

ACT [I]

SCENE [1]

(We are looking at a typical open plan NYC apartment. There is a living area and kitchen as one, with two bedrooms off to one side behind the kitchen and a bathroom off to the other side.)

(Curtain comes up and RUBY is on stage in front of the breakfast bar. Behind her on the breakfast counter there is a shopping bag and groceries. She is leaning on the counter with a tablet in her hand. She is typing and swiping then puts it down. She disappears through a door upstage left for a few beats. She reappears and starts to put away the shopping. She is talking to someone, but we cannot see who it is.)

RUBY

(Loudly)

I got all our supplies MR NOLAN. I'll just put these away, then help you to the living room. It was so strange going into a store for groceries. I usually get home delivery, but when I tried, I was in a queue of 9000, and delivery slots are weeks away. Everything's escalated so quickly.

(Ruby disappears upstage into another bedroom. She reappears with a fragile Mr Nolan. She brings him into the living room and settles him into his chair.)

RUBY

How's that? Comfortable enough?

MR NOLAN

It's not too bad. More frustrating than anything else.

RUBY

You'll be up and about properly in no time.

MR NOLAN

(Rubbing his hip)

I cannot wait. I'm missing a nice walk around the park. I love people watching. Although, I expect everywhere is quieter than usual at the moment. Maybe the best time to be stuck indoors.

RUBY

Yeah, nothing to miss out on at the moment.

MR NOLAN

Are you settled in the guest room? Everything ok for you?

RUBY

Perfect, thanks.

MR NOLAN

At least I'm in a position to pay for live in care, especially since the hospitals needed to free up beds. How are you coping with everything?

RUBY

(Laughing)

It's not been too different for me up to now, apart from the shopping and moving in, of course.

MR NOLAN

You're just a young thing, the store isn't too far away?

RUBY

(Offhandedly)

Oh, it's not that.

(Ruby walks over to the counter and picks up the tablet)

So I was thinking, you don't have a computer do you?

MR NOLAN

(Looking at the tablet)

No, not at all. It's is all new to me.

RUBY

I thought you may have some folks you want to reach out to.

(She is met with silence. Ruby laughs uncomfortably.)

MR NOLAN

That is very kind, but I wouldn't know where to start.

RUBY

Do you have any family you want to see?

MR NOLAN

Well, that's a question.

(A silence hangs between them for a beat. We hear a ding from the tablet)

MR NOLAN

What was that?

RUBY

Oh, that's the email I set up for you. I hope you don't mind. I can help you do all sorts of things.

RUBY (Continued)

Set you up for news alerts, connect you to family. You can video call anywhere in the world if you like. I put an app on so you can watch whatever TV you want too.

MR NOLAN

(Slightly Annoyed)

You really didn't need to go to all this trouble. I have no use for email. And I've got my books and radio.

RUBY

(Blushing)

Sorry, I just love my gadgets and I thought you might find it useful.

MR NOLAN

Well, it seems very complicated to me.

(Softening)

Thank you, though.

(On the screen a 'breaking news' alert flags up. Headline: 'Covid Update 8.30pm ET'. )

MR NOLAN

What was that?

RUBY

Fauci is due to give a speech in thirty minutes. If you tap the news app, you can watch it on there.

MR NOLAN

I can put my radio on. I don't want to break your gadget.

RUBY

It's pretty robust!

MR NOLAN

Yeah well, I like the radio all the same.

(Another silence fills the air)

RUBY

Tell you what, I'll show you how to work it tomorrow and you can decide if you like it. There is even an app where there are loads of books to read.

(Slightly deflated)

I'm going to unpack some more, if that's ok? Just let me know when you want to head back to your bedroom.

(Ruby gets up and heads to her room. She switches on the radio as she passes. We can hear the news talking about further lockdowns.)

FADE TO BLACK

## SCENE [2]

(We are back in Nolan's living room. Nolan is in his seat and Ruby is busying herself in the kitchen.)

MR NOLAN

(Sniffing)

What am I smelling?

RUBY

Well, as a special treat, I'm making us my famous lasagne.

MR NOLAN

(Snapping Slightly)

You know that's not part of the job description, right?

RUBY

(Sheepishly)

I know, but it's been so long since I cooked for anyone but me, I'm quite excited about it.

MR NOLAN

(Resignedly)

It does smell wonderful.

(Ruby plates up the lasagne and pours them both a small glass of wine. At the same time Mr Nolan has pulled a TV tray around from the side of his chair, all ready for his meal. Ruby brings everything across for them. We can see that Mr Nolan is impressed by what has been put down to him and the effort that Ruby is trying to make.)

MR NOLAN

(Raising his glass)

To a beautiful lady and a beautiful meal.

RUBY

(Blushing)

Thank you.

(They start to eat in a relative comfortable silence for a couple of beats, peppered with murmurs of appreciation.)

MR NOLAN

Thank you Ruby. This is just wonderful.

RUBY

You're very welcome. It was nice to cook for someone besides myself.

MR NOLAN

No young man in your life?

RUBY

(Hesitates)

Erm...

MR NOLAN

Sorry, none of my business.

RUBY

No, no, it's alright. Nope, no one special.

MR NOLAN

I just realised I don't know too much about you. When did start work for 24 Care?

RUBY

About six months ago in the care side. I used to work for the corporate side, so I've actually been with them for eight years.

MR NOLAN

That's a step down isn't it?

RUBY

(Avoiding his gaze)

I suppose, but it suits me.

(Another awkward silence. They both fill it by having a drink of wine. )

RUBY

(Tentatively)

Was there anyone you wanted to video chat with? I just wondered if there was anyone you wanted to reach out to with your new gadget?

MR NOLAN

(Sipping some more wine)

Oh no. Lovely idea, but no my dear.

RUBY

No family?

MR NOLAN

(Almost imperceptibly)

None that would want to hear from me.

RUBY

Mr Nolan? Do you see the state of the world?

(Catches herself)

Sorry...

MR NOLAN

I do have a son, but I haven't talked to him in almost twenty years.

RUBY

Oh god, I'm sorry, I never meant...

MR NOLAN

Don't worry about it. I did try calling the number I have a few years ago, but it was disconnected. It's been so long.

RUBY

Can I ask why?

MR NOLAN

My son took his mother's death hard. I wasn't around much. Ever to be honest. Providing is what my generation did. Being there wasn't something you thought about. I wasn't with them when she died. He was just a teenager, holding his mother's hand. I was stuck, waiting for a flight out of LA. Thought there was still time. But that's it though, isn't it? We all think time stops for us. Nothings gonna to happen out-with your timetable.

RUBY

Mr Nolan, I'm so sorry.

MR NOLAN

I'm the one that's sorry. I've left it so long. Cowardly on my part. I just couldn't stand the way that he looked at me. It was easier to look away.

RUBY

We could find him, you know.

MR NOLAN

What d'you mean?

RUBY

Social media. I bet I could find him for you.

MR NOLAN

That's a lovely thought Ruby, but I wouldn't know where to start with all that, and anyway, he knows where I am.

RUBY

Well that's bull! Sorry...it's just that, it's not up to him, is it? You're the parent.

MR NOLAN

(Defensively)

And what would you know about kids?

RUBY

(Gulping hard)

I didn't say I know anything, but given everything that's going on, don't you want to reach out?

MR NOLAN

Well yes. I always do, but he has his own life now. I don't need to go upsetting things.

RUBY

You might not think it, but he'll want to hear from you.

MR NOLAN

I don't know.

RUBY

Wouldn't your wife want you to?

MR NOLAN

Oh, that's a low blow, Ruby.

RUBY

Sorry.

(Beat)

What was she like Mr Nolan?

MR NOLAN

Oh, Ruby, a force. Just a force of nature. Ruled the roost. Just everything...

(Nolan's voice trails off)

RUBY

And what would she say?

MR NOLAN

(Chuckles and tilts his head as if hearing something)

Point taken.

RUBY

So?

MR NOLAN

Why are you pushing this Ruby? What's it to you, anyway?

RUBY

I just think now is the time for family.

MR NOLAN

Are you in touch with yours?

RUBY

Of Course. But we're not talking about me right now. C'mon Mr Nolan, wouldn't you like to know how he's doing? Great thing about the internet, you can check in on people, and they don't have to know.

MR NOLAN

(Wistfully)

I would love to know what type of man he has become.

RUBY

So what can you tell me about him?

MR NOLAN

Ok. His name is Justin Nolan, he's a civil engineer. Last I knew he was living in Chicago.

RUBY

Wife? Kids?

MR NOLAN

(Quietly)

I don't know. No wedding invite ever came my way...

(Gulps down)

I'd like to think I'd have made the cut.

(We can see Ruby, clicking on the screen.)

RUBY

Do you have a picture of him?

MR NOLAN

In the drawer there. It's an old one I'm afraid.

(Ruby gets the picture, studies it and types into the tablet. Nolan is watching as she concentrates. Every so often, Ruby shakes her head.)

RUBY

I'm not seeing any social media presence. Do you know where he works?

MR NOLAN

Afraid not my dear.

(Nolan drains his wine glass and watches her type some more. After a few beats, he breaks the silence.)

MR NOLAN

Ruby...Ruby. Don't worry about it sweetheart.



RUBY

I'm sorry, Mr Nolan, I really did think it would be easy to find him. Usually, it's so easy to find anyone nowadays.

MR NOLAN

Well, let's just take it as a sign. It's getting late Ruby, I'm going to call it a night if you don't mind? Help me through?

RUBY

Sure thing. I am really sorry, I didn't mean to open old wounds.

(Mr Nolan stares out of the window, waving his hand as if to dismiss her comment. He sighs heavily. Ruby has a pained look, realising she may have pushed a little too much. She takes a beat and goes over to help him.)

FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE [3]

(Mr Nolan is sitting flicking through a newspaper. Ruby is sat at the breakfast bar on the tablet. She shrieks and jumps out of her chair!)

RUBY

I found your son!

(Mr Nolan turns his gaze out of the window.)

RUBY (CONT'D)

Mr Nolan?

(We wait for a beat.)

RUBY (CONT'D)

Mr Nolan? Did you hear me?

MR NOLAN

I did Ruby.

(Nolan turns to her. His eyes are moist.)

MR NOLAN

How? I thought you said no online presence or something.

RUBY

(Laughing)

Sewage.

MR NOLAN

Sewage?

RUBY

Sewage. Found an article about some eco-friendly construction he was responsible for. Well, his company.

MR NOLAN

He has a company?

RUBY

Yep.

MR NOLAN

That's amazing. I'm so glad he's doing well for himself.

RUBY

(Smiling)

Why don't you tell him, Mr Nolan? Put this tablet to good use!

MR NOLAN

No Ruby! What's it to you anyway? It's up to me whether or not I talk to Justin!

RUBY

(Lip wobbling)

I just know what regret can do to a person...

(She starts to sob)

MR NOLAN

(Slightly puzzled)

Don't cry Ruby! I didn't mean to upset you.

(softening)

How 'bout you help me into the other room? And set up the call for me?

RUBY

(Wiping her face)

Sure thing. Sorry.

(Ruby helps him through and they both disappear for a beat. Ruby comes back out, goes into her room and comes back out with a photo album and a child's toy. She sniffs the toy as she looks through the photo album. Tears roll down her cheeks.)

RUBY (CONT'D)

(Crying with a wry smile)

At least someone is getting the chance to talk to their son again, Peanut.

CURTAIN