

## Give the Dog a Bone

Based on a true story about grown-up twin sisters coming up against their elderly mother's denial of what happened in the past; something that drove a wedge between the girls, and which might now reunite them.

### CHARACTERS:

**MOIRA GILLESPIE:** Seventy-eight-year-old widow, mentally sharp but physically frail. She has non-identical twin daughters, GRETA (Gretty) and ELEANOR (Eli), in their forties.

**ELEANOR:** Married daughter of MOIRA and non-identical twin sister of GRETA, and a teacher who has taken early retirement. She lives near her elderly mother and is worn out by having to care for the woman whom she visits daily and for whom she does almost everything.

**GRETA:** ELEANOR's twin who lives in France with her French husband, Jean-Pierre. She hasn't seen ELEANOR for over twenty-five years.

**SETTING:** The sitting room and the kitchen of MOIRA GILLESPIE'S spacious house in Morningside, Edinburgh.

### SCENE 1

**SET:** Stage bare apart from minimal props. Sitting room stage left. Settee downstage left with an armchair and a cabinet for drinks upstage left. Stage right, the kitchen with table and two chairs. Imagined door separating kitchen and sitting room.

*(MOIRA is lying stretched out on the settee with a towel over her face and a rug over her legs. Sound of front door (offstage left) opening and closing. ELEANOR walks on from off-stage left then freezes on seeing her mother.)*

**ELEANOR**

Mother?

**MOIRA** *(Without removing towel)*

Who else did you expect to see?

**ELEANOR**

Mother, what on earth are you doing here?

**MOIRA** *(Removes towel)*

Quietly suffering the tribulations of solitude! Point is, my dear, what are *you* doing here?

**ELEANOR**

Oh, you're impossible! I'll call an ambulance!

**MOIRA**

You will not! I may be seventy-eight, but I still have rights.

**ELEANOR**

Don't be so melodramatic. They should never have let you out.

**MOIRA**

Will you stop fussing and make some tea.

**ELEANOR**

This is simply not on. Sending you home to an empty house! I'm phoning the hospital.

**MOIRA**

Self-discharge, it's called. Sounds like some horrid disease one might catch in Africa. Or Glasgow. Anyway, it's not empty! You're here. And what *were* you up to snooping around when you thought I was still in hospital? Casing the joint before the old stick pops her clogs, ay?

**ELEANOR**

Don't be so silly, Mother.

*(ELEANOR approaches MOIRA, kneels beside her, takes her hand.)*

**ELEANOR**

I care about you. You know very well I have to sort stuff out. And you'll have your own room there. Be properly looked after. Everything you need'll be taken care of/and...

**MOIRA**

/No better than a prison!

**ELEANOR** *(Standing up)*

Look! I can't be here twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week! Derek needs me too.

**MOIRA**

Can't he feed and dress himself?

**ELEANOR**

He's my husband, for God's sake!

**MOIRA**

Begrudged me every minute of filial duty, you have!

**ELEANOR** *(Sighs then stands.)*

Put up with, more like! Derek was right when he said you're slowly killing me!

**MOIRA**

So, who's being melodramatic now? Look, all I ask for is a little peace in my last few months on earth. And I won't get that in prison.

**ELEANOR**

It's a nursing home, Mother! They're lovely people. Properly trained.

**MOIRA**

So are the wardens at Cornton Vale.

**ELEANOR**

That's for young offenders... I think.

**MOIRA**

Lucky old me!

**ELEANOR**

Look, Mother... let me just get you back into hospital, then we can discuss it with the social worker like adults.

**MOIRA**

By snooping around?

**ELEANOR**

I don't mind telling you, I've had it up to here!

*(ELEANOR pats the top of her head with the flat of her hand.)*

**MOIRA**

Not my problem, what you've had up to where. As far as your poor old mother's concerned, it's all been taken care of.

**ELEANOR**

I've no idea what you're talking about.

**MOIRA**

You never asked!

*(Sound of front door opening and closing offstage left. ELEANOR turns just as GRETA walks out onto stage left pulling a small suitcase. The two sisters freeze, staring at each other whilst MOIRA fusses about with her rug.)*

**ELEANOR**

Greta?

**MOIRA**

See! My solution to the problem.

**ELEANOR**

Greta... what have you and Mother been hatching together?

**GRETA**

Is that all you can say to your twin sister after so many years?

*(ELEANOR goes over to the armchair upstage and sits with her head in her hands. GRETA puts down the suitcase, shrugs her shoulders and goes across to hug and kiss her mother.)*

**GRETA**

How lovely to see you're out of hospital, Mother!

**MOIRA**

Wish you'd tell your sister that. She's all for having me locked up again!

*(ELEANOR shakes her head without looking up.)*

**GRETA:**

Cup of tea?

**MOIRA**

That's just what I suggested to *her* before you arrived. In fact, it's all I asked of her.

**ELEANOR** *(Through her teeth)*

You know very well it wasn't like that, Mother!

*(GRETA turns to face ELEANOR.)*

**GRETA**

Aren't you even going to say 'hello', sis?

**ELEANOR** *(Looks up)*

Hello!

**GRETA**

Eli?

*(GRETA goes over to ELEANOR and hugs her.)*

**MOIRA**

She's still suffering from the shock of being caught snooping.

**ELEANOR**

Will you shut up, Mother! I'll make you and Gretty a cup of tea, then I'll leave you two to get on with your little game!

*(ELEANOR gets up and stomps off to the kitchen stage right. Starts to make tea. GRETA addresses her sister's back just before ELEANOR exits sitting room through the imagined door separating sitting room from kitchen.)*

**GRETA**

Sis?

**MOIRA**

Never was one for manners, that sister of yours!

**GRETA**

You've been goading her, haven't you, Mother? As always!

**MOIRA**

Come, my little Gretty. Tell me what you've been up to.

**GRETA**

I bought a pony for my daughter, a dozen chickens and a new/ dog...

**MOIRA**

/I knew I could count on you to help your old mother out in her hour of need.

**GRETA** *(Aside)*

And I knew you weren't interested in what I've been up to... but worth a try.

**MOIRA**

She was all for sending me to prison.

**GRETA**

So, we have a lot in common. Like most sisters.

**MOIRA**

You didn't mind me calling you, did you?

**GRETA**

Whatever put that into your head, Mother?

**MOIRA**

He'd have been so proud of you. Always were his favourite.

*(MOIRA grins as GRETA stares coldly back at her mother.)*

**MOIRA**

And just like him! He was forever saying that. Funny how twin sisters can so different. Eli staying indoors and playing with her dolls. You outside, running around, getting chased by the boys. *(Pauses)* Ah... the boys, ay?

*(MOIRA winks at GRETA who looks away.)*

**GRETA**

I'll help Eli in the kitchen. And do try not to fall off the settee. No more broken bones, please, or it'll certainly mean a spell in prison!

*(GRETA crosses into kitchen stage right.)*

**SCENE 2**

**SET:** As before, sitting room stage left, kitchen stage right.

*(GRETA is sitting at the kitchen table whilst ELEANOR stands making the tea. MOIRA is lying on the settee in the sitting room with a towel over her face.)*

**ELEANOR** *(without looking at her sister)*

So why *did* you come back?

**GRETA**

Forget Mother, Eli. Can't we just be friends? Remember our childhood pact? If one of us was in trouble, the other would come to the rescue.

*(ELEANOR chuckles.)*

**ELEANOR**

Like when I accidentally broke the hideous nude statue on the mantelpiece. His 'little nymph'. You said it must've been a poltergeist when he asked who did it. *(Pauses)* Yes, Gretty, I remember. Saved me from a belting! *(Pauses again)* But only once.

**GRETA**

I wasn't after the house, if that's what you're/ thinking.

**ELEANOR**

/A nursing home would be ideal. She'd be properly cared for. And the staff there could take all the flak. I can tell you it's been a full-time job since I took early retirement. Was better off teaching a class-load of delinquents than looking after one.

**GRETA**

There'll be this house at the end of it. Must be worth a pretty penny.

**ELEANOR**

Damn the house! I'm not interested in one brick of this accursed place. Anyway, knowing mother she'd rather leave it to a charity than hand it on to me. Good luck to you, I say!

*(ELEANOR sits down and fiddles with the teapot.)*

**ELEANOR**

And you're welcome to her grumbles and her bunions. But I warn you, with that broken hip bone of hers, it'll mean non-stop nannying.

**GRETA**

Pears'll soon be ripe back home. Only staying a week. Far too /busy to...

**ELEANOR**

Fuck you! Why did you have to come back and interfere? I had it all arranged! It's like... like—oh, I give up!

**GRETA**

Like what?

**ELEANOR**

Like it always used to be.

**GRETA**

As if you'd know! Look, before you go blaming me for everything, I only came back because I thought she was dying. Nothing to do with duty. I'm

not *you*.

**ELEANOR**

Someone has to care. She is our mother, for heaven's sake!

**GRETA**

Out with it, Florence Nightingale! What are you really getting at?

**ELEANOR**

You've been a stranger ever since high school. Wouldn't talk. Gave Mother and Father one enormous headache. Failed all your exams. I tried so hard, but you cut me off. It felt like I had to make up for my other half who was no longer there. Go it alone.

**GRETA**

Get it off your sisterly chest, Eli! All those years of pent-up anger, ay?

**ELEANOR**

Always were his favourite. Boke Father's heart when you cleared off at the age of sixteen. No explanation. You leaving was the end of their marriage.

*(GRETA gets up and walks away, clearly distraught. Stops and turns to look at ELEANOR.)*

**GRETA**

Is that what you truly believe? You, the do-gooder who could never see beyond her own angelic nose.

**ELEANOR**

No! Me the only one who got beaten by father.

**GRETA**

Like Mother said, you spent too much time playing with dolls. It's about people, this world we live in. At least I learnt something after I 'cleared off' ... as you put it! *(Quietly)* You know nothing. *Nothing!*

**ELEANOR**

Didn't you care just one little bit about leaving me behind? Leaving me at the mercy of two cantankerous, grieving parents. For them it was like you'd died. You've no bloody idea!

**GRETA**

And you've no idea how I longed to reach out to you when I hit rock bottom.

**ELEANOR**

He left her within months of you going off. How's that for cause and effect? It's me she blames for Father leaving. 'If only Gretty were still with us all would be well.'

**GRETA**

He saved me.

**ELEANOR**

Father?

**GRETA**

Are you mad? Jean-Pierre! I never told you how it happened.

**ELEANOR**

You just told Mother you were married and you weren't even eighteen. After we'd lost contact with Father. Mind you, I don't know whether that was a good or a bad thing. Never could decide who was worse... him or Mother.

**GRETA**

So, what have you been trying to prove all these years, slaving away for her?

**ELEANOR**

Never heard of daughterly responsibility? *(Softening)* Anyway, what were *you* trying to prove by reappearing at the last minute?

**GRETA**

You couldn't even begin to understand. Look—can't we just be friends for this week?

**ELEANOR**

Friends? *(Pauses then chuckles.)* Remember how we tried to make an immortality potion after Granddad kicked the bucket?

*(GRETA walks back to ELEANOR, smiles and nods.)*

**GRETA**

They should never have forced us to go to the funeral. God, that coffin! Had nightmares for months.

**ELEANOR**

*You* said they'd have to make a special coffin for the two of us. And if one died first, she'd need to be pickled and kept in the fridge till the other passed away. That's when we decided an immortality potion would be better.

**GRETA**

Yeah! We worried the fridge wasn't big enough.

*(ELEANOR looks up at GRETA before pouring hot water into the tea pot. Pours a cup for GRETA and one for herself.)*

**ELEANOR**

Mother can wait for hers. Does she know you're only staying a week?

**GRETA**

Nope! She said to come before she got put away for good. I thought she was referring to a coffin. Thought this would be my last and only chance.

**ELEANOR**

To what?

**GRETA**

You've enough to worry about. Look, why don't you just call the hospital. Explain that the old duck got it wrong. That your dreadful sister has no intention of looking after her. On no account should they cancel her booking for that prison cell.

*(GRETA looks at her sister then looks away without answering.)*

**ELEANOR**

Jean-Pierre saved you? You were going to kill yourself, right?

**GRETA**

More worldly-wise than I thought.

**ELEANOR**

I did teach for nearly twenty years! Know something about teenage girls. Why didn't you confide in me? You're all I thought about for months after you were gone. No, for years! I'd have listened to you.

*(Pause.)*

**GRETA**

Did you never wonder why you were the only one to get beaten by Father?

**ELEANOR**

He liked you better. Everyone did. You were the honey. The *pretty* one!

**GRETA**

Pretty one? Huh!

**ELEANOR**

There was the pretty, fun one and the plain, boring one. Me! The shy one who played quietly in the background whilst you played with Father. And when you got older, with boys. And Father turned a blind eye.

**GRETA**

If only! Look, just call the hospital after you've had your tea and I'll work on Mother. She'll be begging for a prison cell when I'm finished, I promise.

**ELEANOR**

Don't be hard on the old thing. Her tongue might be sharp, but she is pretty frail. It's why she fell and broke that bone.

**GRETA**

Yes, the bone! A little bone of contention. Give the dog a bone, ay?

### **SCENE 3**

**SET:** Sitting room and kitchen as before.

*(MOIRA is lying on the settee with flannel over face. ELEANOR and GRETA are seated at the kitchen table.)*

**MOIRA** *(Lifts flannel)*

Oh, curse the both of them! I could die here, unnoticed, from dehydration.

*(GRETA gets up and walks across to sitting room, stage left, with a cup of tea.)*

**GRETA**

Tea, mother! Two sugars. See... I remember after all these years.

**MOIRA**

Why did you leave me, my child? I never got over it, you know. Neither did he. Eleanor and your father, they were chalk and cheese. She tried sucking up to him but he saw through her. She got on his nerves and he left. Even before he... *(pauses)* before that horrid business...it was like being a widow.

**GRETA**

Mother, I can't put this off any longer. I tried asking you last time I was here but couldn't. Thought I had the strength but...Jean-Pierre, /he said—

**MOIRA**

/That French swine! Stealing my daughter when she was hardly out of the cradle. The pain was unbearable.

**GRETA**

*Your* pain? Can't you even imagine what it's like for me coming back to this place?

**MOIRA**

Why, my darling? And don't you go worrying yourself about everything being left to Eli. Between you and me, she'll not get a bean. Because of Father.

**GRETA**

Oh, for Pete's sake, Mother! The only love ever felt in this household was between Eli and me.

**MOIRA**

My leg hurts. It's this awkward position I'm in. Be a dear. Lift me up a little.

*(GRETA sighs and helps the old lady to find a comfortable position.)*

**GRETA**

Did you hear what I just said?

**MOIRA**

I may be getting on, Gretty, but I am not demented. Of course I couldn't expect you to know how much your father and I loved each other.

*(MOIRA plays with the rug covering her legs)*

**MOIRA**

Think of all those years I've been on my own and never so much as looked at another man. That's love, isn't it?

**GRETA**

Is it? Why did he leave you, then?

**MOIRA**

It wasn't because of another woman, if that's what you're thinking.

**GRETA**

Oh, I know there wasn't another *woman!*

**MOIRA**

It means so much, you rescuing me like this.

**GRETA**

Mother, you have to give Eli a break. You'll be the death of her.

**MOIRA**

Me the death of her? What has she been saying to you behind my back?

**GRETA**

Nothing! It's as plain as watching a TV soap.

**MOIRA**

Never have been one for all that drivel.

**GRETA**

Don't you see, Mother? All her life she's wanted just a little recognition.

**MOIRA**

The ungrateful child!

**GRETA**

She's forty-three. Like me. Remember? We're twins.

**MOIRA**

I keep telling you, I am not demented!

**GRETA**

No. I wouldn't have come back if I thought you were. Look, couldn't you find it somewhere in your heart to say thank you to Eli? Just once?

**MOIRA**

'Thank you' for chasing your Father away?

**GRETA**

Mother... I'm going to ask you something. About Father.

**MOIRA**

Ask Eleanor. It was she who drove him away.

**GRETA**

Listen! Listen carefully and answer honestly.

**MOIRA**

If this is about the house, it's all in my will. Anyway, it was out of my control. Still in his name when we separated—and when he... you know... (*stops short.*)

**GRETA**

Nothing to do with the house. It's to do with him.

**MOIRA**

It was in his will and I couldn't change a thing. Might have been so different if she hadn't chased him away, /but...

**GRETA**

/That's just it. Eli wouldn't chase anyone away. That woman is so dutiful she'd jump from the top of the Eiffel Tower if you asked her to. She'd complain like hell, but she'd do it.

**MOIRA**

No one's asking her to jump off anything.

**GRETA**

The point is, Mother, Father leaving had nothing to do with Eli. *You* know it and *I* know it, so let's stop pretending.

**MOIRA**

I can feel a headache coming on.

**GRETA**

Jean-Pierre got hold of that note. (*Moira winces.*) Through the lawyers.

**MOIRA**

Oh, my head! Be a dear and fetch me a whisky. It's the only thing that works.

**GRETA**

The note, Mother! If you didn't know before, surely you understood then?

**MOIRA**

Oh, not now, Gretty. I cannot think when I get a headache.

*(GRETA gets up, steps away from MOIRA, stops and looks into the distance.)*

**GRETA**

All right, I'll get you a whisky. Drink the whole bottle if you wish, but I'm going to get to the truth.

**MOIRA**

You will be staying, won't you?

*(GRETA leaves sitting room for the kitchen and MOIRA replaces the flannel over her face.)*

#### **SCENE 4**

**SET:** Sitting room and kitchen, as before.

*(ELEANOR is sitting at the kitchen table with her head in her hands. GRETA stands in the kitchen, fuming. MOIRA as before, lying on the settee in the sitting room with a towel over her face.)*

**GRETA**

The woman's impossible! Where does she keep the flipping whisky bottle?

*(ELEANOR looks up.)*

**ELEANOR**

If you're planning on hitting her over the head with it, I'm afraid homicide laws do apply to Mother as well.

**GRETA**

And the sherry! *(Turns to look at ELEANOR.)* She bloody knew all along.

**ELEANOR**

That you're not planning to stay? Then why the hell did she land me in it? I've just spoken with the social worker. They can't do a thing.

**GRETA**

Why not?

**ELEANOR**

A psychiatrist would have to section her. *She'd* need to be the one screaming mad for that to happen... not me!

**GRETA**

Oh Eli!

**ELEANOR**

Why *did* you have to come back now, Gretty? Couldn't you have waited till she was nicely bedded down in a nursing home?

**GRETA**

Like I said, I thought she was dying. Came back for precisely the same reason as the last time. Back then, she wrote that life without Father was so awful she couldn't bear it for another second. Planning to top herself like Father, I assumed.

**ELEANOR**

Still blames me for that!

**GRETA**

When I found her fit and well and talking to photos of Father like he was still here—I... I freaked out. Terrified he'd walk through that door again. The memories all came back in a sort of—rush! Like morning crowds tipping out of the Paris Metro. Almost drowned me in the pain.

**ELEANOR**

I was the one who got all the pain. Those damned beatings!

*(GRETA opens her mouth as if about to speak but is unable to. Goes to kitchen cupboard and opens doors, looking for something.)*

**GRETA**

The only good thing he ever did... kill himself. So, where the devil are the whisky and sherry bottles?

**ELEANOR**

*Two* bottles? Her skull isn't that thick. Leave it to Old Father Time. She can't go on for much longer.

**GRETA**

Neither can I. When Father killed himself, I hoped those things inside my head would stop. They didn't. And I have to know. *(Turns to look at*

*ELEANOR.*) Did it never occur to you why he left that note?

**ELEANOR**

The one the solicitor read out? He hated me to the very end. Even in his final moments when he wrote it, he had a stab at me.

**GRETA**

You weren't mentioned.

**ELEANOR** (*Tenses*)

Exactly! Like I didn't exist. Not even as a family appendage. Oh, I don't care now. Had a whole life since then. But it hurt at the time. I could never do a single thing to please him. Made no sense.

**GRETA**

Nothing fucking makes sense!

**ELEANOR**

*You* were the one who went out with boys and came home late. *I* stayed in the house. Got the sharp end of his tongue. And his belt! Whilst Mother turned a blind eye. 'Why can't you be like Gretty and please him?' she used to say.

**GRETA** (*Hesitates, then speaks softly.*)

I want you to be there. When I speak to her.

**ELEANOR**

So... you've not told her yet that you're off again in a week?

**GRETA**

Should've done this years ago. When you *were* my greatest friend. The past wasn't always bad, was it? (*ELEANOR chuckles.*) What?

**ELEANOR**

I was thinking about the socks.

**GRETA** (*Grinning*)

Not *the* socks?

**ELEANOR**

I forgot to put them in the wash. He found them when Mother was out shopping. It was a Saturday. I can still see him waving them at me. Like I'd committed a mortal sin. He had plenty of other socks to wear, but no, he needed *those* socks. So, he washed them in the sink and put them in the oven to dry.

**GRETA**

And screamed blue bloody murder an hour later when he found two sticky brown patches at the bottom of the oven. Because they were nylon. Boy, that was funny!

**ELEANOR** (*Stops smiling*)

The belting I got wasn't funny. And *I* had to scrape the mess off the bottom of the oven.

**GRETA**

Come through to the sitting room with me, won't you? Please!

**ELEANOR**

To witness you hitting Mother over the head with a whisky bottle?

**GRETA** (*chuckling*)

We could each take a bottle.

(*GRETA & ELEANOR lark around and giggle, pretending to wallop their mother over the head with bottles.*)

**GRETA**

Can't risk breaking valuable bottles of booze.

**ELEANOR**

Gretty... if this is about the will, I really don't give a damn. I know Father wanted me to have nothing. Fine! So—you get the house! Come and live in it! Bring your French chickens and your pear trees and do what you like with it.

**GRETA**

I'm telling you, if the house is left to me, I'll burn it to the ground. Trouble is I can't burn the memories.

**ELEANOR**

Gretty?

**GRETA**

What?

**ELEANOR**

Whatever it is you're going have a go at Mother about, I'll have to pick up the pieces. Underneath, she's very fragile.

**GRETA**

Mother fragile? What a myth! I just need to know how hard she really/ is.

**ELEANOR**

Does it matter now?

**GRETA**

The past matters! So where are the glasses?

**ELEANOR**

Still in the sitting room cabinet. Nothing's changed. Woe betide me if the glasses weren't pristine clean. He'd hold them up to the light. (*Mimes holding imaginary glass up to the light.*) Looking for stains.

**GRETA**

Suppose that's what I'm looking for in Mother. Stains.

**ELEANOR**

Stop talking in bloody riddles.

**GRETA**

Stains on Mother's soul, Eli. If she has such a thing.

## **SCENE 5**

**SET:** Sitting room and kitchen as before.

*(MOIRA is lying on the settee with a towel covering face. GRETA and ELEANOR enter sitting room from stage right, each carrying a bottle. GRETA goes to the cabinet and takes out two glasses.)*

**GRETA**

So, what's going to kill you first, Mother? Your bone or your head?

*(MOIRA removes towel and looks at GRETA without saying anything.)*

**GRETA**

Whisky or sherry? Or shall I mix them together?

**MOIRA**

Just a little sherry first, dear. For my bone.

*(GRETA pours a sherry and gives it to her mother.)*

**GRETA**

Here's hoping it'll help with that other bone—the one I'm about to pick with you.

**ELEANOR** *(Looks troubled)*

Gretty—I'll have a drink too.

*(GRETA looks at her sister.)*

**GRETA**

A small sherry then. I'll want you conscious. *(GRETA pours a sherry and hands it to her sister).* You deserve to know the truth.

*(ELEANOR hands her bottle to GRETA then sits down.)*

**MOIRA** *(having downed the sherry in one gulp.)*

I think I'll have that whisky now, Gretty.

**GRETA**

Yes, I think you will. Can't have a headache coming between you and the truth, can we?

**ELEANOR**

Gretty... please...

*(GRETA pours a whisky for her mother.)*

**GRETA**

So, you knew, didn't you, Mother?

**MOIRA**

Knew what, dear?

**GRETA**

About Father. What he did.

**MOIRA**

You always were his favourite.

**GRETA**

Favourite what, Mother?

**ELEANOR**

No, Gretty, don't. Not now!

*(GRETA turns sharply on ELEANOR.)*

**GRETA** *(Shouting)*

Not now? When, then? I've waited fucking years to ask. I've got to find out before it's too late! Find out if she knew I'd been taken by my own father!

**MOIRA**

Taken where, dear?

*(GRETA turns to face her mother. Walks slowly towards her, kneels on the floor beside the settee and looks into her eyes. ELEANOR cups her hand over her mouth when the penny drops.)*

**GRETA**

I'm going to spell it out, Mother. Listen carefully! My virginity taken! Got shagged! Father shagged me. Not a very nice word, is it? Or would you prefer raped? Because that's what our dear father did to me.

**ELEANOR**

Gretty... please...

*(GRETA turns to look at Eleanor.)*

**GRETA**

That, dear sister, was his loving gift for his favourite daughter. I was only fourteen. It all but destroyed me. I was fucking terrified. Thing is...

*(For a few moments GRETA is speechless. ELEANOR is in tears. She wipes her eyes)*

**ELEANOR**

But/ ...?

**GRETA**

/I didn't 'clear off'. She... *(points over her shoulder at her mother)* she arranged that au pair job for me in Paris when I was sixteen and failing in everything at school. Now why do you think she did that if she didn't know?

*(GRETA turns to face her mother. Looks her in the eye but MOIRA turns her head.)*

**GRETA**

Did you or did you not know Father was shagging me? Afraid it would all come out so you got me packed off before I dared tell my sister—right? And that's why he left—right? And there's more to that suicide note than got read out by the solicitor—right? The bit you forced him to leave out.

*(All three freeze for a few moments.)*

**MOIRA**

My bone's awfully sore. The sherry doesn't seem to be working.

**ELEANOR**

But Gretty, how? Where? When? How? This can't/ be tr—

**GRETA**

/A fucking horror movie! But the rest of the suicide note... you see, Jean-Pierre was always sure there was more.

**ELEANOR**

More?

**GRETA**

Finally got hold of a copy of the note from the lawyers. As good as a confession. At least the monster had the decency to top himself when he realised I wasn't gonna commit suicide.

**ELEANOR**

Oh my God! If only I'd known!

**GRETA**

But that's not the point. Why did Mother not protect me if *she* knew? Her own daughter, for Christ's sake! *(Turns to face mother. Shouts.)* Why,

Mother Why?

**MOIRA**

The pain's not going away. I really do need another/ sherry.

**GRETA**

/That's just it. The pain never goes away! You knew, and you did nothing!

**MOIRA**

Eleanor, be a dear/ and...

**GRETA**

/You pretended he left because of Eli. You'd have done anything to keep us apart. Keep the truth hidden. *(Pause)* Poor Eli! Abused for her good nature... like Father abused my fear.

**MOIRA**

You've no idea what it's like to have a broken /bone!

**GRETA:** *(Standing)*

/And you've no idea what it's like for a girl to be fucked by her father /and abandoned by her mother.

*(GRETA pauses.)*

**ELEANOR**

/Oh Gretty—

**GRETA**

Eli, I'm going! Sorry, but I can't stay here another minute. There's certainly nothing else I can pick off this particular bone! The house is yours. Sell it do what you like with it if you can get her into that nursing home.

**ELEANOR**

Gretty—Please don't go. Not now.

**GRETA**

You know, Father leaving this house to me felt almost as bad as being shagged by him. Made me feel cheapened. Like payment for what he did. As if I was no better than his private little whore.

**MOIRA**

Oh, do close the kitchen door, Eleanor. There's an awful draught here.

*(GRETA angrily picks up her case and heads for the door. Stops then half-turns towards ELEANOR.)*

**GRETA**

For all I care she can join Father in hell, but you, Eli... God, if anyone deserves a place in heaven, it's you. Don't let her grind you down!

*(GRETA stops again at the door without looking back.)*

**GRETA**

Eli... you honestly *were* my greatest friend. Once.

*(ELEANOR, in tears, turns to look at GRETA as her sister leaves the room).*

**MOIRA**

Isn't she staying? Actually, I could do with another cup of tea.

**ELEANOR** (*Shouting*)

Stop it, Mother!

**SCENE 5**

**SET:** Sitting room as before.

*(MOIRA is lying stretched out on the settee with a towel over her face. Sound of front door opening and closing. ELEANOR enters from off-stage left carrying bags of shopping.)*

**MOIRA**

Is that you, Eleanor?

**ELEANOR**

Who else were you expecting?

**MOIRA** (*Removes towel from face.*)

Such a shame about Gretty not staying. It's that French husband of hers, you know. I always thought it was a bad idea, her going off to France like that. Broke your father's heart, it did.

**ELEANOR**

I'll make your lunch, Mother, then leave you in the capable hands of the nurse.

**MOIRA**

It should never have come to this. If your father had had his way, she'd not have disappeared. And she wouldn't have got herself saddled with that selfish man she calls a husband.

*(MOIRA fiddles with the rug on her lap. Looks up)*

**MOIRA**

All the same, the French! Only think of themselves, garlic and frog's legs. But your father... *so* thoughtful. Can't think/ why he—

**ELEANOR**

/I'll not be coming tomorrow. Or the next day. Derek and I are having a break. Going to stay with Gretty and Jean-Pierre in France. Been wanting to meet him for so long.

**MOIRA**

France? You too? Never could understand why Greta wanted to go to that Godforsaken country. She had so much going for her here.

*(Pause.)*

**MOIRA**

Will you do something for me? The flowers on his grave. When I'm gone. To show him how much we still love him.

**ELEANOR**

No, I won't. And you know very well why not.

**MOIRA**

You never did get on, the two of you. Not like him and Gretty.

**ELEANOR**

I'll give you your lunch... then help you to the toilet before I go. But promise

me you won't try walking about on your own. Remember what the doctor said. Your bone will never heal properly. It's too thin. Osteoporosis.

**MOIRA**

Showing off with long words now! I'll make no promises to anyone. Not when nobody cares.

**ELEANOR**

Don't start all that palaver again.

**MOIRA**

It's the truth.

**ELEANOR**

Damn it, Mother! What do *you* know about the truth? Look... I can't leave you by yourself if you're going to wander about.

**MOIRA**

What if I need a cup of tea?

**ELEANOR**

That's what we're paying the nurse for.

**MOIRA**

Prison officer!

**ELEANOR**

Yes, Mother! A prison officer. Very fitting. (*ELEANOR heads for the kitchen door stage right with her bags of shopping. Stops.*) He'll be here soon.

**MOIRA**

He?

**ELEANOR**

They have male nurses too, nowadays. That'll be all right, won't it? More like a proper prison officer. More realistic!

**MOIRA**

For a moment, dear, I thought you meant *him*. Thought he was coming back to me after all this time.

**ELEANOR**

The man you thought he was only existed in your head.

*(MOIRA calls out to the back of ELEANOR as her daughter reaches for doorknob.)*

**MOIRA**

She led him on, you know. It wasn't all his fault.

*(Without turning around, Eleanor holds onto doorknob)*

**ELEANOR**

*She* was a child, Mother. *He* was an adult.

**MOIRA**

If you leave before the nurse gets here, don't go blaming me if they find m dead on the floor.

*(ELEANOR drops her hand and turns to face MOIRA.)*

**ELEANOR**

Blame *you*? Oh, why should anyone blame *you*, Mother? You're way beyond blame, aren't you? It never even entered your mind to blame yourself!

*(MOIRA puts towel back over her face. Exit ELEANOR.)*

**END OF PLAY**