

### Characters

DIANE, *late forties/fifties*  
 NAT, *forties/fifties*  
 JULIA, *twenties*  
 TIERNEY, *fifties*

### Setting

A house in the countryside.

### Author's Note

It would be preferable if stage management remained invisible for this play and the actors make any necessary changes to the set between scenes themselves. This way we also get an opportunity to watch them living together.

### Scene One

*In the darkness we hear DIANE's voice through speakers. It should sound intimate. We hear her thoughts. Lights onstage gradually reveal an isolated house in the countryside.*

DIANE (*voice-over*). I met the man on the road. We had both abandoned our cars and decided to take our chances cutting through the fields. We broke into a house beside the water and locked ourselves in. The waves of bird attacks continued for the next two days, punctuated by terrifying hours of inexplicable silence. The man, who said his name was Nat, was sick. I nursed him while he slept through a restless delirium. And that night was the last broadcast we ever heard.

*New England in the near future. It is night. The shutters are closed. We hear birds rustling outside the house. A fluttering of wings here and there. NAT is asleep. DIANE is trying to tune in a radio. All she gets is static with the odd voice trailing in and out. She adjusts the dial and begins to pick up a signal as voices fade in. Throughout the broadcast, random voices and sounds obscure what's being said. There is chaos in the studio from where the broadcast is coming.*

VOICE 1. Okay, so centres, aid centres, places where people can feel safe, somewhere to sleep. They know there's a meal there...

VOICE 2. I never said that. I can't say that.

VOICE 1. Yes, but they can...

VOICE 2. There are people there, they seem organised, maybe it's safer there, that's what we're...

VOICE 1. We're saying Mountstewart, St Thomas, Port Argus...

VOICE 2. Port Argus won't be able to take the strain.

VOICE 1. Well, Lowtown, Newchurch?

VOICE 2. Well... And Winford, we think, although...

VOICE 3 (*distant, off-mic*). No...

VOICE 1. Sorry, what?

VOICE 3. No, there was no... eh...

VOICE 2. From Winford...

VOICE 1. Don't go to Winford.

VOICE 2. No, what we are saying is what we can't confirm. I'm not trying to tell people where to go. I'm saying that I've been given this advice, that I have received...

VOICE 1 (to VOICE 3). What's the situation with Winford?

VOICE 3 (unintelligible).

VOICE 2. Because, I wouldn't even have said St Thomas myself.

VOICE 3 (distant). There are people there...

VOICE 1. There are people there. One could go to St Thomas...

VOICE 2. So it seems but...

VOICE 1. City Councillor John Little announced today that if he couldn't organise a quorum here tonight in Mountstewart that he will propose a... I can't read this...

VOICE 4. Listen, the situation is...

VOICE 1. Sorry, Dr Brodie, you want to come in there.

VOICE 4. The situation is – (Interference.) simply because no one could have prepared for a...

*Interference...*

VOICE 2. This is what I'm saying, we are all in the same situation, but there's no point in...

VOICE 3 (distant). They got into the gym at Cottonhills last night...

VOICE 1. Sorry, what?

VOICE 3. They got into the gym at Cottonhills last night so...

VOICE 4. You see, once they're in...

VOICE 2. We're talking about crows, sea birds, robins, sparrows! I mean, you think a man could... a grown adult can...

VOICE 4. Yes, but your average gull is big! Four or five or six pounds in weight coming straight down out of the sky, easily

reaching speeds of forty miles an hour, can cause a tremendous amount of damage to a...

NAT *stirs restlessly.*

NAT. Sarah?

DIANE *switches off the radio.*

Sarah! No! Don't!

DIANE *goes to him, taking a cloth from a bowl of water to soothe his forehead.*

No! Stay away from me!

DIANE. Shh...

NAT *suddenly springs up towards the door.*

NAT. I have to get out!

DIANE *puts her hands on his shoulders.*

DIANE. No, don't do that.

NAT *grabs her roughly, forcing her back across the room.*

NAT. I'll fucking kill you! I mean it...

DIANE. You're just having a dream. It's okay, it's me, it's Diane.

NAT *looks at her, his eyes are wild.*

NAT. It's so cold.

DIANE. Why don't you lie down? Here, come on...

DIANE *goes and holds the blanket for him to get back into his 'bed'. He looks around the room.*

NAT. The baby was here.

DIANE. No. It's okay...

NAT. She was over there. She came in the door. She... (Goes towards the stairs.)

DIANE. No, come over here and lie down.

*He obediently goes to her and goes to lie down, suddenly springing up.*

NAT. I hope she didn't go back out!

DIANE (*gently*). No, no, it's alright. Shh... Just try and rest. Try and stay warm. I'm here.

NAT *quietens down and we hear birds shuffling around outside, enlivened by the voices.*

### Scene Two

*Dusk. DIANE is at the stove, putting some fuel in. We can hear some wings flapping outside and scratching or pecking here and there. NAT is awake, watching DIANE.*

NAT. What time is it?

DIANE. Oh, hi. Are you hungry?

NAT. I'd love a drink of water.

DIANE. Yeah.

*She pours him a cup of water from a plastic bottle. He gulps it down.*

More?

*He nods and she pours him another cup.*

NAT. Thanks. How long was I asleep?

DIANE. Two days.

NAT. What?

DIANE. Your temperature broke yesterday. It must have been at least a hundred and three.

NAT. Oh... I'm sorry; did you say your name was Diana?

DIANE. Diane.

NAT. Oh yes, Diane. No sign of the owners, of this place?

DIANE. No.

NAT. Is everything...?

DIANE. Everything's... the same.

NAT. No news or...?

DIANE. Nothing for the last twenty-four hours.

NAT. Right. God... But nothing like, from the Government or...? I mean, how can all the phones all just be out?!

DIANE. I don't know. They think it's the tides.

NAT. What is?

DIANE. The birds go out with the tides. And they come back at high tide. Every six hours.

NAT. Oh.

DIANE. I mean, they don't know why.

NAT. God... I thought maybe it was all a dream.

DIANE. I know. It's high tide now.

*Pause. They listen to the birds scabbling around outside.*

NAT. Do you think they know we're in here?

DIANE. Yeah. I do.

*Pause.*

NAT. Did you say you had a daughter?

DIANE. Yes. But, you know, grown up. Moved away. Et cetera. I was on my way to see her. It was her birthday and I was... going to...

*Pause.*

NAT. What about your husband?

DIANE. We're separated.

NAT. Right.

DIANE. He lives abroad.

NAT. Is this happening everywhere?

DIANE. It seems to be.

*Pause.*

NAT. What does he do?

DIANE. Who?

NAT. Your husband.

DIANE. He's a writer. We're both writers.

NAT. Really?

DIANE. Yeah, really.

NAT. What do you write?

DIANE. Books... you know. I haven't written one for a while but...

NAT. Well, I'd say it's tough enough to... to write a book, I mean...

DIANE. Do you have any children?

NAT. Well, I... no, they're my... the children of my ex.

DIANE. Ex-wife?

NAT....My... ex-girlfriend – or partner, I suppose. Not wife. We were living together. But not... not recently.

DIANE. Right. *(Short pause.)* Well, you were a family.

NAT. Yeah.

*A loud smash somewhere makes them spring up. NAT grabs a hammer and wields it like a weapon.*

DIANE. How old are they?

NAT. Six and eight. But I haven't seen them in about... ten months, a year.

DIANE. Right. Well, that's hard.

NAT. Yeah. And the break-up was... you know...

DIANE. Mmm...

NAT. It was... *(Looks at the shutters where some wings are heard flapping, birds bang against the glass.)* difficult, so...

DIANE. Yeah. Well, that's...

NAT. Yeah.

*Pause*

DIANE. Was this Sarah?

*Pause.*

NAT. Yeah, how do you know?

DIANE. Because you were talking to her.

NAT. What do you mean?

DIANE. You were talking to someone called Sarah. You pushed me right across the room.

NAT. Are you serious?

*DIANE just gives a little wry smile and raises her eyebrows.*

Oh, I'm sorry. Did I hurt you?

DIANE. No – *(Beat.)* just my finger.

NAT. Oh, no. I'm sorry. Is it bad?

DIANE. No, it just got bent right back, you know when that happens.

NAT. Oh God... Listen, I'd never do anything like that. I mean...

DIANE. I know.

NAT. I'm sorry.

DIANE. No, it's okay.

*Pause. A concerted effort by a bird to fly repeatedly through a window makes them fall silent. The noise passes.*

NAT. I can't believe I did that. She's absolutely crazy. I mean, she had me locked up, you know?

DIANE *(looking at him standing there with a hammer in his hand)*. Who?

NAT. Sarah.

DIANE. In your dream?

NAT. No, like really. In real life. She's crazy.

DIANE. What do you mean 'locked up'?

NAT. Not in prison. She signed me into a... hospital. And she's the one who's nuts! That's the... that's the sick... irony.

DIANE....Right. Was this recently or...

NAT *(playing it down)*. No... About a year ago?

DIANE....Right.

NAT. I mean, I wasn't well. I'm not saying that I wasn't. I certainly wasn't a hundred per cent. I was just suffering from a... a form of exhaustion really. But the way she decided to... to deal with it was... it was hugely disproportionate.

*Pause.*

DIANE. Right. (*Pause.*) What... happened, I mean, I'm...

NAT. Oh no, it's nothing to worry about.

DIANE. Right. No. (*Pause.*) You don't mind me asking. I'm just, I don't want to...

NAT. No, no, it's fine. No, just... There were just... a lot of arguments – you know how that... is...

DIANE. Mmm.

NAT. And a lot of criticism, coming my way from her family. About money, about other things... And I'd started getting these headaches and I wasn't able to sleep.

DIANE. Right. (*Pause.*) Do you... still get headaches, or...?

NAT. No. No, not for a long time. Yeah. No, I'm okay. I was always okay, really. There was just a lot of, you know *other* stuff going on there. You know. Certain agendas. But I still... I mean, you worry about people. I mean, I just... that's where I was going when all the... the birds started to happen. Probably a stupid fucking thing to do really.

DIANE. Oh, I don't know. You know what they say.

*She gets up, tidying away her cup.*

NAT. What?

DIANE. The first cut is the deepest.

NAT. Mmm.

*He sits, looking into firelight of the stove.*

### Scene Three

*The lights bring us to daylight. The door is open. The shutters are open, revealing boards up outside the windows. NAT comes in.*

NAT. Listen, em... I think someone's been outside.

DIANE. What?

NAT. The padlock on the shed door was on the ground out there.

*He shows her.*

DIANE. Is anything gone?

NAT. I'm not sure. I thought I saw a can of kerosene in there a few days ago. It's not there now. And a shovel, I think, is gone.

DIANE. When do you think it...?

NAT. I think maybe just this morning when we were at the gas station. I mean, it might have even just been while we were down at the lake. I don't know.

DIANE. Just now?

NAT. I don't know!

*NAT walks restlessly into the hall, looking around and comes back.*

DIANE. Who would it be?

NAT. I think there's someone in that house across the lake.

DIANE. Where?

NAT. On the other side of the lake. I saw him yesterday morning when I was scavenging in the gas station. I think he had a gun, or a shotgun. He stepped back in behind the wall when he saw me.

DIANE. Why didn't you say anything?

*He shrugs.*

He must be watching us.

NAT. Yeah well, if it was him. If he's still there, I mean... I don't know.

DIANE. Let's go round there. We might see him. We might see smoke coming out of his chimney, I mean, if there's someone else living here we should... I mean, shouldn't we at least... be...

NAT. He's got a fucking gun though, Diane!

*She is taken aback by the forcefulness of his outburst. He sees this.*

I'm sorry.

DIANE. No. I know.

NAT goes. DIANE stands there.

#### Scene Four

*Night. The room is lit by a candle or two. DIANE is tuning the radio, getting only static. The wind is howling. Occasionally a thump makes her look up as a bird tries to smash its way in. NAT comes down the stairs carrying a toolbox.*

NAT. They can't get in.

DIANE. Doesn't it seem louder to you, tonight? I mean it sounds like there's a lot more of them.

NAT. Maybe they see the light. Maybe they hear us.

*DIANE wonders if NAT is telling her to shut up. She switches off the radio and sits despondently, perusing a road map. NAT regards DIANE, then reaches into a hiding place and produces a bottle of cheap sherry with a screw top with about half left in it.*

Listen, em, I picked this up in the office of the gas station, I don't know if it's... I mean it's a screw top. *(Reading label.)* It says it's wine... or sherry...

DIANE. Oh great...

NAT. I don't know when your birthday is, or was exactly, or was it your daughter's?

DIANE. Ah, Nat! It was Nina. It was her birthday.

NAT. Well, you said something about a birthday... and...

NAT gets two cups...

A birthday's a birthday. So happy birthday to Nina, right?

DIANE. Yeah. God, this is very swanky.

NAT. Well, I wouldn't say that.

*He opens the screw top.*

Fuck knows what this is like.

*He sniffs it and recoils...*

Oh Jesus

DIANE. Hit me.

*He pours them drinks.*

Thank you.

NAT. No cake, but...

DIANE. You can't have everything.

NAT. You can't have anything!

*They laugh mordantly.*

You could blow out a candle.

DIANE. No, I'm good.

NAT. Good luck.

DIANE. Cheers.

*They drink. They both grimace. DIANE proffers her cup anyway.*

DIANE *(hoarsely)*. That's not too bad.

NAT *(hoarsely)*. No!

*He pours them another drink.*

DIANE. It gives you kind of a nice warm...

NAT. Yeah, when you get it down!

*They laugh. They stand near the glow of the fire. DIANE suddenly puts her face in her hand and cries silently. NAT looks at her for a moment, unsure what to say.*

DIANE (*regaining her composure*). Sorry.

NAT. No...

DIANE. Thanks, Nat.

NAT. No...

DIANE *goes to get the map, bringing it to NAT.*

DIANE. Listen, I've been looking at this. We could get to St Thomas and back – in six hours.

NAT. Yeah...

DIANE. I mean, there's got to be a supermarket. There's got to be something.

NAT. Diane...

DIANE. We could be there in two, two-and-a-half hours. At the very least we'd have had a good...

NAT. Yeah, but...

DIANE. And even if we... if somehow we got... that we thought it was getting too late, there has to be somewhere that we could... I mean, what do we...

NAT. Shh! (*Holds his hand up to silence her.*)

*They hear shouting in the distance. Different voices. Sporadic.*

Blow out those candles!

*They quickly douse the lights. The voices fall silent. There is a lot of flapping and scratching as the birds become excited coming and going from the roof of the house.*

*They wait listening. They only hear the birds. Then they hear a church bell off in the distance. Lights fade as they listen.*

### Scene Five

*It is a bright afternoon. All is quiet. A girl of about twenty, JULIA, comes into the room, rolling a cigarette. She has a dressing over a cut on her head. She is wearing a pair of high-heeled shoes. She finds some matches. A tape is playing in a radio/cassette player. It is someone playing a piano. She smokes, taking a saucer as an ashtray. DIANE arrives, a blanket wrapped around her. She throws a cold eye on the scene. JULIA gets up and turns down the music.*

JULIA. Sorry.

DIANE. Is that the radio?

JULIA. No, I found a few tapes upstairs in a shoebox.

DIANE. Tapes will wear down the batteries.

JULIA. Okay. Sorry.

*She switches it off.*

And I found some shoes. They're going to kill me, but they'll have to do.

DIANE. How are you feeling?

JULIA. You have no idea what it means to me to be here, Diane. I can hardly believe it. I haven't felt safe like this for so long.

DIANE. How's your head?

JULIA. It's sore. But I want to start pitching in with all the chores now. When I stop feeling dizzy.

DIANE. Should you be smoking if you feel dizzy?

JULIA. Probably not.

*JULIA stubs the fag out.*

DIANE. Where did you get the cigarettes?

JULIA. I found some tobacco in a drawer upstairs. It's kind of horrible actually.

DIANE. Is it okay if you don't smoke in the house?

JULIA. Yeah, sorry, I didn't think.

DIANE (*indicating a mattress and blanket on the floor*). Are you finished with your bed?

JULIA. Yeah. Oh sorry.

*She goes to help DIANE tidy it away.*

DIANE. Show me that dressing.

DIANE *goes to JULIA and maternally looks at her wound.*

I didn't do a great job. Let me put another one on.

JULIA. Thanks, Diane.

DIANE. Lie up here.

JULIA *lies on the sofa*. DIANE *wipes her hands and gets the first-aid kit*. *She goes to JULIA and carefully removes the dressing.*

What did you say he hit you with?

JULIA. A bell.

DIANE. A bell?

DIANE *gently dabs at the wound with some antiseptic.*

JULIA. I know. He found it in the classroom where we were hiding. And this particular person, he'd been trying to... you know... trying to be with me for a few nights, I woke up and he was trying to, you know, get close to me.

DIANE. Where were the other girls?

JULIA. They were in a different classroom and in the office. I was in a kind of big closet off one of the rooms. I'd been asleep.

DIANE. How many were there?

JULIA. Two other older girls. But I don't think they would have helped me. I had to get out. I ran across a huge football field, he came after me, but he was drunk. The birds got him. I heard him trying to get back into the school, but I don't think he made it. I hope he didn't.

DIANE. The birds didn't come after you?

JULIA. No. I hid in the church for a few hours and then I started walking out down by the road, but because I had no shoes and my legs were really wobbly, I was like... Then when I saw the smoke from your chimney I just thought, God, this is a miracle!

*Pause.*

DIANE. But why did you leave Port Argus?

JULIA. It was insane there, Diane. The whole place was drunk. There was a fire in the library and everybody had to leave. We had tried to get into Mountstewart. But no one was getting in. They'd closed the whole place down. So we started fucking walking. We slept in a house out in the country like this for a night but it was too crazy. Birds got in.

*She winces in pain.*

DIANE. Sorry.

JULIA. No it's fine. Then we slept in a factory, but that was horrible. We were in the school then for two nights. They'd found a load of malt liquor in a truck and I was sleeping away from the others 'cause I knew that something was going to happen. Something bad.

DIANE *finishes dressing the wound and starts tidying up.*

Thanks, Diane.

DIANE. You're welcome. It really needs a stitch.

JULIA (*lightly touches the dressing*). Thanks for looking after me.

DIANE. Hey, anyone would do it.

JULIA. I don't know about that! Nat told me you have a daughter. Is that right?

DIANE (*nods*). Mm-hm.

JULIA. How old is she?

DIANE. Older than you.

JULIA. I hope you get to see her again soon.

DIANE. Well. We'll see...

DIANE *is over where they keep their food.*

Julia, there was a can of spaghetti here.

JULIA. What was it?

DIANE. There was a can of SpaghettiOs on top of that box there.

JULIA. I don't know.

DIANE. You didn't see it?

JULIA. No. I only had half a stock cube and some water all day.

DIANE. But it was right there.

JULIA. There's pasta in the other box.

DIANE. I know, but the canned stuff is... I'm always very careful with it, because we can mix it with other things. And we never...

*DIANE is searching for it.*

JULIA. Maybe Nat will bring some back from the gas station.

DIANE. Yeah, but that's not what I'm talking about.

JULIA. Diane, I swear to God... I was just looking for tobacco.

Diane. I didn't eat the spaghetti. I wouldn't do that.

*NAT arrives in the doorway. He carries a few things, not much.*

NAT. What's happened?

JULIA. Some food is gone missing. I was just telling Diane I didn't take it.

DIANE. I didn't say that. It's just, there was a can right here on top of the box and now it's gone.

NAT. I ate it.

DIANE. What?

NAT. I ate it.

DIANE. When?

NAT. Before I left. I had to or I couldn't walk all the way round the lake.

DIANE. Oh. Well. I'm sorry, Julia. I didn't know.

*NAT is taking off his overcoat, hat, belt, etc....*

JULIA. No. That's okay. I know. Do you want a glass of water, Nat?

NAT. What?

JULIA. Do you want a drink of water?

NAT. Hm?

JULIA. Do you want a drink?

NAT. Thanks.

DIANE. Here.

*DIANE pours a drink of water for NAT. She hands it to JULIA who brings it to him.*

NAT. Listen. *(Pause.)* There's nothing left up there. Your friends cleared it out.

JULIA. I knew they would.

DIANE. What are we going to do? Try St Thomas?

JULIA. We'll have to.

DIANE. What about we just get the fuck out of here?! Try to keep going!

NAT. There's nothing organised out there! You should have seen what they did over at the gas station. We could run into any kind of... *(Indicating JULIA's injuries.)* St Thomas is as far as we could make it.

DIANE. Well, let's do it.

JULIA. We found food in a place about four miles or five miles from here. It was a house with a shop.

NAT. Where exactly?

JULIA. On the way to Port Argus.

DIANE. How long would it take us?

JULIA. Three hours, four, maybe more, depending.

DIANE. We could do it.

JULIA. I could show you where it is.

DIANE. We could take the wheelbarrow. Or the other handcart. Take turns wheeling it through the traffic jams.

NAT. I don't know. I don't like the idea of no one being here.

*NAT begins closing up the house.*

DIANE. Why? Nat. Why?

NAT. I don't know. I just... No reason, I suppose.

JULIA. You and me could go, Nat. I can show you exactly where it is.

NAT. Let me think about it.

JULIA. We'd be quick.

NAT. Yeah, I just think it's crazy not to have checked everywhere around here before we start going miles away.

*Pause.*

DIANE. Did you get anything?

NAT. I got some candy.

*DIANE takes some rice and considers it. NAT starts shutting up the house.*

JULIA. I like candy.

*She shuts up immediately when she gets nothing from the others. The sound of birds gradually builds taking us into:*

### Scene Six

*The birds are going crazy outside the house. They are whacking into the boards, scraping, fighting. DIANE, NAT and JULIA all sit huddled in blankets. They have no lights on. They are dark, frightened silhouettes, trying to wait out the onslaught.*

*This gradually becomes:*

### Scene Seven

*Silence. It is late afternoon, near dusk. JULIA is looking out the window, peeping between the boards while NAT shaves.*

JULIA. What's the bigger one to the left?

NAT. You don't know what that one is? Have a guess.

JULIA. A sycamore?

NAT. No, those two down there are sycamores. That one there on its own, is that the one you're talking about? That's an oak.

JULIA. Oh, an oak. Do you think it might be related to, em... broccoli.

NAT. Broccoli?

JULIA. Don't you think it looks like a big broccoli?

NAT (*laughs*). I suppose it does!

JULIA. It could be.

NAT. Whoever planted everything out there knew what they were doing. You see where the line of the old ditch meets the wall down there? That's practically prehistoric.

JULIA. Yeah, I mean, you do think that...

NAT. What.

JULIA. That we're safe here?

NAT. We're... pretty... safe here. They can never get through those boards – as long as we're alert, and even if one got in, or more, we'll go in the cellar in the kitchen. Wait for the tide to go out...

JULIA. The tide could change though.

NAT. The tide won't change!

JULIA. How they react to it might change. (*Pause.*) Where's Diane?

NAT (*checking his watch*). I don't know.

JULIA. Nat?

NAT. Yeah?

JULIA. You don't think that maybe Diane feels like... that I'm like...

NAT. Diane is a good person, Julia. She's a great person. We all have to look after each other. And if someone else came here we'd have to look after them too. Right?

JULIA *nods*.

I mean, that's... I mean, this is the new... This is the new way of living. Right? I mean, we're here.

JULIA *nods*.

DIANE *enters wearing a fencing mask. She wears a coat and gloves. She carries a bag with not much in it.*

Jesus, you're cutting it close! Where did you go?

DIANE. Down to the crossroads and into the little post office. I got some candles, oh, and some confetti.

NAT... Great...

DIANE. I know.

NAT. Anything to eat? (*Throws a look at JULIA.*)

DIANE. Two cans of 7 Up. And a pack of yellow tomato seeds.

NAT. Oh well. We could grow them in here.

DIANE. I know. (*To JULIA.*) Here, I got you a watch.

JULIA. Oh. Thanks, Diane.

DIANE. The time is right. Don't mess with it and I'll show you how to wind it later. Right, we've about one hour, who's going to light the fire?

*Pause. NAT watches DIANE put her things away.*

NAT. We're okay for a couple of days, right?

DIANE. Not really. We have some rice. We have prunes.

NAT *looks at JULIA*

NAT. Turn on the light.

DIANE. What?

NAT. Turn on the light.

DIANE. Nat, I'm not in the mood!

NAT. Diane, turn it on.

DIANE. Are you serious?

*She goes to a wall switch.*

NAT. No, not that one. The lamp.

DIANE. Really?

*She goes to a switch. A lamp comes on.*

When did the power come back?

NAT. I fixed the generator. It burns a fuck-load of juice but as long as we're careful...

DIANE (*deflated*). And here I thought it was the end of the end of the world...

NAT. We could even rig up a little hotplate, if we can find one.

DIANE. All we need is the food.

JULIA. Diane. We have food.

*She produces a big basket of food.*

DIANE. Oh my God, where did you go?

NAT. I didn't go anywhere. I was working on the generator. It was Julia.

JULIA. You didn't tell me where you were going. I went after you. You were gone but I found a house with a big cellar in the back.

DIANE. Is it nearby?

JULIA. My arms are killing me! I thought I nearly wasn't going to make it!

NAT. Look, pound cake!

JULIA. Pound cake. Easter eggs. Cans of fruit. Pasta. Cans of soup.

DIANE. Where was it? Is there much left?

JULIA. I think there is. I couldn't look through everywhere properly 'cause I was afraid I was going to run out of time!

DIANE. Well, we can go back tomorrow.

JULIA. I hope I can remember where it is.

NAT. What are you talking about? Of course you'll remember.

JULIA. I nearly got lost coming back.

DIANE. Where did you go?

JULIA. Right, right over, over the other side of the lake. All the way over behind the trees, behind the quarry.

DIANE. What in the name of God were you doing all the way over there?

JULIA. I don't know, I just went for a quick look. And I... I just kept going and I just had this mad thought, 'I bet I can find something.' I knew I would.

DIANE. Julia...!

JULIA. I just thought... I'll have a quick look before I come home. I was so frightened!

DIANE. It's so dangerous going off on your own in a place like that!

JULIA. I knew the tide had gone out at one o'clock – Nat said.

DIANE. I know, but what if...

JULIA. You go off.

DIANE. I never go that far! I'm always...

NAT. Look. Diane's right, Julia, you shouldn't go off like that – without saying or... What if you ran into the people you were with before – or anything could happen.

JULIA. I didn't mean to go that far! (*Throwing things back in the box.*) I just ended up over on the other side of the lake and I just thought, 'Well, I'm here, I might as well see what I can, you know, see if I can... see if I can contribute.'

NAT. Well, yeah, no, thanks this is great, I mean... (*Looks at DIANE.*) But...

DIANE. No, it's great, but, you know... If this is someone's food and they saw you or...

JULIA. I got four bottles of wine for Nat's birthday! So now we can have a little party and cheer ourselves up, because we can even play tapes now!

JULIA *storms off up the stairs. Pause.*

DIANE. I didn't know it was your birthday.

NAT. Well... it's around now.

### Scene Eight

*Night. The piano player's tape is playing on the stereo. Three empty wine bottles stand on the table. They have all dressed up. JULIA wears a wedding dress. NAT stands opening the last bottle. JULIA holds DIANE's hand in hers, reading her palm...*

JULIA. Jesus Christ, Diane, there's an awful lot of pain here.

DIANE. Don't say that.

JULIA. No, it's all in your past.

DIANE. Good.

JULIA. All the old pain is going to melt away, Diane.

DIANE. When?

JULIA. It's all going to be gone.

DIANE. When?

JULIA. You won't believe how it can go. But it will.

NAT. Is this the only tape we have?

JULIA. Leave it on. I see so much peace in your future. You're so lucky.

DIANE. Is this all true?

JULIA. Yes.

*They laugh.*

Your whole life story is here, Diane, if you could read it you'd know.

DIANE. How can you read it? I want to believe you.

JULIA. You want to believe me because you know that it's real.

DIANE. Who showed you how to do it?

JULIA. My mother showed me. She could see a lot more than me though. She died when I was twelve.

DIANE (*sympathetic*). Oh...

JULIA. She had a room where she read fortunes up this old windy staircase down a side street in Port Argus. I used to go there after school. She used to make me sit in a big chair facing the wall to do my homework where the people couldn't see me. She had all kinds of people would come. Politicians, rich people, poor people, drunks, people who'd cry.

DIANE. Wow, what a way to grow up.

NAT. Hey, I never had my birthday cake.

JULIA. Get the pound cake, Nat!

NAT. I love pound cake...

*NAT goes to get the cake.*

JULIA. The chemicals they put in make those things last a thousand years I heard one time.

NAT. I fucking love chemicals.

DIANE (*indicating her hand*). Tell me more.

JULIA. That's all I see, all the pain stops, Diane. It's like someone opens a little door here and you step into paradise.

DIANE. That sounds like I'm going to die!

JULIA. No, it's your life, Diane.

DIANE. All the old pain...

JULIA. It's going to melt away.

DIANE. I wish I could believe it.

JULIA. You do believe it. Your body knows. Your mind wants to stop your body.

*NAT is slicing the cake.*

DIANE. Why?

JULIA. Because you're afraid. (*Pause.*) Have you ever read the Bible, Diane?

DIANE. Oh, please...

*DIANE is looking in the cups for her drink.*

JULIA. What do you mean, 'Oh, please...'

*NAT holds up a can with a white label and a distinctive green stripe, but no writing.*

NAT. Hey, Julia, what did you say was in these cans? Fruit?

JULIA. Yeah, it's pears.

NAT. Who wants pears with their cake?

*NAT is opening the can.*

JULIA. We should get a Bible. You should read it, Diane.

DIANE. I don't want to read the Bible, Julia.

JULIA. I know, but...

*DIANE turns way from her.*

DIANE. Where's my drink?

JULIA. Hey, Nat, you're next!

NAT. Next for what?

JULIA. I'll tell you your fortune.

NAT. No way!

JULIA. Why not?

NAT. I don't want to know.

DIANE. Good thinking.

NAT. Tell me something from the Bible. Something nice to cheer me up.

DIANE (*irritated*). Ohh... Nat, you're drunk.

JULIA. Diane's an atheist.

DIANE. I never said that.

NAT. No, but do tell me something. Not my fortune. Tell me something that'll make me feel happy.

JULIA (*spreads her arms a little*). 'Someone who is always thinking about happiness is a fool. A wise person thinks about death.'

*Pause. NAT looks at DIANE and back at JULIA.*

NAT. Thanks.

JULIA (*laughs*). No, that's wise words, Nat. Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is so beautiful, Diane. 'Sorrow is better than laughter; it may sadden your face, but it sharpens your understanding.'

NAT. I think I'd prefer to be happy and not understand.

DIANE. Yes.

JULIA. 'When a fool laughs, it is like thorns crackling in a fire. It doesn't mean a thing.'

My mother always said she could see herself in Ecclesiastes. She said it's like a mirror.

NAT. Who wants pears with their pound cake?

JULIA. The Bible's not just about God, you know, Diane. It's about people as well. Real people like you and me.

DIANE. Stupid people like me.

JULIA. You're not a stupid person, Diane! (*Short pause.*) Does anyone else ever feel like there's someone upstairs?

DIANE and NAT do not answer her.

NAT. Right, who wants pears? I'm having pears. Oh, balls!

JULIA. What's wrong?

NAT. I've just put onions all over my cake!

JULIA. Onions?

NAT. It's not pears, it's onions!

DIANE and JULIA start laughing.

I've ruined my birthday cake!

JULIA. No, have another slice!

NAT. Whoever heard of canned onions?

DIANE. You moron...

NAT (*looking at the can*). Where does it say it's pears?

JULIA. I don't know... I... I think it must have said 'pears' on the cardboard tray they were in...

NAT. That's a pain in the balls. That's what God gives us now for laughing at him.

NAT brings his plate to clean it off and get some more cake.

JULIA. I'm sorry, Nat.

DIANE. Have mine, Nat.

JULIA. Have mine.

NAT. No, it's alright, there's more.

JULIA. Oh, hold on!

JULIA goes and gets a little box of birthday-cake candles.

Put one of these on!

NAT lets her put a candle in his slice of cake. She lights it. They all sit at the table.

(Sings.) Happy birthday to you...

NAT. Oh no...!

DIANE joins in...

JULIA and DIANE (*singing*). Happy birthday to you, Happy birthday dear Na... at... Happy birthday to you!

They applaud him...

JULIA (*sings*). For he's a jolly good fellow, for he's a jolly good fellow,

NAT. Oh God...

JULIA. For he's a jolly good fe... el... low... Which nobody can deny. Which nobody can deny...

NAT. Please...

JULIA. Make a wish. Wait! Did you make a wish?

Pause. JULIA blows out the candle... They applaud.

DIANE. I hope you made a wish to get us out of here!

NAT stands up unsteadily and raises his drink.

NAT. I just want to say...

JULIA. Speech! Speech!

NAT. I just want to say... I know that this is... I know that this is a... well, a terrible time for all of us. For everybody. But... Be that as it may, I just want to say... to both of you, to all of us. Thank you for giving me a birthday... treat.

DIANE (*claps a little*). Thanks, Julia.

NAT. It's not easy. It's not easy for any of us. But I think that the three of us have done admirably. And I don't know what the future holds. Only Julia knows that...

*They laugh.*

JULIA. Ah fuck off...

NAT. But while we have been here. And for the time we have left to come, whatever is going to happen, I just want to say that I'm proud of... of both of you, of all of us.

DIANE. Hear, hear...

NAT. Because it's not easy and... Well... Look, we're all different people. We all have different lives and... But you know, as long as there's... (*Pause.*) kindness... there's hope, right? (*Pause.*) Every day, I've been waking up. Wondering if this is my last day alive. So frightened that this is the end, every day. But recently, I mean, just in the past few days I've been... at the end of each day, I've been actually *thankful* for that day. (*Almost starts to cry, but recovers.*) When I was a boy I always dreamt of being in the Army. Of course, they wouldn't fucking have me. But be that as it may, I always felt... safe when I was having those dreams. Because I was ready, I suppose. Ready for any disaster. We were equipped for it. We were ready. Mmm. But I feel that the three of us... we can... We can make it. I know we can. (*Shouts at the windows.*) Fuck them! Fuck you! Fuck you!

*There is a flurry of activity from the birds as they hear him shouting.*

Yeah, that's it! That's it...

NAT *laughs and goes to the shutters, banging on them to DIANE and JULIA's alarm. Then he starts to open them in a mad attempt to fight them. DIANE and JULIA go to him, shouting, 'Stop! Nat, don't!', etc.... DIANE slaps NAT across the face. NAT abruptly stops shouting and stares at DIANE while JULIA quickly closes the shutters. NAT goes back to the table. The others follow warily.*

Anyway. Thank you. Thanks. Thank you.

*Pause.*

JULIA. I always think whoever used to play that piano is still upstairs. (*Pause.*) I let someone die. About four days before I got

here. We were in a factory, in the office. Suddenly there was a loud bang and there were hundreds of birds outside. We got under the desk and a tiny little one pecked its beak through one of the windows. I just went through a door and up these stairs, I turned at the top and I looked at this girl and she was holding birds in both her hands and a bird had her eyelid in his beak and he was just pulling and pulling up towards the ceiling. (*Tearfully.*) That's all I saw and I ran upstairs and hid in an oven.

*Pause.*

NAT. You didn't let her die.

*Pause.*

DIANE. That's right.

DIANE *embraces* JULIA.

NAT. There was nothing you could do.

*Pause.*

DIANE (*fixing JULIA's hair*). The last time I saw Nina, my daughter. She had decided to go and visit her father, who lives on the other side of the world with his girlfriend and their young child. A taxi was picking her up to take her to the airport at six o'clock in the morning. I'd been up all night because I'd run out of these sleeping pills I'd been taking – and we had a huge fight. I was just so scared she'd never come back. (*Pause.*) She sent the taxi away, but I told her she was being stupid and I called her another one and she made it. She told me that she never wanted to see me again.

*Pause.*

JULIA. To kindness.

DIANE. To kindness.

*They drink. In the distance they hear dogs howling. With the music gone off they can hear the birds scratching and banging round the house.*

JULIA. What is that?

NAT. Dogs.

JULIA. How are they alive?

NAT. They're living up in the caves up there beyond the quarry. They hide in there. It's a full moon tonight.

JULIA. Won't the birds hear them?

*Pause.*

NAT. People all round here used to worship the moon.

*JULIA turns the stereo back up. She goes to NAT and takes his hand. He dances awkwardly with her at first, in a slightly formal way. They laugh at their inability. But soon the music takes him and JULIA holds him closer and they dance slowly, enjoying the closeness. DIANE watches, a lonely figure at the table, as the lights fade.*

### Scene Nine

*It is a hot afternoon. They are all in states of undress, the heat being almost unbearable. JULIA taps out a few desultory notes on the piano. NAT is mending a gear mechanism from a bicycle. DIANE writes in a notebook. We hear her voice as she writes.*

DIANE (*voice-over*). Day after day, you know it's not a dream when you wake up into reality's heavy deadness. We've scavenged what we can out of all houses in the area – always avoiding the farmer's house on the other side of the lake. We never see him. Maybe he's dead. For three days in a row we went off to locate the house where Julia found all the goodies, but she'd forgotten which way she went! We got lost and arrived back frustrated and exhausted and barely talking to one another. Nat deals with stress by setting about practical tasks; mending the boards or tinkering with a broken lamp brings him the steady rhythm of meditation, and Julia...

DIANE *watches* JULIA. JULIA *smiles* at DIANE. DIANE *smiles back* and we hear her thoughts without her necessarily writing anything.

Julia. I can't decide whether she sees us as her parents or if it's something else. She seems so open, but there's something there that I can't see. That she doesn't show. Or just doesn't show me. When Nat gets down, and we all get down, you can feel her anxiousness like a physical vibration in the air. But she never comes to me to share it. I can't help feeling that they communicate something to each other in the silence. But all I get is the silence.

And the strange... hatred that consumes me isn't just for them and their proximity and the claustrophobic pain of never having any privacy – it's a hatred of myself too. Sometimes it grows so great I feel like just picking something up and...

JULIA. You have lovely legs, Diane.

DIANE. What?

JULIA. You have lovely legs. Doesn't she, Nat?

NAT (*working*). Mmm. (*Goes out to the hall.*)

DIANE. Really?

JULIA. Were you ever a dancer?

DIANE. No!

JULIA. No!

DIANE. No. (*Relenting.*) I've always done a lot of walking.

JULIA. And you have lovely feet.

DIANE. Do you think?

JULIA. Yeah, they're in nice proportion. I have fat toes.

DIANE. You have very nice feet.

JULIA. They're nothing like yours. Yours could be in a commercial. For sandals or something.

DIANE *considers her feet.*

What do you write about?

DIANE (*closing her notebook*). Oh, nothing, just... you know, thoughts.

JULIA. Like a diary?

DIANE. I suppose.

JULIA. God, it's so hot...

DIANE. I know.

JULIA. I'm so bored!

DIANE. I know.

JULIA. What time is it?

DIANE. Where's your watch?

JULIA. It's around somewhere.

DIANE. Around or lost?

JULIA. Around, Diane. It's around.

DIANE. Two more hours of high tide.

JULIA. And no birds.

*Pause.*

DIANE. I know.

*They are looking at each other. But not wanting to get their hopes up.*

JULIA. And none yesterday.

DIANE. I know. What do you think? Try for St Thomas...?

JULIA. Yeah, just go for it. Do it in the morning. Just even you and me go.

DIANE. Do you think.

JULIA. I'm going out of my fucking mind, Diane.

NAT (*coming in*). What's this? (*Pause.*) We'll find that house.

JULIA (*exasperated*). Oh!

NAT. I mean, it's got to be nearby!

JULIA. But I don't know where that is. I can't remember!

NAT. Come on, how far can it be? If it saves us going all the way to St Thomas. It's definitely worth having another good...

JULIA (*with force*). I told you, I can't remember where it is!

*Pause.*

DIANE. We have the bikes now, Nat.

NAT. We have two bikes and one of them the gears are jammed.

DIANE. Alright, well then we'll draw straws.

JULIA. Diane and me can go, Nat.

NAT. Aw, get real...

DIANE. We'll draw straws.

*DIANE goes and takes three long matches, snapping one in two.*

NAT. Listen, all I'm saying is why don't we wait until we get another bike and...

DIANE (*simultaneous, overlapping NAT*). Because I'm not going to wait around here starving to death while you go...

NAT. That way if we get stranded, we're not separated, and at least we all know what's happening...

DIANE (*simultaneous, overlapping NAT*)....round the countryside looking for a suitable bike! We're drawing straws, so just draw a straw, because someone's going and if you don't want to go, someone's going, so draw a straw.

NAT. No, I'm not going to draw a straw.

DIANE. Draw a straw.

NAT. No, I'm not doing this.

JULIA. Nat.

DIANE. Draw a straw.

NAT. No.

DIANE. Draw one.

NAT. No.

JULIA. We're all doing it.

DIANE. Just draw one!

*NAT reluctantly draws a straw. It looks long. DIANE offers the straws to JULIA. She draws one. It looks about the same length at NAT's. They look expectantly at DIANE, who reveals that she has the short straw.*

NAT. Happy?

JULIA. Okay?

*Pause. NAT just goes back into the hall.*

DIANE. Right. (*Pause.*) Okay.

JULIA. You can go the next time.

DIANE. Yeah.

### Scene Ten

*Morning. A grey sky. The door is closed over. DIANE is alone, doing some sit-ups. All is quiet. Then a figure passes the door. DIANE looks up, wondering did she see something. No one is there. A shadow appears in the doorway, a key turns in the lock and the door is gently opened. DIANE can only watch the door in horror. A big, heavysset man in his fifties has come in, carrying a plastic bag and a shotgun. He is filthy. He has what looks like a bamboo waste-paper basket with eye holes cut out over his head. DIANE stares at him, as though she can't believe this is happening. He takes his 'helmet' off.*

TIERNEY. All on your own?

DIANE. No.

TIERNEY. No, you are, that was rhetorical. I'm your neighbour.

DIANE. What do you want?

TIERNEY. I brought you a few gifts. To say hello. I was wondering why you didn't go off with the other pair this morning. Where are they gone? St Thomas? *(Pause.)* There's nothing there. I could've told you, but you're never sociable.

DIANE. They're only down at the lake. They'll be back in a few minutes.

TIERNEY. I saw them going off up the road more than two hours ago towing a wheelbarrow. They're not at the lake.

DIANE. What do you want?

TIERNEY. This is my sister's house. I grew up here.

*Short pause.*

DIANE. Well, I'm sure you understand that all bets are off. I mean, we don't want to be here either, but we don't have a choice. Just take whatever you want and...

TIERNEY *(gives a little laugh)*. All bets are off, I like that. *(Produces a bottle of brandy from his bag.)* Have a drink with me.

DIANE. No, I'm... I'm fine, thank you.

TIERNEY. Mind if I grab a cup?

DIANE. Do I have a choice?

TIERNEY. Of course you do. Hey, welcome to reality – where anything is possible, right?

*TIERNEY takes two cups and pours them both a drink.*

Seen anyone else about?

DIANE. No. *(Short pause.)* Have you?

TIERNEY. Not for weeks. Nothing on the radio any more. Nothing on the TV. Nothing nowhere. *(Drinks.)* What do you think? Are we the last people left in the world?

DIANE. I don't know.

TIERNEY. They never saw this one coming, ha? No one ever thought nature was just going to eat us. *(Pause.)* Mm? *(Short pause.)* Jesus Christ, it's so quiet! *(Pause.)* Sometimes I wonder if I'm going insane! *(Laughs grimly.)* Probably lost it long ago. Here.

*He offers her an open envelope.*

DIANE. What is it?

TIERNEY *(shakes it a little)*. Pills. Tablets. All the kids from Port Argus and Mountstewart used to take them. I got them out of a pharmacy. They're a controlled substance you might say. If you take them with a drink they make the time pass quicker.

DIANE. No, I'm alright.

TIERNEY. They kill pain.

DIANE. No thanks.

TIERNEY. Okay. *(Pops a pill and shudders.)* I have to stop taking them. *(Pause. Regards DIANE.)* Why do you look so familiar?

DIANE. I don't know.

*Pause.*

TIERNEY. Look. I got food. I got drink. I got medicine. I got the lot. I've got a whole lock-up. I can get by for years. I've seen you going around with Romeo. But the girl's with him now. Your days are numbered.

DIANE. What do you mean?

TIERNEY. You're crowding them out. The girl wants him to herself.  
What good are you to her?

DIANE. What are you talking about?

TIERNEY. Ah, wake up, will you? You're on the final countdown here, baby.

DIANE. No. Look, I think you've... You see, the three of us. We don't want to be trespassers but we're just trying to...

TIERNEY. Do me a favour and don't be stupid, will you? You think that girl was out there surviving by her wits and her charm? Anyone who's left out there is an animal! The people she was with ransacked the whole place over at the crossroads. They killed a woman who'd been hiding in the house up behind the gas station. I saw the body. Her mouth was wide open, like this – (*Does the dead woman's face.*) screaming into the floor.

DIANE. That wasn't Julia, she was with some bad people for a while but...

TIERNEY. Use your brain, missus, she's out for herself. I know!

DIANE. How would you know?

TIERNEY. Because... I've lived like that. I was one of the armies of the road. In the eighties, the nineties. Living on the streets over in Wolchurch – and Birhaven. Years, I lived like that before I came back. To look after my mother. You go from morning to night, morning to night, that's all you know about. That's all you know. I can see it in her. I know exactly who she is. It's not her fault, but she'll have to get rid of you.

DIANE. No, you don't know her.

TIERNEY. So you say.

DIANE. Well, I don't agree.

TIERNEY. Well... Hey, be a Christian. Watch where it gets you. (*Pause.*) Look. What I'm saying is... If you... if you want to... you can come with me. (*Short pause.*) You can be safe. (*Pause.*) It's not easy for me to come here like this. I never even meant to. I never would have... But as time goes on... (*Drinks.*) When I lie down at night and... it's so dark. For some reason I see your face and I know I could... take care of you. And we could...

DIANE. Look...

TIERNEY (*suddenly shouts*). I'm a gentleman, missus! But any plant, be it a weed or beautiful flower, needs the water and the sun!! We're all just the same! It's so cold on the other side of the lake. Don't you see what a waste it's gonna be when she gets her way? The two of them will be nice and cosy on their own here. And the wind will just blow across the water. (*Pause.*) Bluejays killed my dog. Maybe just as well.

*Pause.*

DIANE. I can't go with you. I'm sorry.

*Short pause.*

TIERNEY. Hey, I know who you are. Your photo was on those books my mother used to read. I read one. Am I right?

DIANE. I don't know.

TIERNEY. That's it. I knew I'd seen you. You wrote that book about the woman with the wart on her face, right?

DIANE. A long time ago.

TIERNEY. Well, I'll be damned. What about that? It's good to meet you.

*Pause.*

*He takes some cans from his bag. They are white with a distinctive green stripe on them, but no writing.*

No hard feelings. Here, these are pears. I'll leave them here.

DIANE. Thank you.

TIERNEY. And here. (*Leaves the envelope of pills on the table.*) I have millions.

TIERNEY *goes to the door. He stops and turns to DIANE.*

What am I gonna do?

DIANE *has no answer for him. He leaves. DIANE waits a moment then bolts the door. Turning, she considers the cans. She grabs the can opener and opens one of them. She sniffs it and puts it down on the table.*

**Scene Eleven**

*Night. NAT sits drinking a glass of whiskey. A box with more whiskey bottles sits nearby. JULIA is reading a book. DIANE is staring at the fire. Outside a wind blows softly. A bird flits from a branch to the roof. The atmosphere is solemn. They are all oppressed by boredom. Nothing happens. They even seem oblivious to the sounds of birds scratching or thumping at the house outside. JULIA wanders to the radio, switches it on and spins the dial. She only gets white noise and high-frequency whining. She switches it off.*

JULIA. Don't drink too much, Nat. You'll get a hangover.

NAT. Yeah...

*Pause. JULIA regards DIANE.*

JULIA. Getting all that rice wasn't bad, right, Diane?

DIANE. Hm?

JULIA. Just saying, all that rice we got.

DIANE. Yes, no, that's... that's fantastic.

JULIA. And there just wasn't a huge amount of time. *(Pause.)* I mean, even if we don't drink all the whiskey, we could...

NAT. What?

JULIA. Well, if we ever met anyone else we could trade it.

NAT. For what?

JULIA. I don't know. If they had something we needed.

NAT. With who?

JULIA. I don't know.

DIANE. If we have any left.

NAT. Hey, I carried it back... Have a drink, Diane.

DIANE. Whiskey was never my drink.

NAT. Mix it with something.

DIANE. With what?

NAT. Tomato juice.

DIANE. I'll leave it thanks.

JULIA. I'm going to use the bucket.

*She takes a bucket and goes upstairs.*

NAT. Look, I'm sorry we didn't do better, Diane. Jesus Christ, it was so creepy in St Thomas. I thought we'd never get back. I was just waiting for someone to jump out of a doorway and...

*DIANE goes to the stairs and looks up, listening for JULIA. She goes to NAT.*

DIANE. Nat. Listen. The farmer who's over on the other side of the lake. He came here today.

NAT. What?

DIANE. The guy who we've seen on the other side of the lake. He was here. He said this is his sister's house.

NAT. You're joking.

DIANE. No, he was here.

NAT. What did he want?

DIANE. Company. He says he has food and medicine.

NAT *(loudly)*. Why didn't you tell me? What did he say?!

*DIANE puts her finger to her lips and gets one of the white cans with the green stripe. She brings it to NAT.*

DIANE. He gave us this.

NAT. Yeah...?

DIANE. He said it was pears. But I opened one. It's onions.

NAT. Yeah, we know these are onions.

DIANE. But why did Julia think they were pears? She said they were pears too. *(Pause.)* How come she could never find that house again – where she got all the stuff?

NAT. She said she got lost.

DIANE. No. What if he gave her all that stuff?

NAT. She would have told us! *(Pause.)* Why wouldn't she have told us?

DIANE. I don't know. *(Pause.)* Listen, Nat. I know you probably don't want to tell me, and I can understand but...

*JULIA comes back down the stairs. DIANE and NAT fall silent. JULIA goes to where she was sitting and picks up her book, sensing a strange vibe.*

JULIA. It's gone very quiet in here.

DIANE. We've run out of things to talk about.

JULIA *(holds up her book)*. It won't be long then before we have you reading the Bible, Diane. We can have a book club.

DIANE. Yeah... You didn't find any other books?

JULIA. There were other books there, there were loads of books about farming and tractors but I didn't see anything you'd like, I mean, I didn't know what kind of books you're in to.

DIANE. Oh, anything...

JULIA. Yeah but we were really looking for food, Diane. We didn't want to get stuck out after dark.

DIANE. Yeah, I know.

JULIA. We'll go back. We'll get you some books.

DIANE. It's okay.

JULIA. I'm sorry.

DIANE. No. It's okay.

*The three of them sit there thoughtfully, the wind blowing. JULIA gets her bedding and starts to bed down. DIANE opens her notebook. As the lights dim to black, we hear her voice...*

*(Voice-over.)* They say people who've killed someone think about it like no other event in their lives. And they say that to taste it and walk away unpunished is worse than being caught and confessing. The universe seems indifferent to your act – people die every day and the cold Earth doesn't care how they go. But you, the killer, return to it over and over in your mind. No drug can induce its giddy exhilaration. No agitation can match its tantalising meaninglessness. Once you have killed, it calls to you again and again. So they say.

## Scene Twelve

*Night. Darkness. The wind is howling. Lightning illuminates JULIA and NAT standing in a corner, discussing something quietly and urgently. A thunderclap wakes DIANE. She sits up and shines her flashlight at NAT and JULIA.*

DIANE *(lighting a candle)*. Is everything alright?

JULIA *(returning to her bed)*. Just stay out of it, Diane, alright?

DIANE. What's going on?

JULIA. Why do we all have to sleep in this one fucking room?

DIANE. What?

JULIA. We've no privacy! Why can't we be alone to even talk?

DIANE. Sleep where you want! Am I in the way here?

NAT. No. We were... We were just talking...

*NAT reaches for the whiskey bottle.*

JULIA. Nat! Stop drinking.

NAT. My head is fucking killing me!

JULIA. Well, that'll only make it worse! *(Beat.)* Tell her, Nat.

*Pause.*

DIANE. What.

NAT. We'll talk about it in the morning.

*JULIA picks up her bedding.*

JULIA. I'm sleeping upstairs.

NAT. It's not safe – they got in up there before.

JULIA. I'll take my chances. Thanks, Diane.

DIANE. For what?

JULIA. Don't act all innocent. You needn't bother.

DIANE. What? What did I do?

JULIA (*on her way up the stairs*). Oh spare me, Diane, the lies have to stop somewhere.

JULIA *is gone*. DIANE *looks at NAT, who cradles his drink, down by his mattress*.

DIANE. Will she be okay up there?

NAT. The tide's gone out.

DIANE *gets a cup and comes to the table. She pours a drink and sips it. She grimaces*.

DIANE. Are you lovers?

NAT (*rubs his face*). She's pregnant.

DIANE. What?

NAT. She's pregnant.

DIANE. How long?

NAT. I don't know. She said a few weeks.

DIANE. A few weeks?

NAT. We were going to tell you but...

DIANE. Am I that bad?

NAT. No, of course not!

DIANE *goes to a window and opens the shutters, looking out. The first brush of dawn is in the sky*.

DIANE. Look, don't worry.

NAT. How can I not worry? We can't bring a child into... into this.

DIANE. We'll pull together.

NAT. Jesus, the last thing I wanted to do was to cause any trouble... You have to know that, Diane, I... The first time, it was... It was the night we had my birthday.

DIANE. Yeah, okay, Nat...

NAT. I was dreaming and then, there she was beside me. I thought she was frightened. I thought I was protecting her.

DIANE. Society's gone, Nat. No one's keeping score. So you can do whatever you want...

NAT. Yeah, well, all that is fine when you're writing your novels, Diane. But this is bigger than that! This is... A child is...

DIANE. How do you know it's yours?

NAT. Because I asked her. I had to.

DIANE. Is that what you were whispering about?

NAT. I just asked her.

DIANE. What...

NAT. I asked her if she was with him for the food...

DIANE. What did she say?

NAT. She said no.

DIANE (*unconvinced*). Mmm.

NAT. She said no, Diane. I didn't even know she was pregnant. She only told me yesterday. All the way to St Thomas she kept trying to hold my hand. But God forgive me, I just wished she'd fuck off.

DIANE. Sweetie, who knows where she was before she got here? Who knows what happened out there? She could easily have been pregnant before you even met her. If she is pregnant. (*Notices that NAT is holding his head, wincing.*)

NAT. Oh, I haven't had a headache like this in so long.

DIANE. Come on. Sit down over here.

*He goes to her and they sit on the sofa.*

It'll be okay.

NAT. I'm sorry.

DIANE. I know.

*From her pocket she takes the envelope TIERNEY gave her with the pills. She considers it.*

Let me get you some water.

**Scene Thirteen**

*Late afternoon. DIANE is alone. She is reading JULIA's Bible. It is grey and still. JULIA steps into the room from outside. DIANE closes the book.*

JULIA. It's okay, Diane, you can read it. I wouldn't stop you.

DIANE. I know.

JULIA. Where's Nat?

DIANE. He's gone for a walk.

JULIA. Is he feeling better?

DIANE. I think he just wanted to get some fresh air. While there's time.

JULIA. Right.

*JULIA stands there awkwardly.*

I wasn't sure if you were talking to me.

DIANE. I wasn't sure you were talking to me!

JULIA. Of course I am.

DIANE. You weren't too happy with me last night.

JULIA. I just couldn't believe that you'd say something like that to Nat. About me.

DIANE (*goes to JULIA and takes her hand*). I'm sorry if I offended you, that's not what I meant to do.

JULIA. Okay.

*Pause. DIANE goes to get their dinner ready.*

DIANE. You know you could have come to me any time and told me about... what's happened.

JULIA. I just... I've always been a bit too... afraid to talk with you about... certain things, Diane.

DIANE. Why?

JULIA. I don't know. I sometimes think that you always think I came here and wrecked it for you and Nat and that's not...

DIANE. Julia, everyone in the world is dead. We've no food and we can't go anywhere because we'll all be killed. Believe me, I have bigger things to worry about.

JULIA. It's just that Nat's been really hurt.

DIANE. In what way?

JULIA. Well, you've made him question whether he's the father of our baby.

DIANE. Jesus Christ, Julia! Who knows who the father is?

JULIA. I know!

DIANE. Oh, please...

JULIA. That's the problem with you, Diane, it's always 'Oh, please... Oh, please...'

Oh, please what?

DIANE. Julia...

JULIA. I've read your diary, Diane.

*Pause.*

DIANE. Ohh... how could you?

JULIA. I had to! And I was right to, because now I know what's really been going on around here.

DIANE. Julia...

JULIA. If Nat knew half the things you say in there about him...

DIANE. But that's not, I mean, it's not what you think.

JULIA. I know what the word 'love' means, Diane.

DIANE. I don't mean it in that way. I'd have feelings like that for anyone I care about or worry about...

JULIA. Love is love, Diane. That's the whole problem, isn't it? That's why you're against me.

DIANE. Don't be so stupid.

JULIA. What's stupid about it?

*Fishes DIANE's diary out from under the cushion and throws it on the floor at DIANE's feet.*

You even say it yourself. You wrote it down – that no one has ever loved you and your daughter hates you.

DIANE (*going and grabbing a can*). Look, when some... man comes in here with those cans that you came in here with and says they're pears, but they're not, and starts offering me food for... for... whatever, I have to ask where you got it.

JULIA. What does it matter where I got it? You ate it, didn't you? It's kept you alive. What does it matter where I got it?

DIANE. It matters because Nat is upset and worried about it. And he's right to be, because you lied to us.

JULIA. I didn't lie. I got that food fair and square.

DIANE. Really...

JULIA. Yes, really... You know what your problem is, Diane, you think everyone else is like you. Sneaking around, writing in our little notebooks, scribbling down all your horrible blackness and then turning around and being all sweetness and light to everybody.

DIANE. Right...

JULIA. Yeah.

DIANE. Well, maybe you should look at your own behaviour, Julia, crawling across the floor in the middle of the night. Waiting until we're all asleep to make your sordid little advances, sticking your nose into my private thoughts where it doesn't belong.

JULIA. That's bullshit. You don't even have a clue what you're talking about. Myself and Nat have discussed this together. The human race has to continue, Diane.

DIANE. The human race!

JULIA. People can still love each other. We all need to take responsibility! You just don't see it that way because nobody loves you!

DIANE. Are you fucking nuts? What are you trying to bring a baby into the world for? You think it's all going to be a fairy tale? That

there's going to be a coach and horses for the fairy princess to take you off, with your precious young ovaries in a little jewellery box on your lap? Look around you, child!!

JULIA. You're just jealous.

DIANE. Oh, please.

JULIA. 'Oh, please...'

DIANE. Yes! You know, if you like I can sort this all out in a heartbeat.

JULIA. Oh yeah, how?

DIANE. All I have to do is walk over to that farmer and ask him exactly what you did for all that chocolate. (*Beat.*) And the wine.

*Pause.*

JULIA. Well, do then!

DIANE. I will.

JULIA. Well, go on then!

DIANE. I'll go when I fucking well like!

JULIA. Well, do go, because when you know you're wrong, you'll know the truth.

DIANE. Fair enough, and if that's the case I'll apologise. Now are you going to sit there all day? Look at this place. It's like a fucking pigsty!

*DIANE goes to the stove and begins to put wood in. JULIA starts to tidy up. She looks at an axe that is nearby. She walks to it and picks it up. She looks at DIANE kneeling at the stove. She approaches DIANE from behind and stands there getting ready to hit DIANE.*

JULIA. Hey, Diane...

DIANE (*without looking round*). What.

*JULIA realises she can't do it. She turns away, stifling her tears of frustration.*

JULIA. Nothing... (*Puts the axe down and looks outside. Pause.*) It's getting dark.

DIANE. Mmm.

*Pause.*

JULIA. You don't think anything has happened to Nat, do you?

DIANE. I hope not.

JULIA. I mean, the tides going to turn. Where did he go?

DIANE. I don't know. To the lake I think.

JULIA. You don't think he might have fallen asleep?

DIANE. I know he hasn't been well, but surely he wouldn't fall asleep out there?

JULIA. How long do we have?

DIANE. I guess a half-hour.

*Pause.*

JULIA. I better go. I'll just be a minute.

DIANE. Well, don't be long.

JULIA. No, I'll be quick.

*JULIA is about to go. But she turns to DIANE.*

I never meant for any of this, Diane. I'm sorry I read your diary. But I had to.

*JULIA runs out of the house. DIANE goes to the door. She looks out, watching JULIA, then steps back inside. She shuts the door and bolts it, putting up whatever wood they use to block it, locking JULIA out. She closes the shutters. She comes back to the chair by the fire and sits there. The room is very dark. We hear DIANE's voice...*

DIANE (*voice-over*). When you do kill someone, the first thing you think is, 'That was easy. What's all the fuss about?' The peaceful silence that descends when you've done it fills you with such relief. But it's more than that. It's the power that you get. You get that person's power. They are so completely subdued and obliterated. They have bent to your will completely and they are just... gone. You thank God for the strength and you wonder why you didn't use it long before.

*The room darkens as night falls...*

But then as time goes on, you realise that you not only have that person's power. Something else has happened. You have their soul inside you. And it's impossible not to feel their pain, their rage and their embarrassing frailty, which joins with your own. You get it all.

*As dusk gathers outside, we hear the first flapping wings of the night.*

#### Scene Fourteen

*Morning. DIANE is in the chair as the lights come up. It is just past dawn. NAT comes down the stairs. He is naked from the waist up. He has a blanket wrapped around his lower half. He gingerly makes his way down, squinting.*

NAT. What time is it?

DIANE. Just after six-thirty.

NAT. Six-thirty what? In the morning?

DIANE. You slept for twenty-four hours.

NAT. Where's Julia?

DIANE. She's gone.

NAT. Gone where?

DIANE. I don't know.

NAT. What do you mean she's 'gone'?

DIANE. She left last night.

NAT. She left?

DIANE. Before it got dark.

NAT. But where did she go?

DIANE. I don't know.

NAT. What happened, Diane?

DIANE. Nothing happened.

NAT. Well, what did she say?

DIANE (*taking up the Bible*). She told me that I was to tell you that Ecclesiastes says...

NAT. Are you fucking serious?

DIANE. She said I was to tell you that – (*Finding passage.*) ‘I found something more bitter than death – the woman who is like a trap. The love she offers you will catch you like a net; and her arms round you will hold you like a chain.’

NAT. Is that it?

DIANE. That’s it.

NAT. What does that mean?

DIANE. How would I know?

NAT. But she’ll die out there!

*He goes to the door and peeps out through the boards.*

DIANE. Maybe she had somewhere she could go. I tried to stop her. I’m sorry, Nat.

NAT. There’s something you’re not telling me, Diane.

DIANE. I swear to God. She said I was to show you that bit from Ecclesiastes. I told her she was being crazy. I tried to make her stay.

NAT. Read it again.

DIANE. She was too strong for me, Nat.

NAT. Read it again!

DIANE. Oh, for God’s sake! ‘I found something more bitter than death – the woman who is like a trap. The love she offers you will catch you like a net; and her arms round you will hold you like a chain.’

NAT. I don’t get it.

DIANE. Do you think she’s saying she’s... set you free? (*Pause.*) Go to bed, Nat.

*NAT goes to walk up the stairs.*

NAT. I have to look for her. I mean maybe she’s...

*He stops, hearing a flutter of birds outside.*

How long have the birds been out?

DIANE. Only an hour.

*NAT comes back, unsure what to do.*

NAT. Gimme that.

*DIANE hands him the Bible. He looks at DIANE. He takes it upstairs.*

### Scene Fifteen

*Night. The wind is howling outside. NAT sits at the table. DIANE brings two bowls to the table. They both sit, despondently.*

NAT. What is this?

DIANE. Onions. (*As NAT pushes it away.*) Do you want some ketchup? There’s rice.

*NAT puts his fork down.*

Try and eat, Nat. Do you want some curry powder?

NAT. No.

DIANE (*gets up*). I’ll get us some food. Look, if nothing else, I’ll go over to the farmer. Maybe Julia’s there.

NAT. Julia’s not there.

DIANE. Maybe I can talk to him.

NAT. He’s dead. I saw his body in the rushes two days ago.

DIANE. We can get his food.

NAT. There’s nothing there. (*Gets up and moves away.*) Listen. When I was up under the eaves fixing the boards, I could see that the birds have been laying eggs.

DIANE. Are there birds up there?

NAT. No birds. Just their eggs. I can get in with a stick and smash some of them up, but to get them all – they're in between the floor, the insulation and the ceiling, if I get in to get them all, then the whole roof is exposed up there, it won't be safe.

DIANE. Nat, if the birds aren't sitting on the eggs, they can't hatch, they'll be too cold.

NAT. Well, I don't know! I don't like it! I mean, what if they do hatch? What if hundreds of birds suddenly get their way down through the plaster and down and in here?

DIANE. Surely we could... Couldn't we board it up?

NAT. Look, I just don't feel good about it. I think we should just go. I can't sleep.

DIANE. Do you want to take a painkiller?

NAT. I don't want to take anything.

*Pause.*

DIANE. Where will we go?

NAT. I don't know. Find somewhere else. Start again?

*Pause.*

DIANE. Okay.

*NAT gets up and goes to the fire. DIANE stays near the table alone.*

### Scene Sixteen

*Dark grey daylight. Forbidding black clouds. The wind howls. DIANE and NAT are packing up, making some final arrangements.*

DIANE (*voice-over*). Today we leave and wander into the wilderness.

I lay awake all night. Nat's right. Anything would be better than the cold ghost of the girl – and her child – blowing round here in the evenings. We're finally going to St Thomas. Together, if we're careful, maybe we can make it for another year or two, or longer, who knows?

*She picks up her notebook and reads to herself. NAT goes to the door and looks out up into the treetops and the sky.*

And then what? If only I could give him a child. My genes will never make it past me now. We'll all be extinct soon. All my life I've always thought, 'What's so precious about the human race anyway?' When there were loads of us all clogging up the planet I always thought, 'How disgusting.' But now that there's so few of us left, I think – (*Looks up – out at us.*) 'Wait a minute, in all the cold eternal expanse of the cosmos, what if we are the only life anywhere in the vastness of time that can actually think, and knows that it exists, and that knows that it will die? And I realise that God is real. Because I am God. But I never realised before how helpless God is – in the face of reality and eternity. And how alone God is.

*NAT approaches DIANE. He is ready for the road. An old coat is tied by a piece of string across his belly. He holds a stick like a pilgrim.*

NAT. Are you ready?

DIANE *nods and puts her book down, leaving it on the table. She takes her bag and puts it on her back.*

Do you not want your book?

DIANE. No.

*Pause.*

NAT. Okay?

DIANE *nods.*

DIANE. Let's go.

*They leave, closing the door firmly behind them as they walk out into the wind.*

*Lights down.*

*End.*

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THE VEIL

*For Fionnuala and Sumati*