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AT YOUR AGE?!

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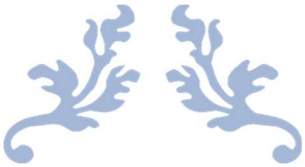
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***This early draft is a work in progress and likely to be subject to significant change as a result of ongoing script development and staging preferences.**

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PART I
Reflection

[These words appear on the projector screen]

Centre stage, there are four chairs arranged around a table in a kitchen scene, which features a large full-length mirror. The reflection in the mirror will need to be projected onto a large projector screen which takes up the back wall of the stage. On the kitchen table, are a lantern, a bundle of papers, two pairs of spectacles, two magnifying glasses and a mobile phone. One of the chairs has a handbag placed by it.

On either side of this central scene, the walls of the stage are both in darkness. They will be periodically lit in a hazy light and darkened throughout the performance. On the left wall, three older adults (one man and two women), dressed in matching clothing, are seated in a semi-circle. A white coat hangs on a coat rack. This side of the stage depicts a generic institutionalised setting, with safety notices and a backdrop on the side wall of a larger room with an institutionalised seating arrangement. There are also a few empty chairs.

In the darkness at the right back stage wall, a glamorous older female is seated. She is dressed to depict Mother Time*.* Mother Time *is seated within a lightly veiled space at a table with a crystal ball, laptop and an hourglass.*

To begin, the left wall setting lights up in hazy, dream-like half-light. An older lady appears on stage being assisted by a NURSE to one of the chairs. Foster and Allen's 'Silver Threads Amongst The Gold' begins playing.

NURSE: *[dressed in the generic blue uniform of a hospital or care home nurse]* Don't slip here. Be careful.

BREDA: I'm grand. I'm fine.

NURSE: Don't fall now.

BREDA: I'm not ancient.

[The NURSE *helps* BREDA *to the seat closest to the audience lined against the wall].*

NURSE: [*in a high, fake cheerful voice*] Do you want to go to the room to play bingo?

BREDA: No, thanks. I don't want to.

NURSE: Come now. You're the odd one out.

BREDA: [*more forcefully*] I don't want to.

[BREDA's SON, *dressed completely in black, has moved into the institutional space to stand beside* BREDA. *He looks from* BREDA *to the* NURSE*, concerned*].

NURSE: [*to* SON] She's really not settled in yet.

*[*BREDA *rises from the chair and moves centre stage, looking back at the others in fear. She comes to sit centre stage in a regular spotlight. She shudders abruptly, as if awakening from a nightmare. The music stops, the left side of the stage darkens.* BREDA *is out of breath and continues to gaze in trepidation at the left wall, even as its light fades].*

BREDA: [*rubbing her eyes*] Shoving me into the grave. Sliding me in there.

[Behind BREDA*, the right wall lights in a hazy red glow to show* MOTHER TIME *behind a thin curtain. She is playing idly with a hourglass in one hand, while tapping impatiently at a crystal ball with long, gel nails with the other, as if the image it is displaying has 'frozen'. The scene darkens again].*

*[*BREDA*'s* SON, *now dressed in everyday clothes, appears from the darkness of the left stage wall and sits at the table centre stage behind* BREDA*. He begins to plait her long, peppered grey hair].*

BREDA: [*smiles at him in greeting, then says absently*] The older the woman, the shorter the hair.

SON: Mmm?

BREDA: My mother would say: **'**The older the woman, the shorter the hair.'

SON: You're young so, according to your mother.

BREDA: [*laughs*] That's a lovely way of taking it. Thank you.

BREDA: Or: 'the higher the hair, the lower the skirt.'

SON: I haven't heard that one before.

BREDA: The lower the skirt, the higher the hair. Or no. The longer the skirt – the shorter the hair, the older -.

CHORUS: *While* BREDA *is speaking, a chorus of three men and three women, all dressed in black, emerge from various positions in the audience. They talk over each other, one couple repeating 'the longer the skirt, the shorter the hair'; another repeating 'the higher the hair, the lower the skirt; and the third pair saying 'the older the woman the shorter the hair.' They come together down right of the stage talking aside in a huddle. They are agitated and divide into separate groups at either side of the stage, the members shifting between groups and shouting across to each other. Their conversation becomes a general mumble, with occasional words like 'longer', 'shorter', 'skirt', 'older' becoming more audible. They eventually return to their positions in the audience, still mumbling.*

BREDA: I remember I was in this supermarket and this woman with the most gorgeous blonde hair was in front of me and I thought: 'wow! [*on a sigh*]. I wonder where she got that colour?' And she turned around and she'd the most haggard, old, awful face [*the projector screen at the back of the stage shows an older woman with sleek blonde hair*].

BREDA: The minute you see me do that, tell me and I'm cutting it off.' [*Her* SON *laughs*].

SON: She obviously liked it or she –

BREDA: Oh, of course.

SON: She wouldn't have done it.

BREDA: Exactly. It was beautifully groomed and everything. Now she didn't even have a slip of lipstick on [*disapproving voice*]. You know. To go with the hair. But it was just –

SON: Maybe she was on her way to an event or something like that. I don't know. [*He continues plaiting* BREDA's *hair*].

BREDA: Maybe. [*pause*]. I do love my hair. But I know it's not everyone's – [*Another pause. Absently*:]
You know, there'll come a time when I'll turn around – you'll be doing this, and I'll turn around and I'll say: 'you know my little boy used to do that for me.'

SON: [*drops the plait abruptly and stands. He begins to move away from* BREDA]
Don't talk like that.

BREDA: [*rising and trying to reach out to him]*
Well, it could happen. It's just a natural progression.

SON : [*withdrawing, and shouting back as he leaves the stage*]
Don't talk like that.

BREDA: [*to his departing back*] Look, if certain things happen, we're going to need to -. There's a lovely pack you can get from the hospice movement. It would take you through the whole lot**.** [*Her voice fades out as her* SON *leaves the stage*]

[BREDA *comes to stand in front of the mirror. Her reflection is projected on to the large screen.* BREDA *observes herself as she reaches around to finish off her plait. The audience is reflected behind her in the mirror and on the projector screen - so she is talking to the audience 'through the mirror'*].

BREDA: He just didn't want to know.

*[*SARAH*, an older lady with bright blue hair and a purple streak at the front, appears on stage. She is not reflected in the mirror as she moves centre left of stage and uses one of the chairs, now in darkness, as a barre with which to practise pliés*].

SARAH: [*while performing pliés*] Men don't like to talk about death. They won't talk about it.

BREDA: [*defensively*] He's said he will [*intake of breath*]. Maybe next year. After he's got married and when he comes back.

SARAH: You're still too young to be talking about that.

BREDA: I don't know about that.
[*Touches her reflection as if it belongs to somebody else. She pulls at the skin around her eyes, stretches out her jaws, pats beneath her chin. She has not yet looked at* SARAH]

SARAH: Maybe he just doesn't want to think about it. He doesn't want to lose his Mum.

BREDA: *[now turning and trying to see her back view]* There is that. It could be that.

[*Having finished her warm-up,* SARAH *moves to stand behind* BREDA *in the mirror and appears on the projector screen.* BREDA *suddenly sees* SARAH*'s reflection behind her. She speaks to her through the mirror*]

BREDA: Wow! Is that you?

[BREDA *turns to face* SARAH. *She walks around her as* SARAH *takes her place in front of the mirror and her image alone is projected on the screen*].

SARAH: *[preening and moving around to try to see the back of her head*]
I got it done. It's called peacock blue. I sat in Fota looking at a peacock, saying 'that [*points to her reflection in the mirror*] isn't the colour that a peacock is.'

BREDA: [*awestruck*] What made you do that?

SARAH: To entertain myself.

BREDA: Good woman.

SARAH: There isn't any fun anymore. You have to go looking for it. And, as you get older, it's a harder thing to find. To be like-minded with people who may think the same way.

BREDA: It is beautiful. Just beautiful.

[BREDA *nods to the audience*].

BREDA: What was the reaction?

SARAH: [*moves to the front of the stage to look at the audience, challenging them*] They disapproved. They disapproved.

[The CHORUS *again emerges from various positions in the audience, repeating the lines as above. They encircle* SARAH*.* SARAH *is initially nonchalant, but the circle begins to close in and she becomes more anxious.* BREDA *reaches in and pulls* SARAH *out to one side. The CHORUS eventually move offstage, still mumbling, and looking back at* SARAH *disdainfully].*

SARAH: *[looking at* BREDA *gratefully. She returns to the mirror and does a graceful pirouette]* My hairdresser was thrilled, though.

BREDA: Yes.

SARAH: She went in and brought all the different dyes. Because nobody else wanted colours. Of her age - of the age group that she does.

BREDA: But what did everyone say? Did they think you were having one of your turns?

SARAH: Well, daughter was too shocked. But granddaughter had great fun with it. The one who's 18 now. She thought it was fantastic. And the men. Talk about entertaining them at the same time. But the person who was my secretary would be a very modern person altogether. She said –

BREDA: She's modern but you're not supposed to be modern.

SARAH: No. Exactly. [*pushes up her hair to give it more volume].* I just find that so many of my friends have become –

BREDA: Staid?

SARAH: Yeah.

BREDA: And safe?

SARAH: Very.

BREDA: That's very challenging.

SARAH: The husband of my very good friend said: 'obviously she toed the line all her life –

BREDA: Spot on.

SARAH: So, she's now deciding to do something that she should have done 30 or 40 years ago.'

BREDA: Oh, absolutely.

SARAH: And that was so. I never did anything out of the way. Ever.

BREDA: Yeah.

SARAH: Good girl.

BREDA: Yes.

SARAH: Good wife.

BREDA: Yes.

SARAH: Dutiful daughter. [*preening in mirror as her image is projected on the screen]*. This is me prioritising me. [SARAH *touches the mirror]*.

SARAH: [*spoken quietly, as if to herself*] 75. And mentally I think I'm 30.

[BREDA *comes to stand behind her and places a hand on* SARAH*'s shoulder. They are now both reflected in the mirror and regard each other through it*].

SARAH: I think you become invisible as you age. Unless we do mad things with our hair or something. Then we're seen alright. But there's a definite invisibility.

BREDA: But that's not always negative. [*laughs*]. Sometimes it's nice. I mean, you can sneak between the cracks and -

BREDA AND SARAH: [*spoken together]* Do your own thing.
[The women laugh and come to sit at the table together]

[BREDA *reaches into the bag beside her chair and takes out a photograph. She hands it to* SARAH*. A black and white image of a shy teenager appears on the projector screen. Mungo Jerry's 'In the Summertime' plays*].

BREDA: I just happened to have that in my wallet. *[to the audience]*. Dad was very big into photography. We had loads of photographs. He had a Brownie camera. It was taken with a best friend who has since died. The two of us were in it but I've cut her out. I was about 15 there.

SARAH: [*nods at the projector screen*] Do you recognise yourself?

BREDA: Well, I'm much more confident now than I would have been. And probably a lot less wary of people. I'm very glad to be of my age. But I think people kind of value your opinion more when you're younger. I think you're sort of – I think with younger people you're kind of ignored. Like as if you don't count. You're written off [*moves hand as if asking for a bill in a restaurant*].

[BREDA *moves to take a seat in the darkness at the left wall of the stage.* SARAH *begins to follow her. Suddenly, there's a loud eruption of* Queen's 'Radio Ga Ga' *and the left and right walls light up. The 'residents' in the seats, including* BREDA*, as well as* MOTHER TIME*, all stand in alarm.* SARAH *stops on her way to join* BREDA *as* DEE *appears centre stage. She's an older lady, dressed in three-quarter length trousers, a long-sleeved tee-shirt and a knitted tank-top. She's doing fist pumps to the music.* SARAH *and* BREDA *join her and the three women dance, laughing. The* NURSE *comes to restore calm among the 'residents' and* MOTHER TIME *shakes her head and smiles, and the walls go dark].*

DEE: *[out of breath as she dances]*
I was at the age of Elvis and the Beatles. They went over my head completely. I didn't even know about Queen until Freddie Mercury was dead. That will tell you. And I just love Queen.

[*The music stops and* SARAH *and* BREDA *sit at the table, while* DEE *walks around centre stage, exploring the space*].

DEE: I remember Dad used play records on a Sunday. All these kinds of Opera singers like Nelson Eddie and Richard Tauber. I'd a transistor radio in bed at boarding school and I used to be listening to classical music instead of anything that anybody else in the school was listening to. And now I love Queen.

SARAH: [*laughing*] When did you get into them?

DEE: About 10 years ago. In my 60s. I think their music is fantastic. I've all their CDs and everything.

SARAH: I was involved in old people in dance and we'd go around to different day centres and things like that. And inevitably they'd have all the Golden Oldies tunes. Like real golden oldies. They were so goldie oldie that they were gone rusty. [*laughter*].

DEE: I love all types of music. Even rap.

SARAH**:** What kind of rap?

DEE: Like The Weeknd or Drake. I play some of that sometimes. Just – I just feel you can – now some of it is a bit coarse – like the language or whatever. But it's just like the beat and the whole – like I wouldn't be listening to the words, but I just love the kind of beat of it. So, I do. I listen to that.

[*The Weeknd* 'Save Your Tears' *plays.* DEE, SARAH *and* BREDA *stand and wave their arms in the air, joining hands*. *As the music fades,* BREDA *and* SARAH *return to sit centre stage, laughing.* DEE, *however, stops at the mirror and her reflection is projected on to the big screen. She looks at her reflection, turning around shyly, as if uncomfortable*].

DEE: I am conscious of my careless dress code. This unkempt hair [*she runs her hand through her hair]*. This homemade vest.

BREDA: [*comes to join her at the mirror and stands behind her*]
It's a fashion statement.

DEE: Relatives often say to me: 'Are you serious? Are you wearing that?' We've a wedding coming up and they're like: 'we really have to make an effort.' They're into being beautifully dressed. And I mean, I admire them. It's a skill. But it's - it's not who I am.

[SARAH *also coming to stand at the mirror behind* BREDA *and* DEE *so it appears there are three heads on* DEE's *body*]

SARAH: And do you think you will conform?

[*All three women synchronise touching their faces, arranging their hair, then bring their arms down*].

BREDA: In a way, it's not so much you're conforming, though. You're doing something to please other people. As a gift to them.

DEE: I will conform. Yeah. But when I'm really, really challenged - as in to do something I don't want to do - I go back to the rhythm of the nursery rhyme to get me to do it. You know. *Hi ho, hi ho, it's off to work we go [all three women do a marching movement in a row]*. And if you get into the rhythm of it, you get through what you don't want to do.

BREDA: That's a great idea.

[DEE *moves back to the table and* BREDA *and* SARAH *follow. All three sit at the table].*

BREDA: I wonder what we're going to be shocked by with our grandchildren? What will they do that will shock us. Like what did we do to shock our grandparents?

DEE: And what will they be horrified by that we think is ok?

SARAH: Yes.

BREDA: Because our grandparents *did* think you should respect the priests and the nuns and you shouldn't question them and they were, you know – that they could, you know –

SARAH: Oh, they were horrified if you expressed a different view to them.

BREDA: Did you ever hear the phrase why do grandparents and grandchildren get on so well?

SARAH: Yes?

BREDA: Because they have a common enemy. [*laughter*].

SARAH: That speaks volumes.

DEE: I've a tattoo I got with my granddaughter [*pushes up her sleeve and shows the women her left arm*].

[DEE*'s* GRANDDAUGHTER *appears and pulls* DEE *away from the others, down centre of the stage*]

GRANDDAUGHTER: Nan, we'll get a tattoo.

DEE: We will. We will.

GRANDDAUGHTER: We'll get it done now during the summer.

DEE: We will. It will be great [*to* GRANDDAUGHTER]. Terrified, now I was [*to the audience*].

[SARAH *and* BREDA *come to stand aside from* DEE*, watching and laughing*]
SARAH: Yeah.

DEE: Terrified [*to* SARAH].

GRANDDAUGHTER [*checking her phone*]:
There's this visiting tattoo artist and he's coming from Dublin. He's in Cork for the day. He's only here for the day. I can book it.

DEE: [*making eyes at the audience*] That's grand.

GRANDDAUGHTER: It's for this Saturday.

DEE: [*in shocked Cork accent*] What?

[*A man with a tattoo gun appears. He,* DEE *and her* GRANDDAUGHTER *take a seat at the table. He begins work on* DEE*'s arm as her* GRANDDAUGHTER *watches in glee.* DEE *looks to the audience, frozen.* SARAH *and* BREDA *come to watch*].

DEE: We got the same thing done. [DEE *looks tentatively at her arm, as* SARAH *and* BREDA *give her the thumbs up]*.

DEE: She got the same as me. [*The* TATTOO ARTIST *begins work on* BREDA's GRANDDAUGHTER's *tattoo and* BREDA *leans forward to watch*].

DEE: She wrote my one and I wrote hers. So, the tattoo artist took the – script.

BREDA: [*looking at* DEE's *arm*] In your handwriting. Lovely.

DEE: It's a location [*to* BREDA]. She chose the location. It's the coordinates of a location that we have in common**.** And everything was just fine. It was just magical. We got the same thing done.

SARAH: And did you get a reaction from anyone? [SARAH *nods to the audience*].

[DEE*,* SARAH *and* BREDA *all move to front of the stage as the* GRANDDAUGHTER *and* TATTOO ARTIST *leave the stage*].

DEE: I did, I did. 'You got a tattoo?' [*disdainful 'up and down' look at audience*]. People don't say - people don't comment, like they used to. They're not as brazen about their commentary. Before they'd have said: 'Aah, you're too old for that.' But I think they're a bit more politically correct. Their face tells it [*the mirror's reflection which is now reflecting the audience is projected on to the screen*].

BREDA: Their face tells it. Yeah.

[*All three women turn to look at the screen.* SARAH *and* BREDA *return to sit at the table*. DEE *wanders to the institutional scene, which lightens to a hazy light as she observes it*].

DEE: It's a bit like being back at school again, isn't it? It's all so cyclical. You all have - you all have your chair. You sit on your chair. And I'll do the same. No, you can't borrow a pencil.

BREDA: Yeah. Except when you started, most people had a parent or something who was looking after you and loving you. When you're in school, there was somebody there. Somebody caring about you. And you have that story. As in 'what happened at school today?' 'Nothing.' You know? There was somebody interested in what you were doing.

DEE: Yeah.

BREDA: When you get to that stage [*nods to the institutional scene]*, you -

DEE: Yeah.

BREDA: – you're not as lovable.

SARAH: There's an element of nurture I think when you're younger.

DEE: And that's gone.

BREDA: The nurturing is gone. Yeah.

DEE: [*returns to the table and joins the other two. She pulls out a piece of string absently from her pocket*]
Dad always loved putting things together with string. Whatever I'm driving in, there's always a roll of string. For some reason I - it's –

SARAH: It stuck with you.

DEE: There's something – yeah. Of a connection. I don't have a lot of things connected to Dad.

[BREDA *stands, picking up the lantern from the table, and approaches* MOTHER TIME's *area, which lights up in a hazy, red glow*. MOTHER TIME *is idly observing the hourglass but looks up expectantly and stands as* BREDA *approaches*].

BREDA: Dad's father died very young so his mentor was his uncle. A priest. He married Mum and Dad. And he died exactly nine months before I was born.

[BREDA *places the lantern tentatively just outside the veil as* MOTHER TIME *watches.* BREDA *wanders around the outskirts of the veiled area. She bends down as if tending graves as she is speaking. While this is happening,* MOTHER TIME *picks the lantern up and turns it around to observe it*. *She places it back outside the veil, leaving a small opening in the veil as she does so*].

BREDA: Every Christmas Eve we go to his grave. And my – it was a thing of Dad's. And now we go to Dad's grave. To put the candle on and all that kind of thing. And my son does it with me. And I'm hoping eventually he will do it with one of his children. You know?

DEE: A lovely tradition.

BREDA: And if I have a grave, maybe I'll ask him to put it on it. But I'm expecting to be scattered anyway, so – [*drifts off*]

[BREDA *stops at* MOTHER TIME's *area, where the veil has parted slightly, as if seeing something.* MOTHER TIME *stands, facing her, as if wondering if* BREDA *can see her. Both women reach their arms out slowly to each other but it is as if they are trying to touch through glass.* DEE *comes and pulls* BREDA *away.* MOTHER TIME *closes the veil more securely, and sits back again, and begins to turn the hourglass*].

BREDA: *[comes to sit at table with* DEE *and* SARAH*]*
God, I've seen myself – I *do* talk about death a lot. I'm aware of that. And I talk about death in – it's not that I *like* death. I don't want to die. But I talk about it *all* the time. Like I say 'for God's sake, sure we'll be in the grave for long enough. We'll do it.'

DEE: That's not too bad. You're actually telling someone - value what they've got, sort of thing.

[BREDA *stands and moves slowly centre stage. She looks out into the theatre, beyond the audience*]

BREDA: Maybe. But I just keep thinking: 'well, do I have 10 more years? You know? Do I have 20 more years? What can I get done in that length of time?

[*In the background,* MOTHER TIME *is sitting forward, listening to the women*].

SARAH: Yes.

[DEE *and* SARAH *come centre stage.* SARAH *takes* BREDA's *hand, looking out at the theatre, too*. *A drumbeat begins quietly in the distance and gets progressively louder*].

BREDA: It worries me that I have people who died in their thirties and in their forties. And they didn't have time. And, yes, it depresses me - the idea that I don't have that much time. You're sort of – in a way – on the slippery slope at the other side. And I think that comes at sometime between 50 and 60. And you just know that your time is relatively –

[*The drumbeat abruptly stops. All three look at the audience at the same time*].

SARAH: Ye could be limited as well, you know? We don't know.

[MOTHER TIME *stands and looks out to the audience as a spotlight moves over them*].

DEE: [*pulls* DEE and SARAH *back to the table, and spotlight returns to them*] I've had four brushes with death. So, I am very conscious of the fact I love life and would like my life to continue. I don't kind of, I don't –

SARAH: Dwell on it.

DEE: No, I don't. And I don't see death as a negative. Death of itself. I say things like, you know: 'You're going to die anyway. It won't matter whether you did 10 of those things or two of those things.' Or: 'it's ok because when I die, it won't matter. 'Cos I won't be here, I won't feel it, nothing. So, that's ok.'

SARAH: Yes. When it actually happens. But between now and then.

[SARAH *walks up centre stage in time to a slow, funereal beat. The walls with* MOTHER TIME *and the institutionalised setting are both alight in a dim light as she walks between them. The residents and* MOTHER TIME *are on their feet with their heads bowed.* SARAH *comes to stand up centre of stage and* DEE and BREDA *come to join her, also walking as if in time to a funeral march*].

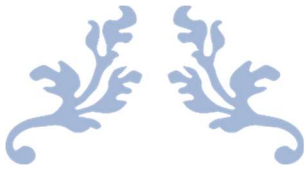
THE THREE WOMEN TOGETHER: Between now and then.

[*Queen's 'These Are The Days of Our Life' plays.* DEE *jumps to her feet]*

DEE: That's why I just want to have the craic with what I can do now.

[DEE *pulls* BREDA *and* SARAH *to her feet. The women wave their arms and hug. The music stops and the scene darkens.*

[LONG PAUSE].



PART II
Re-Focussing

[These words appear on the projector screen]

The three women return to the table centre stage. The stage lights up and a black-and-white photograph of a toddler at a steering wheel appears on the projector screen].

DEE: That's very typical me [DEE *nods to the screen]*. I think it kind of personifies my personality in a way. I think I'm in the driving seat in my life quite well. I still do a lot of things. I water ski and ski and still ride horses, even though I probably shouldn't. And things like that. But I just maybe do things a little bit more calmly now.

BREDA: Yeah. Completely. I'm embracing life. I like the freedom that I can kind of get up and I've joined a leisure centre so I go for a swim or I go to the gym and then I can go for a walk. It's nice that you don't have any ties like 'oh no, I'm working. I can't do that.'

DEE: Yes. I'd say I'm a new person, but I'm not. [DEE *moves to the back of the stage and blends with the screen image*]. I think I'm the old person that was there all the time, that was pressed down.

SARAH: Snap on that really. The last two years have been the best years of my life. The *best* of my life. I've kind of gone back to that sense of freedom and life and how wonderful everything is. And just everything in my life at the moment is amazing.

BREDA: In the last 10 years, a lot of burdens have been left behind. I've had negativity in my life for 45 years and now it's gone. In the last 45 years, I was acting all the time. I was acting this person, you know? That probably was the negative. That pretend.

SARAH: The most positive thing for me is just the fact that I won't have to work for a while now. That I can actually do – like I've *time* now to do other things that I wanted to do. Whereas always - you know, there was always the sense of: 'I have to keep the wolf from the door, just in case the worst ever happens.' You know. You'd better start stockpiling something, you know. And now I kind of don't *care.*

DEE: Absolutely. I did some personal work on myself, especially once the lockdowns started and I was stuck at home. I started to do journaling and listen to podcasts about different things. Started with gratitude things and then moved on from there. And I just got stronger and stronger. And then I went for some counselling [*voice goes up at end as if to underplay*]. And this total stranger who didn't know me at all told me that I was ok.

[DEE *comes to sit at the table and one of the female 'residents' comes centre stage to take a seat across from her*].

COUNSELLOR: You're ok.

[*The* 'COUNSELLOR' *returns to her seat in the 'institution'*].

DEE: [*looks to the audience, surprised*] And I thought 'oh.'

SARAH: And there was a lot of self-discovery.

DEE: And I suppose maturity really. Having a bit more sense and responsibilities. Independence. And I'm sorry to have - I kind of regret that I had to come to this age to get it, to get the -.

BREDA: Yes. Yes.

DEE: But it's the old story. You can't put an old head on young shoulders. And the wisdom that came through the life that I *led* [*emphasis*] is just – [*awestruck voice – fades off*]

SARAH: And the experience.

DEE: Yeah. I didn't know it was wisdom. You don't know you're learning – sure, you don't? When you're going through life, you don't know you're learning. And then one day you wake up and you go: 'Oh yeah.'

BREDA: Yeah.

DEE: Not that [*points to wall with the institutional scene which lights up]*. This [*points to the projector screen image of the toddler in the driving seat*]. This is for me. Not that. It's just great [*on a sigh. The institutional scene darkens*].

[DEE *wanders to the institutional scene on the left wall which lights up again. The residents are seated and the* NURSE *moves among them officiously.* DEE *observes the scene as if on the outside*].

DEE: There is still just that worry, though, of becoming the responsibility of others [*she looks back at* SARAH *and* BREDA]. We're all in relatively good nick, all of us here [DEE *nods to the audience, then looks back at* SARAH *and* BREDA]. But we all know – we all have friends the same age as us, or younger even, who are sitting by the fire being looked after by the daughter-in-law. Already going to the day care centre and that kind of thing.

SARAH: Mmm. But I wonder how much of that is attitude? Have they allowed themselves?

[*The women come together and begin walking together as if on a treadmill*].

SARAH: An awful lot of adults allow themselves become aged before they should. Or before they physically need to be. I mean, I do know if you've MS or you've got Parkinson's – or if you've got all of these things – obviously. [*She looks at* BREDA *and* DEE *who nod their agreement*]. But I've got a friend who is **–** I'd use the word, just so fecking *lazy*. She watches television nearly all day. She's my age and I keep on giving out like stink to her. I'm busy, I travel, I do things. Aam. But I have made those decisions because I could have just said: 'oh, it's lashing. I'll just turn on the TV.'

BREDA: We do have a choice, but we only have a limited choice. We've a choice of diet -

DEE: [*interrupts*] You can influence things – you can delay things, maybe by staying active and involved [*does fist pumps as she walks as if holding weights*]. But I think eventually –

SARAH: [*interrupts*] The physical aspects – like you definitely slow down no matter how – [SARAH *stops walking and starts moving backwards as if being carried back by the treadmill.* SARAH *shakes her head as the others look back and* SARAH *returns to the table.* DEE *and* BREDA *return to sit on either side of her].*

SARAH: I didn't go to the gym from Christmas till June because I was off form. And I just felt I got *so stiff*. I now have an issue that if I kneel down to, say, clean the floor or clean the bottom shelf of a press, I can't get up.

BREDA: Yes. Going down isn't so bad, it's the getting back –

SARAH: Oh, I can get down. I just can't get bloody well get back up again. These are exactly the sorts of things that narrow what you want to do. I mean, I'm furious that I can't do it.

BREDA: Yes.

SARAH: And all these doctors are telling us that when you get up out of a seat, you're not to use your hands. You're just to get up.

[SARAH *demonstrates getting up from the chair without using her hands and* BREDA *and* DEE *imitate*].

SARAH: [*squatting*] This I think is the best exercise. Squatting.

[*The women again imitate* SARAH].

BREDA: [*moving her arms up and around*] And the most important yoga movement of all is this one.

SARAH: [*both* SARAH *and* DEE *now copy* BREDA] Stretching?

BREDA: Yeah. And swinging. [*comes to show both* SARAH *and* DEE]. That's it. D'you know why?

DEE: No.

BREDA: So, you can wipe your own bum. [*raucous laughter*].

SARAH: Important. Very important.

BREDA: An essential.

DEE: I'll be practising that.

BREDA: Oh, yes. I've been doing that for years. [*All three women sit again*].

DEE: In the morning, if I take a second cup of coffee, I can't go out for my walk until I've peed after it. [*laughter*].

BREDA: I'm laughing at you saying that because that is one of the things that ties you down.

SARAH: Actually, it does. Peeing. [*laughter*]. It's a major, major thing.

DEE: And it's very hard if you're out in Crosshaven, you've to find a place to pee. Whereas men can just go behind a bloody tree and do it.

BREDA: When I went for my first consultation about my peeing problem, she said:

[*The* NURSE *from the institutional area comes centre stage and takes a seat at the table across from* BREDA]

NURSE: This might be embarrassing now.

BREDA: I said: *[turning first to* SARAH *and* DEE*, then to the* NURSE] 'It stopped being embarrassing the day I went for a long walk and was glad I'd black trousers on. It's no longer embarrassing.'

[*Stifled laughter from* SARAH *and* DEE. *The* NURSE *looks at* BREDA, *unamused, then leaves the stage*].

BREDA: [*to audience*] That was the worst. But the fact is that people who age – I as I age - will deserve and need support. [*to* SARAH *and* DEE] I just hope that the first little problem I – like a bad ankle or something – doesn't mean I'm shoved into the nursing home.

SARAH: No. I want to live semi-independently for as long as possible.

DEE: Yeah. Like sheltered homes.]
BREDA: Communal living situations.] [*spoken together*]
SARAH: They're tiered, aren't they?]

DEE: Yeah. There's the outer circle…[DEE *makes her arms into a circle in front of her and* SARAH *takes a place within them*.]

SARAH: Then there's the middle circle. [SARAH *makes a circle with her arms and* BREDA *takes a place within them*].

BREDA: Then when you really need it there's kind of like an inner – [*she turns to put her arms around both women and laughs].*

SARAH: Like an inner - Yeah. Exactly.

BREDA: There's one of those in Mallow actually.

DEE: And there was one in Skibbereen but I don't know what happened to it.

BREDA: The one in Mallow I personally think is where I'm signing up for. Yeah. Kind of sheltered accommodation. But not a nursing home.

DEE: Not a nursing home.

SARAH: No. Not a nursing home.

BREDA: In Crosshaven, up to 10 years ago, there wasn't one place that a single person could live. Not one. Like all houses being built are three-bedroomed. Two-bedroomed would be the smallest. The housing situation is *terrible*.

DEE: And there's a lack of public health nurses. Like, as an older person, I will need and deserve support to stay in my own space for as long as I can. At the moment, the Irish state is not providing for older people. I mean, we're voters. We do vote. Older people vote.

SARAH: Sorry, there are plenty of public health nurses but they're all writing out forms. It's 95% administration.

DEE: And no consultation. Any of the consultation that's done with older people often times is based in Dublin, not in rural areas. They don't have any idea of the lack of resources we have down here. There's less of the sort of human relationship.

BREDA: Whenever I go to the doctor, I never see myself as 'I'm a woman and my doctor is a man', or anything like that. When I go to the doctor, this is a body.

[*One of the men from the institutional area dons the white coat from the coat rack and comes to take a seat at the table*. BREDA *pulls her chair across from him*].

BREDA: [to DEE and SARAH] The doctor's *exhausted* from seeing different people's bodies. He just wants to know:

MAN as DOCTOR [*sounding and looking bored*]:
What are you complaining about? Yeah. Yeah. Just lay up there.

[BREDA *looks at the audience, then obediently gets up on the table with the help of* DEE and SARAH. *The 'doctor' pokes her ribs and belly impersonally*]

DOCTOR: Where's the pain? Is it there, is it there, is it there? There's nothing wrong with you. You're imagining it all.'

BREDA: [*meekly*] Thank you, doctor.

[DEE *and* SARAH *help* BREDA *down from the table in helpless laughter as the 'doctor' removes his white coat and returns to his chair at the side of the stage*].

SARAH: [*stands and walks the stage, thoughtfully]* We all know we're ageing and it's a fact of life. And like you do your best to kind of preserve – you know, maybe eating healthily and just don't do anything to excess and whatever. And I like to actually keep active. To keep moving. But I think it's just a constant kind of like a little niggle that you know –

BREDA: Yeah. It's as if they're – like from every aspect - they're preparing you for death. And just sometimes I think: 'am I hiding something?' It might be I'm half waiting for it.

[MOTHER TIME*'s area flashes on and off like an alarm and she looks around frantically. The projector screen comes alive with jumbled advertisements for gravestones, life insurance, stair lifts, private healthcare and nursing homes. The left wall also alights and the residents sit transfixed by the advertisements on the screen].*

BREDA: [*anxiously looking from the screen to the left and right walls*] It just all sort of piles on which is a bit excessive if you're supposed to be trying to be positive. And if you do anything, it's like:

[The CHORUS *runs on the stage quickly and surrounds* BREDA. *Each pair takes a line and leans in turn to speak it in* BREDA's *ear. They repeat their lines several times in a round, cutting across each other and moving out of turn, until the messages become garbled*].

CHORUS PAIR 1: Oh, you better watch it.

CHORUS PAIR 2: Your cholesterol is high.

CHORUS PAIR 3: You're going to get a heart attack if you don't do this.

[DEE *and* SARAH *stand and push the* CHORUS *away. The pairs leave the stage, still mumbling their lines, which grow quieter. The left stage wall and projector screen darken.* MOTHER TIME *falls to the floor, exhausted, as her area, too, darkens*].

BREDA: I just feel when you were younger you never heard anything like that.

SARAH: *[putting a consoling hand on* BREDA*'s shoulder]* There's an element of luck in it, too, of course. Like, well, thankfully for me personally, divorce is you know a possibility now that it wouldn't have been. God alone knows what my life would have been like if I hadn't been able to divorce. You know? Married women are now allowed to work. God alone knows what my life would have been like if it had been different. Being a single parent was – would have been hugely frowned upon. It was – it was actually frowned upon.

DEE: Absolutely. When you come to our age, like things have been very, very, very, very, very bad. And changes in legislation, people's attitudes, people's understanding have got us to a better place.

BREDA: [*smiling at* SARAH and DEE *and squeezing their hands*] And we've got to consider we're relatively lucky. I mean, there are women our age and a lot older who are doing hard physical labour. Or even women that are looking after the grandchildren because the daughter has to go out to work.

DEE: And, also too, we are pale which makes a big difference.

BREDA: Yeah.

DEE: We're not having to kind of work in troubled countries for a pittance. Scared to take a break because we might be raped going to the fields or something like that.

BREDA: Yeah.

SARAH: And I know I'm absolutely blessed to have had an education. And I returned to education quite a number of times. But like, you know, that's not a choice that a lot of other people have had.

DEE: Mmm. We're not as privileged as pale men. But we're still fairly privileged.

SARAH: But we're going to be privileged because we'll outlive them. [*Laughter*]

BREDA: Or is that just longer in the nursing home? [*Pause*]

SARAH: [*rises and begins to dance around the institutional space which lights in a hazy light*] For me, mostly, it would be to do with my legs. If I couldn't walk. Because I know if you can't walk, that's the first thing to go.

[SARAH *sits tentatively on a chair at the side wall, looking at the other residents anxiously.* SARAH's DAUGHTER appears on the stage, with SARAH's GRANDDAUGHTER *and they talk over* SARAH].

SARAH: [*turns to look at the audience]* And the cameras come in at Christmas:

[*The* DAUGHTER *sits and leans against her head against* SARAH's *as the* GRANDDAUGHTER *takes a photo on her phone. Both do fake smiles for the photo*. SARAH's GRANDDAUGHER *shows the photograph on her mobile to* SARAH'S DAUGHTER. *The image appears on an Instagram screen on the overhead projector screen with the caption*: Gran having a great time in the common room. *The* DAUGHTER *and* GRANDDAUGHTER *leave the stage.* BREDA *and* DEE *run to pull* SARAH *back centre stage and seat her at the table as the left wall darkens*].

SARAH: [*breathless in panic*] All that. All that. It frightens me.

DEE: [*strokes* SARAH*'s shoulder*] Oh, we'll just sit in the seats and we'll pee all day long until they throw us out' [*the women laugh*]. And make them take us home.

DEE: What I find more scary is the thought that you might have a long-term debilitating illness. A mind trapped in a body. And you can't do what the mind wants. And I know from experience that, at that stage, it's too late to go to Switzerland or somewhere like that. They won't take you unless you can actually speak for yourself.

SARAH: Mmm. That worry gets more pronounced when you get older. And as you start to feel the aches and pains. Sometimes when you start to think ooh –

DEE: Or a friend gets debilitated.

BREDA: Or you start to need help walking across the rocks on the beach.

DEE: Or if it's cold and going out to the line in winter.

SARAH: I actually don't go to the line. I put them into the dryer.

BREDA: I have a big garden but I don't even cut the grass. Because I just - it just makes me feel older every time I look out the window at it. There's a family next door to me. They've three small children and they've the most beautiful garden. Now the children all play in it and everything. And I'm just too tired to do it. I just don't have the energy. And it makes me feel old when I look out at it. I'm afraid to go near the compost container 'cos there might be somebody living in there. *[laughter].*

DEE: Corcadorca put on a great play about four years ago. It was called Numbers. It was an Italian writer. And it was really, you know – if you knew, if you always knew the age, the number at which you would die, how would that affect your life?

[*A collage of numbers and images of older men and women in conflicting images – e.g., sky-diving alone versus sitting alone appearing lonely appears in a confusing jumble on the screen].*

SARAH: Yes.

DEE: There was kind of, you know, one bit where somebody was saying to a child: [*a* CHILD *runs on to the stage as if just passing through*]. 'Why aren't you in school?'

CHILD: I'm a 6. So, what's the point in going to school for one year? I'm going to die anyway.

[*The* CHILD *laughs and runs off. The* MOTHER TIME *area comes alight as she places the crystal ball on the floor and instead opens a laptop. An ordered spreadsheet of names and numbers appears on the projector screen, with some names with lines through them*].

DEE: You know that kind of way? [*to* BREDA *and* SARAH]

BREDA: You could do all those risky things. If you knew. Although then again would you want to be alive with a broken neck? [*laughter*]

DEE: No, exactly. You'd be alive with a broken - . It wouldn't hurry you up.

SARAH: No. That's part of it. You couldn't do anything totally crazy.

BREDA: Yeah.

DEE: But you could walk outside and if you got flu and the cold it wouldn't bother you.

BREDA: Yeah.

DEE: I'm not going to die anyway until this date so –

SARAH: I don't know – I would be really unsettled. I would hate, you know, knowing when I'm going to die. I would actually *hate* it.

[*Next lines are all spoken together in panic*]

BREDA: You would kind of sit there on the day it's going to happen.
SARAH: Wouldn't you be kind of sitting around, like? You know, when you're –
DEE: It would absolutely mess with my head.

[*All stop at the same time*, *abruptly, and look back at* MOTHER TIME*. Then they look at each other, reach for each other's hands and take a breath. The projector screen and* MOTHER TIME*'s area darken*].

DEE: Actually, if someone said to me 'you're going to die in three years time' now, I actually wouldn't be so upset by it. Whereas if you'd said it to me when I was in my fifties, I think I would have been absolutely messed in my head. I think there's certain things I don't ever want to know and that's one of them.

SARAH: Yeah, me neither. Because there's too much mystery. There's too much enjoyment. And I want to. Whack. Every. Moment. [*slowly*] out of it. Now that I can. You see, there was a time when I couldn't.

BREDA: Yeah.

SARAH: And now I can.

[SARAH *gets up and does a slow, measured, beautiful ballet piece around the stage. The* CHORUS *emerges from the audience. They stand at the side of the stage pushing closer to its centre, trying to hinder* SARAH *in her dance*. *Their usual mumbled words like 'longer', 'shorter', 'skirt', 'older' are audible but* SARAH *moves through them gracefully and begins to divide them. Their voices become louder as they call to each other across the space, then they become confused. Their words fragment and unravel until they become silent. They move off the stage one by one, looking back as if to catch a last glimpse of* SARAH *who returns to sit at the table to* BREDA *and* DEE*'s admiring applause].*

BREDA: I tore my hamstring a while ago. I went into hospital then. The CUH. And they wouldn't let me home because I was on my own. I mean, my children are wonderful and they're very good to me. But like they have their *own* children and their *own* lives. When I left home - I left home to be married and have my own children and I'd go to see my mother whenever it suited *me*. There wasn't that – I had moved on. It was a pod. My pod. Now my children have their own pods. See, I don't expect them –

SARAH: Exactly.

BREDA: But the CUH said we can't leave you go home and that made me feel very vulnerable and old. And they said you have to stay in until this is sorted. I just felt 'oh.'

SARAH: You suddenly came face-to-face with –

BREDA: Yeah. And then friends were calling up, they were like: 'oh, be careful now'. And I was like 'it's ok. I'm not ancient. I know I'm after – I'm grand again. I'm fine.' But they were like 'don't fall now and mind this and -' [*concerned voice*]. That was a nightmare.

SARAH: Tough.

BREDA: It is lonely being on your own as you get older. I came out of my marriage a few years ago. After nearly 40 years. It was a very controlling one. So, I'm happier in that sense. But aam yeah -

SARAH: It was a big change.

BREDA: Big change. Because like you go from doing everything together to sort of having – now you'd still have your friends but it's a big difference from being on your own to being with somebody. But that was my own choice. It took a while to get used to, but I was happy. I think I'm a better person as a result of it.

SARAH: And is it something you'd be interested in – meeting somebody else?

BREDA: I'd be open to meeting someone else. Yeah. I would actually, yeah. Years ago, I couldn't go on holidays because I couldn't afford to go anywhere and now I can afford to maybe treat myself but I can't go anywhere because I just – like it's not everyone you'd go on holidays with either [*laughs*].

SARAH: And how easy is it to meet someone as you get older?

BREDA: Impossible, I'd say. I think people sort of write you off [*does the flourish in the air with her hand*] when you get to your 60s maybe - or maybe even 50s - I don't know. I don't know whether it's a kind of a cultural thing or what but like there's very little openings socially for older people to meet anybody. I just think you're kind of a bit forgotten.

DEE: And what do you think of these dating web-sites for the over 50s? Like internet dating? Would you try that?

BREDA: I actually – my niece set me up on Tinder. I'd split up with my husband, so she decided –

[BREDA's NIECE *appears centre stage. She takes a seat at the table with* BREDA *and picks up the mobile phone on the table.* SARAH *and* DEE *get up and watch from behind].*

NIECE: [*tapping furiously at the mobile phone*] Maybe you should try it.

BREDA: [*light, positive voice*] Ok. Sure, I'll give it a go anyway.

NIECE: [*handing* BREDA *the phone. A projector screen image of very good-looking man in his sixties appears*] Oh, he looks lovely.

BREDA: Yeah, he looks ok [*hesitantly*].

NIECE: Why don't you meet him?

[*The* NIECE *disappears and a small man with glasses wanders onstage uncertainly. He is wearing a waistcoat and tweed suit and looks nothing like the photo on the projector screen which now fades. As he walks towards* BREDA*:]*.

BREDA: [*to the audience*] Oh, my God, is this him?

[She looks at SARAH *and* DEE *who cover their faces*, *unable to watch*. BREDA *stands to shake the* MAN*'s hand and is noticeably taller than him*. *They sit stiffly together at the table, both looking out at the audience in awkward silence*].

MAN: [*eventually*] How did you - how many times have you gone on this thing?

BREDA: Mmm?

MAN: How many times –]

BREDA: [*talking over him*] Oh, never. I - this is my first time].

[*The* MAN *leaves and* BREDA *looks at* SARAH *and* DEE *as they try not to laugh. The phone pings and a text message appears on the projector screen: 'Netflix and chill?'*

BREDA: [*looks at the phone, then shows it to her NIECE who has re-appeared*] I think he wants to go on another date. Is it to watch a movie or something? I'd love to go to the cinema.

NIECE: [*suggestively*] He means to go down to his *house* to watch a movie.

BREDA: Oh, Jesus, forget that anyway.

[Her NIECE *runs off-stage, in hysterics of laughter].*

DEE: *[coming with* SARAH *to re-join* BREDA *at the table].*
It's like being in a foreign land, isn't it?

BREDA: Absolutely. My niece was saying like you'd kind of – you'd meet a guy and then they wouldn't ask you to be their girlfriend or something like for about - I didn't know what that was about. I didn't even bother asking her to explain it to me.

SARAH: There are all these rules.

BREDA: Yeah, and words. All terms, yeah. I'm not going to wear myself down that much about it because it's too much like hard work. This friend of mine, she said to me: 'why – it's funny that your friends wouldn't introduce you to someone? You know? That surely they'd have friends.' But I said: 'that doesn't really happen.' And she found that strange. I asked my friend then because her husband – well, she has a good circle of friends. She plays golf and everything.

[*A female 'resident' rises from a chair and joins* BREDA *at the table*].

WOMAN: Breda, I wouldn't introduce you to any of them 'cos they're all *ancient*. They all have health problems.

BREDA: Good Lord. No. I don't want one of those.

[*The* WOMAN *returns to her chair in the institutional scene*].

SARAH: Maybe a younger fella?

BREDA: I wouldn't – It wouldn't be for me anyway.

DEE: No?

BREDA: Not really, no.

SARAH: Why not?

BREDA: I suppose it depends on how much older. Like, say, me now going out with someone in their forties, I couldn't see that happening. I'd be sort of saying 'God, I' – thinking of like what would others think? What is she doing with a young fella' or whatever. Because I was very friendly with this guy. He was Spanish and we got together through – I don't know was it Meetup or something? I think I was in – oh yeah, I was in Spanish class and they wanted someone to do language exchange and he sent me an email or something and I met up with him.

[*A very good-looking* YOUNGER MAN *enters from up right of the stage and comes centre stage. He looks around as if searching for someone*].

BREDA: And he was like, we'll say 35 or something? And we used to meet.

[*The* YOUNGER MAN *sees* BREDA*, waves, and comes to hug her].*

BREDA: [*moves away to talk to the audience as the* YOUNGER MAN *listens*] And he – it turned out that he was staying quite near me, so we actually got very friendly. [*to* SARAH *and* DEE *who have moved to the side of the stage to watch*]. And we – like I'd maybe go up to his house for dinner once a week. He might come down to me.

[BREDA *and the* YOUNGER MAN *sit down, laughing, at the table*].

BREDA: Or maybe on a Sunday we'd go to the beach or whatever. [*They move their chairs together as in a car, looking at each other and laughing*]. Or go for a drive. And this went on for a couple of years. And then I brought him to something down at my sister-in-law's – I think it was a birthday party.

BREDA: [*to* YOUNGER MAN] Sure, look come down.

[BREDA *and the* YOUNGER MAN *move to the centre of the stage*. *The* CHORUS *emerges from the audience and gathers down right of the stage. They huddle together and watch as* BREDA *appears with the* YOUNGER MAN. *One man and one woman sidle out of the* CHORUS *to stand on either side of* BREDA].

MAN 1: [*low, quiet, disapproving Cork accent*] Sure, what are you doing going out with that young fella?

BREDA: [*turning to face the* CHORUS *member*] Sure, that's only a friend.

[WOMAN 1 *sticks head between* BREDA *and the* YOUNGER MAN *to say in* BREDA*'s other ear]*.

WOMAN 1: Mmm, *you're* doing alright.

BREDA: There was nothing like that going on [*to the audience*]. We were just friendly. So, anyway. It wouldn't be for me.

[BREDA *speaks silently to the* YOUNGER MAN, *pointing off stage*, *and he leaves, along with the* CHORUS*, who are still mumbling as they leave the stage*].

DEE: And what do you think you would get out of a relationship now that you don't have?

BREDA: I suppose the most important thing for me would be the social aspect of it. It would be nice to have someone to go out with and you know maybe just go for a drive or go on holidays. I think it's because you're like – I think people sort of write you off [BREDA *does the writing flourish with her hand*].

DEE: Mmm.

BREDA: You're kind of ignored. Like 'aah sure, she had her life', you know, so –

SARAH: It's like sexuality among older people and things like that – the way that that's portrayed in films –

BREDA: Oh, yeah. Like that it's a no-go area. And I mean it's not as if you're desperately looking for someone. Or that you're gone the opposite way and wouldn't dream of having anything to do with a man again because you had a bad relationship, we'll say. I mean, I never said anything like that. But it's like - I can't explain it. It's like as if you're – it doesn't exist like or that you wouldn't be interested or you just – I don't know.

SARAH: It's funny, isn't it?

BREDA: Even my friends that are married would never say – now one of them yes, alright, she did. She said she wouldn't inflict any of the people that she knew on me. Maybe the fact that they're married for so long themselves. I've often thought of that really. Like they'd say 'why would you want to meet anyone? They're like:

[*Two female residents come and stand on either side of* BREDA].

WOMAN 1: Oh my God, sure, you're better off.

WOMAN 2: I wouldn't mind being on my own.

[*The two* WOMEN *return to their chairs in the institutional scene*].

BREDA: Which is like, ridiculous. I think anyway. I think they're just kind of saying it maybe to make you feel better. Or maybe they genuinely do think that. But I think society is more designed – in this country anyway – for couples? Like I wouldn't be we'll say invited out – if my friends were going out with their husbands, obviously I wouldn't be asked.

SARAH: And how does that make you feel?

BREDA: I suppose I'm on my own now and I'm not kind of afraid. I just feel it's like a bit sad. I'm just kind of resigned to it now. Not that you mightn't even really *want* to go but you would never be included in anything like that.

SARAH: Mmm. My friends [*in voice apostrophes*] – now only contact me if they actually want something. You know, it will always be – it's a one-way street.

DEE: This is where I actually have stopped calling those people friends. I call them acquaintances. That's the big – losing people as you go along, you know. And not just necessarily because they're old and everything. It's like losing people who were friends, or you thought were friends and then – And even people who were genuinely friends but life has moved on, they've had to move on.

SARAH: I have a friend who is 86 or 87 – she's got Alzheimer's. She rang me three times in 10 minutes the other evening. And I'm finding it very hard to deal with that, you know, because she was so - four years ago, I suppose, she did an arts degree in UCC just to keep her brain active. And she still has Alzheimer's.

DEE: [*Both* DEE *and* BREDA *stroke* SARAH's *arm*]: Doing the degree may have postponed it a bit.

BREDA: Actually, it's interesting what you're saying about friends and acquaintances. One of my best friends now. She – her son has got married in the States and he's building a little house at the back of his house for her. So, the chances of us getting together regularly are going to be reduced…you know. Things like that. Of my two best friends, I had to check myself at one stage. I found that I was ringing her up and saying: 'can I run something by you?' And she's brilliant. She's absolutely amazing. But I felt: 'that's not right. I can't just ring her every time I want to kind of do –' So, sometimes I ring and say 'look, just want to chat. Don't need any advice or anything like that.'

DEE: Yeah.

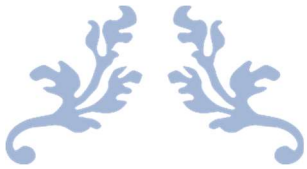
BREDA: And then the other part of it is having somebody that you'd kind of – would be on the same wavelength as yourself - that you could kind of chat to maybe or – 'Cos I was thinking there some days I don't talk to anybody.

DEE: It's funny how it creeps up on you, isn't it, without –

BREDA: Being aware of it, yeah. But I suppose it is a bit of a fear when you think: 'God, imagine now if anything happened. What would I do? I've no-one.' Or say if I got sick or whatever. You know, sometimes that kind of would come across me and I'm like 'I really have no-one.'

[BREDA, DEE *and* SARAH *go quiet, lost in their thoughts. Both side walls lighten briefly, then slowly fade to dark].*

[LONG PAUSE]



PART III
Seeing

[These words appear on the projector screen]

[The stage lightens to the three women sitting at the table in a row as if in a classroom. *Both walls of the stage will stay alight throughout this final part.* MOTHER TIME *and the residents are listening avidly, bending in to the scene center stage, with their legs crossed and chins on their hands*].

DEE: [*speaking like a school mistress*] For older people who want to try and stay independent we need what used to exist.

SARAH: *[Also, in the voice of a school mistress. She puts on a pair of glasses and reaches for a large bundle of papers on the table. She divides them between* DEE *and* BREDA]
It's also essential to have an enduring power of attorney done.

BREDA: Yes.

*[*DEE and BREDA *divide out the papers on the table. The women hold the pages away from their faces as if trying to see more clearly. Then they reach for the spectacles on the table and put them on and try to read again. The women exchange spectacles, trying again to see the form. Next, they reach for the magnifying glasses. Finally, they look at each other helplessly and shrug. They push the forms to one side and remove the spectacles].*

DEE: Do you have to do it if you're going into a nursing home, is it?

SARAH: No. No. You can do it now. I've done it now.

BREDA: When you do your will is a good time to do it.

SARAH: There are two different things actually. One is called Let Me Decide. This is where you can make – you can –

DEE: [*reaches for the forms from the table and turns pages, as if confused*] Do Not Resuscitate, is it?

SARAH: Let Me Decide. It's a form that you can get.

[SARAH *reaches across and selects a piece of paperwork, then hands it to* BREDA *and* DEE. *They take it from her, pretend to read, then place it subtly to one side on the table, glancing at each other and shrugging their shoulders*].

SARAH: So, you tell your family 'this is what I want' and 'I don't want to be resuscitated' or 'I don't want to be PEG fed.' You know, all this sort of thing. You can make your own decisions. So long as your family agree with it. But if you've one person who dissents, it causes chaos.

BREDA: Chaos. Absolutely.

SARAH: The Enduring Power of Attorney is slightly different.

DEE: Does that mean it doesn't matter what they say once you've decided?

BREDA: [*to* DEE] It's more like a guideline really. It doesn't have any legal standing yet.

SARAH: No. The Enduring Power of Attorney does. It does. But the Let Me Decide is a lot more – to me the more serious document. It's what you're saying that you're medically willing to go through.

BREDA: [*shaking her head and pushing the paperwork to one side. She takes* SARAH *and* DEE *by their hands*] If you were to say something now to a younger person about growing older, or to yourself as a younger person, what would it be?

DEE: Stay active and stay *engaged*.

SARAH: Don't be afraid.

DEE: And I think like don't stereotype people or don't kind of batch us all together like 'oh, you're that age now so…' whatever. Like I think you have to take the individual. Some people are kind of young at heart [*looks at* SARAH]; others aren't. But I think don't push all older adults into the one thing and go [*low, morbid voice*]: 'oh yeah, sure God – you're on the way out now.' 'When will you be – when's your sixtieth, when's your seventieth?' I just think there's too much emphasis on age as kind of a number, then stereotyping you to that number, you know? Like it's not denial. I know I'm ageing. But I just think give us older people more of a role in society.

SARAH: Yeah. Don't assume that because we're all this age, we all look the same and do the same things.

DEE: Absolutely. And I'd say it gets better, too. It gets better. TV licence. Living alone allowance. Having a pension. And, to be fair, at this age, you do get a certain amount of respect - whether you deserve it or not. Well, respect is maybe the wrong word. I'm not sure if other people do kind of give you a certain regard. Positive regard.

BREDA: I think it *can* get better. But I'd say have a bit of empathy, too, maybe. And a bit *more* respect. Because we're not a burden. We're a massive asset. If only somebody would recognise that we have a massive, massive, contribution to make. 'Cos I think like – like say in our age group, I think I had more respect and empathy for older people. Whereas I think younger people now, they're like [*pause*] I don't think that respect is there.

DEE: But what do you mean by respect, though?

BREDA: As in like don't sort of write us off [*does the writing action with her hand*] as just *old*. You know? That we have maybe something to contribute. I think that's kind of overlooked a bit.

SARAH: Right. But you'd hate to go back to the stage where older people had to be totally respected and you kind of had to sit there quietly when they spoke. And if they said they wanted you to do something you'd have to do it straightaway. They had this different level of – And I mean I think you know given the abuse that has happened in certain things, I think the fact that that we don't have the – I don't want people to respect me because I'm *old*.

BREDA: Yeah. It was imposed. I felt personally you *had* to respect your elders. Whether they were right, or whether they were wrong, it didn't matter.

DEE: I do think that probably the *only* good thing that has come out of all these revelations about sexual abuse in religious life is that actually it's taken away this mandatory: 'oh, we have to listen to them, we have to respect them. We can't question them.'

SARAH: Yeah.

BREDA: And that's the one thing that – I know the one thing my children have had that I certainly wouldn't have had was the freedom to ask questions. And I think it's one of the best gifts you can give a child.

SARAH: Yes.

DEE: But I'd still like them to help me when I'm struggling [*laughs*]. D'you know that kind of way? I'd like them to notice she needs help or she doesn't need help.

SARAH: Yes.

BREDA: Because one of the things I remember talking many years ago to somebody who was saying: 'why has our Irish society changed so much?' And I was saying that it was television. That people used go and play cards in the neighbour's house –

[*The overhead projector screen shows an old-fashioned scene of people playing cards around a table, with a fire burning*]

DEE: That's right.

BREDA: And they'd go down and visit the neighbour.

SARAH: Mmm.

BREDA: Just to have a *chat*. You might get a cup of tea. You mightn't get a cup of tea. But there was this interaction around the country town where I grew up. And I said 'well, television. Everybody got stuck watching television.' And the thing he said was central heating. And that never entered my head. He said we all stayed in the one room because it was the only room that was warm in the house [*laughter*].

SARAH: Yeah. Or else you were freezing.

BREDA: And now you've central heating so people are going to their own bedrooms or into another room in the house -

DEE: And, also, most houses have more than one TV so people aren't even watching the same TV. Every house now has wifi.

SARAH: Does anyone remember Nuala O'Faolain's final interview? When she said that what made her really, really angry about the fact that she was going to die. She said: 'all my knowledge, all my information I've gathered for years, all that I have to give, is going to be lost.'

BREDA: [*soft voice*] Yes.

SARAH: And I just feel very strongly about that because there's so much that older people *can* contribute to society. We can contribute in fun, music, you know, in so many different ways.

DEE: And that's something that was passed on in earlier years. You know, the old person in the community where people gathered in their homes and they told the stories and sang the songs and passed on the tunes. That was there.

BREDA: Oral tradition. Yeah, it's gone.

[*The institutional scene lights up to show the residents sitting, dreaming, lost in their own worlds].*

DEE: Younger people went to their homes and they listened to them and they heard all this –

SARAH: There was also a *value*. People *wanted* to hear, *wanted* to listen. And it's as if – because we can't manage technology, we're redundant.

DEE: Yeah.

BREDA: And this expectation that you're on Instagram or da da da.

SARAH: Or that you are on wifi.

BREDA: And that you have perfect wifi.

DEE: But, on the other hand, why wouldn't you? Why would you not be trained? There's no reason why older people can't be. I mean, we've learned to drive, most of us. And driving a computer is a hell of a lot easier if you're shown properly.

SARAH: One of the things I will say about that. I planned to do loads of things and Covid came and it stopped all my activities for two years. And we're two years older now. I just had made a decision pre-Covid that I'd go to this class in Crosshaven about iPad and iPhone and everything else like that. And Covid came and everything was cancelled. And I just haven't found – I know where t'was being held and everything. I actually went to the trouble of doing all that. And that is why I feel I'm way behind.

BREDA: I think in many ways we have been replaced by technology.

[BREDA *picks up the mobile phone and moves to the institutional scene. The NURSE comes and stands with the three residents who rise from their seats as if preparing for a photo shoot. All signs of an 'institution' and of growing older are removed and they give big, fake smiles for the camera. A photo of the three smiling older people appears on a Facebook profile on the projector screen with the headline 'STILL LOOKING GOOD AT 85.' The institutional scene darkens*].

SARAH: I think it's so like – For young people nowadays, like it's so kind of false. Like they judge on appearance a lot [*long pause*].

BREDA: It's a bit shallow, isn't it? Judging someone on appearance alone.

DEE: I looked at a few episodes of Love Island and I couldn't believe how they were all so – so perfect. And the guys wanted the girls to be perfect - the hair, everything. I just thought it was like [*laughs*] so far removed from reality. Or maybe that is reality nowadays.

[*A clip of Love Island contestants in swimwear appears on the projector screen and the three women look up at it*].

SARAH: What would you think of a Love Island for older people? Would the conversations be different?

DEE: Would they be that much different when you think of it? Because like they're – the youngsters are planning holidays, having a future. If you had an older group, they would probably be thinking the same.

SARAH: Mmm.

BREDA: But maybe they'd have kids and divorces or whatever. That would have to come into account. It would be – it mightn't be as plain sailing as the youngsters.

SARAH: Yeah. Maybe a bit more complicated.

DEE: But the visions would be the same.

SARAH: Yeah. It wouldn't be like 'let's go together and sit in front of the fire for the rest of our lives.'

BREDA: Yeah. No. It wouldn't.

DEE: There's a generational change, isn't there? Of older people.

SARAH: Absolutely, yeah.

BREDA: We have the same vision of the future as young people now.

DEE: Except older people have lived lives. They've lived and they've been through ups and downs. I think if you're going around in a sort of unrealistic world I don't think it would kind of –. Because I think a lot of young people are very mixed up nowadays.

SARAH: I think it's that they're just so bound up in this kind of virtual life. They don't actually see what's happening around them.

BREDA: No. But I've definitely become more huggy as I've got older.

DEE: I have.

SARAH: I definitely have. I think it has become more accepted that people hug. I think that's partly it.

DEE: Yeah. You see young girls running down the street and they're [*high pitched screaming*]. And they just met five minutes ago.

BREDA: Also, I noticed the quality of hugs is different when you're older. Because I remember – I first noticed this with an older friend. She's 10 years older than me. And I'm sort of saying 'my God, she does the most amazing hugs.' You just want to relax into her.

DEE: Yeah.

BREDA: And I now notice that I'm copying her hug in that it's a long, slow hug.

SARAH: Yes.

BREDA: Rather than, you know. And you're breathing into it and relaxing into it more than – When I was younger, I would have just grabbed someone [*takes hold of* SARAH *for a quick, awkward hug before moving away*], 'how're you doing?' And kind of backed off.

DEE: And we've come out of Covid so –

BREDA: Yeah. I suppose I'd be more conscious of it now after Covid. But it would have been building up before. You feel a genuine hug. You just feel it.

SARAH: Yeah. It's not wanting anything or taking anything. It's just – here's my hug. For you.

[BREDA *stands slowly and* DEE *and* SARAH *join her. The three women form a group hug*. *Then* BREDA *wanders to the mirror and her reflection is mirrored on the large screen]*.

BREDA: [*as if to herself as she looks at her reflection*] There's too much enjoyment. Too much mystery. And I want to. Whack. Every. Moment. [*slowly*] out of it. Now that I can.

SARAH *stands to dance a piece of ballet, then comes to stand behind* BREDA *with her reflection in the mirror and on screen. She touches* BREDA's *shoulder and the two women do a ballet turn in unison. Then,* SARAH *disappears into the darkness.*

Next DEE *comes to touch* BREDA's *shoulder and is reflected behind her in the mirror and on screen*. *Both women do a few hand pumps in unison. Then* DEE*, too, disappears into the darkness. Alone,* BREDA *raises a sleeve of her shirt. On the screen, a tattoo of a hand-written script of geographical coordinates can be seen on her arm. She rubs it fondly. BREDA then takes a piece of string from her pocket and clasps it in her chest as she begins to sing quietly at first, and then more loudly: 'hi ho, hi ho, it's off to work we go.'*

On the projector screen, an image of BREDA *dressed in three-quarter length trousers, wearing a short-sleeved tee-shirt beneath* DEE's *knitted homemade vest and sporting a tattoo briefly appears. She has* SARAH's *blue hair with a purple streak. The projector screen image then changes to reflect* BREDA *as she is, looking at herself in the mirror. She touches the reflection of her face in the mirror and begins to play with her face as if smoothing wrinkles and performing jaw exercises.*

Queen's 'We Are The Champions' begins to play. BREDA *stops the face exercises and smiles at herself, gently touching her reflection. Then she raises her arms and waves them in time so the music. She moves slowly centre stage, still waving her arms in the air, as both side walls brighten hazily.* MOTHER TIME *and the 'residents' stand to salute as she passes but* BREDA *does not see them. She takes a seat centre stage at the kitchen table, calmly looking out to the audience, as the two walls and kitchen scene gradually darken, and the music fades.*

THE END