

**Somewhere**

or

**Nora's Ark**

A theatre-in-education programme

Written by

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Gazebo TIE Company

**[Third Draft]**

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## **Characters**

*Nora Lee - An eccentric woman in her sixties*

*Niven Johnson - A young man from the town*

*Dr Saida Parmar - A local General Practitioner*

*Claire Hipkiss - Nora's Daughter, a secondary school teacher.*

*The action of the play takes place in Nora's tat-yard, on the edges of the small town of Pickerton.*

## SCENE ONE

[MUSIC]

[Nora's place. It is a yard on the edge of the small town of Pickerton, very full of pieces of junk art. In the middle is the beginning of a new sculpture - a kind of 'tree of life'. No-one is there.]

[Niven breaks into the yard. He looks around, then does some damage, in a quite deliberate way. He seems angry, unlikeable. He scrawls graffiti somewhere. He writes 'The Tat-Lady' and 'Loony Tyunes']

[Nora is returning from a car boot sale. She arrives, and Niven has to hide. She has a carrier bag, and a decorated walking stick. She empties her post from the American-style mail-box at the entrance, takes out the post, tips one letter into a bin, and replaces the others. She takes a tape from the bag, and puts it on. It is flamenco music. She dances, surprisingly whole-heartedly, and empties her bag alongside the 'Tree'. Our first impression of her is that she is perhaps mad. She switches off the music. It is not clear that she has seen Niven, but...]

Nora: [Returning to the tree] I should come out. You'll get cramp hiding there.

[Niven jumps out, grabbing the nearest 'weapon' - a stuffed toy crocodile.]

Niven: Freeze!

[She is unperturbed, and passes close to him to get a cloth. She starts to clean off the graffiti]

Nora: It should have a 'y' in it, shouldn't it? T-yunes. Stupid language. No sense to it. You spelt 'loony' right, though.

Niven: I'm not messing about.

Nora: Nor am I. Never do.

Niven: Too far-gone to notice. Crazy old witch.

Nora: I've heard worse. And read worse. Seen better spelling, though.

Niven: Stop going on about spelling will you? Mad cow.

Nora: You won't hurt me much with that, will you? [Takes the toy from him] Here, hold my stick for a bit. I'm carrying too much. My name's Nora.

Niven: I know. Everybody knows you. Mad Nora.

Nora: If you're being polite. You know why they call me mad, though, do you?

Niven: Because you are?

Nora: Because I smile. Try it some time. You walk around smiling in Pickerton, and in the end they'll call you mad. Not supposed to smile. It's normal to be miserable.

Do you want to make yourself useful?

Niven: Did I scare you?

Nora: You're a strong-looking young man. If you wanted to damage me, there's not a lot I could do, is there?

Niven: So I did then.

[He starts looking through her stuff]

Nora: My daughter will be here in a minute. Keep out of that. I expect you ought to have gone by then. Claire gets a little worried about me.

Niven: Mrs Hipkiss.

[Nora looks at him]

She was my teacher for a bit.

Nora: You know she's my daughter?

Niven: Course. Even at school everyone knew. We used to get at her by calling her the Witch's daughter

Nora: Charming.

I would have thought there was enough to get at her about, without dragging me into it.

Niven: 'Sucks', we called her.

Nora: Why Sucks?

Niven: Dunno. We just did.

Nickname.

Nora: I didn't realise so many people knew about me being a witch. I thought I kept it secret.

[She casts a spell on him. This takes a little while, involving strange movements and chants. He thaws a little.....]

Niven: Where do you get all this stuff?

Nora: All over. This morning I have been at a car boot sale. Excellent invention, they are. You never know what gems might be hiding in the rubbish.

Niven: But you buy the rubbish.

Nora: Look at this... What is your name?

Niven: Niven.

Nora: Look at this Niven. My car boot booty.

[She shows him the box of the Flamenco cassette]

Paco de Lucia. 25 pence.

Niven: Bargain.

Nora: Listen....

Niven: I heard it before.

[She puts on cassette and starts to dance again, this time around him. He doesn't quite know where to put himself.]

Nora: Smiling and dancing. Can't be normal, can I?

Niven: You ain't.

Nora: Passion. That's what this dance is about. I'm an old woman. Not supposed to be passionate, are we Niven?

I once met a man who danced the flamenco. That's what this music is.

Niven: Yeah I know. Castanets, stamping and guitars, all that. Spanish.

Nora: Andalucian.

Niven: Whatever.

Nora: You break into my place and write on it. I don't call the police. I treat you well. Now you can just listen politely. The least you can do.

[She carries on dancing intermittently, though she needs to pause for breath a little as she talks, and her knees are hurting a bit]

I met an Andalucian man in America. He was 78 years old, and he stood and danced on the corner of a street in San Francisco. No music, just his feet and his voice and his hands. All day, all weather. I asked him why, he said he danced for his wife. Dead seventeen years, but he still danced for her every day. With this passion in his eyes, anger almost. Like they took her away from him, but he could still dance. The people in the neighbourhood laughed at him. I expect they would write things on his walls. One morning he wasn't there any more and I wondered whether someone had done him in. Or he just got tired of dancing.

Niven: You been to America?

Nora: Clap. Like this.

[He is lured into clapping as she dances. There is beginning to be a sense that they are dancing together. She hears Claire's car and stops. There is no chance for Niven to go, because there is only one way in/out.]

Nora: Back into hiding boy. Your teacher.

Niven: I'm not bothered if she sees me.

Nora: Don't argue.

[She hides him.]

## SCENE TWO

Claire: Ma!

Ma!

[Nora emerges. She switches off the music]

Ma, this is Dr Parmar.

Nora: Oh.

Dr Parmar. Namaste.

[She bows. Claire is embarrassed]

Dr Parmar: Mrs Lee.

Claire: I mentioned Dr Parmar was going to visit, didn't I Ma?

Nora: Not today.

Claire: No, well, remember I said a while ago... Dr Parmar is wonderfully kind to spare the time to visit you here isn't she?

Dr Parmar: It's really no problem.

[Pause]

Quite a place, Mrs Lee.

Nora: Nora. Nora Lee. Nora Lee-Defective.

Dr Parmar: Right.  
What's this?

Nora: The Tree of Life. Mine. It's not finished. Not by a long way.

Claire: Where can we sit? I expect Dr Parmar would like a cup of tea. I'll make some shall I, Ma?

Nora: No. I'll do it.  
[She goes inside]

Claire: [To Dr Parmar] I'm sorry.

Dr Parmar: It's quite alright.  
[She gets out a notebook]  
I see what you mean about the yard.  
Mind you, the way people talked, I thought it would be more all-over-the-place.

Claire: More?

Dr Parmar: I like it. You wouldn't expect it, on the edge of Pickerton.

Claire: That's true.  
[Pause. She calls in to her mother]  
You haven't had any trouble, have you Ma?

Nora: [From inside] No. Why?

Claire: It's nothing really. I just heard someone had been snooping round.

Nora: [Reappearing] Did you? Kettle's on. I haven't got any milk.

Claire: I brought some, it's alright.

Nora: Isn't she good?



Claire: Dr Parmar just wants to talk to you a little, I think, Ma.

Nora: You know why she calls me Ma, Doctor. Because I'm not a normal mum, like other girls have. That was what she told me.

Claire: I was twelve, Ma.

[She goes over to the mailbox, removes letters, opens and sorts them during the following section]

Nora: You want to examine me? Shall I take off my clothes?

Dr Parmar: No really. I just wanted to meet you. I've heard so much about you, Nora.

Claire: You've not seen anyone behaving strangely then?

Nora: Strangely? Who?

Claire: I don't want to frighten you, Ma. It's just I worry.... Someone said they heard that Niven Johnson had been seen sniffing around.

Nora: Oh yes. Him.

Claire: You've seen him?

Nora: Yes. He's visited a few times. Seems to just come in and mess things around a bit and then go away. You shouldn't worry.

Claire: Ma, he's dangerous. God I might have known you'd be - he's a criminal Ma, not some .... What do you mean, mess things around?

Nora: Oh I don't know, make a mess. Last time he did graffiti. With a spelling mistake, I'm afraid. I blame his teachers.

Claire: It's not funny Ma. Trouble follows him around, always has. He could have killed you. Everyone knows he's a loose cannon.

Nora: Funny. That's what they called Niall. [To Dr Parmar] Claire's father.

Claire: We're talking about Niven Johnson, Ma. He's a bully. A thug. He burned down the school for Christ's sake.

Nora: Oh that was him was it?

[Pause]

Well there must have been a reason.

Claire: I give up. You see what I mean Dr Parmar? Why I am concerned for her here.

Dr Parmar: Yes, of course.

Nora: Ah.

We're starting all that again are we?

I'm happy here, Claire. I know it isn't your kind of place. It's my home.

Claire: But you're not safe.

Dr Parmar: [She tends to speak over-clearly to her] I am going to make an appointment with you Nora, to visit you again, and give you a proper once-over, if that is possible. Your daughter is concerned about you coping here on your own.

Claire: I'll make the tea, shall I?

[She goes inside]

Dr Parmar: We thought we might consider alternative arrangements, when I have had a chance to see how you are thoroughly.

Nora: I see.

Dr Parmar: How long have you lived here?

Nora: Not sure, what about you?

Dr Parmar: Me? In Pickerton? About six years I suppose.

Nora: And when did you come to England?

Dr Parmar: I was born here.

Nora: Oh really?

Dr Parmar: [Getting back on course] You mentioned your husband.

Nora: No. I didn't. Perhaps you misunderstood.

Dr Parmar: Claire's father.

Nora: We weren't married.

Dr Parmar: Right, but he is-

Nora: Haven't seen him for years. He wasn't around. Claire is all my doing. Goodness knows how she turned out like that. Do you like Jelly Babies? Are you allowed gelatine?

Dr Parmar: Well...

Nora: Take these. You don't have to eat them anyway. I thought I'd put a group of them round here, but give them each a little space. And a name.

[She starts arranging Jelly Babies around a section of the tree. Sadia is half-heartedly helping]

I'm giving them their freedom.

Dr Parmar: I see.

Nora: They are mis-shapes. From the boot sale. I shall have to varnish them, when they're in place, or something. Otherwise they'll melt in the rain. They may do anyway.

You take these ones.

[They continue for a bit]

Dr Parmar: It's quite a work of art, your yard. Where do you get your ideas?

Nora: I just live my life. The longer it gets, the more is in it, you know..

No, those look the same, you see. They should be different. Here.

[Claire has come out with tea, neatly arranged on a tray]

You found some milk, then. That's pretty.

Claire: I'm still thinking about Niven Johnson. Honestly, Ma.

Nora: This doctor here is helping me liberate these Jelly Babies.

Claire: Good.

How do you like your tea, Dr Parmar?

Dr Parmar: Actually, I think I ought to be going. I'm sorry, but my surgery starts at half-past.

Claire: Of course yes. I'll run you back. Have you had long enough?

You've met my mother, haven't you, so... I'll just put these..

Nora: Leave them there. I'll have a tea party on my own.

Thanks for your help, Doctor. I shall call one of my Jelly Babies after you.

Dr Parmar: Thank you. I'll come and see you in a couple of weeks, Nora. There'll be a confirmation note in the post.

Nora: Just put 'Nora's Yard' on it, it'll get here. Or 'that mad old cow's place'.

Dr Parmar: I've got your address.

Claire: [As she is going] I'll come and fetch you in the morning for Daniel's birthday. Do you want me to get a present for you to give?

Oh that would be kind.

Claire: Ma, I want you to promise something, If you see that boy round here again, ring the police. Or ring me. Promise?

Nora: Police or you. Right.

[They leave]

### SCENE THREE

Nora: You can come out now!

There's even a cup of tea you can have.

[Niven emerges from his hiding place]

Here.

[She offers him tea. He refuses. Takes a biscuit.]

I don't think my daughter likes you much.

Niven: Not much. She don't know me though.

Nora: Of course not.

Niven: Not sure she thinks much of you, either.

Nora: Well.

Who do you think I should ring? Her or the police?

Niven: Depends on how dangerous I'm being.

[He is looking at the sign that Nora has at the entrance of the yard which reads, 'Somewhere']

What's the sign for?

Nora: It's a kind of joke. Just for me.

The Post Office says I live at 53 Pickerton Heath Road - I hate it. I don't live in Pickerton. Nasty small town, people with small minds. I live here. My uncle used to call me 'nowhere'. Nowhere Lee. 'Your head's in the mist'. 'Dreams never filled a larder'. I always said the best places of all were inside my head. This is it. My somewhere. See?

Niven: No.

You knew I'd been here before?

Nora: Yes.

Niven: How come you never said?

[Nora shrugs]

You never grassed me up neither.

When she told you about me.

Nora: So you're a thug and a firesetter. I'm a mad old witch. That's what they say.

I wonder. Niven. Can you help me with this?

[She shows him what she is doing to the tree, adding branches/decorations. Niven gets drawn in over the rest of the section]

That needs to go up there. See?

Niven: What did that Doctor come for?

Nora: Ah. Our Indian friend.

[Niven gives her a look]

I've got nothing against those people, it's just...Claire wants me to move from here, into some sheltered housing place. I think she's getting Dr Parmar to help get me put away.

Niven: You're kidding?

Nora: She just worries.

Niven: She ain't much like you.

Does she take after her Dad?

Nora: No, I don't think she does. He was kind of wild.

She's got his hair I suppose.

[Pause]

Niven: I used to do this sort of stuff at school

Nora: You did Art?

Niven: No, just at Infants. Cutting and sticking. I loved it.

Nora: So much you burned it down.

Niven: No when I was little - Infants School. I was good at all this. Teachers loved me. We used to sit on blue mats, and listen to stories.

Nora: So what went wrong?

Niven: Nothing

[Pause]

At secondary school I was 'remedial'. But only 'cos they never taught me to read properly.

Nora: So it's the teachers' fault?

Niven: I'm not that good at reading, OK. But how come they decided I was public enemy number one? They said I had an 'attitude problem'. I just got bored, I reckon. They never did nothing that made any sense. It was all teachers sneering. Taking the piss.

Nora: My Claire? I mean 'Sucks'

Niven: She was alright. Not as bad as some, anyway. Making up for it now though.

Nora: And you were an innocent victim. Picked on by evil teachers?

Niven: This one bloke, Wyndham, if you hadn't done something, he'd go through this whole routine. 'Let's see.... Mr Johnson, perhaps you could explain this. Oh you don't know, I am surprised. You look so intelligent' Then he'd get me out the front to write the answer up, just 'cos he knew I was crap at it, and he'd get the class to laugh. 'Let's all just show Mr Johnson what we think, shall we?' Like conducting them laughing. That happens often enough you stop bothering. If he's going to disrespect me, I might as well make it worth it. So I got to tormenting him back.

Nora: Poor man. Probably just doing his best to teach you something.

Niven: It wasn't about learning nothing. It was about him winning, looking good. Making me look small. You don't understand.

Nora: I might.

Niven: Was this always broken?

Nora: What have you done?

[He has broken a 'branch' of the tree]

You great lummoX. Concentrate, will you.

[She belts him with the crocodile. They have a funny little fight]

Niven: I'm sorry, OK? Lay off me. Bully.

Nora: Have you always been clumsy?

Niven: I'm not.

[Pause]

Nora: Why did you burn the school down, then?

Niven: I just told you.

Nora: Because you were bored? Because a teacher embarrassed you? Because they said you had a bad attitude?

Niven: Because I could.

Nora: I see.

Niven: Wyndham was just the first. They was all like that in the end. Had this same look.

[He demonstrates the look]

The Head. The police.



The magistrate was worst. I had to stand up in the place while he give me this talking-to. Before he put me away. The thing I remember is he did this sucking with his mouth where he looked like he was going to gob on me. Too much spit. 'I get a lot of your sort in front of me. Young men who think they can bully their way through life.'

[Nora is laughing, so he plays it up more]

'You have the same nasty look. I am going to do my best to change that. Make you think again, Mr Johnson'. They always call me that. Goes with the look. 'Mr Johnson. I am disappointed Mr Johnson'

Nora: This is looking good.

Niven: It is isn't it?

Nora: You come back and help me some more?

Niven: Could do.

[MUSIC]

## SCENE FOUR

[Several days later]

[Dr Parmar arrives at the yard]

Nora: Ah, the good doctor. Come in, or out. I never know which to say.

Dr Parmar: Mrs Lee. How are you?

Nora: You tell me. You're the doctor.

Dr Parmar: Your tree is coming along.

Nora: The only sort of tree that doesn't grow. It rusts.

My knee is quite bad. Arthritis, they say. When it's damp.

Dr Parmar: Yes. That is quite common with ostioarthritis I'm afraid.

Nora: I've been taking nettle tea.

Dr Parmar: Yes, well.

We'll have a little look shall we?

[She examines her knees during the conversation]

You'll have to hope for sunshine.

Nora: I do, I do. I suppose you're not used to this weather.

Dr Parmar: It was much the same when I lived in Bristol. Mrs Lee, I...

Nora: What?

Dr Parmar: Never mind. It doesn't matter.

Nora: You don't take risks, do you, Dr Parmar? You work hard, but inside you yearn for something else. There's nothing wrong with that. I feel sorry for you. Pickerton has got you. In your heart is a great burning. You want to let go.

Dr Parmar: Do you need any painkillers at all?

Nora: It's easier than you think.

Dr Parmar: Right. Can I just ask a couple of questions, Nora.

What day is it today?

Nora: Now then. You are in a state. Don't worry, this was when we said.

Dr Parmar: So what day is that?

Nora: I never bother with days much. Sundays I look for a good car boot.

Dr Parmar: And how old are you?

Nora: Born the year of the coronation. 1953.

Dr Parmar: That would make you 45.

Nora: Yes that would be Claire. Born out of wedlock I'm afraid, Doctor. Not popular at the time, you can imagine. Don't be afraid, though. You need only really believe in yourself. It doesn't matter what people say in the end.

Dr Parmar: No, quite.

Nora: She has always felt she should be looking after me. That's why she asked you in. I'm used to her. You should see her house. Everything in its proper place. It isn't surprising she worries. It's her nature.

Dr Parmar: Your daughter is not just concerned about you, Nora. She is.. well her circumstances make her feel apprehensive.

Nora: Ooh dear.

Dr Parmar: You mustn't worry about her....

Nora: Alright.

You see these two [she gets two dolls] This one is going to be pinned down on the tree like this [it is bound up in a kind of bandage thing] Swaddled, like the baby Jesus. Do you know about Jesus? Upright and unmoving. And this one is going to swing. On elastic, I think. A rag doll, any shape you like, won't get hurt if you throw her, see. This is me. You should look at the difference. Wake up and smell the roses, Doctor. I can feel your sadness.

Dr Parmar: I think you're a very lucky woman, Nora.

Nora: I just do what I feel, and damn the rest of them. That's all.

Dr Parmar: Well you're doing well on it.

Nora: You are doing well to be a doctor. So you can look down on us all.

Dr Parmar: [Avoiding a conflict] These don't seem too bad.

[Her mobile goes off]

Dr Parmar. No, I'm on a house call. Yes I suppose, put him through.

[She mouths 'sorry - colleague' to Nora. Nora mouths back 'Oh']

Anthony, it's Sadia. No. No, she's got an incompetent cervix. I've told the registrar. She presented very badly. With her history that is going to be dangerous. She's unstable, that's the point.

I'll be back soon, we can look at it then.

[She hangs up, and puts away her phone]

Stupid things. No peace.

Nora: Are you going already?

Dr Parmar: I'll come and see you again soon.

[As she is going Niven appears]

Niven: Morning Nora.

Nora: Niven.

Dr Parmar: Will you be alright?

Nora: Of course.

Dr Parmar: You wouldn't like me to ring anyone.

Nora: No thanks.

[She hesitates but goes]

Niven: I brought some varnish. Yacht varnish. The bloke said that would be best for outside use. For the Jelly Babies.

Nora: Excellent.

Niven: I've thought of some names, too.

[He gives her a collection of little signs. She looks at it. It is hard to read.]

Nora: This is kind, Niven

[They get to work on the tree. Nora reads out the signs, and gives them to Niven to allocate]

Boss-man.

Rufus.

Witch-doctor.

Niven: What's the dolls for?

Nora: Scaring off evil spirits, and Indian doctors.

Niven: Voodoo.

Nora: Doobi-doobi-doo.

Niven: They look smart.

[Pause]

Nora: You're good at this, you know. Inventive. Good eye. You should get involved in making things.

Niven: That's what they said at the Young Offenders place. I had this careers session. Joke. 'Suitable for manual work', the bloke put on my form.

Nora: He should have put Natural Artist

Niven: Natural Born Artist.

[He demonstrates again. Pastiche of Natural Born Killers]

That what you are?

Nora: I don't think so. Niall used to collect things. I liked arranging them, that's all.

Niven: Is that how you started doing all this?

Nora: Not really. It's a long story.

You're like me, Niven. We look at the world from outside, us two. When I fell pregnant with Claire. What was it you said, 'public enemy'... I was that. Except it was all kept as private as possible. Whispered about.

Niall wouldn't tell his family. He said it would kill them. I told mine, and they nearly killed me. He was never going to marry me. That was the thing then. So I was sent away to a Hostel place, for 'fallen women', and that was where Claire was born. She was called a bastard, of course. Imagine if you'd known that when she was your teacher, you would have had fun. Plenty of folk did.

I'll tell you something. Every time I am angry with Claire now, I think about what she did for me when she was a baby. Because if it wasn't for her I'd have...

Niven: Started burning places down?

Nora: Something like that.

Niven: What did you do?

Nora: I ran. Travelled. People don't pass judgement so fast away from home. They may have thought I was odd. Unmarried, with a baby. But she was my passport. Everyone talks to you when you're carrying a baby.

Niven: That doesn't explain this place. Why you make all these things.

Nora: I'm a magpie, that's all. I saw a lot of chunks of life quickly, and picked up ideas. I went around Europe, and the States, stayed places. The world didn't seem to like me much, so I thought I'd make another one that I liked. On my terms, no-one else's.

Niven: You don't sound much like me. I ain't a hippie.

I have been whispered about enough, though.

When I was about 12 they took me to this Ed Psych, they called her. Hospital room with horse pictures, a big plastic armchair. With my Nan. Anyway, she asks me all this stuff - my feelings, anger, my dad going, all the foster homes - I had to go through everything. Then I had to look at all these patterns and say what I saw. She had a

whisper to my Nan, that was the only bit that made me feel funny. It all seemed OK, a morning off school. What they never do is tell you what's really happening. She never said 'do you hate your dad, by the way if you say yes it will mean every single person in the world will treat you different from now on', but that's what happened. I don't know which question I got wrong, but it must've been something.

Nora: Have you got any family now?

[Niven shakes his head]

Foster family?

Niven: Not really. Best rid of most of them.

[Pause]

Nora: We should work on something else together, after the tree. What do you think?

[Niven thinks]

Niven: I think the archway. You need a bigger entrance. Brighter. Telling the world.

Nora: Sounds good to me.

Niven: What you said about being somewhere. Make it even more.

Nora: You see. You have good ideas. I am a witch. You're good at doing things. I have evil powers. We could go far.

Niven: Or we could stay here.

[MUSIC]

## SCENE FIVE

[Several days later]

[MUSIC]

[Claire and Doctor Parmar arrive. Claire has an M & S carrier]

Claire: Oh God, she isn't here.

[She starts unpacking the things she has brought. Food and household stuff]

Dr Parmar: Don't worry. We're a little early.

Claire: No, she's probably forgotten. I am sorry, Doctor. I should have come here before to make sure.

Dr Parmar: Sit down, Claire. We will wait for a few minutes. It's not a problem.

You look tired. How are you feeling?

Claire: Fine. Just a bit frazzled.

[Dr Parmar is looking around at the nearly completed tree]

Dr Parmar: It is an extraordinary place, isn't it?

Claire: That's one word for it.

Dr Parmar: Has she ever had any art training?

Claire: No, of course not.

Dr Parmar: But this is a remarkable collection. What will happen to it all?

Claire: I don't know. You think you can get her a place then?

Dr Parmar: Well. I think it would be very difficult. She isn't ill, or incapacitated. She has somewhat erratic patterns of behaviour, perhaps lapses in memory, and is occasionally



confused. We may perhaps talk in terms of early stage age-onset dementia, but I couldn't in all honesty make a recommendation for priority admittance to Prudence House.

Claire: But she can't cope here. Look at it.

Dr Parmar: In her own way she is doing fine.

Claire: But the place is horrible. I can't even let the children visit her here. It's dangerous.

Dr Parmar: Well, you should see some of my other -

Claire: Oh God. Is this because of the way she is with you? Are you blocking it?

Dr Parmar: Certainly not.

Mrs Hipkiss. I am giving you my professional judgement, which may be hard to-

Claire: Anything could happen to her. How would you feel, then?

Dr Parmar: This is about you, not your mother.

[Claire is upset. Dr Parmar tries to be conciliatory]

If you could get her to make her own application... She will have to agree, or it will involve me talking to Social Services about getting her sectioned, and I would not be prepared to do that.

Claire: She'll never agree.

Dr Parmar: Yes, well. You may have to talk to her about your situation.

Claire: No.

Dr Parmar: Right. Well, I will take her through the benefits of moving, but -

[Nora arrives with Niven. They have bags of stuff with them.]

Claire: Ma! What's he doing here?

Nora: Hello, Claire, Doctor Parmar. You remember Niven?

Claire: Ma.

Nora: Have you been waiting long?

Dr Parmar: No, only a minute or two. We were early.

Nora: Niven, you can get started with these. He's helping me with the tree.

[Niven takes the bags over to the tree]

Claire: What are you playing at Ma? You know who that is?

Nora: I just told you.

Claire: I don't know what you imagine you're doing here young man, but if you think you are going to do anything to hurt my mother, you are very wrong.

Niven: I should leave that to you.

Claire: What's that supposed to mean?

Nora: Niven. No need to be nasty.

Claire: I can't believe what I'm...  
Ma.  
What are you grinning at? Get out, now.  
This is not a joke, Ma. This boy is an arsonist. He's a menace.

Niven: I'm not a boy.

Claire: Keep your mouth shut.

Niven: You wish.

Claire: This isn't just some poor nice lad whose been badly treated. Listen. He used to beat kids up at school. He stole, he swore, he was violent.

Niven: You don't know nothing about me.

Claire: In trouble with the police, regularly, and then caught burning down the school, for Christ's sake..

Niven: I can't believe you.

Claire: He's been inside for it, and everybody in the town knows he's bad news except my mother.

Niven: What've I done?

Dr Parmar: [To Niven] Perhaps it would make sense if you were to go away for now.

Niven: No. I ain't going anywhere. There's nothing you can do. Not any more.

Dr Parmar: Well we'll see if the police can do something then.

Niven: She won't want that. She knows what I know.

Nora: Don't Niven, that isn't fair.

Niven: I'm not on about that. I mean, she knows why I'm here, don't you?

Claire: You haven't the faintest idea, you poisonous lout.

Dr Parmar: Listen can we all just calm down for a minute, please.

Niven: You can keep your nose out too, Doctor Smile

Nora: Niven. Perhaps you had better go. For now.

Niven: I'll go. But you ask her why I'm here, in the first place.

Ask Mrs Hipkiss, why she thinks I come round here...

[He goes slowly round to the tree, to put his bags down, before leaving. He has back the menace of the first scene]

Nora: You're wrong. Just because all the petty folk of Pickerton choose to write someone off doesn't mean I have to.

Claire: I'm sorry, Doctor.

Nora: What're you apologising to her for?

Claire: I'm apologising for you, Ma. As always.

Nora: Well, you've no need. I was doing fine.

What did he mean?

[No reply]

What did he mean about knowing why he came?

Claire: I don't think you should still be here on your own. Really. It's just stubbornness.

Nora: So you asked him to come up here and scare me away?

Claire: It wasn't like that.

Nora: You did?

I don't quite believe that, even of you.

Claire: I love you, Ma. I love everything about you, but I couldn't bear the thought of... I had tried talking to you. I saw him, in the town. It wasn't planned, it just came into my head then. Seemed a way of making you see sense. So I talked to him.

Nora: But this is my life. Not a film. You don't hire people to scare me off. Do you Doctor Parmar?

[The Doctor avoids getting involved]

What did you do? Did you meet him in some back alley, and pass him a dirty envelope full of used fivers.

Claire: It was stupid of me. Let's forget it. I should have known it wouldn't work. He was always too thick to trust with anything.

Nora: You did that?

[She laughs]

What you here for anyway?

Dr Parmar: It can wait. I don't think the time is right.

[She makes to leave. Looks at Claire]

Claire: Listen Ma, all I was doing was trying to make you see sense. He wouldn't have hurt you.

Nora: No, he wouldn't. He likes me. I like him.

Claire: That's good.

[Nora waves her stick at her to go. Claire can think of nothing to say and goes]

## **SCENE SIX**

[MUSIC - sound effect running under scene]

[Niven comes in to the yard. He approaches the tree slowly. He picks up a Jelly Baby and eats it. Then quite suddenly and violently, he destroys the tree. He goes off and returns quickly with a petrol can. Pours some onto the base of the tree. He produces a lighter, and is poised to set the fire, but stops. He runs off.]

[Music continues]

[Claire arrives, then Doctor Parmar. Nora is frozen, shocked. Claire goes to her, but stops, turns in on herself and cries. Dr Parmar gets out her notebook and writes. They freeze]

## **SCENE SEVEN**

[MUSIC]

[Dr Parmar and Claire arrive with empty boxes. They seem to be in the middle of a process of packing up Nora's things. They have a roll of sticky labels, which they write on and stick on boxes when full]

Dr Parmar: It's a really nice place. Well you've been there, you said?

Claire: Yes.

Dr Parmar: But there is very little storage space for the use of individual clients.

Claire: Clients?

Dr Parmar: Sorry. That's what we call patients these days. Too used to it. I expect they call them residents at Prudence House.

Claire: I'm really grateful to you for changing your mind. Getting her a place.

Dr Parmar: Well, in the light of this....

What shall I put on this one? 'Bits and pieces'?

Claire: You'd have to put that on every box.

[Pause. They keep on putting things in boxes and labelling]

God, that smell of petrol. I can't stand it.

Dr Parmar: He was going to burn the place, was he?

[Claire nods]

I wonder why he didn't light it?

Claire: Probably interrupted, the police said.

[Dr Parmar shakes her head.]

[Pause]

[She looks for a while at Claire, who is working too hard]

Dr Parmar: You know, Claire, I think you should tell your mother. It would surely help her accept this move. I would really prefer to know that this is her true decision.

Claire: She doesn't need to know. If my operation goes well, she'll be none the wiser.

Dr Parmar: I'm afraid I really doubt that. The way it works, you will be in recovery for a long time. You will look very ill, Claire. However well it goes, with the side-effects of the treatment alone. You will either have to avoid her completely for a month or two at least, or make up some other excuse for looking extremely sick.

Claire: I know.

[Pause]

Dr Parmar: And you ought at least to consider the effect on her if things do not go well.

Claire: She relies on me, Doctor.

Dr Parmar: I know she seems a bit confused at times, but I think she could cope better than you realise.

Claire: How can you say that after all this?

Dr Parmar: All this is partly down to you, isn't it? I'm, worried about the help you might need.

Claire: I know, I know. But she let him walk all over her.

Dr Parmar: She misjudged him. That's all. That kind of young man is highly manipulative. It's part of his make-up.

Claire: But look at what might have happened.

Dr Parmar: I just think if you explained everything to her, she might end up helping you. Your husband -

Claire: Oh Howard is useless, yes. I'm having to leave notes all over the house about how to switch on the kettle, and where we keep the washing powder. But Daniel and Sarah will tell him what to do.

Dr Parmar: I mean emotional support, Claire.

[Pause]

Dr Parmar: How are you feeling about it all?

Claire: About the operation? I don't know.

I suppose deep inside I'm pretty terrified. It helps me to be keeping busy.

I've always been the one in the family that deals with everything. Copes. No-one would manage if I stopped. When you told me the news, I just decided not to let it get to me.

Dr Parmar: Get to you?

Claire: For the sake of the family. Not just my mother, all of them.

Dr Parmar: Well perhaps you need to manage a little less well. Let someone else try to do some of the coping.

Claire: You would, would you?

Dr Parmar: Well, I don't really see my family..

Claire: Keeping busy helps. Helps me.

Dr Parmar: Of course.

[Looking at the remains of the tree] Are we bothering with this?

Claire: I don't know. Leave it for now.

I appreciate your help with all this Doctor, you didn't need to.

Dr Parmar: I feel a little responsible.

Claire: You? There's no need.

Dr Parmar: How is she, anyway?

Claire: Oh much the same. I'm staying here for the next few nights.

Dr Parmar: I don't expect you enjoy that much do you?

[Claire finds something]



Claire: Oh my God.

I didn't realise she still had this.

This, I'm embarrassed to say, was a present I gave her after the first time I went away from her. Holiday with some schoolfriend's family in Rhyll. Isn't it gorgeous?

[It is a tea towel, printed with 'For the Best Mum in the world', or some such thing.]

She made such a big deal out of it. So pleased I'd got her a present.

[Claire fills up. Dr Parmar, as sensitively as she can, takes the tea towel]

[Nora arrives back, with some more carrier bags. She can see that Claire is upset, although both she and the doctor try to hide the fact. Nora looks as if she might ask why, but instead gets busy]

Nora: I'm not in favour of women boxing.

Claire: Very good, Ma.

Dr Parmar: How are you Mrs Lee? I was very sorry to hear about your break-in.

Nora: Every great artist has her critics, Dr Parmar.

Dr Parmar: Why do you think he did it?

Nora: I'm not sure that he did, Doctor. If by 'him' you mean Niven.

Claire: My mother thinks he might have been framed. She thinks he is an unlucky victim of life, who never did any harm.

Dr Parmar: I see.

Claire: She's being a little stubborn about it.

Nora: Your mother thinks innocent until proven guilty. Your mother feels he gets blamed for too much.

Claire: Have you asked why?

Nora: The past. Because nothing better was ever expected of him. Because he was abandoned by his family, by everyone.

Claire: Is that what he told you?

Nora: You haven't seen how he is with me, Claire. He trusts no-one, so it takes patience. But every time he has come here things have been getting better. I know he was carrying out your kind orders to begin with -

Claire: Ma, I -

Nora: I know, but it is more than that now. We are alike, and he sees it. He's finding a way of expressing things.

Claire: Oh, please.

Dr Parmar: I hadn't realised you were so tolerant.

Claire: If he didn't do it, then, which other passing arsonist and vandal was responsible?

Nora: Who knows? Just perhaps someone who was sure he would take the blame.

Claire: Stubborn, stubborn, stubborn.

Nora: I am not being stubborn.

You've won, haven't you? I've said I will go to Prune-Juice House if these people say I'm incapable, haven't I?

Dr Parmar: It isn't really like that, Nora. It would be much better if you visited, and saw for yourself. There are beautiful grounds there. Cherry trees.

Nora: Of course. That's nice. No blossoms on this one.

[Claire has found a letter that interests her. She has opened it]

Claire: What's this?

Dr Parmar: What?

Nora: It is a letter.

Claire: Have you had many of these?

Nora: Quite a few.

Claire: Why haven't I seen them?

Nora: I don't let them bother me.

Claire: 'Legal proceedings will be...'

Nora: It makes no difference now, does it?

Dr Parmar: What is it?

Claire: It's a letter to my mother from the Council. Environmental Health Department. 'Owing to numerous complaints and an unsatisfactory report from members of the Environmental Health Team, we are left with no alternative but to ask for your removal from these premises..... '

What does this mean?

Nora: It's what we were just talking about. Reputation. Once people call you something often enough, the system starts to do it on its own. You end up with a letter from the council, saying you are a 'Tat-Witch', an ugly blot on their pretty little town. They never came to see me. They never ask me what my yard is for.

You should be pleased Claire. They want me to move on too.

Claire: Yes but this is bullying. This is just because they don't like you.

Nora: I lower the tone of the town.

Dr Parmar: I'm sure people do not look at it that way.

Nora: Well you're wrong, isn't she Claire?

Claire: Some people, perhaps.

Claire: Who's complained about your yard?

Nora: Who indeed?

Claire: Ma, I'm sorry, really. This has nothing to do with me.

Nora: Not just you perhaps. I'm a big enough girl to know what people think of me.

The people of Pickerton want a cottage with hanging baskets outside it here, and some nice quiet townfolk tucked neatly inside. My daughter wants the same.

Claire: Ma.

Nora: Best of all would be if I could be put in one of these little boxes -

Claire: Ma, please.

Did you know about this, Doctor Parmar?

Dr Parmar: No.

Claire: We've got to do something. They can't get away with it.

Dr Parmar: I'm not sure we can -

Claire: [snapping] We must.

Dr Parmar: Try and stay calm will you, Claire. I can't really see what difference it makes now.

Claire: You don't see, do you? She's my mother.

Nora: And now anyway you'll have me out. Off your hands.

Claire: No.

No. Ma. Don't say that.

I have to tell you something. It isn't a big deal really, it's just... look I don't want you thinking that about me.

I probably should have told you before, but... I have to have an operation. Next month. The chances are good.

It's to remove something, a bit of a growth, in my intestines. You mustn't get upset. The chances of success are good, aren't they?

[Dr Parmar nods]

I couldn't bear the thought of you here without me, if anything went wrong. It won't be like that, because I'm going to get through it... flying colours.

Do you see? It isn't that I want you to leave.

Nora: Claire, why didn't you tell me? Have you known for long?

[No reply]

[Nora moves around for a while, concentrating on some mundane activity, in silence. She sits and holds her stick. No-one speaks for a while]

Claire: Anyway, shall we get on with this?

Nora: Sit down, will you.

[Claire sits beside her]

My baby.

[She holds her]

[Niven appears. Dr Parmar tries to stop him coming in. he pushes her aside]

Niven: Out of my way.

Dr Parmar: Don't you think you've done enough damage here?

Niven: Me?

[He sees Nora holding Claire]

Nice hug. Can anyone join in?

[Niven starts looking around, searching the ground, and then looking through boxes. This carries on throughout.]

Claire: You've got a hell of a nerve.

Niven: Thanks. That means so much coming from you.

[Nora gets up, and starts emptying the bags she brought with her. She doesn't address Niven directly]

Nora: Niven. I know. You must not think the world is all against you, because I know that you didn't do this. It's no-one's fault, and I don't blame anyone. Claire was only trying to help when she asked you to frighten me. But she didn't bargain for us getting on so well, did she? She didn't realise that we are twins. Outsiders. The ones that everyone likes to blame. The ones that no-one listens to.

You get to my age, and they still put you in boxes.

So I know you wouldn't knock down my tree. I know that we had too much to look forward to. And we still do Niven. Even if I have to move. We'll just make another archway, somewhere in this new place, shan't we? Still 'somewhere'.

Niven: Stand still.

[She keeps moving. He gets very insistent. Scary]

Stand right there.

Don't move.

[She is still. Frightened]

Dr Parmar: Don't -

Niven: Keep back. Stay out of this.

[Turns back to Nora]

Of course it was me.

[He grabs her stick from her. Walks slowly round her]

Of course I broke up your stupid tree. I'm only sorry I didn't finish the job.

You're better off in a home.

Everything they say about you is right.

Nutty as a fruitcake.

Nora: Why are you doing this, Niven?

I thought we were friends.

Niven: I don't make friends with mad old women. What do you think I am?

Nora: I don't know. If that's true.

Niven: You aren't any different from the rest of them.

Nora: Don't say that. You don't mean it.

[She tries to grab her stick back, but he holds it out of her reach. He taunts her with it.]

Niven: You know all about me, don't you?

[Shakes his head slowly]

Gippo.

Hippie.

Witch.

Nora: I refused to think badly of you. I stood up for you.

Niven: And I did what she paid me to do. That's all.

[Pause]

Claire: Ma. Leave it.

Nora: You pleased you were right? What are you feeling?  
Guilty I hope.

Dr Parmar: She has just told you, she isn't well.

Claire: I told you it was a mistake, I did it because I was worried for you.

Nora: I'm not talking about that, I'm talking about you and the rest of his teachers. Guilty.

Read this Niven, see what you make of it.

They're still doing it to me.

[She passes him the council letter. He throws it down]

You don't like reading do you, Mr Johnson? Get your letters mixed up. What would you say, Claire. Slow reader. He's dyslexic, aren't you ?

Claire: What has that got to do with anything.

Nora: I'll tell you. He's got a problem, hasn't he? If our friend here had a sick patient would she taunt them for being ill, or would she try to help them?

Claire: Of course we tried to help him read. I don't believe you.

Nora: How? You tell somebody they are nothing, it affects them. Listen to me, Claire, I know this. Didn't they call me wicked for having you? Don't they call me mad now? Spit at me. The 'tat-witch'. You have to be strong to get through that.

Niven: They called me -

Nora: You keep out of this. I'll deal with you later. You let me down. I believed in you. You are going to explain why you did this to me.

Claire: He was classified at school, special needs, psychological problems, what more do you expect?

Nora: He was written off.

Claire: He wrote himself off.

Nora: Maybe, but what came first?

[Niven has found what he was looking for. It is an old-fashioned cigarette lighter]

Niven: Got it.



You was going to chuck it out. See this?

[He strikes a light. Holds it out]

Claire; Careful with that. The place is still covered with petrol.

Niven: Oh yeah, so it is. I never thought of that. Stupid stupid stupid.

Will you stop talking about me now, please?

It's important to me this. You collect stuff. You should understand that.

[He grabs the tea towel from Dr Parmar, and plays with the possibility of burning it]

It is the only thing I've ever had that belonged to my dad. He didn't even give me this. Just left it. Before he left me. I keep it so I remember not to believe what people say. He said he'd come back.

Dr Parmar: Could I have a look at that, Niven?

Niven: You?

Dr Parmar: Half the people in this town secretly hate me, most of the other half think they know all about me because of the colour of my skin. Even trusting Nora here judges me every time she opens her mouth.

[She is moving towards him gently, like the police do in films]

I just believe that it is my job to deal with that. Not to wait for someone else's sympathy. Rise above it. Prove them wrong.

Niven: Stay there.

Nora: If I were really a witch, Niven, do you know what I'd do?

Cast a spell on you so you'd understand without my help. You are what you are. I'd take a little ride through time on my broomstick. I'd whisper in the ears of every child through history not to take too much notice of what they call them. If my powers were great enough I'd cast the

spell on every one of them. Believe in yourself. Do what is right for you. Then perhaps I'd conjure Niall back, turn a few chosen people into frogs, and fly back to my yard.

I just hope that you find someone who sticks with you. With more patience than me.

[Niven looks for a moment as if he may set the fire, then throws the tea towel away, drops the lighter and goes]

[Pause]

Dr Parmar: I'll ring the police.

[She gets out her mobile. Leaves to make the call]

Claire: You alright, Ma?

Nora: Fine.

[Claire sits, head in hands]

[Nora retrieves her stick, and goes to the tree. She puts on her flamenco music. She picks up the cigarette lighter and pauses with it lit. She lights a candle under the tree, and begins putting things back on it.]