

SPINSTER

SHOOTING SCRIPT

03/03/25

Written by

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C/U on RUBY, serious, in the zone. She clutches her notebook, scribbling with the energy and movement of a concert pianist.

RUBY
(reading as she writes)
I am untameable, a bird flying
free. The rules you follow are not
meant for -
(searching)
...me.

DRONE of a HOOVER. JEN, a woman on a mission, pushes the hoover past the sofa, forcing Ruby to lift her legs.

RUBY (CONT'D)
Ma! I am creating here!

JEN
Creating a pain in my arse.

Jen flicks off the hoover and approaches the mantle piece with a FRAMED PICTURE. She brushes off the considerable dust to reveal a terrifying image of a little girl, a lamb and a bible verse. She looks down at the picture with disgust and resignation.

Resignedly, she takes down a lovely family photo of her girls and replaces it with this horror. She steps back to examine it with repulsion. Ruby joins her, clutching her notebook and looking at the picture.

RUBY
The guests won't stay long if you
scare the shite out of them with
this.

JEN
I wish. They get off on this stuff.
If one of those feckers says I'm a
backslider or that I keep an untidy
house -

RUBY
But you are a backslider. You only
go to church for biscuits and
gossip. It's why I respect you.

JEN
It's Eliza's engagement party - she
gets to call the shots.

RUBY

Marriage is a construct of the patriarchy designed to repress and silence women!

(gestures to self)

Poets shouldn't get married. Look at Sylvia Plath.

JEN

Is that your woman from the Co-Op with a unibrow?

RUBY

She was the greatest writer of her generation. Then she got married. Then she stuck her head in an oven.

JEN

Oh that reminds me - I need to put the sausage rolls in.

Jen's tidying up the table. She lifts the notebook and reads.

JEN (CONT'D)

Christ almighty. "I am untameable" - a bit much, isn't it? Would you not write a nice poem about Mr Fowler's lovely new cow?

RUBY

I won't get published unless I lean into my true authentic voice. And I'm not inspired by "lovely cows".

JEN

Wait til you see this heifer. She has wee dimples when she smiles.

(gestures to glasses)

Make yourself useful and get pouring that pretend wine muck.

Jen gestures to the table. Ruby lifts one of the bottles and reads the label, "Non-alcoholic sparkling grape flavour party drink."

RUBY

"Non-alcoholic sparkling grape flavour party drink." Poor Sven probably thought he was marrying into the craic-loving drinking Irish, not the anally retentive Presbos.

ELIZA (O.S.)

Language!

Ruby and Jen wheel around to see ELIZA, mid 20s, in the doorway. She's wearing a pink tweed skirt suit and a severe up do more suited to a 50 year old Sunday school teacher.

RUBY

What? Anal?

JEN

Aye, that's right. There'll be no fecking swearing at this thing.

ELIZA

This THING is my one and only engagement party-

RUBY

We'll see. Is Sven coming to my poetry slam with you guys?

Jen looks away shiftily.

ELIZA

Why would we go to that? It's for sweaty, single hippies.

JEN

Oh, I can't deal with sweaty, single hippies. You never know what you might catch.

RUBY

I need to bring at least three people or I don't get to perform.

ELIZA

Focus, please. Look, I don't ask much from you.

RUBY

Your hen party is eight nights in Gdansk!

ELIZA

And? Tonight all eyes are going to be on the McCreadys.

(gestures to herself, Ruby and Jen)

We have been low in the pecking order for some time now. But Sven is from good stock, he's rich, handsome, part Norwegian--

RUBY

Which part?

ELIZA

After tonight, people will see us differently. They'll forget that Da ran off with your one from Centra, or that you're a single, jobless failure with a broad back who's moved back in with Mummy.

JEN

But she is moving out asap.

RUBY

No Ma, I told you. Quiet Living. Plenty people my age are moving back home, there's no shame in it.

JEN

That's just some new fangled way to say I'm never getting my house back.

RUBY

We're in the adjustment period, I'll give you that. But soon you'll love having me around. We can get coffee, shoot the shit, really connect as adults.

JEN

God in heaven.

ELIZA

Tonight, you need to play the part of the functional, sane person.

RUBY

Got it. Tits. Teeth. No trauma dumping.

ELIZA

Don't say tits.

RUBY

I've written a little poem. It's quite touching -

Jen's face lights up.

ELIZA

NO! No. No.

Jen's face falls.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

The last thing you are to do is draw attention to yourself. You may mingle. You may schmooze. Quietly. The party line is that you've moved back for a job in HR. You realised the poetry stuff was a waste of time -

RUBY

By that poetry stuff, you mean the purpose of my life since I was 13 -

JEN

You wanted to be a train driver when you were 13.

RUBY

No I didn't.

JEN

We bought you a hat and everything.

RUBY

That was a phase!

ELIZA

Focus. Functional Ruby has a nice flat in town. She does not overdo it on the devil's water nor does she harp on about the gender pay gap.

RUBY

But if we don't address it, we'll never solve it! Did you know single women are paid the least?

ELIZA

Then don't be one.

A KNOCK at the door. They all jump, suddenly very tense.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Right. Stations.

They look at each other. It'll have to do. Eliza rallies around them.

2 INT. HALL - DAY

2

They head into the hall and stand by the front door. "Let's do this" energy. And then COUGH.

Jen and Ruby spin round and practically jump out of their skins. SVEN, Eliza's trophy fiancé, has been waiting quietly and patiently at the bottom of the stairs. He's handsome, tall, thick as a brick.

JEN Jesus! How long have you been there?
RUBY You fecking pervert!

ELIZA
LANGUAGE!

3 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

3

The party is in full swing aka a group of uptight guests clutch soft drinks and mingle poorly. GUEST drops their gift off at the GIFT TABLE, then proceeds to shake the other gifts, violently checking the contents.

Other GUESTS cast side eyes. One GUEST runs a finger along surfaces, checking for dust. Another guest opens a cupboard - Jen slams it shut.

JEN
Vol-au-vent?

Two GUESTS gaze up at the FRAMED PICTURE admiringly.

Ruby watches then gulps her "wine" and shudders at the lack of alcohol. Jen dashes around pushing canapés into guests' hands, then she sprints to Ruby.

JEN (CONT'D)
You talked to any fellas yet? That one there looks like he could be a homeowner. He's combed his hair and everything.

RUBY
No, Ma. I told you, I'm not interested.

JEN
You really can't be so picky once the eggs have been cooked.

Lights flash - they both turn to see Eliza and Sven posing for photos with their huge engagement ring. Ruby notices her mother beaming with pride.

RUBY

You can stop looking at her like that. She's the same girl who perioded on her chair at Pizza Express on her 12th birthday.

JEN

It's just always been us girls. And now...

RUBY

Well, if I stuck around -

JEN

Over my dead body.

Jen bustles off. MR FOWLER, a farmer in his 50s, comes over.

MR FOWLER

Ah, Ruby, it's yourself. How are ye getting on?

RUBY

Fantastic, Mr Fowler. I packed in the whole poetry gig and discovered that what I really get off on is workplace squabbles and wage disputes.

(off his blank look)

Got a job in HR. My true calling.

3A INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

3A

On the other side, Eliza spots Ruby talking and dashes over.

ELIZA

Congratulations on your beautiful new cow, Mr Fowler.

(to Ruby)

I promised Mummy I'd introduce you to a living breathing man tonight, so come meet Carl.

RUBY

Who?

ELIZA

He's the volunteer Youth Leader at Sven's cousin's colleague's church.

RUBY

Then why the hell was he invited?

ELIZA

Language. He has a good job, his own flat and an Audi. And get this... He's never been to therapy.

Ruby looks in disgust at Carl standing on the other side of the room, looking ridiculous in his fedora.

RUBY

That's not a good thing.

ELIZA

Ruby! I actually know how relationships work.

(waves her ring)

In all heathen couples, there's a normal one and a freak. You need someone functional to balance your flawed and godless personality.

RUBY

Christ. I'd rather tell Nana I'm on the pill.

Ruby turns and finds the joyless, decrepit NANA JUNE hovering in front of her like a ghoul from a horror film. Ruby stifles a scream.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Nana! What a delight.

NANA JUNE

You look like a Judas Whore with your dirty pillows out like that.

RUBY

I wear this to church.

NANA JUNE

If you set foot in a church you'd burn.

RUBY

Wrong again, sweet Nana. I went to a wedding in a church last week and not a sin.

NANA JUNE

Well it wasn't yours, was it?

RUBY

No Nana, tragically I'd have to invite you if it was.

NANA JUNE

Hah. We'll be dead in our graves long before your Granda and I get an invite to your wedding.

RUBY

You and Granda do make marriage look so appealing.

Ruby points to GRANDA JIM. He senses Nana June looking and gives her the finger. She gives it right back. The hatred is evident.

3B

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

3B

Ruby turns back to Eliza who is now holding several cheques.

A tap on her shoulder and Eliza wheels round to Mr Fowler, who hands her another cheque. She is instantly hauntingly saccharine.

MR FOWLER

For the happy couple. You're a credit to our church. Even though your fella did dip his toe in the baptist font, we will forgive him.

ELIZA

Bless your heart, thank you so much.

Mr Fowler takes a step back, then secretly lingers, nosily.

RUBY

What are you getting cheques for? Sven's family literally crap money.

ELIZA

Some of us have homes to furnish and future babies to rear. We don't leach off our mothers.

RUBY

Ma loves having me back home.

ELIZA

She says your very presence puts her on edge.

RUBY

She did not. Ma could never come up with anything that poetic.

ELIZA

What if mummy wants to find us a new daddy? Single parent families are so embarrassing.

RUBY

There's no chance of that. She took her bra off the day da left and never put it back on.

ELIZA

Maybe you're fine with being a jobless single hippie who's moved back home but -

MR FOWLER

Oh, so things didn't work out in the big city then?

They all look up, surprised Mr Fowler is still there.

Eliza shoots Ruby a warning look - a silent stand-off.

RUBY

Actually, I made the very deliberate and conscious decision to return to this small, provincial life, take the air and invest in peace and quiet, removing all distractions to allow me to fully commit to my poetry.

They all look at her with open mouths.

NANA JUNE

Were you not disappointing enough already?

RUBY

An artist's life is one of toil and sacrifice where financial remuneration and ownership of land are not the markers of success.

MR FOWLER

You could get a place if you found a nice fella like your sister did.

Eliza beams and pulls Sven close. He grins, totally unaware.

MR FOWLER (CONT'D)

Well, maybe not on the level of himself there. I'd offer one of my boys but they like nice, good looking women. But maybe you could find a short man or a bald one. Or both?

RUBY

Thank you, Mr Fowler. What a lovely suggestion that I will no doubt unpack in therapy.

NANA JUNE

Course this nutter's in therapy.

RUBY

You come up a lot, Nana.

Nana June smirks, pleased with herself. Jen pushes her way into the group and forces everyone to take a sausage roll.

JEN

(extremely high strung)
Ah Mr Fowler, how are ye? Ruby lives in town. She works in HR. She's very functional, you know.

MR FOWLER

There are no secrets here anymore.

He winks at Jen. She recoils, then leans into her daughters.

JEN

What have you told him? Mr Fowler runs the church WhatsWhat group. He's a terrible gossip.

ELIZA

Oh shit.

Everyone looks at her.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

I mean, oh socks.

RUBY

Right then, if you're all so feckin ashamed of me, then I'm off upstairs to have more fun than any of you have ever had in your whole lives.

ELIZA
That's disgusting.

RUBY
I'm going to take off my bra and
drink a whole bottle of wine. Real
wine. Not that shite. Obviously.

ELIZA
Do not say bra in front of my
fiancé.

She starts to walk away. Jen sighs, mind racing. Mr Fowler strokes Jen's arm, flirtatiously. She slaps him away and grabs Ruby with one hand and Eliza with the other.

JEN
Right, youse come on. We're sorting
this now.

She pulls the girls into her and dings her ring against Ruby's glass. All eyes shoot to the McCreadys.

ELIZA
Mummy, what are you doing?

RUBY
Please kill me.

Jen throws her arms around her daughters, one on each side.

JEN
Hi yes, hello there. Hi everyone
and thank you for coming to our
home.
(beat to think)
Praise God. Amen... Thanks be to
Jesus.

Nana June smirks at them. Sven claps alone.

JEN (CONT'D)
Now you'll know we've not always
had it easy, but this is a special
night for my girls -

MR FOWLER
Congratulations to the most
handsome mother of the bride.

JEN
Um, yes, thank you. Eliza is
getting married, which is
wonderful, but Ruby also has news -

Jen shoots Ruby a smile. She's horrified. Eliza fumes.

ELIZA
(through gritted teeth)
Can you stop now?

JEN
Our Ruby has a poetry SLAG coming
up and you're all invited.

NANA JUNE
Course she does. Bleeding Jezebel.

A sea of blank faces. A lone cough.

JEN
You tell them, love.

RUBY
Um. Yes. I have a poetry SLAM. Next
Friday.
(off dead reaction)
There'll be a finger buffet.

An impressed murmur travels around the room.

JEN
Why don't you give them a wee
taster? Do one about Mr Fowler's
lovely new cow.

ELIZA
(gritted teeth)
Are you kidding me?

MR FOWLER
She's a beautiful cow, to be fair.

Jen steps back and gives her a thumbs up. Ruby is horrified. Expectant faces stare up, an excited buzz in the air.

Eliza grabs a bottle of sparkling drink and pours it into a glass with shaking hands. She downs it like booze.

RUBY
But I haven't got one... Okay,
wait. An ode to the lovely cow.
(thinks for a moment)
What a lovely bovine sow -
(crowd lose interest, she
recalculates)
Your udders make milk aplenty,
your fur a gorgeous brown -
(crowd shake their heads)
(MORE)

RUBY (CONT'D)
 Black -
 (more head shaking)
 White -
 (pleased nodding)
 Your fur a gorgeous white,
 Your dimples deep and charming,
 (Jen swoons)
 I wish you were here tonight.

Rapturous applause. Mr Fowler is crying. Ruby takes a bow.

Eliza's grip on the bottle tightens. Her hands shake as she tries to suppress her emotion. The bottle shatters in her hand. Screams from the guests.

The FRAMED PICTURE finally gives up and falls onto the floor. It smashes to pieces. Eliza shrieks as Ruby runs to safety.

4

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

4

The party is over. It's quiet in the house. Ruby and Jen stand by the sink doing the dishes- Jen washes, Ruby dries.

JEN
 So, this slag buffet, will they
 have cucumber sandwiches?

RUBY
 Yeah Ma. So you'll come?

JEN
 I think I will.

Ruby smiles.

JEN (CONT'D)
 Mr Fowler wants to stick your poem
 in the church newsletter. He said
 he won't be taking no for an
 answer.

Ruby's mouth drops open.

JEN (CONT'D)
 I know, thinks he's god's gift.
 I'll tell him you're not interested-

RUBY
 OH MY GOD, I'M A PUBLISHED POET!

Ruby celebrates. Jen tries to join in despite her confusion.

NANA JUNE

Those poems won't keep you warm at
night.

They both jump as Nana June is revealed in the corner.

RUBY

Nana, I swear to God.

JEN

Shut up, Mum!

Jen and Ruby smile at each other with a new understanding.

THE END