

**Stephan Drury**

**The Queue for Paradise  
(A self-contained stage piece)**

**Scene 1**

*Black stage. Spot on BRENDA, an old lady with a white topknot, holding a tin of baked beans. She has a cigarette in the other hand.*

BRENDA

For the first time in sixty seven years I'm a winner. I mean, I actually gone and won something! Yeah, me. Only other time I ever come close I was six. Art competition. Drew a picture of the Queen. You know - to celebrate her coronation. Holding a glass of wine and a balloon she was. Very nice. A lovely bright blue. Came second. Though Miss Brown said I ought to have come first.

Anyway, horoscope in the local paper told me, 'The last few days have been a trial-' Days? Years more like. 'Last few days have been a trial, so tomorrow's surprise will feel like a new dawn. You may fear, but-' um, now what was it? Oh yeah, '- trust your heart.' Something like that. Or was it 'trust your gut'? I don't know - doesn't matter now though, does it?

*(BRENDA brandishes her beans)*

No. So I turns over the page, looking for the crossword, and bingo - there it was - in great big letters.

**Scene 2 (FLASHBACK)**

*Stage is lit by an orange light - it is 4am in a supermarket car park in the urban wilds of the Essex border. Sprawled stage left is TIMON. He is a dishevelled reveller, comatose and still clutching the drink that felled him.*

*BRENDA enters. She looks about and queues next to TIMON. He is motionless and she barely notices him. BRENDA tightens her scarf and coat. BRENDA stares at TIMON. She turns away. TIMON snuffles and remains motionless. BRENDA does not react. She takes a can of hairspray out of her bag and touches up her hair.*

*MATT enters. He is wearing a woolly hat, three coats, a rucksack and is carrying a mattress. He struggles forward and notices BRENDA. BRENDA smiles. A beat.*

MATT

Shit.

*MATT joins the queue and plumps his mattress down. He ignores BRENDA.*

*MATT proceeds to set up camp. He sits on his mattress, pulls a blanket out of his rucksack, two bananas, a thermos flask, a large empty plastic bottle, two packets of soup and a Kindle. His kit neatly set out, MATT wraps himself in his blanket and begins to read his Kindle.*

*TIMON is motionless.*

BRENDA

Cold, isn't it?

MATT

Yep.

BRENDA

You're prepared.

MATT

Hmm-mm.

*A beat.*

BRENDA

Not normally out this early.

*MATT ignores her. He pours himself a drink out of the thermos and slurps it.*

BRENDA

But it's such an opportunity for someone. Do you think we need another supermarket? Mind you, they say Paradise is the cheapest there is. Cheaper than Aldi.

*MATT does not look at her. BRENDA turns away. MATT glances at BRENDA and pours another cup of coffee. He then removes a packet of laxatives, shakes a bag and empties it into the second cup. He stirs it with a flourish.*

MATT

*(without looking at BRENDA)*

Coffee?

BRENDA

What? Oh, that'd be nice. Not got any tea? Um... Yes - love one. Thanks.

*MATT hands BRENDA the poisoned cup. He watches her.*

BRENDA

Oh - it's hot. And strong. Just the thing though. Cheers.

*MATT grins. BRENDA struggles down her coffee. As she finishes, MATT chuckles. BRENDA looks at him.*

MATT

Sorry. Funny bit. In the book.

*MATT gestures for the cup, wipes it with some kitchen roll and slowly screws it back onto the thermos flask. He smiles as he turns back to his Kindle.*

*JANINE enters. She wears a high-cut, quilted jacket with the hood up. She looks about and joins the queue.*

JANINE

You all here for the opening?

BRENDA

Yes. And you?

JANINE

50% discount until midday? Abso-bloody-lutely! What you looking to get?  
BRENDA

Not much.

JANINE

You're kidding, right? I got myself another card. Paradise do a store card too. Rate's crap. Still - I'm going wild.

*(to MATT)*

What about you?

*MATT ignores her. JANINE pulls a conspiratorial face to BRENDA. BRENDA looks away.*

JANINE

Cold, isn't it?

*MATT buries himself with his reading. BRENDA nods.*

JANINE

Hey - not got a spare cup for me, have you? No? Please yourself.

*(to BRENDA)*

So, what you here for then, if you're not bothered with anything?

BRENDA

The competition.

JANINE

What competition?

BRENDA

At the bottom of the ad.

JANINE

In the paper?

BRENDA

Yes. In the paper. At the bottom of the 50% discount offer.

JANINE

Really?

BRENDA

Yes.

JANINE

Truly?

BRENDA

Yes!

JANINE

What you win?

BRENDA

First one in Friday, Saturday, Sunday gets to pick one of the mystery golden envelopes.

JANINE

Real gold?

BRENDA

No.

JANINE

What's the prize?

BRENDA

Told you - it's a mystery. But it could be anything. A deluxe wide screen 3D TV or just a tin of beans.

*MATT is unsettled. He prepares himself a cup of soup.*

JANINE

Wow. Amazing. Heinz?

BRENDA

Maybe.

JANINE

I could do with a new TV. Old one's no good. Just 2D. And you know what kids are like. Always hassling me for the latest stuff. You after the TV, then?

BRENDA

I don't mind.

JANINE

I just want the discount. Still. The kids... Here, do you think you could let me -

*MATT and BRENDA dart JANINE a filthy look. MATT appears prone to violence.*

JANINE

Only asking. Christ. If you don't mind kids in poverty... Well you won't get it anyway.

*(Pointing at TIMON)*

He will.

*(TIMON is still motionless)*

Is he alright?

*BRENDA looks at TIMON. He is not moving. She taps him with her foot. No reaction.*

BRENDA

I think he's fine. Just asleep.

JANINE

You sure?

BRENDA

Yes.

JANINE

Checked his breathing, have you?

BRENDA

No.

JANINE

Well, you'd better. He might be sick. Choke on himself. I wouldn't want that on my conscience.

*BRENDA tentatively kneels down and listens.*

BRENDA

I think he's alright...

JANINE

Anything left in that bottle? I could use a drink.

*BRENDA starts to remove the bottle. TIMON groans and coughs up sick. He clutches the bottle. BRENDA jumps back. JANINE laughs.*

JANINE

Easy! Not dead then!

BRENDA

Disgusting.

JANINE

Yeah... and he's going to win. Hardly fair, is it? Bet he don't even know where he is. Or who he is. Give him a kick.

BRENDA

No.

JANINE

Phone him a taxi then.

BRENDA

No.

JANINE

Check his pockets. Bound to be an address and some cash. Go on. Fine. I'll do it -

*JANINE moves towards the front of the queue. MATT and BRENDA react as if under attack.*

JANINE

Easy! I'm not jumping the queue. Look - we've got to do something. He'll get hypothermia or whatever. You - mattress boy - help her shift him over there.

MATT

I'm not moving.

JANINE

You what?

MATT

He shouldn't have got so pissed.

JANINE

So you're going to let an old girl shift him? You bastard. Come on - what's your name?

BRENDA

Brenda.

JANINE

Brenda. I'm Janine. Let's shift him while this prick watches. Then you get to be first, don't you?

*JANINE and BRENDA drag TIMON over to one side. He steadfastly grips his drink. MATT quietly puts all his kit on the mattress. As BRENDA and JANINE are occupied he shifts his mattress to the front of the queue.*

JANINE

Eww - he reeks. Right - put him on his side so he ain't sick again.

*(backing away slightly)*

That's it... Now check his pockets for a wallet...

*BRENDA freezes. BRENDA and JANINE lock eyes. A beat. Suddenly both women dart for the queue. BRENDA, with a speed and fury that belies her age, grabs JANINE and pushes past her. JANINE falls over and BRENDA reaches the queue first. MATT has blocked her and is reading as if nothing had happened.*

JANINE

What is bloody wrong with you?

BRENDA

You tried to trick me!

JANINE

Oh shut up.

*MATT retrieves his large plastic bottle and conceals it under his blanket.*

BRENDA

I will not!

JANINE

Shut up.

BRENDA

You tried to take my place.

JANINE

Did not.

BRENDA

Did!

JANINE

Prove it.

BRENDA

Never in my life -

JANINE

Shut up.

BRENDA

People today.

JANINE

You pushed me over.

BRENDA

You cheated. And now he's first.

JANINE

You pushed me over - that's assault. I should - what is he doing?

*MATT has finished his secret urination into the bottle. BRENDA looks uncomfortable and feels her belly.*

JANINE

You dirty bastard.

MATT

So?

JANINE

There's ladies present.

MATT

So?

JANINE

Unbelievable.

*A long beat. BRENDA looks increasingly uncomfortable.*

JANINE

You proud of yourself?

MATT

I don't care.

JANINE

Well, I do. You're gross.

MATT

If you've got to go, you've got to go.

JANINE

Not in front of me you don't. First her assaulting me and now you pissing in a bottle.

*BRENDA glances at JANINE.*

JANINE

What?

BRENDA

Nothing. I just...

JANINE

What then?

*JANINE plants her feet ready. She won't be moved. BRENDA looks at MATT. He stares back and smiles. A beat. BRENDA is in severe discomfort. Her gut grumbles.*

MATT

You alright?

BRENDA

Fine.

MATT

You sure?

BRENDA

Said I'm fine.

*MATT looks at his packet of laxatives and packs them lovingly into his rucksack. BRENDA is in pain. MATT smiles.*

MATT

Want me to hold your place?

BRENDA

No. Thank you.

MATT

Well, if you're not feeling -

BRENDA

I can manage.

*BRENDA is about to cry. Her body has failed her. JANINE looks at her. MATT winces and returns to his Kindle.*

JANINE

Is that you?

*BRENDA ignores her and stares ahead.*

JANINE

Jesus Christ, you stink.

*BRENDA fumbles in her pocket and pulls out her cigarettes and lighter. She is shaking as her lighter sparks but fails to light. The cigarette remains unlit and trembling in her mouth.*

JANINE

What is it with you people?

*JANINE positions herself further away. MATT is reading.*

BRENDA

Couldn't help it.

JANINE

Is this what happens when you get old? Christ. Why'd they let you out the home?

*MATT makes a show of coughing and waving away the smell. He rummages in his bag and pulls out ear plugs. MATT inserts them into his nose and returns to his Kindle.*

JANINE

It's like something gone and died.

BRENDA

It's not my fault.

*MATT glances at BRENDA and chuckles.*

JANINE

Oh, do us a favour!

BRENDA

If you can't stand the heat...

*JANINE puts her hood up and covers her mouth.*

JANINE

Should legalise euthanasia.

*BRENDA straightens her clothing. She takes out her can of hairspray, sprays her hair and tries to preen herself.*

JANINE

Don't think that will cover it.

*BRENDA is stoical and manages to light her cigarette. She glances at MATT and stares forward. A beat.*

*There is birdsong. A single warble followed by an answering chorus. MATT, BRENDA and JANINE listen.*

*MATT stands up and stretches.*

MATT

Morning, ladies!

*MATT hums as he starts to pack up his kit. BRENDA watches him. The mattress takes her eye.*

BRENDA

Nice mattress.

MATT

It is. Had it for years.

*BRENDA looks forward and takes a long drag. She takes out her hairspray, shakes it and gives it a squirt. Then, sparking her lighter, she lights the hairspray and unleashes a gout of flame. MATT screams.*

BLACKOUT.

## **Biography**

Stephan Drury has worked in theatre for many years. Previous work includes: *Peppermint* (nominated for 'Best Film' and 'Best Screenplay' at the Southampton International Film Festival); *Megan and the Magpie* (Minotaur Radio); and an adaptation of *David Copperfield* (Mad Dogs & Englishmen Theatre Company). He is currently adapting *Don Quixote* for the stage and developing a TV comedy series for Silver Road Productions.

For more information visit: [www.stephandrury.wordpress.com](http://www.stephandrury.wordpress.com)