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SF PERUSALS

THE REVLON GIRL

by Neil Anthony Docking

SAMUEL FRENCH

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Neil Anthony Docking was born in South Wales and studied music at the University of Westminster before finding work as a writer in press, television, radio and film (credits include: *The Guardian*, *Emmerdale*, *Casualty*, *Station Road*, *Nuts & Bolts*, *TVCC*, *Without a Song or a Dance*, *Crossroads*, *The Throne Room* and *Rain*). *The Revlon Girl* is his first play for theatre.

He is married to the actor/director Maxine Evans and lives in London.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The play's "encore" is traditionally used, first, to enable the cast to clear the stage (as if packing up at the end of the evening and returning the function room to its empty state) and, second, to give the audience a chance to recover from the intensity of the play before they leave.

For Maxine, for everything.

First presented as a short version in 2015 as part of a double bill staged at the Tristan Bates Theatre (Covent Garden). This version was first performed in 2017 at the Pontardawe Arts Centre just before its inclusion at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (at the Assembly Roxy) and its subsequent London run at Park Theatre (Finsbury Park) featuring the following cast:

SIAN	Charlotte Gray
MARILYN/JACKIE	Michelle McTernan
REVLON	Antonia Kinlay
RONA	Bethan Thomas
JEAN	Zoë Harrison

Directed by	Maxine Evans
Lighting Design	Chris Barrett
Set Design	Eleri Lloyd
Special Technical Effects	Dan Travers
Original Music & Sound Design	Neil Anthony Docking

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

SIAN – late twenties, bright, hopeful and eager to help, Sian is very much the instigator (and defender) of the evening's event and is desperate for it to go well.

REVLON – around the same age as Sian (if not younger) Revlon is smart, well-groomed, well-bred, trusting and clearly does not come from a Welsh working-class mining village.

MARILYN – early to mid-thirties, Marilyn is introverted, tense and fearful of change. Though outwardly simple, she is very focused.

RONA – early to mid-thirties, Rona is fiery, foul-mouthed and indomitable. She finds strength in rage, rejects authority and is easily set alight.

JEAN – early to mid-thirties, Jean is stately, conservative and sociable. Though she hails from the same background as Marilyn and Rona, Jean is now the wife of a respected church minister and therefore regards herself as a pillar of the community.

JACKIE (**UNSEEN**) – the hotel's part-time receptionist/ barmaid; helpful but inattentive.

SETTING

The action takes place in a function room above the Aberfan Hotel (a public house in the village) on a balmy, rainy evening in June 1967 – eight months after the disaster.

A NOTE ABOUT CASTING

The character ages – as specified in the text – reflect the likely ages of the real-life women at the heart of this story. However, for practical purposes, the important thing is that **MARILYN**, **RONA** and **JEAN** should be cast similarly in terms of age (as they were in school together) with **SIAN** appearing to be a few years younger; much closer to the age of **REVLON** who should appear to be the youngest of all.

Though based on actual events, *The Revlon Girl* is a work of dramatic fiction and any similarity to real persons is coincidental.

Pre-set, dimly lit.

We hear the sound of children playing. A school bell rings and the children run obediently to their classrooms. We settle on the sounds of an October day in a mining village.

Then the stage darkens as, distantly, we hear an ominous rumble; a deadly, unseen mass that's coming this way and moving with alarming speed.

It builds to a terrifying roar as uprooted trees and heavy debris crack and pound inside the thundering avalanche. It can't be stopped. It can't be outrun. It's upon us…

Suddenly silence; darkness. We hear water trickling – running freely – and then we hear the sound of rain…

Fade up to:

The Aberfan Hotel – June 1967.

Thunder announces the function room above the Aberfan Hotel. It's early evening and rain falls heavily on the roof. In the soft light we see water drip from a skylight and down onto the floor of the empty room.

A silhouette of a woman appears at a doorway. She feels for the light-switch and a bare bulb snaps on, revealing **SIAN** *(mid- to late twenties, bright, hopeful, eager).*

She looks around the bare room and smiles. Then, eagerly, she exits and returns with a table. Setting it down carefully she takes her handbag and wet plastic hat and places them on the table before noticing the pool of water on the floor. She looks up

at the leaking skylight and, with a groaning sigh, she heads back towards the door, and shouts downstairs...

SIAN Jackie?

No answer.

Jackie?

JACKIE *(offstage)* Yeah?

SIAN Is there a bucket or something up here I can use?

JACKIE *(offstage)* A what?

SIAN A bucket?

JACKIE *(offstage)* What do you want a bucket for?

SIAN To catch the drips from the – um – the thingy—

JACKIE *(offstage)* The what?

SIAN The skylight. Water's getting in again. It's all over the floor.

JACKIE *(offstage)* Must be from the skylight.

SIAN Yeah – is there a bucket?

JACKIE *(offstage)* If you want, there's a bucket in the cleaner's cupboard. Do you know where that is?

SIAN Yeah, I know.

SIAN *exits.*

JACKIE *(offstage)* It's out on the landing. On the right hand side, by the Ladies...

SIAN *(offstage)* Yeah, I know.

JACKIE *(offstage)* Only be careful when opening the door—

Sound of a crash as the contents of a broom cupboard tumble out onto the landing floor.

JACKIE *(offstage)* it might need a tidy.

Beat.

JACKIE *(offstage)* Did you find it?

SIAN *enters carrying a zinc bucket and mop.*

SIAN Yeah. Found it. Thanks.

SIAN *mops up the puddle and places the bucket underneath the skylight; catching each drip with a hollow clunk.*

SIAN *carries on mopping the floor around the bucket – her back to the door – and* **REVLON** *enters (early twenties, smart, well-bred, trusting), carrying a wet umbrella, handbag and vanity case.*

REVLON Hi!

SIAN *(jumping slightly)* Oh, hello.

REVLON Am I in the right place?

SIAN Yes. I think. Are you the Revlon lady?

REVLON Yes. Are you Audrey?

SIAN No, "Sian". I'm Sian. You know, "Sian"?

REVLON Of course – "Sian". Hi, Sian.

SIAN Hi. *(Then.)* We've got a leak!

REVLON I can see.

SIAN It's from the skylight. I thought they'd fixed it but they can't have. They can't have sealed it properly. But water will always find its way in somehow, won't it? All you need is a tiny— *(***SIAN** *is staring and* **REVLON** *has noticed)* Sorry. I'm staring. I know. I'm a bugger for it. My husband's always telling me off for it. But I can't help it—

Then she says it.

You're very beautiful.

REVLON *blushes.*

But you don't need me to tell you that, but you are. Your hair, your make-up, your clothes – just beautiful.

REVLON Thank you. *(Then.)* Is there somewhere I can...? *(put my stuff down)*

SIAN Yes. Wait – wait!

SIAN *moves her belongings from the table and* **REVLON** *places hers down.*

REVLON Thank you. *(Then)* Is there anyone who can help me set up the room?

SIAN Yeah – me – I can. I'm "Sian". That's what I'm here for!

REVLON Oh right, oh yes, of course – "Sian". You're *Sian*.

SIAN Yes, I'm Sian. That's me.

REVLON *walks over to the other side of the room.*

REVLON So what do you think if we set up over here, Sian?

SIAN Up to you – whatever you think.

REVLON Yes, probably better over here.

SIAN *moves the table over.*

SIAN Oh yeah, much better over here. But we can do whatever. Everyone's just so pleased you could come.

REVLON Oh no, it's my pleasure. Well it's not my pleasure – I don't mean—

SIAN No, no, I know what you mean. So is that everything? Is that all the make-up?

REVLON No, there's more in the car. Actually, Sian...

Changing her mind, **REVLON** *moves back to the other side of the room; to the area under the bare light.*

...I think back here might be better after all.

SIAN *moves the table back to its original position.*

SIAN Oh yeah, much better back here. Did you say there's more in the car?

REVLON Yes.

SIAN Where's the car?

REVLON Outside.

SIAN Outside the front or outside the back?

REVLON Outside the front.

SIAN *(unsure)* The front – okay.

REVLON What's wrong with the front?

SIAN Nothing.

REVLON Should I move it?

SIAN Good God no. It's fine. You leave the car where it is. *(then)* Nobody spoke to you though, did they?

REVLON No. *(then)* Yes! The woman downstairs.

SIAN Jackie?

REVLON *shrugs – no idea.*

Oh Jackie's okay. She's fine. Jackie is fine. You leave the car where it is. *(then)* But if anyone asks you, you're from the W.I., giving a talk on poetry or something. Is that okay?

REVLON *(no idea why but…)* Yes…

SIAN *smiles at* **REVLON** *and exits.*

Pause.

Within a few moments, **SIAN** *returns with a "make-up chair" (a high bar stool/chair).*

SIAN They said you might need one of these.

REVLON That's perfect!

SIAN So you've spoken to Audrey?

REVLON No, not yet. My boss has.

SIAN Okay.

SIAN *exits again, leaving* **REVLON** *to wonder if she's coming back.*

Within moments, **SIAN** *returns – now carrying a couple of folding chairs from the landing. She begins to set them out.*

Well, Audrey's lovely – really lovely.

REVLON Will she be coming tonight?

SIAN Oh yes, she'll be here now any minute; she's probably been held up, that's all. She spends a lot of time with the bereaved families, you know? The mothers especially. I honestly don't know how some of them would have coped without her—

Sound of a door banging out on the landing.

Hello?

No answer.

Hello?!

Nobody there.

Yes, so that's where she'll be – with the mothers. The men, they don't – well, you know how men are.

REVLON Actually, can I ask you something, Sian?

SIAN Yes, luv?

REVLON The ladies that are coming tonight? Are they all...

She's unsure how to word it.

SIAN Are they all what?

REVLON Are they all...? Did they all have...?

SIAN *helps her.*

SIAN ...children in the school?

REVLON Yes.

SIAN Yes.

REVLON *was afraid of that.*

REVLON And how many...?

SIAN Died in the school? One hundred and nine. Plus the teachers of course. There were five of them – all buried with their kids. Youngest was seven; eldest was ten. The others were either walking to school or killed in their houses. It happened so quickly you see, nobody had a chance to get out. And there was no warning. So the final count was: one hundred and sixteen children and twenty-eight adults in all.

REVLON Sorry, I meant...how many mothers will be coming tonight?

SIAN *(laughing)* Oh, sorry luv, I didn't realise. I'm so dozy sometimes – it's like I'm on another planet. Um – I don't know. We never know. Sometimes it's quite a few. Sometimes it's hardly any.

SIAN *exits and returns with more chairs.*

They come when they feel up to it. If they want to have a chat or talk about what happened – you know? But to be honest, with a lot of them I still think it's sinking in. But then it's so much to take in, isn't it? It's so unbelievable – especially for a tiny village like this. I've lived here my whole life. I grew up here, I went to the same school, my son Paul went there – it's unbelievable.

SIAN *is already heading out to fetch more chairs.*

REVLON At least he was one of the lucky ones.

SIAN Oh no, he died too.

A moment. Then, **SIAN** *exits.* **REVLON** *waits – searching for something to say to* **SIAN** *when she returns.* **SIAN** *enters, again with some chairs.*

Yeah, he was in Mr Jones's class. Whole classroom filled up with slurry in seconds. All the children died. And Mr Jones too, of course.

SIAN *pauses; the raw emotion catching her a little by surprise. She contains it well but* **REVLON** *sees it (though can do little to help).* **SIAN**, *however, won't be beaten and she recovers herself for the sake of* **REVLON** *and the evening ahead.*

Now, is there anything else you need before we get the rest of your stuff in from the car?

REVLON *(nervously)* A drink, maybe?

SIAN Ohh, wouldn't that be nice? Tell you what, I'll nip down the bar in a sec; ask them to put the kettle on.

She winks and turns to exit. In the doorway is **MARILYN** *(mid-thirties, introverted, tense, outwardly simple but very focused).*

Well good heavens – look what the cat dragged in...

MARILYN – *seeing* **REVLON** *and clearly uncomfortable around strangers – comes no further.*

Was that you just then?

MARILYN *nods, but stays near the door.*

Well come in, luv. Don't be shy. This is the lady from Revlon. Come to talk to us. Doesn't she look lovely? Isn't she gorgeous? She's come all the way from...

REVLON Bristol.

SIAN *(to* **MARILYN***)* Bristol... *(suddenly to* **REVLON***) Bristol?!* Bloody heck! Sorry, shouldn't swear. My husband hates it when I swear.

REVLON Is this Audrey?

SIAN No – this is Marilyn.

REVLON Hello.

MARILYN *replies with a brief, nervous smile.*

SIAN Marilyn doesn't come very often, do you, darling? She doesn't like leaving the house much these days, so you're really honoured.

MARILYN *(noticing the skylight)* There's water coming in.

SIAN Yeah I know, I've told them.

MARILYN And there's a car parked outside.

SIAN Yes darling, I know, we're going to say she's from the W.I.

MARILYN Have you heard the rumour?

SIAN No darling, what rumour?

MARILYN About the children being in assembly?

SIAN No darling, I don't think they were.

MARILYN Well that's what people are saying.

SIAN What people?

MARILYN People. Is that right?

SIAN No darling – now look, we need to get set up here. We need some more chairs from the landing; there's stuff to come in from the car... *(then remembering, at* **REVLON***)* Oh! And we're gasping for a cup of tea!

She exits. Pause.

MARILYN *(to* **REVLON***)* Have you heard anything about the children being in assembly?

REVLON No. I'm not from the area so—

MARILYN Because that's not what they said at the inquest. It's different. They're saying now that the children were

in assembly when the tip came down. Is that right? Have you heard that?

REVLON No, I'm not from the area. I wouldn't know.

Pause. **MARILYN** *fixes on* **REVLON***; drips beat relentlessly into the bucket.*

MARILYN It's raining again.

REVLON *nods, unsettled – doubts about the evening are now beginning to creep in. Thankfully,* **SIAN** *returns with more chairs (*REVLON *begins to unpack make-up products from her case and place them on the small table).*

SIAN How are you sleeping now, Marilyn?

MARILYN Not so good when the weather's like this.

SIAN No, I know. Grab a couple of these, will you?

MARILYN What if they were singing in assembly?

SIAN No darling, they weren't in assembly. We know they weren't. They were in their classrooms. We know that. Don't we?

MARILYN *nods. She does know.*

MARILYN Did I show you Glynis's drawing?

MARILYN *produces a piece of well-worn and folded cartridge paper.*

SIAN Yes darling, you did. It's very good.

(To **REVLON***)* Marilyn's daughter was a fantastic artist. Wasn't she, Marilyn? And Annette, her other daughter? What a swimmer!

MARILYN *is about to show* **REVLON** *the drawing when* **SIAN** *routinely and gently pushes it away.*

Marilyn! Chairs.

MARILYN *does what she's told.*

SIAN *(back to* **REVLON***)* Yeah – like a dolphin she was. So: do you want to get the rest of your stuff in from the car?

Now panic sets in for **REVLON** *as she sees a withdrawn, timid* **MARILYN** *struggle with a chair.*

REVLON How long do you think Audrey's going to be?

SIAN Why, what's wrong?

REVLON *(looking at* **MARILYN***)* Nothing.

SIAN *turns to see that* **MARILYN** *has the chair the wrong way around.*

SIAN Oh no, they're not all like Marilyn.

(Beat)

They're much more outgoing. And they're all really excited. Have your tea now and wait for Audrey – she'll explain everything. But honestly – everyone round here is so lovely: so warm, so friendly, so welcoming—

RONA *(offstage)* WHAT A LOAD OF SHIT! What a load of fucking shit!!!

RONA *enters. (Mid-thirties, fiery, indomitable, finds strength in rage)*

I've heard some bollocks since that bastard came down: that "the tips were safe"; "nobody knew there was a stream"; "we ought to have a committee", well let me tell you what that committee wants to do with a million quid— *(then)* Who's this?

SIAN This—

RONA This is the Revlon Girl.

SIAN Yes.

REVLON *(to* **SIAN***)* This isn't Audrey, is it?

RONA Fuck no!

Beat.

...but I'll be talking to her too when she gets here; you've got a leak in the ceiling, Sian!

SIAN I know.

RONA So yeah – listen to this – they want to build a swimming pool! A fucking swimming pool!

SIAN Rona – please – can you not swear?

RONA Oh fuck off, Sian. We're in a pub, not a church. Is Jean here?

SIAN No.

RONA Is she coming?

SIAN I should think so.

RONA She'd better. I want to know what Billy has to say. A swimming pool – what's the fucking point of a swimming pool?! *(seeing* **MARILYN***)* Good God – what are you doing here?

MARILYN I'm not stopping. I'm going home.

SIAN No darling, you're staying. Rona, tell her.

RONA Marilyn, go home!

SIAN Rona!

RONA She doesn't want to stay.

SIAN Yes she does. Please Marilyn – just for a while – we'll be having a cup of tea now in a minute.

RONA Aye, alright then, if you're making – just a drop of milk for me. And hey – have you seen? Brand new Zodiac parked right out the front. Right-out-in-the-fucking-*street*! Makes you sick, people throwing their money around like that. Whose is it? Does anyone know?

Pause. **REVLON** *sheepishly raises a hand.*

Lovely cars aren't they? *(To* **SIAN***)* She's not leaving it out there, is she?

SIAN We're going to say she's from the W.I.

They look at the stylish **REVLON**...

Or maybe the Red Cross would be better?

RONA Oh yeah Red Cross: nobody'll suspect a fucking thing.

MARILYN *(To* **RONA***)* Have you heard the rumour?

RONA No.

(To **REVLON***)* Husband's car is it?

REVLON No, no. It's mine.

MARILYN There's a rumour about the children being in assembly.

RONA *(dismissive)* Is there?

MARILYN Is that right?

RONA No, Marilyn – they didn't have assembly on Fridays.

MARILYN *ponders this.* **RONA** *sidles up to* **REVLON**.

Hasn't tried to put you in touch with the spirit world yet, has she? *(She hasn't)* Stick around.

RONA *takes one of* **REVLON***'s tissues and blows her nose forcefully into it. Then, once finished, she deposits the used tissue on* **REVLON***'s table before taking a fresh one and returning to her seat.*

SIAN I'm so sorry about the swearing.

REVLON *gingerly lifts the used tissue to throw it away.*

REVLON Don't worry, I feel like doing some myself.

JEAN *enters. (Mid-thirties, stately, conservative, sociable)* **REVLON** *thinks this is the aforementioned* "**AUDREY**".

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