

**The Avenue**

By Christian O'Reilly

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## Characters

Jimmy, 30s

Norita, 30

Maureen, 50s

Robert, 50s

Gerard, 30s

## Scene One

*The living room of a council house built in 1973, but with the trappings and mod cons of today. Stage left is a door that leads onto the street. There are stairs as you enter, leading to bedrooms upstairs. A worn sofa faces the audience. A television, its back to the audience, sits in the corner of the room, angled towards the sofa. A small kitchen is stage right. A bottle of beer sits on the coffee table, opened. An ashtray sits on the right-sided arm of the sofa (as it faces us).*

*Jimmy enters carrying some item of clothing in his hands. He opens it out to reveal a pretty dress. He holds it against his body, slightly anxious. He takes a sip of beer and turns on the television with the remote control – Champions League soccer in on. He glances at the score and turns his attention again to the dress. He folds it carefully, but with the awkwardness of a man not used to folding women's clothes. He places it gently on the coffee table, first removing the bottle of beer, then wiping with his sleeve the water mark left by the beer on the table.*

*He goes to the kitchen, opens a few drawers, searches for and finds what he's looking for – a scissors, sellotape and a roll of wrapping paper. He sits down on the right hand side of the sofa – the place he always occupies when seated on the sofa – and opens up the wrapping paper on the coffee table. He places the dress carefully at the centre of it. He cuts off a piece that is way too big and folds the edges of the paper together. He looks for the sellotape, but realises he has yet to cut off a piece of that. Using one hand to hold the two ends of the paper together, he picks up the sellotape with his other hand and tries to bite off a piece of tape with his teeth. He tries a few times, but gives up, realising this is futile.*

*He lets go of the paper and cuts off a piece of sellotape. He closes the two ends of the paper together and joins them with sellotape. He proceeds to wrap the present with as much care as he can, but his work is clumsy and awkward – and he knows it and it bothers him. But he holds the gift in his hands when it is done, dissatisfied, but relieved. He places it gently back on the coffee table as if it was a crown being rested on the head of a princess. The doorbell rings.*

*Panic-stricken, he hurriedly puts the sellotape, scissors and wrapping paper into the drawers of the kitchen. He rushes back to the dress as the doorbell rings again. He picks it up, looks all*

*around, unsure where to put it. He hears a key in the latch and quickly puts the gift under the left-sided cushion of the sofa. He sits down on the other cushion and the door opens. He lights a cigarette and slouches back. (This is how we will find him for much of the play – in front of the television. Even in conversation he remains by and large facing the television. He is not a man for eye contact, favouring avoidance.) Norita enters, carrying a six-pack of beer. He doesn't look over at her. She crosses over to the kitchen with the beer, puts it into the fridge.*

**Norita** Why didn't you open the door?

**Jimmy** You have your own key, haven't you?

**Norita** My arms were full carrying beer for you.

**Jimmy** How did you ring the doorbell so?

**Norita** I had to use my nose.

*He glances over at her, sees that she has her head buried in the small fridge looking for space for the beer. He takes out the present, looks around desperately for somewhere else to hide it.*

**Norita** Any score?

*He shoves the present back under the sofa cushion.*

**Norita** *(Coming over to him.)* Any score, I said?

**Jimmy** Sure can't you see it on the television?

**Norita** I'm after coming in with beer for you.

**Jimmy** I'm watching the match.

**Norita** I'm here to watch it with you.

**Jimmy** You know well I prefer watching it on my own.

**Norita** Will I go 'way so? Will I leave the beer after me?

*Norita returns to the kitchen to get herself a beer.*

**Jimmy** Nil-nil.

**Norita** To who?

**Jimmy** To who?

**Norita** I thought you said one-nil.

*She comes over to sit beside him – and is about to sit on top of the cushion which conceals the present.*

**Jimmy** What are you doing?

**Norita** I'm sitting beside you.

**Jimmy** You can't sit there, I need my space.

**Norita** I always sit beside you.

**Jimmy** If a goal is scored and my arms are flying, I don't want to break your nose.

**Norita** I'll take my chances.

*She sits down before Jimmy can react. He watches the cushion sink down, half afraid that she may hear the crinkle of the wrapping paper, but more concerned that she has undone all his good work. She stares at the TV, oblivious and sips her beer. He closes his eyes in anguish and sits back, defeated.*

**Norita** Can I've the wing?

*He opens out his arm, inviting her into his chest. She snuggles into his chest, pleased, but he is cross with her now. He resumes smoking.*

**Norita** Are you going to give me a cigarette?

**Jimmy** How can I watch the match if you keep asking me for cigarettes and what the score is?

**Norita** I dunno, with your eyes, I suppose.

**Jimmy** Take a cigarette if you want one.

**Norita** I will not take a cigarette.

**Jimmy** Why are you asking me for one so?

**Norita** Because it's a test.

**Jimmy** What kind of a test? A test to drive me mad?

**Norita** I'm trying to be responsible.

*Pause. No response from him.*

**Norita** For when we're married. For when we have a child. I've been getting that milk with the folic acid.

*Jimmy rolls his eyes to Heaven. Not this again.*

**Norita** Do you want a beer?

**Jimmy** I have a beer.

**Norita** Do you want another beer?

**Jimmy** Jesus Christ.

**Norita** I hope our child never talks like that.

**Jimmy** Are you going to watch this?

*She shrugs.*

**Jimmy** 'Cos if you're not, I'm going down to Walsh's.

*Silence as they watch it.*

**Norita** Did you have your tea yet?

**Jimmy** I had my tea two hours ago.

**Norita** Had you? (*Pause.*) You're probably hungry again. Will I make you a sandwich?

**Jimmy** No.

**Norita** No what?

**Jimmy** No you won't make me a sandwich if you know what's good for you.

**Norita** If I know what's good for me? (*Retreating on the sofa.*) Is that a threat?

**Jimmy** What?

**Norita** (*Standing.*) You're threatening your own fiancée. Why – what are you going to do to me?

**Jimmy** Norita...

**Norita** No, what are you going to do to me, Jimmy? What are you going to do to me if I make you a cheese sandwich?

*Pause. He frowns, puzzled.*

**Jimmy** You never said it was a *cheese* sandwich.

**Norita** What difference does it make what class of a sandwich it is? A sandwich is a sandwich.

**Jimmy** A sandwich is not a sandwich. It depends what you put into it.

**Norita** The point is, you were threatening me. What I want to know is, what you're threatening me with.

*Pause.*

**Jimmy** Go ahead and make the sandwich and you'll find out.

**Norita** Go ahead and make the sandwich?

**Jimmy** Go on.

**Norita** I will.

**Jimmy** Go on!

**Norita** I will!

**Jimmy** Will you go on!

**Norita** I will when I'm ready!

**Jimmy** Will you make the sandwich, Norita?

**Norita** How can I make the sandwich when I don't know what to put into it?

**Jimmy** It doesn't make a difference what you put into it.

**Norita** I'm not putting something into it you don't want put into it.

*Pause. He can't believe this.*

**Jimmy** Peanut butter.

**Norita** Peanut butter? Does she have peanut butter?

**Jimmy** No.

**Norita** Then how am I supposed to put it into a sandwich?

*Pause.*

**Norita** You want me to go.

*Pause.*

**Norita** You want me to go.

**Jimmy** I want to watch the match.

**Norita** And me after bringing beer for you. And offering to make you sandwiches.

**Jimmy** Sandwiches now, is it? I thought it was only the one.

**Norita** I love you, Jimmy. I'll make as many as you want.

*She cries.*

**Norita** *(Sobbing.)* I'll make as many as you want, I'll put into them whatever you want.

*She turns away, crying. He lifts up the cushion and looks at the crumpled present in despair. He lets the cushion drop. He looks at Norita. He can't bear to see her like this. He goes over to her.*

**Norita** Leave me alone. Watch your match.

**Jimmy** *(Sincere.)* I'm watching my match.



**Norita** What?

**Jimmy** I'm watching my match.

*She turns, realises he means her. She is delighted. She hugs him.*

**Norita** I love it when you say romantic things to me. You don't do it near enough.

**Jimmy** I do it the whole time, you just don't hear me.

**Norita** That's such a lie.

**Jimmy** Alright so, I'm a liar.

*He sits back down again, concentrates on the television.*

**Norita** If you said romantic things to me the whole time, I'd hear them. If you think a girl don't hear romantic things, you're off your head.

**Jimmy** Anyway.

**Norita** Anyway? *(Pause.)* That's it?

**Jimmy** You've stopped crying now.

**Norita** Is that the only time I can get any attention – when I'm in floods of tears over something mean you said to me?

**Jimmy** Isn't it as good a time as any?

**Norita** I'm getting out of here.

**Jimmy** Good.

**Norita** I'm getting out of here, I said.

**Jimmy** And I said, 'good'.

**Norita** You don't mean that. You don't mean that, Jimmy.

**Jimmy** Don't I?

*She moves towards the door. He looks at her, guilty.*

**Jimmy** I thought you wanted to find out what would happen if you made me a sandwich.

**Norita** Well I don't. I've changed my mind.

**Jimmy** *(She is about to leave.)* Will I show you?

**Norita** No.

**Jimmy** Okay.

**Norita** I'm going.

**Jimmy** Good luck.

*Pause.*

**Norita** Why, what would happen? I'm at the door now, so if you try anything I'll just make a run for it. Or I'll scream. Or both.

**Jimmy** It's not something I can tell you. It's only something I can show you.

**Norita** What are you going to show me? The back of your hand? Are you a wife-beater?

**Jimmy** What?

**Norita** Is that your threat? Is that what you are?

**Jimmy** How can I be a wife-beater, Norita? I'm not even married.

**Norita** Is that what you're going to become? Is that what your father was?

*He turns off the television, furious with her. Silence.*

**Norita** What? What did I say?

*He lights a cigarette.*

**Norita** What did I say, Jimmy?... I know you're not a wife-beater, only I get nervous of you sometimes, I don't know what's going on in your head.

*Pause.*

**Norita** I didn't mean to mention him. I... I was just – you never talk about him, so I don't know...

*Silence.*

**Norita** Will I turn the television back on?

*He just smokes his cigarette in silence.*

**Norita** Will I go so? (*Pause.*) I'll get you peanut butter if you'd like. I'll make you a peanut butter sandwich if you want.

*Pause.*

**Norita** I'll go so, Jimmy.

*Pause. Silence from him. She opens the door.*

**Norita** The beer is there if you want it.

*Silence. She goes out, but comes back in.*

**Norita** Jimmy?... What were you going to do if I made you a sandwich?

**Jimmy** Doesn't matter.

**Norita** I don't mind what it was.

*Pause.*

**Norita** I'm sorry for mentioning your father. I know better than to mention him. It's only that we're going out so many years and sometimes I think I know everything there is to know about you and sometimes I think I know nothing at all... When you're so quiet and looking only at the television, I know well it's your own thoughts you're looking into, not whatever's on... I worry about you and I think you're lonely sometimes and that if you told me what those thoughts were, if you shared them with me, I might be able to help...

*Silence from Jimmy, struggling with his demons.*

**Norita** Please, Jimmy. What was it? I'll go then.

*Pause. Jimmy visibly softens.*

**Jimmy** Do you want me to tell you or show you?

**Norita** I... I want you to show me.

**Jimmy** Come here so.  
*She walks nervously over to where he is sitting.*

**Jimmy** Stand here.

**Norita** Where?

**Jimmy** In front of me.

**Norita** Here?

**Jimmy** Yes. Now close your eyes. No, lift your arms first.

**Norita** Lift my arms?

**Jimmy** And then close your eyes.  
*She closes her eyes, but re-opens them.*

**Norita** What are you going doing to me, Jimmy?

**Jimmy** You want to find out, don't you?  
*She closes her eyes and puts her arms out.*

**Norita** I'm only doing this because I trust you.  
*Jimmy suddenly starts tickling her.*

**Jimmy** Tickle tickle tickle tickle!  
*She collapses onto the sofa, laughing. He keeps tickling her.*

**Norita** Stop, Jimmy! Stop!  
*He tickles her a little more, then stops.*

**Norita** Sometimes I think you love me, do you know that?  
*Jimmy kisses her.*

**Norita** It's going to be my birthday soon. Do you know what I'd like?

**Jimmy** (*Worried he got her the wrong thing.*) What?

**Norita** A date.

**Jimmy** Like go out for a Chinese?

**Norita** No, I want a date. Just one date.

**Jimmy** Oh, *that* date.

**Norita** The house is nearly ready. Are you looking forward to it?

**Jimmy** (*Turning away.*) A house is a house.

**Norita** It'll be our house.

**Jimmy** It'll be your house.

**Norita** They're giving it to the two of us.

**Jimmy** You're the one paying the rent.

**Norita** Only till you get work.

**Jimmy** It's your house, Norita.

**Norita** I want to move in as soon as it's ready. (*Pause.*) Jimmy?

**Jimmy** I'm not stopping you.

**Norita** I want to move in with you. The two of us...

*He grabs the remote and turns the TV back on. She grabs it and turns it off.*

**Jimmy** (*Weakly.*) Are you never going to let me watch this match?

**Norita** Are you never going to let me talk to you? There's never a time to talk to you.

**Jimmy** What about before the match or after the match? You couldn't talk to me then, could you? It has to be right in the middle of it. It has to be then, doesn't it?

**Norita** Why won't you talk to me about our future?

**Jimmy** There's nothing to talk about.

**Norita** What does that mean? We have no future.

**Jimmy** We've already talked about our future.

**Norita** You said your mam would be out at a play or something tonight. I thought we could talk.

**Jimmy** There's nothing to talk about.

**Norita** Jimmy, I want to have a family with you. All my sisters, all my friends-

**Jimmy** We're engaged, what more do you want?

**Norita** We're engaged these past three years. I'm sick of being engaged.

**Jimmy** I don't have a job, Norita. How can I provide for you if I don't have a job? How can I provide for a family?

**Norita** I don't want you to provide for me. I can provide for you.

**Jimmy** I am not having some woman provide for me.

**Norita** For God's sake, you're still living at home with your mammy, isn't she providing for you? If you don't want me or anyone else providing for you, then get off your arse and get a job.

*Pause.*

**Norita** Are you listening to me?

*Silence.*

**Norita** You're the only one I ever want to be with, Jimmy. I've let it go late because I love you. But I'm scared now that it's never going to happen. I'm scared that I'm after wasting the best years of my life on you and I'll have nothing to show for it only regret. (*Pause.*) Say something, will you?

*Pause.*

**Jimmy** Can I not get you something for your birthday other than a wedding date?

**Norita** I don't want anything else! Anything else is worthless!

*The sound of the front door opening makes her turn away. Jimmy resumes watching TV. Maureen and Robert enter, dancing and singing the Jim Reeves song, 'He'll have to go'.*

**Maureen** Put your sweet lips a little closer to the phone...

**Robert** Let's pretend that we're together all alone...

**Maureen** Ooh ooh ooh ooh...

**Robert** I'll tell the man to turn the juke box way down low. And you can tell your friend there with you he'll have to go...

*They finish their dance with a spin. Robert applauds Maureen.*

**Robert** Ah she has it, she still has it.

**Maureen** It's a pity the music they have nowadays, isn't it, Roberto?

**Robert** You can't beat the old stuff, that's for sure. Hi Norita.

**Maureen** You know what he should have had us do? Demonstrate.

**Robert** The dancing?

*He helps her off with her coat. She spins away as he releases her from the arms of the coat.*

**Maureen** How else can you bring it to life? Sure that young fellow wouldn't have a clue – he'd be the same age as you, Jimmy.

**Jimmy** (*Surly.*) Who would?

**Maureen** Ah, you probably wouldn't know him anyway. He's years gone from this town, I'd say.

**Norita** You look lovely, Maureen.

**Maureen** Oh Norita, you should have seen us tonight.

**Norita** Was it a dance?

**Maureen**                    Tonight was a blast from the past.

**Robert**                    A trip down memory lane.

**Maureen**                    It's about time the older people in this town were appreciated.

**Robert**                    Ah now, Maureen, don't be calling yourself old!

**Maureen**                    Oh Roberto, you never miss a trick!

**Norita**                    I thought you said she was going to a play or something?

**Jimmy**                    How am I supposed to know what it was? Some shite down in St Joe's.

**Maureen**                    Some 'shite'? What about that shite on the television?

**Robert**                    Put your sweet lips...

**Maureen**                    ...a little closer to the phone...

**Robert**                    Your mother was the star, Jimmy. You should have seen her.

**Jimmy**                    Sure don't I see enough of her.

**Robert**                    And the camera loved you, Maureen.

**Maureen**                    (*False modesty.*) Ah there were no stars.

**Robert**                    No, I was watching, you see-

**Norita**                    There were cameras?

**Robert**                    Just the one, but it was on Jimmy's mother nearly the whole night

**Maureen**                    It went around the room, Norita, from person to person.

**Norita**                    Was it a film they were making?

**Robert**                    Well-

**Maureen**                    But I won't deny whenever I looked up, it seemed to be pointed at me alright.



**Robert** You had some great stories.

**Maureen** We all had stories, Roberto. But sure who wants to know about hiding white trout in prams?

**Robert** Ah, but it's all colour.

**Maureen** Some of them have nothing better to be talking about, I suppose.

**Norita** Who was hiding trout in prams?

**Robert** Some of the men, Norita – they'd be coming back from the river after poaching a few trout, and the bailiffs would be chasing after them-

*Norita laughs. Maureen rolls her eyes, annoyed at losing the spotlight.*

**Robert** If they needed to hide a trout in a hurry, anywhere would do.

**Norita** Even a pram? What about the baby?

**Robert** Sure what harm? Wasn't it his own dinner he was hiding?

*Norita and Robert laugh.*

**Maureen** Anyway, it's the ballroom he wanted to know about, Norita. The romance of it all. Isn't that right, Roberto? That's what the video is for.

**Robert** Sure why else would he be making it?

**Maureen** Didn't he say it was going to be on television?

**Robert** Well now... Well he was certainly asking about television.

**Maureen** He was, you know. He was. And sure why would he be asking about it if he had no intention of putting us on it?

**Robert** You could be right there, Maureen, although-

**Maureen** Well ament I glad I got the hair done?

**Robert** Sure you look beautiful any time of day.

**Maureen** Oh Roberto.

*She lets him kiss her lightly on the lips. Norita watches them affectionately and looks at Jimmy, but Jimmy has tuned out, his focus on the television.*

- Maureen** Mind the lipstick.
- Norita** It sounds great, I'd've gone down if I'd known about it. Were ye invited or what?
- Robert** A thing came in the door, you see. A young lad from the town got the idea to make a video about the older people from the Avenue – to record our memories.
- Maureen** Those were precious times. Women weren't even allowed into pubs, except maybe into the snug.
- Robert** (*Teasing.*) God be with the days, eh, Jimmy?
- Maureen** Go 'way, you chancer.
- Norita** Why not, Maureen?
- Maureen** A whacker of brandy or a pony of stout! You couldn't be seen drinking with the men.
- Norita** What's a whacker?
- Maureen** And a few biscuits. Not that you'd know, Roberto. Too busy drinking.
- Robert** Sure how was I to know you were in the snug eating biscuits? I couldn't see you.
- Maureen** It's way easier for your generation.
- Norita** What's a whacker...? Or a pony...?
- Maureen** Small measures only for women. God help you if you even thought about getting drunk.
- Silence. Robert looks at Maureen.*
- Jimmy** Who's idea was it anyway?

**Maureen** Women were supposed to know their place. Men were supposed to keep them there.

**Robert** It was probably the Pope, was it? Or De Valera?

**Jimmy** No, this video thing. Whose idea was that?

**Maureen** I'm sure it wasn't his, that young lad's. You can be sure one of the older folk said it to him.

**Robert** He said something about the County Council...?

**Maureen** He did. Maybe someone in there is showing a bit of cop-on at last.

**Jimmy** What's his name anyway?

**Maureen** You wouldn't know him. He got himself a proper job. He works as a researcher or something now.

**Robert** Is it RTE he works for?

**Maureen** It could be, Roberto. Somewhere important anyway. Isn't it great to see a young man make a life for himself?

**Jimmy** Has he a name or is he too good for one of them as well?

**Maureen** I didn't catch his name. Did you?

**Robert** Gerard O'Connor I think he said it was.

**Jimmy** Gerard O'Connor – from where? Over the bridge?

**Maureen** Sure I haven't a clue. It wasn't about him, Jimmy.

**Robert** Yes, that's him. Didn't Mattie say he used to go up there and pick stones out of the fields for your man's great-great-grandfather?

**Maureen** I don't remember that.

**Jimmy** That fool used play soccer with us.

**Maureen** No he didn't.

**Jimmy** Gerard O'Connor. Head like a conker.

**Maureen** He does not have a head like a conker.

**Robert** He does a bit now, Maureen, in fairness.

**Jimmy** He has a limp, hasn't he?

**Maureen** (*Indignant.*) He has not got a limp.

**Robert** Actually, Maureen, I think he had, now that you mention it. Slight enough.

**Jimmy** A limp is a limp.

**Maureen** You make him sound like the Hunchback of Notre Dam.

**Jimmy** He was worse than useless. Never went in for a tackle in his life.

**Maureen** A lad like that wouldn't have played for a team like Rovers.

**Jimmy** He should never have played for us. I played behind him at right back, he was right midfield. He'd be about three years younger than me.

**Maureen** He looks about ten years younger.

**Jimmy** Sure he'll look like a child all his life.

**Maureen** At least he's doing a man's job.

**Jimmy** Videoing old people? That's a job for a girl.

**Maureen** Isn't it great to come home to such a happy son?

**Robert** (*Trying to prevent an argument.*) Ah, you should have been there, Jimmy. Your mother talked about you, you know.

**Jimmy** Oh yeah? What did she say about me?

**Robert** The Jim Reeves concert.

**Maureen** The man I named you after.

**Jimmy** Christ almighty...

**Robert** (*Singing.*) Put your sweet lips...

**Maureen** (*Singing.*) A little closer to the phone...

**Robert** The room was transfixed, Jimmy, as she told them. The way Reeves couldn't take his eyes off her all night. He'd have danced with you, Maureen, if he wasn't so busy crooning.

**Maureen** You saw him watching me that night.

**Robert** Sure the whole place could see you'd stolen his heart. Many men have fought for that heart.

**Jimmy** Many men are fools.

**Maureen** (*To Jimmy.*) And when are you going to get a job? When are you going to get a life?

**Robert** Ah Maureen, let's not spoil the night with fights.

**Maureen** He started it.

**Robert** But do you know what the best part is, Norita?

**Norita** No. What?

**Robert** Will I tell her or do you want to?

**Maureen** (*Remembering.*) Oh yes... You embarrass me, always. You tell them.

**Robert** The young lad's going to video Maureen in person.

**Norita** Just you? For television?

**Maureen** Just me, on my own in this house.

**Norita** Good for you, Maureen.

**Jimmy** God help us all.

**Maureen** When I think about what we had then, Roberto.

**Robert** Sure what we had. We had nothing.

**Maureen** Everyone shared, everyone looked out for one another.

**Robert** There wasn't a job to be had.

**Maureen** People lived from hand to mouth. And when you look at some people now who have everything and yet don't appreciate it. All the jobs in the world, only too lazy to out and get one.

**Jimmy** It's not my fault I got laid off.

**Maureen** You got laid off six months ago. You've been sitting on that sofa ever since. Of course it's like what Sean Loughnane said tonight, Roberto – television has ruined everything. We used make our own entertainment. There wouldn't be a person around whose business we didn't know inside out. People took an interest in one another back then. These days, no-one cares. They know more about David Beckham than they do their own next-door neighbour. But I blame myself. I gave him everything and now he's only spoiled and useless and bitter.

*Jimmy gets up to leave the room.*

**Robert** Ah Jimmy, she doesn't mean it. Maureen-

**Maureen** And that's the other thing about him, Roberto. He's not able to talk. All he's able to do is run away. You'll learn all about that, Norita.

**Norita** Where are you going, Jimmy?

**Jimmy** I'm going out. Alone.

*Jimmy exits. Robert stares sadly at the door as it closes.*

**Maureen** And don't come back. (*Pause.*) 'Course he will. Always back to his mammy. You know where he's gone of course.

**Robert** He might just have gone for a walk.

**Maureen** Down to Walsh's to drown his sorrows. What has he to be sorry about with his whole life laid on a plate for him?

**Norita** It'll be better when we have our own place, Maureen. He'll be out from under your feet then.

**Maureen** Norita, love, he's been stringing you along for ten years.

**Norita** *Nine* years.

**Maureen** Well who's to say it won't be another nine?

**Norita** But the house is nearly ready now. I was only on to the council about it today. They said it was just a few weeks away.

**Maureen** Though why you'd want to move into that place I don't know. It's like a building site.

**Robert** Sure this place was like a building site one time, Maureen.

**Maureen** The Avenue always had character, Roberto.

**Robert** It's not character they're looking for. It's three beds and a back garden. They can make their own character, just like we did.

**Maureen** But that's my point, Roberto? Can they? Look at Jimmy – what kind of a character is he?

*Robert shakes his head as she goes on, as resigned to this as he is dismayed by it.*

**Maureen** He's a loner. No offence, Norita, but that house is wasted on him. All he is is a taker, he hasn't given anything his whole life.

**Norita** He's given a lot to me, Maureen. I love him.

**Maureen** I know you do, God love you, but you've an innocent heart, you don't know any better. I blame myself. I gave him too much.

**Robert** It's the one thing anyone could ever fault you for: generosity. But Maureen-

**Maureen** And should it really be such a fault –

**Robert** It's not a fault as such, but you're not listening to me-

**Maureen** But that's my point. I honestly don't think it's down to me how he turned out. Do you, Roberto?

**Robert** You did your best. Jimmy's a good lad.

**Maureen** He can be kind. He always gives me flowers on Mother's Day. I know he loves me deep down.

**Robert** He never forgets your birthday. He surprises you. You think he doesn't care and then he does something...

*Norita nods.*

- Maureen** That spark of goodness - I'd like to think he gets it from me.
- Robert** Sure where else would he get it from, Maureen, only you? Jimmy's a credit to you.
- Norita** He is a good person, Maureen.
- Maureen** Oh I know, I know he is. I'm proud of him. I'm proud of what I done for him. I raised him on my own.
- Robert** You did.
- Maureen** That wasn't easy. The eighties were especially hard.
- Robert** There was no work almost.
- Maureen** At least you had your furniture business.
- Robert** It's had its ups and downs.
- Maureen** I was working above in the factory.
- Robert** On the stamping machine. I used be terrified you'd lose a finger.
- Maureen** Plenty did. They got compensated for it, too. But when you've got fingers like mine, you take care of them, Roberto.
- Robert** Those lovely, elegant hands of yours.
- She admires her hands briefly.*
- Maureen** (*Suddenly resentful.*) I did that for him. I worked at that machine for him. And this is how he repays me.
- Norita** He worked at that machine himself, Maureen.
- Maureen** Only when he started. Only for a month or two.
- Robert** He was on it for longer than that, I think, Maureen. He was on it for a year or two. You used be awful worried about him.
- Maureen** Well so what if he was? I was on it first. I was on it because I wanted to provide for him. I risked life and limb for him, that's my point. When a woman gives birth to a son, she's taking her life in



her own hands. Do you know that, Norita? Plenty women have died in childbirth. But you can't tell him that, can you? When he was on it, it was just to make money for himself. He wasn't thinking about me or anyone else. Just money for drink.

*Norita is crying.*

- Robert**                   What is it, Norita?
- Norita**                    Why are you so mean to him?
- Maureen**                 What?
- Norita**                    Why do you think it's only for himself he does things?
- Maureen**                 Who else is it for? It isn't for his mother.
- Norita**                    It's for me. For *me*. This engagement ring on my finger... I never thought about it before. He was working away on that stamping machine so that he could buy this ring for me. He asked me what ring I wanted. He wouldn't tell me how much he could afford to spend.
- Maureen**                 Well no wonder ye couldn't afford to buy your own house then.
- Robert**                    Maureen.
- Maureen**                 That's why they're on the housing list this past three years.
- Robert**                    And aren't they about to get a house?
- Maureen**                 Well wouldn't they have been able to buy their own house three years ago rather than going on the list? Wouldn't that have been better? I didn't work on that stamping machine my whole life to have my son apply for a council house.
- Robert**                    Sure this is a council house.
- Maureen**                 Times were different then. We didn't have choices. They have choices.
- Robert**                    But what's wrong with Jimmy choosing to buy a nice engagement ring for the woman he loves?
- Maureen**                 All I'm saying is, with that kind of an attitude to money, it's no wonder he's always broke.

**Norita**                    (*Miserably, to herself.*) He never answers back. He never defends himself.

**Maureen**                He always answers back.

**Norita**                    He never puts himself forward right.

**Maureen**                Well all I'm saying is, don't blame me when I did everything I could.

*Norita dries her eyes.*

**Robert**                  No-one's trying to blame anyone, Maureen. We're all just concerned about him, that's all.

**Maureen**                What right have you to be concerned about him? What are you to him?

**Robert**                  (*Pause, hurt.*) I care about you, Maureen. And Jimmy, I like to think... he's someone I'm terrible fond of. And none of us is perfect, especially me. We all of us say things we don't mean.

**Norita**                    You're such a lovely man, Robert.

**Maureen**                Oh, so everyone's ganging up on me now, are they?

**Robert**                  No-one's ganging up on you, Maureen. You're bound to be sensitive when it comes to Jimmy. It's natural.

*Pause.*

**Maureen**                I suppose the night we've had, bringing it all back.

**Robert**                  It's emotional.

**Maureen**                Let's have a drink. Who's having a drink?

**Norita**                    Maureen, can I ask you something?

**Maureen**                Will you have a glass of wine, Norita? We should be celebrating, shouldn't we, Roberto?

**Robert**                  I suppose we could talk ourselves into it.

**Maureen** Because of the past, talking about the past – being on television. Who'll drink to being on television? We'll have a glass of wine, Roberto, and you can have your cup of tea with two sugars in it.

*Maureen goes to get the drinks.*

**Norita** What about his father, Maureen?

*Silence. Maureen is shocked and hurt at his mention. She exits without a word. Norita gets up to follow her.*

**Norita** Maureen? Maureen, I didn't mean to... Maureen?

*Robert just sits there, head bowed, in silence.*

**Norita** Will I go after her?

**Robert** No.

**Norita** I didn't mean to...

*Silence.*

**Robert** Norita, you're a nice girl, but...

**Norita** I'm sorry.

**Robert** You know better.

**Norita** I know...But it's stupid.

**Robert** What?

**Norita** I just think-

**Robert** Who cares what you think? It doesn't matter what you think. This is her house. Her rules.

**Norita** Well I don't agree with her rules.

**Robert** When you're in your house you can make your own rules.

**Norita** I'm not going to get into my own house unless I break her rules.

**Robert** What's that supposed to mean?

**Norita** Why won't she ever talk about him?

**Robert** Norita.

**Norita** So what's the rule exactly? Don't talk about him when she's in the room, or even when she's in the house? Don't never talk about him ever at all?

**Robert** Yes, don't talk about him ever at all. You know well.

**Norita** Why?

**Robert** He broke her heart, for God's sake. You already know that. He abandoned the two of them.

**Norita** Have they never seen him since?

**Robert** Norita, will you stop?

**Norita** (*Determined.*) Have they never seen him since?

**Robert** No.

**Norita** Is she in touch with him?

**Robert** Why don't you go down to Walsh's and have a drink with Jimmy?

**Norita** Sure I'm not allowed talk to him about it either.

**Robert** I never said talk about that.

**Norita** So I should just drop it?

**Robert** You know well you should. I can't believe you even need to be told. You know the story.

**Norita** But I don't know the story.

**Robert** There's nothing else to know. Now please, Norita – shut up about it.

**Norita** But I can't, Robert. Jimmy's stuck. For some reason, he's stuck.

**Robert** Jimmy isn't stuck. He's out of work.

**Norita** He's depressed.

**Robert** He's afraid of commitment. All fellas are. Jimmy's old-fashioned. He needs to be working.

**Norita** Then why isn't he out looking for a job?

**Robert** He's got into a rut.

**Norita** I'm convinced it's to do with his father.

**Robert** What do you know about what goes on in a man's head?

**Norita** I just have a feeling-

**Robert** A feeling? And you're willing to upset this family over a feeling?

**Norita** I want him to be happy.

**Robert** Then tell him he's great. Help him get his confidence back.

**Norita** It's not enough.

**Robert** Norita, if you push him on this, you could lose him, do you know that? You could lose him.

**Norita** I feel like I've already lost him....

**Robert** Now listen to me...

**Norita** I don't know what to do...

**Robert** We've got through situations like this before, haven't we?

**Norita** This is different.

**Robert** No it isn't. The time he was up in court over the soccer – his mother wanting to throw him out of the house. That was way worse than this.

**Norita** He felt so bad, Robert. He pretended he didn't care, but he just felt so awful. I thought he was going to throw himself into the river with the shame. I was terrified.

**Robert** And what happened?

**Norita** I don't know what happened. He seemed to come 'round.

**Robert** Well I'll tell you what happened. I went up on that stand and I begged the judge to be lenient. I told him the poor fella felt remorse and wouldn't do it again. And then I paid the fine-

**Norita** I know, Robert, you know how grateful I am.

**Robert** Well what you don't know is I also made Jimmy promise me two things. One, that he wouldn't ever again fight a fella on a field of play. Two, that he'd forgive himself, even if his mother wouldn't.

**Norita** He never told me that.

**Robert** I'm not looking for thanks. What I want is for you to trust me to straighten him out, for you to stop getting foolish notions about what he does or doesn't need. I may not be his father, but I understand him.

**Norita** If you do, you're the only one.

**Robert** Just leave it with me, alright? I'll talk to him.

**Norita** (*Nods.*) You're like the father he never had.

**Robert** He had him alright, just not for as long as he needed, God love him...

**Norita** Robert, that's maybe why I think... I think Jimmy's stuck because he's afraid of turning out like his own father. I think he's afraid of having kids. Does that make sense?

**Robert** Don't be worrying... What would you like for your birthday. Norita?

**Norita** I'd like the very thing you're trying to give me.

**Robert** Then leave it with me.

*She nods, smiling and relieved, and exits. Robert stands at the door, in his own troubled thoughts. Lights down.*

## **Scene Two**

*Lights up. It's the afternoon of the following day. Jimmy is inexpertly ironing something in the kitchen. He holds it out full-length and we realise it is the dress. He notices a crease and puts it*

*back on the ironing board to iron it out. He then folds the dress neatly and carefully and places it on top of some pre-cut wrapping paper, which sits on the coffee table, several pieces of sellotape already cut and taped to the edge. He sits down on the sofa and wraps the present, a little more confidently this time.*

*He allows himself a little smile when it is done, but this soon gives way to guilty disappointment. His smile fades and he looks hopeless, depressed by his own inability to move on.*

*A knock on the door.*

*Jimmy quickly hides the sellotape, scissors, wrapping paper in the kitchen. A second knock. Jimmy looks around for somewhere to hide the present. A third knock. Jimmy gives up and puts the dress under the same cushion. He turns on the television with the remote. He goes to answer the door. He opens it to Robert, who stands there holding a bunch of flowers.*

- Robert** Hello, Jimmy, how are you?
- Jimmy** *(Turning away from the door.)* Do you not have a key?
- Robert** *(Entering.)* Ah I don't like to be using it.
- Jimmy** Yeah, well I don't like to be getting up to answer the door when I'm busy watching television.
- Robert** Sorry, only I don't like to be trespassing.
- Jimmy** Sure you're here the whole time, Bobs. Morning, noon and night practically.
- Robert** Not night, no. Never night.
- Jimmy** Not for want of trying, is it, Bobs?
- Robert** *(Good-natured.)* Ah well. *(Suddenly embarrassed.)* Ah no it's not Jimmy. I'm not... she's your mother...
- Jimmy** So?
- Robert** Well, you know...
- Jimmy** It's all the one to me.

**Robert** I respect her.

**Jimmy** So?

**Robert** We're like a pair of friends.

**Jimmy** Ye're goin' together, aren't ye?

**Robert** We're more like companions.

**Jimmy** But do you not... do you not fancy her? You must do, Bobs – you're hangin' out of her the whole time.

**Robert** I'd be glad, Jimmy – I'd be glad if you didn't call me Bobs if you don't mind.

**Jimmy** I only call you what your name is.

**Robert** Robert.

**Jimmy** She calls you Roberto.

**Robert** It's an affectionate thing.

**Jimmy** She always told me treat you like an uncle. Bob's your uncle.

**Robert** She did. You're right. Ah it doesn't matter, I suppose.

*Jimmy sits back down in front of the television. Robert goes into the kitchen and gets a vase for the flowers. He cuts off the ends of the stalks, carefully shakes the flower food into the water, arranges the flowers. This goes on during the following:*

**Jimmy** So?

**Robert** So?

**Jimmy** So do you fancy her or what?

**Robert** Ah Jimmy.

**Jimmy** You can't blame me for asking. You're only goin' with her a million years.

**Robert** Friends. We're friends.



**Jimmy** So you don't then?

**Robert** Where is she anyway? I thought she had that interview today... Or is she out getting her hair done for it, she is? Women are mad about their hair.

**Jimmy** You can tell me, Bobs. What do I care?

**Robert** I didn't come here to talk about this, Jimmy, and even if I did, I wouldn't want to talk to someone about it who kept calling me Bobs when they know well I don't like it.

**Jimmy** God, but you're fierce touchy altogether.

**Robert** Ah well, no, but...

**Jimmy** So if I stop calling you Bobs, you'll tell me what you think of my mother?

**Robert** Why do you need to know what I think of her? You know I care about her. What else is there to know?

**Jimmy** I want to know how much you care about her.

*Robert is silent.*

**Jimmy** I suppose I want to know what your intentions are. Yeah, that's it.

**Robert** Your mother and me are just good friends.

**Jimmy** That isn't what I asked you, Bobs.

**Robert** We like each other as friends.

**Jimmy** Will I tell you what I think?

**Robert** I don't care what you think.

**Jimmy** Why not? People 'round here are forever trying to get me to talk. Now I'm trying to get you to talk and you won't. For a man who's forever trying to get to know me, you're not making much of an effort letting me get to know you.

**Robert** I'm not forever trying to get to know you. Sure I know you. You and me – we've known each other years. Since you were a child I've known you.

*Pause.*

**Jimmy** Anyone can see that you fancy her, Bobs. Anyone can see that you like her a lot more than she likes you.

*Silence. Robert has been cut to the quick.*

**Jimmy** I don't know why you put up with her. It's a mystery to me. Will I tell you what I think? You keep following her 'round in the hope that one day she takes a shine to you. Either that or you're a queer. Is that it, Bobs? Judging from the way you were at them flowers...

*Pause.*

**Robert** (*With dignity and restraint.*) I remember collecting you from school one day after your father left.

**Jimmy** Don't talk to me about my father.

**Robert** I was bringing you home to your mother. She was worried about you because you kept hoping your father would come back and she couldn't face telling you that he wouldn't.

**Jimmy** Don't talk to me about my father, I said.

**Robert** I'm not talking about your father. I'm talking about you and what you were like. You were chatting away to me and telling me you were sure your father would be at home today. You were sure he'd be standing at the door with a cup of tea talking to Mrs Chute about her singing canary. I stopped you in the street and I crouched down and said, 'he's not coming home'. And whatever way I said it, you believed me. You started crying. You were holding an icecream. The whole thing was melted by the time you stopped crying you were crying that long. The two of us were covered in ice-cream.

**Jimmy** I don't remember that.

**Robert** I bet you do.

**Jimmy** I fuckin' don't remember it, alright?

**Robert** I told you what you needed to hear and I'm telling you again now. Sometimes I think that's my role in life where you're concerned.

**Jimmy** You don't have a role in my life, Bobs, except to keep my mother miles the fuck away from me.

**Robert** Why are you so hard-hearted, Jimmy? You usen't be so hard-hearted once.

**Jimmy** I was a child once, Bobs. That was a long time ago.

**Robert** And you're a man now.

**Jimmy** 'Course I'm a man now.

**Robert** Are you?

**Jimmy** Why – what do you think I am? I know what you think I am. You think I'm a prick. A lazy prick that watches television all day, like what my mother thinks of me, like what my girlfriend thinks of me. I don't give a fuck what anybody thinks of me.

**Robert** They don't think that of you. I don't think that of you.

**Jimmy** At least tell me the truth. Go on, I can take it. I don't care.

**Robert** That's your problem.

**Jimmy** What's my problem?

**Robert** I'll tell you what I think of you. I think you're the greatest young man I ever had the pleasure of knowing, only you're acting like a fool and I don't know why. I don't know why you're so angry. I don't know why you're acting like you don't care, but I wish you'd stop.

**Jimmy** I'm not angry. I've just had enough of people talking.... never leaving me alone... to live the life I want to live.

**Robert** What life is that? In a new house with Norita?

**Jimmy** It's my business.

**Robert** You're not living a life at the moment, Jimmy. This isn't living a life in front of the television all day or in the pub like a bitter old man who can't see the good in anything.

**Jimmy** Look who's talking.

**Robert** I love your mother and I love you-

**Jimmy** I don't want you to love me. What you do with my mother is your business, but don't love me. I have a father, Bobs. You're not even an uncle.

**Robert** I don't care what you think of me. I don't want to see you lose Norita.

**Jimmy** Norita is none of your business.

**Robert** Jimmy, for God's sake, the woman loves you. She wants to build a home with you. Don't throw that away.

*Jimmy is about to respond, but falls silent.*

**Robert** You don't want to throw it away, I know you don't. You don't have to. You have a choice.

**Jimmy** I am who I am.

**Robert** What's that meant to mean?

**Jimmy** It means I'm a prick. It means I'm just like my father. It means she's better off without me.

**Robert** (*Advancing angrily on Jimmy.*) You listen to me. Don't you ever talk about yourself like that again.

**Jimmy** Fuck off, Bobs.

**Robert** To hell with your father.

**Jimmy** Leave him alone.

**Robert** I will not leave him alone for the state that bastard left you in.

**Jimmy** Don't call my father a bastard.

**Robert** You're a wonderful person, Jimmy. You're confused and frightened and you say a lot of stupid things, but you're a wonderful person. And don't you ever – don't you ever forget that.

**Jimmy** Stop telling me what to do!

*Jimmy tries to rise from the sofa, but Robert pushes him back down again. Jimmy rises and pushes Robert over the coffee table. Robert falls awkwardly and is winded. Jimmy is immediately sorry and concerned.*

**Jimmy** Are you alright, Bobs?

*Robert gathers his breath in silence.*

**Jimmy** Are you alright, Robert?

*Robert rises awkwardly. Jimmy helps him, guiding him to sit on the sofa – and on the cushion that conceals the freshly wrapped present. Jimmy starts towards the kitchen, then stops.*

**Jimmy** Will I make you a cup of tea or something...? The two sugars in it...? I'm sorry, Robert. I'm sorry...

*Robert looks tenderly at Jimmy. Jimmy looks away, ashamed.*

**Robert** Don't ever try to tell me you don't care.

*The doorbell rings. Jimmy ignores it, angry that Robert has coaxed out this side of him.*

*Robert gets up to answer it. Jimmy returns to the sofa and television. Robert opens the door to Gerard, who stands there holding a video-camera.*

**Robert** Ah, hello there, Gerard. Come in.

*Gerard enters. He has a slight limp.*

**Gerard** Hi. I... sorry, I forget your name.

**Robert** Robert.

*Robert and Gerard shake hands.*

**Robert** And this is Maureen's son, Jimmy.

**Gerard** Hi, Jimmy, how's it going?

*Gerard moves towards Jimmy to shake his hand, but stops, aware that Jimmy is ignoring him, focused on TV, lighting a cigarette.*

**Robert** Best not disturb him while he's watching Judge Judy. He gets awful wound up about it.

**Gerard** You were there the last day, at the storytelling evening?

**Robert** I was.

**Gerard** I looked through the tape. You didn't say much, but it was great to have you there – the way you encouraged the others.

**Robert** Oh, I was only there to listen really. And for support.

**Gerard** For Maureen?

**Robert** Yes.

**Gerard** Are you her husband?

*Robert glances briefly at Jimmy, who ignores him.*

**Robert** Just a friend.

**Gerard** Oh, sorry. (*Pause.*) Is she here...?

**Robert** She's... where did you say she was, Jimmy?

*Jimmy is silent.*

**Robert** I think she's down town getting her hair done still.

**Gerard** Okay...

*Gerard checks his watch.*

**Robert** Are you in a hurry?

**Gerard** No. Well, I need to get back to Dublin, but...

**Robert** Back to RTE?

**Gerard** RTE?

**Robert** Isn't that where you work?

**Gerard** No.

**Robert** Well look I'll go and see how she's getting on.

**Gerard** Ah no...

**Robert** It's no problem. I know the place she goes. She probably walked down, so I can pick her up and save a few minutes.

**Gerard** Well... are you sure?

**Robert** You can wait here sure. You don't mind, do you, Jimmy?

*Silence from Jimmy.*

**Gerard** We used to play soccer together, didn't we, Jimmy?

*Nothing from Jimmy.*

**Robert** He can wait here, can't he, Jimmy?

*Jimmy ignores them.*

**Robert** Just wait here a few minutes. I won't be long getting her.

**Gerard** I could come with you if you want.

**Robert** Ah no. You stay here. I'm sure Jimmy'll make you a cup of tea if you ask him right.

*Robert exits. Awkward silence.*

**Gerard** How's it going, Jimmy?

**Jimmy** Make it yourself if you want.

**Gerard** Sorry?

**Jimmy** The tea.

**Gerard** Oh. No thanks.

**Jimmy** Don't thank me. I wasn't offering.

**Gerard** I don't want any anyway. I had some earlier. (*Pause.*) I didn't know you were Maureen's son.

*Silence. Jimmy smokes.*

**Gerard** Do you mind if I sit down?

**Jimmy** I don't care what you do so long as it's nothing to do with me.

*Gerard sits.*

**Gerard** So this is where you live?

*Jimmy looks at him, then back at the television.*

**Gerard** I mean, I didn't know where you lived. I knew it was somewhere on the Avenue, but I didn't know whereabouts. Like I was saying, I didn't know Maureen was your mother, not that... anyway....

*Silence.*

**Gerard** Was she telling you anything about the project?

**Jimmy** You can't shut her up about it.

**Gerard** It's been really interesting hearing people talk about what the Avenue was like. That they didn't have indoor toilets, or even bathrooms – that they washed in the river at one stage. And the river seems to have been a really important part of the community in the sense of all the fishing-

**Jimmy** Poaching.

**Gerard** Yes, the poaching. Salmon hid in prams. That kind of thing. Really interesting material.

*Silence.*

**Gerard** I'm sure you know all about it from your mother.

**Jimmy** I washed in a bathroom, same as you. I never washed in no river.

**Gerard** I know you didn't. I mean I never said you did.

**Jimmy** I wiped my arse with jacks roll, not newspaper.

**Gerard** I was just saying-

**Jimmy** Is that what this thing is? Having a good laugh at how poor everyone 'round here used be?



**Gerard** No. It isn't about that at all. It's about recording people's stories before those stories die out.

**Jimmy** You mean before the people die out?

**Gerard** I suppose.

**Jimmy** So who's paying for it?

**Gerard** Who's paying?

**Jimmy** You're doing it for free, are you?

**Gerard** No.

**Jimmy** Who's paying for it so?

**Gerard** The County Council – a percentage of funds for social housing is to go towards community development. They asked me to come up with a project that-

**Jimmy** Why?

**Gerard** Why?

**Jimmy** Why did they get you to do it?

**Gerard** I dunno. Maybe because I'm from around here.

**Jimmy** But you're not from 'round *here*.

**Gerard** I'm – well I'm from the town.

**Jimmy** But you're not from 'round here, are you?

**Gerard** No.

**Jimmy** So why didn't they ask me to do it?

**Gerard** I don't know. Maybe they thought you were too busy watching television.

**Jimmy** Are you trying to be smart?

*Pause. Gerard checks his watch.*

- Jimmy** So the money's coming from the housing estates?
- Gerard** Yes. As such.
- Jimmy** So they're spending money on you talking to old people when they could be spending it on double-glazing for me and all the other people moving into the new estate?
- Gerard** Are you moving into one of the new houses?
- Jimmy** That's what's going on, so, is it?
- Gerard** Well, I suppose. Though I doubt they'd be able to double-glaze many houses on the money they're putting into this.
- Jimmy** Would they be able to do one even?
- Gerard** Maybe one.
- Jimmy** Well, that would have been my house. Thank-you very fuckin' much. (*Shakes his head in disgust.*) So why are you talking to the old folks? If the money's coming from the likes of me-
- Gerard** It's not coming from you, it's coming from the Council.
- Jimmy** You said it came out of social housing money, didn't you?
- Gerard** Yes, but-
- Jimmy** Then it's coming from me, isn't it?
- Gerard** That depends on how you look at it.
- Jimmy** I know well how to look at it, I'm not that thick.
- Gerard** I never said-
- Jimmy** So why don't you talk to the likes of me then?
- Gerard** Well, I'd be glad to. I hadn't thought about talking to the younger generation-
- Jimmy** Why – haven't I got memories too? Are they worth nothing?

**Gerard** No, but...

**Jimmy** But what?

**Gerard** No, it's a good point. I never thought of it like that... I suppose I just thought that the older people – they could capture a time that's gone.

**Jimmy** Sure every time is gone.

**Gerard** But what I'm after – it's an understanding of what it was like around here before I was born.

**Jimmy** It was shite around you before you were born. Nothing changed only people got richer. Some of them. End of interview.

**Gerard** Why don't we start again? I can turn on the camera.

**Jimmy** If you point that thing at me, you'll find it up your hole. My mother might want to go on television, I don't.

**Gerard** Don't worry, no-one's going to appear on television. This is only for research purposes.

**Jimmy** You're not doing it for television?

**Gerard** No. Why? I never said I was.

**Jimmy** My mother and Bobs said you were asking them did they want to be on television.

**Gerard** I was asking them about the *coming* of television. But I wasn't telling them they were going to be *on* television.

**Jimmy** (*Laughing.*) And there she is spending a fortune on her hair!

**Gerard** (*Horrified.*) Is that what she thinks? That it's for-

**Jimmy** I wouldn't put her straight if I was you. The interview might turn out a lot shorter than you think!

*Jimmy laughs. Gerard is embarrassed. Pause.*

**Gerard** Are you still playing soccer?

**Jimmy** (*Grudgingly.*) A small bit.

**Gerard** For Celtic?

**Jimmy** Sure Rovers are long gone.

**Gerard** Is it true they were kicked out of the league for fighting?

**Jimmy** Who told you that?

**Gerard** I don't know. It was years ago.

**Jimmy** Well you'd want to get your own memory looked at, Conker.

**Gerard** I haven't been called that in a while.

**Jimmy** It wasn't over fighting.

**Gerard** What was it over?

**Jimmy** It was over the FA acting like the bollockses they are.

*Pause.*

**Gerard** Are you still playing right back?

**Jimmy** Or sweeper.

**Gerard** Sweeper? Yeah, that would suit you.

**Jimmy** What do you know what would suit me? You were never any good.

**Gerard** You read the game well. You always played well.

**Jimmy** I knew my job, that's all.

**Gerard** I don't remember you ever hitting a bad pass.

*Pause.*

**Jimmy** They should never have played you.

*Pause.*

**Jimmy** You hadn't a clue, Conker. Look at the way we played – we kicked teams off the park. You thought you were some kind of play-maker – a fuckin' Glen Hoddle. No wonder they dived into you.

**Gerard** Do you remember the argument we had over penalties? You told me to get into the box and take a dive. I refused. I said it was wrong.

**Jimmy** Your parents taught you that, I suppose. See that's the difference between us, Conker, growing up here and you growing up in a big house out the country. We were brought up learning how to survive. Poaching, coddling the cops. So how you think you're going to understand people from the Avenue I don't know. You're an outsider, just like you were when you played for Rovers.

**Gerard** My parents didn't bring me up telling me that diving in the box was wrong. My *mother* brought me up telling me I was a good player. So when you told me to dive in the box, I just thought, no, I don't need to, I'm better than that.

**Jimmy** Conker, you were useless.

**Gerard** I wasn't useless. I was good. What I needed was someone on the pitch to tell me I was good. Instead, I got ten guys and everyone on the sideline roaring at me for the whole game – and you glaring at me and shaking your head the whole fucking time. You were right back, I was right midfield. You were four years older. It wouldn't have killed you to encourage me now and again. I was a child. You were already a man. I looked up to you.

**Jimmy** You shouldn't have even been playing.

**Gerard** Why not? I was good.

**Jimmy** You were too young.

**Gerard** I was better than most of you.

**Jimmy** You didn't know how to protect yourself.

**Gerard** I wasn't afraid to play football.

**Jimmy** It wasn't safe.

*Pause. Gerard is surprised at this admission. Jimmy is embarrassed.*

**Jimmy** You didn't have the cop-on. You'd get killed by some tackle, you'd get up, you'd want the ball, you'd take them on again. You always took too many touches, you never just belted it.

**Gerard** I was in the team because I wanted to play football, Jimmy. I never wanted to be a hacker.

**Jimmy** I never wanted to be a hacker neither – it was the way we played.

**Gerard** Well maybe if more people played the way we wanted to play, there'd still be a team.

**Jimmy** Well maybe if you learnt how to take care of yourself on a pitch, you wouldn't have got your leg destroyed.

**Gerard** It was only a broken leg. I got over it.

**Jimmy** You were never the same.

**Gerard** I got over it.

**Jimmy** You did not fucking get over it. Get up and walk around.

**Gerard** No.

**Jimmy** Get up and walk around!

**Gerard** That means nothing.

**Jimmy** Get up and walk around if you want to stay in this house.

**Gerard** Make me.

**Jimmy** You fucking crippled retard. Get up!

**Gerard** No.

*Pause. Face off. Eyeball to eyeball. Jimmy is first to look away.*

**Jimmy** You haven't changed a bit.

*Pause.*

**Jimmy** You were good, Conker.

**Gerard** So were you.

**Jimmy** I was a hacker, alright? Always was, always will be.

*Pause.*

**Gerard** I'm still playing.

**Jimmy** You're joking.

**Gerard** I've become a sweeper in my old age.

**Jimmy** You?

**Gerard** Yes, me.

**Jimmy** You're a cripple.

**Gerard** No, Jimmy, I'm a sweeper. And I still don't dive in the box.

**Jimmy** So you've learnt nothing so?

**Gerard** Not a thing.

*Pause. Jimmy, laughing, shakes his head in grudging admiration.*

**Jimmy** *(Rising.)* Do you want tea? I dunno where she's at.

**Gerard** No.

**Jimmy** *(Sits again.)* You don't smoke, I suppose?

**Gerard** *(Shaking head.)* I'm slow enough.

**Jimmy** So where are you living now? Dublin?

**Gerard** Yeah.

*Jimmy lights a cigarette.*

**Jimmy** So are you married? Have you a house an' all? Kids?

**Gerard** I have a house, just about. I'm getting married this year. I don't have any kids. I'd like to, though.

**Jimmy** Yeah?

**Gerard** I suppose it's instinct, isn't it?

*Jimmy shrugs.*

**Gerard** But partly it's to do with my own father...

*This interests Jimmy more than he lets on. Gerard clams up, fearing he's said too much.*

**Jimmy** How do you mean?

**Gerard** He left us when I was about four. I always missed having a father, I think. So I want to have kids and at least be there for them and hopefully be somewhat decent at it.

*Jimmy goes to the fridge. This conversation is weighing heavily on him.*

**Jimmy** Do you want a beer?

**Gerard** No, thanks, I've got the car... You know what this project is making me realise? How little time there actually is. At certain points you have to make big decisions. A lot of people from the Avenue had to emigrate. They had no choice. In a way, maybe that makes it easier. Nothing is forcing me to decide to get married except the realisation that I'm not going to live forever... *(Smiling.)* Well, that and my fiancée... *(Serious again.)* Do you know what I mean?

**Jimmy** It's the same for all of us, I suppose.

**Gerard** What about you?

**Jimmy** Ah, I dunno... I dunno.

**Gerard** You said you were moving into your own place? On your own or with-

**Jimmy** Were you there that time Pa Murphy – it was after a match in Callinafercy and we were waiting for Johnny to come back with the bus. There was a field of turnips beside the pitch. Pa was hungry and he went in with the pen-knife to get himself a turnip. He nearly cut his thumb off.



**Gerard** And he was waiting for ages for Johnny to come back and take him to hospital. We'd no cars.

**Jimmy** The Crow cut him a bit of turnip, but Pa wouldn't eat it! I'm never eating turnip again as long as I live, he said.

**Gerard** Do you remember Mike Hartnett playing a match while he was doing a 24 hour fast for charity?

**Jimmy** Jesus, yeah.

**Gerard** We only had eleven players, so he had to play.

**Jimmy** The goal he scored when he fell down and it hit him on the head.

**Gerard** He was weak with the hunger and he couldn't get up. The Crow had to force feed him a Mars Bar.

**Jimmy** And Mikey wouldn't eat it – 'If I don't fast I can't collect the money'.

**Gerard** He made all of us promise not to tell anyone he'd eaten a Mars Bar.

**Jimmy** We never did.

*Jimmy smiles at his own memories. Gerard notices this.*

**Gerard** Would you be on for being interviewed, Jimmy? For this project. On tape, I mean.

**Jimmy** Sure what have I to say about anything?

**Gerard** I dunno, but... you know, what we've just been talking about.

**Jimmy** Sure that's only shite about nothing.

*Gerard is silent, feeling sorry for Jimmy.*

**Jimmy** You heard about Paul Adams, I suppose?

**Gerard** (*Nods sadly.*) How old was he?

**Jimmy** 37 only, at most. 36 maybe.

**Gerard** He was some 'keeper.

**Jimmy** Sure weren't Palace looking at him one time?

**Gerard** Did you go to the funeral?

**Jimmy** No. He was buried above in Dublin... Two kids...

**Gerard** I didn't know he was so sick. I met him at Christmas down the park and had a great chat with him.

**Jimmy** They didn't think he'd make it till then.

**Gerard** He was in good form that day. His kids were playing on the slides.

**Jimmy** At least the man made something of his life. Two kids, a wife.

*Pause.*

**Gerard** He made a lot of great saves in his day.

**Jimmy** He was a brave bastard.

**Gerard** He'd go in for anything.

**Jimmy** I used hate playing with ye two fuckers.

**Gerard** Why?

**Jimmy** The rest of us were dirty. Ye were brave.

*Pause. Gerard is surprised and touched by this admission. He looks at Jimmy, but Jimmy, as usual, does not return eye contact.*

**Jimmy** God rest the man.

**Gerard** God rest him.

**Jimmy** At least he made something of his life. No-one can take that away from him.

### **Scene Three**

*The stage is empty.*

*A knock on the door. Then the doorbell. Then the door opens. Norita enters carrying a brown A4 envelope.*

**Norita** Jimmy? Jimmy, are you still in bed?

*No answer. She goes upstairs. She returns a few moments later. She sits down on the sofa and dials a number on her mobile.*

**Norita** Jimmy, I'm at your house with the tenancy forms. You said you'd be here – where are you? We have to sign the forms, Jimmy. I'm not leaving here till you've signed them... It's Norita, by the way.

*She hangs up. She sits back to wait. She zaps the TV on and off. She gets to her feet, paces impatiently. She sits down, near to tears. She throws the envelope onto the floor. She gets a start when the phone – the land-line - rings. She looks at the ringing phone, an idea forming, until it stops ringing. She gets up and puts the kettle on. Jimmy enters dressed in a tracksuit. He is agitated.*

**Norita** Jimmy, I need to talk to you.

*Jimmy sits on the sofa, turns on the TV.*

**Jimmy** Do you want to watch the Simpsons?

**Norita** No.

**Jimmy** I was out for a run. Come on and we'll watch the Simpsons.

**Norita** I don't want to watch the Simpsons. You know well that's not why I'm here.

**Jimmy** I don't want to talk, Norita. I'm sick of talking. If you want to go talking, I'm going for a shower.

**Norita** Are you going to sign this form?

**Jimmy** I don't want to talk about houses, I don't want to talk about dates. I don't want to sign any forms.

**Norita** You smell of beer.

**Jimmy** Sweat, Norita, it's called sweat.

**Norita** You weren't out running, you were down in Walsh's. The only run you had was from the pub to this house.

**Jimmy** I was sweating out beer. So what if I had a pint in Walsh's?

**Norita** Are you going to sign this form or not?

**Jimmy** I'm trying to watch the Simpsons.

**Norita** Are you breaking up with me?

*Silence. Jimmy won't answer.*

**Norita** That's what you're saying if you won't sign this form.

**Jimmy** It's only a form. Can't you sign it?

**Norita** Just tell me. I need to know. I'm sick of this.

**Jimmy** (*Barely audible.*) Find someone else.

**Norita** (*Stunned.*) You don't mean that.

**Jimmy** Find someone else. Norita, I can't... I'm...

*Jimmy throws the remote control across the room.*

**Jimmy** Why do you bother with me? Why do you bother with a bastard like me? Are you retarded?

*Norita just watches him, her heart breaking at his anguish. He is near to tears.*

**Jimmy** You're the most gorgeous person on the planet, Norita, I swear to God you are. But you're the fuckin' stupidest, do you know that? You're as thick as two planks. Find someone else for fuck's sake...

*He snatches the form from her and tears it into pieces and throws it at her feet.*

**Jimmy** There. Is that clear enough for you?

*He sits back in front of the TV, devastated, broken, empty. Norita eyes him with a fierce, determined love and makes a private decision.*

**Norita** Jimmy, there was a phone-call... Jimmy, your father phoned.

*Jimmy is shocked.*

**Norita** I wasn't going to answer it, but then I thought it might be you.

**Jimmy** My father?

**Norita** Jimmy, he's coming to visit you.

*Pause.*

**Jimmy** When?

**Norita** This Saturday.

**Jimmy** No he isn't.

**Norita** That's what he said.

**Jimmy** He'd have asked for me. Why didn't he ask for me?

**Norita** He did ask for you, only you were out. I told him to call later, but he said there'd be plenty of time for talk when he saw you.

**Jimmy** That bollocks thinks I want to talk to him?

**Norita** I'm only saying what he said.

**Jimmy** Why didn't you tell him to try me on the mobile?

**Norita** I didn't think of it. I was in shock, Jimmy.

**Jimmy** Norita, it couldn't.... There's no way it was him.

**Norita** He introduced himself. He said, 'My name is Derek Kavanagh, I'm Jimmy's father-

**Jimmy** Then where the fuck's he been these last twenty-five years?

**Norita** I don't know. He didn't say.

**Jimmy** Norita, for fuck's sake... Why did you answer the phone?

**Norita** You always tell me answer it. It could have been you.

**Jimmy** But now look what you're after doing.

**Norita** All I did was pick up the phone.

**Jimmy** Did you tell him to fuck off?

**Norita** No.

**Jimmy** Then that's what you're after doing. You're after giving him the wrong message.

**Norita** Jimmy....

**Jimmy** What's his number?

*Norita hesitates.*

**Jimmy** His number, Norita, he must have left one.

**Norita** No.

**Jimmy** No? Did you tell him who you were? How did he know it wasn't a wrong number?

**Norita** I told him I was your fiancée.

**Jimmy** How did he sound?

**Norita** How did he sound?

**Jimmy** His voice...

**Norita** He sounded fine. He sounded like a man.

**Jimmy** 'Course he sounded like a man, how did he sound?

**Norita** I don't know what you mean.

**Jimmy** Did he ask for me?

**Norita** Didn't I tell you he asked for you? Once I told him who I was, he asked for you.

**Jimmy** What about mam? Did he ask for mam?

**Norita** He asked for both of you.

**Jimmy** Who did he ask for first?

**Norita** I can't remember.

**Jimmy** (*Softly.*) Did he sound like he wanted to talk to me?

**Norita** Yes he did.

*Jimmy sits down, treasuring this piece of information.*

**Norita** Will I make you a cup of tea, Jimmy?

**Jimmy** And did you ask him did he want to call back later?

**Norita** I asked him did he want to leave his number.

**Jimmy** He said there'd be plenty of time for talk?

**Norita** He did.

**Jimmy** (*Hopeful.*) Does that mean he's coming home, I wonder? For good...

**Norita** Jimmy, it might not be a good idea-

**Jimmy** What?

**Norita** Getting yourself hopeful.

**Jimmy** Hopeful? I'm not fucking hopeful. The bollocks can drown for all I care.

*Pause.*

**Norita** I'll make you a cup of tea.

**Jimmy** (*Softly.*) What way was his accent, Norita?

**Norita** His accent?

**Jimmy** Did he sound English?

**Norita** Jimmy, did you ever think of going looking for him?

**Jimmy** What?

**Norita** Since he left. Did you ever think of going over to England to look for him?

**Jimmy** Why should I look for him? He fucked off.

**Norita** But I know you think about him a lot.

**Jimmy** I never think about him.

**Norita** You never *talk* about him.

**Jimmy** I'm talking about him now, ament I?

**Norita** All I'm saying is, it's natural he's on your mind a lot. It's natural, Jimmy.

**Jimmy** I nearly went looking for him about a year after he was gone. Bobs talked me out of it. I couldn't understand why he wasn't coming back.

**Norita** He loved you.

**Jimmy** Sure what would you know?

**Norita** (*Angry.*) He hated you so, did he?

**Jimmy** He fucking loved me, alright?

**Norita** Of course he did.

**Jimmy** We went everywhere together.

**Norita** What kind of places?

**Jimmy** He never missed a match. He'd tell you things like – the big thing was, 'demand if off the 'keeper'. He hated it when you went hoofing. 'Play football', he said, 'always play football'. 'Play fair' - that was another one. He hated it when you went out to hurt a fella. He got into a fight with the Crow over it once. Jesus, I must have been about seven only and already the Crow was telling us kick fellas.

**Norita** You followed your father's advice – I've seen you play.

**Jimmy** I followed the Crow's, Norita. Sure my father was gone.

**Norita** Where else used he bring you?



**Jimmy** The river an awful lot. He was mad for the river.

**Norita** Swimming?

**Jimmy** They used wash in the river, only they never called it washing, they called it swimming. That's where they met – my mam and my dad. He saw her washing herself on a Summer's day. He was spying on her. She gave him hell over it, but you could tell she was glad, he said.

**Norita** Did you ever ask your mam about it?

**Jimmy** Sure you can't talk to her about him. You can't do that to the woman after what he did to her. I can't believe he's coming home, Norita. I don't know why I'm going on with shite memories.

**Norita** They're not shite.

**Jimmy** What good are they after what he did?

**Norita** You can't forget all the good.

**Jimmy** He taught me how to poach. He loved to catch a fish and tell a story. He loved nothing more than to better the bailiffs. He said the worst thing ever invented was binoculars and walkie-talkies.

**Norita** Why?

**Jimmy** Sure the bailiffs used be above in the hotel looking out with their binoculars at who was poaching and then call one of the lads below in the river on their walkie-talkies and the poor lad poaching would get caught. He said it was way different in the '60s.

**Norita** How?

**Jimmy** Sure the bailiffs hadn't a hope then. They didn't have the technology. There used be fierce scraps in the river if a fella was caught. My father said if you were caught, you were caught, that was it. He'd never hit a fella.

**Norita** You remember a lot about him, Jimmy.

**Jimmy** He said it wasn't getting caught that bothered you. It was your name appearing in the paper. The shame of it. They were awful afraid of shame in them days. 'Specially my mother. She was forever worried he'd get caught.

**Norita**                    (*Very gently.*) Did his name ever appear in the paper?

**Jimmy**                    No. He said if you treated them with respect they'd let you off with a warning.

**Norita**                    That man was no wife-beater.

**Jimmy**                    (*Stunned.*) I never said he was. Mam never said that, did she?

**Norita**                    No.

**Jimmy**                    Then where'd you get that idea?

**Norita**                    Only from... Jimmy, him leaving you and the way you never talk about him... it never crossed my mind he might have a good side.

**Jimmy**                    Sure don't talk to me, Norita. I've never in my life been able to work it out. He was... he was awful gentle, innocent nearly.

**Norita**                    He doesn't sound like no man from the Avenue.

**Jimmy**                    He never had a job in his life, mam used go mad at him. He was kind of different... or maybe I only think he was. I don't know what he was like any more. I only know what I'm like.

*Pause.*

**Norita**                    Why did he leave?

**Jimmy**                    Why do you think?

**Norita**                    I don't know. I always thought he was a bollocks.

**Jimmy**                    I wish to God he was.

*Pause.*

**Norita**                    Jimmy, it wasn't over you.

*Pause.*

**Norita**                    It wasn't over you.

**Jimmy** I never played soccer his way. When I got caught fighting, I fucked the ref out of it. My name went in the paper and I didn't give a shite.

**Norita** That only happened after he was gone and who could blame you? You were angry.

**Jimmy** He knew well what I was going to turn out like. You can't blame the man for sparing himself.

**Norita** I don't believe one word of that.

**Jimmy** Mam isn't going to take it well.

**Norita** But Jimmy, even if he wasn't visiting-

**Jimmy** You said he was coming home.

**Norita** But even if he wasn't, you'd still need – you and your mam – you still have to talk about him.

**Jimmy** I never in my life want to talk about that man.

**Norita** I never knew you felt like this.

**Jimmy** I need to talk *to* him and tell him what a bastard he is.

**Norita** Jimmy, for God's sake...

**Jimmy** What?

**Norita** Can you not see what state your life is in?

*Norita goes silent at the sound of the key in the door. Maureen and Robert enter, Robert carrying bags of groceries from Lidl. Maureen glares at Jimmy.*

**Maureen** So much for you helping, as usual. I'd be lost without Roberto.

**Robert** Glad to be of service. Will I put them away for you, Maureen?

**Maureen** Please, Roberto, and I'll make us a cup of tea. Will I make one for you, Norita, and for the man of the house as well? Or would it be too much exertion to expect the poor fella to lift the cup on his own? Maybe we could hook it up to a drip for him?

**Jimmy** Mam, we've a bit of news. You might want to think about sitting down.

*Maureen looks at Robert. She embraces Jimmy.*

**Jimmy** Mam...

**Maureen** Thank God, thank God. Oh Jimmy – Norita, come here to me.

*Maureen embraces a puzzled Norita.*

**Maureen** You've no idea how much this means to me. Obviously ye have to get married as soon as possible – but this means more to me than anything-

**Jimmy** Mam-

**Maureen** Jimmy, I know things will be better between us now. This will straighten you out and make a man of you at last. You're not even showing, Norita, have you only just found out?

**Norita** I think it would be better if Jimmy tells you.

**Jimmy** You're the one that took the phone-call.

**Norita** She's your mother.

**Robert** What is it, Jimmy? What phone-call?

*But Jimmy falters.*

**Norita** Jimmy's father is coming home to visit.

*Pause.*

**Maureen** What?

**Jimmy** It's true.

*Maureen looks to Robert for support.*

**Robert** What do you mean he's coming home to visit? Nothing's been heard from that man for years.

**Jimmy** Norita answered the phone. My father asked was I there. She said no, I'd be back soon, so-

**Maureen** Well that's a lie for a start.

**Jimmy** I'm only saying what she said.

**Norita** That's what he said, Maureen.

**Maureen** If that man called this house, the first person he would have asked for is me and that's a fact.

**Robert** When did he say he was coming to visit, Norita?

**Norita** Saturday.

**Robert** Which Saturday?

**Norita** The one coming. My birthday.

*Pause.*

**Maureen** I'm getting out of here. I'll be long gone anyway. Jimmy, you'll come with me. That man has no right – look what he's doing to us right now, all over again. What does he want?

**Jimmy** He said there'd be plenty of time for talk.

**Maureen** Does he want to explain himself? Is that it? Is that why he wants to visit us, Roberto?

**Robert** Why now? Did he say why now, Norita?

**Norita** No.

**Jimmy** Maybe he never came back for a reason.

**Maureen** A reason? Jimmy, that man abandoned us by the ways to go to England to find work. To find work my arse. He ran away from his responsibilities here, his wife, his child of eight years, and me working above in the factory risking my fingers every day of the week to make ends meet. You know well what happened, only you don't want to admit it. He met another woman in England and he had another family and good riddance to us.

**Jimmy** You don't know that for sure.

**Maureen** I do know it for sure. I've been protecting you. I'll tell you one thing. If he's sick, if he's dying, you can be sure he's only come back here because the other family have seen through him at last and thrown him out.

**Robert** None of us knows the circumstances of his return.

**Maureen** No, Roberto, but we know the facts of his departure well enough. Am I wrong?

**Robert** He left to find work, Maureen. Ye were meant to follow, I believe?

**Maureen** He didn't write to us. He never phoned. I woke up one day and knew he was never coming back. He never even sent Jimmy birthday cards or Christmas cards. I thought he was dead.

**Jimmy** He just disappeared, didn't he, mam?

**Maureen** We needed him, Jimmy, you and me. You needed a father. The way you've turned out, and I don't mean to be hurtful, but a mother can only do so much on her own – and Roberto did his best, but you never accepted him.

**Jimmy** I never accepted him?

**Robert** Could we please not talk about me? There's something more important to decide, which is what to do in light of that phone-call.

**Maureen** There's nothing to decide. We're going away. We're going away, aren't we, Jimmy? We are not giving that man the satisfaction of explaining to us... What does he want – forgiveness? How can I forgive him for what he did to my son? My beautiful son. Look at him now – he's destroyed.

**Norita** He's not destroyed.

**Maureen** What would you know – you're full of hormones.

**Norita** I am not pregnant, you stupid woman.

**Maureen** You're in love, aren't you? Doesn't that make you stupid?

**Norita** You're always on at him for the way he turned out, saying it's not your fault. You think it's his father's going away that's made Jimmy the way he is. I think it's you that's made him the way he is.

**Maureen** How dare you.

**Norita** You won't let him ever talk about it. The way he is, it's only the way he is on the outside. Sulky, angry, drunk. Let's face it, Jimmy, you're becoming a drunk. But the way he really is, it's the way he is on the inside. Loving, tender, kind-hearted – you can see it in him if you bother to look. Before you got back, he was talking about his father. Talking to me about him for the first time ever. And the things he said about him were beautiful. Jimmy's a beautiful person. His memories are as important as yours.

**Maureen** You're a fine one to come into my home and lecture me about my son. All I wanted for him is that he'd never want. I know he's hurt, and you've no idea how responsible that makes me feel, but I'm hurt too. You're right – Jimmy is a beautiful person. Underneath it all, he is. But what his father did to him is a much bigger crime than his mother not wanting to talk about it because of her own pain. Jimmy should be on top of the world. That's how much potential he has. But he has wasted every opportunity ever thrown his way and you can't blame me if I blame his father. It's either that or I blame him. Because I will not blame myself.

**Robert** Blaming each other isn't going to get any of us anywhere.

**Maureen** Well I'm leaving, that's for sure. And I'm taking my son with me.

**Jimmy** No you're not.

**Maureen** Jimmy....

**Jimmy** I want to hear what he has to say.

**Maureen** But what does it matter? What good can it do?

**Jimmy** I don't know.

**Maureen** Talk to him, Roberto.

**Robert** I think he might be right, Maureen.

**Maureen** I will not talk to that man.

**Robert** You can't run away. This is your home.

**Maureen** I can go to Ballybunion for the day, can't I?

**Robert** For the day, yes, but not for the rest of your life. If he wants to talk, you have to listen.

**Maureen** We'll see about that.

*Maureen exits.*

#### **Scene Four**

*Maureen sits on the sofa, about to watch a DVD of her interview with Gerard from a few days back. Robert is in the kitchen making tea.*

**Maureen** I'm starting it, Roberto.

**Robert** I'm nearly there with the tea.

**Maureen** Hurry on, I need the distraction.

*Robert carries a tray of tea for them both and joins her on the sofa.*

**Robert** We need to talk, Maureen... You know that, don't you?

**Maureen** Turn off the lights, and don't be at me. I want to see myself on television.

*Robert turns off the lights. Blackout.*

*When the lights come up, Gerard is videoing Maureen (seated on the sofa), with Robert watching from the armchair. This is the interview from a few days ago.*

**Gerard** It's on now, Maureen. I'm recording.

*But Maureen is distracted, looking behind her.*

**Gerard** Your hair is lovely by the way.

**Robert** She was worth the wait, wasn't she, Gerard?

**Gerard** She was.

**Maureen** Is he gone? I don't want him listening in.



**Robert** He went out, Maureen.

**Maureen** He has no appreciation for this. It makes it very hard, I can tell you.

**Gerard** You don't mind the camera this close, I hope?

**Maureen** Not at all. I hope I look alright?

**Gerard** You look beautiful, doesn't she, Robert?

**Robert** Sure that woman isn't capable of anything but beauty. She could get out of bed in the middle of the night, not that I'd be there, but...

**Maureen** Don't be silly, Roberto. I look a state in the middle of the night and I didn't spend all afternoon in the hairdressers just to be told I look no different.

**Robert** No, of course you look different. You look even more beautiful.

**Maureen** Are you sure he's gone? Are you sure he's not listening somewhere? We're not on the internet, are we?

**Robert** Relax, Maureen. I think he went out for a run.

**Maureen** He should try sitting in front of a camera on his own. That would shut him up, Gerard.

**Gerard** I asked him if he'd consider being interviewed actually.

**Maureen** Why did you do that?

**Gerard** Well only that – he made the point that-

**Maureen** You were talking to him?

**Gerard** We had a good chat. We used to play soccer together.

**Maureen** Oh, so it's an old boys' network now, is it?

**Gerard** No, but while we were waiting-

**Maureen** And what did ye talk about? Me, I suppose? Giving out about me?

**Gerard** No, we... We talked about, well, old times, I suppose.

**Maureen** (*Laughs.*) Old times? Sure what old times would ye have and the two of ye barely out of nappies! That's a good one, isn't it, Roberto?

**Robert** We all have our stories, I suppose, Maureen.

**Maureen** So what – he should be sitting here instead of me?

**Gerard** I just meant that I enjoyed talking to him, that's all. I used to be a bit afraid of him, to be honest. After talking to him...

**Maureen** What did he say to you?

**Gerard** Well...

**Maureen** Please, Gerard.

**Gerard** He... just soccer and stuff. He made me feel... better about myself. That's probably the best way of putting it. (*Pause.*) Anyway, shall we get started?

**Maureen** Why doesn't he ever make me feel better about myself? I'm his mother.

**Robert** Maureen, the man has to get back to Dublin. He needs to get started.

**Maureen** Sure ament I waiting to get started? How was I to know he wanted to talk about my son?

**Gerard** Can you tell me what you remember about people washing in the river?

**Maureen** What? Oh, have we started? You should have warned me, Gerard. Now, what would you like to know?

**Gerard** I was asking you what you remember about people from the Avenue washing in the river?

**Maureen** Sure whoever told you that was having you on. We might have went swimming there, but how could you wash in the river? There's no truth in that.

*Robert is uncomfortable with Maureen's evasiveness, but he remains silent.*

**Gerard** But during the Summer, I mean, in the shallow parts near the island bridge? People would go down to the river with a bar of soap. Someone said that at the story-telling evening.

**Maureen** Well I know I never did. We had standards in this house, I'll have you know. My parents made sure of that.

**Gerard** I didn't mean to suggest there was anything wrong with it. I'm just interested in the importance of the river to the community.

**Maureen** Well, fishing was very important. People around here wouldn't have had shoes only for the fishing.

**Gerard** Oh yes, you mean the poaching?

**Maureen** I do not mean the poaching, I mean the fishing. You seem very determined, if you don't mind me saying, to paint us as a bunch of savages. If you think I'm going to let that kind of thing go out on national television, you've got another thing coming... I thought you wanted to talk to me about the ballroom, the Jim Reeves concert.

**Gerard** No, I do, but I'm also interested in-

**Maureen** But that's what's interesting – the ballrooms, the dancing. Young people can't dance nowadays. I bet you can't dance.

**Gerard** I'm not great, no. I have a bit of a problem with my knee.

**Maureen** Well if you knew how to dance properly, I'm sure you'd have no problem with that knee.

**Gerard** Look, Maureen, I should tell you, the reason I'm recording this – it's for the purpose of creating an archive, to record the memories of the older people from the Avenue.

**Maureen** So now you're telling me I'm old?

**Gerard** No-

**Maureen** Relax, Gerard, I'm only pulling your leg! The good one.

**Gerard** It isn't for RTE, Maureen. It isn't going to go out on television.

*Pause.*

**Maureen** But didn't you say below in St Joe's...? He did, Roberto, didn't he?

**Robert** Well-

**Maureen** He said it was for television.

**Gerard** I'm sorry if I gave you the wrong impression.

**Maureen** So who's going to see it?

**Gerard** It's just to have as a piece of social history captured while.... while it still can be.

**Maureen** So no-one's going to see it?

**Gerard** Researchers maybe. Historians. You could look at it yourselves.

**Maureen** So what you're saying is we're not good enough to be on television? Why? Because we're from the Avenue?

**Gerard** No-

**Maureen** Well I'm not the one that was talking about whether we had bathrooms or not. What I've been telling you *is* interesting.

**Gerard** What everybody has been telling me is interesting. But Maureen, the reason I wanted to put you straight on the television thing, it's not just because I think it's important that you know what's going on...

**Maureen** I know what's going on. Believe me, I know what's going on alright.

**Gerard** It's because I want you to feel that you can be completely honest.

**Maureen** I am being completely honest. Are you calling me a liar now?

**Gerard** No, no, no... I'm just saying, so what if people washed in the river? So what if they poached? So what if they told ghost stories at night because they didn't have television? There's no shame in that. People needed to do what they needed to do. And it seems to me that in return for their poverty, they developed a great sense of community. If you had a cigarette, you passed it around.

**Maureen** That's right.

**Gerard** If you were in trouble, you banged on the hob.

**Maureen** Your neighbour came immediately.

**Gerard** If your neighbour had no food, you shared it.

**Maureen** They did the same for us. If a bag of clothes came from England, your neighbours came in and helped themselves. 'That fits me, I'll have that'.

**Gerard** Whereas nowadays-

**Maureen** Nowadays, everyone's in it for themselves. You've both parents working and the child reared by someone else. They never walk up and down the Avenue. They get into their cars and sit in traffic and work till all hours. There's no-one to talk to any more except ourselves and we're dying out. There's no communities because people are too rich and only looking out for themselves.

**Gerard** Do you miss the way things used to be?

**Maureen** I miss some things...

**Gerard** Do you have any regrets?

**Maureen** (*Surprised.*) Do I have any regrets?

**Gerard** About the way things have gone?

*Maureen turns away, becoming upset.*

**Gerard** I'm sorry, will I turn the camera off?

*Maureen starts to sob gently.*

**Robert** I think you'd better turn it off for a minute, Gerard.

**Gerard** Sorry, Maureen...

*Blackout. Lights come up slowly on Maureen holding the DVD remote control, sitting on the sofa with Robert, having watched the DVD. She is silent for a time, having found the experience of seeing herself, for the first time ever as another person would, sobering.*

**Robert** Are you alright, Maureen?

**Maureen** I don't know.

**Robert** I thought you came across very well.

*Pause.*

**Maureen** I met my husband down the river. He saw me washing. I pretended to be annoyed with him, but I was delighted really. He kept giving me flowers to apologise.

*Robert is silent. He doesn't like that story.*

**Maureen** Why didn't I say that on the tape?

**Robert** Maybe some things are better left unsaid.

**Maureen** But we did wash in the river. We did poach for fish. Sure you'd be down the bank pretending to be courting when you'd really be stroke hauling. I foul hooked a few myself in my day. Derek taught me, I thought it was great craic – only I was afraid of getting caught. (*Pause.*) Now he's coming home. I'm terrified, Roberto.

**Robert** Would it not be better to finally get it out in the open?

**Maureen** Get what out in the open?

**Robert** You know what.... If anything's holding Jimmy back...

**Maureen** How can something he knows nothing about be holding him back?

**Robert** It has to be, Maureen.

**Maureen** I can't tell him... I just can't.

**Robert** It would be better coming from you than Derek.

**Maureen** That bastard can say what he likes, but Jimmy will believe me over him any day.

**Robert** Even if he's telling the truth?

**Maureen** My son will believe me, especially if you back me up, which I know you will.

**Robert** So we'll just deny everything?

**Maureen** We have no choice. If we don't, we'll lose Jimmy.

**Robert** But he's already lost to us. Can you not see that?... It isn't just Jimmy who's suffering.

**Maureen** We'll suffer a lot worse if it all comes out, believe you me. Promise me, Roberto – promise me you won't tell Jimmy.

**Robert** Maureen-

**Maureen** Promise, or you'll lose me forever.

**Robert** You know well I made that promise years ago.

*She kisses Robert gently on the lips.*

**Robert** I'd love to kiss you properly some day.

**Maureen** Your kisses are in my heart where they count. (*She rises.*) Come on, we'll go for a walk.

**Robert** You go.

**Maureen** Ah Roberto, we can walk by the river.

**Robert** I might look at the tape again.

**Maureen** Sure that's nothing compared to the real thing. Come on, don't be getting down-hearted.

*She picks up her coat and handbag. Robert, lost in his own thoughts, struggling with his own demons, doesn't stir from the sofa.*

**Maureen** Aren't you going to help me with my coat?

**Robert** Do you ever think about my feelings?

**Maureen** What?

**Robert** Do you think I like the river?

**Maureen** Why wouldn't you? It's a beautiful river.

**Robert** Would you for God's sake stop thinking about yourself all the time?

*Pause.*

**Maureen** What's wrong with you, Roberto?

**Robert** Have you forgotten everything?

**Maureen** No...

**Robert** Then please don't insult my intelligence by asking me what's wrong with me.

*Pause.*

**Maureen** Will we go to Walsh's for a drink?

**Robert** I don't drink, Maureen.

**Maureen** You could have your cup of tea with two sugars.

**Robert** I don't like to be around drink, I don't like pubs. Can you not understand that even to look at a drink...?

**Maureen** I suppose. I wasn't thinking. My mind is so full, you've no idea.

**Robert** Even the sight of the river... I just wish I could escape my own memory. When I'm on my own, all I can think about is the past. I think that's why I like to spend so much time with you.

**Maureen** But surely I remind you of the past – in a good way, I mean?

**Robert** Yes, but you're so selfish, Maureen. Your constant little demands give me so much to do that when I'm with you I'm distracted.

**Maureen** You're teasing me now. You're with me because you love me and because you enjoy being on the end of my coat-tails. I'm the only one with a bit of style that ever lived in the Avenue and well you know it.



**Robert** I don't care for style, Maureen, and I certainly could love you if you gave me even a fraction of a reason to, but it's not just for you that I come to this house.

**Maureen** I'm going to go for a walk by the river. I sincerely hope you're less maudlin when I return. And remember, Roberto – you won't be long more coming to this house if you get on the wrong side of me.

**Robert** I do love you, Maureen.

**Maureen** That's better.

**Robert** But not half as much as I pity you.

*Maureen exits. Robert ejects the DVD and just sits there. After a few moments, the sound of a key in the door. Norita enters, nervous about something.*

**Norita** Robert...

**Robert** Hello, Norita, I think Jimmy's at training. He's not in anyway.

**Norita** I left him in Walsh's. I was waiting for Maureen to leave the house. I was hiding around the corner these past two hours.

**Robert** (*Distracted.*) I've made tea if you want some. Although it's been sitting there a while.

**Norita** Robert, I need to talk to you.

**Robert** Fire away. We can prove that television hasn't killed the art of conversation.

**Norita** I think you're the only one I can talk to, but I'm even scared to talk to you.

**Robert** What is it, Norita?

**Norita** Jimmy's father isn't coming at all tomorrow. Or if he is, it's only by some amazing coincidence.

**Robert** What do you mean? Has he changed his mind?

**Norita** There was no phone-call.

**Robert** What are you talking about? You told us all the last day-

**Norita** I lied, Robert. I made it up... I didn't mean to. It sort of just happened. I was feeling so desperate about me and Jimmy and -

**Robert** Calm down, Norita. Just tell me what-

**Norita** I just wanted to find some way to get him to talk – about his father, I mean.

**Robert** Didn't I tell you not to interfere.

**Norita** I don't care what you told me, this is my life. It's my life and I have a right to move it on. I know in your day women had nothing. They weren't even allowed into pubs except into the snug for a pony of brandy or a whacker of stout-

**Robert** A whacker of brandy and a pony of-

**Norita** I don't care if it was a donkey of lemonade they were having. To hell with the good ol' days. I'm not going hiding in no snug. I'm sick of this house and the way you get your head bitten off if you even mention his father – and you as bad as the other two. I bet she didn't tell them that on the tape.

**Robert** I told you to let me deal with this.

**Norita** Well you didn't deal with it, did you? I had forms for him to sign for the Council and he wouldn't sign them.

**Robert** Why didn't you tell me?

**Norita** You can't help him with this, Robert. I only did it because I wanted to get him to talk. And it worked. It worked for a precious few minutes. Jimmy loves his father nearly as much as he hates him.

**Robert** Well, Norita, we had interfering women in my day too. Things haven't changed that much. Now what?

**Norita** I don't know.

**Robert** You don't know? What kind of a genius are you at all?

**Norita** A desperate one.

**Robert** You've the two of them psyched up for his visit tomorrow. So what's going to happen?

**Norita** I don't know! I didn't think that far ahead.

**Robert** No, you didn't, did you?

**Norita** Robert, someone 'round here must be in touch with him. There's Irish people all over the world, someone must know where he is.

**Robert** And what if they do? What's your next grand plan?

**Norita** Could we not get a number for him and ask him to come over?

**Robert** Send him an invitation like? I'm sure he'd love a little visit home for the first time in years. I'm sure the idea of digging you out of a hole would be exactly the thing to make him come rushing over, even though he doesn't know you from Adam.

**Norita** But if we told him what it was for...

**Robert** If we could even contact him, which I doubt, why should he care? That's all in the past for him. We don't even know if he's alive.

**Norita** But it's in the present for us. Jimmy – his son – is in the present.

**Robert** Norita, I'm awful glad you're not a town planner.

**Norita** I wish I was. I'd build somewhere to hide myself.

**Robert** You're going to have to tell them.

**Norita** I can't.

**Robert** But look what's going to happen otherwise. They're going to be sitting here waiting for a man who is not going to arrive.

**Norita** I could tell them I got the wrong Saturday.

**Robert** I wouldn't fancy your chances, not with that pair.

**Norita** They'd tear me limb from limb.

**Robert** They'd be right to.

**Norita** But when he doesn't turn up, at least they'll keep talking about him. At least that much will happen.

**Robert** Why do you think that talking solves everything? All they'll talk about is how much of a bastard he is for letting them down again. All they'll do is build up a fresh suit of hurt and bitterness. I thought you wanted to get rid of those things?

**Norita** That's what I was trying to do.

**Robert** But Norita, this is only going to make Jimmy worse. You've given him the hope of the one thing, probably more than anything else in his life, that he needs. But you're not going to be able to carry it through.

**Norita** Then help me, for God's sake. At least I'm trying to do something positive – what are you trying to do? Nothing.

**Robert** It's not my job to do anything, not this time.

**Norita** You're as much a part of this family as I am. You've got the exact same problem as I have. You can't get near the person you want to get near to.

**Robert** I'm as close to Maureen as any man could be.

**Norita** Yes, as any man could be, only because she won't allow any man near. And why do you think that is? You know it's for the very same reason.

**Robert** You don't know anything about us.

**Norita** She won't even let you kiss her, for God's sake.

**Robert** You don't know what we do in private.

**Norita** I'm not stupid, Robert. I might be a bad planner, but I'm not stupid.

**Robert** I don't criticise your relationship with Jimmy.

**Norita** Well you should because it's dying. And if you cared about me or Jimmy, you'd try to do something about it.

**Robert** I tried talking to him.

**Norita** Why should he listen to you anyway? You're like a little puppy dog the way you carry on around her.

**Robert** It's called being gentlemanly.

**Norita** Well thank God Jimmy doesn't suffer from that. You're like a man who's guilty about something. You're like a man forever paying off a debt.

**Robert** Maybe I am paying off a debt, but if I am it's none of your concern.

**Norita** You're the one that enforces her stupid rules. You're the one protecting her and hurting Jimmy.

**Robert** Hurting Jimmy?

**Norita** Well what bloody good is it doing him?

*Pause. Robert is very shaken by this accusation.*

**Norita** Please, Robert, I know it was stupid, but I'm terrified of losing everything.

*Pause. Robert struggles with this.*

**Robert** ... I'm terrified too, Norita.

**Norita** 'Course you are.

**Robert** But you're right. Something had to be done.

**Norita** If I tell Jimmy what I did, that'll be the end, won't it?

**Robert** You can't tell him. Look, Norita, I might know someone that knows how to contact his father. If we got him here, if we managed that, it wouldn't matter who phoned who.

**Norita** If only the man would apologise. If only he could tell Jimmy it wasn't his fault.

**Robert** Is that what Jimmy thinks?

**Norita** It's what I think he thinks. But what do I know?

**Robert** I think you know plenty. I think you know more than the rest of us are willing to admit.

**Norita** So will you try and contact him?

**Robert** I'll try and get him here. It's the only way.

**Norita** It could end in disaster, couldn't it?

**Robert** It could. And it probably will. But it has to be done.

### **Scene Five**

*Maureen, Norita and Jimmy sit on the sofa, waiting. Maureen and Jimmy have both made a real effort with their appearance. Jimmy has shaved and is wearing a shirt. He looks years younger. He lights a cigarette and starts to smoke it.*

**Maureen** Give me one of them, will you, Jimmy?

**Jimmy** I thought you quit with the smoking ban?

**Maureen** How can a person be quit on a day like this?

*Jimmy gives Maureen his cigarette and lights a new one for himself.*

**Norita** Don't mind me. I'll just sit in the middle and get lung cancer.

*Maureen and Jimmy both get up and turn away to smoke.*

**Jimmy** Did he not give a time?

**Norita** All he said was today. Saturday.

**Jimmy** Are you sure he said this Saturday?

*Norita hesitates.*

**Jimmy** Are you?

**Norita** Yes, this Saturday.

**Maureen** Where on Earth is Roberto?

**Jimmy** Sure you know well where he is. You sent him down to the shop to get biscuits. Though why you want to get biscuits for a man you hate is beyond me.

**Maureen** Just because I hate him doesn't mean I can't give him a Jaffa Cake.

**Jimmy** You didn't send him for Jaffa Cakes – you sent him for biscuits. You never said what kind.

**Maureen** I hope he gets Custard Creams.

*Jimmy and Norita look at each other.*

**Jimmy** Why?

**Maureen** You're right. What am I doing getting biscuits for him? But at least Custard Creams are horrible.

**Norita** I think they're very nice.

**Jimmy** Anyway, we're the ones that'll be eating them probably.

**Maureen** Oh what does it matter? Jesus, my nerves.

**Jimmy** Have another cup of tea, mam. It'll settle you.

**Maureen** Jesus, Jimmy, I've been drinking tea since six this morning. I've spent one half the day drinking it and the other half in the toilet.

**Jimmy** Sure no-one can get near the place with you hogging it.

**Maureen** You're the one trying to force tea down my throat.

**Jimmy** Only because I'm trying to relax you.

**Norita** We'll have two toilets in our house, Jimmy.

**Jimmy** Will you ever stop about that house? Can't you see I've enough on my mind?

**Maureen** Jesus Christ, Roberto, where are you? I can feel my bladder filling again. It's no good to me on days like this.

**Norita** Could we talk about something else maybe?

**Maureen** Will we put the television on?

**Jimmy**                    There's nothing on.

**Maureen**                Just for the distraction.

**Jimmy**                    You can't distract yourself from this. I'm sweating like a pig.

**Norita**                    Thank God for deodorant.

**Jimmy**                    I can't help it, Norita.... I need to go to the jacks.

**Maureen**                You'll have to wait. I'm going first.

**Jimmy**                    This won't wait, mam.

**Maureen**                It'll have to wait. All that talk about tea has filled me up again. I'm bursting.

*A knock on the door.*

**Jimmy**                    Fuck.

**Maureen**                Fuck is right.

**Norita**                    Are either of ye going to answer it? Will I answer it?

**Maureen**                Do, Norita. Act as if everything is normal.

*Another knock as Norita goes to answer it.*

**Jimmy**                    *(To Maureen.)* I wonder will he recognise me? Norita said I look boyish when I shave.

**Maureen**                He'll know you, Jimmy. You're still a good-looking boy.

*Norita opens the door to Robert, who stands there holding a packet of Digestive biscuits. Maureen and Jimmy are crestfallen.*

**Robert**                    Will these do?

**Jimmy**                    For fuck's sake, Bobs, would you ever use your own key?

**Robert**                    Sure isn't there three of ye to let me in?

**Maureen**                And look at the biscuits he got. Why didn't you get Custard Creams?



**Robert** You only told me get biscuits. You never said what kind. Will I make more tea?

**Maureen and Jimmy** No!

**Robert** I'll sit down so.

*Norita gestures to Robert – what's going on? Robert just shrugs.*

**Jimmy** Where the fuck is he?

**Maureen** I can't bear it any longer. I'm going for a piss.

**Robert** He's already here.

*Maureen stops and stares, puzzled, at Robert.*

**Jimmy** What?

**Robert** He's already in the room.

**Jimmy** Who's already in the room?

**Robert** Your father.

*Jimmy looks around, puzzled.*

**Jimmy** Well I can't see him.

**Maureen** Stop messing, Roberto. Now isn't the time.

**Norita** Do you mean he's dead, Robert? Like a ghost?

**Robert** Maureen, tell him what I mean.

**Maureen** I don't know what you mean.

**Robert** Tell him, Maureen.

**Maureen** Have you lost your mind?

**Robert** If you don't tell him, I will, and it would be a lot better coming from you and well you know it.

**Maureen** I'm going to the toilet. When I come back, I hope you'll have stopped this stupid prank.

**Robert** I'm your father, Jimmy. Your biological father.

*Pause. Norita stares, shocked, at Robert.*

**Jimmy** This isn't very funny, Bobs. Is it Darth fucking Vader you think you are?

**Maureen** It isn't funny and it isn't true. How dare you come out with a statement like that!

**Robert** It is true and you know it, only you won't say it. Come on, Maureen, this has to be done, for all of our sake's.

**Maureen** Jimmy had a father.

**Robert** Yes, he did, for eight years. Derek Kavanagh. A man who supposedly emigrated to England to find work. But why do you think he really left?

**Maureen** Stop it, Robert.

**Robert** Your mother had broken up with me. I was a drunk – you couldn't blame her. I still loved her... She got pregnant... Derek was a good Catholic, the wedding happened straight away. Naturally he thought he was the father, why wouldn't he?

**Jimmy** Wait a minute. Slow down a minute.

**Maureen** He's making it up.

**Jimmy** *(To Maureen.)* Is it true?

**Maureen** What about the phone-call to Norita?

**Robert** That was me. I called Norita.

*Norita is stunned.*

**Robert** I'm sorry, Jimmy. I'm sorry, Maureen. I know I'm neither a father to one of you, nor a husband to the other. But I can't live like this any longer. I don't think any of us can.

**Jimmy** I don't believe you. You're not even an uncle, Bobs. Didn't I tell you that before?

**Robert** But why do you think he left? Go on, if you're so smart – why did he leave? And why did he never come back?

**Jimmy** He left to find work.

**Robert** No he didn't. That man never did a tap of work his whole life. The Avenue was just a play thing for him.

**Maureen** Shut up, Robert.

**Robert** Poaching was all he was good for.

**Jimmy** Why... Why did he leave?

**Robert** Why do you think? Because your mother told him the truth... I didn't even know until much later when I'd stopped drinking, when it was safe for her to tell me... Jimmy, you have to understand. If it hadn't been for the drink, we could have had a proper life together... Then, when he was gone... like a fool, I thought I could take his place. But how could she take me back after what I'd done? And how could you possibly accept me?... I've tried to be your father, but...

*Pause.*

**Jimmy** Is this true, mam?

**Maureen** Jimmy, love, times were different then.

**Robert** Your father was from the Square. That made him a better husband than the drunk from the wrong end of the Avenue that had got her up the pole.

**Jimmy** Bobs is my father?

*Maureen tries to answer, but turns away, ashamed and exposed. Jimmy sits heavily down on the sofa. Norita puts her arm around him.*

**Robert** Jimmy, you never did anything wrong. That's what you need to know. I'm the one that let you down. I'm so sorry. I'm sorry, Maureen. I've broken a promise I swore I'd never break.

*Robert exits through the front door. Silence. Maureen tries to touch Jimmy on the shoulder, but he moves away.*

**Maureen** Jimmy, it wasn't my fault.

**Jimmy** Nothing is ever your fault.

*Jimmy sits in front of the television and turns it on. Maureen starts to cry. Norita tries in vain to comfort her. Jimmy raises the volume of the television to block out the sound of his mother crying.*

### **Scene Six**

*Maureen sits on the sofa, smoking, upset. She has been crying and her usual sense of style isn't in evidence today. She looks old and tired, but there is a dignity about her too, a quiet determination. The doorbell rings. She goes to answer it. She pauses at the mirror by the door to look at herself, but changes her mind. She opens the door to Gerard.*

**Gerard** Hi.

**Maureen** Come in, Gerard.

*Gerard enters. He carries his camera.*

**Maureen** Would you like a cup of tea?

**Gerard** I'm fine, thanks. Maureen, I really want to apologise for the last day.

**Maureen** Sit down, please, Gerard.

*Gerard sits.*

**Gerard** Just so you know, Maureen, I'm not going to include that tape in the archive.

**Maureen** I want you to include it. And I want us to do another tape now.

**Gerard** (*Surprised.*) Another tape?

**Maureen** Will you turn on the camera, please, Gerard?

**Gerard** Are you sure?

**Maureen** I know I look a state.

**Gerard** No.

**Maureen** Will people recognise me? As I am now?

**Gerard** Of course.

**Maureen** Turn it on, please, so.

*Gerard turns on the camera, directs it at Maureen.*

**Gerard** I'm not sure what to ask you, Maureen.

**Maureen** I want to tell you a story, Gerard...

*Lights down.*

*Lights up on Jimmy and Norita, sitting on the sofa, the rest of the set in darkness. (They are in her mother's house, i.e. not Maureen's).*

**Jimmy** I never want to see that woman again as long as I live.

**Norita** She just wants you to watch it. That's all her note says.

**Jimmy** Why should I do what she wants? She's spent her life lying to me.

**Norita** She spent her life trying to protect you.

**Jimmy** You watch it if you want. I'm going down to Walsh's.

**Norita** Fine. But I won't be here when you get back.

**Jimmy** Where will you be so?

**Norita** If you won't watch this tape, Jimmy, it's the end for us. I am not spending one more day of my life with a man as bitter as you. I'd rather spend it on my own.

**Jimmy** Norita-

**Norita** I mean it, Jimmy. And believe you me, a life with me will be a life worth living... It's up to you.

*Lights down.*

*Lights up on Robert sitting in an armchair, the rest of the set in darkness. He reaches for something in the darkness beside him and brings it into the light – a DVD.*

*Lights down on Robert.*

*Lights up on Maureen, as she begins her story. She stands where the television is and addresses the audience.*

**Maureen**

About once a week, during the fine weather, myself and some of the girls used to go back the river with the washing. There was a secluded spot that we went to, but we knew well it wasn't that private. Much as we thought the bushes were hiding us, they were really hiding the boys who were peeping out from behind them. There was one boy in particular that I was fond of. His name was Robert O'Malley. I used call him Roberto.

*Lights up on Robert, watching Maureen.*

**Maureen**

But Roberto wasn't the kind to peep.

*Robert smiles.*

**Maureen**

He was much too gentlemanly for that. I think he used to look up to me a bit, because I lived in the top end of the Avenue in the new houses, and he lived at the bottom end in the old ones. Robert started getting more confident, though. I suppose the few drinks helped. He got the courage to come up to me at a dance – at Jim Reeves. We started courting. I didn't mind the drinking at first, but I couldn't understand why he still needed it. It bothered me to be sitting there in the snug drinking my lemonade when he was in the bar getting drunk with all the lads and boasting what a great man he was to have landed a catch like me. But one day I was in the river washing clothes and didn't this lad fall in. One of the other lads had pushed him. They ran away, laughing, and there I was, half-naked, facing this young man with a face the colour of fuchsia.

*Robert looks away sadly.*

*Lights up on Norita, watching Maureen.*

**Maureen**

I roared at him and he ran away so fast you'd think the bailiffs were after him. The next day, he came to my house with a bunch of flowers. I refused to see him. He came again the day after that. My mother was fierce excited – she knew he was a solicitor's son. On

the third day, I went out to him and told him he should go to jail for peeping. He got down on one knee and gave me the flowers. He told me his name was Derek.

*Robert bows his head low, this memory so painful.*

**Maureen**

I liked Derek. I liked being seen with him. He always had his own packet of cigarettes, which is maybe one of the reasons he was popular with the other lads. His family had their own television while the rest of us would gather outside Daly's corner and watch the Flintstones through the shop window. Not that I was ever let into his house. I was his secret. It hurt me that he wouldn't show me off to his family, but he said they would disapprove.

*Lights up on Jimmy, sitting on the edge of the sofa, watching his mother tell her story. Norita sees him and takes his hand.*

**Maureen**

When I got pregnant with Jimmy, Derek did the decent thing as I knew he would. But my parents were as ashamed as his were. And so instead of a white wedding in front of the whole town we were married at seven in the morning and I wore a navy costume... Derek loved Jimmy and taught him all he had learnt about the Avenue and the river, just like he was from here. But this wasn't the marriage I wanted. I wanted to be invited to tea in the Square. I wanted to go horse-riding in their fields. All Derek wanted to do was poach and bring Jimmy playing soccer. I was the one who got the job in the factory. I kept on at him to find work. People were going to England. We had a row and he left. He didn't write letters. No-one asked me about him after a while and I never once asked his family. I was too proud. But now I was lonely and I was struggling. I just couldn't manage Jimmy. Roberto had stopped drinking. He was running his furniture shop. We became friendly again. It wasn't the same, but it was something....

*Maureen falters, upset.*

*Robert looks up at Maureen.*

**Gerard**

Are you alright, Maureen?

**Maureen**

I'm fine.

**Gerard**

Are you sure you want this on tape?

*Maureen struggles with her own regret.*

**Robert** (Gently.) Go on, girl. Go on.

*This next part is very difficult for Maureen.*

**Maureen** Roberto asked me one day why Derek left. I didn't answer. I was ashamed. I was confused. And then Roberto, out of the blue, provided his own answer. He asked me was he Jimmy's true father. I just looked at him in amazement. I realised this was something he wanted to believe. And so I let him believe it.

**Robert** What?

**Maureen** When he guessed that this is why Derek had left, I let him believe that, too.

**Robert** No. Maureen...

**Maureen** Jimmy needed a father in his life and I needed the support. And Roberto, I like to think, needed us.

**Robert** Derek found out. You told me he found out.

**Maureen** But even if I know why he left, I'll never know why he didn't return. I'll never understand how he could have abandoned his son. Because his son was perfect. His son was beautiful. His son deserved better. I'm sorry, Jimmy. I'm sorry, Roberto. (Pause.) You can turn it off now, Gerard.

*Lights down on Robert, devastated, Norita and Jimmy.*

*Full lights come up. When they do, only Gerard and Maureen are on stage – Maureen sitting on the sofa, Gerard holding the video camera pointed at her. Gerard turns off the camera, lowers it.*

### **Scene Seven**

*Maureen is obsessively cleaning the house. The ironing board is set up and she's vacuuming the floor. She starts on the sofa, lifting the right cushion and vacuuming under there. Then she lifts the left one and discovers a crumpled package wrapped in birthday paper. She turns off the vacuum cleaner and examines the package. She opens it and takes out the dress, holds it out and sees how creased it is. She puts it on the ironing board and quickly irons the dress. She gets some wrapping paper, a scissors and sellotape from the kitchen and wraps the dress. She holds the gift in her hands, not quite satisfied. She goes to the kitchen and returns with some*



*ribbon, with which she makes a bow. There is a knock on the door. She freezes. She puts the present down on the ironing board and checks herself in the mirror. She opens the door to Roberto.*

*He stands there, holding a bottle of whiskey in his hand.*

**Robert** Two glasses, I think.

*He goes straight past her and into the kitchen.*

**Maureen** Roberto-

**Robert** Don't want you complaining you're in the snug. I want you out in the open, just like me.

**Maureen** Give me the bottle, Roberto.

**Robert** Roberto. Sounds like the name of a Latin lover. Well I was never that, was I?

**Maureen** Yes, you were. Once upon a time.

**Robert** Once upon a time? When would that be exactly? Would it be nine months before Jimmy was born? Would it? Would it?

*Pause.*

**Maureen** No.

**Robert** But what? I was too drunk to remember? Too pissed to know the details?

**Maureen** I didn't plan for it to happen. We needed each other – the three of us.

**Robert** Easy for you, because it was all my fault. All my fucking fault! I was an open door. Let Maureen off the hook.

**Maureen** I couldn't live with myself.

**Robert** Is it any wonder?

*She tries to touch him, console him.*

**Robert** I may have been guilty of drinking, but I was never guilty of this.

**Maureen** I know... But Roberto, I've been guilty every single moment since.

**Robert** Finally – one thing we have in common! At least we can drink to that.

**Maureen** No. Please. You haven't touched a drop in thirty years. I'm not worth it.

**Robert** Jesus, woman, tell me something I don't know.

*Pause.*

**Robert** But your son is. And that's who I've lost. Don't you see?

*Pause. Robert's energy is spent, the heartache too much. Maureen searches herself for words of comfort, but there are none to be found.*

**Robert** Why now, Maureen? Why did you have to end it now?

**Maureen** The same reason as you. I'm sick of lies.

**Robert** But look what you've done to me. I have no son. I have no son.

*He sits down on the sofa, distraught, close to tears.*

**Maureen** Give me the bottle, Roberto.

**Robert** My name is Bobs. Bobs' your uncle. No, not even that. Bobs your fool.

*Jimmy and Norita enter. Jimmy and Robert stare at each other. Robert turns away.*

**Robert** Go ahead and laugh, Jimmy. Get yourself a glass if you want. Come on – let's drink to fatherhood. It's about time we drank to something.

*Robert goes to open the bottle. Jimmy tries to grab it off him. They struggle and Jimmy wins the bottle. He throws it against the wall, smashing it. Robert sits on the sofa, crying. Maureen goes to him, but he pushes her hand away.*

**Jimmy** Leave him, mam.

*Maureen backs away.*

**Jimmy** Give me the card, Norita.

*Norita hands Jimmy a card in an envelope. Jimmy sits beside Robert on the sofa. Jimmy, looking straight ahead, offers the card to Robert. Robert tries to sit up, compose himself, but he can look at no-one, his humiliation too acute.*

**Jimmy** This is for you.

**Robert** Leave me alone.

**Jimmy** Take it.

**Robert** Leave me alone.

**Jimmy** Take it.

*Robert tries to rise, but Jimmy grabs his shoulder and pushes him back down onto the sofa. Jimmy sits beside him again.*

**Jimmy** No-one's going nowhere till we've had this out.

*Jimmy gives Robert the card.*

**Robert** It's not my birthday.

**Jimmy** It's not that sort of card.

**Robert** It's not Christmas.

**Jimmy** It's not that sort of card.

**Robert** Well what sort of card is it?

**Jimmy** It's not a Valentine card neither. Now open the fuckin' thing.

*Robert tears open the envelope, opens the card, reads it. He is very moved, but not persuaded.*

**Robert** It's not Father's Day, Jimmy, and even if it was... Your father is in England.

**Jimmy** I know.

**Robert** He's not coming home.

**Jimmy** I know.

**Robert** He abandoned you.

**Jimmy** I know.

**Robert** So you know everything, do you?

**Jimmy** No.

**Robert** Why did he abandon you?

**Jimmy** I don't know.

**Robert** Why didn't he come home?

**Jimmy** I don't know.

**Robert** Then go after him and find out.

*Robert turns away from Jimmy and hands the card back.*

**Jimmy** No.

**Robert** Why not?

**Jimmy** Because he's gone and you're here.

*Jimmy hands the card back to Robert.*

**Robert** Jimmy, I'm just a drunken fool. A drunk, pathetic fool.

**Jimmy** Like father, like son.

**Robert** I'm nothing to you. Nothing.

**Jimmy** No you're not.

*Silence as Robert struggles to accept this. Jimmy lights a cigarette, offers it to Robert. Robert takes a drag, but starts coughing.*

**Jimmy** You might have been a drinker, but you were never a smoker.

**Robert** No, I wasn't the smoker...

*Robert offers the cigarette to Maureen as the token of forgiveness it is intended as. He gives her a hard look, but it is at least a start. She takes the cigarette gratefully, starts smoking. Jimmy lights one for himself.*

**Norita** Don't I get one?

**Jimmy** No.

**Norita** At least give me a drag of one.

**Jimmy** No.

**Norita** Why not? Ament I as much a part of this family as any of ye are?

**Jimmy** We're starting our own family, Norita. That's why.

*Norita doesn't know what to say. Maureen hands the gift-wrapped dress to her.*

**Maureen** I think this is for you.

*Norita looks at Jimmy, who turns to look at her and nods.*

**Jimmy** Happy birthday, Norita.

*She is moved to tears. Jimmy and Robert, still sitting on the sofa, both look straight ahead.*

*Lights slowly down.*

*Curtain.*