

**The Return
of
Harold Hardy.**

A play by Ian F. Harris

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Act I. Scene I.

America's South. The Present. Night.

A bright moon shines down on the facade of a single storey wooden house. There's a small white fence, a gate (with the name 'Magnolia' painted on it), and a front porch where a dim light burns. The drapes are closed, and the house is in darkness. On the sidewalk, a tree and a streetlamp compete for space.

This might be an idyllic scene if it wasn't for the noisy insect night life and the scream of an automobile's protesting engine somewhere close by. Headlights sweep suddenly across the stage as the unseen car skids and hits something metallic. A moment...the headlights dim, the engine cuts and we hear muffled cursing as someone opens the car door...then slams it again.

A pause...a dishevelled black man (HAROLD HARDY. 60's) stumbles into view and makes his unsteady way towards the house. He's slightly drunk. He stops, reaches clumsily into his jacket pocket and pulls out a silver flask. He unscrews the top and takes a slug. He lets out a satisfied 'Aaah' and replaces the flask in his pocket. A pause...a burp.

He moves unsteadily towards the house and stops directly in front. With some difficulty he reaches into another jacket pocket and pulls out a small crumpled photograph and a pair of broken spectacles. Swaying slightly, he tries to compare the house with the photograph. He scratches his head, orientates the picture then nods negatively...

HAROLD: Can't see a damn thing...too dark. (Moves under the streetlamp which immediately begins to flicker) *Jesus...*

He gives up and plunges the photograph back into his pocket. He turns and stumbles back towards his unseen car...he hesitates...he stops...he seems uncertain.

HAROLD: Hell...I don't know...it's all kinda familiar. It feels Right, smells right...but...

He sighs, retrieves the photo and makes his way back towards the house to repeat the process...

HAROLD: Sure as hell looks like it. (Notices the tree) *Hey wait a minute...wait a minute.*

He ambles towards the tree. He stops, stares and smiles.

HAROLD: Tree? Is that you?

He pockets the photograph...then begins to walk around the tree's circumference...once...twice...three times. On the third trip he's a little dizzy but he's smiling...

HAROLD: Well I'll be. It is. It is ain't it? It is you. My God. **(Laughs)** My oh my...look at you just look at you. I don't believe it. What a fine tree you've become. What a magnificent specimen you are. **(Hits the trunk with the flat of his hand).** *Ooohweee. My God.* My friend...if anyone deserved to be in a wood with the rest of his kind then it's you. *God damn it. Well, well, well. Hey...tree ...it's me...Harold.* You remember Harold? *Huh?* Guess I look a little different too **(pats his stomach)**...a little thicker round the trunk...shed a few leaves...**(pats his head and laughs softly).** *You know me.* Harold? Harold Hardy. Hardy by name Hardy by nature. *Jesus.* You know...when I first set eyes on you...you was nothing more than a sapling...a twig. And there was a time...oh yes siree there was a time when we were all for cutting you down. No-one thought you was gonna make it. To tell you the truth I was one of them for chopping you up and making a bow and arrow of you **(chuckles).** But look at you. Shows how wrong we were right? *Well, well, well...just look at you. Huh.*

HAROLD stands back with his hands on his hips, sighs and looks around. He takes in everything, the house, the tree, the picket fence, the sky, the stars....

HAROLD: My God...this is the place all right. You hear me tree...I said this is the place. This is where it happened. All that time ago. Jesus.

HAROLD sniffs and begins to weep...he reaches into a pocket for a large white handkerchief and wipes his face.

HAROLD: *Damn...*I promised myself I wouldn't get sentimental. **(Begins to chuckle through the weeping).** Tree...you'll never know just how good it is to see you again. Put it there. **(Holds out his hand as though to shake...then laughs, louder this time).** Say...I think this is as good a time as any to celebrate a little don't you eh? You want to celebrate with me tree? For old time's sake...? You want some...*sap?***(Laughs).**

HAROLD returns his handkerchief to his pocket and pulls out the small silver flask. He unscrews the top, takes a long swig...and offers the flask to the tree...he smiles.

HAROLD: I guess not. (**Takes another shot then becomes very erect and official**) Tree. I have something of great importance that I need to say to you. Something I been saving up for a long time...some words that need speaking before they...like me...die of old age. Tree... you'll forgive me I know if I say I feel a speech coming on...a short speech you'll be pleased to hear ...but a speech all the same. I have the urge...nay...*the need*...to mark this occasion. (**Clears his throat, takes a politician's stance and addresses an invisible audience**) Ladies and Gentlemen. It's at times like these that I wish there was such a thing as a medal or an Oscar-like object that we could present to our wooden friends...an award that we could give for centuries of services rendered. From the cradle to the grave...from the crib to the coffin there has always been...*the tree*. To shelter us from the fury of the storm. To warm us when we're cold. To transport us across land, sea and skies we have always, since time began, called upon the services of...*the tree*. Why my friends...in my own life there has been none... *none* more loyal than the wooden wonder who stands at my shoulder now. (**Turns to tree**) Tree. It pains me my barked buddy that I do not have such a prize upon my person. It hurts me that I cannot give you more than my heartfelt thanks. Tree... I have to thank you from the bottom of my heart for those services rendered to me all those years ago. Services that in short...and there is no other way to put is...(shouts emotionally) *services... that damn well saved my life*. Tree...you will never know how much I owe you...never...*never in a million trillion tree years*. (**Salutes**) Tree...you may well have been a mere sapling but *...hell....* (**shouts**) *you was big enough to take a pee behind*. (**Seriously**) So,...in finality I would like to say...(shouts again) *look out there tree buddy... 'cause here I come again*.

HAROLD unzips his fly, laughs and disappears behind the tree quickly. We hear a groan of pleasure and relief...

HAROLD: *Ahhh...mmmm*. You know old friend, many a time when the weather was bad and the rain was pouring down like God himself was taking a leak. Many a time when I was desperate if you know what I mean...this was where I would relieve myself ...right here...this very spot. Admittedly way back then you didn't offer much protection from the storm...or prying eyes come to think of it...but boy...you was some kind of saviour. (**Laughs**) You was only small then but hell...so was I. *Hey...(HENRY'S head peers round the trunk) ...you know what tree?* Maybe that's why you've grown so big and strong. *It was my pee that done it*. You ever think that I might have something to do with your sudden upsurge in growth? You ever pondered on the possibility that I Harold Hardy may be responsible for the thickness of your leaf and the fact that the termites stay well away? (**Laughs**).

HAROLD re-appears from behind the tree with fresh wet patches on his trousers.

Oblivious to everything but his friend the tree, he begins to laugh loudly and perform a strange song and dance around the trunk.

HAROLD: **(Singing)** *Is this the tree ...on whom I'd pee?
Grown so big....it cannot be.
Is this the tree...on whom I'd leak...the tales it'd tell if it could
speak.
Is this the tree with healthy sap we'd all crouch down and take
a cr- **(Stops suddenly)**
(Angry) What the hell am I doing? My God Harold Hardy pull
yourself together you stupid man. You sentimental old fool.
You drunken idiot. You...you... *hypocrite*. Stop this. *Stop this
at once*. You of all people should know better than to celebrate
days gone by... 'specially them days. **(Shouts angrily)**
'specially them blasted days.
(Punches his fist into his hand) No good memories there.
(Pause and a smile) 'Cepting one. Huh. Tree? Listen to me
lest you make the same mistake. You listening? Good.
(Deep sigh) You can't bring back the past and if you got any
brains in your head you shouldn't want to. *That was
then...this is now.* **(Takes a swig from his flask and looks
at the tree)** But... this is the place and you are my pee tree-
no disrespect meant but that's what you are-were. I may be
old as God but I still have all my marbles. I still have all my
memories. Sometimes I wish I didn't but...there you go.
Some things never leave you. Some things just...just hang
around forever. Memories... *goddamn memories*. Some
good...some bad. Mainly bad. Hardly any good if the truth
were known. *Jesus....what is the matter with me?*
Sentimental old fool. Pull yourself together this moment
and *get out of here*. Your business here is done Harold
Hardy. You've paid your respects to the pee tree now get the
hell out of here before...*

Somewhere in the distance a police siren wails and HAROLD pricks up his ears...

HAROLD (contd): ...before you get yourself arrested. **(Laughs...then quietly)**
You know what they do to folks like you round here.
Something's never change. Come on old man...time you was
going.

HAROLD moves off but he doesn't get far...he stops by the gate and studies the sidewalk...

HAROLD: *Huh. This is where I used to stand tree. You know, I'm surprised my footprints ain't set in the concrete for all to see. This very spot. Hour after hour. Looking up into that window (points). Sometimes...sometimes if I felt I'd been waiting too long I'd get real impatient...and I'd call. (Cups his hands around his mouth) Sandra....Sandra. And sometimes...sometimes I'd call too loud...(laughs) And out her mother would come broomstick in hand screaming and hollering at the top of her voice... (Mimics a woman's angry voice) you black devil... What the hell you think you doing? Round here at this time of night. (Deep breath) This is a respectable neighbourhood We don't want your kind hanging round... so.... get your black ass as far away from here as you can before I beat the living daylights out your little black fanny.*

HAROLD breathes heavy for a moment before continuing...he laughs...

HAROLD: *Every bruise...every drop of my blood...it was well worth it. Didn't matter what I suffered because I suffered for love yes sir love. (Laughs...then serious). Jeez...I was lucky...real lucky. Now...if it had been the old man...if it had been old Eugene that came out to berate me...ooooee...I wouldn't be standing here telling the tale no sir. No sir...that evil bastard would have killed me. Stone dead. Serious. That man...that man would have skinned me alive. He'd have hung me by the neck 'till I was short of breath then punched me in the gut to wind me. I'd be dead...no doubt about that. That man...that terrible man...he'd have cut my balls off without hesitation. (Pauses to think of the terrible consequences). Cut 'em off and hung 'em out to dry for all to see. Boy.... don't bear thinking about. (Grabs his balls tightly). But tree...ask me if it were worth it and I'd say yes, yes, yes, and yes again. Ain't never a day passes without me thinking of those times...of her. Not for forty years. I can still see her face when I lie in my bed and stare up at the ceiling...still. I'm a fool I know...but she was everything to me... everything and more. Tree...I loved her. From the top of my head all the way down, past the love machine, right on through to my dancer's feet. With all of my heart...with every little bit of me...with every piece of me...(shouts) balls included Mister Lovett.*

An upstairs light suddenly flicks on and a window slides open.

HAROLD: Oh shit. What light from yonder window shines?

A WOMAN leans out of the window and shouts into the night.

WOMAN: Hey you.

HAROLD: *Damn.*

HAROLD runs for cover behind the tree.

WOMAN: And that'll do you no good. I can see you plain as day. You can't hide from me. What do you think I am...stupid?

HAROLD giggles like a naughty schoolboy.

WOMAN: Do you have any idea of the time eh? Do you know what the hour is?

HAROLD: **(Giggling...looks at watch)** It's two am ma'am. Two o'clock in the morning and if you don't mind me saying so you really should be getting your beauty sleep.

WOMAN: *Are you laughing at me?* Well I guess you'll be laughing on the other side of your black face when the police arrive.

HAROLD: *Damn.*

WOMAN: Boy...I'd hate to be in your shoes when they get here. If you're from around these parts, then I needn't tell you that our law enforcement officers have a well-deserved reputation for toughness. Do I need to tell you that...eh? Are you aware of what's in store for you if you don't get out of here now...and I mean now?

HAROLD: Brutality ma'am don't forget the brutality.

WOMAN: I beg your pardon?

HAROLD: Toughness and brutality ma'am. That's what they got a reputation for. You forgot to mention the brutality.

WOMAN: *What did you say boy? Listen to me...I want none of your lip...you hear me? Just get the hell out of here before you find yourself locked up for the night. Now go...go before I get really angry. Huh...you young folks you're all the same...you think you own the world...you think you can do just what you like and damn the consequences. Well let me tell you... you can't. You may think you have a God-given right to walk this earth like you own the place. You may think you're the first with everything...that every idea that pops into your head is fresh and new and never been done before. Well let me tell you young man....*

HAROLD'S puzzled...he mouths '*Young man?*' silently.

WOMAN: *...you are wrong. There's some of us been here a lot longer than you. Some of us who've worked damn hard to make this place something we can all be proud of. Some of us who don't do what they do just so you can go to your disco's and your happenings and smoke your drugs and whatever. I don't work hard so you can abuse the system. I don't sweat and strain so you can knock down what it is I've built up. You hear me now? You hear what it is I'm saying? (Pause) Damn. Damn you all.*

The window slams and the light goes out.

HAROLD pauses until he's sure that the coast is clear then staggers out from his hiding place.

HAROLD: What the hell was that all about? Jesus...people round here always was unfriendly...never did take to strangers but that...*that takes the biscuit. (cups his hands and shouts up at the window....) I said the people round here was always unfriendly...never did take to strange-*

Much to HAROLD'S horror the window opens again, the light comes on and the **WOMAN** leans out again.

HAROLD: *Shit. (He hides again).*

- WOMAN:** **(Angry)** I thought as much. I knew I recognised that voice.
It's you ain't it?
- HAROLD:** **(Looking down at his body and quietly)** Yup...it's me all right.
- WOMAN:** You can't hide from me you young fool. I'm talking to your
mother first thing in the morning Jay Fox. You, young man
are in deep trouble...deep, deep trouble.
- HAROLD:** *Young man? Why...that's the nicest thing anyone's said to
me all day. Young man...I like that...I really do...thank you
ma'am thank you most sincerely.*
- WOMAN:** That's it...that is it I've had enough. If you don't leave this
area immediately then I'm gonna scream so loud that every
red-blooded male who owns a shotgun is gonna come
running to my assistance.
- HAROLD:** **(Concerned)** I don't think there's any need for-
- WOMAN:** **(Cutting in)** I *mean it.*
- HAROLD:** *Ma'am I don't-*
- WOMAN:** OK...you asked for it...I warned you.... **(takes a deep breath)**....
- HAROLD:** Ma'am please-
- WOMAN:** **(Shouting)** *Ahhh....help.... help me...rape....rape...*
- HAROLD:** **(Panicking)** Please ma'am...ok...ok...I'm going...I'm going.
No need for that...look at me. I'm going...I'm going just as
quick as I can.

The WOMAN stops screaming and watches HAROLD walk briskly away.

WOMAN: Good. Go. I'm sick to death of your kind. Anyone think you ain't got a home to go to. How your mother puts up with you I will never know. You come round here disturbing us folk who work for a living. *Get a job Jay Fox get a job.* Maybe then you'll be too tired after a hard day's work to want to stay up all night partying.

HAROLD: *Jesus.*

WOMAN: *And don't you blaspheme.* Don't ask me why but the good Lord even takes care of the likes of you. Now go away...I need my sleep. **(To herself)** Every car horn...every bottle that smashes...it's too bad...just too bad.

HAROLD hesitates. **Guiltyly....**

HAROLD: Ma'am.

WOMAN: *Will you just get out of here.*

HAROLD: Ma'am...please...will you hear me out? Please?

WOMAN: I don't know why I have to take any more of your lip boy...I've-

HAROLD: **(Cutting in)** Ma'am please. Look...I'm not who you think I am. I was visiting that's all...just looking around. I didn't mean no offence. I didn't mean to wake you. I'm sorry. I'm truly sorry.

WOMAN: What you mean *you ain't who I think you are.* I'd know that voice anywhere...Jay Fox as I live and breathe. Listen...I may be getting old but I know the Fox family well...used to work hard for my father and-

HAROLD: **(Cutting in)** Ma'am...if I may be so bold? Er...I guess you wear glasses eh? Am I right? Do you have spectacles ma'am?

WOMAN: I don't think that's any of your business do you young man?

HAROLD: Maybe...maybe if you were to...er... put them on?

WOMAN: Well I never.... the cheek of the boy.

The WOMAN disappears from the window for a moment...when she returns, she's wearing glasses...she squints down at HAROLD.

WOMAN: (**Embarrassed**) Oh. Well you have a young sounding voice.

HAROLD: Good evening ma'am.

WOMAN: Well...it's still a strange time to be wandering the streets. Normal folk visit in the daylight hours. I don't know what kind of friends you must have that they expect you at two in the morning. Strange hours to keep if you ask me. What are you...*a werewolf?*

HAROLD: (**Chuckling**) No ma'am I ain't no werewolf...and to be honest I wasn't really visiting people as it were. I'm afraid I don't have any friends around here...at least...not for a long while. It's the place I came to see...the place...rather than the people.

WOMAN: So, what are you? A thief? Were you planning to break into my house?

HAROLD: *Ma'am I can assure you-*

WOMAN: (**Cutting in**) And I can assure you that this is a poor household. There's nothing worth stealing here...mores the pity.

HAROLD: (**Angry**) *Madam I may be many things, but I am not a thief...never have been...and I don't intend to start now. And besides...I'm a rich man...I have more than enough. I have no reason to covet another man or woman's wealth... I'm happy with my lot... exceedingly so. (Pause)*

HAROLD (contd): Now...if you'll excuse me...I'm going. I think I've overstayed my welcome...not that there was one anyway...but you are of course correct. I should have known better than to sneak about at this hour of the morning. I'd like to apologise for disturbing your sleep but owing to the fact that my flight leaves in a few hours' time and this was the only window in my diary I had for recreational purposes-

WOMAN: (**Cutting in**) Excuse me...but I have no idea what you're talking about? Window? What window? You speak American?

HAROLD: Never mind... I have nothing else I want to say to you...except ...except maybe to apologise for being a little drunk.

WOMAN: *A little?*

HAROLD: I've been celebrating a successful business deal. I guess I should have known better.

WOMAN: You most certainly should have done. And is that your automobile parked solid up against the street sign?

HAROLD: Street sign?

WOMAN: The one that used to say no parking? The one lying on its side.

HAROLD: Oh yes ma'am. That's my car.

WOMAN: Well then you ought to be ashamed of-

HAROLD: (**Cutting in**) *I know...I know.* You are of course right and like I said I'm *very, very* sorry. Now... if you don't mind...and I'm sure you don't... I'll be getting along. I bid you goodnight.

WOMAN: (**Sarcastically**) You mean good morning of course?

HAROLD: I do ma'am...you are...once again...*right*. I stand corrected. I do indeed mean...*good morning. Hellfire.*

HAROLD begins to make his way off stage.

WOMAN: So, who did you come to see?

HAROLD: Ma'am?

WOMAN: Why are you here? You intimated that you once had friends around here.

HAROLD: I did ma'am. I had good friends. If I am guilty of anything ma'am, it was thinking of days gone by-that sort of thing. Reminiscing aloud I guess you could call it.. Anyway, ma'am I'll be going now. Once again...I am very sorry to have disturbed you. You have my solemn promise that you won't be hearing from me again. And I want you to know that this kind of disturbance...well it is not something I make a habit of. **(Begins to walk off).**

WOMAN: Well...that's fine with me. I guess you are a little too old to be fooling around.

HAROLD stops in his tracks. Indignant..he turns to face the WOMAN.

HAROLD: I'm sorry ma'am?

WOMAN: I said...I guess you are a little too old to be-

HAROLD: **(Cutting in and angry)** *I heard what you said. (A pause.)* I may be old ma'am, but rest assured I am quite capable of *fooling around* as you put it...should the occasion arise *anytime I like*. Age does not come into it. In fact-*in fact*...I am still...at this very point in time...although highly inebriated liable and inclined to...*fool around*...as and when I like. Look at me...cast your eyes upon this specimen. *I have the devil in me, and I am half alligator. I have the ability to leap great distances. Why, I could- if I wanted to-which I don't clamber up the side of your house and... fool around before your very eyes.*

WOMAN: (**Scoffs loudly**) Oh really? Judging by what I see I doubt you could clamber up anything without suffering a major heart attack.

HAROLD: *And...and let me tell you something else. I fully intend to leap...yes leap...into my motor vehicle and drive to my destination at...full throttle. I might even try to achieve one hundred miles an hour. With my eyes closed. Ma'am...I am dangerous. I should not be allowed out. I'm a mean machine. I'm half crocodile and half demon. So, how's that for fooling around eh?*

WOMAN: (**Laughing**) Crocodile? You were half alligator last time if I remember correct-

HAROLD: (**Cutting in**) *I haven't finished yet. And...**(Pulls out his flask, waves it about and drinks it dry)** what's more... I may even stop at one of the many roadside whorehouses that seem to proliferate the highways and byways in this godforsaken part of the country and have me a grand old time. And why? I'll tell you why...because I can that's why. Now...what do you say to that? Eh? **(Pause)**. My...you've gone very quiet. Cat got your tongue. You shocked ma'am? You shocked and horrified that someone of *my great age* should behave so abysmally? Eh? Speak up.*

Pause.

WOMAN: So, you're a drunk then.

HAROLD: Ma'am...I find your line of questioning offensive. I am not a drunk. *I am drunk...*but I am not...*a drunk.*

WOMAN: Same difference in my book my alcoholic friend.

HAROLD: *Ma'am...I am neither alcoholic nor your friend. Now if you'll excuse me...**(Begins to walk off and to himself)** I come back here to remind myself of the few good times I've had in my life and what happens...I meet the only female Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard in the county. When I think of the friendly folks that once lived in this neighbourhood.*

HAROLD (contd): Folks on whose faces there was always fixed a permanent smile. Folks who would welcome you with open arms and a friendly greeting. People who, if you found yourself hungry and cold would call you in to share their last plate of beans and the final logs of their winter fuel. In all the years I lived in these parts I've never seen or heard anything like what I've experienced tonight. **(Turns to face the WOMAN for one last time)** Ma'am...all I have to say to you is this... *things have changed*. This is not the sweet backwater that I once knew.

A pause...the WOMAN finally erupts into fits of laughter....

HAROLD: **(Taken aback)** You find my remarks somehow amusing ma'am?

WOMAN: **(Laughing)** *A sweet backwater? Is that what you said...you remember a sweet backwater? Mister...you got the wrong place...you really have...**(laughs)** a sweet backwater? Listen...I've been here all my life and I don't know of no... sweet backwater.*

HAROLD: **(Hurt)** If you'll excuse me ma'am...**(begins to walk off again)**. Like I said I'm sorry to have disturbed you in the first place I-

WOMAN: **(Cutting in)** Where did you live?

HAROLD: I beg your pardon?

WOMAN: I said where did you live? All those years ago...
(Finding it hard to stop giggling). Whereabouts in this...*sweet backwater* did you live?

HAROLD: I really don't think that it's any of your business, do you?

WOMAN: OK...suit yourself. Goodnight. I hope you find your...what do they call it? Shangri La... that's it...I hope you find that amazing place you used to live in.... *'cause sure as hell this ain't it.* **(Laughs)**.

An embarrassed and angry HAROLD waits for her laughter to subside.

- HAROLD:** *That's fine. You laugh...that's OK by me. So maybe I was painting a romantic picture, but it was a long time ago...and...and I accept times do change. Sure, as hell something's different...and as for your mocking tone...-*
- WOMAN:** **(Cutting in)** Not round here they don't.
- HAROLD:** I'm sorry?
- WOMAN:** Times. Nothing ever changes around here. So, come on...tell me. Where did you live?
- HAROLD:** **(Sighs)** Couple of blocks away...not far. Just past the rail yard.
- WOMAN:** How long ago you say?
- HAROLD:** *Jesus-.*
- WOMAN:** *Language.*
- HAROLD:** Sorry. Um...long time. Forty...forty-five years ago now. Long, long time.
- WOMAN:** I been here that time...longer.
- HAROLD:** Really?
- WOMAN:** All my life. Never been anywhere else. Always lived in this town.
- HAROLD:** That so?
- WOMAN:** The only things changed here have been people passing on. Dying...know what I mean?

HAROLD: People come people go. Natural order of things. Life. Death. Coming and going...to-ing and fro-ing. That's how it is. Nothing we can do 'bout it. Life's rich pattern and all that.

WOMAN: Like dreams.

HAROLD: Dreams? I don't see what you mean.

WOMAN: *Dreams.* They come and they go and there ain't a lot you can do about them either.

HAROLD: Don't get your point.

WOMAN: One minute they're there right before your eyes.... you know...right there and *possible*. The next...well...gone. Into the ether so to speak.

HAROLD: Ma'am?

WOMAN: Don't you just hate it when that happens? Ain't it terrible when all your dreams are gone? You know...I can close my eyes and when I finally get to sleep...well... there's nothing there anymore. I miss my dreams. They were my hopes for the future. **(Pause)** I'm sorry...I must be boring you.

HAROLD: You're not boring me ma'am. But let me tell you... no dreams ever escaped from me. I chased right on after them wherever they led me. Still do. Always ready rope in hand ready to tie 'em down and brand them. Make 'em really mine before they move on to someone else who'll make full use of them. My property. **(Pauses wistfully)** Huh...oh well...it's been nice to end on a friendlier note. A few more hours and I guess we could have put the world to rights eh? Nice to have made your acquaintance ...finally. And I am sorry to have disturbed you...honestly. Goodni-good morning ma'am.

WOMAN: And you please forgive my bad temper...lack of sleep you understand.

HAROLD: Think nothing of it ma'am. I understand and can assure you, you're not the only one who's going to pay for this sleepless night. So, Sleep well for what's left. Nice to have met you- sorry to have woken you. Goodbye.

WOMAN: And a very goodnight to you Mister...?

HAROLD: Hardy. Harold Hardy. Hardy by name and Hardy by nature. And you are...?

The window slams shut and the room's light clicks out

HAROLD: **(To himself)** *Great...simply great.* I knew I was right. Folks 'round here never change. No manners. This place is the devil's asshole...*it stinks.*

As HAROLD HARDY begins to move off yet again...the front door opens slowly letting out a stream of light. The WOMAN appears. We can see her clearly now. She's around the same age as HAROLD.

She wears a dressing gown and stands on the porch looking in HAROLD'S direction. She's white.

HAROLD stops and turns back to look at the static figure.

HAROLD: Ma'am? Ma'am are you OK?

WOMAN: I wonder if you'd mind doing me a small favour Mister Hardy? That was you name wasn't it?

HAROLD: That's right ma'am...Harold Hardy at your service. A favour? If it is at all possible...of course. How can I help?

WOMAN: Would you mind standing directly under the streetlight.... please?

HAROLD: The streetlight?

WOMAN: If you don't mind-I need a clearer view.

HAROLD: Why not? Sure. OK.

HAROLD moves under the streetlight.

HAROLD: *Taraa.* There. Revealed in all my glory. Harold Hardy...not a pretty sight...but with a heart of gold. How's that? Can I go now? You want me to climb to the top? I could. Just say the word.

WOMAN: **(Softly-she puts her hand to her mouth)** *Oh my God.*

HAROLD: That bad eh? Sorry...but I can assure you that in my younger days this tired old frame worked a mysterious kind of magic on the female of the species.

WOMAN: Harold?

HAROLD: That's right ma'am Harold Hardy. Hardy by name and-

WOMAN: **(Cutting in)** It can't be. It just can't be.

HAROLD: Ma'am? Ma'am is something wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost. Look...I think I'd better go. I think it's for the best.

WOMAN: Harold Hardy stop a moment and look at me. Look at me and tell me what you see?

HAROLD: **(Nervously)** Ma'am...please don't take this in the wrong way but may I inquire if maybe...just maybe...you're due for...for some sort of medication? I only say this because if you want me to call a doctor or maybe wake someone else up in the house then I'd be only too willing to-

WOMAN: **(Cutting in)** Please shut up Harold and answer my question?

HAROLD: Question? What question would that be ma'am?

WOMAN: Tell me what you see. Look at me...and tell me what you see?

HAROLD: Ma'am...please...I really have to go. I'm not so sure that my hotel will let me back in this time of the- **(slows as he looks closer at the WOMAN and realisation sets in)** Oh my God. *Oh my God. I don't believe this. This can't be happening. This....this can't be-.... Sandra?*

WOMAN/SANDRA: Harold.

HAROLD: *Sandra? Sandra is that you? Is that really you?*

SANDRA: It is. It is me.

HAROLD: But.

SANDRA: No buts Harold...it's me all right.

HAROLD: I don't believe this. Wake me up.

SANDRA: You're awake Harold. We're both awake.

A pause.... SANDRA and HAROLD stare at each other in disbelief.

HAROLD: *Sandra?*

SANDRA: Harold.

HAROLD: Sandra am I dead and gone to heaven?

SANDRA: You're not dead Harold...and this most certainly ain't heaven.

HAROLD: But. But. Hell. I...I don't know what to say except.... except...*but*.

SANDRA: I know.

HAROLD: I think I want to cry Sandra. Would you mind if I cried? **(Reaches inside his jacket and pulls out the handkerchief)**. Would it be OK? I mean I don't want to embarrass you...that would be the last thing in the world I would want to do...*Oh God. (He weeps)*. I'm sorry. I'm a little drunk Sandra and you know what liquor does to the reactions. It kind of releases everything if you know what I mean. It can't be helped. I'll be OK in a moment. *Oh Jesus. (Dabs his eyes)*.

SANDRA: It's all right Harold. Look....I'm crying too.

HAROLD: **(Holding out his handkerchief)** You want to share?

They laugh.

SANDRA: I have some tissue in the house.

HAROLD: This is all too much for an old man like me. All this excitement...I've...I've gone dizzy. I think I might just topple over. Would you mind...would you mind if I just toppled over right here on the sidewalk? It would be OK...you wouldn't have to worry. I've toppled over many times before and come out relatively unscathed.

SANDRA: I'd be happier if you came into the house and toppled over. A nice soft carpet pile would make a whole lot of difference. You need a drink.

HAROLD: I'm not sure alcohol would be a good idea Sandra. Maybe a blood transfusion? **(laughs weakly)**.

SANDRA: I was thinking more of coffee Harold.

HAROLD: Oh yes of course. Coffee. I think I tried that once. I quite liked it.

They laugh again.

SANDRA: So? Come in?

HAROLD: Er...Sandra? I er...I'd really like that...but.... but it is late, and you should be in bed. You got to work tomorrow, and I think I've done enough damage already. Maybe it would be better if I came back sometime? That is of course if you don't mind?

SANDRA: I don't want you to go Harold. Not now. It's been a long time. *You can't just go.* Not now. *You' have just arrived and you want to go?* That's just rude Harold. I remember a young man with manners. **(Quietly)** In fact to be truthful a young man you just couldn't get rid of.

HAROLD: **(Under his breath)** That's the truth.

SANDRA: Harold? Don't go. There's a lot to talk about. So many years. I won't let you go again you know...I just won't.

HAROLD: Look...to be honest...I don't want to upset anybody. I think it's best that I-

SANDRA: **(Cutting in)** There's only me and the kids.

HAROLD: You see. That's what I mean. What the hell is your husband going to say when he sees me sat on your couch? No... we had enough upset way back then ...I couldn't handle a repeat showing. Not at this particular moment. I'm going. Best thing to do.

SANDRA: I'm a widow Harold.

HAROLD: Your husband's dead?

SANDRA: That's what a widow is Harold. Someone whose husband is dead.

HAROLD: I'm sorry. How long? Was he a good man? Did he treat you right? Listen to me, none of my business.

- SANDRA:** A long time. Years. And yes, he was a good man...a very good man.
- HAROLD:** I'm glad. **(Realises what he's said)** *Not that he's dead of course.*
- SANDRA:** **(Smiling)** I know what you meant Harold...it's OK. **(Pause)** We had a boy and a girl. Twins. Grown up now.
- HAROLD:** Two eh?
- SANDRA:** **(Sighs)** Yes Harold...twins - two. So, come in? Yes?
- HAROLD:** Well...I don't know Sandra. Maybe we could do it in stages?
- SANDRA:** Stages? What the hell are you talking about Harold?
- HAROLD:** I mean...one step at a time. First the porch...and then when you feel safe...maybe inside?
- SANDRA:** Safe Harold? What do you mean...safe?
- HAROLD:** Well...think about it. I may not be the man you remember.
- SANDRA:** You the same. I can tell. Mr Harold Hardy. Hardy by name Hardy by nature.
- HAROLD:** Well that's bullshit, and you know it Sandra.
- SANDRA:** **(Sighs)** OK. If that's the way you want to do it. We'll try the porch first. Come close Harold Hardy come close.
- HAROLD** pauses ...
- SANDRA:** Now what's wrong Harold?

HAROLD: I don't want you looking too close at me Sandra I'm an old man now I ain't...what I used to be.

SANDRA: Excuse my curiosity Harold...but what exactly did you used to be?

HAROLD: Don't make me go into details. That would be cruel.

SANDRA: Listen. You don't look that much different to me. Harold. We all get older. I could say the same. So, come and sit-down old man but-

HAROLD: But?

SANDRA: But...*only* if you sure you can get back up again.

They chuckle.

HAROLD: I'm coming Sandra but you should know that the grim reaper's tapping me on the shoulder. He's calling me home. Can't you hear him?

SANDRA: No but then again Harold, I am deaf. Anyhow, you answering his call without a fight? Now, that's not like the man I used to know.

HAROLD: (**Joking**) When the reaper calls there ain't no choice. There ain't no hiding place from the reaper...your time is over.

SANDRA: Yeah...now I remember.

HAROLD: Remember what?

SANDRA: You were doom laden then Harold Hardy and you're doom laden now. I see nothing has changed in the doom-laden department...(laughs) but I liked you for it then and I like you for it now. Always made me smile.

HAROLD: Well that's nice to know.

SANDRA: Anyhow...putting all that death talk to one side for the moment...you need to take into consideration that I ain't no chicken either. I'm past my sell-by date too.

HAROLD: **(Laughs)** No chickens left from our era Sandra.

SANDRA: So, what's the problem young man?

HAROLD: **(Deep breath)** Hell. I don't know if I can handle this.

SANDRA: What do you mean?

HAROLD: All these years...all these years and I thought I'd trained myself to cope. But now...here you are...

SANDRA: Here I am.

HAROLD: And I just don't know what to do.

SANDRA: Well you could give me a hug.

HAROLD: True.

SANDRA: Actually, I would prefer a celebratory dance but that might not be wise...

HAROLD: Not with my back.

SANDRA: Likewise.

HAROLD: So, a hug it is then.

They hug.

SANDRA: Now. Shall we sit and talk?

HAROLD: Indeed. Of what once was.

SANDRA: Of what once was. You know something Harold? I just realised.

HAROLD: What?

SANDRA: You ain't never been in my house.

HAROLD: Once. I been in...once.

SANDRA: No. *Never.*

HAROLD: I'm telling you. Once.

SANDRA: I feel a tale coming on.

HAROLD: I actually entered the holy of holies.

SANDRA: *What? Momma's kitchen? You never did?*

HAROLD: I stole a pie...frequently.

SANDRA: So, it was you. Drove mama crazy. *'I'm sure I left that pie there'* she'd say. That took some nerve.

HAROLD: Worth it for you mama's cooking Sandra. Anyway, that was all a long time ago now.

SANDRA: The least I can do is invite you into my house...officially.

HAROLD: Officially?

SANDRA: Without you having to steal anything.

They laugh.

SANDRA: I'm making up for the injustice. Momma and poppa's old ways. Wrong ways. When I think back...if they had known about our little gang there would have been hell to play.

HAROLD: They didn't know?

SANDRA: No way.

HAROLD: But me and the boys were always hanging around.

SANDRA: You were just a nuisance. They never thought much of it. As long as you didn't come too close. **(Pause)** So. One step at a time. Porch...then house. OK, I can go along with that. But let it be known that I am...officially inviting you to cross my threshold and enter into my home.

Pause...HAROLD laughs softly

HAROLD: **(Wagging his finger)** You should never invite a werewolf over the threshold.

SANDRA: That's a vampire Harold...a vampire's the one you should never invite over the threshold. Which reminds me...if this is the moulting season for werewolves, you think you could stay off the couch? **(Smiles)**

They laugh and SANDRA gestures to the steps....she sits... as does HAROLD.

LIGHTS DOWN. END SCENE 1.

LIGHTS UP. ACT I. SCENE II.

SANDRA & HAROLD sit close together on the raised porch. They are smiling and enjoying their reminiscing.

SANDRA: **(Incredulous)** *So that was you?*

HAROLD: Let's just say, that little Jimmy stole the gas from his daddy's tractor and my role in this illegal activity was to supply the sources of ignition.

SANDRA: In other words, you lit the damn thing?

HAROLD: Keep your voice down Sandra. I'm not sure the statute of limitations applies in this case.

SANDRA: **(Laughing)** So... Harold Hardy...to what do we owe the pleasure?

HAROLD: I'm very glad you see fit to call it a pleasure Sandra.

SANDRA: Don't you play coy with me now Harold...what are you doing in these parts?

HAROLD: Passing through...you know how it is. Saw the signpost and thought I'd take a detour. Look up some old friends. See if the old gang were still around.

SANDRA: They ain't.

HAROLD: What do you mean?

SANDRA: I mean they're gone. Sad to say but it's the truth. I thought you might have known.

HAROLD: Benny? Darrell? That Irish kid...what was his name? Malhoon?

SANDRA: Maloney.

HAROLD: Patrick Mahoney. Head of hair like fire. Crazy boy.

SANDRA: All dead sad to say.

HAROLD: What? You are kidding me. Right?

SANDRA: Would I joke about something like that. Happened just after you left. Was in all the newspapers. Folks wondered why you didn't come back for the funeral.

HAROLD: I didn't know. What happened?

SANDRA: Irish kid you mentioned. Stole an automobile. There was a police chase. The boys crashed on that bad bend just out of town. All dead. Stupid. A waste.

HAROLD: Oh God. I am sorry.

SANDRA: It was all very sad. But. Apart from that and natural causes there ain't no-one left from the old days anyway. We're the last me and you.
(Pause) *Where you been Harold?*

HAROLD: Around.

SANDRA: That's a good suit you're wearing there. You been more than around.

HAROLD: I've done OK. To tell the truth-

Suddenly, a beam of light shoots from one side of the stage. It interrupts HAROLD and illuminates the both of them.

HAROLD: *What the hell -*

A young heavily moustachioed POLICEMAN carrying a torch in one hand and a gun in the other emerges stealthily from the darkness.

POLICEMAN: You hold it right there boy. Don't you dare move a muscle except to raise your hands above your head. I don't want you to bat an eyelid or scratch your nose. If you do, I will shoot you no question. In fact,...taking into consideration the mood I find myself in... I'd think twice about breathing. You OK Mrs Lovett?

A wary HAROLD raises his hands slowly above his head.

POLICEMAN: Slowly boy slowly. Mrs Lovett? You OK? I got here fast as I could.

HAROLD: I ain't armed officer. Please be careful

POLICEMAN: Oh yeah...I forgot to say shut your mouth also and boy...don't speak until I say so. You got that?

SANDRA: What's going on?

POLICEMAN: It's OK Mrs Lovett...don't you worry none, everything's fine. I got a bead on this undesirable. He only has to make one false move and he's a dead man.

HAROLD: I think there's been some kind of mistake officer.

POLICEMAN: *Indeed, there has boy. You was born. And by the sound of it born stupid. What did I just say? Jesus Christ. Are you deaf boy? Didn't you hear a single fucking word that I just said? Or perhaps you asking for trouble? Perhaps it's in your nature.*

HAROLD: I hear you officer. My lips are sealed.

POLICEMAN: I don't think they are nigger cause you still talking. One more chance. Maybe I didn't make myself clear. When I said don't move a muscle, I was referring to every muscle...jawbone included. You got me now?

SANDRA: **(Shocked)** Will someone explain to me what is going on?

POLICEMAN: Nothing to worry 'bout Mrs Lovell. Situation under control. This man won't be bothering you no more...I can promise you that. I'm just sorry I couldn't get here quicker.

SANDRA: But-

POLICEMAN: (**Cutting in**) In your panic I guess, but you never left no address. Lucky I was in the station when your call came through. I heard your name. Recognised the voice. Got here as quick as I could.

SANDRA: *Billy Swift? Is that you Billy Swift?* I can't see you clearly, come closer.

POLICEMAN: It's me Mrs Lovett. I came as soon as I heard you was be threatened by a black male. I'm here now. You needn't worry. Everything is under control.

SANDRA: *Oh my God...I forgot...my nine one, one call.* Harold...I'm so sorry. I called the police...I forgot...this is my doing. I am so sorry.

POLICEMAN: He touch you ma'am? (**To HAROLD**) You touch her boy?

SANDRA: Don't be ridiculous Billy Swift....Mister Hardy here is a –

The POLICEMAN ignores SANDRA and presses his gun into HAROLD'S forehead.

POLICEMAN: Eh? Well did you boy? Did you touch her?

HAROLD: Pardon me sir but that hurts.

POLICEMAN: Way I see it you got two choices. One...you make a run for it so I can put a bullet in your back...or two...you apologise to Mrs Lovell here and then you run for it so I can put a bullet in your back.

HAROLD: Sandra maybe an intervention would be useful right now.

POLICEMAN: Damn. (**Cocks his gun**) OK boy.... on your belly. *Now.*

HAROLD drops to his belly.

SANDRA: **(Unable to believe her eyes and ears)** Harold...don't you dare. You get up right this second. I won't have you crawling in the dirt for no one.

HAROLD: It's OK Sandra. I'm fine. This ain't the first time.

POLICEMAN: Habitual offender eh? And how dare you use this fine lady's Christian name. Now.... put your hands behind your back.

SANDRA: *Harold...no.*

HAROLD'S on his stomach. He puts his hands behind him ready for the cuffs. SANDRA attempts to raise him up.

POLICEMAN: Ma'am....Mrs Lovell please. You ain't helping matters none. Now if you don't mind standing back some, I need some room here. I need to search him.... you never know. In my experience when they say they're unarmed, they lying.

SANDRA steps back and glares at the young POLICEMAN as he prepares his handcuffs. SANDRA frowns...

SANDRA: Billy Swift. You go any nearer to my friend and I will tell your mother that you are the worst policeman I have ever seen. That you are a bullying brute. That you used the N word and...waved a firearm around unnecessarily. You know as well as I do that your mother is a good Christian woman who believes that all men are equal in the eyes of God.

POLICEMAN: Ma'am? Ma'am I am only doing my duty.

SANDRA: I remember how pleased she was when you became a law man. How pleased we all were. If she saw what being an upholder of the law had done to you, she would be very disappointed. Billy Swift, I know how much you appreciate your mother's blessings in the work that you do. She would be heartbroken to witness the animal that stands before me now...heartbroken.

SANDRA (contd): If I was you, I'd holster that weapon and allow my friend to adopt a more dignified position. Do you hear me Billy Swift...eh? **(Screams)** Do you hear me?

BILLY SWIFT: But ma'am-

SANDRA: **(Cutting in)** And what the hell is that on your top lip?

BILLY SWIFT: **(Embarrassed)** Ma'am? That's my moustache ma'am.

SANDRA: Is that what you call it? Looks like a piece of electrical tape.

Even though HAROLD'S face down in the dust he giggles.

BILLY SWIFT: **(To HAROLD shouting)** *Shut the fuck up.*

SANDRA: And as for your language-

BILLY SWIFT: I'm sorry ma'am but I have a duty to perform-

SANDRA: **(Cutting in)** You know it wasn't that long ago I was picking you up from school. How is Samantha?

BILLY SWIFT: **(Impatient but still holding the flashlight and gun on HAROLD)** She's fine Mrs Lovell just fine.

SANDRA: And your brothers? Six of 'em if I remember rightly?

BILLY SWIFT: All fine ma'am. Henry's a lawyer now. Fully fledged.

SANDRA: What about Adam? How's little Adam? He still wearing the callipers.

BILLY SWIFT: No ma'am. He's walking around you'd never know that he had the polio. Maybe a slight limp but nothing too noticeable. -

HAROLD: (Cutting in) Er...Sandra? You think I could -?

SANDRA: Oh my God. Harold.... I am so sorry. Billy. Help my friend to his feet. Do it now.

BILLY SWIFT: Ma'am-.

SANDRA: *Billy Swift.* If you do not assist my friend to his feet this very moment, I will phone your mother now. *And that is a promise.* (Pause) Well. I'm waiting.

BILLY sighs, hesitates then reluctantly holsters his gun and pockets his torch.

He helps **HAROLD** to his feet.

HAROLD dusts himself down.

BILLY SWIFT: Ma'am you have to understand I do still need to verify this man's identity.

SANDRA: Billy...this man...he's my friend. A very old friend from long before you was a sparkle in you momma's eye. I would think my word would be good enough for you, don't you?

HAROLD: That's OK Sandra...he has to do his duty and I have no objection. Like I said, I'm familiar with the routine. Here you are young man...I'm sure this would help.

HAROLD reaches into the inside pocket of his jacket and produces a wallet. He picks items from the wallet and hands them to **BILLY SWIFT**.

HAROLD: Should be everything you need there to prove who I am. And just to help things along might I suggest you ring the Mayor's house?

BILLY SWIFT: Now why the hell would I want to disturb the Mayor at this time of night.

HAROLD: My guess is that Bernard is still up at this late hour and would be willing to vouch for me

BILLY is concerned for a moment...a little puzzled he snatches at HAROLD'S ID.

BILLY SWIFT: I er...have to go to my car and call this in Mrs Lovett. You going to be OK here?

SANDRA: Don't be ridiculous Billy Swift. I'm fine and I am safe. Just go do what you have to do. *Go...go...shoo. I've had my fill of you.* You disgust me.

HAROLD smiles to himself as BILLY SWIFT exits...

HAROLD: Don't be too hard on the boy Sandra.

SANDRA: That boy is an idiot. His mother did not bring him up to behave like that.

HAROLD: He's from round here?

SANDRA: Of course. You must remember the Swift family? Roman Catholic. Child born every year. Mister Swift was sheriff for a while. Seems to run in the blood except older Swift was a fair man. Say...didn't he arrest you once?

HAROLD: Maybe. I saw the inside of that jail house on a number of occasions. All blends into one.

SANDRA: Anyhow...I can't apologise enough Harold. This was supposed to be a celebration. Two old friends reuniting. Can we put this behind us and start again? Will you forgive me? I just clean forgot I called the police.

HAROLD: Of course, I-

SANDRA: (**Cutting in**) You really know the Mayor?

HAROLD: (Smiles) I do. Just had dinner with him.

SANDRA: You are moving with the big people now Harold Hardy. I am impressed.

HAROLD: Well I wouldn't get too carried away Sandra. Purely business.

SANDRA: Well, seems I've been right about you all along Harold Hardy. You appear to have done well for yourself judging by the company you seem to be keeping. Do I need to watch my mouth and maybe show you a little more respect?

HAROLD: I just like you the way you are thank you very much Sandra.

SANDRA: So...you gonna tell me your story? You gonna tell me what you been doing with yourself all these years?

HAROLD: The last thing I want to do is bore you to death but if you insist, I'll...

Enter an embarrassed POLICEMAN BILLY SWIFT. His mood has changed. Although there is a new air of respect as he approaches HAROLD, he appears angry and resentful. He returns HAROLD his ID.

HAROLD: Thank you son.

BILLY SWIFT: I'm told I owe you an apology.

HAROLD: Indeed. Let's hear then it son.

BILLY SWIFT swallows hard. He forces the words out.

BILLY SWIFT: Seems I got a little carried away. You must understand that not a lot happens around here and maybe I got a little over-excited –

SANDRA: (Cutting in) *Maybe?*

BILLY SWIFT: The Mayor asks that I make sure that you are not stranded out here. That I should offer you every courtesy to make up for my hasty behaviour. That I either give you a ride back to your hotel or at the very least get you a taxi... at our expense of course. What's your preference sir?

HAROLD: My preference young man is I am not overly impressed by your newly discovered respect *and* I am quite capable of getting myself back to my hotel which I will do in my own time if you don't mind. I have a conversation to finish here.

BILLY SWIFT: As you wish sir.

HAROLD: So, don't let me detain you any longer officer. I'm sure you have other people to arrest and harass. But. Let's say no more about the matter. A good night to you and oh...

BILLY SWIFT: Yes sir?

HAROLD: May I suggest a little less enthusiasm on drawing one's deadly weapon. You understand?

BILLY SWIFT: Yes sir. Of course, sir.

HAROLD: And I think you owe Mrs Lovett here an apology also.

BILLY SWIFT: (To SANDRA sheepishly) Ma'am I can't apologise enough. If either of you wish to file a complaint, I want you to know I fully understand...although-

SANDRA: (Cutting in surprised) *Although? There's an although?*

BILLY SWIFT: I would appreciate it Mrs Lovett if you didn't mention this unfortunate incident to my mother?

SANDRA: Billy Swift...Billy Swift you have a damn chee-.

HAROLD: **(Cutting in to BILLY)** I'm sure that my good friend Mrs Lovett here will take your request into consideration young man. But let me make it clear...that would be only because she speaks highly of your mother and has no wish to cause her any disappointment or pain. We will both leave things as they stand and hope that you have learnt a lesson from this evening's unfortunate events. Is that understood? Do I make myself clear?

BILLY SWIFT: **(Not happy)** Of course.

HAROLD: Good.

BILLY SWIFT: **(Speaking as though from a well-rehearsed speech)** The mayor has insisted that I make it my business to apologise and welcome you and the Double H brand to our town. I hope that our future relationships will be cordial. You should know also that my wife and I when we are out of town, we always make a point of eating at your establishments and -

HAROLD: **(Cutting in & firmly)** That's quite enough officer. Thank you and good night. Please, I would appreciate it if you would leave us in peace now? If you don't mind?

BILLY SWIFT: Thank you sir. Thank you, Mister Hardy. Mrs Lovett. Goodnight to you both.

BILLY SWIFT bows slightly and EXITS, swiftly...

SANDRA: **(To HAROLD as they watch BILLY leave the scene)** Well I must say, that was a quick and unexpected change in his tone.

HAROLD sighs...he looks at SANDRA knowingly...

HAROLD: OK. Ask away. I know you are dying to.

A pause...

- SANDRA:** **(Smiling)** I think I might have already put two and two together Harold.
- HAROLD:** You always were too clever for your own good Sandra.
- SANDRA:** So. The way I see it. The nationwide Double H brand of restaurants and hotels? **(Pause)** That's you eh?
- HAROLD:** **(Smiling)** It is.
- SANDRA:** I don't wish to be rude but...how the hell did that happen?
- HAROLD:** Well...to cut a very, very long story short. I have your mother to thank for it all.
- SANDRA:** What? How so?
- HAROLD:** Her cooking. The scents and smells that used to emanate from the holies of holies. Her dexterity in the kitchen. Her skill. And not forgetting many a blueberry pie stolen and shared amongst me and my departed friends.
- SANDRA:** As simple as that?
- HAROLD:** That and a lot of luck. But she made me want to cook *and* make something of myself.
- SANDRA:** Well I never. Who would have thought that little Harold Hardy would make so much of himself? Huh. Unbelievable...just unbelievable.
- HAROLD:** I'm not sure how to take that.
- SANDRA:** **(Laughs)** So look at you mister businessman. All dirty and dusty. What a sorry sight for a man in your position. You ready to come in now and get cleaned up? Or are you still taking things steady even though your secret identity has now been revealed. Eh? You coming in or what? Speak up man.

A pause as SANDRA puts her key in the door.

HAROLD is embarrassed...suddenly he blurts it out.

HAROLD: You know I loved you, don't you?

SANDRA turns to face him slowly. She smiles.

SANDRA: I knew you had a soft spot for me Harold. But love? Weren't we all a little young for love?

HAROLD: Not me.

SANDRA: Harold...it was all a long time ago.

HAROLD: I'm aware of that. And like I said...I loved you.

SANDRA: Harold. You were my secret friend.

HAROLD: **(Raising his voice)** *What the hell is that supposed to mean?*

SANDRA: Hey...

HAROLD: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to raise my voice. I'm just curious. To tell the truth I was hoping for something better.

SANDRA: Something better? I don't understand.

HAROLD: I loved you Sandra. Still do. That has to mean something.

SANDRA: Harold. Harold my dear friend. Those were different times. It was all so long ago. How can it matter to you now? It's like you said...I ain't the person I used to be. Time has changed me. You can't love someone you don't know.

HAROLD: It was one of the reasons I left.

- SANDRA:** I have no idea what you are talking about. What do you mean ‘one of the reasons why I left’?
- HAROLD:** I believe the term is unrequited love. I couldn’t stand it. I was hurting. I felt like I was being ignored.
- SANDRA:** I didn’t mean to.
- HAROLD:** Then why...?
- SANDRA:** For God’s sake Harold think about it. You appear to be forgetting the times we lived in. You know what my ma and pa were like. You know, what everybody was like in those days. Love between a black boy and a white girl? Think about it. Be real.
- HAROLD:** Oh, I was real all right. You ignored me.
- SANDRA:** Just what were you expecting?
- HAROLD:** I want you to come away with me.
- SANDRA:** **(Shocked)** *What?*
- HAROLD:** I want you to come away with me.
- SANDRA:** That’s the kind of thing you say to a teenage girl Harold. Are you still drunk?
- HAROLD:** I’ll keep saying it until I get an answer. I can offer you a better life than this.
- SANDRA:** Now you’re stepping out of line. There ain’t nothing wrong with my life.
- HAROLD:** I’m a wealthy man. I got houses all over the damn planet. **(Pause)** I want you to come away with-

SANDRA: *(Shouting and cutting in)* Will you shut up you stupid man. You think I'd give all this up for you? **(laughs).**

HAROLD: I don't know what you find so damn funny Sandra. I've come a long way to declare my love for you. I'm a busy man and I am not used to be laughed at.

SANDRA: Well I don't care what you are used to. You are just being plain ridiculous. You need to pull yourself together Harold Hardy and see sense.

HAROLD: Now you're being foolish. Have you any idea what I am offering you eh?

SANDRA: Don't you dare call me a fool. Who the hell do you think you are? What has happened to you? Is this what the world has done to you? Is this the consequence of having your own way all the time? Sounds like your life is spent being surrounded by what do they call them.... yes men. That's it. Yes men. Your every whim and pleasure catered for. Well let me tell you Harold, it ain't gonna work on this one.

HAROLD: If anything has happened to me Sandra, it's memories of this place.

SANDRA: I don't know what you mean. You were happy here.

HAROLD: Sandra you had your eyes closed. You weren't seeing what I was seeing...or feeling. You didn't see the way I and my family was treated. And if you did, you had this mechanism in your brain that would allow you to ignore it.

SANDRA: You ain't talking about the world I remember

HAROLD: And that is the truest thing you said tonight.

SANDRA: Harold Hardy you are just ungrateful.

HAROLD: I came here tonight as a self-made man not the victim I used to be. I got nothing to be grateful for. I did it all off my own back. I ain't performing for you folks no more. I'm done with that. Tonight, I have the power.

SANDRA: I have no idea what you are talking about Harold. Man, you were right. You are different. And I don't like what I see. It's like you feel nothing for nobody.

A pause. When HAROLD speaks again it is with a softer tone.

HAROLD: Oh, I got feelings all right. And at this moment all of them are aimed at you. For God's sake Sandra don't you hear what I'm saying. I love you. I've always loved you. I never stopped loving you.

SANDRA: (**Gently**) Please Harold. Can we stop this?

HAROLD: I've waited too long for this to stop now.

SANDRA: Harold...I am flattered, I really am. An old woman like me receiving overtures of love from a rich man like you. That never happens.

HAROLD: Believe it. Hear me. I want you to come away with me.

SANDRA: (**Firmly**) That's quite enough Harold. I have no intention of going anywhere with you and...if you insist on continuing with this embarrassing behaviour, I'm going to turn right round and shut my door in your face. Now, I don't want to have to do that, but you will leave me with no alternative if you do not stop. Look, let's just sit down and renew our friendship. Let me go in get a couple of chairs and we can make ourselves comfortable and just chat about old times. I got a bottle somewhere. Please? This is too much.

HAROLD: Sitting down and talking old times was not my plan.

SANDRA: But it's mine Harold.

HAROLD: I'll ask you again Sandra...will you pack your bags and come away with me?

- SANDRA:** And I'll tell you again Harold. I ain't going nowhere.
- HAROLD:** That makes me very sad.
- SANDRA:** Well I'm very sorry about that. You know, I can't believe you would turn up on my doorstep after such a long time and immediately put something as precious as our friendship under such strain because that is what you are doing. Your behaviour is reprehensible Harold. It's just not on.
- HAROLD:** Is that so? Reprehensible you say? If I'm bothering you that much Sandra why don't you call the police again? I'm sure your young friend would sort things out in his own way.
- SANDRA:** There was absolutely no need for that kind of remark. I'm done here. I'm going in. I have nothing else to say. You should leave my property.
- HAROLD:** Your property?
- SANDRA:** What?
- HAROLD:** Your property you said.
- SANDRA:** Your point.
- HAROLD:** Won't be your property much longer.
- SANDRA:** I don't know what you mean.
- HAROLD:** You got a year.
- SANDRA:** I still don't know what you mean. An explanation would help as I am completely in the dark here.
- HAROLD:** My dinner with the mayor...

SANDRA: What about it?

HAROLD: Like I said. Me and the mayor we do business. To cut a long story short. I bought the land. This land. Your house. I bought it. It's the site of my new restaurant.

SANDRA: You can't do that. I have documents.

HAROLD: What you have Sandra is a lease agreement. You should read it. It's ended. The lease ran out some months ago. I'm surprised no-one took the trouble to tell you. You should look on me as your new landlord. This is all mine now. **(Pause)** You have a year.

SANDRA: What are you talking about?

HAROLD: You should receive the new arrangement in a day or so. I signed and completed tonight but you know what lawyers are like. Or maybe you don't.

SANDRA is stunned. She stares at HAROLD and begins to tremble.

SANDRA: *You can't.... you can't do that to me. You can't. No.... no.*

SANDRA is in a state of shock and collapse. She slides to the floor in shock and weeps hysterically.

A concerned HAROLD rushes to her side and holds her hand and cradles her head in his arms

HAROLD: Ssh...ssh. Hey, hey don't take on so. It'll be OK. A year is a long time.

SANDRA: How could you do this to me ... how could you treat me like this?

HAROLD: Sandra. You ain't looking at this the right way. This ain't a bad thing. No way is this a bad thing. I think you have the wrong idea about me. I have no malicious intent if that's what you are thinking. I swear to you. I thought you would take me up on my offer. I had it in my brain that things would work out. I was quite convinced that you would come away with me. I was sure you loved me. **(Pause)**

HAROLD (contd): You do, don't you? I mean it's not too late to say so. Never too late. You do love me, don't you? I know you do. I think what has happened here is the shock set in. it was such a shock seeing me like that...after all this time. Shock does strange things to people. It knocks them all off kilter.

Look. Just say the words. That would be enough for me. Say that you do love me, and we can forget everything that has happened tonight. And get this...

You could pack right now. This very moment. Eh? How does that sound? We could go back to my hotel and well tomorrow would be a new day. What is it they say? Tomorrow would be the first day of the rest of your life. You know, everything I done. Everything I worked for...it was all for you. There was not a day passed when I did not have your name in my head. And now, now it's time to claim what is rightfully yours. The Double H brand would not exist if it wasn't for you Sandra and it's yours, all of it.

SANDRA is amazed, shocked. She stares at HAROLD with a look of total incomprehension on her face. A pause...

SANDRA: Harold...Harold I think you are mad.

HAROLD: Don't say that Sandra...please don't say that.

SANDRA: If you have been hanging on to such a ridiculous dream about me for all these years, then that is where the madness has come from. **(Pause)**. You are scaring me.

HAROLD: That's the last thing I want to do. I mean what I say. It's yours all yours.

With a great effort SANDRA tries to get herself to her feet.

SANDRA: I have to go in now. And Harold I'm going to shut my door in your face which is something I will regret because only my long dead parents would do such a thing. But you Harold Hardy are not well. You are scaring me. You should go.

Finally, on her feet SANDRA opens her door and quietly enters her house.

The door closes quietly.

HAROLD frozen to the spot, stares at the door. (Is he shocked, surprised? Hard to tell).

HAROLD: (Softly) You are making a big mistake Sandra. A big mistake.

A pause. HAROLD turns away from the door and heads toward the tree. He stops and addresses the tree.

HAROLD: Well. What do you make of that tree eh? You think she might come around? You think I should maybe come back in the morning and try again? Maybe a good night's sleep would enable her to regain her senses. Who knows eh tree...who knows the mind of a woman? Maybe I should have approached it differently? Maybe I was a little too quick with my declarations of love? After all it has been a very long time. But then, she remembered me. She knew who I was...and she knew, didn't she, how I felt about her? That was no surprise to her. You could tell.
 . You know what tree, I think...I think she loves me but just doesn't know how to say so. I think I was wrong to expect an instant reaction. I should give her time. I shouldn't have been so hasty. I been hanging on to it for so long that I forgot about her part in all this. I've been a fool. An idiot. **(Pause)** I'll come back to-

A sudden beam from a high-powered torch lights up a surprised HAROLD.

BILLY SWIFT the POLICEMAN has returned with gun drawn.

BILLY SWIFT: Damn I knew it. I had a feeling. There was something about you boy that just didn't fit. There was something in Mrs Lovett's eyes that said all was not well. I was right not to move too far away...I was right. I just knew things would develop. I had a gut feeling and damn it I was right. It didn't take too long did it. Another call more distressed than the first I'd say. And thankfully I was right on the spot. Ready for anything. You boy. You know the drill. On your knees...**(shouts)** *on your damn knees.*

HAROLD: **(Shouting)** No. Not this time officer – *not this time.*

HAROLD turns away from the POLICEMAN/BILLY SWIFT.... BLACKOUT.

We hear shots ring out. 7 shots.

end