

Low Level Panic

Clare McIntyre

Scene 5. A bathroom in a shared flat.

Mary (20s) works in an office. Late one evening, after leaving work on her bicycle, she was brutally sexually assaulted by two young thugs. This has had a traumatic effect on her and she cannot stop thinking over the senseless events of that night. Jo (20s) is Mary's room-mate. She is slightly plump and obsessed with her weight, her looks and her vivid sexual fantasies. As this scene opens the two girls are getting ready to go out to a party and Mary is swigging wine from a bottle. Both girls are dressed in their 'party gear'.

JO (*coming in*). If you don't come to this party I'll kill you.
MARY. It was because I was dressed up.

JO. We've been over this before Mary: you weren't dressed up.

MARY. I was more dressed up than usual.

JO. You were wearing a skirt.

MARY. For me I was dressed up.

JO. You weren't dressed up at all. You never dress up. And what if you were?

MARY. I remember being all dolled up.

JO. I can't remember ever seeing you all dolled up.

MARY. I am now.

JO. Apart from now I don't.

MARY. I was wearing those enamel bracelets I've got. I can't remember why . . . but I was looking nice. I know I was. I just felt it. Sometimes you do feel that don't you? Sometimes you just know you're looking okay. It's not like

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I was looking like anything in particular. I just felt nice. That's more it. I'd felt nice when I'd been cycling to work: all cool and breezy. I don't remember what I looked like but I remember how I felt.

JO. But you weren't dressed up.

MARY. I wasn't concentrating.

JO. You weren't.

MARY. No.

JO. You always wore a skirt didn't you?

MARY. Had to.

JO. You were just dressed ordinary.

MARY. They didn't think so.

JO. Boys like that don't think, not with their brains that is. They might think a bit with their dicks but not with their brains they don't. Not at all. They don't even know where their brains are.

MARY. I'm sure I was looking nice . . . for me, that is.

JO. You are nice looking.

MARY. I must have been looking sexy but I didn't know it. They must have thought I was looking all dressed up and sexy.

JO. What's wrong with looking sexy?

MARY. I want to look like I feel.

JO. You do. You must do. You just look natural.

MARY. Not in a bloody party dress I don't. Not all done up in a party dress. It makes me feel like I did then, all flimsy and open and . . .

JO. And women love it.

MARY. What?

JO. Being sexy.

MARY. Do they?

JO. 'Course they do.

MARY. And what's being sexy?

JO. Oh come on.

MARY. Feeling like this?

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JO. Yes. What's wrong with that?
MARY. It feels horrible.
JO. Why can't you enjoy it?
MARY. Because . . .
JO. You won't let yourself will you? Just relax.
MARY. I'm trying.
JO. You've got to feel good about yourself or nothing'll happen.
MARY. Nothing like what?
JO. I'm going to count to ten and then I'm going to *scream*.
MARY. So this looks sexy does it? (*Holding her dress up against her.*)
JO. 'Course it does . . . No, it doesn't. It doesn't look sexy at all. Okay?
MARY. No. I feel like someone else. I feel funny and peculiar and a million miles from confident and that's fine and terrific and just as it should be and I'm to go out and enjoy myself. Right?
JO. Yes.
MARY. That's what you want me to do?
JO. Yes. 'Cos you will. You're just nervous. I'm nervous for Heaven's sake.
MARY. Are you?
JO. Yes. No.
MARY. Which?
JO. I don't know.
MARY. But what . . .
JO. Stop asking questions. You'll disappear up your own bum.
MARY. I think I'm in a coma.
JO. Well rally round or we'll be late.
MARY. 'Pornography's the tip of the iceberg.' Somebody said that.
JO. Oh my God. Cut my wrists. Cut my wrists.

MARY. They were right.
JO. And we've all got to learn to live with it.
MARY. I can't . . .
JO. In the course of a day, a day without too much effort put into it you'll see more pictures of naked breasts than you will naked bollocks. Breast for breast, bollock for bollock, breasts will come out on top.
MARY. Is that . . . ?
JO. Try and stop thinking for once will you? For five minutes, however long it's going to take you to get yourself out of this house and on to the street. (*She goes out.*)
MARY (*has to shout to be heard*). What matters then? Things do matter, you know. We've got to understand why we think whatever it is we do think otherwise how are we meant to live with ourselves? I mean that's what we are. We are what we think about things.
(*JO enters carrying her coat - ready, apart from final touches of make-up, to leave.*)
Most of the time you know what you think. You know if you like oranges or not or what you feel like having for tea. But none of that matters. And you can't say that everything that does matter somehow has got nothing to do with you 'cos it has got something to do with you whether you like it or not. It has. 'Cos we're all alive and we all walk down the street and see things and you can't pretend those things don't get inside your head somehow because they do. Even if you're not aware of it they do. So they're there for you to make sense of. You've got to decide what you feel about them and you can't just say you feel whatever it is you do just because that's the way you do because that isn't true. You're not born thinking the way you think. Things happen which make you think like that. You're making decisions all the time even if what you're deciding to do is not to think about something. That's a decision. I mean there are some people who don't

think they think at all, who think they're just thick, but they are thinking because all that stuff they see is getting into their heads just like it's getting into mine. It's part of them like it's part of you and me. It's there for them to think about. It's hopeless to say you don't have to think about things because you do. You've got to.

JO. You're pissed aren't you?

MARY. Yup.

JO. Aren't you?

MARY. Yup.

JO. Coming?

MARY. Yup.

JO. Bloody liability.

MARY. Yup.

The Memory of Water

Shelagh Stevenson

Scene 1. A bedroom, dominated by a double bed. The room is slightly old-fashioned. There is a pile of books on the bedside table. Morning.

Mary (39) is a successful and busy consultant neurologist at a London hospital. She is single and for the past five years has been having an affair with a married man. Teresa (early 40s) is Mary's elder sister. She is married to Frank and together they run a business selling 'health supplements'. Following the recent death of their mother, Vi, they have come back to her house to prepare for the funeral. Their younger sister, Catherine, will also be joining them. As the scene begins Mary is lying in her mother's bed wearing Ray-Ban sunglasses.

(MARY is lying prostrate. She stirs and gets out of bed, goes to the dressing-table, opens drawers, rifles through them. The phone rings.)

MARY. Hello? ... What time is it? ... I wouldn't be talking to you if I was, would I? I'd be unconscious ... Where are you? ... Jesus ... you're what? So will you want me to pick you up from the station?

(The door opens and TERESA comes in.)

TERESA. Oh ...

MARY. Hold on ... *(To TERESA.)* It's not for you.

TERESA. Who is it?

MARY *(to caller).* What? She's gone where? ... OK, OK. I'll see you later. Are you sure you don't want me to pick you up -

(She's cut off.)

COMMENTARY: This play vividly and often comically confronts how a brutal act of male violence affects one woman and her two flatmates. The author gives no personal details about the characters so you might want to create your own histories for them. The personalities of Jo and Mary are quite different and you must show how their attitudes in this scene reflect this. Jo has been trying desperately to get Mary out of the depression that seems to be on the verge of overwhelming her. As Mary struggles to come to terms with what has happened to her, Jo jollies her along saying, 'You need to get yourself out of yourself, forget who you are and have a good time.' But their very preparations for the party exacerbate Mary's anxieties. She starts fretting that it was the way she was dressed on that fateful evening that played such an important part in leading the boys on. More than anything Jo just wants to get to the party. Notice that there is a humour in the girls' camaraderie but use it carefully to counter the underlying horror of Mary's vicimisation. Since the scene, and the play as a whole, deal with men's sexual perceptions of women, you will want to be cautious in how you portray the physical and sexual aspects of Mary and Jo.