



THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING

Anne Curtis

Until two years ago Maeve Dennehy's garden was the best kept on the estate, now volunteer befriender Dawn must climb across junk and piles of newspapers to enter the flat. What happened to cause this change?

PERFORMANCE

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Notes

/ at the end of a line indicates that the next line should be an interruption.

... indicates that the speaker trails off.

? indicates a response without anything being spoken. For example, the actor may look up or turn to look at the other actor.

SCENE 1 - Easter Saturday 2016. The inside a council flat in north London. There is a chair in the middle of the room which sits on a raised plinth. To the left is a small table on which is a sherry bottle, glass, a copy of a DVD: 'The Importance of Being Ernest' and an aerosol of air freshener. To the front of the chair is a cheap plastic chair with a baby doll sitting on it. There is a screen top stage right to indicate the entrance to the kitchen. The stage lighting is set so that room appears to be in semi darkness as if the curtains are drawn on a fine day. Maeve, a woman in late middle age is wearing a large Edwardian style hat and dressed in a cheap black full length dressing gown. She is performing from a script in a rather exaggerated fashion. She holds the script in one hand and a handheld duster in the other. The duster has been 'dressed' in a headscarf and glasses to look like a person. Maeve has been drinking

Maeve

Prism! Prism! Where is that baby? D'you hear me? Do You? *(Drops the book)* Twenty-eight years ago. Twenty-eight years ago-you witch! You were after leaving Lord Bracknell's house, in charge of a peram, pram, perambulator- Jaysus. Can't you just write feckin' pram? It contained a baby of the male sex. A baby boy! You never returned. A few weeks later, through the elaborate investigations of the Metropolitan police, the peram- whatever, was discovered at midnight, standing by itself in a remote corner of Bayswater. But the baby was not there! Now then Prism! Tell What have you done wi' that baby?

A woman aged in her late 30s enters the room and stands by the door watching. She is dressed in an 'anorak,' a cardigan and a smart pair of trousers, making her look older than her years. She is carrying a bundle of newspapers that have been tied together with string.

(Maeve adopts the pose of Miss Prism). Oh Lady Bracknell, I admit with shame that I do not know. **(She steps backward and is about to fall over when Dawn intervenes)**

Dawn

Are you okay?

Maeve

(Maeve waves the script at Dawn indicating that she would like her to take it). This one is after losing a baby.

Dawn

I thought so, 'The Importance of Being Ernest.' Oscar Wilde.

Maeve

?

Dawn

Probably the best-known play by an Irishman.

Maeve

? **(Wobbles)**

Dawn

Beats Pygmalion - My Fair Lady. George Bernard Shaw into second place.

Maeve

?

Dawn

I'm a librarian. I'd say that 'Ernest' was borrowed more often than any other script. Am dram groups mainly. They like a good comedy.

Maeve

No feekin' craic in losing a baby.

Dawn

If you read the whole play, you'll see that
it ends happily.

Maeve

I have. *(Waves the DVD at her. Maeve gets
up and then staggers)* Away from his mother
for twenty-eight years.

Dawn

*(Dawn navigates Maeve to her chair on the
plinth and sits her down.)* Now how about if
I open these?

Maeve

No-oooo.

Dawn

A bit of light surely? *(Stage becomes
brighter)* Och - your own wee theatre.

Maeve

(Staggers across the stage). S'all the
world is a stage, and we are merely players
on it.

Dawn

(Dawn helps her to sit down) William
Shakespeare

Maeve

(Points at Dawn). You

Dawn

Dawn, your Irish Volunteer

Maeve

Who comes to visit me on Holy Saturday! And what have you planned for Easter Monday?

Dawn

(Acknowledges that it is a joke) The centenary. Very good. I'm from the Celtic centre - down the road. You should have got a letter. I'll just find the kettle. **(Dawn moves towards the kitchen. Maeve follows her and pokes the handle of the duster into Dawn's back)**

Maeve

Surrender. In the name of Her Majesty's government

Dawn

Aaargh. What are you doing?

Maeve

Kilmainham gaol for you

Dawn

Stop it.

Maeve

Call yourself a volunteer? An Easter bunny more like. **(Dawn turns around to see Maeve now using the duster handle as a rifle).**

Run rabbit, run rabbit, run, run, run

Dawn

(Takes the duster) You nearly sent my heart crosswise then, so you did. **(Maeve laughs)**

Maeve

Thank Christ you weren't fighting with the rebels. Never mind six days, they'd have to surrender after two.

Dawn

Let's keep politics and guns out of the way. I think a bit of fresh air would do us both good. *(Indicates that she would like to open a window. Maeve blocks her way)*

Maeve

I was in a play about the Rising. Easter 1966. Fiftieth anniversary production.

Dawn

Aye.

Maeve

I was Kitty, a wee girl who runs errands for the soldiers in Boland's Mills. Run Kitty, run Kitty, run, run.

Dawn

And did you?

Maeve

I was fast and loose. Too feckin' fast. Or was I too slow?

Dawn

?

Maeve

Got caught out anyways. A grand tour of Ireland was planned, but they wouldn't let me go

Dawn

That's a shame

Maeve

Just cos I fell in love with Eamon de Valera. Rise Up. And he bloody well did.

Dawn

The De Valera?

Maeve

No Dermot. My lovely Dermot with the laughing eyes. Cast as Commandant Eamon de Valera. Best part in the play. He was a teacher. My brother Kevin was in his class.

Dawn

Oh

Maeve

Couldn't have that, couldn't have that at all. So, they locked me up. Sent Dermot away. The love of my life gone. All the way to Africa to teach the children all about... What the feck did he teach? Me mind's gone.

(Dawn hands her a glass of water to drink from which she does. Claps her hands)

You need to audition.

Dawn

If you mean Criminal Records check, that's all sorted

Maeve

Don't care about that. You can be the biggest feckin criminal in the world so long as you can act. Now take these words and im..im...?

Dawn

Imbue?

Maeve

That's it girl. Imbue them with life.
That's what I want you to do

Dawn

There's a wee bit of tidying to do first.
If you'd point me in the direction of the
recycling bags. You've six of these
blocking the entrance to the front door.

Maeve

Onto the stage.

Dawn

Maeve- you do understand why I'm here?

Maeve

Because I told them I wanted someone with
an interest in drama. *(Indicates that she
wants Dawn to get on the stage.)*

Dawn

I'm afraid you're talking to Miss Prompt
not Miss Prism.

Maeve

?

Dawn

I'd loved to have acted but never got
chosen. Stage manager, costumes that sort
of thing. Now I think it would be a good
idea if you... *(Takes the bottle/ glass from
Maeve but the drink spills. Dawn goes
towards the kitchen).*

Maeve

D'you believe in Jesus?

Dawn

Religion is a bit of a 'no go' area for me

Maeve

But do you?

Dawn

(Dawn enters with a cloth. Maeve looks at her waiting for an answer). The one wearing the balaclava or the bowler hat.

Maeve

The fella in the Bible. There is a story about the woman who'd sex with someone she shouldn't. They were going to throw rocks at her till Jesus stopped them. Said you shouldn't automatically blame the woman.

Dawn

?

Maeve

Father Byrne was after telling me that. From St Jude's' up above. Says we're all lost causes some of the time.

Dawn

?

Maeve

They moved him on two years ago. New fella's a thick accent. Can't understand a word he says.

Dawn

I'm from Antrim. I keep well away from all that.

Maeve

The daughter of an Orangeman begod. I
thought noticed a purposeful stride.

Dawn

Orange woman. Mixed marriage. Dad was from
Cavan. Moved across the border for work.
Unusual I know.

Maeve

Are you going to give it a go or not?

Dawn

The only acting I've only ever done was
role plays with my mum in drama therapy.

Maeve

Then do one of them 'role plays'.

Dawn

They're not really plays you perform. Just
something Sally, the therapist did to help
mum.

Maeve

?

Dawn

My mum needed help her look at life
differently

Maeve

That's no bloody use to me

Dawn

Nor to mum as it happened

Maeve

You've read the 'Importance of Being Ernest'?

Dawn

Aye.

Maeve

Go on so

Dawn

A speech would be way beyond me. I could tell you the story if you like.

Maeve

(Indicates for Dawn to get on the stage)

Ladies and Gentlemen I give you the story of the 'Importance of Being Ernest by..

Dawn

Dawn. Dawn McCreedy

Maeve

By Miss Dawn McCreedy. *(Dawn gets on the stage)*.

Dawn

(Pause) The story. Well. Before the play begins Lady Bracknell's sister has a baby boy who she names Ernest. She hires a nanny, well governess, to look after him. Only one day the nanny, she's called Miss Prism by the way, takes the baby out for a walk in his pram and doesn't come back.

Maeve

I told you- a play about a baby being stolen from its mother

Dawn

Don't worry-it's a comedy.

Maeve

Never.

Dawn

Wait. Years later Lady Bracknell accidentally meets up with Miss Prism.

Maeve

(Waving the duster handle) Child stealer.

Dawn

She tells Lady Bracknell that she left the baby in a locker at Victoria Station by mistake. Instead of the manuscript of a romantic novel she'd written. Anyway, it turned out alright in the end.

Maeve

(Waving the duster handle) Baby thief.
Fetch the police.

Dawn

No need. Jack Worthing, the baby who was left in the locker was found by a man called Thomas Cardew who became his guardian. Anyway, Jack grew up and fell in love with Cecily, Lady Bracknell's niece. There's another romance too between Lady Bracknell's daughter Gwendoline and Algernon, Jack's brother. It is very funny.

Maeve

A baby is taken from its mother- left in a station- given a stranger as a guardian without its mother consent. Where's the joke in that?

Dawn

The comedy is about the mix up. The way that no one knows who anyone else is. Only everyone does in the end, that's why Cecily and Jack- whose real name is Ernest can get married. May I get down?

Maeve

Tell me about the poor mother who lost her child.

Dawn

We're only given her name- Mrs Moncrieff

Maeve

Is that so?

Dawn

Oscar Wilde probably didn't think that she was important.

Maeve

Typical Irishman.

Dawn

So? Did I pass? May I join your company?

Maeve

(Waves her hand dismissively). Your understanding of the play won't do at all. Tell them to send another.

Dawn

Because you don't like my opinion of the play?

Maeve

(Looks at her watch) Thirty-three minutes. You could be in first place.

Dawn

I was warned about you and volunteers.

Maeve

What did they tell you?

Dawn

That I was number nine.

Maeve

And they can't feckin' count. Ten! Number five only lasted ten minutes. They don't count her.

Dawn

What on earth did you do to her?

Maeve

Sprayed the air freshener at her **(Points it at her backside)**, just there. Threaten to empty the bottle of bleach over her if she told me once more about how nice the feckin toilet would look if it was clean. Followed it up with a can of Pledge as she ran screaming down the garden path. **(Picks up the air freshener as if she is about to spray. Dawn laughs)** Trouble with you volunteer people is you think you know what I want. **(Maeve goes behind the screen and returns with a duster with which she wipes the table. She then picks up some washing up liquid and takes the lid off)** See? I can do it meself if I choose. History is full of ye. Those volunteer fellas who took over the old GPO back in the day. Did they ask anyone if they wanted them to do it? No, they didn't. Oh, they're making a great fuss about it now, one hundred years on but did it do any good?

Dawn

I'm from Antrim.

Maeve

Jesus the way you talk you'd think they
never discuss politics up there.

Dawn

So how do I stop you throwing a bottle of
bleach over me?

Maeve

Bring your own copy of the play next time
you come.

(LIGHTS DOWN)

*(SCENE 2 -Dawn walks in to see Maeve
feeding a baby doll with a bottle, after
feeding the doll she winds it and then
burps it. She appears completely convincing
to anyone who watches her. Maeve has been
drinking, there is a glass filled with red
wine nearby and a large bunch of flowers
tied with a purple ribbon. Dawn removes her
anorak.)*

Maeve

Bit young to be off the breast, wouldn't
you say? He's been weaned for a while
though. Thought it best to do this early;
you never know what is going to happen.

Dawn

Right

Maeve

We can only hope that the baby boy Prism
mislaid was off the teet. Distressing for
him otherwise. Isn't he lovely?

Dawn

?

Maeve

Shh, shh. Shh. Mammy's boy mustn't cry now. Must he/ *(Puts the doll over her shoulder and nurses him, possibly sings to him)*. Is it the wind poppet? Is it that nasty horrible wind? *(Maeve moves around the stage until the baby has stopped crying. Dawn continues to look on incredulously)*. There, there, all better now. Mammy's baby boy is all better, isn't he? That colic, it is a dreadful thing altogether. Do you have children?

Dawn

(Dawn shakes her head.)

Maeve

Then you won't get the lovely presents that I get given. Look what he's brought for his mammy. What a kind wee boy he is. Aren't you pet? A lovely, beautiful bunch of mammy's favourite flowers. Aren't they gorgeous? Shall we ask Prism if they are gorgeous? We don't need to do we. Because we know that this wee boy only buys the nicest flowers for his mammy, doesn't he? Can see him growing up to be a true romantic. Break a hundred hearts, won't you? Put them in the vase for me girl. Can you not see that me hands are a bit full?

Dawn

(Takes the flowers but notices the 'With Sympathy' card on the bouquet and puts them down)

Maeve

What does baby say to Prism? We say 'thanks Prism - don't we - thanks you for putting our lovely flowers in the vase where mammy

and the baby Jack can see him? **(Maeve hands over the doll to Dawn as if she is handing over a child.)** Now, be a good girl and just put him down there for me, would you please? Over there where we can see him. Jaysus girl. Do you not know how to hold a child properly? Like this. **(Dawn adjusts the way that she is holding the doll and puts it in the pram).** We wouldn't want anyone to steal him sure we wouldn't. Thanks. We won't do anything until he's dropped off. We can have a cup of tea when he's 'away wi' the fairies'. **(Maeve rocks the baby back and forth. Dawn goes to get the vase. The following lines are said from behind the screen)**

Dawn

This isn't in the script you know.

Maeve

(To the doll). That Mr Wilde didn't think your mammy was important enough to be in his play, did he?

Dawn

It'd be a very long play if it started when Ernest was a baby.

Maeve

Or a tiny, tiny, teeny, weeny play if he realised that men taking babies away from their mummies wasn't funny at all.

Dawn

(Dawn returns with a vase and unties the bouquet) Och- we all know ... Where did you get these?

Maeve

Jack got them for me.

Dawn
Truly?

Maeve
From the florists, (**Beat**) on the high street- where d'you think? (**Maeve pulls the pram towards her and rocks the baby back and forth**)

Dawn
A special occasion?

Maeve
You don't need a special occasion to tell your mammy that you love her. Sure, you don't?

Dawn
Your florist must be a strange one. They normally use purple ribbon for funeral bouquets. Any chance she delivered the wrong one?

Maeve
Look he's almost off. Don't babies look peaceful when they are asleep?

Dawn
They do indeed.

Maeve
A couple of minutes. There he is away to fairyland.

Dawn
(Dawn finishes putting the flowers in the vase. She spots the card that goes with it, reads it and looks at Maeve. She is about to say something but decides against it).
There you go. Let's get started. What page were we on?

Maeve

(Maeve stands up) Change of plan.

Dawn

Sorry, I thought that you wanted/

Maeve

Time for his walk. Fresh air - essential for your constitution, isn't it? *(Picks up Dawn's anorak.)*

Dawn

Me?

Maeve

Aren't you his nanny?

Dawn

I don't think it's...

Maeve

(Hands Dawn her coat.) A servant is not required to think, is she baby?

Dawn

I'm happy to do a roleplay but only inside.

Maeve

Jaysus. Would you listen to that one? She thinks up to her to decide how she helps us. Shall we go back to those volunteer people and say "*Send another to play the part of Prism. This one's no good*"?

Dawn

Maeve I can only stay for an hour today. I don't think we've time for a walk.

Maeve

Who is this impertinent person, can we trust her to look after you at all?

Dawn

If you let me open the curtains you will see that it is a lovely day. Why don't we go into the back garden and sit in the sun? We can all have a cup of tea. What's the matter? Sure no one will see you out the back if that is what's worrying you.

Maeve

(Maeve pushes the pram towards Dawn) Prism take him for his walk immediately.

Dawn

(Dawn goes to pick up one of the chairs) Is it okay to put these outside?

Maeve

Did you not hear what I said.

Dawn

Maeve. The improvising is great fun, but I will have to go soon. We really need to get started now if we're to make any progress with those lines. Let's put the doll back in the pram

Maeve

What did you just say?

Dawn

We need to put the doll back in the pram so we can get on with the lines or we'll/

Maeve

(Louder) What did she call you? *(Something about Maeve's demeanour is scary; she is now only inches away from Dawn's face. Dawn*

pulls back). Why you good for nothing girl.
I'll *(Raises her arm)*

Dawn

Okay. Okay. I'll take the baby

Maeve

'I'll take the baby Mrs Moncrieff'. Who
pays you good money for the care of her
child!

Dawn

Mrs Moncrieff. I'll take the baby Mrs
Moncrieff

Maeve

Keep him on the pavement now - look out for
the horse and carriages. *(Dawn pushes the
pram to the side of the stage and the
lights go down on her. Maeve pours herself
a drink. She then removes a box out from
under a chair, takes the baby clothes out
and looks at them folds them. Dawn looks on
from the side of the stage. After a few
moments, whilst Maeve is still preoccupied
Dawn quietly pushes the pram across the
stage. Picks up her coat and leaves).*

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE 3 - *(Dawn enters to an empty stage
carrying a bag of groceries which she takes
to the kitchen. She crosses the room when
she is confronted by Maeve who has come on
stage pushing a pram. Maeve stands in front
of her barring her way. Maeve and Dawn
perform something of a 'dance' as Dawn
tries to get past.*

Dawn

May I? *(Steps to one side. Maeve pushes the
dolls pram towards her)* Please Maeve if I
could just. *(Steps to one side, Maeve*

*pushes the pram towards her). I need to ...
(Steps to one side, Maeve pushes the pram
further towards her. Dawn stands almost
motionless as she does not know what to do)*

Maeve

Where is he?

Dawn

?

Maeve

Me baby?

Dawn

Maeve, I'm Dawn. D'you not/

Maeve

Where is me baby?

Dawn

The doll/

Maeve

Me baby boy, me darling baby boy.

Dawn

I left him in the pram.

Maeve

You did not.

Dawn

I promise you I did. I can help you look
for him.

Maeve

You stole him. Empty your pockets!

Dawn

Maeve- why don't we?

Maeve

Kidnapper. Baby thief.

Dawn

Shall we just sit/ *(Dawn puts her arm
around Maeve. Maeve brushed her off quite
violently.)*

Maeve

Worse than King Herod you are.

Dawn

Let's just look/

Maeve

You took him. I saw you. Left the house
with him you did.

Dawn

I don't think that's true/

Maeve

Liar. Prism where is my baby?

Dawn

Maeve. Maeve. Listen to me.

Maeve

You sold him. Trading in stolen property
you are.

Dawn

No, I didn't

Maeve

Baby kidnapper.

Dawn

You're right. Prism did take the baby. She did leave the house with him and didn't come back and leaving poor Mrs Moncrieff upset, just like you are. But I'm not/

Maeve

My pram is empty. D'you hear me? Empty. **(Maeve is sobbing violently.)** I can hear him crying. I can hear him crying and I can't help him.

Dawn

(Dawn tries to put her arm around Maeve, which she rejects. Dawn stands and looks on helplessly whilst Maeve sobs). Oh Maeve, I'm so sorry. So very, very, very sorry. *(She spots the baby under a chair and hands it to Maeve who takes it).*

(LIGHTS DOWN)

SCENE 4. *(Dawn is at the front of the stage which for this scene represents the doorstep, holding an umbrella. She is talking to Maeve who is sitting 'queen like' on a chair on her stage. Maeve mimics Dawn as she speaks).*

Dawn

Maeve. Please. Unlock the door for me. It's raining cats and dogs out here. Maeve, can you hear me? Please open the door. **(Pause for the imagining of opening the door)** I'm getting drenched. You wouldn't want me to catch a cold, sure you wouldn't?

Maeve

Get an umbrella

Dawn

I've got one

Maeve

Then open it

Dawn

If you didn't want me to come back. You should have said. Open the door please.

Maeve

It's my house - who I let in is up to me

Dawn

Do you want me to catch pneumonia? Let me in so we can sort this out.

Maeve

I can't get out of me chair. Aaargh.

Dawn

Oh God are you hurt?

Maeve

Aaargh.

Dawn

D'you need an ambulance? Stay still, don't move whatever you do- just in case.

Maeve

Aaargh.

Dawn

Did you hear what I said?

Maeve

Aaargh, Aaargh.

Dawn

What have you done?

Maeve

I'm stuck. I can't move.

Dawn

Oh God! What's happened? Oh Jesus. You haven't fallen, have you?

Maeve

It's probably the glue I stuck to me arse.

Dawn

What are you talking about?

Maeve

The glue I stuck to me arse. To stop me getting out of me chair and upsetting the volunteers who come to see me in **ME OWN HOME**. I wouldn't want to do that even if it is **ME OWN HOME**

Dawn

You haven't really?

Maeve

What if I have? It's my arse, my chair, my own house

Dawn

Okay. I get it.

Maeve

Sending battalions of them people from the Gaelic League to tell me how I can behave in **ME OWN HOME**.

Dawn

It's the Celtic centre and I'd hardly describe Vince and Mary as 'battalions'.

Maeve

They annoyed me. You annoyed me.

Dawn

We were concerned about you.

Maeve

Nosey, feckin do-gooders. I don't tell you what to do in **YOUR OWN HOME**. Do I?

Dawn

No. No, you don't. Can I come in?

Maeve

Feckin bossy boots, you are. Telling people that there's something wrong with me head.

Dawn

Those weren't the words I used.

Maeve

So what feckin words did you use?

Dawn

I apologise, I shouldn't have said anything.

Maeve

So what did you say?

Dawn

'Confused', 'muddles things up a bit' when's she's had a drink

Maeve

I don't drink.

Dawn

If you say so.

Maeve

Not like you. I can smell it on your breath

Dawn

You're muddling me up with someone else.

Maeve

You're the one whose feckin confused.

Dawn

I was worried about you.

Maeve

"I was worried about you". Did I ask you to
be feckin worried about me?

Dawn

You seemed very unhappy the last two times.

Maeve

You lost me feckin property.

Dawn

I don't think/

Maeve

You did.

Dawn

If you're talking about your doll/

Maeve

I don't have any feckin dolls.

Dawn

(**Pause**) My mum had things that were important to her.

Maeve

Well, I hope she didn't give them to you to mind

Dawn

No, she didn't.

Maeve

Sensible woman.

Dawn

They were too precious to let out of her sight. She put them in a locked cupboard.

Maeve

I hope she hid the key.

Dawn

They were baby clothes. This was years ago - she'd no need for them

Maeve

You're allowed keep what you want **IN YOUR OWN HOUSE**

Dawn

I know. Would you like to know why she kept them?

Maeve

You're going to tell me anyway.

Dawn

She lost a baby. Her little girl who died when she was two days old. Mum kept all the clothes she'd worn or been given. They were precious to her, like the doll is to you

Maeve

You've dolls on the feckin brain. Prism's baby's not dead - just lost. Turned up after twenty odd years.

Dawn

I understand- may I come in?

Maeve

Not before I've locked all me stuff away. Don't want you pinching something from **ME OWN HOME**.

Dawn

Come on- it's raining.

Maeve

You can get rid of anything on Ebay.

Dawn

I don't want any of your things. I promise.

Maeve

It'll take me a while.

Dawn

Does that mean you want me to come back?
(**Pause**) Is that a 'yes' or a 'no'?

Maeve

When it is convenient for me.

Dawn

And when will that be?

Maeve

When I decide.

Dawn

I need a time.

Maeve

Come back to me in an hour and a quarter.
There's a bus shelter at the end of the
road.

Dawn

Maeve - come on.

Maeve

Not a minute before or after. Please be on
time. Else I might not let you **INTO ME OWN
HOME.** *(Maeve laughs to herself).*
(LIGHTS DOWN)

**SCENE 5: A very wet Dawn enters. She is
carrying a cake box and a paper bag
containing paper plates. She takes her coat
off and goes to the kitchen to look for a
plate**

Maeve

What's that?

Dawn

A cake. And these soggy things are paper
plates. They told me about volunteer
'number four.'

Maeve

She was Greek. Those fellas smash their plates rather than wash them.

Dawn

The Celtic centre didn't think much what you did.

Maeve

Took her thirty seconds to get from the front door to the sink and start washing up! Thirty seconds. Forty if you included getting the Marigolds on. Didn't even say "Good morning, Maeve" or "How are you?" I'd no time for her at all.

Dawn

Even so, was it really necessary to take the plates, she was about to wash and throw them in the bin whilst you sang a Demis Roussos song at the top of your voice?

Maeve

I'd swear she was on the arsetistic spectrum.

Dawn

Autistic.

Maeve

'Arsetistic'. People whose words come out of here.

Dawn

At least she came to see you.

Maeve

No one else would have her.

Dawn

Let's put the cake out.

Maeve

I don't like them volunteer people

Dawn

So I've noticed.

Maeve

They weren't going to let you come back.

Dawn

Volunteer safety.

Maeve

Did I really frighten you?

Dawn

That doll's pram is a mean weapon.

Maeve

I was only acting.

Dawn

Oh.

Maeve

That Mary is a bossy auld one.

Dawn

Actually she's a very nice person. So's
Vince.

Maeve

Feckin risk assessment. What does she think
I am - a fire door?

Dawn

She cares about us.

Maeve

She said that I was lucky to have you. Said
you hadn't put '*willing to befriend*' on
your list.

Dawn

That was good of her. I've brought my own
script.

Maeve

You wanted to help out at cultural events.
(**Pause**) Thanks...

Dawn

(**Opens her play script**) Which scene?

Maeve

...for coming back

Dawn

(**Offers her Lady Bracknell's Hat which she
refuses**) Your hat Lady Bracknell.

Maeve

I'm sorry for your trouble.

Dawn

?

Maeve

Losing your baby sister.

Dawn

Not quite.

Maeve

?

Dawn

They adopted me about a year after she died.

Maeve

Oh

Dawn

It's fine. 'Twas never a secret, I've known about it since I was five. Shall we get the kettle on? I've heard that Lady Bracknell doesn't like to be kept waiting.

Maeve

You don't have to stay if you don't want.

Dawn

Okay. Helping out at cultural events was at the top of the list. I'm new to London I wanted to meet people; but they didn't need anyone for that. Now do you want to be Lady Bracknell, or shall I read her part?

Maeve

Put it away. That Oscar Wilde has strange ideas.

Dawn

He's highly regarded.

Maeve

Feckin comedy - says who? Tell me about this old role play, that Sally woman did with your ma.

Dawn

I don't see what this has to do with/

Maeve

Ah do.

Dawn

(Pause) The baby dying so soon after being born. It was desperate for them both. Dad managed to carry on, but Mum's self-confidence was shattered. Adopting me was supposed to bring some light into her life but that didn't happen. Professionals tried everything but none of it worked. In the end the doctor prescribed a series of drama therapy sessions to see if they would help.

Maeve

Show me.

Dawn

I'm not a professional

Maeve

Good - they're all useless.

Dawn

It's about what you hope to achieve or change in your life. Mum hated going out of the house. She'd developed an irrational fear. So, the therapist got us to act out scenes about being in the street. Tried to show Mum that it wasn't necessarily scary.

Maeve

She might have had a point. There are all kinds of weird people out there.

Dawn

A few but not everyone.

Maeve

Ah but they could be

Dawn

Unlikely. Drama therapy helps you to consider all possibilities.

Maeve

Stops all those bad thoughts that keep going round in yer head?

Dawn

That's theory but listen I'm no expert.

Maeve

Worth a try anyway

Dawn

What is?

Maeve

Let's act out the play in the way I want it done.

Dawn

Rewrite 'The Importance of Being Ernest'?

Maeve

Yes.

Dawn

Isn't that like slaying a literary giant?

Maeve

I don't care what size he was - he didn't know a thing about women's feelings.

Dawn

He preferred to mix with men.

Maeve

It will be a play about when the baby was young when they called him Jack. Before he found out that he was really Ernest.

Dawn

You could call it 'The Importance of Being'.

Maeve

The play isn't complete without Jack's early years.

Dawn

Okay.

Maeve

We'll drink to its success. *(Picks up a bottle of wine and a glass)* No?

Dawn

It works better with a clear head.

Maeve

We'll wait till after so. Then we'll celebrate each new scene. We'll be like those film stars at the Oscar party.

Dawn

You direct. What would you like me to do?

Maeve

Shall we practice first? We'll do the afternoon tea scene that everyone knows. You be Laine the butler and I'll be Lady B. *(Dawn puts a tea towel over her arm and bows)* And don't forget to speak posh. *(Maeve sits down)*

Dawn

(In the manner of an Edwardian Music Hall announcer) Ladies and gentlemen. I give you the 'Importance of Being' by Miss Maeve Denehey. *(Assumes the voice of a butler)*.

Shall I pour M'Lady? One lump or two

Maeve

Neither. I have heard it said that sugar, far from sweetening a lady's nature rots her teeth.

Dawn

Your restraint is very commendable Lady Bracknell. May I be permitted to serve the cake?

Maeve

A small slice Laine. I have heard it said in the finest circles that it is possible to determine a lady's breeding from the size of her waist.

Dawn

The bigger the better is what I heard M'Lady. Where shall I cut it?

Maeve

Ah stop. *(Laughs)*. Would you look at us? *(Recovers)* There are no cucumber sandwiches

Dawn

No m'lady

Maeve

But I asked for them. Do I take it that you have had a problem remembering things? Or maybe you have been drinking?

Dawn

No M'Lady. No aberration whatsoever and certainly no liquor. There were simply no cucumbers to be had

Maeve

No cucumbers. *(They laugh)*

Dawn

Not even for ready money

Maeve

(In her own voice) That poor Mrs Wilde, wasn't she married to a right eejit? He couldn't tell the difference between tragedy and comedy and thought that you pay for your vegetables by cheque. This cake is lovely- did you make it yourself?

Dawn

Jackie from two doors down gave it to me. *(Maeve splutters)* Wasn't it kind of... Are you okay?

Maeve

That old witch.

Dawn

Who is nice enough to send you a cake!

Maeve

Spit it out. You don't know what's in it.

Dawn

Flour, butter, eggs, sugar. It's a Victoria sponge.

Maeve

You wouldn't know with that one.

Dawn

Really?

Maeve

She's a strange one alright.

Dawn

I don't think that's true.

Maeve

She was after complaining to the police about me.

Dawn

No, she wasn't.

Maeve

Then why were those nosey feckers from Social Services banging on me door? "*Maeve-are you in there? Are you alright Maeve?*" It was the police who told them to come.

Dawn

It wasn't.

Maeve

And how did she get so well informed about my business?

Dawn

How d'you think? The junk in the garden. The newspapers blocking the front door. She thought they were a fire risk. She only wanted to help.

Maeve

So you're discussing me behind me back now.
Are you talking with the whole street or
just Mrs Nosey Jackie Parker?

Dawn

Her name is O'Shea, and she was worried
about you.

Maeve

It's my land.

Dawn

Of course.

Maeve

No one can tell you what to do on your own
land.

Dawn

I know. It's just that

Maeve

What?

Dawn

Jackie said that things didn't used to be
like this. Up until two years ago your
garden was always lovely, your curtains
were always open and that you were a great
one for inviting people in. A fantastic
baker. Proper Mary Berry.

Maeve

Someone round her needs to be able to bake
a cake properly. Jesus - where's me bin?

Dawn

And that's why she's so worried.

Maeve

Did I ask her to worry about me?

Dawn

She just wondered if everything is alright

Maeve

It was before she tried to poison me.

Dawn

She thought that something might have happened a couple of years ago to make you unhappy. (**Maeve gets up and starts to clear the things away**) What's the matter? Have I said something wrong?

(LIGHTS DOWN)

SCENE 7: Dawn walks in to find Maeve standing purposely beside a huge cardboard box.

Dawn

What in the name of God is that?

Maeve

Get in there

Dawn

I'd prefer taxi to Parcelforce

Maeve

Go on - in

Dawn

If it's not a daft question

Maeve

We're starting again - Scene 1

Dawn

Cardboard boxes in Edwardian times?

Maeve

I wasn't there, were you?

Dawn

No

Maeve

Turn it round so. (*They manoeuvre the box so that it sits on its side with the doors pointing outwards*). There you are.

Dawn

What is it supposed to be?

Maeve

Jaysus you're no use at all. What do they have at Victoria station?

Dawn

Trains.

Maeve

Mary Mother of...in the feckin play.

Dawn

Lockers

Maeve

Exactly. Get in

Dawn

No.

Maeve

You're baby Jack- get in.

Dawn

I'm not sure ...

Maeve

Tell me how we're supposed to do the feckin scene if you don't get in.

Dawn

...that it is a good idea.

Maeve

Who's in charge of this?

Dawn

There are professionals who can help with/

Maeve

You repeating yourself?

Dawn

You know what I mean.

Maeve

Now I've Oscara Feckin Wilde in me front room. The young fella has a right for his story to be told.

Dawn

I don't disagree.

Maeve

Get in so.

Dawn

Maeve - we're talking about a baby being
left in a locker.

Maeve

Well done.

Dawn

You're asking me to play the part of a
baby.

Maeve

Jaysus there's no flies on you.

Dawn

Babies don't talk. (*Maeve glares at Dawn*)
D'you want me to get in a cardboard box
gurgle and cry?

Maeve

No. I want you to tell me what he was
thinking when he was put in the locker.

Dawn

Babies don't think- well not in words
anyway.

Maeve

Next, you'll be telling me that he didn't
know what was going on.

Dawn

He'd have been frightened of course.

Maeve

And been thinking about his ma.

Dawn

But not with words.

Maeve

What's that supposed to mean?

Dawn

I'm no expert on a baby's subconscious. All I know is that someone had to tell me that I had another mum, I don't remember her.

Maeve

(*Shouts*) Baby Jack wouldn't have forgotten about his real mother! He wouldn't. I know he wouldn't.

Dawn

Okay.

Maeve

Are you going to help me with this scene, or do I have to do it meself?

Dawn

Oh Maeve, this is painful stuff. Are you really sure that you want/

Maeve

Get hold of yourself- this is a feckin play, for which I need an actress not a bloody psychiatrist.

Dawn

If you say so but/

Maeve

I do. Now. Get in that box. (*Indicates once more that she would like her to get into the box*)

Dawn

On one condition.

Maeve

You'd make a saint weep.

Dawn

We change things around. (*Dawn picks up the baby doll, wraps it in a blanket and lays it gently in the box. Maeve reacts badly. Dawn responds by being firm*). Now the baby is in the locker. You be his voice- gurgle, cry whatever you want to do. I'm going to be Mr Cardew who finds him. Are you ready?

Maeve

(*Maeve is immobilised- there is a long pause*) D'you think they put babies in boxes?

Dawn

Why would anyone/

Maeve

But if there were lots of them being adopted at the same time, and if they were going on a long journey? Not cardboard ones- plastic- more like cots.

Dawn

Which babies?

Maeve

Would they be left with no one to mind them? Could someone have come along and hurt one of them and no one noticed? That could happen if there were lots of them.

Dawn

I think we should stop.

Maeve

Get out of me way. I'll do the scene on me own if you won't help me *(Dawn reluctantly moves over towards the box and picks the doll up which she nurses)*.

Dawn

Hello little fella. Been left on your own, have you? Sure, that won't do at all will it? I bet there some mammy somewhere missing you like crazy- broken hearted so she is. So, so, sad, she'll be crying herself to sleep so she will. *(Dawn walks over and puts her arm around Maeve and hands the doll)* You're Mr Cardew now. I'll be the station master.

(In station master voice) Hello Mr Cardew. I was just walking past, and I noticed you with that little baby. He's been abandoned, hasn't he? That's awful for the mother and awful for the child. We'll have to make sure that he gets the very best care that we can give him. I know that is what his mother would want for him until she finds him again which I'm sure she will. *(Maeve weeps into the baby dolls body)*.

(LIGHTS DOWN)

SCENE 8. (Dawn and Maeve are standing on the floor. Maeve is holding a parcel.)

Dawn

I've two parts?

Maeve

The Postman and Mr Cardew.

Dawn

Oh.

Maeve

I'm Baby Jack well more Jack the lad. Today is his sixth birthday. Knock on the door, give me the parcel, and then come back as Mr Cardew his guardian.

Dawn

(Knocks) Hello. Postman. Anyone at home?

Maeve

I am.

Dawn

You must be Jack the birthday boy. This big parcel is for you. Look at the label- there's your name.

Maeve

Thank you.

Dawn

Goodbye young Jack.

Maeve

Goodbye. **(Indicates for Dawn to go out and come back in again)**

Dawn

Hello Jack. What have you there?

Maeve

Someone sent me this parcel. Look it is a toy train. I think that it is the finest train in the land - look at the engine. It must go very fast don't you think?

Dawn

Indeed. Now do we know the name of the kind person who gave it to you?

Maeve

No.

Dawn

Let's see if we can find out. Now did it come with a note or a card?

Maeve

I can't see one.

Dawn

Well that's a mystery.

Maeve

I know who will have sent it me. Me mammy.

Dawn

Now Jack.

Maeve

Yes. That's it. My mammy of all people will know the date I was born.

Dawn

Now Jack. What did I tell you?

Maeve

I can't remember

Dawn

It's best if you don't think about your
mother.

Maeve

Why not?

Dawn

Because it is not good for you. **(Pause)**
Maeve do we have to do this?

Maeve

What the feck does '*not good for you mean*'?

Dawn

It's what they told children until
recently.

Maeve

?

Dawn

Those who've been adopted. Not to think
about... you know

Maeve

That Cardew fella would've told Jack not to
think about his mammy?

Dawn

I am sure that he had the best of
intentions.

Maeve

Sure, what do you know about them Edwardian times? Do it again and do it properly.

Dawn

Maeve this really isn't a good/

Maeve

D'you hear what I said? We'll start again and this time do it properly. (*Indicates that she should go off the stage and come back on again*)

Dawn

Hello Jack. What's that?

Maeve

A toy train. Look

Dawn

That is a lovely toy. Who sent it to you?

Maeve

I don't know

Dawn

Let's see if we can find out. Now did it come with a note or a card?

Maeve

There's nothing here.

Dawn

Well that's a mystery.

Maeve

No it isn't.

Dawn

What do you mean? (*Maeve glares at her*)
Young Jack.

Maeve

I think I know who sent it.

Dawn

Who?

Maeve

Guess.

Dawn

Santa Claus

Maeve

Silly Mr Cardew, it is not Christmas. It is my birthday. And who knows the date of my birthday? Me ma does. She has sent me the train that she will come and fetch me in.

Dawn

I think that we better take that away
until/

Maeve

No.

Dawn

What about all the other lovely presents
you've been given?

Maeve

I want that one.

Dawn

You're being very silly.

Maeve

Give it me back. *(Maeve goes to bite Dawn)*

Dawn

Oi

Maeve

It's his feckin train.

Dawn

Honesty is crucial in role plays.

Maeve

How do you know? You're not a professional.

Dawn

Until very recently people thought that children should move on, that it wasn't good for them to dwell on the past.

Maeve

Well, that was now, and this is back then.

Dawn

It still applies. Look, these roleplays-are you sure?

Maeve

The door is there - if you don't want to do it *(LIGHTS DOWN)*

SCENE 8- *(Maeve is standing on the stage. Dawn walks in carrying a recycling bag. Maeve is wearing a top hat. She puts a floppy hat on Dawn's head)*

Dawn

Wedding or funeral?

Maeve

Time for Jack to go to school. We're at Eton College. Best school in the country. I've decided to send him there.

Dawn

Very smart.

Maeve

Prince William, David Cameron and that Boris Karloff fella are all old boys.

Dawn

Johnstone is the politician. Karloff's the actor who played Frankenstein

Maeve

Who cares? One steals your money and the other steals your blood. Here **(Hands Dawn a floppy hat)**. They all went there and a top hat is part of the uniform

Dawn

But this/

Maeve

The only thing they had on Ebay. Here. **(Maeve opens the recycling bag full of newspaper)** Stuff it with that. **(Dawn does as she is bid)**. Now. Eton College- a new school year and baby Jack has arrived. Only he's not a baby anymore- more like thirteen

Dawn

And we're in?

Maeve
The Fandangle

Dawn
Quadrangle

Maeve
That's it. Fees are £37,002. And that's before you start paying for the uniform. And you must sign a register, so you'll be needing a quill pen for that. I'm Algernon. He's in the year above. Now- think of somewhere Jack might be and start.

Dawn
(Dawn starts running across the stage holding onto her hat. In Jack voice) Aagh, aagh, aagh, Get off me. Give it back. Leave me alone.

Maeve
(In normal voice) I haven't touched you

Dawn
Not you. It's my hat. The other boys are taking the micky out of me. Trying to pull it off my head just because I am a new boy.

Maeve
Baby Jack's getting bullied?

Dawn
Mildly. They're only throwing his school hat around the playground

Maeve
I couldn't bear it if I thought that he'd be upset. Have mine.

Dawn

Let him put up with it. Kids get teased all
the time.

Maeve

Please *(Maeve and Dawn exchange hats)*

Dawn

Splutter, sputter, splutter. Stop it

Maeve

What are they doing to him now?

Dawn

Putting his head down the toilet.

Maeve

He's just arrived, and they are trying to
kill him. What'll we do?

Dawn

It's called 'initiation rites'- it's what
they do at these schools. He'll get over
it.

Maeve

But this is the finest school in the
country. And I've sent him there. Jesus
he'll have to leave.

Dawn

But it's only day one.

Maeve

D'you think I'll get a refund for his
uniform? It's had little or no wear.

Dawn

(Jack's Voice) Oh I say. There's a master!
Sir, sir. Look at what these boys are doing
to me. *(Normal Voice)* There you go the
teacher's taken them to his office. He'll
whip them good and proper. Serves them
right.

Maeve

Oh God I'm after sending baby Jack to a
school where they thrash lads

Dawn

Don't worry, he's not the one in trouble

Maeve

Would they do that to him if he was bold?

Dawn

That's what happened in these schools

Maeve

Jaysus. Rich people have no sense at all,
paying good money to for their children to
get bullied and beaten.

Dawn

It's supposed to make them good leaders.

Maeve

Explains a lot about the laws they make.
(The role play loses impetus and fades).

Dawn

Jack seems very real to you.

Maeve

It's me talent for the acting.

Dawn

I know. I just wondered if.

Maeve

If what?

Dawn

Some actors base their characters on real people. I just wondered where you got your ideas for baby Jack from.

Maeve

Are we going to carry on with this scene or not?

Dawn

If that is what you want.

Maeve

Wasn't I after getting you the hat? **(Walks around the stage with a swagger)** I'll start. Why hello? I say- aren't you the new boy?

Dawn

Yes. Just arrived.

Maeve

I thought so. New hat. **(Puts out his hand)**
Algernon- Algernon Moncrieff.

Dawn

Jack Worthing.

Maeve

I've never heard of the Worthings before.
Where do your people live?

Dawn

I have no idea.

Maeve

What kind of a fella does not know where
his family lives?

Dawn

I'm afraid that I lost my family, or rather
they lost me.

Maeve

Good lord. That's unfortunate. Do tell.

Dawn

I was found in a locker at a London
terminus, Victoria Station to be exact.

Maeve

What a 'to do'.

Dawn

Indeed.

Maeve

What in the world would cause them to leave
you there?

Dawn

I can only think that they had a journey
planned and they placed me in the locker
for safe keeping whilst they went to
purchase their tickets. And in the
excitement of it all forgot about me.

Maeve

Good Lord.

Dawn

You won't tell anyone will you? It's just that... well, when the boys at my prep school found out what my parents had done. Well, they ... they tried to lock me in my trunk at the end of the school term. Said that the best place for me to spend the schools hols was the left luggage office at Waterloo.

Maeve

They didn't?

Dawn

It's role play.

Maeve

'Twas a joke- wasn't it?

Dawn

The Edwardians might have been strict with their children but I'm sure that even they didn't use railway lockers as substitutes for babysitters.

Maeve

How d'you know?

Dawn

I don't. I'm making it up.

Maeve

Babies that went on long journey- they wouldn't ever be left on their own would they?

Dawn

(Pause). Maeve, about this baby Jack.

Maeve

What?

Dawn

You care a lot about him- like you would a real baby.

Maeve

Get over yourself. He's a character in the feckin play.

Dawn

That's all.

Maeve

You're awful serious today.

Maeve

(In Algernon's voice) Jack, Jack. Come into my study, why don't you. I will order crumpets and cakes and all sorts of delicious things for our tea. We can be friends for life. *(In her own voice)* The boys at Eton have their own rooms. And their own butlers. How about that?

Dawn

How about that indeed?

(LIGHTS DOWN)

SCENE - 9. *(Dawn and Maeve are sitting on the stage, side by side. They each have a duster handle on which is tied a piece of string.)*

Dawn

(She puts her hand on her hips and sniffs the morning air) I say Algie, what a

spiffing morning. Just the day for a
fishing trip. What ho. (*She casts off*)

Maeve

Would you mind what you're doing with that
fishing line yourself.

Dawn

Sorry old bean- just casting off

Maeve

Tis meself who'll end up swimming wi' the
fishes if you're not careful.

Dawn

Sorry.

Maeve

That's if they don't find me floating on
top of the water.

Dawn

(*Bows in apology*)

Maeve

I have an important social engagement
tonight and it is not done for a gentleman
to be seen looking dishevelled.

Dawn

Indeed it is not.

Maeve

Wouldn't do at all. I say Jack old boy-
have you caught anything yet?

Dawn

Thought I felt a tickle on my line a moment ago but no luck. You?

Maeve

Nothing. Those fish are pure hungry. Where did you put the bait?

Dawn

Over there in that small box.

Maeve

Why Jack- isn't that your old brown bag I on the riverbank? What made you bring it with you?

Dawn

You'll think me rather strange, but I take it with me wherever I go. Laine hides it when I come to your house.

Maeve

Have you hit on hard times old man?

Dawn

No at all. It's just that..

Maeve

What old boy?

Dawn

I fear that you will think me very stupid if I tell you.

Maeve

Spit it out- why don't you.

Dawn

Remember on my first day at Eton when I told you that I had lost my family. Well, this is the bag that my nanny put me in before she left me in that locker at a London station.

Maeve

I say. That was the queerest thing to do.

Dawn

I fear that her mind was disturbed at the time. I would hate to think that she considered this normal behaviour for a nanny. One is so helpless when one is a child, so dependent on the kindness of one's elders.

Maeve

Indeed. This bag brings you so much sadness. Why not throw it away?

Dawn

Algie you are my dearest friend which is why I am going to tell you something that I have never told anyone else.

Maeve

Pray dear boy- what is it.

Dawn

Truth is Algie that I can never give this bag away because... because it is the only thing, I have that I think my mother may have touched.

Maeve

It was your mother who gave it to your nanny?

Dawn

Where else would a servant get such a high-quality bag from? This is my only connection to her. *(Pause. Maeve stays silent)* Other boys know the smell or the feel of their mother but I am not like other boys, I must imagine a mother's loving touch through some inanimate object. *(Dawn picks up the bag and caresses it)*. Even if it is a tatty old bag. *(Maeve stays silent)*. Your turn.

Maeve

Jack would hang onto the bag because his ma had touched it?

Dawn

If that was the only thing he had - yes

Maeve

The touch of her on the leather handle-that would be enough?

Dawn

I think so.

Maeve

So, he'd keep anything his mammy had sent him even if he couldn't remember her?

Dawn

It would depend on the son of course. But I would say so, yes.

Maeve

You sound terrible certain.

Dawn

I suppose I am.

Maeve

?

Dawn

I've a photo of me when I was a few days old, it is in a cheap plastic photo frame. Dad said that my birth mum wanted to keep it but that the adoption people took it from her.

Maeve

God love her.

Dawn

Don't laugh but when I was growing up I used to hold it against my cheek just there, just because she did. Daft - but there you go. I like to think she kissed it before she handed it over.

Maeve

'Birth mother'. Who made up that feckin stupid title? Makes us sound like breeding cows. Given birth? Away back to the pasture wi' you. Shut up, put yer head down and eat the grass and forget about your calf.

Dawn

It's just jargon.

Maeve

Thank God you've the photo anyway. Would you think me terrible nosey if I asked you something?

Dawn

Yes, I did.

Maeve

And?

Dawn

I'd left it too late. Spent too many years
worrying about whether I'd be a
disappointment to her, or her to me. By the
time I plucked up courage. It was, well...
We never met.

Maeve

Ah jay.

Dawn

The staff in the hostel had tried to revive
her but...

Maeve

Holy Mother of...

Dawn

Wasn't the first time apparently.

Maeve

The sadness of losing you would've torn the
will to live out of her.

Dawn

I wish. That accolade belongs to the drugs
she chose to pump into her veins or snort
up her nose.

Maeve

Because she needed to kill the pain.

Dawn

And I'd be there every Christmas- alone in

me bedroom, with the photo frame against my
cheek hoping that she hadn't forgotten me.

Maeve

She'd be thinking of nothing else. I
promise ye

Dawn

You're being kind, but somehow, I don't
think that 'cold turkey' meant Stephen's
Day lunch to her.

Maeve

*(After a moment of silence Maeve picks up
the bottle of wine and pours Dawn a glass)*
Here. *(Dawn takes the glass but does not
drink it)*

Dawn

Sorry.

Maeve

Don't be daft girl. *(Pours herself a drink)*

Dawn

We've come a long way from old Ernest.

Maeve

Dawn.

Dawn

What?

Maeve

The baby's mother.

Dawn

Mrs Moncrieff

Maeve

Do you think she ever thought that she was going a bit, you know 'do lally' sometimes?

Dawn

Out of her bloody mind I imagine. Who could blame her? (**LIGHTS DOWN**)

SCENE 10- (Maeve and Dawn on stage. Dawn has her outdoor clothes on. Maeve is holding a knife that she is pointing at her stomach. She has been drinking heavily)

Dawn

Jesus. Maeve.

Maeve

Childless bitches- thieves

Dawn

What's happened?

Maeve

Whores. Barren whores

Dawn

Who are?

Maeve

Them. You. Stealing my baby

Dawn

I haven't.

Maeve

Liar.

Dawn

Maeve please- let's put the knife down.

Maeve

Why?

Dawn

Because.

Maeve

Feck.

Dawn

We don't want anyone to get hurt- do we now?

Maeve

(Mimics) We don't want anyone to get hurt- do we now? Am I pointing this at you?

Dawn

No, but

Maeve

Then it's not a crime. Feck off. You piece of... You ...substitute

Dawn

What have I done?

Maeve

Feckin replacement - that's all you are

Dawn

Me?

Maeve

No the queen of feckin England

Dawn

Tell me what's wrong.

Maeve

Substitutes. Replacements. Stand in.
Reserves.

Dawn

This is about me being adopted?

Maeve

They can't have children themselves, so no
one else can. They stole my child.

Dawn

Let me have the knife.

Maeve

No.

Dawn

Do you really want to hurt yourself?

Maeve

Yes.

Dawn

You don't mean that.

Maeve

I'm going to cut the pain out.

Dawn

Maeve please.

Maeve

It's me own body.

Dawn

It is.

Maeve

So feck off- it's nothing to do wi' you.

Dawn

There was a baby once wasn't there? You were worrying about baby Jack is because you've been worrying about your own child.

Maeve

(A long pause) My body- my baby but they wouldn't let me keep it.

Dawn

That's awful.

Maeve

There's no feckin word for... for this pain. Sometimes I think I can't breathe.

Dawn

Tell me where it hurts.

Maeve

(Maeve shakes her head) Why? You can't make it go away.

Dawn

Here? Or here? *(Points to her stomach and heart)*

Maeve

I've had enough. I'm going to cut it out
now.

Dawn

(Dawn ill-advisedly tries to grab the knife)

Maeve

Don't be putting yourself in danger now.

Dawn

It hurts here- right- just inside - where
your baby grew- where you could feel him.
Sometimes when the pain is bad you can feel
him kick, even though you know that he is
not there. Nearly drives you mad.

Maeve

'Twas my own body, my own baby. Mine. Not
theirs to take. *(Puts her shaking hand
towards Dawn, the knife drops. Dawn takes
her hand)*

Dawn

You placed it there, didn't you? Just
there to feel him growing inside you.

Maeve

Me heart's broken.

Dawn

All that hurt and sorrow inside your body.
Sometimes it gets too much.

Maeve

(Places her hand on her breast) There.

Dawn

Where you laid him as a new-born. So
precious these moments.

Maeve

Gone - they took him. They took my baby.
And they put on plays to laugh at us.
'Prism where is that baby'?

Dawn

A mother should have all time in the world
with her baby. But you had so little.

Maeve

They stole him.

Dawn

I'm sorry.

Maeve

America- they sent him to America- to a
good family they said.

Dawn

And you miss him so bad.

Maeve

A family wi' money but he could still get
hurt. All the money in the world and I
can't protect him.

Dawn

I know.

Maeve

But I'd have been good to him.

Dawn

I know.

Maeve

Every morning I...

Dawn

I know.

Maeve

You can't understand.

Dawn

May be a little.

Maeve

You've never had a child.

Dawn

No but my mum lost one. I saw what it did
to her.

Maeve

Not the same.

Dawn

I know. But you've done well. Carried on.
Kept going. Not like my ma or my foster
mother.

Maeve

I've done well?

Dawn

Believe it. I used come home from school
and find my foster mum still in her
dressing gown, curtains drawn ashtray full
of butts. And you know about my real ma.

Maeve

I get dressed. Everyday.

Dawn

I know. And you had a job didn't you? Until a couple of years ago. I saw the photos of you with everyone at the garden centre.

Maeve

Your ma didn't bother?

Dawn

(Shakes her head). Couldn't manage that, or even ask me what kind of day I'd had at school.

Maeve

Not interested in how you were getting on.

Dawn

Not interested in anything. Not as strong as you.

Maeve

I don't feel strong.

Dawn

Not now. But you will again.

Maeve

Will I?

Dawn

It's just a very, very bad day. Shall I tell you what one of my neighbours said once?

Maeve

?

Dawn

It was on a day, like the one that you are having now.

Maeve

?

Dawn

"Och Dawn, we're a long way from the troubles here. But do you know I sometime think that it might have been better if the men in balaclavas had blown the wee one away. At least that way she'd have someone to blame". Imagine, telling a child that.

Maeve

Some people have no cop on.

Dawn

Natural causes. No one to blame except God.

Maeve

It was wrong to send him so far away.

Dawn

When did you last see your boy?

Maeve

Fifty years ago. It's his birthday today.
(Puts the knife down. Takes an envelope out from inside her bra and hands it to Dawn).

Dawn

That's an American stamp. *(Maeve hands Dawn the letter).*

Dawn

This is from your son?

Maeve

The one they stole from me.

Dawn

The postmark is two years old.

Maeve

Better if he'd ignored me altogether.

Dawn

How long did it take you find him?

Maeve

Too feckin long - not feckin long enough.

Dawn

(Dawn reads the first part the letter and stops). I'm so sorry.

Maeve

Desperate. Broke me feckin heart.

Dawn

(Carries on reading) Hang on. When did you last read this?

Maeve

?

Dawn

It's just that.

Maeve

What?

Dawn

I might be reading this wrong but I'm not sure if... Doesn't matter.

Maeve

You've a terrible habit of not finishing your sentences.

Dawn

Have you read to the end?

Maeve

The first three lines tell me all that I need to know. He doesn't want his mam in his life. Couldn't read anymore.

Dawn

This letter is two years old. Maybe now is the time. Here, read the last paragraph **(Maeve shakes her head)** *"Well as I say, that is the situation now but my mother is old so who knows, maybe my circumstances will be different in the future. My best wishes, Yours J Fitzgibbon Esq."*

Maeve

J Fitzgibbon Esquire. What kind of a name is that?

Dawn

I would try reading it form the top.

Maeve

(Reads the letter which explains that his parents have been very kind to him. His father has just passed away and his mother is old and frail and needs his care.) So?

Dawn
(Picks up the envelope.) Posted two years ago.

Maeve
?

Dawn
He's probably got over his dad's death by now and his mum does sound very frail. What if she is no longer around?

Maeve
?

Dawn
It's a huge risk. *(Pause)* But sometimes-things can and do change. Think carefully, really carefully before you do anything. You've been hurt enough already.

Maeve
You forget Prism - that's my baby.

(LIGHTS DOWN)

SCENE 11. (Maeve is sitting on a chair applying her makeup She is wearing a nice frock. Dawn walks in)

Dawn
Hey look at you. Fabu-lo- so.

Maeve
D'you think it's suitable? For the occasion like.

Dawn

The colour's great on you. Makes you look
twenty years younger

Maeve

Ah stop. Else I'll never be able to get me
head through that door.

Dawn

How are you feeling?

Maeve

Me stomach's thinks it's a feckin spin
dryer. That's when it doesn't think that
it's a washing machine- chunkety, chunk,
chunk. Oh God

Dawn

I'll get a bowl.

Maeve

I'll be grand- just haven't been this
nervous for ages.

Dawn

Room looks lovely.

Maeve

I'd the windows cleaned.

Dawn

So, I noticed.

Maeve

And I paid a fella to do a bit of weeding.

Dawn

A few plants and it'll/

Maeve

Look like Kew Gardens.

Dawn

I was going to say Buckingham Palace.

Maeve

I just want the place to be the way I'd
have it, if he was here.

Dawn

He'd be flattered by the amount of care and
attention.

Maeve

J Fitzgibbon Esq. (*Maeve looks at her
watch*) Jaysus to think I gave birth to an
Esquire.

Dawn

Just phone calls in the first instance.

Maeve

Don't I know that?

Dawn

Then we'll move onto Skype.

Maeve

?

Dawn

The ones I told you about, calls you make
over the computer. Where you can see the
person who you're talking to on your
screen. You've the room ready for those
anyway.

Maeve

I want to hold him not see him. What time
is it?

Dawn

Three minutes past four London. Three
minutes past 8am San Francisco time.

Maeve

Sounds so far away.

Dawn

It is.

Maeve

All those years lost. Oh Dawn. What if I
can't speak?

Dawn

You'll be fine. Remember he's only got five
minutes.

Maeve

*(Maeve gets up and walks across the room.
Hovers. Pause)* What's the time?

Dawn

A minute later than it was when you last
asked.

Maeve

Oh God he's forgotten.

Dawn

He'll just be getting up.

Maeve

He should be dressed by now.

Dawn

It's only eight o'clock.

Maeve

But I'm an early riser. Oh, Dawn what if he's taken after the Yanks and not me?

Dawn

Whose blood is in his veins?

Maeve

I don't like the name Jim at all.

Dawn

The Fitzgibbons obviously did.

Maeve

Joseph is much nicer. D'you think he's married?

Dawn

You might be a granny.

Maeve

Twouldn't that be great. Oh God.

Dawn

Now what?

Maeve

What if he doesn't like me and won't let me see the kids?

Dawn

Let's just take one thing at a time.

Maeve

Do you think he might be angry with me?

Dawn

?

Maeve

For not having the money to go looking for
him in America.

Dawn

It's a big country, he'll understand.

Maeve

Oh Jaynee.

Dawn

What?

Maeve

What if they've brought him up not to be
like Jesus? He might think I'm a whore.

Dawn

?

Maeve

A tart. A floozy. One of those young ones
who'd dropped their knickers for any man.

Dawn

I'm sure he/

Maeve

Only it wasn't like that. I'd never, not
before. Dermot was my first. I didn't like
to say 'no' what with him being our Kevin's
teacher and playing the part of Eamon de

Valera in the anniversary play. (*Maeve is interrupted by the phone ringing.*) Oh God—
d'you think that's him? (*The phone carries on ringing*)

Dawn

Are you going to answer that? (*The phone carries on ringing*) He'll ring off if you don't. (*Dawn picks up the phone*) Yes, it is. Hang on a sec (*Hands Maeve the phone*)

Maeve

Hello. Hello. It's Maeve. That's right—
your Irish mam. Nice to talk to you too.
(*Curtain down*)

THE END