

Rayla Clay...and the following day

A play script by David Riaz Zaman

The John Byrne Award (July, 2020)

“I see the Past, Present and Future, existing all at once before me.”

William Blake

“There is no present or future – only the past, happening over and over again-now.”

Eugene O'Neill

The People

RAYLA: Rayla Rayne, aged 12.

A listener, a 'sponge', who projects a subtlety of refinement and perception beyond her years. Rayla has grace: and her optimistic outlook and older-than-her-years maturity is not just wisdom, it's a self-imposed safety mechanism; because at her core, Rayla is a wild pony, straining to bolt.

RAY: Rayla's older self, aged 37.

Ray's become as addictive / alcohol dependent as her father. Ray's grown combustible, where she swiftly exudes a moody, incendiary defiance. Her redress to bursts of shame and blame is, to a large extent, her *raison d'être*: a substitute for the life she wanted; at least when she roars, she knows she's alive. Deep down, and it will surface, this woman is a luminosity of unfulfilled desire.

SAM – Ray / Rayla's dad, aged 39.

An unemployed lecturer: subversive, rebellious, charismatic – a functioning alcoholic. Sam projects a burning, caustic articulation about the world, and himself in the world. His youthful, cynically hostile wit is merely a veneer: any semblance of humour a smokescreen for what is a raging storm of addiction, damage and despair at the heart and soul of his torn and tattered being.

Time and Place

A city, more poor than rich, one day in the near tomorrow.

A two-bedroom flat that Sam shares with his daughter, Rayla / Ray: the action unfolds in a single time and place, but, as you'll see, this is something of a Memory Play, a slice of hyper-realistic Magic Realism, where the past-present-future play out in real time before our eyes.

Design: a sense of the city, a sense of a room, and a sense, albeit fractured, of the beauty-truth that's Alicia Keys.

Dedication

To my father, 'Sam' – for the trawl of hope, the crawl to love, the "fearful symmetry."

Peace now, "tyger tyger" – we're clean – so sleep.

Act One: Before the Interview

Lights up on RAYLA, aged 12, cradling a man.

The man, curled into her in a kind of foetal position, is wearing a shabby suit; tie loosened, shirt hanging out.

The man is SAM, her father: he's fragile, broken – the final day of a frail, sick 80-something man.

RAYLA holds her father, gently rocks him.

Light change.

RAY – RAYLA'S older self, aged 37 – is there.

She's holding a hat in one hand – a trilby – and a tumbler of scotch in the other.

RAY is not drunk at this point – merely reflective – as she sips scotch, addresses us.

RAY: My name is Rayla, Rayla Rayne. I'm 3 years away from 40, the Big Four-O, and to tell the truth - - didn't think I'd make it this far. Once upon a time, I was 12, 12-years-old. Stuck in a rut, modelled and shaped by this man in my life – putty in his loving hands. Like clay – easy to shape when wet, but when left out to dry - - I just seized up. So, once upon a time, there was a day – a wet and wild day.

RAYLA, to her dying dad.

RAYLA: “That's all it takes,” you used to say.

RAY: “Carpe diem, seize the day.”

RAYLA: “Squeeze it,” you said, “squash the living truth out of it.”

RAY: “Because life is what happens in a day.”

RAYLA: So here we are, dad – finally.

Music begins: 'Rock Wit U' by Alicia Keys.

RAY: That one true day.

Lights begin to change.

RAY: Oh – and a hat.

Rayla Clay...and the following day

RAYLA cradles her dad.

RAY bows her head, raises her tumbler of scotch, and is about to put on the trilby.

Before the hat touches her head . . . fade lights.

The music / song keeps playing.

Lights up on RAYLA, SAM.

SAM, getting dressed – into that suit; RAYLA will assist him.

Fade music / song.

SAM exudes an infectious, wired energy, the kind that's motored by the toxic-euphoric drench and dreg of having consumed a skinful of booze the night before.

SAM: So what I'm saying is – listen to me now – we squeeze it, we hold the day in the palm of our soul, and smash the living blood out of it.

RAYLA: Carpus deezum.

SAM: Carpe Diem.

RAYLA: Sorry, that's what I meant.

SAM: As opposed to Mea Culpa. Which means - - ?

RAYLA: Dad, you're gonna be tired out before you *get* there.

SAM: I'm fine, don't fuss – Mea Culpa means - -

RAYLA: You're still sweating it out.

SAM: Ray, you are not my mother, just tell me what - -

RAYLA: Fault. It means Through My Fault.

He beams, gives her a hug.

RAYLA pulls a face, disengages.

SAM: What? Do I stink?

RAYLA: No, but sort of - -

SAM: Truth, Ray – always tell the truth.

RAYLA: But I wished you'd stopped last night, instead of carrying on.

SAM: "I've started so I'll finish."

RAYLA: Yeah. "One's too many, two's - -"

BOTH: "- - not enough."

SAM laughs.

SAM: Smart girl. Look at you – my ball of fire. And what am I? *(pause)*
You gotta say it.

RAYLA: Dad, please.

SAM: If you don't say it, I'll have bad luck for the day.

SAM awaits a response.

RAYLA: Ball of fire, light of my life.

SAM: That's my bright girl. And speaking of 'fault', it must not lie in the stars, *ourselves*, but in our - - our what, Ray?

RAYLA: Actions.

SAM: Spot on. Because it's not what we think or feel in life, it's what - -

RAYLA: We *do*.

SAM: Always.

RAYLA: Because the day is short.

SAM: Our *life* is short.

RAYLA: Gotta smash it.

SAM: God, you are so like me. A tiger.

The mention of tiger makes her bashful.

SAM: No, you are – face it – you're a - -

SAM – a big cat roar.

SAM: You're my Cat Woman.

RAYLA: Cat *Girl*.

SAM: Naa, you're getting to be a woman, more and more, with each passing - -

RAYLA: I know, I sort of *feel* it.

SAM: Glad you feel it. Like the cliché about saplings. The bud that blossoms into a - - y'know, butterflies, *rebirth*, the cycle of - -

SAM puts two fingers in his mouth, mimics throwing up.

RAYLA copies him.

SAM: Clichés – hate 'em.

RAYLA: That's why a lot of people don't get you. They don't think like you.

SAM: I'm misunderstood, no question.

RAYLA: That's why they haven't said yes.

SAM: That's thoughtful, my love.

RAYLA: Coz you're trouble.

SAM: (*proudly*) Oh yes.

RAYLA: In a good way.

SAM: One hopes.

RAYLA: Cowards, they are – they're just threatened by you.

SAM: Non-conformity: people *claim* to admire it, but do they?

RAYLA: And this Bad Monkey in you – makes 'em jealous, scared.

SAM: I pity them.

RAYLA: You should, coz it's *their* fault.

SAM: No, seriously – for their own petty narrowness. Like they're sitting up high on a throne of judgement.

RAYLA: And you got more letters *after* your name than they got numbers in their phone.

SAM: Of course, tiger – power. An interview's a game, a struggle for dominance. These structures in life - - you'll encounter them. Hierarchical constructs, Palaces of Them And Us, erected in the name of sublimation. Life, it's all about power, the *abuse* of it.

RAYLA: They're so blind they can't see.

SAM: It's their lazy vision of embracing the 'norm' that makes them, I dunno, 'cautious'. And first impressions – they count?

RAYLA shakes her head.

SAM: Of course not – another cliché. And even if I *do* give off that “He’s trouble, let’s reject him,” then this tension, this tiger in *me*, is a man they should embrace, take to the *bosom* of their precious institution, welcome with open - - because let’s face it: only *unreasonable* men get the job done, with any degree of - -

RAYLA: And women.

SAM: - - of inspiration. I mean, look at me, am I that intimidating?

SAM, at this point, has not put his trousers on.

They share a smile.

SAM: “Oh, he’s tricky, speaks his mind too much,” putting me on the pile of ‘no’ because they can’t cut the mustard with my - - *self*. Maybe it’s all just, I dunno, *ego*. Yep, a Bad Monkey indeed – giving life the finger, giving familiarity the contempt it deserves.

RAYLA: I’m not having a go, dad.

SAM: (*pause*) Um?

RAYLA: Y’know, about sweating – saying things to criticise and that. I just don’t want them to smell it on you, make an excuse of it.

SAM: Hey, nuff said.

RAYLA: I put some gum in your bag.

SAM: Merci, mother.

RAYLA: And I picked up this cheap body spray – it’s really nice. Put that in, too.

SAM: Most considerate.

RAYLA: But it’s not coz you stink. It’s just to keep you - - fresh and that.

SAM: Rayla – never apologise for telling the truth. And I’m telling you – I hate advice, but here’s some advice – watch yourself out there. Those that speak it as it is: they do *not* inherit the earth.

RAYLA: Day like today's gonna change the earth – coz they're gonna say yes.

SAM: Well, we'll see. My future, as ever, in the hands of 'experts' not fit to engage me in - - and you know what they *truly* think? "Gaps, Mr Rayne, there appears to be huge gaps in your employment." The clear implication being I'm sat on my arse all day watching Judge Judy and Dr. Phil.

RAYLA: I like that Judge Rinder.

SAM: "Pushing 40, and he's still not settled."

RAYLA: I'm glad Jeremy Kyle's gone, but Oprah's a goddess.

SAM: I wish they'd man-up and say it to my face: "We genuinely feel that if it was going to happen for you, it would've happened by now."

RAYLA: Forget about all that bad stuff.

SAM: And if I was man enough I'd respond: "Then say 'yes', you feeble contrarians, and maybe it will happen!"

RAYLA: Don't be so negative, dad.

SAM: I am, Rayla.

RAYLA: That's what I'm saying.

SAM: No, not negative – a man, I'm saying I'm a man! (*pause*) Tricky – to stay positive. Days like today, they're getting to be too - - big.

RAYLA tries to lift his ailing spirits.

RAYLA: Forget the big. It's the small that matters – you told me that.

SAM: And I love you for listening.

RAYLA: "Look closely, the beautiful may be small."

SAM – impressed, touched.

SAM: Who said that?

RAYLA: Kant.

SAM: Full name.

RAYLA: Immanuel Kant. Born April 1724.

SAM: Clever girl. 79 when he died – something to *show* for his life.

RAYLA: Not necessarily. Maybe he was horrible – as a man.

SAM: *(pause)* Ball of fire.

RAYLA: *(pause)* Light of my life.

SAM closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, exhales.

SAM: The future, the thought of it – that’s what tires you out. Easy to begin the day – y’know, *hope* – but not so easy to commit to it.

RAYLA senses his fatigue.

SAM: Hey, your dad’s fine. These moments we share – a gift, a gift in life. A day without you, Ray - - it’s - -

RAYLA: It’s okay.

SAM: “Perdition catch my soul, but I do love thee. And when I love thee not, chaos is come again.”

RAYLA: Othello.

SAM: Smart girl. *(pause)* Daddy’s girl.

RAYLA – uneasy.

RAYLA: Don’t think so much. You feel too much and that.

SAM: You’re right, of course. It all comes down to what we *do*. Yes! To hell with thoughts and feelings – it’s what I’ll do that matters.

RAYLA: Knock ‘em dead and stuff.

SAM: If I was religious – God forbid – I’d say your presence here is a blessing.

RAYLA: That’s good, then.

SAM: Good.

RAYLA: ‘Course good, coz I’m always here.

SAM: *(pause)* To your detriment?

RAYLA, unsure, shakes her head.

SAM: This advances *us*, Rayla, not just me.

RAYLA: I know.

SAM: It's about both of us – not all about me.

SAM, more intense.

SAM: And what, you think my saying it means I mean the opposite?

RAYLA: No.

SAM: That I'm like those contrarians, at one with the day for *myself*?

RAYLA: 'Course not.

SAM: Me Myself I applies to someone else 'round here, not me.

RAYLA: Dad, don't.

SAM: It applies, then as now, to the person who's not here.

RAYLA: Please, you need to save energy.

SAM: And what, ignore the past? The past *is* the present – that's something you'll learn this life.

RAYLA: Past's gone. Mom's gone.

SAM: Oh no! (*indicating his head*) Not in here. (*indicating his heart*) And certainly not here.

RAYLA: You're talking like she's a curse.

SAM: It is a curse! (*pause*) Abandonment's the worst curse of all – and we carry it within. (*indicating his stomach*) Here! *This* is thoughts and feelings – it's called How A Man Was Treated, This Man Did Not Deserve It. Me and your mom – we ended up defining ourselves by difference, our differences. Ok, fair enough, but shame - - shame on us. So here I am, alone – alone with you, of course, don't ever underestimate that – but here I stand, the *last* stand, the cliché of the Last Chance Saloon, waiting and wishing for the worst cliché of all: Hope Springs Eternal.

SAM – less intense.

SAM: Do you know what a saloon is?

RAYLA: Is it - - it's a - -

SAM: Don't say if you don't know.

RAYLA: Is it like a - - ?

SAM: If you don't know you don't know.

RAYLA: No, I think it's a - -

SAM: I don't expect you to know *everything*, for god's sake.

RAYLA: Hair! Where people sort their hair.

SAM: *(pause)* That's a salon.

RAYLA: Oh, sorry.

SAM: Don't *do* that!

RAYLA: Sorry. I mean - -

SAM: Never apologise to me.

RAYLA: I'm sor - - yes, no, I know.

SAM: How many times do I have to tell you?

RAYLA: I'll never apologise, I promise.

SAM: And never promise – that's worse than lying.

RAYLA: I'll never say sorry, I'll never *promise* I'll never say sorry!

SAM: *(pause)* You know when Kant was born, but you don't know what a salon is. *(pause)* You'll get your nails and hair done. One day.

RAYLA: Don't want all that.

SAM: What *do* you want?

RAYLA: A hat.

SAM: *(pause)* Arrr - - yes - - Alicia Keys.

RAYLA: Goddess Tiger of Light.

SAM: Then a hat yee shall have, my sweet.

RAYLA: And a job yee shall have, my - - dad.

SAM: There is no tomorrow without the - -

RAYLA: Hope of today.

SAM: Well said, my love, but your father - - he has doubts.

RAYLA: That's coz you stayed up too late.

SAM: (*spiky*) Drink doesn't make me a victim, it just relaxes me.

RAYLA: Sorry, I meant - -

SAM: The mind, the muscles.

RAYLA: Ok, sorry.

SAM: Stop apologising! Say what you mean, fine, but know this: I'm survival.

RAYLA: I know.

SAM: Of the fittest, Ray, regardless of - - in spite of - -

RAYLA: "Never give up, never give in."

SAM: Bad habits are just a ritual, a coping mechanism. I am not just a human *resource*, some automaton who must conform, I am flawed, Rayla, human.

RAYLA: You've always been human.

SAM: Exactly, and human beings are complex, they're not just a species that must, y'know, *make* things, propagate and produce things.

RAYLA: They should get on their knees and just pay you to *think*.

SAM: Precisely, thank you! (*pause*) On the other hand, speaking realistically, if they want to exploit me, 'use me' - -

RAYLA: Then they gotta show you the money.

They impersonate Tom Cruise from 'Jerry Maguire'.

BOTH: "Show Me The Money!"

A loud bang-bang on the ceiling: from the occupant of the upstairs flat.

Silence.

SAM gestures "shush, quiet"; RAYLA mimics him.

They stifle chuckles, like a couple of conspiratorial kids.

SAM: I'll tick any box they want. I mean it's not like I'm signing away my soul.

RAYLA: No.

SAM: These things have to be put in perspective.

RAYLA: Balance.

SAM: Proportion, yes, correct and proper - - P,P,P,P,P.

RAYLA: Planning Prevents - -

SAM: Piss Poor - -

BOTH: Performance.

SAM: Yippee Ki Yay!

RAYLA: Motherfucka!

A single bang on the ceiling.

RAYLA, mortified by what she's just said.

SAM: It's okay. I won't tell your mom.

RAYLA: I know. How *could* you?

Tension.

SAM smiles, snaps himself out of his melancholy.

SAM: Come on, Sam! C'mon now.

RAYLA: Hat in the ring.

SAM: No, I'll *get* you that hat.

RAYLA: Yeah, no, I meant - -

SAM: I am neither damaged nor diminished.

RAYLA: No.

SAM: And people – pardon my alliteration – people will not demean me. In spite of the fact that they project their own agenda, then try and contaminate us with it.

RAYLA: Like a waspy sting.

SAM: Absolutely.

RAYLA: Like poison and stuff, rushing through the - -

SAM: Good girl – yes! – like a dagger, dagger to the - -

RAYLA: They try and eat you up and that coz *they're* weak.

SAM: Doing their egregious best to make my world even smaller.

RAYLA: Which is cruel.

SAM: And I require neither pity nor “poor me,” but people’s attitude, this descending spiral of negativity, it’s detrimental, to *me*, the ‘receiver’ of their crap, and then it ends in disgust, *self-disgust* – what a noted scholar once termed (*grandiloquently*) The Entropic Declension of Rot and Waste.

Silence as he gathers his thoughts.

SAM: Waste. Analyse and discuss. “Our next topic is the concept of Squander, and how it becomes addictive.” (*pause*) Squander.

SAM – blank for a moment.

RAYLA: It’s all right.

SAM: I loved your mother. You do know that, don’t you?

RAYLA hesitates, nods.

SAM: I just want to tell her sometimes, remind her what I am, was, *still* am. That I’m not some loser, dragging his bloody paw to the water’s edge – but a tiger. “Tyger Tyger Burning bright, in the forests of the night.”

RAYLA: “What immortal hand or eye can frame - - ”

SAM: Could, *could* frame thy fearful symmetry.”

RAYLA: (*pause*) She knows, dad, I’m sure she does.

SAM: People have to *show* that they know. And if she’s not here, how can she ever *prove* she knows?

RAYLA: No, I know, but - -

SAM: Then fuck her, Ray, stop excusing her.

RAYLA: Yeah, but she can’t be expected to - -

SAM: Fuck her! That statement seemed definitive, don't you think? And it requires neither condescension nor contradiction. *(pause)* Pardon me, I'm just a bit - - worn out. Need to rehydrate. You're right – should've got to bed earlier, drank water.

RAYLA: It's ok.

SAM: No, my love – it's far from ok.

RAYLA: *(pause)* I know what you mean. It's like when I'm down, things not clear and that, I say things, in my head, things I probably don't mean.

SAM: There's my girl. I'm the teacher, but you teach me. So tell me: what do you do, to rid yourself of bad thoughts?

RAYLA: I - - I get on my knees.

SAM: *(wincing)* God? Us?

RAYLA: No, not her, but - -

SAM: Good, because god is dead.

RAYLA: But the goddess – Alicia. Thing is, yeah, I sort of speak to her: "Dear Alicia, Goddess K, sing a song for my father. Sing a song for his efforts, and don't let this world of 'no' burn his bleeding heart. Bring light into his dark, and give him hope for the live long day."

SAM, overcome, kisses her on the head.

SAM: I love you, Rayla Rayne.

RAYLA, uncomfortable, disengages.

SAM changes the subject.

SAM: What's her best song?

RAYLA: *(pause)* 'Rock Wit U'. No, it's 'I Need You'. Hold on: 'No-one'. Her best song's 'No-One'.

SAM: Someone. You're someone.

RAYLA: I know. Was talking about the song.

SAM: And thank goddess she gives you joy.

RAYLA: Just makes me happy and that.

SAM: Remember – three rules for happiness. One: something to do. Two: something to hope for. Three?

RAYLA: Someone to love. (*pause*) I know all that.

SAM, conscious he's losing her, gears up to teacher-pupil mode, delivers the following with verve.

SAM: I'm gonna make you proud today. Remember last night, when I talked about Camus, that seminal book of his?

RAYLA: 'The Outsider'.

SAM: Well, I think I'm gonna refer to this in my interview: the concept of Being and Nothingness, the existential continuum that's the notion of 'self' and 'body' and 'nobody'. The predicament, a pandemic in the west - -

RAYLA: Dad.

SAM: - - of the individual who – no reflected glory or narcissistic vanity – who recognises that the human instinct to conform is not an act of courage, but, in fact, the opposite.

RAYLA: Stop.

SAM: It's an act of cowardice, *denial* even, that we all – ultimately – die alone. No, not unfulfilled, and certainly, one hopes, not unloved - -

RAYLA: Save it.

SAM: - - but that the essence of true fulfilment arises out of a total, absolute consciousness of living your life organically, *in the moment*, which embraces saints as well as sinners – be they clean 'n' sober or smashed 'n' mashed.

RAYLA: Stop.

SAM: And I'll emphasise this: that we're born naked, die naked, get buried, get burnt, the end in the beginning, that to hell with *gaps*, that I'm here to teach, I *can* teach, *should* teach - -

RAYLA: Stop it.

SAM: - - *must* teach, must give my life some purpose and meaning again.

RAYLA: Save it for them!

Silence.

SAM: It's all right. It's all right, Rayla. *(pause)* Feeling too much is thinking too much. And - - vice versa.

SAM – depleted, down.

RAYLA – tender, conciliatory.

RAYLA: So: this hat. It doesn't have to be new or anything. And when you've shown 'em that you're the best for the job, you can celebrate by buying me a hat. It'll make you feel good. And it isn't a trilby – it's a fedora. Alicia *has* worn trilbies, but people keep getting her wrong. It's a fedora.

SAM: *(pause)* Shame on them.

RAYLA: They don't mean anything by it.

SAM: Insult to Alicia. Injury. Because life is *details* in the day, or - - ?

RAYLA: Life's a blur.

SAM: *(pause)* Ball of fire.

SAM, suddenly sad.

SAM: I overwhelm you.

RAYLA is not 'going there'; her mood chipper.

RAYLA: Alicia's sort of like that man in 'The Outsider'.

SAM: Protagonist, not 'man'.

RAYLA: She's an individual, too. Goddess of love who spreads peace and truth. Courageously, alone.

SAM: You should write about her. Make a great dissertation.

RAYLA: I - - I'm years off doing that.

SAM: Know what drives me mad about dissertations? It's just an essay. A big, fat, ugly essay. They should call it Eric or something, *Felicity*, take the academic panic out of it.

RAYLA: You're not gonna say that in the interview, are you?

SAM: *(disappointed)* Pay me the courtesy.

RAYLA: Sorry.

SAM: Stop saying sorry!

Two loud bangs on the ceiling.

SAM shouts up.

SAM: Preparing for an interview, Kaz! Thank you!

A single bang.

SAM: Just getting warmed up – y’know, get the blood flowing. *(pause)*
You mad at me?

RAYLA – a sulky shrug.

SAM: I’m not gonna make promises, Ray. To stop, change. My habits don’t define me – they don’t define a man. It doesn’t excuse anything, either, but I’m not here to justify myself to you. My - - actions. So I’d rather you didn’t – get mad.

RAYLA: I’m not.

SAM: Because I had a bellyful of that with *her*. Treading on eggshells, heart in my mouth twenty-four-seven, wondering when the next tantrum’s gonna burst its banks.

RAYLA: Please.

SAM: To be scared in a marriage. *That’s* the curse. Mood swings. You should’ve seen her, and thank god you don’t remember: swinging high, swinging low, verbal swipes at anything, everything.

RAYLA: I do remember.

SAM: All aimed at my *manpower*, for christ’s sake, the futility of my persistence.

RAYLA: Dad, please.

SAM: And call that her ‘pain’, call it her ‘passion’, but the result’s the same, even on days as crucial as this: she said things to hurt me.

RAYLA: Must’ve been hurting herself, inside.

SAM: She made things up about me.

RAYLA: She wouldn’t do that.

SAM: She has, she does!

RAYLA: She's gone!

Silence.

SAM: I never touched her, Ray. I never hit that woman.

RAYLA: Stop.

SAM: I have never violated or abused, or - -

RAYLA: You're spoiling it.

SAM: *(pause)* Spoiling what, my love?

RAYLA: Hope.

A look between them.

SAM double-checks his appearance, picks up his shoulder-bag, double-checks the contents: i.d., qualifications, stationery, etc.

SAM: A fedora? No problem – the hat is yours, tiger. Because today's the day I succeed. Yes?

RAYLA: Yes, dad.

A door slams – a swift, subtle light change.

RAY'S voice.

RAY: Dad?

RAY enters, with shopping bags: this is the older RAYLA, aged 37.

RAYLA'S attitude to her older self is an approximation of her attitude towards the absent mother.

SAM never addresses RAY / RAYLA at the same time; also – SAM would be 64, but he stays the same age, 39.

SAM addresses RAY.

SAM: How do I look?

Over the following: RAY sets down the shopping bags, takes out a bottle of whisky, locates a glass tumbler (on a bookcase), pours herself a drink – at fairly regular intervals.

RAY: You look fine. A cheap suit can take years off a man.

SAM: Sure?

RAY: Let me tell you what I'm sure of: I'm up and out there, getting 'on it' as usual, giving you time and space to prepare, I walk back in, I walk into *that*.

'That': RAY, indicating the tenant upstairs.

SAM acts all innocence.

RAY: Don't do that, don't do the Who Me. I walk in after running fuck knows how many chores, and before I even get to the door, I'm confronted again, *ambushed*.

SAM: What, the - - ?

RAY indicates upstairs.

RAY: Him, of *course* him. Don't come it all innocent, dad, that's really gonna - -

SAM: I'm not, I'm - -

RAY: - - piss me off.

SAM: Haven't said anything.

RAY: You *must've*.

SAM: Get a grip.

RAY: I come back to *that*, you must've done something.

When RAY impersonates 'that' – the neighbour upstairs, Kazimierz Golanski – she adopts a cod East European Accent, which is not accurate . . .

. . . which will amuse RAYLA more than SAM.

RAY: "Your father be making big noise with voice."

SAM: C'mon now.

RAY: "He go boom with loud talk to make me mad, make me get body up out of chair."

SAM: Stop with the voice, Ray, it's borderline offensive.

- RAY: What's offensive is you being passive.
- SAM: I hate when you do that voice. He's not - - Dracula.
- RAY: No – but he's drinking *something*.
- SAM: Meaning?
- RAY: You know full well what I mean: you've had a drink with him.
- SAM: Not today I haven't, I've been busy.
- RAY: Fraternising with the creature.
- SAM: Ages ago, way back.
- RAY: So why's he pissed off today?
- SAM: I was just - - y'know, playing.
- RAY: Playing?
- SAM: To kick start the day, to - - it was nothing.
- RAY: I thought I went out so you could practise.
- SAM: That, too, but - - a bit of fun, that's all.
- RAY: Well I'm glad you had fun.
- SAM: I'm prepared, I'm ready, just took a bit of time out for - -
- RAY: Fun 'n' games, great. Well let me tell you: no fun when that pig puts his stinking breath in my face.
- SAM: Shush, quiet.
- RAY: Fuck 'shush', Mr Passive.
- SAM: Just get a grip of yourself, Ray.
- RAY: And to hell with "I am man who will not tolerates insult and dissing of respect." And do not tell me to get a grip! "And by way, lady, I 1not know why you *with* man like this."
- SAM: He's just trying to - -
- RAY: I know what he's - -
- SAM: - - get a rise out of you.

RAY: - - doing, what he's doing is using the noise you make with 'fun' as an excuse to get in my face.

SAM: We know this, don't bite.

RAY: *My face.*

SAM: This is what he does.

RAY: Yeah, and what he says, giving me that filthy look, like he wants to touch me, lick me, lick my skin off 'til I'm - - his. Yuck!

RAY puts two fingers in her mouth, mimics throwing up.

RAYLA copies her.

SAM: It's a game, he's just a bit - - uneducated.

RAY: And when he looks me in the eye – disgusting little eyes, the rodent – even then I know. What he's actually looking at is my - - my tits. (*almost to RAYLA*) Sorry – breasts.

SAM: He's a man – he just wants attention.

RAY: I can see him, in his greasy little chair, smacking his lips, putting his grubby hands down his pants: "Arrr, my bitch lady Rayla with your titty so suckable."

RAYLA, highly amused.

RAY: "Yummy, me be Kazimierz Golanski, sucker 'n' fucker of the juicy melon."

SAM: That's ridiculous.

RAY: "I am – how you say in yo country? – I am not a fruit like melon, but melon-kolics."

SAM: Ludicrous.

RAY: "I am man with melancholy lolly, and when I drink I dream of you, then spunk my juice at the thought of yo flesh."

SAM: That's inappropriate, Ray, xenophobic.

RAY, coming on to him as KAZ, but minus the East European accent.

RAY: No, Mister Sam. I am only offer to take your bitch away from your hands, show her time like I show my lady dogs back home.

SAM: Very amusing.

RAY: She must be strong lady, this girl of yours, to have the balls to *do* everything and say everything.

SAM: Hey.

RAY: I see only *her* each day. She bring food, she take letter from post, she go in, she go out - -

SAM: Enough.

RAY: - - she wear herself to the damn bone to fetch 'n' carry.

SAM: Point made, I said 'enough'.

RAY, still a version of KAZ, almost addresses much of the following to RAYLA.

RAY: You see, sweetie, men with many clever words in brain do not wish to get hands dirty in this world.

SAM: I offer.

RAY: If your daddy no be hint-er-lectual, then we would call him for what his behaviour *tells* us he is.

SAM: I *offer* to fetch and carry.

RAY: In my country we call man in sheep clothing a show-ven-eest.

SAM: I am not – never have, never will – been a chauvinist.

RAY: Ain't whatya say, honey, it's whatya - -

SAM: *Do*, quite. And what I do is offer to take up the slack.

RAY: But you don't, dad.

SAM: Because you're up and out before I can blink.

RAY: That is so not true.

SAM: Before I can breathe.

RAY: Don't gimme breathing lessons, professor.

SAM: You validate yourself with this.

RAY: (*pause*) Excuse me?

- SAM: Activity.
- RAY: Oh, what, that's all I'm good for?
- SAM: No, it is not all you're 'good for', it's what you *do*. Of your own volition, choice, your - - *raison d'être*, for god's sake.
- RAY: My reason to be is Facing Reality.
- SAM: Says the woman with a drink in her hand.
- RAY: (*pause*) Takes one to know one, 'daddy'.
- SAM: Look, Ray, your reason to be is Leaving This Flat To Prove You Exist.
- RAY: Don't let's talk existence, Sam.
- SAM: You enjoy shopping, there's nothing wrong with that.
- RAY: Check your finances, Mr Benefits, it's called *window* shopping.
- SAM: Fine, no argument: I claim the benefits, you run the errands.
- RAY: Ohhh, wonderful, "my cup runneth over!"
- SAM: That's unfair, we had an agreement.
- RAY: Yeah, an agreement that's one-sided. I want a division of labour, dad, not just - - supping from the same cup.
- SAM: Well so long as it's flowing, what's the damn problem?! (*pause*) Listen, I'm fully aware of reality, our *predicament*, but I happen to have an interview.
- RAY: I know.
- SAM: Today's reality is a job, the *prospect*, end of.
- RAY: I know, we all know, even Kazimierz Go-fucking-lanski upstairs – even he, the entire block, for christ's sake, we all know you have an interview!
- SAM: To get us a life.
- RAY: Life, existence - - what next? Another mention of – let me guess – another reference to what *you're* doing today.
- SAM: It's called priority.

RAY: Name me something that isn't.

SAM: Spite.

Silence.

SAM: I don't want attention, I just don't appreciate how you minimise. My efforts. *(pause)* Are you listening to me?

RAY: I hear you, dad, I hear you every day.

SAM: No – you're asleep.

RAY: Chance'd be a fine thing.

SAM: Sleep *walking*.

RAY: I resent that.

SAM: Then tell me: what's the subject of my presentation today? What's the core context of my interview that's gonna wow them?

RAY, acting the 'dumb teenager'.

RAY: Urrr, soz, sir, is it about how to fill in a benefit form and pay bills at the same time?

SAM: Hope.

RAY: Is it about balancing them non-existent books, sir?

SAM: Despair.

RAY: Well, now you're talking: if it's about that, send me instead. Bound to get the job.

SAM: And I won't? *(pause)* The implication being that I won't?

RAY: A statement, that's all – of fact. Y'know – facts. Like reality. That Thing We Must Sometimes Face.

SAM: I know what I've faced.

RAY: Yeah, and what I face is the consequence.

SAM: It's not my fault.

RAY: Not saying it is, I'm just saying - - paying you a compliment, *your* words – that if it looks, sounds and smells it, then it *is* it.

SAM: Is what?

RAY can't face him.

SAM: Failure? *(pause)* To fail. That's what you think of me?

RAY: It, that's what I think of *it*.

SAM: You always do this.

RAY: Do nothing.

SAM: Yes you do. Demean! Stick in the knife, twist the blade, then you come out with "Well, you said it yourself, dad, all I'm saying is don't worry, loser, but you'll probably fuck it up, they're bound to say 'no', but all I meant was - - "

RAY: Time to face facts: you've had twenty-two - -

SAM: Three.

RAY: - - interviews, and the point I'm making - -

SAM: Disgraceful.

RAY: - - is, maybe it's time to try something else.

SAM: To do this on a day like today. Unforgiveable.

RAY: I don't mean clean a floor, serve a coffee - -

SAM: Shameful.

RAY: - - mend a car – as *if* – I'm just saying try something that's not about, y'know, *brains*.

SAM: Your father isn't that man.

RAY: Yes, no, that's not the point.

SAM: When you were splashing around in your mother's womb, what did you have in mind for me?

RAY: Oh don't start this again.

SAM: *(baby talk)* "When grow up want daddy to be baker, builder."

RAY: I'm saying be flexible, that's all.

SAM: Every day, little girl – I'm flexible every damn day.

RAY: Be as sensitive and touchy as you like, but the issue's the same: you're proving a point – splendid, honourable – your nobility in the face of adversity is acknowledged, we bow down *before* it, but stay flexible, dad, get your head out the sand, get your head out your *mind* for once, and stop indulging in - - futility!

A bang on the ceiling.

RAY: And you know and I know: if it was gonna happen - -

SAM: It would've happened by now.

RAY: Is all I'm saying.

SAM: That is an egregious, appalling thing to say!

A bang on the ceiling.

SAM: Why don't *you* get a job?

RAY: You're my job!

A bang on the ceiling.

RAY shouts up.

RAY: Shut the fuck up!

No response from upstairs.

Silence.

RAY replenishes her glass.

SAM checks the time, picks up his shoulder-bag, checks the contents.

RAY: You've checked it. I've checked it, you've checked it. It's checked.

SAM: Sensitive? Never said a truer word.

RAY: Dad, look, I'm just - -

SAM: "Just, just". Which has replaced "and that", "and stuff". Ad infinitum, ad nauseam.

RAY: Well children become adults, and what goes around comes around.

A long look between them.

SAM: What do you think I am, Ray? A cliché, He Who Fears Success? I'd welcome it. I'd embrace success, squeeze the living breath out of it. But if you want me to fail, well - -

RAY: Don't you dare.

SAM: - - that's your business.

RAY: Blackmail.

SAM: Your prerogative, your conscience.

RAY: Don't you dare come it on with emotional black - -

SAM: Then don't start if you can't finish.

RAY: Don't lecture me. I am not one of your - -

SAM: No, students are - -

RAY: - - disciples.

SAM: - - kinder, more responsive and supportive.

RAY: Were, were! Past tense, dead, buried, gone!

RAY shouts up.

RAY: And don't say a word!

No response from upstairs.

RAY – introspective.

RAY: Words. *Raised* with 'em – all day every. And they never know when to shut the fuck up.

Almost to RAYLA.

RAY: Like that prick upstairs – different tongue, same words. Words to *put* me down, *keep* me down.

RAY as KAZ – less mocking, more insidious.

“I put you down like bitch, Rayla. You watch that mouth with filthy words, else I, Kazimierz Golanski, will sneak into the night, take the best of you, dip you in man-filth and put cock in yo ass.”

SAM shakes his head, sits, his head down.

RAY: Yeah – one’s too many, two’s not enough.

Subtle light change – RAYLA speaks.

RAYLA: He stopped me. Just back from the shops, and he said “You are sad little pigs. You open dirty mouth and puke up badness. Tell your daddy he is white-trash-educated-guilt. But I am here, little princess, to warn you – you remind this weak daddy of yours: I am Golanski The Great, and back home I am Furious Warrior Prince, Destroyer Of Peace. I have power in heart to smash your living souls, so stay weak and respect strong.” *(pause)* Goddess Alicia would kill him.

Subtle light change.

RAY: Hey-ho: what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger. What kills us is the presence of men like *that* – who you won’t confront. No, you just smile, you leave it to me. You correct *me*, every day, but instead of correcting him you charm ‘n’ disarm, share a bottle or two – to the detriment of me. “Empathy, Ray, one must slip into another’s shoes.” You don’t slip, dad, you slide. Away – as far away from the problem as you can possibly get. You put your head down – like now, look at you – and you think some wonderfully aesthetic, academic thought about the concept of - - of Vicarious Suffering In Postmodern Man, then you swill it around your big fuck-off brain, and leave the little girl to deal with the puke in this world. Then to counter this filth, the little girl does likewise – drinks deep. “Daddy’s Girl.”

SAM: *(pause)* Yes. Quite. I hear you.

RAY: Then act on it: get some balls, get that job, and get us out.

SAM: You’re not your mother. You’re not my wife. So pay me the courtesy, if you wouldn’t mind, of remembering who is who around here.

RAY: Don’t take this personally, Sam – but I haven’t a clue who you are.

SAM: *(pause)* Snap.

SAM stands, checks his bag, the time.

RAY: Leave it, it’s checked.

SAM flings his bag over his shoulder.

RAY: Stick up for me. Stick up for me, dad.

Subtle light change.

SAM goes to RAYLA.

SAM: Light of my life.

RAYLA: They're only people. And today they say "yes."

SAM: Hell Is Other People. Who said that?

RAY: (*distantly*) Jean Paul Sartre.

SAM, to RAYLA.

SAM: Being doesn't *have* to be Nothingness.

SAM gives RAYLA a hug – which is reciprocated.

SAM: Fedora.

RAYLA: Doesn't matter.

SAM moves to exit.

RAYLA: Good luck.

SAM: Carpe Diem. But, one hopes, not Mea Culpa.

RAYLA: Goes without saying. And stuff.

SAM exits.**We hear a door slam.****On the slam: a sharper light change.****The younger RAYLA responds to her older self as if RAY'S a version of her mother.**

RAY: Misery loves company.

RAYLA: Sorry?

RAY: It's a saying – I think *mom* used to say it. Misery loves company, nature hates a vacuum. (*pause*) Don't know what the hell we're talking about, do you?

RAYLA hesitates, nods.

RAY: Do you know what we're doing to each other?

RAYLA: Like what happened with mom. I think.

RAY: Goes around comes around. (*pause*) I'm glad you're gonna get that hat.

RAYLA: Mom turned me on to Alicia.

RAY: I want you to have the hat, but I don't want dad to use it to - -

RAY trails off into silence.

RAYLA: To what?

RAY: Buy you. Your friendship, your love.

RAYLA: He's not doing that.

RAY: Ahh, wake up, grow up: when someone promises you something - the gesture, the timing – it's about negotiating, to - - to *split*, split you. In two – the best of you.

RAYLA: Best of me's not for sale.

RAY: Smart girl.

RAYLA: Always.

RAY: Well don't get *too* smart.

RAYLA: That's not fair.

RAY: Fuck fair, babe – facts! Facts have to be faced in life. Dad – *he* has to be faced. He's Spur Of The Moment, fits and bursts. Chaos! A sprinter's chaos. Like a cheetah. Y'know, one of those big cats that looks good, sounds good, but schvum!, over in a flash, *chase* the prey, *catch* the prey, *kill* the prey, then sod all to do the rest of the day.

RAYLA, as if addressing her class at school.

RAYLA: Cheetahs can't commit like other cats. It's not their fault, it's their nature. They're built for speed, what's called "instant gratification." No future, just the present, the moment. And these cats, like people, they kill you with kindness, then they just - - kill you.

RAY: Each Man Kills The Woman He Loves. Dad should never've married. He should've hired out ex-students, turned 'em into drinking buddies, charmed 'n' smarmed 'em into Cheetah Fodder. Like all men who're brains with no balls – he's a prude, deep down, doesn't practice what he preaches. He thinks he's outside of convention, his 'own man', but in here, his heart, what passes for

self, he's the most traditional square on the planet. And that's not honest.

RAYLA: What isn't?

RAY: Promises. The kind that trip off the tongue after a skinful. (*pause*)
No – not promises. Personality.

RAYLA: But he can't do anything about that.

RAY: Suppose not. What he *can* do something about is the extent to which he's trying to make you trust him.

RAYLA: Don't wanna hear this. Could say that about you.

RAY: We're not talking about me.

RAYLA: But two, it takes two.

RAY: Not to hit someone.

RAYLA: He never hit her!

RAY: Takes *one* to do that.

RAYLA: No, that's - - twisting, twisting it.

RAY: You, my babe, he's twisting *you*.

RAYLA: He wouldn't.

RAY: He has!

RAYLA: I'd know, I'd see.

RAY: Abusers move in mysterious ways.

RAYLA: I'd *feel* it if that was true.

RAY: What the fuck do you know about feelings?

RAYLA: That people need a second chance and stuff.

RAY: He's had that – he's all 'stuffed' out.

RAYLA: A third, then, a fourth - -

RAY: He's seen-it-done-it to a *hundred*, little girl!

RAYLA: Don't talk about him that way.

RAY: He's a liar, Ray.

RAYLA: No, you are! How do I know who's lying? I'm a child, for god's sake, I *am* a girl, so how in the world am I supposed to know who's lying?!

Bang bang from upstairs.

A sudden vomit of anger from RAYLA as she shouts up to the ceiling.

RAYLA: Shut up, you prick, just leave me alone, fuck off and die!

From upstairs – a blast of loud music: 'Vlad The Impaler' by Kasabian.

The music, slightly lowered in volume.

Then a bang – another – another.

RAYLA sits, closes her eyes, hands over her ears.

RAY shouts up.

RAY: Oi, Golanski! Kazimierz! Kaz! Pack it in! I'm telling you!

The music – louder.

RAY: I'm warning you – knock it off!

Music, bangs, music, bangs.

RAY darts out.

RAYLA, hands over ears, opens her eyes.

RAY returns – holding a kitchen knife.

RAYLA – scared.

RAY addresses RAYLA – shouting over the music.

RAY: Okay, that's it, this is it, no way, no more! Not today, no way!

RAYLA – too scared to speak.

RAY: Fuck this, fuck him!

RAY, fuelled by the courage brought on by whisky, rushes out.

RAYLA sits – very still and frightened.

Time passes.

The music stops.

Silence.

RAYLA looks to the ceiling, straining to hear.

RAYLA – heart in her mouth.

Finally . . . RAY walks back into the room.

RAY, in shock, unsteady on her feet.

She has the bloody knife to hand: blood on her hands, her clothes, a bloody gash in her side.

RAY, full of alcohol-drenched adrenalin, giggles.

RAY: Rayla, my babe. You want a hat? Naa, I'll give you a fucking *head*.

Blackout.

Music: 'No-One' by Alicia Keys.

Act Two: After the Interview

Lights up.

The same day – evening.

RAYLA, seated, preoccupied – the picture of concerned contemplation.

She's smartly-coolly dressed (Alicia Keys would be proud), as if to embark on a journey.

She's holding a blouse, belonging to RAY.

Luggage: cases, holdalls.

A door slams.

RAYLA, more alert, sets the blouse to one side.

SAM enters: he's clearly drunk, having consumed a skinful. He's 'functioning' and lucid, but the change is tangible – he looks more tough, taut, the fire in his soul too close to the surface.

He has a carrier-bag to hand; we don't see the contents.

SAM freezes on seeing the luggage, sets down the carrier-bag and his shoulder-bag.

He looks to RAYLA, who looks away.

SAM: Where - - where are you going?

RAYLA, so silent and still.

SAM: We going somewhere? Are you? (pause) Lost the power of speech?

RAYLA: Lost.

SAM: (pause) For what: words, a little bit of respect?

RAYLA: Don't know how to explain.

SAM: A-a!, weak answer, four out of ten, see me after school.

RAYLA: Words – no good anymore.

SAM: Feeble. Two out of ten, detention.

RAYLA: Words are trouble.

SAM: Don't talk to me about words, Rayla – it's how I connect to the world, to - - to *you*. They empower you. Told you, thousand times – words are power.

RAYLA shakes her head.

SAM: Don't be smart now, don't get tetchy with me. I don't like it, tiger. This gap - - gap between us. This is a sad, sorry day. That there'd be something unspoken between us.

RAYLA: (*perky*) The job.

SAM: So, let's use some words: why are you dressed like that?

RAYLA: What happened with the job?

SAM: Don't evade.

RAYLA: Was it good?

SAM: Don't say 'good' – how many times! – the term 'good' is naff, crap.

RAYLA: I mean 'positive', was it posit - -?

SAM: Stop playing games.

RAYLA: Is it a 'yes'?

SAM: Stop.

RAYLA: It's a yes.

SAM: Do not invert, do not patronise!

RAYLA: It must be. Just tell me – in your own words and that.

SAM gives her a look.

SAM: I'm smashed, my love – out of all proportion today, so you need to gimme a straight answer.

RAYLA: Ball of fire.

SAM: You need to – the hell with fire – need to tell me what's going on.

RAYLA: Light of my life.

SAM: Stop it!

RAYLA: Don't get mad at me.

SAM: Then don't get cute. There's no fire, there's no light! All there is a room – you, dressed like that, in a room, a room we don't even own! Now, the truth: has someone *got* to you, has someone come out the woodwork and - - is it your mother, is it school?

RAYLA: Don't *go* to school.

SAM: Yes, I know, what I meant was - -

RAYLA: *Got* no mother.

SAM: Don't spar with me! I need to know if anyone's been here, if you've let anyone in to influence you, to - - to - -

RAYLA shakes her head.

He stares at her.

She doesn't know what to say or do.

SAM: What's wrong, my love? There's something terribly wrong here.

RAYLA offers a weak nod.

SAM: All right, look, don't sweat the small stuff – I'm not apportioning blame. That's *her* department, good riddance, so - - no shame, but I need to know.

RAYLA: Not my fault.

SAM: What isn't? What have you done?

RAYLA: Nothing.

SAM shakes his head.

SAM: Ohh, Ray.

RAYLA: I swear.

SAM: Don't you dare.

He stumbles a little as he locates the carrier-bag.

SAM: Before we get to the heart of what in the world's going *on* here, let me tell you about my day. Wanna hear?

He indicates the carrier.

SAM: It's in here. Let me show you what I did with my day.

He's about to reveal the contents of the carrier-bag . . .

. . . when RAY enters.

There is no light change – and RAY / RAYLA are now interactively connected; the same time, same space.

RAY is semi-attired: on her top half – a bra; on her bottom half – her best trousers, shoes.

Like RAYLA, an outfit indicating the imminence of elsewhere.

RAY has a makeshift bandage / dressing on her left side, the 'love handle': a medley of plasters, very do-it-yourself, padded around the gash / wound.

Traces, smears of dried blood on the love-handle.

RAY, wincing, gently presses the bandage / dressing to make sure it stays put.

SAM: Hello? (pause) I said hello.

RAY: (to RAYLA) He's drunk.

SAM: No – but he's about to be.

SAM staggers to the bookcase, locates a bottle of whisky and tumbler, pours himself a large drink.

SAM: What's going on? I think I deserve – and don't you dare lecture me about 'drunk' – think I deserve an explanation.

RAY: Owed, deserved - -

SAM: *Entitled*, then.

RAY: Simmer down.

SAM: Is it this again?

RAY: Depends what you mean by 'this'.

SAM: This! Threatening to 'walk' again – that it? Your - - your erratic, sporadic continuum of contaminant pain. Is it that?

RAY: You wax lyrical, professor, and I'll get changed.

SAM: I *enable* change, I'm the one whose roof *affords* you change.

RAY: Yeah, go ahead, raise the roof, blow your top – as much as you want. Makes no difference.

RAY indicates upstairs.

RAY: He's gone – so no worries for you, dad. No bad man for you to run from and hide.

RAY shouts upstairs – that mock East European accent.

RAY: Hey, Kazimierz, farewell and fuck off, please, yes!?

Silence.

RAY indicates the silence.

RAY: And he never got to drink my blood.

RAY, to RAYLA – very Bela Lugosi.

RAY: "Children of the night, what sweet music they make." The creature's gone, Sam. Everything's changed.

RAY picks up her blouse – puts it on over the following.

RAY: *(of RAYLA)* And don't even think of blaming her.

RAYLA: *(to SAM)* I *wanted* to call the police.

RAY: I went up.

RAYLA: She said 'enough'.

RAY: I had a knife, Kaz turned it on me, cut me, ran out.

SAM: Cut?

RAY: Pissed – out of his tiny mind. Cut, yes.

SAM: He wouldn't do that.

RAY: And you're such a sound judge of character. *(to RAYLA)* Takes one to know one.

SAM: Kaz wouldn't - - he's not like that.

RAY: Then what's this?

RAY indicates her love-handle.

RAY: Me seeking attention?

SAM: All right, I can see that, I'm not stupid.

RAY: No, what you are is pissed, pissed off.

SAM: With good reason.

RAY: No reason, no reason at all. Nothing's reasonable – not for a long time. (*indicating her wound*) Except this. This is the most - - I swear, dad, it's the most clear - - *clean* thing that's happened to us in a long time.

SAM: (*to RAYLA*) Reasonable? (*to RAY*) Did you just say that?

RAY: You heard.

SAM: Perverse. If you find virtue in this, then you, my girl, are totally, egregiously perverse.

RAY: (*to RAYLA*) He loves 'egregious'.

SAM: Deviant, then, this is deviance, like a - - la moody teenager, for the *sake* of it.

RAY: Please – don't come it on like a lecture.

SAM: I come it on like sense, Rayla, common sense.

RAY: That word doesn't exist.

SAM: Will you stop being so - - aberrant.

RAY: (*to RAYLA*) Good word, means 'abnormal'.

SAM: And tell me what's happened!

RAY: I've told you. (*to RAYLA*) See – look at him. He wants it complex, he needs a tease.

SAM: Ray, it's not - -

RAY: To test his big, IQ brain.

SAM: It is not good enough!

RAY: (pause) Excuse me?

SAM: I'm - - I'm just saying.

RAY: What? (to RAYLA) What's he saying?

SAM: He's saying I don't want you exposed to this.

RAY: Why – because it reflects badly on *you*?

RAYLA: I'm fine, dad.

RAY: I've been exposed to a lot worse, Sam.

RAYLA: Everything's calm now and stuff.

SAM: (to RAY) Meaning?

RAYLA: I was scared, shaking – with anger, *power* – but it's cool now.

SAM: (to RAY) What's that supposed to mean?

RAY: It means 'exposed', 'worse', 'a lot!' You know precisely what it means.

SAM: Your behaviour, this attitude - -

RAY: Hey, are you my dad or my grandad? Just chill the fuck out.

SAM: You're disgraceful.

RAY makes a sound and gesture as if she's an imbecile.

SAM: Look at you: disgusting.

RAY: What I am is smart: no police, no drama, simply a solution out of a problem. Rejoice, dad – he's run away, tail between his legs, vamoose!, so you'll have all the peace you can deal with.

RAYLA: (to RAY) You will get it checked, though.

RAY: "Perdition catch my soul, but I do love thee." (to SAM) But I have a better one today: "If you prick us, do we not bleed? And if you wrong us - -"

SAM: Get to the point.

RAY: Here's the point: I'm bleeding, but the prick has gone. How's that for an Entropic Declension? (to RAYLA) Yes, I'll get it checked.

SAM: (pause) "All the peace *you* can deal with"? Why say that, why's it only apply to me?

RAY makes a gesture towards the luggage.

A long look between RAY and SAM.

SAM: I don't think so.

RAY: Don't think, see.

SAM: Oh - - I see, believe me.

RAY: Then believe it.

SAM: No.

RAY: You wanted a day – good, fine, *this* is the day.

SAM: You've ruined the day.

RAY: No, this has.

RAY tries to snatch 'this' – the bottle of whisky.

SAM: Stop.

RAY grabs the bottle, SAM staggers over to her – a messy tussle and scuffle over the bottle.

RAY: This, this, this!

SAM: Stop, stop it!

They pull and push like a pair of schoolkids – much to RAYLA'S silent disgust.

RAY: This, this!

SAM: Stop! Ray!

RAY: This!

RAY, the stronger, has possession of the bottle, holding it away at arm's reach.

Impasse.

SAM makes a point of sipping from his tumbler.

SAM: Not a problem. Pyrrhic victory. There's more in the kitchen.

RAY shakes her head – then sets down the bottle a distance from SAM.

RAY: A day to get clean, dad. Don't you think? If not now, when? Because the day - - it's shifted orbit, kicked us in the teeth. Kaz has left his mark, so let's make ours. And clean up our act.

SAM downs his whisky, makes a point of putting the tumbler back on the bookcase.

SAM: Easy does it, tiger. It's not all about you.

RAY: It is today.

SAM: You're not going anywhere.

RAY: Do not tell me what to do.

SAM: It's not that simple.

RAY: Oh yes it is. It's what people – people who're alive – call A Life.

SAM: *(to RAYLA)* Actions have consequences.

RAY: Same difference.

SAM: *(to RAYLA)* Actions have a time and place.

RAY: Don't do that!

SAM: *(to RAYLA)* You can't just get up and go. *(to RAY)* Who the hell do you think you are – history repeating itself, your *mother*?

RAY: *(to RAYLA)* Here we go.

SAM: What you trying to aspire to – mom by proxy? Who the fuck *are* you today – mom *vicariously*? Coz let me tell you: abandonment is not the most aspirational goal in life.

RAY: Now who's being egregious?

SAM: Walking out is a cowardly one-way-ticket to nowhere.

RAYLA: Somewhere. Someone.

SAM: Ohh, of course: grass green, sky blue, and hope and happiness just drops in your lap.

RAY: Maybe.

SAM: Child.

RAYLA: I know what's good for me.

SAM: Infant!

RAY gives him a dismissive gesture, finishes dressing.

RAYLA: It's bad. All of it and that – been bad here a long time. And that's not your fault, dad, but - - but nothing's gonna change. This. *This* is change.

SAM: She's brainwashed you.

RAYLA: I'm speaking for *me*.

SAM: I'm out there every day.

RAYLA: I'm me saying this.

SAM: Twenty-plus interviews. Back-to-back, doing my absolute, honest best, and I walk back into (*of RAY*) you, what *you* want.

RAYLA: Want elsewhere.

SAM: That's your mother talking.

RAYLA: I'm nowhere.

SAM: Stop.

RAYLA: We're nowhere.

SAM: (*to RAY*) How dare you.

RAYLA: It's the right thing, dad.

SAM: (*to RAY*) Look what you've stirred up.

Over following: SAM ignores RAYLA, addresses RAY: his tone increasingly intense.

SAM: Of all the wicked, nasty - - I'm out the room – one day, a day to change lives – I come back, you steal my thunder, piss on my hopes.

RAYLA: Dad.

SAM: What you think you're doing? Provoke a confrontation with the man upstairs so you can put a *close* on me?

RAYLA: Dad.

SAM: Because that is self-serving and parasitic.

RAYLA: Please.

SAM: Get yourself stabbed to get closure with me, so you can slam a door in my face.

RAYLA: Stop.

SAM: Are you insane?! To think I'd let you do what your fucking mother did?

RAYLA: Sam.

SAM: Ohhh, yeah, just steal away, agenda intact, like a thief in the night.

RAYLA: It's not her fault.

SAM continues to ignore RAYLA.

SAM: No-one – nobody – does anything they don't choose to do, so it *is* your fault.

RAYLA: That's not true.

SAM: It *is* true, Ray, I taught you that: about Will, Will To *Power*.

RAYLA: That's not fair.

SAM: And you turn on me.

RAYLA: You can't say this.

SAM: Stubborn, wilful, selfish little girl.

RAYLA: Stop saying things.

SAM switches his attention to RAYLA.

SAM: Can say and do whatever I damn well choose!

RAYLA: Don't shout at me.

SAM: Planning Prevents Piss Poor Performance. P-P-fucking-P! That's me, that's *my* day – for years – so stop taking sides.

- RAYLA: Someone's got to.
- SAM: Ohh, spare me – what are you, my mother?
- RAYLA: Talking about *my* mother.
- SAM: Let me tell you about your mother: she was like this as a student – expected me, at risk to my reputation, to *carry* her.
- RAYLA: But you wanted to.
- SAM: She hustled me, 'worked' on me. She didn't have one organic, autonomous, insightful thought in her tiny little head.
- RAYLA: She was a student, there to learn.
- SAM: She was a *lazy* student, and she only agreed to sleep with me – at great risk to my standing – when I promised, against all rhyme or reason, to help finish her fucking dissertation.
- RAYLA: Because you loved her.
- SAM: Sorry, let's not call it 'dissertation'. Let's call it Eric, or Felicity, or whatever the fuck you want, but the motive ends up the same: blackmail.
- RAYLA: She was young.
- SAM: "You can fuck me in private, professor – not that I *made* professor – you can fumble in the dark with me, sir, teacher, *lover*, but the price you pay is finish what I start. Finish what I'm too selfish and *lazy* to finish."
- RAYLA: Not true.
- RAY: Yes it is. (*pause*) Except you didn't – did you, teacher. Because you did the same to me. Kept me away from school, friends, 'home tutored' me, but when it suited *you*, you wanted me to go to college.
- RAYLA: "Gotta raise your IQ, got to forget where you're from, who you are, what your *mother* was, and be like me."
- RAY: And if memory serves – believe me it does – what you actually did is demean me.
- RAYLA: Intimidate me.
- RAY: Made me realise how ever-so thick I was, what an academic waste of space I was, and, finally, *true* spite, you refused to finish Eric or Felicity. You dumped on that dissertation – you dumped on *me*.

RAY – growing more angry than upset; her fury rising.

For a binge, a bender, coz you couldn't wait to get down the pub and lord it over the grads. Show off! Coward! *You're* perverse, you're the aberrant deviant. And cruel. Who'd offer to finish a course for someone they claimed to love, then snatch it away for the sake of - - what? To get back at mom?

RAYLA: Why'd you do that, dad?

RAY: To make me lesser, a lower species than you? To make yet another woman in your world dependent? Who the fuck would do that? You promise everything, you deliver nothing. There *is* no day, there's just a false dawn and words, words, lies, lies, because you're an intellectual bully – a manipulating, abusive narcissist, and how dare you say nobody does anything they don't *choose* to do. Tell that to mom, tell that to me! You're the parasite. You let her down, you let me down, all of us. You, 'sir', are a bloodsucking, life-sucking motherfucka. What you are is what you do – and what you do is loss, *lost*, losing, loser, a loser!

SAM elicits an animalistic sound, from his gut of pain, as he lashes out, striking RAY across the face.

RAY hits the deck.

On the hit: RAYLA immediately closes her eyes, puts her hands over her ears.

Silence.

SAM sits.

The violation has sobered him up.

Shame kicks in: he cries.

RAY, on her feet.

RAY, 'maternal' now, goes to RAYLA, gently takes her hands away from her ears.

RAYLA opens her eyes.

RAY kisses her younger self on the forehead.

RAY: "See me after school." "Could do better." Will do better.

RAY alternates the following between SAM and her younger self.

RAY: You remember Jo?

RAYLA: (*pause*) Joanne.

RAY: Loved her. Best friend. Heart, she had so much heart. And in my gullible state of naivety, I thought Heart meant Soft. Soft couldn't mean Success. How could it? Nice guys, like girls, finish last. Not so. She broke the mould, made a *huge* success of her life.

RAYLA: I saw her. Today.

RAY: Hadn't seen her for years.

RAYLA: Where do people go?

RAY: And she could see – smell it on me – that I was trapped. Me, with a cheap bag of shopping, the look of someone who'd just had a row with someone in the benefit office, and my Jo, she spread out her arms, the biggest smile, and said - -

RAYLA: "Oh My God, wow, it's you, Rayla Clay."

RAY: That was her nickname for me: "Gonna name you Rayla Clay."

RAYLA: "Why?"

RAY: "Coz you're stuck – never come out, always indoors, stuck in a rut." Desperation and isolation – that's what my friend could smell.

RAYLA: And she held me. Felt like minutes.

RAY: Probably, like all things, only a lifetime of seconds.

RAYLA: And I didn't cry.

RAY: Fuck that – I will not cry.

RAYLA: *She* cried.

RAY: She felt my pain, and just blubbed her sweet heart out. And I pulled her together, made a joke, we sat down - -

RAYLA: Seven-eight minutes.

RAY: Then she had to go, to some - - some meeting.

RAYLA: Another country.

RAY: Somewhere beautiful and hot.

RAYLA closes her eyes, lifts her head, smiles, as if taking in sunshine.

RAYLA: Wow.

RAY does likewise.

RAY: Wow. Clever girl.

Silence as RAY / RAYLA bask in the sun.

SAM: I taught Joanne. How did this girl - - this woman, mediocre by any standard, how in the world did she get a life? To finish something, to - - commit to it. To finish what you start – to *choose* to do that. *(pause)* Takes my breath away.

RAY and RAYLA – eyes open.

RAY: To choose hope – that’s what takes my breath away.

SAM: That’s all I wanted for you – truth be told.

RAYLA: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty.”

RAY: Hell with truth. Let’s get some beauty.

RAYLA: And all before she’s forty.

RAY smiles.

RAY: Forget forty. No way. Not going there.

RAYLA: You can’t give up. Sounds like we’ve given up.

RAY gestures ‘what’s the point?’

RAYLA: If you give up, what’s the point going? What you have in mind? Like mom – always threatening to end herself before she’s forty.

RAY: Oh the drama.

RAYLA: It *is* drama. *Then* where am I?

RAY: Spare me.

RAYLA: Spare *me*. Where am I *then*?

RAY: No-one’s ending themselves.

RAYLA: But what if you change your mind, give in, then I’m alone, all alone.

RAY: It's misery – not suicide. And misery – it loves company. And nature – hates a vacuum. So we fill the emptiness with threats.

RAY indicates herself then SAM.

RAY: We're a pair of miserable specimens, but that's not you. Not now. Not ever.

RAYLA: Gotta promise me.

RAY: C'mon now, none of that.

RAYLA: Gotta swear.

RAY: No ultimatums.

RAYLA: Your *word* – that you'll stay alive.

RAY: It's just habit.

RAYLA: It's a threat.

RAY: All we are is a bad habit.

RAYLA: I want your word.

RAY: You're looking way too far.

RAYLA: It's my *future*. Want your word.

RAY: Listen, you have my heart – now you want my word?

RAYLA: It's all we've got and that!

RAY: *(pause)* Yeah, and that. Tell me about it.

RAYLA, closer to RAY.

RAYLA: It's like Sat-ray *(to SAM)* Sorry, Sart-ter-ay.

SAM: Stop saying 'sorry'.

RAYLA: *(perfect pronunciation)* Sartre.

SAM: And never promise you'll never say sorry.

RAYLA: *(back to RAY)* Your 'being'.

SAM: Promises – worse than lying.

RAYLA: You think it's nothing, nothingness, that being a bad habit means we're heading off for more of the same and stuff, sort of frying pan and fire, but we're not, we're not nothing. It doesn't *have* to be fire.

SAM: This is known as The Void.

RAY: This is known as failure.

SAM contemplates this, shakes his head, gets to his feet; a certain perception and confidence restored.

SAM: 'Being and Nothingness', my presentation, critiques the notion that Sartre's mantra vindicates the freedom of the human *intent*, positing the theory that we each have unfulfilled higher possibilities.

RAYLA, growing inside, seemingly older; a hint of who she'll become.

RAYLA: This is something I *know*.

SAM: I'm just saying: it's what I *would've* said – and the students, modesty aside, would've loved it.

RAYLA: Would've?

SAM: And the other candidates, bet you all the hats in the world, they were predictable, *passé*. I was gonna talk about Hope-Despair, was planning to engage the students in the *perennial*, the endurance of a Utopian-Dystopian continuum, the - - yes, the Human Condition ad infinitum, for *all* time, but bet you every hat in Alicia's bag that the others tried to show off. Their erudition, to justify the letters after their name, the trite-but-true, the lowest common *denominator* of discourse. Like - - yes, like The Death Drive.

RAY, more connected to SAM.

RAY: Naa – corny. Only a novice would engage students in The Death Drive.

SAM: I disagree – one must open with a bang, start with The Big Guns.

RAY: Or that other oldie-but-goody – The Pleasure Principle.

SAM: Good point. The cliché that *desire*, deep inside us, for self - -

RAY: Self-destruction.

RAYLA: What's that mean – 'would've'?

SAM: Not to be confused with Freud's take on Pleasure.

RAY, sounding like her former self: the attentive, eager-to-learn student.

RAY: That we seek pleasure as a means of avoiding - -

SAM: Avoiding pain – yes, Ray, excellent.

SAM and RAY: teachers now to RAYLA'S pupil.

RAY: Much like Deferred Gratification.

SAM: A person's willingness to - -

RAY: That in order to obtain that which we want, it's necessary to place oneself in a position of - -

SAM: Vulnerability.

RAY: The ascending-descending scale of - -

SAM: - - expectation in tandem with - -

BOTH: - - disappointment.

SAM: Back in the day it was called Willpower.

RAY: Self-control, how to *exercise* it, is a presentation in itself. And let's not even go there with the Twelve Steps.

SAM: Well, no control out there when addiction comes-a-knocking.

RAY: Stagnation – that's the *Thirteenth* Step.

RAY: The moral standstill.

SAM: That we're stuck.

RAY: And *there's* my dissertation: 'Rayla Clay, and the same damn day'.

SAM: Don't put yourself down.

RAYLA: What do you mean you were 'going' to tell the students?

SAM: What I *should've* talked about, what they *needed* to know, was the imperative known as 'der Wille zur Macht'.

RAY: (to RAYLA) Will To Power.

- SAM: Nietzsche.
- RAY: Fuck off – we all know who Nietzsche is.
- RAYLA: ‘Going to’, ‘would’ve’ - -
- SAM: Rayla, please, in the middle of something here.
- RAYLA: But you keep saying ‘could’ve’, ‘should’ve’.
- SAM: Please – I’m trying to emphasise the fact that I should’ve referred more transparently to the concept of Nihilism *per se*, as it affects their *lives*, the life of now in the *moment* of now.
- RAYLA: Again – ‘should’ve’. (*louder*) Coulda-woulda-shoulda.
- SAM: The salient notion that - - the rejection of empirical moral principles, that life, in itself, for and *by* itself, Hope and Despair as *one* as it were, that life, ultimately, this is *indisputable*, that life is - -
- RAY: Meaningless.
- SAM: That life, finally, is nothing.
- RAY: That nothing in this cruel world has any real existence.
- SAM: No, Ray – we exist.
- RAY: Well, technically.
- SAM: The point, macro-to-micro, is that we *feel*, feel too much.
- RAY: Because hearts govern heads.
- SAM: Entirely.
- RAY: Emotional eyes bigger than emotional stomachs.
- SAM: Yes! Then the man takes a *drink* and the drink takes *him*.
- RAY: And when we sober up to the fact that we’re Nothing and Nobody in this putrid world, all that’s left is “I wish”.
- SAM: “If only.”
- RAY: The two saddest, sorriest words ever uttered by Man, Woman or Child. “If Only.”
- SAM: (*to RAYLA*) Coulda-woulda-shoulda. The postmodern plague.

RAY: Hope *is* despair. *That's* Step Thirteen.

SAM, a sad smile, concedes her point with a nod.

RAYLA: You didn't go, did you. The interview. You went drinking.

Silence.

RAYLA, seemingly older – more steel in her soul as she addresses her dad.

RAYLA: What was it – fear? Of success? Change?

SAM can't look at her.

You've taken change *away*. Thrown it away – again. Over and over, again and again. Because you're - - there's this *nothing* in you, Sam. And your mind is all words, but your actions are fists. And that makes you *waste*, makes you a waster. Coz you didn't even try. Because you're a boy, a baby. Not a tiger, a kitten. A big, scaredy-cat-losing-using-pussy.

SAM – a big cat roar.

SAM: And what are you scared of?

RAYLA: *(pause)* You.

SAM: You – you're the baby. I get up, I get out.

RAYLA: And you come back.

SAM: When did you last get out there?

RAYLA: Come back with nothing.

SAM: Do not correct me, do not judge me.

SAM'S exasperation is building.

SAM: The time, effort.

RAY: Easy.

SAM: The love. Me, *mine* – not just your mom.

RAY: Take it easy.

SAM: The time and love expended, not resented, in *raising* you.

RAY: Control yourself.

SAM: Raising you *up*.

RAYLA: And putting me down.

SAM: To prepare you!

RAYLA: For what?

SAM: Potential.

RAYLA: What for?

SAM: For fuck's sake, you've learned nothing, you've - -

RAY: Take a breath, dad.

SAM: Don't gimme breathing lessons. I don't need lessons from a woman who doesn't even connect to this world.

RAY: And whose fault is that?

SAM: (*back to RAYLA*) You won't even risk it.

RAYLA: You told me.

SAM: Closeness.

RAYLA: *Told* me to stay put.

SAM: A closeness to people, it - -

RAYLA: Dangerous, you said.

SAM: - - it scares the shit out of you.

RAYLA: You made me!

SAM: No, not having that.

RAY: It's true.

SAM: *I'm* close to it – people, the *real* world – me!

RAY: Sam, stop.

SAM: I'm the one rubbing shoulders with the The Great Unwashed, not you, little girl.

RAYLA: You're being horrible.

SAM: Ohh, that's a childish thing to say.

RAYLA: I am a child.

SAM: Really, you think? Ok – let's talk child, shall we?

SAM – patronising, sarcastic, addressing RAYLA as if she's a silly, ignorant child.

SAM: Baby daughter sits indoors brooding on the past, waiting 'n' wishing for mommy, the loving mommy of memory that never actually *occurred*, and daddy come home and daughter puts pain on *him*, places burden of shit on *him* each day. And the door is open – daddy not lock door – Rayla can walk out and make-friends-make-life whenever she choose. Why doesn't she, daddy wonders?

RAYLA: Coz she has no money and she makes the best of things.

SAM: Rayla, my beautiful ball of fire: don't go believing your own importance, don't go believing that just because I *tell* you you're special and different that you *are* special and different.

RAY: That's an appalling thing to say.

SAM'S pain and fury grows as he addresses RAYLA.

SAM: You are not here to point me *out* to myself.

RAY: That's enough.

SAM: You are not – ever, never! – bigger and better than me.

RAY: Enough.

SAM: Don't you dare try and invoke 'special privileges' with me just coz you were born.

RAY: Get a grip, for god's sake.

SAM: There is no fucking god. (*to RAYLA*) Not in here, not out there, nowhere!

SAM makes an ambiguous physical gesture – which makes RAYLA flinch.

RAYLA: Don't you hit me!

Silence.

SAM sits – deflated, exhausted.

SAM: “Tyger Tyger burning bright, in the forests - - fearful symmetry.”
(*pause*) I’d never hit you. Never hit anyone – isn’t that right, Ray?

RAY: (*pause*) Whatever you say, dad. Whatever.

SAM: (*to RAYLA*) Killed me. You kill me.

Calm – nothingness.

**SAM staggers over to the carrier-bag, removes the item:
a second-hand trilby.**

He holds it out.

**RAYLA hesitates, looks to her older self for reassurance,
then moves to her dad, takes the hat.**

She runs her fingers over it.

**RAY, impersonating Kazimierz Golanski – her tone
affable, cheeky.**

RAY: Goodness grief, Mister Sam. This be wrong hat. This hat, like one Alicia wear, it no be right. You have lost power in yourself to do as told. You have power of talk, but you no listen. You have no ears for women in your life. And if man no listen, he no see, no feel. Baby girl need fedora. This is trilby. This no good.

RAYLA: Stop.

SAM addresses RAY.

SAM: Shame on you.

RAY: Yes. That appears to be the point.

RAY picks up an item of luggage.

RAY: I’m done.

Subtle light change.

SAM – older, somewhat shrivelled now.

SAM: Don’t go. Don’t throw me away.

**RAY picks up another item of luggage – stands there, in
two minds.**

SAM: Don't throw us away. Please. Stay.

RAYLA: *(pause)* That man. Ages ago. Told me about a man you met. Teacher or something: and he *told* you. That you were - - that you had it in you to be extraordinary.

SAM: *(pause)* He was just a man, my love, a man in a pub. He said I had the *potential* to be extraordinary. Which isn't quite the same thing. I think what he was actually talking about was squander. Waste.

RAYLA moves away, hat to hand.

SAM, to RAY.

SAM: It's not that easy. Surely. At the end of the day. To just - - go.

RAY: It shouldn't be – but it is.

RAY makes a move to leave.

SAM elicits a nervous, involuntary chuckle.

SAM: Wait, this'll make you laugh, you'll love this: above reception, the College, emblazoned, they had this huge sign, their Mission Statement. Know what it said? *Aspire, Achieve, Advance*. And I swear, in my mind it said *Alcohol, Anonymous, Arsehole*.

He smiles.

SAM: A statement like that, the *expectation*. So intimidating. Who in the world could possibly live up to that?

RAY sets down the luggage, locates the bottle of whisky, then the tumbler from the bookcase – pours herself a drink.

RAY: Oh, dad. So free. But not so easy.

SAM: I can't be alone.

RAY moves to him, drink to hand, cradles him.

RAY: Ball of fire, light of my life.

SAM curls up into her – a kind of foetal position.

He's so fragile and broken in RAY'S arms: the final day of a frail, sick 80-something man.

RAY gently rocks him.

Lights change.

RAYLA, trilby to hand, addresses us.

RAYLA: My name is Rayla Clay. And once upon a time I was 40 years old. And once upon a time there was a day. And on this day, I spoke: Dear Alicia, Goddess Tiger of Truth, sing a song for my father. Lift his bleeding heart for what's left of his live long day, and let him float, a whisper on the earth, back to the womb, and leave this world as he found it. With beauty. Truth.

Lights begin to fade.

Music begins: 'I Need You' by Alicia Keys.

RAYLA: P.S. Look closely. The beautiful – it's so small.

Music and lyrics – amplified now.

RAY cradles her dad.

RAYLA bows her head, places the trilby on her head.

'I Need You' keeps playing.

Lights fade.