

SIXTEEN

Matthew Turner

Characters

GLADYS, female, 83

SHANICE, female, 16

Lights up.

Gladys and Shanice are sitting next to each other on a couch. Shanice is in her school uniform, and has a schoolbag by her feet. She is wearing more make-up than the school would allow.

Gladys has a mug of tea before her. Shanice is on her mobile, texting, not paying any attention to Gladys.

GLADYS This isn't tea.

SHANICE *[Eyes still on her mobile.]* What it said on the box. Tetley right, that's tea?

GLADYS Tea is brewed in a pot.

SHANICE Uh-uh. Tea is in a bag. Why they call it a teabag.

GLADYS You heat a kettle of freshly-drawn water, warm the pot, add fresh tea leaves – never a bag – then pour the water at the peak of the boil, the peak mind you. Let it stand for five minutes exactly and pour through a strainer into chinaware. Then and only then does the drink deserve the name 'tea'.

Shanice stops texting and looks at Gladys as if she is crazy.

SHANICE Lot of fuss for a drink.

GLADYS Milk can be added before or after, as you prefer.

SHANICE Yeah, right.

Shanice turns away again, back to her mobile. She laughs at something she reads.

Gladys doesn't look at her.

GLADYS You can leave if you want. I shan't mind.

SHANICE If I leave I don't get my credit.

GLADYS What's that?

SHANICE My credit. Assisting the elderly. You don't think I want to be here, do you?

Beat.

You don't think I got better things to do with my time?

Pause.

GLADYS Well then.

Might I suggest we come to an arrangement?

SHANICE I aint gonna be doing no—

GLADYS An arrangement. I sign your form or what-have-you, say you've spent the full hour, and we can both be spared. You can make me a cup of tea and leave.

Beat.

SHANICE Just leave?

Gladys nods.

Alright. S'pose I can do that.

GLADYS So?

Gladys gestures to the door.

SHANICE You messing though? You won't shop me?

GLADYS And have them send another?

Beat.

SHANICE You'll be alright though?

GLADYS I'll manage.

Shanice gets up to leave. At the door she turns.

SHANICE Thanks, yeah.

Blackout.

Lights up.

Gladys and Shanice are sitting next to each other on the couch. Gladys is drinking a mug of tea.

There is a plate of biscuits on the table before them. Shanice picks up a pink wafer.

SHANICE These are real old-lady biscuits. Like, we studied these biscuits in History.

GLADYS We take what we're given here.

SHANICE Yeah but still.

She eats the biscuit and grimaces.

Pause.

Shanice looks around the room.

SHANICE What do you do in here? There's like, literally nothing to do. No flatscreen. No Xbox. No tunes.

GLADYS We talk. Or we listen. I don't like to talk.

SHANICE I get that.

Pause.

I been thinking, like, our nan lives with us, or she did, before you know, and it was a pain and that, sleeping on the sofa so she could have my bed, having her granny knickers in with my wash, but why are you living here with no one coming to see you?

GLADYS Not no one, dear.

SHANICE I don't count.

Beat.

Like, my uncle been vex with my mum from time, some money someone owed to someone or something, but he's still round our yard three times a week. He's still having his food with us, scowling at my mum's back. You must 'a done something real bad to have them cut you off and not come by you.

Beat.

Eh Gladys? Why they grudging you?

GLADYS Shanice? What sort of a name is Shanice?

SHANICE It's my name. It's good enough. Don't be getting all racist on me now.

Gladys puts her mug down.

GLADYS I've finished my tea.

SHANICE Yeah.

Yeah we're done.

Shanice gets up to leave.

You wanna be grateful you got me, you know.

Gladys doesn't respond. Frustrated, Shanice exits.

Gladys sits in silence.

Blackout.

Lights up.

Gladys and Shanice are sitting next to each other on the couch. They are now both drinking mugs of tea.

SHANICE I said to the woman, that nurse woman at the door, I said man you gotta upgrade your snackage. Like, white choc chip cookies. White choc chip with raspberries. And none of that sugar-free – you ladies in here, what else you got? You going out you wanna go out in style.

Gladys smiles.

No offence like.

GLADYS I wish I could measure my life by the quality of a biscuit.

SHANICE The other women, like, you could gang up. Demand better biscuits. You ever talk to them?

GLADYS They prattle. It's nothing I want to hear.

SHANICE Gone in the head, yeah?

GLADYS They talk about the other girls. From your school. How the girls come because they want to, and always stay the full hour.

But you're not like the other girls, are you Shanice?

SHANICE It's just... it's not for me, yeah? You know, school's fine if you're set on getting your As and your A stars and your name read out in assembly, but I can't be wasting my time.

GLADYS So they punish you with me.

SHANICE They think it'll straighten me out. Ashley calls it my community service.

GLADYS You won't be staying on for A levels?

SHANICE As if. Me? I need to be earning. I aint got no rich man's gonna whisk me away.

GLADYS You said Ashley?

Shanice laughs.

SHANICE Ashley's no rich man. Ashley's a boy.

Beat.

GLADYS What about, something vocational? A technical college?

Shanice puts down her mug.

SHANICE You're boring me now, Gladys.

GLADYS It's not boring to think about the future. It's not boring to dream. What are your dreams, Shanice?

SHANICE I'm sixteen. Like, I got years to work all that out.

Long pause.

GLADYS There is a reason, Shanice, why no one comes to see me. It's not that no one cares, it's just that there is no one.

I never had children.

SHANICE Bet you regret that now.

GLADYS Regrets are all I have.

SHANICE But like, no nieces and nephews?

GLADYS I was an only child.

SHANICE For real? Me, I got tonnes of cousins. I'm always forgetting their names, their birthdays.

GLADYS Well maybe you'll be fine when your time comes.

SHANICE So like, you never wanted your own?

GLADYS There was a time. A man who might have... Some things we choose, and some are taken out of our hands.

SHANICE Did he die? Like, in the War.

GLADYS *[Indignant.]* How old do you think I am?

SHANICE I dunno. How'm I supposed to know how old you are? You're old.

GLADYS I didn't need a man. I didn't... like men.

A beat while Shanice gets it.

SHANICE Gladys! You dirty girl.

GLADYS There's nothing dirty. It wasn't a choice. It's just... how I'm made.

SHANICE But in here, with all the other women. You got the hots for any of them? Do they know?

Shanice looks around the room excitedly.

GLADYS Shanice!

SHANICE Alright, alright. I'm not stupid. I wasn't gonna...

Beat.

I'd better...

GLADYS Of course.

Shanice gets up to leave.

Blackout.

Lights up.

Gladys is sitting on the couch. Shanice is pouring tea from a teapot into two china cups on the table, through a tea strainer. She makes a bit of a mess, she's not used to using a teapot, but she manages to fill the cups.

SHANICE This isn't like, some TV thing, we're best mates now or nothing.

I just thought it'd be nice.

GLADYS It is nice.

Shanice sits down and hands a cup and saucer to Gladys.

Gladys sits sipping her tea. Shanice is watching her.

SHANICE What you said. You know, before. Like, couldn't you adopt?

Gladys laughs.

GLADYS Not in those days. And then I was too old.

My friend, she changed her mind, decided to marry a man instead.

Convinced herself that was who she was.

I sometimes get a card at Christmas.

Pause.

SHANICE I looked into some courses. At the college. I thought, perhaps Hotel Management or something. Can't you see me running a hotel?

GLADYS My dear, I really wouldn't act on any advice I may have inadvertently given you.

SHANICE But you said I should—

GLADYS If I did I shouldn't have. Things are so different now. So very different now to my day. I won't tell you what to do with your life.

SHANICE Oh.

GLADYS I'd have no basis to give advice.

Beat.

I'm sorry, dear.

SHANICE Ashley wants me to move in with him. Wants us to get serious.

GLADYS And what do you want?

SHANICE It's like, he's got a job and everything. He sees it all. He's got plans, dreams, like you said.

GLADYS His dreams?

SHANICE Right. So we could have it all, a flat, a little car, kids of our own, DJ gigs for Ashley at the weekend.

GLADYS But you're not sure if you're ready yet?

SHANICE I'm ready. I just... I just don't know if that's too much like giving up. You get me? Like, am I taking what I want or only what I can get?

Gladys picks up the other cup and saucer and hands it to Shanice.

They both sit sipping their tea.

Shanice jumps.

Nearly forgot.

She roots in her schoolbag and brings out a packet of cookies. She opens the packet and gives one large cookie to Gladys and takes one for herself.

White choc chip. With raspberries.

They eat their cookies together.

Lights down.