SPLENDOUR

Splendour was first performed by Paines Plough in association with The Peter Wolff Theatre Trust at the Traverse Theatre on 3 August 2000, with the following cast:

MICHELEINE	Mary Cunningham
KATHRYN	Faith Flint
GENEVIEVE	Myra McFadyen
GILMA	Eileen Walsh
Director	Vicky Featherstone
Designer	Neil Warmington

Splendour was revived at the Donmar Warehouse, London on 30 July 2015, with the following cast:

GILMA	Zawe Ashton
MICHELEINE	Sinéad Cusack
GENEVIEVE	Michelle Fairley
KATHRYN	Genevieve O'Reilly
Director	Robert Hastie
Designer	Peter McKintosh
Lighting Designer	Lee Curran
Sound Designer	Adrienne Quartly
Movement Director	Jack Murphy

Characters

MICHELEINE
the wife, female, late 40s

GILMA
the interpreter, female, early/mid 20s

KATHRYN
the photographer, female, mid/late 30s

GENEVIEVE
the informer, female, early/mid 40s

SETTING:

The play is set in a house, in an affluent neighbourhood on the edge of a large city.

The sound of fireworks/shelling should be abstract.

Evening; A palatial drawing room in the home of a dictator.

MICHELEINE, the wife is our hostess. GENEVIEVE, her best friend, has just entered, her coat on as if she has just come in from outside. She is covered in snow. KATHRYN, a photo-journalist, is standing, her back to us, staring at a large and incongruous abstract painting that hangs on the wall. Her interpretor, GILMA, a local woman has just broken a red Venetian vase. She is sweeping up the broken shards of glass off the floor.

MICHELEINE: Genevieve, your hair it's –

GENEVIEVE: Snow.

KATHRYN: …dripping on her green dress.

GENEVIEVE: I'm fine. The roads are terrible.

GILMA: I'm sorry.

MICHELEINE: It's nothing, just a vase. *(Introducing.)* Gilma.

GENEVIEVE: Gilma.

GILMA: Don't look me up and down like that.

GENEVIEVE: I had to take the back route. Is there anything to drink?

MICHELEINE: Yes. We're onto our third.

(GENEVIEVE walks across the room and pours herself a glass of vodka.)

I am sitting in the garden of friends, good friends a few hours before this moment.

GENEVIEVE: Jesus –

MICHELEINE: …we are having lunch with friends.

GENEVIEVE: *(I.e. drink.)* … Micha, where did you get this?

MICHELEINE: Lunch with Isabella.

KATHRYN: We are drinking chilli vodka.

GENEVIEVE: You saw her?

MICHELEINE: A few hours ago.

KATHRYN: Chilli vodka that is blindingly hot.

MICHELEINE: To my right is a pudgy man I always seem to get stuck with. He laughs too much at a joke my husband makes –

(GILMA hands MICHELEINE back the dustpan and brush.)

GILMA: *(To MICHELEINE.)* I'm sorry.

MICHELEINE: Of course, it's a very funny joke… A nun is walking through a park.

GENEVIEVE: I thought Oolio would be –

MICHELEINE: Coming. You know the office. You're dripping on the carp –

GENEVIEVE: *(To MICHELEINE.)* Micha, there are bells ringing all along the Southside.

(A beat. MICHELEINE takes her coat from her. GENEVIEVE clocks KATHRYN looking at the painting.)

MICHELEINE: A nun is walking through a park when a giant gorilla attacks her. He ravishes her in the bushes and then quickly bounds away. She is clearly distressed and returns to the convent where Mother Superior with some concern takes the young nun aside. 'My dear I can't help but notice, you seem very upset of late.'

GENEVIEVE: The painting –

(GENEVIEVE comes up to look at the painting with KATHRYN.)

I see you've noticed the painting.

KATHRYN: Sorry?

GENEVIEVE: The painting? You like it?

MICHELEINE: We commissioned it. It's not one of his best.

KATHRYN: I'm sorry… *(To GILMA.)* Gilma? Gilma? I'm sorry. I don't understand. *(To GENEVIEVE.)* I'm sorry. I don't understand.

MICHELEINE: *(Introducing.)* Kathryn.

KATHRYN: *(To GENEVIEVE.)* Kathryn.

MICHELEINE: *(To GENEVIEVE.)* She's a very important journalist.

KATHRYN: I've come to take a photograph.

MICHELEINE: This is my best friend, Genevieve. Our husbands have been, were friends for thirty –

GENEVIEVE: …five –

MICHELEINE: …years.

(GENEVIEVE and KATHRYN shake hands.)

KATHRYN: Gilma?

GILMA: The painting. Her husband –

KATHRYN: …painted it? We're discussing fucking painting.

MICHELEINE: *(To KATHRYN.)* Won't you have a little nut?

Moved by the Mother Superior's vigilant concern, the young nun confesses to the recent contretemps with the gorilla in the park. The Mother Superior bestows sympathy but as the weeks pass, a vow of silence is shrouded over the terrible event. But one day the Mother Superior unable to contain herself, betrays a certain curiosity, a certain girlish interest… 'My dear, don't think me indiscreet, but may I ask' – Mid way through the punch-line, the pudgy man who is already laughing, suddenly shoots up and says 'Ssh did you hear that?'

GILMA: *(To GENEVIEVE.)* The bells on the Southside. I heard them, this afternoon.

MICHELEINE: 'Faint, on a cold breeze.' *(Beat.)* I heard nothing at all.

GILMA: There were people, they were dancing –

MICHELEINE: No.

GILMA: *(To MICHELEINE.)* I saw a soldier being paraded.

GENEVIEVE: Micheleine –

GILMA: That is impossible. You must have been –

MICHELEINE: I must have been –

GILMA: …very far away.

KATHRYN: What did she say?

(GILMA shakes her head.)

MICHELEINE: I sat next to that pudgy man –

GENEVIEVE: Who laughs at almost anything?

MICHELEINE: Oolio did his usual –

GENEVIEVE: Not?

MICHELEINE: The gorilla and the nun.

(MICHELEINE and GENEVIEVE laugh.)

'May I ask, "Did it hurt?"'

'Of course it hurt Mother Superior, I mean imagine this big gorilla, he never rings, he never writes, there's not a bunch of flowers in sight…'

And we're laughing but the truth is –

KATHRYN: Why the hell are they laughing?

MICHELEINE: … I want to but today –

GILMA: *(Touching GENEVIEVE.)* Fuck, you're freezing.

MICHELEINE: … I don't find the joke funny at all.

KATHRYN: I am standing in the foyer of a large hotel a few hours before this moment. In a city that is familiar, a city I have been to several times before. This job that I have come for, this job is particular. I have been travelling since 5 a.m. Greenwich Meantime. I am tired. At the airport there is no one to meet me. It's the usual. I pick up a taxi. The taxi is expensive, too expensive, I argue. I win my case.

MICHELEINE: This portrait of my husband?

GILMA: This photo that you plan to take? You must be important. He rarely courts press.

KATHRYN: It was agreed through your office.

GILMA: A request from his advisors. It was a personal invitation.

MICHELEINE: We're delighted you could come.

(The phone rings.)

GILMA: *(To GENEVIEVE.)* It's snowing.

GENEVIEVE: Only a little now.

GILMA: …You drove along the…

GENEVIEVE: Past the Gymnasium…

GILMA: …I use to swim there as a child…

GENEVIEVE: Since they bombed the bridge last August –

GILMA/GENEVIEVE: …It's the only route to take.

KATHRYN: I arrive at my hotel. There are large lions and a plastic flamingo arrangement in the foyer. The man in the lobby reassures me that they are not real. Reclaimed since the Zoo was bombed. There is frost on the lion's mane.

MICHELEINE: Genie, your hair. I'll get you a towel.

(MICHELEINE picks up the ball of newspaper from the bin and takes it out to throw it away.)

KATHRYN: I ask if there have been any messages for me and a girl standing in the lobby, a girl wearing a coat that is clearly not hers, a girl wearing a coat that is weighed down with shoulder pads, a girl –

GILMA: *(To KATHRYN.)* From the newspaper? Excuse me? You've come to take the photograph?

KATHRYN: …with an accent I can barely understand –

GILMA: I'm an interpreter. The car's… You come? This way.

KATHRYN: *(To GILMA.)* My office?

GILMA: Yes. They contact me.

KATHRYN: They arranged for you to take me?

GILMA: *(To KATHRYN.)* Gilma.

KATHRYN: *(Nodding.)* Gilma. *(Beat.)* She barely understands me. In my mind I am sticking pins in the office PA.

(MICHELEINE comes in, dropping a towel in GENEVIEVE's lap.)

GENEVIEVE: Micha –

MICHELEINE: Genie, what are we to do with you?

GENEVIEVE: Was that Oolio on the telephone?

MICHELEINE: Yes, he's on his way. Gilma? A Northern name.

GILMA: Not always.

MICHELEINE: How's Darius?

GENEVIEVE: He called last week. I think there's a new girlfriend –

MICHELEINE: A girlfriend at last. We had money on it he was –

GENEVIEVE: And Marcus wrote. He's going to bring Gina and the children to stay.

MICHELEINE: *(Eyeing KATHRYN.)* She's watching me. *(Beat.)* That's good. That's lovely, Genie –

GILMA: Stockings –

MICHELEINE: Italian.

GILMA: With underwear I bet to match.

MICHELEINE: Gilma… I wonder I didn't clock that right away.

GILMA: *(To MICHELEINE.)* Nice shot glasses.

MICHELEINE: Siberian. *(Beat.)* Thank you.

GILMA: You're welcome.

MICHELEINE: That sounds very American.

GILMA: Sorry?

MICHELEINE: 'You're welcome'? *(Beat.)* That's very American.

GILMA: The University of California. I studied abroad.

(KATHRYN holds up her bag to MICHELEINE.)

KATHRYN: Is it okay, if I…? Gilma?

GILMA: Is it okay? To unpack her things?

MICHELEINE: Please tell her, of course –

GILMA: *(To KATHRYN.)* It's fine.

MICHELEINE: *(Calling out.)* Marianna… Will she need some help?

KATHRYN: It's fine.

GILMA: It's fine.

GENEVIEVE: The painting is of the city. That is the river and that is the persons… I speak a little of your language…

KATHRYN: Someone should tell her very badly. *(Beat.)* The persons?

GENEVIEVE: Yes. The persons of the town.

KATHRYN: And which bit are the persons?

GENEVIEVE: There are the persons.

KATHRYN: Right.

GENEVIEVE: You see their faces?

KATHRYN: I see. Yes. I see. Right. Is that a cow?

(The phone rings. And rings.)

MICHELEINE: *(Calling out.)* Marianna, Marianna, will you please get the telephone?

(The phone stops ringing.)

No matter. We need more ice.

(MICHELEINE goes out.)

GENEVIEVE: How did you get here?

GILMA/KATHRYN: Taxi.

GILMA: The office said you'd pay it.

KATHRYN: I know this is a lie. A blatant, shameless lie. The office have included it, she has already been paid once today.

GILMA: If there's going to be a problem –

KATHRYN: I reassure her there's not a problem, but I know the tricks they all readily have –

GILMA: It takes on average –

GENEVIEVE: Twenty minutes, fifteen if you're lucky.

GILMA: It's a forty-minute ride. It's better if we pay him. He won't drive us anywhere until he sees there's cash.

KATHRYN: He takes us on the scenic route. The view is one I'm used to, one we've all come to expect. *(Beat.)* She'll ask for forty and I know it will only cost twenty. She splits the extra and the driver gets the ride. *(Beat.)* And he will come back for us? My paper will be waiting? I have to get back to the hotel. I'll need to wire the photos to the paper as soon as they're done.

She nods. *(Beat.)* I don't trust her.

GILMA: *(Nodding.)* She's mean with her money.

KATHRYN: Her shoulder pads crunch as she climbs in the car.

GILMA: The driver is a friend, a friend of my brother's. He's a gambler and a user. I hold back ten. That way he'll come

back. That way she won't criticise. Please do not worry. The door?

KATHRYN: Sorry?

GILMA: Not closed.

KATHRYN: *(Beat.)* She leans across me and there is a faint smell of BO.

(MICHELEINE comes through, a bucket of ice in her hand.)

MICHELEINE: Do you know I went out and found the front door wide open? We now have ice both inside and out. *(Holding up ice.)* Genevieve, you said the traffic –

GENEVIEVE: A log-jam all along the North route.

MICHELEINE: *(Beat.)* No one likes the cold nights. If I didn't know better, I'd say this snow's in to stay. Have you seen outside? Genie lives –

KATHRYN: She lives…?

GENEVIEVE: Only five minutes away –

MICHELEINE: Her husband was –

GILMA: … The nuts are finished.

MICHELEINE: …a marvellous man.

GENEVIEVE: He died…

GILMA: Four years ago…

MICHELEINE: Her husband painted the picture.

GENEVIEVE: She hates it.

MICHELEINE: That painting is very dear to me.

GENEVIEVE: She hates it.

MICHELEINE: Genie, it's still hanging on the wall.

GILMA: Under-wired, most definitely. With stockings and suspenders.

MICHELEINE: La Perla have the ones I normally prefer.

GENEVIEVE: *(To MICHELEINE.)* Have you called Angelica? *(Beat.)* Micheleine? She's at home with the boy?

MICHELEINE: Your accent it's…?

GILMA: Californian. I studied in an American university.

GENEVIEVE: California?

GILMA: Hollywood.

KATHRYN: Hollywood, my arse.

GILMA: It's beautiful.

KATHRYN: She's making chitchat.

GILMA: You've worked in America?

KATHRYN: Elections, a race riot, some bomber in Idaho. The Idaho bomber a few years ago.

GILMA: Idaho?

KATHRYN: In America.

GILMA: Yes, Hollywood.

KATHRYN: A1 wonderful. An interpreter who doesn't actually know how to interp. *(Beat.)* She's not even listening.

GILMA: *(Beat.)* I hear every word.

(GILMA knocks her drink back too hard, coughs.)

MICHELEINE: Careful –

GILMA: It just catches you –

MICHELEINE: …when you're least expecting –

Chilli, chilli vodka.

GILMA: Right at the back of /

MICHELEINE: …the back of the throat.

(MICHELEINE hands her a glass of water.)

(Beat.) Alright now?

GILMA: Thank you.

MICHELEINE: You're welcome.

GILMA: That's quite alright.

GENEVIEVE: *(I.e. drink.)* … Micha, where did you get this?

MICHELEINE: *(Beat.)* Lunch with Isabella. *(Beat.)* She insisted. She insisted I bring a bottle home.

'For the pain. The chilli? To enjoy the pain as you drink it.'

I knock back the last mouthful quickly, gently scalding my tongue. We won't forget this moment. We want you to know this. There's an emotion in her voice that embarrasses me. Embarrasses my husband.

I pray he does not intervene with another joke.

Help me out, sweetheart. We have a little signal –

'Darling, your ulcer? We must get that ulcer home.'

My husband informs us, our car is surely waiting. It is as we leave I notice the vase.

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(GILMA is standing admiring a beautiful Venetian vase, red and lilac catching in the light, roughly wrapped in newspaper and rolling on its side.)

GILMA: It's beautiful.

(MICHELEINE nods.)

MICHELEINE: Venetian.

GILMA: The vase?

MICHELEINE: In Isabella's hallway, resting on a bookshelf. A wedding present we gave them some years ago.

KATHRYN: She nods so lightly –

GILMA: So carelessly forgotten.

MICHELEINE: Isabella is a woman who guards possessions carefully. I am therefore surprised when she takes this gift, this gift that we gave her, she takes this beautiful gift down from the shelf and offers it to me.

GILMA: A vase which I can see is worth half of what I earned last month. A vase which, at this moment, I would dearly like to own. Red. Venetian. She's clearly distracted… I wonder if she'd notice –

MICHELEINE: *(To GILMA.)* A gift.

(GILMA aware of MICHELEINE watching her, withdraws her hand.)

'Take it – we'd like you to have it.' Is it my imagination or does our hostess shake as she holds it out in her arms?

GILMA: … It would fit in my bag.

MICHELEINE: My smile is a graceful smile but as we stand in her hallway I see there is pity in her husband's eyes.

(The phone starts ringing.)

Marianna, our –

GILMA: *(To KATHRYN.)* …housekeeper –

MICHELEINE: Don't worry, she –

(The phone stops ringing.)

…probably answered it.

(A distant rumble.)

MICHELEINE: There's no breeze. The silence carries everything.

(GENEVIEVE comes in.)

MICHELEINE: Genevieve.

GENEVIEVE: The door was wide open, I didn't think of closing it, I thought she must be outside –

MICHELEINE: I forgot. *(Beat.)* It's her half – day.

Oolio –

He squeezes my hand and leans back to kiss me. Tells me that there are papers at the office that he really must sign. I am to go in alone, he'll be back quite shortly. I clutch the half bottle of vodka and the vase from these strangers that we have known and loved for years.

Something about his manner. Something about his manner…

We pull through the gates and…

KATHRYN: We are here when the wife arrives.

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(The play begins as before; MICHELEINE our hostess, GENEVIEVE has her coat on as if she has just entered the room. KATHRYN is looking at the painting. GILMA is sweeping up the broken glass off the floor.)

GILMA: I'm sorry.

MICHELEINE: *(Touching hair.)* Your hair, it's –

KATHRYN: …dripping on her green dress.

GENEVIEVE: I'm fine. The roads are terrible.

MICHELEINE: It's nothing, just a bit of glass. *(Introducing.)* Gilma –

GENEVIEVE: Gilma.

GILMA: Don't look me up and down like that.

GENEVIEVE: I had to take the back route. Is there anything to drink?

MICHELEINE: Yes, we're onto our third…

(MICHELEINE holds up a pack of cigarettes to KATHRYN.)

Do you smoke?

(KATHRYN shakes her head.*)*

I'm giving up.

GENEVIEVE: Jesus, where did you get this?

(The phone rings.)

MICHELEINE: Isabella.

GILMA: Marlboro. A brand new pack.

MICHELEINE: Genie, what are we to do with you? I'll get you a towel.

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KATHRYN: She is shorter than I expected and not as beautiful, certainly not as her photos have shown. Her behind is large and there is a thin line of hair bleached on her top lip. Her clothes are too tight and the handbag –

MICHELEINE: Prada. Last season's and shoes to match.

GILMA: Pink with tiny stripy edging. The soles look barely dirty. I pray. Yes indeedy they are my size. *(To MICHELEINE.)* Your shoes, they're very hairy.

KATHRYN: Animal not mineral. Possibly Zebra.

GILMA: She says she thinks you're wearing –

(MICHELEINE laughs.)

KATHRYN: If there's a seam, tell her, it's normally where the anus once was.

GILMA: *(To MICHELEINE.)* She likes them.

MICHELEINE: Please tell her thank you, I have many more.

KATHRYN: Amidst such devastation how do you…

GILMA: Devastation… To cause great destruction…

KATHRYN: *(Beat.)* I barely embarrass her.

GILMA: They're delivered by road.

KATHRYN: How many handbags –

MICHELEINE: …do I actually own? *(Beat.)* A number is not important.

GILMA: I'm glad I've worn my big coat, with very, very deep pockets.

MICHELEINE: A figure is just a crude way to define us all. I find it rather tasteless… This fascination with quantity.

GILMA: Twelve in each side and one larger pocket just under my arse.

MICHELEINE: Two maybe three…hundred. *(Beat.)* She asks too many questions. I grace them by –

KATHRYN: …showing us the room where they are stored.

MICHELEINE: How can you quantify something that means nothing to one person and everything to another? A number is redundant.

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(KATHRYN's gaze falls to the painting beyond.)

GENEVIEVE: The painting, I see you've noticed –

KATHRYN: On the wall is a painting. An obscene and gross painting. It is modern. In oils. Smeared like shit.

GENEVIEVE: The painting on the wall?

KATHRYN: Gilma, can you tell her, the light, it's fading. When will her husband –

MICHELEINE: *(Beat.)* My husband… Will you explain to her…

GILMA: At the office…

KATHRYN: Yeah. I got that.

MICHELEINE: He's had to –

KATHRYN: …sign papers. Yeah. She said that before. *(Watching MICHELEINE.)* Her nails are aubergine, the colour of aubergine, and clasped around her bag even in her house. As if she is under threat, as if she is under threat or about to go somewhere.

GILMA: *(To GENEVIEVE.)* Fuck, you're freezing?

GENEVIEVE: My heating's jammed –

MICHELEINE: That car –

GENEVIEVE: It's a bit temperamental.

MICHELEINE: Genie, it's time to get rid of that car.

GILMA: … You drove along the…

GENEVIEVE: Past the Gymnasium…

MICHELEINE: The changing rooms are now offices and the athletic pitch barracks…

GENEVIEVE: Since they bombed the bridge last August –

GILMA: … It's the only route to take.

GENEVIEVE: *(To KATHRYN.)* Your first time here? Over here?

MICHELEINE: You must visit our coastal towns.

KATHRYN: *(To GILMA.)* I've been mainly…mainly in the Northern states.

MICHELEINE: *(To GENEVIEVE.)* Gilma's the interpreter, if you want to talk to –

KATHRYN: *(As if introducing herself.)* Kathryn.

MICHELEINE: … Kathryn, Genie, it's best if we all go through her.

KATHRYN: The piano?

MICHELEINE: My grandson –

GILMA: *(To KATHRYN.)* …has lessons here.

MICHELEINE: Tuesdays and Thursdays.

What am I doing? Shut up. Stop talking so much.

KATHRYN: I'll have to move it. The piano. Gilma?

MICHELEINE: *(To GILMA.)* Ask her, will you ask her…will I see the photograph first?

GILMA: The photo, she'll get to choose it.

KATHRYN: I wire them direct.

MICHELEINE: He has a little disfigurement to the left of his face –

KATHRYN: The paper trust my choice. I select the best shot.

MICHELEINE: …he's naturally self-conscious. The removal of a mole.

GILMA: Shoot him from the left.

KATHRYN: It will depend on the light.

MICHELEINE: He's a man you admire?

KATHRYN: More fascinated.

GILMA: More fascinated.

MICHELEINE: *(Beat.)* To me he's my husband. The piano… Be careful. It is a Steinway.

(A sound. Faint. Just audible. In the distance. Bells/shelling/the rumble of guns.)

He squeezes my hand and leans back to kiss me. A small patch of stubble… Back in one hour. Just give them a drink – Oolio… Oolio… He's already gone.

(To GILMA.) Your English. You learnt?

GILMA: In the University of California.

GENEVIEVE: California?

MICHELEINE: *(To GILMA.)* You're very lucky…

KATHRYN: California my arse. *(Watching MICHELEINE.)* She's nervous.

MICHELEINE: I'm shaking. The hostess' disease. The young girl is sly, her coat is quite terrible –

The older. Tougher. No ring. No man.

Kathryn, it is Kathryn who clocks my hands. God I need a drink.

KATHRYN: We move the piano.

MICHELEINE: Careful –

GILMA: We make a big great scratch as we drag it across the floor. If we're moving pianos I'm asking for more.

KATHRYN: On the stool is an imprint, a perfect crease, a perfect crease of a very tiny child's behind.

GILMA: Her grandson's.

MICHELEINE: He's this tall. A sweetheart. A tiny little sweetheart. *(The ring of a phone. For a long time until –)*

Excuse me, a moment –

KATHRYN: She answers the telephone.

MICHELEINE: *(As if on the phone.)* Darling…

GENEVIEVE: She's talking to Oolio.

MICHELEINE: And ruining my floor. *(As if on the phone.)* She seems very nice. She's brought a lot of equipment. *(She laughs.)* I'll tell her… I'll tell her… *(To KATHRYN.)* He's making a joke.

GENEVIEVE: She laughs too much.

MICHELEINE: I laugh too much.

GILMA: Something funny at his office.

MICHELEINE: He says would you mind…

GILMA: Would we mind holding on?

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back to chili vodka

(MICHELEINE pours three shots for them. They all chink glasses and knock back in one shot.)

KATHRYN: Wow.

GILMA: Jesu –

KATHRYN: I like it.

GILMA: *(Coughing.)* Jesu –

GENEVIEVE: *(To GILMA.)* Are you okay?

MICHELEINE: I'll get you some water.

GILMA: It catches you –

MICHELEINE: Right at the back of –

GILMA: …the throat.

MICHELEINE: *(Beat.)* Alright now?

GILMA: Thank you.

MICHELEINE: You're welcome.

GILMA: *(Beat.)* That's quite alright. Nice glasses.

MICHELEINE: Siberian.

KATHRYN: *(Eyeing GILMA.)* I know what you're doing. Put it back.

GILMA: *(Holding up glass.)* M for Micheleine.

MICHELEINE: A whim of my husbands. M on all the silverware.

GILMA: *(Admiring the glass.)* M that's very nice. If I could just get a set.

KATHRYN: Put it back. Put it back.

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KATHRYN: Her children?

GILMA: They live near.

KATHRYN: The grandson with –

MICHELEINE: My daughter, Angelica.

GENEVIEVE: The girl translates.

MICHELEINE: …touches everything.

GILMA: *(Beat.)* She's married to an obstetrician.

MICHELEINE: My son is studying –

GILMA: …at agricultural college –

MICHELEINE: …in the North. My daughter, Angelica, she lives on the Southside. How's Darius?

GENEVIEVE: Skiing. He's skiing with a new girlfriend.

MICHELEINE: *(Beat.)* A girlfriend. At last. We had money on it he was…

KATHRYN: The woman flinches.

GILMA: *(To KATHRYN.)* A daughter, a son, one grandson and the woman in the green dress –

GENEVIEVE: Two boys. They're all grown up –

GILMA: They don't live at home.

GENEVIEVE: Have you heard from Angelica? Micheleine? She has called today?

MICHELEINE: Don't worry so. Don't worry so.

GILMA: Two glasses, a Zippo lighter, nail varnish and a light thing.

MICHELEINE: Genevieve, you worry too much.

GENEVIEVE: *(To MICHELEINE.)* There were people, they were dancing and soldiers being paraded. If Angelica –

MICHELEINE: There is mud on my carpet.

KATHRYN: … Gilma, your shoes…

GILMA: *(Picking up soles of feet.)* Fuck…

MICHELEINE: Outside…outside…

KATHRYN: Gilma –

(GILMA exits as if going outside.)

GENEVIEVE: There have been bells ringing all day.

KATHRYN: Excuse me…

(KATHRYN holds up her mobile, as if about to make a call.)

MICHELEINE: Genie, you exaggerate.

KATHRYN: Do you mind?

GENEVIEVE: The roads… There's a log-jam.

MICHELEINE: You're always prone to exaggerate.

GENEVIEVE: If Angelica's on the Southside…

(KATHRYN on mobile.)

GILMA: Inside, I can hear them bickering, *she* is on her cellphone.

KATHRYN: Nick, can you hear me? It's Kate.

GILMA: Screeching down the phone. That woman, that woman has a pickle up her arse.

KATHRYN: … Nick… I've arrived… We're here waiting for him…

GILMA: In the taxi, on the way here I take her the long route.

KATHRYN: *(As if on the phone.)* Apparently he's on his way… Nick… It sounds like there's action on the Southside.

GILMA: Down the main street there are fronts of houses, with no rooms only doorways… A boy, too big, too old sleeps in a pram in a hotel front door.

MICHELEINE: I am nervous. I talk.

GENEVIEVE: Too much.

KATHRYN: *(As if on the phone.)* I don't know… Who knows where the fuck he is?

GILMA: At a time like this I think of just leaving them. The wife is rude, the other…wallpaper. And as for camera girl, she can go take a flying-

KATHRYN: *(On phone.)* Shucks and I thought you missed me…

GILMA: It is only a moment and then I remember –

KATHRYN: Yeah, well fuck tomorrow, I need to be over the Southside…

GILMA: The glasses and the knives and spoons engraved with the *M*.

KATHRYN: Nick, you're just not listening… I need to be on the Southside, it's kicking off now… If this is revolution… Yeah well Nick, it's just not happening here. It's Ok?… You sent Makin? You sent fucking Makin?

GILMA comes back in.

GILMA: Who's fucking Makin?

KATHRYN: *(As she loses signal.)* I'm stuck here and fucking Makin's on the fucking South-

(KATHRYN loses her signal.)

Fuck.

GENEVIEVE: Kathryn, my mother's name.

KATHRYN: I'm sorry. I don't understand.

GENEVIEVE: *(Gesturing.)* My mother? Katerina. It's actually the same name.

KATHRYN: Your mother? Right. It's common. I imagine the world over. My mother's was Margaret.

GENEVIEVE: Sorry. I don't understand.

GILMA: In a bin, by the window there's an old MacDonald's bag. Brown with M.

MICHELEINE: My grandson. Yesterday. He just loves MacDonald's.

GILMA: And *Toy Story*. On the table. Now in my bag.

(A sound. A bang. Shelling. Fireworks. Something. Somewhere.)

KATHRYN: The noise –

MICHELEINE: It feels very cold in here. The windows are open.

KATHRYN: Yeah, you hear it this time. Finally –

MICHELEINE: I'll close them.

KATHRYN: Ask her, does she know –

GILMA: Outside. Do you know what is going on outside?

GENEVIEVE: There must be a certain kind of –

GILMA: *(To KATHRYN.)* ...professional ambition, she's asking –

GENEVIEVE: *(To KATHRYN.)* ... I expect it's dangerous –

KATHRYN: *(Eyeing MICHELEINE.)* She's shaking...

MICHELEINE: I'm shaking. I can hardly close the window.

GENEVIEVE: ...especially abroad. To be so eager to get your pictures in the papers.

KATHRYN: Jesus –

MICHELEINE: If there's no wind, even the river sounds... sounds not far away.

KATHRYN: *(To GILMA.)* Tell her, I haven't really ever thought about it before.

MICHELEINE: But you've travelled here, a long way? That shows a certain passion, a certain desire to do, what you do?

KATHRYN: A certain passion... I suppose... Tell her, yes, I guess yes.

MICHELEINE: Gilma. *(Beat.)* You're not married yet?

GILMA: I'm waiting. For someone to come back.

MICHELEINE: A soldier?

GILMA: A soldier.

MICHELEINE: That's marvellous. That's marvellous.

GILMA: Before I was a lecturer, in science, in physical science. Before all this happened...

MICHELEINE: And look at you now.

GILMA: *(Beat.)* She patronises me.

MICHELEINE: I'm getting drunk.

That's clever. You are obviously very clever. You can't quite hear it... Your accent? Am I right?

GILMA: My accent?

MICHELEINE: Its Northern edge. You've softened it. Smoothed it over.

GILMA: I don't think so. I've been here a long time.

MICHELEINE: A long time. *(Beat.)* I mustn't have any more. *(Beat.)* I don't like to tell her but she has my *Toy Story* in her bag.

(KATHRYN holds up her bag to MICHELEINE.)

KATHRYN: Gilma, I'm going to set up.

GILMA: Is it okay? To unpack her things?

(KATHRYN begins to unpack her things.)

MICHELEINE: *(Eyeing GILMA.)* I could possibly negotiate. Appeal to her better nature. It is the favourite film of a very little boy but –

GENEVIEVE: It's the view from our window. Not everyone can see it. It's...

KATHRYN: Black.

GENEVIEVE: Not everyone gets it. It was painted by my husband before he –

MICHELEINE: Excuse me a moment.

GILMA: *(To KATHRYN.)* … When he was still alive. He was found… How do you say? In the water, his body was full of water…

KATHRYN: What?

GILMA: They found him in the swimming pool, floating in the swimming pool.

KATHRYN: *(Beat.)* I get it.

GENEVIEVE: Tell her, he'd been depressed for a very long time.

(MICHELEINE walks across the room, ice bucket in hand in search of some ice.)

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MICHELEINE: Genevieve?

(She suddenly stands as if she is on the telephone.)

GENEVIEVE: Micheleine?

KATHRYN: Somewhere, in a different house, in a different street not far away, this woman in her green dress is summoned to the phone.

MICHELEINE: Just listen for a moment, listen and I will tell you as best I can.

GENEVIEVE: Micheleine, you've caught me watching the television. That thing where –

MICHELEINE: Of course. Come over right now.

GENEVIEVE: …the man wins a million. *(GILMA touches KATHRYN's camera equipment.)*

MICHELEINE: Don't be silly. That would be fine. Genie.

KATHRYN: It's clear, she's bluffing it…

GENEVIEVE: Micheleine, are you listening? Who are you talking to?

MICHELEINE: There's a lady from the press and we're having a few drinks. He's not back yet… Uh, you know how his work is?

(KATHRYN puts out one hand to stop GILMA picking up a lens.)

KATHRYN: Excuse me…

GILMA: Sorry.

KATHRYN: It's just the grease from your fingers. We all have it and don't know it. It smudges the lens.

GILMA: What's this?

KATHRYN: A light meter.

GILMA: What's it do?

KATHRYN: It measures light. It says the light's fading.

GILMA: She looks at her watch.

MICHELEINE: *(As if on the phone.)* You wouldn't be interrupting. We'd love you to come round…

GENEVIEVE: Micheleine and I have been friends for…

MICHELEINE: Thirty –

GENEVIEVE: …five –

MICHELEINE: …years… We believe in the same things. Our children…

GENEVIEVE: …don't get on.

'Micheleine, I'm in the middle of making supper… Micheleine…'

MICHELEINE: She's very lonely. Her husband…

GENEVIEVE: She's been very good to me. She's been very kind to me.

MICHELEINE: Sometimes I have to fight to get the time on my own. Sometimes she calls and I don't want to talk to her sometimes…but today…she's my very best friend.

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KATHRYN: Your husband was a painter?

GENEVIEVE: At the local art college…

MICHELEINE: Our husbands were school-friends, that's how we met. Tell them the story of the first time you visited…

GENEVIEVE: Micheleine…

MICHELEINE: A dinner party, the first we ever had…

GENEVIEVE: In that flat…

MICHELEINE: Above the butchers. We were so poor…

GENEVIEVE: Scrag end of lamb…

MICHELEINE: And after someone had brought a bottle of…

GENEVIEVE: Pie-eyed…

MICHELEINE: Pie-eyed…

GENEVIEVE: From some grass…

MICHELEINE: My father's place in the mountain… My brother and I used to…

GENEVIEVE: Dry it in their loft… And later… When most of the others had gone home…

MICHELEINE: We danced with each other because our…

GENEVIEVE: Preferred to talk…

MICHELEINE: They hated it most when we would giggle…

GENEVIEVE: …while they talked rubbish late into the night.

MICHELEINE: How can you say that?

GENEVIEVE: This is where we differ…

MICHELEINE: My husband never talked an ounce of rubbish in his life…

(A ripple of laughter broken only by the smash of glass.)

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MICHELEINE: Genevieve –

(GILMA bends down and starts to sweep up the broken vase as GENEVIEVE stands once more in a familiar pose, pulling the scarf off from around her neck. The repetition is faster, now slightly more fragmented.)

GILMA: … Hair dripping –

KATHRYN: … Green dress.

GILMA: I'm sorry.

GENEVIEVE: The roads are –

KATHRYN: … Terrible.

MICHELEINE: Snow –

(GENEVIEVE looks at GILMA sweeping up the glass.)

Just a bit of glass.

GENEVIEVE: Gilma –

(GENEVIEVE waves away MICHELEINE as she goes to take her coat.)

Don't…

GILMA: … Look me up and down like that.

GENEVIEVE: Micha… Micha… Is there anything to drink?

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(GENEVIEVE walks across the room and pours herself a drink.)

KATHRYN: This man, that I've come to see, to photograph, this man is a tyrant, a man who is now on the edge of civil war. This man is a figure who fascinates, appallingly fascinates, this man, is now, too many hours late.

GENEVIEVE: Well this…

KATHRYN: Yes…

GENEVIEVE: This is… Very exciting…

MICHELEINE: We thought by the window. Sitting at his desk.

KATHRYN: He sends fucking Makin. Scandinavian. Reuters reject. Blonde. Too blonde. Work done to her lips.

(They sit. A silence. Time ticks by.)

GENEVIEVE: She must visit our –

KATHRYN: Northern States. I cover mainly the Northern states.

GENEVIEVE: …coastal towns. It's very exciting to have a visitor from abroad…

MICHELEINE: Genie, don't embarrass yourself. You're gushing.

GENEVIEVE: You're drinking too much.

(GENEVIEVE comes up to look at the painting with KATHRYN.)

(To KATHRYN.) You've noticed the painting.

KATHRYN: Sorry? I can't understand you.

GENEVIEVE: The painting? The painting on the wall?

KATHRYN: When you go to countries where terrible things have happened, things that I cannot mention, things that I prefer to look at through the eye of a lens, when you go to these countries the thing that shocks you is that you are so shocked you are not shocked at all.

(The phone rings.)

GENEVIEVE: Does she understand it? Can you ask her? What does she think of that painting?

MICHELEINE: *(Calling out.)* Marianna…

GENEVIEVE: My husband painted –

MICHELEINE: *(Beat.)* I forgot, today is her half day.

(No one answers it.)

KATHRYN: Then something throws you, some incongruous object, a child's rubber ring or a school book in the mud, or a grown man crying because he can't get a jar open, a jar of honey which he has found in the wreck of his house. You are touched for a moment by the horror of it all and you want to – You want to close the door quickly…

GILMA: What do you think of the painting?

GENEVIEVE: My husband painted.

KATHRYN: *(Beat.)* That painting…that painting is the foot in the door.

(A beat. The phone stops ringing.)

GENEVIEVE: What did she say?

GILMA: Not much at all.

MICHELEINE: Someone will have answered it.

GILMA: *(To KATHRYN.)* Someone will have answered it.

KATHRYN: Gilma, I can't stay here –

MICHELEINE: *(Beat.)* My husband had he not joined the political arena may have been an architect…

GILMA: *(To KATHRYN.)* A builder…

KATHRYN: I'd like to use the phone? Gilma… Gilma… Has she any idea what is happening?

MICHELEINE: *(Beat.)* My daughter. My grandson they live on the Southside.

GILMA: *(Holding up video.) A Bug's Life.* Second favourite after *Toy Story.*

KATHRYN: Cartoons. Fuck. Fuck.

GILMA: Could I watch?

MICHELEINE: If you'd like –

KATHRYN: No.

MICHELEINE: She's rude. So sharp. Why are you so rude? They're being rude to me.

Oolio, where are you? Sweetheart, where are you?

KATHRYN: She tells us the story of the first time she met him –

MICHELEINE: I was standing in the library. He kissed me on my neck. Have I told you this story?

GENEVIEVE: No darling, you've not told me.

KATHRYN: She has… Several times… It is clear on the woman's face.

GILMA: *(As if to KATHRYN.)* Her husband made love to her –

MICHELEINE: …around the great buildings of our city…

GILMA: *(As if to KATHRYN.)* Fish markets…and how do you say…the place where you…watch the sharks swim.

KATHRYN: Aquarium.

GILMA: Aquarium.

KATHRYN: How unusual…

GENEVIEVE: Yes…

GILMA: I guess yes.

MICHELEINE: *(To GILMA.)* I'm watching you.

GILMA: Amazing, how they get the bugs to talk like that –

MICHELEINE: She thinks that they're real. Christ –

GILMA: She thinks I think they're real. Christ –

GENEVIEVE: *(To GILMA.)* Kathryn, with your work? You must have travelled?

MICHELEINE: Genie, don't bother her –

KATHRYN: All the time she is talking –

MICHELEINE: …my husband always says busy people find it boring to discuss work.

KATHRYN: …her skin is pulling tighter across her mouth, and tiny specks of powder blot the beads of sweat around her nose. The light has now quite gone.

MICHELEINE: We thought by the window.

GENEVIEVE: Micheleine. It's nearly ten o'clock –

MICHELEINE: Please don't ask – Please don't ask again.

KATHRYN: …and we've been here since four.

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GENEVIEVE: When Micheleine calls I am not watching the TV programme. The one where the man wins a million. I am sitting in my kitchen. I have turned all the lights off. It is dark and outside…the noise is lighting up the sky. Somewhere there are people smashing shop windows. And upstairs my neighbour has just hit his wife.

MICHELEINE: Genevieve?

GENEVIEVE: 'You've caught me watching the television. That thing on the television?'

MICHELEINE: Of course. Why not come over?

GENEVIEVE: 'The one where the man wins a million?'

MICHELEINE: No, that would be fine. That would be absolutely wonderful.

GENEVIEVE: 'Micheleine…'

MICHELEINE: *(Beat.)* There's a lady, she's here from the press.

GENEVIEVE: I put down the phone and sit for several minutes. Upstairs I can already hear someone moving out. They are filling their car with as much as they can carry. Knowing that their Northern neighbours may no longer be their friends. I listen as they bump a washing machine down the stairs. I wonder what I'll take. Certainly not a washing machine and suddenly I realise I'm not going anywhere.

'Micheleine, of course, of course I'll come over.' *(Beat.)* Thirty –

MICHELEINE: …five –

GENEVIEVE: – years is a long time to despise your best friend. *(To KATHRYN.)* Why do you look like that?

KATHRYN: Ask her, ask her how her husband drowned?

GILMA: *(To GENEVIEVE.)* Beautiful colours.

GENEVIEVE: Sorry?

GILMA: *(To GENEVIEVE.)* She thinks beautiful colours.

GENEVIEVE: That's not what she said.

KATHRYN: I'd like to phone my office. It's clear he's not coming.

MICHELEINE: I assure you. I assure you…

GENEVIEVE: Will you calm, Micheleine? Calm.

MICHELEINE: His ulcer is grumbling and he's waiting for some papers. There are some papers he said he has to sign.

GENEVIEVE: *(Beat.)* Feed them. It's suppertime. They're probably hungry.

GILMA: She says that she's starving.

MICHELEINE: *(Eyeing GILMA.)* It is you who is starving.

GILMA: There is fruit and some cheese and some left over cuts.

(The sound of footsteps as though someone is walking down a long silent corridor.)

MICHELEINE: I walk down the corridor to the ground floor kitchen. I notice that the lights have not been turned on in the west wing behind. The darkness is surprising, unfamiliar, unordered. It is ten and by ten, there should be every light on in the house. In the kitchen I still hope to find Marianna. *(Calling out.)* Marianna. *(Beat.)* She normally stays until we are all fed. The oven is off, the larder is empty, she has even taken the flour and sugar from the jars. *(Beat.)* I forget, it's her half day. I scrabble… I scrabble together some kind of supper… Some cheese, some oranges and there is some fat pork at the back of the fridge. I arrange them on a plate, as best I can. I walk back

along the corridor. I see fires burning far away, lighting my route back.

(Whispering.) Oolio… Oolio…

KATHRYN: She calls out a pet name.

(KATHRYN is suddenly standing as if in her path, making MICHELEINE jump, almost laugh, her phone in her hand.)

I can't get a signal.

MICHELEINE: Christ… Christ… You made me jump.

GENEVIEVE: How old are you?

GILMA: Twenty-four. I know I look older.

GENEVIEVE: No…

GILMA: Yes, I do. I know this. You don't have to lie.

(KATHRYN and MICHELEINE hover, as if one doesn't know if the other should cross their path.)

KATHRYN: Can I try it in here? *(As if entering a room.)* Wow…

MICHELEINE: For state entertaining. For official visits. You can seat four hundred with relative ease. The marble was mined from a small village in Southern India. You see the awning it was cut from one piece.

KATHRYN: Oolio?

MICHELEINE: A pet name. I thought I heard him come back.

KATHRYN: Micheleine, can you try and understand what I am saying? My office says there are riots building up on the Southside. Soldiers being shot. Probably looting. Micheleine are you aware of any of this?

(MICHELEINE turns and heads back as if with the others.)

MICHELEINE: I am aware of the young Northern girl, Gilma, as she wipes her plate with the skin of an orange, eating the peel to get the last of the grease.

GILMA: Jackie Collins? My God, I love Jackie Collins.

MICHELEINE: I am aware of my best friend, my dearest friend, Genevieve who is trying to make conversation, trying to make everything alright…

GILMA: Second shelf. Lady Boss… American Star is her best.

MICHELEINE: I am aware of something happening outside of here, I can hear the noise, I just chose to lie. My husband, he finds them relaxing. I prefer…

GILMA: Shakespeare. The complete works…

KATHRYN: Lady Boss. Sometimes there are pockets of insight that one can't help but try and shoot.

(As GILMA licks the last of the food off the plate with her fingers.)

MICHELEINE: Please mind the china. The plates are a set.

GILMA: *(Holding glass.)* Nice glasses.

MICHELEINE: Siberian.

KATHRYN: I'm not an idiot. I know what you are doing.

MICHELEINE: Gilma has a boyfriend. A soldier.

GENEVIEVE: That's very nice. A soldier?

GILMA: The State Military.

GENEVIEVE: That's admirable. A soldier –

MICHELEINE: Gilma's from the North.

(Silence.)

KATHRYN: I need to use the phone now.

GILMA: Where is your telephone please?

KATHRYN: Mine can't get a signal.

MICHELEINE: Just to your right.

(KATHRYN goes to use the phone.)

GILMA: The woman in the green dress watches me while I finish my food up. It is obvious what she is thinking. 'Her manners? Of course she's from the North.' I eat the orange peel not because I have to, not because I am in poverty but because I like the taste.

KATHRYN: At last he picks up the line is faint.

GENEVIEVE: Your accent?

GILMA: It's been five years.

GENEVIEVE: You've visited your family?

GILMA: No. Not often.

GENEVIEVE: That's a pity. I couldn't live, I really couldn't without mine.

MICHELEINE: Liar.

They've never actually visited her. I love Genevieve. She's my very, very best friend but sometimes… I won't say this. I'd hate to embarass her.

GENEVIEVE: I'm sorry.

GILMA: Sorry? What is there to be sorry about?

KATHRYN: *(As if on the phone.)* You sent fucking Makin? I'm stuck here…

Nick… I've been here since four o'clock. There's not a taxi for miles… I can't walk… It's freezing… Would you stick around for this?

Well maybe he's got the right idea… The joke's on us… Fuck, the fucking photo, the light has gone.

GILMA: I visit my family, one day last summer. They ask me how I am. I can't bear the way they eat. I show them the clothes and the things that I have brought them. A jacket from Marks and Spencer's. A video – a hip and thigh diet for my mother. 'Hip and thigh…hip and thigh…where is the food for me to get fat?' This is said, so that I send more money for them each month. 'Even in a war you must make the effort… Even in a war, mother…' Even in a war, I polish my shoes.

MICHELEINE: Gilma has a boyfriend. A soldier.

GENEVIEVE: That's very nice. A soldier? I hope you love him very, very much.

MICHELEINE: You –

GILMA: …plan to get married when he gets home.

As soon as I say this, I wish that I hadn't. Not because I am lying but because it was never true.

KATHRYN: *(As if on the phone.)* … I don't know what's going on here. I don't know why I'm here. Nick, don't piss around. I don't know what to do now. You sent Makin.

GILMA: Fucking, fucking Makin.

KATHRYN: *(As if on the phone.)* Fuck you. Fuck you. Yeah fuck her too.

GILMA: She swears a lot. *(Beat.)* Her office is telling her to stay where she is.

KATHRYN: *(As if on the phone.)* He may have asked for me but he's not fucking here.

(KATHRYN, as if slamming down the phone.)

Gilma, the taxi. We can we get the taxi?

GILMA: We said not until later. We have to wait.

MICHELEINE: My husband has a driver. Perhaps I could call him.

GILMA: She makes gestures to find her diary and call her husband at work.

GENEVIEVE: Your work must be fascinating you take photos for a living?

MICHELEINE: Genie, don't bother her. Oolio says busy people don't like talking about work.

KATHRYN: In places of crisis –

MICHELEINE: My favourite photo of us is at Christmas…

KATHRYN: …places of war.

GENEVIEVE: And you are not moved by the things that you see?

KATHRYN: I'm sorry?

GENEVIEVE: You don't understand at all.

MICHELEINE: It was taken last Christmas. With all of us. The family.

GENEVIEVE: Micha, have you called Angelica? Is she at home with the boy?

(MICHELEINE goes and pours herself another drink.)

KATHRYN: On the desk is a photo. Of her husband with his family. He is wearing a paper hat, he is flushed, the hat's awry, like a comical drunkard or a man with one eye. There is a smile on his face and clasped around wrinkled fingers are those of his grandchild hugging the skin… He's very…

MICHELEINE: Like his grandfather… Do you have children?

KATHRYN: No. Not at all.

MICHELEINE: *(To KATHRYN.)* Are you married?

GILMA: She's asking if you are…

KATHRYN: No.

GENEVIEVE: I imagine there is no time…no time with your work…

KATHRYN: Sometimes it is easier if I say I am married. Sometimes it is easier…

MICHELEINE: *Bug's Life.* Now also stolen. Slipped in her jacket. *Toy Story* in her bag. *Bug's Life* most probably wedged under her bra.

This photograph of my husband? This photograph that you plan to take? You must be important. He rarely courts press.

KATHRYN: It was agreed through my office. A request from his advisors.

MICHELEINE: He's a man you admire?

KATHRYN: More fascinated.

GILMA: More fascinated.

MICHELEINE: To me he's my husband.

KATHRYN: And to the rest of the world?

(The phone rings. And rings until – it stops.)

GILMA: … You drove along the…

GENEVIEVE: Past the Gymnasium…

GILMA: I was there the day they filled in the pool. The day they poured in the concrete.

MICHELEINE: The changing rooms are now offices and the athletic pitch barracks… There were no headquarters. *(Beat.)* I suggested it one evening after supper in bed.

GENEVIEVE: She wants us to admire her.

KATHRYN: In this light she is almost bearable.

MICHELEINE: By morning there were engineers knocking down walls.

GILMA: Your husband used to swim there?

MICHELEINE: He'd been depressed a long time.

GENEVIEVE: With my children.

MICHELEINE: Don't upset her.

GENEVIEVE: Marcus is twenty-one. Darius our youngest is almost eighteen.

MICHELEINE: You've heard from him?

GENEVIEVE: Last week. A painter like his father. He's been skiing for the winter.

MICHELEINE: She is lying.

KATHRYN: She is lying.

GENEVIEVE: He's met a new girl. He doesn't say exactly but as a mother you know.

MICHELEINE: Genevieve.

KATHRYN: The look on her face says she is desperate for us to believe her. The look on her face knows we suspect it's not true.

MICHELEINE: *(Beat.)* A girlfriend. At last. We had money on it he was…

GENEVIEVE: My husband used to tease him. He is gentle like his father. *(To GILMA.)* You don't have children?

GILMA: No. Not yet…

GENEVIEVE: And you?

KATHRYN: No, not at all.

MICHELEINE: *(To GENEVIEVE.)* It's a joke. Don't look so serious. You take me far too seriously.

(MICHELEINE offers GILMA an orange. She takes it.)

KATHRYN: *(Watching GILMA and GENEVIEVE.)* She offers her an orange.

(The phone rings. Eventually MICHELEINE gets up to answer it.)

KATHRYN: She goes to the phone.

MICHELEINE: Hello. *(Long silence.)* Don't do that darling. *(Breaking into a long broad smile.)* He's teasing me on the

telephone… We're eating… Only cold cuts… *(Calling out.)* We'll leave some for you.

GENEVIEVE: As we drink the last of the vodka, her comment still burns me. You may have had money on it Micha, but I know my son is not gay.

MICHELEINE: All the time that I am talking they shell oranges on my floor.

KATHRYN: All the time that the wife is talking, the lady in the green dress is pulling a thread from her hem.

GILMA: It's lovely… It's lovely… That green is a lovely colour…

GENEVIEVE: You think so?

GILMA: I think so…

(Eyeing GENEVIEVE.) She has five notes in her purse. A bus ticket and a library card. And a photo of a man, he is eating a hunk of sausage and standing with a watering can, squinting in the sun.

GENEVIEVE: My husband was fascinated with light and how it fell on life… His paintings were always the balance of dark and light… It seems very black but the more you look, there is… You see in that corner, that tiny chink of –

KATHRYN: She's crying.

(GENEVIEVE gets up to pour herself another drink.)

She's crying. She's trying not to show us. But as she pours herself a drink, there are tears in her eyes.

(GILMA touching KATHRYN's camera equipment.)

KATHRYN: *(To GILMA.)* Don't do that… Please don't do that… You keep on touching…

GILMA: Sorry…

KATHRYN: If you keep on touching you'll get grease on the lens.

(MICHELEINE enters as if off the phone.)

MICHELEINE: He asks that you leave him some of the ham, please. It's his favourite, his sister sends it from her own farm.

She stares at me. I turn and catch her eye, aware she's always watching me.

KATHRYN: You don't look…

MICHELEINE: 54-55 next month.

KATHRYN: She's a vain woman. This flatters her.

GILMA: She says you don't look it… She says…

KATHRYN: Tell her she has beautiful skin.

MICHELEINE: That's really very nice of you… That's really very kind of you…

GILMA: I take the five notes and a photograph.

I slip the purse of the green lady back in her bag.

GENEVIEVE: In my house I have several photos. Of Micheleine with my family. Micheleine and him and my husband and me. On boating trips and birthdays and there is even one at my husband's memorial. Micheleine sitting, head bent down at her husband's side.

KATHRYN: She has this way of turning her head, as if trained, as if knowing that this is captivating…

GENEVIEVE: The photo was commented upon, noted, that they both visibly cried.

(To anyone.) I have the most marvellous photo of Micheleine at my home.

MICHELEINE: There's an edge in her voice.

GILMA: She says she has a photograph of Micheleine at her husband's funeral.

KATHRYN: The friend barely can look at us. She can barely believe she's said it.

MICHELEINE: Have you, Genie? I don't think I've seen that one.

GENEVIEVE: I always admired the coat you wore.

MICHELEINE: You can borrow it…any time at all.

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(GILMA holding the broken bits of vase. A silence broken only by the ring of the phone. MICHELEINE lets it ring for some time until –)

GILMA: I'm so sorry. It was just… In my hand.

MICHELEINE: *(Calling out.)* Marianna… Marianna… I'll get you. *(Calling out.)* Marianna… I get you… I'll one minute… *(Going.)* We need more ice.

(MICHELEINE scoops up the ice bucket to go and get more ice. The phone stops ringing.)

GENEVIEVE: I bolt the gate behind me. I climb into the car. My neighbour has many possessions littered across the grass. A washing machine, a wheelbarrow, a bed, a table… *'You should think of leaving. They won't want you staying here.'* I choose to ignore him. I'm not ungracious. I'm not unfriendly. As I pass in the car, I see his dog sleeping in the machine's metal drum. I drive along the North route and past the Gymnasium.

I stop. I lie in the snow. Wet, seeping through my coat, as if I am floating, as if I could just drown, just drown. I think of going to sleep.

After, the streets are already littered and there are several broken panes of glass. Someone has set off a burglar alarm and there is a crowd near the crossroads. I lean forward and lock my doors. I take the back route here. I drive through the gates and already I know it is over. Maybe now my sons will come back.

(MICHELEINE enters, back with a fresh ice bucket of ice, passing the dustpan and brush to GILMA.)

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MICHELEINE: Genevieve –

(MICHELEINE stands. GILMA is once more on the floor sweeping up some glass with a dustpan and brush. KATHRYN is standing looking at the painting. GENEVIEVE now has her coat on, her hair still wet, pulling off her scarf as if she has just arrived. The repetition is faster, fragmented into a ricochet of words.)

Hair…

GENEVIEVE: Snow.

(GILMA sweeps up on the floor.)

MICHELEINE: Venetian… Special vase –

GENEVIEVE: The roads…

KATHRYN: Green dress.

GENEVIEVE: Oolio –

(MICHELEINE offers KATHRYN a cigarette. KATHRYN declines. GENEVIEVE pours herself a glass of vodka.)

MICHELEINE: Onto our third.

Genevieve. Kathryn… Gilma… Best to go through her.

KATHRYN: You're freezing…

GENEVIEVE: The heater on my car packed up…

KATHRYN: You have a car?

GENEVIEVE: Very old. Very battered.

MICHELEINE: I am shaking. I am frightened. I want to tell them I am very, very frightened. I had not planned for this. What happens next?

GENEVIEVE: Micheleine, there is trouble –

MICHELEINE: I was showing them my handbags.

GENEVIEVE: As far as the North route.

MICHELEINE: The military?

GENEVIEVE: Are not around.

MICHELEINE: Hair…

GENEVIEVE: …dripping.

MICHELEINE: Towel…

(MICHELEINE goes to get GENEVIEVE a towel. GENEVIEVE watches KATHRYN looking at the painting. The phone stops ringing.)

GENEVIEVE: *(To KATHRYN.)* The view from our window… From our house… You see? That is the river and that is the persons…

KATHRYN: And which bit are people?

GENEVIEVE: You see their faces?

KATHRYN: Your husband painted?

Your husband painted it?

For them?

(GENEVIEVE nods.)

GENEVIEVE: *(To GILMA.)* Tell her, will you tell her, I find it frightening too.

(MICHELEINE enters and drops the towel into GENEVIEVE's lap.)

GILMA: They are talking about the painting. All three standing in front of it. That is when I take *Toy Story*. That is when. When their backs are all turned. Earlier Kathryn has asked her –

(A sound. A bang. Shelling. Fireworks. Something. Somewhere.)

KATHRYN: The noise? It's getting nearer.

MICHELEINE: It's much louder if you have the windows open.

GILMA: She closes them. Ignores our gaze. I translate of course.

MICHELEINE: On a clear day…

GILMA: When there's no wind…

MICHELEINE: You can hear almost everything. The silence carries everything.

GENEVIEVE: When the children were younger you could sometimes hear them splashing no matter how far you were from the swimming pool.

MICHELEINE: Genevieve. Don't gush now. What are we to do with you?

(GENEVIEVE hands back the towel to MICHELEINE.)

Help me, Genie, help me. I don't know what to do.

GILMA: *(Watching MICHELEINE.)* She's frightened. You can see this. She smiles but she is frightened. Her mind is elsewhere. She won't notice what I take.

MICHELEINE: When I pick up the phone, the first time there is no one. The silence is empty but there is definitely someone there… The second time I can hear them talking in the other room…

GENEVIEVE: My husband was fascinated with light and how it fell on life…

MICHELEINE: She's trying to impress them, flailing around in artist talk…

'Hello.' *(Long silence.)* 'Don't do that darling.'

Someone is sending insults down the line… Terrible words cutting through the silence –

'Bitch. Whore. Say goodbye now.'

A northern accent. And then – Mama… Mama *(Breaking into a long broad smile.)* He's teasing me on the telephone.

KATHRYN: Terrible things happen, you shoot what you can. You do your job.

(A sound. A bang. Shelling. Fireworks. Something. Somewhere.)

GILMA: Bang.

(A ripple of laughter as GILMA makes them laugh.)

MICHELEINE: A noise. Like gun fire.

I am worried because I think I hear my grandson crying. I am worried because…

(Beat.)

My daughter… Angelica…lives on the Southside.

KATHRYN: If you keep on touching you'll get grease on the lens.

(MICHELEINE as if slamming down the phone.)

(MICHELEINE as if re-entering the room.)

MICHELEINE: He asks that you leave him some of the ham, please. It's his favourite, his sister sends it from her own farm.

GENEVIEVE: Micheleine…

MICHELEINE: It wasn't him… It was someone… I don't know who it was… It was someone…

GENEVIEVE: How did they get your number?

MICHELEINE: I don't know… I don't know…

GILMA: If I hadn't been a lecturer, I might have been a photographer…

KATHRYN: People always say this…

GILMA: Do they? I wonder why.

GENEVIEVE: Call him.

MICHELEINE: I have tried. I don't even get his secretary.

GENEVIEVE: Do you think?

MICHELEINE: No.

GENEVIEVE: Do you think maybe…

MICHELEINE: No.

GILMA: Buzz Lightyear is not real, he's an electronic space man and the cowboy…he's the hero. He doesn't like it when he moves in on his patch.

MICHELEINE: What are they talking about?

GENEVIEVE: They're making conversation.

GILMA: The cowboy is in love with… I can't remember who the girl is.

KATHRYN: Barbie?

GILMA: Of course, Barbie, but she is the fantasy, the cowboy has a real love that the space man steals.

KATHRYN: This is a ridiculous conversation… This is a fucking ridiculous conversation…

MICHELEINE: Bo Peep. It's Bo Peep. I've watched it with my grandson.

GILMA: Of course it all turns out alright in the end. *(Long beat.)* You've not had sex, it's clear –

KATHRYN: Piss off.

GILMA: …in a very, very long time.

KATHRYN: Fuck you.

GILMA: Desperate.

KATHRYN: Is that nice and clear?

GILMA: When? One year…two…

KATHRYN: Three… Three weeks ago… Actually.

GILMA: Not bad. And you enjoyed it?

KATHRYN: Brief. Necessary. Uncomplicated. Yes I enjoyed it.

GILMA: I sometimes get it wrong.

KATHRYN: The wife is upset. She is being hushed by the woman in the green dress. *(To GENEVIEVE.)* You're freezing…

GENEVIEVE: The heater on my…

KATHRYN: Could you drive me, if I paid you, over to the Southside?

GILMA: On the Southside is the flat where I live with my boyfriend's mother. She is poor and I work to make sure there is money coming in –

GENEVIEVE: The North route is log jammed…

KATHRYN: But there's a road, we drove past it…

GENEVIEVE: I can't.

KATHRYN: Please –

GENEVIEVE: Don't ask me. I can't.

MICHELEINE: She can't. Alright? Alright.

(Beat.)

GILMA: This morning I receive a call from my agency. There is one phone in the hall, which you can only use at certain times in the day. I am told I am to come to interpret for the wife of a diplomat and a journalist, a photographer who is coming into town. Giving the taxi driver instructions which I have picked up from the agency, it is only then I realise where it is we are to go. He is not just a diplomat, he is more than a diplomat.

MICHELEINE: Gilma's from the North.

GENEVIEVE: Your accent?

GILMA: It's been five years.

GENEVIEVE: You've visited your family?

GILMA: Sometimes.

GENEVIEVE: *(To KATHRYN.)* I'm sorry. I can't. The roads are too icy.

KATHRYN: Snow.

GILMA: Snow, slowly falling outside.

(The four women stand as if looking out of the window, watching the snow fall as it floats by outside.)

GENEVIEVE: The night my husband died –

MICHELEINE: You were having supper with us…

GENEVIEVE: He had gone to take the children to the Gym –

MICHELEINE: And left her all alone. I persuaded you to come and eat with us… Our husbands were school friends, that's how we met. Tell them the story of the first time you visited…

GENEVIEVE: Micheleine…

MICHELEINE: A dinner party, the first we ever had…

GENEVIEVE: In that flat…

MICHELEINE: Above the butchers…

GENEVIEVE: Pie-eyed…

MICHELEINE: Preferred to dance…

GENEVIEVE: …while they talked rubbish late into the night…

MICHELEINE: This is where we differ… My husband never talked an ounce of rubbish in his life…

KATHRYN: Maybe if I could take the car.

MICHELEINE: You have the right kind of insurance? I didn't think so. That would be dangerous.

(KATHRYN laughs.)

Have you not family? Someone you should think of. Have you no-one who may be worried about you back home.

GENEVIEVE: I don't think it would get you there.

KATHRYN: It is no more dangerous than what is going on in here. Translate it… Gilma will you please tell her what I said?

GILMA: The car's fucked. Don't keep asking. I've paid for the taxi. To take us back to the Southside.

(KATHRYN looks to GILMA who remains silent until –)

She says that is fine. She will wait for the taxi ride.

(MICHELEINE nods, offers KATHRYN another orange from the bowl… KATHRYN hesitates then takes it and starts to peel, she walks as if going outside.)

GENEVIEVE: Fireworks.

(KATHRYN nods. They look up as if above the sky has just lit up. The sound of shelling.)

KATHRYN: Fireworks. And not even November…

GENEVIEVE: Sorry…

KATHRYN: It doesn't matter.

GENEVIEVE: I'm sorry. I don't understand.

KATHRYN: Sometimes, tonight, I wonder why I do this.

GENEVIEVE: I loved my husband.

KATHRYN: Yes.

GENEVIEVE: Love. I loved my husband.

KATHRYN: Sorry.

GENEVIEVE: I want you to know that.

(GILMA peels an orange.)

MICHELEINE: There's a bowl…

GILMA: She is watching even when I peel an orange.

MICHELEINE: Why don't you put your peel in the bowl?

GILMA: Sorry. Sorry.

MICHELEINE: There's no need to be sorry… *(Beat.)* Your boyfriend, the soldier, is he from the North?

GILMA: His family live here, here in the city.

MICHELEINE: I thought not. I thought not in the army. If he was from the North, they wouldn't let him in.

(GILMA pauses in peeling her orange, letting the peel drop to the floor.)

KATHRYN: How far away? *(Beat.)* How far away do you think they are? You know they'll come here.

GENEVIEVE: *(Looking at KATHRYN.)* I wonder, looking at this woman, if this was a different time, if we spoke the same

language, if this hadn't happened, if I wasn't me and this all hadn't happened, would we be friends?

KATHRYN: The light. It doesn't matter…

GENEVIEVE: She carries a kind of melancholia… Your family?

KATHRYN: Family. Just me. Not really any family.

GILMA: What are you fucking looking at?

GENEVIEVE: A kind of melancholia that is familiar to me.

GILMA: *Bug's Life* in my pocket.

MICHELEINE: Don't think I haven't noticed…

GILMA: Shit she's going to say it.

MICHELEINE: Gilma *(Long silence.)* you've some orange in your teeth.

(GILMA picks, nods. Silence.)

GILMA: Your husband is a great man.

MICHELEINE: To me he is my husband.

GILMA: My boyfriend has his picture above our bed.

MICHELEINE: He's a soldier. As it should be.

GILMA: Yes of course, as it should be –

(MICHELEINE holds out her hand. GILMA disposes the peel into her hand.)

Thank you.

MICHELEINE: You're welcome. Gilma.

GILMA: Gilma. Micheleine… Are you not worried about your husband?

MICHELEINE: Are you not worried about your soldier?

KATHRYN: The woman in the green dress is shivering… Genevieve? I'm going inside.

(MICHELEINE rolls back laughing as if GILMA has just told her the funniest joke.)

MICHELEINE: *(As if bursting into conversation.)* That is the rudest joke that I ever heard.

GILMA: He learned it in the army.

MICHELEINE: And it best stay there. We thought that you had gone…

GENEVIEVE: I was showing her the car.

KATHRYN: She's right, I can't drive it.

GILMA: The car is fucked.

KATHRYN: That's not what I said.

GILMA: She says you're right, she can't drive it. But thanks very much.

KATHRYN: If you are going to talk for me can you try and get it right.

GILMA: If you don't speak it how do you know what I am saying?

(The phone rings. MICHELEINE does not move.)

If you don't speak it how do you know what I am saying?

KATHRYN: I know.

GILMA: Pardon. *(Beat.)* You don't speak a word.

GENEVIEVE: I'll get it, Micha.

(The phone rings some more. GENEVIEVE goes and answers it.)

GENEVIEVE: *(As if on the phone.)* Hello… I'll tell her but she won't like it. I hear you… I hear you… That kind of talk doesn't wash with me…

(GENEVIEVE, as if coming back off the phone.)

MICHELEINE: You spoke to him. He's on his way, Genie.

(GENEVIEVE is silent.)

Did he give you a message? Did he not want to speak to me?

GENEVIEVE: No.

MICHELEINE: No?

GENEVIEVE: No.

Is there any more to drink?

MICHELEINE: See. He's on his way.

GENEVIEVE: The photograph. Where did you find it? In your hand? The photograph?

GILMA: Under your chair. It must have slipped…

GENEVIEVE: Out of my purse. Marcus is twenty-one. Darius almost eighteen. There's a new girl. He doesn't say exactly but I know –

MICHELEINE: *(Beat.)* A girlfriend. At last. We had money on it he was…

GENEVIEVE: No. You always say that, but no you are wrong.

MICHELEINE: What do I say? Genevieve, if I have upset you…

GENEVIEVE: You haven't but let us now at last set the record straight. My son is not gay. My son is gentle. My son is like his father, but for you it is easier to say…

MICHELEINE: Genie –

GENEVIEVE: Easier to say…

(GILMA stands up and moves across the room, placing back the video of 'Bug's Life' onto the table.)

GILMA: My favourite is *Toy Story* –

KATHRYN: She places it on the table. She is totally unashamed. The wife and the friend, Genevieve, stop their arguing, the wife is momentarily bemused…

MICHELEINE: My grandson's.

GILMA: And there it is back. *(To MICHELEINE.)* Your husband is a man I admire, Miss. Your husband is a man who I believe is doing good. Your husband, I am grateful to your husband for all he has done –

MICHELEINE: For your people? For your family?

GILMA: My family is not my family. My family is my soldier. My family, like your husband, despises people from the North.

My mother says 'A soldier? You are sleeping with a soldier?' 'Yes, mother. Yes, mother. What is wrong with that?'

One day through her door my mother gets a tongue, cut out from the throat of my brother, her youngest son.

MICHELEINE: That's most surprising. I'll tell my husband. He will be surprised to find that…you…feel the same way. Well done.

GILMA: Bloody and dirty and staining the newspaper it's wrapped in. A dirty Northern tongue. A warning to us all.

You're welcome.

MICHELEINE: That's quite alright.

KATHRYN: In a Northern town not far away, an old man brings me a baby, a baby that the soldiers have gouged the eyes out from.

GILMA: What?

KATHRYN: The old man is holding the baby up to me to witness, holding it up, asking me to take it, to take it in some way.

GILMA: What?

KATHRYN: I feel sick. I feel sick, not because I have not seen this before, because I have just used the last of my film. I pretend to this man. I shoot anyway.

You're from the North.

GILMA: I'm whatever I want to be. In my pocket, is your licence. International. *(As if reading.)* Kathryn Margaret Foxton. Kate Foxton.

KATHRYN: Give that back.

GILMA: It fell out in the taxi. You might need it when you get home.

KATHRYN: I'm going to tell the agency. Not to use you again.

GILMA: That is fine. That is fine. I can always find work elsewhere.

KATHRYN: And after. Where will you go then? When your soldier is back? What happens then?

(A sound. A bang. Shelling. Fireworks. Something. Faint. Yet closer than before.)

MICHELEINE: When I first met my husband, my father did not want us to marry, it was all a secret, I used to meet him at an old school hall outside of the town.

KATHRYN: *(Watching MICHELEINE.)* Lamplight. A window. She kneels on a chair. Her feet hang. Her nose pressed against the glass. The sound of… The snow keeps falling.

MICHELEINE: One winter, when the snow was so thick that for days we would never leave the house, only my father would be picked up and driven to work. The days were very boring and my sister was so irritating and all I wanted to do was see him, this boy, who I did not yet know whether I loved, when there was a tap at the window and I looked down and it was him and I say… *'Ssh my little sister will give us away.' 'Don't worry my darling, no-one will know that you have been with me, walk in my shoe steps, follow behind me and then there will be only one set of footprints in the snow.'* So I followed him through the dark of a very, very short day and that afternoon, while my sister played house with my mother, we made love for the first time until I was sore –

He leans back to kiss me. A small patch of stubble. Something about his manner. Back in one hour.

I feel sick.

Genie, I'm rambling –

GENEVIEVE: It's late…

MICHELEINE: Did someone win a million – ?

GENEVIEVE: No, a fat lady had trouble with a question on the Pope.

MICHELEINE: Did you know the answer?

GENEVIEVE: No.

MICHELEINE: You must read more, Genie, you really must read more.

GENEVIEVE: New handbag.

MICHELEINE: Last season's.

GENEVIEVE: It doesn't look it.

MICHELEINE: You're sniping…

GENEVIEVE: I'm not, Sweetheart.

MICHELEINE: You're picking a fight.

GENEVIEVE: Micha, when I drove over, I saw they had firebombed the Southside.

MICHELEINE: Along the Terra –

GENEVIEVE: Yes –

MICHELEINE: Oh my God… My God…

Coffee –

(MICHELEINE goes as if to make coffee.)

GILMA: Is Micheleine alright?

GENEVIEVE: Her daughter she lives –

KATHRYN: With the boy?

GILMA: With the boy…

KATHRYN: Your family?

GENEVIEVE: …moved away when their father –

MICHELEINE: I ring the office.

The woman who finally answers it is my husband's secretary. She spent last Christmas here when her house was burgled and she had nowhere to go.

'Where's Oolio…? He's not there… But he was coming to sign papers. He was coming to you to sign papers. But he's taken the car.' There's noise. A lot of noise.

Hello… Hello –

(The woman hangs up on MICHELEINE or is cut off.)

See, he's on his way.

(Aside to GENEVIEVE.) He didn't call. You didn't talk to him –

GENEVIEVE: Micha –

MICHELEINE: Why did you lie?

GENEVIEVE: Did you want me to tell you that some man with a thick Northern voice, a thick Northern gruff voice, a thick angry Northern gruff voice thinks you're a whore?

I thought not. *(Beat.)* I thought not.

MICHELEINE: It's the waiting.

GENEVIEVE: Yes… I know… I understand that.

(MICHELEINE suddenly breaks into a low, wailing, engulfing outpouring that shocks and silences those around her, for several seconds until, regaining composure –)

MICHELEINE: No milk? The milk is on the sill. I put it there this morning. Excuse me…

KATHRYN: No one says anything until –

(The clitter-clatter of heels as if disappearing down a long corridor.)

MICHELEINE: I have never noticed until this day what a clitter-clatter my tiny mules make along this corridor. I have never noticed the way my husband winces every time I run to greet him, fuss around him, scoop the work papers out of his arms and ask him to tell me about his day. 'Darling, your shoes.' I thought it was just him…just his grumbling ulcer… I thought that my conversation… my concern…my direction when yet another problem fell in his lap, yet another blot on the landscape threatened to disrupt some important advance, soothed this noise. That my advice, taken, relied upon, needed, often acted upon, was enough to disguise the clitter-clatter of heels I have observed in other women.

'Where's Oolio?'

'He's not here.'

'But he was coming to sign papers. He was coming to you to sign papers.'

'Micheleine, you must get out of the house. Micheleine you must get a car and get out of the house and get out of the city as soon as you can.'

'But he's taken the car…'

There's noise. A lot of noise…

'Micheleine. I can't talk to you now. He has left you. He has left us.'

(The footsteps stop. MICHELEINE takes the milk and pours it into a jug.)

KATHRYN: He wasn't on the phone, was he?

GENEVIEVE: No.

KATHRYN: He's gone.

GILMA: At that moment I see my mother-in-law… My non-mother-in-law, my boyfriend's mother, where I live until my boyfriend comes home…

I kiss him with my dirty Northern tongue.

At that moment I see my mother-in-law screaming at others to get out. They have stolen her television and are writing things on the wall… The Northern invasion… It is from my mother-in-law that I have learnt to speak. She turns a blind out to the odd clumsy vowel, I assure her that this is a throwback to some distant relative a long time ago who came from the North side… I know she doesn't believe me but the money I bring in is more important to her. It is I who stole the trainers that she wears on her feet. Nike Air, size seven. Men's. Too big. Uncomfortable. Taken from a journalist who was careless with his bag. If this is it…if this has not been for anything better than this –

GENEVIEVE: You have walked into this mess…

KATHRYN: This is what I do.

GILMA: Where's he gone?

GENEVIEVE: I don't know.

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(GILMA smashes the vase in her hand.)

GILMA: I'm sorry –

MICHELEINE: Gen…

GILMA: It was just in my hand.

(GILMA bends down and starts to sweep up the broken vase as GENEVIEVE stands once more in familiar pose, pulling the scarf off from around her neck. Language is almost obliterated, the physical actions more important than what is said.)

Hair…

GENEVIEVE: Kathryn…

(GENEVIEVE and KATHRYN go to shake hands but stop.)

KATHRYN: Gilma, outside, ask her does she know that outside, the crowd, they'll be seeking a revenge.

(GILMA does not respond.)

KATHRYN: Gilma?

GILMA: I can't translate that.

KATHRYN: You won't translate that?

GILMA: I won't translate that.

GENEVIEVE: I think she is questioning whether it is right to stay.

MICHELEINE: *(To GENEVIEVE.)* Did you go? You did not. Even when your husband died. You did not leave. Did you? Did you? Look at your hair.

GENEVIEVE: Why have you stopped crying? I could feel sympathy for you when you were crying. I can remember the warmth of that night when we ate scrag end of lamb and our husbands danced with us and mocked us and laughed at us. And thirty-five years on here we are now.

I think she is right. I think you should go.

MICHELEINE: I'm not listening.

GENEVIEVE: You can hear me.

MICHELEINE: I'm just not listening.

GENEVIEVE: Oolio has left you…

MICHELEINE: *(Eyeing KATHRYN.)* You've been listening too much to her.

GENEVIEVE: On the way here, on the North route I passed the Terra Strata, the road is firebombed, my neighbours were cheering…

GILMA: The Terra Strata. My boyfriend and I live near.

MICHELEINE: How long have I known you? How long have I known you?

GENEVIEVE: Thirty –

MICHELEINE: – five…

GENEVIEVE: …years.

MICHELEINE: And you give up now… He will not be pleased with you… Don't blame me if Oolio's angry with you…

(GENEVIEVE gathers together her coat and bag, as if preparing to go.)

(MICHELEINE picks up a towel and rubs GENEVIEVE's hair.)

GENEVIEVE: I want to be with my children. If I drive around the back road I might make it to the Strata –

MICHELEINE: And you think they'll want to see you? They don't want to know you. I know, Genie, don't make us laugh any more, everyone has always known. You let them down. Children don't forget that.

KATHRYN: Woman in the green dress. Almost bent double. Mouth slightly gaping as if she is going to laugh or as if she is trying not to lose the sweet out of her mouth.

Genevieve, are you alright?

(GENEVIEVE nods.)

(To GILMA.) What did she say?

GILMA: She says –

MICHELEINE: Your sons don't love you. They've lost where they've come from –

GILMA: She says –

MICHELEINE: When was the last time they even sent a card?

GILMA: She says –

GENEVIEVE: You make it hard for me to like you.

GILMA: When did you last see –

MICHELEINE: …your own grandchild.

I understand why you're angry. I understand that there is jealousy – Your husband is dead while mine is still alive. *(To KATHRYN.)* Suicide is painful.

GENEVIEVE: It wasn't suicide.

MICHELEINE: Suicide is surprising, but we weren't surprised. *(To GILMA.)* Translate it.

He was a very unhappy man. *(To GENEVIEVE.)* When the inquest was called you were happy to admit this, you were happy to acknowledge that he had not been as well as before.

He had a certain darkness, a way of not seeing the world… It was irritating, destructive to say the least. I've kept the painting as a tribute to him. A reminder, that on every life some rain must fall.

(To GILMA.) Translate it.

GILMA: *(To KATHRYN.)* Do you understand?

KATHRYN: Yes, I understand.

MICHELEINE: He'd been depressed. It was clear he'd been depressed for a long time.

(GENEVIEVE sinks into her chair. MICHELEINE comes over and takes her hand.)

KATHRYN: The wife, head to head with the lady in the green dress. The loll of a scuffed sandal next to the wife's thin zebra mule.

MICHELEINE: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Genevieve, I'm sorry, but there was nothing, nothing anyone could do.

GENEVIEVE: She calls me up, and says –

MICHELEINE: Genevieve, get your self up here –

GENEVIEVE: We have oysters to eat. There's far too many, so won't you join us. Bring…

MICHELEINE: *(To KATHRYN.)* Her husband. Her husband was a very good man.

GENEVIEVE: I leave him a note. Say come on later. He's taken our youngest son to the swimming pool. Fourteen. Darius is just fourteen.

GENEVIEVE: I arrive at this house and drink oysters and a liqueur. It goes to my head. I'm almost a flirt. Somebody mentions… 'Your husband is a long time.' I'm happy. Not worried. He'll be at home with the boys. And when I get home, the house is empty. The police have called. I'm to go at once. I arrive at the station to find my youngest

sitting in a waiting room, holding his father's swimming towel.

He drowned. He'd been depressed. He'd taken too many… I know what pills he takes. No, you're wrong, who kills himself in view of their child? Takes and swims and drowns in view of their child. Without me even ringing them, I look up and see Micheleine and him, and I know, I see through my youngest's eyes.

MICHELEINE: If we hadn't have kidnapped you. I'm so sorry, Genie…

GENEVIEVE: My youngest wants to speak, to say something but I squeeze his hand hard –

No… I was with my friends all night long. I tell the officers. I see Oolio laughing in a back room with some officers, some brusque aside, some inside joke, about nothing, about some man who drank some magic beer and thought he was Superman, a stupid nervous joke, inappropriate yet needed, badly timed yet delivered with the telling of a raconteur, funny, making her laugh. And I know… I know you killed my husband.

MICHELEINE: He painted the picture, a commission for my husband. It was meant to be the most glorious view. Instead he gave me polemic, instead he gave me mind numbing politics, lies. That painting lies.

GENVIEVE: I know the way these things are done.

GILMA: I was there the day they filled in the pool.

MICHELEINE: There were no headquarters. *(Beat.)* I suggested it one evening after supper in bed. It seemed the only tribute to a very dear friend.

GENEVIEVE: She thinks that we admire her.

KATHRYN: In this light she is almost bearable.

MICHELEINE: By morning there were engineers knocking down walls.

Genevieve, we're not going anywhere. We're here for the duration.

You and I have nothing to be ashamed of.

KATHRYN: Your daughter? She lives on the Southside.

MICHELEINE: No matter.

KATHRYN: But your grandson?

(A beat.)

(MICHELEINE smoothing across the piano stool, as if ironing out a crease, she takes a seat.)

MICHELEINE: Yes, I hear what you say.

GENEVIEVE: The morning after my husband's funeral, I sit in his studio and I look at the painting and suddenly I see what the rest of the world can see. A frightening view, a view of the outside. Unsettling, mocking, outspoken, outside of what one is allowed to say and I hear Micheleine.

But darling, where's the glorious view?

GENEVIEVE: The next day I drive the painting over to Micheleine. 'You must have it. Please take it. He painted it for you.' And I let them comfort me. Let them joke about his outspokenness. Because that painting frightens me, it frightens me like it did them. And from that day I am lost to my sons who see me fawn, and smile, and listen and console with these people so that they can survive. So that I…

(In the distance. Shelling. Fireworks. Something. Somewhere. Very distant. Muffled by the snow and the wind and the distance.)

GILMA: I look at this woman. I have her bus pass in my bag. And a lip pencil and some tweezers and a small St Christopher.

KATHRYN: Taxi?

Cunt bastard's way too late.

(GILMA knocks back her coffee, slipping the cup and saucer into her bag. GILMA exits as if waiting for the taxi. MICHELEINE sits on the piano stool watching as KATHRYN packs up her equipment.)

MICHELEINE: Where do you live? At home. Where is your home?

KATHRYN: I'm sorry… I don't understand what you say…

MICHELEINE: It's nice? Your home.

KATHRYN: Gilma…

MICHELEINE: And when you walk in, what do you see?

KATHRYN: I'm sorry… *(Calling out.)* Gilma? Translation please…

MICHELEINE: There is a mirror, and a table, with a key on the table and a vase of flowers, normally fresh, next to a rack of shoes –

KATHRYN: *(Calling out.)* Gilma –

(GILMA smokes a cigarette, which she has only just lit, admiring the lighter, in her hand.)

MICHELEINE: When you walk into my house you walked along the corridor and there are several prints, cartoons, political, mocking, which my husband likes…

KATHRYN: I don't understand you…

MICHELEINE: A bicycle is always against the door, always waiting for my complaint to Marianna who should have moved it. It is not mine. Turning left is the drawing room and to the right is reception –

KATHRYN: Gilma –

MICHELEINE: I have chosen everything in this house. Everything in this house has a place, has been chosen for a reason, everything I have formed an attachment to.

(The sound of distant violence. Getting closer. GILMA as if standing in the snow, watching the distant violence coming near.)

GILMA: Kathryn, I call out. No one hears me. The city burns now brightly. Kathryn… *(Calling out.)* Kathryn we have to go soon…

KATHRYN: They will come in this house and they will ransack it and take your things and you know what they will do to you then –

MICHELEINE: You've never looked have you? When you walk in your house, you've hardly noticed what is around, have you?

GENEVIEVE: Micheleine…

MICHELEINE: Have you?

(GILMA enters.)

Ask her?

There's mud on my carpet. Your shoes.

KATHRYN: What is she saying?

GILMA: She is asking about your house. The rooms.

MICHELEINE: I want to know what her house is like, she has come into mine… Ask her. Ask her.

GILMA: She says –

(A beat.)

KATHRYN: Hallway… Lampshade… I don't know… *(To GILMA.)* Will you tell her, I think she should leave now?

MICHELEINE: In the bedroom there's a –

KATHRYN: A bed –

MICHELEINE: *(Beat.)* That is it?

GILMA: *(To KATHRYN.)* That is it?

KATHRYN: There's a lamp and some proofs of photos that I am always about to check.

MICHELEINE: And what is on these photographs?

GILMA: The photos? By your bed?

KATHRYN: I don't want to… The massacres in the Northern states. There are several pictures of children with their wounded mothers. There's a boy with his father. They've cut off his hands… There are pictures of soldiers they're taunting a local man. They're making him kill his dog. There's a small shot looks like nothing… Just like a puddle, it's iced over but through the water… There's a face… A child still grubby from the sandwich he was eating, the morning the soldiers came and burnt his house.

MICHELEINE: Tell her I want her to take a photograph.

GENEVIEVE: Micheleine, I'm leaving –

MICHELEINE: Tell her.

GILMA: You've to take the photo.

MICHELEINE: Tell her I want her to take the photograph of me before and after they come –

GILMA: Before and after they come…

(A ricochet of noise. Muffled but nearer…)

MICHELEINE: Tell her, a woman who describes her subject better than her own home, a woman with such attention to detail for her subjects, such an eye for detail, this is a woman after my own heart…

Tell her what does she have left if she doesn't have history? Tell her I'm a piece of history right under her nose.

Tell her I want her to shoot my right side, even after… My right side is the side I want the world to see…

Tell her outside of history she is nothing… A parasite… I am history… I know what I leave behind…

Tell her I want to be seated in front of the painting… Tell her I take back nothing…

(From somewhere the phone rings. And rings. And rings. And stops. Silence. GENEVIEVE picks up her coat and bag and makes to go.)

Genie. Don't drip, sweetheart, you're leaving a trail of water. *(Calling after.)* Be careful. The roads are icy.

(GENEVIEVE pauses, then walks over to MICHELEINE and slaps her hard across the face. A silence. GENEVIEVE turns and exits.)

GENEVIEVE: *(Calling back to GILMA.)* You can have a lift if you want.

MICHELEINE: Kathryn's staying. *(To KATHRYN.)* How can you not?

(GILMA walks across the room before taking off her shoes and dumping them in the bin.)

GILMA: Your shoes… A Northerner needs your shoes.

MICHELEINE: Gilma –

GILMA: A Northern name. Did I not say before?

(MICHELEINE looks down at the mules on her feet, then slipping them off she holds them out to GILMA.)

MICHELEINE: I think they're your size.

(GILMA hesitates, then takes them, nods her thanks and exits.)

KATHRYN: I am sitting in the lobby of my hotel. After. The taxi driver is arguing. He did turn up last night… He haggled about the money even when all around him…

In my wardrobe there are several packets of linen unopened. This is not some fetish just always the thing I buy. When I find myself walking aimlessly around a department store, normally en route back from some job somewhere, I always buy sheets, or pillowcases, whatever. I always buy clean white sheets. I suppose that's my whim. I take them home and am about to unpack but instead I leave them in the wrapper, for next time. I don't know why. I don't know why. Some kind of comfort I suppose. To know that somewhere they are there.

As we drive to the airport, the taxi driver curses. An old lady dances while a young soldier is shot. He is dragged through the street by a rope by his neighbours, who this week are the ones seeking revenge.

On the plane, they serve pineapple and chicken with thin chips, and for once, I am not hungry. For once I want to go…home.

(A ricochet of noise. Louder. Nearer.)

A window. Lamplight. The peel of an orange. The turn of the face as she stands looking out.

MICHELEINE: My face against the light. His book collection in the background. My skin. I have good skin.

The world is white…

KATHRYN: The hallway. The darkness. The door open outside. Outside –

MICHELEINE: The snow. Everything is…

KATHRYN: …everything is…

MICHELEINE: …stay and take your photograph

What else is there to do?

(The rhythmic ricochet of noise the silent undercurrent.)

I am seventeen, it is snowing, I am walking back with… he's ahead of me… I tease him to hurry up, bored with his pace. He is lumbering and frightened of the ice and won't

go any faster so I step across him and this time it is he who has to tiptoe behind to match my boot. And he does, laughing. It is snowing, and we are laughing. And that is when I know I have found the love of my life.

Oolio… Keep up.

KATHRYN: I'm sorry. I don't know what you're saying.

(MICHELEINE turning slightly to the right.)

MICHELEINE: My right side…

(The ricochet of noise grows louder, carrying the ripples of violence, of shelling as KATHRYN hovers with the camera in her hand, as if holding a gun.)

Shoot… Shoot…

(KATHRYN hesitates then slowly aims her camera –)

The End.