

The Children

Written by [Lucy Kirkwood](#)

Characters

- ROSE
- HAZEL
- ROBIN

All in their sixties.

Key

A forward slash (/) indicates an overlap in speech.

Words in brackets are spoken aloud but are incidental.

A comma on its own line (,) indicates a beat. A beat is shorter than a pause. It can also denote a shift in thought or energy.

The text has been punctuated to serve the music of the play, not grammatical convention. Dashes are used sparingly and generally indicate a hard interruption.

A Note on the Dance

In the Royal Court production we used 'Ain't It Funky Now' by James Brown, chosen by the actors from a shortlist, but I haven't specified this in the text as you could use anything. These are the things we liked about our track in case they help you in choosing yours:

1. It is of a period but not defined by that period. The play is not addressing a single generation, and it would be a shame if this moment made it feel like it was.
2. It is credible a group of friends might have choreographed a routine to it.
3. It is quite spare, so doesn't compete with the dialogue that is spoken over it.
4. It is cool. But not too cool.

Scene 1

The light moves slowly from dark to light.

The effect of a painting being cleaned.

Revealed is:

A small cottage on the east coast.

A summer's evening.

The sound of the sea through the open door.

It is not usually lived in full time.

Camp has been made here by someone with a domestic hand.

Wild flowers in milk bottles.

Candles in wine bottles.

Tupperware fruit bowl.

The room is at a slight tilt.

The land beneath it is being eroded.

But this should not be obvious to the naked eye, and only becomes apparent when, for example, something spherical is placed on the kitchen table.

And Rose.

Her nose is bleeding.

Blood has spilled down her top.

She looks around the room and does nothing to tend to her nose. She looks for a long time at a basket of washing on the floor. Finally she raises her voice.

Rose How are the children?

Hazel *(off)* What? Oh, the – they're fine, they're – just keep holding it Rose! At the bridge. Are you doing it?

Rose Yes.

Hazel *enters with a towel.*

Hazel And put your head down!

Rose *puts her head down.*

Here.

Hazel *clamps the towel over Rose's nose. Rose holds it there.*

I'm so sorry, Rose, it isn't broken is it? It's not swollen anyway.

Rose It's fine.

Hazel No I'm mortified. I don't know what – can I, sorry, let me just, I won't hurt you.

Hazel *lifts Rose's chin.*

She gently wipes the blood from her nose and chin. Rose watches her.

Look at your lovely top. Would you like me to put it in to soak?

Rose No, / that's

Hazel Please let me, you can borrow / something

Rose No, I don't care, I hate it. It doesn't suit me anymore. Honestly, I'll throw it away.

Hazel Oh you can't! Because of this? But I can get that out, no problem, I have a special, it's a stick, for oil-based products.

Rose Oil-based?

Hazel You know, blood, butter. All dairy really. Sun-cream. Semen.

Rose That's a big problem you have is it?

Hazel Well, when the boys were younger.

Rose You have boys?

Hazel Very young / I mean, not

Rose How many do you have?

Hazel What?

Rose How many / children?

Hazel Please let me wash it. It wouldn't take me ten minutes.

Rose It's fine, it doesn't

Hazel No but, I feel terrible, I don't know why I got so frightened, just / I thought I was alone

Rose I should have knocked.

Hazel I wasn't expecting anyone, we're so isolated here / so I just

Rose I did call out. The door was on the latch.

Hazel It isn't your fault. I've been on pins all day. And normally you hear the tyres, on the gravel so

Rose The taxi dropped me at the top / of the drive.

Hazel It isn't your fault it was just feeling you come up behind me, I sort of, I panicked.

Rose Fight or flight.

Hazel And also, (yes I spose) no but and also Rose, when I saw you standing there, Rose don't take this the wrong / way but

Rose It's fine, Hazel.

Hazel But we heard you'd died!

Rose Ah.

Hazel Yes so it was a bit of a shock., Lovely you're not of course.

They laugh. Hazel takes off the apron she is wearing, shuts the door.

Sorry, let's – start again! So good to see you. Is it stopping?

Rose *takes the towel away from her face.*

Rose Yes, I think so.

Hazel Good, that's good. Sorry, what were you saying?

Rose Oh. How many children do you have?

Hazel Right yes, after Lauren you mean?

Rose Yes.

Hazel Three more

Rose Four children! God, / that's

Hazel another girl and, and two boys. Not children any more / of course.

Rose fantastic, no, of course. Because Lauren must be, what?

Hazel Thirty-eight.

Rose thirty-eight!

Hazel Thirty-nine at Christmas.

Rose Thirty-nine at Christmas.

Hazel A grown woman. Did you want to sit down, Rose?

Rose I just can't. I can't believe it. Thank you.

Rose *sits in a battered armchair.*

Without looking she reaches under it and pulls out a footstool, rests her feet on it.

Hazel *watches her.*

She loved beards, didn't she?

Hazel What?

Rose Lauren. As a baby. She was cuckoo for beards.

Hazel I don't...

Hazel *takes a seat herself.*

Rose Because yes because every time she saw a man with a beard – d’you remember? She’d stick out her arms and scream with laughter

Hazel Well. She was a very friendly little thing at that age.

Rose and I spouse Robin had one, didn’t he?

Hazel Probably why she was drawn to them, / would you like some tea?

Rose I’ve always wondered about things like that, (thank you, love one) if there’s a study or something, that charts our relationship to the things we’re drawn to, as children, and how that changes as we grow up. I mean for instance does Lauren have a husband or partner?

Hazel Yes.

Rose Oh great. Great, no that’s great. And so then does her husband or partner / have a

Hazel She’s clean-shaven.

Rose She’s clean-shaven is she? Well there you go, no correlation! I mean, an inverse correlation. Of course you’d have to test a much wider sample than just Lauren.

Hazel Rose.

Rose Yes?

Pause.

Hazel I’m growing a beard you know. This morning – I found two hairs on my chin and I looked at them, for a good minute, and I tried to convince myself this was *alright*, it’s natural, it’s chemical, it’s your age, you know?

She takes an apple from the fruit bowl, begins to polish it on her top or a tea towel.

Just oestrogen declining. Because you know I don’t hold with people our age trying to look twenty-two, because you see these women don’t you, in the paper, looking like stretched eggs, trying to hide it when all it’s doing is shouting it out loud isn’t it, ‘I’m old and I’m frightened of it!’ I mean and because I’m *not* frightened of it so so so so but then I thought no. *No* because this is how it starts isn’t it, the slow descent into the coffin it starts with two black hairs on your chin that you let run wild one day and you don’t even know it but right there, in that moment, you’ve lost, you’ve lowered your defences and the enemy’s *got in* hasn’t it yes so I went at these hairs I went at them ruthlessly with a pair of tweezers and I can’t describe to you the sense of triumph.

Hazel *puts the apple on the table.*

It rolls down the table away from her.

Rose *catches the apple, returns it to the bowl.*

Rose Grandchildren?

Hazel What?

Rose Do you have grandchildren?

Pause.

Hazel Oh. Yes. Yes, / Rose

Rose Hazel a granny that's insane! I can't / believe it!

Hazel Rose I'm sorry. I feel a bit. I might have a glass of water

Rose I'll get it.

Hazel No, it's fine, I'll –

Rose *finds a glass in the first cupboard she opens. Hazel watches her.*

Rose I guess you're not using the tap?

Hazel No. There's clean water / in the

Rose Oh yes.

Rose *fills the glass from a large plastic container and gives her the water.*

Hazel *takes it and looks at it for a beat before drinking.*

How many?

Hazel *chokes slightly on her water.*

Sorry, go ahead.

Hazel *drinks.*

Puts the glass down.

How many grandchildren do you have?

Hazel Four now. Rachel has two and my sons have one each, they're poppets.

Rose I bet you're a wonderful granny.

Hazel Like it more than being a mother actually. I enjoy the feeling of handing them back!

The women laugh.

We haven't seen them since the disaster, of course.

Rose They weren't affected I hope?

Hazel Well we're all affected.

Rose No but they weren't, in the area or it's a terrible thought / I know

Hazel Well yes actually Rachel's lot were supposed to be visiting only by the time they got up here they'd closed the roads.

Rose So you were at home when / it

Hazel Yes. Yes I was... making banana bread, for the children and, because it was the eggs, they started shaking in the box and – this sounds stupid, but I thought, they're hatching. Something's going to come out of them, like a, like a a

Rose Chicken.

Hazel No a Gremlin, but then because that's when I realised the whole kitchen was shaking, the plates started falling and the lights went out and the ground was sort of rolling and I thought this must be what it's like on a ship in a storm and then I thought, what are you doing you stupid woman, get out, just get out, so I did, I just ran outside in my apron, and I saw the road cracked down the middle and then... and then it just stopped.

Pause.

Rose God. You must have / been

Hazel Yes so then I wanted to call Robin so I walked, I ran down to the beach, because the reception – and that's when I saw the tide had gone out. I mean it wasn't miles but it looked like miles, and then I saw the wave, only it didn't look like a wave, it looked like the sea was boiling milk and it just kept boiling and boiling and boiling and., And then everyone was running, so I ran too., I'm so sorry, did you say you wanted tea / or

Rose Lovely, thanks. Sorry it's so late in the day.

Hazel *starts to make tea using hot water from a large thermos.*

Hazel Oh / don't be silly

Rose Only it took me a while to track you down.

Hazel Sorry I can't make you a fresh one. We're still on scheduled blackouts round here.

Rose I went to the house. Those lovely old pink walls. I thought – I heard you were still living there.

Hazel Yes but we left it, just after the disaster, we left it.

Rose But it's outside of the exclusion zone, isn't it?

Hazel Yes but only just, and we didn't feel like we could take the risk, I mean you can actually see it, the power station, from the house and the idea of it, I know that probably sounds, does that / sound?

Rose No, not at all. It's funny though isn't it. You think us, of all people.

Hazel You mean having spent so much time inside it?

Rose Yes you think, three scientific minds, we'd be a little more, insulated. From the hysteria.

Hazel No, exactly. I mean I'm not a silly sort of woman.

Rose No of course / you're not

Hazel But after. When we went back to the house, after the wave, after the explosions, I felt like, it's stupid but, I felt like I could *see* it the radiation hanging in the air a sort of a sort of filthy glitter suspended and I didn't like it, I'm not a silly woman and of course my background would suggest that I could but I couldn't I couldn't stand it any longer. Milk?

Rose (No thanks.) I would have done exactly the same thing.

Hazel It's skimmed.

Rose No, I really, I shouldn't

Hazel Are you intolerant?

Rose No.

Hazel No, sorry, none of my business is it.

Hazel *pours milk into her own tea and hands Rose a cup of black tea.*

Rose *looks around the room.*

Rose It's a lovely cottage.

Hazel Yes, belongs to some distant cousin of Robin's. She offered it to us, kindly I thought because they're not close.

Rose But this place. It's only ten miles from the house, / it's not

Hazel No, it's just that little bit extra but it makes a world of difference to our peace of mind. And because the thought of leaving the area entirely felt somehow I don't know it felt disloyal, to the land if that makes sense?

Rose Well, you've lived here so long.

Hazel Yes exactly. I would've felt like a traitor. Besides, retired people are like nuclear power stations. We like to live by the sea.

They laugh.

Rose I nearly told the taxi to go off at the turning, it was like autopilot. Five minutes later I would've been walking through the car park expecting Ken to pop out of his booth to validate me!

They laugh.

Hazel Ken! I'd forgotten about *Ken*, I wonder what happened / to

Rose Dead I should think.

Hazel Oh I hope not, he was only young

Rose No I meant. If he was still... you know. Working there when the wave came and...

Hazel Oh. Yes. Of course., You know lately I've realised it's sort of beautiful when the sun's on it.

Rose The power station?

Hazel Yes, when the smoke clears for a moment. That great white dome like a duck egg.

Rose I always thought it should have a flake sticking out of it.

Hazel A flake?

Rose A chocolate flake.

Hazel Oh, yes. And a drizzle of raspberry sauce maybe?

Rose making me hungry!

Hazel Sorry Rose, where are my, would you like something / to

Rose No I didn't / mean

Hazel No because have you had dinner? We haven't had ours yet. We've mostly been eating cold meals because the electricity doesn't come on till ten o'clock sometimes, and we try not to use more than we absolutely have to.

Rose Yes of course.

Hazel Salads because we're lucky this time of the year, you know, with the peas and the beans and the tomatoes. There's an old boy with an allotment up the road. It's been tested, it's perfectly alright.

Rose No well that's. Personally I find salad deeply depressing.

Hazel Well you just become aware of the risks, don't you. Osteoporosis strokes diabetes blood pressure, all the usual suspects –

Rose Cancer.

Hazel Well yes cancer naturally cancer! I do yoga you know.

Rose Do you?

Hazel I love it.

Rose Do you?

Hazel Absolutely love it.

Rose Really.

Hazel Oh yes. Fanatic.

Rose I'm awful with exercise. I get out of breath just looking at my sneakers.

Hazel Oh gosh, no we're the exact opposite, we like to keep healthy.

Rose I really admire that.

Hazel *laughs.*

No I do, must take a lot of self-discipline. Of course it's easier when there are two of you isn't it, you sort of, cheer each other on, don't you.

Hazel I spose there is that.

Rose Whereas when you're on your own there's no one to slap the chocolate biscuit out of reach, so to speak.

Pause.

Move the steak frites from under you.

Pause.

Wrestle the sausage sandwich from your cold dead / hands.

Hazel We're not monks.

Rose No of course I was just, a regime like that, / you

Hazel It's not a regime.

Rose God no, I didn't mean to

Hazel It's just common sense isn't it? We've worked hard, all our lives, what's the use of all this time now if you can't enjoy it? If your body fails you –

Rose No you're right of course. I envy you.

Hazel When my mum and dad retired, they both sat down in their armchairs and never got up again. Drank a box of wine a night and watched TV from eleven in the morning.

Rose Sounds okay to me!

Hazel And they both lived well into their nineties like that – what? No, it wasn't okay it was death.

Rose But if it made them happy.

Hazel How can anybody consciously moving towards death, I mean by their own design, possibly be happy? People of our age have to resist – you *have* to resist, Rose.

Rose Hold back the tide.

Hazel You have a choice, don't you, exactly, at our age which is that you slow down, melt into your slippers, start ordering front-fastening bras out of Sunday supplements, or you make a committed choice to keep moving you know because you have to think: This is not the end of our lives but a new and exciting chapter.

Rose That's a philosophy I really admire.

Hazel If you're not going to grow: don't live.

Rose Exactly.

Hazel No, I mean, if you're not going to grow, don't live.

Pause.

Rose Yes.

Hazel No, but you see what I'm saying, don't you? If you're not going to / grow

Rose You've really got it all worked out, haven't you?

Hazel Well it's just what we think it's not rocket science.

Rose *laughs.*

What?

Rose No, you just – I actually went out with a rocket scientist for a while. In America, I used to try and trick him into using that phrase. Like if he did housework or something, I'd really go for it, what a WONDERFUL job you've done mowing the grass, how DID you get this toilet so clean that sort of thing.

Hazel *smiles.*

What?

Hazel No it's. I'd forgotten what an odd sense of humour you have.,

Rose Right, well anyway, he never said it until finally one day, he made dinner and I went for it, how did you get the skin so crisp! And the inside so fluffy! And I moaned and stamped my feet and banged my fists on the table and finally the rocket scientist puts down his knife and fork, and he goes:(*American accent.*)'it's a baked potato, Rose. It's not brain surgery.'

Rose *laughs hysterically.* **Hazel** *laughs politely.*

People think we're a breed don't they? Scientists. They don't realise that we're all standing in different fields, just as in the dark about what goes on beyond our own hedgerows as the next man.

Hazel I met a geneticist once, at a wedding, and we were having quite a good chat about shrubs for a north-facing garden and then the dreaded you know, he says 'and what do *you* do?' So I said, I work at the power station, I'm a nuclear engineer. And he says, so what does that entail?

Rose God. Not really wedding talk is it, fission?

Hazel Exactly and so the heart sank a bit but I explained it, in layman's terms, I said well a slow-moving neutron is absorbed by a uranium 235 nucleus, and this turns it briefly into a uranium 236 nucleus and then that turns into fast-moving lighter elements.

Rose And releases three free neutrons.

Hazel And releases three free neutrons, yes, and he nodded and smiled and said oh yes I see but I knew he didn't, he was faking it, this... dumb show of comprehension. I mean I could have said we use tiny hacksaws and a salad spinner, he wouldn't have blinked. And this is a man with two PhDs. So what happened?

Rose I'm sorry?

Hazel With the rocket scientist. Are you still?

Rose Oh no, no. We – it – it was a long time ago. He's married now. I'm godmother to one of their boys actually, well not godmother, more sort of non- denominational slush fund...

Hazel I'm sorry.

Rose God, I'm not. I never really fancied him properly, if I'm honest. He smelt sort of feminine.

Hazel You've always been picky. All those poor men written off for crimes they didn't know they'd committed.

Rose Yes but it's the small things that get under your skin, isn't it?

Like there was this man I knew once.

And the way he lit a cigarette just took my breath away.

And he didn't even know he was doing it, but watching him smoke, watching his hand hold a cigarette, made me want him so much I had to cross my legs to stop myself going down on my hands and knees to lick it.

Pause.

Hazel In America was this?

Rose What?

Hazel Someone you knew in America?

Rose Oh. Yes, that's right. In... Massachusetts.

Pause.

He owned and ran a climbing wall.

A long pause.

Hazel No, you're right, it's important to keep active. That's why we took up the farm, of course.

Rose The farm.

Hazel Yes didn't you know? When we took early retirement, we started an organic smallholding. We bought up some land near the house. It was a lot of work, to get the accreditation, but you know Robin and me, we really threw ourselves into it. We won prizes for our dairy.

Rose Holy cow.

A tiny, disoriented pause.

Hazel Yes we're very proud of our / achievements.

Rose I'm sorry. I don't know why I said that, I feel a bit. Light-headed

Hazel Right, well would you like a glass of water?

Rose No. No I'm alright. Thank you. Sorry. Sorry.

Rose *goes to Hazel, puts her arms around her.*

Hazel *returns the gesture.*

It's so good to see you Hazel. I've missed you.

Hazel You too. You too.

They part.

During the following, Hazel produces salad leaves, tomatoes, pre-hard-boiled eggs, a bowl of cold new potatoes, tinned tuna, a jar of olives. She begins to prepare the salad.

You come up, you know. In conversation, sometimes you come up.

Rose Where is Robin?

Hazel I didn't mean with Robin. With the others though, we're still in touch with most of them. We have a pub lunch every Christmas.

Rose But Robin's well, is he?

Hazel Oh, yes. He's out there now.

Rose Where?

Hazel On the farm. He visits every day.

Rose But the farm is – it's near the house?

Hazel Further down the coast

Rose But, so the farm is... inside the exclusion zone? – Isn't that / quite –

Hazel Robin is deeply attached to the cows.,

Rose I see.

Hazel I'm deeply attached to them too. But I'm more attached to not getting cancer.

Rose But every day, / isn't he

Hazel Believe me, we have had this conversation, I promise you, that conversation has been had, but he's always been sentimental, you know that.

Rose So the house is okay?

Hazel No the house is a wreck. We were lucky. When the wave came, the house was flooded but not destroyed. The fields and the garden were destroyed but the house was just stinking and full of silt it was cosmetic you know but I can't describe to you the stench. I waded through it up the stairs, the carpet squelching and something else, something dreadful, a smell a feeling a hopelessness. Like the infinite sadness.

Rose...

Hazel It's a film, the children used to, the never-ending whatsit you wouldn't know it.

Hazel *gathers the salad leaves into a colander and washes them in container water.*

Anyway, I couldn't cope with thinking: how are we going to clear it up? and I cried, Rose, I just sank down at the bottom of the stairs where the pencil lines mark the children's heights and I / was just

Rose Your poor thing.

Hazel *crying* (thank you) because the mess the mess was just overwhelming

Rose *takes the salad from her and shakes it dry.*

It was overwhelming Rose.

Hazel *blows her nose.*

And then I had this amazing thought: we don't have to. We don't actually have to.,

Rose Sorry, have to what?

Hazel To clear it up. It was like e equals $m c$ squared, one of those exquisite pieces of thinking that's so simple, you feel like Archimedes running naked to the king, screaming 'eureka!' Because when I told Robin, the relief on his face. And you know all our lives we've been those kind of people, when we have a picnic or, camping we don't just clear up our own litter, we go around and pick up other people's too, I have a little stash of plastic bags in my cagoule, that's just our policy, leave a place cleaner than you found it but but but so you see we'd *earned* it. We'd earned the right, on this one occasion, just to say: at our time of life, we simply cannot deal with this shit. And we decided to leave that night. And we went down to the barns and we fed the cows for the last time and I just wept, I honestly, to think what they'd been exposed to, their big brown eyes looking back at me but what choice did we have? They always say you shouldn't name them, but of course we'd named them, you can't not name them, so I'm leaning out of the taxi like a mad woman, 'Goodbye Daisy! Goodbye Bluebell! Goodbye Heisenberg!' We drove away and we knew they'd all be dead in days.

Rose That must have been. Very hard.

Hazel Yes it was. It felt very. Final and that was, I found that quite frightening., Yes but then a week later Robin decided to go back. One morning I woke up and he'd just gone. And do you know what he found? The cows were still alive. All of them, flicking their tails and looking at him reproachfully! And that's when he decided he was going to carry on. He has to throw the milk away, but he goes down there every day now.

Rose Come hell or high water.

Hazel Well exactly.,

Rose I still can't believe it's happened.

Hazel Yes well. It was a one-in-ten-million-years fault sequence. But this part of the country, we're basically in the same boat as Bangladesh, / so

Rose There is an inquiry.

Hazel Oh. And have they asked you to help with that? Is that why you're in the area?

Rose Oh, no. Not exactly, Douglas sends his love by the way.

Hazel Douglas Klein?

Rose Yes.

Hazel You still see Douglas do you? I thought he dropped off the radar. No, that's lovely. How is he? Send him our regards.

Rose I will. Perhaps you can yourself.

Hazel and **Rose** look at each other.

Hazel laughs. Goes back to preparing the salad.

Hazel Yes, so that's us! A potted history, children, cows, la-di-da! I haven't even asked how you are, Rose.

Rose No!

Hazel How are you!

They laugh.

Rose Yes, fine, thank you.

Hazel No children?

Rose No.

Hazel Married?

Rose No.

Hazel Pets?

Rose No.

Hazel Oh well. You've kept your figure!

The sound of a car pulling up a gravel drive, off.

It is starting to grow dark, Hazel lights oil lamps.

That'll be Robin. I think he'll be very pleased to see you.

Rose Do you?

Hazel Yes of course. Rose? Why have you come here?

Pause.

Robin *enters. He is carrying a child's trike.*

Darling look what the tide washed up!

Robin *stares at Rose. He looks at Hazel.*

Robin Rose. It's not. Rose Cavendish.

Rose Hello Robin.

Robin Rosie Dish, well don't just stand there! Give us a squeeze!

They embrace. He gestures to the blood on her top.

(What happened there?)

Rose Nosebleed.

They embrace.

Robin I can't believe it. How long has it been?

Hazel Thirty-eight years.

Robin Yes because Lauren was just –

He looks at Hazel.

Wasn't she, how was America?

Rose Yes.

Robin You've not picked up the accent?

Rose No siree.

Hazel But you have. You say things like 'go ahead' and 'sure', you / never?

Robin No, she always said things like that.

Hazel She didn't. I'd have remembered, Rose and I were good good friends, Robin.

Robin Tell her, you have, you've always had a *twang*.

Hazel Sneakers. That's another / one.

Rose I suppose. I guess –

Hazel See. I guess.

Rose My dad and I used to watch a lot of Westerns when I was a kid and / so I mean

Hazel Kid!

Rose That was our thing, so maybe, I mean I've never thought about it / before so

Hazel (*as John Wayne*) 'Get off your horse and drink your milk.'

Pause.

Rose Yes. That sort of –

Hazel 'Sorry don't get it done, dude.'

Pause.

Robin *looks at Hazel.*

Robin No other visitors today?

Hazel *shakes her head.*

Rose Only me! Gave Hazel a hell of a fright actually. She thought I was dead!

Robin Hazel's always doing that. Accusing perfectly alive people of being dead, I've warned her about it.

Hazel Didn't you hear that Robin? Last Christmas / maybe

Robin I never heard that.

Rose By the way, how am I supposed to have gone? Something glamorous I hope? Rescuing a pram from a railway line or something?

Hazel No, I think they said, um. I think they said you were very ill, and that you'd got a little better –

Rose Oh good.

Hazel But then you'd killed yourself!

Hazel *laughs.*

Robin *puts down the trike.*

Robin Now then, you didn't kill yourself, did you Rosie?

Rose No, I don't think so.

Robin You're quite sure?

Rose I'm pretty certain.

Robin Well you say that but. Say 'ah'.

Rose *sticks her tongue out and says 'ah'.*

Robin *puts his glasses on, examines her tongue.*

No, she seems alright to me. Dreadful halitosis, though. 26

Rose *laughs, hits him, playful.*

Robin *laughs.*

Picks up the trike, shows it to Hazel.

Rescued Zuzu's trike.

Hazel Well, I hope you washed it down.

Robin Yep.

Robin *takes out a small Geiger counter and runs it over the trike.*

Tell you what girls, you nearly lost me tonight.

Hazel *tuts.* **Robin** *examines the reading.*

Nearly had to scrape me off the shingle.

Hazel Robin don't.

Robin Twenty-five.

Robin *gives Hazel a thumbs up, puts down the Geiger counter.*

He gets on the trike and, knees by his chin, rides it round the table.

It's a little game I play, Rose. The top field runs right along the cliff and every year, I drive the tractor a little closer to the edge and every year the edge comes a little closer to the tractor.

Hazel The coast is just crumbling away around here. Has been for centuries.

Robin I tell you, it's a thrill.

Hazel It's reckless is what it is.

Robin We're not dead yet my love. Our age, you have to show no fear to Death, it's like bulls, you can't run away or they'll charge. You've got to keep grabbing him by the lapels, poking him in the eye and saying: not yet mate. I've got your number, boyo. Keep him in line. Else he'll steal up behind you while you're trying to get the lid off your Bingo pen and have you away.

Robin *leaps off the trike.*

Hazel *makes a 'there you go' gesture to Rose.*

Hazel If you're not going to *grow*, don't *live*.

Rose Still. I really don't think you should do that Robin.

Hazel I've told him, he's mad, it's Russian roulette.

Robin Only when I take a bottle of vodka along.

Hazel *stares at him.*

Skol!

Hazel *tuts.*

Hazel That's Scandinavian, there was a town, Rose, very close to where we are now. It was one of the most important towns in the country in the Middle Ages. Then one day it fell into the sea, the whole thing in one go. The cliff just crumbled off like a lump of wet cake. The houses, the school, the church, the marketplace. Just tumbled into the water.

Robin At certain times people say you can walk on the beach and hear the church bells ringing from under the sea.

Hazel Crackpots say that.

Robin She means locals

Hazel Well I've never heard it.

Robin when she says crackpots, she means locals.

Hazel I am local. Lived here nearly all my adult life, I've never heard it.

Rose I've heard it.

Hazel You haven't. It's nonsense. Ghost stories.

Rose I have. Very clear, at dusk. Ringing out for evening prayers.

Hazel When have you heard it?

Rose In the summer.

Hazel You've been here, in the summer have you?

Rose Yes, of course, in the past

Hazel Oh in the past, I see, sorry, and that's when you heard these bells these ghost bells?

Rose Yes.

Hazel Well. You've always been religious.

Rose *laughs.*

Rose Someone told me once, at a party, that out of every type of scientist, physicists are the most likely to believe in God.

Hazel Must have been a thrilling party.

Robin Hazel's just jealous, we don't go to parties any more.

Hazel Well Robin drinks too much at parties, it's a liability.

Robin Robin does, Robin drinks far too much, and Hazel doesn't drink nearly enough, speaking of which, have you offered Rose one?

Hazel I... yes I offered her a glass of water.

Robin A glass of water! A glass of! A whole glass, did you, careful! She'll think we're rich as Croesus and nick our pension books when we're not looking.

Rose And we had tea.

Hazel And we / had tea, thank you.

Robin Good thing you only come once every forty years Rose, you'd bankrupt us otherwise. With your demands for whole glasses of water. Let's have a drink. A proper one, to celebrate. I'll raid the cellar for something with a nose on it.

Robin *exits.*

Hazel *smiles at Rose.*

Hazel Robin makes wine. Elderberry. Gooseberry. If he offers you the parsnip it means he wants to get you drunk, it's absolute filth.

Rose I think, perhaps I should go. Come back in the morning.

Hazel If you really thought that, Rosie, you'd have already gone.

Robin *enters with a bottle and three glasses.*

Robin I thought, given the occasion, we might crack open the parsnip.

Rose Lovely.

Robin *uncorks the wine.*

Pours it.

Gives **Rose** *and* **Hazel** *a glass each and takes one for himself.*

Robin There's a smell comes off it at first but it's just the fermentation. It grows on you.

Hazel Literally.

They raise their glasses.

Are you hungry love?

Robin Have we got any steak?

Hazel You know we haven't.

Robin I feel like a steak. I feel like tearing something's flesh with my teeth

Hazel There's salad or crackers.

Robin Salad *or* crackers! You mean I have *choices*! À la carte! Did you hear that Rose, the decadence coming from my wife's mouth, it's like the last days of Weimar Berlin in here tonight!

Hazel Not or, I didn't mean or, you can have both

Robin Both? Both! Have you taken leave of your senses woman!

Hazel You're showing off, he's showing / off, Rose.

Robin *opens a box of crackers, eats two or three in one go.*

Robin Can't wait until this is over I cannot actually wait to roast a chicken without feeling like the antichrist. How much longer do you think the power shortage will last Rose?

Rose Why should I know?

Robin You're still in touch with the world. I imagine you as someone who reads a newspaper. Watches TV. Tweets, do you tweet Rose?

Rose I do not tweet.

Robin No, we're not tweeters either, are we dear, we've barely mastered the microwave.

He picks cracker from his teeth.

Offstage, a phone rings.

Robin and Hazel *look at one another.*

We're just simple retired nuclear engineers slash farmers who have no idea when the powers that be will resume normal service, get that will you Haze?

Hazel *goes.*

Robin *picks cracker from his teeth.*

I've got a dry mouth now.

Rose *fetches Robin a glass of water.*

The phone stops ringing.

Rose I don't expect it'll be much longer. A month maybe.

Robin A month! Thank you.

Rose It's a good thing though, isn't it?

Robin (*downing the water*)What?

Rose Well. Learning to live with less.

Robin *picks up Rose's hand and kisses it.*

Robin But I don't want to live with less. It's hell.

Rose Well you might have to.

Robin *moves behind her.*

Robin Well then I shall shoot myself with a bolt gun.

He kisses her neck.

Rose The resources are finite.

Robin Well maybe people should be taught to use less of them then.

He buries his face in her hair.

Rose Well maybe you shouldn't have had four children then.

Robin *pulls away.*

Looks at the door.

Robin You're upset. Because I never told you.

Rose I'm upset because it's fucking irresponsible but yes three more children might have been the sort of / thing you'd

Robin When? One day a year, Rose, if that, when it suited *you*, when *you* deigned to – when one of those little notes arrived, nothing but a date and a time and an R with an order, be here, and I was, I was always here, I did, I dropped everything, always, I missed chiropodist appointments for you. Barbecues at the houses of solicitors. I stood them all up the second you landed on my doormat, and the reason I did that

Rose Such a martyr.

Robin the reason I did that my darling

Rose I hate to think, what would've happened if I ever had / to compete with anything you actually cared about

Robin the reason I did that was not to talk about my fucking children. Anyway you never asked.

Rose I asked about Lauren.

Robin Because you didn't want to know really, did you, so don't be / so bloody theatrical now, especially when

Rose I always asked about Lauren.

Robin Especially when I haven't heard a bloody thing from you for five bloody years, don't walk in here and start, anyway it balances out doesn't it?

Rose How does it balance out?

Robin Because you don't have any. So if it makes you feel better, you could look at it like we just had your ration, and the balance books are still...

He mimes a pair of even scales.

Rose *stares at him.*

Rose It doesn't make me feel better.

Rose *stands, turns away to the window.*

Looks out at the sea. Tries not to cry.

Robin *is surprised and alarmed.*

Robin I thought we were playing. I thought we were – talking in that way we talk where – we're horrible to each other but actually we're... flirting, Rosie, don't – I'm so sorry. Rose.

He looks at the door.

Goes to her.

Touches her lightly on the arm.

Rosie.

Rose *turns, gives him a bright smile.*

Rose What happened to your beard?

Robin What happened to yours?

Rose Scared my students.

Robin I had a freak accident during a tour of the Gillette factory. The doctors say it'll never grow back.

Rose I used to like your beard.

Robin That was the main attraction, was it?

Rose Pretty much.

Robin Scheiss. If only I'd known.

Rose *laughs.*

Robin *throws his arms round her.*

She tries to keep him at arm's length.

Rose Don't. No don't. Please don't.

Robin *feels something different in her body.*

Robin Rose?

She twists out of his arms.

But he grabs her hand.

He pulls her back.

He feels her chest.

Scientific, not sexual.

Rose It's not, I'm alright. It's, it was in America, the health care's much better than here now. I'm clear. Eight months. The left one was just a preventative... thing, Robin, don't.

Robin *steps away, very upset.*

Robin Sorry. But you're... they got it and... you're... are you, / you're?

Rose Oh, God, yeah.

No, I'm... It's just a nuisance.

None of my clothes hang right.

They gave me this special bra but it makes me feel like a pantomime dame.

Rose *forces a laugh.*

I'm sorry. I know how you feel about flat-chested women.

Robin Don't be so fucking facetious.

Hazel *comes back.*

Everything alright?

Hazel Yes.

Hazel *assembles the salad.*

Oh, by the way. A man came today. Young. Clicky pen. He said they're talking about putting those things those windmills on the heath and did I want to sign a letter of support.

Robin *tops up their wine glasses.*

Robin Well, wind. It's a start.

Hazel It's an area of outstanding natural beauty.

Robin Only when you're there my love.

Hazel Creep.

Robin When Hazel walks across the heath, the crickets all go cheep cheep cheep

Hazel Crickets don't cheep.

Robin What do they do then?

Hazel They rub their hind legs together.

Robin Perverts.

Rose Personally I think fusion is still our best hope.

Robin Not after this.

Rose No, well. If no one loses their / heads

Robin *It's a terrible thing.* A terrible dreadful thing, we can't just plough on as if nothing's, can we, no, we need more wine.

Robin *leaves the room.*

Hazel *seasons the salad and puts it on the table.*

Rose *watches her.*

Rose So the children are well are they?

Hazel Yes! I told you, they're all fine

Rose I think about Lauren a lot you know. Wondering, how she grew. What sort of life she has. Because when you've known someone as a baby, they're a blank slate, aren't they? The possibilities are infinite. I mean, for example, what field did she go into?

Hazel What field?

Rose Her job.

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Pause.

Robin *comes back in with a new bottle of wine.*

Registers the silence.

Robin Okay who farted?

Rose *laughs. Too loudly.*

Hazel *(tuts)* Rose was asking what field Lauren went into.

Robin Oh. Human / resources.

Hazel Human resources.

Rose Oh great. Great. She enjoys that does she?

Robin She's on a bit of a break just now.

Rose Oh, great.

Hazel It's not great.

Rose No, I just meant. I really admire that generation, they're much more balanced than we were, don't you think Hazel? They understand work isn't everything.

Hazel I understood that.

Rose No, of course but –

Hazel I raised four children, I worked but I raised four children, they didn't suffer because I had a career, they all had costumes for Red Nose Day, home-made birthday cakes (hedgehogs, button moon) never had latchkeys till they were / teenagers

Robin Hazel was a brilliant mother.

Hazel I'm not dead.

Robin What?

Hazel Why are you using the past tense, I'm not dead.

Robin No, I just / meant

Hazel *starts tossing the salad with her hands, vigorously.*

Hazel I was very good with babies. I was in my element with babies, teenagers weren't my element but even there I made a good stab at it.

Rose I think I'd be the other way round.

Hazel No, people make heavy weather of babies but babies have a small set of very simple desires. They want food, they want sleep, they want to be clean and dry, they want to be held.

Rose I think that's all I want too, most days!

Hazel No, I expect there are all sorts of things you want that are much more complicated than that Rose! That's what I always liked about Douglas you know, he had very simple desires. He travelled lightly. I found him on the beach once at dusk with a sleeping bag and a Scotch egg, he looked like the happiest man in the world.

Robin Douglas who, Douglas Klein?

Hazel Yes.

Robin what are you talking about, he lived like a serial killer.

Hazel Which one?

Robin I went round / there once

Hazel Which serial killer?

Robin I don't know, all he had was two dirty mugs and a screwdriver.

Hazel Not Fred West, Fred West was a hoarder, Fred West had a vast collection of tools and he referred to all of them as 'she'.

Robin Hazel's got very into murderers at the moment.

Hazel Lots of serial killers are hoarders actually, it's a classic sign. The accumulation of stuff is psychopathic. They have insatiable needs. More more more, that's what goes through the mind of a serial killer. Douglas isn't like that at all.

Rose And so Lauren is, taking some time off?

Robin Lauren's had some problems.

Hazel Robin!

Robin What? You didn't know her Rose, after she was a baby but even as a child, even as a small child she had a / lot of

Hazel Robin!

Robin rage.

Hazel *slams plates down on the table.*

We used to call her the Vampire. It was very funny.

Hazel You don't know, she never went for you. Such sharp little teeth.

Robin Haze made her a little cloak. She was very fond of her little cloak.

Hazel But mainly it was so you could hear her coming.

Robin I never knew that.

Hazel It made a sort of swooshing sound you see.

Rose Sorry, what was wrong with her?

Hazel There's nothing wrong with her.

Robin She's just quite angry.

Rose About what?

Robin Oh. Everything.

Robin *takes Hazel's hand.*

Hazel *smiles, grim, lifts Robin's hand and kisses it.*

Rose Can I use your bathroom?

Hazel Do you want a wash?

Rose No, sorry. Your loo.

Hazel Oh, I'm so sorry! Just through there, the green door.

Rose *goes out. Pause.*

Robin Was that her on the phone?

Hazel Yes.

Robin Did you answer it?

Hazel...

Robin *sighs.*

Robin Hazel.

Hazel She's left four messages today, it might have been an emergency.

Robin It's never an emergency. What did she say? What did she want? Money?

Hazel No.

Robin What then?

Hazel She was frightened.

Robin Of what?

Hazel It was a sort of general terror.

Robin Oh well, as long as there's nothing specific.

Hazel *gets up.*

Fetches a loaf of bread and slices it.

Hazel It's funny, Rose coming, isn't it?

Robin Not really. Nice to catch up.

Hazel *tuts.*

Continues slicing the bread.

She slices the entire loaf.

Silence, until:

Hazel Oh by the way, I forgot to say, she got me a glass of water.

Robin When?

Hazel I'd been out in the sun all afternoon and then I came indoors. I turned my back for a moment and suddenly she was just standing here, it scared me. Even after I realised... she's just got that sort of presence, hasn't she, like when the TV licence people come and even though you know you've got one you feel guilty, I couldn't stop talking, burbling on³⁹ about the hairs on my chin, I felt like I was going to faint or something so I said I'm sorry, I better have a glass of water, and she said I'll get it.

Hazel *looks at Robin.*

She said I'll get it and she got up and she went straight to the cupboard with the glasses in.

Robin Well, she's like that, Rose. She likes to feel useful.

Hazel Yes, she went straight to the cupboard, where the glasses are kept.

The sound of the toilet flushing, off.

Robin What are you saying?

Hazel Me? Nothing, I'm just saying, she went straight to it.

Robin And?

Hazel And nothing.,

Robin It's by the sink, that's where most people keep the / glasses.

Hazel Is it?

Robin Most people.

Rose *enters.*

Hazel Find it alright?

Rose Yes, thank you.

Hazel Rose? / Can I ask you?

Robin Let's have a top-up.

Robin *refills their glasses.*

Rose What?

Hazel I'm sorry, I hope you don't mind me asking / but

Robin Hazel.

Hazel No, I should have said before but well did you do a number one or a number two?, Only the macerator on the downstairs toilet is very unreliable and if you did – if you did do a number two then it will cause it to overflow which is, it's a very messy / business so

Rose It was a number one.

Hazel so we only use downstairs for number ones, if you did want a number two I'd ask you to go upstairs.

Rose It was a number one.

Hazel Oh good! I'm sorry. I should have said before.

Rose It's fine.

Hazel *smiles.*

Rose *glances towards the door.*

Hazel *watches her. She almost says something. Doesn't.*

Robin *shakes his head at Hazel, warning.*

Hazel *looks at Rose .*

Hazel I'm so sorry, I hate to / press the

Robin Haze, drop it.

Hazel no but you're *certain* aren't you? Only I know it's embarrassing but it's better just to say now / otherwise

Rose I'm certain.

Hazel You did a number one?

Rose Yes.

Hazel Not a number two?

Rose No.,

Hazel You know what I mean when I say number one and / number

Rose Yes.

Hazel Yes. No, good. Good! Sorry. That's wonderful.

Robin Jesus.

Hazel What? Don't, looking at me like that, it's not you who'd be on their knees with a J-cloth cleaning / up her

Robin Hazel!

Hazel God, you're so squeamish darling! Rose doesn't mind! It's a perfectly natural bodily function! He's always been like this, even with four tiny babies, wonderful father so long as nothing was leaking out of them!

Robin That's rubbish. That's, you know / that's

Hazel Is it? Oh I'm so sorry, I must have remembered my entire life wrong.

Hazel *coolly picks up the wind-up radio and starts winding it up.*

Robin *watches her for a moment or two.*

Robin Do you have to do that now?

Hazel This is when I wind it. If I don't wind it now then I can't listen to Radio 4 in the morning.

She continues to wind. Pause. Robin tries to tolerate it. Fails.

Robin It's just it's, it's really / irritating

Hazel I heard another man died today.

Rose From the plant?

Hazel There are cats and dogs running wild around it, apparently. No one to stop them, and how are they supposed to know? What they're breathing in, it breaks my heart.

Robin Hazel's sappy about animals. I once said to Hazel, what would upset you more, to see a car hit a dog, or a child?

Hazel Robin. (*To Rose.*) Don't listen to him, he embroiders.

Rose What did she say?

Robin She said 'a nice child or a nasty one?'

Hazel That was a joke, you know that / was a

Robin No, she said the child.

Hazel Of course I said the child!

Robin Yes of course, she said the child. Eventually.

Hazel Eventually what does that mean eventually?

Robin It means my love you had to *think about it*.

Hazel I did not.

Robin For at least a minute.

Hazel A minute!

Robin It was it was nearly exactly a minute.

Hazel Were you counting then I didn't notice you counting

Robin No

Hazel Didn't notice your lips moving

Robin I wasn't counting

Hazel Did you have some sort of mental stop/watch

Robin No

Hazel Well then how could you know it was / a minute

Robin BECAUSE I WAS BOILING AN EGG AT THE TIME.,

Hazel *stops winding the radio. Puts it down.*

Hazel You should have had an elderberry. The parsnip always makes you belligerent.

Robin Yes well that's my prerogative. As an old man that's / my prerogative

Hazel 'Old', you're not old.

Robin Young men get impotent rage, old men get incontinent belligerence.

Rose And what do old women get then?

Robin Fat.

He downs his glass, pours another.

Present company excepted.

Hazel Oh well that's nice. Is this what you were expecting Rose? To drop by on some old friends and be told you're old and fat?

Rose You look amazing Hazel, I don't know how / you

Robin She drinks the blood of virgins.

Hazel It's just good diet and exercise.

Robin Oh yes. That's what I meant. Good diet and exercise. Not the blood of virgins. Hazel doesn't need the blood of virgins. Hazel does yoga.

Rose I know.

Robin *refills their glasses.*

Robin Oh you know do you? Yes, she's very bendy. She could pick her nose with her toes if she wanted.

Hazel How do you know I don't?

Robin Because I watch you. When you roll out your mat I watch you and I say a prayer a special prayer that I made up in my head just for you, it goes like this:

'The earth may be irradiated

The seas may rise up and wash us away

The human race may eat itself

But may Hazel's sun always be saluted

And her dog always be downward!'

He toasts her. She looks at him. Pause.

Hazel That's nice, dear.

Robin Nice? Nice! Hazel saved my life. If I wasn't married to Hazel, the walls of my arteries would look like loft insulation. Together Hazel and I are going to live forever. On a diet of yoga and yogurt.

Robin *kisses Hazel.*

Hazel *pulls away.*

Hazel Well it's in my interests isn't it.

Robin Oh stop! No romance please, not in front of the guest.

Hazel Rose isn't a guest, Rose is an old old friend.

Robin Oi now! Less of the old! Rose doesn't look a day over eighty.

Rose Fuck off Robin.

Robin *stares at her.*

Then laughs.

Raises his glass to her.

Robin Yes, exactly. 'Fuck off Robin.'

Robin *sits.*

Pause.

(To Hazel.) Come here. Sit on my lap.

Hazel Sit on your? Good grief, Robin.

Robin What?

Hazel *lets out a very long sigh.*

Hazel Just because you and Rose once went to bed a few times you assume the only reason she could have come here tonight is to steal you away from me and so, sweetly but very misguidedly, you're smothering me in affection. And it's so transparent, it's embarrassing, darling.

Pause.

Robin My mistake. I'm sorry Rose. My middle-aged spread has gone entirely to my ego.

Hazel You remember, he's just like this sometimes, it's harmless, it only comes of liking women. We used to have a girl to do the milking

Robin *(sings the name)* Fioooooooooona!

Hazel Fiona, yes, she came to do the milking / and

Robin Fiona. With two Fs.

Robin *makes a gesture to signify enormous tits. Halfway through he finds Rose looking at him and he falters, mortified.*

Hazel You couldn't take your eyes off them. Even I couldn't, to be fair, they were mesmerising. In the end I had to take her aside and suggest that, for the more manual work, she might like to start wearing a bra.

Rose *takes out her cigarettes.*

Robin *recovers himself.*

Robin I knew you'd put the wind up her.

Hazel Well, she was estranged from her mother, wasn't she, she didn't have anyone to tell her, so I said to her, it's all very well now when the skin is elastic, but you'll thank me in twenty years when they're not down by your knees.

Robin Killjoy.

Hazel Perv.

Robin Puritan

Hazel Lech.

Robin Jealous old bitch.

Hazel Dirty old man.

Robin *raises his glass.*

Robin Cheers.

Hazel Cheers!

Robin To Fiona.

Hazel And all who sail in her!

Robin and Hazel *laugh and clink glasses.*

Hazel *sits on Robin's lap.*

He pats her arse fondly.

Pause.

Rose Do you mind?

Rose *is holding up her cigarettes.*

Hazel Oh, yes – would you mind standing at the door?

Robin Are you sure that's a good idea?

Hazel She's a grown woman, she can dig her own grave, it's fine Rose.

Rose *moves her chair to the back door.*

Opens it and sits, lights a cigarette. Smokes.

The sound of the sea from the dark outside.

Robin *watches Rose.*

Robin So you didn't come to seduce me, then?

Rose 'Fraid not.

Robin You're certain? You don't want to think about it?

Rose No, I'm quite sure. Hang on... yep, no. Wouldn't touch you with a bargepole. You've aged very badly Robin.

Robin *groans, mimes shooting himself in the head.*

Hazel *pats him on the head.*

Hazel Poor love. Not fair is it, men are supposed to grow into their looks, aren't they, it's the women who go to seed.

Rose Whereas Robin's got a face like a haunted house.

The women start to laugh.

Robin Oh that's nice. That's charming.

Hazel Don't worry. I can still tolerate looking at you, darling. If I squint.

She squints. The women laugh harder.

Robin You're very funny, both of you.

The women laugh harder.

You both have a winning sense of humour.

The women laugh harder.

Which is lucky given you're both such fat old hags.

The women laugh hysterically.

But it does beg the question though, doesn't it? If you've not come here tonight to woo me away from Hazel, then why have you come?

Rose *takes a drag on her cigarette.*

Rose I'm going back. To work at the power station.,

Hazel You're not serious.

Rose Yes.

Rose *laughs.*

I mean. Yes. Somebody has to restore control.

Hazel *gets up from Robin.*

Robin Rose, are you sure / you want to

Hazel There are people doing that.

Rose Yes of course, but they're all so young. Most of the engineers are under thirty-five / and

Robin But it's their job. It's what they're trained for.

Rose Yes and but lots of them have families. Their whole lives ahead, and I just feel, I feel very strongly. It's not fair. Every day they're there is less life. They've raised the radiation exposure limit from a hundred millisieverts to two hundred and fifty / millisieverts

Robin Yes we heard.

Rose These... *young people* these *children*, basically, actually with their whole lives ahead and it's not fair it's not right it seems *wrong*. Doesn't it? Because we built it, didn't we? Or helped to, we're responsible, so I do, I feel the need to, to to

Hazel To clear it up.

Rose Yes. Yes.

Pause.

Rose *finishes her cigarette, closes the door.*

Robin That's...

Hazel That's very brave.

Rose Brave?

Hazel Yes, brave, very brave very, I don't know

Robin Noble.

Rose I don't think I'm particularly special.

Hazel Don't you?

Rose No. I think most people would, if they could, if they had the education, the expertise, the knowledge / that we

Hazel But then you don't have any children

Rose No I suppose not

Hazel grandchildren

Rose No but

Hazel you're not married.

Robin Shut up Hazel.

Hazel I'm sorry?

Robin Just fucking shut up for a fucking minute will you?

Robin *takes Rose's hands.*

It's death, Rose. You understand that?

Hazel *takes out a can of air freshener from under the sink and sprays it liberally.*

Hazel Of course she understands it, she's a leader in her field.

Robin They're playing it down in the press, to protect the industry –

Hazel Of course they are, they / have to

Robin That's not what / I'm

Hazel No good getting silly about nuclear because what's the alternative?

Robin Whose idea was it? Who asked you to do this?

Rose No one. It was my idea. When I heard about the wave, and the meltdown, when I saw it on the news, and understood the full, the mess, the meaning of this, the thought came into my head immediately. And of course I dismissed it but I couldn't shake it off...*(To Hazel.)* It was like you with the house after the wave. It was so simple. Like Archimedes, I knew it was right. Right now I'm looking for a team of twenty people over the age of sixty-five. To take over and let the young ones go, while they still have the chance, while there's still the possibility of, well, life. I still have contacts at the Science Council so I flew back and I took it to them and they, I think fast-tracked is the word and, so what happened is I've been in talks with the Government, and the operating company and two weeks ago they approved the proposal. So now I've been... gathering people.

Hazel People.

Rose Yes, we're going to need scientists, engineers. Construction workers, that's not my field, I'm leaving that to Mike Briar. The last few weeks I've been writing emails, making phone calls but mostly going about the country, visiting people

Hazel Guilt-tripping them.

Rose No I don't think all of them saw it like that.

Hazel Oh, didn't they? That's good.

Rose No, I think a lot of them were, not happy, but, relieved maybe. I think there was relief, that someone was taking charge.,

Hazel Horse shit.

Robin Hazel.

Hazel No, I'm sorry but horse shit horse *shit!* that's not / how they felt

Robin How many have you asked?

Rose Well it's... maybe about a hundred / or

Robin And these other people have agreed to, to do this?

Rose Yes. Well, no only eighteen so far, / but

Hazel Eighteen?

Robin Anyone we know?

Rose One or two.

Robin Not Douglas.

Rose Actually Douglas was among the first.

Robin No, not Douglas.

Hazel *starts putting out cutlery, plates.*

Hazel Why not Douglas? Douglas was a brilliant man, and very brave. Don't you remember, he offered to give his cousin his kidney?

Robin He didn't actually give it though did he?

Hazel No because the cousin fell off a viaduct unfortunately.

Robin And I'll bet old Douglas breathed a sigh of relief!

Hazel It isn't the point whether he breathed a sigh of relief the point is he would have given it, the point is he offered, isn't that right Rose?

Rose Well, you can function perfectly well with only one, can't you?

Hazel Yes but why would you want to? Are you eating Rose? It's only salad and bread but you're welcome.

Rose Thank you.

Hazel *clatters a plate and cutlery down before* **Rose.**

Robin So. So when are you going?

Rose Tonight.

Robin Tonight?

Rose The others are on their way. I thought I'd have more time, but... this morning there was a radiation spike. They should be pulling them all out but they can't, there are major leaks in unit two, somehow there's contaminated water flooding into the discharge channel.

Robin *groans in horror.*

Hazel Oh God.

Robin And so how long have you got?

Rose You mean –

Robin Before it starts spilling into the sea.

Rose Oh. About three feet.

Robin Right. Right.,

Rose Yes so we'll be taking over from the skeleton crew first thing in the morning.

Robin And you're telling us this because...?

Hazel Don't be callow Robin. You understand perfectly well what she's saying what she's asking / well I'm sorry but no

Robin No but is that what you're saying? Are you asking / us to

Rose I'd like you to consider it.

Hazel It's out of the question. Help yourself to salad.

Rose Both of you worked at the power station for a long time. Much longer than me and –

Hazel Not for years.

Hazel *starts to shake the dressing.*

Robin And is twenty enough / to

Hazel Eighteen.

Robin What?

Hazel She's only got eighteen. Dressing?

Rose Twenty's just (no, thank you), twenty's just to start with. We're going to need more of course, lots more, hundreds, but if we can get enough, we can let most of the young ones go and still reach a cold shut-down by Christmas. But I'm out of touch. The people I've been contacting, I haven't seen most of them for thirty years. Some of them don't even remember me.

Hazel Don't be silly, you're a very memorable person, I expect they were just trying to get rid of you.

Rose But you're still in contact with so many of them, people like you, people always liked you. I was hoping you might be open to, helping / me to

Hazel Oh this gets better and better, you want us to recruit for you? Is that what you're, ding dong can I talk to you about Jesus?

Rose I think if people knew you were there it would inspire confidence.

Hazel I'm sure it would.

Rose I think it would make them feel safe.

Robin But it's not safe, in fact it's very unsafe, they're not stupid Rose.

Rose Yes but

Hazel Yes but what?

Rose You have the power to... you have a power. You have power, and you've both already had long and full lives.

Hazel Long? Long, I'm sixty-seven that's / not *long*

Rose The people working there now are in their twenties and thirties, they have young families, / it's not

Hazel Look it's, what you don't – is I come from a line of very long-living women. My granny was a hundred and three when she died peacefully in her sleep, not bleeding from her gums not hair falling out nausea bloody vomit diarrhoea not leukaemia, / body riddled with

Rose The effects of the radiation could take twenty years to affect us by which time we'll be –

Hazel By which time we'll be dead anyway?

Rose Probably, yes. Or dying.

Hazel I AM NOT OLD.

Robin You must have known, what you're saying, what you're / asking

Hazel She is saying you are past your sell-by date, you are dispensable, shrivelled-up cannon fodder, this bloody COUNTRY. I should've lived in the Mediterranean! I could have sat under an olive grove until I was a hundred and twenty like a pickled walnut, I would've been respected, they would have called me Gerondissa, my age would have been a badge a badge of honour, / not

Rose I think there is honour in this. I think this is very / honourable

Hazel How dare you come here. Show up unannounced and bring, bringing this / poison into our

Rose I did send an email.

Hazel What good is that when we aren't using the computer?

Robin No, we're not using the computer Rose, it eats up the power.

Hazel And anyway what a thing to write in an email 'dear robin and hazel how are you I am well would you like to come and get cancer with me?' What font / did you use?

Robin Hazel, please.

Hazel Did you put a little smiley face at the end? A row of kisses? LOL RSVP?

Rose It was more. General.

Hazel *starts to serve the salad.*

Hazel And what I resent most is is is is your tone your expectation that we will feel *guilty*. What am I supposed to feel guilty about? I've done my bit. I I I I I I / I

Robin You helped them remove the topsoil from the playground didn't you?

Hazel I did, I helped them do that.

Robin And we barely use any power.

Rose Yes but / that's not

Hazel It has compromised us. All of this, we have *been compromised*—

Rose You don't have a right to electricity.

Hazel What a thing to say.

Hazel *starts eating her salad.*

Rose But you don't.

Hazel What a thing to say.

Rose Half the developing world exists without it.

Hazel Well perhaps they should develop then, /'scuse me, I'm going to bed.

Hazel *stands, picks up her plate, takes a few slices of bread.*

Robin Haze, wait. Just hear her / out at least.

Rose We built a nuclear reactor next to the sea then put the emergency generators in the basement! We left them with a shit-show waiting to happen and no evacuation procedure! And then *they* were the ones standing in the dark, trying to fix something we could have predicted, we should have predicted, opening valves by hand, even though it was already too late!

Hazel I feel like I should tell you, I'm / sorry but

Robin That's enough.

Hazel I never much liked you Rose.

Robin Don't – she's upset, she / doesn't

Hazel No, it's true, I always found you sinister, I found your friendship suffocating and sinister and I think the way you speak is affected. But I hate to waste food, there are starving children in Africa. So there's fruit salad and cream in the fridge for afters, help yourself.

Robin Haze.

Hazel leaves the room with her food. **Robin** looks at **Rose**.

You're serious aren't you?

Rose Might be fun, in some ways. Catch up with the old team.

Robin They didn't like me much.

Rose No, of course they didn't. Only two women in the entire plant and you were getting off with both of them.

Robin They didn't know that.

Rose Everyone knew that. Hazel knew that.

Robin No.

Rose Of course she knew!

Robin No, of course she knew you and I... had, before I met her. But she never suspected that it was still, that we were

Rose Ongoing? She did.

Robin No.

Rose She did.

Robin I don't know why you'd assume

Rose Because she got knocked up, didn't she?

Pause.

Robin No. No, I don't think / that's

Rose You don't?

Robin No.

Rose Then you're a bloody idiot.,

Robin Yes. / Maybe, but

Rose Because I'm the sort of woman who forgets to take a pill in the morning, I'm just that sort of person, I don't make lists or eat salad, I don't do yoga or – I don't have a pension even. But Hazel was a very cautious person. I remember when we were on night shifts together, she always – this sounds funny but, she always smelt so lovely. And at first I thought it was you, I thought I was smelling you on her and that was what I found so... but then one day I asked her, what's that lovely smell you always have? And she said it's sun cream. And I thought, it's January and it's night. And I wondered if maybe she was a bit mentally ill, but I did understand, in that moment, the fundamental difference between Hazel and me, and why you might be more drawn to... To that sort of woman. To the sort of woman who is cautious, and doesn't make mistakes.

Robin That's not

Rose No, it is, so when Lauren happened, I knew it wasn't an accident at all, it was entirely intentional. And I remember, at the time, thinking, it might have been easier Hazel, it might have been easier if you'd just pissed on him.,The summer before she was born. Coming here. Watching you prowl around this table, I prayed, I really prayed that something terrible would happen and she'd lose it.

Lauren.

Don't you think that's wicked?,

Robin No. I did that too.

Rose Did you? You never – that makes me feel a bit. Because it's most awful thing I've ever done. I wished that child ill. With all my heart, and with great poison. And I think I thought, going away, and time and all that, I think I thought it would numb it a bit. That getting older I'd be a bit more...Sanguine a bit more philosophical a bit, higher minded. But now I'm sitting here I'm wondering if it's this room that brings out the worst in me because the thing is, I do genuinely think that what I'm doing, what I'm asking of you is right, but also I realise now, that part of my coming, part of my desire, was to kill her, Hazel. To put her in a situation where she would be killed.

Where she'd understand, what it is.

To die slowly. And I'm so ashamed of that. I'm so completely ashamed.,

Robin *reaches for her hand, she moves it away.*

Anyway.,

Rose *starts to eat hungrily.*

Through a mouthful, friendly:

Do you like your children?

Robin Yes. Of course.

Rose No, only I know quite a few people who don't. They love them and deeply, but they don't actually like them. And I know other people who like their children a lot only it's painfully clear their children don't like them. And you never wanted them in the first place so I wondered how that went for you.

Robin I know this sounds callous but. I don't think you could understand.

Rose *looks at him, mid-mouthful.*

Nods, swallows.

Rose No. I have tried cats. I couldn't be doing with it. People say it's a substitute but it's not a substitute. I think I am maternal. Just not towards cats.,

Robin You never wanted?

Rose I never wanted anyone else's. Are you going to eat that?

Rose *gestures to his plate of salad.*

Robin *shakes his head, pushes his plate to Rose, she eats.*

Rose *remembers suddenly.*

Shit. I told you, didn't I? Idiot.

She rummages in her handbag.

Finds a pill-box, takes one.

Robin What's that?

She swallows it with a drink of water.

Rose Birth control. I have to take it with food or it makes me feel sick,

Robin So is that still, is that something you have to worry about?

Rose What?

Robin You know. Getting. Up the duff.

Rose *laughs.*

Rose I'm sixty-five, Robin.

Robin No I / know, but

Rose I mean, even if I did, can you imagine the poor creature? It'd be deformed.

Robin Okay.

Rose It would have flippers!

Robin Okay but don't, all I'm asking, it's actually a completely acceptable question, is why is a sixty-five-year old woman taking the fucking pill?

Rose Because it annihilates my libido.,

Robin Does it?

Rose Pretty much.

Robin Right.,Right. So.

Rose It just makes my life a lot easier. Not to want it in the first place.

Pause.

Rose *keeps eating.*

Robin *takes a Peperami out of his pocket.*

Tears it open, breaks it in half and offers her a piece.

What's that?

Robin Peperami. Drove halfway up the motorway for that.

Rose Thanks.

Rose *takes it.*

They both eat.

How are the cows?

Robin Dead.

Rose *stops eating.*

They were dead when I went back the first time. Couldn't bear to tell Hazel. I told you, she's very sentimental about animals.

Rose But you go down there. Every day, morning to night, Hazel said.

Robin I've been digging graves. You need to dig a very big pit for a cow, it takes me a few days just to do one so it's been quite a, quite a slow process. I have to dig it next to wherever they're lying and then I get the tractor and sort of drag them in.

Then I cover them up and then I conduct a little service. Say a good poem and sing a good song.

Rose Oh, Robbie.

Robin No I sort of... I dunno, I quite enjoy it. I cry a lot. Sometimes I get to the end of a day and I realise I've been crying for... six or seven hours.

Rose You must have been very attached to them.

Robin No, not really.,

She picks up the Geiger counter.

Looks at him, asking for permission.

He nods.

Rose *runs the Geiger counter over Robin.*

It beeps.

She looks at the reading.

She hands it back.

Rose It doesn't matter. I don't want you to think I came because I wanted something more or I had some sort of, I was harbouring some sort of hopes because I didn't, I'm not, so. I mean I think I've grown up a lot. Because I understand, I do understand now, that for the world not to you know completely fall apart, that we can't have everything we want just because we want it.,

She smiles.

I mean, maybe people like you and Hazel can / but

Robin Oh, fuck off. Don't – you can / fuck right off

Rose No? Name one thing, in your life, that you wanted and couldn't have. Something real I mean, not a steak or a... speedboat

Robin A speedboat?

Rose I don't know, you're at that sort of age, one thing.

Pause. Robin thinks. Laughs.

What?

Robin No, / it's.

Rose Tell me.

Robin You'll laugh.

Rose Probably.

Robin *groans.*

Robin Fiona.

Rose *laughs.*

Rose The milkmaid?

Robin *shrugs.*

As he talks he clears the plates.

Robin We had this caravan, bottom of the low field, she rented it off us. I'm walking back from The Ship one night, cross-country, she's outside in a T-shirt, pair of wellies, knickers, that's it. She kissed me back, so she can't have been... I mean it must have been alright. Not too... necrophiliac. Do you mind if I?

He gestures to Rose's cigarettes.

She pushes them closer, he takes one.

Rose Do you want a light?

Robin No, I just like holding it, her pupils are like Frisbees, she says 'd'you want one?' I pretend I do, she puts this pill in my hand, I make a bit of a switcheroo, take one of my blue ones instead. Which means I've got about half an hour to kill before lift-off and you know cos it's not like with Hazel, she just uses the time to put a wash on, so I slow things down a bit, ask her about her family. But she just shrugs and says 'they live in a cul de sac' then falls asleep in my lap, conks out, thumb in her mouth. You know and that's alright for a bit but I've taken this pill and her head's right... there on ground zero you know and then, then, then I'm terrified because things are actually starting to happen, and suddenly I'm on my feet, walking away. The next morning she grins at me like nothing happened. And I realise she can't, she cannot possibly imagine, she's designed not to be able to imagine, how incredibly sad she makes me.

Robin *lights the cigarette.*

He smokes.

Rose *looks at him.*

He does not know he is being watched.

Rose *crosses her legs.*

The blackout ends for the day and the electric kettle suddenly starts to boil.

The fridge hums.

The oven clock starts to flash.

Rose *suddenly stands.*

Takes a laptop and charger from her bag.

Rose Do you fancy a dance?

Robin What?

Rose I just, it's upsetting me. How miserable you look.

Robin Oh, I'm sorry if my existential crisis makes you uncomfortable.

Rose That? That's not a. Oh my God, you think that's a crisis? You couldn't get it up to shag the milkmaid, it's hardly the endgame / of your life.

Robin You asked me, so I told you, / so don't

Rose No I know, it's just, you just, you used to be so...

She gestures, vaguely, something enormous.

And Hazel, Hazel was so, she was – she used to be a Socialist!

Robin Yes, but she's alright now.

Rose *makes a face, holds up the lead.*

Rose Where can I plug this in?

Robin *gestures to a socket.*

Robin But the electricity, we're not supposed / to be

Rose This is an emergency.

Rose *plugs the laptop in and starts it up.*

Robin Hardly.

Rose You're having an existential crisis.

Robin Yes, I am, actually, I'm / having a

Rose I know, I know, you / feel

Robin I do

Rose What?

Robin I feel very

Rose What?,

Robin I feel eroded.

Rose *clicks open a programme on her laptop.*

What are you doing?

Rose I'm playing our song.

*She stands, puts her hand out to **Robin** as a song starts to play from the computer's speakers.*

Robin Oh, God! Do you remember that party? At Douglas's? I wonder if they still have parties like that. Had parties like that.

Rose Not the way we did them. Get up.

Robin *laughs, shakes his head.*

Robin I'm enjoying the floor show.

Rose Get up you sad old man!

*She drags **Robin** to his feet, he feigns reluctance, but begins to dance.*

Robin and Rose *dance together.*

What was the dance?

Robin What dance?

Rose You know, the routine.

Robin Oh the

Rose Hazel'll know.

Robin Why would Hazel know?

Rose Hazel made it up. HAZEL!

Rose / Robin HAZEL! HAZEL! HAZEL!

Hazel *comes running back in.*

*She registers the song playing as **Rose** goes to **Hazel**. Puts her arms around her.*

Rose I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. Lovely Hazel.

Hazel Yes, well. What did you want?

Rose You smell lovely, what is it?

Hazel What? I don't know, probably just suncream, I don't know what else it would –

Rose and Robin *burst out laughing.*

Hazel *turns to leave.*

Rose *grabs her hand, pulls her back.*

Rose No, wait, play with us!

Hazel Grow up, Rose.

Robin How did that dance go?

Hazel What dance?

Robin You know, the routine. We did for two hours without stopping that night at Douglas's

Rose don't you remember it?

Hazel Of course I remember it, I made it up.

Rose Yes that's what I – it was like this:

She shows her.

Hazel No it wasn't.

Rose Something like that / though

Hazel No, it wasn't, it's not even – it was like this:

Hazel *does the routine, proficiently.*

Standing in a line, they fall into a pretty synchronised routine of a repetitive dance.

The others copying Hazel, but growing in confidence and unity as they repeat it.

They get into their swing.

They grow in confidence and flair.

Even Hazel starts to enjoy herself.

Water starts to seep into the room from under the door to the bathroom.

It begins to flood the floor.

Presently Hazel sees it.

Rose!

Hazel *stops dancing. Rose and Robin continue doing the routine.*

Rose What?

Hazel What's the matter with you, I asked you, three / times I asked you

Robin Okay, Haze, calm down

Hazel I will not calm down, don't tell me to

Robin It's just a bit of / water

Hazel You're pathetic, you know that? I feel sorry for you, I really do, I'm sorry you've had such a, that your life's been so, because, but that isn't our fault. It isn't our fault and it's embarrassing, actually, honestly, it's really, you've embarrassed yourself coming here like this, so well done

Robin *stops dancing. Rose continues to dance.*

Robin That's enough

Hazel well done you silly bitch

Robin HAZEL!

Hazel you know what she's done, don't you?

Robin Yes, / but

Hazel You know what she's / done to us?

Robin I'm just saying, / there's no need to

Hazel SHE SHAT IN OUR TOILET! YOU SHAT IN OUR TOILET ROSE, WHAT HAVE YOU GOT TO SAY FOR YOURSELF?

Rose *stops dancing and kisses Robin on the mouth.*

Hazel *stares at them.*

The water is halfway across the floor now.

They part.

Pause.

Hazel *walks towards Rose.*

Hazel *turns towards Robin and slaps him.*

Robin *laughs.*

It turns into a cough.

Some blood comes from his mouth.

He stops laughing.

He reaches for Hazel.

Robin Oh, bloody hell... Hazel.

Hazel I'm here. I'm here. Oh my. Robin.

He tries to wipe it away, embarrassed.

Rose *watches him cling to Hazel.*

Robin It's alright. Could I have a tea towel please?

Hazel *gives him a tea towel, he wipes his mouth.*

Hazel Is this – are you?

Robin It's nothing. I'm sorry.

Hazel *rubs his back.*

Hazel It's alright, shhhh, can you cough it all up? You'll feel better if you can cough it all up.

Robin *coughs some more.*

Tries to wipe his mouth, speaks through it.

Robin It'll stop in a minute.

Hazel Has this, this has, it's happened before has it?

Robin Not really.

Hazel Not really? Not really, oh my God oh / my my my my darling

Robin A few times. It passes.

Hazel I asked you not to go down there, I begged / you

Robin I know.

Hazel This would never have happened if you'd / just

Robin I know!

Hazel Well good. I'm glad you know, I'm glad you can admit that. I'm sorry. I'm so, I don't know why I said that, that was a horrible thing to, how do you feel?

Robin Bit rough.

Hazel Right. Right well you probably just need a good night's sleep.

Robin *wipes the blood from his chin.*

Robin Yes.

Hazel I don't know. I don't know what to, do you want me to call an ambulance?

Robin *shakes his head and sits down.*

If the song has not already finished, Robin now shuts the laptop.

Robin I'm going.

Hazel What?

Robin I'm going to the power station.

Hazel Don't be stupid. You should be in a hospital.

Robin No thank you.

Hazel What?

Robin I said no thank you.

Hazel Robin.

Robin My God aren't you sick of thinking about your fucking *body* all the time? It's just meat, it's rented meat who gives a shit. We used to wrestle the atom all night on a crisp sandwich.

Hazel Yes well you can do it when you're young but you're sick, you're really sick and if we don't get you some help, you'll die Robin, do you understand me? I don't know why I'm treating / it like a discussion, it's not a discussion

Robin Yes but I've been thinking about that and / the thing is

Hazel I'm going to call an / ambulance.

Robin the thing is I'd quite like to die at some point.

Hazel Take that back! Take it back!

Robin No. One day the world will be full of billions of beautifully kept little machines living forever and we'll all want to kill ourselves anyway we're so bored.

Hazel Take it back. Robin. Please.,

Please.

He shakes his head.

She starts to cry.

He pulls her on to his lap or close to him.

He holds her.

Tender.

She clings to him.

He comforts her like a child.

Rose watches them from a distance.

Tries to look like she isn't.

Robin Come on Haze. It's just a little bit of blood. It's just like... what's that show the kids used to... the crystal whatsit, fucking shite, / they loved it

Hazel The Crystal Maze

Robin the Crystal Maze, exactly, and that's it, all it is, is now there's just a little clock counting down in the corner of the screen and there's a bald fellow outside the door playing the harmonica. You know, and that's. Alarming, but. I've always been better with a deadline. You know that.

Hazel And what about me. What about what I, the things that I

Robin What is it, Lauren?

Hazel of course Lauren. Always Lauren.

Robin Because you know a hundred years ago you'd probably be in the ground by now. Dead from... Flu, or an ear infection... childbirth even, but because of science, and because we've decided that natural decay is unnatural, and because of the distance the human brain has travelled us, forcing our bodies to keep up, here you are, alive and kicking and that's of course, you know, marvellous, but you're a terrifying act to follow my darling, do you know that? You are, and so, when I want to shake her, Lauren I mean, when I feel like attaching a pair of jump leads to her fucking ears, I remind myself of that, that her mother is a giantess (a pain in the arse, also, true) and but d'you know what I think? I think the only thing that

will force Lauren to grow is for her to wake up one day and find that we're not there any more, and I know what you're about to say, you'll say you're her mother, and you'll want to talk about duty, but what I think, what I honestly think is this is your duty, you have a real duty to that child, to fuck off at some point.

Pause.

Hazel But... but what, um... what about the cows?

Robin The cows are dead my love. I'm going to pack a bag.

Robin *goes out.* **Hazel** *looks at* **Rose.**

Rose *gets her cigarettes and walks towards the door.*

Hazel *grabs her by the hair and pulls her back.*

It comes off in her hand.

Hazel Rose. What.

Rose It's fine, it was a while ago, I'm fine now. It's just it takes forever for it to grow back. Specially at our age.

Rose *fixes her wig.*

Do you want to call your children?

Hazel Why?

Rose To let them know your plans.

Hazel What plans? I haven't said anything, I haven't got any... plans, what plans?, Is that what people do? Is that what the others did?

Rose Some of them. The others are waiting till they get there because otherwise it gets a bit, they get emotional, don't they, children? Douglas's daughter, oh God, we had a time of it there. She spat in my face. Crying, lying on the floor, 'you can't take him, it's not fair, I'm not ready' all that jazz.

Rose *laughs.*

They don't like having things taken away from them.

Hazel But... but you're doing it for them. That's why you're doing it.

Rose No I know, it's funny, isn't it? Maybe you'd prefer Robin to call them, / or

Hazel I haven't said – stop – rushing me!

Pause.

Rose You don't have to worry. I won't. I won't go near him.

Hazel Oh, okay then.

Rose No, I know, I wouldn't believe me either. But it's true. I went to a therapist once, in America, she said to me, 'Rose, are you familiar with the definition of madness as doing

the same thing over and over and expecting the result to be different?' I said No. But ask me again.

Hazel *laughs.* **Rose** *laughs.*

Do you think Lauren's going to be alright?

Hazel I don't know. She's thirty-eight and she thinks she's still young. You're lucky, you've always had a good head shape. I'd look like an egg. Where was it?

Rose *touches her breast.*

Hazel *nods.*

I used to be so jealous of your chest.
You used to say 'oh but the backache is terrible' and I wanted to smash your face into the table. Did they take both?

Rose Yes.

Pause.

Hazel I want a cup of tea, do you want a cup of tea?

Rose Sure, go on.

Hazel *reboils the kettle and makes tea.*

I'm sorry about the bathroom.

Hazel That's alright. Milk?

Rose No / thank you.

Hazel No, you said –

Rose I'm not allowed. Dairy promotes cell production.

Hazel Does it?

Rose That's why we give milk to babies.

Hazel I never knew that.

Rose No well why would you? You're not a doctor.

Hazel No.

Rose You're not a biologist.

Hazel No.

Rose You're a physicist.,

Hazel Retired.

Rose Yes / but

Hazel I know what you're doing. It's not, it isn't...Why do you even want me there?

Pause.

Rose It'll sound silly but. You were who I wanted to be when I grew up. I thought, one day I'll be like Hazel. I won't smoke cigarettes and I'll wear sunscreen and plan the week's meals ahead and get a slow cooker and not just buy sandwiches from petrol stations and I'll keep the bathroom really clean not just give it a wipe when people are coming over and I'll stop crying all the time and I'll do exercise and have a really neat handbag and do washing regularly not just when I've run out of knickers and stop losing earrings and not stay awake reading till four in the morning and feel like shit the next day and I'll find out how tracker mortgages work and be fifteen minutes early to everything and most of all most of all I'll know when I've had enough. But I never quite got there. And I think it's a bit late now. And then tonight I saw your washing outside, on the line, and I thought about you, pegging it out, and how many times in your life you'd done that and no one noticed. And I thought, that woman holds up the world. So that's why, really.,

Hazel We're an island.,

Rose Well –

Hazel No, I mean literally, we're a very coastal country. We've got miles and miles of coast, and it's windy. Why aren't they thinking about wave power? That's what they should be thinking about.

Pause.

Douglas has got a daughter has he?

Rose Yes.

Hazel And so he's married, or?

Rose Um, widowed I / think.

Hazel Widowed, really? That's, poor Douglas.

Pause.

When you go, I'd take some mugs. For teas and coffees. Never enough mugs in that staffroom, used to drive me crazy., And teaspoons. No one ever thinks about teaspoons.

Pause.

Or tea towels, has he still got that tattoo?

Rose Who, Douglas?

Hazel Yes, on his arm, a tree with bare branches, he added a leaf every year.

Rose I don't know. I didn't see his arms, he was wearing a, it was a sort of um, running top?

Hazel Oh, so he's still keeping fit then. Good for him.

,
no, good for him.

,
I've got some tea towels you can take actually, if you...

Hazel gets up and collects some tea towels, mugs and teaspoons into a bag.

Whatever happens, I'm not sure I can stay here any more, to be honest. It feels foul to me.

Pause.

I can't give you the car, it belongs to the insurance company. How did you get here?

Rose I came in a / taxi.

Hazel A taxi, that's right, you said.

Pause.

Then Hazel goes out.

She returns with the phone, dials, waits.

Presently the call is connected.

Hello, Denny? It's Hazel., Hello love, we'd like a taxi please. In an hour, do you think you can
-, Half-past, that's fine, thank you, from the cottage, yes., To the power station., The power
station, yes, Well to the edge of the exclusion zone then., ⁷⁶Robin and a a a friend of ours., I
might do.,

Hazel adds teabags and a jar of instant coffee to the bag of mugs and tea towels. Maybe some
milk.

I said I might do, I haven't decided yet., I know., I know. I'll pay you fifty pounds extra., A
hundred then., Not in cash, I haven't got a hundred quid in cash just in my - (*Hand over the
phone, to Rose.*) Have you -

Rose shakes her head.

(*Back to Denny.*) No, you'll have to stop at the Co-op then., Is it? Well there's one outside the
post office then. , No, they won't need picking up again. Thank you Denny. Half-past. Yes, just
sound the horn. We'll come out. Thank you - sorry, Denny - how's the little one today?, Is
she? ⁷⁷Oh dear, yes that is a bit worrying isn't it?

Tell Maria not to fret.

Two of mine went through the same thing.

Hm. Cayenne pepper. Dab it around the nostrils. Helps it clot., You too pet. Bye now.

Hazel hangs up. *Pause.*

I'd better come with you to the cash point at least. Denny's a very nice man but he takes the
piss sometimes., Rose. I'm frightened.

Rose That's alright.

Hazel It's just it's very hard to, I don't know / how to

Rose I know

Hazel I don't know how to want less.

The phone rings, it makes them both jump.

Hazel *answers it.*

Hello?, Oh, hello darling. Are you –

Hazel *becomes afraid she is going to cry.*

Hang on sweetheart, Dad wants to talk to you – ROBIN! ROBIN! What did you do about the washing machine in the end?, Oh dear, yes you do have to activate them or they won't –

Robin *enters.*

It's Lauren – you speak to her – your father's got something to tell you sweetheart. 78

She holds the phone out.

He stares at her, shakes his head.

Please. I can't.

Eventually, Robin takes the phone.

Robin Hi Loz...

He sees Rose watching him.

Just a second piccalilli, just going to take you upstairs...

He takes the phone out, closes the door behind him.

Perhaps we hear the rumble of his voice from upstairs as he talks to Lauren.

The women listen to it.

Rose *tries to comfort Hazel, she smacks her away.*

Hazel Don't touch me.

Pause.

Hazel *gathers herself and abruptly stands up.*

Sorry. Sorry, d'you mind if I?

Rose Whatever you / need to

Hazel Just, I have my routine. It's later than I thought, if I don't do it now, it won't get done, and I'll feel it tomorrow.

Rose You don't mind me sitting here while / you

Hazel No, that's fine. I'll just pretend you're not there.

Hazel *finds her yoga mat and rolls it out on a dry patch of the floor.*

Rose *watches her.*

Hazel *kicks off her shoes and takes up her position.*

She starts to stretch, a warm-up.

Rose goes to the door, opens it, takes out her cigarettes. The sound of the sea rushes in from the dark.

Rose I did hear the bells you know
From the church, under the water. I heard them as clear as anything, ringing out across the shingle and I thought about them all, going in for evening prayers, till the tide came in and the sea went black and I felt the water was round my ankles.

She looks at **Hazel**.

She puts her cigarettes down.

She kicks off her own shoes and takes up position adjacent to **Hazel**.

Rose taking her lead from **Hazel**, the two women perform a yoga routine.

Robin enters with a bag, watches from the doorway for a moment.

He finds a pair of yellow washing-up gloves, puts them on.

He sees **Rose's** cigarettes on the table.

He takes one, goes to the open door, lights up.

He gets a broom or a mop and starts sweeping the water out of the door, smoking as he does.

The women repeat their routine as the lights slowly fade.

Through the open door

the sound of the sea and waves breaking

mixes with the movement of **Robin's** broom

and the women

as they try to keep breathing.

Out of this, very gradually, the sound of a wave building.

It grows and grows

It crashes upon us.

Silence.

Distantly, a church bell rings.

As if from under the water.

The sound distorted but unmistakable.

End.