

EXTRACT

# MASTER OF HIS DOMAIN

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Virginia Proud

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CAST

SHORTY	An elderly man, resident of the Glenview Nursing Home.
GLORIA	His nurse, probably in her mid-late forties.
ANGELA	A second nurse.
PAUL	Shorty's son.

**ACT I**

**SCENE 1**

*In dark, we hear a car starting, driving away followed by a huge crash. In the aftermath, an ECG machine, the heartbeat slowing to a flat line.*

**BLACK OUT**

*A blue glow from the TV and a low volume program, rise to reveal SHORTY's room at Glenview Nursing Home. An armchair, a TV downstage. a chest of drawers to one side. Displayed, a photo of a woman and a baby. There is a clock face that shows the time marked for each scene.*

**11.00am**

*SHORTY is in the armchair. He watches a few moments, then switches off the TV. After a search, he finds his phone and carries it back to his chair. He fumbles a bit with the dialling.*

SHORTY: Oh hello there! *(realises it's an answering machine)* I am waiting for the bloody beep can you get on with it? *(nicer)* Hello there, it's Dad. I'm just calling because...well it's been a while and I know you're both very busy, but I thought I'd check everything's OK... Oh bugger it, I never know what to say to these bloody things. I just wanted to...hello? Hello?

*He drops the phone on the chair in frustration. Picks up a call buzzer that he stabs at repeatedly. There's no sound. He throws it down.*

SHORTY: Bloody thing! Gloria!

GLORIA: *(Entering)* What are you shouting about now?

SHORTY: This wretched buzzer isn't working.

GLORIA: You're yelling to tell me your buzzer isn't working?

SHORTY: No, I'm yelling *because* my buzzer isn't working.

GLORIA: *(Retrieving it)* Let's see, is that because you keep throwing it out of your cot?

SHORTY: Cheap piece of garbage.

GLORIA: It works just fine for everyone else.

SHORTY: The fees I pay.

GLORIA: You don't pay anything Shorty, the government pays.

SHORTY: I don't? Then where's my pension go every week?

GLORIA: To our fine establishment.

SHORTY: So I do pay.

GLORIA: Who pays your pension?

SHORTY: The government...Oh you're a tricky one aren't you?

GLORIA: I have to keep up with you, don't I? Can't let my guard down for a second. So? What's it this time?

SHORTY: You don't happen to have some of those headache tablets?

GLORIA: Got a headache have you? Maybe you should stop shouting? I know it gives *me* a headache.

Short For God's sake woman, I'm in pain. Can I have the bloody pills, or not?

GLORIA: I just gave you some fifteen minutes ago! (*She sees them on the chest of drawers*) What's this right here? Did you even bother to have a look? Course not. (*Hands him the pills*) Do anything else for you while I'm here?

SHORTY: I could use a cuppa.

GLORIA: So could I, Shorty. In fact I could do with a cuppa and a nice little lie down. But I tell you what I'm going to do instead, I'm going to go and clean the sick off Mr Eldridge's bathroom floor.

SHORTY: Did the gravy get him? They love that gravy, it's on everything. I don't know what they put in it, but it's not natural, just the colour of it makes my stomach quiver. I'm never right after.

GLORIA: Could be, or it could be his chemo. But I'll let the kitchen know your concern, shall I?

SHORTY: Aw, don't do that, they'll spit in my soup, they'll water my juice, they'll do unspeakable things to my rice pudding.

GLORIA: I sincerely doubt they'll do any of those things.

SHORTY: The people who control the food supply hold all the cards. I wouldn't go up against them in a million years.

GLORIA: I should get myself a job in the kitchen, finally get the respect I deserve.

SHORTY: I don't know about that, but they shouldn't have you cleaning the bathroom. Not with that fancy nursing degree you keep going on about.

GLORIA: What can I say? Cut backs. First it was the free coffee in the nurse's lounge, then the nurse's lounge. Then the orderlies went to half time...

SHORTY: Oh, so that's it! That nice young chap, dark hair, used to bring round the juice in the afternoons. I thought I hadn't seen him for a while. Whatever happened to him?

GLORIA: A victim of the government's war on aged care.

SHORTY: And there was that other one...Jennifer...now, she was a laugh! She's gone too?

GLORIA: You're noticing this now, for the first time?

SHORTY: I'm not as quick as I was, Gloria. That's why I'm here. At least, it's the reason they wrote on the form.

GLORIA: If you ask me, there's nothing wrong with you a swift kick in the arse wouldn't cure.

SHORTY: That's your professional opinion?

GLORIA: And I won't even charge you for it.

SHORTY: Hang on, before you go, what time are we having lunch?

GLORIA: Really?

SHORTY: Is it at noon?

GLORIA: Was it at noon yesterday?

SHORTY: I think so, yes.

GLORIA: And the day before?

SHORTY: Might have been.

GLORIA: And so then today?

SHORTY: Noon?

GLORIA: Jackpot.

SHORTY: And can I have it here, in my room?

GLORIA: Something wrong with your legs?

SHORTY: Dining room it is then.

GLORIA: I do have a surprise for you though... it's chicken today.

SHORTY: Ugh. It was chicken yesterday.

GLORIA: But now you've got it solved, haven't you? It's chicken, at noon, in the dining room.

SHORTY: Not exactly trying, are they?

GLORIA: Cheer up. Fish on Friday.

SHORTY: Ooh I do like those Fish Fingers. With a bit of bread and butter. My mum went mad for them when they first came out, it was fish finger sandwiches every night for weeks. Although you'd have to watch out for the frozen bit in the middle. Not much of a cook my mum, not her calling, she said. Her gift was more in the line of a stiff gin and tonic.

GLORIA: I like the sound of your mother.

SHORTY: Ah, I feel the pressure coming off, maybe I'll just shut my eyes for a bit. Get my strength back before I face the music.

GLORIA: And now we get to the heart of the matter. Go on then, out with it.

SHORTY: It's that Mary.

GLORIA: Which Mary?

SHORTY: The one with the white hair and the curls... (*searching for a better description*) she always has those flowery things on her legs.

GLORIA: Leggings

SHORTY: Yes, on her legs

GLORIA: I know on her legs, they're called...forget it...what about her?

SHORTY: She's stalking me.

GLORIA: She's what? Come on now.

SHORTY: I'm being true. Every day at lunch, just as I find myself a spot, up she pops, asking to sit with me.

GLORIA: That's nice.

SHORTY: It's not! Bloody question after question. Says she wants to get to know me.

GLORIA: Maybe she does?

SHORTY: Exactly! She fancies a bit of this!

GLORIA: And what if she does? She's a nice lady.

SHORTY: But she's so old.

GLORIA: She's younger than you.

SHORTY: I don't really go for the wrinkly bits.

GLORIA: And what about your wrinkly bits? I've seen them and let me tell you, they're not that attractive.

SHORTY: I can't help what a fella feels.

GLORIA: So you've given it up, have you?

SHORTY: The sex?

GLORIA: The word I had in mind was romance.

SHORTY: You have your word for it, I have mine.

GLORIA: You won't be getting anything of anything with that attitude. We're not exactly fighting off hordes of young women, rushing the front

doors. Unless you're planning to run off with one of the nursing assistants?

SHORTY: I do quite fancy that young Betty, she's got quite the figure.

GLORIA: Betty is married and happily.

SHORTY: Doesn't mean a fella can't look. You're a bit of alright yourself.

GLORIA: Stop that.

SHORTY: Calm yourself. Can't a fella pay a compliment? Shame you haven't got yourself someone special.

GLORIA: How do you know I haven't?

SHORTY: And not tell me all about it? That'll be the day.

GLORIA: I don't tell you everything.

SHORTY: The last time you had a fella, I was treated to the ups and downs of it like it was Days Of Our Lives!

GLORIA: I did no such thing!

SHORTY: My favourite bit was when he finally invited you to stay the night and you discovered you'd be sharing the bed with his five Pekinese.

GLORIA: It was only three.

SHORTY: That's not a dog for a grown man.

GLORIA: They were his ex-wife's...

SHORTY: Oh yes! I remember! I didn't like the sound of her. If you ask me, you were better off out of it.

GLORIA: Why is it you can remember all this, and yet lose your way to the men's room?

SHORTY: It's a mystery to me too love. But I'm right aren't I? Because not a peep on the subject of boyfriends since.

GLORIA: Fine, you've proved your point.

SHORTY: Or...maybe it's a girlfriend you've got?

GLORIA: And what if I did?

SHORTY: Nothing...nothing! I'm a man of the world. And at a certain age you're running out of options. Some of them in here are fishing in their own ponds, like it's their last day on Earth. But I'm not one to judge.

GLORIA: That's reassuring, because if I did have a girlfriend I'd not appreciate being judged for it. But as it happens I'm not seeing anyone.

SHORTY: You could have just said.

GLORIA: Maybe I want to keep the details of my private life to myself?

SHORTY: I thought we were friends.

GLORIA: Of course we are, you know you're my favourite patient.

SHORTY: But I'm just a patient?

GLORIA: Not just. But this *is* my work.

SHORTY: Of course it is. I forget you see, because this is my life. Don't worry, I'll mind my own business from now on.

GLORIA: I'm not going to stand here while you work yourself into a huff.

SHORTY: Don't let me keep you then.

GLORIA: You think you're worrying me? This'll last all of five minutes until you need something.

SHORTY: I said, don't let me keep you.

GLORIA: Suit yourself, Mr Sensitive.

*SHORTY ignores her, turning away, pulling his rug up defensively.*

*Lights down.*



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