

CARNAGE

Daniel Nellor

CHARACTERS

Helen, 59

Chris, about the same

Anthony, mid-twenties

Anna, around 30

Man, twenties

Policeman, twenties

(The man and the policeman should be played by the same actor.)

1.

Helen and Chris.

HELEN: I need help.

CHRIS: What kind of help?

HELEN: Financial help.

CHRIS: Why?

HELEN: They let me go.

CHRIS: Did they? Why?

HELEN: (shrugs)

Not needed.

CHRIS: After all those years?

There'd be a payout.

HELEN: (nods)

It's gone.

Rent and food.

It's gone.

CHRIS: Hel ...

We're not married anymore.

HELEN: I know that, Chris.

CHRIS: So why am I your default?

HELEN: What do you think? Do you think I want to be here?

CHRIS: I wouldn't've thought so.

HELEN: I feel—sick. Do you understand? Here I am. Do you think I want to be here? I am here, and that ought to tell you that I don't have any other options.

CHRIS: But why am I an option? This is my point. Why am I an option? We're two people. Aren't we? This is how you wanted it. I'm just—what am I?—some person. I'm not the one who thought that thirty years of marriage could just be wiped away, just like that, but hey, turns out it can—except maybe it can't though because here you are and suddenly I'm some kind of option again, am I?

I give you money.

HELEN: It's not enough.

CHRIS: It's what was agreed.

HELEN: But it's not enough.

CHRIS: But then what's the point of a negotiation? We sat in a room. We worked this out.

HELEN: I need to live in a house, Chris. I need to eat food. I'm here because I have nowhere else to go. I don't want to be here. It doesn't change anything. I have to beg from someone and I choose to beg from you.

CHRIS: Don't say 'beg'.

HELEN: I am beyond caring about words.

Bloody Dan, he said to me, 'you've given longer to this company than anyone else', and I said 'well, this company has sucked me drier, then, than anyone else', to which he took offense and said, 'this payout doesn't look like sucking you dry', and I said, 'this payout is exactly what it's supposed to be, it's not a gift', and he said, 'I suppose we can just skip the niceties then', and I said, 'well let's not pretend it's a happy ending, goodbye', and he said, 'I'll tell you what, Helen, I'm going to let you have the last word as a farewell gift', and I didn't say anything because I didn't want any gift from him.

CHRIS: How much do you need?

HELEN: Ten thousand.

CHRIS: That's a joke.

HELEN: No.

CHRIS: Well, that's ridiculous.

HELEN: Why?

CHRIS: Because A, you don't need it, and B, I don't have it.

HELEN: You have it.

CHRIS: I don't have it.

HELEN: How's the pool going?

CHRIS: What's that got to do with it?

HELEN: If you pay my rent this week I'll be stuck again next week. I want to get on top, Chris, I want breathing space.

CHRIS: I don't have ten thousand dollars!

HELEN: Well, then, whatever you can.

CHRIS: On our last day of mediation you said that I had poisoned your life.

Do you remember that?

Poisoned your life, you said.

And I never got the chance to ask you if you meant it.

HELEN: I meant it.

CHRIS: You know, time moves forward. It doesn't move backwards. We had thirty years of marriage. Six months of betrayal, yes, but how does that work the other way? How does that poison the past that's already happened? I said I was sorry and I was sorry. I am sorry. It was a punch in the guts, I know it was. It was the worst thing I could have done. But where does sorrow end?

HELEN: You're with her.

CHRIS: Yes, I'm with her.

HELEN: You're living with her!

CHRIS: Yes.

HELEN: So let's not talk about sorrow.

CHRIS: Because I couldn't be with you.

No, that's not fair. That's not fair to her. I do love her. I do, of course I do. I'm here, but you put me here. I don't know what the fuck I'm talking about ...

HELEN: You put yourself here.

CHRIS: You ended it.

HELEN: You ended it.

CHRIS: No, you ended it. I—yes—I gave you a reason to end it. But, and, I reckon, a whole lot of reasons not to.

HELEN: Children. Business.

CHRIS: Love.

Love!

Hello?

I mean, did it just disappear, did it, when you found out? Did it just suck away, down the drain? I don't believe that. Fuck, you and me. I saw Billy from school. Fat and bald now. Billy! Still likes his beer. Said do you remember this, do you remember that. And the truth is, I said, I don't remember. I don't remember anything. I don't remember anything from those days

except Helen. You were school, you were life, you were everything. It didn't have to be sex, touching your hand sent me to the moon and back. If you got a detention I made sure I got one too. Holding hands under the table, do you remember?

I can't do ten thousand.

HELEN: How much can you do?

CHRIS: Money. Is that what it comes down to? We had everything, we're one person, not two, one, then we break each other's hearts and suddenly we're in a room with lawyers talking about money.

HELEN: Broke each other's hearts?

CHRIS: It made me wonder, you know. You're not gonna like this. But we jumped so quickly to lawyers and money and negotiations that it made me wonder if you were actually just looking for an excuse.

HELEN: !

An excuse for what?

CHRIS: An excuse to leave.

HELEN: Would that make you feel better?

CHRIS: How would that make me feel better?

HELEN: This was you, Chris. Right? Your choice. Your betrayal. Not a night. Not a slip. Six months. A decision. Many decisions. One after the other. I'll go, I'll go again. I'll keep going. And every decision was a decision to—put me out of mind.

CHRIS: It didn't feel like that.

HELEN: No, it felt like smooth skin and a tight cunt.

CHRIS: Please.

HELEN: Don't say I wanted it. Do you think this is what I pictured? At 59?

CHRIS: No.

HELEN: No.

CHRIS: No, I think you thought it would go better. Little crack of light. Opportunity. New phase. Last chance. Rid of the baggage. Independence.

HELEN: Own it.

CHRIS: Everything we built together. The business, family. You don't let that go for a mistake by a sorrowful man. Unless you want to let it go. Unless you're looking for a reason to let it go. Unless, maybe, you'd just had enough. So say that.

HELEN: I sit alone. If you want to picture it. I have a cup of tea and save the teabag for another one. The flat is damp. The toilet runs. I'm a 59 year old woman. I saw no crack of light. No opportunity. I saw you moving on, that's all I saw. Yes, in all but name. 'Holding hands under the table.' Jesus. We haven't held hands for fifteen years. 'The thrill of your touch.' Chris. Lie to yourself if you want to but don't lie to me. This is you. You did this to me, you did this to us. And it does poison, yes, everything that went before. Why? Because I didn't think that everything that went before would let you do what you did, that's why! I thought that's what everything that went before meant! Minimum! That you would—Christ, I don't know—honour it, what we had, for thirty years, by not, at a minimum, fucking around on me. Was I perfect? No. But I was committed to the marriage. It was what we had, I was happy with it. I ask one thing, one thing only, that I'm not the stupid bitch sitting at home while my husband is off fucking someone else, that's all I ask. Is that unreasonable? Am I being old-fashioned? If you could do what you did then the whole thing didn't mean as much to you as it did to me, that's all. Fine. Draw a line under it. Move on. Except I move on to a flat with a broken toilet and you move on to our house with an extension and a pool.

CHRIS: It was good, then.

HELEN: What?

CHRIS: What we had. If you didn't want to leave, if you weren't looking for an excuse, then just admit that it was good then, what we had.

HELEN: If I admit it was good will you give me ten thousand dollars? Oh, it was good, Chris, it was so good. You were great, you were amazing, you were just the kindest, most handsome man in the world to me and I wanted you, I wanted you so badly, every single day, I couldn't wait for you to come home from work so we could make love until the sun came up. Now can I please have the money.

CHRIS: No, you can't, you can't have it. Fuck this. What am I, a fuckin bank? We had a deal. It was a good deal, a fair deal. Where's the money gone, anyway?

HELEN: You want to know where it's gone?

CHRIS: Yes I do.

HELEN: You want to know where the money has gone? Well, some of it has gone—

To our son, actually. Yes, it has.

CHRIS: Anthony? Why?

HELEN: Because he asked for it.

CHRIS: What for?

HELEN: Because he needed it.

CHRIS: He needed it, he could've come to me.

HELEN: I think your version of 'need' is different from his version of 'need'.

CHRIS: How much did you give him?

HELEN: I gave him—amounts—over the past few months. I'm allowed to give money to my son.

CHRIS: And then come crying poor to me.

HELEN: He's living his life, Chris. He's happy. Doesn't that mean something?

CHRIS: He never had to be unhappy!

HELEN: I don't want to discuss that. Alright? He's alright. I can breathe.

CHRIS: Clothes and parties. You're a soft touch.

HELEN: But that's progress. Don't you see? That's a win. Yes, he likes nice clothes. He has his friends. He can get through the day.

CHRIS: What an achievement.

HELEN: Chris.

CHRIS: He can get through the day. Fuck me. We all have to get through the day. Does he realise that? He's not special. Everyone has to get through the day.

HELEN: He realises that.

CHRIS: Like he's some kind of special case.

HELEN: I will not sit at home—wondering.

Pause.

CHRIS: You made your choices, then.

HELEN: It's not a choice, I'm a mother.

CHRIS: What does he say about me?

HELEN: He doesn't say anything about you.

CHRIS: They blame me. Anna too.

HELEN: Well they're not blind, Chris.

CHRIS: I don't see the grandkids. Barely see them anymore.

HELEN: So call her.

CHRIS: What do you say to them?

HELEN: To the kids? I don't say anything to them.

CHRIS: Little drip feed.

HELEN: Paranoid.

CHRIS: I have not once said a word against you.

HELEN: Just out of interest, what would you say if you were going to say a word against me?

CHRIS: That I'm a shit. A fuckin lowlife. But it didn't have to end.

Pause.

HELEN: I haven't said a word against you either.

CHRIS: I didn't poison everything. Did I? Not everything. I made a mistake. I knew what I was doing. Hated myself for doing it. Punched a wall at her house once. Didn't tell you that. Frightened the shit out of her. Wanted to break my hand. Fuckin cheap place she was in, couldn't even do that. Hand went right through.

Not everything. Not the birthday parties. Not the barbeques. Look at this place, what we made here. From nothing, from a block of land. I sweated for it. Nail after nail. And it's not finished, even after thirty years it's still not finished. How could you leave when we still had more to do?

See the pool on your way in?

HELEN: Course.

CHRIS: Dug it myself. First night of the mediation. Came home, grabbed a pick and a shovel and just went for it. And every night after that. Digging, digging. Diggin in the dark.

She doesn't even swim. Kids don't visit. So what's the fuckin pool for?

HELEN: You had dirt under your fingernails at the mediation.

CHRIS: Did I?

HELEN: Almost made me change my mind.

CHRIS: Showers together.

HELEN: Stop it.

CHRIS: Sprucing me up.

HELEN: I swim.

Pause.

CHRIS: Yeah, you swim.

Pause.

HELEN: Not everything.

Pause.

Chris cries.

HELEN: Oh, don't.

Don't, Chris. Stop it.

Listen, stop crying and let me tell you something: Billy tried to sleep with me in high school.

CHRIS: What?!

HELEN: At a party. At Jenny's, you had the flu. Yeah. He came on to me. Laid it on thick. God. I'd forgotten about that till you brought him up.

CHRIS: What did he do?

HELEN: Kept getting me drinks. Put his hand on my leg. Moved it up.

CHRIS: Fuckin hell.

HELEN: Do you think I would ever? I mean, he wasn't bad.

CHRIS: Wasn't he?

HELEN: Not at all.

CHRIS: You should see him now.

HELEN: So I made the right choice, did I?

CHRIS: I don't know, did you?

Pause.

HELEN: I didn't come here to talk.

CHRIS: We're just talking.

HELEN: Well if we're talking then tell me why.

Pause.

CHRIS: You never asked me that.

You never actually asked me that.

Maybe there was a good reason why you never asked me that.

HELEN: Maybe there was.

CHRIS: It was your birthday.

Two years ago, because you turn 60 next month and don't think I've forgotten that. We were on the lawn, all of us: kids, grandkids. Couple of friends I think. The little ones were all over me and Anthony was good and the meat was the best from down Georgie's. Smoke rising slowly into the clear blue sky. And everything was shining and everything was blue and the grass came up thick and I had no complaints in the world.

No complaints in the world at all.

And that's when I knew.

That's when I knew I was going to do it.

Because everything was right, and it wasn't enough. You see? Everything was everything I wanted it to be. I could have written it, I could have dreamt it in my dreams. But I knew there was someone just south of the city. And I knew she was waiting if I knocked on her door. She wanted it. I wanted it. And maybe you remember I went out that night.

That's right. On your birthday. Could it be any worse?

So there's your why, then. Me, a fuckin scumbag. Who thought there might be more.

HELEN: Ten thousand.

CHRIS: Didn't stop me loving you.

HELEN: Ten thousand.

CHRIS: Hel.

HELEN: I need it. I have a landlord. I'm behind.

CHRIS: I'm trying to be honest. You asked.

HELEN: That's a reason? Everything was perfect?

CHRIS: I could see the finish line. You know? The future used to be far away. But Dad had a heart attack at 60. Mum barely pushed 70. It's not an excuse.

HELEN: No, it's not an excuse.

CHRIS: No, it's not.

HELEN: Let me tell you something. If you haven't got ten thousand then you've messed up the finances. Who's doing them? Is she doing them?

CHRIS: Helen, I've been on my knees, I've been at your feet, and I'll do it again if you want me to. Tell me what you want.

HELEN: I've told you what I want. What do you want?

CHRIS: It's a good question.

HELEN: Yeah, it's a very good question.

Pause.

CHRIS: We don't hold cash like we used to.

HELEN: Why not?

CHRIS: You were always over-cautious.

HELEN: It's a volatile industry, Chris, you have to think about cash flow.

CHRIS: Alright I'll tell you what I want.

You can't sit in your tiny flat on your birthday. It's your birthday. Come here. We'll get the kids around, the grandkids. We'll swim in the pool. I'll do the meat, I'll do my tabouli, we'll drink some good wine and I'll get you a cake. I know what you're thinking. She'll make herself scarce. What do you reckon? Eh? For the kids. For the grandkids. They need to see us together, Hel, it's important. Course I'm gonna bloody help you. I'll get the money. Just come. Say you'll come. For the day, for the family.

What do you reckon?

HELEN: I reckon I would be a bigger whore than she is.

Pause.

CHRIS: You're a cold cunt, you really are.

HELEN: You shit.

CHRIS: What the fuck is your problem?

HELEN: I get the money if I come to your little dressups day?

CHRIS: Did I say that?

HELEN: Why don't you just fuck me on the floor here, Chris? A thousand bucks a pop.

CHRIS: Jesus Christ.

HELEN: Ten times, why not? I would prefer it. I'm not playing happy families with you, Chris, you selfish prick, then going home, then she comes back and you get to fuck her into the evening. Christ. The best of both worlds for you that day.

CHRIS: That's bullshit.

HELEN: If you want to know why the divorce happened so fast, this is why.

CHRIS: What is why?

HELEN: Your self pity. Your pathetic, self-blaming, 'oh I'm such a terrible person' fucking act—but in the midst of it all you were the real victim, weren't you, you poor bastard? It hurt you so much to hurt me.

CHRIS: It did, actually.

HELEN: Do you think it was enough for me? Do you? A bottle of wine and a barbeque? Fuck! It wasn't enough. It was never enough. You were never enough. I slept with Billy in Jenny's bed because even then you left a hole.

CHRIS: I don't believe that.

HELEN: Don't then.

CHRIS: You can say I poisoned everything but you can't say things happened when they didn't.

HELEN: Ask him.

CHRIS: I'm asking you.

HELEN: Well I just told you, didn't I?

CHRIS: No, you're lying.

HELEN: We laughed at you.

We laughed at you, Chris, at home with your Mum's chicken soup while I was sucking his cock.

CHRIS: You're just disgusting, you got such a fuckin mouth on you. I hope this is making you feel better.

HELEN: Oh, thank you for having my interests at heart. The worst part of what you did was feel sorry for me. Like I got a terminal illness. Fuck that. The cancer shouldn't feel sorry for the victim. No. Please. Enjoy it. Enjoy what you have, what you've taken. It would be better, it would be more tolerable than your pity. Your pity is what burns, your charity. What? I get to come round to this nice big house, do I, for my birthday? Oh, lucky me. What a lucky girl! What a lucky old slag. I get to swim in the pool. I get to smile and laugh and drink wine I can no longer afford in a house that is no longer mine. For a day. For an afternoon. Aren't I lucky? He might have betrayed me but he's really looking after me.

It's for you. It's a stage play. And your pity for me, that's for you, too.

It made me mad, your pity. Literally. Not angry. Mad. Like blood on the walls mad. Voices in my head mad. Tearing the skin off my face mad. Or tearing the skin off yours. Why do you think I lost my job? You have to shed staff, who would you get rid of? The old one. The cranky one. The one who mutters to herself. The one who can't stop crying.

Bloody Dan, he said to me, 'you've given longer to this company than anyone else', and I said—

They look at each other. Silence.

CHRIS: I'll get the money.

HELEN: Make me go away.

CHRIS: No.

HELEN: Bargain.

CHRIS: No, Hel. I'm glad you came.

I don't believe you about Billy.

I get you want to hurt me. What can I say? Mission accomplished.

Fuckin hypocrite, if I thought it was true, I would still want to punch his lights out. But I don't think it's true. And I'm not gonna ask him. Because I have to hold on to something from all those years. Because this is my life. And I think we had love. And you can deny it, but it wasn't an act. And a barbeque on your birthday would be just that. Just nice. Not an insult. Not a performance. Just sausages and steak and our family, together. Like we used to be. Like we still would be, if I wasn't such an idiot, and if you weren't—

Unforgiving like rock.

I'll get you the money.

HELEN: Oh, Chris. It's a shame. I thought I could but I can't.

CHRIS: Can't what?

HELEN: Take your money.

CHRIS: Why not?

HELEN: Because it's yours. That's all. No other reason. It's yours. It's your dirty, filthy money and your fingerprints are all over it and even though it's just numbers on a screen, I would know.

CHRIS: Well that's just ...

HELEN: Mad.

Told you.

Welcome to the show.

It's yours, you won it, fair and square. The magistrate liked you, like people do. My lawyer was crap. But I chose him, I have to live with the consequences.

CHRIS: I want you to have it.

HELEN: And I want you to think about cash flow. It's cyclical. We had hairy times but we got through them because we had a buffer. Six months, payroll and expenses, ready to go. Who does the books now, does she do the books?

CHRIS: Yes, she does.

HELEN: The perfect replacement! Does the books, cooks the meals, and to top it all off she's younger and more beautiful. But does she know about the down times? Does she know the darkness comes? Does she know she needs a buffer? Does she know the whole thing can come crashing down around her head?

CHRIS: I'd like you to take the money.

HELEN: And I will. Of course I will. I can't afford to take a stand, not now. Maybe not ever again. I never had a landlord before. Are they all like that? Were we like that? I told him, if I don't have the money then I don't have the money, it's unfortunate but it's just the reality, what more do you want me to say? And he told me eviction is a reality too.

Don't make me come to this barbeque.

CHRIS: It's for all of us.

HELEN: I don't know what you're picturing. Laughing and smiling and drinking in the sun. But if I cry at work. If I cry at the train station. If I can't even talk to a checkout girl without tears in my eyes then what do you think's gonna happen? You picture laughing and drinking. I picture screaming and a broken glass in your face. Please, Chris, just transfer the money and I'll get out of your life. Hold on to the memories; I have memories too. But I don't want a family reunion.

CHRIS: Something else, then.

HELEN: What?

CHRIS: Billy.

HELEN: What about him?

CHRIS: Tell me you were lying.

HELEN: Oh, Chris—

CHRIS: You were lying.

HELEN: Okay, I was lying.

CHRIS: That never happened.

HELEN: No, it never happened.

CHRIS: Because that would be insane, wouldn't it, to do that at the start of our relationship.

HELEN: Better at the start than at the end.

CHRIS: Did it happen?

HELEN: No.

CHRIS: Did it?

HELEN: No.

CHRIS: Then why did you say it?

HELEN: To hurt you.

CHRIS: That's all.

HELEN: Yes.

CHRIS: You made it up. Because I mentioned him.

HELEN: Yes.

CHRIS: But the party.

HELEN: That was true.

CHRIS: He came on to you.

HELEN: He did.

CHRIS: Put his hand on your leg.

HELEN: And moved it up.

CHRIS: How high?

HELEN: High enough.

CHRIS: And what did you tell him?

HELEN: That he shouldn't, of course.

CHRIS: But you never slept with him. You never laughed at me.

HELEN: How long is this game gonna go on?

CHRIS: As long as I fuckin want it to.

I begged you to stay, Helen, but you went. You went, not me. I was on my knees, I was at your feet. You went anyway. Your choice. But now you're back. But not for love. Not for old times' sake. For money. My money, which I won, fair and square. And I'm gonna give it to you, Hel, because I still love you. Like in high school, like for thirty years. I can't help it, I do. And I'm not asking for much in return. Just our history, that's all. Just our past. I want my life, that's all, as I know it to be.

So you didn't laugh at me. Did you?

HELEN: No.

CHRIS: And you didn't sleep with Billy.

HELEN: No.

CHRIS: No?

HELEN: No.

CHRIS: Okay then. Good.

HELEN: No, Billy I just sucked him off. Karl I slept with. Brendan too. Mike I gave a hand job by the lake. And Jonathan I fucked in his sister's bed.

Now can I have my money, please?

2.

Helen and Anthony, in his underwear, phone in his hand which he uses throughout.

HELEN: I need help.

ANTHONY: You need help? Well I guess we're all fucked, then.

HELEN: Watch your language, please.

ANTHONY: Oh, Mother, don't be petty.

HELEN: Why aren't you dressed?

ANTHONY: I just got up.

HELEN: Did you? It's the afternoon.

ANTHONY: Alright, don't go all Dad on me—he called me, by the way.

HELEN: Did he?

ANTHONY: Something about a barbeque. Which is happening, apparently, whether you're there or not. Which is weird, really, because it's for your birthday.

HELEN: Are you going to put some clothes on?

ANTHONY: You should come. Anna will be there. Darren won't. We'll see the kids. Make fun of Dad. Call Darren a cunt.

HELEN: Anthony! Don't use that language in front of your mother.

ANTHONY: You use it.

HELEN: Not in front of you I don't.

ANTHONY: Well he is.

HELEN: Well he's not.

ANTHONY: Girls marry their father, they reckon.

HELEN: Why are you just getting up?

ANTHONY: Late night slash morning.

HELEN: Anything suitable for your mother's ears?

ANTHONY: Oh, just the second circle of hell.

HELEN: What's that?

ANTHONY: Dance party. Dante. *Inferno* last night, *Paradiso* tonight.

HELEN: Should I know what that means?

ANTHONY: (laughs) No. I had to Google it myself. It's a poem. Old Italian. Guy visits hell, then guy visits heaven. Last night sin, tonight salvation! Tonight I'm an angel. It's cold.

He leaves the room and returns carrying clothes and wearing angel wings.

What do you think?

HELEN: I hope you'll be wearing more than that.

ANTHONY: Not much more.

HELEN: Anthony, am I allowed to say it? You're beautiful.

ANTHONY: Thanks Mum.

He removes the wings, and dresses.

By the way, just so you know, there's someone sleeping in the bed in there. I thought there might have been but I wasn't sure.

HELEN: Do you want me to go?

ANTHONY: No! I want to talk to my mother. Be as loud as you like. It's the afternoon, for Christ's sake. I couldn't remember if I'd been abandoned or not. Then when you knocked I jumped out of bed without looking. Why didn't you text first, anyway? Hey, do you still have that sewing machine?

HELEN: No.

ANTHONY: That's a shame, I need help with my wings. Never mind, I'll do it by hand. Might need your help later, if you want to have a little sewing party? Fuck. Pills. Wait there.

He leaves the room and returns with some pills and a bottle of water.

Don't want me schizing out.

HELEN: Some of those are morning pills.

ANTHONY: Well when you spend your morning in the depths of hell it's a little hard to remember your medication, isn't it? So what's the deal? This barbeque's gonna be awkward if you're not there. Who's gonna blow out the candles? Let me do it! Let me do it! Remember how I used to say that?

HELEN: I do.

ANTHONY: Every time. And you would. Which annoyed Dad, he could never get the photo he was after.

HELEN: I hope you're taking everything you're supposed to be taking.

ANTHONY: I am taking everything I'm supposed to be taking.

HELEN: Good.

ANTHONY: And more.

HELEN: I don't want to hear that.

ANTHONY: Don't ask then.

HELEN: Anthony, you know the money I gave you last week?

ANTHONY: Why, do you want it back? Thank you so much, by the way. Fucking lifesaver.

HELEN: Do you have any of it left?

ANTHONY: Ha! Definitely not. The inferno is an expensive place. They had drinks on fire, I love drinks on fire. You'd think heaven would be free, but capitalism reigns there too, apparently. If you're asking what I think you're asking then the answer is yes.

HELEN: What do you think I'm asking?

ANTHONY: Do I need a little top-up.

HELEN: That's not what I'm asking.

ANTHONY: Oh. Well, the answer is still yes. I kind of do.

HELEN: You might have to speak to your father.

ANTHONY: Oh, God, Mum, please.

HELEN: I don't have it.

ANTHONY: You speak to him.

HELEN: I'm not speaking to him.

ANTHONY: About this?

HELEN: About anything.

ANTHONY: Well what am I supposed to do? I can't ask Dad. I'm not gonna justify every one of my life choices just to get—three hundred? Can you do three hundred?

HELEN: No.

ANTHONY (*texting*): I'm gonna have to tell Julian drinks are on him tonight.

HELEN: I need to talk to you about something.

ANTHONY: It's alright, he got a modelling job, he can afford it. What?

HELEN: When do you think your friend might be leaving?

ANTHONY: Don't worry, my life is an open book. Talk.

HELEN: I need to update you on my living arrangements.

ANTHONY: Oh, yeah?

HELEN: I'm no longer living in the flat.

ANTHONY: Good. It was a shithole. Where are you living?

HELEN: I'm not really living anywhere. I'm sort of—I'm staying somewhere.

ANTHONY: Who with?

HELEN: It's a sort of place where women can go for somewhere to stay.

ANTHONY: What sort of place?

HELEN: A sort of charity place. You pay for it. But not much. You get your meals. They help you out. It's not too bad.

ANTHONY: You're talking about a—like—shelter.

HELEN: I don't know if that's the right word.

ANTHONY: It's a fucking homeless shelter.

HELEN: No no, it's a place you can stay ...

ANTHONY: If you're homeless.

HELEN: I don't know what it's called. My landlord said he wasn't a charity so when he kicked me out I thought I better go to someone who was. They don't know what to do with me, actually, I'm not really what they're used to. They said some of the places out there are dangerous and I believe them because even this place I wouldn't call safe. If you want to know why I didn't text, well, a girl took my phone. She came up to me and she just said give me your phone. And I said I can't give you my phone, I need it. And she just said give it to me. And I couldn't believe the cheek of it! I thought I should slap this girl, who does she think she is?

But I think she would have hurt me very badly.

I really think she would.

So I gave it to her. And some money, too.

Why did I tell you that? I wasn't going to. I feel a bit shaky when I think of it, actually. I have to pass her in the halls. I don't think she remembers who I am. I don't know what she did with my phone.

ANTHONY: Sold it for drugs. [*as in, obviously*]

HELEN: Well—yes, I suppose she did.

ANTHONY: What is Dad doing?

Mum? What is Dad doing?

HELEN: What do you mean?

ANTHONY: He knows. Doesn't he? He sits in that house, and he knows. With that awful fucking slut, and he knows.

HELEN: We're not married anymore.

ANTHONY: So? So fucking what? You're homeless. I can't believe it. You are in a fucking homeless shelter with junkies and thieves.

HELEN: It's not that bad.

ANTHONY: You were robbed!

HELEN: That could've happened anywhere.

ANTHONY: Oh my God, I can't handle this. I'm sorry. I'm not in a place where I can deal with my fucking mother on the streets.

HELEN: I'm not on the streets.

ANTHONY: I knew a girl went into one of those places, we never saw her again.

HELEN: Did you look?

ANTHONY: What do you mean?

HELEN: Well, where did she go?

ANTHONY: I don't know. No-one knew. She just kind of disappeared off the face of the earth.

HELEN: Anthony, please don't worry about me. Okay? This is one of the better places. You can get robbed in your home. You can get robbed on the street.

ANTHONY: He should die.

HELEN: Oh, please.

ANTHONY: He's a prick and I'll tell him that.

HELEN: No you won't.

ANTHONY: So you do want that money back.

HELEN: No.

ANTHONY: That's why you were asking.

HELEN: No. It's yours. I gave it to you.

ANTHONY: Well, I spent it.

HELEN: That's fine. That's what you were supposed to do. No, I was actually going to ask you something else. You can say no to this. I mean, you can really say no to this, and I probably shouldn't ask. But I thought maybe I could stay here for a while. Is that crazy? Because they say—well, they say to me, haven't you got any family who can take you in? And I say not really, I mean my son lives in a tiny flat, a bedsit really, and my daughter has two kids and the house is not that big and her husband is—well, you know, he's just a bit of a handful, and I say no, not really, and anyway I don't want to be a burden. And they say be one. That's what she said, this lady, she looked at me and she just said 'be one'. So here I am. Nightmare! But. You can say no. Honestly you can. And you should. If you want to. I mean I said I'd ask.

Honestly, darling, I said I'd ask, and I've asked. You can really say no.

ANTHONY: How?

HELEN: What?

ANTHONY: How can I?

HELEN: I'd sleep on the floor.

ANTHONY: No, I mean how can I say no?

Pause.

HELEN: I think maybe you just have.

ANTHONY: But this is so hard! Matthew said this would happen. He did, he said be careful. He said home, family, has been—so hard, but you have managed to—slowly, carefully—and bravely, actually, yes, even bravely—extricate yourself from that mess, from that web, from that network of pain. That's how he talks, Matthew. But our brain is wired, he said—from childhood our brain is wired to love the ones who hurt us. Despite ourselves. Despite our victories along the way. And it can be so easy for them to draw us back into their own pathologies, their own disorder, their own projects and plans. I'm not saying you. I'm not saying consciously. But if anyone knows how far I've come. You have picked me up, literally, from a bed full of blood. Do you want to put me back there?

HELEN: How?

ANTHONY: How?

HELEN: By sleeping on your floor?

ANTHONY: I'm just trying to explain why it's hard.

HELEN: I know it's hard. Do you think I don't know that it's hard?

ANTHONY: I bring friends here. Most nights. And I know that you think that's just fucking around, but it's healing to me and this place is about what is healing to me.

HELEN: Well I'm sorry, I just didn't—

ANTHONY: What about Anna?

HELEN: Darling, I can't ask Anna.

ANTHONY: Why not?

HELEN: She's got the kids.

ANTHONY: She's got Darren, you mean.

HELEN: Well—yes. She's got Darren.

ANTHONY: Why is everyone scared of him?

HELEN: They haven't got room, Anthony.

ANTHONY: I haven't got room!

HELEN: I know. I'm sorry. They shouldn't have made me ask. It's not the way things should be done. A mother is not a beggar of a son. It's alright, darling, honestly. I said I'd ask and I've asked. This place is not that bad. The meals are alright. You get everything you need. For the first time in my life, I don't have to wash towels! Towels and sheets, my God, so nice not to have to wash towels and sheets. They come folded up, stiff and cold, like in a hospital. That doesn't sound nice but I like it. And you get a worker, too, a case worker, because, well, I suppose I'm a case, aren't I? And a bloody hard one, too. On Friday nights a van comes round. It parks out the front. We all crowd round because they have food. Hot food. Nice food. Pastries and things. There's a bit of pushing, but I don't push. I just stand at the back till the rough ones have gone. They're volunteers, the people on the van. They don't get paid. They talk about Jesus but don't push it down your throat. Hot pastie on a cold night. Little cuppa little chat. One lady said if I wanted to share my journey. I said what journey? I don't have a journey. I just thought I had a right, that's all. After what he did, I just thought I had a right. Just thought I had a right to go.

ANTHONY: When I was eleven years old you came into my room, do you remember? You heard me crying, like I did all the time in that room. You sat on my bed, and you asked what was wrong, and I said Dad didn't like me. Do you remember? I said he just doesn't like me, Mum, and I said we should leave. You and I, I said, and Anna, too, if she wanted to come, but I didn't think she would because she actually liked Dad, the bitch, and still does. And what did you do? You wiped the snot from my nose and the tears from my eyes and you told me not to be silly. Do you remember? 'Don't be silly,' you said. Fuck. Little punch to the guts, that was. 'Oh, of course he likes you, Anthony, it's just his way.' But I wasn't silly, was I? I was right.

HELEN: He hadn't done anything. He never did anything.

ANTHONY: Because you think abuse is like hitting or something.

HELEN: Well what is it then?

ANTHONY: It's a room with two people and one of them looks at the other like he shouldn't have been born.

HELEN: And the other looks back the same way.

ANTHONY: Do you blame me?

HELEN: Well, I have left, haven't I?

ANTHONY: Now! Now that I got myself out! After years of it, years! And now you want me to rescue you? How does that work? I begged you, Mum, and it wasn't the last time. I begged you, I said he wasn't good for you, I said he wasn't good for any of us. You were supposed to listen to me, I was your son. I was your son and he was a choice, he was your choice—I didn't get a choice! Fuck, I'm shaking. This is not a good time for this, I swear. If Matthew was here I know what he'd say. He'd say 'alarm bells'. He'd say 'red flashing lights: be careful'.

HELEN: Alright! Jesus! I said don't worry about me!

ANTHONY: And how am I supposed to do that?

Helen takes out some money.

HELEN: How much are the drinks at this place?

ANTHONY: Don't be stupid.

HELEN: How much are they?

ANTHONY: I need you to understand where I'm coming from.

HELEN: ?

ANTHONY: More than that.

HELEN: Well, take it anyway.

ANTHONY: I can't un-know what you've told me.

HELEN: You can try.

Please, Anthony. Your friend is waiting. Take it.

ANTHONY: What are you trying to do to me? What am I supposed to do? Tell me, what do you want from me?

Fuck, Mum! Why are you being like this? Is this place alright or not?

HELEN: Yes.

ANTHONY: Are you sure?

HELEN: Yes.

ANTHONY: Do you at least understand what I'm saying?

She holds out the money.

I just feel that for once in my life I have to put myself first.

She holds out the money.

I can't take that, don't be ridiculous, are you sure?

Pause.

Oh Jesus, Mum, fine.

He takes it.

You understand, don't you? I need you to understand.

HELEN: Why don't you go in to your friend?

ANTHONY: Will you come to the barbeque, at least? I'll tell him. I will. I'll tell him he has to help you.

Say something, Mum, please.

HELEN: Who was it for?

ANTHONY: What?

HELEN: All of it. Who was it for, then? The screaming, the cutting, the blood. Who was it for, was it for us? All those nights in the hospital, days on the ward—who was that for? Was that for us, was that for your father and I? Was that your gift to us? All that time in your room, your refusing to eat—

ANTHONY: What are you talking about?

HELEN: When in your life have you not put yourself first?

ANTHONY: !

HELEN: You have to forgive me, Anthony. You have to forgive me for loving him.

ANTHONY: Do you think any of it was fun? Do you?

HELEN: I didn't say it was fun.

ANTHONY: No, you said it was selfish. Basically. Callous bitch. Well it was for you, actually. Yes, it was. The screaming, the cutting, the blood. Yes. It was for you, because you needed it, didn't you? You needed it so you could still do something for me, still be a good mother, still look like you were trying so hard, caring for this tortured, difficult little child of yours, and everyone would feel sorry for you even though you wouldn't give me what I really wanted, what I needed, which was to leave. You wouldn't do that, no, because of your pathological fucking attachment to that cunt who came first every time. But you could still do so much for me because I was so fucked up. Just like you needed me to be. Just like you wanted.

HELEN: I'm going.

ANTHONY: You don't want to hear this but you're going to. There's a name for what you did. I forget what it's called. Make me sick then give me medicine. Fuck me up then be my nurse.

HELEN: Why don't you go in to your friend?

ANTHONY: You're where you are now because you didn't listen to me.

HELEN: Go in to your friend, Anthony, or I will.

ANTHONY: I don't give you permission for that.

No, I don't give you permission. It's not like when I was a kid and you could walk into my room any time you wanted and call me silly and weak and anything else you liked. No. This is my home, not yours. You lost yours, remember? And it was all your fault.

Helen walks towards the bedroom, Anthony tries to stop her.

HELEN: DON'T TOUCH ME!

He releases her. She opens the bedroom door and looks in. Closes the door again. Looks at Anthony.

ANTHONY: Sometimes there is.

Helen picks up the angel wings and examines them.

HELEN: I think these will be alright, you know. They only have to last one night. Bring a bit of tape with you just in case. I couldn't carry the sewing machine, I only took a bag. Left it out on the nature strip with everything else. Double stitch it if you want, but I don't think you need to. Careful with the needle.

She puts the wings down and walks to the door.

Darling, if Anna asks, or your Dad complains—

Tell them I said you could blow out the candles.

She leaves.

3.

Helen looking offstage, anxious.

Anna enters.

HELEN: Why?

ANNA: Why?

HELEN: Why did they run away?

ANNA: Why do you think they ran away?

HELEN: ?

ANNA: You scared them, Mum.

HELEN: Scared? I did? Why?

ANNA: Why did you tell them that?

HELEN: ?

ANNA: You didn't do that, did you?

HELEN: ?

What did I tell them?

ANNA: Mum!

HELEN: What?

ANNA: Are you alright?

HELEN: Yes.

ANNA: Are you sure?

HELEN: ?

ANNA: Where have you been?

Mum? Where have you been?

HELEN: I've been ...

I mean, I've been ...

What did I tell the children?

ANNA: It doesn't matter.

HELEN: Please!

Pause.

ANNA: You said a girl was disrespectful and when she passed you in the kitchen you put her hand on the stove.

What does that mean?

You didn't do that, did you?

What kitchen, what stove?

Mum, where have you been, we couldn't find you?

HELEN: I didn't hold it there for long.

ANNA: What is going on? Anthony called me, the shit. Crying. It was all about him, of course, it was the second thing he told me. He said you lost the flat. I said what? You were living in some kind of shelter. I said what shelter, what do you mean, he said he didn't know.

Didn't he even ask? I called all the ones I could find. They didn't know you. I went round to the flat. There was a couple living there. They didn't know you either.

HELEN: Why were they in their bathers?

ANNA: What?

HELEN: Why were they in their bathers?

Pause.

ANNA: We were going to Dad's. They were going to swim in the pool.

It's for them, not him.

HELEN: It makes a sizzling sound. Like a barbeque. Five fat sausages. I didn't have anything to give her, I told her that, I said I'm sorry but I don't have anything to give you, we're all just trying to survive. She took my hair in her hand and pulled me down to the floor.

ANNA: Mum!

HELEN: She kicked me but it didn't hurt. I stayed there till I knew she'd gone. Then later I was making noodles and in she came. She wasn't expecting it. I wasn't expecting it either. But God, it felt like something. It felt like a lot.

I take them to the pool, don't I?

ANNA (*calling offstage*): You two get your clothes on over your bathers and then come and say goodbye to Grandma!

(*to Helen*) I'm going to take them to Dad's then I'm going to come back here and we're going to sort this out, okay?

She is distracted by something in her pocket. She pulls out her phone and answers.

Can I call you back, what's happening?

Well, my mother is here.

My mother is here.

Yes.

Darren, I said I would come with you if you wanted.

That is not fair. I offered, you said no, and now you blame me for not coming anyway.

Well I can't now.

I can't now.

I am taking them to Dad's.

My mother is here.

Because I've been looking for her for more than a month and now she's here!

Why would you say that? I didn't even suggest that.

Well, you're pre-empting nothing.

I know that.

I know that.

Then go.

Darren, if they're calling you you should go. I did say good luck.

Well I said that too. Darren, you need to make them like you so just go, will you?

She hangs up.

If I take the kids to Dad's, will you stay here?

HELEN: I saw Darren on TV.

He looked old.

He looked scared.

He looked guilty.

ANNA: It didn't happen like they said it did. He lost money too. It was a risk, but everyone knew it was a risk. I don't think they should be allowed to chase him down the street like that.

First day of court, he's feeling—

HELEN: Can I stay here?

Pause.

ANNA: Where have you been staying?

HELEN: ...

ANNA: I mean of course you can, but where have you been staying?

HELEN: But that's not true, is it?

ANNA: Of course it's true.

HELEN: He already said no, didn't he? Didn't he already say no?

Pause.

ANNA: Well it's my house too.

HELEN: Well tell him, will you, tell him what time it is, because the alarms are going off now, Anna, because it's serious, do you understand, it's really serious now, because you can't burn someone, no, you can't, not even if they deserve it you can't. And I think they understood but they had no choice. That's what she said, my worker, she said 'I'm sorry but we have no choice.'

ANNA: Where did you go?

HELEN: Where did I go? Where did I go? I went to nowhere, do you understand, I went to nothing, I went to the only place you can be if you can't be anywhere else, I went to where I SHOULD NOT BE, my baby, where I ACTUALLY SHOULD NOT BE! So you have to tell him, will you? That it's midnight. That the mice come out to play. Fat fingers fuck! I am not a rag doll I am not a bank! You cannot put me down, do you understand, you cannot put me to the ground, and bloody Dan he said to me 'Hel, you've given longer to this place', and I said Dan, I said, YOU SUCKED ME DRY, I said THIS PLACE HAS SUCKED ME DRY!

What did I say to the children?

ANNA: Mum ...

HELEN: What did I say?

ANNA (calling offstage): I'm not hearing dressing up there!

HELEN: Anna, you'll help me, won't you, because the birds are calling, the sun is going down.

ANNA: Dad said he offered you money. Did he?

Why didn't you take it?

Why didn't you take it, Mum?

HELEN: How much did he give you?

ANNA: No, you.

HELEN: I know, but how much did he give you?

Pause.

ANNA: Well why shouldn't he, how much have you given to Anthony over all these years? Do you know what would happen if I gave one of mine something I didn't give the other? Meltdown. Armageddon. So what? We needed the money. Darren didn't do anything wrong, not really, I mean he may have oversold it a bit but that's part of the game, isn't it, everyone knows that, but now people are screaming and Darren's in court and our shit lawyer told us it would look better if we gave them something, anything, cents on the dollar. So yes, Dad helped. Why shouldn't he? Why are we even talking about this, anyway? You're the one who needs help. What is this 'nothing'? What is this 'nowhere'? How could you let it come to this? Why didn't you just take his money, Mum? It's money, it doesn't mean anything. It's your money too; more yours than his if you ask me. I didn't speak to him for months. Screened his calls. Didn't even go to the shops near the house in case I saw him, or God forbid her. But you said! You said don't cut him off. You said you could hate him but I couldn't. So eventually, I chose not to. I went round. Told him exactly what I thought of him. Said he was pathetic and selfish and cruel and that he'd ruined everything and he should be ashamed of himself. But he just kept agreeing with me, which is infuriating, but what can I do? The kids love their grandpa, and they love the pool, and where were you? Where were you, Mum? The world was crashing around us and I needed you. It was for them, not him. At that age they're sponges, they soak up everything. Their Dad was stressed, their Mum was crying, God knows where Grandma went and Grandpa, well, Grandpa was in exile for some reason they couldn't understand. And I couldn't do anything about any of it except the last bit. So yes, we went around. They swam in his pool. We had some wine and it was nice, it was just like old times except you weren't there and Anthony wasn't bleeding to death in his room. No, don't start on me, the days are gone when we have to tiptoe round that. We're all drowning now. So I told Dad what was happening

and he offered, that's all, he offered, I didn't ask, he said how much do you need. And I said I don't forgive you, Dad, don't think that I do, and he said that's fine, just try to be nice to that bitch he has living in the house and I said that's fine, I can do that, it's not really about her anyway. And now we go maybe every second day. He babysits sometimes. The pool's great, he's done a really good job on it. She's out most of the time anyway. Mum—if I can take his money you can too.

HELEN: The kids could move in together and I could have one of their rooms.

ANNA: You're not listening to me.

HELEN: You'll tell Darren, won't you?

ANNA: It's not a long term solution.

HELEN: But I need to sleep in a bed.

ANNA: I know, but I bet the money's still on offer if only you would ask—

HELEN: I will not ask! I will not! I will not bend over, I will not spread my cheeks, I will not be fucked by that man anymore, do you understand me?

ANNA: Mum!

HELEN: Why aren't you listening to me? Just tell him, will you? Tell him I'm tired.

ANNA: It's not up to Darren. Why do you think that it is?

HELEN: Then say I can come.

ANNA: (calling) You two!

HELEN: Say I can come.

ANNA: (calling) Get down here!

HELEN: Say it, please!

ANNA: (calling) I've told you enough times! I'm counting to ten!

HELEN: One.

ANNA: Mum, we'll sort something out, okay? I promise we will.

HELEN: Two.

ANNA: You need to stay here while I take the kids to Dad's.

HELEN: Three.

ANNA: Can you do that? What are you counting for?

HELEN: Four.

ANNA: Mum, don't be like this, please.

HELEN: Five.

ANNA: Stop it, will you, the walls are coming down.

HELEN: Six.

ANNA: I can't have this now!

HELEN: Seven.

ANNA: Oh, shit.

Anna is distracted by her phone. She pulls it out and checks who it is. Looks at Helen.

HELEN: Tell him.

They look at each other.

HELEN: Tell him.

They look at each other.

HELEN: Tell him he's getting a bat in his belfry.

Anna answers the phone.

(into phone) Hang on a minute.

(to Helen) Wait here.

Anna goes to another room. Helen waits. Long pause. From a pocket or a bag, she pulls out a sandwich packet, crumpled, with half a sandwich in it. She removes the sandwich and eats hungrily. After some time, Anna enters. Watches Helen. Helen finishes eating the sandwich. Holds the crumpled packet. Sees Anna. They look at one another. Anna smiles.

ANNA: Good news.

HELEN *(relieved)*: Thank you.

ANNA: I spoke to Dad.

Pause.

HELEN: Dad?

ANNA: They fixed up the room. Did you know that? Anthony's room. For guests. Yeah, they knocked down the wall between the room and the bathroom, so it's self-contained now. Ensuite. Microwave. Like a hotel. I would have killed for that room and you knew it!

Anyway, I spoke to Darren; he wasn't keen; so then I spoke to Dad.

It's a temporary solution. You won't see them much. You just have to try to be polite, that's all. No-one's expecting more than that. I know it's not ideal but she's not evil, you know, she's actually okay with this. That can't be easy. None of this is easy, for anyone. I think of you out there and I want to cry, Mum, believe me. No-one wanted this, no-one imagined this. But this is day one. This changes now.

Mum, say something, will you?

HELEN: Never once in your marriage have you stood up to that man.

ANNA: Don't say that.

HELEN: We all knew what he was the minute we met him, and we assumed you'd see it too. But you never did.

ANNA: He didn't do anything wrong.

HELEN: I know he didn't. But you did.

He's in court because he's too dumb to pull it off. But you know and I know that he's not even smart enough to have had the idea in the first place.

Why didn't you ask us for money if you needed it?

ANNA: Oh Mum, shut up, you don't know what you're talking about.

HELEN: No, I'm mad.

ANNA: You are mad, you should listen to yourself.

HELEN: I need help.

ANNA: You do.

HELEN: I need help.

ANNA: I know you do.

I know you do, Mum, and I'm getting you help. This is a temporary solution.

HELEN: THIS IS NOT A TEMPORARY SOLUTION! THIS IS A KNIFE! YOU KNOW WHAT THIS IS!

ANNA: Mum, please don't shout.

HELEN: WITH THAT CUNT IN HER HOUSE?

ANNA: I'm asking you to be quiet.

HELEN: AND ALL BECAUSE YOU CAN'T STAND UP TO THAT RAT IN YOUR BED!

ANNA: WELL HE DIDN'T SAY NO! Actually. Darren didn't say no. I did. And I'm right, and you're proving that I'm right. I swore one thing I would give my kids stability. That's all. That they would grow up in a peaceful house, without the constant anxiety. I was there for Anthony, remember? Every moment. In my room. The second best room. Listening through the walls. Hoping he was alive. Hoping, sometimes, that he wasn't. Can you believe that? Because if his pain ended maybe mine would too. Horrible. Horrible. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting for the car to come back from the hospital. Would he be in it or would they keep him a bit longer? Please let them keep him. Please, just a few more days. I was there, you forget that. I was quiet, I was easy, but I was there. But it was going to be different here. I always said it would. But I failed, because this is not a stable house and it never has been. And now this? No. This would only make it worse.

HELEN: What would make it worse?

ANNA: Mum, you're the best grandmother in the world. Just not now.

Pause.

HELEN: What do you think I might do to them?

ANNA: Mum ...

HELEN: What do you think?

ANNA: You held a woman's hand on a stovetop! Is that normal? And then you tell the children about it? Why?

HELEN: I don't know.

ANNA: Why?

HELEN: I don't know.

ANNA: And then Dan and Dad and getting fucked and whatever else. They can hear! They can hear us down here!

HELEN: I can change.

Pause.

ANNA: Then we can talk about it.

HELEN: Don't make me go there. Please.

ANNA: I get one chance with them. I'm already messing it up. Their Dad's in court. He's crying his eyes out in front of them every night. He might be going to prison, and he knows it, and I think they know it too. You can all celebrate then. Have a party. Yes, you're right. It was my idea. But he didn't do it right. I'm happy to admit it—he puts on a bluster, but he's not a smart man. Or a strong man, either, so I have to be the strong one. You understand what that's like. And I will be. This once, I fucking will be.

No, Mum, it's a reasonable solution. It's temporary. We all have to make compromises.

HELEN: You're a good mother.

ANNA: You don't have to say that.

HELEN: Protecting your children from the monster. No no, listen: When I took them to the pool I could have drowned them many times. No no, listen, listen: For love! Don't you see? So they would never know how alone they really are.

ANNA: You're making the case, Mum. You're making the case every time you open your mouth.

HELEN: I'm tired.

ANNA: Let me take that.

She goes to take the crumpled sandwich packet, but Helen snatches it away.

ANNA: Don't be silly, it's rubbish.

HELEN: Don't tell me what is mine!

ANNA: Fine. Fine! Then let's go. I'll drive you there now.

Helen stares straight ahead.

ANNA: We'll be alright, Mum. We're still a family. It's time to go.

HELEN: Eight.

ANNA: What?

HELEN: Nine.

ANNA: Mum—

Helen breathes in.

4.

A young man speaks to the audience.

MAN: Can you imagine if all you could see of a city was the electricity? Running down walls. Connecting buildings. Crackling down streets and lanes. And in the plants and animals, too, and in the people. Nerves ringing with it, down to our toes and up to our heads—and our brains are just these tiny electrical storms moving around, about this high off the ground. We are weather systems. We are noise. We spark off each other. We are not alone. My father was a good man and he died before I knew him. My mother was a woman and I knew her very well. My brother broke my arm but then he taught me how to steal. My mother's boyfriends came and went and some of them were fine. Some of them were paying. Some of them paid twice. My parole worker was the kindest woman I ever met in my life, the cunt. Is this what you wanted? An explanation? Sometimes I go in churches and give my sermon. They look frightened, like God turned up. I light the candles and put my hand through the flame. I look at the people as they pray, and they look at me. Can't they see an answer when it stares them in the face? I have no child inside. I am an avenging angel. I am the lightning and the storm. We are all electricity, but only some of us can strike.

If you saw me now?

If you saw me now you would see a fat man in a tight t-shirt holding a yellow crayon in the art room, staring at the paper then shifting my stare, slowly, through thick fog, to a worker with a tissue for the drool. I draw lightening I draw fire. But if you saw me then. If you saw me then I lived on light. I was the light, I shone.

That day, that day I started at my mother's house. I woke but I don't really sleep. Had a sugary cereal and a cuppa tea. I wasn't on my heels I was on my toes, bouncing. I said to Mum this is a day, Mum, this is a real fuckin day, but she didn't say anything, she never does. She had a cig and I had one too. Crack you if you don't. Need a lighter hurry up. What else you got? And she did. Smoke a that too—fuckin cracklin now. Awake! Do you know you can get an electrical charge from a potato? Well you can. We did it in primary school. Every living thing. Every animal, every plant. That's why they twitch when you cut their throats. But in the big times, in the biggest times of all, all the electricity in the world doesn't come through you it comes through me. I am the conductor, I am the charge. I am the one who can point and make fire. Someone said lie down in a dark room when the feelings come. But Jesus Christ what a waste! You lie down in a dark room. I will set the world on fire. But if you could see me now. Belly hangin out of my shirt. Pimples on my face bad breath. No electricity, none left. The meds. The fuckin meds. But if you could see me then. If you could see me then you would know the weather. Severe storms, damaging winds. Tie down objects, no unnecessary travel. Too late to leave, too late to stay. That day. That day I started at my mother's house. One of these times I'm gonna crack her in the face. DO NOT LOOK AT ME DO NOT LOOK AT THE SUN I AM SHINING! Bitch. Gym. Press. Hundred and ten. FUCKIN DON'T LOOK AT ME I'M LEAVING! Home. Smoke. Internet. Wank. Down the shop CALL THE POLICE I DON'T CARE I DON'T CARE! Score. Smoke. Hear the thunder in the sky. Electricity, I see it now, it arcs across the house. I see it! It's like aluminium foil, shaking. It's beautiful, so beautiful, I don't want to close my eyes.

And that's when I thought I might hotwire a car.

Act two. My teenage years. Is this what you wanted? In the first year of high school I met a girl. In the last I threw a bottle at her head. In between I fuckin loved that girl and she always talked to me even when even when. Fuckin hurts in my heart fuckin eyes fuckin mouth. Don't forget I was normal till I wasn't. Not a good kid. Not a nice kid. But a kid who she liked and who no-one else did. I just think she just thought I wasn't anyone to be scared of. And maybe I

wasn't. And maybe I'm not. And we grew. And we talked. And she smiled, and it fuckin hurt in my chest when she did. And everyone wanted her, especially when she grew. And everyone ached, and no-one could believe she would know my name. Have me as a friend. But she did and fuck you to all of them. It wasn't anything more than that. But it was enough. It was more than enough. It was everything I had.

Then—FUCK I WAS STUPID I LET IT TAKE ME OVER BUT—then, about fifteen, I became a different kinda bad. Not stealing. Not fighting. Not anything I did. But the thing that I would be. Was fucking turning on. Electric me. The weatherman. And I don't know what she saw but let me tell you what I saw: A little cloud across her face. A tiny shadow in her eye. A wrinkle in her forehead. She was worried and I don't blame her. Who wouldn't be scared at the birth of a god? And I couldn't blame her and I wouldn't if she chose to walk away. But guess what? She didn't. She was that good. I was the cunt. I made this happen. And after the school formal everyone thought I must have had a reason. Must have been jealous. Must have seen her boyfriend kiss her neck or touch her arse or something, well I wish. Like everyone else I would love to have a reason. A bottle in the head for a reason is something you can understand, it's sort of comforting even. But a bottle in the head for no reason at all—well, that's just the lightening falling where it falls. That's the electricity in my head just dancing. It's random, but random doesn't look like random. The lotto can come up one two three four five, there's no reason why it can't. And maybe I can just want to do something and maybe she can just happen to be there, dancing with her friends and laughing, smile that makes my chest feel tight, and maybe there's no reason, and maybe there doesn't have to be a reason, maybe you should STOP LOOKING FOR ONE! It could've been anyone. Happened to be her. I DIDN'T CHOOSE HER SHE CHOSE ME IF ANYTHING WHY THE FUCK DID SHE DO THAT WHY DID SHE HAVE TO BE SO FUCKING GOOD?

And the thunder in the distance. And the sheet across the sky.

I throw a bottle.

It connects.

And the whole place explodes into light.

A clue? Up to you. Act three. That day. I think about it sometimes, in here. Through the fog that is my brain. No electricity now, none left. I draw lightening I draw fire. I ask the worker: How many? And he knows what I am asking cause he's told me many times. And he knows I'm only asking cause he doesn't like to say. How. Many? And he tells me and I think about the number. Is it high or low? The middle of the city in the middle of the day. People don't expect it so they don't get out the way. It happened fast, but not for me. The closer you get to the speed of light the slower things go. And if you're riding the lightening, time stands still.

That day I started at my mother's house. Home, wank, smoke, gym. The electricity in my hands was enough to start the car. I don't hate cops I like em. It's easy to make them chase you and easy to make them stop: just go near a kid or put a wheel on the curb. But this day. This day was different. I took the car to the city. Watched the whole thing from on high. Saw the car move through the streets. Heard the sirens get up close. Then my car stops. It turns. And points its nose down a street full of people.

And then. And then. It goes again.

Broom broom.

If you could see me now I'm fat.

I'm lying in a room.

I know that what I did was wrong.

For ordinary people.

But if you could see me then.

GOD DAMN THESE FUCKIN DRUGS.

If you could see me then, I'm

light and the thunder is over our heads and the light and the sound happen at the same time and a bolt from the heavens comes down to the earth and I'm lightening I'm thunder I'm sliding my way down the street down the footpath and everyone turns and the birds fly up into the sky and the screams and the voices say why what is happening and why and they run and they stumble and some of them fall and the ones that fall this way are under my wheels and the ones that fall that way are staring and then there's the ones that I catch and they fly in the air and some land on the windscreen and slide to one side and some land on the roof and fly into the sky and I'm

pushing like into a girl and the pedal is down and I'm pushing like into some bitch and the people are flying like angels and birds and there's blood on the windscreen and sirens are sounding and women are screaming and I am the lightening the beautiful lightening the merciless lightening the charge and the terror I find my way out of the car and I pull out a gun I don't have and they shoot and I fall and the fire in my leg fills my heart fills my eyes fills my hands and I throw it and then I'm the sun and the air catches fire and I stand in the fire and I breathe in the fire and I breathe it in deep and the second shot comes and the light fills my eyes and I wake in a hospital bed and the nurse she is kind and the light never reaches that level again and they tell me the number and tell me again and I count on my fingers

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten.

He looks at the audience.

Which one?

Which one?

Which one?

WHICH ONE?

WHICH ONE!

WHICH ONE!

WHICH ONE!

5.

Chris, Anna and Anthony stand with drinks in their hands.

ANNA: I found out why Darren doesn't want me in court. He's blaming me. His sister, who hates him, told me. She said he's blaming me, saying it was my idea. He's describing conversations that he now says he didn't really understand. He's saying he did these things and he's really sorry but he was pressured into it. And the reason they arrested him instead of me, he says, is that I was clever enough to make sure that everything that happened happened in *his* name, not mine. And I don't know how far he's going to get with that but that's not really the point, is it? It's about loyalty, and it went out the window, first hint of a breeze. So I'm leaving him. He knows. And you can say what you want to now. Don't pretend you don't know what

I'm talking about. Mum said you were all just waiting for me to see what you saw. Well guess what? You weren't so brilliant. You weren't so insightful. I already saw it. I saw it years ago. I saw it every day when he tried to run the business and kept tripping over his feet at every turn. That magical combination of ignorance and arrogance. Yes, I saw it. I couldn't help but see it. And you were right: he was everything you thought he was and more. But I thought he was one thing else and that was dependable. Not because he was good, or strong, or responsible, but because he was weak, actually, and a little bit useless, and on some level he knew it, he had to, and besides he had nowhere else to go. So I was happy to keep him around. Run the business behind the scenes. And give him credit, which he took when the times were good. When the books were healthy and everyone said he was smart. But he's proud, you know, despite everything he's just very proud, and when it all went wrong I thought the one thing worse than admitting he did it would be admitting it wasn't his idea. But apparently he's not that proud after all. So that's it. Over. There's only one problem. Unlike the rest of you, I sort of came to like him.

She cries.

CHRIS: I paid Georgie extra for a premium cut this morning. I said make it the best, he said what's the occasion. So I told him. And he said who's birthday? I said Helen's. And he got confused, like he couldn't remember if she was the old one or the new. I said my ex-wife, Helen. He said really? I said it's family, George, it's a family tradition. He said that's what we don't have enough of in this world, Chris, he said. Loyalty.

ANTHONY: When she came to see me she was starting to smell. It was a particular kind of smell. It was a smell like if you smell it on a train you change carriages, do you understand? I can't forget that smell. Can't get it out of my nose. What have we done? What have we done? I was right, I had reasons. I had good reasons, we all did.

CHRIS: When your mother gets here I have something to say. We've let her down, I don't mind admitting it. None of us have covered ourselves in glory. But I believe in second chances. So when your mother comes I'm going to ask her to marry me. Again. Now, I know what you're thinking. I don't deserve it, I'm the first to admit that, but I didn't deserve it the first time either. Look around you. Look what we have made here. She can have all this. She can have it all back. You said she was—unbalanced, was she? Well, she'll get better here. One thing I

know about your mother, she's smarter than the lot of us. She knows a good deal when she sees one.

ANNA: She's left you, hasn't she? The other one? Well, that was inevitable. And now you want everything to go back to the way it was. Let me tell you something, Dad: If you think Mum's coming today you're madder than she is.

CHRIS: Don't use that word.

ANNA: What word would you like me to use? What would you call it? Do you know what she said to me? She said she could have drowned my children. She said she could have drowned them in the pool.

CHRIS: She would never have done that.

ANNA: She would never have said it, either.

ANTHONY: They should do the same to you, then.

ANNA: What?

ANTHONY: If you change, if you start to smell, if you scream and shake and cry and bleed then your children should do the same to you, they should put you in the street, throw you into the darkness, and they should lock the door and do the right thing by their children, and so it goes, round and around and I'm no better.

CHRIS: Anthony, you need to keep it together today.

ANTHONY: But somewhere—love!—don't you understand?—is not—done, it is—infinity!

A policeman enters.

They look at him.

The policeman goes to speak, but then clutches his head and falls to one knee. He struggles to his feet again.

POLICEMAN: I'm sorry. Migraine. I shouldn't be working, but we're so short of staff. It's a challenging day. I knocked on the front door. I heard voices back here.

ANNA: Are you here for me?

POLICEMAN: I don't know, who are you?

CHRIS: Is this about Helen?

Pause.

POLICEMAN: And you are?

CHRIS: Her husband.

ANNA: Ex-husband.

POLICEMAN: And you are?

ANTHONY: Her son.

ANNA: I'm her daughter.

POLICEMAN: Alright then.

Alright.

I regret to inform you—

Just give me a sec.

He clasps his head.

In the city today—

Oh my God I feel sick—

Anna takes out her phone and looks.

POLICEMAN: I'm sorry, it's like an electrical storm—

ANNA: It says 'Carnage.'

Pause.

'Carnage', it says, 'on City Streets'.

Why are you here?

A car—what is this?—drove down a footpath?

No.

No.

No no, please—

POLICEMAN: I'm so sorry—

ANNA: But wait! No, but wait! It's alright! It's alright. Oh my God. It's alright.

God, you gave me a heart attack.

She lost her phone. It was stolen from her, probably sold. It could've been anyone. I'm really sorry for whoever it was, but it wasn't our mother.

POLICEMAN: She had a drivers licence with this address.

ANNA: Stolen too.

POLICEMAN: But the photo matched her face.

Pause.

ANTHONY: You saw her.

POLICEMAN: I did.

I'm so sorry.

It was random. Like lightening. There was nothing she could do. There are families all over the city today. Lights flashing outside. A knock on the door.

End of the old life and into the new.

I won't keep you long. I just need to ask a few questions. You said 'ex-wife'. Was she living here?

They look at each other.

ANTHONY: No.

POLICEMAN: Where was she living?

They look at each other again.

POLICEMAN: Where was she living?

ANTHONY: We don't know.

POLICEMAN: Why not?

ANTHONY: She's been moving around.

POLICEMAN: From where to where?

ANTHONY: Not always to anywhere.

POLICEMAN: What does that mean?

ANTHONY: You'll figure it out.

POLICEMAN: When did you last see her?

ANTHONY: When she asked us for help.

For somewhere to live.

For a home.

For a bed.

You're being very professional. Keeping your thoughts to yourself.

POLICEMAN: Families are complicated.

ANTHONY: Not ours. We're not complicated. We said no, that's all. She asked for our help, and we said no.

The policeman clasps his head.

ANTHONY: It's not migraine, you know. It's this family, infecting your brain.

ANNA: Anthony!

ANTHONY: Have you ever seen anything like it? Our mother—who we loved, actually, who we cared for, who had done nothing wrong—cast out. Into the street, and why?

ANNA: Anthony, stop.

ANTHONY: Because she was in the fucking way.

ANNA: Please.

ANTHONY: She was strange. She was changing.

ANNA: Stop.

ANTHONY: Isn't that awful? Isn't that beyond anything you can possibly imagine?

ANNA: I said stop.

ANTHONY: Maybe you'll feel better if you tell us what you think of us.

ANNA: Anthony!

ANTHONY: No, I want to hear it. What is the word you would use? You must have seen things. Murder. Rape. How would you describe this? How does it compare?

ANNA: Shut up! Shut up!

ANTHONY: I want him to tell us! Don't you understand? He needs to tell us what we've done!

POLICEMAN: I have seen evil.

If that is what you think you are.

I have seen it. I have touched it. I have locked it in a cell.

You are not that. You're not.

ANTHONY: Well then what would you call it?

Pause.

POLICEMAN: Just ordinary selfish, I guess.

ANTHONY: No. No.

POLICEMAN: There are many other families being visited today. With things they didn't do or say.

ANTHONY: It can't be ordinary, it can't be.

POLICEMAN: You don't see what I see.

ANTHONY: But wouldn't that mean that—

ANNA: Who drove the car?

POLICEMAN: Someone known to police.

ANNA: Mad.

POLICEMAN: Yes. Mad.

I know you're looking for reasons.

We're all looking for reasons.

But one thing I've learned is you can't change the weather.

He goes to leave, then stops and turns back.

Oh, by the way. Something I forgot to say. As victims of crime we can organise counselling.

If you think that might help.

Funny how stupid I always feel saying that.

He leaves. Silence.

ANTHONY: But wouldn't that mean that

CHRIS: I paid Georgie extra.

ANTHONY: Wouldn't that mean that

CHRIS: Premium cut.

ANTHONY: If this is not evil then

ANNA: Grandma's on holiday.

CHRIS: Family, George.

ANNA: Do we all understand that?

ANTHONY: There is no such thing as

ANNA: I won't put them through this.

ANTHONY: There is no such thing as

CHRIS: It's family, George.

ANTHONY: There is no such thing

ANNA: I will not put them through this.

ANTHONY: There is no such thing as love.

Helen enters. Only Chris 'sees' her. The others do not respond as he speaks.

CHRIS: I told them you'd come.

Knew you couldn't stay away.

Did my time in the doghouse.

But it's all better now.

Got the pool heated up.

I built it for you.

You know that, don't you?

Digging. Digging.

Smoke rising slowly.

Digging. Digging.

Everything shining.

Digging. Digging.

Grass came up thick this year.

Digging.

Digging.

Digging in the dark.

The end.