

Proof
of
Provenance

by

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Proof of Provenance

Running Time: 35 mins

Cast – 3F

Ruth Retirement age – Experienced, confident, enthusiastic. A joker.

Cassie Retirement age – Reserved, unsure, more serious.

Woman 30's, calm but confident.

Setting: A loft

Time: The Present

Synopsis

Ruth, an ex-Brotherby's Fine Art Evaluator, is now running a house clearing business with her long-time friend Cassie. When they venture into the loft of a house they've been asked to clear, they soon realise that there is something very odd about it. Why are the contents of the loft not what they expect? Who is the Woman that joins them? Where has she come from and what does she want?

A loft.

Towards backstage centre is an A-frame with a single bulb hanging down.

Behind the A-frame, stage right, you can see the back of a wardrobe. The Woman appears from here.

Backstage left in front of the A-frame is a wall of about four/five feet hiding the 'loft hatch'. The cast enter from behind the wall as if coming up a loft ladder. The wall has a metal ring attached at knee height with a chain and manacle attached. Two buckets stand next to it.

Centre stage is the 'boarded' area of the loft. This contains various items of furniture all covered in dust sheets. Everything under the dust sheets is clean, neat and tidy. The furniture should include:

A single mattress, duvet and pillow that look rather old but are clean, neat and tidy.

A low table with an old TV and aerials.

A basket of toys containing jigsaws, fluffy toys, lego and dolls.

A table with a camping gas stove, pans, crockery, washing up bowl, cutlery etc. Cooking utensils including a spatula and knife. Two chairs stand beside the table.

Two chests of drawers. One filled with children's clothes, one filled with women's clothes. The top drawer of the child's chest of drawers should contain art items including a set of felt pens, a pad of drawing paper, a magnifying glass, a wooden ruler and a tin marked 'pencils' that contains a chocolate bar.

A child's pictures are tacked high onto the A-frame. See production notes for details.

To each side of the 'boarded' area you can see loft insulation stretching into the wings.

Music – Simon and Garfunkel - Bookends

Music fades.

Tabs open to black stage.

A few seconds of silence.

Sound – someone thumping on wood, then a bolt being pulled back, followed by more thumping on wood.

Cassie There! It's open. I just need to push it up and we're in.

Ruth I'm not sure I want to be 'in'. Can't we leave this for tomorrow when the men are with us? You know this is my least favourite part of the job.

Sound – loft hatch opening and being pushed back

Cassie I just want a quick peek. I'll be two seconds. Here, help me with the ladder.

Sound – metal ladder being extended and someone climbing up it.

Ruth Well we can't be long. I'm on the school run again.

A torch light flickers around from behind the 'wall'.

Ruth What can you see?

Cassie Nothing. Well.....nothing to my right and a wall to my left.

Ruth A wall? Do you mean a chimney?

Cassie No, I don't think it can be a chimney. It doesn't go up to the roof. It's definitely a wall. Hang on, there's a light switch here.

Sound - someone flicking a light switch.

Lights – hanging bulb on.

Cassie There we go.

Lights – bulb flickers and goes out.

Cassie Or maybe not.

Ruth Perhaps the bulb's blown. Oh, please come down, Cassie, we can do this tomorrow.

Cassie Just give me a minute. I want to have a little look. I'm intrigued to see what's up here, aren't you? The rest of the house is amazing. It looks like a 1970's film set.

The torch flashes around and lands on the bulb hanging down.

Cassie I've spotted a bulb. Maybe it's just loose. I'm going up to have a fiddle with it.

Ruth Oh, please don't. Not now.

Cassie Just a quick fiddle, Ruth, I promise. Here, hold the torch for me.

Ruth Well, turn the switch off first!

Sound – light switch.

Cassie emerges from behind the wall and fiddles with the bulb.

Cassie Can you try the switch again?

Sound - Light switch.

Lights – bulb on, stage lights up half.

Cassie turns to see in the loft and looks around in amazement.

Ruth Now what can you see?

Cassie Nothing.

Ruth You mean it's empty?

Cassie No. I mean it looks like everything's covered in dust sheets.

Ruth Dust sheets? In a loft?

Cassie Yes. Come and have a look. Bring the torches.

Ruth Do I have to? Really?

Cassie You're ok, it's boarded. Well, this middle section is. Not sure about the rest.
Here, I'll give you a hand.

Cassie helps Ruth 'up the ladder.' They use their torches to look around.

Ruth (looking around) I'm telling you now, Cassie, if I see just one spider, I'll be down that ladder quicker than a quick thing. Who covers everything in a loft with dustsheets?

They start to look around. Ruth takes the cover from the child's chest of drawers. Examines the outside closely and then opens the drawers. Cassie goes stage right out of the boarded area as if walking along a joist/beam. She shines her torch into the wings.

Ruth Cassie, no! For heaven's sake come back. I don't want you falling through the ceiling.

Cassie I won't. I'm not going any further. I can see the end wall from here anyway.
Nothing else up this end.

Cassie returns and goes stage left out of the boarded area as if walking along a narrow, boarded walkway. Ruth takes the cover off the child's chest of drawers.

Cassie This side looks like a walkway. It's got boards down. What have you got?

Cassie goes along the walkway and eventually off stage. Ruth is too busy opening drawers to notice.

Ruth Nothing interesting. Unless you've found an unknown market for a chipped and scuffed, veneered chest of drawers circa 1950. It's full of the usual stuff – children's art materials, clothes, etc.

Ruth lifts out a child's jumper, looks closely at it and smells it.

Ruth Funny though, the clothes are all clean, neatly folded and smell of fabric softener.

Ruth opens the drawer with the art materials again. She takes out the felt pens and drawing pad and tries to write.

Ruth The felt pens are all dried up though. Cassie? Cassie? Cassie!

Lights – blackout.

Ruth screams.

Lights – up full, bulb on.

Cassie (off) Sorry. That was me. I'm round the corner in the extension.

Ruth You can get through to there?

Cassie enters quickly and makes her way back to the 'boarded' area.

Cassie Yes. There's a big hole in the end wall, tall enough to walk through.

Ruth But that must be the end wall of the original house. Surely, that's a retaining wall. Who in their right mind makes a huge hole in a retaining wall?

Cassie The same person who uses dust sheets in a loft? And that's not all. There's another loft hatch through there with a proper ladder and several light switches.

Ruth Another hatch?

Cassie Yes. I think it must come out in that bedroom extension above the garage.

Ruth But it can't. We went in there. That's the room that's completely empty, smells of fresh paint and has a new carpet. There was definitely no loft hatch in there.

Cassie Then it must have boarded it from underneath. From the bedroom side. I wonder why? Bit odd.

During the following dialogue they both start slowly removing the dust sheets and examining what's underneath. They do not reveal the mattress.

Ruth This is all looking a bit odd. Not sure I like it. I say we leave it until tomorrow. Send the lads up to drag it all down for us.

Cassie Found any spiders?

Ruth Not yet. But then, I can't see any cobwebs either, and believe me, I've had a good look.

Cassie Which part of a computer does a spider use?

Ruth Not now, Cassie, thank you. I do NOT want to hear any of your stupid spider jokes. They weren't funny last year and they won't be funny now.

Cassie Everyone else in the waiting room thought they were funny.

Ruth Everyone else was not sitting there with their hand swollen up to twice its normal size with two, huge craters in it where the bugger had bitten me.

Cassie (trying not to smile) Huge craters?

Ruth (relenting) Well, middle-sized craters then. Large holes anyway.

Cassie Large..... pin pricks, I think the nurse called them. Everyone else was laughing.

Ruth(smiling) Admittedly you did have the whole of A&E in stitches at one point. No pun intended!

Cassie Even that rather dour receptionist twitched her mouth at times. Did you know **(She quotes)**.... Although they are 650 species of spider in the UK, only 12 of them have reportedly bitten humans and just two or three are known to give a nasty bite.

Ruth(irritated) Strangely enough I do. You've quoted that to me so many times recently that I know it off by heart myself.

Cassie I was just trying to tell you that the chances of you getting bitten by a spider for a second time are.....

Ruth Yes, I know, Cassie, I know. But surprisingly, I don't find that very comforting. Oh.....What the hell am I doing up here anyway? I could be sitting in comfortable surroundings, in decent clothes, examining beautiful paintings in antique frames. Not wearing scruffy jeans and ferreting about in people's mucky junk.

Cassie You sat comfortably for 20 years, remember? Got bored, took early retirement, got bored again.

Ruth

I was NOT bored at work. Admittedly I was getting a littlerestless... in my early retirement, but I was not bored when I was working. Frustrated? Yes. Infuriated? Definitely. But not bored. I'd had been fine for a few more years if old Mr Marshall himself hadn't retired and handed over the reins to his son. Jumped up little upstart. Wouldn't know his Picasso from his Constable. And that friend of his? The one he insisted taking on as my assistant? How is a degree in PE, or whatever it's called these days, supposed to equip someone to work in art authentication. Ridiculous.

Cassie

Well, Brotherby's loss is our gain. Our house clearance business has mushroomed since you came on board. Being able to advertise the fact that people's 'junk', as you call it, will be assessed by an ex-Brotherby's Fine Art Valuer obviously appeals to people. I think it must give them a feeling of confidence in us, or something. We're doing well and, you never know, you may well yet find your long-lost Picasso or Constable. Besides, you joining us has given me a new lease of life to keep going too. Probably not a bad thing in today's economic climate.

Ruth

Yes, Sorry. And you're right about one thing – I did get bored at home. This is the perfect part-time job for me – apart from the lofts. And the spiders. I can work round the school runs and the hospital runs and whatever else comes up.

Cassie

And we get to work together. How good is that? Best friends since school and now best business partners. Come on, we'll leave it for now. I know you're not comfortable up here. Let's call it a day. We'll get the guys to lug everything down for us tomorrow.

They head towards the loft hatch.

Sound – the loft hatch slamming closed.

Cassie What? Oh, for goodness sake. The hatch door has fallen back down.

Cassie tries to pull up the hatch.

Cassie There's no handle to pull it up. Here, give me a hand.

Ruth helps Cassie.

Ruth It's stuck.

Cassie It can't be. It opened easily enough once I'd taken the bolt off.

Ruth Well it's definitely stuck now.

Cassi Can you find me something to slip under the edge to lift it?

Ruth looks around and takes a wooden ruler from the drawer.

Ruth This do?

Cassie Maybe. Anything stronger?

Ruth selects a plastic spatula and a knife.

Ruth How about these?

Cassie Perfect! Here you hold this one under that side while I force this one in over this side.

They struggle with the hatch.

Ruth It's not working.

Cassie Oh! this is ridiculous! I can see daylight round the edges. It's got to open. For heaven's sake why isn't it opening?

Ruth I don't know, but it's not. What now?

Cassie You ring Gareth. He can be here in 10 minutes. I'm going to look at the other hatch.

Cassie goes along the walkway.

Ruth I can't ring Gareth. My phone's in my handbag – on the landing. You?

Cassie Er....same.

Ruth So.....?

Cassie Just hang tight. I'll be back in a minute.

Cassie exits.

Ruth starts using her torch to look under things. She runs her fingers over the dust sheets and looks quizzically at them.

Sound – banging and crashing from offstage left. Cassie reappears.

Cassie There's no way that's shifting. It's solid.

Ruth So what now?

Cassie So we wait. If we're not back when the office closes then they're bound to notice and come looking.

Ruth Maybe. Or they might just think we've not noticed the time and are still working.

Cassie Don't worry, at the very worst Gareth will notice the time round about 6 – when he's hungry and realises I'm not cooking his tea.

Ruth I can't be here til 6, I've got Olivia to pick up from school in....**(She looks at her watch)**.... Half an hour.

Cassie Don't panic. I'm sure the school will look after her. They must have an after-school club or something.

Ruth They have, yes, but Olivia's going to fear the worst if no one's there to collect her. She'll start worrying that something dreadful's happening.

Cassie That's understandable. Poor little thing. It can't be easy for her having a little brother who is constantly in and out of hospital. I know it's not easy for any of you, but it must be even more confusing for her at her age, and I've no doubt she picks up on all the anxiety that's around.

Ruth We're careful what we say in front of her and we try and keep her routine in place, but I'm sure you're right. She's going to be so upset if I'm not there.

Cassie I'm not sure what we can do, Ruth. It looks like we're stuck in here for now. Try not to worry. The school know the situation so I'm sure they'll take good care of her. And Gareth will come looking for us – sooner or later. **(She looks around her)** What's with all this camping stuff?

Ruth Not sure. They liked to go camping?

Cassie Yes, maybe, but it's all clean and laid out in order ready to use.

Ruth Yes. Same as the clothes. All clean. Folded and neat.

Ruth gives Cassie the jumper she sniffed earlier.

Ruth Here, smell this jumper.

Cassie takes the jumper and smells it.

Cassie Fabric softener. Not long washed.

Ruth And no sign of any mouse droppings and very little dust on the dust sheets.

Cassie No dust, no cobwebs, no....spiders. No signs of mice. Someone's been up here recently.

Ruth But who? And why? I thought this place was supposed to have been empty for years.

Cassie It was. Now, let me get this right. **(She thinks)** The solicitor said that it had been left to a brother and sister by their mother over thirty years ago. The sister was married and lived up North so the unmarried brother lived in it.

Ruth Which is probably why it looks like a 1970's museum. I guess he didn't see any point in updating an a perfectly useable avocado bathroom suite.

Cassie Apparently, the sister came down to visit her brother about seven years ago as she hadn't heard from him in a while and was starting to get worried. Found the place deserted. She was so concerned that she actually reported her brother missing to the police. The solicitor has now told her that as she's not heard from her brother for so long and the police have no idea of his whereabouts, she can apply to have him legally declared dead so she can sell the place. Otherwise, the house is just going to stand here empty, gradually falling apart.

Ruth Well, if he's missing and she's up North, who's been washing and cleaning?

Cassie And why?

Ruth I'm really not liking this.

Cassie It does seem a bit....unusual. But now we're stuck up here let's have a good look at what we've got. An assortment of children's toys. Lego, jigsaws, some fluffy toys, dolls. Again, all clean.

Ruth Another chest of drawers. This time full of women's clothes. Cheap, basic.
(She sniffs them) All freshly washed.

Cassie A TV and aerial. Looks rather old.

Ruth draws back the cover on the mattress.

Ruth A bed! **(She suddenly realises what this could mean)** Oh my God! Was someone actually living up here?

Cassie Or IS living up here.

They both look around warily. Ruth rushes to the loft hatch in panic and scabbles at it.

Ruth Open up you damn thing! Open!

Cassie Ruth, Ruth! Stop it. Calm down.

Ruth I need to get out. I need to get out. Something's not right up here.

Cassie It's OK. Calm down, Ruth, calm down. It'll be alright. There's no one up here at the moment – we've looked. Come and sit down.

Cassie leads Ruth to a chair. Ruth sees the chain and manacles. She pulls away from Cassie, pointing at them.

Ruth Cassie, Look! Oh my God! Oh my God!

Cassie examines them.

Ruth(hyperventilating) I'm starting to get the heeby-jeebies now. There's only one reason I can think of to have those fixed to a wall.

Cassie (going over to Ruth) Steady on, Ruth. Breathe. Deep breaths. With me, with me – in, and out. In, and out. That's it – keep breathing. Steady. Now come and sit down.

Ruth sits.

Cassie OK? Now look, we don't know for certain that anyone is....was...living up here. We certainly don't know if they were being kept here against their will. We just need to stay calm for now and wait until Gareth gets here. If he agrees that it looks suspicious then we'll call the police. OK?

Ruth Cassie, I'm sorry, but I don't feel very good.

Cassie It's probably that sudden rush of adrenalin. It's upset your sugar levels. Did you have lunch?

Ruth No. I skipped it because I was in a rush to get here. I didn't think we'd be here this long.

Cassie Silly girl. Where's your insulin?

Ruth In my handbag. On the landing.

Cassie OK. Don't worry. I'll look for something. What do you need? A fruit drink, isn't it? A sugary snack? There must be something here somewhere.

Cassie searches for food or drink.

Cassie A webcam.

Ruth What?

Cassie The part of the computer a spider uses.

Ruth Ha! Ha! Very funny – not.

Cassie How long before you.....

Ruth I don't know. I've managed it so well for years that I just don't know. Sorry. This afternoon must have upset my usual balance.

Cassie Just don't worry. Nothing. I can't find anything. Oh shit, shit and more shit.
I'll keep looking.

Unseen by Ruth and Cassie, the Woman appears from behind the wardrobe.

Lights – downlight on.

Woman Hello.

Ruth screams again, Cassie jumps round to face her.

Woman I'm sorry. I didn't mean to startle you.

Cassie Who are you? Where did you come from? Have you opened the hatch?

The Woman moves forwards.

Lights – downlight off

Woman Your friend doesn't look very well.

Cassie She's diabetic. I was looking for some food, but if the hatch is open, then I
can get down to her insulin.

Woman That's not possible, but if you look in the top drawer in a tin marked 'pencils'
you should find some chocolate. Her secret stash. It's so old it's probably
gone all white now, but I expect it will do.

Cassie finds the chocolate bar and gives it to Ruth.

Ruth (examining the wrapper) Derek the Dinosaur. My Grandson's favourite. **(She starts to eat the
chocolate)**

Woman My daughter's too.

Cassie Who are you?

Woman You're Cassie, aren't you? And you're Ruth.

Cassie How do you know?

Woman (looking at Ruth) You were in the news recently. You found that missing Caravaggio painting.

Ruth No. I didn't find it. A friend of mine did when we were clearing out his mother's house. I just rescued it from the skip he'd thrown it in and helped to authenticate it.

Woman Ah, yes, of course. It went on to sell for.....what was it? £15,000,000?

Ruth How do you know all this?

Woman I used to watch a lot of TV. **(To Cassie)** I like your earrings.

Cassie Thank you.

Woman I wish I'd had nice earrings. I used to see them on the shopping channels. Are they diamonds?

Cassie Not real ones. Why?

Woman I like diamonds. Diamonds, jewellery, paintings. I used to like programmes about those. I'd watch every one I could find. I did try to paint a bit myself but I never had the right paint or brushes.

Cassie Look, fascinating though this conversation is, who are you and can you get us out of here?

Woman (Looking at Ruth) Provenance.

Ruth What?

Woman That's what it's called, isn't it? When you authenticate a painting.

Ruth Well....yes. That's part of it. Provenance is establishing a record of ownership. That's not really what I do.

Woman No, you actually examine the paintings, don't you? Close up? Look at the paint used, the brushstrokes?

Ruth I do, yes. That's another part of the authentication process.

Woman But you, you personally, you examine the paintings?

Ruth Yes.

Cassie(getting annoyed) What is this? Why are we discussing paintings? We need to get out of here.
We need you to show us how to get out – now!

Woman I'd like you to authenticate these drawings. **(She indicates the child's drawings.)**

Cassie What? But they're a child's drawings. They're not really works of art.

Woman(quietly angry) No? And what gives you the right to define what art is? If a naked man hanging himself upside down, twirling about and spraying blood everywhere is considered art in London these days, then why is this not art?

Cassie(angrily) Look, I may not have Ruth's qualifications but I know a child's drawing when I see it. And to ask Ruth to authenticate them is ridiculous. You need to be helping us out of here. That chocolate bar may have helped for now but we need to get to her insulin.

Woman (calmy but with determination) I want you to authenticate these drawings.

Cassie (advancing on her) Right. That's enough. I don't know who you are or what you want but I'm not playing your silly games anymore. You are going to....

Ruth Cassie no! Wait, please.

Cassie and the Woman stare at each other. Pause.

Ruth **(To the Woman)** This is why you're here, isn't it? These drawings are really important to you. **(Pause)** Cassie, could you pass me one of the drawings please.

Cassie takes down the 'Cy Twombly' and passes it to Ruth.

Cassie Oh for goodness sake, Ruth! Why are you indulging her?

Woman There's a magnifying glass in the top drawer.

Cassie (with contempt) This is getting even better! A child's picture viewed through a child's magnifying glass. How very high class. Brilliant. **(She hands the magnifying glass to Ruth. To Ruth)** What on earth do you think you're doing?

Ruth I don't know, Cassie. But I have a strange sense that I need to do this. Please don't ask me why because I don't know. OK?

Woman Look at the style first please. I'm sure you'll recognise the artist. Then look at the content. You'll soon get the idea.

(Ruth studies the drawing)

Ruth This is.....

Cassie Scribble.

Ruth Possibly. Although there's no mistaking that it's in the style of Cy Twombly.

Cassie Did he scribble then?

Ruth Some people think he did, yes. The Tate Modern had some of these on display at one time.

Cassie But still scribble.

Ruth Maybe, but \$70,000 dollars worth of scribble.

Cassie Good Lord! If I'd found that in a loft I'd have put it in a skip.

Woman Along with the Caravaggio no doubt.

Ruth Twombly was an American but he lived and worked in Italy. He died in 2011 in Rome. **(To the Woman)** What am I looking for here? The person? The place? The....what?

Woman I thought you were supposed to scrutinise the pictures? So please scrutinise.

Ruth uses the magnifying glass.

Ruth OK. So.....broad felt pen on cheap drawing paper. Probably the kind of paper you'd buy in any stationary shop. The strokes are a little hesitant in places.....it's not freely drawn - as if the child was trying to copy something. There's a splotch in this corner made with athinner, ink pen? No. Not a splotch. It's a drawing. It's in a more definite hand. More controlled. **(She turns the paper round)** A building perhaps? A derelict building? No – I recognise it now - it's the Colosseum. **(to the woman)** Is Italy the clue? Rome?

Cassie The clue to what though?

Woman Will you look at another one please?

Cassie goes and gets the 'Monet'.

Cassie passes it to Ruth and looks at the picture with her.

Ruth In the style ofMonet, I think. Monet was a serious gardener who's famous for painting his garden in Giverny in Normandy. Let's see.....various shades of pink and purple flowers under trees, set diagonally, with a glimpse of his house in the background through the trees. Felt pen on cheap paper. Almost a copy of his oil on canvas called Le Jardin De.....

Cassie No! Not HIS house. Look, Ruth. The shutters on the windows. The blue door. And this.....this is that laburnum tree in the back garden. The one I said would make a right mess when it dropped. This is the back garden of this house.

Woman Will you look at that? Even Cassie is playing detective now.

Ruth uses the magnifying glass.

Cassie So.....where's the clue? Is this it? Hidden in the flowers? What is it?

Ruth A patch of bare earth? Some kind of mound? Again, it's been added afterwards with a stronger, more controlled hand. **(she looks at the Woman.)** Your hand?

Cassie (to the Woman)A grave? Is that what we're looking for? But who's grave? Who's buried there?

Pause.

Cassie (to the Woman)Have you killed someone? Did you kill someone and bury them in the garden?

Woman Will you look at another drawing please?

Cassie (angry) No we won't! How do we know you're not planning on killing us too? I mean, you've obviously trapped us up here for some reason.

Woman (to Ruth) Please look at another one.

Cassie I said no! I don't know what you think you're playing at, but no more of it. Do you hear me? No more.

Woman Or what?

There is a silence as the Woman wanders about.

Woman He comes back you know. Every few months. He comes back and cleans. Everything spotless just like he made me keep it. No dust. No cobwebs. **(Looking at Ruth)** No spiders. He even launders all the clothes and returns them to the drawers. He's gone, but he can't leave.

Cassie Who can't leave? Gone where?

Woman He doesn't bring her with him though.

Cassie Bring who? With who?

Woman She did these for me. **(She indicates the drawings.)** She was such a good girl. I did my best for her you know? **(She is getting upset)** I taught her to read and write. She knew all the continents and she could do sums in tens and units. We used the mattress to do our gym – forward rolls, backward rolls, teddy bear rolls. And we used the plates and cutlery to form our very own band. How we laughed and sang.

Ruth Are you telling us that you lived up here?

Cassie Ruth.....remember the manacles? **(to the woman)** Are you saying that you were forced to live up here?

Woman Always such a good girl. All the lights would come on and we'd hear his footsteps on the wood. We'd wonder if this was just a delivery visit or one of

his 'Special Times' visits, as he called them. She never once complained about these 'Special Times'. He'd take her down through there. (**indicating stage left**) to the room below. If he was in a bad mood, he'd tie her up and leave her sitting there. If he was in a good mood, he'd give her new toys and let her play freely. On those occasions she was able to look out of the window. She'd come back in and smile, and tell me about the things she'd seen. The changing seasons. The birds that were free to fly about the sky. She knew that I'd be upset when she returned, although, of course, she was too young to know why. She'd cuddle up to me, talk about the garden and tell me that everything would be alright.

Ruth Who kept you up here? The missing brother?

Woman He never hurt her. Please don't think that. He didn't need to. He had me.

Ruth But who hurt you?

Woman I did try to get out – once. When she was a baby. I could reach this hatch you know. Although what I thought I was going to do after I'd broken it open, I don't know. I wouldn't have been able to get down with the chains on. But of course, he noticed the broken hatch. He never said a word, just quietly repaired it. Then he came up and took her away from me and I didn't see her for days. Can you imagine how I felt? How frantic I was? Wondering where they were, what he might be doing to her and if they'd ever come back. When he finally returned her he said that if I ever tried that again he'd take her away for good.

Cassie How long were you up here?

Woman I knew he'd come back and clean the place out once they'd left. Get rid of all the evidence. I needed something for someone to find. Something that would help you find me. Help you find my daughter. I desperately need you to find her for me, for her sake. Now she's growing up and he doesn't have me around, he may well turn to her. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Ruth I think I'm beginning to.

Woman And these pictures? **(She indicates the drawings)** For some reason he always made such a fuss over her drawings. I pinned these up hoping that he wouldn't have the heart to destroy them. Not that he has a heart, but something, something, made him leave them alone. I guess he thought that if anyone ever found them, they wouldn't mean anything. After all, they're just a child's drawings. He used to like to sit and look at them when he'd finished cleaning. He'd spend hours staring at them. I used to worry every time that he'd see past the obvious. But he didn't. Now they, and all this, are my evidence. Your evidence.

Cassie Look, I think I understand what you're trying to tell us, but what I don't understand is why haven't you been to the police yourself? If you really are the loving Mother you would have us think then why wait all this time to do anything about it? Why all this.....charade with us?

Woman I don't mean to be rude ladies, but it's not really usual for two more ...mature....women to be clearing out a loft.

Cassie Usually we wouldn't be. Usually, I'd send my Grandson up here with a couple of the lads to carry everything down for us.

Woman How old is he?

Cassie Nineteen.

Woman And do you think he would have noticed the lack of dust? The neatness? The smell of fabric conditioner?

Cassie Probably not. Judging from the state of his bedroom.

Woman Precisely. By the time you'd opened any drawers and wondered at the fresh smell of the clothes, all the other evidence would have been gone. Dust sheets in a heap, drawings torn down and thrown away, pens and paper in the rubbish.

Cassie (abruptly) Look, from what you've been telling us, it appears that you and your daughter were kept here against your will, right? And if all this is true then I can't begin to appreciate how awful your life up here was. But what I can't get my head round is why you've done nothing. You stand there and tell us only what you want us to know but never answer any of our questions. You just keep deflecting us all the time. Why haven't YOU gone to the police yourself? Why are you expecting US to do it for you?

Ruth Cassie! This is not like you. We've just heard the most heart-wrenching details of this woman's life, and you're snapping at her as if it's her fault. You've been grumpy on and off all day. What is it with you?

Cassie I don't understand why she's not done anything herself. Do you? It doesn't make any sense.

Ruth Maybe it will do if you step back and calm down a little.

Cassie You're right. I'm sorry. Both of you. I'm not having a good day.

Ruth Why? What's happened?

Cassie

You really want to know? Ok. This is probably going to sound really silly but..... this morning, at the supermarket, there was a young Mum – am I allowed to say ‘Mum’ these days? Struggling with a crying baby in a sling and a fractious toddler who wouldn’t stand still. She was obviously having trouble finding a pound coin for the trolley, so my natural instinct was to get another pound out of my purse and get a trolley for her. Then I just got my own trolley and went on my way. But now, I’ve spent the whole day wondering if I’m going to be tomorrow’s headline in the local paper because I caused that Mum untold emotional damage. Did I make her feel like a charity case? Did I belittle her skills as a mother in front of her children? I mean, who knows? Is it just me, or has the whole world gone mad since Covid?

Woman

There’s certainly been some big changes.

Cassie

Everything in the news these days is about anger and violence. Was it always like this but I just never noticed? Stabbings, drugs, young people attacking each other, acrimonious court cases over petty squabbles, strikes and protests, dangerous sexual fantasies on public display for all to see and, yes, naked men hanging themselves upside down and squirting blood everywhere in the name of art. And what happened to ‘innocent until proved guilty’? People are being judged by the public and the media without trial and ‘cancelled’ for expressing personal opinions. And everyone, but everyone, wanting to spill the dirt on someone for their five minutes of fame.

Woman

But don’t you think there have been some good changes too? Changes that were long overdue.

Cassie Yes, I agree there has. But to implement those changes we require empathy, tolerance and respect and it is those very values that seem to be rapidly disappearing. Don't you think so? I'm at the point where I hardly dare say anything to anyone I don't know in case I inadvertently get it wrong. Use the wrong pronoun. Look at them in the 'wrong' way. Ruth, you know me, I'd never deliberately hurt anyone's feelings, but it's not easy at my age to take onboard all these changes. Do you think that young people make allowances for that? I mean, where did all this sense of self-importance and entitlement suddenly spring from? As my Grandmother would have said – the world's going to Hell in a handcart. **(She suddenly stops. Pause.)** Oh....Sorry, I'll get off my soapbox now.

Woman You've certainly raised some very controversial questions there – and no, I'm not about to attempt to answer any of them. So, you've spent the whole day worrying that what you thought was a good deed may be turned on its head and thrown back at you?

Cassie Basically – yes. I mean, what if someone recorded it and puts it on Tik-Toc? I could find myself being trolled.

The Woman and Ruth hide a laugh.

Ruth I think you mean trolled.

Cassie No I don't. I mean trolled. As in - shopping trolled.

Ruth Ah! That's more like it. That's the Cassie I know and love. Full of crap jokes.

Woman So what are you going to do about it?

Cassie I don't know. I don't what I can do. But I do know that it worries me and is something I need to give some serious thought too. Although, this is

obviously not the time and place to do so. We have enough to contend with at the moment trying to help you and working out how we can get ourselves out of here. **(to Ruth)** What next?

Ruth Another picture, maybe?

Ruth goes to get another picture but falters and sways.

Cassie goes to help her and sits her down.

Cassie Ruth? Are you sure you can do this? I'm getting seriously concerned about you now.

Ruth The next drawing. Please, Cassie.

Cassie gets the Lowrey and hands it to Ruth to look at. Cassie looks at it over her shoulder.

Ruth Definitely Lowery. The School Yard painted in 1956. **(She uses the magnifying glass.)** But this figure here, the one at the front in the red jumper.....has curly, brown, shoulder length hair and blue eyes. I'm pretty certain that Lowrey never drew curly hair of blue eyes. This time the extra detail hasn't been added by the firmer hand. So.....a self-portrait? I'm no expert on children's drawings, but judging from the fact that they've drawn eyebrows and a neck, I'd say the child is probably around six years old.

Ruth looks at the Woman for conformation, but the Woman gives no response. Ruth keeps looking at the picture.

Ruth One earlobe is quite a bit bigger than the other and there is some sort of blemish on it. Not sure if this is intentional though. A birthmark? The nose is.....

Cassie Ruth, turn it sideways. Look in the hair.

Ruth does so.

Ruth Writing. Hidden in the curls. It says.....Charlotte. Your daughter is called Charlotte?

Woman Well now, look at you two. The perfect detective partnership. You may be best friends but you both have a very different take on life. Between the two of you, you'll work it out.

Ruth It would be a lot easier if we had more idea of what we were trying to work out.

Woman But can you authenticate them?

Ruth Authenticate them? I don't know. Possibly. We could match the paper to the type found in the pad in the drawer I suppose. Although there must have been thousands of those pads available so it may not be possible to identify the exact one. I expect we can prove that the ink on the drawings is the same as the ink in the dried up felt pens, but again there must have been thousands of those sets of pens around. Wait a minute.....Cassie, would you get me the pad from the drawer?

Cassie does so. Ruth examines it.

Ruth Clever. Very clever. See, Cassie? She's made sure that she's torn each piece of paper out of the pad in a unique way. Not ripping it straight across the seam but rather tearing it away leaving rough edges. This means we should be able to match each drawing to the pad.

Woman And the provenance? You can't authenticate them without that, can you? Do you think you'll be able to show proof of provenance?

Cassie Well, we found them, so surely we're the provenance?

Ruth Mmmmm...maybe, but how do we prove who drew them and that no one else has had them in the meantime?

Cassie (excitedly) Fingerprints! We fingerprint them. We can then connect the fingerprints to the artist – and to us because we've handled them, and then, if there are no other fingerprints on them, it shows they passed straight from the artist to us.

Ruth I suppose it could work, although I know nothing about fingerprints.

Cassie Ah! But we know a man who does!

Ruth You're right – we do. And he owes me a favour.

Cassie And then, we'd have to find the artist.

Ruth Exactly.

Cassie(To the Woman) So.....that means, if we find the artist then we've found your daughter.
Charlotte.

Ruth (to the Woman) Did you handle them?

Woman Yes. But I was careful. You won't find my fingerprints on them. But you will find my fingerprints safely preserved in the Mesozoic Era.

Cassie The what?

Ruth The Mesozoic Era. When the Dinosaurs lived. Derek the Dinosaur? The chocolate bar in the tin. **(To the Woman)** You said 'in' the Mesozoic era. Have you left your fingerprints inside the tin where they wouldn't have been cleaned off? You really thought this out, didn't you?

Woman I had plenty of time to do so.

Cassie But I still don't understand why you've waited all this time for us to do this.

Woman I think Ruth does.

Cassie Ruth?

Ruth (breathing heavily and slumping forward) I'm sorry. I'm feeling quite disorientated now. The last picture, quicky please, Cassie.

Cassie Ruth, no! No more. You need to lie down now. Come on. **(She takes Ruth to the bed)** You're all cold and clammy. **(To the woman)** You've got to stop this now. Enough is enough.

Ruth No Cassie, please, I need to do the last picture for her.

Cassie takes the last picture down. As she does so, a photograph falls from behind it. Cassie picks it up and looks at it. She hands Ruth the drawing. And Ruth looks at it.

Cassie (to the Woman) This is you, isn't it. With a baby. You, and Charlotte? **(To Ruth)**. That red mark on her ear in the picture? It is a birth mark.

Woman It was the only photograph he ever took of us. You should preserve your memories, they're all that's left you.

Ruth Gauguin. Garden in the Snow. **(She laughs)** Although I'm pretty certain that Gauguin never painted a snowman on his. **(She uses the magnifying glass.)** Flurries of snow are dripping off. No, not snowflakes.... they're all.... diamond shaped. They're diamonds. **(to the Woman)** I don't know where they fit in to all this just yet, but these are definitely diamond shapes and you spoke about diamonds earlier so there must be some connection.

Cassie(looking over Ruth's shoulder) And what's that strange looking pattern on the snowman's scarf?

Ruth Not sure. It's meticulously drawn by the more controlled hand, but it's difficult to make out with this magnification. Initials? Some kind of..... logo? I'm so sorry, I can't do anymore. To be honest, I've lost the thread of what we have done.

Cassie takes all the drawings.

Cassie You and me both. Ok then. Let's pause a moment. Recap. First of all, we think we have evidence up here to suggest that someone was being held here against their will. We think that possibly we have a missing girl of about 12 years old called Charlotte. We don't know her surname, but we could probably link it to name of the brother who lived here who is also missing. We have her fingerprints on these drawings. We have the fingerprints of....**(looking at the woman)**.....someone else, that.....Derek the Dinosaur has been protecting. We also have a potential connection to Rome and some sort of connection to diamonds and, possibly, some kind of company logo. Lastly, and what seems more sinister, it's likely that we have something, **(she looks at the woman)** or someone, buried in the back garden of this house. **(She gives a big sigh)** It's like trying to do a jigsaw puzzle when you're only given one piece at a time, none of which seem to be an edge and you don't have the picture to follow. We need more pieces.

Ruth(looking at the Woman) I have a feeling that we're expected to find the rest of the pieces for ourselves. Am I right?

Sound – an ambulance in the distance, getting closer, then stops.

Woman That's your ambulance arriving. I know the chocolate bar helped but you really need to get to the hospital now.

Cassie Ambulance? But we didn't call for an ambulance. We couldn't. Our phones are on the landing.

Woman Gareth's right behind it too.

Cassie But how does he know to come here now? What the Hell is going on?

Voice off Hello? Paramedics. Anyone here?

Cassie rushes to the loft hatch and bangs on it.

Cassie We're up here! We're up here in the loft. The hatch won't open.

Voice off It's ok. We can hear you. Try and stay calm while we find something to open the hatch with. Won't be long.

Woman (starts to exit right along the 'beam') I have to go. I think the time is right for me to do so now. I might even pause to see the birds flying free before I leave. **(She turns back)** Oh, and Ruth? Your Grandson? The one in hospital? Don't worry about him - he's going to be just fine. Good luck with the jigsaw, ladies.

The Woman continues along the beam to exit. As she goes, she sings some lines from the Simon and Garfunkel.

Woman Long ago, it must be, I have a photograph,
Preserve your memories,
They're all that's left you.

Lights – blackout.

Tabs close.

Production notes:

The pictures on the A-frame should not be difficult to produce bearing in mind that they are a child's representation and will only be seen by the audience from a distance.

1. This should represent one of Cy Twombly's untitled works in the 'Red' series. In the corner is a small drawing representing the Coliseum in Rome.
2. Monet - 'Iris in Monet's garden at Giverny'. The house should have a blue door and one of the trees should be a Laburnum tree in full flower. A small, brown 'mound' is hidden in the flowers.
3. L S Lowry – The Schoolyard. The child at the front in the red jumper has shoulder length, curly, brown hair and blue eyes. The name 'Charlotte' is hidden in the curly hair.
4. Gauguin – Garden Under Snow. With the addition of a melting snowman. The melting snow should be diamond shaped and the snowman's scarf represents a logo.

Only the back of the wardrobe is seen so this may be a simple sheet of painted plywood.

Likewise, the 'wall'.

The A-frame is not essential. The bulb and drawings may be attached elsewhere at the Director's discretion.

The downlight is also optional. If used, then it may be selected as the one additional, specific light allowed to be pre-set in competitions.

Additional furniture may be added at the Director's discretion.

