

## **SALT WATER BLOOD**

*Scotland. Today.*

SCENE 4

*THE ELLIOT HOUSE*

*Mrs Elliot sits in her kitchen and pulls on an enormous pair of ear protectors. She checks the clock - nearly 6pm. Through the thin shared wall she (and we) hear Dan, Bon, Scott and Erin chant -*

EVERYONE IN DAN'S HOUSE: 10! 9!

*In Dan's house next door - Dan, Bon, Scott and Erin are watching the living room clock counting down to 6pm*

EVERYONE IN DAN'S HOUSE: 8! 7! 6!

*The countdown continues while Karen and Cora make tea in the kitchen and look at the sealskin coat.*

KAREN: I mean sealskin, that must be vintage, you get it in Edinburgh?

*The countdown in the other room ends triumphantly.*

DAN AND THE KIDS: *Power! Hour! Power! Hour! Power! Hour!*

*Cora cramps. Her face twists.*

KAREN: Ok. What is that? Don't give me shite. What's up?

CORA: I saw Dr Begg yesterday morning.

KAREN: Are you sick? Is it the change?

CORA: I was pregnant.

KAREN: Oh my God! But you're so old!

CORA: Shut up. Anyway. Now I'm not.

KAREN: Oh Love!

CORA: I can't be pregnant.

*Karen cuddles Cora who slumps with tiredness. Dan and the kids conga through the room chanting -*

DAN / KIDS: *Power! Hour! Power! Hour! Power! Hour!*

DAN: *(to Karen)* C'mon Mum. It's The Power Hour.

CORA: When your neighbours agreed to this we didn't mean you had to do it every day -

ERIN: Pooooooooooooooooowwwwwwwweeeeeeeeer.

DAN: Hooooooooooooooooouuuuuuuuurrrrrr! Come on Mum. Everything ok?

*Karen is still looking stunned by Cora's news.*

CORA: *(firmly)* Everything is fine.

*She hands Dan an electric guitar rigged to an amp.*

DAN: How about Saxon?

ERIN: Black Sabbath.

KAREN: AC/DC

*Scott whispers to Cora.*

CORA: Scott would like Rainbow. I like Rainbow.

DAN: Rainbow it is.

*Dan plays the opening to 'Since You Been Gone'. They sing.*

DAN / KIDS:

I get the same old dreams  
Same time every night  
Fall to the ground and I wake up

*Karen realises the lyrics are terrible for Cora's situation and makes a face. Cora grins and shakes her head and picks up Scott. Singing at the top of her voice.*

CORA/DAN/KIDS:

So I get out of bed, put on my shoes and in my head  
Thoughts fly back to the breakup

DAN

*(to Erin)*

These four walls are closing in!

ERIN:

*(to Dan)*

Look at the fix you put me in!

EVERYONE:

Since you been gone

Since you been gone  
I'm out of my head can't take it

*Mrs Elliot in her kitchen, presses her enormous ear protectors to her head. The china on her dresser vibrates. The song rolls on.*

Could I be wrong  
But since you been gone  
You cast your spell so break it!

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### SCENE 17

#### IAIN'S HOUSE

*Iain brushes his hair roughly in a wall mirror in the hall.*

IAIN: We'll be late.

*Cora enters the room in a stunning shimmering mermaid green dress with a sizeable split up the side. Her leg visible to well above the knee. She hasn't dressed like this for a long time.*

IAIN: Bloody hell.

CORA: I like having legs.

IAIN: Bloody hell.

CORA: I'm going to find a way to keep them.

*She starts to move to him and is interrupted by a coughing fit, unable to catch a breath. Iain puts his arms around her. He lifts her hair back to behind her ear. And there, on her neck are three ridges. They might be gills.*

IAIN:(*whispering*) Bloody hell. What's that on your neck?

*She kisses him.*

### SCENE 18

#### THE VILLAGE HALL

*The main hall is heaving with folk. Round faced folk singers and rough faced musicians pile onstage. Kids yammer in a sugar hyped feral pack. Teenagers haunt the bar area. Karen takes ticket money at the door. The village folk exchange looks as Iain and Cora arrive together.*

*Maureen walks up to the mic. The audience cheer. She waves them quiet.*

MAUREEN: Well, we'd best get started. We've been asked a rare thing the night. We're doin' ah the songs that's got Selkies in them. Now, we've a big list up here, and we've maybe no agreed on how to play them -

*(There's laughter on stage from the musicians. All too true).*

- but we'll give it a bash and see how we get on. And if you mind a Selkie song and we've no done it - well come up and let us know and we'll get to it in between the beers!

*The band begin a jaunty version of 'Mhairi's wedding'. Maureen sings and the crowd dances.*

Doon the water, on we go,  
Heel for heel and toe for toe.  
Arm in arm and row on row,  
All for Mhairi's wedding.

*Everyone dances a Strip The Willow. Lassies occasionally get spun into the audience. Scottish dancing is a contact sport. Their action goes into silent, rhythmic dumbshow as we focus on:*

## SCENE 19

### VILLAGE HALL STORAGE ROOM

*In a deserted little side room of the hall, three flip charts lined up, Karen and Dan break out felt pens. They write 'Doon the water, on we go'. It's going to be a long night.*

*Dr Begg inspects Cora's neck while Iain hovers.*

DR BEGG: They could be gills.

CORA: What does that mean?

DR BEGG: It means they could be gills. They might be permanent. They might go away. Even human embryos have pharyngeal arches for a brief time in their early stages.

IAIN: What are Pharyngeal arches?

DR BEGG: Gills.

*The music bursts out again, the noise of the jig for a fleeting moment before we focus on:*

## SCENE 20

### VILLAGE HALL BACKSTAGE

*Isla sits at the side of the stage with LARS (70), a huge, silver haired musician from Norway.*

ISLA: But these aren't the same as the words you learned?

LARS: *(in a strong Norwegian accent)* No. In the third verse she has to go home. It's not like this.

ISLA: What are the words?

LARS: Well, this is translation y'know -

ISLA: That's fine.

LARS: *(beating time with his hand)*

So lay the stones down one by one,  
Her time is done, one by one,  
Turn your face to the rising sun, The rising sun -

- and then the chorus. You know?

ISLA: *(writing frantically)* That's rare Lars. That's rare. Thank ye.

*She looks at what she's just written down.*

Her time is done?

LARS: Her time is done.

ISLA: Shite.

*She dashes off to find Cora.*

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## **SALT WATER BLOOD**

### SCENE 24

*At the top of the cliff edge Dan, Karen and Iain lay out climbing gear. They look down to the shelf that holds Cora.*

KAREN: I'm going.

DAN: What?

IAIN: No chance.

DAN: I'll do it.

KAREN: *(to Dan)* You can't talk her out of anything. *(to Iain)* And you Sunshine, are half the problem.

IAIN: Oh aye. Because being a Selkie has fuck all to do with it.

*(beat)*

Look, I made a mess of this. I'm going to sort it. I won't let her go. Honest.

*Karen reluctantly hands over the climbing harness. Iain puts it on and gets roped to Dan. He passes his phone to Karen.*

IAIN: Phone Callum. Tell him where we are. Tell him there's a jumper.

*He puts his backpack on over his harness.*

DAN: *(double tying knots)* Now there's heavy cross winds down there so take your time -

KAREN: *(to Iain)* I don't have to tell you that you better come back with her.

IAIN: No.

KAREN: I don't have to tell you that.

IAIN: No. I promise Karen. I'll get her.

*Dan delicately belays Iain over the edge and down towards Cora.*

KAREN: *(into Iain's phone)* Callum. It's Karen Spink. Iain says to say he's a potential jumper at the Needle's Eye here.

*Distantly through the PA we hear Callum's voice on the phone.*

CALLUM: Bugger. Right you are. Tell him I'll see him at the Station.

KAREN: No. He can't. He's down on a line right now.

CALLUM: Ailsa's not going to like that. She's never led a rescue at the Needle's Eye.

KAREN: Callum. It's Cora. The jumper. It's Cora.

CALLUM: *(softly)* Ffffffffuck. *(All business)* Ok. M'on it. Karen love, dinnae you worry pet, wu'll be there in a nae time.

*Through Iain's phone comes the faint sound of sirens and the noise of the Lifeboat Station swinging into action.*

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## **CRYBABY HILL**

*ALABAMA 1944*

### SCENE 1

A tin cut nightlight spins over a bulb - light dancing, shaped like stars and moons, all over the walls of the loft. The light sweeps over DANNY'S face - he's a clean cut 30 yr old in an mailman uniform.

DANNY: I just wanted to deliver a bunch of tea roses, five eggs and git out of there. An old lady on my route asked me to take 'em.

I says "Ma'am, I'm a post office worker, not your personal messenger. You take em down to the post office and put a stamp on em and I'll take em anywhere you want". Well she acted like I told her to stick her grand-baby in the mail. So I took em. We ain't supposed to.

She says to me - these are for my friend Eliza. The flowers are for her husband's grave and the eggs is for a cake. There's such a lot of women struggling and on their own now, with the war an all. I says 'Alright. Alright. Where's she live?' She says 'Up on Cry Baby Hill'.

Well the Postal Service don't like you to say to folks 'The hell I'm going up there you crazy old coot'.

*(Pause)*

When a man don't go to war like every other fella, folks look at him like he's afraid. Even if he's got a bum leg that any fool can see.

*(Pause)*

So I took 'em.

*(Pause)*

Cry Baby Hill... It scared the pants off me when I was a little boy and I'll tell you, it scares me now. When a fella can't run away, it makes him a little more cautious than most folks.

*He decides to tell us. He knows it sounds dumb.*

I was a kid when Billy Johnson told me about a girl left her baby out on Cry Baby Hill. Left it there to die. It was during the Great Depression and she hadn't had a thing to eat for days. She couldn't stand to watch her little one starving to death so she left the baby out in this field and then she threw herself in the river and drowned.

But she couldn't go to heaven because she had her child's blood on her hands and murder is murder. When that girl's ghost tried to float away from the world she found she was tied to this place. Just as stuck as can be. Trapped inside the scarecrow on Cry Baby Hill.

They say you can still hear the baby crying, or maybe it's the woman. The mother. Crying for her baby dying right there in front of her.

*Silence. The wind in the trees. Danny is there now. Carrying the roses and eggs. Up on Crybaby Hill. He looks terrified as he faces down the ragged scarecrow that towers over him. There is an otherworldly wail. A rush of wind shakes the trees. The ruined clothes on the Scarecrow reach toward him, lifted on the wind.*

DANNY: *(Whispering)* I don't want no trouble.

*(louder)*

I'm just passing by to deliver these here...

*The wind flutters the rags on the Scarecrow. They reach for Danny. Another piercing wail. Danny screws his eyes shut in terror.*

*Another wail. Danny frowns and opens his eyes. Something familiar? Something. With his eyes on the Scarecrow's face, Danny takes a step forward. He peers at the clothes flapping round the cross of wood that support the Scarecrow's head. What the hell is that?*

*Using the bunch of flowers, Danny pushes aside the cloth and stares inside. He drops the eggs in shock.*

DANNY: I thought it was the dead baby. But then I smelled her diaper. I don't think ghost babies mess themselves that way.

*Danny lets go of the flowers and gently lifts the baby out of the little hammock inside the Scarecrow where she's been rocking.*

DANNY

Hey there. It's ok. Hey. Hey.

*He gets a waft of her diaper*

My God, you smell like a truck stop shit house in summer.

*Danny cradles the baby, trying to stop her crying.*

Oh come on now. You ain't more scared than me. I nearly filled my pants too. Yes I did.

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**THE GOD IS MY WITNESS TREE**

*Rural Pennsylvania. October, 1695*

SCENE 5

*Dixon's cabin porch at dawn. DIXON sits on a bench on his porch watching the sun rise. HENSHALL steps out the house. Her face and arms washed clean, hair brushed, her bloody apron in a ball in her basket of medicines and knives. She carries the cloth covered bucket from the birthing room.*

DIXON: I suppose you want paying?

HENSHALL: Have I asked for aught before?

DIXON: Are they alive?

HENSHALL: The child is dead. Your wife was nearly claimed as well.

DIXON: Was it a boy?

HENSHALL: Does it matter now?

DIXON: Of course!

HENSHALL: It was a girl.

DIXON: Why can she not carry a son for me? You know about these things. Tell me.



HENSHALL: (*furious*) Look to your wife Master Dixon. Her life hangs in the balance. If you rouse her from bed before the next seven day is out then you are as sure to kill her as if you took poison and tipped it down her throat.

DIXON: There are the children.

HENSHALL: You can beg Honour Tyndall to wet nurse your youngest.

DIXON: It is not for a man to go begging to his neighbour's wives.

HENSHALL: Since you are so keen to beget all these children it is your responsibility to find a way for them to eat.

*Dixon screws his face up in frustration at this unbiddable, obstructive woman. TYNDAL strides towards the porch ready to begin a day's work.*

TYNDAL: Ready for the day Dixon? Mistress Henshall, how fare thee? (*He realises why she's there.*) Is the baby born?

HENSHALL: She did not live.

*Tyndal murmurs a blessing under his breath. Henshall indicates to Dixon that he should ask his favour of Tyndal. Dixon is mortified.*

DIXON: This is not charity.

HENSHALL: Says the only man who did not offer me his help when my husband died.

DIXON: My wife has been ill.

HENSHALL: And I saved her. I feel I have done more than my duty as a neighbour for today. So here is my fee.

DIXON: You said-

HENSHALL: You can afford it. Now listen. How old was Verity when you wed her?

DIXON: No business of yours.

HENSHALL: 14. She was 14 year old. You have kept her pregnant ever since in your quest for a son and it is killing her.

*Tyndal shifts uncomfortably now.*

DIXON: It is a wife's duty to bear children.

HENSHALL: Listen to me Dixon. All I ask of you in return for my work here today is that you keep your lust away from her. Her insides are broken. Corrupted from birthing child after child. Leave her be.

DIXON: *(apoplectic)* How dare you speak of such things. You barren, unnatural old crow!

TYNDAL: Dixon! We are all friends here.

DIXON: Are we indeed?

HENSHALL: Your pride and wrath makes no mark on me. Here, make yourself of use.  
*(She places the bucket in front of him)* These are the remains of the child. It had been dead some days.

*Ever righteous rather than wise, Dixon pulls back the cloth. He is unready for what he sees and will never be able to forget it.*

DIXON: God have mercy, what have you done?

HENSHALL: What was necessary.

TYNDAL: This is troublesome for you, Ezekiel. My wife will gladly come and tend your baby so Verity may rest.

HENSHALL: *(to Dixon)* There you see.

TYNDAL: I will fetch her right away.

*Relieved to be away, Tyndal makes a swift exit.*

DIXON: *(pointing to the bucket)* What will you do with this?

HENSHALL: I? Nothing. You might bury her at the God Is My Witness Tree.

DIXON: It is not baptised.

HENSHALL: She is still your child.

*Dixon looks down at the bucket. Conflicted.*

DIXON: That is no child of mine.

*Henshall stares him down with contempt.*

HENSHALL: Your wife has walked through the valley of the shadow of death today. She is only nearly home. Look after her.

*She picks up the bucket and her basket and walks away.*