A Frantic Assembly and State Theatre Company South Australia production.

Originally co-produced with Warwick Arts Centre in association with Chichester Festival Theatre and the Lyric Hammersmith

This production of Things I Know to be True was revived on 27 September 2017 at Oxford Playhouse, before touring the UK.
TRACK LIST

It Was Really, Really Grey
More
Stolen Car
Keep
Tristana
Snippet
Said and Done
Corn
Ambre
For Peter - Toilet Brushes - More Less

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Award-winning theatre company Frantic Assembly’s method of devising theatre has been impacting theatrical practice and unlocking the creative potential of future theatre-makers for twenty-three years.

One of the most exciting theatre companies in the UK, Frantic Assembly is led by Artistic Director and co-founder Scott Graham, and has toured extensively across Great Britain, and worked in over forty countries internationally collaborating with some of today’s most inspiring artists.

Frantic Assembly is currently studied as a leading contemporary theatre practitioner on five British and international academic syllabuses. The success of the company’s distinct approach has influenced contemporary theatre-making and foregrounded the use of movement directors and choreographers in new dramatic works. With a history of commissioning writers such as Mark Ravenhill, Abi Morgan, Simon Stephens and Bryony Lavery the company has been acclaimed for its collaborative approach. In 2016 the company started delivering practical modules on a new Collaborative Theatre-Making MA it has created with Coventry University (UK Modern University of the Year 2014, 2015, 2016 and UK University of the Year 2015). Frantic Assembly runs Ignition, a free national training programme for young men aged 16-20, increasing involvement in and access to the arts in places of low cultural engagement.

Frantic Assembly productions include Fatherland, Things I Know To be True (UK and Australia), Othello, Beautiful Burnout (UK, Australia, New Zealand and New York), Lovesong, Stockholm (UK and Australia), The Believers. They are also the Movement Directors on the award-winning National Theatre of Great Britain, production The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (West End, Broadway, UK & Ireland tour, US tour). Television credits include Movement Direction on BAFTA winning British-American series Humans (AMC, Channel 4 & Kudos).

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Registered charity: 1113716
Characters

THE PRICE FAMILY

BOB, sixty-three, a retrenched auto factory worker
FRAN, fifty-seven, a senior nurse

THEIR CHILDREN

PIP, thirty-four, an education department bureaucrat
MARK, thirty-two, an IT specialist
BEN, twenty-eight, a financial services worker

AND

ROSIE, nineteen, who doesn’t know who she is or what she wants to be yet

Note on Text

A lack of punctuation at the end of a line indicates a sentence shared by more than one character, and that the following line should come straight in.

Setting

The play is set primarily in a suburban home in Hallett Cove, the southern suburbs of Adelaide, a provincial city in Australia. It is not unlike any other working-class suburb in any provisional city in the Western world.

A family room, a kitchen and patio extension at the back open to a classic Australian backyard. A Hills Hoist, a lemon tree, a well-cut lawn, a rose garden, a shed up the back somewhere and an ancient eucalypt towering above.

The play takes place over a year.
It Begins Like This

BOB PRICE stares at the telephone. His children are watching.

PIP. It’s late.

BEN. Past midnight.

PIP. And the phone starts to ring.

MARK. You’re standing in your pyjamas and bare feet, still heavy with sleep because you’ve just been woken.

ROSIE. Your heart is beating.

BEN. Too fast.

ROSIE. Like it might go.

PIP. Any minute it might go.

ROSIE. And you know if you answer your life is going to change.

MARK. And you’re not ready for it.

PIP. Even though you’ve been waiting for this call ever since we were old enough to stay out past nine.

BEN. Ever since you stopped tucking us in at night and turning off the light.

ROSIE. Ever since we came screaming into this world.

PIP. You’ve been waiting for this.

MARK. And you’re thinking which one of my kids is in trouble?

ROSIE. Which one of my kids is hurt?

BEN. Which one of my kids is dead?

PIP. And how will I tell their mother?

BEN. You could turn around.
PIP. Walk away

ROSIE. Not answer.

MARK. But you know that this

BEN. Whatever this is

ROSIE. Just has to be faced.

*The phone starts to ring... once... twice... three times... four times.*

BOB answers.

BOB. Hello?
Berlin


I’m standing on the platform at the train station. It’s cold. The train is late and my socks are wet. I’m not quite sure how I got here or where I’m meant to go next.

I met him four nights ago and he was the most beautiful boy I had ever seen. His name was Emmanuel, of course, and he came from Madrid.

I’d been travelling by myself for three months. The great European adventure. London, Dublin, Paris, Prague. Then Berlin. I’d been saving for a year. Café work, bar work, babysitting. Mum and Dad said don’t go by yourself. It’s too dangerous. Go on a tour or at least with some girlfriends.

I’ll meet people, I told them. I’ll be fine. But meeting people is harder than you think. I mean I did meet people, at hostels and stuff but mainly other Australians. And it was fun for a night or two. But the boys just wanted to have sex and I guess that’s alright but if I wanted sex with an Australian boy I would have stayed in Hallett Cove.

So I go to the churches and the museums and the galleries and I walk through the cobbled streets and I sit in cafés trying to look mysterious and everything is so beautiful. Everything is what I was expecting it to be. And yet somehow I want it to be more.

I Skype home once a week and tell Mum and Dad what an amazing place Europe is. They’ve never been. I tell them I’m having the best time because I can’t bear the thought of them being disappointed for me. And when I Skype my brother Mark, I pretend the camera on my iPad is broken because he knows me and he will see it in my face. He’ll see that it’s all a mess and he’ll tell me to come home but I can’t go home,
not yet, I mean then, I couldn’t go home then because it would be such a... defeat.

I don’t know what it’s meant to be. I don’t know what I’m meant to do. I keep wondering when it will start. Life. Will life start?

And then there he is. At a club in Mitte. Dancing. With his shirt off. And I think, wow, that guy can really dance. The guy is like... fire. And then he looks over at me. Me? And I am gone. I pretend not to be. I try to be cool. To make it seem like I’m not interested. But I am so interested. And dance until the sun comes up. And as we come out of the club into the light, I think this is it. This is life. I am living.

And I know he wants to take me home. To his place. Or to his friend’s place. Or to someone’s place, I’m not quite sure whose place it is, and I say okay. Because at last I am living and I don’t want life to stop.

And when he kisses me I want to cry. Because I’d never been kissed like that. Not in Hallett Cove. And I’d never been kissed where he kissed me or touched quite like that. He seemed to know things and for once it didn’t seem to matter that I didn’t. Three days. Three days we stayed in. And after three days I knew some things too.

We don’t even get up to eat. He disappears and comes back with a bowl of cereal and two spoons. And that’s all we eat. Cereal. Out of the same bowl. For three days.

On the third night I watch him sleeping and I do that thing you shouldn’t do. I think about the future. I imagine taking him home to meet Mum and Dad and my sister and brother and and how they will all love him, like they love me. And how clever I am and brave to have found such a man, such a beautiful man, different but the same and brought all the way back to Hallett Cove and then, there I am... Can I am so embarrassed but suddenly there I am in our backyard with Dad’s roses all around us and I’m walking across the lawn on his arm, and he’s got tears in his eyes and Mum’s there in a new dress, which she never lets herself have an my sister Pip is there with her husband Steve and their tw
THINGS I KNOW TO BE TRUE

girls. She got married in the backyard too. And Mark, my oldest brother who I adore is there with his girlfriend, Taylor. And then there’s Ben, my other brother who’s there with a girl who’s new and won’t last because they just don’t with Ben and I love them all so much, sometimes I think too much, if you can love too much but now I have to make room for Emmanuel who’s standing there in a suit and he is just so, so... so handsome... And I... I’m wearing a white dress... And I’m kind of surprised, kind of shocked because I never even knew that that’s what I wanted. And maybe it’s not what I want, it’s what I think Mum and Dad will want for me but anyway I’m there in a white dress, on my father’s arm, walking across the lawn and...

Then he wakes up and he looks at me as if he knows what I’m thinking and as if he wants to get up and run so I kiss him on his lips before he can. And he smiles. And I’m gone all over again. And we make love, so tenderly, so sweetly and after, as I drift off to sleep, lying on his chest, listening to the beat of his heart, thinking I could listen to this for the rest of my life, I think is this it, is this what falling in love is?

And when I wake up in the morning he’s gone... along with four hundred euros from my wallet, my iPad, my camera, my favourite scarf and a large piece of my heart. I find a girl in the house, smoking a cigarette at the kitchen table and ask if she’s seen him. She shrugs and says that he said something about going to see his girlfriend in London. She tells me to get my things and to get out of her house.

I walk through the streets of Berlin. I feel small. I feel like I’m twelve years old, I feel ridiculous. I want to cry but I won’t. Well I do, a bit. But not as much as I want to. I want my dad. I want my mum. I want my brothers and my sister. I want to hear them laugh and argue and fight and tease me. But I can’t think of them much because if I do my chest will explode. I feel like I’m going to literally fall to pieces. That my arms are going to drop off and then my legs and my head. And so to stop myself coming apart I make a list of all the things I know... I mean actually know for certain to be true and the really frightening thing is... It’s a very short list.
I don't know much at all.

But I know that at 25 Windarie Avenue, Hallett Cove, things are the same as when I left and they always will be.

And I know that I have to go home.
Home

The roses are in bloom. BOB is using the leaf blower. He blows this way. He blows that way. He hasn’t quite got the hang of it.

FRAN appears at the back door. She wears a nurse’s uniform.

FRAN. Bob… Bob… BOB!

He blows her.

Stop it!

He blows her again. She raises a warning finger at him. She’s not in the mood.

The kids have to be picked up at three fifteen.

BOB. I know.

FRAN. But you can’t be late.

BOB. I’m never late.

FRAN. You were late on Monday.

BOB. Five minutes. That’s not late.

FRAN. It takes two minutes to grab a child and put her in your car.

BOB. You know that, do you?

FRAN. There’s dinner in the fridge. Some bolognese. Just heat it in the microwave. Pip will pick them up at six.

BOB. I’m going to see about getting rid of that tree.

FRAN. You’re not touching that tree.

BOB. It makes a mess of the garden.

FRAN. Good. Give you something to do.

BOB. It’s going to drop a bough one day, right on the shed.

FRAN. With you in it if I’m lucky.
BOB. It's a bloody eyesore.

FRAN. It's the most beautiful thing in the garden. It's the only thing that doesn't grow in a straight line and hasn't been pruned to within an inch of its life.

She turns to go inside. ROSIE is standing there, wearing a winter coat with her backpack over her shoulder like she's never been away.

ROSIE. Hi.

FRAN. Where the hell did you come from?

ROSIE. Berlin.

BOB. Rosie!

ROSIE. I'm home.

FRAN. What's happened? What's wrong with you?

ROSIE. Nothing.

FRAN. Bob?

BOB. Are you hurt?

ROSIE. No.

FRAN. Sick?

ROSIE. I'm fine.

Somewhere in here, amongst the talk and all the questions, there are hugs and kisses.

BOB. When did you get in?

ROSIE. About an hour ago. It took me a while to get through customs.

FRAN's already dialling her phone.

BOB. Why didn't you call?

ROSIE. I wanted to surprise you.

BOB. I would have picked you up... I would have been the first one there.

ROSIE. I caught a taxi.

BOB. Well, how much did that cost?
FRAN (on phone). It’s me.

BOB. Fran?

FRAN (phone). Rosie’s back.

BOB. She caught a taxi.

FRAN (phone). Something’s happened.

ROSIE. Mum!

BOB. Did he come the coast road at least?

ROSIE. It was a she and she came down the expressway.

FRAN (phone). I think you should come over.

ROSIE. It didn’t really matter. There wasn’t much traffic.

BOB. Well, that’s it, Rosie. They think the expressway is quicker but if there’s no traffic it’s better to take the coast road.

FRAN. That was Pip. She’s on her way.

BOB. You should have called.

FRAN. I’ll call your brothers.

BOB. Look at you.

ROSIE. I know.

BOB. Frannie.

FRAN. I know. (Then back to the phone.) It’s Mum. Rosie’s just walked in... I know but she’s here. Something’s happened.

ROSIE. Mum!

BOB. You look...

ROSIE. Different?

BOB. No.

ROSIE. All grown up?

BOB. Just the same.

FRAN. Mark’s on his way.

ROSIE. I’m meant to look older, Dad.
BOB. Well, you haven’t been away that long, love.
FRAN (phone). Ben... Rosie’s back.
ROSIE. I wanted to surprise you.
BOB. You did.
FRAN (phone). Something’s happened.
ROSIE. Mum!
FRAN. He’s on his way.
ROSIE. Nothing’s happened.
FRAN. Look at you.
ROSIE. I know.
FRAN. You look...
ROSIE. Just the same.
FRAN. No. You look...
ROSIE. What?
FRAN. Did you meet someone?
ROSIE. No.
FRAN. A boy?
ROSIE. No.
FRAN. Did he hurt you?
BOB. Who hurt you?
FRAN. A boy.
ROSIE. Mum, I’ve just walked in the door. You have to stop asking questions because I don’t have the answers. Not yet. And if you keep asking I’m going to cry. I’m home. Okay? That’s as much as I know right now.
FRAN. Okay. You’re home... Bob... She’s home.
BOB. I know.
FRAN. We can sleep again.
PIP enters.
PIP. Rosie!

ROSIE. Hi.

*Embraces. Kisses.*

PIP. Look at you.

FRAN. I know. She’s here. Can you believe it?

BOB. Just walks in through the front door. Not even a phone call. And she catches a taxi... Pip? From the airport.

PIP. What for?

BOB. Exactly! When there’re all these cars here. And people to pick her up. What’s the point of a family if they can’t pick you up at the airport?

ROSIE. I wanted to surprise you.

BOB. I’m still getting up off the floor, love.

PIP. You look...

ROSIE. Exactly the same, apparently.

PIP. What’s happened?

ROSIE. Nothing.

PIP. Mum said...

ROSIE. I know but...

PIP. Why have you come back early?

FRAN. Somebody hurt her.

ROSIE. Mum!

FRAN. A boy.

PIP. Oh, Rosie. Really?

ROSIE. No!

PIP. Are you okay?

ROSIE. I don’t want this to be about that. *(Appealing to BOB.)* Dad?
BOB. Now... now, she’s right. Give the girl some air. She’s ready to talk about it.

BEN (entering). Rosie... what happened?

PIP. A guy hurt her.

BEN. What’s his name... where is he?

_They embrace._

Hey, little sister. I’ve missed you. Where have you been again? Hey, Mr Nap-a-Lot.

BOB. She caught a taxi.

BEN. From the airport?

BOB. Of all the things.

BEN. I would have picked you up.

BOB. That’s what I said.

BEN. You should have called.

BOB. I told her.

BEN. I’m making coffee. Who wants coffee?

PIP. I can’t stay.

FRAN. You can stay for a moment.

PIP. I’m late, Mum.

FRAN. But Rosie’s here.

ROSIE. Where’s Steve and the girls?

PIP. At home. They’ve got school.

FRAN. Dad’s picking them up at three fifteen. Go with him. Make sure he’s not late.

BOB. I’m never late.

PIP. You were late on Monday.

BOB. Pip’s been promoted.

ROSIE. Really... that’s fantastic.

PIP. I’m starting so early and finishing later.
BOB. She's running the whole department... a whole government department.

PIP. No, I'm not.

BOB. It's incredible what she does.

PIP. I'm overseeing curriculum development. It's temporary. I'm filling in for someone.

BOB. She's reporting directly to the Minister for Education.

PIP. Just to his advisers, actually.

BOB. But you've met the Minister.

PIP. Once.

BOB. Well, there you go. They even sent her overseas.

ROSIE. Where?

PIP. Vancouver. It was just a conference.

FRAN. She's lucky she's got help.

PIP. I know that, Mum.

FRAN. I'm just saying with Steve. He's good with the kids.

PIP. Yeah, he's great. He's their dad.

FRAN. With a job of his own.

PIP. That's right... He's a father and he's got an important job of his own. He's amazing.

FRAN. I'm just saying that some men can't manage it as well as he does.

PIP. I know that. I don't need you to tell me.

FRAN. Well, excuse me for having an opinion on the matter.

PIP. Can I scream now? Would anyone mind if I screamed now?

BEN. This hasn't been used... Dad, why haven't you used this?

FRAN. He hasn't worked it out, yet.

BEN. But I showed him. Dad, I showed you. You stick in a pod and turn it on. I don't understand why you don't use the things I give you.
FRAN. He does.

BOB. Because I don’t need them, son. I don’t need coffee machines and leaf blowers when a rake does the job just as well and I drink tea. Sometimes, I think you’ve got more money than sense.

BEN. Well, I work for it.

BOB. You want to put a little away. That’s all I’m saying.

FRAN. I’ll have a coffee. Rosie, you want coffee? Pip?

PIP. I have to go.

FRAN. Make your sisters a coffee, Ben. I’ll have a latte. (to BOB.) Give him a break.

MARK (entering). Rosie.

She moves to him and they embrace – a moment.

I thought you’d got away.

ROSIE. So did I.

BEN. You want coffee, Mark?

MARK. I can’t stay.

FRAN. You just walked in.

BOB. Why don’t you make me one of those after all, son.

FRAN. Show him how to do it, Ben. It’s good to learn new things, Bob.

BOB. Yeah, give me a look at that thing.

MARK. What happened over there?

ROSIE. I don’t want to talk about it.

MARK. Okay.

ROSIE. How’s Taylor?

An elephant walks into the room.

FRAN. He didn’t tell you?

MARK. We split up.
ROSIE. Really?
FRAN. A month ago.
ROSIE. Are you okay?
MARK. I’m working on it.
FRAN. She left him.
MARK. It was mutual.
FRAN. Packed a bag and walked out without an explanation.
MARK. Were you there, Mum?
FRAN. And why wouldn’t she?
MARK. You don’t know what happened.
FRAN. I’ve got a pretty good idea.
MARK. No, actually you don’t.
FRAN. She wanted children.
MARK. Did she?
FRAN. And you wouldn’t be in it.
MARK. Is that right?
FRAN. Then what? Tell me. A woman just doesn’t walk away like that.
BOB. Now... now, come on. We won’t have any of that. Rosie has just got home.
FRAN. Look, I liked her. She was a part of this family for three years. And then one day she’s gone and you give us nothing. We’re not even allowed to say goodbye. I miss her. I thought she was the one. I’d made room for her.
MARK. I know, Mum.
ROSIE (to MARK). I’m sorry.
BEN. I’ve got to get going.
FRAN. We’ll have dinner tonight. All together. Bob, pick up a few chickens from the butcher when you get the kids.
THINGS I KNOW TO BE TRUE

BEN. Mum, I’ve got plans.

FRAN. What do you mean? Rosie’s home. Change them. And don’t forget to take your washing. It’s folded up on you.

PIP. You still do his washing?

FRAN. Only on Sundays.

BEN. It’s just my shirts.

PIP. Mum!

FRAN. He does his own underwear.

PIP. You’re not doing him any favours.

FRAN. He works in an office. He has to look smart.

PIP. So? He can learn how to iron. He’s twenty-eight.

BEN. Mum helps you with the kids.

PIP. So?

BEN. I’m just saying.

PIP. That’s different.

BEN. Why?

PIP. Because she’ll help you with your kids too. If you ever meet a woman stupid enough to have them with.

FRAN. Don’t say that. Of course he will. What kind of thing to say?

PIP. I just said, Mum, you’re not doing him any favours.

FRAN. It’s my washing machine. It’s my house. He’s my son. I’ll wash his clothes if I want to.

BOB. This coffee’s not bad.

PIP (to MARK). Will you back me up?

MARK. Ben, wash your own clothes.

BEN. I do! It’s just my shirts. I can’t get them like she does.

PIP. Then take them to a laundry and pay for it.
FRAN. What's the matter, Pip? You think you're missing out on something here?

PIP. You work, Mum. You always have. You work harder and more hours than anyone in this family. You should not still be washing and ironing his shirts.

FRAN. That's my business.

PIP. I'm trying to defend you.

FRAN. I don't need defending from my own son.

PIP. I'm going.

MARK. Me too.

FRAN. No one misses out here. You understand? What one gets another one gets in a different way.

BOB. Who'd have thought it?

FRAN. What?

BOB. That she's been all over the world and now she's back. Our little Rosie. She was never meant to be here, you know. We thought we'd finished at the three kids.

MARK. That's my exit cue.

BOB. But South's were in the grand final.

PIP. And that's mine.

BOB. So it was a big night.

FRAN. Enough of that old story. We've all heard it too many times. It's enough to say that your father is lazy and irresponsible and should have had it on when he didn't.

BEN. Mum!

FRAN. And he was altogether too quick with his business anyway... so there was no joy in it for anyone but him but that's what will happen on grand final night after a few beers and let that be a warning to you all.

BOB. She's right, all of it's true but thank God for a little recklessness. Because look what came of it.
A moment as they all look upon ROSIE – there’s no question – they adore her, all of them. But life goes on as

There’s a flurry of kisses and goodbyes as car keys and mobile phones are gathered. This is a family that always kisses on greeting and parting. It is just second nature. Boys kiss their father as naturally as they kiss their mother.

FRAN. Don’t forget the chickens, Rosie?
BEN. Has anyone seen my phone?
ROSIE. You want me to get them ready?
FRAN. I’ll call you. Tell you how I want it done.
ROSIE. I know how to prepare a chicken.
FRAN. You don’t know everything.
ROSIE. I probably do about this.
FRAN (going). You have to rub salt on the inside.
ROSIE. I know that.
BEN. Did someone put my phone somewhere?
PIP. You’re so gorgeous. You know that?
ROSIE. I can’t wait to see the kids. I’ve got presents for them.
PIP (going). You didn’t have to do that.
ROSIE. Of course I did, I wanted to.
BEN. It’s okay… it’s here, I’ve got it. Thank you everyone for your concern.
MARK. I’ll call you.
ROSIE. Are you okay?
MARK. I’m fine. I’m just really tired of answering that question. I’m sorry… I wish…
ROSIE. What?
MARK. That you’d got away.
ROSIE. I wasn’t ready.
MARK (going). Don’t leave it too long. You’ll miss the chance. Like the rest of us.

BEN. Shit... I’m so late. (Kissing ROSIE, going.) I might not make it tonight. But don’t tell Mum. Love you.

ROSIE. Ben... come. It will be good for us all to be together.

And suddenly everyone has gone and she is alone.

Somewhere in the flurry of the departures, BOB has wandered into the garden and is dead-heading the spent roses. ROSIE joins him.

BOB. Are you hungry?

ROSIE. I ate on the plane.

BOB. There’s bolognese in the fridge.

ROSIE. I’m not eating much meat at the moment.

BOB. Well, there’s probably cucumbers or something.

ROSIE. The roses look good.

BOB. They’re still in their first flush, Rosie. They’re at their best. Just like you.

ROSIE bends and smells a rose.

Are you going to tell me what happened over there?

ROSIE. I fell in love with the wrong guy.

BOB. Did it hurt?

ROSIE. So much, Dad.

BOB. Ah... well. I’ll tell you something for free. Everyone has their heart broken, at least once. Hopefully, for you it will be the only time.

ROSIE. Have you?

BOB. I’ve been with your mother since I was a kid. First and only love.

A moment – ROSIE breathes, safe in the certainty of her parents’ love and in the familiar surrounds of her father’s garden. For a moment everything is right, everything is as it should be.
ROSIE. All those cities. All those beautiful cities. All that history. All through Europe. And all I could think about coming home.

BOB. It’s not such a bad place.

ROSIE. I tried, Dad.

BOB. To do what, love?

ROSIE. To grow up.
Autumn

Pip

It's early in the morning. The light is still new. Leaves drift from trees. Fallen rose petals form a carpet of bruised colour across the lawn.

PIP is sitting in the garden.

PIP. This garden is the world. Everything that matters happened here.

I kissed my first boy in that shed. I was nine. He was my cousin, Tom. Down from Port Augusta. I don’t know if it counts if it was your cousin. But it was a kiss, nonetheless. He kissed me and then he put his hand down my pants. I don’t know what he expected but I think he got a shock because he pulled it straight back out again. But I liked it. I got so excited that I bit his face. He started to cry and ran to his mother and I was sent to my room. And I don’t know if it was because I bit him or because I liked having his hand down my pants. Somehow, I think Mum knew. I think she knew exactly why a girl bites a boy in the face. But then she always knew the things you didn’t want her to know.

She caught us, me and Penny McCrea and Stella Bouzakis with a bottle of sweet wine. We were in Year 9 and we snuck off from school at lunchtime. Penny had stolen it from her parents’ drinks cabinet. We came back here and made a party of it, smoking those long coloured cocktail cigarettes as well. Thinking we were totally it. And suddenly Mum’s standing at the back door. She was meant to be at work. She never came home for lunch. Never. But that day, when we’re wagging school and drinking sweet wine in the backyard she decides to come home. Stella got such a scare she started to vomit. Mum stuck her face in the compost pit and said ‘Vomit there, you silly girl’. I was grounded for the rest of Year 9 and never drank sweet wine again.
This garden is the world.

It all happened here and more.

Once I saw her, Mum, bawling her eyes out and banging head against the trunk of that tree. I was twelve. I had never seen her cry. Not once. Not even when her own mother died.
And everything I thought was certain about the world changed. I went back inside and turned the television on scared. What makes a woman cry like that? A mother. My mother. I didn’t understand and I didn’t have the courage to ask her. Now, that I am a woman, married with children of my own I don’t need to, I know exactly why a woman bashes her head against the trunk of a tree.

*She hums a few bars from a Leonard Cohen song: ‘Famous Blue Raincoat.’*

*(Sings.)*

It’s four in the morning, the end of December
I’m writing to you now, just to see if you’re better

*She becomes quiet.*

This garden was the world.

*FRAN is watching. She is dressed for work... as always.*

*ROSIE joins her having just risen from bed.*

*ROSIE (seeing PIP). What’s wrong?*

*FRAN. Get a blanket... The quilt from her bed. The one that she knows. And Rosie... wake your dad.*

*ROSIE moves off as FRAN moves outside to join PIP.*

You’re up with the birds.

*PIP. I’ve been for a jog.*

*FRAN. What’s going on?*

*PIP. Can’t I visit and sit for a moment in the garden where I grew up.*
FRAN. Is that what you call it now, when you come? A visit? A visit is something a relative you don’t know very well does once a year. Something you’ve just got to get through. This is different. This is you, coming home, which you do three or four times a week. The thing is when you come you don’t sit. You come. You do what needs to be done and then you go. That’s the way it is. So now I find you sitting and I’m pretty sure something is wrong.

BOB emerges from the house doing up his dressing gown.

BOB. What’s going on?

FRAN. Pip is visiting.

BOB. What’s wrong?

FRAN. There you go... Why don’t you make some coffee, Bob?

BOB. Well, I would if I knew how to work that machine.

FRAN. Rosie will show you.

BOB. You want milk, Pip?

PIP. Black thanks, Dad.

BOB. Visiting?

BOB goes back inside.

FRAN. Is this about Steve?

PIP. I’m leaving him.

FRAN. Does he know yet?

PIP. He will soon.

FRAN. You might want to drop the kids over. Give yourselves some room to talk.

PIP. You’re not surprised?

FRAN. No. I could see this coming. The writing’s been on the wall for some time.

PIP. What did it say, Mum? This writing.

FRAN. It said ‘I’m not happy’. In big black letters.
Pip. Don't.

Fran. What?

Pip. Make out like you know more about my life than I do.

Fran. I'm just saying.

Pip. Let me be the expert on that at least.

Fran. Somebody got up on the wrong side of bed this morning.

Pip. This was a bad idea.

She rises to go.

Fran. Don't you walk away from this... You're not twelve years old any more.

Pip. What will you do, Mum? Pull my hair? Slap my face?

Rosie has come out of the house with the quilt. She has caught the last of the exchange. She wraps the quilt around Pip's shoulders. Pip takes it in, and is grateful for its comfort.

Fran. Dad's made a mess of the coffee so we're having tea.

Pip. Rosie, do you remember when you fell off the ladder?

Rosie. Not really, I was only two, wasn't I?

Fran. Eighteen months. If that.

Pip. Mum asked me to watch you. She was busy inside.

Fran. I was doing the house.

Pip. But I didn't really want to. I was trying to get a tan. I was lying in the sun in my bikini and Mum kept saying I would burn.

Fran. You didn't have the skin for it. You still don't.

Pip. But I was determined that I'd have a tan that summer.

Fran. You've got your father's skin.

Pip. I only closed my eyes for a moment. Dad had left the ladder up against the shed.

Fran. He never did that again.
PIP. And I didn’t know you could climb. Babies can’t climb ladders.

FRAN. She could.

PIP. I can still hear the crack of your skull hitting the path.

FRAN. I heard it from the kitchen.

PIP. I screamed. Mum ran out of the house and saw what had happened. She looked at me and I swear I went cold. She could do that with just a look.

FRAN. I still can.

PIP. But particularly to me, Mum. You do that to me.

Beat.

I ran into the house and hid under the bed. And she came after me.

FRAN. Here we go.

PIP. You came after me and pulled me out from under the bed by my hair.

FRAN. Well, you wouldn’t come out.

PIP. By my hair.

FRAN. I couldn’t reach anything else.

PIP. You tore the hair from my head.

FRAN. It was just a few strands.

PIP. It was a clump with skin. And then you slapped my face.

FRAN. I was in shock. I was angry. I was tired. Four kids I had and one day a week to clean the house. And I asked you to do one thing. To watch over your sister. But you were too selfish. And too vain to do it.

PIP. Vain?

FRAN. Lying in the sun like you were Princess Bloody Muck instead of watching your sister.

ROSIE. Dad... How’s the tea going?
PIP. I wasn’t vain. I was just trying to fit in. To be like all the other girls.

ROSIE. I’ll see how he’s going.

PIP. Stay... Rosie. Would you?... I was a mouse. A mouse. Mum. The only thing I thought was pretty about me was hair. Which is what you tore out of my head. Funny that.

FRAN. It was a moment. A moment of anger.

PIP. I had a bald patch for a whole term. It still doesn’t grow properly there.

FRAN. It was one time. And now what? You’re unhappy because I pulled your hair when you were twelve years old.

PIP. I was fourteen.

BOB comes into the garden with the tea tray.

FRAN. Are you going to tell him or will I?

PIP. Go right ahead.

FRAN. She’s leaving Steve.

BOB. Steve?

FRAN. Well, who else would she be leaving, Bob?

BOB. Why?

FRAN. Because I pulled her hair when she was fourteen years old and she’s been unhappy ever since.

ROSIE. Mum!

BOB. Pip?

PIP. It hasn’t been good for a while, Dad.

BOB. Well, I know there’s been a rough patch. But that’s true for most marriages.

PIP. I’ve tried.

BOB. Well, have you thought about trying some more?

PIP. I’m not happy, Dad.

FRAN. There’s that word, Bob. Happy. As if that is the point of living.
BOB. And what about Steve? How’s he feel about it?

PIP. I think he’d like things to stay the same.

FRAN. You have a husband who loves you, who treats you well, who’s a wonderful father and you’re walking away from that.

PIP. Not easily.

FRAN. It doesn’t make sense.

PIP. I know. He’s a good man.

FRAN. Oh, I get it.

PIP. What?

FRAN. There’s someone else?

PIP. No.

FRAN. Look at me.

PIP. I’m doing this for myself.

FRAN. Yeah, that much is clear.

PIP. Can you just take my side, Mum?

FRAN. The man’s done nothing wrong. He’s loved you and been a good father. Why would I make an enemy of him?

PIP. I don’t love him.

FRAN. Too bad. You’ve got kids. You make it work. Look at me and tell me there’s no other man.

She looks at her... FRAN thinks she sees the lie in her face.

You stupid girl!

PIP. Don’t.

FRAN. Why would you do that to yourself?

BOB. She said there’s no one.

FRAN. Please, God, tell me he’s not married.

ROSIE. Mum... Please don’t.

BOB. What about the girls... where are they in all this?
PIP. I’ve been offered a position in Vancouver. I’m going to take it.

FRAN. You’re taking the girls from him too?

PIP. They’re staying here.

FRAN (to BOB). Do you hear that?

BOB. Now hold on... I don’t think that’s right, Pip.

PIP. The position is for twelve months... I’m going to see how it goes. At the end we’ll decide what’s best.

FRAN. Do you hear what she’s saying?

PIP. If it was a man making this decision... If it was Mark or Ben you would support it. There would be no question they should do this.

FRAN. Not if they were walking out on their kids.

PIP. My work is important to me, Mum. This is a professional opportunity. I’m going to take it.

FRAN. And who’s going to pick up the slack with the kids? I’ve been a mother for thirty-four years. I’m over it.

PIP. I’m not asking you to do anything more than you already do.

FRAN. How’s he going to manage for twelve months? On his own.

PIP. The same as I would if it was him that was going.

FRAN. But you’d have me. And Dad. You know you would.

Day and night. And you’ve gone ahead on this knowing I will be there.

ROSIE. I’ll be able to help.

FRAN. Shut it, Rosie.

ROSIE. I’m just saying I would help.

FRAN. You made a choice. Nine years ago. To have children. You don’t walk away from that.

PIP. Things don’t have to stay the same... people work these things out differently now. Steve is as good a parent as I
FRAN. Those girls need their mother.

PIR. Not if she is unhappy.

FRAN. You selfish bitch.

BOB. Jesus, Fran.

FRAN. Your happiness is not what matters here.

BOB. Pull it back a notch would you?

PIR. Because you know what happens then, Mum? She will make sure her children are unhappy too. She will choose one and she will make sure that she feels like shit about herself.

FRAN. What happened, Pip? Did some guy bored with his wife look twice at you and make you feel like you were more than a mouse?

BOB. What's the matter with you?

FRAN. She's walking out on her kids. What's the matter with you? Christ, Bob. You know what you get when you treat a girl like a princess. You get a fucking princess.

BOB. Oh, we're swearing now, are we?

PIR. You're going to annihilate me.

FRAN. Toughen up... You'll need to if you're planning to shack up with some Canadian for the winter.

BOB. Stop it!

FRAN. Or what? You'll raise your hand to me. You'll do it once and once only, Bob Price.

FRAN walks inside — a moment.

BOB (to ROSIE). Go and see if your mother's all right... I want a moment with Pip.

ROSIE goes inside.

Is she right? Is there something more to this? Someone else?

A moment... He couldn't bear it to be true.

PIR. No.
BOB. All right then... You’re an intelligent woman. You know your own mind. If this is an opportunity then grab it with both hands. Because life is horribly short. And there’s no gain staying with a man who you have no love for, no matter how good a man he is. You’ll just end up hurting him. Or hurting him more than you already have. I’ll come on board with the kids, you know that. And so will your mum. One thing have settled down.

PIP embraces her father.

Treat Steve with respect now... I’m fond of him.

PIP. So am I, Dad... That’s the problem.

BOB. What do you mean?

PIP. A woman needs to feel more than fondness for her husband.

She leaves. BOB takes a moment before FRAN joins him from inside.

FRAN. Daddy make everything all right again, did he?

BOB. Here we go.

FRAN. She’s lying.

BOB. There’s one thing I ask of my kids. One thing! Absolute honesty. She knows that a lie to my face would kill me.

Beat.

You want to try listening for a change. Just listening to the other person, instead of always thinking that you’re right... And I would never strike you.

They hold on each other for an unforgiving moment until she gives a little ground.

FRAN. I know that.

She picks up the quilt where it has dropped in the fray. She folds it and holds it close to her chest.
As Autumn Turns

The branches are bare and the rose bushes are pruned back for the winter. BOB is spreading manure on the beds.

FRAN and ROSIE work side by side in the kitchen. ROSIE is cutting onions.

FRAN. What are you going to do with yourself?

ROSIE. Mum, not this conversation, please.

FRAN. One gap year’s all very well. Two is starting to look like a girl who doesn’t know herself very well... You should think about nursing. It’s honest work and decent money.

ROSIE. I’m just not ready to decide.

FRAN. What’s the most important thing in a woman’s life? And don’t make the mistake of thinking it’s love.

ROSIE. I wasn’t. (She was.)

FRAN. Or children. Those things are fine but they are not what matter. It’s independence. Without that the others are just a trap. A woman needs to stand on her own feet and earn her own money. That’s the best advice you’ll ever get from me. So get a job.

ROSIE. I’ve got a job.

FRAN. One that you’ll still want to be doing when you’re forty years old and not so pretty.

ROSIE. You always make me cut the onions. You say, come, I’ll teach you to cook but I only end up cutting onions.

FRAN. And look how well you cut them.

ROSIE. It’s not fair.

FRAN. It’s a mother’s job to make her children cry... one way or another.

ROSIE. Why?
THINGS I KNOW TO BE TRUE

FRAN. So they understand pain.

ROSIE. That is so wrong.

At some point BOB has stopped as if he has forgotten what to do next.

FRAN. What’s he doing?

ROSIE. I don’t know.

FRAN. Bob!

ROSIE. Sssh.

FRAN. BOB!

BOB looks up.

What are you doing?

BOB. What?

FRAN. The manure. You’re doing the garden.

BOB. I know.

He wanders off.

FRAN. I’m not looking after him if he gets dementia. I’ve looked after people all my life.

ROSIE. Then I will.

FRAN. That’s enough onion... Do me some carrots as well. A fine dice. Cubes. Not rectangles. (Glances back out to garden.) I worry about him, Rosie.

ROSIE. He’s all right... isn’t he?

FRAN. I want to take him away.

ROSIE. Where to?

FRAN. To Europe. To America. To all those places you’re meant to go. I want to leave you lot and all your troubles behind. I just want it to be him and me again. Before...

ROSIE. What?

FRAN. I forget what that’s like.
ROSIE. Can you afford it?

FRAN. You’re not to tell your dad but I’ve got a stash.

ROSIE. Of what?

FRAN. Of money. What do you think? I’ve always put a little away. Since my very first pay packet. Even if it was just five dollars. It adds up, Rosie. Compound interest!

BOB (from the garden). Fran...

FRAN. What?

BOB. Have you used my secateurs?

FRAN. No.

BOB wanders off not entirely convinced by her denial.

He’s older than he needs to be. And he knows much less of the world than he should.

ROSIE. Yeah... but he’s happy with what he has, Mum.

FRAN. That’s because he thinks he doesn’t deserve more. You work for a carmaker for thirty years. You know nothing else and then they close the doors and tell you you’re not needed any more. They give you a package and tell you that’s what you’re worth. And it seems like a hell of a lot when it’s given to you all at once, if all you know is a fortnightly pay packet and so you believe them. A few years later it’s nearly all gone and you realise you weren’t worth much at all. And so you satisfy yourself with a bed of roses... I hate those roses.

ROSIE. Mum!

FRAN. They’re just an excuse for not living.

ROSIE. Why don’t you stop work? So you’ve got more time together.

FRAN. Because I’d bash him to death with the back of a shovel if I had to spend all day with him and then I’d kill myself from boredom. No. I like work. I like who it lets me be.

BEN enters with his shirts.

BEN. I can’t stay.
FRAN. Are you hungry?
BEN. What is there?
FRAN. There's lasagne in the fridge.
BEN. Can I take it with me?
FRAN. Put it in a Tupperware. And make sure you bring it back. You've got all my containers over there, already.

BOB (entering). What's that parked in the drive?
BEN. I know... What do you think?
BOB. It's a little flash.
BEN. What do you mean?
BOB. It looks new.
BEN. It's off the floor... I got a deal.
BOB. It's European.
BEN. So?
BOB. What are you trying to prove?
BEN. I'm not trying to prove anything. That's just what people drive.
BOB. What people?
BEN. I don't know. People. People I know. People I work with. Jesus, it's just a car.

BOB. Did you get finance for it?
BEN. Yeah, what else?
BOB. You didn't want to talk that over with me, first?
BEN. What? You're a bank manager now?
FRAN. He can afford it... Can't you?
BOB. There was nothing wrong with the car you had.
FRAN. They're like that now, Bob. They don't drive the same car for long. Not the kind of people he's with.
BOB. What people? What people is he with? The kind of people who take out a seventy-grand loan to buy a new car, so that they can look better than they are?

BEN. Is that what you think?

FRAN. He’s not saying that.

BOB. You’re not even thirty years old and you’re driving a brand-new car. European, no less.

BEN. I earn good money. Spending it is not a crime.

BOB. Your mum and I paid cash for our first new car. We saved for it. And you know what we did until we had enough in the bank?

BEN. Rosie... get me a pad and pencil. I should write this down and stick it on the fridge.

BOB. We lived with what we had... a second-hand bomb.

BEN. That was last century.

BOB. Nevertheless... we made do.

BEN. Yeah, well, I’m not prepared to work all my life for the same company for a handshake and a car at cost at the end of it. I want more than that.

BOB. It was cost and a bit more. They weren’t so generous.

BEN. Well, there you go. You got screwed at the end anyway.

FRAN. Ben.

BOB. Are you insured?

BEN. Of course.

BOB. Full comprehensive?

BEN. I’m not an idiot.

BOB. Right then, it’s in your hands.

BEN (as he goes). I’ll take you for a spin... if you want.

BOB doesn’t reply.
ROSIE. You can take me.

BEN. Maybe next time, Rosie.

FRAN. You don’t need to talk to him like that.

BEN. Like I said... I can’t stay.

FRAN. You want to stand still... just for a moment, Ben. Just take a look at what’s going on around you.

BEN. Coming here is like a lesson in how to be a better person. I get it every time. I’m over it.

FRAN. Yeah, well that’s our job.

He kisses her.

You want the lasagne?

BEN. No, Mum... I have to go.

BEN exits. FRAN joins BOB in the garden.

FRAN. He’s doing well for himself... You might want to think about noticing that now and then.

BOB. He should have talked to me about it first.

FRAN. What would you have said?

BOB. I would have said don’t do it.

FRAN. Well, there you go.

BOB. He doesn’t think things through.

FRAN. He’s young. Christ, Bob, it’s a small window in which to shine and be foolish.

BOB. I wouldn’t know about being young, Fran. I had two and a mortgage at his age.

FRAN. Yeah, well, you weren’t there alone.

She goes back inside to ROSIE.

ROSIE. I’m thinking of moving out of home.

FRAN. And now’s the time you choose to tell me?

ROSIE. I thought seeing how you’re already upset.
FRAN. How will you pay your rent?

ROSIE. I’ll get more hours.

FRAN. You won’t go far. The youngest never does. You’ll get a house around the corner.

ROSIE. I will not.

FRAN. It’s better to buy than rent. We’ll help you with the deposit. That way when the onions need cutting you won’t have far to come.

ROSIE. You’re trying to bribe me with a house?

FRAN. Why not? You’re my favourite.

ROSIE. You can’t say that.

FRAN. Don’t worry. I tell you all the same thing.

ROSIE. Do you tell Pip?

FRAN. She’s different.

ROSIE. Why?

FRAN. Because she’s me... But stronger.

ROSIE. You should speak to her, Mum.

FRAN. I will... When she comes back and takes care of her kids like a normal woman.

ROSIE. I think she’s happy.

FRAN. Well, good for her because nobody else is.

ROSIE. Anyway, it’s not true I’m your favourite. Ben is.

FRAN. What can I say? The boy makes me laugh. He just has to walk into the room and I want to smile.

ROSIE. Mark’s my favourite.

FRAN. Of course. He’s loved you from the get go.

ROSIE. Why did Taylor leave?

FRAN. You’ll have to ask him. He doesn’t talk to me. Not about the important things.
BOB enters holding a letter.

BOB. The mail’s come.

FRAN. So? It needs to be announced now?

BOB. There’s a letter from Canada... It’s addressed to you.

FRAN takes it and folds it into her uniform pocket before moving outside. BOB and ROSIE are watching her expectantly from the house.

FRAN. I don’t need an audience... Thank you very much.

ROSIE and BOB pretend to be busy as FRAN takes out the letter and opens it. She begins to read.

As PIP moves through the cycle of her day.

PIP. Dear Mum. It’s cold in Vancouver but I like where I’m living. That’s a reference to a Leonard Cohen song except I was talking about New York. But you know that, don’t you, ‘Famous Blue Raincoat’. You used to play it. Over and over...

(Sings.)

It’s four in the morning, the end of December
I’m writing you now just to see if you’re better
New York is cold but I like where I’m living
There’s music on Clinton Street, all through the evening

I was on Skype with Katie the other day and I found myself thinking that she was a little plump. And wishing that her face was not quite so round and that her hair didn’t fall quite so straight from her head. Is that what we do to our daughters? Praise them whilst we secretly think they’re not good enough. The moment they start to become women, the first shedding of blood (do you remember how early I was?) and the first sign of a developing breast, is this when we start thinking that they’re not pretty enough? Or smart enough? Or this when we start worrying that they’re never going to find someone? Or be someone. Is this what we do? Maybe it’s better that the girls are brought up by their father who looks at them and only sees the best. Like Dad. That’s what Dad sees when he looks at me. I wish you could too.
(Sings.)
Yes, and Jane came by with a lock of your hair
She said that you gave it to her

FRAN joins her on the third line.

FRAN and PIP.
That night that you planned to go clear
FRAN finishes alone.

FRAN.
Did you ever go clear?

PIP. I never really understood the song when I was a girl. I still don’t. But I knew enough to know that it was about love and that each time you played it you wanted to cry. You never did. Not with us around. Only once did I see you let yourself go. You thought you were alone. In the backyard. Leaning against the old gum tree. Howling and howling. Bashing your head against the trunk. Why were you crying that day, Mum?

FRAN quickly wipes a tear away before it dares to fall.
I’m sorry I never asked you. Why didn’t we have those conversations? I think that maybe we were too busy hiding from each other the things that really mattered.

And so I’m sitting here in my apartment in Vancouver and it’s threatening to snow. And I hope that it does because that’s a good enough reason not to go out. And I’m playing that song and wondering why it meant so much to you. And I can only ask this from a distance because I’m scared of seeing the truth in your face like you saw it in mine.

I met him at an education conference here in Vancouver on that first trip. I didn’t see it coming. Do you ever see it coming? So yes, your accusation of another man was right. Are you ever wrong, Mum?

I was ready. For him. For love. A Canadian. A public-education specialist. A man who spoke with passion about something that I’d stopped caring about years ago. It wasn’t hard. I was ready to fall. For someone. Someone who reminded me of what mattered. And so I fell, Mum. In love.
THINGS I KNOW TO BE TRUE

Three days at a conference. Six months of thrilling email and text messages and clandestine phone calls and I knew that I had to come.

He’s married. Of course. You knew that too. Three children: a son and two daughters. To a woman who is good and fine and right and beautiful. But I don’t care. Because I feel loved. By him. Like I have never felt loved by Steve. My good sweet husband who has done nothing but care for me and the children but who does not look much further in than the end of his own driveway. And now, I’m waiting for his call, my lover, wondering if tonight he will find the excuse to leave his good wife, his sweet children and his home and come to me.

I didn’t want to be this woman, Mum. But I can’t leave. I won’t. Eventually, he will have to make a choice and it probably won’t be me. But for now... well, for now, I am this woman.

‘Thanks for taking the trouble from her eyes’. Do you remember that line from the song? That is what this man has done for me. And I’m wondering if there was someone who could have done it for you, if you let them.

My love, Pip.

FRAN sits in the silence of the garden. BOB has come out of the house and is watching.

BOB. Is everything all right?

FRAN. It’s fine.

BOB. What does she say?

FRAN. She says it’s cold in Vancouver.
Winter

Mark

The roses are bare and the sky is grey. FRAN is in the garden smoking a cigarette.

MARK. On the weekends when Dad wanted help in the garden I would climb the gum tree and hide. From up there, I could see the world.

At least I could see our world. Pip singing to a song on the radio and checking her split ends at the patio table. Ben kicking the football from one end of the yard to the other. Always running. Dad pushing a wheelbarrow of dirt around with Rosie following him with her plastic shovel ready to help. And Mum hanging out the washing before sneaking a cheeky fag behind the shed, thinking that no one knows she's there.

They didn't know I was up in the tree watching and seeing everything. Not really a part of the picture and not really even knowing why.

There were two occasions on which Mum would smoke. The first was if she'd had more than two glasses of wine. She wasn't a big drinker so this was rare. It usually happened on New Year's Eve. She would light up after two glasses of sparkling wine and only ever smoke the one. She was also known to dance with Dad's undies on her head, after he had taken them off for God knows what reason, so New Year's Eve was always an ordeal for us kids. The other occasion was when she thought that one of us had a problem that she couldn't solve, which was also rare, Mum having a solution for most problems in life. And on these occasions she could go through a pack, one after another until a solution was found. I suspect that of all of us, she smoked the most cigarettes on account of me.

BOB is pushing a load of dirt across the yard when he finds FRAN.
BOB. What the hell are you doing?
FRAN. Sssh, I don’t want Rosie to see.
BOB. Well, give me a puff?
FRAN. No. One puff for you and you’d be back on a pack a day. Mark called. He’s coming over.
BOB. Good… I’ll get him to help me shift the garden furniture. There’s a storm coming in.
FRAN. He says he needs to talk to us.
BOB. What about?
FRAN. Now you’re not to go on but I think he might be gay.
BOB. Bloody hell!
FRAN. See… there you go.
BOB. Well, it’s a bit out of the blue!
FRAN. He doesn’t know we know so you’ll have to act surprised.
BOB. Well, I am. I mean why hasn’t he told us before?
FRAN. It takes some men longer, that’s all.
BOB. So this is why Taylor up and left, you think?
FRAN. I’d say so… Are you all right with it?
BOB. Yes… if he is. If it’s the way he wants to go.
FRAN. It’s not a way you go, Bob. It’s not a direction you take.
BOB. I didn’t mean that. I mean he’s thirt… how old is he?
FRAN. Thirty-two.
BOB. Exactly! He’s thirty-two. His life is his own.
FRAN. That’s right.
BOB. And you? Are you all right with it?
FRAN. Yes!… I think so. I mean it’s not what you think you’re going to get when you have kids.
BOB. No.

FRAN. I mean a part of me thinks Not My Son. Please God not my son. Let it be some other woman’s son. But apart from that, no, I’m fine with it.

BOB. Yeah, it sounds like it too.

*They share a moment, a laugh.*

Anyway, no matter what, he’s still going to be our boy... It’s starting to rain.

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The storm breaks.

A little later that night. MARK’s at the back door, wet from the rain. BOB and FRAN are fussing over him.

FRAN. You’re soaked through.

MARK. I walked over.

BOB. In this weather?

FRAN. Rosie, get a towel.

BOB. You’ll catch your death.

MARK. It wasn’t raining when I left.

BOB. Why didn’t you take an umbrella?

MARK. I told you it wasn’t raining.

BOB. It’s the middle of winter, son. You go for a walk the chances are you’re going to get wet.

FRAN takes the towel from ROSIE and starts to dry MARK’s hair.

MARK. I’ll do it, Mum.

BOB. Take that shirt off. Rosie, get him a shirt from my drawer. What about your pants?

MARK. They’re fine, thanks.

FRAN is starting to take MARK’s shirt off.

Mum!
FRAN. You think I haven’t seen you naked before?

*He removes his own shirt.*

Would you look at the colour of him? When’s the last time you saw any sun? That’s your fault, Bob. White as a bloo ghost. Both of you. And have you had that mole checked out? I don’t like the look of that.

ROSIE *(entering with shirt).* Is blue okay?

MARK. Right now polka dots would be fine.

*He takes the shirt and puts it on.*

BOB. So are you hungry?

MARK. I’m fine.

BOB. I could fix you something.

MARK. I’ve eaten.

FRAN. What exactly? Because you’re as skinny as a rake.

BOB. There’s your mum’s stew in the fridge. I’ll heat it up.

MARK. What’s the matter with you two? I said I’ve eaten. I’m fine. And I’m not too skinny and I’m not too white. And I haven’t got skin cancer. Can we have a conversation for one that doesn’t begin with you making a list of everything that’s wrong with me? And could you stand still for half a minute because I’m trying to tell you something here and it’s not easy.

FRAN. Look, Mark, there’s nothing you could tell us that would shock us or make us feel any different about you. I just want to say that.

BOB. Unless you told us you had decided to become a woman.

Then I would be shocked.

BOB laughs at his joke. He’s the only one though. It’s a terrible silence as they realise what’s just been inelegantly revealed.

MARK. That’s not how this was meant to go.

*They are silent. Shocked.*

I need you to say something.
FRAN. We thought you were gay.
MARK. Right.
FRAN. Are you?
MARK. What the hell does that matter?
FRAN. I don’t know.
MARK. Well, I’m not.
FRAN. Okay.
MARK. Are you relieved?
FRAN. No... no, that’s not what I’m feeling right now.
MARK. What are you feeling, Mum?
FRAN. I’m... I can’t... begin... Are you sure about this?
MARK. Yes.
FRAN. Then what are you feeling?
MARK. Afraid... confused... A little ashamed. No. Not ashamed. I’m finished with feeling that. But embarrassed. I guess. Telling you. And angry. Yeah. Angry. I had a whole speech prepared. I’ve been practising it for twenty years.
BOB. And I put my foot in it.
MARK. You did, Dad, yeah.
BOB. Are you telling us that you’re one of those men who wants to be a woman?
MARK. That’s the gist of it.
BOB. Is it that you like to put on women’s clothing in the privacy of your own home because there was Uncle Trevor on my mother’s side or are you talking about the whole shebang here?
MARK. Okay. This is something that I have known about myself for many years. It is something I have fought and hidden. It has made me very unhappy. And it has cost me a relationship with a woman I loved very much.
FRAN. Well, you can understand her point of view.