

I DON'T CARE

by

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CHARACTER

AAMIRA, 16, has the soul and dress sense of someone in their fifties.

SCENE 1

AAMIRA: Every time I see the GP the first thing he says is: "How are you?". It's like they're trying to catch you out. Before you know where you are you've said "I'm very well thank you" and they've got you. Nothing to see here.

I showed him my bruise.

He said "You want to get some arnica cream on that". I said "Don't you want to know how I got it?". I could have cancer. Cancer gives you bruises. Then I told him. I've waited years to say it. My tummy felt all wobbly my knees went to jelly and I did a little fart but I don't think he heard. I said:

"It was my father".

The GP looked at me, you could tell he was shocked. "Oh" he said. Oh indeed. Then he starts fiddling with his computer. Good he's making a note of this.

"Do you want to report domestic abuse?" I want him gone, I've given up my A-Levels because of all of this and I can no longer cope. You lot can have him.

"Oh we can't just take him away" he says.
"It's all police reports, solicitors and the courts, it's a long process".

I told him it's not like that - he's violent because he's got dementia. He doesn't know who I am. He was a gentle man, now he attacks me. The dementia put a different light on it. I said: "He just sits there every day like a bastard." "Like a bastard?"

"You can put that in your notes" I said.

Out comes the checklist.

"Are you his sole carer?" "Yes".

"What about your mother?" "She passed away when I was little".

"Oh. Sorry. Can he dress himself?" "Sort of"

"Make a cup of tea?" "Maybe" "Cook a meal?"
"He could pop in a ready meal I suppose".

"What about the toilet?" "He can go on his own, but you have to go there afterwards and scrape it off the walls".

Then: "We only provide care for end of life patients. Your father could still go on for years." Years?

"Come back if things get worse".

"Get worse? I should be at school and instead I have to watch him like a hawk to make sure he doesn't fall over or set fire to himself, I'm awake all night listening to see if he's still breathing. All the thanks I get is a thump in the face. I've had to resuscitate him in the middle of the night, call ambulances and stand around shivering in my nightie while the doctor comes. My dad hits me. Start whatever wheels rolling that start rolling when this sort of thing happens."

Then a moment. "Oh bollocks." I thought.

"Have you ever thought about being violent towards your father?"

Now I know this game. They lull you into a false sense of security and then WHAM! They report you to Social Services. "No".

"You've never thought about hitting him, even in moments of stress?"

I told him I knew his game. I'll not admit defeat. He sighed. I stood up to leave.

"You're a bastard and you and David Cameron and all his cronies can go swivel" I said, flicking the V sign at him.

Actually I didn't say that. I wish I had of done.

"Aamira, you've never thought about being violent towards your dad?" I don't know why but I sat back down. My knees went funny and I plomped back in the chair.

"Maybe, just sometimes, I think about a quick whack around the back of the head with the frying pan".

And then he nodded and scribbled in his notes.

SCENE 2

AAMIRA:

I thought Maria was Polish, but apparently she's Lithuanian. She turned up at four pm, asked for a cup of tea and the toilet and I said could she tell me who she was first. She laughed and said she was the carer.

I told her he's in the front room. Instead she shuts herself in the downstairs toilet and when I ask her through the door if I can pop out while she's here she laughs - laughs while she's peeing mind, which you'd never get off a Pole and says: "He's got a twenty minute slot and five minutes of that was parking the car, the traffic round here".

She flushes the toilet and comes out, I surreptitiously try to inhale a whiff for suspicious odours. A wee is one thing but if she'd done anything more I'd have grounds for a complaint.

"I'm ten minutes late already, the traffic round here". She spends another minute discussing how she'd like her tea and then five minutes drinking it despite being over time already. "I'll give him a quick wipe down and get him ready for bed".

"It's four o'clock in the afternoon!" But apparently he's on her rota for putting to bed and so if she comes at four, he goes to bed at four.

"Get me a bucket of warm water and a flannel and I'll start him off and you can finish him, OK?" I told her he'd often thump me when I was trying to wash him, he'd think I was a burglar or rapist or maybe Nigel Farage.

"I'll be back tomorrow morning to get him up and dressed" "What time will that be?"

"Any time between five thirty am and eleven

o'clock". Five thirty?

SCENE 3

AAMIRA: Everyone was asleep when Vanessa made her first appearance. She just barged in. "Is he in here?" before merrily letting herself into the front room. The door slammed behind her. I heard her bellow at my dad.

"HELLO MR HOSSEIN HOW ARE YOU I'M THE COMMUNITY MATRON. YOUR DAUGHTER SAID YOU'RE BEING A BIT OF A BASTARD".

I sat and waited, buttocks clenched, dreading the state he'd be in once she'd finished. She eventually comes out, all smiles, and he's all smiles and I ask her when she's coming back.

"Oh I'm not coming back dear". What? Why not? "There's nothing wrong with him."

"He's got dementia, he hits me. I told the GP I need help. He's got multiple organ failure, he's partially sighted - "

"Oh he seemed very jolly to me" she says.

Oh course he would. Of course he would. That's how dementia works. You can hold it together for an hour, then he'll go back to being completely demented again and I'll have to clear up the mess. I show her the bruise. "Look what he's done!"

"Oh have you put arnica cream on that?" and before I reply she's out the door: "If there are any problems see your GP".

SCENE 4

AAMIRA: I heard the bang as he went down. He was on the toilet. I knocked on the door, then banged, then decided to sod the embarrassment and just open it. It only opened an inch. It wouldn't move. I kicked it hard a couple of times before I realised Dad's head was wedging it shut. I couldn't hear him breathing.

OK when this happens on the telly what do they do. They ring an ambulance in a panic and it's

all brilliant and dramatic.

"Can you tell me exactly what's happened?" the bored sounding ambulance control woman says.

I take a moment. I can't think what to say.

What I want to say is: "This is it. This is how he dies. Not even on the toilet like Elvis, but he dies falling off it and now he's stuck behind the door."

I don't say that.

"Is he breathing?"

"Maybe, dunno, he's gurgling."

"Stay on the line with me. The ambulance is on its way."

"How long?"

"Not more than 3 minutes my love."

If the ambulance is coming straight away that means she thinks he's either dead or dying. Usually he's a Red 2 which means cardiac arrest, but by the tone of her voice this is a Red 1. Red 1 is when they stick the sirens on and drive Dukes of Hazard-style across town mowing down pensioners and small children.

She keeps asking can I get to him, is he breathing. No I fucking can't, he's wedged behind a door.

"Is there someone there who could force the door open for you?"

I mull over lobbing the phone out the bathroom window. I don't know any neighbours well enough to ask for help.

Instead I stick the phone on the floor and ignore her. I wiggle my hand round the door, I can feel the top of Dad's head. All I think is: "He hasn't washed his hair in a month, they can't see him in this state".

"Dad, can you hear me? Can you hear me?"

I need you to move a little bit. You're stuck behind the door. Can you just move back a little bit for me?

Dad can you hear me?"

A groan and a gurgle and he rolls onto his back. Result! I wedge open the door a bit more but still not enough.

Only then he starts throwing up, and choking on it. I tell the woman on the phone.

"OK my love you just wait for the ambulance."

I can't wait for the ambulance. He wasn't supposed to die like this. I'm not ready. All I can hear is 'I'm Sorry I Haven't Got a Fucking Clue' blaring out on Radio 4 downstairs and he's gurgling and choking to death.

I'm actually really pissed off.

So I karate kick the door, knocking him enough to get the door wedged open.

"Please don't be a vegetable, please don't be a vegetable."

His head is cut open, blood everywhere. He's gone down like a sack of shit and hit the radiator proper knocking himself out. His face is cut open and his eyeball is all mashed up.

I put him in the recovery position, clear his airways, towel under his head. He starts to try to talk. I say:

"It's OK, keep quiet the doctor is coming"

but he's garbling through blood and vomit and I realise he's telling me off for getting sick on the carpet.

The doorbell goes.

SCENE 5

AAMIRA: When I saw Dad in the Coronary Care Unit he had two tampons shoved up his nose. On closer inspection they were rolls of tissues he'd

shoved up there cos he'd had yet another nose bleed. We'd been warned they were a signs of heart failure but he'd shoo me away whenever I mentioned it.

He was also trying to swing his legs over the bars of his bed.

"The bastards have imprisoned me!" he yelled. He started to try to put on his jumper but couldn't get it over all the ECG leads sticking out of him.

"Is the taxi downstairs?"

"What taxi?"

He's coming home today. Now.

This didn't look right. There was a nurse in the bed next door making a bed. She looked too formidable to approach but Dad was making a Herculean effort at this point to get out of bed.

"I'll be over in a minute yeah!" she cackled, punching a pillow.

Dad was covered in blood and half out of his hospital pyjamas.

Oh god this was so embarrassing.

"I'm really sorry to bother you but..."

There was a thud. She pulled back the curtain between the cubicle and there he was, kneeling on the floor having fallen off the bars of the bed.

She stared down at him.

He stared up at her.

He had the look of a kid caught stealing sweets. With one move she pulled him back into bed, still cackling, and tucked him in.

"He's quite feisty, isn't he?"

Feisty felt like a polite word for something else.

"You was quite feisty last night weren't you Mr Hossein?"

Oh god.

She cackled and puffed up his pillows while my father grimaced.

"Didn't want his oxygen on. Nearly broke my arm didn't ya."

Nearly broke her arm? The nurse was the size of a Vauxhall Corsa. She had a bottom that swung in alternate directions to the rest of her when she sashayed down the corridor and one of those mono-busts that seem to go all the way round. My dad was tiny, shrivelled, less than five foot.

She held out her arm, it had a familiar looking bruise on it.

"At least Security stopped you from doing any real damage" she cackled again, laughing, walking off, her bottom sashaying slowly behind her.

Security?

SCENE 6

AAMIRA: I got the call at 7am on Sunday, the next day.

"I need to know your father's views on dialysis."

What? Who is this?

It was a consultant in Intensive Care. Dad had been shouting all night, his potassium levels were through the roof, his kidneys had almost completely failed, been moved to the ICU and now officially had delirium. Who knew that was an actual thing?

"Without dialysis we're looking at him going tonight, maybe tomorrow."

Going where?

A pause. Then:

Going. Passing over. Passing away. Dying.
Dead. Dying tonight.

I can't make a decision like that. I'm in my
Hello Kitty pyjamas. I've not got any pants
on.

"Dialysis gives him maybe 2 or 3 days more.
Enough time for family to come."

What family? The only family that'll come to
his funeral are the distant cousins who think
they might get a free feed.

All I could think was I wasn't dressed. I'm
having a conversation like this and I'm not
dressed. So I tried to pull my trousers on
over my pyjama bottoms, only the pyjama
bottoms just ended up like a big rubber ring
round my middle.

I tried to get my jumper on. It got stuck over
my fat head and I could hear the consultant on
the phone:

"Hello? Hello? Are you still there?"

I had no option other than to leave the jumper
where it was and shove the receiver up
underneath it.

There were risks with dialysis, they have to
open up his veins so his blood pressure could
drop and it would kill him, and he'd be very
ill for 2 or 3 days after it. Was I OK, I
sounded muffled?

I'd spent my childhood dreaming of the day he
went but somehow, at this point in time, I
wasn't ready for it.

OK I said, strap him up, stick it on, shove it
in. Do what you have to do.

SCENE 7

AAMIRA: An hour later the phone rang. "We need you to
come in immediately."

Oh god the dialysis had killed him.

"Can you talk to your father?"

What? And say what? I've completely run out of small talk.

"It's just, when I tried to put the dialysis line in he punched me. Can you stand with him and talk to him while I do it?"

Is this a joke?

An hour later fresh off the bus I was barrelling into Intensive Care. I had visions of Dante's Hell, dark with bleeping machines, patients on their deathbed, head lolled to one side with their family crying around them like a Renaissance painting.

It weren't like that.

It was huge. Three wards all joined together. It was completely white and silent and was strangely like walking into heaven. Unlike the other ward there wasn't an obvious reception, and every time I moved my trainers squeaked.

The ward sister heard me and shrieked at me to go to the waiting room. She came in with the consultant, locked the door, asked if I knew how ill my dad was. He might stabilise enough to come home, but that was less than 1%. Did the family want to come in to see him?

They gave me a leaflet on the rules for Intensive Care which I mindlessly folded into a paper airplane as they talked.

Was I really sure Dad would want to have dialysis? Absolutely sure?

"I don't want to go to prison if I make the wrong decision."

I caught a glimpse of my reflection in a picture frame. I didn't look 16. I looked about 50.

The consultant kept pressing me for an answer.

"I just, I think, well, please, it would be so much easier if he just slipped away."

"Yeah that's what I would do" said the consultant, shaking my hand before rapidly exiting. Come into the ward to spend time with your Dad when you're ready.

I threw the paper plane with gusto in front of me. It immediately crashed on the floor.

SCENE 8

AMIRA: It was odd seeing Dad in Intensive Care. He was sat up in bed throwing punches at imaginary people. Everyone was poisoning him, he'd outwitted them and now he'd won. Told me he knew I was plotting against him.

Then he stared right through my soul and ripped out my heart - "All the things I did to you I did for your own good".

I grabbed my bag and walked away. Smacked into Dad's nurse.

"Getting some fresh air? Always a good idea" she said.

"I'm so sorry" I replied,

"But he can fuck right off".

And then, because it was three wards rolled into one, I couldn't find my way out, and I couldn't ask one of the patients as they were all unconscious so I had to go back to Dad's nurse.

"Please, how do I get out?"

SCENE 9

AAMIRA: I sat at home and waited for the call to say he'd died and I was going to hell.

It took 24 hours before they finally rang.

I could go and collect him myself or if I was prepared to wait they could deliver him home.

What? I can't have the body at home. He can't be laid out in the front room like you see on the telly. There's no family to come round and weep over him about what a wonderful man he'd

been.

"No my dear, he's being discharged."

It wasn't the consultant who rang. It was an occupational therapist. Dad'd be home by lunchtime. He'd finally been thrown out of Intensive Care and they'd stuck him in a spare bed in a medical ward. How the hell was he well enough to come home? He couldn't get out of bed yesterday.

"He's been up and walking with his walking frame. Went up twenty steps on his own. Heart failure's like that, very unpredictable."

I'd been here before. It's common with dementia and heart failure for people to pull it out of the bag for an hour then they go back to being crap.

"I can only judge him on what I've seen him do today, and he looks perfectly fine to me."

"Who will look after him? He needs 24 hour care."

"We're patient led here so it depends what your Dad feels he needs. He seems perfectly bright to me. Where else would he go?"

"I thought maybe, he could go, I've thought for some time, that a care home might be a better option."

She snorts, properly snorts at me.

"You can't just shove your father in a care home. If you've got anymore problems try seeing your GP."

SCENE 10

AAMIRA:

I finally did it. I didn't want to be one of 'those' people but I did it.

Dad had been home for two days before I cracked and rang Social Services. 'Doreen' she's called. A vision in 1970s polyester. Showed her one of my many bruises, demanded something be done. She inspected it, I waited

for her to note it down on her clipboard but she just said:

"Have you tried arnica for that?"

I said I want him taken in somewhere. I can't cope.

She looked at me, nodding.

"We can get you some respite care" she says, a week, maybe a month. "It's £500 a week though. Per person." Five hundred pounds a week? My dad'll never go for that. He's rather go to the Ritz.

"Most people sell their house" she continued, "but I'd wait for the end of life care before you do that." What?

"That's a thousand a week." We can't sell the house, where will I live?

"Try to keep him at home for as long as possible." Puts down her clipboard. If things get worse try going to my GP.

SCENE 11

AAMIRA:

He didn't know who I was. He was just screaming. It wouldn't stop.

I wait for Maria. As soon as she comes he's fine, cheery, knows his name and what day it is. Except he leaves Radio 4 blaring out. It's so loud yet he can't seem to understand he needs to turn it off. Maria's shouting: "Are you alright, are you peeing OK?" just as the theme tune to the Archers come on. Dum-de-dum-de-dum-de-dum "Bowels alright?" Dum-de-dum-de-dum-dum. He starts to tell a tale about the war, not even one he's fought in, some Spanish thing from years ago. Reckons he's fought all over the globe; if he wasn't for him we'd all be speaking German. Or Spanish. Or Irish if he hadn't single-handedly beaten the potato famine of 1845. She says he's fine and if I really want ask the GP to test his pee for a urine infection.

After she's gone I just calmly walked into the

front room, and pushed his beloved telly on the floor. I'd had enough. I was clutching the frying pan.

I told the ambulance, you'll find him in there, dum-de-dum-de-dum-de-dum.

My tummy goes all squiffy when I think about it. But the solicitor said she is sure the judge will look on the case favourably - "extenuating circumstances" - and she'll say that because of my age, and all the people I asked for help from it can't be considered grievous bodily harm.

We're losing the house, that's up for sale. Not for his end of life care, when push comes to shove you'd be amazed at what they can pull out. He's back in hospital now, they reckon his next stop will be a hospice.

It's the solicitor's fees that have done it. No legal aid. Pay or represent yourself. I said "Sod my inheritance, sell the house and get the best lawyer possible." If I'm going down I'm going down with dignity and grace.

CURTAIN