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Queen of the road

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(Excerpt in English)

"Rebellion, and rebellion alone, is the creator of light" (André Breton)

"We are more possible than you can powerfully imagine" (Slogan of the anti-road movement)

In 1994, London was preparing to start work on the M11 motorway link, part of the ambitious 'Roads for Prosperity' project. After countless social protests involving groups of ecologists, anarchists and counter-culturalists, the Department of Transport met the most unlikely of adversaries: Dolly Watson, the 92-year-old resident of Claremont Road who refused, in every way you could imagine, to leave her home. This is her story and that of the vandals of Claremont Road.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Any events or characters that feel somewhat nonsensical are precisely those inspired by reality, by the exploits of the activists of the NoM11 movement: 'sometimes truth is stranger than fiction.'

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DOLLY: 92 years old. She just wants to live in peace for what remains of her life but suddenly finds herself in the eye of a storm. All she can do is decide whether to grab hold of something or let herself go. The heart of Claremont Road.

JOHN: Late twenties. A bundle of energy, he wants to change his surroundings, society, the world, everything. The lungs of Claremont Road.

SAM: Late twenties. Emma Goldman said: "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution," but she is also quoted as saying "Ask for work; if they don't give you work, ask for bread, and if they don't give you work or bread, take bread." Both quotes represent Sam. The guts of Claremont Road.

OLD MICK: A very old 40. Many's the time he's been knocked down in life. He doesn't ask for help getting up, just not to be knocked down again. Now he has nothing to lose. He is the strategist, the politician. The brains of Claremont Road.

The actors playing JOHN, SAM and OLD MICK will play other roles as and when required - the text will show NAME OF MAIN CHARACTER / NAME OF THE SECONDARY CHARACTER BEING PLAYED AT THIS MOMENT to make directing clearer. If the director sees fit, the actors playing JOHN, SAM and OLD MICK can also play some songs on guitar, bass and drums. If they don't play these instruments very well, so much the better, this is punk. And if anyone doesn't like it, don't worry, like all good punk music, none of our songs will last more than a minute and a half - two minutes. To make the show more appealing to the audience, all the music will be melodic punk / punk rock: fast, entertaining and catchy.

SCENE 0

SAM, or the actress playing her, moves to the centre of the stage like a diva on the dance floor, visibly excited:

SAM

Roll up, roll up! Love, anarchy, revolution, a wild tribe in the Eastend of London, a shedload of characters, the best rave ever, a silver rhinoceros and a whole fucking neighbourhood covered in a fishing net! Are you ready? I can't hear you... I said, are you ready?!

As the audience shouts 'Yes', the actors playing OLD MICK, DOLLY and JOHN appear, warming up on stage. One is stretching, one is skimming through the script, the last one gargling...

SAM

Yeah? Well, we aren't quite ready yet... Stir yer stumps! ¡Hey, Ho, let's go!

SCENE I

JOHN bursts onto the stage.

JOHN

Introduction! Introduction!

On the stage, there is a strange and beautiful chaos: a giant chess board on the floor; a drum kit and an electric guitar; some screens, which will be used fairly often to project footage, a trashed car showing the slogan 'Rust in Peace,' and some filched traffic lights showing very different messages to what we're used to: a red light with the words Go Ahead, or an amber light with a rainbow drawn on it. There is also some graffiti, the words at odds with their rough crudity: Vandals keep out; Claremont Road: Heavenly houses for sale. DOLLY comes to the stage from the stalls. She stands in the centre. She addresses the audience. As she does, OLD MICK, SAM and JOHN bring on other props: on one side a video camera and tripod, and on the other, a table on castors with a relief map on it, somewhere else a surveyor's wheel.

DOLLY

Oh hello, how lovely, hello everyone, I'm delighted you've all come here to XXXX theatre (actress mentions the name of the theatre), especially given this lousy weather / today's news / the terrible traffic (actress mentions the most fitting reference for the day of the show), to see our play, a play that... well, without giving any sp...what's the word?

JOHN
Spoilers!

DOLLY
...it's about the importance of home, it's about a feeling of community, about how it's the connections between people that really make neighbourhoods, cities... It's also about how sometimes we judge with our eyes instead of with our hearts, about how some people I thought were just a bunch of punks turned out to be my blood, about how our family sometimes turns out not to be the one we're born with, but the one we choose...

As DOLLY speaks, JOHN, SAM and OLD MICK listen to her yawning, mucking about. Her final words prompt OLD MICK to stand up, walk slowly towards DOLLY and try to cover her mouth, just as she is getting going with her speech.

OLD MICK
No, no, come on, Dolly, come on... We've talked about this. This ain't your story, Dolly, this ain't your story or mine or Sam's, John's, Moira's, Grace's, Simon's or Emma's story. This goes beyond us, this is bigger than all of us...

OLD MICK drags an indignant DOLLY to one side of the stage. OLD MICK returns to centre stage.

OLD MICK
No, Dolly, this ain't about us. This is about those bloody Non-places...

DOLLY
Huh?

OLD MICK
(In a teacherly fashion) According to Marc Augé, a Non-place is a space without identity, a place where there is nothing or if there is something it's exactly the same as you'd get anywhere else. The kind of space you just pass through, that doesn't have a life of its own.

DOLLY
(Suddenly angry) Claremont Road wasn't a Non-place.

OLD MICK
(Relaxes, his tone changes) Identical shopping centres in Chicago, Valencia, Sao Paulo, Bucharest, Cairo, Sydney... where the same shops with the same teenagers with the same look of wanting to be anywhere but there, folding clothes, sitting at cash registers, arguing about shifts...

DOLLY
Claremont Road wasn't a Non-place!

OLD MICK
The concept of the Non-place emerged a couple of years before this story began, 1992, and it spread very quickly, and, well, why not? We all know what I'm talking about: you don't get village squares

any more, and who really knows their neighbours?

DOLLY

Me! I knew my neighbours! Claremont Road wasn't a Non-place!

OLD MICK

And today, your today, my today, it's all dead spaces, pavements lined with franchises, the gap between motorways.

Places that are there but literally don't exist... As if someone had cut round reality and yanked out a piece of the world.

DOLLY

Claremont Road wasn't a Non-place...

OLD MICK moves over to DOLLY, he hugs her.

OLD MICK

As if someone had taken the most fucked up scissors in the world and cut out the place where Samuel and Dolly had their first kiss, where they first entered their new home, at 452 Claremont Road, as if the smell of Emma Jenkins' pancakes that wafted down the whole bloody street could be cut out of space and time, and be eliminated from memory forever, as if the seesaw where the Jones twins used to play after school, the bench where Lisa Sinclair and James T. Kinley scratched a big L, a big X and a big J and encircled them with a heart, could be erased by putting a fucking roundabout in their place. (He repeats the last bit slowly, knowing how much it hurts:) A fuck-ing round-a-bout.

DOLLY

(On the verge of tears of impotence, no longer shouting, almost murmuring) Claremont Road wasn't a Non...

OLD MICK

No, Claremont Road wasn't a Non-place. We weren't going to let that happen.

DOLLY looks at him affectionately, nods her head. DOLLY and OLD MICK hug.

JOHN

Fuck off, Mick! Non-places my arse, it's just an idea, a concept, and what we're doing ain't theory, it's practice!

JOHN grabs the relief map and gestures to OLD MICK for him to film JOHN with the video camera, OLD MICK reluctantly agrees.

JOHN

This is the story of London in the early '90s. It's the story of how the Iron Lady broke us down, chewed us up, spat us out and hung us out to dry like bangers in a butcher's shop, and it's about how, despite all this, she managed to convince the world that she left the United Kingdom in a state of prosperity... Prosperity... what a fantastic word...

As JOHN speaks, SAM and DOLLY make bored gestures, as though listening to a relative telling the same old anecdotes at every family get-together. OLD MICK makes the same gestures, although he really should be concentrating on positioning the camera. He finally gets it right, so that it catches a bird's eye view of the map JOHN is showing, which appears projected on the screen, an old map of London, with a thousand colours, as if daubed on by a child, each neighbourhood a different colour, each street a different tone...

JOHN

This is the story of the politicians who don't believe in cities, who don't create cities to live in, but cities to move around, cities for sleeping, and above all, cities for consuming. Never, never cities for living. You folk from XXXXXX (mention the city where the play is being performed), you know what I mean, don't you? They believe in money-making machines to attract a false prosperity, bread for today, hunger for tomorrow. This is the story of the Roads for Prosperity project... It's the story of how, to cut six minutes off the journey time into London, they decided to tarmac over our woods, our houses, our lives...

Suddenly, the projected map of London loses its colour, turning to black and white.

JOHN

And this is the story of how we said NO.

SAM, DOLLY AND OLD MICK

NO!

JOHN

It's the story of how we said NO to the M11.

From underneath, JOHN makes a cut in the map just where the motorway would cross it, the map rips in two.

SAM, DOLLY AND OLD MICK

NO!

JOHN

It's the story of how we said NO to them flattening Wanstead Woods.

From underneath, JOHN scrunches up one of the sections of the map.

SAM, DOLLY AND OLD MICK

NO!

JOHN

It's the story of how we said NO to being trampled on, being spat at...

From underneath, JOHN sets fire to the wrinkled side of the map. On the screens, London is burning.

SAM, DOLLY AND OLD MICK
NO!

JOHN

It's the story of Claremont Road and those days when we truly existed. The days when we were more than possible.

JOHN moves away from the map, angry, but gives an order to OLD MICK:

JOHN

Film it!

OLD MICK keeps filming, the map burns on the screens. SAM's turn, she jumps into the ring, furious.

SAM

Seriously, Marc fucking Augé, the Iron Lady and those shitty shopping centres? What the hell do you think these ladies and gents have come here for? A bloody lecture? These people have come to have a good time, they've come to see a sodding punk musical!

SAM walks towards JOHN, furious but grinning from ear to ear, she abruptly thrusts the camera that OLD MICK has just put down at him. JOHN films.

SAM

They've come to see us! Us, not what people say about us! Us, the ones who want to build a city we're proud to call a city, who want life instead of tarmac, who carry no weapons or machines that destroy everything they come across...

SAM grabs the guitar. OLD MICK behind her, sits at the drums, JOHN films, DOLLY is no longer there.

SAM

Us, for fuck's sake, us. Those bastards with their weapons, their diggers and their corrupt laws stuffed in their 600-quid leather wallets... Us! they call us radicals. THEY call US radicals!

The drums start. SAM and OLD MICK start playing guitar and drums. JOHN's recording of it is projected on the screens like an improvised music video.