

Beside the Kitchen Table

A ghost story by Jasper Kent.

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Characters

Michael Baker, a boy of about 18

Paul Baker, his father

Laura Baker, his mother

Benny Stevens, Paul's business partner

Jennifer Baker, Michael's elder sister, 20

Abigail Baker, his younger sister, 16

Lily Buckland, a ghost, apparently aged about 17

The action takes place in early 1986 in the large kitchen of the Bakers' somewhat secluded house. A wooden table, big enough for all to sit round, is centre stage. Around it are the kitchen sink and a window looking out on to the garden. The window continues, coming down the side of the room to the back door. Another door leads to the rest of the house. Against the walls are a fridge, a cooker and an empty dog basket.

ACT I

Scene i

Morning. Paul sits at the table, hidden behind the newspaper he is reading. Lily sits opposite, seemingly bored. She is barefoot and looks slightly dishevelled, wearing clothes more suited to the 1970s. The radio is playing. The toaster pops up.

DJ [*on radio*]: Time for an oldie now. Can you remember what *you* were doing fourteen years ago? It's 1972, it's David Bowie and it's ch... ch... ch... ch... *Changes*.

The music starts playing.

LILY: Oh, I love this one.

Paul turns the page of his paper, saying nothing. Michael enters and goes to the toaster.

MICHAEL: Toast?

PAUL: Please.

LILY: Yes, please.

Michael puts several slices of toast on a large plate and one on a smaller plate. He goes over to the table, placing the large plate in the middle and the small one in front of Paul. Paul folds his paper in half so that he can hold it in one hand and begins to eat. Lily takes a slice from the big plate and puts it on the table in front of her. Laura enters from the house. Throughout the scene, only Lily and Paul remain settled at the table, the others busy preparing for the day.

LAURA: You know you can't have the car today, don't you love?

She sits at the table and helps herself to some toast.

PAUL: I know. Benny's picking me up.

MICHAEL: Uncle Ben? He hasn't been over for ages.

LILY: Thank heavens.

PAUL: We work together every day.

Jennifer enters, carrying a cup of coffee. She heads for the table.

MICHAEL: He used to be round here all the time.

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Jennifer sits and helps herself to toast.

JENNIFER: Who?

LILY: Ben Stevens.

MICHAEL: [*at the same time*] Uncle Ben.

LILY: [*to Michael*] He's not your uncle.

JENNIFER: I can't say I've missed him.

LILY: Exactly!

JENNIFER: Old leech.

Lily and Michael both smirk.

LAURA: Jenny!

JENNIFER: What?

PAUL: He's married now.

MICHAEL: So?

PAUL: That's why he doesn't come round here so often.

LILY: [*authoritatively*] No, it was before that.

Abigail enters.

JENNIFER: I don't see how getting married stops him being an old leech.

Abigail sits at the table.

ABIGAIL: Who's an old leech?

LILY: Benny Stevens.

ABIGAIL: [*repeating herself, rather than asking for qualification*] Who?

LAURA: Your Uncle Ben.

LILY: He's *not* their uncle.

ABIGAIL: Where's all the toast?

Michael picks up the slice in front of Lily and gives it to Abigail.

MICHAEL: Have that one.

LILY: Oi!

ABIGAIL: It's been on the table.

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PAUL: The table's clean enough.

LILY: You'd know.

Benny appears at the back door. Only Lily sees him.

(LILY:) Speak of the Devil.

Benny taps on the glass. All look in his direction. Laura beckons him in. He enters.

BENNY: Sorry to butt in. Paul, we really need to get moving.

PAUL: Two minutes.

LAURA: Benny, sit down. Have a cup of coffee. We were just talking about you.

LILY: Jen thinks you're an old leech.

Benny thinks for a moment, eyeing Lily, or at least the seat she is in.

BENNY: Best not, thanks all the same.

LILY: [*feigned disappointment*] Oh!

BENNY: I'll go wait in the car. It might persuade him to get a move on. We've got to be in Winchester by ten.

LAURA: You sure?

Benny nods and exits.

LILY: See you, then.

MICHAEL: He's changed.

PAUL: Marriage does that to a man.

LAURA: [*hugging Paul from behind*] Yes. You used to be such a grumpy sod, didn't you, darling?

ABIGAIL: I still don't see why that stops him being an old leech.

PAUL: Once and for all, Benny Stevens is *not* an old leech. [*pause*] He's the same age I am.

LILY: And?

LAURA: [*to Michael and Abigail*] Are you two okay to walk in to school?

ABIGAIL: Mum! It's Friday! I've got my violin!

MICHAEL: I'll carry it.

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ABIGAIL: It's valuable.

LILY: It's Japanese.

ABIGAIL: [*looking around for support, but finding none*] You'll break it.

LILY: Do us all a favour.

MICHAEL: I'll be careful, Abby, I promise. If I break it, I'll get you a new one, okay?

Abigail scowls but says nothing more.

LILY: [*to Michael*] Are you crazy?

JENNIFER: Mum, can you give me a lift to the station?

LILY: I mean, have you people actually *listened* to her playing?

LAURA: I'm going the other way, love.

JENNIFER: Dad?

PAUL: Sure, Benny won't mind.

MICHAEL: Getting into a car with an old letch?

LILY: It could be worse.

JENNIFER: I'll be sitting in the back.

MICHAEL: He'll be able to see you in the mirror.

JENNIFER: Shut up!

LILY: [*leaning forward towards Jennifer*] Don't worry. Your dad'll be there.

Michael picks up his bag.

MICHAEL: [*to Abigail*] Come on then, if you're coming.

Abigail exits to the house.

JENNIFER: [*to Paul*] Can we go soon?

PAUL: Give it a few minutes. Benny's such a stickler.

LILY: Ha!

JENNIFER: I've got a train to catch.

PAUL: You can wait two minutes.

Abigail re-enters, with her violin case. She holds it out for Michael to take.

MICHAEL: Come on then.

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Abigail coughs theatrically.

(MICHAEL:) What?

ABIGAIL: You promised.

MICHAEL: Oh, right.

He grabs the case off her.

ABIGAIL: Careful!

LAURA: For God's sake, Abby, it's hardly a Stradivarius. It's Japanese.

LILY: That's what *I* said.

ABIGAIL: And whose fault's that?

LILY: Why do you only pay attention when *she* says it?

PAUL: You know what you have to do to get a better one.

LILY: [*her anger rising*] Do you know what it's like to be ignored all the time?

ABIGAIL: But I won't ever pass grade five with a piece of junk like this.

She bashes the violin case with her hand.

MICHAEL: [*sarcastically*] Careful!

Lily begins to speak over the others, rather than finding gaps in the conversation. In contrast to her rising anger, their conversation remains relatively light-hearted.

LILY: [*standing up*] To hear you all, and never to be heard?

PAUL: Let's not make a big thing of this.

LILY: A big thing? I'm living in a prison.

ABIGAIL: You don't understand. Music is a big thing.

PAUL: I know. I didn't mean that.

LILY: Just once! Just once I want to know what I have to do for someone even to notice me.

LAURA: We both know what it means to you.

MICHAEL: I was only kidding.

LILY: I could scream till my lungs bleed.

LAURA: We'll get you a new one when you pass the exam.

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Lily stands on her chair.

LILY: [shouting] What's it going to take for you people to hear me?

PAUL: When you *take* the exam.

Laura glances at him, then nods in agreement. Lily steps on to the table and stands in the middle of it. She leans down to shout in their faces.

LILY: [at the top of her voice] Abby couldn't play the violin to save her life.

Abby runs over to her father.

ABBY: Thanks, dad.

She hugs Paul.

LILY: 'Uncle' Benny latches over Abby and Jen, and every other girl he's ever seen.

Lily talks over them.

(LILY:) Jen is catching a train to London to meet her boyfriend. They're going to share a line of cocaine, and then he's going to fuck her brains out. And you know what's worse than all that? Do you? What's worse is that I've been living in your house for the last fourteen years. I came here, I stayed here and I died here – and none of you gives a shit about it. You invited me in here, and you didn't even bother to check that I'd left.

The conversation of the others is a quiet background underscoring Lily's speech. Eventually it stops as they listen to the radio.

MICHAEL: Oh, thanks Dad!

LAURA: Don't start.

PAUL: What?

ABIGAIL: You *had* a guitar. You never practised.

JENNIFER: [making to leave] Dad! Please!

PAUL: Sh!

He points to the radio and they all listen as Lily continues over it.

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TRAFFIC REPORTER [*on radio, starting before Paul stops them*]:

And if you're anywhere around the Sussex/Hampshire border you'd better listen up because we're getting reports of a lorry that's shed its load just east of Petersfield, covering the road with scrap metal and causing traffic to tail back in both directions ...

When Lily has finished her speech, she pants. The others remain silent, looking into space, some by chance at Lily.

(TRAFFIC REPORTER:)

...for over two miles. So, if you were planning on taking the A272 then you'd better find an alternative route, or bring a picnic.

All but Lily react unhappily to the news on the radio.

PAUL: Bugger!

JENNIFER: You can still take me to the train.

PAUL: Yes, but we have to go *now*.

He and Jennifer both stand up and get ready to leave. Lily begins to climb down from the table.

LAURA: I'd best get off too. The traffic will be hell everywhere.

PAUL: All right. I'll see you this evening.

Paul and Jennifer kiss Laura goodbye. Laura exits to the house. Paul also kisses Abigail.

JENNIFER: See y'all.

MICHAEL: Bye.

ABIGAIL: See you.

Paul and Jennifer exit to the garden.

LILY: [*sitting down*] Bye.

Laura re-enters.

LAURA: If you can leave now, I'll give you a lift as far as the crossroads.

She turns off the radio.

LILY: That's okay, I think I'll stay here.

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Michael and Abigail glance at each other.

MICHAEL: We're ready.

Laura, Michael and Abigail head for the back door.

LILY: [raising her voice] See you this evening.

They exit. Laura locks the door from the outside. Lily remains seated for a moment, then goes and turns the radio back on, before sitting down again.

DJ: A bit more up-to-date now. This one made it to number two in the charts a couple of years ago. Is there something strange in *your* neighbourhood?
Well, who you gonna call?

Theme music for Ghostbusters starts playing.

LILY: Ha!

The scene blacks out.

Scene ii

Later that day – early evening. The kitchen is empty. Lily can be seen through the window coming from the garden. She enters by the back door. She goes to the table and sits down, leaving a trail of muddy footprints behind her. A few moments later, Michael tries to enter by the same door. He finds it locked, and unlocks it. He dumps his bag in the kitchen then exits to the house. Lily stands and goes to look out of the window. Paul enters via the garden door. He looks at the floor and scowls. Michael re-enters.

PAUL: Did you bring this mud in?

MICHAEL: What mud?

PAUL: [pointing] These footprints.

Michael comes over to where he father is standing.

MICHAEL: I didn't see... [He sees them] Oh!

PAUL: If you didn't see them you must have made them.

MICHAEL: It could have been anyone.

Lily returns and sits where she was.

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PAUL: [suddenly irritable] Just clean them up, would you?

He strides across the room and exits to the house. Michael fetches a mop and bucket and begins to clean the footprints, starting at the back door. The trail of footprints leads Michael to Lily.

LILY: I'm sorry. [Pause] I'd have cleaned them up myself but, well... [She shrugs]. And I'm sorry about this morning too. [She speaks a little too fast, knowing that he cannot hear her.] It just gets so frustrating sometimes, but I shouldn't have said those things. Not all of them. Abby's not that bad at the violin. I'm sure she'll pass her exam.

As Michael gets close, she lifts up her feet so that he can clean right up to the chair.

(LILY:) But it's true about Jen – about the coke, at least. I heard her on the phone. I mean, I know I only got one side of it, but you can tell what she meant.

Michael has finished cleaning. He empties the bucket into the sink and proceeds to put it and the mop away.

(LILY:) [becoming a little more urgent] I don't think he's any good for her, Michael. This new boy – what's his name? [She waits for Michael to respond, but he does not.] Liam – that's right. I'm not sure he's even her boyfriend – not properly. He's just trying to get her hooked. And she's going to be paying all the rent when they move in together. [Pause] Your mother's got something against him, and she hasn't even heard the phone calls. Mind you, she can't... Still, mothers are like that. My... [she stops suddenly, holding back a tear.] I never did drugs – though I suppose I would have done. Do you think that if I'd —

The sound of the door closing as Michael exits to the house silences her. She sits sullenly for a few moments. Laura and Jennifer enter from the house.

LAURA: I'll get tea started. There's only Abby to wait for, but she won't be long.

JENNIFER: Do you want some help?

LAURA: No, I can manage. You could lay the table.

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LILY: She's all sweetness now.

Jennifer begins setting the table. Laura flicks a light switch, but the light does not come on.

She tries it a few times, but with no success. She tuts.

JENNIFER: What are we having?

LAURA: Just lasagne.

She gets the shop-bought lasagne from the fridge and studies the instructions on the packet.

JENNIFER: It's what I'm going to miss most.

LAURA: What?

JENNIFER: Home cooking.

LILY: Home cooking? That?

LAURA: You're definitely going then?

Laura takes off the packaging and throws it away, then studies the panel of the microwave.

Then presses some button and put the food in.

JENNIFER: It's silly me coming back here every holiday. I might as well live in London.

LAURA: I suppose.

JENNIFER: I'll be home loads. You'll get fed up of me

Abigail enters through the back door.

ABIGAIL: Hi mum! Hi Jen!

LAURA: }
JENNIFER: } Hi!
LILY: }

LAURA: You've got [*she peers at the microwave panel*] four minutes before dinner.

ABIGAIL: Okay.

She runs across the room and exits to the house, bumping into Paul and Michael as they enter:

PAUL: Dinner ready?

LILY: Four minutes and counting.

LAURA: Oh, darling, can you fix the light [*she points*]. I think it's just the bulb.

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Paul goes over and flicks the switch a few times. Laura takes a bag of salad from the fridge and empties it into a bowl. She hands the bowl to Michael. He takes it and puts it on the table, sitting.

MICHAEL: What are we having?

LAURA: *[to Paul]* I told you, it's the bulb.

LILY: *[loudly]* It's the bulb, Paul!

Abigail re-enters from the house.

MICHAEL: What are we having?

PAUL: Have we got any bulbs?

Laura points at a low drawer. Paul bends down and takes one out. Laura goes over to the table and puts a bowl on it.

ABIGAIL: What are we having?

LAURA: }
JENNIFER: } Lasagne.

Michael expresses mock dismay at not having the same question answered.

LILY: *[confidentially, to Michael]* Don't worry. They're *always* doing that to me.

ABIGAIL: We had that last week.

LAURA: You liked it last week, didn't you?

PAUL: Can you pass me that chair, love?

Laura takes the chair that Lily is sitting on, causing her to fall to the floor. She hands the chair to Paul. Lily scowls at Paul as she gets to her feet and stands behind Michael's chair.

MICHAEL: We should have it every week.

ABIGAIL: Crawler.

LILY: *[at the same time]* Buttkiss.

Paul puts down the chair with one leg inside the dog basket and is about to stand on it.

LAURA: Not in Dylan's basket.

PAUL: It's not like *he* needs it.

JENNIFER: But it's Dylan!

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Paul moves the basket brusquely to one side and climbs on to the chair to change the bulb.

ABIGAIL: We should get a *new* dog.

The microwave pings. Laura fetches the dish from it and puts it on the table.

JENNIFER: You would say that.

LILY: [*wistfully*] I liked Dylan.

ABIGAIL: I *do* remember him.

JENNIFER: You were two!

The phone rings. Laura quickly goes to answer it, but Michael, without noticing her rush, is there first. Lily looks intently at Laura. Paul climbs down and flicks the light switch a few times. The light works.

MICHAEL: [*on phone*] Hello?

PAUL: Good as new.

JENNIFER: [*sniffing the food*] Smells lovely.

LILY: I'm surprised you've got any sense of smell left.

MICHAEL: Sure, I'll get her.

Both Jennifer and Laura look at him, anticipating themselves to be the 'her'.

(MICHAEL:) [*holding out the phone*] Jen, it's for you.

Jennifer gets up and goes to the phone. Lily sits in her vacant seat. Laura returns to her cooking, disappointed.

(MICHAEL:) [*whispering*] It's Liam.

JENNIFER: [*taking the phone*] Hiya!

Paul kicks the dog basket back into place and returns the chair to the table. Lily moves back over to sit on it.

(JENNIFER:) [*giggling*] Well maybe next time you should.

MICHAEL: [*shouting into phone*] Don't do it, Liam!

Jennifer exits to the house, taking the phone with her.

LAURA: [*shouting after her a little irritatedly*] Don't let your food get cold.

All except Lily start eating.

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MICHAEL: Do you think we'll ever *meet* Liam?

LILY: Ha!

LAURA: I think that's really up to Jen, don't you?

ABIGAIL: [*to Michael*] I don't think meeting *you* is going to be very high on his list of priorities.

MICHAEL: But she's moving in with him.

PAUL: She's what?

LAURA: Who told you that?

LILY: Good question.

MICHAEL: I ... I just assumed, that's all.

LAURA: She's getting a flat on her own.

ABIGAIL: He'll still be 'visiting' [*using her fingers as quotation marks*].
Lily laughs.

LAURA: Don't say things like that.

PAUL: And it's not the same as living together.

LILY: How very paternal!

LAURA: Perhaps we *should* meet him.

MICHAEL: Before they start 'visiting' each other senseless.

LAURA: Michael!

MICHAEL: She said it first.
He points through Lily at Abigail.

LILY: I did not! It was Abby.

PAUL: I'm sure Jen will introduce us to Liam when she wants to.

MICHAEL: What about the drugs?

LAURA: What drugs?

MICHAEL: [*defensively*] It's London. There's bound to be drugs.

PAUL: [*seriously*] Michael, do you know something?

MICHAEL: No. I'm just saying. It's London. She's a student.

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PAUL: Well I suggest you think before starting rumours about your own family.

LILY: Ooh, no. We wouldn't want any rumours spreading about *this* family, would we?

Jennifer re-enters and hangs up the phone. The rest of the family concentrate on their food.

Lily makes an exaggerated show of shushing them and appearing innocent.

LAURA: How's Liam?

JENNIFER: [*sitting down*] He's fine.

PAUL: It would be really nice to meet him sometime.

JENNIFER: Well it won't be for a few days. He's away.

LAURA: Away where?

JENNIFER: He's visiting his mother.

Michael, Lily and Abigail burst out laughing. Paul and Laura manage to maintain straight faces.

Scene iii

That night. It is dark except for moonlight. Lily is sitting alone at the table. Michael enters from the house and turns on the light. He picks up a glass and then goes to the fridge and pours himself some milk.

LILY: How did you know about Jen taking drugs?

Michael appears not to hear her. He goes upstage and looks out of the window as he drinks his milk.

(LILY:) How did you know she was moving in with Liam? [*She waits for an answer, but none comes.*] You could only have heard it from me. Which means you must be able to hear me.

She gets up and goes over to stand beside him, staring out into the garden for a moment.

(LILY:) [*shouting directly into his ear*] Can you hear me, Michael? [*He doesn't react.*]
Just a coincidence then?

She turns away and goes back to her place at the table.

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(LILY:) You must have overheard her on the phone, like I did. You shouldn't eavesdrop on your sister, Michael. It's not nice. [*She waits, as if listening to him speak.*] Me? Well for a start, she's not my sister. And what else am I supposed to do for entertainment? It's not like I can get out more. [*Listening again.*] What a good idea! Yes, reading a book will help the years fly by.

She falls into silence, bored with her own game. Michael drains the glass and rinses it, then turns and heads for the door to the house.

(LILY:) You off to bed then? I think I'll turn in myself.

She heads for the garden door. Both reach out for the door handles at the same time. She turns her head towards him.

(LILY:) Goodnight, Michael.

She opens the door and begins to leave.

MICHAEL: How do you know about Dylan?

Lily dashes across the room and leans on the table, facing Michael with excitement.

LILY: You *can* see me!

Michael continues to address her beside the door, not catching her movement.

MICHAEL: He's been dead for fourteen years.

LILY: Or at least you can hear me.

He pauses and then realizes where she is.

MICHAEL: I can see you and hear you.

Lily pauses for a moment to take it in, then she spreads her arms and spins round and round joyfully

LILY: I knew it! Oh, thank you! Thank you!

MICHAEL: I'm not sure I did anything.

LILY: How long's it been?

MICHAEL: What?

She sits at the table then reaches forward and excitedly taps it at the place opposite, indicating that Michael should sit too.

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LILY: Since you've been able to see me.

He sits down. He rubs his face and runs his hands through his hair as he speaks hesitantly, finding it hard to come to terms with what he is seeing.

MICHAEL: I don't know. Only recently. It's been getting stronger; it was only just now I was sure.

LILY: [*calmer*] But you still pretended to ignore me.

MICHAEL: It seemed like the safest thing to do.

LILY: But not the kindest.

MICHAEL: No.

LILY: Not after fourteen years.

MICHAEL: Fourteen years?

LILY: I've been *dead* for fourteen years.

He leans against the worktop, gripping it for support. Eventually he turns back to her.

MICHAEL: So that *is* what you are.

LILY: What?

Michael shakes his head, dismissing the idea.

(LILY:) *What?*

MICHAEL: [*whispering*] A ghost.

Lily is briefly silent, afraid to admit the idea to herself.

LILY: If that's what you want to call it.

MICHAEL: [*shaking his head and backing away*] No. This can't be. I'm dreaming or something.

LILY: Want me to pinch you?

MICHAEL: [*to himself*] Or maybe not. It doesn't feel like a dream. I must be mad. Or ill.

LILY: I'm still here Michael. You can't ignore me anymore.

MICHAEL: I didn't ignore you. I couldn't see you until now.

LILY: I must have been thinking of somebody else.

MICHAEL: Maybe I *should* ignore you – if I'm imagining you.

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LILY: If you're imagining me, why ask *me*?

Michael thinks, then sits down again

MICHAEL: If I get the choice, I'd prefer you to be real.

LILY: You don't, but I am, so lucky you. Real as a ghost can be, anyway.

Michael laughs.

MICHAEL: This is just preposterous. I mean... Who are you? How long have you been here? *Why* are you here? Are there any more...?

He peters out and looks at her expectantly for answers.

LILY: Are there any more what? Ghosts?

Michael nods.

(LILY:) If there are, I've never seen them. But why should I? The house could be teeming with ghosts and I might not know they were there – just like you with me, until today.

Michael glances around the room.

MICHAEL: I don't see anyone else. It must be very lonely for you.

LILY: Sometimes. Sometimes I pretend I'm part of the family. They ignore you almost as much as they ignore me.

MICHAEL: No, they don't! Well, sometimes. Is Liam really into cocaine?

LILY: I think so. I only heard Jen's side of it.

MICHAEL: [*with a slight laugh*] It's usually only family who call her 'Jen'.

LILY: Your family's all I really know.

MICHAEL: How do you mean? There must be more. If you're a ghost, you must have been alive once. You must have had a life.

LILY: I had, but now I don't. Now I have this. Fourteen years of this.

MICHAEL: And how come I can see you all of a sudden?

LILY: I wanted you to. I really did. And my wish came true. I think you wanted it too.

They sit in silence for a moment, looking at one another.

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MICHAEL: Christ! I don't even know your name. I'm Michael, by the way.

LILY: [*smiling*] I know that.

MICHAEL: Duh! Of course you do. But I don't know yours.

LILY: Don't you?

MICHAEL: I feel I should but ... [*he shakes his head.*] No.

LILY: [*as if introducing herself as an old friend*] I'm Lily.

He thinks about the name for a moment, but recalls nothing.

MICHAEL: This is crazy. I'm sitting in my kitchen, talking to a ghost who says she's called Lily, who says she's been dead fourteen years, who knows my whole family, who knows my sister's on drugs – who can even remember our dead dog!

LILY: Not exactly talking *to* me, are you? More *about* me.

MICHAEL: Sorry.

LILY: It's better than nothing. But don't make it a habit.

MICHAEL: I won't. I won't. How could I? I've got so much to ask you. How do you know us? Why are you here? And ... I mean ... you're so young. So how ... how did you die?

LILY: Questions! Questions!

MICHAEL: Answers?

LILY: Which one?

MICHAEL: [*after a pause*] How you died.

She stands and turns away from him.

LILY: Not that one. Not now. Not yet.

MICHAEL: But it must be important.

LILY: [*a little angry*] How I died? More important than how I lived?

MICHAEL: No. I don't know. How can I? Start at the beginning then. Tell me...

He is interrupted as Jennifer noisily comes through the garden door. She is stoned. Michael puts his finger to his lips to shush Lily.

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JENNIFER: Still up?

LILY: You don't need to shush me. *She can't hear.*

MICHAEL: You okay, Jen?

Jennifer goes and sits beside him.

JENNIFER: Not so bad. I've been out.

Lily joins them at the table.

MICHAEL: You should go to bed.

LILY: Too right!

JENNIFER: No, let's talk. We never talk like we used to.

She starts singing We Don't Talk Anymore to herself.

LILY: You never used to.

MICHAEL: What about?

JENNIFER: Life!

LILY: [*burying her head in her hands*] God!

MICHAEL: Life?

Lily stands and heads for the garden door.

LILY: Family stuff. I'll leave you to it.

MICHAEL: Don't go!

JENNIFER: What?

LILY: Michael! She can hear *you*.

JENNIFER: I'm not going anywhere.

LILY: I'll see you tomorrow Michael. Promise.

Michael looks pained, but Lily shrugs and exits.

JENNIFER: Did I ever tell you you're my favourite little brother?

Michael rests his head in his hands. Blackout.

Beside the Kitchen Table

Scene iv

The following morning. Laura is cleaning the kitchen. She begins to clean the table, rubbing at a stubborn stain that we cannot see. Occasionally she glances nervously at the phone. Lily enters from the garden.

LILY: Laura. Glad I caught you. I think we need to talk.

She sits at the table and signals for Laura join her. Coincidentally, Laura sits, still looking nervous.

(LILY:) You've probably guessed. It's about me and Michael. I know it's early days, but we really seem to hit it off.

She pauses, but there is no response.

(LILY:) You're right, I'm probably reading too much into it. It's just so strange for a boy – for anyone – to pay me attention ... Well, it's flattering. You know that better than anybody.

Laura stands and gazes out of the window.

(LILY:) It's not like I'm asking your permission as such. Maybe I am. I know you and I don't really get on, because of ... well before that. I suppose you felt I was kind of taking your place. Anyway, I was just hoping that, for Michael's sake if not mine, you won't hold any of that ...

The phone rings, interrupting her. Laura looks around to check no one is there, then approaches the phone. Just before answering she momentarily straightens her hair.

(LILY:) No, go ahead. We can talk about this later.

LAURA: [*eagerly*] Hello?

LILY: [*brightly*] Hello!

LAURA: [*disappointed*] Oh, it's you.

LILY: [*slyly*] Who were you expecting?

She stands and goes to lean against the counter, close to Laura.

LAURA: The man of my dreams, I know. But I saw you half an hour ago.

LILY: I don't think so somehow.

Beside the Kitchen Table

LAURA: No. I've been doing the housework ever since.

LILY: [*runs her finger across the worktop*] You'd never guess.

LAURA: I don't know. What do they look like?

LILY: Don't ask me.

LAURA: You mean that thing you had in the tube?

LILY: What's he doing on the tube?

Laura looks around the kitchen.

LAURA: Can't see them.

LILY: There's so much you can't see, Laura.

LAURA: Don't blame me; they're you're plans.

LILY: There's none so blind...

LAURA: You sure you've not got them.

Michael enters from the house, seen by neither of the women, who have their backs to him. He is about to speak, but sees that Laura is on the phone.

LILY: [*pointing to the plans on the worktop*] Are those them?

LAURA: Well, you obviously think *I* am.

Lily walks over to the plans. She gestures but does not touch.

LILY: Look! Here!

LAURA: I'll watch out for them.

LILY: For God's sake, woman, use your eyes.

She sees Michael and beams. She goes over to him.

(LILY:) Michael!

LAURA: [*spotting plans*] Oh, there they are!

LILY: Duh!

Michael is about to speak to Lily, but she shushes him.

(LILY:) You don't want your mum to think you're mad.

LAURA: Something like that. Anyway, they're all safe.

Lily is standing beside Michael now.

Beside the Kitchen Table

LILY: It's so cool to have someone to talk to.

LAURA: I know. You said.

LILY: It's your dad.

LAURA: I wasn't going to.

LILY: I can always tell, just from how she stands.

LAURA: See you.

She hangs up then gazes at the phone for a few moments. Again, Michael is about to speak, but Lily raises a hand to stop him.

LILY: Let's see what happens.

Laura reaches for the phone as if about to pick it up again.

(LILY:) Who's she gonna call?

Laura lets her hand drop. She begins to turn towards where Michael is standing.

LAURA: [*shocked on seeing Michael*] Jesus Christ!

MICHAEL: [*turning to Lily, think Laura has seen her*] What? But...

LILY: [*holding up her arms in innocence*] Wasn't me.

LAURA: For God's sake, Michael! What are you playing at?

MICHAEL: Me?

LAURA: You scared the life out of me, creeping in like that. I didn't see you.

LILY: You know what *that's* like, don't you Michael?

MICHAEL: Sorry. I didn't want to interrupt you.

LAURA: You could have made some kind of noise so I'd know you were there.

LILY: Yeah. Farted or something.

Michael holds back his laughter:

LAURA: It's not funny, Michael. [*She relaxes*] You in all morning?

LILY: Please say you are.

MICHAEL: I think so.

LILY: [*proudly*] Talking to me.

LAURA: Good. I'll need your help later. I'm turning the mattresses.

Beside the Kitchen Table

LILY: He's not a skivvy.

MICHAEL: Now?

LILY: No!

LAURA: I'll give you a shout.

She heads for the door.

MICHAEL: Who was on the phone, by the way?

LAURA: Just your dad.

LILY: See?

Laura exits to the house. Lily goes and sits at the table. Michael joins her.

(LILY:) Over the shock then?

MICHAEL: Shock?

LILY: Of seeing a ghost.

MICHAEL: It wasn't a shock. It was more ... gradual than that. And more pleasant.

LILY: Not surprised to find me still here this morning?

MICHAEL: No, not surprised. Happy.

They lapse into silence for a few moments.

LILY: Talk to me Michael, please.

MICHAEL: What about?

LILY: Anything. Just talk to me. It's been a long time.

MICHAEL: But I thought you could hear everything we say?

LILY: That's not the same. That's like ... watching television. Which reminds me, how about getting a TV in here for when I'm on my own?

MICHAEL: I'll see what I can do.

LILY: [*earnestly*] But for now just speak to me. Say something that's intended for *me* to hear.

MICHAEL: So, no one's ever spoken to you – spoken *to* you – in, what, fourteen years?

LILY: Give or take.

MICHAEL: And no one's ever heard you.

Beside the Kitchen Table

LILY: You'd think they would, the way I go on.

MICHAEL: Mum heard you.

LILY: I doubt that.

MICHAEL: But she saw the plans, after you'd told her.

LILY: She didn't see them, then she did. Nothing supernatural in it.

MICHAEL: You're quite a sceptic, considering you're a ghost.

LILY: I know what I know. I don't need anything else.

MICHAEL: But maybe that's how it always works, when that sort of thing happens. Some little voice tells us, even though we don't realize it. Someone like you.

LILY: Someone *like* me?

MICHAEL: I still don't know who you are. Or how you know me.

LILY: No bells ringing up there?

Michael tries to speak, but fails.

MICHAEL: I'll get there.

LILY: I know.

MICHAEL: There so much to find out.

LILY: You're really interested?

MICHAEL: I never met a ghost before.

LILY: [*morosely*] Oh, I see.

MICHAEL: I mean ... I've never met a girl like you before.

LILY: Careful, Michael. You're about to find out whether a ghost can vomit.

LAURA: [*calling from off stage*] Michael! Can you come?

MICHAEL: Coming!

He stands up.

LILY: Well it's been fun. We must do this again in another fourteen years.

MICHAEL: Come with me. It only just upstairs.

LILY: Can't be done.

MICHAEL: It's all right. It's not like mum can see you.

Beside the Kitchen Table

He heads to the door and beckons her. She stands and begins to follow. He exits. She tries to follow, but finds it increasingly difficult, as if walking against the wind. Sound effects of ghostly, screaming voices, getting louder. She puts her hands to her ears and presses on, but eventually she can go no further. She flees across the kitchen, exiting by the garden door. The sound stops.

Scene v

Later that day. Paul and Benny are leaning over the table, looking at the set of plans. Lily is sitting with her chin in her hands, looking at the plans too.

BENNY: [*pointing at the plan*] They want these beds reduced so that the lawn comes up level with the hedge here.

PAUL: Shouldn't be a problem.

BENNY: No, it's easy, but they're bound to change their mind again.

PAUL: How so?

BENNY: Because it'll ruin the view when anyone comes down to the lake. That's why we spent so much time positioning the flower beds.

LILY: [*to Paul*] Idiot!

PAUL: Haven't you told them?

BENNY: I've tried explaining it to Hammond, but he doesn't get it.

LILY: You can't get Hammond to do anything.

PAUL: When's Tomlinson back?

BENNY: Not till next month.

PAUL: Can we delay putting in the beds till then?

LILY: I much prefer a flower bed to a lawn.

BENNY: That's fine; it's ordering what goes in them that's the problem.

PAUL: What did they ask for?

LILY: Or a rockery.

BENNY: Can't remember. You've got the list.

Beside the Kitchen Table

BENNY: No more piddling little private gardens; this is Stockby Park. People *pay* to get in. And if we get this right, they'll all be coming to us.

MICHAEL: [*looking at the diagrams*] It's hard to picture, just from this.

BENNY: I should have brought the artwork. But some things you can see better on the plans. Look at the knot garden. [*He points.*]

MICHAEL: [*looking*] It's almost a maze.

Lily looks at him over her shoulder, annoyed. She then lies back on the table, spreading her arms wide, covering the papers.

BENNY: We offered, but they didn't want one. How do you like the landscaping coming down to the lake?

He points. Michael pretends to look, but can see nothing other than Lily.

MICHAEL: Very nice.

LILY: Do you like *my* landscaping, Michael?

BENNY: [*affronted*] Nice? [*calmer*] I can't blame you. You father's the same. He understands it, but he doesn't feel it.

He stares at the diagram thoughtfully.

LILY: Do you think Uncle Ben would like to see my shrubbery?

BENNY: Thinking about it, if we extended the woodland here ...

He leans forward with his pencil, about to draw on the diagram. Lily sits up sharply to get out of the way.

MICHAEL: Uncle Ben, do you remember our dog Dylan?

BENNY: Dylan? Yes. Well, vaguely. It was a long time ago.

MICHAEL: What happened to him?

BENNY: He ran away. You know that.

Lily turns and looks intently at Benny.

MICHAEL: I know, but I was only four. It just occurred to me that the dog 'running away' might be one of those things that parents tell their children when something bad's happened.

Beside the Kitchen Table

LILY: Ha!

BENNY: No – he really did run away. At least, he disappeared. God knows what happened after that, poor fella. All alone; it doesn't bear thinking about.

LILY: You really don't know?

MICHAEL: I seem to remember one story that he'd been stolen.

LILY: Stolen! By *me*, I suppose.

BENNY: Stolen? No, no, no. Perhaps that *was* a story they made up.

LILY: Yeah!

MICHAEL: Do you remember anyone called Lily? Connected with the family, I mean.

BENNY: Lily? No.

LILY: You fucking liar!

BENNY: But I'm hardly family, am I?

Paul re-enters, left with a sheaf of papers.

PAUL: This is everything I've got. Hi, Michael. Uncle Ben been showing you the plans?

MICHAEL: Very impressive.

LILY: He particularly likes those two hills, right in the middle.

MICHAEL: [*looking at Lily*] Very impressive indeed.

She covers her mouth in mock shock. Paul has been glancing through the papers and doesn't see where Michael is looking. He puts the papers on the table. He indicates the chair in front of them, the one where Lily usually sits, to Benny.

PAUL: Take a look. See if you can find it.

Benny glances around the room, a little unsure.

(PAUL:) Come on.

Benny sits and leafs through the papers. The phone rings. Paul answers it.

(PAUL:) Hello ... Hi Craig ... What? ... Well can't you ...? Why should that make any difference? ... All right ... No ... All right. I'll come ... Yeah – straight away.

Beside the Kitchen Table

[*He hangs up.*] For God's sake! I've got to go to Mrs Crawford's. *Apparently* the pond is now too close to the gazebo.

He heads for the door. Benny stands, gathering up the papers.

BENNY: I'll come with you.

PAUL: It doesn't need both of us.

BENNY: You'll only have to come back for me.

PAUL: Okay. See you, Michael.

They both head for the back door.

MICHAEL: Bye, Dad. Bye, Uncle Ben.

Lily stands beside him and puts her hand on his shoulder. Michael freezes.

LILY: Bye.

BENNY: [*cheerily, waving the plans*] This comes off, Mikey, and we can tell Mrs Crawford exactly where to stick her gazebo.

Paul and Benny exit. Michael steps away from Lily, taking her hand from his shoulder and holding it briefly before dropping it.

MICHAEL: You're real!

LILY: Real?

MICHAEL: Solid. Flesh and blood.

LILY: Hardly. What would be the point of blood?

Michael looks at her questioningly. She undoes the middle button of her blouse and takes his hand, slipping it inside. They stand in silence for a moment.

MICHAEL: No heartbeat.

She shakes her head.

(MICHAEL:) No warmth.

She pulls away from him.

LILY: [*sarcastically*] Thank you.

MICHAEL: I meant ...

LILY: [*relenting*] I know what you meant, 'Mikey'.

Beside the Kitchen Table

MICHAEL: You're cold – like a stone.

LILY: I'm dead. What do you expect?

Michael pauses.

MICHAEL: I think he can see you too.

LILY: [*too quickly*] Don't be silly. [*More thoughtfully*] Who?

MICHAEL: Uncle Ben. Not like I do, I mean, but like mum does.

LILY: Your mother sees nothing.

MICHAEL: Subconsciously, like when you showed her the plans. Uncle Ben didn't want to sit down 'cause he thought you might be sitting there.

LILY: That's very observant.

MICHAEL: He senses you're there, even if he can't see you.

He pauses, trying to find the right words.

(MICHAEL:) Are you haunting him too?

LILY: 'Too'? Who else do you think I'm haunting?

MICHAEL: Well ... me.

LILY: [*laughs*] Oh, you are full of yourself, Michael.

Laura enters left.

LAURA: Darling, I ... [*She sees that Michael is alone*]. Oh. I heard you talking. I presumed you father was here.

MICHAEL: I was ...

LILY: Singing.

MICHAEL: Singing.

Lily begins to sing Changes, dancing around Michael.

(MICHAEL:) Dad and Ben went off. Mrs Crawford's.

LAURA: Any clues when he'll be back?

MICHAEL: I think they were headed somewhere else after.

LAURA: Did I hear the phone ring earlier?

LILY: Wasn't for you. [*She resumes singing.*]

Beside the Kitchen Table

MICHAEL: That was Mrs Crawford.

Laura turns to go.

MICHAEL: Mum ...

LAURA: [*turning back*] Yes, love?

MICHAEL: Do we know anyone called Lily?

Lily stops singing.

LAURA: Why do you ask?

MICHAEL: I just heard the name on the TV, and it rang a bell ...

LILY: Ding! Ding!

MICHAEL: ... somewhere.

LAURA: You had a babysitter called Lily, but that was way back.

LILY: [*proudly*] A babysitter.

MICHAEL: When?

LILY: Fourteen years ago.

LAURA: Ooh – I don't know. Abby had been born, but she wasn't that old.

MICHAEL: What did she look like?

LAURA: It was a long time ago.

LILY: [*posing*] A bit like this.

LAURA: She was a teenager. She must have been sixteen when she started with us. She had long dark hair – very straight.

Lily shows off her hair to Michael.

(LAURA:) Pretty, as I recall.

LILY: [*smugly*] Pretty.

LAURA: Ring any more bells?

MICHAEL: Doesn't sound like anyone I know.

Lily punches him on the arm.

(MICHAEL:) [*rubbing his arm*] What happened to her?

LAURA: She ran off.

Beside the Kitchen Table

LILY: [outraged] Ran off!

Laura turns away to pick the newspaper off the worktop. While she is not looking, Michael punches Lily in the arm.

LAURA: At least, that was what the police told us.

Laura turns back.

LILY: It won't work on me.

MICHAEL: Police?

LILY: I can't feel a thing.

LAURA: There was quite a hoo-ha. Her parents reported her missing – like *they'd* notice.

LILY: [bitterly] They noticed more than you.

MICHAEL: And?

LAURA: They even came round here – the police.

LILY: I remember that.

LAURA: But it had been weeks since she sat for us. We didn't know anything about her personal life. Anyway, we were all too worried about Dylan going missing.

MICHAEL: I remember that – vaguely.

LILY: [affronted] Yes – everyone remembers Dylan.

LAURA: In the end, they assumed she'd just run off. She was always doing it.

LILY: Once!

LAURA: If we'd known, we'd never have hired her.

LILY: If *I'd* known, I'd never have accepted.

LAURA: She's probably living rough now; begging for money to buy drugs.

LILY: That's Jennifer you're thinking of.

MICHAEL: I don't suppose you can remember her surname.

LILY: It's Buckland.

LAURA: Now you're asking.

LILY: [louder] Buckland.

Beside the Kitchen Table

MICHAEL: Would Dad know?

LILY: [*quickly*] B-U-C-K-L-A-N-D.

LAURA: Pff! I doubt it. All that sort of thing was down to me.

LILY: Lily Buckland.

MICHAEL: Can't hurt to ask.

LAURA: I really should remember.

LILY: [*speaking precisely in Laura's ear*] It's Lily Buckland.

Laura thinks for a moment.

LAURA: [*shaking her head*] No. Not coming.

LILY: [*at the top of her voice in Laura's ear*] Lily Fucking Buckland.

MICHAEL: No worries. What's for tea?

Lily goes and sits at the table.

LAURA: I thought I'd try doing Crispy Pancakes.

MICHAEL: Yummy. I'm going to nip into town. Do you need anything?

LAURA: No, that's okay. I'll see you later. Oh, actually, we could do with some garlic bread.

LILY: Garlic's for vampires, not ghosts.

MICHAEL: Okay.

LAURA: Bye then.

Michael heads for the door. Laura opens the newspaper.

LILY: [*to Michael*] You just going to leave me here then?

Michael cannot say anything.

(LILY:) [*indicating Laura*] She's got no conversation. Look. [*To Laura*] Awful what's happened at Chernobyl, isn't it? [*She waits for a response.*] You see? Nothing?

LAURA: [*looking up at Michael*] Forgotten something?

LILY: Just go. I'll be here.

MICHAEL: No. I'm off.

Beside the Kitchen Table

He exits to the garden.

LILY: Can I have the 'Weekend' section when you're done with it?

Laura says nothing.

(LILY:) Tsk!

Scene vi

Late that evening. Michael and Lily are sitting at the table. Laura is standing near the door to the house. Lily looks sulky.

LAURA: I'll see you tomorrow then. Don't forget to lock up.

Laura exits.

MICHAEL: Night, Mum.

LILY: I thought she'd never leave.

Michael goes over to the door to check that Laura has gone, then closes it and comes back to the table.

MICHAEL: We could have gone somewhere else. [*A little embarrassed.*] My room, or something.

LILY: No, we couldn't. I couldn't, anyway. Just here, or the garden, or the path between the two.

MICHAEL: What?

LILY: Don't ask.

MICHAEL: I found out about you in the library.

As he speaks he leans forward and grabs her hands with his. He immediately recoils.

LILY: Still cold?

MICHAEL: It doesn't matter.

He takes hold of her hands again.

LILY: And what did you learn?

Beside the Kitchen Table

MICHAEL: Only what was in the papers. It was pretty much like Mum said. But you must know already. The papers said your parents left you alone one night. When they came home, you were gone. They'd been down the pub.

LILY: That's allowed, isn't it? I was seventeen. I could look after myself.

MICHAEL: God yes. But ... the papers put a spin on things.

LILY: We were never popular. We'd only been here a couple of years.

MICHAEL: You babysat for a few families.

LILY: I was cheap. And I could turn on the charm. [*She sits primly.*] 'Oh, no, Mrs Baker, I don't have a boyfriend. And if I did, I certainly wouldn't invite him to where I was working. I'll just sit here and do my homework. Is it all right if I use your television? Only once the children are fast asleep.'

MICHAEL: It said you did have a boyfriend.

LILY: [*outraged*] Who?

MICHAEL: Andrew Mason. It was in your diary.

LILY: They read my diary? And published it?

MICHAEL: They were desperate to find you.

LILY: Who? The police?

MICHAEL: You parents I suppose. The police were pretty certain you'd run off.

LILY: And did I take anything with me?

MICHAEL: Nothing serious. A coat.

She indicates the coat she is wearing to him.

(MICHAEL:) A handbag.

LILY: It's around here somewhere. I don't have much to put in it these days.

MICHAEL: So, you weren't planning on being away for long.

LILY: Not this long.

MICHAEL: You'd run away once before. Before you moved here.

LILY: For one night. I was nine. I hid in our shed.

MICHAEL: On your birthday.

Beside the Kitchen Table

LILY: My, they are thorough, aren't they? I'd convinced myself my parents were going to get me a dog as a birthday present. They didn't. I decided they needed punishing. It didn't work; we never had a dog. [*Pause*] That's why I liked it so much here.

MICHAEL: Because of Dylan?

LILY: [*nodding*] We got on really well.

MICHAEL: So, who was Andrew Mason?

LILY: Back to that, are we? He lived three houses down from us, with his parents. I don't think he ever took a second look at me, though my diary may have told a different story. He went away a few months before I ... [*She peters out*]

MICHAEL: To Bristol.

LILY: [*uninterested*] That sounds about right.

MICHAEL: They interviewed him there; searched his flat. But there was nothing.

LILY: There wouldn't be, would there? I was here.

MICHAEL: In the end, the story just petered out.

LILY: 'Story'?

MICHAEL: In the papers. People just thought that you'd done a runner. Like my mum said.

They lapse into silence for a moment.

LILY: Are they still there – my folks?

MICHAEL: No. I checked. There's a family called Aylward there now. I don't know when they moved. I could find out.

LILY: It doesn't matter.

MICHAEL: They must miss you.

LILY: And how are you gonna fix that?

Silence again.

MICHAEL: So, are you going to tell me what happened?

LILY: I died.

Beside the Kitchen Table

MICHAEL: Simple as that?

LILY: You wouldn't believe me.

MICHAEL: Try me.

She takes his hand.

LILY: One day.

MICHAEL: [*after a pause*] You said you were here when the police came.

She nods.

(MICHAEL:) Here like you're here now.

She nods again.

(MICHAEL:) So you died here. Here in this house.

She turns to face him.

LILY: [*angry and tearful*] In this house. In this room. On this table. Right here.

She slams her hand down on the table. Michael jumps to his feet and backs away.

MICHAEL: [*whispering*] Fuck!

LILY: [*calmer*] Don't worry – it's been cleaned.

MICHAEL: And you can never escape the place where you died.

LILY: How should I know?

MICHAEL: And the garden? You said the garden too.

LILY: [*with mock solemnity*] Where my body lies.

MICHAEL: [*in a whisper*] Jesus Christ!

LILY: Under the rockery, to be precise.

MICHAEL: And that's where you go? To sleep?

LILY: But not to dream.

He pauses, taking it in.

MICHAEL: But you won't tell me why you're here?

LILY: [*lightening up*] Oh, that's easy. I can't leave.

MICHAEL: What? Can't leave Earth you mean? Can't move on to... [*peters out*]

LILY: To?

Beside the Kitchen Table

MICHAEL: Wherever.

LILY: Oh no, Mikey, you can't dodge that one. It's make your mind up time. Is Lily destined for Heaven or for Hell?

MICHAEL: So they exist?

LILY: Fuck knows. Maybe I will too eventually, but not yet. Like I said, I can't leave ... [*she gestures around her*] ... here. This room. Some of the garden. That's why I couldn't come with you. I can't even make it all the way across the kitchen.

MICHAEL: Can't?

Lily stands and heads across the room towards the door to the house. Her steps become shorter and she hugs herself. It as if she is struggling through a strong wind. Strain and terror show on her face. She puts her hands to her ears. Ghostly sounds effects. Suddenly she rushes back to Michael, who embraces her. Sound effects fade.

LILY: Don't make me.

MICHAEL: I won't.

LILY: The noise gets louder with every step, and I know I'm hurting them just by moving.

MICHAEL: Them?

LILY: They scream at me.

She sits down, as does Michael.

(LILY:) The first thing I did was try to go to the road and flag down a car, but I didn't make it as far as the drive.

MICHAEL: Is it the same for all ghosts?

LILY: [*snapping*] How should I know? There's no welcoming committee; apart from them, screaming. I'm just here. I was alive here; now I'm dead here. Everything I know, I've worked out.

MICHAEL: You don't even know *why*?

LILY: Oh, I understand that much. Revenge.

Beside the Kitchen Table

MICHAEL: And will things change – when you get your revenge?

LILY: Who knows? Perhaps I'll be able to move on.

MICHAEL: Move on?

LILY: To where the dead are supposed to be. Anywhere, as long as I wasn't alone.

She squeezes his hand. There is a pause.

MICHAEL: And so you're waiting. Waiting for whoever it is to come here so you can ...
what? Haunt them?

She laughs dismissively.

(MICHAEL:) Or just so that you can kill them?

She stands and turns away from him.

LILY: [*despairingly*] If only it was that simple.

MICHAEL: Why not? You can touch. You're real. Why not just grab a knife and stab
them?

LILY: A knife?

MICHAEL: Or whatever comes to hand.

LILY: Nobody seems to notice when I move things.

MICHAEL: But you *can* move them.

LILY: Oh, yes. Look.

She goes to a drawer, taking out a kitchen knife. She returns to the table and places it there.

(LILY:) But people just make excuses – claim they must have forgotten to put things
away.

MICHAEL: But if they actually saw the knife, floating across the room ...

LILY: They don't. People see what they expect and ignore what they don't want to
see. You pretended I wasn't there even when I was screaming in your ear. I've
given up trying to be a poltergeist.

MICHAEL: But the knife was over there; now it's here. [*He picks up the knife.*] That's a
fact.

LILY: Maybe you put it there yourself.

Beside the Kitchen Table

He looks at the knife in his hand, then puts it back on the table. He takes her hand.

MICHAEL: *You're here. That's a fact.*

They gaze into each other's eyes. The garden door slowly opens. Benny enters. He eyes the room neurotically. He is drunk. Michael looks at him and waits for him to speak.

BENNY: Is she here, Michael? Is she sitting in her usual place?

MICHAEL: [*pulling away from Lily*] Is who here?

LILY: Good bluff.

BENNY: Lily, of course.

LILY: Maybe not so good.

MICHAEL: You can see her?

BENNY: If I could see here I wouldn't ask, would I? But I know she's here.

LILY: He's been drinking.

Benny walks over and sits at the table.

BENNY: You mustn't trust her Mikey. She'll tell you things, but they aren't true. Not all of them.

MICHAEL: I'd rather trust her than you.

LILY: Good for you!

She takes Michael's hand again.

BENNY: Did she tell you what happened?

MICHAEL: Everything.

BENNY: Did she? Or did she make you work it out for yourself?

MICHAEL: I worked out some of it. She told me the rest.

LILY: I will tell you, Michael. I promise.

BENNY: That's how she does it. It's more convincing that way. So, is she here?

MICHAEL: Work it out for yourself.

BENNY: I can't, not anymore, but I reckon I'm lucky.

LILY: Better luck than you deserve.

MICHAEL: But you could see her?

Beside the Kitchen Table

BENNY: For a few months.

MICHAEL: When did it stop?

BENNY: Years ago. She had no more use for me.

MICHAEL: [*to Lily*] Is that true?

BENNY: So she *is* here.

LILY: Of course I'm here. Where else would I be?

MICHAEL: [*to Lily*] Sh!

BENNY: Ha! You're a braver man than I was, Mikey. Has that put a stop to her yabbering?

LILY: No, it bloody hasn't.

BENNY: Always in your ear, isn't she?

MICHAEL: It's not like that.

BENNY: So sweet – but you know there's only one thing on her mind.

MICHAEL: And what's that?

BENNY: It's revenge she wants, pure and simple.

LILY: What's wrong with that?

MICHAEL: What's wrong with that?

BENNY: Is that you talking, or her?

MICHAEL: Answer the question.

BENNY: You think revenge'll help her, Mikey? It certainly won't help you.

LILY: Just get away from him, Michael. Go to bed. Throw him out. Leave him with me – I can cope.

MICHAEL: [*to Lily*] Just be quiet for a minute, would you?

BENNY: Ah! She hasn't told you everything yet, has she?

LILY: [*to Benny*] Why don't *you* tell him?

MICHAEL: Tell me what?

BENNY: Well, I'm not going to do her dirty work for her. You won't hear it from me.

MICHAEL: You don't know anything.

Beside the Kitchen Table

Benny leans forward towards Michael.

BENNY: I've always liked you, Mikey – all of you kids – but you most of all. You're like your dad.

LILY: He is not!

BENNY: And you like me. That's why you call me Uncle Ben, isn't it?

MICHAEL: You're not my Uncle.

BENNY: [*excitedly*] She said that. That's what *she* used to say. Oh – she's got you hooked proper.

LILY: It's not like that, Michael.

MICHAEL: Let him speak.

BENNY: [*looking where he thinks Lily is, but missing, as though he were blind*] Yes, let me speak. I never thought she'd try it with you Michael. I thought I'd got rid of her – thought she'd gone somewhere; Heaven or Hell. Back out there. [*He gestures to the garden.*] I didn't give a shit.

LILY: You'd have liked that.

BENNY: But I always suspected. She was here before I could see her. Why shouldn't she be here after? That's why I avoided the place. But when I did come, I kept my eyes open. And then you mentioned her, and I knew.

MICHAEL: Just because I mentioned her name?

BENNY: I knew.

He leans forward and notices that his arms are resting on something. He lifts them and sees the knife. He picks it up.

(BENNY:) Oh! So she's been showing you this, has she?

LILY: Put it down.

BENNY: She always was one for irony.

MICHAEL: [*to Lily*] What does he mean?

LILY: He's trying to turn you against me.

MICHAEL: What's so important about the knife?

Beside the Kitchen Table

BENNY: [astonished] Important?

MICHAEL: [still to Lily] Tell me!

BENNY: I'll make her talk.

He jabs the knife in the direction of where he thinks she is sitting. She dodges it and then stands up and backs away. Michael hits Benny on the arm and the knife falls to the floor.

(BENNY:) [rubbing his arm] Well, it wouldn't have done any good anyway. She can't feel. She's not capable of it.

LILY: I can feel enough to hate you.

BENNY: All she can feel is hate. And she wants you to feel it too.

LILY: No!

BENNY: She's tried it all before, take my word for it.

MICHAEL: Why shouldn't I hate you?

BENNY: Forget me. What about your family?

LILY: Get rid of him, Michael.

MICHAEL: What's it got to do with them?

He looks from one to the other for an answer.

BENNY: Tell him, then, Lily.

LILY: Throw him out.

MICHAEL: Lily?

BENNY: Keeping schtum, is she?

LILY: Michael ...

BENNY: That'll be a first.

MICHAEL: [to Lily] Tell me.

LILY: You can't make me.

BENNY: [to Lily] Not going according to plan, eh?

MICHAEL: I didn't think I needed to.

BENNY: Come on, Lily. You told me.

Lily walks to the garden door and exits to the garden, slamming it.

Beside the Kitchen Table

MICHAEL: Lily!

BENNY: [*looking in the direction he last saw Michael speaking to her*] I'm not going to do your dirty work for you.

Michael goes and sits by the table, exhausted.

(BENNY:) Just give him a little clue. He's a smart kid.

MICHAEL: She's gone.

Benny looks from the door to Michael and back again.

BENNY: Gone?

MICHAEL: Are you going to tell me what happened?

Benny picks the knife up off the floor. He looks at it in thought, then puts it away in the drawer. He pats Michael on the shoulder.

BENNY: Best not, Mikey. Best not. Some things you have to learn for yourself.

He exits to the garden. Michael leans forward and buries his face in his arms on the table.

Scene vii

The following morning. Michael, Laura, Abigail and Jennifer are having breakfast at the table. Lily is standing glumly by the garden door.

JENNIFER: Is dad okay?

LAURA: He's just having a lie-in.

ABIGAIL: [*knowingly*] Hangover.

LILY: Michael ...

MICHAEL: He wasn't out late, was he?

LAURA: It's not a hangover. He's just tired. He's been working hard.

MICHAEL: Uncle Ben's always been the one for drinking.

LILY: Michael, please.

ABIGAIL: Really?

JENNIFER: [*to Laura*] Is that true?

LAURA: Not that I know. You shouldn't make up stories like that, Michael.

Beside the Kitchen Table

MICHAEL: I've seen him drunk.

LAURA: When?

LILY: Michael, I'm sorry.

MICHAEL: It doesn't matter.

LILY: [*hopefully taking a step forward*] Really?

LAURA: Well if it doesn't matter then you shouldn't have mentioned it.

Lily realizes that Michael was not talking to her and slumps back against the door.

MICHAEL: Fine!

LILY: It's not me who should be apologizing.

LAURA: I've only seen him drunk once.

JENNIFER: Aha!

LAURA: And that was years ago – when Dylan went missing.

LILY: Can't we just forget it?

Michael, suddenly interested in what Laura is saying, flashes Lily an angry look to silence her.

MICHAEL: What's Dylan got to do with it?

LAURA: Well, Benny was supposed to be looking after him. We were all away you see
– at grandma's.

JENNIFER: I remember us being away.

MICHAEL: So Dylan was staying with Uncle Ben?

LAURA: No.

LILY: [*mimicking Laura*] No.

LAURA: Benny lived in a flat then.

LILY: Dylan was here.

LAURA: He popped in here two or three times a day.

MICHAEL: So Uncle Ben had a key.

ABIGAIL: [*sarcastically*] No! He used to climb in through the window.

MICHAEL: Shut up Abby. You weren't there.

Beside the Kitchen Table

ABIGAIL: Neither were you.

LILY: I was.

LAURA: Anyway, Benny left the door open one day, and Dylan got out. He was devastated. Needed a little Dutch courage before he could face us.

JENNIFER: I'll bet.

LILY: It was nothing like that at all.

MICHAEL: So how did he explain it?

LAURA: Explain it? Oh, come on, Michael. It was an accident. Benny was beside himself. We were supposed to be showing how we trusted him.

JENNIFER: Trusted him?

Laura looks glances around the room and lowers her voice.

LAURA: Because of ... what happened.

Jennifer, Abigail and Michael stare at her. Lily comes over to the table, intrigued.

LILY: What happened?

LAURA: Benny had done time. He robbed a couple of houses when he was a kid.

JENNIFER: Bloody hell!

MICHAEL: [*probing*] Is that all?

JENNIFER: [*mistaking his question as rhetorical*] It's enough, isn't it?

LILY: Well, I never knew that.

LAURA: Don't mention it though. Not even to you father.

LILY: Some hope.

MICHAEL: And you gave him a key to the house?

ABIGAIL: And Dylan went missing!

LAURA: Yes, but nothing *else* happened.

LILY: Ha!

LAURA: Nothing was stolen.

MICHAEL: What about Dylan?

LAURA: I do hope you're all going to be grown up about this.

Beside the Kitchen Table

LILY: Fat chance!

There is a general pause.

JENNIFER: You should have told us. Not about Benny's past – but about Dylan.

LAURA: Maybe, but we knew how much you all loved him. God, you should have heard the screams when we suggested getting a new one.

ABIGAIL: We're older now.

LAURA: You're still trying to blame Benny.

JENNIFER: Michael is.

Michael stands to take his dishes to the sink, passing close to where Lily is standing.

LILY: You can't trust what Benny said.

He ignores her.

ABIGAIL: We should get a new dog.

MICHAEL: [*forcefully*] No!

LILY: Nice to know what you *really* care about.

LAURA: Jen?

JENNIFER: It's not down to me – I'll be out of here soon enough.

LAURA: [*looking at Dylan's basket*] I don't think so. I think we've made too much of not having one.

Michael sits down again.

LILY: Maybe a dog would be able to see me.

MICHAEL: If everyone else wants a dog, I'm happy.

ABIGAIL: It didn't sound like it.

MICHAEL: I overreacted. I'm sorry.

LILY: It's hard enough being ignored when people can't hear you. Worse when they do it deliberately.

MICHAEL: [*looking at Lily*] I'm sorry.

He gestures with his head that she should come and sit beside him. She does.

LILY: See how easy you find it?

Beside the Kitchen Table

Paul enters from the house.

PAUL: Good morning! Good morning!

Michael gives Lily a questioning look.

LILY: [*softly*] To pretend I'm not here.

He holds her hand.

JENNIFER: Doesn't sound hung over.

PAUL: Who said I was hung over?

LILY: It was Abby.

LAURA: No one. It doesn't matter.

PAUL: And who needs alcohol when you're drunk on life?

ABIGAIL: [*wearily*] Oh, God!

PAUL: What?

JENNIFER: What's so wonderful with the world today?

PAUL: Everything.

JENNIFER: Everything?

PAUL: Two things. One, I have convinced Mrs Crawford that her gazebo is located precisely where the good Lord intended it to be.

LILY: Thanks heavens for that.

MICHAEL: And two?

PAUL: We signed the final contracts for Stockby Park.

All speak over each other.

JENNIFER: Excellent.

MICHAEL: Well done.

ABIGAIL: That's great, dad.

LILY: [*after the others have finished*] Super!

JENNIFER: So you went out drinking with Uncle Ben?

PAUL: No. [*sounding upset*] Benny didn't seem to care much. He didn't stick around long at all.

Beside the Kitchen Table

LAURA: Trouble at home, if you ask me.

LILY: Whose home?

PAUL: Anyway, I thought we could all go out there today. As a family. It's a lovely place.

LILY: Not for me, thanks.

ABIGAIL: [*excessively exasperated*] Dad! I've got my exam tomorrow!

JENNIFER: I'm meeting Liam.

Lily presses her finger on one side of her nose. She makes a loud snorting noise in Jennifer's direction.

LAURA: [*a little overenthusiastically*] Well I'd love to.

PAUL: [*turning to Michael*] What about you?

LILY: Don't go, Michael.

MICHAEL: I'm not sure.

PAUL: My two daughters have abandoned me.

MICHAEL: I was going to revise.

LILY: You don't want to go to some smelly old park.

PAUL: Your exams are months away.

LILY: He *needs* to study.

MICHAEL: But I *would* like to see what you're working on.

PAUL: That's the spirit.

LILY: Oh, go then.

MICHAEL: I'll come.

PAUL: Excellent. [*turning to his daughters*] Can I persuade either of you to change your minds?

LILY: You've got Michael, isn't that enough?

ABIGAIL: No chance.

Jennifer looks at her watch.

JENNIFER: I'm late already. I'll see you all this evening.

Beside the Kitchen Table

She goes to the garden door and exits.

LAURA: When are we off then?

PAUL: No time like the present. Michael?

MICHAEL: [*cautiously*] I guess so.

LAURA: [*heading for the door to the house*] Give me five minutes to get ready.

She exits.

PAUL: [*calling after her*] Okay. We'll meet you out front. [*He stands.*] Come on, Michael.

Paul exits to the house. Michael follows him to the door, then turns towards Lily. He checks to see that Abigail is not looking, then shrugs apologetically.

LILY: [*with mock pique and gesturing him to go with her hand*] You go have your fun, Michael. We'll be all right here.

Michael turns and exits.

(LILY:) So, Abby, just us girls together. What shall we get up to?

Abigail stands and exits into the house. A few moments later violin scales begin.

(LILY:) [*burying her face in her hands*] God, no!

Scene viii

That night. Lily is sitting at the table. Michael is standing by the door to the house, having just entered. He is carrying a photo album.

MICHAEL: I thought they'd never go to bed.

LILY: [*turning at the sound of his voice*] Did you have a nice time?

MICHAEL: [*coming over and sitting*] You know we did. We've been talking about it right in front of you.

LILY: You were telling them, not me.

MICHAEL: Who says?

LILY: At least you didn't have Abby's violin all day.

MICHAEL: She's not that bad.

Beside the Kitchen Table

LILY: I went out for a nap.

MICHAEL: Out? You mean ...?

She nods.

(MICHAEL:) Where your body is?

LILY: Where else would I sleep?

MICHAEL: You could ...

LILY: What?

MICHAEL: Never mind.

LILY: [*smiling*] There's *so* many reasons I couldn't do that.

MICHAEL: I'm sorry. About earlier. I shouldn't have ignored you.

LILY: You shouldn't let Benny wind you up.

MICHAEL: I know. It's just that I thought I was ... [*peters out*]

LILY: [*chuckling*] My first?

MICHAEL: I don't mean that. [*pause*] Maybe I do, a little.

LILY: First isn't always best.

MICHAEL: Have there been others?

She laughs and he joins in.

(MICHAEL:) No, I mean ... I'm interested. I'm just trying to get to the bottom of it. I found this.

He puts the photo album on the table.

LILY: So?

MICHAEL: You're in it.

LILY: [*suddenly animated*] Really?

He opens it and flicks through a few pages.

MICHAEL: [*pointing*] Look. You and the three of us.

LILY: [*wistfully*] I remember that.

MICHAEL: There's you with Dylan. You must have been close to the family.

Beside the Kitchen Table

LILY: I think your dad just wanted to finish the roll. Looks like they were going somewhere posh. [*She points.*] See how your mum's dolled up?

MICHAEL: [*turning the page*] And dad's in black tie. You must have taken that one. It looks like summer. It can't have been long before ...

LILY: It wasn't.

MICHAEL: There's a couple of just you. You look really pretty in close-up.

LILY: Thank you.

MICHAEL: [*quickly*] And from a distance. The garden hasn't changed much.

He suddenly pushes the album away.

LILY: What?

He pulls it back and points at a photo.

(LILY:) How appropriate. Lily standing in front of the new rockery.

She pushes the album away again. There is a moment's silence.

MICHAEL: Look, I know you find it hard to talk about what happened, but just tell me whether I've got it right or wrong.

LILY: You've got it wrong.

MICHAEL: I figured it out.

LILY: You've got it wrong.

MICHAEL: Hear me out.

She considers for a moment, then nods.

(MICHAEL:) As soon as mum said we were at gran's, it all made sense.

LILY: Really?

MICHAEL: You must have come round when Benny was here.

LILY: It wasn't Benny.

MICHAEL: We weren't here and he had the keys – so that he could feed Dylan.

LILY: It wasn't Benny.

MICHAEL: Are you sure? Did you actually see who killed you?

LILY: Ha!

Beside the Kitchen Table