

SOMETHING BORROWED

(A 40 minute Stage Play)

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CHARACTERS

Rosemary a woman in her late 40s.
Mrs Williams her mother aged 75.
Donald their middle-aged neighbour.

SET

The play is set in Rosemary and Mrs William's cluttered living room. There is a small kitchen just visible stage left, and a large window which gives onto the garden. As the lights rise, birds can be heard singing merrily.

Rose (seated by the window, struggling with calculator and paperwork) Figures!
Numbers! Nothing makes sense in spring. (pause) Twelve percent of thirty seven pounds? Oh, what's the point?

Moth (enters stage right) Not finished yet? He'll be here soon.

Rose I know that.

Moth Make sure you check it out in long hand. I don't trust those calculator things.
Everything has to go so fast these days. There's no time for thoroughness any more.

Rose A calculator is thorough.

Moth Those birds are driving me mad. (she closes the window) All that twittering and tweeting.

Rose I'm trying to concentrate, mother.

Moth (dismissive) Yes, yes. (she shuffles to her armchair and sits down painfully) Ah, that's better. Rest my joints a bit. My back's playing up dreadfully. (pause) I said, my back's playing up dreadfully.

Rose (annoyed) Do you want me to stop?

Moth (pause) You'll see. They've charged us £18.50 too much.

Rose It's very difficult to work bills out so exactly.

Moth We've got the meter readings, we've kept last year's bills. Gas has gone up 6 percent spread over . . .

Rose £18.50 is such a small amount.

Moth Is it now? I'll thank you not to talk about my money in that fashion. After all, where would you be without it?

Rose (pause) You know I'm grateful, mother, but . . .

Moth No ifs or buts. I want every penny accounted for. (pause) Now where's my needlepoint? I can never find anything when I want it.

Rose Under the chair.

Moth Oh, so it is. I wonder how it got there? (starts to embroider) Still no word from Aunt Ginny. She could at least have thanked us for the headscarf. I thought the colour was very wearable.

Rose (refers to paper work definitively) They haven't over-charged us. It all adds up.

Moth I don't see how it can do. The radiators were turned on as usual on the first of December. We kept the thermostat constant. We had one cooked meal a day . . .

Rose Perhaps the hot water . . .

Moth Bath times Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. Wash days on Tuesdays.

Rose Perhaps the washing machine's less efficient now. It is 12 years old.

Moth Rosemary, you're blushing. We both know what that means.

Rose I just think . . .

Moth There's no need to think if you tell the truth. Thinking is for liars.

Rose (pause) It was exceptionally cold in January.

Moth Not exceptional, as I recall.

Rose (petulant) That's because I put the heating up for you.

Moth (catching her out) Aha.

Rose Your back . . . I thought . . . I didn't realise it would make such a difference.

Moth Was that the only thing you did? (pause) Look me in the eye. Rosemary? (Rosemary does so) Good. I believe you. If there's one thing I detest and that's being lied to. You've no idea how pathetic you look when you lie. You remind me of your father. He never had the courage to lie well. He would always let himself down at the last moment. Of course, I had no option but to let him off the hook. What else can one do with a weak man but carry him?

Rose (checks watch and hurriedly clears away paperwork) Now I'm running late . . . (drops some papers) Oh, damn.

Moth You're such a flutterer, Rosemary. Look at you. Fluttering again. When I was your age I had three children, your father was dying of cancer and we were about to lose the business. There was no time for fluttering. I had to act.

Rose (busying herself with tidying up) Yes, mother.

Moth I've had a hard life. A very hard life. But do you ever hear me complain?

Rose Do I have to answer that, mother?

Moth I've made it all too comfortable for you.

Rose Comfortable?

Moth Even when you were born. Bawling your head off while I lay there pouring out my life blood. You very nearly killed me.

Rose (pepping up) Did I?

Moth You were a very difficult birth. (pause) The others were easy in comparison.

Rose I was the first. It's always more difficult with the first.

Moth Especially Hazel. It was a positive delight putting Hazel into the world. And even Michael, even he . . .

Rose You're just trying to upset me because you know Donald's coming.

Moth Why should I want to upset you because Mr Greenham's coming?

Rose (checks watch) He's late.

Moth He's got another five minutes.

Rose (starts to dust the furniture) I expect he's been held up at work.

Moth Rosemary, you know I hate it when you dust. It makes me ill.

Rose Then move into the other room.

Moth I don't want to move.

Rose Stay, then.

Moth It'll be you who has to nurse my asthma.

Rose Don't get morbid, mother.

Moth Mind the carriage clock. You're going to knock it over.

Rose I don't want him to get the wrong impression.

Moth You know how fond I am of that clock. It's been with me since I was a little girl.

Rose Mother, you never were a little girl.

Moth That's very cruel, Rosemary. (pause) Hazel would never say anything like that to me.

Rose Oh, Hazel's so bloody perfect.

Moth Language!

Rose She never makes mistakes, does she?

Moth Very few. Leaving home was one of them.

Rose She seems happy enough on it.

Moth She'd be a lot happier if she'd listened to me.

Rose She's still be here if she'd listened to you.

Moth She'd have made a better match, and a lot nearer home.

Rose Aha! A lot nearer home.

Moth Aberdeen, I ask you. When I think of the sacrifices that girl has had to make for him.

Rose It's no sacrifice.

Moth I miss her.

Rose You were always arguing. The things you used to say to her.

Moth The things she used to say to me!

Rose Hazel had guts.

Moth It was you who encouraged her.

Rose Rubbish.

Moth Oh, I could see you at work, quietly in the background, too timid to do your own dirty business, but always delighted if Hazel did it for you.

Rose That's not true.

Moth We were happy. We could have stayed like that for the rest of our lives. (rises and moves over to look at a framed photo of her children) I tried so hard to keep it together for you all after your father died. I wanted the best for you.

Rose (softens) Hazel still loves you.

Moth From afar. For the price of a postage stamp.

Rose I love you.

Moth Do you?

Rose (hesitant) Yes.

Moth Then why do you dust when I'm in the room?

Rose You're not easy to please, mother. God knows we try. Even Michael . . .

Moth We don't discuss Michael.

Rose He is your son.

Moth A coincidence. I happened to be present at his birth, and so did he.

Rose One day, you'll see, he'll come back.

Moth One day I'll be dead, and much he'll care about it. (sighs) I'll end up just like Mr Greenham's mother - a little jar of ashes waiting to fertilise the soil.

Rose Mother, please.

Moth Funny woman. Hardly said two words to us in all those years. Well she'll be saying nothing more now, that's for sure. (pause) I wonder how he'll cope. (she moves over to inspect the dusting) You've chipped the dresser.

Rose It's been like that for months.

Moth I didn't say you'd chipped it today.

Rose That's what you meant though.

Moth It'll have to be mended.

Rose (panicking) We don't have time.

Moth I didn't say now. You're getting fluttery again, Rosemary.

Rose No I'm not.

Moth (pause) He's a good-looking man for his age, isn't he?

Rose Who?

Moth Mr Greenham.

Rose Not particularly.

Moth Shy of course, but that might change now he's alone. Now there's a thought, Rosemary.

Rose (nervous) I'd better check the tea things.

Moth He will be touched to know how much effort you've put into his visit.

Rose (horrified) You're not going to tell him?

Moth I can read you like a book. Cover to cover. (Rosemary heads off to the kitchen)

Rose (lights rise on Rosemary in the kitchen) Same old cupboards, same old wallpaper. I'll grow old in this place. Hers. Never father's. Never ours. Her bricks. Her mortar. (drops a plate) Damn!

Moth (from living room) Rosemary?

Rose (shouts to mother) It's alright, mother. I haven't broken it. (to herself) Always watching, always listening. She's going to ruin it. She'll take over and I'll just stand there and watch. (pause) Why couldn't Hazel have taken me up to Scotland? I'm five years older, five years more forgettable.

Moth (rises from chair) Rosemary, what are you doing in there? (slowly moves towards

the kitchen)

Rose (shouts to mother) Get on with your needlepoint, mother. (to herself) Dearest Donald. I know we've only had the odd chat about wheelie bins and things, but . . . I can see a change in you. You want what I want. Oh, we'll be so happy together. You fixing the lights, me wiping our crockery. And there's roast chicken for dinner. I've done it just the way you like with onion and apple stuffing. (giggles) No, no. After dinner darling, after dinner. I'll change into my lovely new neglige. It's blue. Blue with little bits of lace all down the front. It's very flimsy. (pause) Dearest darling, tell me you love me, just one more time.

Moth (entering kitchen) Talking to yourself, Rosemary?

Rose Oh ! It's you.

Moth Who did you expect? The Archangel Gabriel? (sighs) Stop dithering. It gets on my nerves. Now, have we got a doily on each plate? Three biscuits per person. And no sugar unless he asks. Well? Pick up the tray, and bring it in.

Rose Yes mother. (follows her with the tea tray)

Moth I expect underneath it all, he's glad his mother's finally done the decent thing.

Rose What do you mean?

Moth Died, of course. Which child isn't glad for the death of an inconvenience? Oh, don't pretend you won't dance on my grave when I'm gone. I hear you practising most mornings.

Rose That's my aerobics, mother. (pause) We'll all be very upset when you . . . you know.

Moth Michael too?

Rose Especially Michael. He'll feel dreadful.

Moth He'll feel even more dreadful when he sees the will. (pause) The Last Will and Testament - it's a great moment in a person's life. Almost like rising from the dead. (pause) Well, aren't you going to ask me?

Rose I'm not interested.

Moth You're dying to ask me.

Rose I don't care about your will. You can change it as often as you like.

Moth Is he in, or is he out, I wonder? Because if he's in, you automatically get less. But if he's out, you could get more.

Rose What I've done for you, I haven't done for money. I've done it out of love, respect . . . duty.

Moth Duty. That's a very cold word, Rosemary. (pause) Put the silver spoons out. That'll impress him.

Rose You said no sugar.

Moth I like to think we have a choice. (the doorbell rings)

Rose Oh!

Moth (checks her watch) Bang on time.

Rose He must be feeling dreadfully nervous.

Moth Why should he feel nervous? He's hardly come to ask for your hand in marriage. (bell rings again) (teasing) Or has he?

Rose (checks herself in mirror) Oh.

Moth (heads to the door) Try and do something with your hair, Rosemary. It's looking like a bush again. (points to the apron Rosemary is still wearing) Apron. (exits)

Rose (pulls off apron and fixes hair in front of mirror) He's going to hate me. He's going to wonder why he ever came. Oh, what's wrong with it? (trying to calm herself) Calm yourself, Rosemary. Think of the birds. Think of the spring. (quoting a self-help affirmation) "I totally love and accept myself."

Moth Go right through, Mr Greenham. Make yourself at home.

Don Thank you.

Moth Rosemary, take Mr Greenham's coat for him.

Don (looking around as he enters) Lovely wallpaper. Goes with the carpet. (pulling off his coat, his hand gets stuck) Blast. (his hand is stuck)

Rose Can I help?

Don No, no, no. (still struggling)

Ros Are you sure?

Don Yes, yes. The lining's a bit torn, that's all. (frees his hand) There.

Moth (having returned to the room) A free man at last. (Donald and Rosemary laugh nervously)

Rose (takes the coat) What a lovely shade of grey. (goes and hangs it up)

Don Thank you.

Moth Do take the armchair, Mr Greenham.

Don (checks other chairs) What about you?

Moth These days I can't use it, I'm afraid. My back.

Don I bought mother a Parker Knowle. Made all the difference. Getting up and sitting down, you know; that sort of thing.

Moth Too expensive, I'm afraid.

Don It was money well spent.

Moth (sitting down painfully) Ah. (sighs) Who'd grow old, eh, Mr Greenham?

Don (sits in the armchair) I've kept the catalogue, if you'd like to borrow it. (Rosemary re-enters)

Moth Rosemary, come and sit down here, where Mr Greenham can have a good look at you.

Rose (under her breath) Mother!

Moth (to Donald) You've no idea how much she's been looking forward to your visit. Been a busy little bee in the kitchen, haven't you?

Rose (hastily) Any excuse and I'm up to my elbows in flour.

Don Mother was a wonderful cook.

Rose Do you like rock cakes? I've made them specially.

Don It's exactly one month since she died.

Moth How very distressing for you. (pause) I'm so sorry we didn't know about the funeral.

Rose We would have sent flowers.

Moth (long pause) Would you like some tea, Mr Greenham?

Don Oh, yes, thank you.

Rose We've got a choice - Earl Grey, Darjeling, PG Tips, or we can mix them for you. Do you take milk? Perhaps you don't. Perhaps you take it continental.

Moth Stop twittering, Rosemary. I shall take care of tea. Earl Grey in the afternoon. (to Donald) I hope that suits. If you'll excuse me a moment. (Donald leaps up to help her) No, no, no. I'll manage. Thank you. (she heads for the kitchen)

Rose (after a long embarrassed silence) They say . . .

Don (simultaneously) Mother would have . . .

Rose (embarrassed laugh) I'm sorry. (indicates he should continue) Please.

Don No, no, no. You were saying?

Rose I was just going to say . . . Majorca's rather beautiful, in spring.

Don Oh. Yes. (long pause) I'm sure it's lovely in summer too.

Rose Yes.

Don (pause) Hot.

Rose Are you?

Don No, Majorca.

Rose Yes. (pause) Very hot.

Don (pause) When did you go?

Rose I haven't.

Don You've not been?

Rose I've read about it in the brochures. Miles of beaches, little fishing villages. Very romantic.

Don We never go abroad.

Rose Oh.

Don Mother used to say, why pay out good money for insect bites and Delhi Belly? (pause) Wales. (clarifying) The country. (pause) Not so hot.

Rose No. (rises) But very beautiful all the same. Don't you think the blossom's wonderful this year? (goes to the window) Look. Daffodils. Even the tulips are starting. Doesn't it make you want to . . . sing? Digging, trowelling, waiting. At the time it seems so much effort, so much wasted time. But now . . . now, it suddenly makes sense.

Don (pause) I wish I had green fingers.

Rose Oh, but you could have, Donald. Nature is so seductive if you let her.

Moth (bringing in the boiled kettle) Don't let me interrupt anything. It's such a pleasure hearing a man's voice in the house again.

Rose We were talking about the garden, weren't we, Donald?

Moth We miss a man's conversation. Nothing but women's voices day in, day out.

Don But women's voices are so comforting, don't you think? (stops abruptly)

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