

TERESA'S GREEN

A monologue by Geraldine Aron

CAST:

GRAHAM 'GRAY' HEFFERNAN: 50+. A Galway born, long time Londoner. Well groomed. Neatly dressed. A teeny bit camp.

SETTING:

A worktop in Gray's small but stylish, immaculate, London kitchen.

GRAY is preparing an apple crumble. During the course of the monologue, he peels, slices and cores two big apples (preferably using a nifty mechanical apple peeler) and places them in a greased pie dish. He adds ready-made crumble mixture from a packet. At the end, he'll add a few dots of butter.

GRAY

A couple in their early twenties, Craig and Celine, moved into the flat below. Got in just before lockdown. I gave them a hand on moving day. He was a looker, a bit George Michael-ly. In love with himself. With a sculpted haircut, three-hundred-quid trainers and a swagger like Liam Gallagher.

The wife was a nice little thing, all babyish blond curls and an innocent face. She put me in mind of a young Jessica Lange. She was chubby and got puffed out climbing the stairs. I guessed she was five months pregnant and I was bang on.

My flat's on the fourth floor, theirs is on the third. Our balconies are stepped:

(HE USES HIS HANDS TO DESCRIBE GIANT STEPS)

In my opinion, pathetic architecture, because the design means that whoever lives in an upper flat can see and hear most of what's going on in the flat below.

I'm Graham Heffernan. Gray to my friends. I'm an Irish Londoner, forty-five, but thanks to good genes and regular moisturising, I get mid-thirties a lot.

I manage the menswear department in the flagship branch of England's most beloved store. I'll give you a clue: *Never. Knowingly. Undersold.*

(HE PAUSES AS IF AWAITING AN ANSWER, THEN LEANS FORWARD AND SPEAKS CONFIDENTIALLY.)

John Lewis.

I've worked there twenty-five years and my many regulars refuse to be served by anybody else.

(HE HOLDS HIS NOSE FOR A P.A. EFFECT)

Mr Heffernan to Menswear, please. Mr Heffernan to Menswear.

They trust me to dress them tastefully, appropriately. Unlike my counterparts at The Gap, you won't find me letting a middle-aged man delude himself into thinking he looks good in skinny jeans.

If I had to write my own epithet, I suppose I'd put '*Fine Design Was His Life.*' Even as a small child, I had a hand in the redecoration of the family home. When other teenagers plastered their bedroom walls with posters, yours truly was rag rolling and exploring Trompe l'oeil. And – I don't mean to boast - but I designed and made my four sisters' wedding dresses. There was an article about it in the Connacht Tribune.

Block wise, I'm the perfect resident. There's always one who cleans the common parts and disposes of junk mail. C'est moi. Because sometimes it's less stressful to stop bitching and do the job yourself.

Take the staff room at work: Some Johnny-come-lately sales assistants can't be bothered putting the milk back in the fridge, let alone running a damp j-cloth around a sink.

(THIS RECOLLECTION MAKES HIM VERY ANGRY AND HE STRUGGLES TO SUPPRESS IT)

I used to kick off about it, but people like that can't be shamed. So I took to doing it myself, just as if it were my own home. Which it is, in a way. Years ago, I saw a play in the West End in which a woman said "If home is where the heart is, I may as well move into John Lewis."

(HE LAUGHS) What a line! It brought the house down!

Anyway:

After a couple of days, Celine came up, asking to borrow a ladder. We talked paint colours. I let her see through to my bedroom – socially distanced of course – and she loved the Farrow and Ball Teresa's Green paint I'd used. I'd briefly considered Elephant's Breath, but who wants grey walls in grey times? I told her I was planning on using lockdown to do the whole place in Teresa's Green. It's a classic, one of their most popular designer colours.

I carried the ladder down for her and gave her my Farrow and Ball colour swatch to show his nibs.

The same evening, I heard him shouting: "No way - and you can tell your batty boy buddy upstairs to butt out."

She said "but it's a lovely soft green, Craig. Gray says it's a classic, one of Farrow and Ball's most popular designer colours."

"*Fuck* Farrow and Ball. And '*Gray*' can kiss my arse. Subject closed."

(PAUSE)

Celine started to say something. He shouted her down.

“What did I just say? Answer me, what did I just say?” I heard a slap and looked down just in time to see him tossing my swatch over the balcony.

“Jesus, gonna sulk all night now, are ya? Well sulk away.”

A door slammed and when I peeked over, she was alone on the balcony, looking sad and lost. He’d locked her out and the more she knocked and asked to be let in, the louder he put up the telly.

She wasn’t supposed to contact me – I heard her gobshite of a husband telling her to stay clear of the creepy old gay upstairs - but we’d have a whisper on the landing now and then and I became very fond of her.

It seemed Craig – who worked in an amusement arcade in Leicester Square – had made her give up her job as a dental assistant, because according to him, her real job was to take care of her husband. She had a sweet, shy smile on her face when she told me that. A look of pride.

(HE ROLLS HIS EYES, EXASPERATED)

Craig was her first serious boyfriend and she’d married him against everybody’s advice. “He’s not all bad, honestly he isn’t. It’s the strain of lockdown. And it’s not his fault I do his head in”

I asked *how* she did his head in. “Well for one thing,” she said, “I don’t get it when he explains how the punters at the arcade can never win on the slot machines. The odds system is really complicated. So I pretend to get it and then he tests me and catches me out. Oh, and I know it gets on his nerves when I keep asking him if he loves me. Because it’s obvious that he loves me.”

She fished out a pendant – a piece of junk that had Argos Catalogue written all over it.

“Look” she said. “It’s so beautiful. He knows I love dolphins, bless him.”

She said it wasn’t her birthday. It wasn’t Christmas. He just gave it to her.

“He can be so sweet. You watch - being a dad will bring out the best in him.”

I got to know the ways he’d pick a fight.

“How many times have I told you I want my toast buttered right to the edges? Here, pass the butter. I’m now going to butter *every inch* of your stupid face.

“Not just in the middle with a few random streaks shooting off here and there, but *right...to...the...fucking... edges*. And better stay very still, shit-for-brains, because if you get cut it’s on you.”

My hands were shaking as I phoned the helpline but I couldn’t get the eejit on the other end to understand that no, I wasn’t having a laugh, that my neighbour’s face was being *battered*, not battered.

I swear to God it was like living above Suzanne Whatshername, your one who sang *My name is Luka*. He picks a fight. He hits her. He throws her out. I can't tell you how many times I found her sitting on the stairs, shivering in her nightie.

(HE PAUSES, LOOKING CLOSE TO TEARS)

And once, naked except for a damp towel, too small to accommodate her bump.

Yet whenever I threatened to phone social services, she'd work herself into a state of hysteria until I swore on her baby's life I wouldn't make the call.

If you google '*why abused women don't just leave*' you'll accept, as I did, that not leaving is typical if illogical. They give six reasons and I think Celine's would mainly be Reason Number Three: *Shame, Embarrassment and Denial*. Complicated by lockdown.

One afternoon, when she was seven months along, he was drinking on the balcony and started his bully boy routine.

He'd often use a soft voice to start with. And she was so gullible.

"...sweetheart... Celine...Celine-e Deon-e...If I asked you a question and your answer guaranteed that *My Heart Will Go On?* would you answer that question?"

"Course I would!" she said. I couldn't see her face but I knew she was smiling.

"Ready for the question?"

"Yes!"

"Okay. Here goes: How does it feel to be fat and ugly? Seriously, how does it feel to be so disgusting your own husband can't bear to look at you? Jesus wept - look at the state of your legs! I didn't sign up for fucking tree trunks. Well? Final Answer?"

(PAUSE)

She said she'd lose weight once the baby was born.

He said "You'd fucking better. And if the kid comes out looking anything like you, I'll put a pillow over its face."

She said "Don't say that, Craig. Please don't say that. Not even as a joke."

He had his feet up on a table. He lifted one leg, swung it over and booted her off her chair. The poor lamb just lay still on the floor, protecting her tummy.

He threw a beer can at her and told her to get out and not come back till it was time to make his dinner. She struggled to get up.

"That's it, hippo." He said. "Hup hup *huuup* gets the hip hip *hippo*. It's like watching The Blue fucking Planet."

He put on a David Attenborough whisper.

"And as the hippopotamus waddles away from the watering hole, we get a bonus view of her massive, lardy butt."

Celine went inside. Craig opened another beer, burped and stretched out comfortably, both feet back on the table.

I leaned over my balcony and whispered “CRAIG-EEE...”

I was directly above him. He swivelled his sculpted head to look up, a confused expression dawning on that handsome face.

(GRAY MIMES USING BOTH HANDS TO LIFT, CAREFULLY POSITION AND THEN STRAGETICALLY DROP A LARGE AND WEIGHTY TIN OF PAINT)

(PAUSE)

I hated to waste an un-opened tin of Farrow and Ball, but the sound it made as it split his skull made the sacrifice a hundred per cent worthwhile.

No flies on me – I dropped down a roller and tray to establish myself as the generous and helpful neighbour in the flat above.

(HE ADDS LITTLE DOTS OF BUTTER TO THE SURFACE OF THE APPLE CRUMBLE)

The coroner’s verdict was death by misadventure. I was offered counselling, but declined.

Two months later, Celine gave birth to a beautiful little boy. They’ll be home any minute.

The baby’s room is all set - freshly decorated in Teresa’s Green. A classic, one of Farrow and Ball’s most popular designer colours.”

(HE ADDS A FINAL DOT OF BUTTER)

Now: All done.

(IF FEASIBLE, HE OPENS HIS OVEN DOOR. HE PRESENTS THE APPLE CRUMBLE FOR INSPECTION. HE SLIDES IT INTO THE OVEN)

Celine can’t get enough of my apple crumble.

(HE CLOSES THE OVEN DOOR.)

He smiles.

END