

FLYING ANT DAY

by

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SCENE 1

A HALLWAY. A MIRROR HANGS ON THE BACK WALL. ALICE STANDS FACING IT HOLDING A POT OF WHITE PAINT AND A PAINTBRUSH. AS SHE SPEAKS, SHE BENDS DOWN TO PAINT HER FEET AND ANKLES BEFORE PLACING THE POT AND BRUSH NEATLY ON THE FLOOR BELOW THE MIRROR.

ALICE: 'Women of a certain age,' she said. Like it's inevitable - the disappearing. My feet went first. It happened gradually - not toe by toe but more like... fading away. No one else seemed to notice and it didn't hurt, so what are you supposed to do? It didn't seem like something you go to the doctor for. And no more stepping on Lego. So, you just get on with it, don't you? I tried to tell my mother but she just laughed and said, "Women of a certain age, darling, you know how it goes..." But. I mean, I'm not even forty. And I didn't think it would happen so quickly.

SCENE 2

A CHILDREN'S BIRTHDAY PARTY. ALICE AND KAREN SIT ON CHAIRS AGAINST THE BACK WALL. A FEW BALLOONS AND BALLS OF WRAPPING PAPER LITTER THE FLOOR. BETWEEN THEM IS A BABY CAR SEAT, TURNED AWAY FROM THE AUDIENCE. THEY EACH HAVE A PLASTIC PLATE OF PARTY FOOD AND EAT IDLY, STARING OUT AT THE PARTY, OCCASIONALLY BREAKING OFF THEIR CONVERSATION

TO YELL AT THEIR RESPECTIVE
CHILDREN.

ALICE: I think I'm going blind.

KAREN: Oh honey. You're just tired. First three years are the worst.

ALICE: I keep getting those floaters, you know? In the corner of my eye. Little black specks, wherever you look.

KAREN: Sleep deprivation is a bitch. Is Georgie teething again?

ALICE NODS, REACHES DOWN TO THE
BABY SEAT AND SETS IT ROCKING.

Do you ever get to nap when-

KAREN CATCHES SIGHT OF SOMETHING
BEYOND THE AUDIENCE.

Lola! Give your brother his Spider-man back now!

ALICE: I just... I feel like I'm losing something. Like, if I close my eyes it's all going to disapp- *Nathan! No pushing!* Oh, for chrissakes, it's like Lord of the Flies over there.

KAREN: (TO THE BABY) Look at you, all those teeth, keeping your mama up all night, huh?

ALICE: -like it's all going to disappear. Like there's a black hole about to swallow me up.

KAREN: Do you think it's... You know, depression?

ALICE: The nurse said I should get my thyroid checked when I took Georgie for his boosters. I don't know. I mean, I'm fine, really. It's normal, isn't it? Don't put your finger in his mouth, he's got six teeth now.

KAREN: Six? Busy boy. Be crawling soon- Oh, is that okay? He's got a streamer.

ALICE: Ah let him. I'm done with hovering second time round.

KAREN: Try having three... *Lola, I saw that. One more time and you're banned from the bouncy castle.*

ALICE: But... It's like there are pieces of me falling away. Every day, less and less. Sometimes I can't even keep my eyes open-

KAREN: I'm telling you, you're sleep deprived. Go to bed with ear plugs and get Mark to deal with the kids tonight. Oh, bless his heart, Nathan won pass the parcel.

ALICE: Or maybe I'm not going blind. More like turning invisible.

KAREN: Ugh, if I eat any more chocolate fingers I'm gonna throw up. They should really serve alcohol at these things.

SCENE 3

ALICE PICKS UP THE PAINT AND
BRUSH ONCE MORE.

ALICE: You see, I'm never going to catch up to Karen and the upper tier of motherhood that exists between two kids and three. Karen doesn't slam doors and throw sippy cups across the room and eat chocolate biscuits behind the kitchen cupboards and lock herself in the bathroom to scream into a towel. She doesn't disappear when you're not looking right at her. She - well, she's a *matriarch*. I don't know what that makes me.

ALICE PAINTS HER HANDS UP TO THE
WRIST.

My hands went next. Less of an inconvenience than you might think. Gets you out of certain marital duties, at least. I left my wedding ring on the side of the basin and Mark tidied it away. I learned to pick up the baby with my forearms. You just get on with it, don't you? Don't make a fuss. It's not hurting anyone, I mean, why bother?

BLACKOUT

SCENE 4

ALICE CROSSES THE STAGE AND
STOPS TO LOOK AT AN UPTURNED
CUP. SHE SLIDES A POSTCARD
UNDERNEATH IT AND LIFTS IT
GENTLY, PEEKING UNDER THE CUP
BRIEFLY BEFORE WALKING OFF
AGAIN.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 5

A LIVING ROOM. ALICE KNEELS,
AWKWARDLY SCRUBBING AT A CHAIR
USING ONLY HER WRISTS AND
ELBOWS, A PHONE BALANCED ON HER
SHOULDER. KAREN PROVIDES THE
OTHER HALF OF THE CONVERSATION
AT THE SIDE OF THE STAGE.

ALICE: -or maybe not quite invisible. See-through. Like I'm
in a vacuum. Like people can see me but choose to
ignore it.

KAREN: The moment you give birth you turn invisible. I'm
almost tempted to get pregnant again just to get some
attention.

ALICE: Seriously? You'd go for number four? Dan would freak
out.

KAREN: We'd have to actually, you know, *have relations*,
first. He'd probably freak out more at the novelty of
that.

ALICE: (LAUGHING) 'Relations'?

KAREN: I can't be crude, Jamie's right here.

(AS IF ANSWERING A QUESTION OFF-STAGE)

It's Auntie Alice.

(...)

You know, Georgie and Nathan's mummy. Oh, for goodness' sake, Jamie! Alice, hang on a minute, sorry, juice everywhere.

ALICE: Wait, put Jamie on while you clear up.

KAREN HURRIES OFF STAGE. ALICE
CLUTCHES THE PHONE TO HER EAR
NERVOUSLY.

Hey kiddo, it's me.

(...)

Alice. You know. You see me every day at school.

(...)

I used to pick you up from nursery on a Wednesday.
Nathan's mummy. Georgie - the baby with the curly hair
- I'm his mummy, right?

(...)

Jamie?

KAREN: Sorry. Ugh. Honestly, he's all elbows at the moment. Look honey, you're not invisible, you're just tired. Sounds like you need some 'relations' of your own. I gotta go, they're killing each other upstairs- *Thomas! Lola! Get off the bloody bed!*

SCENE 6

ALICE STANDS AT THE MIRROR, PAINTING A STRIPE ACROSS HER EYES. SHE TAKES OFF HER DRESS AND PAINTS ANOTHER STRIPE ACROSS HER BRA, AND THEN HER LEGS, ALL THE WAY UP TO HER PANTS.

SHE KNOCKS AT A SIDE DOOR.

ALICE: Mark? Are you finished? I need a shower.

WHEN SHE GETS NO RESPONSE SHE SITS ON THE FLOOR OUTSIDE THE DOOR, WAITING.

I've been crying a lot lately. It's not hormones. It's like I'm mourning. Like I'm dead. Or you are. This morning I thought you might be. There was a three car pile-up, about the same time you'd be on your way to

work. And I thought, if you'd died, the last thing I'd have to remember you by was the spider you left under a cup in the bathroom. I put it in the airing cupboard, just in case reincarnation is real and you somehow got put into the last living thing you'd been close to.

I've been talking to it. Her. I saw her making those little cotton wool egg sacs on the spare towels. All the things you didn't listen to when you were alive. All the little moments that get swept away. Like:

We swam today, Georgie and me. The pool water tasted like metal. Georgie kept swallowing it. There's always a certain percentage of urine in it, isn't there, but what if there's blood, too?

Nathan learned the word 'shit' at school. Except he thought it was 'shift' at first. I had to correct him. He knew the V sign, too. I taught him the middle finger - just so he knows. Preventative action, you know?

There's a man on Winterbourne Road with no legs. He sits in his wheelchair at the window all day long, just watching the world go by. We wave at him on the way to school. I don't know his name but I was thinking of sending him a Christmas card this year. Just to let him know someone knows he's there, you know? Nathan asked me why we always have to wave and I said it was because he's lonely and it's nice to say hello but really... It's because he sees me.

ALICE GOES TO KNOCK AGAIN BUT
DECIDES AGAINST IT. SHE PICKS UP
THE PAINT AND DRAWS A HUGE
CIRCLE ON HER CHEST.

SCENE 7

THE PARK. ALICE AND KAREN SIT ON A BENCH AT THE SIDE OF THE STAGE, WATCHING THE CHILDREN. ALICE WEARS A COAT OVER HER UNDERWEAR.

ALICE: He forgot my birthday.

KAREN: He what?

ALICE: (ALMOST TO HERSELF) So did you, incidentally. (TO KAREN) He said he thought it was September. Eleven years, and he thinks my birthday is in September.

KAREN: *Wow, good jumping, Thomas!*

ALICE: And the postman keeps sending my post back to the depot.

KAREN: Oh, I hate it when they do that. Was it a parcel?

ALICE: Everything. Statements, bills, junk mail. Anything addressed to Mark gets through. It's just me. Like I've been erased. It's like it's all building up to something. I mean, do people know when they're due a car accident or a stroke? Do you think they have a sense of it, before? Some kind of premonition? This constant feeling of... ugh. Or maybe it's the other way around. Maybe it's like something bad has already happened and no one else has noticed except-

KAREN: (GETTING UP, APPARENTLY NOT EVEN HEARING ALICE) *One more minute, kids, let's get your stuff together!*

KAREN EXITS. ALICE LOOKS AT THE AUDIENCE.

ALICE: Except me.

SCENE 8

ALICE PAINTS THE REST OF HER
BODY, TALKING AS SHE WORKS, AS
IF TO MARK.

ALICE: Yesterday was flying ant day. They came crawling out of the patio, thousands of them. All those fat queens, off to start new colonies. One day in the light and a life spent underground.

Nathan wanted to go outside. I told him what would happen but he went out anyway, like a little stomping giant. But no matter how many he killed, the swarm kept on coming. He was covered in them. I had to pick them off one by one. I gave some to the spider in the airing cupboard. The baby ate a few. Most of them die, anyway, don't they? Saved from a life of inertia.

The man in the window - the man with no legs - I think he's dead. It's been a week and a half now and I haven't seen him once.

I'm not even forty. I'm not a certain age. I can disappear but it doesn't matter because everything goes on the same. You'd only notice if I really wasn't here.

The spider gave birth today. Hundreds of tiny little legs, clambering over her. She'll die. That's her job done and she'll die. Her whole life in a dark, hot little cupboard. And I put her there. I put her there. I put her there.

BLACKOUT