

What Will Survive of Us – Tom Fowler

Characters

Mick – *A playwright, mid-forties*

Anna – *An actress, mid-forties*

Peter – *A playwright, mid-forties*

Russell – *A director, late-forties*

Edward – *An actor, early-twenties*

Natalie – *An actress, mid-twenties*

Marcus/Martha – *A waiter/waitress*

Note: This part can be played by the actor who plays Edward or the actress that plays Natalie.

Act 1

Scene 1

Mick is sitting by himself in the middle of a fancy restaurant. He is in his mid-forties. On the table there is a half-drunk bottle of red wine. Mick looks at his watch, then reclines back into his chair, taking a large swig of wine. It is clear he has been here for some while. Peter enters. Peter is of a similar age, though is dressed smarter and carries an air of success with him.

Peter: Mick! I am so sorry, I got caught up with –

Mick: Don't worry about it, sit down.

Peter: Rehearsal ran over late, then I had to wait for a taxi -

Mick: Please sit down.

Peter: Yes, well.

Peter sits down.

Peter: Not been here long have you?

Mick: No.

Pause.

Peter: Have you eaten?

Mick: Not yet.

Peter: Nor me. The crab here is truly sublime.

Mick: I wouldn't know.

Peter: Oh. Have you not been here before?

Mick: I'm afraid not.

Peter: Well trust me, this won't be your last visit.

Pause. They both study the menu.

Mick: I fancy a steak. How is the steak? Here, I mean.

Peter: Can't say I've had it myself, but Anna raved about it.

Pause. Waiter enters.

Marcus: Mr Reid.

Peter: Marcus!

Marcus: *Your* table is ready if you'd prefer?

Peter looks at Mick.

Peter: Here's fine, thank you.

Marcus: As you wish. Are you ready to order, sir?

Peter looks at Mick. Mick nods.

Peter: I'll have –

Marcus: The crab?

Peter smiles and nods.

Peter: Anna always says –

Mick: I'll have the salad please.

Marcus: And to drink?

Peter: This one here please.

He points at the drinks menu.

Peter: Could we have a wine cooler with it?

Marcus: Certainly. And you, sir? Another glass of the house red?

Mick: Another bottle.

Marcus: Of course. Enjoy your meal.

Waiter exits.

Peter: We love this place, Anna and I. We come here quite a lot.

Mick: I gathered.

Peter: Shouldn't really, but it gives Carla a break from cooking, you know. On top of her looking after the kids every day, it does get a bit much. She has her own to see to when she gets home.

Pause.

Peter: Anyway how *are* you? It's been too long

Mick: I'm fine.

Peter: I'm glad.

Pause.

Peter: Well, we've been rehearsing most days.

Mick: *Plastic Paradise*. So I hear. Russell's directing?

Peter nods.

Mick: Going well I hope?

Peter: I think so. Tour's been extended.

Mick: It was in the paper. Ending in The National?

Peter: Yes.

Mick: That's great news.

Pause.

Peter: It's bit of a pain really. Anna and I had flights booked –

Mick: Home?

Peter: Barbados

Mick: Ah.

Pause.

Peter: I hear the sitcom's going well. Not that I've seen it myself I'm afraid, but the children love it.

Mick: They're a bit young for it, aren't they?

Peter: Kate's seventeen now, Martin's fifteen.

Mick: God, they must be... Well then, I wish your kids had written the reviews.

Peter: It's not about reviews though is it? It's about ratings.

Pause.

Peter: You've been working on other projects though, haven't you?

Mick: Yes actually, you're right. My latest should be released on Channel Three over the next couple of weeks.

Peter: Wow, that's great Mick! What is it? A series or a drama?

Mick: An insurance advert.

Long pause.

Mick: Well it's paid the mortgage off.

Mick takes a large swig of wine. Peter looks at him, then looks away as soon as Mick puts his glass down.

Mick: Seventeen? Does she look like you?

Peter: Who?

Mick: Kate, your daughter, does she look like you?

Peter: Not really, looks more like her mother if I'm honest with you. Anna always says she's got her looks –

Mick: And your genius.

Short pause.

Mick: She must've said it once, when I came over.

Peter: When did you last come over?

Pause.

Mick: Seven years ago?

Peter: The reunion?

Pause.

Mick: Yes.

Peter: That was eight years ago.

Mick: You're right, it was eight.

Pause.

Peter: Martin does though.

Mick: What?

Peter: Martin, my son, looks like me.

Mick: Oh.

Pause. Peter removes a book from his jacket.

Peter: Brought something to show you, actually. Anna found it in the attic. It's our poetry book.

Mick: Oh god...

Peter: 'What will survive of us.' That's what we called the book.

Mick: Did we really? That's me and you there.

Peter: Yes. There's Anna.

Pause. Mick studies Peter closely, as Peter studies the book's cover.

Mick: 'What will survive of us.' I don't remember being so pretentious.

Peter: Mick...

Mick: I guess we must've been... marching around campus like the future voices of our generation.

Pause. Peter looks at Mick sadly. Mick realises that both Peter and Russ are considered future voices of the generation.

Mick: Oh, pardon me. I forgot that's what they call you these days. 'The voice of our generation.' Christ.

Pause

Mick: Part of me hopes it is.

Peter: What do you mean?

Mick: Well if this book is all that survives of us, I'll come off a lot better than you will.

Peter: What?

Mick: Have you read your poem recently? 'The Midnight Flower' by Peter Reid.

Peter: Well, they'll have my plays to judge me on as well though, won't they?

Long pause.

Peter: I guess you're wondering why you're here.

Mick: I assumed it was to be boasted at.

Peter: I'm sorry.

Mick: Don't apologise for being successful.

Peter: I'm apologising for *Wilder Path*.

Mick: Oh.

Peter: When Russ pulled out, the company had to pull out...I had to pull out. Do you understand? It was nothing personal, or any disregard of the text itself, it was a money saving decision that anyone would have made. It was nothing personal.

Pause.

Peter: I have a business proposal for you.

Mick: I don't need your charity.

Peter: It's about Anna.

Pause.

Mick: What about Anna?

Peter: She needs a writer; she's trying her hand at directing. She wants something political, something provocative.

Beat.

Mick: I don't need your charity.

Peter: I'm not saying you do. To be honest with you, moneywise it's not great.

Mick: How much are we talking?

Peter: I'll get 70%.

Mick: You're right it's not charity, it's a fucking robbery. I'm getting double that for the ad.

Peter: Leave it, then.

Beat.

Peter: Come on, Mick, think about it. One script, Anna will work on it with you. It'll be the three of us again. Please...for me? For Anna?

Pause. Mick shrugs.

Peter: That's a yes?

Mick: That's a maybe. I'll need to see her before I commit to anything, to discuss...ideas.

Peter nods.

Peter: Of course. Marcus! A bottle of champagne, please! I'll call Anna.

Peter exits. Mick is left onstage, looking at the book.

Scene 2

A living room in Peter and Anna's house. Anna stands by herself, looking out the window. Mick enters.

Anna: Mick.

Mick: Anna.

Anna: Please sit down, sit down. Can I get you anything?

Mick: I'm fine, thank you.

Anna pours herself a glass of wine. Mick sits. Pause.

Anna sits down.

Mick: Nice house.

Anna: You like it? Personally I find it rather bland.

Mick: Do you?

Anna: Maybe I've just been here too long. I seem to remember liking it when we bought it.

Pause

Anna: I suppose we should just get on with it.

Mick: Alright, well, Peter tells me you want to direct?

Anna: 'Want' is the wrong word. To tell you the truth, work's a little hard to find these days. Too old to play the leads, not quite old enough to play the hags.

Mick: I'm sorry.

Anna: Don't apologise, what did *you* do? Breasts sag naturally. It was bound to happen; it's inevitable. I was just in denial about it all. I mean we can't all play Juliet for ever. I'm in limbo.

Mick: 'Something political, something provocative.' Those were the words he used.

Anna: Did he? Political? Yes, I am quite attracted to it, the idea I mean. Issues, inequality...those are the plays that last aren't they? The ones that shock, bring something new to the table. I mean God knows they do nothing in the scale of things, but it sells. Shame I know virtually nothing about the old thing.

Mick: Politics?

Anna: Mmm. What do you write these days?

Mick: Slogans.

Anna: Oh stop that, it's boring. What do you *write*? Or want to write then, if you're too busy feeling sorry for yourself.

Mick: I haven't written anything since *Wilder Path*.

Anna: Ah yes, that self-loathing, self-indulgent drivel.

Mick: I'm glad you liked it.

Anna: Oh come on Mick, you named a character after yourself.

Mick: Well...it was no *Plastic Paradise* I guess.

Pause.

Mick: I'm surprised you're not in it.

Anna: *Plastic Paradise*?

Mick: Mmm.

Beat

Anna: Peter won't cast me anymore, won't let me audition, the sod. Says he's worried about his reputation. Never stopped him before. I was his lead.

Mick: I imagine it's the saggy breasts.

Anna: Did you see it?

Mick nods. They share a knowing look.

Mick: I loved every second.

Anna: Wasn't it superb?

Mick: Incredibly well written, and not unoriginal, repetitive, political for the sake of being political and generally dull in any way.

Anna: And Natalie, the leading lady –

Mick: I believed every line –

Anna: Mesmerising -

Mick: And her breasts were incredibly perky.

Anna: She's the new Juliet

Pause.

Mick: She's got nothing on you, besides her breasts.

Pause.

Mick: What *should* I write then? What do you want?

Anna: Something good?

Mick: Don't be too specific.

Anna: Write what you mean, don't just write something for the sake of it. I lied earlier, I quite liked *Wilder Path*.

Pause

Anna: How about...a couple..

Mick: Good start.

Anna: Of lesbians...

Mick: Better.

Anna: Patricia and Annabel.

Mick: Are they happy?

Anna: No...not anymore, at least Annabel isn't. Patricia's too busy, or ignorant to notice. They very rarely have time to talk these days, never mind fuck.

Mick: And what do they do, for a living I mean?

Anna: Patricia's a clown.

Mick: And Annabel?

Anna: A ballerina. But she doesn't dance anymore. She's ageing.

Mick: Beautifully, I imagine.

Anna: Well no one else seems to think so. Now every time she dances she cries, as she knows it's all downhill from here. Her ballet shoes sit at the bottom of the cupboard, untouched.

Mick: Sounds a bit dramatic.

Anna: Just as she is on the verge of selling out and becoming a clown too, she meets someone.

Mick: Who?

Anna: Michaela, her ex-lover, and an old friend of Patricia.

Pause.

Mick: And how does she feel about him? Sorry, her.

Anna: She's not sure. But talking to her brings her back to the days where she'd dance and dance and not give a damn about anyone else. With Michaela, she feels as if she could get that back. But she's tied to Patricia, and her two children.

Mick: But Patricia's a clown!

Anna: So is Michaela. Anyway the play becomes a love triangle between the three women, as Annabel is forced to choose between the two, or live unhappily forever undecided.

Mick: How does it end?

Anna: I'm not too sure, you haven't written it yet.

Pause.

Anna: Scrap it, it's awful. We'll do a political drama about the current state of Britain, write that down. You can tell Peter it will be provocative. Mind if I smoke?

Mick: Not at all.

She lights a cigarette.

Mick: You don't honestly want me to write that play do you?

Anna: God no.

Pause.

Anna: Are you seeing anyone these days?

Mick: Not really.

Anna: You surprise me.

Mick: You seem happy about it.

Anna smiles. Pause.

Mick: There *was* someone, but I ended it a while ago.

Anna: Oh?

Mick: Christine, she's an actress.

Anna: Will I have seen her in anything?

Mick: Insurance adverts. She was a corpse recently on *Casualty*.

Anna: Then I'm sure I'd recognise her.

Mick: We were together for about six months.

Anna: Why did you end it?

Mick: Well, we'd been together for some time, so...she invited me to meet the parents.

Anna: Christ, you didn't call her father a racist did you?

Mick: Nothing like that. Her parents, Norman and Rosie...They were practically my age.

Anna: Her parents?

Mick: I knew she was younger than me, but it hadn't dawned on me that her parents would be like...well, like us. We talked about music, about films, and Christine just sat at the end of the table clueless. The three of us could've been in the same cinema and she wasn't even born yet. They would've been at university around the same time as us. They went to Bristol. I mean what must her parents have thought when I turned up at the door?

Anna: Did they not warm to you?

Mick: If I hadn't been sleeping with their daughter, they may have done. The whole thing...made me think of Kate, your Kate. Christine was only slightly older. The idea of it all just made me sick. Anyway, after that I had to end it.

Anna: How did she take it?

Mick: Not well, but she'll find someone soon enough, someone her age.

Anna: My parents were surprisingly fond of you, before you called my father a racist.

Mick: He is a racist!

Anna: That's by the by Mick, if you wanted to impress you should have avoided the word 'racist' during dinner, at least in relation to my father.

Pause.

Mick: What should I write then?

Anna: What?

Mick: For your play, what should I write about?

Anna: Oh I don't care. Just have a go, see what you can come up with. Write an epic for me, Mick, something astonishing; the pearl of your somewhat unimpressive career. Move me.

Mick: God, I've missed you.

Pause.

Anna: Mick...

Mick: What you said, about...us, is it true?

Anna: I don't recall saying anything about us.

Mick: Are you...undecided?

Pause. A car is heard driving up the house. Anna goes to the window.

Anna: Oh God, its Peter's mother. You should go.

Mick: Anna, I –

Anna: Call me when you've written something...anything.

Pause.

Anna: Goodbye.

Mick: I'll keep in touch.

Anna: Do.

Mick begins to exit.

Anna: Wait...I almost forgot. We're having a party here on Friday, for promotional purposes really. Anyway Peter asked for you, thought it might be nice for the old gang to reconvene. A sort of impromptu reunion

Mick: Will Russell be there?

Anna: Of course he'll be there, he directed the bloody play.

Mick: I can't stand the bastard.

Anna: Well fortunately, you did not direct the play, so you're not obliged to come if you have better things -

Mick: Alright, I'll be there.

Anna: He'll be delighted

Beat

Mick: Right, goodbye.

Mick walks into another area of the stage. Lights fade on Anna. Spotlight on Mick. He is holding his mobile.

Mick: Peter? It's Mick. I'm fine, thank you. Listen, I'll do it. Yes. But I swear, if you pull out again -Yes, Anna said. I'll be there. Russ? I haven't seen him in years, how is he? It will be great to catch up with him. I'm meeting my agent tomorrow so we'll get a contract drawn up. Alright, speak to you soon. Bye.

Mick slowly returns the mobile to his pocket and stands still for a moment.

Scene 3

The party at Peter and Anna's house. One of the living rooms. Lights up. Peter is onstage with Natalie and Edward. All three are holding champagne glasses. Soft music, and sounds of chattering and clinking glasses can be heard in the background.

Edward: So the manager comes over, right. Your typical Italian; short, round faced, a little moustache and what have you. Anyway he marches over, and he tells me I can't have any of the specials, cos there's a famous play on across the road. He says they don't serve specials before a show, cos then they can't get everyone out in time. And then to top it off he says if I don't like it, I can eat somewhere else. The fucking cheek of it. So I lean over, right, real close. I'm looking him in right in the eyes, and I go, 'And what if I'm in the play?'

They all laugh. Mick enters.

Natalie: And what did he say to that?

Edward: The steak was on my plate in twenty minutes, not to mention the complimentary bottle of bubbly that came with it. About right.

Peter notices Mick.

Peter: Mick! You came! Edward; this is Mick, an old friend of mine.

Edward: You alright, mate?

Peter: Edward was the lead in *Plastic Paradise*.

Mick: I know, I recognised him. You were fantastic, really spot on.

Edward nods.

Peter: And this is Natalie – I suppose you recognised her too?

Mick: I did. Well done, seriously.

Peter: What are you drinking, Mick? Champagne?

Mick: Uh – yes, thank you.

Peter: Stay here, I'll fetch one for you.

Pause.

Natalie: I'm surprised you're drinking, Ed.

Edward: Oh I'll be fine, flight's not till three.

Natalie: Remember what happened last time?

Edward laughs.

Mick: Where're you going?

Edward: Peru. You been?

Mick: Only once, it was years ago.

Edward: Doing this flick with Daniel O'Toole. Script's not great, but the money's alright.

Natalie: And it's Daniel O'Toole!

Edward: We were in Paris last week, Peru tomorrow.

Natalie: I'm so jealous.

Edward: Why? It's summer over there. Filming 12 hours a day in that heat, it'll be horrible.

Mick: Your right, it sounds awful.

Natalie: So what do you do, Mick?

Mick: I write.

Natalie: Oh!

Edward: What kind of stuff?

Mick: Last thing I did was an insurance advert.

Short pause.

Natalie: Is Tanya coming?

Edward: Not sure.

Natalie: I hope she doesn't. I suppose you heard? She got the lead in Malcolm's new play.

Edward: We all know why though, don't we?

Natalie: The bitch. If I'd known he was going to get big, I would have fucked him years ago. How many roles would that have got me?

Edward: Not enough.

Edward and Natalie laugh. Peter returns with two glasses of champagne.

Peter: Here you are. Chin chin.

Natalie: Peter, when is Russ arriving?

Peter: Shortly. The press just arrived.

Natalie: Fuck. How do I look?

Edward: You're fine, let's go. See you in a bit, Pete.

Edward and Natalie exit.

Peter: Extremely talented, both of them. You should see about getting them in yours.

Mick: Yes, maybe.

Peter: She's awfully excited about it you know, Anna. Wouldn't stop talking about it.

Mick: Really?

Peter: Provocative and political were the words she used. Exactly what the stage needs right now.

Mick: Mmm.

Edward enters.

Edward: Russ is here!

Peter: Alright, I'll be there in a second.

Edward exits.

Peter: You joining us?

Mick: I'll stay here for a while.

Peter: Alright, well help yourself to the wine. See you later, Mick. I'm glad you're here.

Mick: So am I.

Peter exits. Mick sighs and takes a long swig of his glass. He looks lost, obviously not knowing anyone else in the room. Anna enters.

Mick: Thank God.

Anna: Did you miss me?

Mick: I was beginning to think you'd lead me into a trap. Getting me to come here and listen to those pretentious arseholes alone. I half expected you to be on the other side of the city in a quiet restaurant with a nice glass of red and a good book.

Mick looks at his watch.

Mick: It's not nine yet, we could still escape. I know a great place, would only take twenty minutes in a cab.

Anna: Don't be ridiculous. The trick is to drink until you can no longer hear anything they're saying. You can just watch their desperate faces as they fight over who gets the last word, without hearing their atrocious babble. Is that your first?

Mick: Yes.

Anna: You better hurry up then. The speeches are in an hour, and personally I'd avoid being sober for them.

Mick: I just met Edward and Natalie.

Anna: Oh, lovely people.

Mick: I could have strangled him.

Anna: Him? At least *he* can act.

Mick: He's in a Daniel O'Toole film! He's half our age!

Anna laughs.

Mick: They get younger and younger, I swear it.

Pause. They look at each other.

Anna: We should join them.

Mick: Do we have to?

Anna: Come on. We'll get another glass down us first.

Anna leads Mick off slowly.

Scene Four

The main room of the party. Lights up. Russ is standing on a chair, surrounded by Edward, Peter, Mick, Anna, and Natalie.

Russ: I'll only say a few words. I just want to say thank you all for coming. Directing this play has been an absolute pleasure, and I cannot express how delighted I am to do it all over again, without being incredibly boring! Throughout my life I have been terrifically fortunate in that I have only ever worked with friends. Don't worry, I won't get too soppy, I promise. But Petey, this is to you. We've got six under our belt now; I won't stop unless you do. And the cast, our lovely, lovely cast. Edward; you're a star but put that bottle down. You've got a flight tomorrow and we don't want a repeat of last time. And Natalie. Natalie, my angel. You will brighten up the stage like a sexy lantern. All of you, stars. When we burn, we'll burn together. Nickie, our wonderful producer, our designers, and to my lovely wife, Eleanor, who sadly couldn't be here tonight but she sends her love, from Belgium. If we made them cry this time, we'll have floods at the National!

Everyone cheers.

Russ: Now if you don't mind, I plan to get horrifically drunk and that bottle will not stop staring at me!

They applaud.

Natalie: Russ dear, can I get a photo?

Russ: Of course, darling.

Natalie: That's perfect. You look marvellous!

Russ: Thank you.

Natalie takes the photo then walks towards Edward. Peter and Anna are chatting on one side, Edward and Natalie are chatting on another. Mick walks towards Russ.

Russ: Mick! Peter said you were coming but I didn't believe him. How are you?

Mick: I'm alright, thanks.

Russ: God, it's been years and you haven't changed a bit. Look, before we start all the catch-up chit chat, I want to make sure you know how sincerely sorry I am for what happened with *Wilder Path*. I know you, so I know you won't believe me but I am terribly, terribly sorry.

Mick: I know.

Russ: As much as we like to float about doing what artists do, eventually it all comes down to money and right now there's just not enough of it. But Mick, let's start again. A clean slate?

Mick nods.

Russ: I have no doubt this new one will be superb. I was flattered when Anna asked me to produce –

Mick: What?

Russ: Anna asked me to produce? I accepted, of course. I assumed you knew, darling!

Mick: I didn't.

Russ: Oh. Well don't worry about me. I know what I'm doing. Now excuse me, Mick, I'm just going to talk to Peter...

Russ walks towards Peter. Mick stands alone. Anna walks towards him.

Anna: Having fun?

Mick: Him? Producing? Fucking hell.

Anna: Oh, it was between him and Peter and I couldn't stand having him breathing down our necks the whole time. So I chose Russ.

Pause.

Mick: Why didn't you tell me?

Anna: Because I know you. I anticipated this exact reaction, and you can't say I was wrong to. I thought maybe if you saw him again, you'd change your mind about him.

Mick: Well I haven't.

Anna: Not yet. He's one of us, you know.

Mick: A failure?

Anna: A liar. And I resent you calling me a failure. You haven't seen me direct yet.

Mick: I'm sure you'll be brilliant.

Anna: Don't say it if you don't mean it. Look at her dress, it's embarrassing. Oh, here they come. Smile, Mick.

Natalie and Edward walk towards Anna and Mick.

Natalie: Anna!

Anna: Natalie, darling! How are you?

Natalie: I'm great, thank you.

Anna: I was just telling Mick how much I loved your dress.

Natalie: Thank you.

Anna: It's wonderfully revealing.

Natalie: I know.

Anna: I don't think I could wear it myself, I'd feel a little self-conscious.

Natalie: Mmm, I think I would too if I were your age. Edward, I thought Daniel was coming?

Anna: Daniel?

Mick: O'Toole.

Anna: Oh God, I hope not. He's awful. Have you seen his work, Mick?

Mick: I'm afraid I haven't.

Anna: I envy you. There's ten hours I'm never getting back.

Natalie: Ed's in his new film.

Anna: Oh, I don't envy you, Ed. Christ, I hope the money's good.

Edward: It is actually.

Anna: Well, that's something, isn't it?

Edward: Excuse me, I'm going for a fag.

Edward exits. Natalie follows shortly after.

Mick: That was incredible, if not slightly unnecessary.

Anna: They need deflating occasionally, or they'll pop.

Mick: Peter wants them in ours.

Anna: I'm sure he does. They're just young, you can't blame them. We were like that once, or I was at least. You were just as sour as you are now.

Russ and Peter walk towards them.

Peter: The old gang, reunited.

Russ: It's good to have you back, Mick. I propose a toast to us, being exactly the same twenty years on.

Peter: Well, not exactly.

Peter smiles at Anna. They all raise their glasses. As they bring them down, Anna and Mick look at each other.

Scene Five

Everyone moves to dancing positions – Peter with Anna, Mick with Natalie, Edward with Russ. Music begins upbeat. All characters are clearly inebriated. Mick and Anna can be seen glancing at each other. After a while everyone freezes apart from Mick. The music at this point switches tone and pace completely. As everyone else is still, Mick walks towards Anna. He stares at her for a while before eventually exiting. Music switches back to upbeat and everyone comes to life again. Russ stops dancing, and goes to drink. Natalie goes to dance with Edward. Eventually the music fades.

Natalie: Petey? Could we get some chairs? My legs feel like they could give way any minute.

Peter: Of course.

With the help of Russ, Peter brings on a couple of chairs.

Natalie: It's all that dancing.

Edward: It's all that wine.

Natalie laughs. They all sit, besides Anna who stands, as if she is in her own world.

Peter: Well, I think it's safe to say the party's been a success.

Natalie: It has. Well done.

Peter: I've always had this fear when it comes to holding parties, since my eighth birthday.

Natalie: What fear is that?

Peter The fear of nobody coming

Natalie laughs.

Natalie: But why wouldn't they?

Peter: I don't know. But no one came then. There were three balloons on the door, so people could find the house. My Mum had made this cake in the shape of a train. She'd spent the whole day on it.

Edward: More cake for you though, eh?

Peter: Well quite, not that I ate much of it. I never had a birthday party after that, not until my eighteenth. I still worry about it, whenever I have people round. I mean besides the fact that I'm bigger, and have money... I feel like I'm exactly the same as I was then. So then what's stopping it happening again?

Russ: I was wondering where all the wine went.

Natalie: Shhh, this is serious. Petey, *we're* here. Look how many people came! As long as you're famous, you'll always have people here.

Peter: Yes, I guess you're right.

Edward: What time is it?

Russ: Nearly midnight.

Natalie: You should think about leaving soon.

Edward: Mmm.

Russ: I've got an interview tomorrow.

Natalie: For who?

Russ: The *Times*.

Natalie: Oh, you'll talk about me, won't you? An up and coming star to look out for.

Russ: Of course, darling.

Edward: What about me?

Natalie: You don't need it do you? Which one of us is in a Daniel O'Toole film?

Anna: Russ, have you seen Mick?

Russ: He's smoking, dear.

Anna: Excuse me.

Anna exits. Russ watches her leave carefully.

Natalie: Is *she* in anything at the moment?

Russ: Who?

Natalie: Anna.

Russ: No. She hasn't been in anything since Pete's last, *Circuits*.

Natalie: Oh what a shame.

Russ: She's directing Mick's new play, though.

Natalie: Is she?

Russ: Mmm.

Edward: Peter, will you call me a cab?

Peter: What?

Russ: It's alright, I'll do it. Christ knows who he'd end up calling in this state.

Russ exits. Lights fade until only one area of the stage is lit. Mick and Anna are smoking.

Anna: I can't stand them when they're drunk.

Mick: I can't stand them sober.

Pause.

Mick: Twenty years on, it's been twenty years... We're in our forties. That's a joke, isn't it?

Anna: It's not a very funny one.

Mick: No, not at all. It just doesn't seem real.

Anna: What doesn't?

Mick: This, all of it. You know, I sometimes think I'm still twenty one, sitting on the sofa in our old flat. The kitchen surfaces are covered in dirty plates and wine glasses, there're ash trays on the floor, and I'm sitting there, sleeping, having some sort of premonition, watching how my life could turn out if I fuck it up. You know? I'll wake up any minute now.

Pause.

Anna: What would you do differently, then?

Mick: Nothing, everything, I don't know.

Anna: You'd live it exactly the same.

Mick: I wouldn't. I'd be more careful not to lose -

Anna: Lose what? Me? I don't remember it being your decision to...lose me.

Pause.

Mick: What would *you* do then?

Anna: What?

Mick: If you woke up tomorrow to find you're still twenty one. What would you do differently?

Anna: Well, I would never have invited you to meet my parents, that's for sure.

Mick: Oh, come on.

Anna: This is silly. What do you want me to say? I would never have left you? I would never have married my husband? To be perfectly honest, I don't think I'd change a thing. I've been terribly fortunate and it would be awful of me to say otherwise.

Pause.

Mick: You know it's seven years now, since we...

Anna: I know what you're doing. I've slept with you enough times. I know all of your tricks.

Pause. It looks as if Mick and Anna might kiss.

Peter (from offstage): Why am I getting a taxi? I live *here*!

They move away immediately.

Anna: Timing's never been our strong point.

Mick: No, I guess it hasn't.

Peter (from offstage): I seem to have lost my wife! Anna? Anna?

Mick: I'll call you.

Anna: Do.

Anna begins to exit.

Mick: Anna, wait.

Anna turns around. He kisses her.

Anna: What was that for?

Mick: I've woken up.

Blackout.

Act 2 – A month later

Scene 1

Peter and Russ are playing golf, at a driving range.

Russ: Well it's alright, isn't it?

Peter: Mmm. I'd go so far to say it's actually quite good.

Russ: Yes, well, you've always been kinder than me.

Peter: It's political, it's provocative, it's heartfelt, it's –

Russ: Self-indulgent. It's just Mick all over.

Peter: It *is* well written.

Russ: Maybe, hardly worth staging though.

Peter: Russ -

Russ: I just don't understand, Pete.

Peter: Understand what?

Russ: Understand this. Why *you* didn't write a play for her? You're a playwright for God's sake, an extremely talented one, and she's your wife. It just seems logical! Am I missing something? You know out of all of this, what baffles me the most is that you asked Mick to do it, of all people, after everything...

Peter: After what?

Short pause.

Russ: Well after...all these years. The reunion was... What? Eight years ago?

Peter: Yes. The truth is I think Anna and I working together would cause the demise of our marriage.

Russ: What? That's nonsense.

Peter: She's been cold with me ever since you didn't cast her in *Plastic Paradise*.

Russ: Since *we* didn't cast her.

Peter: She resents me, completely, Russ, I know she does. Understandable, I suppose. I thought, if I can't cast her in my play, the least I can do is put out the money so she can direct one. But I couldn't write it.

Russ: Why not?

Peter: It would be a nightmare. Every little argument in the rehearsal room would come back with us to the dinner table, and every argument at dinner would come with us to the rehearsal. It would never stop. In this business you have to learn to separate your professional life from your personal life. Loving someone is not the same as working well with them professionally. This is where Anna and Mick get it wrong. They'll take it personally if a friend, or partner, or relative, doesn't cast them, or won't produce their play. But you can't, you just can't.

Russ: But why ask Mick?

Peter: Whatever you say, I believe he is talented. Misguided perhaps, but talented, and while it was in no way our fault, we did let him down. I feel like I – like *we* owe him another chance. Plus Anna's fond of him. If I, her husband, won't write it, the least I can do is get the second best; one of our dearest friends.

Russ: Well remind me next time to make more talented friends.

Peter: We've got Edward and Natalie.

Russ: Natalie's not talented and Edward's...not a friend. He's a well behaved house pet, at most.

Pause.

Russ: Well it's done now. Auditions are next week, aren't they?

Peter nods.

Peter: How's the wife?

Russ: Still breathing.

Beat.

Russ: I hate golf.

Peter: This was your suggestion.

Russ: It's the start to my 'healthy living campaign,' which unfortunately includes exercise. I don't see the appeal in the gym, and frankly I don't have the heart for team sports or anything too exhilarating. It leaves me with golf.

Peter: Tennis?

Russ: You won't catch me dead in those shorts.

Peter: Well maybe I can cheer you up. I finished it.

Russ: Finished what?

Peter: The script, I finished it.

Russ: *The* script?

Peter: Yes.

Russ: As in *the script*, the ‘mother courage of my career’ script –

Peter: Yes.

Russ: When?

Peter: Last night. I mean it’s a rough draft but most of it’s there.

Russ: Well is it any good?

Peter: Do you want me to be modest?

Russ: Of course not

Peter: It’s brilliant. Or the best I’ve written at least. It’s relevant, heart wrenching and completely in your face. I went with *Katy’s Bones* for the name.

Russ: *Katy’s Bones*?

Peter: Yes.

Russ: With a cast of...

Peter: Five. This is it Russ, this is the one.

Beat.

Russ: Well I wish you’d told me earlier, I wouldn’t have suggested golf. Christ, what a dire way to celebrate.

Russ takes a shot.

Scene 2

Mick’s flat. Anna is sitting on a chair in a dressing gown, smoking. Mick enters topless.

Mick: I still can’t believe you.

Anna: Oh grow up.

Mick: Edward and Natalie? Edward and Natalie? Do you remember who they are?

Anna: Don’t patronise me, Mick.

Mick: I just don’t understand you. Edward and Natalie!

Anna: You can stop saying their names now, I’ll still know who you’re talking about.

Mick: Playing the leads in my play –

Anna: *Our* play.

Mick: We loathe them –

Anna: *You* loathe them, I’m indifferent to them.

Mick: Define indifferent.

Pause

Anna: It's politics.

Mick: I thought it might be. Was it Peter? The sod.

Anna shakes her head.

Mick: Russ. It was Russ, wasn't it? I knew it. Did he threaten to pull it if you didn't cast Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum –

Anna: No.

Pause

Anna: We made...an agreement.

Mick: An agreement?

Anna: Yes. He swore not to tell Peter, if we cast them.

Mick: Tell Peter what?

Anna: What do you think?

Mick: About us –

Anna: Yes.

Mick: About me and you –

Anna: Yes.

Mick: But...how does he know?

Pause.

Anna: A couple of years ago, when it looked like you weren't coming back I told him, about what happened...in Paris, seven years ago.

Mick: Jesus.

Anna: I'd had at least seven margaritas, it wasn't my fault. I had to talk to someone about everything, I had to. It was killing me. And for obvious reasons that someone couldn't be Peter –

Mick: So it was Russ.

Anna: Don't pretend like you don't understand. I know you do.

Pause.

Anna: I *am* sorry. He won't tell a soul; at least he won't anymore.

Mick: Do you trust him?

Anna: In not telling Peter? Yes.

Mick: Alright. It won't be easy –

Anna: I know.

Mick: But I think, with work, they could pull it off. A lot of work. Do they know yet? That they've been cast?

Anna: Natalie does. Russ is telling Ed tonight.

Pause.

Mick: Are you hungry?

Anna: No.

Mick: Just as well, there's barely anything in the fridge.

Pause.

Mick: Hypothetically speaking –

Anna: Mmm.

Mick: Hypothetically, if the play was a success, and we were to make enough money to buy a house somewhere, hypothetically, would you leave your husband? Hypothetically?

Anna: Hypothetically, I would be offended that you'd assume I'd need a new house bought for me in order to leave my husband.

Mick: So you wouldn't need a new house? Hypothetically?

Anna: Hypothetically, no, not necessarily. Food would be preferable though.

Mick: How preferable?

She laughs.

Anna: It's three o'clock in the afternoon, it's a gorgeous day, and we're inside. What *are* we doing?

Mick smiles.

Anna: Alright I know what we were doing inside, but now we're not doing *that* anymore, I feel like we should go outside. Walk down the canal or something. I know what will happen though, it always does. We'll get dressed, we'll get our shoes on, we'll pack a picnic and by the time we're outside it'll be raining. Or it will be perfectly sunny and I'll just get bored after twenty minutes.

Pause.

Anna: Let's stay inside.

Mick: Would you?

Anna: Would I what?

Mick: Leave him?

Anna: Mick, I –

Mick: Would you leave your husband? For me? With or without a house, or food, whatever it takes. Would you?

Anna: I -

Mick: I know we've been here before –

Anna: Seven years ago –

Mick: I know, and we're still here. What does that say? I've tried to pretend like nothing ever happened, I have and it was awful. The truth is, I don't think I'll ever love anyone as much as I love you and I feel like we're running out of time. It's different when you're young, because whatever happens you can re-assure yourself that you're bound to meet someone in the next twenty years. Well, twenty years are up now and I didn't. And we're back here.

Anna: We're not that old.

Mick: I'm sorry, I don't mean to push you or rush you I just...I just...

Long pause. Mick lights a cigarette.

Mick: Do you remember the day you realised how nothing is ever black and white? I mean when you realised how complicated everything is, how ambiguous everything is. Well I do. For me it was one moment, one conversation. I must have been about fourteen, I was with my Dad. We were talking about my Aunt and Uncle, Aunt Cathy and Uncle Ben. I knew Cathy had been married before she met him, but I never really thought about it. But here, for the first time, my Dad tells me they first got together, my uncle and aunt, while she was married to someone else. They were having an affair. My aunt and uncle, two people I adored, two people I looked up to, having an affair. At that age you don't know much about infidelity, just that it's wrong. Was it wrong? But they were in love, and they still are forty years later. Yes, she was married. But she was unhappy. In this one moment it hit me, all at the same time. People aren't logical, so it makes no sense to judge them logically. Don't think about what your mother would say, or what Russ would say or even what Peter would say. If you love him, your husband, stay with him. But if you love me, and God I hope you do, then leave him. Nothing else matters.

Anna: Don't be naïve.

Mick: But it doesn't, not really. If you're unhappy, change it.

Pause.

Mick: I love you. Sorry, I think I said that already.

Anna: I don't mind.

Mick: Don't you?

Anna: Stop fishing. I need to think about it. That's not a no.

Mick: It is until you say yes.

Anna: You can't expect me to rush into this. I don't want to end up on the streets.

Mick: I'm not that poor.

Pause.

Mick: Do you remember what you said? All those years ago.

Anna: Of course I do, I'm not that old.

Mick: "If this song doesn't stop, we could keep dancing like this forever."

Anna's mobile rings. She picks it up.

Anna: It's Peter.

She answers.

Anna: Hello? I'm fine, dear, I'm at Mick's flat. Just editing the script, we're not entirely sure how it should end. We were wondering whether the original draft might be slightly dull. Do you think? I didn't know if it was provocative enough. Well, we want to shock them, don't we? If it'll better the script in the long run we shouldn't give a damn what people might say. Well, anyway, I won't be back for dinner, we've got a lot of work to do. Thank you, I'll let you know what we decide.
Goodbye.

Pause.

Anna: I've changed my mind. I think we should go outside. After all, how often do we get a day like this?

Mick smiles.

Scene 3

Russ and Edward in Russ's flat.

Edward: He's fucking useless. How he's got to where he is, I don't know.

Russ: He climbed the ladder, darling, that's how it works. He's not afraid to get on his knees if it means succeeding.

Edward: I said to him, right, I went right up to him and I said, 'I know how to fucking act, and besides freezing my bollocks off, standing in that lake for two hours is gonna do nothing.' He couldn't take the truth, started saying all this shit about how I wasn't getting the character's history across. So I tell him I've seen dogs more talented than him and he storms off the set, swearing and

shouting. Next thing I know I get this call from my agent. Turns out the contract wasn't finalised so they've scratched me.

Russ: I know, it's awful.

Edward: Have to get myself a new agent as well. Wouldn't have happened if he'd known what he was doing. I'm fucked, Russ. This was it, this was my break. I haven't been offered anything else, I've not got anything besides *Plastic Paradise*, which is almost finished. I need this part –

Russ: Now Edward dear, I've told you. You are on the shortlist. It's between you and Kyle Chase.

Edward: Kyle Chase?

Russ: He was Macbeth in Stratford last month. Anna's undecided, she's thinking of re-auditioning the two of you.

Pause.

Edward: What's the part like?

Russ: A politician. He's corrupt but he knows it. He puts on the mask but behind it he's struggling to cope with the guilt. He's a complex character, not anything like you've done before, dear. Similar to Macbeth, I suppose. He's a pig.

Edward: A pig?

Russ: Yes, a pig, darling. The play is called *Scapegoat*. It's a political drama, a sort of modern re-telling of Animal Farm. Highly innovative.

Pause.

Edward: Where's it being performed?

Russ: The first run's in Manchester, but if it goes well, which I imagine it will, we'll be touring around the country.

Edward: And Natalie's in it?

Russ: Yes.

Pause.

Edward: Can you talk to Anna? For me? You know, put in a good word. Tell her how easy I am to work with, and all that shit. Please mate.

Russ: I'm not sure I can.

Edward: Why not?

Russ: How do I know you want this for the right reasons? How can I rely on you, after what happened with Daniel –

Edward: But that's –

Russ: How can I trust you? The play is on the experimental side, how can I know you are willing to...let go? If you can't stand in a lake for two hours -

Edward: You can trust me -

Russ: But how do I know for sure?

Pause.

Russ: How badly do you want this part?

Edward: Badly, I told you, I -

Russ: Do you know how far people have gone to get roles in my plays? Far. Some might say too far, but I would disagree. As a director I need to know my actors are willing to succumb to my direction, and are willing to push themselves as far as they possibly can. I want you to show me that you are able to push yourself, now. You're a clever boy, Edward, and I don't want to patronise you. You know exactly what I'm talking about, don't make me say it bluntly. Do you understand me?

Edward nods.

Russ: Good. You can start on your knees.

Edward kneels.

Russ: My trousers won't unzip themselves dear.

Edward begins to unzip Russ's trousers. Blackout.

Act 3 – Four Months Later

Scene 1 –

Backstage of the theatre. Anna is alone. Mick enters.

Anna: How do I look?

Mick: Beautiful, as ever. Your breasts aren't sagging much at all.

Anna: Ever the charmer.

Short pause.

Mick: This is it.

Anna: I know.

Mick: Christ, it's only just hit me.

Anna: What's hit you?

Mick: That this is it. This could be the start or the end of my career.

Anna: I forgot how over-dramatic you are. Every second sentence to come out of your mouth is a cliché.

Mick: My existence is a cliché.

Anna: That's exactly what I'm talking about.

Mick: It's true though. If this goes well, if it's received well, it should get me some work. I mean some *real* work, not writing dialogue for a fucking dog.

Anna: Don't start whining again. Compared to others, you've been fortunate.

Mick: Compared to Peter?

Pause.

Mick: How long have we got?

Anna: Half an hour.

Mick: Are Edward and Natalie ready?

Anna: They're getting changed, relax. What do you think of them, as a couple?

Mick: I don't know. What am I supposed to think of them?

Anna: You're not supposed to think anything. I was just wondering what your thoughts were.

Mick: Well what are *your* thoughts?

Anna: That's not how it works, I asked first.

Short pause.

Mick: Well, they look perfectly happy. I don't see it lasting though.

Anna: Don't you?

Mick: No.

Anna: Why?

Mick: I can just see her leaving him for a successful director, or actor, or anyone who can guarantee her more roles. I get the impression she would stoop as low as she was asked to, if it meant climbing up the ladder. Why, what do you think?

Anna: I think they're in love, truly.

Mick: It's only been a month or so, hasn't it?

Anna: Three months. I can't explain but I can see it. Let's just hope they hold onto it.

Mick: Even if they let go, surely they could pick it back up, let's say, in twenty years or so?

Anna: Mmm, and she would leave her husband for him?

Mick: Exactly.

Anna: You're incorrigible.

Voice: Actors in *Scapegoat*, this is your twenty minute call. Actors in *Scapegoat*, this is your twenty minute call. Please make your way to the stage area.

Mick: This is it.

Natalie enters dressed as a goat.

Natalie: Anna, darling, have you seen my horns?

Anna: No, I haven't.

Natalie: Fuck. Sorry. Hello Mick.

Edward enters, dressed as a pig.

Edward: They're here, babe.

Natalie: Where were they?

Edward: Just upstairs. You alright, Mick?

Mick: Slightly nervous, but I guess that's understandable.

Edward: Don't be mate. We'll smash it. We should probably go inside.

Anna hugs Edward. Natalie hugs Mick.

Anna: Good luck!

Mick: Give it your all.

Natalie: We will! Thank you for everything!

Edward and Mick shake hands. Natalie and Anna hug.

Natalie: Where are Pete and Russ?

Mick: I imagine they're already in their seats. Good luck again, guys!

Natalie: Thank you! We'll see you afterwards!

Natalie and Edward exit. Mick and Anna kiss.

Mick: I found a house by the way, outside the city.

Anna: Mick, I thought we said –

Mick: I know, but I couldn't help it.

Peter enters.

Mick: Good evening, Peter. Shouldn't you be inside?

Peter: Yes, I'll go in shortly. I just wanted to speak to Anna quickly.

Mick: Alright, I'll head in. *(To Anna)* I'll see you after the show. Good luck.

Anna: You too.

Mick exits.

Peter: I just wanted to say good luck.

Anna: Thank you.

Peter: Are you nervous?

Anna: No.

Peter: You shouldn't be.

Anna: I'm not.

Peter: I'm glad. I'm looking forward to it.

Pause.

Peter: Is everything alright?

Anna: Why wouldn't it be?

Voice: *Scapegoat*, this is your fifteen minute call. *Scapegoat*, this is your fifteen minute call.

Peter: I should be going.

Anna: You should.

Peter: But listen, I need to talk to you about something after the show. It's about – Well, actually it is probably better if I just tell you after. Good luck.

Peter goes to kiss her. She turns her face away. He kisses her cheek and then leaves. Long pause. Natalie enters, running across the stage.

Natalie: I forgot the bell!

She exits. Short pause. Then she runs back across the stage.

Natalie: Found it!

She exits. Lights fade. Blackout.

Scene 2 –

Natalie, dressed as a goat, is lying down onstage. Edward, dressed as a pig, is also lying down. The following scene is an extract from Scapegoat. Edward stands up, and walks across the stage. Natalie watches him, and then copies him, walking like a goat. Edward notices that she has followed, and walks to the other side of the stage. Natalie watches him, and then eventually follows him. Edward walks faster away, Natalie is right behind him. He sits down, she sits down. He stands up, she stands up. Eventually Edward is sprinting around the stage while Natalie is trotting behind him. He turns around to face her. Lights change. They are now in a barn.

Edward: I hope you understand that this is a difficult situation for me.

Natalie: Are you accusing me, sir?

Edward: All I know is that the hay was in the corner of the barn last night when I left, and when I came in this morning it was gone. Now I'm not saying it was you, but -

Natalie: But you think it was, don't you?

Pause.

Natalie: Because I'm a goat.

Edward: Now wait a second –

Natalie: It's true though isn't it?

Edward: Not at all, I –

Natalie: Just because I have horns you think I'm going to charge into you, or into the walls so the whole thing collapses? Because of what happened at Parker's farm?

Edward: I don't know what you're talking –

Natalie: I have been at this farm for five years now, five years. It's unusual for one of us, a goat, to make it at a farm like this. It wasn't easy but I made it. I've worked hard for this farm, and how am I repaid? Like this. I guess I should thank you, for telling me how it is. I know my place now, sir.

Edward: Now wait a second –

Lights change. A movement sequence similar to the first begins, only this time Natalie attempts to walk like a human but continues to fall over. Lights fade. Lights come up. It's now another scene from Scapegoat, later on in the play. Edward and Natalie are standing. Natalie falls to the floor. She then sits on both knees. Then stands again. Throughout the monologue she continues to do these movements, getting faster and faster.

Natalie: They set the example, Parker's goats. I'm not saying it was right of them, to charge his house. They weren't exactly treated like kings though. You poke the bear, it'll bite. But Parker wasn't just poking the bear, he was killing it.

Edward begins to do the same movement sequence: standing, falling, kneeling. He begins slow, and like Natalie slowly increases in speed.

Natalie: So they retaliated. Now I disagree with their beliefs, with what they want to do with the farm. I don't support them, but I don't judge them, you know? Good on them, that's what I say. They didn't like something, so they fought for it, and they've changed it. The problem is, they've started a trend. It's happening everywhere. While I disagreed with the Parker goats, I understood why they did what they did. But at Jones' farm there was little motivation, besides just trying to assert their authority and the problem is, more and more people are getting hurt and more and more us goats are getting judged. People are making their minds up about us before we've even opened our mouths. These goats are giving us goats who are trying to earn a living, a bad name. We're not the first though. Fifty years ago the horses got it bad. After a couple of incidents, no one trusted them. It's a cycle. A vicious cycle. And we won't be at the bottom for ever.

Natalie collapses. Edward continues to do the movements until he collapses. Lights fade. Lights up. A reversal of the first scene. This is the last scene of the play.

Natalie: I hope you understand that this is a difficult situation for me.

Edward: Are you accusing me, sir?

Natalie: All I know is that the bucket was full last night when I left, and when I came in this morning it was gone. Now I'm not saying it was you but –

Edward: It wasn't me.

Natalie: I'm not saying it was.

Edward: But you think it was, don't you?

Pause.

Edward: Because I'm a pig

Pause.

Edward: It's true, isn't it?

Pause.

Edward: Because I have trotters you think I'm going to charge into you, or into the walls so the whole thing collapses? Because of what happened at Cole's farm?

Pause.

Edward: I have been at this farm for eight years now, eight years. It's unusual for one of us, a pig, to make it at a farm like this these days. I'm one of the only ones left. And as soon as one pig steps out of line in a farm 5 miles away, you use it as an excuse to get me out? Because that's what you want, isn't it? Me, out?

Both fall to the floor. Natalie gets up and starts running around the space. Edward gets up, and also runs around the space. Natalie chases Edward around. Edward chases Natalie around. They

continue to swap until it is no longer clear who is chasing who. They both fall. Blackout. Slow clapping is heard.

Scene 3

Mick is outside on his phone. Peter is sitting in his office, on the phone. Both characters are holding various newspapers.

Mick: "I'd rather gauge my own eyes out than watch *Scapegoat* again, and if somehow gauging, the playwright, Mick Taylor's eyes out meant getting those two hours back, I would. Happily."

Peter: They're just reviews, you have to ignore them.

Mick picks up another paper.

Mick: Oh here's a good one.

Peter: Really?

Mick: "This is the worst play I've seen all year." Most have said of all time, so that's a step in the right direction.

Peter: Ignore them.

Mick: It was awful though, wasn't it? That's why you're pulling it.

Pause.

Mick: You don't have to lie to me. It was, to quote the *Times*...

Mick picks up a newspaper and opens it up.

Mick: "Two hours of people running around and falling over, pretending to be farm yard animals. Essentially, it's like watching a nursery. For two hours."

Pause.

Mick: Ok look, I know it's been slammed, and I know it needs work, but look at Van Gogh. I'm sure people said similar things about his work.

Peter: *(reading from a paper)* "If no one had walked onto the stage for the two hours, and we all just sat in silence watching an empty stage, I genuinely believe I would have enjoyed myself more."

Mick: The thing is, you can't pull it.

Peter: What?

Mick: You can't, you just can't.

Pause.

Peter: Mick, I don't know what to say –

Mick: I can get you another draft by tomorrow. We can completely revamp it. You could help me -

Peter: Mick –

Mick: We could write it together! Mick Taylor and Peter Reid present *Scapegoat*, it'll be like old times.

Peter: I just don't –

Mick: Please.

Pause.

Mick: Please.

Peter: I can't.

Mick: Why?

Peter: First of all, to put it lightly, the play has not been received as well as perhaps we thought it would. While you are right in the fact that there are great artists whose work has not been received well initially, if we were to continue this run we would lose money – *I* would lose money. Not to mention my reputation.

Mick: Of course.

Peter: I'm being honest.

Mick: This is what you wanted wasn't it? To make a fool out of me?

Peter: Don't be ridiculous. I wish the play had been received well –

Mick: Maybe *you* should have written a script for Anna then?

Peter: Grow up, Mick, this is not my fault. It is either yours and the fault of the script, the fault of Anna and her direction, Edward and Natalie's acting or perhaps just the poor taste of the public. Think whatever you like, but don't blame me. This has nothing to do with me.

Beat.

Peter: You resent me, I understand that, and you always will. But this is not my fault; how your career has unfolded is not my fault.

Pause.

Peter: Even if I wanted to help you, I couldn't. I'm too busy. My new script 'Katy's Bones' is being funded. We're touring, starting in New York.

Mick: Let me guess, Russ is directing?

Peter: Yes.

Mick: And Edward and Natalie are in it?

Peter: Well actually we've not held auditions yet, but Natalie won't be in it.

Mick: Why not? Because she might ruin your reputation?

Peter: No, because there is only one female role and we've already given it to Anna.

Pause.

Mick: What?

Peter: There is only one female role in 'Katy's Bones,' which is Katy. We offered the role to Anna, simply because we knew she'd be perfect for it –

Mick: And she accepted it?

Peter: Of course. Why wouldn't she?

Pause.

Mick: When do rehearsals start?

Peter: In about two months. Then we'll rehearse for another two months before flying to New York.

Mick: Congratulations.

Peter: Thank you. I *am* sorry. You'll be absolutely fine though, I know you will.

Mick: Thank you. I should be going now; I'll talk to you soon. Good luck. Thank you, for the chance. To be honest with you I didn't even think I'd get that, so I should be grateful really. Anyway, goodbye.

Peter: Goodbye.

Phone call ends. Mick is seen crumpling up the newspapers as he exits.

Scene 4

Anna and Peter's house. Anna and Natalie are in the living room.

Anna: I'm sorry.

Natalie: Don't be. I'm happy for you. You deserve one last shot at it. There can't be many lead roles suitable for you anymore. I would have felt bad taking this one as well.

Anna: I know you would have.

Natalie: Edward's been precast as well.

Anna: Has he?

Natalie: Mmm, he got the part of Trevor.

Anna: Really? Peter didn't tell me that. I was under the impression they were auditioning for that role.

Natalie: So was I. Apparently Russ just gave him the part like that.

Pause.

Anna: Well if it's any consolation, I'll miss working with you, profusely.

Natalie: Aww, you won't though. Not when you start rehearsing, in New York.

Anna: I'm sure you're right.

Natalie: 9-5 rehearsals every day.

Anna: According to Pete.

Natalie: That'll be exhausting for you won't it? At your age. You'll barely have the energy to enjoy it all.

Anna: I think I'll manage. Performing to that amount of people alone is a reason to enjoy it.

Pause.

Anna: When's your flight?

Natalie: On Wednesday. It's only an audition. I'll be back next week.

Anna: But if you get it?

Natalie: Well then I'll be there for about five months. We'd be in New York at the same time.

Anna: Yes, I guess we would.

Natalie: It's for Mark Blackburn's new play, 'The Kettle is Black.' It's political, highly relevant. They're calling him the new voice of the generation.

Anna: I'm sure they are.

Natalie: Well, I should get going.

Anna: Good luck.

Natalie: Thank you darling. You too. I'll keep in touch.

Anna: Do.

They hug. Natalie exits. Anna is left alone. She lights a cigarette and sits, smoking. Mick enters, unnoticed. He stands, watching her. She turns around. They look at each other.

Anna: I suppose you heard.

Mick: I did. New York.

Anna: And?

Mick: And what? Congratulations.

Anna: Jesus, I thought you'd at least pretend to be happy for me.

Mick: How can I be happy or even pretend to be happy for you when *you're* not even happy?

Anna: What are you talking about? Of course I'm happy.

Mick: How can you be? One minute you're on the verge of leaving your husband, and then suddenly he offers you a job and now you're happy? Now everything's fine is it, you're happy with Peter? And I suppose you want me out? Is that what's happened?

Anna: No, it's -

Mick: It's fucking shit, that's what it is.

Pause.

Anna: Is that why you came here? To shout at me.

Mick: Of course that's not why I came here, I came here because – Well, the house I found. Just outside London. I bid on it yesterday, it was going to be a surprise.

Anna: You can still live there –

Mick: That's not the point.

Pause.

Mick: So you're going, then?

Beat.

Mick: And I can't change your mind?

Pause.

Mick: I realised the other day, the best periods of life have been when I'm naïve. Naïve to cruelty, naïve in love, naïve to the actual quality of my work...Naïve to how fucking shit everything can be. I remember...I must've been about fifteen. My Dad got into the habit of taking me to all his work do's, departmental parties, to show me off to his colleagues. 'This is my son, he wants to be a playwright, he does brilliantly at school, look out for him in the papers.' And I believed him. Walking around the party like I was an adult, drinking beer and pretending to like it. He'd get me to talk about my 'work,' and I would, as if I was fucking Pinter or something, talking about my influences. I mean for them it must have been a bit of a joke, but I was happy. When I say happy, I mean completely happy. Not the happy I am these days. Yes, I'm happy to take this job, I'll write another insurance advert, but I'm not actually happy, am I? I'm writing dialogue for a fucking dog. Yes it's a pay check but where does it lead? Writing another insurance advert, that's where it fucking leads. What makes it worse is I think even if, like Peter, my play was being put on at the National, I wouldn't be happy. Not completely, not really. All it takes is one negative review and I'd be immediately aware that actually, I'm not the voice of the generation. I'm not God, I just wrote one successful play, and in fifty years' time I'll be forgotten. Sometimes I think...if I'd died then, at the age of fifteen, people would've looked at my life's achievements and said, 'He was going to be a star.' If I died now they'd say, 'He wrote an average sitcom, a couple of insurance adverts and an awful play about a goat.' Naïve....The

awful thing is I actually believed it would change this time. I was happy, for the last five months I've been happy. But that's just it, I was naïve, believing that everything would change.

Pause.

Mick: Do you love him?

Pause.

Mick: Do you love me?

Anna: I do –

Mick: Don't say yes unless you're prepared to leave him, for me. Do you love me?

Anna: No.

Pause.

Anna: I'm sorry –

Mick: Don't apologise. I would have done the same.

Long pause.

Mick: I guess I should say goodbye then?

Anna: Mick –

Mick: This is it though, the last time. I can't do this again, I just can't.

Anna: I know.

Pause.

Mick: Alright, goodbye.

Anna: Goodbye.

Mick: And good luck. I hope you'll both be very happy.

Anna: Do you?

Mick begins to exit.

Anna: Wait.

Mick turns.

Anna: Good luck.

Mick exits. Anna stays alone. Silence. She lights a cigarette. Peter enters.

Peter: Who was that?

Anna: Natalie.

Peter: Oh was it? How is she?

Anna: Fine.

Pause.

Peter: Why is the radiator on? It's boiling.

Anna: *I* turned it on, I was cold.

Pause.

Peter: He came round today by the way, the designer. Finally. He was meant to come last Tuesday. Anyway I told him you were tired of the wallpaper in the living room. That you wanted a change. He agreed with you, that it looked weary. I told him I've never been very observant, and that I hadn't really noticed. Apparently flowers are last season. Well, anyway, he started showing me all these new designs, and the truth is I couldn't see the room in any colour besides the one it is now. I'm useless, I know. I told him you'd decide and then give him a call. If it was up to me, I'd leave it.

Anna: You're right, you *are* useless.

Long pause, as Peter stares at Anna, baffled.

Scene 5

Russ's flat. Russ is sitting with a scotch, already clearly quite drunk. Russ's mobile rings, he picks it up.

Russ: Hello? Yes I'm awake. No. No. I couldn't sleep. No.

Short pause.

Russ: How's Belgium? Is it? Oh. Mmm. Yes. I know, yes. Uh-huh. Mmm. Yes. Uh-huh. Oh I'm sorry. Yes I remember. Did he? Well you never liked him did you? Mmm. That's awful. I know, it's awful. That's what I said, it's awful. I know, I know dear. I said it's awful didn't I? It's awful, what else do you want me to say? I agreed with you. I'm agreeing with you. It's awful. What else can I do? I'm in London and you're in Belgium, of all places. No – No – wait, darling that's not what I – that's not- that's not what I meant. I know – yes, I know – I know why you're in Belgium - Sorry, sorry. It's not been the easiest of days.

Long pause.

Russ: I'm fine. Mick's play bombed. Yes, the one about the goat. We all knew it would, or I did at least. He was never Peter. No. I did tell him but – Well Pete's Pete isn't he? Again and again I told him, there's a fine, clearly marked and well-advertised line between innovation and stupidity. Well exactly, Mick's work almost always drives straight through it and parks somewhere in the latter mentioned area. He's never been an honest writer. Well yes, stick to what you know. Clichéd yet utterly accurate advice.

Edward enters topless. Russ watches him.

Russ: No, I said it was good advice despite being a cliché, I wasn't saying – No that's not what I was saying. I know dear, I know. That's not what I saying. Well I'm sorry if it came out that way, I didn't mean to undermine you. I know you understand. Thirty odd years, how could you not understand?

Edward begins putting his shoes on.

Russ: New York? Really? Are you sure you'll be able to get the time off work? They won't need you? Marks incompetent though isn't he? No – No that's not what I - of course I want you to be there. Of course I do I just thought they might miss you. You know I miss you I just – We'll be rehearsing every day, I'd feel guilty leaving you at the hotel every day. Yes. You booked flights? You've already booked? Why didn't you tell me? I know but you could have let me know – Well I know you're telling me *now* - Of course I'm pleased but – no I am pleased, I am but I'll need to check with Peter. I'm sure he won't mind but still I need to... You checked with Peter? Did you? And what did she say? Did he? The same hotel?

Pause.

Russ: Hello? Yes, I'm here. No darling that's - Of course I'm pleased. Of course I'm pleased but I'll...Just a bit of a shock isn't it? Yes, a good shock. Look I just remembered I'm meant to call Peter quickly. I know its late but I ought to, it's about the play. Yes. Yes. Alright, I'll call you tomorrow. I am pleased dear. Alright goodnight.

Russ puts the phone down. Edward is looking at him. Russ pours a drink and drinks it all in one.

Russ: Did you want anything?

Edward: No I –

Russ: Piss off then.

Edward goes to leave.

Russ: Close the door on the way out.

Edward exits. Russ sits in silence. Anna enters.

Anna: You'll never guess who I bumped into on the stairs. He let me in.

Anna pours herself a drink. They sit in silence.

Russ: Peter invited Eleanor to New York with us. Christ.

Anna: She must know.

Russ: I don't know how she doesn't. I've never been subtle.

Anna: Maybe she does and doesn't care.

Beat.

Russ: Maybe. Though she's never been subtle either. Talking to her is like walking through a mine-field. Something will set her off.

Anna: Maybe *you* should tell her.

Russ: It's too late for that now. I've dug myself in, I'll just have to keep digging. We'll have to keep digging.

Pause.

Anna: Have you spoken to Mick?

Russ: No, Peter has though. Apparently he's moved, some house on the outskirts of London.

Pause.

Russ: Well at least you're going. New York. If you weren't, I wouldn't. Maybe you'll make it bearable, though somehow I doubt it.

Pause.

Russ: Are you driving?

Anna: No.

Russ raises his glass.

Russ: Wilde said, 'There are only two tragedies in life; one is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it.'

They both drink. Blackout

Act 4 – Seven Years and Five Months Earlier

Scene 1

Anna's family's flat in Paris. Mick is getting into his dinner jacket. He walks towards the window. Anna enters in a dress.

Mick: You look –

Anna: Awful, I know. I bought this about fifteen years ago –

Mick: I remember. You wore it to graduation.

Anna: Well, I've gained a little weight since then.

Mick: I wouldn't have known.

Pause.

Mick: The view's fantastic.

Anna: Gorgeous, isn't it? I sometimes wonder why I never brought people here, while we were at university. I'm indecisive, that's the problem. I'd never be able to choose who to invite, I'd keep changing my mind. I should never be allowed to organise anything.

Pause.

Mick: Would you like some wine?

Anna: I would love some. White please.

He pours two glasses.

Anna: Chin chin.

Mick: To our week away.

Anna: Oh God, don't say that.

Mick: Say what?

Anna: 'Week away.' You're reminding me that we do in fact have to return at some point, to England, to everything...to him.

Pause.

Mick: How is it?

Anna: Mmm?

Mick: Marriage, how is it?

Anna: No different to when we weren't married really, only I feel slightly guiltier when I'm unfaithful.

Short pause.

Anna: He wanted to talk to you actually, my husband. He wants to put on one of your plays, *Wilder Path*.

Mick: Does he?

Anna: I say put on, he wants to produce. Russ would direct, I imagine.

Mick: Russ? I haven't seen him since the reunion. I can't stand him.

Anna: Oh how can you say that? He's not happy.

Mick: Lots of people aren't happy, Anna; it doesn't mean he can behave like an asshole.

Anna: Are you happy?

Mick: I haven't been happier.

Anna: Neither.

They kiss.

Mick: That was a lie; I went to Greece last year with Holly. We had our own pool.

Anna: You have a terrible habit of ruining the most romantic moments –

Mick: I'm sorry I couldn't resist.

Anna: Yes, well. There goes your chances of having sex in Paris.

Mick: Actually the cab driver gave me the number of this place down the road –

Anna: Well, next time I'll come here on my own.

Pause.

Mick: What's the time?

Anna: Half six. When does the show start?

Mick: We've got an hour.

Anna: I really don't think you're going to enjoy this.

Mick: Why not?

Anna: It's experimental theatre –

Mick: When have I ever said anything against experimental theatre –

Anna: In French. You're not going to understand a word.

Mick: I don't mind.

Anna: If you're sure.

Pause.

Mick: How are the children?

Anna: Fine. Martin's eight now, Kate's ten.

Mick: Ten? I don't believe it. Does she look like you?

Anna: Yes. She's got my looks, and Peter's genius.

Pause.

Mick: Does she look like Peter?

Anna: Not particularly, but she doesn't look like you either, if that's what you meant. I fancy some music.

Anna chooses a vinyl and turns on the record player. Soft jazz music plays. Mick stands, and they two walk closer together. They begin slow dancing.

Anna: I forgot.

Mick: Forgot what?

Anna: That you're a terrible dancer.

Mick: Now who's ruining the moment?

Anna: No, listen. The beauty of slow dancing is you don't actually have to dance. You just sway, so stop moving as much. There we go.

They dance in silence.

Anna: If this song doesn't stop, we could keep dancing like this forever.

Mick: You wouldn't get bored of me?

Anna: See that's the beauty of dancing, we wouldn't have to speak.

Mick: Oh, I see.

Anna: We'd dance our way through our existence until we got so old that we'd have to hold each other up. Only then would the music stop.

The music stops. Silence.

Mick: Leave him.

Anna: What?

Mick: Leave Peter, leave your husband –

Anna: Now wait -

Mick: If you leave him, I promise to dance with you until we can no longer walk, until we can no longer stand.

Anna: Mick –

Mick: I'm sorry, that wasn't fair of me. Forgive me, I know we said we wouldn't talk about -

Anna: Where would we live?

Mick: What?

Anna: If I were to leave him, where would we live?

Mick: Wherever you wanted.

Anna: Would we have a dog?

Mick: We would have fifty if it means you moving in with me. Wait, are we doing this? Are you doing this? Please, only say we are if we *are* actually doing, if this is actually happening.

Anna: I'm going to have to teach you how to dance.

They embrace passionately.

Mick: I love you.

Anna: Oh god.

Mick: What?

Anna: I just realised.

Mick: What?

Anna: I'm going to have to tell my parents aren't I? "I've left Peter for Mick. Mick, you remember Mick, don't you? You did meet him! Remember the boy who came over while I was at University and called you a racist? Yes, that's him." That'll be me scratched off the will.

Pause. Mick is smiling.

Anna: What is it?

Mick: Nothing, I just can't really believe this, that's all.

Anna: We ought to go if we're going to catch this play.

Mick checks his watch.

Mick: You're right, let me grab my coat.

Mick exits. Pause. The phone rings. Anna looks at it, waiting for it to stop. Eventually she picks it up and puts it back down immediately. Mick enters wearing his coat.

Mick: Who was that?

Anna: Just a wrong number. We should go.

Mick: Alright, let me finish my wine.

Mick drinks his wine. Pause.

Mick: It's changed, it's finally changed.

Anna: What has?

Mick: My luck. I always think it will, but it never does. Until now.

Mick has finished his glass.

Mick: Are you ready?

Anna walks over and plays the record again.

Anna: One more dance.

Mick: We'll miss the show.

Anna: We won't. And if we do it's not like it matters if we arrive ten minutes late. It's experimental theatre; even if we watched the whole thing through it's not like either of us would understand it. Knowing you, you'd probably pretend to.

Mick: We've got the rest of our lives to dance

Anna: If I'm dancing with you for the rest of my life, you need practice. Just five more minutes.

Mick smiles. Anna puts the music on. It plays, as both Mick and Anna stay silent for a moment.

Mick: I'd be surprised if we leave the flat at all.

Anna: And why is that?

Mick: Timing's not our strong point.

Anna: No, I guess it isn't.

Mick: Wine?

Anna: What about the show?

Mick: It's French, experimental theatre.

Anna takes his hand. They begin dancing in silence.

Anna: You'll never guess what I found? Our poetry book.

Mick: Did you really?

Anna: I must have left it here, years ago.

Mick: Wasn't it awful?

Anna: Most of them were, yours were at least. I can remember a bit of Pete's though; "The Midnight Flower."

Mick: Recite it then.

Anna: I only know the last verse. 'What stood in sun, Is gone by night, No fault of hand but fault of time. What once was bold, Is now hardly a rose. But what will wilt, Will return to grow.'

Mick: And mine was worse?

Anna: Marginally

They continue to dance in silence. Lights fade. Blackout.