

Malice Toward None

By Chris Aronsten

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CHARACTERS

CATHY..... 42. A drug addict on the decline.

PETE..... 74. A gambler with a memory problem.

JANE..... 40. The daughter of a carrot addict.

JANET..... 70. Jane's mother. A carrot addict.

PART ONE: "WHAT WOULD CATHY DO?"**SCENE ONE**

An inner city street.

CATHY, 42, staggers out onto the road. She's dressed like a junkie: blue tracksuit pants with buttons down the side, one pant leg is rolled up to her calf, dirty sneakers, a grimy white singlet, baseball cap, hair in a short greasy pony tail held together by a scrunchie, a bumbag slung over her shoulder and clasped shut across her chest. She's a little sweaty and pale, but healthy enough.

CATHY

(to someone off stage)

Indian cunt!

(to audience)

I've just been chucked out of Woolworths.

(beat)

Did you like my stagger?

She comes at the audience like a zombie, arms out in front of her. She stops suddenly. Looks at the audience.

Oh - wait - no - it's not what you - you don't know, do you?
Oh, fuck! Ha! You must be lookin' at - fuck me! - you must be
lookin' at all this get up, thinking, who's this toothless
cunt? Fuck - no, no... Fuck! - where do I begin?

She sees a half-smoked cigarette on the ground. Picks it up. Massages it between her fingers to make it round again.

Still life in the old girl!

She lights the cigarette, takes a drag.

You like the pants? That's an authentic fuckin' smell. I'm not one of those actors sits at home trying to *fake* this kind of shit. That is shit. I do by doing, 'cos that's The Method. As opposed to the Methadone. Goes way back to Marlon Brando. He's the one made it famous and that... Most of the young one's coming up wouldn't know him from Adam. Even my agent's never seen *On the Waterfront*. But she's a full cunt. Wants 15% of my dole cheque. Still, she got me the gig, and when you get the gig, you forgive and forget. I know that speech off by heart - "I could have been a contender". Fuck. What language. I'd do it for you now, but I'm currently being Cathy. Now until the end of the shoot. And impersonations are not something Cathy would do.

Her phone rings. She fishes it out of her bumbag.

Has he got any? Why? Why? Why? Why not? Why not? Why not? You're useless!

*She hangs up and puts the phone away.
Beat.*

Some don't like the word "actress". I do. I'm still a feminist, but, and I'll kill and cunt says I'm not. I'm just old fashioned. Got that from Aunty Jean, who taught me to lay my cutlery side by side on the plate when I finished a meal so the waitress knows you're done. She was into manners and that. She looked after me.

Thought I'd be a waitress forever. Every actress does, deep down. You move from cafe to cafe 'cos you don't want to look like you belong, but you know the music's going to stop one day. On the other hand - one minute you're pulling pubes out of corn fritters and next thing you know, the phone rings. And the phone did fuckin' ring, and it was her, the 15% cunt.

I was, like, "You've got a nerve, after two years", and she's, like, "You've got work", and I'm, like, "Oh yeah, all right". Smug cunt. But wait - there's more. It's only on a fuckin' film, isn't it. Only a fucking feature film. Proper money. Foreign producer. Fuck me, I thought, I've been plucked by Merchant Ivory. Fetch me a bonnet and watch me go! But to her I said, "Oh yeah, all right".

She says, "You'll be playing a drug addict." Could hardly fuckin' say it. Expected me to be afraid. But I said, "I'll take that, and I'll take it with both fuckin' hands". 'Cos Academy awards aren't for handmaidens. They're for whores and retards and junkies, and I'll have my speech prepared before the cameras start rolling.

Few weeks ago, the script arrives. Tear the fuckin' thing open and yeah... Not bad... Not bad... Three scenes in all... I'm "Cathy, 42". No surname - but see, that's good. I don't want it all on a plate. I want to create her from the ground up. Want to *be* her before I walk onto the set. So I throw off what I'm wearing, put on the filthiest fuckin' things I can find, and step out onto the street.

SCENE TWO

A cubicle with a waist high bench. On the bench is a rectangular vinyl gym mat. Cathy is more drawn. Dark circles under her eyes. Scratching her arms.

CATHY

Why do junkies walk so fast?

She walks fast, back and forth, like a junkie. Stops.

I can answer that now. But first you got to understand the junkie's day. Now, you live out in the suburbs, right - if you fuckin' live anywhere - and you get the train to Central, and you go up the Cross and you walk around and around till you find some cunt who's holding, and if you can't wait, you have it right there, and if you can, you get the fuck home as fast as you can. But it 'aint always that simple.

She walks around stiff-legged and fast like a junkie.

It's a couple of K's from Central to the Cross. There's a certain way that's the quickest and all the junkies use it 'cos they're the laziest cunts on earth. They call it the silk road. Up the Cross, everyone's doing the same, wearing the same, talking the same. Round and around and around. "Where's that cunt who said he'd meet me?" "Why'd that dog say she had some when she 'aint got nothing at all?" You can't see normal people, only other junkies. You're mindless with your cravings, but you don't run, cos who knows how long you'll be out there? And what if you catch they eye of the pigs? So you do your best to try and act normal.

She demonstrates - a junkie trying to act normal

Don't mind me, just going about my business, paying bills and such...

She stops.

Then word gets out that someone's holding, and you start to speed up to get there first.

She starts walking, faster and faster.

And the person behind you picks up the pace, and so on and so on down the line. Soon the vibe's right back to Central and everyone's walking as fast as they can without running - like kids who've been told to slow down; like some cunt's just kicked an ant hill. You're angry. You're jealous. Someone's getting on and getting out and you're still going round the sushi train.

She stops.

That's the junkie's day. That's your housework, your chores, your shopping. And they bitch and complain and smash up the phones 'cos they hate the fuckin' effort of it. But I remember something Jean said. She had a neighbour, Pat. And when she'd come home in her little car, Pat would offer to open the Rolladoor. But you couldn't do a thing for Auntie Jean. She'd say, "Thanks all the same", and she'd get out, open the gate, walk down the driveway, and open it up herself. She'd say, "Opening that door is part of my day."

She lights a cigarette. Change of lighting.

Cathy'd be doing all this, so I start going out to the suburbs, getting the train to Central, making myself known. Soon they're nodding to me. "How's it going, Cathy?". And I'm stoked. Nod back. "Yeah, how's it going?" One called Tony asks me who my contact is. He's tall with long hair. I tell him I've got nothing organised - and right away I feel like a fool. "Organised". I sound like a fuckin' secretary, but Tony says to stick with him and he'll sort me out. Can't believe my luck. Pretty proud of my act. Train pulls in and he takes me up the Cross. Everyone knows him. He's fuckin' king shit.

And of course they're wondering who the fuck I am. Giving me the evil eye. "Who's this fresh cunt, and what's she doin' with him?". I mean it's no big deal, but I'm like, yeah, I think I done all right.

We go up inside this sex club. Porn and vibrators and shit. Cubicles where fags put their dicks through a hole in the wall. Upstairs are the private rooms. Tony knocks on number seven and this big furball opens the door. Too fat to be on smack, but he's out of it on something. We go inside. I'm a bit fuckin' nervous. It's just a vinyl mat on a bench, about waist high. Tony locks the door and Fatty pulls a foil from his sock. Hands it to Tony, then Tony leaves. I try to follow but Fatty stops me. Shuts the door. Takes out another foil and gives it to me. What am I going to do with it? I'm just observing. But I take it, 'cos I think something bad'll happen if I don't. He puts his hands down the front of my pants. I pull back... but there's nowhere to go. He pushes me onto the bench. I start shaking and he starts shaking and the cheap fuckin' plywood walls start shaking. It's a short fat one. No underwear. It smells and it's not real hard. He keeps stuffing it back in with his hand. It hurts - it really hurts... But part of me's going - this is it - this is what happens.

I say to myself, "What would Cathy do?".

SCENE THREE

A dark and dingy apartment. Sheets for curtains. A mattress on the floor. An old TV. Cathy has scabs on her arms. Her clothing is dirtier, more tattered. She's agitated.

CATHY

After it's over with fatty, I need something, so I let him sort me out. I don't puke or nothing. Jean said I had a cast-iron stomach. It's like someone's poured warm honey all over my head. I mean, yeah... I had a few things on my mind, and after, they weren't on it anymore. I can see why you'd use it, you know? I put the bit about the honey in my notebook, then I head home. Get out the script and start going through it. I highlight all my lines, 'cos even Brando learned his lines - at first. Later he just had 'em on cards stuck around the place. But I don't have to copy all his moves.

To practice, I say them onto a tape and leave a gap for mine.

TAPED FEMALE VOICE

Come outside, Cathy.

CATHY

No.

TAPED FEMALE VOICE

Why won't you come outside?

CATHY

I don't want to.

TAPED FEMALE VOICE

What can I do, Frank? She doesn't want to come out.

CATHY

That's the first scene - a flashback to Cathy's childhood, before she got all fucked up. They're trying to show the seeds were all there: Mum who didn't love her, father she never knew etcetera. After a couple of days I've got 'em learned, no problem. Head's gettin' busy, but.

I mean, I talk tough but the nerves are bubbling up. Where do I go when I get to the set? Will they do a rehearsal? Will they freak out because I've arrived in character?

I have to go into town for some bibs and bobs and somehow I find myself back at room 7. Fatty's not there... but I'm relieved in a way... I feel like wandering 'round the Cross a bit, so I do, and next thing I know, up comes Tony, arm 'round my shoulder, wanting to walk and talk. Takes me into a store with real bright lights and shouts me a two litre bottle of Sprite. I go, "Are we on a fuckin' date?", and he laughs real hard.

Next we go to an apartment in a real nice building. We wait out the front, acting normal, till a resident comes and we slip in behind. I have to give Tony some tips on acting normal, like stop *scratching* and stand *still*. And lose the reflective sunnies 'cos this neighbourhood's posh.

Upstairs they've blacked out the windows and there's mattresses on the floor. Tony says have I got any cash, and I do, 'cos I don't want no-one taking advantage this time. I give him a fifty from out of my shoe and he buys two foils. Wants to get on it right there. And I don't mind, 'cos I've got the time, so we both have a taste and lay down.

I can see the shoot so clearly now. It'll all be OK. I write in my notebook: "Junk makes Cathy feel she'll never need it again."

SCENE FOUR

Cathy's slumped against the wall of a prison cell, eyes half closed, on the nod. She has a black eye. Her mobile rings. She slowly fumbles for it.

Answers.

CATHY

Hello?

TAPED FEMALE VOICE

Cathy? Where are you?

CATHY

With a friend.

TAPED FEMALE VOICE

We're so worried about you.
(beat)

Cathy?

CATHY

I'm going to find Mum.

TAPED FEMALE VOICE

Cathy, don't do that. Come home.

CATHY

The camera's going to stay on my face, like I'm about to speak - but I don't and the scene just ends.

She hangs up the phone and puts it down.

Been Cathy so long I'm starting to think like her. Other day I'm at Coles, and I wanted an ice cream, but I had no cash. So just like Cathy, it went into my pocket and out I walked. Thought the Indian guard wouldn't frisk a whitey, but he got me alright. Cops came, too. Just doing their job. I explain the misunderstanding, then one of them offers to take me down to a detox place. Food, clothes, nice rooms and that. I said, "I could use a break, but unfortunately, that's not what happens to Cathy."

I love a white Magnum. They look like the vinyl on Auntie Jean's car seats. You had to peel your legs off in summer. God, I screamed! I mean it hurt, but I always added some extra, you know? Always wanted to make things more tragic. Sometimes, I'd lay on the floor and pretend I was dead, and Jean'd come in to do her chores. I'd be hoping she'd say, "Oh my God, what's happened!" But she just Hoovered around me.

I sure am in routine with Cathy. Get up, grab the notebook, hook up with Tony and go to the dark room. He says, "Hurry up, bitch!", cos I can't find a vein. I say, "You've got too many tatoos!" Then whack!

*(She holds the side of her face
as if she's jus been slapped)*

I'll be glad to started the fucking shoot. Whack!

*(She holds the other side of
her face)*

If I get on first, I don't feel it.

The dark room has a stack of videos. Other day I put one on and my eyes popped open. Jesus Christ - it's Brando, and he's fifty fuckin' stone. What's happened to the man? And where have I been? Didn't know he was still acting - me, who's supposed to be following in his fuckin' footsteps. Gee, but he's still got it. Can't take your eyes off. I lay there staring for ages. I don't think I even blinked.

*She stares unblinking at the audience
for a moment.*

Uncle Frank went first, on account of his heart. But when Jean went - that was something else. Couldn't put that shit in my notebook. Found her on the couch. Head back. Eyes wide open. Thought she was fuckin' joking. I'm said, "Why're you staring at the ceiling? Wheel of Fortune's on".

The house went to me. It's good for an artist to own her own home. Means there's only so far you can fall. Then again, I can't see Cathy stuck out in the 'burbs. Reckon she'd sell. Invest the money. Or just live life, you know?

SCENE FIVE

Cathy is limping along the street. Gaunt, scabby, pasty, greasy, itchy, shivering, coughing, smoking. She's holding a piece of paper.

CATHY

Call sheet came though on the fax last night. 6am start but I've been up since 4. Hair and make-up then on set by eight. I'm to "M.O.W.", which means "make own way". Couldn't be more ready. Time's flown by. Notebook's full. Be funny going back to being me.

Other day some rich old cunt says, "I won't give money to drug addicts". I said, "Cathy's a methadone addict, you ugly bitch."

Cathy sits down on a chair in front of a mirror. Picks up a brush. Starts brushing her hair.

Tony's not comin'. We broke up - if we were even together. Wasn't pulling his fuckin' weight. Like, I'm getting ready to fire up, 'cos it's been a long day, and he grabs the spoon right out of my hand. I said, "Tony - you're forty years old. You ought to have your own fuckin' spoon!" We were in the nice place then. Two bedrooms, balcony. Paying the rent with my fuckin' money. Like to see how far he gets with ten bucks and no spoon.

Cathy applies make-up with a shaky hand.

In his last film, they shot Brando in a steam room, covered in white towels. You could hardly see him. But when he spoke, you leaned forward.

"I'm a methadone addict, you ugly cunt!" She didn't know about the film. Walked away before I could explain.

Aunty Jean once said, "You ought to be in the movies".

Cathy stands up.

Last scene's the funeral and she doesn't have any dialogue.

Cathy slowly eases herself onto the ground. Lies down. Closes her eyes.

TAPED FEMALE VOICE

She was going to be in the movies. She used to lie in the middle of the room, and you'd swear she was dead - she was that good at it.

Curtain.

PART TWO: "MY NAME IS PETE"**SCENE ONE**

Pete is sitting in a chair with his back to the audience. He's 74, wearing a cheap polo shirt, shorts with a belt, sneakers and calf-length white socks. He stands up. He's nervous.

PETE

Hi, my name's Roy, and I'm a drug addict. Sorry - gambling addict.

(He turns to face the audience)

They're laughing, but I ought to be more careful. I've been banned from the drug one... What do they call it? "N.A.". It was Marty and the sleeping pills. How many pensioners are addicted to sleeping pills? Held the place up with an over-ripe banana. Afterwards, someone from the group called and said, "Don't come back till you get in touch with your higher power". I'm an enabler, apparently. Well, I thought, I'll look that up someday, but right now I've got a quota to make. I steer clear of druggos now. Stick with the gamblers. They don't give me any grief. No temptation for them at the chemist. Nothing coin-fed. Well - the weighing machine, but it's not something you can win on, is it? Unless you're a certain type of woman. No, gamblers get the job done nicely. We're nondescript. Healthy looking. Like her.

(Looking at someone)

I've got my eye on her. She's plain looking. 70, I'd say. Charlene, or Cherie or something. I'll ask her after. Gambling or not, she'll need the money. I know where they need to get to before they come to these meetings. George says production has to double this week. Demand is high. I wrote down the target somewhere. I said, "That puts a lot of pressure on the roster". He says, "Get more effing people".

Change of lighting. Pete is playing the pokies.

George got me when I was down to my last dollar.

Playing the one cent machines. And if you've never been there, it's like making love to a hole in a plasterboard wall. He hangs around outside the strip joints, luring blokes in. Lebanese. Muscular and fat at the same time. Backside like a Negro woman, if that's the word we use now.

He says, "What's with the one cent machine? You on a diet?" Thinks that's funny, but I go down to 90.

I say, "I'm busy right now" and bounce back up to a dollar ten.

"Listen" he says. "Listen". And he pulls out a brand new fifty and slides it into the slot.

Poker machine sound effect.

I was thinking this'd be my last dollar - last one for the machines, you know? I mean Pete - enough's enough - time to stop acting like a child.

(Beat)

He says, "You wanna sit around like this, or you wanna earn 200 a day?"

I say, "You should've put that in the other machine. The one the pink haired lady was playing. She's been feeding that thing like a starving child."

(Beat)

He says, "What's your name?"

I say, "Pete"

He says, "No. From now on, I say who you are."

SCENE TWO

PETE

*(Pete is on his mobile phone,
pacing as he talks)*

What's your name again, darling? Well, Sharon, you are now a Smurf. You go round all the chemists, buy cold and flu tabs, then give them to me. I give them to George, and he does something that's nothing to do with either of us. You get 20 dollars a packet, but I take five because I'm papa Smurf and I do the roster. Inside your info pack, there's a copy of your schedule, a list of your chemists, and all your different names. You're a different person at each Chemist, because there's a limit to how much of this stuff you can buy. Make sure you study your name before you go in. Say it out loud a few times. You following me so far... Sheona, was it?

(to audience)

She'll go well. Still got a car, too, so I've put her on Marty's old round in the south west. Keith's on northern suburbs, Dot and Harry handle the west and the rest is up to me. Dot and Harry and are a double act. Married 40 years. She's the gambler; he just does it to satisfy her urges. Haven't heard from Keith at all this week. Reckons I promised *him* south west. I thought, "Here we go". Keith's needy, as they say in those groups. Wants a disabled sticker on account of his knees. Wants petrol money. I said, "Keith, for fuck's sake, tell it to the smurf union."

I wouldn't wish that rostering on my worst enemy. You can't be seen at the same place too often, so you've got to spread them out, put them on a circuit of all the chemists in the area. Then you move them on to a new area. I tell the rookies, "Fake a blocked nose, it helps". Then again, we're all so old we've often got one anyway.

Been to five meetings this week and laid it on three others. Two of them got cold feet and one's going to think about it. I'll need more than that to give George what he wants.

I'm running around like a mad thing. Earning well, but need my relief, too. Starting to get RSI from popping pills out of foil packaging. Doctor can't work it out. Asks if I've been overindulging in "X-box". I say, "I haven't got time for *porn*."

George comes by my place for the Friday pick-up and I'm not home. Screams at me down the phone. Says he told me 3pm. I say, "No, mate, you told me four", but he's already hung up. I rush back home and we do our business in his car. It's an inch off the ground and hard to get in to.

He gets into the car.

I give him the pills and he weighs them on his electric scales. Scratches his stubble. "You're under, stupid." I say "Keith's gone AWOL", and he clenches his fist and I get out fast. Too fast.

He falls.

Drives off without giving me a cent.

He gets up, dusts himself off.

He's a shamer, George. A bully. I don't mind the shouting but I'll wear this feeling for days now. Like a suit with all the buttons done up. Like a wet jumper. And of course one thing always leads to another. Previous fuck-ups, years ago. Right back to the beginning.

I drop a few hundred down the club and finish with a schnitzel and chips. I'm thinking - am I fired? Do I walk away? I'm paid up in rent for a month... Got a few hundred under the mattress...

A beat. The sound of a poker machine rings out a couple of times.

SCENE THREE

Pete has his back to the audience.

PETE

My story's pretty similar to yours I guess... Did my schooling in Grafton, apprenticeship in Brisbane. Built a house in... whatchya call it... 'bout an hour west. Me and Kaye, two kids. Good times, till the business went bad. That's when I got on the one-armed bandits.

He turns to face the audience.

I mean, you can invent a story, but then you've got to remember it.

After the meeting I help myself to a scotch finger and put out the feelers to a man who tried to fool a poker machine with a beer coaster.

He says, "You don't remember me, do you?"

I say, "Have we met"?

He says, "You tried that line on me 6 months ago."

Turns out he's also hooked on cough meds and I'd cornered him at an N.A meeting. I throw the whole thing into reverse, but it's too late, and he goes and talks to the people in charge. I know what comes next, so I make a hasty retreat. I'm so bloody angry I forget what street I'm on and end up back where I started. Good work, Pete. That'll get 'round all the gambling groups now. Christ. Now what? You won't get a sex addict smurfing for you. Not at 74. Not with that face.

I'm hours behind, so I rush off to the Hillcrest pharmacy with it all going 'round in my head. Park at the back, grab the list from the glove box and everything falls on the floor. Who am I here? John Randall. John Randall, John Randall. Put the ID in my top pocket. Go in, ask for the stuff. Wait while they take my details, then back to the car and pick the next one: Victoria Street Family Pharmacy. Tom McDonald... Tom McDonald...

After two more, I'm making good time, covering the quota and then some. I'm thinking I don't need the extras. Not if the traffic goes my way and the old duffer routine keeps hitting the mark. But then Harry calls. Trouble with Dot. She's gone off the deep end, down the casino, 24 hours straight. I say, "Harry, please, go out on your own", but he won't leave her. "Well that's all well and good for her, isn't it?", I say, and hang up the phone.

Sharon's taken to the game quite well, so I raise her on the mobile and ask if she can pick up the slack. She says yes right away, and I pop over with the paper work. It's one of those modern blocks and I spend fifteen minutes fiddling with the damn buzzer... Did she say 7? Or 007? Or 1-7? And when am I supposed to press "Bell"?

Inside, it's her and another lady from the group. But Sharon comes across all discreet and doesn't let on why I'm here. Just some paper work for her to sign, she says. Ushers me into the kitchen, gives me a cup of tea. I think we're just hiding in here - from the flatmate - but then Sharon wants to talk. Asks me questions - where do I live, what do I do in my spare time. I say, "There's nothing to know about me, Sharon." Which she doesn't like and we both just stare at the tea bags in the sink for a while.

Finally I say, "I like the movies and walks on the beach". Because maybe I don't need Keith and Dot and Harry at all.

SCENE FOUR

PETE

After I leave, it's the Newton St. Pharmacy, which is right next door to the Newton Hotel. To celebrate, I pop in for a spell. I'm down, then I'm up, but after an hour I come out even. It's worse than losing, 'cos at least when I lose, I know how to feel.

I pull up stumps and continue on - but the car's not where I left it. Stolen, in broad daylight. I've got the keys. Didn't lock them in, or leave them in the door. I'm a victim of theft. And all the bloody pills are in the glove box.

When I call the cops, I'm so annoyed I can't remember the licence plate. They look it up via my name and say all I can do is wait. Wait!

Pete paces anxiously, thinking.

Don't ask me why, but I call Sharon and she picks me up. Says we'll just do my rounds and forget about the car for now. And we tear through it. Me double parked, her going in. No names to remember. No one to talk to. Just me driving and her popping pills out of foil as we go. In a couple of hours, we're done. If they find the car, plus the stuff we've just got, I'll be fine. Sharon's hungry, so I offer to buy her a bite to eat. As thanks.

Half way through her steak, she tells me how she lost her house and kids. Five hundred thousand down the drain. Stole from work, and friends. It's a sorry tale, all right. When she's done, it's my turn to talk. I stare at my plate. Try to come up with a slice of what I've done she could actually stomach.

A beat. The sound of a mobile phone ringing. Pete answers.

It's the police. They've found the car.

They're saying it was just around the corner from where I said. I say, "Bloody joyriders!". The cop goes quiet for sec - someone's laughing in the background - then he says, "looks like its been there the whole time, mate."

Sharon asks what's going on.

"Nothing".

But she won't take nothing.

I say, "Joyriders", but she can smell a lie.

"What's happened Pete?"

"Leave it alone. They've found the car. The pills are safe. Christ almighty, Sheree!" Then she bursts into tears.

"You're getting a hundred a day. What more do you need to know? We're sitting pretty. You popping out those things and me doing the driving."

She makes a lunge at me. Can't tell if its kiss or kill so I push her back. Get out of her car. She says she'll flush the the pills and I can rot in hell. "Flush those pills and I'm finished", I say. 'Cos Dot and Harry are done with it too, and Keith's gone missing and I'm just one fucking man." But she drives away. That fucking bitch... Where am I? What suburb is this? What road am I on? And where's the nearest bloody hotel?

He paces anxiously, lost. Takes out his mobile, dials.

"George? It's Pete. They've all quit. I'll never make the quota. Can you pick me up?"

He holds the phone out from his ear. Shouting through the little speaker.

I can't repeat that... He's going to cut off the money if I don't fix it. Tip off the cops. Him about *me!*

He listens to the phone again. Shouting from the other end.

That's tomorrow! Ok, ok, ok!

He hangs up. An anxious beat.

Taxi!

A taxi pulls up. Pete gets in. Street lights, neon lights, headlights pass across Pete's face as the taxi drives through the night. Arabic music from the taxi radio.

No roster. No ID's.
(Beat)

Can't remember one of my pharmacies.
(Beat)

Pete puts his head in his hands. Sits up. Notices something out the window.

There! There! The Fountain Day and Night!

The taxi stops. Pete gets out, anxious.

I ask the driver - what's your name? Ahmed. Can't be bloody Ahmed. See an ad on the back of the cab. "Maguire's". John Maguire. John Maguire. If I get ten packets I'll have enough. On top of what I've got in the car. I'll take them over tonight. Tell him there'll be fresh recruits next week. Maybe even that flatmate of hers? She looked desperate enough.

I go in, order the stuff, tell her the name. Explain I've lost my ID - say the whole family's sick. I'm sweating all over and it's not even hot. George says I'm lazy. No will to succeed. He may as well ask me straight out, why did you leave them behind - what's her name, and the boys. Isn't that what's he getting at? I don't know George. *Something else felt better.*

Things are taking forever. I get up and ask what's going on. She says, "Under what name was the prescription?"

I say, "No - it's not a prescription. It's just my cold medicine. Whole family's sick." I can see ten packets.

Sitting there.

"Those" I say.

"What name?", she says.

What name. What does she care what name? Me, standing here. Why the yellow blouse? Why the auburn hair? Jesus Christ - what name! I've got money to spend. You know me. It's Tom. Arthur. Roy. Jimmy. Do I call someone? Kaye? Whatsie - the one who won't shut up? What's wrong with me? Do I walk away? Just give me the pills! What name... You drifted off again, Pete. Off to la-la land. You ought to be trying to remember but you're thinking about that sweet machine down at McMurphy's. You shouldn't be here. Should have kept that business going. Pushed yourself. Taken on an apprentice. You should have faced what was right in front of you. For god's sake Pete, snap out of it!

(Beat)

Jesus Christ. What's my name?

(He turns to the pharmacist. A beat.)

"I don't know."

(Beat)

She says, "Take a seat". Says it nice, like everything will be OK. I sit. She'll just give them to me. She'll just go and get the pills.

(Beat)

A policeman comes in and talks to me. Wants to help. What's my name? I tell him a couple. He takes me by the arm and I'm so glad to be leaving.

SCENE FIVE

Pete is sitting alone at a portable card table. Listening to the radio. Playing solitaire slowly. Content. There is fist-sized hole in one of the plasterboard walls.

PETE

A man just came to visit. Said he'd been looking for me. Didn't look like someone I'd know.

"Where's the stuff?"

What stuff?

"Why aren't you working?"

Working?

"You want me to go to the cops?"

What have I done?

"You're my Smurf. You're a no good gambler. Left your family high and dry in Queensland."

I don't think so. There's no gambling in here. I did have a business. It was in Queensland. I imagine the kids are running it now, 'cos by the looks of me, I've retired.

Then the man punched a hole in the wall. Left. I said, "Wait a minute. What's your name?"

Curtain.

PART THREE: "JANET WANTS A CARROT"**SCENE ONE**

A doctor's office.

Jan and Janet sit facing the audience. Janet is 70, thin, shrunken looking, wearing a housecoat. Her face has an orange tint. On her lap is a handbag with a metal clasp. Jane is 40, short hair, tattoos visible on her arms, pierced nose, long shorts, tank top, boots.

JANE

You'll have to force her. Won't she, Mum.

Janet doesn't move.

JANE

Take off your dress, so the doctor can examine you.

JANET

Janet wants a carrot.

Janet takes a carrot out of her handbag. Takes a bite, chews.

JANE

She didn't know a carrot from a canary six months ago. Now she's found god and he's eight inches long.

Janet takes a rapturous bite of the carrot.

JANE

Doctor says, "Why don't you mash them up with other things?" I say, "As far as she's concerned, there are no other things". Because its unpeeled and whole or its nothing at all. Doctor gives me a look. I know that look. Working in Occupational Health and Safety, I'm used to it. Got it last Tuesday, from Kerrie in Finance. I said, "See that cable?"

It's a trip hazard." Then comes the look - like I'm the problem. But I'm just the message. An accident will happen. I'm just sorry it can't be today.

JANET

Janet wants a carrot.

Janet takes another bite of her carrot.

JANE

I ask the Doc if it's is a real addiction - in case there's a patch she can wear, or a therapy group. But it seems we don't have receptors for carrots. "Maybe she's unique. Maybe you can put her in a trial", I say. But she fobs us off to a psychologist. Friend of hers, no doubt. Hundred and fifty an hour, no doubt. Me and Jules have got a mortgage. I make my own lunch. How much tuna and corn am I supposed to endure?

JANET

Janet wants a carrot.

JANE

She eats all but the stumpy ends, which I find on the bed and under the lounge and even inside the bath, because she chomps away on the loo. That's turned orange too, by the way. "At least you're not stuffing your face with cake", I say, "at least we're not winching you out of an upstairs window." Doctor frowns on my attempt at humour. Says Mum's undernourished and tries to give her a shot. But Mum won't have a bar of that. I say, "Can't you strap her down?"

JANET

(annoyed)

Janet wants a carrot.

Janet eats some more carrot.

JANE

I ate a T-bone steak in front of her last night. "Hungry, Mum?" Juice running down my face. Big pile of mash, which I know she loves. Jules hates it when I eat there, but I had to see for myself. "You ought to be careful", I said, "only dykes eat wholefoods". No reaction, though.

Doctor says if things don't change, bring her back. I say, "What about Stilnox? Don't they sometimes eat in their sleep?" But that seems to be that on the topic of mum.

As we're leaving, I take the doctor aside: "Tell me, how long would sperm last in the 'fridge?" She says, "Semen is best consumed immediately". Tries to hide her disgust. I'm about to bite back, but I look at her sagging shelves and her faulty wiring and her unergonomic chair and think - I'll be having the last laugh here.

The whole sperm thing came to a head because Steve's been over from England. He's an old friend who's agreed to be our donor. But his mum slipped and fell on a wet floor and he had to go home before Jules was ready for basting. "There'll be other donors", I said. But she heard that as: "I don't want a baby", so I rooted around for an old mayonnaise jar while Steve went upstairs to get in the mood.

But the water had hardly boiled when the phone rang and the saga began. It was Doreen, Mum's neighbour, saying, "Jane, Jane - Janet's turned orange."

SCENE TWO

A psychologist's office.

Jane sits in a chair. Janet is asleep in another chair beside her.

JANE

"Human beings are basically triangles. Feelings, thoughts and actions. Change one and you change the others." I'm looking at this on a white board, which has been hung at the wrong height. It's her session, but Mum's fast asleep. And while I'm sitting here on compassionate leave, god knows what's happening at work. An electrical fire is my best guess, judging by what I saw in H.R.

When the lecture's over I say, "After Christmas I'm basically a triangle too." The psychologist writes something down in her notebook. I say, "Are you taking all this in, Mum?"

Janet wakes up suddenly.

JANET

Janet wants a carrot.

JANE

I've agreed to see this watered-down shrink because of my deal with Jules. When I got home from the Doctors, the mayonnaise jar was smashed on the floor and Jules was curled up in a ball on the couch. Steve and his precious cargo were long gone. Apparently the taxi came before he could.

I did my best to pick up the pieces, but Jules was determined to fight. "Did I *will* the phone to ring? Did I *tell* her to go nuts? I moved out of that house to be with you", I say. But the fun really starts when we get on to babies. I don't want an anonymous donor, whatever the rush, because who knows what you're getting. But Jules is 38. Thinks that nurture can conquer nature. I say, "Has that worked with Mum?"

JANET

Janet wants a carrot.

JANE

She gives me a month to deal with Mum. After that, I'm to give her and the subject of babies my full attention. In the meantime, she's started painting the spare room pink.

"C.B.T." is supposed to stand for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. In the gay world, it stands for Cock and Ball Torture, which is much more appropriate. Three sessions in and Mum is yet to utter a word, so I decide to wean her off myself. I fill the fridge with things she likes. Hide her cashcard. Stop by each day with a certain amount of her drug of choice. And stick by stick, I get her down to a kilo a day.

Two weeks go by. I take a peek in the fridge and she seems to have nibbled on some creme caramel. A few days later, and the mashed potatoes have either been eaten or cleverly re-shaped. Julie calms down. Changes her mind about anonymous donors and starts "Fag Farming" at the Imperial Hotel - which is making friends with gay men she might want to milk later on.

Friday that week I'm about to embark on my kitchen audit when I get a call from the cops. Mum's been caught leaving Paddy's with a kilo of Western Reds down her knickers. I pick her up from the cop shop, and on the way back, I stop by at Bunnings for a couple of dead bolts. I say, "We'll do it cold turkey. Break its back, once and for all. Sooner or later you'll have to eat. And when you do, there'll be all the meatloaf and mash you can handle."

Yes. I lock her in. Because I'm not moving back - but I'm over there three times a day. Sometimes, she's shivering in a corner, or rocking back and forth, or staring at the tele like she's dead. She begs me to go to the grocers. Gives me cash she's been hiding in books. Sticks a sign in the window:

JANET

Janet wants a
carrot.

JANE

"Janet wants a
carrot".

JANE

I say, "You're a triangle with only one side. Thoughts and feelings you keep to yourself. Actions are all I've got to work with."

JANET

(angry)

Janet wants a carrot!

JANE

By the time I get 'round to the kitchen audit, the fridge has gone septic - chockers with rotting secretary food. Fat free yoghurt, shrivelled mixed leaves, homemade dressings, three bean mix, brown avocados, putrid soy milk, hard cream cheese, rotting grapes, lidless tahinis and half-eaten hummus. The whole thing's a death trap and I'm surprised they're all not at home with the runs. I send 'round an email to that effect - deleted by all, I'm sure. Because no one wants to hear the message. I wish I had a magic button. Gastro for all. Something to show them the threat is *real*.

An hour later, the fridge is fit for humans. I bleach the sink and benches, then pop in to the loo to wash my hands. When I come back, there's half a Ryvita with cheese in the sink and a dirty knife on the draining board.

Janet stands up.

JANET

Janet wants a carrot.

JANE

There are no carrots. There's proper food and you'll sit down and eat it.

Janet stays standing.

JANET

Janet wants a carrot!

JANE

Sit down and EAT!

SCENE THREE

A hospital waiting room.

Jane and Janet sit in chairs facing the audience.

JANE

My month's up and I'm back at square one. Given the choice between carrots and nothing, she chose nothing. I was trying to get her to drink some juice and she passed out and I couldn't rouse her, so the ambulance came and took her away. "Lives alone, does she?", the doctor says. I say, "Yes, but I'm there three times a day". He looks at Mum, who's a bag of bones, then back at me. Looks at my stomach like I'm eating for two - stealing her food. A nurse with a mouth like an asshole says, "This is the woman who raised you." I say, "this is the woman who cared enough to serve me meat pies, just not enough to defrost them."

JANET

(Exhausted, but determined)

Janet wants a carrot.

JANE

Jules falls into a funk. I say, "Do we have make this decision now?". She says, "Yes, because time's running out". I tell her, pick a bloke and go for it. But it's me she's waiting on. Doesn't want to do it alone.

I know there's a few others circling. Dykes like that can smell blood. One in particular is licking her lips - a so-called friend - who's probably putting her things in boxes and practising in the mirror: "Hi honey, I'm home."

During her week in hospital, they run some tests. I'm praying for tumours, or Alzheimer's, or at least dementia. But the results come back normal. "Normal?", I say, "she's the colour of Ayres Rock". A fifteen year old psychiatrist comes 'round to talk to me. Says Mum has an obsession with carrots, not an addiction.

I say, "What's the difference?" He says, "that's something we'll have to explore at another time."

They've had Mum on a tube and she's back to a healthy weight. A nurse comes 'round to unplug it, and I say, "Wait - how far would that thing stretch exactly?". "She's in your capable hands now", she says.

JANET

Janet wants a carrot.

JANE

A man in Marketing persists in using a mouse with boobs where the buttons should be. I flagged it as an issue of course - but now he's got RSI and his secretary's filed for sexual harassment. A moron at Reception spilt cup-a-soup on her keyboard and I've been forced to ban all beverages. And last week the smokers set fire to the bin room and the brigade charged us a thousand bucks.

I'm in my office with my head on the desk and a scrag from H.R. bursts in to complain about my policy on stilettos. I say, "You're damaging the parquetry floor." And she says, "You're damaging my reputation." I call Jules but she doesn't answer. I look out of my office and someone's plugging a footbath into a double adapter. I start shaking. I try eating a Tim Tam but it crumbles in my hands. I try some C.B.T. but my breathing gets faster and faster. Then I remember the lighter I keep in case of emergencies. I take it out and decide there is one.

She gets up, moves to another room.

There's a tiny room where they keep the servers. I shut the door, climb up on a stool and light the lighter.

A sprinkler above her starts drenching Jane with water.

JANE

I hear the other ones going off too. Alarms sound throughout the building. A robot voice says, "Evacuate". It runs down my neck and onto my arms and all over the benches. It trickles down cords and into computers. Some die quietly. Some go "fizz" and "pop". Idiots run past the door, talking, squealing, carrying on. After a while the water stops.

The water stops.

The alarms stop. It's quiet. Just the drip, drip, drip of the water. Then there's voices. A man bangs on the door. Calls my name. I lie on the ground and close my eyes. There's thumping and kicking and it flies open. He picks me up. Puts me over his shoulder. Carries me out of the building. I open my eyes. Everyone's there in the assembly area. They put me onto a stretcher and into an ambulance and take me away.

SCENE FOUR

The pink bedroom of a little girl.

Jane and Janet sit facing the audience.

Jane has a bag of carrots on her lap.

JANE

Being back in your childhood bedroom makes you think. If I could only go back with what I know now. Well, that's happened.

JANET

Janet wants a carrot.

Jane hands Janet a carrot. Janet takes a bite out of it.

JANE

It's amazing how quick people say they're "life partners". She works in "Communications Solutions". Her solution for me was to write a cheque for my share of the house and stick it in Mum's letter box. Then for Julie's birthday, she gave her the best sperm money can buy. I asked for one more chance, but with the court date looming and no job, Jules said, "I've got to make the best decision I can for the baby."

There was only one serious injury. Kerrie tripped and fell in the rush to get out and now she's got a plastic septum. Lot of damage to the electronics. Back-up failed to run apparently. Customers are up in arms. In the press release, I was dubbed a "rogue employee". That's got me 10,000 Facebook friends and an offer to host a triva night. But nights don't really work for me.

Lights up on CATHY, sitting in a chair facing the audience.

CATHY

Like, I'm all determined to not use and that, but it's like the universe doesn't want me to stop, because some kind of shit always happens, and I have to get back on it.

Lights up on PETE, sitting in a chair facing the audience.

PETE

Next thing I know, I'm in the pub. It's like I'm in a trance.

JANET

Janet wants a carrot.

Jane hands Janet a carrot. Janet takes a bite.

CATHY

My mum didn't want me, so I never got a start in life. I never got looked after, so I started taking drugs.

PETE

And my wife says, just don't go there. Just stay home. And it sounds really simple, so I agree to it. Then I can't explain how I end up back down the pub again.

JANET

Janet wants a carrot.

Jane hands Janet a carrot. She hands Cathy and Pete a carrot. They all take a bite.

Music starts: "Malice toward none", by Lambert, Hendricks and Ross.

Jane sits facing the audience. She takes a carrot out of the bag. Starts eating it.

A beat. Cathy, Pete and Janet talk simultaneously:

CATHY

I was feeling really strong, and was drinking those juices they recommend, trying to get my vitamins up, and this chick I hadn't seen for ages rocks up and ask me how I'm going, and I said to her, "Yeah, all right", and she tells me that there's this amazing stuff going around, and her eyes are wide as, and I can tell she's telling the truth, but I'm like, "Thanks, but I'm off that at the moment", and she says that's a shame because it won't be around long, and this thought creeps into my head that maybe I'm not sick of it after all, and like, maybe I should try this new stuff, just to see if it's better. So she takes me down to this apartment and hooks me up, and 'cos it's been a few weeks, its fucking amazing, and as I'm going under, I think, fuck, that's it, I can stop now, I've had it all...

JANET

Your father's packed up and left, Jane. That's the simple truth. We're high and dry. He's done it to punish me, but I'm not going to let it curb my activities. I've got this fucking house and I've got you.

(beat)

I've met another fellow, Jane. It was bound to happen, so I don't want you getting jealous. He's got a daughter of his own, and the best thing is you two'll be sharing a room.

(beat)

I don't expect you to understand this, but somehow he's managed to take out a mortgage without me knowing. That's five hundred a month I've got to find. He's bought a car and land in Queensland. There's nothing I can do. I'm going to my room, Jane.

PETE

This bloke told me at the last meeting that they call it the "rapture", you know, when they idea comes into your head that you want to gamble? That first excitement? And then there's the period before you've even spent a cent, where you know you're going to do it, and you're making your preparations. That's when I feel happy. That's my high. But you can't stretch it out too long. You've got to go and do it. Now, actually doing it's all right...

You're just trying to extend the feeling then. But then you have to take money out.. Leave the machine... Thoughts creep in. You try not to look at other people too much, except to see if they're winning or not... The more those thoughts creep in, the more you want to keep going, 'cause you know what's coming afterwards. Just stop now, you say. But then - you've come this far. It's like, you've smoked all your life, you're not going to quit when you're eighty, you know?

*The voices of Pete, Janet and Cathy
fade down as the lights fade down.*

*Music continues for a few moments over
a darkened stage.*

Curtain.