

OUR LITTLE SECRET

A play

by

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ACT I SCENE 1

A ROOM. NOT SHABBY, ALTHOUGH SPARSELY FURNISHED. THERE IS A LARGE, OLD-FASHIONED LEATHER-TOPPED DESK AND A HIGH-BACKED SWIVEL-CHAIR BEHIND IT. ON THE DESK THERE ARE A READING LIGHT AND A BUSH RADIO. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM THERE IS A BIG WOODEN ARMCHAIR. THERE ARE BOOKCASES LINING MOST OF THE WALL-SPACE. ONE SHELF CONTAINS REFERENCE BOOKS: DICTIONARIES, THESAURUS, ENCYCLOPAEDIAS ETC. ALL THE OTHER SHELVES ARE PILED WITH NEWSPAPERS, NEATLY STACKED AND METICULOUSLY LABELLED. THE SHELVES ARE FULL, SO THERE ARE PILES OF NEWSPAPERS ON THE FLOOR ALL ROUND THE DESK, AND AT THE FOOT OF THE BOOKCASES. THE ROOM IS PILED HIGH, BUT NEAT AND CLEAN. ARRANGED BEHIND THE ARMCHAIR ARE THREE LARGE HESSIAN SACKS. A FOURTH ONE IS BESIDE IT. THEY ARE ALL STRONGLY FASTENED AT THE TOP.

UPSTAGE THERE IS A DOOR LEADING TO A PASSAGEWAY AND THE REST OF THE HOUSE. THE DOOR IS CLOSED. LEANING AGAINST THE WALL BESIDE THE DOOR THERE IS AN OLD, WELL-LOVED CRICKET BAT. ON THE ARMCHAIR SIDE OF THE ROOM THERE IS A SMALL WINDOW. THE CURTAINS ARE HALF-DRAWN AND SOME WEAK LATE-AFTERNOON AUTUMN LIGHT SPILLS THROUGH.

A DOOR SLAMS OFF.

THE ONSTAGE DOOR OPENS.

ENTER CONNOLLY. HE OPENS THE DOOR WIDE, AND LEAVES IT OPEN, CONCEALING THE CRICKET BAT.

HE'S A TALL, BULKY MAN, NEATLY DRESSED IN OVERCOAT AND SCARF. HE CARRIES A LARGE PILE OF NEWSPAPERS. HE PUTS THEM DOWN ON THE DESK AND SHIVERS.

CONNOLLY: Chilly.

HE WALKS OVER TO THE WINDOW AND CLOSES THE CURTAINS COMPLETELY. HE RETURNS TO THE DESK AND SWITCHES ON THE READING LAMP.

CONNOLLY: The wettest summer since records began, and now, apparently, it's autumn.

HE SITS DOWN AND BEGINS SORTING THROUGH HIS NEW PILE OF PAPERS.

CONNOLLY: According to the newspapers, lack of exposure to sunshine leads to depression, which, apparently is why Scandinavians are prone to doing themselves in despite their high standards of living. And yet, for weeks at a time, the sun never sets. Here, of course, it's just grey all year round. Especially this year. A drab winter, followed by a drab spring and summer, and now a drab autumn. Still. Look on the bright side. At least no one will be suffering from seasonal affective disorder this year. How's that for a silver lining?

PAUSE.

CONNOLLY: You're in all the papers. You'll be glad to know. All the ones that count. Front pages, mostly. Not the posh ones. Buried in the inside pages, the ones that have got you. Still, five front pages. I hope that makes you proud. Acres of free publicity. All publicity is good publicity, what do you think? I suspect, all things considered, that that isn't true. Not been so good for you.

PAUSE. HE LEAFS THROUGH SOME OF THE PAPERS.

CONNOLLY: You'll laugh at some of this. One thinks you're in hiding at your mother's. They obviously haven't seen how small her house is. This one says you've gone to an ashram to find yourself. And this fella is convinced that you've slipped away to wed your childhood sweetheart in a secret ceremony on a Caribbean paradise island hideaway. Brilliant. Anyone can write for the posh papers, but to come up with that level of imbecility takes brains.

PAUSE.

CONNOLLY: They're in for a shock when they find out where you really are.

PAUSE.

CONNOLLY: If they find out.

PAUSE.

CONNOLLY: Are you listening to me?

SILENCE.

CONNOLLY GETS UP AND QUIETLY CLOSSES THE DOOR, REVEALING THE CRICKET BAT, WHICH HE PICKS UP. HE WALKS OVER TO THE SACK BESIDE THE ARMCHAIR AND WALLOPS IT WITH THE BAT.

CONNOLLY: I said, 'Are you listening to me?'

ROBINSON: (INSIDE THE SACK.) Ow! Fucking hell. What are you..For fuck's sake.

CONNOLLY: I've been trying to keep you abreast of developments. The least you could do is show some manners and pay attention. I'm not having you accuse me of not keeping you in the loop.

ROBINSON: What?

CONNOLLY: Openness and honesty. How much did you hear? Of what I just said.

ROBINSON: Some.

CONNOLLY: There! We're getting somewhere.

ROBINSON SUDDENLY STARTS STRUGGLING VIOLENTLY IN THE SACK.

ROBINSON: Fucking get me out of here! What the fuck are you doing?

CONNOLLY: Well, the next thing I'm going to do, if you keep swearing at me, is hit you again.

ROBINSON: Please.

CONNOLLY: I'm using a cricket bat, by the way. Openness and honesty!

ROBINSON: You fucking crazy bastard.

CONNOLLY: I can quite understand why you might think that, but really, you want to be more careful. People can be very sensitive about such things. It doesn't bother me, of course, because I know I'm not crazy. But supposing I was; I imagine I'd be fairly touchy on the subject. So shall we agree? And no more swearing.

ROBINSON: Fuck off.

CONNOLLY: The finest English willow. Handmade. She's never let me down. We learned to play together. I remember, there was a time in the Eighties, when they experimented with bats made from aluminium. Remember that? Never caught on, thank goodness. Awful. No, it's willow or nothing. When you hit the ball right on the meat of the bat; there's no feeling like it. You can do a surprising amount of damage with very little effort.

HE HITS THE SACK AGAIN.

ROBINSON: Ow! Fuck. For fuck's sake.

CONNOLLY: Do you see? Didn't even need to follow through.

ROBINSON: Fuck. Please. Who are you? Why are you doing this?

CONNOLLY: Which of those would you like me to answer first?

ROBINSON: Who are you?

CONNOLLY: I'm not telling you.

ROBINSON: For fuck's sake. Please. I think you've broken my arm.

CONNOLLY: Oh dear. Really? Oh. Better have a look-see.

HE STARTS GENTLY PRESSING THE SACK.

CONNOLLY: Here? Here? Does it hurt here? What about here?

ROBINSON: Ow! Fuck! Fuck!

CONNOLLY STRAIGHTENS UP AND WHACKS THE SPOT WITH THE BAT.

ROBINSON: Ow! Jesus Christ! Fucking hell!

CONNOLLY: I think you're right.

ROBINSON: Oh, Jesus.

CONNOLLY: Oh, do stop whimpering. Really. Save it. We've hardly started, believe me.

ROBINSON: Please let me out of here. I can't breathe.

CONNOLLY: Dear God. Do you ever stop complaining? (HE PUTS ON A WHINY VOICE.) My arm hurts! I'm too hot!

ROBINSON: Please.

CONNOLLY: Oh, for God's sake. Well, I suppose it can't hurt. In the long run.

HE STARTS TO UNFASTEN THE SACK.

CONNOLLY: Only your head, mind. I'm not stupid.

HE OPENS THE TOP OF THE SACK AND UNCOVERS ROBINSON'S HEAD, REFASTENING IT ROUND HIS NECK. HE SITS AT THE DESK AND THE TWO MEN FACE EACH OTHER. ROBINSON'S FACE IS BLOODY, SWOLLEN AND BRUISED.

CONNOLLY: Welcome to my little home, Mr Robinson. I don't think I've ever played host to such a famous man before. Certainly not under these circumstances. I daresay this is a first for you, as well.

PAUSE.

CONNOLLY: I wish it could have been different, Mr Robinson, really I do. I would have been pleased to welcome you into my home in happier times. I was prepared to give you the benefit of the doubt. You see, I've been watching you, Mr Robinson. I know all about you. How naïve I was. I never for a second dreamt what you would be capable of. Never for a second. And so I had no choice. I was compelled to act.

PAUSE.

CONNOLLY: I wish you could see your face. Unrecognizable. I mean, obviously, I know it's you, but, quite honestly, if someone else had found you in there, I don't think they'd have had a clue, famous as you are. Even with your boat race all over the front pages.

HE LOOKS AT SOME OF THEM.

CONNOLLY: You were a handsome chap, if you don't mind me saying. Not sure you'll ever get back to that. You've taken quite a pasting.

PAUSE.

CONNOLLY: Still. Could be worse. To be quite candid, it's a relief to be talking to you. I thought I'd overdone it. Until you woke up this morning, I thought I'd landed myself with a corpse, and that wasn't my intention at all. I want you alive. Don't want to let you off the hook.

ROBINSON: Let me off the hook?

CONNOLLY: When I saw you in that bar, laughing and joking, and having a merry time with your friends, I just..I mean it was so blatant, so shamelessly out in the open. I wanted to make you pay a proper price.

ROBINSON: What?

CONNOLLY: So I waited for you. Followed you in my car. You'd had a bit to drink, and you weren't expecting it, so it wasn't hard. I forced some tablets down you, keep you quiet for a bit. Don't worry. They're perfectly safe. I use them when I can't sleep. They certainly worked on you. Crikey.

ROBINSON: How long have I been here?

CONNOLLY: Long enough for the papers to start taking an interest. You've been reported missing, you see. Officially. It's terribly exciting.

ROBINSON: How long?

CONNOLLY: A little while. A day or two. I can't see that it matters.

ROBINSON: I've been in a fucking sack for two days?

CONNOLLY: No. Of course not. What do you take me for? No. I popped you in there when you started waking up. For safe-keeping.

ROBINSON: Safe-keeping?

CONNOLLY: I had to go to work. Life goes on, Mr Robinson. The world doesn't revolve around you, you know.

PAUSE.

CONNOLLY: I think you ought to know, by the way, that I don't make a habit of this sort of thing. I don't go around just grabbing people off the streets.

ROBINSON: Well, that's a fucking great comfort.

CONNOLLY: I know you're being sarcastic, but really, Mr Robinson, I should think it ought to be. Imagine how much worse this would be if you were here only because you happened to be on the wrong street at the wrong time. How futile, how pointless your suffering would be. No, I chose you.

ROBINSON: Oh good.

CONNOLLY: I didn't set out with the intention. I didn't say to myself: 'Tonight, I shall make a detour on my way home, pluck Wayne Robinson from the pavement outside his house and disappear him'. It was a spur of the moment decision, but one taken with perfect clarity, with the absolute conviction that it was the right thing to do. So, yes, I chose you. You see, Mr Robinson, I've had a lifetime of keeping my head down, saying, 'It's no concern of mine, what difference can I make?' Well, that's just not good enough. Eventually, one has to become involved. One can't sit around wishing things were different and do nothing. If every individual did their bit, however trifling, it would soon mount up to something wonderful. Politicians are always banging on about citizenship when they've run out of policies. But what does it actually mean? Citizenship. It's a fine-sounding word, but..to me, finally, it means doing one's best to make the world a better and a safer

place. For everybody. And that's why I brought you here. Think of it as a citizen's arrest.

ROBINSON: I feel much better now. You fucking maniac.

CONNOLLY: And, you know, the ridiculous thing is that I'm almost certainly breaking the law. Even though I'm trying to be a good citizen, despite what you are, I could get arrested for doing this.

ROBINSON: What a mad fucking world.

CONNOLLY: It is that, Mr Robinson. We can agree on that.

ROBINSON: What do you mean, what I am?

CONNOLLY: Don't play the innocent. It won't wash.

ROBINSON: What am I?

CONNOLLY: Come on, Mr Robinson. Wake up! Take some responsibility.

ROBINSON: For what?

CONNOLLY: Not your fault? Is that it? Led you on? Lied about her age?

ROBINSON: What?

CONNOLLY: You see, I know all the arguments.

ROBINSON STARTS TO STRUGGLE AGAIN.

ROBINSON: You crazy fucking bastard! Get me out of here!

VERY SUDDENLY, CONNOLLY DASHES OVER AND PUTS HIS HANDS ROUND ROBINSON'S THROAT. HE PUTS HIS FACE RIGHT UP AGAINST ROBINSON'S.

CONNOLLY: How would you feel if she was your child? Eh? You make me sick.

HE LETS GO. AS ROBINSON SPLUTTERS TO GET HIS BREATH BACK, CONNOLLY UNFASTENS THE TOP OF THE SACK AND PULLS IT BACK OVER HIS HEAD. HE REFASTENS IT.

CONNOLLY: If I have to look at you any longer there's no telling what I might do. And I haven't finished with you yet. Not by a long chalk. Animal.

HE KICKS THE SACK.

ROBINSON: Ow! For Christ's sake! Please! Listen to me.

CONNOLLY: It's for your own good. Anyway. You'll sleep better in there. Like wearing one of those eye-masks they give you on night flights.

ROBINSON: I fucking don't want to sleep! Get me out of here! Please.

CONNOLLY: You should sleep. Really. I think so. You're a bit over-wrought, and you don't look at all well.

ROBINSON: Please.

CONNOLLY SITS IN THE ARMCHAIR.

CONNOLLY: And I can't spare you any more of my tablets. All this excitement. I won't sleep a wink without.

ROBINSON: You crazy bastard.

CONNOLLY: Just try and relax, Mr Robinson. You'll soon drift off, you mark my words. And you'll feel all the better. (HE LOOKS AT HIS WATCH.) Goodness me. Look at the time. I'll miss my soaps if I'm not careful. I must have my nightly dose. You'll think me silly, Mr Robinson, I'm sure, but I'm quite the addict. A hopeless case. Oh, I know they're a poor substitute for some of the excellent dramas of the various golden ages of television. I know that. And I resent the way the producers seem to think their viewers are half-wits, but nonetheless, they do exert a strange kind of fascination. Every so often, half-buried in amongst the implausibility and the tenth rate acting, comes a storyline so startling in its execution and verisimilitude, that it quite knocks your socks off. Sadly one watches more in hope than expectation. Oh, I agree. There is any number of more constructive ways for an intelligent man to use his time, but, on the other hand, after a day's hard graft, an hour or so of mindless pap is quite soothing. And, although I expect you might have guessed by now, I live alone.

It's a bit of company for me. (HE LAUGHS SUDDENLY.) I've just realised how that sounds. 'A bit of a loner. Keeps himself to himself.' Dear oh dear. I mean, you read that in the paper and straightaway you think 'Uh-oh. Psycho!' Well, we'll just have to make sure it doesn't come to that.

PAUSE.

CONNOLLY: You know, you've presented me with a dilemma. My original thought was to keep you here for a bit, in there, and then, in due course, release you back into the wild, as it were. 'Wayne Robinson was found alive, last night. He was discovered wandering naked and disorientated in the New Forest (let's say, for the sake of argument), by a dog-walker. At the present time, Mr Robinson is unable to account for his recent whereabouts.' That's the kind of thing I was envisaging. But now. Because of your insistence on being let out of the bag, I don't know. You've seen what I look like. I'm not at all sure what to do now. Something to think about. (HE LOOKS AT HIS WATCH.) Look at the time. You are naughty, Mr Robinson, keeping me here, gassing. I've missed the beginning now. So, enough chit-chat.

HE GETS UP AND MOVES TOWARDS THE DOOR.

CONNOLLY: Be a good boy, now. I'll look in later, see you're comfortable.

ROBINSON: Fuck you.

CONNOLLY: Oh really, Mr Robinson.

HE GOES SHUTTING THE DOOR BEHIND HIM.

ROBINSON: Come back here! You come back here! Now! Get me out of here, you fucking lunatic!

HE STRUGGLES VIOLENTLY, SHOUTING FOR HELP AND CRYING OUT IN PAIN. EVENTUALLY HE STRUGGLES SO MUCH THAT THE SACK TOPPLES OVER AND HE LANDS ON THE BROKEN ARM. HE SCREAMS IN AGONY.

ROBINSON: Fuck! Fucking hell! Oh Jesus! Help me, for Christ's sake, somebody help me!

THE DOOR SUDDENLY FLIES OPEN. CONNOLLY
STANDS IN THE DOORWAY.

CONNOLLY: Honestly, Mr Robinson, I can hardly hear the
television. It really is high time you were asleep.

HE PICKS UP THE CRICKET BAT AND BEATS THE
SACK REPEATEDLY. ROBINSON CRIES OUT AND
STRUGGLES, BUT GRADUALLY BECOMES QUIET.
THE SACK TWITCHES A BIT AND THEN BECOMES
STILL. CONNOLLY GINGERLY PUSHES IT WITH
HIS FOOT. IT DOESN'T MOVE. HE LEANS THE
BAT AGAINST THE ARMCHAIR.

CONNOLLY: Sleep tight, Mr Robinson.

HE GOES TO THE DESK, SWITCHES OFF THE LAMP
AND EXITS, CLOSING THE DOOR BEHIND HIM.