

DON'T WAKE THE BABY

*A one act play by Andrew Gunn*

## DON'T WAKE THE BABY

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### CHARACTERS:

Linda, female, late 20s/early 30s

Rob, male, late 20s/early 30s

### SCENE:

The departure lounge of an airport. The set comprises a sofa and coffee table.

### PROPS:

1x pram or pushchair, dressed as if for a sleeping baby

1x blanket

1x rucksack (Rob)

1x battered paperback novel

1x carry-on luggage (Linda)

3x chocolate bars (Linda)

3x chocolate bars (Rob)

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*ROB pushes the door open, peers into the lounge, ducks back out of sight.*

*Rob returns, holds the door open, beckons. LINDA wheels the pram inside. The wheel trails a blanket. Rob grabs the blanket, lets the door swing shut—*

LINDA

Sssh!

*They wait, listen. No sound from the pram. Linda wheels the pram to the sofa, fusses with the blankets. Rob hovers by the pram, watches.*

*Linda eases herself into the sofa next to the pram. Rob shrugs off his rucksack, sits beside her.*

*Silence. Linda peers into the pram—sits back, satisfied.*

*Rob unzips his rucksack—*

LINDA

Sssh!

ROB

Sorry.

*Rob rummages inside the bag, cautiously at first, then making all kinds of noise. Linda glares at him. Rob seems to give up—*

*then searches with renewed fervour—*

LINDA

For God's . . .

ROB

Sorry—

LINDA

Just—tell me what you're looking for.

ROB

My book.

*Linda grabs the rucksack, reaches inside, finds a paperback novel and hands it to Rob.*

LINDA

There:

ROB

The other book. The other, I haven't started that one yet.

LINDA

Start it now.

ROB

I can't have two books on the go at the same time.

*Linda puts the rucksack on the floor on her side of the sofa.*

ROB

God, all right . . .

*Rob opens the paperback, starts to read.*

*Linda checks inside the pram again, sits back.*

ROB

This isn't going to work.

LINDA

Sssh! . . . What's wrong?

ROB

Well . . . which one is it, "Sssh!" or "What's wrong"?

LINDA

What the fuck is wrong.

ROB

I can't . . . I was reading about a bunch of guys doing a casino heist. Close to the end, too. They were about to blow it or get away with it.

*(turns pages)*

Now I'm in the suburbs and somebody's . . . somebody's having . . . sex with, uh . . . hang on . . .

*(turns pages)*

oh, my God . . .

*Linda tries to sneak a peek. Rob pulls the book away, now transfixed. Linda stands.*

LINDA

Rob. Do you want anything? Can of juice, chocolate?

ROB

Nah, cheers. D'you have a think about the house?

LINDA

We're not talking about houses. You'll wake the baby.

ROB

It's the perfect time to talk about it.

LINDA

Let's get up there first.

ROB

It's just a hypothetical—

LINDA

I'm going for a walk. Have a look at the Duty Free . . .

ROB

Fine. But you never get anything at the Duty Free.  
Anyway, it's not duty free—we're not leaving the country.

LINDA

They've got those perfume robots.

ROB

Don't call them robots, they just wear a lot of make-up.

LINDA

They look like—

ROB

Don't be a bitch.

LINDA

Don't . . . say "bitch" around *him*.

ROB

And don't come back smelling of perfume. You can't have  
perfume on while you're, you know, while he's—

LINDA

I'm going for a walk, then. Can I go for a walk?

ROB

Yeah.

LINDA

Will you be okay?

ROB

Yeah. Yeah.

LINDA  
With him?

ROB  
Yeah.

LINDA  
What if he wakes up?

ROB  
I'll read to him.

LINDA  
You'll read him filth.

ROB  
I'll change the words. Like, wherever it says "masturbate"  
I'll say "play with": so, here, "she liked to *play* with the  
little wooden soldier."

LINDA  
No filth. Just sing him a wee song, all right?

ROB  
I'll sing him a . . . just go, we'll be *fine*.

LINDA  
I'm going.

ROB  
Go for a fucking . . . go for a walk.

LINDA  
I'll be just along there.

ROB  
We'll be fine. Go on.

*Linda hovers by the pram, then walks out.*

*Rob reads for a moment.*

*Puts down the book, slides along the sofa, peers into the pram.*

*Smiles.*

## ROB

Yeah, you'll be fine there, wee man. When you're a teenage insomniac I'll tell you about all the stuff you slept through. Fireworks! Right outside the window, by the park. Bonfire night—like the Gaza Strip, five minutes after the end of ceasefire. You, oblivious. Wee snoring machine. Slept through a fair few arguments. Helicopter with a searchlight. Washing machine stuck on spin-dry for an hour and a half. Your mum dropping dishes. I flush the fucking toilet after midnight *one time*, you wake up. So that's that: rest of your mother's life, you'll hear how you could *never* get a full night's sleep because of me.

(beat)

Funny how you won't remember this. Big day for us. What'll it be like for you? Grow up in one place thinking you're a Scot, and then one day you'll find out you're as English as family pubs, sub-par fish and chips and expensive parking. And to you the place'll just be—a wee dot on the map, a name. Maybe you'll go there, maybe we'll take you one day, show you where you were born. Well, *I'll* take you. Your mother won't come back. Funny how you won't remember.

(beat)

It's good you won't remember the plane. I don't think you'll like the plane, wee man. But: safest way to travel. If God had wanted men to *not* fly, he wouldn't have put all the good beaches so fucking far away.

(beat)

Always thought memory started when you were about three. But it's all in there somewhere. I see you doing something and I get a flash—you know, *I* played with that toy, *I* had that book, *I* put my head in the washing machine.

(beat)

God, I hope we're doing the right thing.

(beat)

Tell you a story. Your mum's, she thirty-nine weeks and a day, can't do anything for more than an hour at a time. Sit down, lie down, lie still. Like sleeping with a cement mixer. Couldn't watch a whole film. So she goes off to bed one night, and I watch *Night of the Living Dead*. The proper one. Last film I saw all the way through. I crawl in beside her at midnight and I have a dream about you, and we're protecting you from the zombies. Your mum gets bit and I have to chop her head off with a big wooden spatula. I mean, it's a dream. Next thing, it's three fifty-eight, the bedroom door's open, the bathroom light's on and she says you're on your way. Contractions! "Get the bags, get in the car!"

ROB (*continued*)

Now, maybe it *is* a male thing that I had to wash my hair first. But I knew it was going to be a long day, and we'd take pictures at the end, and if I look like a pile of shite in *them* then I'd get told off, wouldn't I? Of course I didn't *tell* her I was washing my hair. Told her I was brushing my teeth. And she told me off for *that*. She didn't brush *her* teeth. But she's going to spend the day with a gas mask on her face, and I'm going to be stuck making friends with the midwife, so . . . don't judge me. You'll be a man. You'll do silly man stuff as well.

(*beat*)

I'd had my driving lessons, but I'd never actually driven your mum before. Now, don't pay any attention to her PR campaign. I'm not *too* bad. Especially at twenty miles an hour in the middle of the night, no other cars on the road. I come up behind this wee van dithering on the boulevard and she's in the backseat screaming "Overtake the motherfucker!" . . . sorry. And I cut up past him and she gives him the finger out the back window. And he sees her. So then suddenly we're in a car chase. A car chase with contractions and pot holes. The van's tailgating us and as soon as I hit forty, your mum's like, "God! Too fast! Slow down!" And I can see the driver in the mirror, he looks black and white like one of the zombies—except he's fucking mental. So we get to the roundabout at the top, and I think, "Fuck it," I signal for the exit but I keep going round. Van turns off. I keep going in a circle. Your mum's like, "The hospital! The hospital! Jesus Christ!"

(*beat*)

We get there, your mum goes in the main door, and I go to the barrier, roll down the window, take a ticket—you pay for parking *everywhere* down here—and I decide: now we qualify for a parent and child space. Then I'm up the stairs with four bags and a pillow, running around trying to find the maternity ward. On the wrong floor. Eventually I find your mum in this wee room with a big cabinet, wide open, full of drugs. Nurse comes in and hooks us up to this thing, we can hear your heartbeat. I'm staring at your mum. Your mum's staring at the drugs.

(*beat*)

They move us into another room. Everything slows down for a while. All these nurses and doctors come and go. You don't want to know about all that. The best part was at the end, when your mum started pushing. The midwife's like "Push! Push! Come on!" and I'm like "Yeah, push harder!" . . . that went down like a fucking salmonella chicken. *Never* say "push harder."

ROB (*continued*)

But she does, and your wee head pops out—your wee face, your eyes shut, as if you’re thinking really hard. Then the rest of you just kind of flops out. Bigger than I thought. And the midwife gives you up to your mum, tells me to make you cry. So I say “You’re English” and you start howling. I cut the umbilical cord with these evil-looking scissors. Then they clean you up a bit and they give you to me, and I just sing Row, Row, Row Your Boat—don’t know why. Six-fourteen PM.

(*beat*)

I put on your first nappy. Proud of that.

(*beat*)

You and your mum get tucked in and I go down to the car about eleven. Fucking driver’s-side window’s still open. Now that’s strictly between you and me. First night as a dad might’ve been spent in a police station, on the phone trying to get a hire car from the insurance. Instead, I was just too late to buy any of the day’s newspapers. Lucky escape.

(*stands, wanders around the sofa*)

I have done proper fatherly shit. This morning, cleaned up after a spider assassination. Fucking pointless—I mean, it’s the last time we’ll set foot in the place, but . . . this big garden-dwelling fucker runs across the hall. Normally I’d call your mum or pretend I hadn’t seen it, but you were watching me, so . . . I tried to smack it with your mum’s shoe—first one to hand—but then the noise set you off, so she came in and squished it with a sponge. So while she’s trying to calm you down, I’m the one binning the sponge and picking up bits of leg. Those fuckers *twitch*.

(*beat*)

Thing about going up north, you’ll finally meet your grandparents—on my side. Linda’s mum was down after you were born. Testing my stress levels and giving us useless fucking advice about wooden toys and gravy. “Gravy with every meal, fills them up, makes them tired.” I put gravy in all of her meals, but she didn’t get the joke. God, they say if you want to know how your wife’ll end up, look at her mother. Maybe all the mother-in-law jokes are really wife jokes with their balls cut off. I hope Laura doesn’t turn out like her mum. You can’t have them together for more than seventy-two hours. It’s true: everyone ignores the insults and sniping and rising tension until lunchtime, Wednesday, Laura says “Why don’t you take some cheese for the journey?” and her mum says “I can look after myself, you know” and Laura says “That’s all you ever did” and then they just screamed at each other until her mum walked out.

ROB (*continued*)

At least she came. My folks are travel-shy. They live one postcode away from where mum grew up, and dad hates all forms of transport—only drives the car as far as the church. We moved down south, we knew they'd never come and visit. Dad called me the other day. Said I was a good dad, bringing you home.

(*beat*)

I don't know, maybe you'll hate me. Maybe this new job'll have me coming home late every day and I'll be a weekend dad . . . or else I'll be at home all the time and have no authority. Or maybe you're just *supposed* to hate your dad for a while. Then *you* become a dad and you understand. When you have a kid, I'll come and visit. I hope you don't hate me. I think we have the same sense of humour. We'll go and see films with fart jokes. I always wondered why they made those.

*Linda comes back in, empty-handed.*

ROB

Not get anything?

LINDA

Sssh! Is he awake?

ROB

Sssh yourself.

LINDA

Is he awake?

ROB

No.

LINDA

(*sits*)

Plane's going to be a nightmare.

ROB

Might be all right.

LINDA

He won't understand all the noise. I wish we'd kept the car and just driven up.

ROB

We've got my dad's car until we find—

LINDA

We could have driven up though, and sold it there.

ROB

Yeah, but . . . seven or eight hours on the road.

LINDA

I know.

ROB

Even if we'd split the journey over two—

LINDA

I know.

ROB

He's definitely got the crappy end of the deal. But as long as he's going to be uncomfortable, better an hour and a half on a plane and then it's done.

LINDA

I know. Stop making me say "I know". I already know I know.

ROB

You know everything.

LINDA

I know everything you know, anyway, and a bit more.

ROB

Did you not get anything?

LINDA

Did you want something?

ROB

No. Maybe some chocolate.

LINDA

God, I *asked* you.

ROB

Yeah,—

LINDA

I said, "Rob, do you want chocolate?"

ROB

I know. It was after you left, I thought—

LINDA

And they were doing a three-for-two . . . Well, go and get something. D’you need change?

ROB

*(stands)*

Nah, cheers. But d’you want that, then? Three-for-two?

LINDA

I don’t mind. If you get two, get one for me.

ROB

Any preference?

LINDA

Yeah, something I hate.

ROB

Yeah, all right. I’ll have a look at the books as well.

*Rob leaves. Linda sits on the sofa, extracts three chocolate bars from her pockets. She stuffs two inside her carry-on bag, unwraps the third.*

*Linda hesitates, checks the pram, smiles.*

LINDA

God, I hope we’re doing the right thing. But you’ll be all right, babe. Don’t worry about the plane. I’ll keep you safe. You just clamp yourself on there like a limpet. Cuddles with mummy, all the way home. Well, temporary home.

*(beat)*

Your job is to keep granny and granddad busy so I don’t have to talk to them. See, your daddy’s—well, he’s not a social man. I even have *one* person over, he hides in the kitchen. On my twenty-fifth I found him hiding in the pantry. “An inventory,” he says. Shy with his own parents. So I do the chat.

*(beat)*

With granddad, just avoid religion. He’s not even a zealot, he’s Episcopalian. The fence-sitters. Transsubstantiation? “Oh, well, we don’t know, wouldn’t like to comment.” Celtic or Rangers? “Oh, we go to Firhill.” And granny likes her baking. If you tell her you walked past a cherry tree when you were twelve, you’ll get cherry buns for the rest of your life.

LINDA (*continued*)

Nice enough people. Can't complain when you get free room and board. I'm just worried that's the idea. You're not Rob Junior. You're Henry. Just . . . let them make a fuss, but don't be shy about where you poo.

*Linda re-wraps the chocolate and puts it in her carry-on bag.*

LINDA

Said I wouldn't just eat my problems. You're not the problem, babe. You were never . . . I mean, all the weight I was carrying around, most of it was padding. You were a wee thing. What we should have done is get daddy to carry around a bowling ball against his tummy, straps over his shoulders. See how he likes having a spine like a fucking question mark.

(*beat*)

I don't think he wants to go home. Even though he calls it "home"—he calls his parents' house "home" sometimes. He wants to go—but he doesn't *need* to. I *need* to see my friends again. I need to make friends with other mums. I need to make jokes about him—and about you. No offence. Not nasty jokes. Nipple-clamp jokes, or jokes about . . . you look like a potato, or how you look all serious in your blue pyjamas, like a junior doctor.

(*beat*)

They say labour's a marathon. Just, it's a marathon you prepare for by having chronic insomnia and cheese with every meal. And it's *longer* than a marathon. *Afterwards* is the marathon. And it's lonely.

(*beat*)

Lonely, and you're surrounded by morons. Old ladies, especially. They always want a kiss. Eight decades' worth of germs and pestilence and they want to kiss my wee boy. Like vampires absorbing youth. And they make faces at you when we're having lunch in the café, and on the bus. God, I'd like to push one of these old biddies off the kurb. Or run them over with a shopping trolley. Dicks.

(*beat*)

Cheese and chips. Cheese and rice. Cheese and curry.

(*beat*)

Thought I could do the whole thing without pain relief. In the pool, like a water birth. But they said my blood pressure was too high. So then I thought: all right, just gas. That got me through the first contractions. Then they told me the contractions weren't really contractions. *Pre-labour*. *Pre-labour!* What the fuck is that? They *never* told me about that.

LINDA (*continued*)

Then the real contractions started, and I said “Right, no more pissing around, just give me a fucking epidural. Now.” But it was like getting served in a restaurant where all the waiters are deaf, and they hate you. Two hours, everybody comes in the room, I’m like, “Are you doing the epidural?” Dinner lady comes in with my lasagne. “Are you doing the epidural?” Rob says I tried to hit someone—I don’t remember that. Hope it wasn’t the dinner lady. Hope it was him, and he’s too polite to say.

(*beat*)

Finally the doctor comes in, all breezy, “And what can we do for you today?” They’re really geniuses. “Epidural? Have you discussed the alternatives? We have this new thing . . .” I’m half-naked, climbing over the back of the bed with the gas mask. The doctor’s giving me terms and conditions between contractions. If I could have punched him, I’d have punched him. They gave me a disclaimer, a laminated thing. I thought: probably take me sixty seconds to read this; so I just stared at it for sixty seconds and then said “Yeah. Still really want the epidural.” Then they did it—and it only worked on one side. So I was un-pain-relieved on the left hand side. God, it was like trying to shit an oil tanker while someone’s stabbing you up the twat with a crow-bar made of solid fuck. It was like the God of periods. You’ll never have to worry about that.

(*beat*)

Men get the fun stuff. What do they have to deal with? Hiding an erection’s probably as tough as it gets, and that only really matters at funerals. We get the cramps and the headaches one week out of four, which is what?—it’s your body telling you “Well, that’s another opportunity missed, another month gone by, down the drain.” Basically, it’s like your mum. And you try and outsmart it by getting an education, then a career, but still, one week out of four your brain gets run over by a fucking eighteen-wheeler full of hormones and estrogen and you get angry and cry and the men just think: “*Women.*”

(*beat*)

So you get knocked-up. Become a mobile incubation unit, then a not-mobile incubation unit, then you get fourteen hours of labour. And fourteen’s the lucky end of the spectrum. My mum says I took forty-seven hours to come out. Probably why she hates me. That’s what it all comes down to, this tidal wave of pain and being stuck in a room, bit of plastic over your tits, a bunch of nurses running around, and Rob being useless, and I might as well just be a body—just a corpse with some electricity shot through it.

LINDA (*continued*)

I thought I'd die, I just had to push you out first. Now I'm the milk dispenser. With occasional daydreams of violence against old ladies. And on a really good day, violence against Rob. Or Rob passing a kidney stone the size of a fist, and me telling him "Push! Push harder!"

(*beat*)

I'm a bit jealous that he saw you first. But you saw *me* first. And not seeing the placenta made up for it. Rob says he'll never eat poached eggs again.

(*beat*)

Basically, all men are cissies. Rob literally can't kill a spider. Combination of being phobic and he can't swing a shoe. The big girl's blouse. He *is* giving up a good job. And I think he liked being the token Scot down here, like it added about fifteen percent manliness. You're my man now. Don't tell Rob. He's still my husband. But you're my man.

(*peers into the pram*)

Don't wake up now. Sleep as long as you want. Wake up for the plane, then sleep again after, you'll think it was all a dream.

*Linda stands, improvises a song as she tours the lounge—*

LINDA (*sings*)

Stay asleep, little one, for mummy's sanity.  
The departure lounge isn't all it's cracked up to be.  
Dream of puppies and milk and . . . teddy bears,  
Ripped open by customs looking for drugs.  
Once we're twenty-thousand feet in the air,  
You'll cry and cry and I'll give you hugs.  
And where we're going, we'll see Highland cows,  
And drunk girls in the street having rows,  
And you'll always say "lochs" and not "lakes,"  
Which rhymes quite nicely with "cheesecakes."

*Rob returns. Linda stops singing, moves back to the sofa—*

ROB

Is he awake?

LINDA

No.

ROB

Were you singing?

LINDA

No. Yes—what’s it to you?

ROB

No, fine. He’s great, isn’t he?

LINDA

Mm?

ROB

He’s brilliant. I was just thinking, he’s brilliant.

LINDA

I don’t know if I’d describe a human being as “brilliant.”

ROB

Well, as opposed to “rubbish.”

LINDA

I don’t know if I’d describe anyone as “rubbish,” either.

ROB

Right, fine. I was just—

LINDA

Sorry. Did you get . . .

ROB

*(distributes bars of chocolate)*

Yeah. And I found that book I was reading—found a copy in the shop, so—

LINDA

Which one, the casino thing?

ROB

Yeah. Turns out I was only five pages from the end. It’s one of those, you think you’ve got another chapter to go but it’s actually the first chapter of the guy’s next book.

LINDA

Used to hate that.

ROB

*Used* to hate . . . ?

LINDA

I don’t have time to read any more, Rob.

ROB

Well, you'll read again. You'll hate shitty publishing again.

LINDA

Yeah.

ROB

Listen, give me a kiss.

LINDA

Why?

ROB

What d'you mean, fucking "why?" Spousal rights. I'm enforcing the romance clause of our marital contract, that's why "give me a kiss".

LINDA

I'm not in the mood.

ROB

It's a kiss.

LINDA

I'm not in the mood.

ROB

It's like a handshake.

LINDA

It's not like a handshake. You didn't kiss anyone at your job interview, and we didn't shake hands at our wedding.

ROB

I kissed the whole interview panel *and* offered them sex.

LINDA

Yeah, with that tie you wore it was probably the only way to show you were taking it seriously.

ROB

The tie was fine, I took out the wee thing that plays the tune.

LINDA

Why d'you want a kiss?

ROB

Look—this is only a step backwards if we make it a step backwards.

LINDA

I don't know. Are you going to be happy?

ROB

Some of the time. Same as here. D'you think he'll be proud of us?

LINDA

Don't know. Probably won't cross his mind.

ROB

Nah.

*(beat)*

Says "go to gate."

LINDA

Right.

*Rob grabs their luggage. Linda pushes the pram towards Rob, who opens the door . . .*

LINDA

Did they get away with it?

ROB

Mm?

LINDA

In your book.

ROB

The casino thing? Nah, last minute betrayal.

LINDA

Could have told you. House always wins.

ROB

Speaking of houses . . .

LINDA

Don't wake the baby.

*. . . and they're gone.*