

Magda Manning 55 *Erik's mother. A widow. She is psychotic.*
Erik Manning 30 *Magda's son. Unemployed. Lives with his mother.*
Hazel 22 *Erik's ex-girlfriend. A nurse*

The stage setting is the living room area of Magda's house - a dining table and four chairs are upstage left with a doorway to an offstage kitchen. Downstage right is a sofa and an armchair with a small coffee table.

On the stage left wall is a faint rectangular shadow of where a painting used to hang. Beneath it is a sideboard with bottles of booze. Magda sits at the dining table looking through an old photo album. She is calm and contented

Erik enters with the shopping. He is jaded and irritable. He hangs his coat on a hatstand and fumbles with change from his pocket. He crashes notes and coins onto the table top

Erik What are you looking at ?

He makes his way into the kitchen

Magda Did you catch the execution ?

Erik freezes. Magda is apparently suffering another of her delusional time spells. He decides to play along

Erik Not this morning, no. Didn't they hang someone yesterday ?

Magda A burning! Some heretic woman; she sewed gun powder into her dress .. Bang! Gone ..

Erik stares at his mother. He reciprocates in 15th century speech to test her condition ..

Erik I got a horse and cart into town ..

Magda The saddler ?

Erik *(defeated)* A monk

Magda *(pointing to a photograph in the album)* Where was this Erik ?

Erik Plague got that serf family on the mill pond

Magda *(quoting)* "When Adam delved and Eve span - Who was then a gentleman ?"¹

¹ Radical Priest - John Ball at an open air sermon on Blackheath, London 7 June 1381

Erik shrugs 'no idea' in his mother's direction

Magda John Ball darling. The peasants are revolting this week

Erik shuffles into the kitchen in despair

Erik *(offstage)* What are you doing mother ?

Magda *(studying photos)* When did I last see Hazel ?

Erik Oh God ..

Magda Oh ! Is this Venice ? Erik ! Look at you both .. absolutely radiant

Erik returns to look over her shoulder at the album

All those holidays : I cannot remember a time when Hazel was ever any trouble to you ?

Erik It's complicated isn't it mum .. you know that

Magda Mmm .. it is now. I can't figure it out at all. Bloody best thing that ever happened to you. Best thing that ever happened to me. Hazel was the only nurse in the ward who listened to me. She was kind and respectful

Erik Well, I guess I wasn't good enough for her .. so there we go

Erik lifts a pile of albums and takes them to a sideboard stage left. He notices the vacant space on the wall where the painting used to hang. The blood drains from his face

Erik Mother.

Magda is getting up from the table

Magda What Erik ?

Erik Where is the Duval ?

Magda What ?

Erik Where is the Duval painting

Magda It was collected Erik

Erik No mother. It was not.

Magda King's orders. Something to do with taxes. There's nothing we can do about it

Erik *(building fury)* Cut the Medieval crap. Where is it mother ? What have you done with it ?

Magda Stop it Erik. Stop !

Erik This is a late 19th century painting by Henri Duval mother

Magda Be quiet Erik

Erik Valued at no less than around £40,000 .. Is what the dealer guesstimated !!

Magda Well I don't like seascapes

Erik Mother

Magda I hated it

Erik How is that relevant ?

Magda All that sunlight on chalk cliffs

Erik *Evening Over Etretat* mother. Valued at around £40,000 squid and you're worrying about light and shade ?

Magda It made the room feel smaller

Erik That painting had nothing to do with anyone feeling even the slightest bit smaller now did it .. *Mother* ?!

Magda Now you stop it Erik

Erik *(with venom)* Where is it ?

Magda Stop it Erik

Erik Where

Magda I'm telling you

Erik pauses in vain hope

Ever since we hung that painting we've had nothing but bad luck .. I could swear it

Erik *(intensified fury)* Well we're sure in for some bad luck now aren't we Ma ?

Magda Oh leave me alone Erik .. I won't listen to this ..*(screaming)* I won't !!

Magda's illness has externalised. She flees to the kitchen.

Erik starts pacing the room - beside himself.

On the table, the opened photo album of holidays with his ex girlfriend (Hazel), promotes an idea.

Seeing no other option - he pulls out his phone, dials and waits on the sofa.

Erik Haze ? Hazel it's me. I'm sorry. I know this is weird but I'm desperate *(He listens to Hazel)* I've got a serious problem Haze .. No it's nothing like that .. she .. she's gone and done something stupid .. and its perfectly salvageable .. No.. no, we need facts. She's never going to tell me .. she's on one .. completely ablaze. *(he listens)* Well ok - so, what time .. what time do you get off the ward ? Yeah. I know .. I know she'd love to see you. If you *(Hazel is resisting)* If .. If you .. could just show up .. Haze .. that would be .. Hazel I'm begging you *(stops)* Hazel ? Hazel ?

Hazel has hung up

Erik Fuck

Erik starts pacing upstage, trying to decide how best to handle his mother. An indefatigable silence

The phone rings

Erik stumbles back to the coffee table to pick up the phone

Erik Yes ...? *(huge relief)* Haze .. *(He sits on the sofa and listens)* Thank you. Yes. Thank you so much. I owe you big time Haze. Big time

Magda Erik ? Who are you talking to ?

Erik ends the call. He fakes surprise and relaxation

Erik You won't believe it

Magda appears at the kitchen door

Magda What is it ?

Erik That was Hazel !

Magda What ? Your Hazel ?

Erik Yeah.. Thought she'd pop over

Magda What now ? Direct from work ? My angel from heaven ! I'd better get changed ..

Erik checks his watch. Magda 'bangs about' in the kitchen. Suddenly Magda starts talking to someone imaginary. Erik is overcome with renewed dread.

Magda The bouillon Agnes ..and the celery. You start chopping dear and I'll saute the sausages

Sizzling sounds issue from the kitchen. Erik starts looking hopelessly for the painting.

The doorbell rings. Hazel arrives in nurse uniform. An icy atmosphere. Neither Erik or Hazel bother to greet one another. Hazel gets out of her coat like an on-call doctor on high alert

Hazel What time period ?

Erik *(rummaging his brain for the right answer)* Err .. oh God .. peasants revolt .. err Tudor ?

Erik's vagueness inflames Hazel

Hazel Well, are you sure ?

Erik Public execution, she said. Asked me if I'd seen it when I got in from the shops ..

Hazel *(still not convinced)* Ok ..

Erik Who was that hung drawn and quartered guy ?

Hazel *(snapping violently)* Oh whittle it down can't you ?

Erik The guy who led the peasants. Head on a spike ?

Hazel Who ?

Erik *(searches for historical quote)* "When Adam delved and Eve span .."

Hazel Oh. The priest

Erik *(wearily)* John Ball

Hazel *(deepening concern)* That's him. OK. Medieval then.

Erik *(attempting to flirt)* Henry Bolingbroke ?

Hazel *(scolding contempt)* Richard the Second

Magda Hazel ! What a lovely surprise ..

Magda appears in an apron with heavy make up on her face. She looks like a clown

Magda embraces Hazel

Magda Stagwyffe is chopping vegetables and Erik will pour the sherry. Go and sit down dear

*Magda points over to the sofa down stage and goes to grab the sherry on the sideboard.
Erik takes over*

Erik I've got it mother. Go and help Agnes

Hazel and Erik move downstage right. Hazel sits on the sofa. Erik hovers. Hazel puts her head in her hands and then looks up at Erik in despair

Hazel *(dread)* Agnes Stagwyffe for Christ's sake ?

Erik is completely at a loss and frowns at Hazel for further explanation. Burning smells start coming from the kitchen

Hazel What's that burning ?

Erik Don't go into the kitchen. Not under any circumstances

Hazel What do you mean ?

Erik There's no one there

Hazel Oh

Erik Agnes is ..?

Hazel I gathered

Erik When I told mum you were coming, Agnes whats-her-face materialised out of nowhere

Hazel *(big sigh)* Exactly **what** has triggered her ?

Erik I don't know

Hazel *(trying to make a connection)* Agnes .. Magda invented her years ago when she was first involuntarily committed

Erik stares at Hazel

Hazel *(pessimistic)* Agnes crops up when Magda's feeling vulnerable

Erik Stagwyffe ?

Hazel Oh God. A home helper .. or .. a lady in waiting ? I don't know : Agnes Stagwyffe was burned at the stake

Erik remains standing

Hazel Sit down. You may as well

Erik I need the loo

Hazel We need to ground her. Lets try and get her onto Shakespeare

Erik *(concurring)* Constance from King John .. Right. I'll be five minutes. Just stay put ..

Erik leaves for the bathroom. Hazel checks the sherry bottle but she is without a glass. Magda is babbling away to thin air in the kitchen.

Magda *(offstage voice)* Agnes ! They've been tied to that land for generations ! Good Christians they are .. and not a bad word's been spoken of them.. Tostig Malghom had eight pigs and a cart load of chickens .. Drowned ! The lot of them ! All soused in the Mill Pond

Busy whisking sounds come from the kitchen.

Hazel starts rummaging through her bag. She pulls out a small medicine bottle. She studies the label.

By her face and actions she is considering a very serious criminal act

Magda "When Adam delfed and Eve span .. Who was then a gentleman ?" A preacher's words .. John Ball's - Not mine .. idea being .. just a minute Agnes .. No. Let me finish that .. Idea being that Adam and Eve were not noble .. and .. that everyone have the same rights in God's eyes

Magda calls from the kitchen

Magda Hazel - could you give me a hand with this ?

Hazel does not respond. She stares at the fatal poison in her hand.

Magda Hazel ?

Hazel Yes, Mrs Manning ?

Magda Are you coming dear ?

Hazel *(under her breath)* Fucks sake Erik ..

Hazel goes into the kitchen.

Offstage voices of Hazel and Magda

Go and sit down Mrs Manning. I can manage all of this ..

Magda Oh Hazel. Are you sure ?

Hazel Go and sit with Erik. Get yourself a sherry. I'll bring it all out in a moment

Erik reappears

Erik Sit down mother. Sit

Erik looks around for the sherry. Magda points downstage right to the coffee table

Magda It's there dear

Erik fetches the bottle and puts it on the table. He grabs glasses from the sideboard. Hazel enters with plates of food. She seems to have everything in hand

Magda is invigorated by Hazel's co hosting and jumps up

Magda Music and candles ! Erik ?

Erik *(exhausted)* Kitchen drawer - second one down. And go seeketh some humble tavern music while you're about it

Magda Humble? I thought a little music from the Royal Court might tickle your fancy

Hazel *(imitating a lady of the court)* Madam! I would be delighted

Erik *(flourishing a hand)* Go forth my dear. Your humble servants await you

Magda disappears into the kitchen. Immediately Hazel drops all pleasantries

Hazel Why am I here ?

Erik Mother adores you .. and between the two of us, you are much more likely to loosen her up. We need a name and an address

Hazel Sorry ?

Erik Of the dealer

Hazel Dealer ?

Erik The antiques dealer .. *(with great emphasis)* Mother packed up the 19th century Henri Duval painting because she decided to *(making air inverted commas)* 'get rid of it - once and for all'

Hazel looks at the vacant space on the wall

Hazel Oh no - the *Evening Over Etretat*. *(horror struck)* Where is it ?

Erik Exactly.

Hazel takes a deep breath and pours herself a stiff sherry

Erik Some lucky son of a bitch is sitting on a 30, 40 grand fortune and I have NO INTENTION of ..

Magda swings back into the room with two flaming candles

Magda Hazel ? Do you eat meat ?

Hazel refers to the plates of food already on the table

Hazel This is great Mrs Manning

Medieval Lute music wends its way into the dining room

Magda and Erik do not appear to be interested in the food

Hazel Well ! Bonne appetit as they say !

Erik goes to eat. Hazel fixes on Magda who is still not eating. Erik clocks this and lowers his fork.

All three diners look at each other. Magda pours herself more sherry.

Magda Erik ?

Erik Oh yes. Please.

Magda pours Erik more sherry.

A game ? Mother ? Shall we play a merry little game ?

Hazel *(faking enthusiasm)* A game ? What sort of game ?

Erik looks at Hazel as if to psychically cue her in, but Hazel has no idea what to do. Magda is familiar and has already started 'the game'.

The game is to group improvise a story. Each word that follows is an unknown to each player and so should be performed accordingly ..

Throughout the game - Hazel's contributions are intensively cautious for fear of saying the 'wrong thing'

Magda *(with great emphasis)* It

Erik was

Hazel .. a ?

Magda miserable

Erik shitty

Hazel afternoon

Hazel looks at Erik and reads his silent hint. She takes a huge risk

Hazel Magda .. ?
Magda decided
Erik that
Hazel she
Magda could
Erik no
Hazel *(pausing)* .. longer ?
Magda *(enjoying the game)* bear ..
Erik to
Hazel *(even more caution)* ... ssset ?

Magda eyes
Erik *(desperate)* upon
Hazel the
Magda Late

Erik *(gaining confidence)* 19th
Hazel Century
Magda Painting

Erik *(egging on Hazel)* that

Hazel hung ?
Magda over
Erik the
Hazel old
Magda sideboard

Erik *(unable to resist)* So in a rush of pure insanity - Magda Manning seized the painting !

Hazel *(also carried away)* Ripped it from the wall

Magda looks surprised but not offended by this hogging of the narrative

Erik With the greatest of care, she wrapped the old family heirloom and left her home. On foot ..

Hazel .. in search of her nearest and dearest antiques dealer

Erik *(eagerly inviting Magda back in)* After ..

Magda some

Hazel *(very nervous)* consideration ?

Erik *(nodding at Hazel to reassure her)* she

Magda decided

Hazel to

Erik head

Magda and Hazel look at each other. Magda looks peculiar

Hazel towards .. ?

Erik and Hazel can see that Magda is disengaging. He uses Medieval vernacular to entice her back

Erik Err ... the King's castle ! She passed fields farmers peasants tailors fishmongers butchers
brewers

Hazel .. and a half charred corpse on the stake in the market square

Erik ... flames still crackling !

Hazel But then ! Magda remembered the words of John Ball

Magda Ah ! The preacher !

Hazel Magda resolved *not* to take the painting to the nobles of the Royal Court

Magda Certainly not !

Hazel But instead ..

Erik She would head straight for

Magda (*self righteous importance*) .. the peasants !

Erik and Hazel stare at Magda in horror.

Erik shakes his head. Hazel resorts to fierce coercion ..

Hazel Head .. straight for the .. ?

Magda Antiques dealer ? Godfrey and Gilbert, Number 10 Perkins Street, London NW6

Erik rushes to the hat stand to grab his coat. Hazel reigns him in with slow measured speech

Hazel And we are calm .. And we are all going to finish the meal that our Mother has made for us ..

Magda And all of these need reheating

Magda starts to gather up the plates

Hazel Oh ! No Mrs Manning !

Erik returns to the table

Magda Stay exactly where you are my dear. Erik can help me.

Magda and Erik go into the kitchen. Hazel is suddenly beside herself.

Erik reappears gesturing impassioned celebratory signs for their shared victory

Hazel Erik ! I poisoned your mother's food.

Erik You did what ?

Hazel She was prattling away to Agnes Stagwyffe - her .. condemned witch kitchen companion and .. suddenly it all just felt so hopeless. All the years of progress that we've made. Wiped out .. Pffft ! I just figured that - with her out of the way ..

Erik It's OK. It's OK. We have the painting. I can fetch it as soon as we've eaten.

Hazel But I can't remember which one .. ?

Erik *(aggressively)* Perkins Street .. Perkins Street

Hazel Which *plate* Erik .. the poison ..?! I can't remember which *plate* ..

Magda returns with a tray carrying two plates of food

Erik Two plates mother ?

Hazel Should I fetch the other ?

Magda No no dear ! I've eaten it. I got a little bit carried away. It wasn't my best ..

Hazel Did you eat it all ?

Magda Not all of it. No. But enough ..

Hazel and Erik lock eyes in view of a tricky situation

Magda settles back down to the lute music and her sherry

Erik and Hazel pick at their food as slowly as possible. They are loathed to swallow

Minutes go by and Magda starts to slur and rock from side to side : the poison is working and Magda is fading.

Hazel watches Magda like a hawk. In light of the identified poisoned plate she begins shovelling the meal into her mouth.

Hazel *(mouthful of food)* Check Google Maps

Erik google maps 'Perkins Road' on his phone

Erik Oh no

Hazel What ?

Erik Oh no

Hazel What is it Erik ?

Erik Godfrey and Gilbert closed business. They shut up four years ago.

They both fixate on Magda. Erik starts to shake his mother

Hazel Wake her up ! Quick !

Erik Mother ! Mother !

Hazel Smack her !

Magda starts to laugh. The ruckus temporarily brings her round

Magda Erik ! Stop that will you ?

Erik Mother please !!

Magda Anyone for dessert ?

Erik Mother ! Listen to me carefully ! Where did you take *Evening Over Etretat* ? *(pause)* Mother ..?

Magda Evening ?

Erik *Evening Over Etretat* - the painting mother ! Please ! Where did you ..?

Magda The painting ?

Erik Yes yes mother. The painting is worth £40,000. The Henri Duval

Magda The painting in the attic ?

Erik No mother ! The one that was on the wall ..

Hazel On the wall .. over the sideboard !

Magda Normandy ... err .. France ?

Erik *(spitting)* Not Etretat MOTHER ! The painting God damn you. Where IS IT ?

Magda It's in the attic

Erik What's in the attic ?

Magda *Evening Over Etretat.* It's in the attic dear. The painting

Magda slumps backwards and gives a side glance to Erik. A faint smile lights up her face. It is not clear how much longer she has got. Hazel looks at Erik

Hazel I ..

Hazel crosses herself and bows her head in shame. Without hesitation - Erik races out of the dining room and up the stairs to the attic. Silence befalls the room.

Hazel is dumbstruck and increasingly she sinks into mortification at the sight of Magda's descent into death. She backs slowly out of the room and makes a quick escape.

Erik comes wheeling back into the dining room. The painting has been unwrapped and Erik cannot take his eyes off it. He hangs the painting on the wall.

Erik Evening Over Etretat. Ready, revived aaaand ... Restored ! Hazel ?! We are ..

He looks around. Hazel has disappeared.

Magda sits and smiles at him. She opens her mouth to speak. Erik takes in his mother for some time. He breaks inside and falls into a chair at the table

Substituting character names with the names of her own family, Magda begins to speak Constance's lines from Shakespeare's King John.

Magda Thou art not holy to belie me so; I am not mad : this hair I tear is mine;
My name is Magda; young Erik is my son, and he is lost : I am not mad : I would to heaven
I were ! For then, 'tis like I should forget myself: O, if I could, what grief should I forget !

Fare you well : had you such a loss as I, I could give better comfort than you do.

O Lord, my boy, my Erik, my fair son ! My life, my joy, my food, my all the world !
My widow-comfort, and my sorrows' cure !²

Erik (weeping) Mother. I'm here. Don't you see me ?

² Act 3 Sc. 4 Constance from King John by William Shakespeare

Lights down