Concentrating) The British Broadcasting Corporation

Small quiet.

Ern Now, is there anything you'd like to ask about this week?
Moniq You should've been a teacher, Mr Ernie.

They wait for Gloria.

Moniq Who will be your next queen?
Ern A good question. Next in line will be a king. King Charles... the third, I think.

They wait for Gloria again.

Moniq What is the price of a first-class stamp?
Ern I am ashamed to report.... 37 pence.

They wait.

Moniq And what is the advantage of first class postage over second?
Ern Almost guaranteed next day delivery!

They wait.

Gloria Why do you allow newspaper photographers to take a picture up a woman's dress?

Ern Ahhh!

Gloria Why do you plant pictures of the naked as big as houses on every corner?

Ern Erm... freedom of expression...

Gloria Why honour pretty people who do nothing?

Ern Well, you've got a poi.....

Gloria Why fill your homes to their roofs with things that are nothing.... as if they were everything....

Ern That's a little unkind....

Gloria Why so many grown men and women are..... bloated children!

Ern It's a free country.....

Gloria **(Sharply)** Who is free? Huu? I do not see freedom.....

Ern Well, you came here....

Gloria And I can go home? Huu? That what Mr Ern say?

Ern Gloria! No, no....

Moniq Xanahi! Xanaxi!

Gloria I do not wish to show ingratitude.....

Ern A good word, Gloria.... You'll be speaking like a native....

Gloria It is not ingratitude. But I come to be at home..... and no-one I ever see....

Ever looks that way, sir.... At home. People free from so much that could be..... and carrying so much of nothing... empty hearted...

Moniq Xanphela

Gloria I only say because I did not expect.....

Quiet.

Gloria Thank you for my lesson.

Ern I am tempted to say.... And thank you for mine....

Quiet.

Ern Tell me about home...

Gloria is silent.

Moniq It is a beautiful country of sky and mountains....

Ern **(To Gloria)** Do you have any pictures? Family.

Gloria I have no family. No pictures.

Ern I shouldn't pry.

Moniq We all have our ghosts, Mr Ernie.

Ern O, I don't know, Moniq....

Quiet.

Moniq I don't know we've been good enough teacher.... But you must dance for us...

Ern I'll need to get ready.

He goes for the suit hanger.

Ern I'll play you a song... it's all ready.... It'll set the mood... and by the time it's done I'll be ready. Me and the boys have got quick-change down to an art... sometimes need a quick exit!..

He puts on the tape - a fast English folk song – and exits with his suit-bag. The listen for a moment.

Moniq Mr Dav needs a change.

She wheels the Old Man out. As he leaves he turns his head to look at Gloria who is sitting with a look of intense concentration – intense self-control. Two fingers discreetly pressed to her forehead under a handkerchief. He keeps focus on her as he disappears. The music plays. Gloria is still. As the song ends Moniq returns and takes her seat. Ernie enters in full Morris-man costume. He takes his place right on cue and as the next song starts he is ready. He dances with a precise, elegant ferocity including stamps and shouts. His dance draws even Gloria's attention. She smiles. Moniq claps along. Towards the end of the dance we hear the mega-phone protester outside (indicating an arrival). A few moments later Mickey returns. He sees the end of the dance and Ernie's breathless bow. He claps loudly along with Moniq and Gloria... but his clapping makes the nurses jump to their feet.

Mickey At ease, ladies. Salright. Only me.. Caught ya napping on duty, eh? S'great that, Ern. Wot we're fighting for... beer, curry and Morris-dancing! 'R way a life!

Moniq and Gloria move the chairs back.

Moniq You surprised us , sir. That is all.

Mickey I'm sorry. Never my intention to surprise a lady!

Moniq Are all returning?

Mickey Just me. Nipped out.

Moniq Gloria, we have work.

Mickey Didn't say a proper goodbye to his lordship. He in bed?

Moniq We shall bring him through.

They exit.

Gloria eyes Mickey and his uniform as she exits.

Ern (As they leave) Next week....
Mickey Highly strung those nurses.

Quiet.

Mickey I thought he'd still be here. I slipped out. Not in the mood. Carvery not up to much. Yorkshires' limp.

Ern I'd best get changed.

Mickey Not on my account. It's class.

Ern I'll take the bells off. **(He does)**

Mickey Wish the towel-heads had those on. Hear 'em sneaking up.... You done desert?

Ern Passed through. Jungle.

Quiet.

Mickey Came back to see him. In private. Can talk. **(Wait.)** Thought he might lay a hand on me.

Ern They'll get him in.

Mickey S'alright.

Quiet.

Ern You alright, Mickey?

Mickey As rain, mate.

Quiet.

Mickey I know what's coming this time 'round. Takes the edge off. More manageable. Sarg said it would.

Quiet.

Mickey Wanted t'feel like I was doing something. Something bigger than.... Pissing around. There's always something bigger. I love science programmes, Ern. Space, planets, solar system, The Universe! On telly after tea. How can they put that into your front room. Like nothing's happening. The Universe, Ernie! Cold and indifferent. Just specks a space dust. Nothin', Ernie. How big's nothing? War's not scarey, Ern. That's scary? I'm eating tea on me knee. I can see the gaseous ball of the sun going down behind the houses opposite. A plate a chips. The indifferent universe in HD. You've gotta do something, Ernie. Something bigger. There's always something bigger. No-one gives it ya. You and him know what I mean. Something bigger. **(Wait.)** Gaseous? **(Wait)** It wasn't the telly. Always known it. Just forget. Rabbits down holes. I've come out. Blinkin' Kit bag on me back. Blinking. **(Wait.)** Was I an ugly kid? You wouldn't know. He might. Just. I must've bin. I feel it. I always blinked. **(Wait.)** Bus at six.

Ern Eighteen hundred hours, soldier.

Mickey Yeh.

Gloria comes back in with the Old Man. Now in silk pyjamas.

Ern Thank you Gloria.
Gloria **(look at Mickey's uniform)** Sir, wanted to see him.
Mickey S'alright now, Miss. I'll get going before I'm missed.

Gloria goes still glancing back at Mickey.

Mickey Early f' pyjamas.
Ern Spend all day in 'em some places. Least here....
Mickey Think he'll lay a hand on me? Daft I know.
Ern S'not daft. **(Quiet)** Funny you being.... now. In the blood. Even if....
Mickey That's not it, Ernie. You know that. Might as well have me share, but....
(Quiet) He was somewhere there. No-one said much. But I knew I had someone.... Glad Rob found me. Glad he's still 'round to see me.
Ern I'll lift his hand.

Mickey kneels down in front of the Old Man. Ern lifts his hand and puts it on Mickey's shoulder. After a moment or two the Old Man lifts it himself and puts it on Mickey's head. It rests there a moment and then the Old Man tightens his grip powerfully on Mickey's hair. Mickey struggles, then pulls away.

Mickey Mad bastard.
Ern It was just a spasm. The drugs.
Mickey **(Laughing)** Mad old sod....

Quiet.

Mickey When I get back, Ern. Teach me that dance. It's class. Sarg won't believe it, sees me do that out the blue....
Ern Deal.
Mickey Best get back. They'll be missing me. Puddings up. The girls 'r in it for the night.

He stands in front of the Old Man.

Wish I'd know ya. Wish y'd known me. **(He salutes)** Nip out fire-escape. Avoid the wailing.

He goes. A quiet.

Ern Be off meself, Captain.

He packs away the tape-recorder and postcards.

Get meself changed.

He goes.
It has grown dark.

The Old Man glances briefly around the room. Protestors are heard outside.

After a moment, Mel sticks her head into the room. Then withdraws. A click and the lights go out.

Mel and Jan enter drunkenly with a piece of cake on a plate and candles pushed haphazardly into it.

They're singing – Happy Birthday.

They hold the cake under his face... expecting him to blow them out at the end of the song. After a pause, Mel blows them out.

Jan goes and put the lights back on.

Quiet.

Mel We didn't like to think of you all on yer own.... An' us filling our faces

Jan She said... "How old is he anyway?" I said, I dunno.

Mel And she said... when's his birthday? And I said "I dunno"

Jan And Rob didn't know.... with all his papers!

Mel None of us knew... and us 'family'!

Jan So she says... "It's his birthday t'day... and he's a hundred!"

Mel "I can feel it" I said.

Jan Must be then...

Mel Happy hundredth birthday, pops. **(She kisses him)**

Quiet.

Mel takes out a fork sits down to eat the cake.

Mel Sorry, did ya want some?

Quiet.

Jan takes a seat close to him.

Jan I saw him at a christening once. He didn't mix well with our lot. Kept himself to himself. I went in the house once. When Rob lived there for a bit. I remember his garden. High wall all around it. Huge garden. Beautiful. Shame. I think he was nice. Already old then... to me.

Mel Din't know he existed. Nice surprise.. you know... coming into..... He's the only man I know who doesn't flirt with me. Even Ernie has his moments. O, no, there's Doctor Beardy too. He looks right through me.

Quiet.

Jan I wonder what it's like to be you

Mel Shut up!

Jan Men look at you. When you move. Walk. Flick her hair. Smile. I look at you.

Mel Dumb blond, Jan. Lotta bother....

Jan The waiter.... just now....

Mel I came down on me own. Just a laugh. A bit o' company....

Jan I can smell your hair from here...

Mel Shampoo, pet, just shampoo.

Gloria returns to take the Old Man.

Gloria He must go to bed....
Mel **(Whispering to him. Kissing him)** Happy Birthday...

Gloria exits with the Old Man
The protestors are heard again.

Mel Someone coming in. Late?
Jan **(With a laugh)** See their candles!

They listen.

Mel Last thing the girls need. When I was....

Rob enters furiously.

Rob I'm sitting there like a right lemon. Mickey scarpers. Then you two. I knew you'd be here. Don't start getting any ideas. You're just beneficiaries. Don't start falling in love with the old bastard. You're here cos you need to be. It's business. That's it. Now are you coming back? We've got things to sort out.

Jan Sorry Rob. Didn't mean....

Mel **(Touching his arm)** Sorry Rob.

Rob exits. Mel and Jan follow sheepishly.

As they leave Ernie re-enters the room in civvies. He has clearly been listening to them.

After a moment the protestors pipe-up ferociously. Rob is remonstrating with them angrily. The megaphone is very loud.... but the words still indistinct.

Black.

Scene Three

The chrome mirror is extended and reaches to the centre of the stage.

The old man, dressed in a loin-cloth cum nappy, crosses the stage painfully slowly. His nose is running with blood. In his mind he is running with great urgency. His breathe is short. It takes an age. As he moves he leaves a soft, damp trail behind him.

Sharpe enters behind him.

Sharpe You know I can catch you.

The old man carries on.

I can have you on the floor in a minute. You miserable man. You miserable, clumsy, slobbering, idiotic man.

There's a queue to get in here. You're the only one now but as soon as....

You know I can catch you. I choose not to. **(Wait. A brief glance to the audience.)** Your body's cut with diamonds.

Wait.

You must let me help you. You slipped moving to avoid me. Escaping me. Am I someone who needs escaping from? Am I the glass on the floor you walk over?

He stops.

Sir. There is no glass.

She notices the chrome mirror and puts it back in its original position. He carries on.

Hot, sweet tea. If I stop chasing you will you stop running? You're meant to be a cripple. This exertion will kill you. Hot sweet tea. And a biscuit. You're running against a wall, sir. Hot. Sweet. Tea.

A brief glance again at the audience. She goes.

Gloria, enters with his wheel chair. She efficiently scoops him into it.

Gloria **(With care)**Mr Dav. Stay in the chair. There are straps. They are leather. They will cut. We won't need them will we, Mr Dav. You are our only customer. Can not loose you Mr Dav, Eh? Then where would we both be? Me, out on your rain-spattered, greasy street. That's where.

She cleans the blood from his mouth.

Sharpe re-enters.

Sharpe Gloria. You have him. I have made some tea. Hot and sweet. He looks so calm now. You have a way with him, Gloria. He was very agitated. He flinched when I came towards him. I don't know why. I have only ever shown him kindness. He lost his balance. Slipped. The grip marks are where I caught him. He fell onto the coffee table.

Gloria Miss, Sharpe, there is no need to explain...

Sharpe But there is...

Gloria unless there is something to explain.

Sharpe He is in our care, Gloria. We must be rigorous. Certification isn't granted on a whim. My very next task will be the thorough completion of an accident form.

Gloria Yes, Miss Sharpe.

Sharpe's phone rings. She answers.

Sharpe Yes. Of course. No no. Of course, Robert.
They're back. Can't they leave.... Gloria family baying at the gates. Get him cleaned and ready. I'll pull the blood from the floor.

She goes.

Gloria Your family, Mr Dav. They must love you... twice in a week.... **(Looking at the blood on the floor)**. Some blood is never pulled....

She takes him out.

Sharpe returns with a mop and a steaming bucket on wheels.

She mops very thoroughly but swiftly the line that the old man has travelled clearing any drops of blood but also his shuffling route.

Rob enters behind Sharpe.

He watches her finish.

He is carrying an old leather briefcase.

As she finishes...

Rob Look good with a mop in your hand.

Sharpe **(Not yet turning)** Thank you, Robert.

Rob Rubber gloves?

She holds her hands up to show that she HAS... without turning.

Rob O, Susannah!

She turns and snaps off the gloves.

Sharpe Don't be idiotic.

She begins to wheel off the mop bucket passed him.

Rob **(Stopping the bucket)** Let me see. What have we got. What trail has the old slug left behind himself today? **(Looks into the bucket)** Miss Sharpe. A full head of steam. I am impressed. **(Looks)** Well, I'm pleased. Not the usual tinges, what is it?.... Is it pink?

Sharpe Robert!

Rob But there is a pinkness...

Sharpe It's the disinfectant.

Rob You were cleaning up before I arrived. Deceiving me.

Sharpe It was blood. He fell. I am about to complete an accident form. Which will be freely available in his personalised medical record cardex.

Rob I'm sure it will. And all in order.

Sharpe He fell, Robert. It was horrible. I tried to catch him. He winced from me

Robert Come here.

He embraces her.

Sneaks out a piece of chocolate he has already prepared, unwraps its gold foil and puts it in her mouth. Tries to kiss her.

Sharpe Don't.

She pulls away.

Sharpe What do you want?

Rob To see him.

Sharpe What for?

Rob To see him.

Sharpe Well, he'll be through presently.

Rob "Presently"

She goes.

He looks for a chair and pulls it forward.

He looks at the chrome mirror which is angled towards him. He goes to it, lifts it adjusts his hair and then turns it away. As he walks away he glances back at it.

Sits.

The lift rattles by.

Gloria wheels in the old man. He is dressed in summer flannels with a colourful bow-tie.

Rob A proper dandy, sir.

Gloria From his chest.

Rob I should have paid more attention. It's a chest of treasures.

Gloria Should I put him...

Rob Here. By me. We have business.

Gloria He has been a little distressed

Rob A fall. I know, He seems to have shaken it off.

Gloria leaves.

Rob Do you recognise it? Your satchel. Your business bag. Dad pointed it out to me one time. He wouldn't touch it. In case he left prints... You don't mind my using it. Smell it. Can you smell that? Does it take you back? It takes me back in an instant. Those 'precious' few months we spent living like paupers at your house. You in the hall. On the mosaic tiling. Beautiful craftsmanship. Delicate. Every piece of tile placed and pressed into lime plaster. And grouted. Polished off with bare working hands. Never seen anything like it. Do you see it too? Sun through the stain glass of the door behind you. Just from the whiff of it. It'll take you back to any number of specific moments. I'll bet you see Dad in short pants. That day he came to you on his knees.

Does leather ever lose its tang? When it's 150 years old. Does it still stink. I suppose it'll just rot to nothing... like the meat it once packed. It's feeling a bit wormy.

You used to breeze through the front door over that diamond-hard floor. Shiny shoes tapping, clattering like ball-bearings dropped in a marble hall. Clatter. Clatter. Here he comes. Gliding in. You always moved fast. And ya can't have been a young man then. Like a trapped animal in a box with a glass floor. Scurrying. Always too much to do. Dad said you were the same when he was a kid.

It always had 'papers' in it. "Papers". Not "paper". "Papers". That "s". All the difference. A satchel of "papers". "Don't touch his satchel, Robert". It gives off such an energy in that smell. Fills any room it's put in.

I knew you wouldn't mind my using it.

He opens the satchel.

Papers. You know I have power of attorney. Over all your legal and financial affairs. Documentation securely registered with the Office of the Public Guardian. (Did you know we had such a thing? No, neither did I.)

(Loud) Now try and listen to me.

Sharpe enters.

Sharpe The accident report form. I thought you'd want to see it.

Rob Not now.

Sharpe It'll put your mind at rest

Rob It is at rest.

Wait.

Sharpe When you wish to avail yourself it will be in the cardex.

He waits until she has gone. The lift rattles by.

Rob I don't know why I should bother. No-one can say you weren't told. Now. Try and listen. The house is gone – as you know- mosaic floor, vaulted ceilings and all. You wouldn't believe property prices. Investment and business interests not so great..... but also made liquid. You're a cash-rich man, sir. As your executor I am proposing a range of investments. Put your money to work. Your money which will be ours.... this happy band.

Gloria enters with a tea trolley.

Gloria Tea.

Rob No.

Gloria For the patient.

Rob He doesn't want tea.

Gloria It's tea time.

Rob I pay your wages! Get out!

He waits until she has gone.

Rob I am proposing to divide your estate pre-mortem. Expenses and care bills will be covered separately. You have no need to worry on that account. Your assets will be divided and utilised to the benefit of your inheritors pre-mortem. Do you understand? The benefit to the recipients is clear. The benefit to you is the delight of seeing the fruits of your bequesting grow plump with sugary juice whilst you have the eyes to see and the heart to jump. Was that a reaction?

There are debts to be resolved. Serious debts. It is a question of maintaining lifestyle. Which is a matter of pure survival.

Never helped us out! Never! Never helped Dad. He brought us up in a shit-hole. And you in yer house.... "Nothing for nothing".

I take that momentary focus of the eye as a signal of flickering lucidity. Take this pen. Sign this. I vouch for your lucidity. It'll make it easier.

He puts the satchel on the old man's lap and the pen in his hand.

Sign this. It must be at least at least plausible. We will find witnesses to sign later.

He puts his hand on the old mans to guide him.

Don't stiffen your hand. I don't need your signature. Is it a spasm? Don't stiffen.

He is forcing the hand which has great strength.

Behave yourself. I have power of attorney. I can act without it. Damn you.

Mel and Jan off. A commotion.

Jan Don't you put your ugly hands on me!
Mel You even legal!!

They barge in. Gloria behind.

Gloria I asked them to wait sir. I said there was business..

Mel Business. His business is OUR business.

Rob It's Ok Gloria.

Gloria They are rude people.

Rob They have been drinking. Please forgive them. I'm sure when they are sober...

Mel When we're sober!

Jan We've had two drinks..... most, three

Rob Thank you Gloria.

She goes.

Jan Thirsty work, shopping

**She holds up the bags she is carrying triumphantly.
Mel follows suit.
They stand foolishly.**

Mel What has he come as?

Rob Out the trunk

Mel I haven't seen it before

Jan You didn't know he had a trunk

Mel It stinks of mouse piss. Its infested

Rob Leave him with something.

Mel Where's he get it all from?

Jan Its his

Mel Let me buy him some new stuff.

Rob He's fine. Look at him.

Mel He's got the money

Rob It'd be a waste.

Wait.

Jan Let me see. **(She takes the papers)** Is that his signature?

Rob Partly

Jan It's scribble

Rob We don't need it. I just thought we should. He was being difficult.

Jan You mean he was listening!

Mel He can't listen. Can you, Dove? Look at those lovely eyes. They don't change do they? I bet you were a looker in your day. You've still got it, eh. Look. Deaf as a poster of himself.

Rob You've been shopping.

Jan Don't start.

Rob He's barely signed.

Jan He doesn't NEED to sign.

Rob I want the bastard to sign!

Mel Bin playing the lottery ten years. Nothing, Now this.

Quiet.

Mel **(To Old Man)** Want to see what we bought?

She pulls out expensive, exotic-looking underwear and holds them close to his face.

See. Nothing.

Monique enters with two chairs. Quiet. She separates them and places them for Jan and Mel. Exits.

Mel See that. Sent the other.

Rob Shift-change

Mel Spying. How can they be 'stuck up'? Cleaners.

**They sit.
Silence.**

Jan It's what he would have wanted. No really. If he'd know us better... he'd know its right.

Quiet.

It's important to look forward. There's too much in the past. It's an anchor. The chain has to break. That's what it's about. Making an investment in the future. In future blood. It's what anybody would want. Why we bothered crawling in the first place.

Mel I love underwear. All of it. With some it's shoes... me, knickers. When you think about it it's daft – least you can see shoes – they're there- end of your feet. But apart from a very select group of special guests... knickers are hidden. But they're mine like nothing else. Pressing here and there. I've got a glass wardrobe just for them. Customised with short-drop rails. Six rows. Favourites on top row. Presents from lovers on the bottom. Web-thin secrets. They're everywhere.

Rob That's enough.

Quiet

Jan Ernie's right. It was a lovely house. I only went once or twice... when you were staying (**Rob**) Then again when you were gutting it and the dealers crawling over everything..... but even I could tell.... Deep roots. Like this building. Firm in its place. A place for a family.

Mel It'll be broken into flat-lets for students.

Jan That garden...

Rob That swing on the magnolia.

Jan The magnolia. I'd forgotten.

Rob A touch of the orient. I think he might have brought back the seeds one time.

Jan (**To Old Man**) Is that right? The seeds. You planted them. Now look. Last forever.

Rob Flowers were like heavy wedding silk. Big as a child's head.

The lift goes passed.

Mel is listening to it.

Mel What's upstairs?

Rob What?

Mel What's upstairs?

Jan Empty rooms they said. For the expansion.

Mel I know what's downstairs... gives me the willies. Very discreet signage... but everybody knows... how could you not with all that palaver outside. I bet it's done right under there..... (**points at the floor**)

Rob Now come on....

Mel Listen. (**Referring up.**)

Rob She said. For the expansion. Probably decorating.

Mel You hear the lift, but you don't here them....

**They listen to the lift go down. A thud above.
Jan receives a text.**

Jan Ernie. He's coming.

Mel He uses a tooth-pick. Says the buttons are too small.

Jan Stubby fingers.

Rob We should get this done and away before he arrives.

Jan He's scratched holes in it.

Rob I've got copies. Printed a batch.

Mel Don't if we don't need to....

Rob He'd want to. Hold the case. Put the pen in his hand. Hold his arm. I'll get the hand.

**They manoeuvre around the old man, firmly pinning and holding him.
He resists by becoming immovable. They struggle. The pen cuts the paper.**

Mel I think he's fitting.

Jan He just needs our help. A firm hand.

Rob brings out another paper.

Rob I've a stack of them. Don't worry.

This time the pen wanders right across the paper.

Rob **(More papers)** This time. Let us help you. He's like rock.

They succeed with effort. He has allowed it.

Rob **(Shouting off)** Gloria. Monique, Quick, Gloria.

Jan The panic button.

They find it. Press it.

Bells ring. Gloria and Monique enter.

They see Jan, Rob and Mel caught it an horrific family snapshot around the old man.

Rob You have proper English nursing qualifications? Permanent residence?

Moniq Proper qualifications. Yes.

Rob We need a witness. To his signature. You can both sign – added legitimacy.

Jan We're just steadying his hand

Rob It's an important document. You witnessed his signature.

Moniq Witness. Yes we did sir.

The three collapse in relief.

Rob straightens himself and comes to the nurses with the papers.

Rob He has moments of lucidity. You must have seen. I am his legal protector. Power of Attorney. He made it clear he wished to sign. They are important papers concerning the financing of his place here. Thank you for your help ladies. The family appreciate it.

He waits for them to go.

Rob One of the two must be legal. In the bag.

He puts the papers in the leather satchel and closes it. He keeps hold of it.

The protestors are heard, signalling an arrival.

Rob I don't know why we keep him hanging around.

Ern enters.

The women go to him hugging him, much to his discomfort.

He is carrying an old heavy cloth tool bag.

Rob Nice to see you sir.

Ern Is everything alright? He well?

Jan Butcher's dog.

Ern Hardly. What you all doing here?

Jan We were in town.

Rob We don't need an excuse to visit..

Ern O

Rob What?

Ern Nothing.

Mel Ern.

Ern I'm only saying.....

Rob What?

Mel You make us sound awful

Ern Well

Mel Well, don't. **(She tickles him)**

Jan I'd come more. It's time, Ern. And the parking around here. Some of us work.

Ern I've worked.

Jan But now. Not now.

Mel Want to see my knickers, Ern?

Ern No **(She has them in his face)**

Quiet.

All but Rob sit. He stands with the satchel.

Rob What you got there then? **(Tool bag)**

Ern Summat. I see you got your hands on his work case.

Rob He bequeathed it to me.

Ern He's still here.

Rob I like the smell of it.

Ern What you up to?

Jan O Ernie.

Ern Selling his kidney's?

Rob Right. I'm off. Good to see you all. Ernie.

He exits quickly with the satchel.

Jan You do like to upset him.

Ern He's too easily cracked. Something to....

Mel You're very naughty, Ern. I might take you in hand.

Ern That's enough of that, girl.

Quiet.

Ern Bin shopping?

Jan Yes. Right. Ready for the off?

Mel Let's leave the two old codgers to their grumping.

They pick up their bags.

Mel See you Ern.

They go towards him but he stops them with a gesture.

They leave.

He takes a seat and sits close to the Old Man. Watches him.

Ern Bin a long time. You and me. Other side of the world.

Gloria enters with tea. A cup for Ern and a beaker with a spout for the Old Man.

Ern Thank you Gloria.

Moniq My pleasure sir. You can manage?

Ern I'll call if I need you.

Moniq Very good.

She goes.

Ern Who'd believe it, Captain.

He holds the plastic beaker to the Old Man's mouth.

Ern Is it hot? **(He takes the lid off and blows it.)** Everything here's too hot. They'll have the lino off the floor and the skin off your tongue. **(He blows. Replaces the lid, tries again)**

Ern I brought them back. I said I would. I've had a clear out of my shed. Do nothing in there nowadays. You always said to bring them back. "Loan Ernie, loan". Well I always did bring them back. But some stuck. They must have liked my place. A will of their own, tools, as you know. Well, they're coming home. There's some I took recently. When the house was cleared. I salvaged them. For prosperity. The rest went in a skip. The smell o' your shed! Grease, sweat and welding gas. Dug into the embankment with your own hands. Masterpiece.

Wait.

“Heads on sticks”. You said it. Once. “Avenues of heads in sticks”. Like you’d dropped into a dream. From the time you went on ahead. Drawing fire. Cutting us passage. Disappeared f’ a month. We walked clear out. Month. No sign. Then ya walk back in t’ camp. You never spoke of it. How could you? But yer’d seen.

We were fishing. Inner city lake. Summer evening. Crusty algae. You could almost walk on it. (Well YOU could anyway!). We fished through the scum. Ya said, the fish deserved it.

You’re older, of course. But I didn’t know I could catch up. I almost have. Listen. Before.... **(Wait. Opening his arms)** I’ll be your representative on earth, Captain. **(Wait.)** Been thinking of the right word for ya. Never good wi’ words like you. I’ve got it.... To me.... you’re a colossus.

I remember your words. You said, “There’s so much to consider. To remember. Why do I only remember horrors? There’s so much sun, good, light. Why is it black that comes when I close my eyes to look things quietly in the face? When I turn to look back at the route travelled, the streams and bright grass are there... appealing as a woman warmed bed.... But the slate mountains – few as they are- are what I see. Is it a disease? A disease of the mind. Or is it that patches of sun here are an irrelevance to the slate hills there?” Never forget such talk.

Let out a word so I know, Captain. **(Wait.)** Do you think they have an inkling?

You said, “Leaving them nothing. Cos its nothingness they need.”

He puts his fingers to his temple.

I didn’t understand you, Captain. Worried about it for years. Now its coming clear.

We were children of war. Born with the echoes of the first still pulsing through the forehead-veins of haunted men. People forget .Our fathers knew the Somme. As we knew the camps. As they know... what...? Things yet to come... the Big One... that the towers was the simple pre-shock to. And, god forgive me... it may be all that will save them from idiocy. They don’t know they are children of war. **(Wait.)** Listen to me! Sound like a vicar on a Sunday.

Tell me a story. You’re brim full. I gave you a book. T’ write. I know it’s empty. Too many empty books. Left too late.

He sees the torn paper left by Rob on the floor. He goes to it and reads. Looks up.

Can I show you the tools.

He unrolls the tool bag on the floor and we see a range of standard and specialised tools.

They're out-designing tools. Zero-maintenance. Digital says "Hands Off". Works by witchcraft. That or it's a uni-tool. It'll be all allan-keys, my friend. R' lovely words in the bin. Pincin', twistin', tweakin', teasin', strippin', wrenchin', shavin', routin', hewin', tappin', borin'.

I see them all in your hands. Strong. Precise. You're the only man I know made his own front door. You didn't need to. You were a successful man. But that's something. Your own front door. From oak. Look, can you hold it?

He places it in the Old Man's hand.

I see you stripping the paint off an antique chair. Vandalised by seventies gloss. And you, with the hook, pulling it back to glory.

Placing another tool.

And this. You hewing the hull of the sailing dingy you built from scraps.

Another.

You inscribing the brass plate for the bow. And the brass plaque for the front door you made. It was a phase. Everything as could had a brass plate. I polish my front door name plate weekly. Thank you, sir.

Another.

This. You boring holes for children's toys. Cutting wooden wheels. Stick axles. Nursery school brushes in your bear hands. Painting engine red.

The last tool in the row.

But this. I took this from a reluctant drawer. Wrapped in greased cloth. Never seen it in your hands. I won't place it now.

He holds it himself. It is sharp and dangerous. As he speaks he moves around with it.

I can't fathom its use. Curved like a scalpel but hooked and serrated as if it would saw. The oiled skin has kept it sharp.

He cleans the edge with the oiled cloth and the blade shines.

Can't see it in your hands. It isn't a tool of ordinary doing. Something else. I think it isn't yours. Never was. Picked up along the way. Called out to you as tools do... to join a master's collection. Where did it lie when it came to you. The cloth-oil smells of spice. I don't see it in your hands.

He tries to place it in his hand. It falls. Clattering to the floor.

Quiet.

You could resist. I know you are there.

He holds the paper again.

A man shouldn't sign his own warrant.

Quiet. He replaces all the tools and lays it on the Old Man's lap. Touches the Old Man's forehead and looks into his eyes.

You'll forgive me. I won't have it.

There'll be clean pillows.

He wheels the Old Man out.

Black.

Scene Four

Mo is revealed praying. His feet are bare. His face is swollen. One eye red. His clothes are dishevelled. He carries himself awkwardly as his ribs are bruised.

After a time he stops. Speaks to us.

Because I am a doctor. Not because I am a Moslem. Though because I am a Moslem I think their blows are sharper. Mostly, I think they are Christian.

This is an escalation. Such extremes. An American import, I think. The lines harden.

A picket dawn till dusk most days. Pamphleteering. Chanting. Demonstrative Christian prayer. But I think their most potent tool is silence. When they simply look and make us turn.

We do turn. Always. Because whatever the argument is to be had... it is removing life. And that can never be right. To a doctor it may be a technical matter. A practical matter. An act of care. Mother in. Woman out. But listen: First, do no harm. It is irreconcilable. But I reconcile non-the-less. Or do I just build other rooms. And keep doors firm.

It is a need and I help to provide a safe service. I do not 'proceed' myself... but the building is mine and I take my cut. It sits on a roundabout that cuts a dual carriageway. From maps.... an ancient crossroad. Prominent. A landmark to the city. They call it "Fountains". There was a fountain. It is dry. The city is measured from here. The house sits by "Fountains". A Victorian suburban castle that speaks of past domination. A past

of empire. At Coronation flags were hung from the windows. We found photos. Ladies in dresses and kitchen staff in white cloth. This was the site of flags.

I have taken a seat to the roof top. I often sit to see the sun fall over the city of brick. It was built by children. The hum of traffic is like the final note. Struck and fading.

Through my feet I felt the tremble of the coming storm.

The building was chosen for its prominence.

Pain.

With effort he drops to his knees and rolls up the prayer mat.

The first time I submitted to their blows like the Nazarene. Today I fought back. They would not have me. This incensed them. But they may think again.

The first time. Within the cycle of a bruises fade. I gave them my body to absorb their ugliness. When they had done they walked slowly away. When I resisted, today, they ran. Which I prefer. Their urgency gives me back a warrior's dignity. I might rise.

I shall show you.

Believe, my friends. I must today resist. I will only carry my own scars. To resist evil is a duty. They will say the same. It is a duty to all. But what will be named thus? We must each name it.

Look.

He has unbuttoned his shirt and removed his tie. On his left breast is a scar in the shape of a crucifix.

I think the 'surgeon' had medical training. They stuffed my mouth with alcohol-soaked rag. The edges of my mouth tore. Pinned me to the sodden grass and cut. Just enough to leave a shape that will gather scar – lumpen and with a relief that fingers will read. Even in the night. It looks to rise out of me. I shall meet my maker with this scar. A surgeon friend has said he can pull it from me. But to do so he must see it. I have determined.. it will not be seen. Nor wife, Nor child. It shall remain.

He touches it.

Do I take Christian children?

Moniq enters with a steaming bowl and dressings.

Moniq This is not the first time I have dressed my doctor's wounds. One work from you.... I would drive them off with a big stick.. You carry the patience of saints. Perhaps you should not doctor. When a thing needs ripping from the earth, it should be ripped.

Mo The people at the gate will feel the same.

Moniq Let me see you....

Mo raises his hand to stop here.

End.

Scene Five

Ernie is lying on the floor – he has been tied with a large sheet. His hands behind his back. Gloria is standing at a distance looking at him.

Gloria Such things.

Quiet.
Sharp enters.

Sharpe My god. You can't..... This is a medical establishment. Sedate him!
Don't.....

Gloria It is best

Sharpe Maybe where....

Gloria It is best.

Sharpe Well I don't know what doctor will say.

Gloria He will say it is best.

Sharpe **(With a gesture half to us.)** He has been restrained. To protect himself and others.

Sharpe crouches at Ern's side and puts a hand on him. Moniq enters.

Sharpe Who could have guessed? A would-be.... "Ernie". No-one. There's not a look in the eye or anything. It just happens. Snap. I could snap. "SNAP!" There was a science teacher at David's school. Ordinary as you like. A scientist for heaven's sake. A super-rational man. Well, a science teacher anyway. A rough diamond on all accounts... but David's science teacher! Very convincing at parent's evening. Played five-a-side on a Friday after school with the Year 11 boys. Very neat hand-writing on all his reports. Killed three men. Saturday nights. Knife. After closing. Picked a fight. Knifed. Qualified as a serial killer. "SNAP!" If old... "Ern".... I think it's in all of us... Which is the purpose of order and respect and discipline... and cleanliness. Without civility, jungle.

Moniq It is something else, Mrs Sharpe. We was calm.

Gloria Will the police be involved?

Sharpe My Lord, of course they will, Gloria

Gloria This is an unlicensed nursing home.

Sharpe As yet! As yet unlicensed.

Moniq Miss Sharpe...

Sharpe I'll not hear another word. A crime has been committed.

Moniq No harm...

Sharpe Around here crimes have consequences.

Gloria I don't know what doctor will say.

Quiet.

Sharpe One thing I'll say for you ladies. You are unsnapable. Is that a clean sheet!

Mo enters

Mo Could he not be seated?

Gloria We thought it best.

Moniq So he couldn't fall.

Mo You've covered his mouth.

Gloria We thought it best.

Moniq He can breathe.

Ernie starts to wriggle as if to free himself.

Mo He is distressed.

Sharpe I'd be distressed. I've just been caught smothering my oldest friend.

Mo He is an old man himself.

Moniq He is strong.

Mo We must untie him before the family arrive.

Sharpe Sedate him. See.

Mo Binding him has kept him calm. Now we need him quiet.

He produces a syringe. Hands it to Moniq who administers it to Ernie. He relaxes almost immediately.

Mo Untie him.

They do so. Then lie him straight.

Mo (To Sharpe) Bring the other chair. With the tilt.

Sharpe goes.

Gloria The police, doctor?

Mo No.

Sharpe returns with the chair.

Moniq and Gloria lift him into it as Sharpe holds the chair steady. The chair is then tipped so he can not fall forward.

Mo This is an internal matter.

Sharpe I thought you had called...

Mo No. I thought again.

Sharpe He can't be let....

Mo It is an internal matter. Am I clear? There is too much at stake. My registration for one. We shall consider this an internal matter. His offence shall not go unacknowledged. I have called Robert and the family. There is work to be done ladies. (He exits.)

Sharpe Spotless. **(She claps her hands. The nurses exit. To the audience...)**
You see our trials!

Black.

Scene Six

Ern, in his tipped chair, is at the centre of the room. There are three chairs around him at a distance. Jan and Mel are seated in two and the third is empty.

Mel is crying. Jan has been crying but is now looking at the motionless Ernie. She has chocolate in her hand. Eats a piece.

Mel Uncle Ernie. You were going to be my new granddad... I told you. Now look. We were gonna sit and talk. You were full of stories.... I could've coaxed him out of his shell. I didn' know you had it in ya....

Jan Would've been a mercy killing.

Mel He wasn't suffering. Really. People running 'round after him. Warm. Fed. What more could he want at his age?

Jan Ernie....

Mel We should've cut him in

Jan He isn't family. It wouldn't have been right.

Mel We're barely family....

Jan But we are. And look at us. We've driven....

Mel **(Crying again.)** Do you think so?

Jan Our blood's as weak as kiddies cordial. They're washed in the hot blood of who knows what. Experience. That's what we're missing.

Mel Well no more, Jan. No more. It's gotten out of hand. Victimless, he said.

Jan Love....

Mel Watch me. **(Wait.)** Uncle Ernie's dribbling.

Jan It's as good as spent

Mel I don't wanna penny

Jan You've already had it

Mel No, I aint

Quiet.

Jan It would have been peaceful. At the hands of someone who cared... who knew you.... Wouldn't you want that? Some one whose scent you'd know... at night. Take your softest new pillow... just hold it for you. 'Till....

Mel **(Crying again.)** But he would've popped 'em so soon anyway. Why cause all this fuss, Uncle Ernie?

Jan I'm with you.

Mel We should've gone with them to put our penny's worth...

Jan He wanted us here.

They both look at him. Quiet.

Mel I've never seen....
Jan He isn't.....
Mel I know. But he's still. It's the stillness that's shocking about a dead one.
Jan Restful
Mel Restful. Yeh.
Jan A rest to be wished for...

Small Quiet.

Mel How morbid are you?

The lift passes.

Jan takes a comb from her bag and brushes Ern's hair.

Rob enters – satchel in hand. Behind him Mo and the two nurses.

Rob sits at the empty chair. The other three position themselves as an outer circle.

Jan continues to comb Ern's hair and finishes in her own good time.

Rob Always been impatient Ernie. That was his Achilles heel. Helped him out with a few jobs over the years. Couldn't wait for paint to dry. Had to touch it. Leave prints. Couldn't wait for seeds to take... had to poke around in the dirt. Twist 'm till they didn't know which way was up. All it would've taken was a bit of patience. He knows we would've looked after him too. I told him as much.

Jan He wouldn't have had it..

Rob Janet?

Jan Why did you have to hide the papers from him? Hush us up when he was around. Because he'd have nothing to do with you...

Rob Nice as pie now.... Now he's the 'kindly old codger'... But he'd got a violent past. Screw loose. Something dark. On top of that... age... Doc thinks he might have had an aneurism.... Popped something in here **(head)** sent him over the edge. He's been ponderous about the past. Depressive... then 'pop'!

Jan Ponderous? He's an old man, pondering the past's all he's got.

Mel We're not having any of it...

Small quiet.

Rob That's up to you. I brought you in 'cos you could reasonably lay a claim. But if you want to sign the papers surrendering pursuance.....

Mel Got 'em in your satchel?

Rob They can be drawn up in hours. Though I don't know what good it'll do ya. Thought you'd already spent half of it. Both of you. Knickers and cruises was it? I don't know what's the matter with you. Just 'cos the old bastard wanted to help us along... speed up the inevitable... you get cold feet. It's inevitable. Not our fault he clings on out of malice. His nails' been dug into this family for ever. Bloodless, dry diggin' in. He could've done so much for us. Well know he will. And I'm not waiting any longer. It's not pretty. But Ern's helped us out. Probably hastened things. Doc says there's medical reasons for sudden changes in personality... for uncharacteristic behaviours... and we can deal with it medically. Now you two... with yer

suddenly-contrite crocodile tears... you tell me ya don't want this... you don't deserve it. You might be distant to this family... but he cast a shadow over all of us.... Like a granite hill. Who looses? He doesn't know any different? We're looked after. Ern's looked after. We move on to better things... with what's rightly ours. Like you said, Mel.... This is that lottery win you've dreamed of; The Big One... and we've not got to wait for any balls to drop our way. We're seizing hold of our destiny... our inheritance. Screw the past. Screw the world. Screw him. Let's get on with it. Look at him (**Ern**) In't life too short? Bet it feels like a week ago he was us... two weeks ago, a kid. Blink of an eye. We gotta get on. Don't ya feel it at your heels. Right there. Pecking. Like you could turn and stab it with a sharp stick. It's them (**Ern**). They stink of it. Ash. Embalming fluid. Something. Pecking at yer heels. At the bones and nerves of yer spine. Needle-beak. Pecking. Screw that. Run. This'll let us run.

Quiet.

Rob You stay or you go. Up to you. But this is what is going to happen.

The lift passes.

Mel Who's upstairs?

Mo Short-term lease

Mel They're very busy up and down

Mo We must make a decision.

Rob I think we are all clear.

Mel I'm not clear.

Rob We can deal with this as a family matter. A medical matter.

Jan We his family too now?

Rob He has no-one else. We are all he has.

Mel You gonna get your "solicitor" to draw up some "papers" to adopt him?

Rob If need be. Not a bad idea, Melanie.

Mel Mel, thanks!

Jan For the best love.

Mo He has exposed us. My agreeing to take the old man in advance of certification was a risk. For me more than anyone. It was an act of kindness. Now he has challenged our situation with his foolishness. We must act together. Everybody here needs this. Everybody.

Mel (**To Jan**) I don't like how he's talking to us.

Quiet.

Rob It was only a matter of time. As I have said... inevitable...

Sharpe I would just like to express my discomfort.

Rob Discomfort, Margaret, we can cope with. Non-compliance we can not.

Sharpe There is no need for tone, Robert.

Jan None of us like it

Mo He has put us in this position.

Mel Poor Uncle Ernie. Must've been desperate

Rob Popped. Seeing his old mucker suffer....

Jan Fleeced....

Rob Janet
Jan By his own kin.
Rob That's enough.
Mel Don't say that.
Jan His own kin.
Rob Talk about once the horse has bolted. The papers are filed. That's it. You carry on ya shopping.

**Rob, Mel and Sharpe are arguing ferociously.
Mo, Gloria and Moniq are still.
Ernie stirs. He joins in the shouting deliriously, rhythmically and tapping on his own forehead.**

Ernie (The sound he can hear.) Poom. Poom. Poom. Poom.

They stop one by one as they hear him.

Mo Draw up a drip!

**All look at Sharpe. She shrugs. She doesn't know how.
Moniq exits.**

Mo We need clear heads. Once it is done. It is done. This way he is punished – quietened – and the facility continues. I can sign the necessary medical documents.... and a colleague counter-sign. You will arrange any auxiliary legal documentation. He has a marketable house?

Rob Modest.

Mo This will be his home. The company of soldiers. Some peace for him. The value of the house made liquid and added to the available pot. Fees paid. Residuals distributed. I see no losers.

**Mel receives a text.
She laughs freely on reading it and begins a long text back. A beep with every character.**

Mo of a rabbit.

Moniq returns with the drip stand. She shows Mo the syringe she has drawn-up. He glances and nods. She injects it into the drip bag. She then inserts a canular into Ern's hand and attaches the drip. Setting it to work.

All this time Gloria has been watching intently, swaying a little. She begins to speak in an unrecognisable language – one which Moniq but no-one else will understand.

Gloria Xelo. Xelah. Xelo.

Moniq Pxilidu

Gloria Xelo. Xelah. Xela.

Moniq Pxilidu Igelae.

Gloria Xelo! Xelo! Xelah!

Mel What's she saying?
Moniq It is nothing.
Mel It's angry. Isn't it.
Gloria Xelo! Xelah! Ngapala Xrinopalu Llavraselah.
Mel What's she saying.
Moniq It is nothing.
Sharpe Gloria, get a grip woman.
Gloria Pxisla cgoni lalanaso prisgla on galo riso. Xeb! Igonei.
Mo Take her outside. Anywhere.

She resists.

Gloria Xaneh pulisol xridi pprisgla ngalea lepd (**She continues**)

They argue.

Mel What sort of staff have you got here!
Mo Highly trained and caring.
Jan Ready to 'go off' at a minutes notice.
Mel Where did you get them from?
Mo An agency.
Mel For circus performers!
Mo Moniq sponsors Gloria. She is recently arrived.
Jan An illegal. I knew it.
Mo I resent the implication....
Jan Look at her.
Mel She's possessed.
Mo She has had a difficult time.
Mel I bet she has!

Mel receives another text.

Again, reads, laughs and replies.

Rob (**To Mo**) We should go over details together. Alone. (**To all**) Remember. He brought this upon himself. He's been grinding to a halt for years. This was a cry for help. And we're going to help him. This might prove the only time he has known peace. It is our gift. It was only a matter of time. He'd thank us. (**To Mo**) You've doubled your customer base.

The old man enters.

He is wearing the top half of a military uniform. His legs are bare with the loin-cloth 'nappy' about his middle. He is carrying the 'unknown' tool out-stretched in front of him.

Everyone scurries out of his way.

He moves around 'running' as before.

Gloria continues to shout. Moniq to remonstrate with her. The others variously to argue, scream, protect themselves.

Mel He is dangerous. Knew that.
Jan Take it off him.
Rob Where'd he get it from? Is it medical?
Gloria It is for butchery.
Jan He was never a butcher.
Moniq **(Reacting to the tool)** Xlandi pgenlo llidenxi. **(Repeats)**

The old man goes to Ernie. As if blind he feels his face. His hands. The old man lets out a noise- part moan, part howl, part struggling for a word. He swipes the air with the 'tool'.

Moniq, Gloria and Mo and standing to the edges. The others stooping below the sweep of the blade.

Rob launches himself at the Old Man who repels him with a sweep of his arm. Rob tried again. Repelled again. The third time he comes at him from behind and puts his arms around him awkwardly... avoiding the blade.

Rob Someone get his legs. Floor him!

No-one moves.

Rob Take him down. Grab the knife.

No-one moves.

With a slow, slow movement the Old Man brings Rob around to the front of him and holds him by the throat.

Rob is appealing for help. No-one moves. The Old Man holds the blade high. The hand and the throat begins to bleed.

Sharpe walks to the medical tray brought on earlier. She looks through the equipment. Selects a syringe and stabs the Old Man in the neck. He drops Rob who scurries away gasping and holding his bloodied throat.

We hear the mega-phone protestors. Then a new sound... a different kind of praying from above.

Mo looks to the ceiling and joins in with the praying.

Gloria Cleansing.

Mel Was on a bus. Sat in front of me. Back of his head. Sweating. Thought he had a virus. Held me breathe. Disease, I didn't want. Got off a stop before. Five seconds. Heard it. Passed through me. Still feel it.....

The Old Man is fighting the drugs; his body wants to sink to the floor but with supreme effort he raises himself up – arms reaching to the heavens.....

Gloria It will be wash white as white. The sky is falling... said Chicken Lickin'. And it fall. But was not seen, Falling cleansing fire. It burn. It burn back to bone. And bleached that bone. Wipe away all word. All remembering.

There is just now. Just here. It is as you would have it. As we would have it. It cleanse. It cleanse. It is fire to bring life.

**An explosion. Blinding light. Rush of air.
Then pitch, pitch black.
The sound of gently running water from a broken pipe.
Dust in the air.
Quiet.**

**Matches are struck in a sequence revealing each character. Their eyes blinking.
The second time through they speak as their own match is struck. In the light we see dust and 'snow' falling.**

Mo	Night has fallen. As it must. Inevitable night. Am I stil....
Moniq	Breath held as long as may. People begin to breathe.
Jan	I shall not breathe this air again. I promise new air.
Sharpe	I promise new air. To strip filth. There is nothing.
Mel	There is nothing. The aching, hollow pulls free.
Rob	(Gently) Screw the dark. Screw the wilting spine. Run.
Gloria	And when the sun rise hot... as it will, my friends... how will you mighty ruins rise? We watch.

**A match strikes. The child is seen.
Another match. The Old Man is seen.
The child blows out the Old Man's light.
Then his own.**

Black.

Slow light.

**The room has changed. Everyone has gone.
There is a hole in the ceiling and obliquely below it, a hole in the floor. Dust in the air.
Light is streaming from one to the other.
It is 'snowing' from above.**

The child is standing alone centre. Looking out.

Slow black.

Act Two

Scene Seven

As the end of Scene Six.

Mel is holding her phone up to try and get a signal. Like everyone else, she has a layer of dust over her. She is distraught.

Mel I need to speak.... To someone.... **(She moves around)** Where can I go to get..... I need..... **(She panics)** I'm not having this.... There's always.... It's this dust... it's everywhere... signal can't get through.... Soaks it up... steals it! **(She attacks the dust in the air around her. It swirls.**

Moniq is seen watching from the edge of the room.

Moniq Can I help?

Mel Only if ya can clear this poison out of the air. Get me a signal.

Moniq Let me see....

After a moment Mel hands her the phone.

Moniq looks at it for just a moment then drops it to the floor and stamps on it.

Mel **(A gasp. Then laughing....)** Ya mad bitch.

Moniq picks up the pieces and puts it back in Mel's hand. She gestures for Mel to throw it down the hole. Laughing nervously, Mel does so.

Mel **(Laughing)** Abandon hope all ye....

She swirls the dust around her again.

Mel It's everywhere. Will it settle?

Moniq I do not know, Miss.

Mel sits.

Sharpe rushes in.

Sharpe What is this? Have you seen? Tape. A cordon? Why a cordon? Who came so close but didn't come to see how we were? Why is no-one here to help? No fire service? No medical team. What are we? Diseased?

Moniq We have a medical team.

Sharpe You two remembered some English now have you.

Moniq We apologise Miss Sharpe. She took a turn.
Sharpe Another instance and that'll be it.
Moniq Miss Sharpe. You know..... ?
Sharpe Play your cards right and there's still a job for you here with us.
Moniq Have you seen the snow?
Sharpe Is it snow? I thought..... lovely.

They watch it fall.

Sharpe Do you have snow.....?
Moniq No.

They watch.

Mo enters with the others behind including Gloria with the child, Rob with Ernie and Jan with the Old Man in a dusty hospital dressing gown. It is a sombre procession.

Mo **Addressing them.** We appear to be contained within a quarantine zone. Erected over-night. We can be happy we have survived the blast.
Mel Who blows up old folks homes? Who were your tenants?
Mo Tenants?.
Rob Look. We've been caught up in something that had nothing to do with us.
Mel You think so...
Rob We all ran the gauntlet every time we came through the door. Fanatics. The devil's own god-squad. Just didn't think....
Jan Drunk on heaven.... There's no distance they wouldn't...
Mel **(To Mo)** Did they pay a commercial rent?
Rob Wrong time. Wrong place.
Jan I wish I could just see out....
Mo There was a window. Before the lift was put in....

Quiet.

Mel **(To Mo)** Did they pay a commercial rent?
Mo **(Ignoring her question)** It is a matter of time before we are declared safe and we may move beyond the cordon.
Mel And go home..... for a bath?
Mo In the meantime I shall continue to monitor your condition from a medical perspective.
Jan Did they pay a commercial rent? She's worked in lettings. Answer her questions.
Sharpe You saw the placards... you know this building was a target. We are collateral damage. Nobody bombs an old folks home.
Mo So you are in safe hands.
Rob **(Suddenly intrigued. Looking at the holes)** How did they get in? Is it a blast from above or below?
Mo The ground floor operation has long drawn attention.
Jan Why the cordon? Who put it up?
Moniq Over night.

Quiet.

Mel comes forward to Jan.

Mel Have you got any signal?

Jan I don't know/

Mel Let me see.

Jan Later.

Mel Let me see. **(Jan finds her phone. (To Rob) You Rob?**

Rob No.

Mel Let me see.

Rob I said no.

Mel Moniq showed me a trick....

Rob There is no signal.... **(He reluctantly takes out his phone and hands it to her.)**

She holds them both up like she is trying to find a signal for a moment. Glances at Moniq and then drops them both on the floor in glee and stamps repeatedly on them laughing.

A moment and then Rob and Jan explode. Mel continues to laugh for a moment and then stops... as their fury mounts...

Rob Three hundred and fifty quid that! £58 a month contract.

Mel It's gone.

Jan You silly, little cow....

Mel All gone.

Rob Incomparable functionality and connectivity

Mel They don't work.

Jan Don't care about the phone... only a cheap one.... But the numbers!

Rob My whole life's on that phone.... Contacts, emails, documents..

Mel **(Scared but persevering...)** O, get over it!

Jan **(With great sadness)** My numbers. I'll never find 'em again. Take me a year... my brother.... he's...gone... but I see his name.... when I scroll through... I could call him....

Rob What's got into you, Melanie?

Quiet.

Mel I'll find your sim.

She scurries on the floor amongst the phone debris. Rob joins her. Rob finds his first... then Mel finds Jan's... they hold them up. Mel has pieces of both phones in her hands.

Mel Then we throw them down the hole.

Rob What?

Mel Moniq broke mine. Then we threw it down the hole.

She walks over to the hole and drops the pieces down. Watching them fall.

Quiet.

Gloria I have something to say
Sharpe Not now, Gloria.
Mo Please.
Gloria Could I take this opportunity to apologise for my earlier behaviour. My outburst was uncalled for... **(They murmur agreement mixed with surprise)**
The tongue in my head has a way of wrestling me to the ground with the devil of fools. **(More murmuring)**
Sharpe You speak well, Gloria. When you make the effort.

Quiet.

Gloria I think you are good people. Carelessly good. But look **(She moves the dust in the air around her)** Dust. From red lip to the raw bottoms of our throats. You continue to run your nails down walls that are no longer there – walls are powder around you. **(Wait.)** What must come? **(Wait)** Forgive me for speaking thus.
Rob Thank you for your pearls of wisdom, Mrs Mandela.
Mel Anymore of that and I'll have you outside!
Gloria Outside is inside already, Miss.
Sharpe I think you've exercised your English enough.

Quiet.

Mo Does anybody need any medical attention? Any cuts, bruises, abrasions?

Quiet.

Rob I've got a headache.
Jan Paracetamol. My purse. **(She throws him some.)**
Mo The water supply is intact....
Mel Is it safe?
Mo As far as we know.
Jan As far as we know!
Mo There is bottled water in the kitchen.
Mel How do we know that's safe?
Mo It is in a factory-sealed container inside an industrial fridge.
Mel Tone.
Rob I'm sure if anybody needs anything they'll let you know, Doctor.
Mo Try to remain hydrated.

He nods to Gloria, Moniq and Sharpe.

They follow him as he exits. Moniq with the child, checks Ernie's drip briefly as she leaves.

Sharpe **(As they go)** I thought the child was gone.

Jan **(Laying her hands on the Old Man's head)** You raised your hands
Rob Christ Almighty!

Jan There is always a price to pay. You let the right hand act as if it were not yours. The left – doing as it should – takes all of your attention. **(Looking at her hands.)** I've got somebody else's hands!

Mel **(Looking into the hole)** Table. Stainless steel. White floor. Snow . Stirrups. Metal bucket.

Rob Come away from the edge.

Mel There's a shred of theatre gown caught on the stirrup. A trail leading to the door. A tool with a cutting edge fallen on the floor.

Jan **(Looking into the hole)** Mother of.....

Rob Stop that now.

Mel Something in the bucket.

Jan Mother of.....

Mel It's like a pearl in crimson honey.

Rob We've got to keep a grip.

Mel It's beautiful. **(She weeps)**

Jan stops. Looks at her.

Jan You're crying.

She watches Mel and cries herself.

Mel It's a beautiful thing.

Rob walks away as they cry.

Rob When this is done. We must be cleverer. There are two estates to contend with. We mustn't attract attention. We can allow ourselves a few comforts. But split.... it isn't life-changing sums. House prices not what they were – good but... Listen. No more shopping. For the time being. Papers for Ernie is a problem. I'm sure there's no living blood relatives. He told me as such. I'm sure. But we don't want any aussies, any cousin Veras creeping out the woodwork. Must be cleverer. You two must remain calm and vigilant. Of yourselves. Not regret. Not retreat. Guard our spines.

Mel Are there cameras? Will they step out a locked door? Audience applaud? **(Wait.)** Without traffic. With clocks stopped. Dampened with dust. Quiet as space.

A helicopter approaches above. Air rush through the hole. A light scans.

Rob takes out the leather case. Finds papers. Holds them up to the light.

Rob I've got papers! Papers!

Ropes drop down into the room from the hole.

Black.

Scene Eight

Light 'snow'.

Mickey in a wheel chair. His legs blasted. 3d glasses on.

Mickey Sarg's bin 'university. Could be a general. But sticks with his boys. There's a lot of waiting. Sometimes talking. Sarg says.... "Sometimes you can give the exact co-ordinates in time. Before that time there was this. Things were like this and you were this. And after that precise moment. There was this. And you were this."

Sarg says, "War-zone at breakfast. Mum's by tea. Issue-wheels thrown in by supper".

(Takes glasses off.) Said I couldn't come. Brass wouldn't have it. Lads at base owed me. I'd taken it for them, 'ad'n't I? **(Finger to lips.)** Don't tell.... Flew in from the coast. S'all still. The city. Waste. Just this standin.... Barely.... A steel tower in a field of brick. The lads shot a few dogs! Packs of 'em. Right laugh.

Lowered me through the roof on ropes. "Cripple comin' through". Biblical-like. Only, there aint no Jesus hanging 'round here to give you legs back.

There aint no winning. Just struggling. Us. Them. Long empty.... Then BANG! Full stop. All too big. Too blank. Too webbed. Too hard. Fifth year maths. Can't be bothered. Need it simple.

Hey. Had our own "Christmas-Day-in-the-trenches". No lie. Big match. Us. Saudis. Cup. Techies hooked up flat screen. 3d HD. Glasses. The lot. (He puts the glasses back on). Dark at night in a desert. TVs like a bonfire. Beacon. Middle of a mission. They creep out of the dark like wide-eyed ground-bats. Moths to a flame. Got enough glasses. Why not? Hand 'em 'round. We're in the middle of a table-flat desert plateau. Oooing and Rrrring like idiots. Dog and Duck. Friday Night. Be honest, I can't say who they were. Camelly bedouin , maybe. Towel-heads for sure. Their skins brown-raw. Like polished leather. Beautiful in the scatterry HD-telly-light. Sitting all beardy in their 3d glasses.

Sport's daft. But it's clean. Whistle blows. **(Chants)** "3 – 1. 3 – 1, 3 – 1" Well, we won! Dancing the highland fling us lads. Tips of 'r toes. Should be in the

Geneva Convention. Any war with no winner at full-time ('bout a year) should be declared a draw. And we all go home. Intact.

Turn round. Leather-skins slipped off. Shirt tails flashing. Back into the pitch. No sign. We jump up. Fire off a couple-hundred rounds into the dark all around. Let 'em know it's all over. Circle a bullet sparks flying. Quiet again. Telly off. Whole world's black again.

But the stars in a desert. Billion pin-holes in the blackout fabric of the universe. You'd look at 'em – knowing they're all other suns. The indifferent universe. When the gun sparks'd fallen, we stood looking up. Soldiers blinking up at the cosmos. Who'd believe it? Fucking big! **(Wait.)** Sorry, ladies. Soldier talk.

Next morning. I'm out. Patrol. Crossing a bridge. (should avoid bridges). BANG! Full stop. Most of me bottom half's still lying there. In the sand.... Ya leave something out in the sand... bit a sweet-corn... tank... covered up before you know it. Desert reaches up and takes it under. Me bottom half. Desert got it now.

I kept the glasses. I wear 'em. The whole world looks 3d.

End.

Scene Nine

Moniq and Gloria are sitting. Bottled water in hands.

Moniq I wish there were news...

Gloria How could...

Moniq I know. My sister...

Gloria Where is the boy?

Moniq Resting.

Gloria He is a fine boy.

Moniq From good, firm stock.

Gloria Amen to that sister.

Quiet.

Gloria suddenly laughs.

Moniq What?

Gloria continues to laugh. Moniq joins in involuntarily.

Moniq What?

Gloria Mr Ernie. Dancing. Lord

Moniq Didn't think....
Gloria Brightens the day. Stampin' and prancin'
Moniq "The Queen mother!" Teacher didn't like that?
Gloria Such a face.
Moniq We should've exchanged dances.
Gloria **(Getting up.)** I couldn't.... **(She attempts a few of Ernie's steps... some stamps. These become mixed with a few of her own moves. Moniq claps a rhythm.**

Moniq This is sister Gloria! Kicking up dust.

Gloria stops.

Moniq **Continue.**
Gloria It is enough. **(Wait.)** What would he do? If he danced himself back?

Quiet.

Moniq Do you wish for home sunlight.
Gloria Nothing.
Moniq Cooking pans.
Gloria Nothing.
Moniq I tell you....
Gloria You forget. **(Quiet.)** I was dancing.

Mo enters. He is holding the cordon tape.

Mo Last night' wind has shredded it. **(No response)** It needs replacing.

Moniq comes forward and takes the tape. Gloria moves away.

Mo It is for the best.
Moniq Yes, Doctor.
Mo If it is gone, they may leave.
Gloria And so what? So they see.
Moniq We are better together
Gloria We are not parents.
Moniq They will despair.
Gloria Let them. Yes. Let them despair.
Moniq Doctor....

Quiet.

Mo All are cleansed. Happily. But these. They are happy as pets. Amusements. Let them go or let them stay. It is no matter. **(Wait.)** This is the cone of stillness under the very spot of the blast. They should be dust. As should we. But we have been kept. I was not called... as friends were called. I do not know why. Until it is clear... let us stay. Let us keep our pets. Let us tend them.

Gloria Doctor....
Mo You owe us a debt of gratitude, Gloria. Moniq for bringing and myself for giving you home. You should trust us to know these people. Through to

the marrow. We see with the eyes of 'the other'. I have been about them near-all my life... and if I live another hundred about them... I will not belong to them, nor they to me. We are cut from different cloth. Believe it. But we have been spared. Together. I would wipe them from the face of their godless earth. We shall inherit...

Gloria

.... more fields of poison....

Mo

The earth... we shall inherit the earth! Set the tape. We must remain until the work is done... whatever it be...

Moniq leaves immediately with the cordon tape she has had about her. Gloria follows.

Mo

(To audience, smiling.) Who is it then says, I am a villain? **(Listens)** Listen. Do you hear? Something in the blast cleared a blockage. The fountain flows again. Imagine. In all this. Gravity still draws water. Indifferent.

Scene Ten

Days later.

Mickey, Ernie and the Old Man are sitting in their respective wheel-chairs. All wearing identical dusty hospital dressing gowns. Jan and Mel are curled up on the floor apart asleep.

Mickey

That dance Ern? Cud ya squeeze in a lesson? Quick one. It's the stamping I like. Look. I dug out your tape machine. Might rouse ya **(He plays the folk dance. The batteries are running low.)** That's a sound you don't hear these days. **(Plays the music at fast-forward).** Ahh! Another sound that's gone. Like the tick of clock work.

Quiet.

(To Old Man) Alright, Captain. Bin up to much? **(Wait)** It's like you're on pause. I could clunk a button and you'd jump to life. Like a clown in a box. You'd sit up, bright as a button... ready for that chat... like you've never heard. You'd tell me it all. All that stuff behind yer curtain. Can see it all – right through ya.

Quiet.

You an' Ern. What were ya? Blood brothers? I could be yer blood brother. The three of us. Musketeers. How about it... All for one!

Quiet.

Look at us. Look at me. I'm 21.

Quiet.

An' all I keep seeing are those dogs being shot. Packs of 'em. Chopper blades slicing' a disk outta the dust-soup. I couldn't see the lines of the streets. I know them... rubbed out like pencil. Just miles of it. Brick and grey. I wouldn't've known where I was. Could've bin any war-zone **(Quiet.)** Is it all like this?

Ern moves his head. Then the Old Man. Then they are both still.

I gave my legs fighting t' defend it. Morris dancing. NOW look. Who knew it were all made a matchsticks? Who knew? **(Looking up.)** Aint any stars.

Quiet.

Lot a good laying on of hands turned out....

Rob enters with his satchel. Walking around agitatedly. Sees Mickey.

Rob **(Whispering)** I've been doing some sums. You're gonna need a lot. Those chairs don't come cheap. I thought.... Cheetah legs... When Ern's money comes through.... From the house.... The girls don't know their tits from their arses.... Can tell 'em anything. Three way split.... They get half a third... me and you.... Third each. What you think?

Small quiet.

Mickey Alright Rob.
Rob Great. Great. We look after our boys.

He pats Mickey on the shoulder. Mickey wheels himself out. Rob takes himself and his satchel out excitedly, now looking around upwards. Quiet.

Mel wakes with a start. Sweating. Hands on stomach. After a moment.

Mel Jan. You awake? Jan! You awake?
Jan **(Waking)** Always awake for you pet.
Mel Listen. Can you hear something?
Jan No.
Mel It's not right is it. Nothin'
Jan Not even street lights humming
Mel Do they hum?
Jan If you listen.
Mel Fridge's hum. At night.
Jan They hum all the time... you just hear them at night....
Mel Cos you listen.
Jan Cos everything's quiet.

Quiet.

Mel Quiet now int it? Thought I heard water. But it stopped.

Quiet.

Mel Old men breathin'. An'..... nothin' **(Quiet)** I miss that loud-hailer.

Jan We could pray

Mel Nah. No point.

Quiet.

Jan Been thinking about the house. His. Don't know what you'd do with so many rooms. So much garden. It'd be a job just to.... **(Quiet.)** Didn't see much of it.... But it stuck with me. It was something I'd never have.... Really was another world. I wondered how he'd fill his time without all this and that. Without stuff. There was a girl at school without a telly. What did she do all night? I can't imagine filling up all that space. **(Quiet)** Now look... all there is is space. An' empty time. Just a blank. I don't know how..... what..... you know?

Mel has a sudden sharp, stabbing pain in her stomach.

Jan What is it, pet?

Another pain.

Jan What is it?

Mel Here....

Jan I knew there was something. I'll get the doctor.

Mel No, it'll pass. Don't want him touchin' me.

Jan How long has...

Mel Since the.....

Another pain. Then it begins to subside.

Jan Not had it before?

Mel Once....

Jan You're not....?

Mel No, I'm not! Less it's an immaculate conception...

Jan You've had loads of.....

Mel Ya just think that 'cause I come across.....

Jan No chance?

Mel No. I told ya. In the blast. It passed right through. And some grain of something started to move in me. Here. I don't sleep. Picturing it growing. Doublin' and doublin'. A speck of dust pushed right through me so fast....the blast sparked life in it. I don't sleep. Picturing it opening up like a clotted, dusty bird. Now it's started peckin' at my innards. Sharp. Like it'd push its head out beak-first.

Another pain.

Jan **(Taking her in her arms.)** Your imagination. It's bruising... or a bit of internal bleeding. And our diet's been terrible. Dust just doesn't do that, love.... You know that don't ya? It's something ordinary. Please.... Ask the doctor... he's a GP.

Mel I need a cup o' tea! **(She cries)**

Jan cradles her, comforts her.

Jan We'll look after you. I promise, pet. Things are bad enough without yer imagination chippin' in... painting' pictures. We'll look after ya. And if it gets worse.... You'll have to let Doctor Beardy have a look. Plenty he could do. It's a medical establishment. **(She looks around her at the ruins.)**

Quiet.

Jan I been thinking. Least it meant we didn't go through.... The money's still where it should be.... This was a let out. Couldn't've planned it better myself. And when the cordon's lifted... like Doc said.... back to normal. I'll have nothing to do with it..... or him.

(Looks at the Old Man)

I forget you're here. I'm sorry. When we're out.... You come an' live with me. We'll buy a stair lift!

She settles down to sleep. Still cradling Mel.

The lift comes down.

Rob falls onto the stage. Listening to the lift. Intense. Distracted. Sharpe enters behind him.

Sharpe Come and lie down. We can cuddle. You've got to stop walking around. You've cut a line in the dust. Come and lie down. You need to rest. I need to rest. Please, Robert. Look.

She shows him the rubber gloves and some chocolate. She exits. He follows, still looking up.

The stage is still for a moment.

Rob enters again. The satchel pressed to his chest.

He looks around.

Salutes the Old Man and exits.

Sharpe enters exasperated.

Sharpe **(To audience)** Seems like a year ago. We spoke. About the availability of nursing care within our new facility..... **(Quiet)** The offer's closed. We're full.

Quiet.

I'm the queen of a hole in the ground. Drives right through.... Sky to floor, to basement to foundations, to soft earth, to bedrock. Heat rises from it it's so deep. Drilled. Quite a cut.

Quiet.

Look at my hair. I've not seen water steam for months.

I should leave him to it. It's something to do.....

She goes.

Black.

Scene Eleven

Weeks later. It has stopped snowing but there is still dust in the air. Light through the hole in the roof. Everyone but Mo is assembled. The old man is back in the centre. His chair is in a position which makes him raised subtly higher than normal.

**Mickey and Ernie (still attached to the drip) are in their chairs.
The others are seated on the floor.
Gloria is sitting alone to the side.**

Quiet.

Mel Hungry.

Rob There is nothing.

Mickey I've started on the drugs trolley. There's a whole store room. Keep us going for years.

Mel I hope my cat's being fed.

Jan I'd a pile of ironing. Top of my list.

Mel How many lottery draws have we missed?

Jan Could be millionaires. An look at us.

Mel Walk-in bath. Sick of it. I want me own bath. Me own power-shower!

Sharpe I want a decent chardonnay.

Mel Can a scrumpy'll do me.

Jan Don't

Sharpe Box of Thorntons

Jan Quality Street do me.

Mel Own-brand cooking bar'll do me.

Rob Pint of Theakstons
Mickey Pot with an handle.
Jan Pub Sunday dinner. Plate rammed. Need two hands.
Mel Carvery.
Mickey Carvery.

Quiet.

Mel They know we're still here right? They haven't left us.
Rob Cordon's intact. Doc's remained in communication.
Mel How has he? Phones are down last thing I heard. He been slipping notes out?
Rob Semaphore, maybe Melanie.
Mel It's not funny.
Rob The instruction is to stay inside the cordon until the danger is passed.
Mel We're gonna wait? On his say-so?
Jan Why no food parcels?
Rob What?
Jan If they're monitoring us... keeping an eye on us... why no food parcels? Could air-lift them through the hole in the roof.
Rob Bring the rest of the roof in on us.
Mel I'm hungry.
Mickey These red ones take the edge off. Listen. I've got it. Close your eyes. **(He waits for them to do so.)** I've been at five-a-side with Spicer and Muppet. Come back to your house **(Rob)** I've had a shower and a quick one (sorry ladies). We're sitting on the decking. Magnolia tree blooming. Sun's shining. Ernie's with us. Feeling better. Everyone right as rain. Rob's at the barby. Got the pinny on I bought him. With the tits. Draft Stella in our hands. Bottle of Chardonnay for the girls **(To Sharpe)** You've come round to see 'Bobby'. Hot. Mel's got her bikini top on. Half-pound burgers sizzling. Flies on the mayo lid. An Jan's whipped us up a Chicken Tikka Massala. Oven cooked. She brings it out with her oven gloves. Flowery ones. Naan from the curry house. Microwave pings. Papodoms. Starters anyone? Sky's blue. Not a speck in the air. Patio door's open. We've turned the flat-screen round so we can see it from the decking. Playing the Argies. Semi. We're winning. Two minutes to go. Everyone takes a drink.

He waits for everyone to raise their imaginary glasses.... Including, unnoticed, the Old Man.

One of those moments.

After we've won. We pull the speakers to the windows. Me and Mel dancing. Everyone.

Mel notices the Old Man who still has his hand raised.

Mel **(Going to the Old Man)** And where were you at Mickey's party? Forgotten. That's where. HE can come Mickey, can't he? What'll you wear? Wear something smart. Officer's dress-suit. White. Your broad shoulders. Hold a young girl's world up. He's standing with you and Ern, Mickey. Clear of the

barby. Doesn't want to mess that white suit up. He's on his own two feet. He's 52. Prime. Straight as a die. Later. He might sing to us. Army song. Voice rich as fruit-cake. **(Wait)** You've seen it all. I know. Those get-ups. They're all yours. I know. The trunk. I know.

She takes his hand and puts it under her top.

Mel Strong hands. Still.

Rob goes to Sharpe and makes her stand. He tries to kiss her. She rejects him at first but then surrenders into it. They kiss.

Mickey (hands out) Anyone fancy it?

The lift rattles past.

Mel stands. Then Jan. Then the others.

Sharpe No.No.No....

Mel Someone...

Rob There's no up-stairs. That's the sky.

The lift goes down.

Mickey Phantom limb.

Quiet.

Gloria It is time to leave.

Rob We can't leave. Need to wait for the cordon....

Gloria It is time to leave. You can just walk.

Quiet.

Mickey We prefer it here. We like the company.

Mel It isn't safe....

Jan We're awaiting word...

Quiet.

Gloria At arms length there are such things....

Quiet.

Xandi Lluyedo ufaosidi. A baby should not hang. Cgindu fiyudo ka. They tie me to his feet. Ptengo xranye. So I am the weight that pull. Ptengo xrengo. I am the weight that pull.

Mel lets out a scream. Her stomach pain returns.

Xylansc inbulo.

Jan Get the doctor!

Mel No

Jan Find him.

Mel I wont have his hands.... **(another pain)**

Jan Someone!

No-one moves.

Gloria I can help here.

Before anyone can object she takes Mel in her arms and places a hand on her stomach.

Gloria Xylansc inbulo. Xylansc inbulo. Xylansc inbulo.

Mel calms.

Gloria sings.

Rob wanders out... looking intently around again.

Sharpe follows.

Helicopter arrives. Air through the hole.

Mickey **(Shouting.)** My boys. Boys. Come back for us! See, still people....

The helicopter leaves.

Mickey Boys! Boys!

Gloria has carried on singing throughout.

Mo enters, summoned by the noise and air. Followed by Moniq.

Mo If it be now. As I feel it shall. I shall go clean.

He removes his hand from his bare chest.

He has cut a neat line around the crucifix on his chest. It is gone.

Instead a clean, bright red square of muscle-wall.

Mo As deep as they knew to cut to scar. I know to cut deeper to cleanse.

Gloria continues to sing in her mother tongue.

Mickey **(Pointing at Mel)** Is she knocked up? You knocked up? In here? Who was it? Wont me. Who was it?

Jan She isn't, Mickey. It's something else. We don't know.

Mickey Who was it? Who was it?

Gloria exits with Mel. Jan follows with Ern followed by Mickey still questioning.

Mo remains staring at the hole in the roof. Moniq watches for a moment and then exits with the Old Man. Who looks back at Mo and he is wheeled out.

Mo This was to be it. I felt the rush of heaven's air blow through every room. I felt the beat of Gabriel's precious wing. I ran to supplicate myself. My shameful, unworthy face. To look into the eyes of God.

When I look through. To the other side. All I see is the pounding, industrial heart of a knife-bladed iron wasp.

You have supplanted god. I am abandoned. He has been blown from on high. His pillars topple. He falls the path of Lucifer. Crashes into sun-scorched desert rock. Melts into simple heat. God is dead. Why else would he abandon me here? With such as these.

(Referring to his scar) I would have come to you clean. You would heal me. Dress me for honouring. **(Wait.)** Why have you forsaken me? **(Wait.)** Will you strike me if I repeat? God is dead! Three times and it is so. God is dead! **(He cowers. Looks up. Nothing.)**

He looks around the room. Up to the hole again.

I have seen through. To the gardens of paradise. They are empty.

We are alone. But for ourselves.

Quiet.

What happens now?

He looks up through the hole and down through the other.

The lights fade as he looks from one to the other.

Puts out his hands as if to feel the warmth rising from below.

Black.

Scene Twelve

Later. Darker. Light through the hole.

The Old Man's trunk is in the room. It is open. He has on just the garment about his middle. His skin is leathery, vibrant, alive.

He is looking into the trunk. Still. Everyone else is asleep under old hospital blankets. There is a ladder poking up from the hole.

The Old Man takes out each piece of clothing and inhales its scent deeply. He lays them at the side of the trunk with care.

The chrome mirror is beside him. He momentarily offers each piece to his body, glancing in the mirror, before folding.

Noises below. The ladder moves.

The Old Man folds the last piece and returns to his chair just as...

Rob emerges awkwardly from the hole followed by Sharpe. They have medical waste bags in their hands which contain snacks, food, drink, bottled water, drugs, chocolate.

Rob Stash in the usual.

Sharpe Rest's running low.

Rob Was us thought of scavenging down there. No-one knows there's a sweet trolley too.

Sharpe Doc'd know.

Rob He won't eat this junk food.

Sharpe It'd be a treat....

Rob Stash it. I'll let Melanie and Janet know in the morning.

She goes out.

Rob sees the Old Man awake.

Rob **(Whispers)** Kitkat?

Quiet.

(To audience) I've seen it. I've been wandering. Looking. The lift isn't broken. It's a miracle. Of architectural engineering. The lift was added later – square steel tube up the side of the old building. Lifting mechanism's in the basement. Deep in the foundations. Untouched. Functioning. The lift still moves! Only... above this floor.... there's nothing. I've seen it... upstairs rooms, loft, roof... sheered off. Blown out. But the lift still works right up to the top of the shaft. The steel shaft's solid as a prison cage. It withstood the blast... without a scratch. Engineering miracle. It stands like a slender, mirrored tower... a minaret. The highest thing for miles. I've taken the lift to the top. Looked out. **(Gestures. Laughs.)** That gushing sometimes. Old fountain. Never seen it work. But now.... Two miracles. Rest.... Pancake. **(Laughs.)** Boom! A bloodless massacre. People would've vanished before they knew anything.... A decent way to go.

But, shhh! They don't need to know.... The expectation of home is a powerful thing.

Been the edge of the cordon too. A few steps beyond. It's just plastic tape. Tatters in the wind. It's odd what survives a blast.

He looks in the satchel. Unwraps an object wrapped in cloth. It is the loud-hailer we heard in Act One. It has a small “Jesus saves” sticker on the side of the misshapen horn.

I haven't dared try it. The noise. But it switches on. Smaller than I'd thought it would be.... For the sounds it produces. Should I try? Quickly.

He begins to do so.

I don't know what to say. What is there to shout about?

He thinks. Looks at the sticker.

(Sings) “All Things Bright and Beautiful...”

It is very loud.

He stops, expecting others to come. They don't.

(Sings) All Things Wise and Wonderful
The Lord God made them all”

Stops. Waits.

He wraps it up again and puts it in the satchel.

He finds papers in the satchel. Looks at them. Rips them up and throws them down the hole.

Looks at the chocolate in his hand.

Course they'd have a sweet trolley. Young girls mainly. Stressful time. Need chocolate. You wanna see the price list. It's not fair to rip 'em off.

He opens the chocolate and eats.

So much for leather briefcases. “Papers” **(laughs)** Think this is us now. This is it. It's not so bad. That cordon's uncrossable. You'd have leapt it in your day. I know you would. Things change. We're better here. When the food's gone... we've got Mickey's drug's cabinet.

He takes a bright red pill.

Sun'll be up soon. Not that you'd know. I'm going off my watch. **(He looks at it)** Which seems to have stopped. Battery. Should've bought a wind-up. Wonder if they've got any hearing-aid batteries that'd fit? **(Loud)** YOU'D THINK SO WOULDN'T YOU!

Quiet.

He didn't act in malice. **(Ernie)**He thought it best. “Merciful Release” he would've said. You might have agreed. Compos Mentis, you'd've agreed. Still the best friend you've got. His actions have not been without consequence. Don't worry on that account.

Sharpe returns.

She notices the folded clothes beside the trunk. Looks at Gloria.

- Sharpe** That fancy dress stinks. If we had powder I'd have 'em on a full cycle. Washing label or not. All in. Hot wash. Flower of the forest conditioner. Hang them on the line. Fresh air.
- Rob** Should we go and.... eat chocolate?
- Sharpe** You're more yourself.
- Rob** I am. And ravenous.
- Sharpe** I'm pleased.
- Rob** Chocolate, my love?
- Sharpe** I can be persuaded.

They exit.

Ernie lowers his chair from its tilted position. It gives a long squeek. He pulls out the drip feed.

- Ern** They looked parched as paper. If they could've drunk it, they would. Saline you see. Moniq kept me topped up. Don't ya love her? But my particular sedative - all gone. Short shelf-life. Bin unadulterated saline for a week. I'm the most well hydrated bugger here. Famished. **(To Old Man)** But I see your point now. Silence. It's a good trick if you can pull it off. As long as you know when it's enough. Let it out, Captian. Like guts on hari-kari night.

Quiet.

Unless you'd rather keep schtum. Probably wise. How long is it now?

Quiet.

I'm sorry. The pillow. Not my choice to make. It isn't pretty, captain. But sometimes it is a rational choice. But it a choice I can make only for myself.

He lifts a pillow from behind himself. Sniffs it.

- Ern** It was this pillow. I clung to is when they felled me.... With a clawed hand. The girls let me keep it.

He notices the room. Presses two fingers to his forehead. Sees Moniq and Gloria. Holds up the pillow.

- Ern** **(A nod.)** Ladies. Those looks of yours were precious to me in the last weeks. And discreet. Thank you.
- Gloria** Won't you stay and dance for us?
- Ern** Need a stretch.

He stands and stretches and then suddenly and momentarily slips into a furious, energetic dance as before. The nurses clap. It ends with a heavy, heavy stamp. Then silence.

Ern Well. What's do be done? **(Quiet. He takes out the Old Man's butchering tool. Quiet.)** Would you believe it? What we learnt... **(He points to them, they understand.....)**

Moniq and Gloria To be or not to be....

Ern That is the question, ladies. **(Quiet.)** When I see an abyss. I dance right in.

He reaches for his forehead again. Massages the vein.

There's always the right tool.

He feels for the vein.

Gloria and Moniq sit down.

He nicks the vein with the knife. Shudders. A sigh. There is a small towel to hand. He holds it to the cut. It reddens through the following.

An emaciated young woman in a theatre gown appears in the hole on the ladder. She is half way through. Watches as Ernie begins to weaken. He clicks on the tape-recorder that has been in his chair. Slowed folk music as before. He walks to the open trunk.

He sees the young woman. They share a look of recognition. A smile. She drops her eyes and walks to the trunk.

She holds his hand as he steps in.

Ern S'alright. I'm sorry. **(He holds her.)**

He begins to fade to his knees. She helps him down. She looks around the room. Then gently lowers his head down. She lies down with him and snaps down the heavy lid. The metal clasp clunks together.

Gloria and Moniq lie down.

IT is quiet. Then brief, furious energy from the trunk. It rattles. Thuds. Then is still.

Mel enters. Gloria looks up again towards Mel.

Mel She did nothing. But it came away. Holding on like a muscle in spasm. Rebelling in shock. No dust. No bird. Just the usual. Filled a silver bucket.

She puts her fingers to her forehead. Feeling for the pulse. Finds it. She sees the chest. See the ladder.

Looks into the hole.

Climbs down the ladder.

Black.

Scene Thirteen

Light through the hole in the roof. A white sunrise. A single string of bird-song.

Old Man as in One. Moniq is washing him. She is singing quietly to himself.

Moniq Morning bath, Mr Dav. Pull this damn dust from your bones.

Gloria enters with the steamy bucket on wheels and a mop.

Gloria Where to begin?

Moniq Await instruction. It is sure to come.

Sharpe enters.

Sharpe Ladies. We must make ready for imminent release. We all saw the sun begin to rise. First time since.... It must mean something. I want the place looking spik.

Gloria And the hole, Miss Sharpe?

Sharpe Nothing we can do about the hole without a first-class builder, Gloria. And before you ask – the ceiling too. Mop up to the hole but not beyond.

Moniq Very good.

Sharpe **(To audience)** Drips collected from a broken pipe. Heated on a fire of split furniture and cardex files.

Sharpe exits

They wash and clean.

The child ambles on.

Moniq Your feet clean, child?

The child goes to the snow which is still lying where it fell and begins to play with it.

Moniq You clean it up now, Jeremiah.

The child is piling the snow into human shapes.

Jan enters. She has a bathrobe on. Her hair washed.

Jan Breathe of fresh air seeing a child play **(She watches. Starts.)** Why has the snow not melted? All this time. Come away from it. Is it even cold? **(She puts her hand into it.)** It's cold.

Moniq The air is cold. More than it feels. Keeps it firm.

Jan **(Seeing them at work)** Can I help?

Moniq Wipe down the chairs.

Jan Thank you.
Gloria Cloths in the bowl.

Jan takes a cloth. Wrings it out and wipes down the chairs rigorously.

Jan Lovely to have your hands in warm water.
Moniq There are gloves in the sluice.
Jan I like the feel.

Mel returns.

Jan Cloth?
Mel I've just had a bath.
Jan So have I.
Mel I've got nails.
Jan Where did you get those from?
Mel Always carry nails. Bin saving 'em. No. I'll watch.

They clean.
Mel looks down the hole.

Mel Things have moved.
Jan Rob and "Susie". Been on a raid.
Mel The bucket's moved.

She looks up through the hole. Then at the child.

Mel Why ya you letting the kid make a mess?
Jan Playing.
Mel Why's the snow not melted?
Jan It's cold.

Rob and Sharpe enter together.

Sharpe Janet. The girls are more than capable....
Jan I want to keep busy.
Mel I thought we were going
Jan Can't leave it a mess. We've been guests.
Mel Guests!
Rob Let's part on a pleasant note.
Mel So we are going.
Rob The cordon is apparently down. Cut to tatters and not replaced.
Mel Has anyone been out to see?
Sharpe When we're done here?

She takes to mopping too.

Rob I think I'll write an account. Of the whole sorry business. There must be money in it. I will interview you all in turn.
Mel Should do pictures

Rob Professionally done.
Jan Get a ghost writer.
Rob I don't need a ghost writer. I've got lovely prose.
Mel Are you not hungry any more.
Rob Reds. **(Quiet.)** I just don't know there'll be a market for such a thing.
(Quiet.) I'll write it for posterity. For what future might come.

Mo enters with a refuse bag.
He empties it out on the floor. Sweet wrappers. A shiny pile.

Mo Sweeties.
Jan We shared the food.
Mo Chocolate. You gorged yourselves
Mel It was never a gorge.
Jan You'd've heard us if it was a 'gorge'.
Mo Whilst we grow pale for lack of nutrition. This is fathomless gluttony.
Insatiable, godless gluttony.
Mickey Steady on, mate. S'only a bit a chocolate.
Jan I wouldn't exactly call it 'nutritional'
Mo I want my share. I want my sweets!
Jan If you think about it... you had more of the good stuff because we had this.
If we'd split the lot... you would've got a share of something you didn't
want AND wasn't good for you.
Mo A simple square of your chocolate. I though we had an understanding.
Mickey With you? Never.
Sharpe We are sorry.
Rob Took a lead.
Mo **(Trying to remain calm.)** You were party to this, Susan? As your
employer I am very disappointed. **(Exploding)** Give me my sweets, sir. I
demand satisfaction
Rob You'll be disappointed on the satisfaction front....
Mo A single square of chocolate. I single square. I have seen these party-
colours around me all my life. Now I want my share, sir. I want my share!
Rob If you've never had it... make you sick...
Jan If you're not used.....
Mo A square of chocolate!

**Mel takes out a fairly large square of chocolate wrapped in gold foil
and throws it to him.**
**He sits on the floor with it; taking his time over unwrapping,
smelling, licking with the tip of his tongue and finally eating it. The
scene continues as he does all this. He answers their questions
absently.**

Quiet.

Rob We got carried away. It gave us something to stay interested in. Playing
naughty children. You know. Own devices. Cat's away. You're the cat.

They look at the child absorbed in the snow.

Gloria They are leaving doctor.
Mel Is the cordon down?
Mo I have heard nothing.
Mel Since when?
Mo A little time.
Mel So why are we still sitting here?
Mo I have heard nothing. I haven't received a release notice.
Jan Maybe their attentions been taken by something else.
Mo That is possible.
Mickey I wish the telly was working
Mel We can't wait for an 'all clear' when there might be no-one there to give it.
Mo The principle is precautionary.
Rob No news is not good news.
Jan That's pessimism. Things are bad enough.
Sharpe At least the floors will be clean.

Quiet.

Mickey **(Calling to the child)** Want to play? When we get out. Haven't got a ball. Can't manage a kick about. Could play catch. **(No response)** I'll roll some papers into a ball. **(No response)** You speak English? **(No reply)** That's rude kid. Don't ignore me! I'm talking to you!
Mel Mickey
Mickey I'm talking to you.

**He makes to move to the child, pushing himself.
The child stands and looks at him**

Mickey If I could get out...

**Moniq takes Mickey and wheels him to the far side of the room. She puts the brake on and makes an operation which makes the brake clunk and lock.
He tries to push himself but can't. Struggles furiously.**

Moniq You'd think my sister'd missed her Jeremiah.
Mickey What have you done? I can't...
Moniq Behave yourself!

He struggles a little more then gives up. Slumping.

Moniq (To child) Mamma coming soon. Mamma sick. Mamma haunted.
Mickey I've had training..... I could snap...

He cries quietly. Quiet.

Mel Where's Ernie?

Quiet.

Rob We're leaving.

Jan Let me get dressed. **(Makes as if to leave.)**
Mel I'll come with you. Clean knickers.
Sharpe Finish him. Get him dressed.

Moniq takes the Old Man off.

Rob You have no objections, Doctor?
Mo **(Tasting the edge of the chocolate)** You could have left at anytime.
Rob Of course. We're not leaving against medical advice. Not taking our own discharge.
Mo You are not my patients.
Jan No. We're not.
Moniq **(Still mopping)** Jeremiah, come here. **(He carries the human shapes he has made to her)** See what he fashion from dust. We should not wait for prophets to speak. It is a trick. We should open our eyes and speak. We should name what is seen. I name the tape. I name... "the line you do not cross". I name the cordon, "At my hands". I name this city: "Laid waste by dead gods". I name us, **(Holding up the child's model)** Cold, dead dust waiting for life". I name the child, "Come expectant on the horizon".

Quiet.

Mo You are safer here. We have a roof. A little food. Pills. We may have the tap water. A few squares.
Rob Out there?
Mel I'm not hungry. Or thirsty.
Jan It is so quiet.
Moniq Doctor

Mo fills his mouth with the whole square of chocolate. It is too thick in his mouth. He gags. Struggles to swallow it.

Moniq Doctor. It is too much. Too rich.
Mel He can't stomach it
Jan He's gonna throw....

He doesn't throw up but he does spit the chocolate out.

He lifts his head and tears open his shirt. His hands on this red raw sore. Blood seeping quietly through his fingers.

Mo Is there no solace to be had? It doesn't close. You do not have such wounds. **(Presses. Pain. Looks around and laughs. Stops himself.)** It is a sacred hole. I am a warrior. This, the centre of a righteous dirty storm. The empty, peaceful centre of the zero. A ground zero. Of many. Many. I name you, "The last".

A moment, then Uproar. Mickey impotently tries to jump at Mo. Raising himself up and down on strong arms. Rob does launch himself at Mo. Falls on him. Mo doesn't resist. Laughs again. Rob retreats almost immediately. Straightens himself.

Amidst this Gloria enters walking ahead of the Old Man who is dressed in a full military dress uniform.

Rob Get him out of that “get-up”.
Gloria The last piece. The trunk has locked.
Sharpe You’ve washed it. Ironed it.
Moniq It snapped itself sharp on hanging.

Quiet.

Jan I’d follow him.
Mickey Who is he?

Mel exits.

Quiet. They are all standing. Mickey pulling himself to height on the back of a chair.

The Old Man speaks in a rich voice.

Gloria speaks across him as if to translate.

Old Man Impra Kuhastranau impra insuplanah is impra tracnishur sic impra nauislan orpeniou. Te osthren impra pur an yohl.

Gloria Passed labours. Past loss. Past work of hands. Past butchery. Past trials. Past sacrifice. Past struggle. For what?

Quiet.

Old Man For what?

Quiet.

The angled mirror begins a journey of its own accord. It travels the room and moves to the centre of the space angled upwards. Light hits the mirror and fills the room with myriad spots of light. Mickey looks up at the exploding universe light display. Laughs.

Mel returns. She is fully, smartly dressed. She has a bag. She moves the mirror so the light show stops.

Mel I’m leaving. Into the blank frame. Blinking.

Black.

The End.