

GUILTY ANIMALS

by

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CAST LIST

RYAN NEWMAN	-	34
ELLA KAVANAGH	-	31
CARRIE BRATTON	-	31
KYLE ROUSSET	-	44
VOICE		

SCENE 1

RYAN NEWMAN appears on screen. He's responding throughout to questions from an off-screen **VOICE** (represented by a blank Zoom screen).

VOICE: Tuesday 3rd March. Evening. Where were you?

RYAN: *(inaudible)*

VOICE: Louder. For the recorder.

RYAN: I went for a walk. I needed fresh air.

VOICE: And is that normal, for you?

RYAN: It clears my head.

VOICE: And ... you're not working.

RYAN: I've been off sick.

VOICE: But I thought you'd been sacked. From the Fire Service.

RYAN: I meant before that. Stress. But ... yeah.

VOICE: So. Something on your mind that night, was there? Because we understand from your partner ...

RYAN: How's she involved?

VOICE: ... that you'd had a bit of an argument earlier that day.

RYAN: No. Well, I mean, yes. We had a call. Ella and me.

VOICE: About?

RYAN: She had something of mine.

VOICE: What?

RYAN: A ring. My ring.

VOICE: So you went to get it back.

RYAN: No! She doesn't have it any more. I went out to look for work.

VOICE: Ah. So. Not to destress then.

RYAN: Well, a new salary would do that.

VOICE: Just ... evening's a strange time to go job-hunting, isn't it?

RYAN: I thought I'd try some nightclubs. Temporary work. Just to tide us over.

VOICE: Bit of a climbdown for a decorated firefighter. So which clubs did you visit?

RYAN: Well, none in the end. I changed my mind.

VOICE: Because you walked to Franklin Row.

RYAN: Not on purpose. I was wandering and when I looked up ... Habit, I guess. Still feels like home in a way.

VOICE: And it's much nicer than where you live now.

Beat.

RYAN: I walked down the street and away. That's it.

VOICE: What time?

RYAN: 8pm. Around then.

VOICE: Not 10:30?

RYAN: Clubs would've been open by then. Far too noisy to chat. Why're you so interested anyway?

VOICE: Look. I know you don't want to discuss it Ryan. And we know what you've been through before. But a fire's a fire. We have to investigate.

RYAN: Well have you asked her? She must have sobered up by now. I mean, all those bloody candles, it's not a surprise.

Beat.

VOICE: It wasn't the candles. It's easy for them to tell. You know that.

RYAN: Yeah, well, she's certainly not blameless.

VOICE: So this ring ... It was, what - a gift?

RYAN: My Gran's.

VOICE: And after you split up. Did you both return everything else?

RYAN: How'd you mean?

VOICE: Other gifts.

RYAN: Well, no. But this was different. It's an engagement ring. It's the one gift you get back. What are you getting at ...?

VOICE: Just ... we found a Zippo. In the back garden. Looks like it's been dropped. They think it was used to start the fire. Take a look.

Ryan slowly holds up a Zippo in a plastic ziplock evidence bag.

VOICE: If you look closely, you'll see it's engraved. You recognise it Ryan?

Ryan says nothing.

VOICE : Mr Newman ... we'd like to show you some video from last night. Around 10:30pm.

RYAN: What video?

VOICE: A camera at the back of the house.

RYAN: No, listen, that was ... It was only up as a deterrent. Look, I don't get it. Why don't you just ask her?

VOICE: I'm sorry, Mr Newman. But we can't. Ella died in the fire. She was inside the house when it went up. It looks as if she might have been ... intoxicated.

Beat.

RYAN: What ... I ... that's not ... She was out ... at the pub ...

VOICE: Jeff. Put it on, will you?

RYAN: No ... she, ah ... never connected the ...

VOICE: Turns out she did. So we got the footage off the cloud this morning.

RYAN: *(slowly)* So ... what am I meant to be looking at?

VOICE: Just watch the video, Ryan.

SCENE 2

*A Zoom call between **RYAN** and **ELLA KAVANAGH**. There are candles in Ella's room whilst Ryan is sitting in front of a worn-out wall.*

ELLA: Ryan.

RYAN: Ella.

ELLA: You've got five minutes. I'm meeting Carrie at 8.

RYAN: Pub on a Tuesday?

ELLA: Wildcat's gone under. Why the video?

RYAN: I prefer face-to-face.

ELLA: You *hate* face-to-face.

RYAN: Email's just ... too easy to misunderstand.

ELLA: Unlike someone storming out, shouting they hope you die.

RYAN: I was upset.

ELLA: *You* were? How do you think Mum felt?

RYAN: Eh?

ELLA: She was in the kitchen.

RYAN: What do you mean she was in the kitchen?

ELLA: Exactly that.

Beat.

RYAN: Most normal people would say. If someone's watching.

ELLA: She wasn't.

RYAN: Listening, then.

ELLA: So is *she* in the room with you now then?

RYAN: She's working. (*Beat*) So I'm off your Mum's Christmas card list then?

ELLA: Don't even ...

RYAN: It's a joke. I'm joking. God. I thought it'd be easier this way.

ELLA: Easier?

RYAN: Speaking. Face to face.

ELLA: Well, you don't seem to be lost for words. When are you picking up the rest?

RYAN: What? The books? Keep them.

ELLA: I'll bin them. Look, I have to go ...

RYAN: I need to ask you something.

Beat.

ELLA: What?

RYAN: It's just ... not the easiest topic.

ELLA: And you wanted to see my reaction.

RYAN: So ... well ... it's ... the thing is ...

ELLA: Spit it out Ryan, for God's sake.

RYAN: You know the engagement ring?

Beat.

ELLA: You're kidding.

RYAN: I know you *know* the engagement ring ...

ELLA: But you want it back.

RYAN: Of course I want it back! It's been in my family for years.

ELLA: You honestly believe that I'll ... c'mon Ryan. It wasn't even that expensive.

RYAN: That's not the point.

ELLA: That's exactly the point. Just go out and buy her another one.

Beat.

RYAN: So that's it? You just don't want me to, what - reuse it? To give it to ...

ELLA: Don't you dare mention her name.

RYAN: Oh grow up Ella.

ELLA: Save up. Like you should've done the first time.

RYAN: And how do I do that? Without a job.

Beat.

ELLA: You quit?

RYAN: You're kidding me ... I was sacked! As you well know ...

ELLA: So they finally got sick of all your skiving.

RYAN: Someone called the Station.

ELLA: And you used to be such a fine, upstanding ... Bet Erica hates it.

RYAN: She doesn't know about the job. She's not fixated on money, like you.

There's a female voice off-camera in the distance. Ryan's eyes flick involuntarily away from the screen.

I can't talk long.

ELLA: Don't you dare hang up on me Ryan. Not when *you* called me.

RYAN: I want it back, Ella. Now.

ELLA: You're just scrounging for cash. As usual. Because you were caught with your pants down at work.

Beat.

RYAN: So you did know.

ELLA: All I know is it's very touching, you missing my deep pockets like this.

RYAN: She's pregnant. Erica's pregnant.

Beat.

ELLA: The ring was mine. You don't get it back. Newsflash! That's how gifts work!

Beat.

RYAN: What do you mean 'was'? You said 'The ring *was* mine'.

Beat.

ELLA: I sold it.

RYAN: You what?

ELLA: Held too many bad memories. And I was hardly going to wear it, was I?

RYAN: But it was a gift!

ELLA: Not if you planned on taking it back.

RYAN: It's an heirloom Ella. You knew that. You're such a vindictive ... *(Beat)*
Give me the money then.

ELLA: No.

RYAN: I want the cash. It's mine. Then I'll buy it back.

ELLA: Oh just ... go and ask her for your pocket money.

RYAN: You bitch. All that ... poison. It's just burning away constantly, isn't it? Like one of those underground fires at a rubbish dump.

ELLA: You stopped taking your meds or something Ryan? You seem awfully upset.

RYAN: Eating your insides. Until you spew it out and destroy anything left of value in my life.

Ryan's distracted now, constantly looking up from the screen. He's clearly watching someone who's come into the room.

ELLA: She's there, isn't she? Put her on.

RYAN: *(To off-camera)* No, it's fine, it's just ... you know. I'm OK ... honestly ... give me a minute or so ... no, I finished work early ...

Beat.

ELLA: She's still there, isn't she? Little Miss Sympathetic?

RYAN: No. She's gone.

ELLA: Really?

RYAN: Really.

Beat.

ELLA: So where we? Oh yes. *(loudly)* You begging for money 'cos you got sacked.

There's a shouted 'what?' off screen. Ryan looks up from the screen again, and he's speaking to Erica (presumably) as he does so.

RYAN: She's lying, you know what she's like, she always was a ...

Clunk!

The screen goes blank as Ryan closes his laptop, leaving Ella alone on screen. A big wracking sob comes out of nowhere. She lifts a vodka bottle that was out of frame and takes a huge swig. Then she has another ... and another ... and now she drains the bottle. She's getting smashed.

SCENE 3

*A Zoom call. **CARRIE BRATTON** is in her office. A bedraggled Ella is sitting in her house on Franklin Row, surrounded by burning candles, wincing as she drinks from a glass of wine.*

CARRIE: God, Ella. I'm so sorry. Are you OK?

ELLA: I'm ... fine.

CARRIE: The accountant was pushing for final figures before this afternoon. Couldn't get away. But you're alright?

ELLA: I just keep wondering. When he realised.

CARRIE: What do you mean?

ELLA: Well, you hear stories don't you? About what goes through their heads.

CARRIE: Well, if you're hearing them, I don't know who's telling them.

ELLA: Like that space shuttle. The one that went up ...

CARRIE: They all do that.

ELLA: ...then exploded. The rumour was some of them lived. For a bit.

CARRIE: Ella.

ELLA: I feel responsible.

CARRIE: No. No way. Not if the guy was crazy.

ELLA: He might have just misjudged it. Slipped. Police think it's possible, with all that rain.

CARRIE: I thought that's why you got the taxi. You said you were going home.

Beat.

ELLA: I knew him.

CARRIE: Yeah. A neighbour or something?

ELLA: Well, Ryan did. They were in the same group for ... survivors y'know. PTSD stuff. Think he'd been in the military a while back. I forget now.

CARRIE: Well, it doesn't sound like he was all there anyway.

ELLA: That's a bit harsh. Would you say the same about Ryan?

CARRIE: Now? Yes. Wouldn't you?

ELLA: Maybe. *(Beat)* It's been dark all night. Across the street. Lived alone, I think.

CARRIE: What did he do?

ELLA: Never said. Seemed quite high-up though.

CARRIE: Not any more. Bad joke, sorry. Anyway, the cameras on the bridge will have picked up what happened.

ELLA: He was just trying to ... I shouldn't have thrown it.

CARRIE: And he shouldn't have thought he could fly.

ELLA: I'd been carrying it round for weeks. That weight in my pocket. Warm, sometimes. As soon as I was in the taxi, I thought ... Now. End it.

When I got there, there were already a few people on the bridge. Just staring out across the water. No idea why. And I saw him standing there. I mean, it's pretty well-lit at night. I think he even nodded at me. Didn't seem drunk.

CARRIE: You weren't exactly sober.

ELLA: I stood at the edge, and held the ring up for a moment. Waiting. For a sign or ... something to stop me. Nothing. So I threw it. As far as I could. That's a long way at that height. It was sucked up instantly by the darkness. I heard a shout. And then ... trainers on tarmac. Sprinting. I can still hear it. I braced myself, thought I was going to be hit. Pushed over the edge.

But he ran straight past and scrambled up to the ledge. And then just ...

Beat.

CARRIE: Have you slept?

ELLA: I can't. Have to keep busy.

CARRIE: Maybe give the wine a rest eh? And all those candles ... it's like a church in there.

ELLA: Listen Carrie. If I could just ... maybe if I come back in ... ?

CARRIE: Need this investment first, Ella. Then ... we can take it from there.

ELLA: But I'm fine now.

CARRIE: You're in shock. And if you come into work drunk again ...

ELLA: I was hardly ...

CARRIE: I can't take your car keys off you again. It's favouritism. If it had been anyone else ...

ELLA: I'm just ... living in a vacuum here. I swear it's getting harder to breathe. Like all the oxygen's being sucked out the house.

- CARRIE:** I thought you were selling it? Moving back to your Mum's?
- ELLA:** Every single night, I hear them outside. Shouting and cackling. Up and down the street, pressing doorbells. They wouldn't dare if Ryan was here.
- CARRIE:** Well he'll not be rushing back after a phonecall like that.
- ELLA:** Good. He deserves it. I'm glad you did it. He deserves a good slap on the wrists.
- CARRIE:** What about your cameras?
- ELLA:** They're up. Just not connected.
- CARRIE:** Seriously Ella, pay someone. You can afford it. You'll feel safer.

Carrie's phone beeps with the arrival of an email arriving. She looks at her phone and starts to read.

- ELLA:** You know, that was the first time I'd been back at the bridge. Ryan wanted somewhere memorable. Didn't even care about the traffic. He was straight down on one knee ...
- CARRIE:** Shit! I don't believe it. I'll kill him!
- ELLA:** Ryan?
- CARRIE:** The investor. The meeting's cancelled. 'Unforeseen circumstances'.
- ELLA:** What does that mean?
- CARRIE:** Ran out of money? Chose a competitor? Who knows. He's pulling out.
- ELLA:** So now what?
- CARRIE:** Fuck! *(Beat)* Right, I've got seven days. To find a shitload of money.
- ELLA:** I could come back. Help in the office if you like?
- CARRIE:** No, I ... I just gotta go sort this. You'll be alright, yeah?
- ELLA:** Course. Business first. Don't worry. I understand.

SCENE 4

ELLA is at the front door of KYLE ROUSSET's house. She's pressed the buzzer and he's answered via a video stream to an app on his mobile phone.

- KYLE:** Ella?

ELLA: Yeah. Hi. Are you ...?

KYLE: Sorry. I'm not in. But I can see who's at the door from my phone. Technology eh?

ELLA: Ah. OK. Well. I've got your parcel. It was left on my front step for some reason.

KYLE: Ah. The good old Neighbourhood Watch, eh? Thanks Ella.

ELLA: I'll just put it here.

KYLE: How's Ryan? Not heard from him for a while.

ELLA: We split up.

KYLE: You're kidding.

ELLA: You seem surprised.

KYLE: Yeah. I am. I mean, he was ...

ELLA: An asshole?

KYLE: No. I mean ... Last time ... he was just saying ... I got the feeling he was very much in love, that's all.

ELLA: Yeah well. That changed. Left one day, when I was at work. I'm better off without him.

KYLE: And there's no chance that you might ... ?

ELLA: Nope. I've binned most of stuff. Just a few bags to go. Then the engagement ring. One last trip to the dump. And that's that.

KYLE: Oh. That's ... final.

ELLA: Well, it *is* final.

KYLE: Listen. Don't take this the wrong way but ... you should keep the ring.

ELLA: To remind me of what he did? No thanks.

KYLE: No. So it can remind you of how you felt. The first time you put it on.

ELLA: That feeling got drained long ago, I can tell you.

KYLE: So let me buy it off you then.

ELLA: What? No.

KYLE: I've got the cash. If that's what you're worried about.

ELLA: It's not, it's just ...

KYLE: If it only holds bad memories for you, then what's the problem?

ELLA: It's just ... it's personal, y'know. It's been used. It's better to get rid of it.

KYLE: Look, Ella. Can I give you some advice?

ELLA: What?

KYLE: Things. Objects. They're like keys. They unlock the memories of what we've done. How we felt. If you destroy them all, what are you left with?

ELLA: No bad memories.

KYLE: But also, no good ones. Don't get rid of it. It's the wrong move. We all need objects. If only because they tether us to the real world. Don't cut the guy ropes now.

ELLA: Look, why are you so interested in it?

KYLE: For exactly the same reason you don't want to sell it to me. He's been through a lot, Ella.

Beat.

ELLA: I've gotta go. I'll leave your parcel outside.

The call ends.

SCENE 5

CARRIE and KYLE are on a phonecall.

CARRIE: The guy at Starbucks gave me your number. I just wanted to say thanks. Properly.

KYLE: Look, it was no problem. As I said.

CARRIE: It took the Police so long to take my statement. God knows why. And you'd left by then.

KYLE: Meetings to get to.

CARRIE: Honestly, no idea what I'd have done if he'd got away with it. My whole life's on that laptop.

KYLE: Just glad I could help.

CARRIE: Most people wouldn't have reacted so fast.

KYLE: Well, he wasn't looking in my direction. Gave him quite a fright I think. A tackle like that belongs on a rugby pitch.

CARRIE: Most people would've assumed he was with me. When he tried to pick it up.

KYLE: But you were sitting alone.

CARRIE: And they'd freeze at the thought of making a fool of themselves. *(Beat)* You'd noticed I was alone?

KYLE: You looked like you were there for work.

CARRIE: A meeting. With a guy who never turned up.

KYLE: Oh really?

CARRIE: An investor. Well - prospective, anyway.

KYLE: So it was all for nothing?

CARRIE: I'm waiting to see. Maybe it'll be rescheduled.

KYLE: Fingers crossed. What's the work? If that's not a rude question.

CARRIE: Not at all. I've got a company - Wildcat Eco. We invented a new type of renewable energy. For individual homes, basically.

KYLE: Wow. So you're saving the planet. Amazing.

CARRIE: Yeah. If I didn't have to work round the clock to keep it afloat.

KYLE: But it's a passion. I can tell.

CARRIE: I'm doing my bit, that's all. But I've only found one investor who might be willing to take a punt.

KYLE: You need money?

CARRIE: We'll only last a few weeks without it. Weird thing is, I've still not even met him. His people texted me early that morning. Completely out of the blue. Suggested a coffee. God knows what's going on.

KYLE: Well. So long as the money arrives.

CARRIE: I just like to know someone before I do business with them, y'know.

KYLE: I understand that. Completely. So what are the plans? Once you get it?

CARRIE: Ah, y'know. Usual stuff. Saving the planet. And growing the team.

KYLE: World domination then?

CARRIE: There's someone I've known for years. An old school friend. I'd like to bring her on full-time.

KYLE: Brave. Employing a friend.

CARRIE: Well, she gave me a loan. More of a gift really. Right at the start.

KYLE: Sounds like she deserves it.

CARRIE: Plus she's just been through a really bad breakup. Engagement, wedding next summer ... all down the pan. She's drinking a bit and ... not thinking straight. I feel I owe it to her.

KYLE: Sure it'll do her good. To focus on something else.

CARRIE: Other than destroying anything to do with him. Anyway ... you don't want to hear this.

KYLE: I don't mind. It's nice to chat. I'm not often ... y'know.

CARRIE: Of course. Sorry, I just ... well, I've got a meeting at 3. So - thanks. Again.

KYLE: Good luck for your investment. Hope it all works out in the end.

CARRIE: Well, if the investor can't even bother to turn up ...

KYLE: He'll show up when at the moment it counts Carrie. I'm sure of it.

SCENE 6

KYLE and RYAN on a call.

RYAN: I just ... I didn't know who else to call.

KYLE: Look it's fine. Honestly. That's what the group's for, right?

RYAN: I guess.

KYLE: But you stopped coming to the meetings. What's up?

RYAN: I just ... keep seeing it. That night. The roof as it caves in. Standing there, watching. Doing nothing.

KYLE: Nightmares. Yeah. Your head's stuck on reset. I was the same when I got back home.

RYAN: So I'm counting them out, thinking we're good. That we've done a solid job, you know? But then I dream I'm walking back in and finding ...

KYLE: You'll get there. Trust me.

RYAN: I thought everyone was out. But if I hadn't withdrawn the team ...

KYLE: You can't do this.

RYAN: ... those kids might've got out the warehouse.

KYLE: And you might have been dead.

Beat.

RYAN: I thought we could grab a pint. But ... Ella, y'know.

KYLE: Things still not great?

RYAN: She started off sympathetic. But I don't think she believes me now. When I tell her I still need time - before going back - she just doesn't get it.

KYLE: She wasn't there. Maybe she needs time as well.

RYAN: To admit her big strong firefighter's a fraud?

KYLE: C'mon mate. That doesn't help.

RYAN: I know. I just

KYLE: Look, it's a battle, right? Recovery. And it's early. You haven't even left the front line yet. You can only go forward.

RYAN: Which sucks if you don't know where the road is.

KYLE: Right, in war, everyone carries something. In their pockets, round their necks, whatever. Might not be much. Photo. Ring. Poem on a scrap of paper. Just so long as it helps them remember.

RYAN: This isn't war though.

KYLE: You think? I didn't join up for the money. I needed to challenge myself. You're the same. You need that focus back.

RYAN: Would you do it again? Go back?

KYLE: God, no. But that's me. You will. I'm sure of it.

RYAN: Even if I'm no good at it?

KYLE: You've got medals that say you are.

RYAN: Is that what they mean? Or just that I was lucky?

KYLE: Focus on something that makes you happy. Remind yourself every day what it is. And hold on tight. Plenty of soldiers keep slogging forwards because it's the fastest way to return home to see their loved ones.

RYAN: Even if their loved ones don't want to see them?

KYLE: Sure that's not true.

RYAN: We just trip over each other at home each day.

KYLE: Didn't she start working?

RYAN: Her mate keeps saying she'll take her on. If her business picks up.

KYLE: Which should help.

RYAN: I keep comparing us to my Gran and Grandad though. How perfect that was. Married for seventy five years. 1946 they tied the knot. I've still got the engagement ring.

KYLE: Exactly! That's what I'm talking about. That ring. It's not just a piece of metal. It *means* something.

RYAN: It means everything. I promised my Mum before she died that I'd never lose it.

KYLE: So think of them. Your grandparents. Your only job now is to find that kind of love and support.

RYAN: No matter the consequences?

KYLE: No matter the consequences.

RYAN: There's one thing I could do. But it's a huge change.

KYLE: Life is nothing but change, Ryan. Just do it. What's the worst that could happen?

SCENE 7

ELLA has phoned RYAN.

ELLA: Where the hell are you?

RYAN: I, ah ... I'm getting croissants. For our breakfast.

ELLA: *(peering)* In a pharmacy?

RYAN: What? No. I'm ... at Asda.

ELLA: I'm amazed you're anywhere. Vertically-speaking.

RYAN: Didn't say I was enjoying it. My head's thumping.

ELLA: The two of you were wrecked when you got in. You and your new best mate.

RYAN: I didn't think you were awake.

ELLA: I got woken up. Thought I heard someone down the side of the house. Just before you got in. *(Beat)* You still there?

RYAN: What? Yeah, sorry, I'm just ... avoiding shopping trolleys. Doubt it was anything.

ELLA: She's still not up. Hey. Is this for her?

RYAN: What?

ELLA: Croissants.

RYAN: No. Well ... she's a guest.

ELLA: Sooner she's gone, the better.

RYAN: C'mon Ella, she's your sister.

Beat.

ELLA: My night was good. Thanks for asking.

RYAN: Did Carrie find an investor?

ELLA: There was one guy there. Reckons he knows some anonymous wealthy benefactor.

RYAN: Sound a bit dodgy.

ELLA: Plenty of wealthy people want to stay out the spotlight, Ryan.

RYAN: To avoid scrutiny.

ELLA: For safety.

RYAN: Funny how it's only rich people that get that choice.

ELLA: I think you're scared of money sometimes, Ryan.

RYAN: Just the lack of it.

ELLA: Everyone needs security. I mean even *we* have cameras.

RYAN: Total waste of money they were! Still in the box.

ELLA: No, they're up.

Beat.

RYAN: What?

ELLA: You really don't listen, do you? The guy was here on Tuesday.

RYAN: But ... that's ... why would you do that?

ELLA: What, they're better in the cupboard? Instead of the back wall?

RYAN: You should have told me.

ELLA: I did!

RYAN: But ... there's admin. I'll need to tell the insurers ...

ELLA: Jesus, Ryan. One email. Big deal.

Beat.

RYAN: What about the recordings?

ELLA: Those meds are destroying your memory.

RYAN: Where are they?

ELLA: Like I said. They're just a deterrent. That's all. They're not hooked up yet. We'll connect them later.

RYAN: Ah. Right. Fine.

ELLA: Anyway. Hurry up and get back here. I'm not having breakfast with her alone.

RYAN: Five minutes.

ELLA: And I've got something for you.

RYAN: What?

ELLA: That'd spoil the surprise. Just a small thing. Love you!

RYAN: Yeah. OK.

Call ends.

SCENE 8

RYAN and ELLA are getting ready to go out. Both face the screen as if it's a mirror throughout (brushing teeth, applying makeup, checking spots, combing hair etc).

RYAN: It's pointless. Only one of us going.

ELLA: You're doing nothing else tonight.

RYAN: I'm meant to be resting.

ELLA: One of us needs to be there. It's his 40th.

RYAN: But if you can't go ...

ELLA: C'mon Ryan.

RYAN: But it's *your* family!

ELLA: *Our* family.

RYAN: I'm not ready for it.

Ryan's now taking pills at the mirror. He washes them down with a glass of water.

ELLA: And you don't need those.

RYAN: Thank you Doctor.

ELLA: You can't take them forever. And you'll be drinking.

RYAN: Too right.

ELLA: You have to get out more. Like tonight. You've been off work too long.

RYAN: Can we not just do it online?

ELLA: Thought you hated Zoom?

RYAN: Not as much as going to these parties.

ELLA: Anyway, I've told them you'll be there instead of me.

RYAN: All of them?

ELLA: Well I've not phoned up every single person ...

RYAN: So most of my evening will be, "So where's Ella? Not here? Why ever not?"

ELLA: Always with the drama.

RYAN: “Bet you’ve trapped her in a basement. You beast!”

ELLA: Work comes first. The family understands. You don’t shirk your obligations.

RYAN: But you’re not even an employee, Ella. Why does she need you at the dinner? *(Beat)* I feel like a puppy. Being sent ahead to keep everyone sweet.

ELLA: Don’t talk rubbish. You’re not that sweet.

RYAN: A special envoy. Dropped into the War Zone of your cousin’s Fortieth. Remember Terry Waite? Taken hostage for years, he was.

ELLA: Like they’d want to keep you. Look, just ... talk about the wedding or something. They’re always fun, these get-togethers.

RYAN: Hardly.

ELLA: So they can be a bit stiff to start with. But they improve once they let their hair down.

RYAN: Some more than others.

ELLA: Those that still have it.

RYAN: I just feel I’m permanently on guard. So many conversations. And your family are so ... different.

ELLA: Because your lot couldn’t fill a room?

RYAN: Whilst you have hundreds of Kavanaghs. Breeding all over the place.

ELLA: I guess we’re just more attractive.

RYAN: Ouch.

ELLA: You enjoyed that Golden Wedding. You were hungover for days.

RYAN: Well, it was a free bar.

ELLA: It wasn’t a ‘free bar’. It was a party. With catering.

RYAN: Closest my family ever came to catering was Auntie Nora.

ELLA: The dinner lady, yes, very good. I remember you propping up the bar.

RYAN: That was Erica. Forced me onto Jaeger bombs.

ELLA: Amazed the rest of us could hear anything else. Above those howls of protest.

RYAN: Well at least she spoke to me.

ELLA: She's a nightmare.

RYAN: You can't say that about your own sister!

ELLA: How would you know? You don't have a sister.

RYAN: No, 'cos my mum's too ugly, right?

ELLA: Erica's a selfish cow.

RYAN: Because she rejected the corporate life?

ELLA: I couldn't care less about her little painting hobby. In her spare time. But expecting Mum and Dad to support her? At her age? She needs a job.

RYAN: But she's got a dream.

ELLA: Good. 'Cos she's certainly not got any talent.

RYAN: Jesus, Ella! Why she's staying over then?

ELLA: Because I asked her to.

RYAN: Eh?

ELLA: Look. I wanted someone to be there tonight. With you. Alright? Because I can't be. I might not like her, but I know you get on well. And she'll make sure you're OK.

RYAN: Oh. I see.

ELLA: Just ... make sure she doesn't come back steaming drunk and throw up everywhere. Knowing her, she'll probably get off with someone and go home with them.

SCENE 9

ELLA and CARRIE are on a call.

CARRIE: So you're sure it's OK? Next Thursday night?

ELLA: Completely. We're always having family parties. And you need me at the meal to make introductions.

CARRIE: It's amazing you know all these folk.

ELLA: Yeah, well. It's not me. Dad's worked with a lot of investors through the years.

CARRIE: And Ryan? Will he go to the party anyway?

ELLA: Under protest.

CARRIE: Can't be easy for him.

ELLA: C'mon. A medal for bravery but he's scared of a party?

CARRIE: But he's improved?

ELLA: Those first few days were tough. I'm not going to lie. He wouldn't even leave the house.

CARRIE: He's been through a lot though.

ELLA: I'm not convinced it's as bad as he says. But I do think he's turned the corner now.

CARRIE: Good. He's a nice guy, Ella.

ELLA: We've kept it from the family. You're the only one that knows.

CARRIE: He's lucky to have you in his corner.

ELLA: He is, isn't he? Hey, I even got him something. A present. Wanna see?

CARRIE: Sure.

Ella holds up a shiny Zippo lighter to the screen.

ELLA: Good, right?

CARRIE: I mean, it's ... shiny. Has he started smoking on his time off?

ELLA: Ryan? The fitness freak?

CARRIE: Did wonder.

ELLA: Look, I got it inscribed. (*reading*) 'All my love. Forever, Ella'.

CARRIE: Bit of a strange gift isn't it? For a fireman?

ELLA: That job's his whole life. Always has been. Without it, he's lost. He couldn't do anything else. All I want for him is to get back out there. Because ever since that warehouse thing, he's been ... different.

ELLA (cont'd): So I thought I'd give him a gift. To remind him that I'm always on his side. A little fire he can always keep with him. Carry everywhere. For when he's down. To bring him a spark. To remind him of me.

And to always bring him home.

END