

A MOTHER'S RANSOM

A play in one act for two people

by Owen Lewis

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A Mother's Ransom

A play in one act for two people

Cast

Doris Taylor.....Mum 65/70

Bobby Taylor.....Son 40 /45

Voice of Policeman

The action all takes place in Doris's living room in Hackney in North London. She has lived there from birth and is struggling with the modern world. The date is 1963 it is winter so although it's only eight thirty it's dark outside. In the corner of the room is a budgie in a cage called "Nip," Doris is looking into the cage and talking to the budgie.

Mum

Come on little man be a good boy for your Mum, have a little go on your swing, oh you don't look well. Come on Nip, who's a pretty boy then? Who's a pretty Boy then? Come on say it for Mum. You haven't touched your millet, and look at this cuttlefish, I bought that special for you. Come on Nip, just a little nibble. Oh we'll have to get the vet to you, more expense eh? Never mind about that though you're worth it. Come on sing your little song for your Mum. Oh Nip, oh dear.

(She stands looking at it for a while and putting her fingers into the cage she plays for a while, tires of it and crosses to the sofa, sighs a little looks back at the cage looks a bit sorrowful. She gets her knitting out and starts to knit. This is all done in silence and should be done naturally at life's speed. Actor has freedom here to improvise what Mum might do as she settles down to her nightly routine almost without thinking. Enter Bobby, he is breathless and crosses to the window and peers out. He is a young looking man with a trilby hat and a long trench coat. He pulls back the curtains and he looks warily up and down the street. Doris is watching him a bit flabbergasted at his suspicious behaviour.)

Mum

Hello might be nice.

Bobby

Sssshhh

Mum

What?

Bobby

Mum be quiet!

Mum

Well I was only saying that's all.

(Bobby is satisfied that it's all clear outside and goes to the coat rack to remove his hat, coat and scarf.)

Mum

Anyway what are you up to sneaking in her like Dick Barton? Nearly scared the life out of me you did.

Bobby

I am doing nothing, just want to avoid that bloomin' girl from the end of the street she is a bloody nuisance recently.

Mum

Bobby....language.

Bobby

Sorry Duchess, I am just; you know...

Mum

Oh I like it when you call me Duchess; you haven't said that in years. Anyway sit down son I'll get us a cup of tea.

Bobby

(Still distracted) Eh?

Mum

Tea, I will get us some tea.

Bobby

Yea alright thanks.

(Doris puts down her knitting and exits to get the tea. Bobby goes straight back to the window and is again furtively looking up and down the street. He is still doing this when Mum comes back with a tray of tea)

Mum

Come away from that window, she'll see you and come knocking.

Bobby

No she won't, she ain't there. She's gone away. *(Bobby seems to visibly relax and crosses over and sits on the arm chair, Doris on the Sofa and she pours the tea)* Thanks Mum.

Mum

Anyway, what have you been doing all night?

Bobby
Nothing why?

Mum
I just wondered that's all.

Bobby
Oh.

(There is an awkward kind of feel about the two of them)

Mum
He's not a bit well you know.

Bobby
Drinking.

Mum
Oh where?

Bobby
Who's not? We've been up the Railway and Nat in Crouch End.

Mum
Nip, I am going to have to get the vet you know.

Bobby
Yea, just me and the lads, you know couple of pints, won five bob on the
Dominoes and here I am.

Mum
Five Bob eh?

Bobby
Why?

Mum
What?

Bobby
Why?

Mum
Why what?

Bobby
The vet? What's up with him?

Mum
I like Crouch End.

Bobby
The vet, what's up with him?

Mum
Nothing's up with him.

Bobby
No, not the vet, I know he's alright, well I hope he is, I mean what's up with Nip?

Mum
Oh he just sits there, he won't eat, he won't play on his little swing, I bought him some cuttle fish, he hasn't touched it, his Millet hasn't been touched either he's not well.

Bobby
Why do you like Crouch End?

Mum
Just do, so we need the vet.

Bobby
So long as you don't expect me to pay!

Mum
Bobby I have never asked you to pay for anything have I?

Bobby
Well.....

Mum
Have I?

Bobby
No Mum I guess not.

Mum
Even if you have won five Bob at dominoes.

Bobby
Well call him if you're worried. Remember Mr Anson?

Mum
Oh I do, claimed he had sailed all over the world didn't he?

Bobby

Yea that's him. Had a parrot from the Caribbean, that got sick.

Mum

Oh yea it did, did it die in the end?

Bobby

Not before he did if I remember right!

Mum

When did he die?

Bobby

Oh God, about twelve years ago. He lay dead there for days with his parrot screeching out, no-one bothered did they, remember. It was only when the meter man called and saw him through the letter box, just lying there at the bottom of the stairs that anyone knew at all.

Mum

Its funny isn't it, the biggest city in England, London is, and yet you can be as lonely as that.

Bobby

Yea guess so. Anyway he had a parrot and the vet took it away. They kill them you know, when no-one's looking.

Mum

Who do?

Bobby

Vets, they ring their necks. They say they will find it a home and then *(He does a ringing it's neck gesture with his hands and makes a neck breaking sound)* as simple as that it is.

Mum

They do not *(looks a little thoughtful)* do they?

Bobby

Course they do, why would they want someone else's pet cluttering up their lives. No, they just collect the animal from the deceased's house and.....
(does the gesture again)

Mum

Oh stop it Bobby. It's alright Nip no vet will do that to you, I promise.

(Bobby gets up goes across to the cage stands over it and does the same gesture and noise again, this clearly upsets Doris)

Mum

Will you stop that you'll frighten him.

Bobby

I am only having a laugh aren't I Bobby?

Mum

Well I'm not laughing and nor is he.

Bobby

Budgies can't laugh that's why.

Mum

Well if they could he wouldn't be laughing at you !

(Something distracts Bobby at the window he crosses and very carefully looks out)

Bobby

Sssssshhh

Mum

What do you mean sssssshhhhh? This is my house I will say what I like, *(calling out)* Won't I Nip?

Bobby

For God's sake shut it will you.

Mum

Bobby what on earth is it?

Bobby

(Silent for five beats whilst looking out) It's alright it's nothing. Sorry Mum thought I saw that girl again, out there by the tree on the pavement.

Mum

Don't be so daft and anyway couldn't you just tell her to go away, tell her you're not interested? Come on son sit down and drink your tea.

(Bobby recovers and crosses the room sits down and picks up his tea again and starts drinking it)

Mum

There that's better. Here how did you get on at that job interview the other day?

Bobby
Which Job interview?

Mum
You know that one in the printers on Green Lanes.

Bobby
Oh that one.....don't ask.

Mum
Well I just did.

Bobby
Bloke was an idiot.

Mum
You said you liked him when your friend worked there.

Bobby
I didn't, I never met him.

Mum
You did. You said you met him in the pub one night when your friend was there.

Bobby
I don't remember that at all.

Mum
You're getting scatty, just like your Aunt Hilda, it was only a few weeks ago.

Bobby
Oh.

Mum
Well what was wrong with him anyway?

Bobby
Just didn't like him.

Mum
Sounds odd to me that. How come you like a man one minute and the next you don't.

Bobby

(Displaying annoyance)

Leave it eh Mum I said I didn't like him, ain't that enough?

Mum

I am just asking I am interested.

Bobby

(Flash of anger) Well don't be....just.....*(calmer,)* don't be that's all.

Mum

Sorry for breathing I am sure.

Bobby

I am sorry to snap Duchess but you do go on a bit don't you old girl?

Mum

I sit here all day, I have Nip and no-one else to talk to. Hour upon hour I sit here waiting for you to come home, I think Bobby will be here soon, Bobby will chat to me, Bobby will have some news for me.

Bobby

And I do.

Mum

Just recently you have hardly said five words to me and you're off out. It's got that I can't ask you anything in case you snap at me. You're all I have got Bobby since you father you know, well you're all I've got.

Bobby

I know Duchess and don't you worry. How about, and listen this isn't just to shut you up, how about us two this coming summer, on the bus down to Clacton, Southend even, a week by the sea: Ice creams and beers. What do you say Mum? My treat.

Mum

How can you afford that Bobby?

Bobby

Don't you worry about that, come on what do you say?

Mum

I think it would be lovely. Oh I love the sea, your Dad and me went everywhere before the war. He had a little motorbike and side car, oh we had a laugh you know once when we were going through London, I think it was London but it might have been Chelmsford, no it was it was London 'cos I remember seeing Eros , I think it was Eros, anyway, he saw this policeman standing on the side of the road, no it wasn't the side, he was in

the road with his hand up, no it wasn't his hand it was his notebook held up in front of him and he waved at us to try and stop us, did he wave? Yes he did, he waved at us to stop.....

(Bobby sees a light flash by the window)

Bobby
(Preoccupied) Nice

Mum
What do you mean nice?

Bobby
Nice story Mum.

Mum
I haven't told it yet. Oh you say some funny things you do.

Bobby
Sssssshhhhhh

Mum
What?

Bobby
I said Sssssshhhhhh.

Mum
What do you mean Sssssshhhhhh?

Bobby
I just mean please don't say anything for a minute.

(Bobby gets up and looks through the window furtively)

Mum
What are you doing?

Bobby
(Whispers) Hang on.

Mum
She's only a girl. Why not let her in and have a little chat to her and let her down gently.

Bobby
(Still looking out but talking to Mum without turning round)
It wouldn't work Mum. She's not going to take no for an answer.

Mum
Well she's not good enough for you then Bobby!

Bobby
My thoughts exactly!

Mum
Anyway come away from the window she'll see you and then come knocking and I would have to open the door.

Bobby
(Snappy)
No you mustn't open the door.

Mum
All right calm down, I was just saying that's all.

Bobby
(Sits back down)
I know sorry, I am just a bit tired.

Mum
Well get some more sleep then you are a proper night owl.

Bobby
No more than anyone else, really Mum.

Mum
That's not true Bobby I hardly ever see you.

Bobby
What is this, twenty questions?

Mum
Don't be so touchy. It's just that I miss you sometimes.

Bobby
Behave, I am here now aren't I?

Mum
Bobby it's not the same. There's only me and Nip and he's not much company recently.

Bobby
Mum I got things on in town that's all. I am here as much as I can be. You know that I shall always be here for you. You know that.

Mum

Do you remember when you were small and your Dad was still around? We had so much fun. I remember once, oh it was funny, we were having a firework party and Dad built a fire in a bucket. We could only afford one rocket and a packet of sparklers but your little face was a picture. I made some bonfire toffee and we stood in the yard and the fire burnt and you stood there writing your name with your sparkler. I had stitched mittens on elastic and they ran through the sleeves of your duffel coat.

Bobby

Oh stop it.

Mum

No these are my memories. What you don't understand is your childhood isn't just yours. I was so happy and proud, there was you, there was your Dad and there was me. No wonder I get lonely sometimes. What have I got now eh? You sometimes, and a budgie that looks like he may not be with us for much longer.

Bobby

Oh come on Duchess, don't go upsetting yourself eh?

Mum

I am alright, just memories. I can see you now with that sparkler and those blue mittens.

Bobby

Red

Mum

So you do remember then?

Bobby

Yes of course I do. I miss him too, he was my Dad.

Mum

I know he was. Still we get on with things don't we?

Bobby

Course we do Mum.

Mum

Don't know what I'd do if I lost you.

Bobby

What you talking like that for?

Mum

I worry that's all. With you being out there on your own late at night in London. I just worry.

Bobby

I am not a baby Mum.

Mum

You will always be my baby.

Bobby

Don't talk soft.

Mum

I often think when I see you standing there a full grown man, where did the little boy go. You used to lie awake listening for Father Christmas and you would say you could hear his bells ringing. And now I see you there and I think that little boy's dead, he's gone.

Bobby

Don't be so ridiculous. That little boy was desperately trying to be big and grown up and make his way in the world. Imagine if we stayed as children. What could we ever gain eh?

Mum

I am not saying that, I am saying things change Bobby, and sometimes we are not ready for those changes.

Bobby

Well you can't say you weren't warned. You know that people grow up and things change. Nothing stays the same. It would be a dull world if things did.

Mum

It would also be a safer world wouldn't it?

Bobby

Nothing we could ever do or say would make this world a safer...
(He stops dead and looks at the window.)

Mum

Here what is it Bobby?

Bobby

(Up to the window again)
Thought I heard something Mum.

Mum

Well if it's her won't she just come and knock the door again? Why are you hiding from her anyway? I have never known you to be scared of a girl before.

Bobby

It's complicated, that's all.

Mum

Oh Bobby you haven't gone getting a girl into trouble have you?

Bobby

Mum, don't be stupid.

Mum

Here who are you calling stupid.

Bobby

Sorry Mum I didn't mean that. I meant that I haven't got any girl into trouble.

Mum

Well good, glad to hear it. Do you remember that first girl of yours? Oh what was her name?

Bobby

That was Lorna Mc. Donald she had a Scottish father with a wonky eye and her Mum never spoke.

Mum

I remember she used to come round and play on your bike and have tea with you. I used to make a tent for you under the clothes horse, do you remember?

Bobby

No, not really but I do remember her though.

Mum

Well where did she go?

Bobby

Mum, how on earth would I know eh? That was years ago. Things are always changing.

Mum

What did you say her name was again?

Bobby
Lorna Mc.Donald.

Mum
Lorna, that's right; such a pretty girl. I thought that might work out. Still you were too good for her I thought.

Bobby
How can you say that eh? It was twenty odd years ago I was about five I think.

Mum
I know but it just seemed right seeing you playing together.

Bobby
Oh for goodness sake Mum.

Mum
You wait 'til you're old everything feels like it was yesterday.

Bobby
Well believe me Mum it was a lot longer ago than that! Now can we just listen for a moment?

Mum
Well don't let me stop you.

Bobby
Sssssshhhhhh!

Mum
What is it Bobby what can you hear?

Bobby
Please don't say anything there's someone out there.

Mum
What? I can't hear anything.

Bobby
(Getting more and more tense) Ssssssssssh please mum.

Mum
I can't hear anything at all.

(Bobby gets up to the window again and looks sneakily beyond the curtain through the glass)

Bobby
Well there is someone there.

Mum
Look I don't like this you're scaring me here.

Bobby
Mum please, don't say anything.

Mum
I think there's something you are not telling me isn't there?

(All of a sudden a torch light flicks through the window and into the room)

Bobby
There did you see that?

Mum
Did I see what?

Bobby
That torch, it flashed into the living room. You must have seen it?

Mum
No I didn't see anything. Come on Bobby you're just getting jumpy.

Bobby
No there's someone there.

Mum
What on earth would they want at this time of night?

Bobby
Maybe they're looking for someone.

(The torch flashes again this time for a longer defined search around the room)

Bobby
Now come on Mum. You can't pretend you haven't seen that.

Mum
Well yes I did see that one. Who on earth is it?

Bobby
I don't know.