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SF PERUSALS

HENCEFORWARD...

A Play

by Alan Ayckbourn

SAMUEL FRENCH

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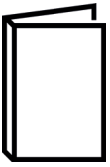
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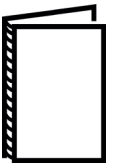
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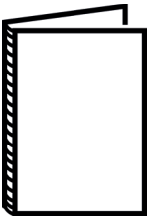
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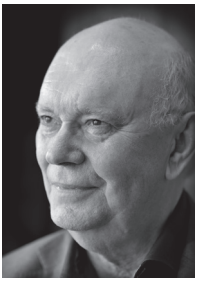
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Alan Ayckbourn has worked in theatre as a playwright and director for over fifty years, rarely if ever tempted by television or film, which perhaps explains why he continues to be so prolific. To date he has written more than eighty plays, many one act plays and a large amount of work for the younger audience. His work has been translated into over thirty-five languages, is performed on stage and television throughout the world and has won countless awards.

Major successes include: *Relatively Speaking, How the Other Half Loves, Absurd Person Singular, Bedroom Farce, A Chorus of Disapproval,* and *The Norman Conquests.* In recent years, there have been revivals of *Season's Greetings* and *A Small Family Business* at the National Theatre; in the West End *Absent Friends*, *A Chorus of Disapproval*, *Relatively Speaking* and *How the Other Half Loves*; and at Chichester Festival Theatre, major revivals of *Way Upstream* in 2015, and *The Norman Conquests* in 2017.

Artistic Director of the Stephen Joseph theatre from 1972–2009, where almost all his plays have been first staged, he continues to direct his latest new work there. He has been inducted into American Theater's Hall of Fame, received the 2010 Critics' Circle Award for Services to the Arts and became the first British playwright to receive both Olivier and Tony Special Lifetime Achievement Awards. He was knighted in 1997 for services to the theatre.

Image credit: Andrew Higgins.

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HENCEFORWARD...

First presented at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round, Scarborough, on 30th July, 1987, with the following cast:

JEROME	Barry McCarthy
LUPUS	Robin Herford
ZOË	Serena Evans
GEAIN, aged nine	Victoria Horsfield
GEAIN, aged thirteen	Emma Chambers
CORINNA	Penny Bunton
MERVYN	Michael Roberts

It was subsequently presented by Michael Codron at the Vaudeville Theatre, London, on 21st November, 1988, with the following cast:

JEROME	Ian McKellen
LUPUS	Robin Herford
ZOË	Serena Evans
GEAIN, aged nine	Victoria Horsfield
GEAIN, aged thirteen	Emma Chambers
CORINNA	Jane Asher
MERVYN	Michael Simkins

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn
Designed by Roger Glossop

CHARACTERS

JEROME, a composer
CORINNA, his wife
GEAIN, their daughter
ZOË, an actress
MERVYN, a welfare officer
NAN 300F
LUPUS
YOUNG GEAIN } (seen on video only)

Nan 300F is played by the same actress as Corinna in ACT I and by the same actress as Zoë in ACT II.

The action takes place in Jerome's studio in North London.

ACT I	Scene One	Friday night/Saturday morning
	Scene Two	A few hours later

ACT II A week later

Time—sometime quite soon

ACT I

Scene One

JEROME'*s studio. Friday night/Saturday morning. Sometime in the future.*

The living-room of a flat. It's a curious room. No windows, or, at least, what there were are curtained off and no light comes through the heavy steel shutters outside. There is a sofa, two swivel chairs and a low coffee-type table—all modern. That's really the extent of the recognizable furniture. The remainder of the room is filled with some very sophisticated electronic equipment. Not an amateur electronic rat's nest of wire and cable but custom-built units containing computers, tape and disc recorders—racks of amplifiers, filters, reverb units and gismos of all descriptions. At one end, several keyboards. Some of these are covered and remain so until much later in the play when we realize for the first time what a vast array of equipment **JEROME** *actually owns. The room, in fact, betrays the contradictions in his own character. For while the immaculate technical equipment is kept lovingly protected from the slightest speck of dust, the rest of the room—the living area—is in fair chaos. Remnants of instant meals, old tea and coffee cups, the odd item of clothing. The signs of someone who lives alone and has stopped caring much. And, strangely, the overall impression given off, despite all the modern paraphernalia, is of something faintly Gothic. Three ways off, one to the hall and front door,*

one to the kitchen and one to the rest of the flat—the bedrooms, bathroom, etc.

When the curtain rises, the room is dark. The only light is from a video/sound console system, at present inactive. We can make out very little or guess the time of day. All at once, a large wall-mounted video screen lights up. Or perhaps a series of screens. We see the picture as from a front-door video entryphone system.

JEROME, *a man of about forty, can be seen at the door. He is carrying three carrier bags, together with a somewhat incongruous walking stick. We see* **JEROME** *inserting his key and struggling and muttering as he opens his front door. He enters the flat. As he closes the front door the screen blanks again. After a second, the hall lights come on and* **JEROME** *approaches down the hall. Then the lights come on in the living area.*

JEROME *is standing in the hall doorway having just switched on the lights. He dumps his packages on the sofa and replaces his stick near the hall doorway. Also on the sofa, slumped, face down in a somewhat undignified posture is* **NAN**, *who remains motionless for some time.* **JEROME**, *ignoring her, crosses to the console, where he switches on his answering machine. As he moves back to the sofa, on the screen and through the speakers, the machine fast-rewinds. He doesn't take much notice of it, though. He gathers up two of the carriers which appear to be filled with tinfoil-sealed instant meals and starts to go into the kitchen. As he does so, the answering machine starts to play back both sound and vision. An introductory beep. A logo appears: The Department of Social Services. ECONOMY. Except in special circumstances all calls made are NVR. 01-993-9000.*

MERVYN'S VOICE Mr Watkins, this is Mervyn Bickerdyke from the Department of Child Wellbeing…

JEROME *groans.*

I've been trying to get hold of you for some days now, regarding a meeting. The time is nine forty-six. I wonder if you would call me. My number is on screen. Thank you.

He hangs up. The screen blanks, the audio beeps. In a second, the next message appears.

JEROME *(on his way to the kitchen, in reply to* **MERVYN***)* No, I won't and I'm not.

JEROME *goes into the kitchen.*

A fanfare-like tune from the answering machine and a logo appears: BLAISE GILLESPIE—Escorts for the Discerning.

CHOIR *(singing, from the video)*

BLAISE GILLESPIE! A CALL FROM BLAISE GILLESPIE!

VOICE *(cheerfully)* Hallo, Mr Watkins, this is Mary Hope-Fitch, calling once again from the Blaise Gillespie Agency. It's ten-forty on Friday. Just to remind you of your appointment today with Zoë Mill who plans to be with you by fourteen hundred this afternoon. I hope that's still convenient. She's looking forward so much to meeting you. We feel certain she'll answer all your rather specialized requirements. If there's any problem at all, please don't hesitate to call. Thank you.

JEROME *returns from the kitchen for his third carrier bag.*

CHOIR *(singing, from the video)*

BLAISE GILLESPIE! A CALL FROM BLAISE GILLESPIE...

JEROME *(mimicking them)* From tone-deaf Blaise Gillespie...

Another couple of beeps as the message ends and moves on to the next. It is the same logo as the first call.

MERVYN'S VOICE Mr Watkins, this is Mervyn Bickerdyke, Department of Child Wellbeing...

JEROME *groans. And goes into the kitchen with the carrier.*

It is urgent that I speak to you. I realize you may be—busy with your compositions—but it is a matter of some importance. It's eleven seventeen and my number is on screen. Thank you.

JEROME *returns with one of the tinfoil food packages in one hand, a palm-sized section of printed circuitry in the other.*

A beep as the message ends on the answering machine.

Look what I've brought for you. *(He balances the circuitry casually on* **NAN***'s back as he passes her)* Who's a spoilt girl, then?

JEROME *sits on the sofa and studies his purchase. Another beep. The screen crackles and flickers with a fuzzy image that could be anyone's.*

ZOË'S VOICE *(faintly)* Hello, this is Zoë Mill. I'm from the Blaise Gillespie Agency. And it's eleven fifteen… Hallo? Hallo, this is Zoë… Hallo? Can you hear me? Oh, dammit…

Another beep. The screen clears. **JEROME***, unperturbed, continues to read. Another beep. Interference as before, if not worse.*

Hallo, this is… Oh, Jesus! Don't any of these bloody things work at…?

Another beep as **ZOË** *is cut off.* **JEROME** *reads on. As he does so, there is a swift beep—a yell from* **ZOË** *and another beep—qualifying as the shortest message ever.*

(in fury) Aaarrrgggh!

From the machine, another beep and **LUPUS** *appears on the screen. He is a forlorn sight, a harassed, careworn man in his forties. He wears a T-shirt reading MUSIC IS A LIVING THING. It appears he is at home, from*

the background we can see behind him. The sound of a child playing out of sight.

LUPUS'S VOICE Hallo, Jerry. It's me. Lupus. I thought I'd just call you, mate...

JEROME, *reacting to* **LUPUS***'s voice, gives a terrible groan.*

...keep you up to date with how things are—

A ball, presumably thrown by a child, bounces off **LUPUS***'s head. The child laughs.*

(ineffectually) Ah, now don't do that, Orson... That hurt Daddy. The point is, Jerry, it's come to the big N.C.H. Ultimatums from Deborah. Threats from the Bank Manager. I mean real threats, Jerry. Two heavy lads in camel-hair coats kicking at my front door. So it looks like I'm going to have to take that job with those geriatrics. I never thought it would get this desperate, Jerry. Look at me, I'm a top session-player—

He is struck again by a projectile.

Orson—don't do that, darling, Daddy's talking—Jesus—what am I reduced to—? —relief drummer in a three-piece band for an old folks' dance in Finchley. Who needs it, Jerry? Answer. I need it. Desperately I need it.

JEROME, *apparently following the instructions he has been studying, removes the tinfoil package from its sleeve and searches for an insulated surface. In the end he decides to place the container on one of his discarded items of clothing, a shirt, which he spreads on the coffee table.*

My God, I do. Because there's nothing else. But I don't have to tell you.

JEROME, *having positioned his container, holds it in one hand, and tugs at a red ring in the lid. This pulls out a length of metal strip which he is left holding in*

his other hand. He stares at both items suspiciously. **JEROME**, *during the next, goes to the answering machine, tossing aside the packet sleeve.*

And if Deborah leaves me, Jerry, which it looks as if she's going to—it's sorting out the suitcases time, you know—but if Deborah goes—on top of everything else… I mean, I've been a loving husband. I've been a forgiving husband. God, have I been forgiving? I let her play around with—every bastard who could make it up our stairs. Present company excepted. I just don't know what I'm going to do, old mate…

JEROME *pushes a button on the console and* **LUPUS** *goes fast-forward mode. He spools jerkily on for some time. The child-aimed missile hits him on the head as his high-speed twitters on.* **JEROME** *finishes his instructions. He shrugs and moves over to* **NAN**, *picks up the printed circuit card and examines it. He goes to a cupboard beneath the console and gets out a large loose-leaf manual. He studies this. As he does so,* **LUPUS***'s message on the tape ends, the machine beeps and resumes normal speed. Another beep. The screen reads: FAULT: VISION TEMPORARILY INOPERATIVE.*

ZOË'S VOICE *(rather distraught)* Hallo. This is Zoë Mill from the Blaise Gillespie Agency at—God, what's the time? —it's twelve thirty-one—All right? I've been trying to phone you for ages—Only none of the—And I keep getting your machine. My train is—my *bloody* train—pardon the language is delayed and I'm now at—God knows where I am—Oh, where the hell am I? Just hold on a second.

Station sounds as, apparently, she opens the call-box door.

(calling to someone) Excuse me! I say, excuse me. Could you tell me where I am, please? …Where? …Hendon Central? Thanks so much.

The door closes.

Hallo, I'm at a place called Hendon Central, apparently. So I don't know when I'll reach you. More important, I hope you're there because I'd hate to think I— *(She is interrupted by a series of beeps)* Oh, I've no more on my card, that's it. See you shortly. I hope. Otherwise I—

The screen goes dead and then reads: MESSAGES END. **JEROME** *remains impervious to this. He is still intently studying the manual. After a second, the screen blanks.*

JEROME *(at length)* All right. Let's see what we can do. *(He rather unceremoniously puts his hand up the back of* **NAN***'s skirt and fumbles for a moment)* Pardon me. *(There is a click and his hand re-emerges with an identical piece of printed circuitry)* Ah-ha!

He studies it critically for a moment and then throws it aside. His hand goes back under her dress as he replaces the circuit with the new piece. There is a series of clicks.

(as he does so) Now... I'm not supposed to be doing this, you know... If they caught me doing this...they'd...aaah! ...get in...they'd probably lock me up and melt you down for scrap... I had to steal this from a check-out machine at the supermarket when their backs were...aah!

A final click.

NAN *(a little sigh)* Aaah!

JEROME Ah! There you go. Good girl. Now.

He heaves **NAN** *round and sits her up on the sofa.*

God, you're a heavy old bag of bits. Come on.

He grabs her neck on either side, brings it sharply forward and then back. **NAN** *clicks. A male's voice, decidedly not hers, probably a long forgotten technician's, emanates from somewhere in* **NAN**.

VOICE NAN 300F, series four, model 99148622G for Gertie. System check commencing—Go.

NAN *goes through her pre-check routine. This is rapid and comprehensive. A great deal of internal computer chatter as systems load. Her eyes blink rapidly, her mouth flaps, every joint of her body tenses then relaxes. She rises, sits, her limbs jerk.*

NAN *(in her own voice, very rapidly)* Modified Sampling Commences. Oh-for-God's-sake-Jerome-can't-you-think-of-anyone-else-but-yourself-for-a-change-just-for-once-I-mean-what-sort-of-a-person-are-you? Modified Sampling Ends.

A few more whirrs and clicks.

System check complete. Operational eighty-three point one seven. We are sixteen point eight three per cent unstable and are within eight point one seven per cent of permanent shutdown. *(Cheerfully)* Clock set o-eight-hundred hours. Good-morning. Rise and shine.

JEROME Nan, walk about.

NAN Walk about, Nan.

She does so. She walks with a rather bouncy stride but has a slight limp. She clanks a little as she goes down on her bad leg. **JEROME** *watches her critically as she circles a couple of times.*

JEROME That's better. You're not bumping into things like you were. I've still got to fix your leg, though. It's the pivot. You need a new pivot, old girl. Only they've stopped making them, you see.

NAN *(banging into a piece of furniture)* Oh, for goodness' sake, you extremely stupid old bat. Who put that there, then?

This last reveals the slightly tetchier side of **NAN**. *In fact, as time goes on, we see that she is rather a Jekyll-and-Hyde creature. Her sunnier nature is the result of her initial "nanny" factory programming; her darker*

side the result of subsequent modifications by **JEROME** *himself—the source of which will become clearer later.*

JEROME Nan, come here.

NAN Coming, Nan.

NAN *comes to him and stops in front of him.*

JEROME That's it.

JEROME *crouches down and lifts her skirt to examine her knee. We see that at the knee joint her legs cease to be humanoid and are exposed metalwork.* **NAN** *licks her fingers and starts to smooth* **JEROME***'s hair.*

NAN That's better...

JEROME Don't do that...

NAN That's better.

JEROME Nan, stop.

NAN Stop, Nan.

NAN *stops. He rises.*

JEROME Nan, watch my finger.

NAN Watching your finger, Nan.

He moves his finger to and fro in front of her eyes. She follows it with her eyes very slowly.

JEROME Yes, I think we can sharpen your reflexes a bit.

He places his hand inside **NAN***'s blouse while continuing to move his other hand in front of her eyes.* **NAN***'s response quickens noticeably.*

That's it...that's better...

NAN *suddenly twitches violently.*

Whoops! Too much. Sorry. That's it. Nan, thank you.

NAN Thank you. Lovely glass of orange? Lovely orange?

JEROME Nan, lovely.

NAN Lovely. Lovely morning. Rise and shine.

She bounces off to the kitchen.

JEROME *(glancing at his watch)* Oh, I never set your clock, did I? Never mind. You're better than you were.

He goes to the console and plays with a few switches. From the kitchen a crash.

NAN *(offstage)* Oh, for goodness' sake, you extremely stupid old bat. Who put that there, then?

JEROME *frowns but ignores the sound. He puts on some Bach. It relaxes him. The phone rings. He makes no effort to answer it. It continues to ring.*

JEROME Go away, Lupus, I'm not here. *(He notices suddenly that his meal is still sitting there in its tinfoil)* Oh, no! *(He grabs hold of the tinfoil package. It is very hot. Dropping it)* Ah! *(He picks it up with the shirt it was standing on and cautiously, still protecting his hands, he opens the lid. The contents are black and charred and smoking. Disgustedly)* Oh, miraculous. *(He drops the tinfoil back on the table)*

NAN *comes in with a mug in her hand. It is unfortunately empty since she is holding it upside down.*

NAN *(placing the inverted mug on the table by* **JEROME***)* Lovely glass of orange. *(heading towards the bedrooms)* Lovely morning, wakey-wakey.

NAN *goes into the bedroom.*

JEROME *(staring at the mug in disgust)* You load of old scrap. *(He is about to drop the shirt, too, when he observes that it now has a burn mark on it, left from the heated tinfoil. Equally)* Oh, mind-numbing. *(He lies on the sofa for a moment absorbing the music)*

NAN *enters with a face flannel in her hand. She makes a beeline for* **JEROME**.

NAN *(playfully)* Booo! Nan's coming to getcher!

NAN *attacks his face vigorously with a flannel.* **JEROME** *struggles. She is apparently quite strong.*

JEROME Waah! Noff.

NAN Come along, wash your face and hands before your breakfast!

JEROME Wah! Noff! *(Getting his mouth clear)* Nan off! Nan off!

NAN *stops at once.*

NAN That's better.

JEROME I am reprogramming you. You've taken a layer of skin off my face. You do that again and I'm stripping you down for spares and then dropping you off a twenty-storey building—

NAN Story-time, now...

JEROME Oh, God...

NAN Once upon a time there were three bears called Jack and Jill who wanted to go to the ball only the other ducklings wouldn't let her play with them...

JEROME Nan, stop.

NAN Stopped, Nan.

JEROME Nan, register.

NAN Register, Nan.

JEROME *(standing in front of her so she can scan his face)* Not child. Not child.

NAN Not child. Registered, Nan.

JEROME Nan, take a nap.

NAN Take a nap, Nan.

JEROME *(muttering)* I don't know why I bothered to switch you on again, really.

She heads back to the bedrooms.

NAN *(turning suddenly tearful, in her other tone)* I don't know why I bother, Jerome, I really don't. When you treat me like this. I've done everything I possibly can. I can't cope any more. If you want to go and live with her, I don't care. Go on! Go on! Go and live with the bloody woman. See if I care.

She goes out to the bedrooms.

JEROME *frowns. He sits. The Bach continues to play. After a moment, there is a crash from the bedroom.* **JEROME** *gets up.*

(offstage) Oh, for goodness' sake, you extremely stupid old bat. Who put that there, then?

JEROME *sits once again and closes his eyes, assured of peace at last. After a second, the doorbell rings. The screen lights up once more. It is the video entry-phone system again.* **ZOË** *is at the front door. She is breathless and disheveled.*

ZOË *(from the screen)* Mr Watkins...

JEROME *(disturbed again)* I don't believe this...

ZOË Mr Watkins! This is Zoë Mill from the Blaise Gillespie Agency. Would you let me in, please? *(She looks anxiously over her shoulder and rings the doorbell again)*

JEROME *crosses to the console. He switches off the music.*

(urgently) Mr Watkins! Please!

JEROME *(pressing the door button at the console)* All right! Push the door.

ZOË Mr Watkins, open the door...

JEROME Push it. It's open...

ZOË Oh, please say you're in. Please God you're at home... *(She rings the bell again)*

JEROME *(yelling)* It's open. Push the door!

ZOË I'm going to break it down, Mr Watkins.

We see her, on screen, step back and run at the door. **JEROME** *presses the door button long and hard.* **ZOË** *hits the door which opens easily. She disappears.*

A second later, she appears in the room, a tattered, breathless wreck. She pulls up short, breathing heavily.

JEROME *stares at her incredulously.*

(attempting a semblance of dignity) Mr Watkins? How do you do. I am sorry to burst in like this. My name is Zoë Mill. From the Blaise Gillespie Agency.

JEROME *stares at her stupefied.*

(after a pause) I hope they advised you I was coming, I... *(She trails away)*

On screen, the view of the hallway remains.

JEROME *(suddenly aware of this)* You've left my front door open...

He rushes out of the room into the hall, seizing his walking stick as he goes.

ZOË, *alarmed, flinches slightly as he dashes past her.* **JEROME** *appears briefly on the video screen. We see that his stick is in fact a swordstick which he has now drawn. He checks to left and right, then closes the door. The screen goes blank.*

JEROME *returns, sword still drawn.*

ZOË *watches him, transfixed.* **JEROME** *sheathes his sword and replaces the stick near the door.*

Never leave my front door open.

ZOË *(muted)* No. I'm sorry. *(Pause)* You see, there were these people—

JEROME I know there are these people. Why the hell do you think I keep it shut?

ZOË Yes.

Another pause. **JEROME** *stares at her.* **ZOË** *tries to pull herself together. It is difficult for her. Her clothes are in ribbons, her face is bleeding from a cut and her hands are torn and filthy. She has lost one shoe and is holding the other. Her stockings are in shreds. She obviously started out looking quite elegant in her smart suit and crisp blouse.*

JEROME *(aware he has been rather rude)* Sorry.

ZOË No, no. I'm sorry. *(Brightly)* Well, here I am. At last. *(She laughs nervously)* What a super room.

JEROME *is staring at her. A pause.*

(nervously indicating a seat) Is this—for sitting on?

JEROME *(guardedly)* Yes.

ZOË Well. Would you mind if I...?

JEROME No.

ZOË Thanks very much.

She sits. **JEROME** *continues to stand, staring at her. She gives a sudden, quite unexpected, reflex sob as the shock begins to take hold but elects to continue as if it hadn't happened.*

I'm sorry if I'm looking a bit of a—I must do a bit. I'm sorry. Anyway, I understood this was just an initial interview. Mrs Hope-Fitch told me you just wanted to look at me. See if I was suitable. But I believe the actual job's not for a week or so? Have I got that right? *(She sobs)* Excuse me. Yes?

JEROME *(thoughtfully)* Yes.

ZOË *(indicating herself)* Look, you'll just have to disregard all this. I mean, *this* is ghastly. But I can—you may not believe this—I can look pretty good. Although I say it myself. Yes? But as I say, not—Don't, for God's sake, go by this. *(She sobs)* Sorry.

Silence.

Would you like me to—walk up and down? Give you an overall picture? People sometimes find it helps them to—get a more general... Of course, I don't know quite what you're looking for so it's a bit... I understood it was slightly unusual? Is that so? *(She sobs)*

JEROME *(thoughtfully)* Yes.

ZOË I'll stand up. *(She does so)* There.

JEROME *studies her.*

Five foot four and a bit. I can lose a bit more weight if you like. I'm a bit over my usual... *(She sobs)* I'll walk about for you. In case you need me to walk. *(She walks about, limping slightly)* By the way, I don't usually limp, of course. Please, disregard that. I just seem to have bashed my knee—Anyway. And, naturally, with heels on I'm that bit taller. They help no end, of course, with all sorts of things. God, look at my legs. Don't look at those, either. I'm sorry, I'm afraid you're just going to have to take my word for an awful lot of things. *(She sobs)* Look, I'm awfully sorry, I think I'm just going to have to go away somewhere and have a quick cry. I'm sorry, I'm just in a bit of a state. I am sorry. Is there a...? Have you got a...?

JEROME Oh yes, yes, sure. There's one just out there. First on the left. *(He indicates towards the bedrooms)*

ZOË I'll be as quick as I can. I'm so sorry.

ZOË *plunges out of the room. As she reaches the offstage bathroom door, we hear the sudden start of her tears, then the slamming of the door.*

JEROME *stares after her, thoughtfully. He goes to his console and winds back a tape. He replays a section.*

ZOË'S RECORDED VOICE ...all sorts of things. God, look at my legs. Don't look at those, either. I'm sorry, I'm afrai—

Her voice cuts off as **JEROME** *stops the tape. He shrugs. He switches the machine back to record. He waits. He fades up a fader on the panel.* **ZOË***'s sobs are heard over the speaker and the sound of her blowing her nose.*

ZOË *(over the speakers)* Oh, dear God...

JEROME *fades her down and moves away from the console.*

After a moment, **ZOË** *returns with a handful of tissues, wiping her nose.*

Sorry about that. Here I am. Back again. Anyway, where was I? Yes. Let me tell you about me. I'm originally an actress. Still am, actually. Only I also model occasionally to keep the wolf from the door. And I've been doing this escort thing lately which has been very interesting. Only I understood you didn't just want an escort, you wanted something slightly more. So that's probably why they thought of me. I did have some pictures and my CV to show you as well, only they took my briefcase. *(Getting tearful again)* It wasn't even as if there was anything in there... Sorry. There were these terrifying girls, you see...

JEROME Girls?

ZOË Who attacked me. Just now. On my way here.

JEROME Attacked you?

ZOË Girls. Women. I don't know.

JEROME What did you do to them?

ZOË *(rather indignantly)* I didn't do anything. I was just quietly walking here from the station. It was a lovely day and I—

JEROME *Walked?*

ZOË Yes.

JEROME You walked from the railway station to here?

ZOË Yes. I've just said. And then these monsters...came from nowhere. What sort of area is this? Don't you have any police at all? Any security patrols?

JEROME Not any more.

ZOË Neighbourhood vigilantes?

JEROME Not lately.

ZOË You mean, this area is not protected? At all? What about this building?

JEROME The security staff kept being found dead. It got very expensive...

ZOË My God. Mrs Hope-Fitch might have warned me.

JEROME What did these people look like?

ZOË Oh. *(She shudders)* Awful. No hair at all. Not on their heads, anyway. Masses of it everywhere else. And sort of purple paint across here. *(She indicates a band across the middle of her face)*

JEROME No, that's a tattoo.

ZOË Really?

JEROME They're the Daughters of Darkness.

ZOË Oh. They were female then.

JEROME Most of them.

ZOË Well, whatever they were. I didn't stop to introduce myself. I hit the biggest of them and ran as fast as I could...

JEROME *(stunned)* You hit a Daughter of Darkness?

ZOË Yes. On the head. With my shoe.

JEROME Ah.

ZOË Am I supposed to have done something wrong?

JEROME Well, I don't think you should have done that.

ZOË Why not?

JEROME Well, you may have got them angry.

ZOË Angry? What about my briefcase...

JEROME Was there anything important in your briefcase?

ZOË No, I've just said, just my—

JEROME Then it would have been simpler to have given it to them.

ZOË But I don't see why I should have just handed it over. It was a present from my ex-boyfriend.

JEROME You may have made things difficult.

ZOË *(sarcastically)* Well, oh dear, oh dear. That's all I can say.

JEROME For you.

ZOË How do you mean?

JEROME Well. When you want to get back, they may not let you back...

ZOË You mean...? But...? How do I...? I can't stay here indefinitely, can I?

JEROME No, no...

ZOË If they won't let me out, then we'd better call the police, hadn't we? Or whatever it is that passes for the law round here...

JEROME I'm afraid that's them. They pass for the law round here. They are the law.

ZOË The Daughters of—

JEROME Darkness. Yes. Currently.

ZOË Well, in that case, I'm sorry. I had no idea I was hitting a policeman, I can assure you. Where I come from they don't have purple stripes tattooed across their faces. You mean this is a genuine no-go area? My God, I've only read about them till now. Mind you, I've never been this far up the Northern Line before. Where are we? Somewhere extraordinary. Edgware. I went to Balham once but that's the other way, isn't it? How absolutely terrifying. So what happens now?

JEROME It's all right. I'll talk to them. I have a relationship with them. Of sorts. I do things for them, now and then.

ZOË Do what?

JEROME I help rig their sound gear when they have their big concerts. Things like that.

ZOË Oh, how interesting. Are you a roadie?

JEROME Not really. It's just a hobby.

ZOË What is it you do?

JEROME I'm a composer.

ZOË How amazing. Well. Hence— *(She indicates the sound console)* —hence all that.

A sudden violent clang from one of the windows. **ZOË** *is startled.*

What on earth is that?

JEROME That's the Daughters.

ZOË What are they doing?

JEROME Throwing bricks at the window shutters. They're showing their displeasure.

Another clang. **ZOË** *winces.*

It's all right, they're half-inch steel. They'll probably keep this up for an hour or two. Till they think of something else to do.

Another clang.

ZOË Lucky you had your shutters closed.

JEROME Hardly lucky. They're welded to the window frames. They haven't been opened in four years.

Another clang. She winces.

ZOË They can't get in, can they?

JEROME Not unless they can jump thirty feet. It's all right.

Another clang. A silence.

I think they've gone.

They listen again.

Yes.

She relaxes slightly. A pause.

It's quieter where you live, then?

ZOË Yes, we're—pretty lucky in Kilburn. Regular armed patrols, masses of security cameras and so on. Very well lit, most of it. I mean, actually, the High Street's brighter at night than it is in the daytime. Providing you're in by dusk you're fine. I've had no trouble. Not really. Couple of burglaries, that's all. Oh, and my dog was shot, that was sad, but we think that was an accident. We think someone must have mistaken him for a police dog.

JEROME Shame. We?

ZOË My ex-boyfriend.

JEROME Ah.

ZOË He's still living with me but he's definitely my ex-boyfriend. Still. Enough about me. To business.

JEROME Yes.

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