

WAYWARD

Three old gambling women

The sound of cards being put down on the table. Noises: ooh! eh?! and whistling between teeth as the tension mounts.

WOMAN 1. (*slaps down a card*). Queen of clubs. Hand over your baubles, sisters.

WOMAN 2 (*wails*). I'll win it back.

WOMAN 1. Shouldn't have bet it.

WOMAN 2. Cheap little thing, it is.

WOMAN 1. I like it. Onyx?

WOMAN 2. But it meant something.

WOMAN 1. Onyx (*pause*) onyxonyxonyx

WOMAN 2. It was given me.

WOMAN 1. Fits my thumb perfect.

WOMAN 2. You're a bad woman.

WOMAN 3. No wonder she's alone.

WOMAN 1. All on my ownsome. (*gloating*). Just me and my onyx ring. No cheating husband.

WOMAN 2. Like a rat without a tail.

WOMAN 3. Me to deal?

WOMAN 1. (*loudly*). Yes.

WOMAN 3. Alright alright. I'm not deaf.

Fiddles with hearing aid, the gnat whine of it adjusting

Be damned, this electric thing. I'd prefer one of them ear trumpets.

WOMAN 1. Daft.

WOMAN 3 (*still fiddling*). No sound in my head, and the world dwindles out. Like your man, eh?

WOMAN 1. He fell like a tree, not crewdled or tipped or nothing.

WOMAN 2. Put the black ring back down for me? I liked it.

WOMAN 1. I like it, too. Here, I'll put this down.

Bleeping of a cheap digital watch

WOMAN 3. Is it working?

WOMAN 1. It's a good 'un.

WOMAN 3. Does it keep time?

WOMAN 2. It's shit, that's what it is. Put my ring down.

WOMAN 1. Snot yours. Snot your ring anymore.

WOMAN 3. I've always wanted a digital watch. Like terrorists.

WOMAN 2. Terrorists. What you know about terrorists?

WOMAN 3. They have digital watches.

WOMAN 2. You got a bomb in your handbag?

WOMAN 3. Better than a bomb.

The sound of a bottle being unscrewed and glasses being filled. They chink glasses.

WOMAN 1 (*drinks, smacks lips*). Boom!!

WOMAN 2. (*splutters*). Whassin this one?

WOMAN 3. Mammy's recipe. Makes you see things.

WOMAN 2. Powerful.

WOMAN 1. Open the bleeding third eye in your face.

WOMAN 2 (*coughs*). Throat on fire.

WOMAN 1. Another hand?

WOMAN 3. Gambled your husband with the devil and lost. (*pause*) Or did you win, my lovely?

WOMAN 1. Maybe I did.

WOMAN 3. Good riddance?

WOMAN 1. He was cheating on me with some drab. Buying her stuff. With my money.

WOMAN 2. Put the ring down.

WOMAN 1. Onyxonyxonyx?

WOMAN 2. Please?

WOMAN 3. Go on, give her a chance to win it back.

WOMAN 1. Let's see some stakes worth playing for then.

WOMAN 3. Worth playing for. (*mosquito whine of a hearing aid being fiddled with and removed*)

WOMAN 1. Eu. (*loudly*) That's been in your ear. It's got your warm ear wax on it.

WOMAN 3. I can't hear a damned thing without it. Chuck it in the lake if you win.

WOMAN 1. I will and all. What's this screwed up bit of paper?

WOMAN 2. A private letter.

WOMAN 3. You shouldn't –

WOMAN 1. High stakes, she said

WOMAN 3. Yeah, but there's high stakes and there's –

WOMAN 1. Who's it from? Give it here?!

WOMAN 2 smacks her hand

WOMAN 2. No you don't!

WOMAN 1. Ooh. I like a mystery.

They begin playing

WOMAN 3. Shouldn't be here.

WOMAN 1. Stuff to do people to meet?

WOMAN 3. It's against the rules.

WOMAN 2. What is? Gambling?

WOMAN 3. Mumbling?

WOMAN 1. (*louder*) GAMBLING? Hardly Las Vegas is it. I mean look around. Poky little hole the chickens shit in.

WOMAN 3. Corona, I mean. Three of us inside.

WOMAN 1. Corona Schmona. More likely to die of the damp. Anyway all that's over now.

WOMAN 2. You vaccinated?

WOMAN 1. Course I am, my pet.

WOMAN 2. (*louder*). What about you?

WOMAN 3. No. Never. 5G isn't it? Phone masts.

WOMAN 1. Come off it, you can't even get a normal signal round here. I was up in the top paddock trying to ring the bookies. Only place I could get a bar.

WOMAN 3. Who did you put money on?

WOMAN 2. I put a few bob on Innocent Flower last week.

WOMAN 1. Look out for that Fly, Fly, Fly. Now there's a runner.

WOMAN 3. Won't go well for him.

WOMAN 1. I'll bear that in mind.

There's a pause as they play.

So... (*casually*) what's with the letter then, my sweet?

WOMAN 2. Don't distract me.

WOMAN 1. Not.

WOMAN 2. Catch me out then.

WOMAN 1 (*grumpily*). Why you so ugly?

WOMAN 2. Least I never killed my husband.

WOMAN 1. I didn't kill him – I only wanted him dead, the cheating devil.

WOMAN 2. Said it in front of old Baba Yaga here. Didn't you?

WOMAN 1. She can't hear you. She's taken her ear out, hasn't she.

WOMAN 3. Who's she, the cat's mother?

WOMAN 2. (*louder*). Did you do for her husband?

WOMAN 3. (*evasive*). Shouldn't have been up a ladder in a storm.

WOMAN 2. What was he doing up a ladder that night?

WOMAN 1. I told him the cat was on the roof.

WOMAN 2. Was it?

WOMAN 1. We haven't got a cat.

WOMAN 3 (*slaps her cards on the table*). Look! I won! There she is again!! Queen of Clubs! She's my lady this time (*kisses the card*) Give me all your precious goodies! (*drums a victory tattoo on the table*) I like myself an onyx ring! Black! Black as my heart.

WOMAN 1. Sssh! (*louder and enunciating*) Sit down! You haven't won.

WOMAN 3 (*suspicious*). I can't hear you.

WOMAN 1. You haven't won. Look, I put down a seven of spades. See?

WOMAN 3. I still can't hear you.

WOMAN 1. WHY DON'T YOU PUT YOUR HEARING AID BACK IN? I can always rip it out of your ear if I win.

WOMAN 3. Alright alright.

They carry on playing.

WOMAN 3. There'll be a war soon.

WOMAN 2. Eh?

WOMAN 3. Mark my words. Big nasty one. Proper one. Like the one my pa was in. It's in the ground. Like an ant's nest, all the ants scurrying around and the ground all filled with little passageways and grottos and the earth crumbling, you can hear it if you listen. And then one day, there it is, the ground gives way, and the buildings are all hollowed out and before you know it they're blowing each other to bits.

WOMAN 2. The ants?

WOMAN 3. The people.

WOMAN 1 (*louder*). How come you can hear the fucking ants of war, but you can't hear us?

WOMAN 3. I can see it. Sickening. It's in the air. Smoke like swirling clouds. And the fields are pocked and barren but lives are scattered like grain in a drought.

WOMAN 1. Do us a favour, love. It's depressing. How about we stick to races.

WOMAN 3. Neptune's Ocean. Newbury 6 to 1.

WOMAN 2. (*unexpectedly*). Can I have back my letter?

WOMAN 1. Course not.

WOMAN 2. I've got a brooch. Here. How about I put that down?

WOMAN 1. You can't change the stakes, love.

WOMAN 2. Look at it! Little owlet, see. Twittwwooooo... (*fades out*)

Pause

WOMAN 1. Why did you put it down?

WOMAN 2. Because I wanted my ring back! Because I – But you're on a winning streak!

WOMAN 1. Show me your hand.

Silence

WOMAN 2. ...No... Give me another chance...

WOMAN 1. That's not how it works. Foul play!

WOMAN 2. I know, I know. Just this once. I was a fool.

WOMAN 1. We can't play if one of us isn't being fair.

WOMAN 2. I like that! You! Calling foul?

WOMAN 3. Clean start. Deal again.

WOMAN 1. Alright, I'll deal again. But only if you agree whoever wins gets to read it.

Sound of cards being shuffled and some handed out.

WOMAN 2. I'll go (*she puts a card down and they begin playing*)

WOMAN 1. Yessss

WOMAN 2. (*puts cards on table*). What have I done.

WOMAN 1. Yesss, I knew –

WOMAN 3 (*slaps her cards down, interrupting WOMAN 1*). King of Hearts! Look at that! Hearts is trumps! Give us the letter.

WOMAN 1. I don't believe it.

WOMAN 3. All above board.

WOMAN 1. You charm the cards?

WOMAN 3. Tisn't just you wins, you know.

WOMAN 2. (*anxious*). What'll you do with the letter?

WOMAN 3. Burn it, my sweet. Like you should have.

WOMAN 2. No –

WOMAN 1. Read it first! Read it out!

WOMAN 2. You can't –

WOMAN 1. Give it –

WOMAN 2. Wait –

WOMAN 1. Mine –

WOMAN 3. No one

WOMAN 3 lights a match

Silence as the letter burns

An owl passes over, gently hooting