

Ulster American

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London, present day.

Leigh Carver's living room. It's Sunday evening, around 8pm. Jay and Leigh sit on a sofa. Jay drinks a can of Diet Coke. Leigh drinks red wine.

JayIs there homophobia in Hollywood? Of course. And misogyny? How can we deny it? It's reflected in so much of our output. Narrative upon narrative centred around the *abuse* of women, the *violent* abuse of women. And racism? Only a fool could pretend otherwise. We've come a long way since Stepin Fetchit ... fuck we've come a long way since *Poitier* but still ...

LeighNo I agree with what you're saying.

JayYou ever use the n word?

LeighMm?

JayYou ever use the n word?

LeighThe n word?

JayYeah.

LeighThe actual word?

JayYeah, the actu-, you need me to say it?

LeighNo.

They laugh.

JaySo have you?

Leigh *shakes his head no.*

JayNever?

LeighNot that I remember.

JaySo you may have? If you were drunk or –

LeighMaybe as a teenager.

JayOhh ...

⁴

LeighBut it's unlikely. My parents were old communists so ... it wouldn't have been ...

JayI've *never* said it. I don't even like saying the phrase "The N Word". Even referencing it obliquely like this causes me discomfort.

LeighI know what you mean.

JayBut I do wonder if that's right. Are we abnegating our responsibility to history by refusing to speak the word? Maybe we have a responsibility as white people to say it as much as possible. To take possession of the word. As our ancestors once took possession of the people. Not my ancestors obviously.

LeighNor mine.

JayMy ancestors were – uh

LeighYeah, mine were probably ...

JayThey were not slave-owners.

LeighNo. Nor mine.

JayYou ever see Ice Cube on *Real Time*?

LeighWhat's *Real Time*?

JayIt's a talk show.

LeighI don't know the American talk shows.

JayOne week Bill Maher said the n word.

LeighWho's Bill Maher?

JayHe's the host of the show.

LeighAnd he's white?

JayYes.

LeighOhhhhh ...

5

JayIn context it was not without irony, but it still proved controversial.

Leigh'Course.

JaySo the next week they had Ice Cube on as a guest, I know Cube, he's very honest, straight-talking ...

LeighHe's a rapper, isn't he?

JayAnd a great one. If he'd been murdered in the nineties he would be spoken about with the same reverence as Tupac and Biggie, Big Pun.

LeighMm.

JayBig L. And of course Eazy E.

LeighYasss.

JayCube made the mistake of surviving. It says something about America that we prefer our iconic black artists to meet unnecessary, preferably violent, deaths.

LeighIt's a tragedy.

JaySo on the show he said that under no circumstances can the white man say the n word anymore. 'That's our word now', he said.

LeighRight...

JayAnd the studio audience applauded.

LeighYou can see his point of view.

JayCompletely. But I also love what Baldwin said.

LeighWhat did Baldwin say?

JayBaldwin said that that word had nothing to do with the black race. That it was an invention of the white race and was placed upon black people without their consent.

LeighWho could argue with that?

6

JaySo as it's the white's man word, it's the white man who must look inside himself and ask himself why he invented that word, why he needed that word in his lexicon. It's a really good question.

LeighIt is a good question. And what was his conclusion?

JayBaldwin's conclusion?

LeighYeah.

JayI don't think he had one.

LeighMmm.

JayBut I think that was his point. That it was a question for the white race.

LeighBut surely the point he's making is that it's precisely his responsibility.

JayIs it?

LeighAs a white man.

JayAs a *white* man?

LeighYes, as a white man, he has to answer for his racist language.

JayWho?

LeighBaldwin.

JayBaldwin was black.

LeighReally?

JayDefinitely.

LeighNo.

JayI promise you.

LeighAlec Baldwin's black?

JayAlec Baldwin?

7

LeighHe must be very light-skinned, you can't even tell.

JayNot talking about *Alec* Baldwin.

LeighWho are you talking about?

JayJames Baldwin.

LeighOhhh!

Jay *laughs.* **Leigh** *laughs.*

LeighIs he the youngest one? The one who was on Big Brother?

JayNo James Baldwin – you never heard of James Baldwin?

LeighI don't know all the Baldwin brothers by name. Was he the one in *Sliver*?

JayNo James Baldwin was uh... an African-American author – prolific in the sixties. He wrote *Notes of a Native Son*.

LeighOh... yeessss ... God, I'm a –

JayHe was also gay.

LeighI do know who you mean now. I am a complete Neanderthal, forgive me.

JayHe's not as well-known as he should be. Perhaps because America – and the world – wasn't ready to hear his voice. It was presumptuous of me to assume you would have heard of him.

LeighI have heard of him, I should have ... I'm a fucking idiot. Sorry.

Pause.

JayAm I talking too much?

LeighNo.

JayI get like this when I'm nervous.

8

LeighYou've no need to be nervous. What are you nervous about?

JayThe journey.

LeighJust jump on the Victoria line and change at King's Cross.

Jay *looks confused.* **Leigh** *realises his mistake.*

LeighOh you mean ... ?

JayI mean the spiri –

LeighThe internal ...

JayThe process ...

Leigh(*at the same time*)The process.

He repeats it, pronouncing it the American way, like Jay.

LeighProcess, yes. Well everyone's nervous at this stage! The other actors, they'll be very intimidated by you.

JayI don't want them to be intimidated.

LeighThey should be intimidated. Your character is intimidating.

JayOk ... ok ... good.

LeighI like to keep things very relaxed on the first day anyway.

JayI cannot wait to meet our writer!

LeighI don't understand why she's so late.

JayI really want her to like me.

LeighShe loves you.

JayI love her name. 'Ruth Davenport.' It's so real. So Irish.

LeighWell she is real. And she is Irish.

JayI connected so much with this play I can't tell you.

9

LeighYou have told me.

JayThese *words*.

LeighWords are everything.

JayThe savagery. The visceral rhythm and savagery.

LeighThat's exactly what I said to her. It's visceral. Poetic.

JaySavage.

LeighRelentless. And yet compassionate.

JayOnly a woman could write with this kind of relentless compassion.

LeighShe is a woman.

JayI love that she's a woman. To hear a woman tell this kind of story. And this important moment in history. When women's voices are crying out to be heard.

LeighI think it's true we need to do more for women. Create more opportunities.

JayAgreed.

LeighEtcetera.

JayWell fucking listen to them for once.

LeighYep.

JayAllow *them* to be heard. Learn from our mistakes. This is where we're at as a culture.

LeighHistorical materialism.

JayYou ever heard of the Bechdel theory?

LeighI've heard of the Bechdel *test*.

JayIt's this theory that for a work of art to be truly progressive, it must feature two women talking.

LeighYes, I'm familiar with it.

[10]

JayAbout something that's really important.

LeighAnd about something other than a man.

JayWhat?

LeighIt has to feature two women talking about something other than a man.

JayThat's the Bechdel theory?

LeighThe Bechdel test, yes.

JayAnd they have to talk about something feminist, right?

LeighNo.

JayYeah a woman told me this, they have to talk about something women give a fuck about. Rights. Voting. Equality. *Pay*.

LeighI don't think – all those issues are important – but I don't think that's strictly speaking part of the Bechdel test.

JayWell it fucking should be. Bechdel should have added that to his fucking test. If he really gave a fuck about women.

LeighBechdel was a woman.

JayNo I don't think so.

LeighShe was. Is.

JayA woman told me Bechdel was a man.

LeighI'm sure Bechdel's a woman.

JayYou sure?

LeighYes.

JayReally sure?

LeighI am in fact 100 per cent positive Bechdel is a woman.

JayWell there you go. Right?

[11]

LeighRight?

JayBechdel was a woman.

LeighBechdel *is* a woman.

JaySo that's an example. Why should I, a man, dictate to Bechdel, a woman, what should or should not be part of her fucking theory? This is me, learning from my mistakes, learning to shut the fuck up.

LeighI suppose.

JayAnd that's what I'm saying, this is where we're at. Guys like me and you taking a back seat. Allowing the Ruth Davenport's of the world to have their say. Fucking white heteronormative, privileged fucking uh... *cis* ... motherfuckers like you and I who have to stand aside now. We have a moral responsibility to ... I mean not *me*. Obviously. I'm Irish Catholic, so I can't ...

LeighOf course.

JayI'm not part of that – the equation of –

LeighNeither am I.

JayI have an intersectional exemption. Am I white? It's undeniable. Am I heterosexual? Yes completely. Am I trans? Well I love my dick, so no. But I'm not part of this rampant elite the, who –

LeighAnd I'm English so ...

JayExactly you're English, so –

LeighSo I'm sort of ... not really part of –

JayBecause we have no power. Do you have power?

LeighWell I run a theatre.

JayBut that's not power. Not real power.

LeighI suppose not.

[12]

JayAnd I'm just an actor.

LeighSure.

JayAdmittedly I have *some* power.

LeighWell you have a power onstage. And onscreen.

JayI would classify that as charisma more than power.

LeighAnd you have won an Oscar.

JayThat means nothing to me. I've never sought external validation.

LeighIt's why you're so good.

JayI work my program. I talk to my sponsor on a daily basis. On a daily basis I pray, I meditate, I maintain my relationship with a power greater than myself.

LeighNice.

JayDid I tell you my sponsor is a priest?

LeighYou did, yes.

JayI told you I'm in AA, right?

LeighYes.

JayBeing open about with trusted colleagues helps me maintain my sobriety.

LeighSensible.

JayI distanced myself from God, when I was a kid. I come from a big Catholic family.

LeighYou told me this.

JayI turned my back on the Church when I discovered acting. Acting became my religion.

LeighYes, we talked about this last time we met. It's really really fascinating.

[13]

JayWhen everyone else had turned their backs on me, it was God, it was the Church, it was the Twelve Steps, it was Father Michael Mulcahy, that lifted me up.

LeighVery moving.

JaySo now I ... I'm just trying to be a better fucking person now, Leigh. A better Catholic. Treat people with respect, starting with myself. Honour my truth. The truth of who I am.

LeighIf one can't live truthfully, how does one live at all?

JayIt's what drew me to this script. The truth of it.

LeighYes.

JayAnd the unremitting violence.

LeighI know what you mean.

JayWhat it says of the Irish. And who we are as a people historically.

LeighHistory is so important.

JayAnd where we're going.

LeighWhere are we going? Where are the Irish going? These are all important questions. Particularly in the current climate.

JayThese tumultuous times.

LeighThe post-Brexit environment.

JayAnd the rise of women. The voices of Irish women. And all women everywhere. Which must be heard.

LeighTrue.

JayA woman from England, a British writer, forgive me but it's true ...

LeighWhat?

14

JayA British writer could never have written a play like this.

LeighA play set in Northern Ireland?

JayA play of this kind of emotional intensity.

LeighWhy not?

JayBecause of how emotionally repressed the British are.

LeighI don't think that's –

JayIt's a stereotype?

LeighIt may have been true at one point. But these days the British are more open, more emotionally articulate. Particularly since the death of Diana.

JayDiana who?

LeighPrincess Diana. The Princess of Wales.

JayOh. Oh *Diana*. Riiiiight.

Leigh'Our dead princess.'

JayYeah yeah.

LeighWhen she died, there was a sea change.

JayI get it now.

Leigh*They* say.

JayNow she's someone I would loved to have met.

LeighReally?

JayJust to have a conversation with her. Find out what *she* thought. I bet no one ever really spoke to her. I think her whole problem was no one ever saw her as a real human being with real problems and real feelings. And clearly Charles, Prince Charles, he never loved her. At least not in the way that a woman like that needed to be loved.

15

LeighCharles had a very old-fashioned view of marriage, I suspect. Not untypical of the Windsors.

JayHe needed to love that woman like a ... well, like a princess. Actually. Because that's what she was. She was a princess. Even if she was a ...

LeighHmm.

JayA waitress. Had she been born a waitress.

LeighYes, that is a very interesting remark. Very perceptive. And very very interesting.

Jay *sets his can down and leans forward.*

JayWould you mind if I asked you a troubling question?

Leigh... No.

JayMay I?

LeighGo ahead.

JayDo you think there are any circumstances where it's morally acceptable to rape someone?

Pause. Leigh furrows his brow. He clears his throat.

Leigh... Sorry?

JayIs it ever ok to rape someone? A woman?

LeighNo. No I wouldn't have ... *thought* so, sorry, why are we talking about this?

JayI made a picture with Paul Verhoeven once. You won't have seen it, no one's seen it, it was very early in my career but there was a scene in it, eventually got cut from the script but it was a great scene where my character had to, uh- he was being held hostage in a room full of women. And this terrorist, this evil son of a bitch, played in the eventual movie by Rutger Hauer, who is the sweetest man - well, he forced my character at gun point to select one of the women to rape. And if I refused, he would detonate a nuclear bomb in ¹⁶downtown Minneapolis. Eventually, my character chose ... one of the hostages was his ex-wife ... so he chose her. Which he naturally felt conflicted about. It was a terrific scene and it really took the story to a whole 'nother level but too many people at the studio, mainly women it has to be said, found it objectionable. And maybe they were right. Maybe it did cross a line. But it got me thinking cos I like to think about things, that's what draws me to stories, it's what drew me to this story - am I provoked? Does it make me think? Does it make me see the world in a new way?

LeighRight, right.

JayAnd it got me thinking. If I had to rape someone. Who would I rape?

LeighRight. But you wouldn't actually want do that to anyone, would you?

JayOf course not, Leigh. I'm a fucking feminist. How could I not be? I benefit from the patriarchy yet I am nonetheless demeaned by it.

LeighI actually am a feminist.

JayDiana.

LeighWhat?

JayI would rape Princess Diana. If I had to. At gunpoint.

Leigh... Uhm ...

JayThink about it, it was her life's mission to empathise with the oppressed and the marginalised. Them. Out there. You know? *AIDS. Landmines. Africa*. If you raped Diana, it would have given her a deeper sympathy with the victims of sexual assault. She could have used it in her work. Some good could come from it. Now I'm not for one minute justifying violence against women. But if you did wish to justify it. It can be done. So?

LeighSo?

¹⁷

JayWho would you rape? If you had to?

Leigh...Uh ... No one.

JayNo one?

LeighNo one.

JayYou can choose anyone in the world.

LeighI wouldn't.

JayBut if someone put a gun to your head?

LeighI still wouldn't.

JayRight but if someone put a gun to your head?

LeighYes I understand but I still wouldn't.

JayThey're going to kill you.

LeighI understand.

JayThey have a gun to your head.

LeighI know.

JayThey'll detonate a nuclear bomb.

LeighI understand what you're, the premise of, but I - I wouldn't. They would have to kill me.

JayI don't think you understand.

LeighI do understand.

JayIt's Rutger Hauer.

LeighYes I know but – I just could never ... under any ... It's wrong.

A momentary pause.

JayWhat if it was Jesus?

LeighSorry?

JayWhat if Jesus put a gun to your head?

18

LeighWell... I'm not a Christian but –

JayYou don't have to be a Christian.

LeighI'm not a Christian but –

JayYeah you don't have to be a Christian.

LeighIf you'll let me finish my *bloody* ... !

Pause.

I'm not a Christian but from what I know of Jesus, from what I've read of his teachings I don't think it would be in his character to put a gun to a person's head and request that they sexually assault someone.

A silence. Jay seems to disappear into himself. The silence seems to go on forever. Jay won't look at Leigh. Leigh is unsure how to respond.

Then ...

LeighThatcher.

Jay looks up.

LeighMargaret Thatcher. If I was forced to ... 'do that' ... to anyone. I would ... Thatcher.

JayWhy?

LeighEverything about that woman was ... I grew up somewhere ... well, everything that woman stood for disgusts me ...

JayOk ...

LeighBut even she didn't deserve that. No one deserves that.

Pause.

JayHave I upset you?

LeighNo.

19

JayCos I'm sensing this uh, if you'll excuse me, this sense of passive resistance from you.

LeighFrom *me*?

JayThis attitude of barely concealed resentment like I've said something to offend you?

LeighNot at all. I don't know where you're getting that from.

JayIf I've offended you, you have to tell me. I know I can be overwhelming. I know I can be intense.

LeighYou haven't offended me.

JayIt would kill me to offend you. I know we've only known each other a short time but I feel that I can trust you with my life.

LeighYou absolutely can.

JayThere is no more important relationship, Leigh, than the relationship between an actor and a director. It's as important as the relationship between a mother and a newborn.

LeighI honestly couldn't agree more.

JayFor the next four weeks you are my mother. You are my father. You are my lover, my king, my cousin, my brother. My wife, my fuckbuddy, my cuck, my nemesis, my *dick*. That's the level of –

LeighYes.

JayThat I put you at.

LeighWell I am humbled. And you have not offended me.

JayGreat. Ok. Great.

Leigh gets up and heads for the kitchen.

LeighWould you excuse me for a second?

20

JayEverything ok?

LeighI'm just going to uh, are you ok for drinks?

JayI'm fine. Thank you.

Leigh enters the kitchen. **Jay** flicks through his script. He reads the lines to himself in a terrible Belfast accent.

Jay'You fucking dirty Fenian bastard. You fucking dirty Fenian fuck.'

He plays with the word in his mouth.

'Fenians.' 'Fenians.' 'Fenians.' 'I hate the Fenians.' 'I hate the Fenians.' 'I want to murder all the Fenians.'

Leigh re-enters with a huge glass of wine.

JayDo you think I could have an eyepatch?

LeighA what?

JayAn eyepatch.

LeighYou mean for the play?

JayI think it would be a great metaphor for my character's moral decay.

The buzzer goes. Leigh goes to answer it.

JayIs that Ruth?

LeighI hope so.

When Leigh goes out to the hall, Jay stands up, makes a great fuss over himself. He fixes his hair, maybe does some star jumps. From the hall, we hear Leigh welcoming Ruth.

Leigh(from off)Hi!

Ruth(from off>Hello!!! Hello!

Leigh(from off)Come in, come in!

Leigh enters, followed by **Ruth**.

21Ruth this is, ah ...

JayHi Ruth, I'm Jay Conway.

RuthOh I know who you are! Hello! I'm Ruth ... eh ... Davenport, hi.

She offers her hand and they shake.

It's really nice to meet you.

JayIt's so great to meet you.

RuthI'm so sorry we haven't been able to meet before it's just the dates and –

JayForget about it.

LeighIs everything ok?

RuthYes, I'm sorry I'm so late.

LeighWhat happened? Why didn't you call?

RuthMy phone ran out of battery. And God ... so ... I was ... my mother was driving me to the airport. And we've been arguing a lot lately, really getting under each other's skin, that's the kind of relationship we have and I love her but she's really fucking ... you know how it is with parents.

LeighShe's quite something, Ruth's mother. You'll meet her.

JayCan't wait!

RuthSo we're bickering about everything and she asks when I'm coming back from London and I tell her not for another month or two and she says, 'Sure I'm going away to Portrush with Joan Maginness next week, so who's gonna feed the cat?' And I'm like, 'Get Kelly to do it.' Kelly's my sister so ...

JayYou live with your mom?

RuthYeah yeah.

22

LeighWould you like a drink?

RuthNo. Yes actually.

Leigh Wine?

Ruth Yeah. So I'm ...

Leigh Red ok?

Ruth Yeah yeah.

Leigh *exits.*

Ruth So she says, 'I can't ask Kelly, she's too busy with the kids' and I'm like, 'Mum, I've got a play opening in London with Jay Conway in it, I'm not coming back to feed the cat.' But she's no idea who you are.

Jay Oh!

Ruth Sorry! She hasn't been to the cinema since *Dr Zhivago*, so –

Jay Great movie.

Leigh *re-enters carrying a glass of wine for Ruth.*

Ruth Then she says, 'This isn't another play about the Troubles, is it? People are sick of hearing about the Troubles!'

Leigh There you go.

He hands it to her.

Ruth Thanks. Then she says, 'you're too young to remember the Troubles anyway.' And I'm like, 'Mummy I'm thirty-six, I grew up in the nineties of course I remember the Troubles. I remember Omagh, I remember the Shankill Chip Shop bombing. My best friend was killed in the Troubles!'

Jay You lost a friend?

Ruth Yeah, she was killed in a bomb in the city centre.

23

Jay I'm sorry to hear that.

Leigh Ruth's actually dedicated the play to her.

Jay That's beautiful.

Leigh Gemma Spencer.

Ruth Yeah. So my mother says, 'you would never have stayed friends with Gemma Spencer anyway. You weren't that close. And she was awful dreary. That whole family was dreary. Her being murdered was the most interesting thing about them.' I just lost it with her and – I don't know what came over me, I just said, 'Mummy – why do you always have to be such a cold-souled, black-hearted thoughtless fucking bitch?'

Leigh Oh...

Jay You called your mom a fucking bitch?

Ruth Uh huh.

Ruth *drinks her wine.*

Leigh So what happened then?

Ruth Well then she crashed the car.

Leigh She crashed?

Ruth Yeah.

Jay God...

Leigh Is she ok?

Ruth No. No she's in hospital. I left her there a few hours ago and got the first flight I could to Heathrow.

She drinks again. Jay and Leigh are speechless.

Ruth It's fine. She's fine. My sister's with her now.

Leigh Do you need to ring anyone or –?

Ruth Yeah I should. I forgot to pack a charger.

24

Leigh Give me your phone.

She hands it to him.

Ruth Could I get another wine as well?

She knocks back her drink and hands him the empty glass.

Leigh exits.

JayWow.

RuthYeah... Yeah ...

JayWhat a journey you've had.

RuthYeah...

JayI hope your mother's ok.

RuthShe'll be fine. She's a tough woman.

JayYou know what they say? *(In a terrible Irish accent.)* 'We do make them tough in the old country.'

Ruth laughs nervously. **Jay** laughs self-consciously. *They sit.*

RuthSorry, I shouldn't have told you all that, I must seem like a real weirdo to you.

JayNo, no.

RuthIt's because I feel like I know you.

JayI feel like I know you.

RuthListen, thank you for doing my play.

JayPlease! Thank me, thank you! It's the role of a lifetime.

RuthI'm your biggest fan. I've loved you since I was like two.

JayWell now you're making me feel old.

RuthSorry sorry!

JayNo I'm kidding! It means a lot to me that my work has spoken to you.

25

RuthCan I tell you my favourite film of yours?

JayGo ahead.

RuthWould that be ok?

JayGo ahead.

Ruth *Elixir.*

JayReally?

RuthThat final scene in the car between you and Jack Lemmon?

Jay*Jaaaack!* I learnt so much from that man. He was like a father to me. When he died I wept for two weeks.

RuthIs Jack Lemmon dead?

JayI think so. Yeah, he is ... yeah.

RuthThere's one word for that scene – heartbreaking.

JayHeartbreaking is two words.

RuthIt's one word.

JayHey you're the writer.

RuthI am.

JayBut I think you're wrong.

RuthI'm not.

Jay smiles. **Ruth** smiles back at him.

JaySo can I tell you something now?

RuthGo ahead.

JayWould that be ok?

RuthGo ahead.

JayYour script. Your fucking script, Ruth. Is the single best script I've read for ten fucking years.

26

RuthThat's so nice to hear.

JayI mean it.

RuthThank you.

JayI hope you don't mind but I sent it to Quentin.

RuthYou sent it to who?

JayIs that ok? I felt I had to share it. It had such a visceral impact on me, it didn't feel right to keep it to myself.

RuthQuentin who?

JayTarantino.

RuthNo way!

JayWe're talking about doing something together next year and I was telling him about this. He loved it. Is that ok?

RuthOf course! Oh my God!

JayHe said if you were ever in LA he'd love to meet.

RuthAre you serious? I fucking love Tarantino.

JayWell he loves you.

RuthSorry for swearing but that's too exciting.

JayOh please. I love to swear. I swear like Liza Minelli with a twelve-inch cock in her ass. *A shocked, delighted laugh from Ruth.*

JayAfter this is all over, you come out to LA, I'll introduce you to him. How about that?

RuthYes. Definitely!

Leigh *re-enters with a glass of wine.*

LeighRuth, do you need me to call you a doctor or anything?

27

RuthNo I'm fine, he ... listen to this ... have you told Leigh?

JayNo.

RuthHe... Jay ... sent my script to Quentin Tarantino.

LeighWell that's ... wow.

RuthOh! I forgot.

JayWhat?

RuthLeigh's not a fan of Tarantino.

JayWhat??

LeighNo I think he's great, I just ...

JayAre you *insane*??

LeighNo he's brilliant but I just find the gratuitous violence in his work inherently problematic. It's juvenile. Isn't it? I mean he's very accomplished but he's not exactly Nuri Bilge Ceylan, is he?

JayWho is?

LeighWho is Nuri Bilge Ceylan? I'm glad you asked. He's this extraordinary Turkish *auteur* that I am obsessed with –

JayMotherfucker, I know who Nuri Bilge Ceylan is! I'm co-producing his American debut.

LeighOh. Of course you would know ... That's wonderful that you're ...

JayNuri would love this play. I really think this play could play anywhere in the world. We need to take this play to Broadway.

RuthDo you think that's possible?

LeighYou know we've sold out London already? Thanks to this man, we're critic-proof!

JayHey fuck the critics, I don't give a fuck about the critics.

28

LeighNo me neither.

JayThey're fucking animals, Leigh. They're animals, Ruth. And we should do with them what we do with animals. Kill them and eat them. And the good ones keep as pets.

RuthI try not to read them.

LeighI find it's best to, if you're going to read them at all, you should read them after the run of a show ends.

JayOnly thing I ever want to read from a theatre critic is a suicide note.

RuthCan we actually stop talking about critics? It's making me nervous.

LeighYou have nothing to worry about.

JayYour script is ALIVE.

LeighYour words, Ruth, that's why we're here.

JayWords words words words words.

LeighLanguage.

JayThe truth. The truth. The truth. The truth. The truth the truth the truth. The truth. The Truth. THE TRUTH. The truth.

LeighHe's right, you know.

RuthWell that's what you have to write isn't it? The truth.

LeighWhat is there but truth? This is what we go to the theatre for.

Pause. Leigh and Ruth drink their wine. Jay watches Ruth and Leigh drink.

JayWould you excuse me for a second? I have to make a phone call.

LeighOf course.

Jay puts on a baseball cap.

29

JayGive you both a chance to talk about me.

He puts sunglasses on and flashes a smile.

'Cos I know that's what you'll do.

Ruth and Jay laugh as he exits.

RuthOh my God, he is so – fucking – *real!* He's everything I hoped he would be. Oh my God, I fucking love him.

LeighDo you want to borrow my phone?

RuthWhy?

LeighTo ring your mother.

RuthNo.

LeighOr someone in your family?

RuthIt's fine.

LeighYou don't want to check she's ok?

Ruth No.

LeighOk.

Ruth paces around excited, knocking back her wine. **Leigh** has his head in his hands.

RuthDo you really think we could go to Broadway?

LeighWith him in it, yeah.

RuthDo you think Americans would understand the play?

LeighI don't know. I'm not fucking American am I?

RuthWhat's wrong with you?

LeighNothing.

RuthAre you upset about the Tarantino thing? Look I'm sorry if you felt I embarrassed you

-

LeighIt's fuck all to do with Quentin fucking Tarantino!

30

Ruth... ok ... so what is it?

LeighHe said something.

RuthWhat?

LeighSomething really terrible.

RuthWhat?

Leigh looks to the door.

RuthWas it about me?

LeighNo.

RuthAbout the play?

LeighNo.

RuthSo why can't you tell me?

LeighHe said ...

Leigh *gets up to look out the window, stumbles a bit.*

RuthAre you drunk?

LeighA bit, yeah.

RuthIs he drunk?

LeighNo he's in AA. That's all he fucking talks about as well. 'AA! The program! My sponsor!'

Has no one in AA told him that the second A stands for anonymous?

RuthSo what did he say?

LeighYou won't believe this.

RuthTell me.

LeighHe said ... he *said* ... he wanted to ...

Ruth... *What?*

Leigh *Rape. Diana.*

RuthDiana?

³¹

Leigh *nods.*

RuthDiana who?

LeighPrincess Diana.

RuthAre you serious?

LeighThat's what he said.

RuthYou're joking?

LeighNope.

RuthThat's fucked up.

LeighI know.

RuthAre you sure that's what he said? Because you do have a tendency to exaggerate.

LeighI am not exaggerating. Those were his exact words.

RuthWhat was the context?

LeighHe was talking about some film he made, and then he started talking about how if he had to rape a woman, he'd rape Diana, about how it could be good for her.

RuthFucking hell.

LeighIt was horrendous. It was appalling. I was ... I was appalled.

RuthSo what did you say?

LeighWhat do you mean?

RuthDid you tell him you were appalled?

LeighI did.

RuthAnd what did he say?

LeighWell then he asked me who I would rape.

RuthWho *you'd* rape?

LeighYes!

³²

RuthSo what did you say?

LeighNo one. I told him, I told him I found the idea repellent. Offensive. Misogynistic.

RuthRight. And what did he say when you said that?

Leigh... he apologised.

RuthOk. Good.

LeighIt was awful. I felt sick when he was talking about it.

RuthWell ok ... so ... I think it's important right now to make it clear to him that that kind of comment won't be acceptable in rehearsals.

LeighWell I think he knows that.

RuthBut we should be clear with him.

LeighBut we don't want to offend him.

RuthBut what if he makes a comment like that to one of the women in the company?

LeighIt's an all-male cast.

RuthWhat about the stage manager, the box office staff, the ushers?

LeighHe's an Oscar-winning movie star, he's not going to talk to the fucking ushers.

RuthHe says something like that to anyone in the theatre it could jeopardise the whole production.

LeighNow you're being hysterical.

RuthHow am I being hysterical? I'm trying to protect us, protect my fucking play! I'm doing him a fucking favour here!

LeighAlright! Calm down.

RuthDon't tell me to calm down, you're the one being fucking hysterical, I'm trying to deal with this. ³³Leigh Ok! Jesus ...

RuthWe have to make it clear to him that just because he's famous he can't be allowed to say and do whatever he wants.

LeighBut if you say something then he'll know I told you.

RuthSo what? You already told him you were appalled.

LeighYes but he also made me promise not to tell anybody what he said. He was very embarrassed.

RuthSo why did you tell me?

LeighHow could I not tell you?

RuthJesus... look I think it's really important for the sake of the play we clarify some professional boundaries. We're all adults here. We can have a conversation.

LeighHe's not an adult, he's an actor. The best actors, and he is one of the best actors in the world, are like children. Gifted, precious, special children. I understand the psychology of actors much better than you. If you confront him about this, he'll no longer trust me, and then we're all FUCKED! And you'll never get to meet Quentin Tarantino. And I'll never get to run the National.

Noise of Jay entering in the hall.

RuthIn what universe are you running the National?

LeighPlease, Ruth! Don't say anything!

Jay enters.

JaySorry about that. I was talking to my sponsor.

LeighOh yes?

JayI'm part of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

LeighYes I think you might have mentioned that.

JayIf I'm in a situation where alcohol is present my sponsor likes me to ring him every hour.

³⁴

LeighOh I'm sorry, we can stop drinking if you like.

JayNo no, my illness cannot be allowed to affect your behaviour. It's my responsibility to maintain my own sobriety not yours.

LeighWell as long as you're sure.

He takes a big drink, draining his glass.

Would anyone like another drink?

JayYeah I'll have another Diet Coke.

LeighWould you like another wine, Ruth?

RuthI'll just have a glass of water.

Leigh exits. Jay picks up his script and pencil.

JayDo you mind if I ... ?

RuthNot at all.

JayInterrogate?

RuthGo ahead.

JaySo first question:

RuthYes?

JayWhat is Ulster?

RuthWhat is Ulster?

JayI mean I understand what it is, it's a *place*, right?

RuthIt is a place, yes.

JayBut I need to know specifically.

RuthWell, Ulster is historically part of Ireland.

JayHistory is so important to this. For this play, I feel like I need to know the history of Ireland like I know my own ball sack.

³⁵

RuthOk. Ulster is another name for Northern Ireland. It's what loyalists like Tommy usually call Northern Ireland.

Jay *writes this down.*

JayGreat. Second question – do you think I could have an eyepatch?

RuthAn eyepatch?

JayI think it would be a great metaphor for my character's moral decay.

RuthI don't see a reason for it.

JayIt's a metaphor.

RuthOk.

JaySo that's a yes?

RuthNo. I was just saying 'ok'.

JayI took that as a yes.

RuthWell it wasn't.

JayOk. Ok ...

He flicks through his script.

So on page thirty-five, this line puzzles me ...

RuthWhich one?

JayWhen Tommy says he's British.

RuthUh-huh?

JayWhy does he say he's British?

RuthHe says he's British because he is British.

JayBut why would an Irishman call himself British?

RuthBecause he's a unionist. Unionists call themselves British. Like me. I'm a unionist. I'm British.

JayYou're British?

³⁶

RuthYes.

JayBut you're Irish?

RuthNo.

JayNo what?

RuthNo I'm not Irish. I'm British.

JayOk ... So that's interesting. So you're British because you're what? You're British because ... now let me try to understand this ... you're British because ... No I'm sorry, I don't get that?

RuthWell –

Leigh *enters with drinks.*

LeighHere we are.

JayLeigh you told me Ruth was Irish.

LeighShe is Irish.

JayBut she says she's British.

RuthI am British.

LeighYes well ok, I know that's a thing you say, Ruth, I know you call yourself British, and you're in some ways part-British. Perhaps in historical terms British.

JayHistory is so important to this.

LeighOh it's vital.

JayI was just saying this I have to know the history, the cultural woodwork of this play, like I know the contours of my own genitalia.

LeighMmmmm.

JaySo historically Ruth is British?

LeighSort of, yes.

JayEven though she's Irish?

[37]

RuthI'm not Irish.

LeighShe is Irish.

RuthI'm not Irish. I'm British.

JayAre you British because Britain used to own Ireland? So they used to own you, like a slave, so you're British?

LeighExactly!

RuthThey never *owned* me. I was never a slave!

JayIt's confusing because to me you sound Irish.

RuthI sound Northern Irish.

JayNorthern Irish is still Irish though, right?

LeighNorthern Irish is still Irish, yes.

JayBecause 'northern Irish' sounds to me like *Irish* but from the *northern* part of Ireland?

LeighThat's right.

RuthBut Northern Ireland's part of the UK. The UK is British. I was born in the UK. So I'm British.

JayOk I think I'm starting to understand.

LeighIt's very complicated, the whole history of the region is very complex and tragic that's why Ruth's voice is so important in helping us understand this tragic and complex history. Particularly in this disastrous post-Brexit nightmare we're living through.

JayIs Brexit relevant to this?

RuthNot really.

LeighCompletely. Brexit is a tragedy waiting to happen for Northern Ireland, it undermines the Good Friday Agreement, the peace process.

RuthIt won't necessarily be a tragedy though.

[38]

JayCould there be a return to war?

RuthI don't think so.

LeighIt is possible though. That's why the play is so important.

RuthA *play* isn't going to stop Brexit.

LeighNot on its own, but as part of a general cultural resistance.

JaySo if Tommy is British?

RuthYes?

JayWhy does he hate the British?

RuthHe doesn't.

LeighBut he does doesn't he? He has that speech about betrayal.

RuthBut that speech is about the failure of successive British governments to defend the British people of Ulster. Tommy feels betrayed by the British state, there's a difference.

LeighIs there? Most English people I know are indifferent to Ulster unionism, if not downright hostile, embarrassed by what they see as a meaningless hangover of colonialism.

RuthI don't understand your point, Leigh.

LeighMy point is that Ulster unionists aspire to be British when most real British people want nothing whatsoever to do with them.

RuthWe don't aspire to be British. We are British. We don't need your permission to be what we are.

LeighWell...

RuthWhat?

39

LeighYou sort of do need our permission to be British, don't you?

RuthYou don't get to decide who's British and who isn't.

LeighWell we sort of do. That's the point. That's what the Empire was all about. Which is why imperialism was such a shameful chapter in our history.

JayHistory. It all comes down to history.

LeighEverything is history. Because history is everything.

JayThis is more complicated than I thought.

LeighDon't worry we have four weeks.

JaySo my character is British?

LeighNot really.

RuthYes.

JayHe thinks he's British?

LeighYes.

RuthBecause he is British.

JayBut he hates the Fenians. He wants to kill them all. 'The Fenians'. Right from the first speech.

He reads in a terrible Belfast accent.

'Dirty fucking Fenian bastards. Dirty fucking Fenian cunts. Fenian fucking cuntbags.'

He looks up.

LeighIsn't his accent incredible?

RuthYep. Incredible.

JaySo?

RuthSo what?

40

JayWell that's the British he's talking about. The Fenians are the British. Right?

Pause.

LeighNnnnoooo. That's not right ... Ruth?

RuthNo Fenians are ... uh... The Fenians are not the British no.

LeighThe Fenians are the Catholics. Right, Ruth?

JayCatholics?

RuthYeah. Well Irish Republicans or nationalists, Catholics.

LeighIt's an offensive term used by Protestants.

JayOffensive?

RuthCan be, yes.

LeighIt's a bit like the n word isn't it, Ruth?

RuthNo. It doesn't have the same kind of history.

LeighHistory. That word again.

JaySo the word Fenian is offensive to Catholics?

RuthIt depends on the context. When Tommy uses it, it signifies hate, anger, murderous rage.

JaySo it's hate speech? You admit you've written hate speech?

LeighWell it's a play. It's a dramatic construction. Ruth isn't motivated by hate.

JayAnd when Tommy celebrates 'killing Fenians', when he talks about driving all the Fenians out of Ulster, 'murdering all the Fenians', he's talking about killing Irish Catholics?

RuthYes. That's the point of the speech.

LeighBut that's not Ruth's point, is it? That's Tommy's point?

41

JayHe's talking about killing innocent people? Because they're Catholic?

RuthYes.

JayBut I'm Catholic. I'm Irish Catholic.

RuthOk.

JayHe's talking about killing people like me. Are we endorsing the murder of innocent people here?

LeighBut it's a character. Right Ruth? You as a playwright are not condoning murder, are you?

RuthI think my feelings are quite complicated about this. And I think the play is complicated about this subject. I think in the context of Northern Ireland it's hard to say that the murder of innocent people was always wrong. The UVF did murder many innocent people, innocent Catholics. Which was a deliberate strategy to terrorise the nationalist population. To weaken support for the IRA. Who were also engaged in a campaign of sectarian murder. Now the British government, the British army, had no vested interest in protecting working-class Protestant communities from IRA attack. We were completely vulnerable. And while the UVF undoubtedly behaved monstrously ... they murdered the innocent, they murdered children, in the case of the Shankill Butchers, they hacked limbs from bodies, they decapitated so-called 'innocent Catholics', disembowelled them, as Tommy does in the play. But if they weren't there, what would the IRA have done to us? They were our last line of defence – the Protestant community's only line of defence – against one of the world's most well-organised, well-funded ruthless terrorist machines. Funded, I might add, in large part, by wealthy Irish Americans like yourself, Jay. So ...

LeighSo... what Ruth's saying here is she is dissecting murder. She is dispassionately examining the historical circumstances that allow ordinary people to commit extraordinary acts of violence. Isn't that right, Ruth?

⁴²

RuthI'm not sure that is what I'm saying.

JayWait, wait, wait. Wait.

They wait.

JayIs she a Protestant?

RuthYes. Is that a problem?

JayWell...

RuthIs it a problem?

JayYeah, I ... I kinda feel like I've been lied to here.

RuthBy who? By me?

JayBy both of you.

LeighIn what way?

JayI feel that I was approached with this project on the understanding it was a story about the struggle for Irish freedom, written by an Irish Catholic. And now I find it's a story about the murder of Irish Catholics written by a British Protestant, written by someone I would consider a traitor to the cause of Ireland.

RuthExcuse me?

LeighJay, no one at any point said anything about Ruth being a Catholic or a Protestant. I didn't realise it was important to you. And secondly, I know she says she's British but she's Irish.

RuthI'm British.

LeighI know you perceive yourself to be British, but in terms of how the rest of the world perceives you, you're Irish.

RuthI don't care what the rest of the world thinks.

LeighAnd that's great. That's why you're such a ferocious, uncompromising, indispensable artist. But the fact of the ⁴³matter is that most audiences who see this play, theatregoers in London by and large will see you as an Irish writer and will receive this as an Irish play. The

notion that the Ulster Protestant community is in any way British is absurd to most real British people. They won't understand that any more than you will, Jay. This is, I promise you, really not an issue.

JayI have to take some time to consider if this is a project I want to be involved in.

RuthWhat?

LeighWell wait just a second here. We start rehearsals tomorrow.

JayI know that.

LeighThere's a contract here.

JayThere's a contract here.

He points to his heart.

Here! Ok?

LeighOk.

JayI have a contract with a power greater than myself! Ok?

LeighOk.

JayAnd I have a contract with my Irish ancestors! Ok?

LeighOk. I hear that. I respect that. But you do have an actual legal contract with us.

RuthHave you ever been to Ireland?

JayMe?

RuthYeah, have you been to Ireland?

JayThe north or the south?

RuthEither.

JayNo I haven't been to either.

⁴⁴

RuthJay. I'm a British citizen. Where I come from, union flags are flown with pride from every rooftop. There are symbols of Britishness everywhere – the crown, the Red Hand of Ulster, the King James Bible. I grew up watching British TV, studying British history. I went to a British university, I've built my career and reputation in Britain. And generations of my family have given their lives in wars for Britain. And you? You've never even been to Ireland. So why is it absurd for me to call myself British? But it's not absurd for you to call yourself Irish?

LeighWho are you asking?

RuthAnyone who'll answer me.

LeighIt's a good question. I don't know the answer.

JayMy blood is Irish.

RuthMy blood is British.

LeighThis is excellent. No it is. This discussion is really helpful for the play. This is what Marx would term *praxis*. Just imagine what Brecht would make of this conversation!

JayBut, you see, in my mind, now. In *my* mind. This is over. This is over now. You have to find someone else.

RuthCan he even do that?

LeighWell now, this is a, we're all very nervous, we all feel like this the night before rehearsals, but you're doing the fucking play, I mean come on. You're doing the fucking play, Jay!

JayI was led to believe this was an Irish play by an Irish writer.

LeighIt is an Irish play. She is an Irish writer!

RuthIt's a British play and I'm a British writer.

LeighOh fuck off, Ruth!

RuthWhat?

⁴⁵

LeighThat is so disingenuous. Part of the reason people take you seriously as a writer is because you're writing about Ireland, Irish history. You wouldn't be taken so seriously if you came from the fucking Home Counties. I have built my reputation on discovering Irish

writers and directing Irish plays. I know an Irish play when I see one, Jay. This play is about a murderous psychopathic terrorist released from prison under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement who roams the backstreets of Belfast decapitating Catholic priests because he believes the ghost of Bobby Sands is trying to send him to Hell. It couldn't be more Irish if it tried. It's as Irish as a fucking potato famine.

JayI've made up my mind. I'm out.

RuthFine. We'll get someone else.

LeighWell let's not ... come on now ... There must be some kind of compromise we can reach here.

JayI don't see how.

LeighAre there changes Ruth can make to the play?

RuthI'm not changing anything.

LeighKeep an open mind. Please, Ruth.

Jay *thinks.*

JayMake Tommy a Catholic.

RuthNo.

LeighWait, Ruth.

JayPut him in the IRA.

RuthNo fucking way.

JayAnd there's gotta be dancing.

RuthDancing?

JayIrish dancing.

⁴⁶

LeighLike *Riverdance*?

JayPeople love Irish dancing. And if we want to go to Broadway, this play needs to be Irish.

LeighIt is Irish.

JayMore Irish. It needs to be as Irish as a pig fucking his sister in a peatbog. Let's get a pig! A live pig! Think about it!

LeighWell I'm not sure about the pig, but Irish dancing is very theatrical. It can be very effective.

RuthProtestants don't dance.

LeighWell that's ...

RuthIt's true.

JayEveryone dances.

RuthProtestants don't.

LeighThat's all the more reason to put it in. Challenge stereotypes.

RuthI thought you both loved the truth of the script.

LeighWe do.

RuthIts authenticity.

JayI can't fault its authenticity.

LeighBut you know, if anything it's almost too authentic.

JayThat's a really interesting thought. Go with that.

RuthWhat are you saying?

LeighI believe its authenticity is potentially alienating.

JayYes! That's ... he's ... yes!

RuthWhy have you never mentioned this before, Leigh?

LeighI always felt there was some kind of problem.

JayI did too. I couldn't put my finger on it but –

⁴⁷

LeighIf this play has a weakness and I don't believe it does but if it has a weakness, it's its –

JayI think I know what you're gonna say.

LeighIt may be guilty of a certain parochialism.

JayParochial, yeah. That's what I –

LeighA certain introspective uh...

JayMentality.

LeighMentality, yeah, a mindset.

JayA mindset yeah.

LeighThat's something the critics might, they could pick up on.

JayThey definitely will.

RuthI thought you didn't care about critics.

JayI don't. But you do.

RuthYou told me this was the greatest script you'd read for ten years.

JayThat still holds true.

RuthAnd Leigh, when you first read it you compared it to Pinter.

LeighI stand by that. In many ways it's better than Pinter. I think if Pinter were still alive he'd admit that himself.

JayIt reminds me of Chekhov. When I read this, I thought, I have to do this. This chick is the new Chekhov.

RuthChick?

LeighWell don't be ...

RuthDon't be what?

[48]

LeighHe's saying something complimentary. Honestly, Ruth, a great actor compares you to Chekhov and all you focus on is chick!

JayI'm sorry for saying chick. It was purely for alliteration.

RuthI'm not making Tommy a Catholic. I'm not making him a member of the IRA. That's not happening.

JayOk.

LeighWhat if he wasn't a Catholic. But also he wasn't a Protestant.

RuthWhat?

JayGo on.

LeighThis story is so universal you could really set it anywhere. You could set it in England. You could set it in Doncaster or Wolverhampton, or Chicago or Cape Town.

RuthI'm not rewriting the play so it's set in Wolverfuckinghampton.

LeighAnd I'm not saying you should.

RuthI don't even know where Wolverhampton is.

LeighWell, maybe you'd know where Wolverhampton was if you were ...

RuthWhat?

LeighGenuinely British.

RuthI'm not changing a word of this play.

LeighYou're not listening to me, you're letting your bloody –

JayEmotions.

LeighEmotions– thank you, Jay – you're letting your bloody emotions get in the cloud. I mean cloud your –

JayJudgement.

[49]

LeighJudgement, thank you Jay. It's like your mother said, Ruth – nobody wants to hear about the Troubles anymore.

RuthDon't mention my mother.

LeighBut with just a few cuts, it can become a universal –

RuthI am not cutting a fucking word. I'm not cutting a fucking word from this –

LeighIf you'll listen to me –

RuthI AM NOT CUTTING A FUCKING WORD FROM THIS PLAY. Fuck you and fuck you. I am not cutting *A WORD*.

JayWhoah.

LeighLook.

JayI am not used to being spoken to like this, Ruth. I like your balls. If you were a man I'd put your balls in my mouth right now. And I'm not even gay.

LeighLook. You've been in a car crash.

RuthThat's completely irrelevant.

LeighYour mother's in hospital.

RuthStop talking about my mother!

LeighBut I think it's affecting –

RuthStop talking about my fucking mother!

LeighRuth.

JayRuth.

LeighRuth.

JayPlease Leigh, let me. Ruth. I understand. I do. I also am an artist. Directors are not – no offence, Leigh.

LeighNo none taken.

50

JayBut directors are not artists in the same way that writers and actors –

LeighI completely agree. I myself see myself as a *liberator* of artists, an enabler.

JayI know Leigh is right here. My instincts are never wrong. This play could play anywhere in the world.

LeighThe *world* Ruth.

JayIf you let us explore and and ...

LeighReimagine it.

JayReimagine it, exactly. Also.

LeighYes?

JayIt allows us the opportunity to revisit the question of the eyepatch.

LeighOh.

JayBecause an eyepatch is universal. Everywhere in the world, everyone knows what an eyepatch is.

LeighThat's true.

JayAny audience in the world could see an eyepatch and think ... 'That's an eyepatch'.

RuthLook. We all know what's going on here.

LeighWhat's going on?

JayWhat's going on?

LeighWhat is going on?

JayI don't understand.

LeighWhat's going on here is we're trying to put on a fucking – bring some fucking ground-breaking art into the world. And it's what the world needs.

JayZactly. Now more than ever.

51

LeighThis disastrous environment of the post-Brexit disaster.

RuthYou wouldn't put up with this shit from a regular actor. It's just because he's famous you're letting this happen.

LeighI'm insulted by that. No I am.

JayI think we both are. You're being insulting, Ruth.

LeighI'm trying to do what's best for the play. And this glorious genius of an actor – I'd cast him if he were a complete unknown.

JayThank you. And I know that's true.

RuthEven though he can't do the accent?

JayWhat?

LeighWhat?

JayI can't do the accent?

LeighYour accent is perfect.

JayI've worked really hard on the accent. (*In the accent.*) 'How now brown cow.'

LeighIt's perfect.

Jay'You're telling me I don't sound like an Irish fella.'

RuthIt's really bad.

LeighI strongly disagree.

RuthYou sound like a Belfast Dick Van Dyke. Like you're Dick Van Morrison. I mean, if we're talking about the truth here ...

Jay gets up.

LeighJay please don't leave.

52

But he's not leaving. He goes to his bag. He takes out his Academy Award. He places it on the table. Jay looks at Ruth. Ruth looks back at him. Leigh looks at the Academy Award.

JayYou want to talk about the truth. This is my truth. I take it with me everywhere I go. To remind myself that I mean something to the world. That my work resonates with people. That I will not be spoken to as if I am a piece of shit. When someone treats me like a piece of shit and it never happens but when they do I bring it out. I display my truth. And my truth is speaking to you right now, Ruth. It has something to say. It's saying I'm right. I'm right about your play. And even if I weren't right its presence here makes me right. Change the play. Perhaps if you do, you too may find yourself the owner of the truth one day too. There are no coincidences. The universe, God, Vishnu, Medea, is speaking to you now. And if that doesn't mean something to you then nothing means anything.

LeighNothing means anything, exactly.

JayMake this a story for everyone.

LeighYep.

JayA story of a Jew or a Muslim, a fucking Welshman or a kid in Alabama.

LeighA suffering Palestinian.

JaySome kid with no shoes in a shanty town in Cairo.

LeighA, a, a, kid from the Bronx whose brother's just been shot by a racist police officer.

JayA teenager in some European city like Prague who's thinking to himself 'you know what? I might be a fucking woman.'

LeighOr a, a, Congolese immigrant in the suburbs of Paris who's considering suicide –

53

Jay– could come and see your play and say – This is My Story too. All it needs is.

LeighYes.

JayYes!

Silence. They watch Ruth. She looks at the Academy Award. Then looks at Jay.

RuthWould you like to rape me? Or do you only rape dead princesses? *Silence.*

Leigh... ok ...

Jay stands up. He goes to exit. **Leigh** chases after him and blocks his exit.

LeighJay Jay please don't leave!

JayNo I don't have to be here right now. I don't have to be treated like this.

LeighI am well aware of that.

JayI don't have to be in England arguing about a fucking play!

LeighI understand how you're feeling, Jay, I do.

JayI turned down James Cameron to be here!

LeighCompletely I know.

JayWhy did she say that?

LeighI've no idea.

JayIs she insane? What kind of person says a thing like that?

LeighI'll get her to apologise. Ruth apologise.

RuthNo I don't think so.

54

LeighApologise Ruth! He doesn't have to be here. Didn't you hear him? He turned down James Cameron to be here!

RuthFuck James Cameron.

Jay*Excuse me?* Did you just say fuck James Cameron? Did she just say fuck James Cameron?

LeighI know, but bear in mind her mother's in hospital.

JayI don't know how to talk to this person. I can't be part of a dialogue with someone who questions the artistic legacy of Mister James Cameron. I'm done here, Leigh.

He goes to the door and turns back.

I happen to know a little something about American cinema and James Cameron is the greatest filmmaker in the history of our art form and more than that he is a pioneer, a philanthropist, an inventor of worlds and a benefactor. He's the American David Lean. He's the American Tarkovsky. He's the American Bergman. How can you deny that?

RuthHe's Canadian.

JayI'm outta here.

He starts to go but Leigh stops him.

LeighWait!

JayI'm leaving.

LeighLet me talk to her. Come on. Let's not end things like this. I'm sure we can still find a way through. Remember what brought you here. The play is still the play. You are the only actor for this role. And as for your Belfast accent, to my ears it's perfect. And most of the audience who come to see this will be from my socio-economic background. It's unlikely anyone from Belfast will ever hear about this play. And Ruth, Jay's right. You are the new Chekhov. You're better than Chekhov. You're Chekhov with jokes. Real jokes, not Russian jokes. 55 We were both so excited when you said yes to this part. The only actor of his generation comparable to Clark Gable and Fred Astaire. Celebrity does unusual things to people like us. It does, Ruth. We expect too much of our celebrities. And the bigger the celebrity the more we expect. And the bigger our disappointment when they fail to meet our ridiculous expectations. We've talked a great deal tonight about honesty and truth. So let me be honest. Before Ruth arrived tonight you made a comment, which discomfited me. I felt compelled to share this comment with Ruth when she arrived. Specifically it was your comment about Princess Diana. Do you remember what you said? You said that if you had to – a woman. You'd – Princess Diana. I found this comment deeply – not deeply, let's not exaggerate – I found this comment *somewhat* distressing. The comment yes, but also who made this comment. An artist, in my view, *sans pareil*. I was disappointed. And I relayed my disappointment to Ruth when she arrived. I now see that I shouldn't have. I realise now, having got to know you better, that this comment was intended ironically. It was a thought experiment. We've asked you to come here to engage with this thematically very troubling play, to essay this rich and complex character. We can't then ask you to not access subconsciously your own dark side in preparation. We start tomorrow morning after all. Whether you knew it or not you were getting under the skin of the character, enveloping yourself in this play's psychically devastating undercurrents. Ruth wanted to confront you about your comment. And I stopped her. That was wrong. A great man once said that workers in the theatre were the 'engineers of the human soul'. Well the human soul is a messy and unforgiving country. And our currency in this country is honesty. If we are unable to give voice to the erroneous thought, the 56 unspeakable comment then our currency will lose all value. And so will the human soul. The human race depends upon us, the makers of theatre, for its very survival. And without the freedom to be wrong in the pursuit of the truth, then we're no better than actual engineers. We're no better than theatre critics.

JayYou told her what I said?

LeighI did.

JayI said those things in confidence.

LeighIt was an unforgiveable betrayal. But I hope we can move past it.

JayIf it's unforgiveable how can we move past it?

LeighThat's a very good question.

JayI trusted you.

LeighAnd I trust Ruth. She won't repeat this conversation to anyone. Will you, Ruth?

They look to her.

RuthWhy did you say it?

JayIt was hypothetical. I was saying who I would choose to ... if I had to ...

RuthRape?

Jay*nods.*

RuthSo say rape.

Jay... Rape.

RuthSo you chose ...?

Jay*nods.*

RuthSay her name.

JayDiana.

57

RuthI don't understand why you would say something like that in the first place.

JayBecause I was saying she could have turned it around, made it into a positive experience.

RuthWhy Diana?

JayBecause of how she – who she was – and the good work she – this is what I'm saying – this movie I was in – it was in context of this –

RuthYou see, I think it's disgusting.

JayDisgusting?

RuthYou're disgusting. That you would think that, let alone say it. That you would not just contemplate raping someone but you would speculate about who exactly that would be. What kind of sick mind comes up with something like that?

LeighRuth, I know it seems –

RuthAnd you chose Diana because she's, what? Powerful? Totemic? Iconic? Because she was better than you? You want to put her in her place, is that it?

JayNo. I love strong women. I chose her bec –

RuthYou want to bring her down to size. Remind her she's nothing compared to your dick? Your big powerful dick? I bet it's fucking tiny. I bet it's fucking microscopic.

JayNow look. You're crossing a line here. There's a line. And you're crossing it.

RuthHave you ever raped anyone?

JayJesus.. .

RuthHave you?

JayI'm embarrassed you would even ask me that.

58

RuthI wonder. Everything I've seen from you tonight makes me wonder. What have you done? Who are you really?

JayAre you accusing me of rape? Because of a ... a thought! You listening to this, Leigh? She's calling me a rapist. Where's your evidence?

LeighJust be careful what you're saying, Ruth.

RuthI don't know if you're a rapist.

JayOk then.

RuthBut I do know you're a fucking prick.

JayThat's it. We're done here.

LeighLet's just –

JayNo, fuck her! Fuck her, Leigh! She needs to apologise. For everything she's just said.

RuthI have nothing to apologise for.

JayI can't believe this is happening! I am one of the nicest people in this business. Ask anyone! I love women. I respect all women. My manager's a woman. A black woman! I respect you, Ruth, as a woman and as an artist, but if you don't apologise to me right now, I will make it my life's work to destroy you like the cunt you are.

RuthExcuse me please.

She disappears into the kitchen.

JayI can't tolerate this, Leigh. I can't be in her play. Not after what she's said.

LeighI understand how you're feeling.

JayShe's going to have to apologise.

LeighI agree. I think this has all gone too far.

JayToo fucking far, yes!

⁵⁹

LeighI think we should all apologise.

JayWho?

LeighAll three of us. I think we've all said things tonight we shouldn't have.

JayI'm not apologising. What the hell do I have to apologise for?

LeighWell...

JayShe's the one being unreasonable here.

LeighYou just called her a cunt.

JayYeah... I meant that in a good way.

Ruth *returns with her phone.*

RuthOk, Jay. You're going to be in my play and there'll be no cuts. You'll say every word I've written. And you won't wear a fucking eyepatch.

JayWhy would I agree to that?

RuthBecause I've composed a tweet and I'm ready to hit send. 'Tonight Jay Conway told me he wanted to rape Princess Diana'. You stay and do the play, or I'll tell the world what you said.

JayGimme the phone.

RuthStay away from me.

JayLeigh, get the phone off her.

LeighDon't do this, Ruth.

Jay *steps towards her.*

RuthStay the fuck away or I hit send!

JayDo not send that tweet. Delete it. Delete what you've typed. Delete the tweet.

⁶⁰

RuthHere's what I want ... I want you to go back to your apartment now. I want you to start learning your lines and work on your Belfast accent until it's at least passable. We'll see you tomorrow morning at ten o'clock sharp. Over the next four weeks you're going to work like fuck, you're gonna work like a paddy on the railway, and you're gonna give the Tony-award-winning performance of your fucking career. And then you and I are gonna fly out to LA together first class where you'll introduce me to Quentin Tarantino and any other motherfucker in Hollywood I want to meet. And then. *Then.* I'll delete the tweet.

Jay *goes towards her.*

RuthStay away.

Jay *stops. Then goes again.*

RuthStay the fuck away.

LeighOk look.

JayI need that phone, Leigh. She can't expect me to tolerate this.

LeighI'll get it off her.

RuthNo you won't.

JayShe's a very disturbed young woman. She's disturbed and damaged and she has to be stopped.

RuthYou both stay away from me.

Jay *paces around, tortured.*

JayFuck! FUCK FUCK FUCK!

LeighLet's all stay calm.

JayI will not be held to ransom by a fucking tweet!

Ruth's phone rings. They all watch her. She stares at the number.

LeighAre you going to answer it?

[61]

RuthKeep him away from me.

She answers it.

Ruth(*on phone*)Hello?Ok ...Ok ...Can I call you back in five minutes? I'm just in a meeting.Thanks for letting me know. I'll call you back.

She hangs up.

LeighRuth?

RuthYes?

LeighWhy don't you give me the phone? I can take care of the phone while we work out some kind of compromise. Ruth?

RuthYes?

LeighAre you listening to me?

RuthNo.

LeighWell could you listen to me please? We're in something of a fucking crisis situation here I think you'll agree.

RuthMy mother's dead.

LeighOh.Oh.Well, I'm ... I'm very sorry to hear that. Uhm ... I think ... I think the three of us should all ... you should go back to your apartment Jay, and Ruth, if you like, you can sleep in the spare room. I'm assuming you'll want to get back to Belfast in the morning? Ruth?

Ruth *nods.*

[62]

LeighI'll get the theatre to book you the first flight we can.

RuthI'd appreciate that, thanks.

LeighAs regards the production, let's uh... let's just all get a good night's sleep. A lot's happened tonight we all need to process. In the morning, I'll ring both your agents and we'll work out what to do next. I think we've all got a bit carried away and forgotten about the bigger picture. There are more important things in life than putting on a play.

JayLeigh the uh...

LeighWhat?

JayThe tweet.

LeighThe... ?

JayI need some kind of reassurance she's not going to send that tweet.

LeighI think we can discuss this another time, don't you? Her mother's just died.

JayI'd feel better if you had her phone.

LeighRuth. Would you mind if took your phone?

RuthWhat?

LeighCould I ... ? Your phone?

Ruth *doesn't respond. She's lost in her thoughts. Leigh sneaks up to her. He gently takes the phone from out of her hand. She doesn't notice. Leigh and Jay watch. Leigh gives Jay a surreptitious glance. He nods at Jay.*

RuthCan I use your bathroom?

LeighOf course.

They watch her disappear into the bathroom.

Jay Leigh, if she blackmails me I will sue you. I'll sue your fucking theatre.

63

Leigh Relax! It will not come to that! Hopefully now that her mother's died she'll have a different perspective on all this. Proves your point actually.

Jay What point?

Leigh About Diana. That good things can come from terrible events.

Jay And why the fuck did you tell her what I said about Diana? You're such a little *bitch!*

Leigh Well there's no need to call me a *bitch!*

Jay You betrayed me, motherfucker!

Leigh I know. And I'm sorry. But Ruth is one of my oldest friends. I thought I could trust her.

Ruth *re-enters unseen by them.*

Jay I could have told her what you said about Thatcher. Let's not forget that.

Leigh Well hold on here, what I said was not in the same league as what you said.

Jay What you said was much worse.

Leigh No it wasn't.

Jay You said you wanted to punish Margaret Thatcher by raping her.

Leigh I never said that.

Jay I was trying to help Diana. Make the world a better place.

Leigh Ok. Ok. Thank you for not telling her. I appreciate it.

Jay Whole situation is fucked.

Leigh We're not fucked. You still want to do the play don't you?

64

Jay Not like this. I came to do an Irish play. Not British propaganda!

Leigh Well the great thing about her mother being dead is she'll be away for at least a week and even when she does come back her mind won't be on the play. We can really shape it into whatever we want to. We can cut what we want.

Jay You don't think she'll object?

Leigh Not once she sees how much better we'll make it. I understand Ruth's process – she's sensitive, fragile, haphazard. She writes from her *id*, it's wild and free and poetic – but there comes a point where she needs rational guidance. Most women writers are the same. As are most Irish writers. She's Irish *and* a woman so she needs it more than most.

Ruth No.

Leigh Oh. Ruth. We were just talking about –

Ruth You're not cutting anything.

Leigh How long have you been ... ? Of course we wouldn't cut anything without your permission.

Ruth You're cutting nothing, Leigh. You're cutting nothing.

Leigh How are you feeling?

Ruth How am I feeling?

Leigh Yeah how do you feel?

Ruth I feel I'd miss my mother's funeral before I'd leave you two untrustworthy cunts alone with my play.

Leigh Ok.

Ruth But that's so typical of me, isn't it? I'm so sensitive and fragile and haphazard.

Leigh I'm sorry you heard that but I meant all of it as a compliment.

65

Ruth So you want to rape Margaret Thatcher?

Leigh No.

Ruth To punish her?

Jay Context.

Ruth What?

Jay There was a context.

RuthWhat was the context?

LeighWell he was ... there was a gun to my head.

JayRutger Hauer had a gun to his head.

LeighIt was Jesus actually.

JayJesus had a gun to his head and asked him who he would –

RuthRape, I know. But you told me you refused to answer.

LeighI did, didn't I? Initially.

JayHe did yes.

RuthYou told him he was a misogynist.

JayI don't remember that. You think I'm a misogynist?

LeighI didn't use those exact words.

RuthWhy Thatcher?

LeighI was worried Jay would be offended if I didn't come up with an answer and so I thought of the worst woman I could think of and ...

JayI wouldn't have been offended. You thought I would have been offended?

LeighWell when I did refuse to answer, you were offended.

JayI wasn't.

66

LeighYou were. You were acting all weird.

JayNo I wasn't.

RuthSo you lied to me?

LeighYou did act weird, you went very quiet and intense.

JayThat's part of my process. I can't believe you thought I was offended.

RuthLook at me, Leigh.

JayI'm offended now. *Now* I'm offended.

RuthYou lied to me?

LeighYes. I was worried you wouldn't understand. And I was right. You don't understand.

RuthI understand exactly what's happened here.

LeighYou're not appreciating the context.

RuthBut you lied. You said you didn't answer but you did answer. And now you're planning to betray me by changing my whole fucking play while my mother is ... fucking ... while my mother ... my mother ...

LeighRuth please.

He goes to her.

Ruth *Fuck you!*

JayRuth, just –

Ruth *And fuck you!*

LeighI did it for you!

RuthFor me?!

LeighYes!

RuthFor fucking *me*?!

67

LeighEverything I've done tonight has been for you. For your play! To get your play on! To keep him happy! Including saying I would rape Margaret Thatcher. You know me! You know I'm not capable of that! I'm the biggest fucking feminist you'll ever meet! No one has done more for women in theatre than I have. Look at you!

RuthWhat about me?

LeighWell you wouldn't have a fucking career if it wasn't for me! I believed in you when everyone thought you were shit. I kept your career alive! So yes, for the sake of the play, for your sake, because I care too much I said I would rape Maggie Thatcher. I'm fucking sorry! But I also said that as awful as she was, as horrendous and evil a human being as that woman was, even she didn't deserve to be raped. Because no woman deserves to be raped.

JayHe did say that.

LeighDespite the fact she herself was practically the worst rapist this country's ever seen, that she raped the miners, she raped the trade union movement, she raped the working people of this country, despite all that even she doesn't deserve to be raped.

RuthSo if you disagree with a woman it's ok to fuck her over?

LeighThat is not what I'm saying and you know it. Don't twist my words.

RuthIt sounds very like that's what you're saying.

LeighI'm saying that she didn't deserve it. That no woman deserves it, even a woman as evil and cold and inhumane as Thatcher! As a socialist you surely understand where I'm coming from?

RuthWho said I was a socialist?

LeighAs a social democrat.

68

RuthWho said I was a social democrat?

LeighAs a person on the left.

RuthI'm not on the left.

LeighWhat do you mean?

RuthI'm a Conservative.

LeighWhat?

RuthI voted Conservative in the last election.

LeighFuck off.

RuthAnd in the local elections.

LeighI don't believe you. You're saying this to hurt me.

RuthI intend to vote Conservative in the next election too.

LeighNext you'll be telling me you voted for Brexit.

RuthI did vote for Brexit.

LeighOh God.

JayAre you ok?

LeighI know you only said that to hurt my feelings. I get it. I've hurt you. I've betrayed you. Now you're pretending to betray me.

RuthI don't see how I've betrayed you.

LeighBut how could anyone *sane* vote Brexit?

RuthI don't like the European Union. I don't see how that has any bearing on our friendship.

LeighThis is a betrayal of everything we've worked towards. You cannot be a Brexit-voting Tory bastard! I refuse to believe this! You're a fucking artist!

RuthSo artists are only allowed to think one way?

69

LeighWhat's thinking got to do with it? It's not about thinking! It's about feeling! It's about empathy! It's about foodbanks! And fucking austerity and fucking ... foodbanks! Tell me you're not a Tory. As a woman, as a feminist ... You're not even British! You're fucking Irish! You shouldn't even have a vote on Brexit! Tell me it's not true.

RuthIs it worse than what you said?

LeighYou can't tell anyone.

RuthI can't tell anyone what you said?

LeighWell you can't tell anyone what I said but you also can't tell anyone you voted for Brexit. Nobody will ever commission you again.

RuthI've no intention of telling anyone.

LeighIt would ruin your career. Your career would be over.

RuthLike me telling everyone you're a misogynist.

LeighWhy would you call me a misogynist?

RuthYou joke about raping women.

LeighIt wasn't a joke.

Ruth So you were serious about raping women?

Leigh No fuck off, Ruth, you know I'm not a misogynist. I adore women. I want to be a woman. I wish I was fucking trans! That's how much I love women.

Ruth Give me my phone.

Leigh Why?

Ruth Give it to me.

Leigh Why do you want your phone?

Ruth Because it's my phone.

Leigh You're not going to tweet are you?

70

Ruth That's my business.

Jay Don't give it to her.

Ruth Hand me the phone now.

Leigh I need assurances that you're not going to put anything on social media about me.

Jay Same.

Leigh About what I said.

Ruth I need to ring my sister.

They look at her. Leigh doesn't know what to do.

Ruth My mother has just died. I want to speak to my sister. I need my phone.

Leigh looks at **Jay**. **Jay** shakes his head disapprovingly. **Leigh** hands **Ruth** the phone.

Ruth Thank you.

She appears to be texting on her phone.

Leigh What are you doing? Ruth?

Ruth I'm texting her.

Leigh You said you were ringing her.

Ruth I'm texting her to ask if it's a good time to talk.

She keeps texting.

Jay She's tweeting.

Leigh What?

Ruth I'm not.

Jay She's tweeting. She's on Twitter.

Ruth speeds up her typing, walks away from them.

Leigh How do you know?

71

Jay I can see in the mirror.

Ruth speeds up her typing, tries to run as they grab her and try to get the phone out of her hand.

Ruth Fuck off!

Leigh Give me the phone!

Ruth Get the fuck away from me!

Jay bites **Ruth**'s hand. She screams in pain. Blood pours out of her hand.

Jay Get the phone! Delete the tweet!

Leigh picks up the phone. He fiddles with it, trying to delete the tweet. **Ruth** goes for him but **Jay** physically restrains her.

Leigh I can't find it! I'm not a Twitter user, I don't know how to operate the app!

Jay Show me!

Leigh holds up the phone, **Jay** looks at it. While he's distracted, **Ruth** stamps on **Jay**'s foot. She escapes from his grasp. She grabs **Jay**'s Academy Award and smashes it over his head two or three times. He stumbles and falls. She goes to **Leigh**.

Ruth Give me the phone.

Leigh Now wait –

*She smashes the Academy Award over **Leigh**'s head. She beats him with it until he stops moving. She goes to get her phone as **Jay** struggles to his feet. As **Ruth** almost gets the phone, **Jay** grabs her by the throat, pushing himself against her, choking her. She gasps for breath. She is on her knees. **Jay** stands above her, choking her. She reaches on the ground and finds **Jay**'s pencil on the floor. She drives the pencil deep into **Jay**'s eye. He screams in agony, as blood pours out of him. **Ruth** stands up, covered in blood, the Academy Award still in her hand. **Ruth** Now you can wear a fucking eyepatch!*

72

***Leigh** moans in pain. She steps over him and grabs her phone out of his hand. She types her tweet and presses send. She sits exhausted, phone in one hand, Academy Award in the other. Lights slowly down as her phone buzzes and beeps with notifications.*