



Covid **Changes**

a play in one act

by John Hodgart

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COVID CHANGES

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COVID CHANGES
(or Covid Metamorphoses)
A play in one act by John Hodgart

Characters

NORMA Caig, around 40, a nurse and single mum with two children
AILEEN Caig, her daughter, age 14
MALCOLM Caig, her son, age 11
IRENE, their aunt and their mother's older sister
NORRIE Caig, Aileen and Malcolm's dad, an absent father, mid 40s
JACKY and JAMIE, their cousins (Irene's sons) a year or two older
than Malcolm
KATY and ALISON, pals of Aileen's
MR BAIRD and MS HOLMES, social workers
STEW and SADIE McGraw, near neighbours
Two AMBULANCE DRIVERS (non-speaking)

SCENE ONE

The family living room in a council flat in Dalgarnock, Ayrshire.
Early April 2020.

The song 'Change' by Lana del Rey could be played softly as the scene opens but should fade out down when AILEEN finishes phoning. AILEEN is in the hall phoning a pal, with her hand round the mouthpiece. She nods her head, laughs out loud and, after a few more nods, puts the phone down. She then joins her mother, NORMA, in the living room, who, with a cigarette and ashtray in her hand, is watching the news which is all about the pandemic and the lockdown.

AILEEN Mum, can I get a smart phone for ma birthday?
NORMA Ye're smert enough withoot wan, hen,
AILEEN Aw ma pals've got wan an ...
NORMA Ye spend long enough on the phone.
AILEEN But I widnae need tae dae that wi ma ain phone an ...
NORMA The last thing you need is spendin mair time on a phone, Aileen.
AILEEN But I keep missin oot on a lot o things.
NORMA Ye mean missin oot on a lot o stupid blethers.
AILEEN That's no fair. It's no aw stupid.
NORMA Fair or no, I've hardly onythin left at the end o the month.
AILEEN That's whit ye always say when I ask for anythin.

JOHN HODGART

NORMA Ye've nae idea how lucky ye are young lady. Jist leuk at the McGraw weans doon the road, puir shilpit wee souls that need ...

AILEEN But their Ma an Da's alkies.

NORMA Ay, an the social workers are never away fae their door.

AILEEN But we're nuthin like them.

NORMA That's jist whit I'm sayin. They weans are often stervin an there's plenty ither families aboot here survivin on food banks an ...

AILEEN But aw that's nuthin tae dae wi us.

NORMA Is it no? Get real hen, there's folk oot there hungry an you're complainin aboot no haein a smart phone.

AILEEN But it widnae cost aw that much an it wid save on ...

NORMA Mibbie if yer Dad wis a bit mair generous wi his contributions, I could think aboot it.

AILEEN Ye always blame him.

NORMA Naw I don't. I jist cannae afford it, no the noo anyway.

AILEEN Could we no cut back on some things?

NORMA We're already daein that.

AILEEN Whit about ...

NORMA Jist forget it, Aileen.

AILEEN But Mum ...

NORMA Drop it, right now, ma lady!

AILEEN Sorry for askin.

She sits down in a huff and there is a frosty silence as they watch the news.

NEWSREADER The UK coronavirus death toll has now passed 15,000, with a further 737 patients dying in hospital in the last 24 hours after testing positive for Covid-19. Meanwhile nursing homes are struggling to cope and management are warning that they are facing a crisis ...

NORMA No lookin guid at aw.

AILEEN Gettin quite scary.

NORMA Goodness knows whit'll happen.

AILEEN Thousans catchin it an hunners dyin.

NORMA I better try tae get some mair masks.

AILEEN Ye mean for us tae wear in the hoose when you're smokin.

NORMA Is it that bad?

AILEEN Ye should smoke outside an no share yer fume wi us.

NORMA Aw right hen, I get the message.

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She rises and heads slowly for the back door. AILEEN follows her. NORMA opens the door and stands outside, coughing. AILEEN follows her and stands in the doorway.

AILEEN And you're needin tae lose a couple o stane - at least!
NORMA Less o yer cheek. I'm tryin an I'm fed up hearin comments
 about ma weight.
AILEEN Well, mibbie ye're no tryin hard enough.
NORMA You're nippin ma heid, Aileen!
AILEEN Well, ye need tae dae somethin.
NORMA Look, ye've nae idea whit it's like at the hospital jist
 noo. It's pure bedlam. Ye're run aff yer feet an ye're
 tryin tae grab quick snacks when ye can.
AILEEN Ye mean stuffin yer face wi chocolates fae the patients?
NORMA Noo, that's ... that's enough lip fae ye.
AILEEN But ye're needin tae ...
NORMA I'm fed up hearin 'needin taes'!
AILEEN Ye're no makin things any easier for ...
NORMA Listen, Aileen, things huvnae been easy for me the past
 couple o years an it's no easy bringin up two weans on a
 nurse's wage.
AILEEN So ye waste money on fags.
NORMA You're really beginnin tae sound like yer Aunty Irene.
AILEEN At least she disnae smoke.
NORMA Naw, but she's guid at stertin fires.
AILEEN I can sometimes see why Dad left.

NORMA stubs out her cigarette, empties the ashtray into a bin and pushes angrily past AILEEN into the kitchen.

NORMA Naw ye cannae, an ye huvnae a clue whit ye're talkin
 about, so jist zip it!

AILEEN is taken aback at how angry her mother is.

AILEEN Okay, okay, keep the heid ... I've got hamework tae
 feenish.
NORMA An I've got hoosework tae feenish.

AILEEN exits hurriedly. NORMA, still looking very annoyed, is about to close the door when MALCOLM returns home, dumping his ball and bag just inside the door.

MALCOLM Hi Mum. Whit's up?
NORMA Nuthin much. Only ... how was the fitba?
MALCOLM Brilliant. I scored some great goals.
NORMA Ye mibbie shouldna hae been playin at aw.

JOHN HODGART

MALCOLM It wis jist a wee kick-about wi Jacky an Jamie, but it helps keep me in shape for the team.

NORMA Well that's guid that ye're keepin in shape, but noo get yer bag picked up an let me see whit needs washed. An you need washed tae, ya manky wee skanky. *(giving him an affectionate swipe on the back of the head)*

MALCOLM Sorry Mammy. *(picking up his bag)*

NORMA Right, hurry up. Oh for heaven's sake, I forgot.

She fetches a poly bag from the kitchen.

NORMA Auld Tam an Annie have baith got a bad cauld an huvnae been owre the door for nearly a week. I got them a few things at the shops. Jist chap the door an haun them in.

MALCOLM *(hurrying off)* Nae problem.

NORMA Imagine forgettin about Annie's messages. Ma heid's fair spinnin so it is wi the wey things are in the hospital an they're wantin us tae work extra shifts.

She checks his bag and throws some dirty items into the washing machine.

Could dae wi the extra money, but I'm sae tired ... but ay, I need tae cut back on the fags an lose some weight.

MALCOLM *returns.*

NORMA Did ye speak tae them?

MALCOLM Naw, jist shouted in an left the bag ahin the door. Auld Tam shoutit 'awfae guid o ye, son, an thank yer maw'.

NORMA Thanks son. Right noo get yersel washed an then get yer jammies on an I'll make some toast for ye.

MALCOLM Aw thanks, Maw.

NORMA An less o the Maw. Huv ye done yer hamework?

MALCOLM *(shouting back)* Did it aw afore I went oot.

NORMA Imagine forgettin tae take their messages in. Thank guidness I'm aff the morra. Must remember tae try an get some masks.

She opens a loaf of bread and crosses to the toaster. Lights dim.

SCENE TWO

Late April evening 2020.

AILEEN and MALCOLM are sitting in their pyjamas watching the news which is giving the latest Covid figures.

NEWSREADER And in the past 24 hours there have been a further 987 Covid-related deaths reported, taking the total number of deaths in the UK to 35,751. Over the past week an average

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of 885 have died each day and the number of patients in hospital has again risen to ...

AILEEN *turns it down and it continues in the background.*

AILEEN Malcolm, I think it's time you were in yer bed.

MALCOLM I want tae wait till Mammy gets back.

AILEEN She'll be a while yet, for she's gaun tae the supermarket for some messages efter work.

MALCOLM An I want tae hear the rest o the news.

AILEEN I'm pittin it aff.

MALCOLM That's no fair an you're a bossy boots.

AILEEN It's jist aw aboot things gaun fae bad tae worse.

She switches it off.

MALCOLM Pit it back on. *(trying to grab the control, but she holds on to it)*

AILEEN Ye'll hae nightmares if ye watch ony mair o that news aboot folk dyin.

MALCOLM I'm no a baby ony longer, Aileen.

AILEEN Mibbie no, though ye sometimes act like ane.

MALCOLM That's no fair, I don't! *(on the verge of tears)*

AILEEN It's aw bad news. Nae point in watchin it, an anyway ... ye've got some tidyin up tae dae.

MALCOLM I ken, an I'll dae it in a meenit, but I want tae ken whit's happenin.

AILEEN I think naebody kens whit's really happenin.

He sits back down in a huff. Nobody speaks for a few moments.

MALCOLM Dae ye think Mammy could catch it?

AILEEN Well, they're aw wearin masks an protective gear, so that shid help.

MALCOLM Whit if it disnae?

AILEEN Disnae whit?

MALCOLM Disnae help ... disnae work ... tae stop her gettin it *(trying to hold back tears)*.

AILEEN How dae I know? Look, I'm sorry Malky, I didnae mean tae upset ye.

MALCOLM *(blowing his nose and wiping his eyes)* I'm no upset!

AILEEN Look, Mum'll be aw right, sae stop worryin.

MALCOLM Cannae help it, sometimes.

AILEEN Ay, I ken, but worryin disnae help. Look, it's late an time ye were in bed or ye'll no be able tae get up in the mornin.

JOHN HODGART

MALCOLM There's nuthin tae get up for since the schuil shut.
AILEEN Ay, but ye'll need tae log intae yer classwork an fin oot whit ye've tae dae.
MALCOLM I can dae that ony time. Anywey, I'll need tae wait till you're feenished.
AILEEN I keep tellin Mum we need anither computer, but, as usual, she says we cannae afford it.
MALCOLM Mibbie ask Dad?
AILEEN I don't think sae.
MALCOLM When dae ye think Mum'll be back?
AILEEN I dunno. If she'd let me go the messages, she could've been hame by noo.
MALCOLM Mibbie she's scared you wid catch it.
AILEEN It doesnae seem tae affect teenagers as much, leastweys, that's whit they're sayin.

A sudden clatter comes from the front door as if someone has fallen in the door, followed by the dumping of message bags on the floor. They both run to see what is happening.

MALCOLM Mammy, whit's wrang?
NORMA I jist ...*(getting off the floor)* fell owre the step an drapped the bags ... Had tae work a bit late ...*(coughing)* but managed tae get the messages, an some extra stuff in case, but ... *(coughing as she picks some things up.)*... An I got some masks.
AILEEN *(going to help her)* Mammy, ye're aw sweatin. Grab some bags, Malky.

As they both lift bags, their mother is looking a bit dizzy and holding onto the door handle to steady herself.

AILEEN Mammy, are ye okay?
NORMA I'll be aw right in a meenit, hen, wance I get washed an chynge.
AILEEN You get tae yer bed an we'll bring ye some tea an toast.
MALCOLM I'll make toast for everybody. *(exiting to kitchen with some bags)*
NORMA That's awfae guid o ye, son.
AILEEN You go an get yer shower an I'll sort oot the messages.
NORMA Thanks, hen. I'm feelin a wee bit shivery, so bring me some paracetamol tae.

She heads for the bathroom and starts getting ready for bed. AILEEN puts down the heavy bag of shopping she is holding and follows her.

AILEEN Mammy, you don't think it's ...

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NORMA I think I'll be aw right in the mornin, or in a day or twa or ...

AILEEN Gadz, Mum (*holding her nose*) ye're reekin o cigarette smoke.

NORMA Noo, don't go on at me, Aileen. I only had a couple on the wey hame, tae help me calm doon a bit. But, ye better keep back ... jist in case.

AILEEN Whit'll we dae if ...

NORMA It's probably jist a cauld. I'll feel a bit better efter a shower an a few pills. Noo on ye go an let me get washed.

AILEEN hesitates, then moves slowly towards the kitchen with the bag of shopping.

AILEEN Okay, Mum. Wance ye're in bed I'll bring ye yer tea an toast.

NORMA Ay, but lea it at the fit o the bed an tell Malcolm he's no tae come in.

AILEEN Okay, I'll dae that.

NORMA I'll be fine efter a couple o pills an a guid nicht's sleep, hen.

Lights dim.

SCENE THREE

The following morning.

Lights come back up slowly. AILEEN listens at her mother's bedroom door and then looks in as her she struggles to get up, though she manages to sit on the edge of the bed, wheezing and coughing.

AILEEN Mum, ye're lookin terrible.

NORMA Ay, hen, no guid. I'll need ye tae get me some mair pills an somethin tae drink. Ma throat feels lik saun paper.

AILEEN Will I phone the doctor?

NORMA Eh, naw, I'll be okay in a couple o days, but tell Malcolm he's no tae come in. Oh, an bring me a bucket.

AILEEN Whit for?

NORMA Whit dae ye think! Jist get me a bucket fae ablow the sink.

AILEEN exits and MALCOLM peeps round the door.

MALCOLM How ye feelin, Mammy?

NORMA No awfae guid, son. So stey back in case ye catch ma cauld or ... flu.

MALCOLM Are ye suir it's jist a cauld or ...?

NORMA Ay, I think sae, but jist in case ...

JOHN HODGART

AILEEN *returns with a cup of tea, some pills and a bucket which she puts on the floor, but she leaves the pills and tea on a small tray at the foot of the bed.*

AILEEN Here ye are, Mammy. Can ye reach them?

NORMA Ay, but keep back, hen.

Her mother struggles to reach them and nearly slides off the bed. AILEEN moves forward to help her, but her mother immediately puts her hand up to signal her to stop and then struggles on to her side.

NORMA Stey whaur ye are. *(wheezing)* Gie me time. I'll manage.

AILEEN Mum, I need to phone the doctor.

NORMA Phone the Covid helpline. The nummer is jist 111.

AILEEN I'm gonnae ring it right noo.

NORMA Ay, dae that hen ... *(AILEEN exits)* but they'll jist tell ye whit I ken onyway.

She sits on the edge of her bed, takes two paracetamol, drinks some tea and lies back down. MALCOLM looks round the door, then turns to AILEEN who is on the phone in the hall.

MALCOLM Dae ye think she's got Covid?

AILEEN Shoosht. I'm listenin. Go an sit doon.

He moves to the window and looks out at the sun beaming in the window. After a short pause, the lights dim and he turns away to look at a picture of himself as a toddler with his sister and their parents. The lights slowly come back up. AILEEN and MALCOLM are sitting in the living room eating toast.

AILEEN She's slept maist o the day, but her breathin is awfae wheezy.

MALCOLM An if she's no ony better in the mornin?

AILEEN They said it could take owre a week tae run its course, but if she's worse I'm gonnae phone again.

MALCOLM An if she ends up in hospital?

AILEEN Jist hope she disnae.

MALCOLM An if she does, whit'll happen?

AILEEN She'll get better. Maist folk dae.

MALCOLM But plenty don't. An whit wid happen tae us?

AILEEN Dae ye mean if we get it?

MALCOLM Ay, but no jist that. I mean ... whit'll we dae? Who'll look efter us?

AILEEN I will. I mean we don't need onybody. We'll look efter oorsels.

MALCOLM Should we no phone Dad?

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AILEEN Naw, no a guid idea.

MALCOLM Can we ... I mean are we allowed tae stey on oor ain?

AILEEN Who's gonnae stop us in a pandemic? No even Auntie Irene, though she'll no be slow tae tell us whit we should dae.

MALCOLM Ay, for she hardly ever stops talkin.

AILEEN Funny how Uncle Andy is the exact opposite. But he jist worships Aunty Irene.

MALCOLM An he always agrees wi her.

AILEEN He widnae dare disagree!

MALCOLM Probably cannae get a word in. A bit like me, sometimes.

AILEEN Meanin whit, exactly?

MALCOLM Oh, nuthin. I usually agree wi you, Aileen, but I want tae watch the news.

AILEEN It'll jist be mair o the same or worse.

MALCOLM switches on the TV and sits down to watch it. AILEEN sits beside him.

NEWSREADER Geriatric wards in the Queen Elizabeth have now been completely filled with Covid patients and staff are struggling to cope, while several other hospitals are reporting a similar situation with the number staff off work with the virus also increasing. Meanwhile, the number of deaths in nursing homes continues to rise sharply across the UK and here are the latest figures ...

MALCOLM Pit it aff, please, Aileen.

AILEEN That sounds like a guid idea.

She switches it off and the lights dim.

SCENE FOUR

A few days later.

A flashing blue light fills the stage as an ambulance is at the door and NORMA is being carried out on a stretcher by two ambulance drivers wearing masks. MALCOLM and AILEEN are standing in the hall with masks on, looking very worried. Their mother manages to raise an arm and mutter a few words before being carried away.

NORMA No tae worry ... be hame soon ... help each ither ... Irene'll...

AILEEN Don't worry. I'll look efter everythin. Jist you get better, Mum.

MALCOLM Please get better soon, Mammy. Please (*trying very hard not to cry*).

JOHN HODGART

They move towards the door. AILEEN puts her arm round MALCOLM's shoulder as they watch the doors of the ambulance being closed. Their Aunt IRENE is outside speaking to the ambulance crew and when it drives off she comes to stand at the door wearing a mask. The children move back a bit.

IRENE Jeez oh, she's lookin awfu. An I thought she wis getting better?

AILEEN Well that's whit she said tae tell ye.

IRENE Typical o yer Mammy.

MALCOLM Dae ye think she'll get better, Auntie Irene?

IRENE Of course she will, son. She's made o hardy stuff, yer Mammy, an she'll come through it.

AILEEN Let's hope sae, but whit if ...

IRENE Look, hen, she's had tae deal wi worse afore noo, whit wi yer Dad an aw his cairry on, but onywey, dae ye need onythin? Hae yous got enough food in the hoose?

AILEEN Ay, Mum's been buildin up a wee store an we'll manage till next week.

IRENE I'll leuk in as often as I can tae see ye're aw richt.

MALCOLM Can we no come an stey wi ye, Aunty Irene?

IRENE Sorry, son, ye'll huvtae isolate for aboot ten days an I huvnae got a lot o room as ye ken, though I suppose we could clear oot the wee back room if we need tae or the boys could aw double up.

AILEEN Naw, we'll manage thanks. We'll be aw right an I'll go for the messages next week. I've got Mum's purse an I can yaise her caird.

MALCOLM Should we no tell Dad? Mibbie he'll come doon.

AILEEN He'll be too busy workin, as usual. We don't need his help.

IRENE Quite right, hen. I ken how ye feel aboot him ... He let you an yer mammy doon big time.

MALCOLM He's still oor Dad, but.

IRENE An he sometimes forgets that, especially when it comes tae money.

MALCOLM He never forgets oor birthdays an he's promised tae come an see me playin fitbaw some Setturday ... soon.

IRENE Ay, he's fu o promises, but short on the delivery, an yer Uncle Andy agrees wi me aboot that.

AILEEN We can manage withoot his help, or onybody else's.

IRENE I'm sure ye can, hen, but if ye're worried aboot onythin, jist lift the phone.

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AILEEN Ay, I will.

IRENE An don't be botherim the MacDinnels next door, for auld Mrs Mac isnae keepin aw that weel an ye widnae want tae cairry onythin tae her.

AILEEN We'll be aw right. Sure we will, Malky?

MALCOLM Eh, ay, I think sae, but I wish I could go oot tae play at fitbaw.

IRENE Ay, Jackie an Jamie feel exactly the same, son. Like a pair o caged tiger cubs.

AILEEN Ye've got plenty o hamework tae catch up on an yer room tae tidy up.

IRENE Onywey, I'll need tae get gaun, for I've got messages tae get, ironin tae dae, the tea tae make, an umpteen ither things afore I get tae ma bed. Phone me if ye need me.

She hurries off and the children wave to her, then close the door. They remove their masks.

MALCOLM Aileen, whit if we cannae manage?

AILEEN We'll manage. We've got tae manage an we've got tae keep the hoose really clean an tidy. Sae nae messin things up. Ye hear me?

MALCOLM I willnae, but ... whit if wan o us gets the virus?

AILEEN We'll be okay, if we keep washin oor hauns, wipin everythin an ...

MALCOLM But we could've already got it fae Mammy.

AILEEN I don't think sae, for we've kept as faur awa fae her as we could.

MALCOLM But whit if you catch it?

AILEEN I'd get better quick.

MALCOLM But whit wid happen tae me?

AILEEN You'd huvtae look efter me. But young folk don't seem tae get it.

MALCOLM I think we should phone Dad an ask him if ...

AILEEN Naw, no yet. Well, mibbie next week.

MALCOLM How no the noo?

AILEEN We better wait an see how Mum gets on.

MALCOLM But we need tae tell him she's in the hospital.

AILEEN I suppose we could lea a message.

MALCOLM Then we'll phone him?

AILEEN Ay, okay, but no the noo. I really need tae phone ma pals.

She lifts the phone as the lights dim.

SCENE FIVE

Three weeks later. Late May.

AILEEN and MALCOLM are walking in the public park. MALCOLM is carrying a football. Sound of a blackbird singing.

AILEEN Great tae be oot walkin in the sun, eh Malkie.

MALCOLM Ay, brilliant, but the grass is awfae long. They're needin tae cut it.

AILEEN But leuk at aw the wild flooers growin in it. It's kinna lik a magic carpet.

MALCOLM Ay, so it is. A magic carpet tae zoom awa on.

AILEEN Whaur tae?

MALCOLM I dunno, but I wish we'd a magic wand tae make Mammy better.

AILEEN She'll get better – soon.

MALCOLM Ay, but she's still strugglin isn't she?

AILEEN Ay, though at least she's no ony worse.

MALCOLM But still no ony better.

AILEEN Well, she's still alive an fightin the virus.

MALCOLM Ay, she's still fightin. That's guid.

AILEEN It is. But, stop worryin, at least for a wee while, an let's jist enjoy bein oot here.

MALCOLM Dad said he'd try tae come doon an see us at the weekend.

AILEEN We'll see if he turns up or gies us mair excuses. Hey, there's ma pals, Katy an Ally.

She hurries across to chat to her friends, though they keep a safe distance from each other. MALCOLM moves away to kick his ball around.

AILEEN Hi Katy. Hi Ally. Great tae see yous again.

ALISON Hi Aileen. Guid tae see you tae.

KATY Hi Aileen. How ye doin?

AILEEN Survivin. No easy, is it?

ALISON Naw, kinna like bein in the jyle at hame.

KATY It's nearly two months since we last saw ye.

AILEEN Ay, but it feels like two years.

KATY How's yer ma doin?

AILEEN Still in intensive care.

ALISON So, still no ony better?

AILEEN Naw, well ay. A ventilator helps her lungs tae work an keeps her breathin.

KATY That's guid. Hope she's better soon. I'm sure she will.

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ALISON A man across the road fae us died in Crosshoose Hospital last week. He wis only about fifty, but a heavy smoker an built like a hippo.

KATY That's no a nice thing tae say about onybody.

ALISON Naw, but it's true.

AILEEN Ma Mum smokes tae, but she wis tryin tae stop.

ALISON Smokin definitely disnae help if ye get Covid.

AILEEN I ken an I kept tellin her that. An she's overweight.

ALISON Ay, that disnae help either.

KATY Ma Granny died in a nursing home wi it last month.

AILEEN Oh, sorry tae hear that. Ye didnae tell me.

KATY Sorry, I didnae want tae tell ye, wi yer Ma gaun intae hospital an that, but ma Gran wis quite auld. Sixty five.

ALISON That's no really auld, but an awfae lot o auld folk are dyin in they places.

KATY I think they've jist been shovin them in there an leain them tae die.

AILEEN But I suppose they had tae get them oot the hospitals.

ALISON Some homes must be like a wan wey ticket tae the crematorium.

AILEEN No mony folk get a return ticket tae a crematorium.

ALISON *(laughing)* Aw, that's a guid ane, Aileen. A return ticket tae the cremmy ...

KATY For guidness sake! That's no funny.

ALISON Twa auld sisters, baith really close, died in the same home last week.

AILEEN That's really sad. Sisters dyin in a home like that.

ALISON They were inseparable aw their lives an they were still thegither when they died.

KATY That's kinda nice in a wey.

ALISON Ay. They were Siamese twins!

They all laugh, but then look at each other guiltily.

KATY You can be awfae cruel at times, Ally.

ALISON Jist tryin tae make yous laugh.

KATY Ay, I suppose we huvnae had much tae laugh about. There's even young folk been dyin wi it noo.

ALISON Ay, an that's no funny.

AILEEN We huvnae seen each ither for ages an here we are talkin about Covid an folk dyin.

KATY Hard no tae, but we're a sad bunch right enough.

ALISON For God's sake, cheer up an let's talk about somethin else.

JOHN HODGART

KATY Ay, like Ally's new boyfriend, or at least the wan she's never aff the phone tae.

ALISON Well, nae wunner, when I huvnae seen him for ages.

KATY Whit wid we dae if we couldnae phone each ither, eh?

AILEEN Ay, true, but it's no the same as meetin up, an actually seein folk, is it?

Their conversation is interrupted by an argument between MALCOLM and two other boys over football. AILEEN goes over to see what is going on and discovers her two young cousins, JACKY and JAMIE involved in a row with MALCOLM.

JACKY Ye better shut it Malky, or ye'll get a gubbin.

MALCOLM Jist cause I can beat baith o yous at fitbaw?

JAMIE Naw ye cannae ya wee bawheid. An ye support a diddy team. Ayr United!

MALCOLM They're no a diddy team an ma Dad comes fae Ayr.

They quieten down when AILEEN approaches.

AILEEN Whit's gaun on here? Whit's aw the argy-bargyin aboot?

MALCOLM They stertit it?

JAMIE Naw we didnae.

JACKY Thinks he's Lionel Messi.

JAMIE Ye're nae Messi, but ye might end up aw messy, if ye don't ...

AILEEN Jist zip it baith o ye. Ye shid be ashamed o yersels, pickin on yer wee cousin.

JAMIE We werenae pickin on him. Jist windin him up.

JACKY Thinks he's cool, but he's a wee mammy's boy.

AILEEN That's enough fae you, Jacky. Jist shut it!

ALISON and KATY join them.

KATY Needin ony help, Aileen?

AILEEN Naw, it's aw right. They're jist leavin.

ALISON Gaun, beat it afore we sort ye oot.

The cousins move off, but turn back to make some cheeky comments before running off.

JACKY Needin lassies tae fight yer battles, eh?

JAMIE Try askin yer Daddy tae help ye next time. When ye see him again that is!

MALCOLM picks up his ball looking angry and upset.

AILEEN Shut yer gubs the pair o ye, or I'll come owre an skelp yer jaws!

COVID CHANGES

ALISON Imagin pickin on their wee cousin an his Mammy fightin for her life in the hospital.

MALCOLM is now in tears and AILEEN is not looking too happy either.

KATY Eh, but, don't worry, son. She'll get better.

She goes over and puts her hand on his shoulder. ALISON puts her arm round AILEEN.

ALISON Sorry, Aileen. Shoudnae've said that.

AILEEN It's aw right, but I think we better get up the road.

The blackbird is now singing directly overhead.

KATY Ay, okay, but hey, listen tae that blackie.

ALISON Ay, right up on the tap branch.

KATY Bet he's no bothert wi Covid.

ALISON Doesnae sound as if he's bothert aboot onythin.

KATY Wish I had wings tae flee awa somewhaur.

AILEEN Well I think we better flee awa hame. Mibbie chat tae ye later on.

KATY Ay, keep in touch.

ALISON An if ye get ony mair bother fae they twa tubes, jist let us ken, Malky, an we'll gie them a bunch o fives an I don't mean five-a- sides.

AILEEN Thanks, but I can manage that. Bye the noo.

KATY / ALISON Bye. See ye. Hope yer Mammy's better soon.

Sound of a blackbird singing as they all exit. Lights slowly fade.

SCENE SIX

A week later.

Lights come back up quickly. AILEEN and MALCOLM are in the kitchen clearing up after tea. Aileen starts washing the dishes and Malcolm dries them.

MALCOLM Aileen, dae ye think she's gonnae get better?

AILEEN Could be a wee while yet. Mibbie if she wisnae a smoker ...

MALCOLM Ye mean she might no make it?

AILEEN I dunno.

MALCOLM Whit dae ye mean ye don't know?

AILEEN I mean ... she's been in intensive care a while ...

MALCOLM But she's still breathin an still conscious.

JOHN HODGART

AILEEN Sometimes. Sometimes she's no. An she might no be strong enough tae ..

MALCOLM *is struggling to hold back the tears and holds the dishtowel up to his face to hide it. AILEEN puts her hand on his shoulder and gives him a gentle shove.*

AILEEN Stop yer snotterin intae the dish towel ye were minger ye!

MALCOLM *is half laughing and half crying as he takes the dishcloth away from his face.*

AILEEN If Mammy saw ye daein that she wid go mental. An we've got tae keep the place spotless for when she gets hame.

MALCOLM Ye mean ye think she'll get hame.

AILEEN Of course I dae.

MALCOLM I jist hope it's soon.

AILEEN Ay, so dae I, but sorry I shoudnae hae said whit I did *(putting an arm round him)*.

MALCOLM But if she disnae get better, whit'll happen tae us?

AILEEN We'll jist huvtae wait an see. Mibbie ...

MALCOLM I'm no wantin tae go an stey wi Aunty Irene noo.

AILEEN Because o whit happened in the park?

MALCOLM No jist that.

AILEEN Ye need tae learn tae staun up tae smert erses an bullies, Malky. Jist laugh at them an show ye're smerter than they are. Ye're definitely a lot better at fitbaw than they are *(ruffling his hair)*.

MALCOLM Mibbie that's whit they sometimes don't like about me.

AILEEN Could be, but they're baith needin taught a few lessons an I'm no meanin fitbaw lessons.

MALCOLM I think we should ask oor Dad tae come doon or ask if we can go an stey wi him, at least for ...

AILEEN *(putting dishes in a cupboard)* He's actually already offert.

MALCOLM Whit? Why did ye no tell me?

AILEEN Sorry I didnae think it wis a guid idea, especially him comin tae stey here.

MALCOLM But ye should've tellt me. That's no fair.

AILEEN Sorry. I should've, but I'm no sure how we'd get on if he steyed here or if we went tae stey wi him an Jill.

MALCOLM We could at least try it.

AILEEN A weekend might be okay, but I don't think they'd want us steyin, like long term.

MALCOLM Jill seems nice.

COVID CHANGES

AILEEN *(wiping the table)* Ay, mibbie too nice, but ... I dunno. Jist somethin about her I don't like. I'm no sure that ... that I wid trust her.

MALCOLM Whit dae ye mean?

AILEEN I think she's mibbie too pleased wi herself an she widnae really care about us, if Mum disnae ...

MALCOLM So if we don't stey wi Aunty Irene or oor Dad, whaur wid we go, if Mammy disnae make it?

AILEEN We'll worry about that if it ever happens.

MALCOLM Aileen, I think we should try steyin wi Dad.

The doorbell rings.

AILEEN Aunty Irene has offert tae take us if the worst happens. She's wantin us tae come an stey for the weekend tae see how we aw get on. That'll be her noo.

MALCOLM Aileen, I don't think I really want tae stey wi them.

AILEEN That's fine by me, pal.

MALCOLM stays in the kitchen but AILEEN hurries to the door and when she opens it, IRENE stands there wearing a mask.

IRENE Is yer bell no workin? The door wis locked an I rang for ages. An the McGraws bawlin an cursin ane anither oot on the street. Alky bams the pair o them.

AILEEN Ay, an it's a shame for their weans, but sorry, we were in the kitchen.

IRENE *(speaking quietly as she comes in)* An I've jist seen a nurse leein the MacDinnels. Auld Mrs Mac has Covid, an they say ...

AILEEN Oh, that's terrible. She's quite auld an ...

IRENE Auld Tam has been strugglin tae leuk efter her, but she disnae want tae go tae the hospital.

AILEEN That's daft, but I can unnerstaun how ...

MALCOLM appears.

MALCOLM Whit's daft?

AILEEN Nuthin really, jist tellin Auntie Irene we're okay.

IRENE Onywey, hen, Uncle Andy's cleared oot the wee room an pit a fold-doon bed in it for ye, an we've got a mattress for Malky tae sleep in the boys' room.

AILEEN Thanks Aunty Irene, but I don't think we need tae.

IRENE Whit dae ye mean? We'll need tae try this, jist in case ye need ...

AILEEN It's an awfu lot o hassle for ye.

IRENE I'll manage. An we'll mibbie aw huvtae manage.

JOHN HODGART

AILEEN But you've got enough on yer hauns.

IRENE Ye're ma sister's weans an it's the least I can dae. An Uncle Andy agrees wi me.

MALCOLM Oor Dad says we can come an stey wi him, at least for a weekend, or he'll mibbie come here for a wee while tae see whit ...

IRENE Ye must be jokin, son.

AILEEN He's no. I spoke tae him on the phone the ither day an he's happy tae try that.

IRENE Weel he's never seemed aw that happy tae help yous or yer mammy up tae noo,

AILEEN In fact he's really keen on the idea.

IRENE Oh, is he noo? Well he's never been aw that keen on seein ye regularly since he ran awa wi that wee ...

AILEEN Jill's actually quite nice.

IRENE Ay, I bet she is when they take ye oot for the day, wance in a while an spyle yous rotten.

MALCOLM We've always had a guid time wi them.

IRENE Ay, son, but yer mammy didnae hae a guid time when yer faither left you an yer sister for that wee flirt.

AILEEN Mibbie it wisnae aw his fault.

IRENE Ye dinnae ken yer faither as I ken him. The fact is he left yous aw for a wee ... tart.

AILEEN You're bein a bit unfair tae him ... an her.

IRENE A bit unfair? Unfair is whit he did tae you an yer mither. Totally unforgivable an how you can staun there an stick up for him, when ...

AILEEN I'm no, but ...

IRENE When yer mammy is lyin in hospital ... is jist ... words fail me.

AILEEN I'm no defendin whit he did. It jist might be okay tae stey wi him for a weekend.

IRENE Ay, much nicer than styin in a cramped hoose wi us. I ken whit ye mean, but I better no say ony mair.

AILEEN That's mibbie a guid idea.

IRENE Ya cheeky wee besom ye! Richt, I'm gaun hame. Ye ken whaur I stey. Phone me if ye chynge yer mind ... or if ye get ony bother fae the McGraws.

IRENE *marches out the door with steam coming out her ears.*

MALCOLM Ye've really upset her, Aileen. Mibbie we're bein stupid about this.

AILEEN Ay, but I jist wish she'd haud her tongue about some things.

COVID CHANGES

MALCOLM She's jist tryin tae help us.
AILEEN I ken an she's helped us faur mair than oor Dad ever has.
But it wid drive us up the waa styin wi her.
MALCOLM Uncle Andy's aw right, but it wid drive me up the waa
styin wi Jake an Jamie.
AILEEN But we might huvtae, at least for a wee while.
MALCOLM I think we shid go an stey wi Dad.
AILEEN Mibbie, but I think we'll jist wait anither week or so
till we see whit happens.
MALCOLM Ay, okay. We'll manage an I promise no tae blaw snotters
in the dishtowel again!

AILEEN *skelps MALCOLM on the back of his head affectionately.*

AILEEN Right, come on, we've got hooverin an dustin tae dae. Your
turn tae hoover.
MALCOLM That's no fair. I did it last time.
AILEEN Naw ye didnae an stop moanin ya wee snotter!

AILEEN *makes to skelp him again, but he ducks and they exit
laughing.*

Lights dim.

SCENE SEVEN

Two weeks later.

*Lights up quickly. AILEEN is on the hall phone and MALCOLM is
standing listening. They are both in their pyjamas.*

AILEEN So, she's now breathing on her own ... most of the time.
Moving to a ward tomorrow did you say? ... Yes, right,
that's great ... and thanks, thanks so much.
MALCOLM She's getting better? Gettin hame?
AILEEN Ay an naw, no quite, but she's aff the ventilator an ... I
think she's owre the worst.
MALCOLM Aw, that's brilliant, Aileen.
AILEEN Ay, it is that, pal. Best news for ages, but remember
she's no oot o danger an ...

AILEEN *starts bubbling and she wraps her arms tightly round
MALCOLM's neck. Eventually he manages to squirm free.*

MALCOLM Whit ye greetin for? That's brilliant news, an ye're
nearly choking me, ya big daftie!
AILEEN Sorry, wee man. I couldnae help masel. Been savin that up
for a while.
MALCOLM It's aw right. I don't really mind. I still like a cuddle
fae ma big sister, wance in a while.

JOHN HODGART

AILEEN I'm awfae gled tae hear that. Come on, let's feenish oor breakfast. I'll pit some mair toast on.

They go into the kitchen to finish their breakfast and are happily munching toast when there is a sudden banging and shouting at the front door. They run to the window.

MALCOLM It's Stew McGraw.

AILEEN Oh naw, this could mean trouble.

MALCOLM I think he's hurt himsel.

STEW Gonnae open yer door. I need yer help, Norma. (*wailing like a wounded animal*) ... fell doon the stair an cut ma effin lug!

AILEEN She's no in ... she's in ... at work. She'll no be back ... for a while.

STEW When will she be back?

AILEEN She's ... on a double shift an ...

STEW But I'm needin help, noo ...

AILEEN Ye better go doon tae the surgery or tae A&E at the hospital.

STEW I cannae ... widnae see me ... nae money tae get there.

AILEEN Can ye no get somebody tae take ye?

STEW Naw.

AILEEN Sorry, I cannae help ye.

STEW Ay, naebody wants tae helps us. An see doctors an nurses ... never effin there when ye need them nooadays.

AILEEN Ye better go an get ...

STEW Naebody cares about us. I could bleed tae daith an naebody wid even notice.

AILEEN Clean it wi disinfectant an stick a plaster on it.

STEW Huvnae got ony.

AILEEN Haud on a meenit.

AILEEN hurries off and returns shortly after with a small plastic bag containing a few dressings and some balls of cotton wool.

MALCOLM looks very alarmed at what she is doing.

MALCOLM Aileen, ye cannae ... he could be drunk an ...

AILEEN It'll help tae get rid o him.

AILEEN opens the door slightly.

AILEEN Staun back fae the door.

AILEEN peeps out and quickly puts the bag on the doorstep.

AILEEN Clean it wi some disinfect or alco ... naw, better wi disinfect, an haud the cotton wool on it till it stops bleedin an then pit a plaster on it.

COVID CHANGES

STEW Eh, ay, okay, hen. Ta. Eh, tell yer mammy ...

AILEEN closes the door quickly and MALCOLM looks out the window anxiously as Stew slowly walks away.

MALCOLM I think that's duin the trick. He's awa.

AILEEN Thank God for that.

MALCOLM Whit a bampot!

AILEEN Ay, but kinna helpless tae, tho he disnae help himsel.

MALCOLM Widnae like tae hae him for a dad.

AILEEN Must be a nightmare for their weans.

They move back to the kitchen and AILEEN turns on the radio, but when the latest Covid news comes on she switches stations to some pop music. They resume their breakfast as the doorbell rings several times. They eventually hear it.

AILEEN I hope that's no him back.

MALCOLM runs to the window and looks out.

MALCOLM It's a man an a wumman.

AILEEN goes to the door, opens it and finds a man and woman standing there holding up badges. MALCOLM stands behind AILEEN.

MR BAIRD Hello. Miss Caig?

AILEEN Ay, but who wants tae know?

MR BAIRD I'm Mr Baird from Social Services and this is my colleague, Ms Holmes.

MS HOLMES Can we come in for a minute?

AILEEN looks closely at his badge.

AILEEN Mibbie I should phone up first tae check who ye are?

MS HOLMES If you like, but I can assure we're well known about here and we're on our way to visit a neighbouring family.

AILEEN Oh ay, I see. But whit is this about?

MR BAIRD Just checking to see if you're ok.

MALCOLM He wisnae really botherin us.

MS HOLMES That's good, but can we come in for a minute or two? Just into the hall.

AILEEN Aw right, but we're still in oor pyjamas. We slept in an then I wis on the phone for a while.

They move further back and the social workers follow them.

MS HOLMES On your mobile to your friends, eh?

AILEEN I huvnae got a mobile an I wis phonin the hospital tae fin oot about oor Mammy.

MR BAIRD Ah well, that's why we're ... How is she?

JOHN HODGART

AILEEN A bit better thanks. She's aff the ventilator.
MR BAIRD Ah, that's good.
AILEEN But she's still quite ill.
MS HOLMES And that's really why we're here, to see what we can do.
AILEEN We? Dae about whit? You're no nurses or doctors.
MS HOLMES Of course not and I didn't mean medical help, but in case you need help, or support. If your mother is in hospital long term and you are both under sixteen, you might need ...
AILEEN I'll be sixteen afore the end o the year.
MR BAIRD That's fine, but in the meantime ...
MALCOLM We're managin okay, Mr Baird, an ma big sister runs the hoose like a charge nurse.
AILEEN Thanks very much, Malky.
MS HOLMES Well I can see you are both very independent and sensible ... and the house is very clean and ... but all the same ...
AILEEN We're managing just fine.
MR BAIRD We can see that, but we're here to help if your mother ...
AILEEN Thanks aw the same, but oor aunt is jist a mile doon the road an she keeps an eye on us, an oor Dad is comin tae take us up tae his place the morra.
MS HOLMES Oh well, that's good, but ... is your father really ...
MALCOLM Ay, he's really oor Dad. Naebody else's.
MS HOLMES I didn't mean that, but is he actively involved?
AILEEN Oh ay, he's comin doon the morra, as I said.
MR BAIRD You're quite sure?
BOTH Ay, oh ay. Yes, definitely.
MS HOLMES Right, I'll leave this card with our number and you can phone us or leave a message if you need any help.
AILEEN That's very kind of you, but it's Stew doon the road that's needin yer help. He's had an accident.
MR BAIRD Oh, thanks for letting us know. We'd better go over. Right, we'll leave you in peace, but remember, any problems, just give us a ring.
MS HOLMES Nice to meet you both. Bye for now.
AILEEN *and MALCOLM see them to the door.*
AILEEN Bye, an thanks.
MALCOLM Thanks very much.
AILEEN Cheerio! Have a nice day!

As soon as the door is closed, MALCOLM turns to AILEEN, laughing.

COVID CHANGES

MALCOLM You didnae hauf tell some porky pies there. Sixteen afore the end o the year! An ye're no even fifteen yet!

AILEEN No be long though, an I didnae say whit year I'd be sixteen. Jist a wee bit o exaggeration.

MALCOLM Ay, an Dad's no really comin doon the morra, is he?

AILEEN Naw, but soon, an by the way I'm no really like a charge nurse, am I?

MALCOLM Naw, jist noo an again, but a guid sister maist o the time.

AILEEN Thanks Malky. Ye're ma bestest pal, maist o the time!

MALCOLM Wunner who sent them?

AILEEN Mibbie Aunty Irene?

MALCOLM Could they pit us in a home?

AILEEN Naw, don't be daft.

MALCOLM Well, her name is Ms Homes!

They both laugh as they head back to the kitchen and the lights dim.

SCENE EIGHT

A week later.

AILEEN and MALCOLM are walking up to their front door carrying bags of messages, just as IRENE arrives from the opposite direction also carrying some shopping.

IRENE Jist on ma wey back fae the shops. I've got a few things for ye.

AILEEN Oh, thanks very much, Aunty Irene, but we've got aw we need.

IRENE Jist some things tae stick in the fridge, hen, an a chocolate cake.

MALCOLM Aw thanks Aunt Irene. That's brilliant.

IRENE I kent ye widnae say naw tae that, son. Sorry tae hear yer Mammy's no sae guid again.

AILEEN She's had a few ups an doons in the last week.

IRENE Ay, she's mibbie still got a long wey tae go.
Here, better take the messages in.

They carry the bags of messages into the kitchen and start to empty them on the table.

IRENE Nae mair bother fae Stew McGraw?

AILEEN Naw, an I huvnae heard ony battles recently.

MALCOLM Thanks for the cake an the ither things, Auntie Irene.

JOHN HODGART

IRENE Jist tryin tae dae whit I can tae help.

AILEEN I know that Aunty Irene, but we didnae need social workers at oor door.

IRENE Social workers? When wis this?

MALCOLM Last Friday.

AILEEN An ye had nuthin tae dae wi that?

IRENE Of course no, hen. For guidness sake, whit dae ye think I am?

AILEEN I wunner who sent them then?

IRENE Could've been onybody. Plenty o folk ken yer Mammy's in the hospital. Or mibbie they jist saw Stew at yer door.

AILEEN Ay, probably.

IRENE Whit did they say tae ye?

AILEEN Nuthin much. Really jist checkin we were okay.

MALCOLM Och, they were aw right, but we tellt them we're no needin help.

IRENE Dae ye no think ye should come doon an stey wi me jist in case?

AILEEN In case o whit?

IRENE Jist for a wee while, especially if things get worse.

MALCOLM Is Mammy gettin worse?

AILEEN Naw, jist kinna up an doon, good days an bad days.

IRENE Whit ye caw unstable, son. No steady.

MALCOLM I ken whit unstable means. Like a shoogly table or a drunk man.

IRENE Ay, exactly, kinna like yer ... (*biting her tongue*). Sae ye obviously didnae go up tae yer Dad's. Has he been doon?

MALCOLM Naw, no yet, but he is comin.

IRENE When?

AILEEN He said he might manage doon the day.

IRENE Ay, mights an mibbies. He's aye been guid wi them.

AILEEN He hasnae had a lot o time aff. An ye cannae work fae hame drivin a lorry.

IRENE True, but I think ye're makin excuses for him.

AILEEN I'm no makin ony excuses. Jist sayin how things mibbie huvnae been easy for him either.

IRENE He's aye liked the easy wey oot, hen, an Uncle Andy agrees wi me about that.

AILEEN Ye'll never forgie him, will ye?

IRENE Naw, an you shouldnae either.

COVID CHANGES

AILEEN I'll decide that for masel.

IRENE Ay, nae doot ye will.

The doorbell rings and MALCOLM runs to the window.

MALCOLM It's Dad. He's here.

He runs to the door and opens it before anyone else can get there. NORRIE is wearing a mask, but MALCOLM runs to him and cuddles him.

NORRIE Hi, Malky. Great tae see ye, son.

MALCOLM almost drags him into the living room.

NORRIE An guid tae see you tae Aileen. Hello Irene. Long time no see.

AILEEN stands back beside her aunt who doesn't reply to his greeting.

AILEEN Hello, Dad. Aunt Irene wis jist gettin us some things.

NORRIE That wis guid o her.

IRENE I better get doon the road. I don't think I'm needit here. Excuse me.

NORRIE is blocking the living room door, but he steps aside to let her pass. IRENE hurries past him, but turns at the outside door after the following comment.

NORRIE Pleased tae see me as always, eh Irene?

IRENE *(turning round)* Naw, but the weans are, an that's aw that maitters. Tho ye should've been here long afore noo.

NORRIE Thanks for yer advice. Still haunin it oot freely, eh?

IRENE Somethin you've never done wi yer money or time for yer ain weans.

NORRIE I've done whit I could.

IRENE Ye mean whit yer fancy women, Joy, lets ye.

NORRIE Her name's no Joy. It's Jill.

IRENE Oh ay, sorry, no Joy, but Jill, as in Jack an Jill.

NORRIE An joy is somethin you've never kent much about.

IRENE Oh, is that so? But nae doot ye'll get plenty o that fae Jill.

NORRIE Ye ken nothin about her, sae keep her oot o this.

IRENE I ken enough about her an how ye cheated on Norma.

NORRIE If ye're wantin a row in front o the weans ye're gaun the richt wey about it.

IRENE The richt wey about it? Somethin you ken nuthin about, an Andy thinks the same.

NORRIE Noo, listen, I didnae come doon here for a row.

JOHN HODGART

AILEEN Mibbie ye better go, Aunt Irene.
IRENE Ay, hen, I will, but I widnae trust a word he says if I wis you.
NORRIE Jist shut yer face, Irene. Only makin things worse for everybody, as usual.
IRENE That's rich comin fae you, ya cheatin b ... ye.
AILEEN Please Aunty Irene, on ye go, please. I'll phone ye later.
IRENE I'm gaun. I ken when I'm no wantit.
MALCOLM Thanks for the cake, Aunty Irene.

IRENE exits quickly and MALCOLM follows her to the door.

AILEEN I think ye better sit doon, Dad, efter aw that. Dae ye want a cup o tea or onythin?
NORRIE A cup o tea wid be great. My ye've baith shot up since last time I saw yous.
AILEEN Ye huvnae seen us since ... jist efter New Year.
NORRIE Sorry, I huv tried quite a few times, but atween wan thing an anither, I couldnae manage.
AILEEN Couldnae or didnae want tae?
NORRIE Of course I wantit tae, hen, but jist no always possible an no always ma faut.
AILEEN Who's faut wis it?
NORRIE Eh, naebody's, Aileen. Jist how things've ... an I went doon wi the Covid masel.
AILEEN Oh! Why did ye no tell us?
NORRIE Didnae want tae worry you. But it took me nearly a month tae get owre it.
AILEEN Could've been a lot worse then.
NORRIE Ay, it certainly could.
AILEEN For us aw.

MALCOLM returns.

MALCOLM Are ye gonnae stey the night, Dad?
NORRIE Dae ye want me tae, son?
AILEEN No sure that's a guid idea, but ...
MALCOLM Aileen, I want him tae stey.
AILEEN Well, if Malky wants ye tae, I'm no gonnae try an stop ye.
NORRIE But you don't want me tae?
AILEEN I didnae say that, but I'm jist no sure aboot ...
MALCOLM Jist wan night. Maybe two?
NORRIE At least wan, son.

COVID CHANGES

MALCOLM An we could aw watch a DVD or a film later on.
NORRIE That wid be smashin, Malky.
AILEEN I'll need tae sort oot the messages, an ye'll need tae decide whit ye want for tea.
NORRIE I see the chippy in the Main Street is open. I could go for fish suppers or whatever ye want.
MALCOLM Brilliant idea, Dad.
AILEEN No for me, thanks.
NORRIE (*winking at Malcolm*) Jist suppers for the boys, then eh, Malky?

Lights dim as MALCOLM exits with his Dad, leaving AILEEN on her own. She moves to the living room window to watch them leave.

SCENE NINE

A week later.

Lights come up slowly. The phone is ringing and AILEEN goes to pick it up. MALCOLM follows her to the phone. They are both in their pyjamas again.

AILEEN Yes, I'm her daughter ... Oh, sorry I didnae catch that... Oh ... oh ... a couple o days, all going well... Right, thanks for letting us know. Yes, yes I can arrange that. Thanks very much.
MALCOLM Whit's happened?
AILEEN Malky, she's getting hame afore the end o the week, 'all going well'.
MALCOLM Aw, that's the best news ever. Pure dead brilliant.
AILEEN Ay, an we're lucky she's no dead, Malcolm.
MALCOLM Ye're no kiddin. It's the answer tae ma prayers.
AILEEN Ye mean ye've been prayin?
MALCOLM Ay, every night, afore gaun tae sleep.
AILEEN Well, thank God or whoever has been oor guardian angel
MALCOLM You are, Aileen.
AILEEN Thanks Malky. An you're a brilliant wee brither.

AILEEN gives him a big cuddle and MALCOLM doesn't resist this time.

AILEEN We'll need tae phone Aunt Irene ... an Dad.
MALCOLM Who'll go for her?
AILEEN Probably Aunt Irene. She'll want tae go.
MALCOLM I hope Dad wants tae go.

AILEEN goes to the phone and dials her Aunt's number.

JOHN HODGART

AILEEN Hello, Aunty Irene. Great news. Mum's gettin oot in a few days if all's well ... Ay, ye're no kiddin ... of course ... That wid be a great ... But we'll need tae let Dad ken ... Eh? ... ay, ye're probably right ... she'll be stressed enough... Ay, it wid be much better if you went for her. I'm sure Uncle Andy agrees ... Ay, okay. Thanks again. Bye.

MALCOLM She wants tae go for her?

AILEEN Of course. Irene wid go mental if Dad went, but she's probably right. Dad turnin up for her, efter whit she's been through wid be too much for her.

MALCOLM I still hope he comes tae see us ... an Mum.

AILEEN Ay, I think he might.

MALCOLM Come on, let's get the rest o oor brekky. I'm still stervin.

AILEEN Scrambled eggs on toast?

MALCOLM Yummy!

*As they head for the kitchen their doorbell rings several times.
MALCOLM runs to the window.*

MALCOLM It's Sadie McGraw.

SADIE batters on the door.

AILEEN She sounds kinda desperate.

MALCOLM Don't open the door, Aileen.

SADIE Norma? Haw, Norma, are ye in?

AILEEN She's mibbie needin help.

AILEEN moves to the door.

AILEEN Who is it? Whit dae ye want?

SADIE It's Sadie fae doon the road. Is yer Maw in, hen?

AILEEN Naw, she's ... in the hospital.

SADIE Sorry, but ...

Sound of whimpering from the other side of the door. AILEEN half opens the door to find SADIE trembling and holding a cloth to a cut on the side of her head.

SADIE Dae ye mean workin, or is she no weel?

AILEEN No weel ... wi Covid.

SADIE Aw, eh, sorry, hen, but ... *(whimpering again)*

AILEEN Whit's happened tae ye?

SADIE Jist fell ... at the back door step. I wis hopin yer maw could've sortit it for me. Didnae ken she wis in the hospital.

AILEEN Jist wait a meenit.

COVID CHANGES

AILEEN *hurries back into the house and returns with a couple of masks. She puts one on herself and is about to pass the other one out to SADIE when MALCOLM hurries towards the door looking very worried and whispers to his sister.*

MALCOLM Aileen, naw! Ye'll mibbie catch somethin fae her.

AILEEN *(whispering back)* It's aw right. I'll be really carefu.
(handing the other mask out to SADIE) Put that on, Sadie.
Right, come in an let me see it.

SADIE *steps into the hall and turns her head towards AILEEN.*

AILEEN *(having a look at the cut)* Don't think it's too deep, but ...

MALCOLM But, Aileen ...

AILEEN I'll try tae clean it up a bit an pit somethin on it.

MALCOLM Aileen ye better no ...

AILEEN Shoosht, Malky. Come through tae the bathroom an I'll see whit I can dae, Sadie.

SADIE That's awfae guid o ye, hen. Sorry tae be a pest.

They exit as MALCOLM goes to look out the window again, looking a bit anxiously up and down the street.

MALCOLM We better no tell Aunty Irene about this. She'll go aff her heid!

As the lights dim, MALCOLM moves back to the hall to see what is happening. AILEEN walks to the front door behind SADIE who has washed her face and has a plaster on her cut, plus a few spare ones in her hand. She turns at the door, smiles at AILEEN and touches her on the arm.

SADIE Thanks, hen ... Ye're a credit tae yer maw so ye are, an I'm sorry ... eh, hope she gets better soon.

AILEEN *stops her at the door.*

AILEEN Jist haud on. I've got something else for ye.

AILEEN *rushes off to the kitchen and returns quickly with something in a poly bag.*

AILEEN Jist as wee treat for yer weans.

SADIE *(looking into the bag)* A chocolate cake! Oh my, the weans'll love that. Ye're a wee angel so ye are. But I better go – Stew'll be ...

SADIE doesn't complete her sentence and hurries off, looking a bit embarrassed, though no longer shaking. MALCOLM stands gaping at AILEEN and shaking his head as if he cannot believe what she has just done.

MALCOLM Jeez oh, Aileen, oor chocolate cake!

AILEEN *stifles a laugh as the lights dim slowly.*

SCENE TEN

Three days later.

Lights up slowly. MALCOLM and AILEEN are standing looking out the window as a car drives up.

MALCOLM Hey, that's Dad's caur.

AILEEN Somethin must've happened. She should've been hame a while ago.

AILEEN It is him ... an Mum's haudin on tae his airm.

MALCOLM I kent he wid go for her. I dreamt aboot it.

AILEEN Whether he wanted tae or no, somethin must've happened tae Uncle Andy an Aunty Irene ... Oh naw, here she is comin up the road.

MALCOLM Better open the door an let them in.

MALCOLM rushes to the door, followed by AILEEN. NORRIE, wearing a mask, helps NORMA in (also wearing a mask) and the children rush to cuddle her. They are all overcome with emotion and struggle for words.

NORRIE Noo, steady on, or ye'll suffocate her an besides she's jist oot a recovery ward. I don't think she wants tae end up back in there ... or in A&E!

MALCOLM Mammy, aw mammy, we ... really missed ye an ...

NORMA Ay, but oh dearie me, oh ... it's great tae see ye baith an haud ye again ... an ...

AILEEN An it's great tae see you, mammy.

They are all trying to keep the tears in check.

NORMA Oh my, it's great tae get hame, but let me get intae ma hoose tae fin oot if I recognise it.

The children laugh, then stand back to listen to NORRIE.

NORRIE Andy an Irene's caur broke doon an she had tae phone me an ask me tae go for her. That wis some surprise. I don't mean me gaun, but her askin me. Lucky I've got a couple o days aff.

NORRIE helps NORMA into the living room followed by AILEEN and MALCOLM. NORMA removes her mask and the children cuddle her again. NORRIE keeps his mask on and crosses to the window, maybe looking to see where Irene is.

NORMA Noo, help me owre tae ma ain chair.

AILEEN and MALCOLM help her over to the chair and prop her up with cushions. IRENE sneaks in the door almost unnoticed and, without saying anything, crosses to NORMA's chair and goes down on her knees beside her.

COVID CHANGES

IRENE Oh, ma wee sister. This is ane o the happiest days o ma life.

NORMA An mine tae, Irene, an thanks for aw ye've duin for the weans.

IRENE I didnae get daein a lot for them. They leuked efter ane anither an they baith deserve a medal.

MALCOLM Ay, I wis the man o the hoose, but Aileen wis the boss.

AILEEN Only when I had tae be.

NORRIE Ye've baith done brilliant.

IRENE We sometimes thocht ye were a goner, but here ye are ... an ye're lookin great.

NORMA Lookin great? Stop talkin mince, Irene.

NORRIE She'll soon get the colour back on her cheeks.

IRENE Ay, ye're still a wee bit peely-wally, but whit can ye expect after mair than twa months in the hospital an ye've lost an awfu lot o weight.

NORMA Mibbie no sae bad then, eh? As long as I don't pit it back on again.

MALCOLM So, nae chocolate cake for a while, eh Mum! An anyway we ... eh, we huvnae got ane.

They all laugh.

NORRIE I'll go for a wee walk an let yous aw catch up.

IRENE Don't let me chase ye awa.

NORRIE Me an Norma did a bit o catchin up on the wey hame.

MALCOLM Are ye comin back, Daddy?

NORRIE Of course, son. I jist need a wee bit o fresh air an exercise. As ye can see I'm still needin tae lose a a few pounds. Need tae chynge ma habits, sae nae chocolate cake for me either.

MALCOLM Me an Aileen guzzled the wan Auntie Irene got us. But don't worry. If we get anither ane, we'll soon eat your share, an Mum's tae.

Both NORRIE and NORMA laugh at the joke as he exits.

AILEEN I'll go an pit the kettle on.

AILEEN goes through to the kitchen and MALCOLM follows her.

NORMA I honestly thought I wisnae comin hame, Irene.

IRENE Ye shid be really prood o yer weans, Norma.

NORMA Oh, I am, an I've aye been.

IRENE Ay, I ken that.

NORMA I'm a lucky Mammy, a really lucky Mammy, an so are you.

JOHN HODGART

IRENE Ay, winnin the lottery could never compare tae bein a mither, for it's a lifelong job, wi nae end o work, unpaid of course.

NORMA But hopefully peyd wi love, Irene.

IRENE Ay, an a mither that's come back fae daith's door is a really special ane, deservin a lot o love.

NORMA Ay, I cannae believe how lucky I am jist tae be alive an that's definitely faur better than winnin ony lottery, for money cannae buy ye this kinna happiness.

IRENE That's very true, but a wee bit mair money widnae go wrang at times.

NORMA Ay, ye're right there. But I cannae believe how tidy an fresh ma hoose is. It's a lot tidier than when I left it.

IRENE Kinda like comin back tae a different hoose?

NORMA Ay, in some weys it mibbbie is ... an we'll need tae try an keep it like this.

AILEEN and MALCOLM come through with some cups and biscuits etc and sit them on a coffee table.

NORMA I wis jist sayin tae Irene how clean an tidy everythin is an whit a brilliant job ye've duin, hen.

AILEEN Well, I couldnae hae managed withoot ma right haun man, even if he's sometimes a right wee snorter!

IRENE No a nice thing tae say aboot yer brither.

AILEEN Only jokin. *(ruffling his hair)* He did his fair share o keepin the place clean, an mair.

IRENE Oh, nearly forgot. The boys tellt me tae ask ye if ye want tae go tae the park for a wee kick aboot.

MALCOLM Mibbie the morra, Aunty Irene. I'll need tae help leuk efter Mammy.

IRENE Ay, I ken, son. Ye don't want tae let her oot yer sicht.

AILEEN has crossed to look out the window. MALCOLM joins her and they speak quietly to each other as their mother and Irene chatter away in the background.

AILEEN He's phonin somebody.

MALCOLM Jill?

AILEEN Mibbie, but that's his business.

MALCOLM I ken, but mibbie we shid go oot an talk tae him ... jist in case.

AILEEN Better wait a bit.

MALCOLM Naw, I think he's gettin intae his caur.

Before she can reply, MALCOLM runs out the door. AILEEN goes to the door, but she doesn't go any further.

COVID CHANGES

NORMA Whaur are they gaun?
IRENE Jist oot tae the door, talkin tae their dad, I suppose.
NORMA Oh, Irene I feel that happy, I could float doon the street in the sunlight.
IRENE An you deserve a lot mair sunlight in yer life.
NORMA Weel, I've got twa brilliant weans, but ... I'm no crossin ma fingers aboot Norrie.
IRENE I think that's wyce o ye, Norma.
NORMA Anywey, I'm jist thankin ma lucky stars I'm here.
IRENE An so am I, Norma. So's everybody.

A short pause.

NORMA Shame aboot auld Mrs Mac. Norrie tellt me on the road hame.
IRENE Ay, an Auld Tam's in the hospital.
NORMA That doesnae sound guid.
IRENE Naw, an he tried his best tae nurse Annie.
NORMA Did ye tell the weans?
IRENE I heard last week, but I didnae tell them.
NORMA I'll tell them later.
IRENE An I've jist heard that Stew McGraw's in the hospital tae, an Sadie wis howlin lik a wean when they taen him awa.
NORMA Puir wee soul. She hasnae got her sorrows tae seek.
NORMA Ay, an I widnae fancy Stew's chances o comin hame.

Another short silence. IRENE crosses to look out the window.

IRENE Here, I'm jist wunnerin if ... naw, they're still talkin tae their Dad.
NORMA Dae ye ken he sent me a get-well caird, wi a wee letter inside it.
IRENE Oh, did he noo?
NORMA Ay, he did.
IRENE That must've been a surprise.
NORMA Ay, it wis, but I think a lot has chynged in the past few months an there might be mair tae come. Who knows?
IRENE Ay, we never ken whit's roon the corner waitin for us.
NORMA That's true. Mibbie Covid's chynged him tae.
IRENE Well, I widnae be too sure aboot that, but ...
NORMA But there is somethin different aboot him.
IRENE Dae ye really think sae?
NORMA No quite sure, but ... I hope sae.

JOHN HODGART

IRENE Well, miracles are mibbie possible efter aw.

NORMA Mibbie, but we'll see. Ay, we'll jist huvtae wait an see about that ... an ither things, but wan thing's certain: life's never gonnae be quite the same again.

Lights slowly dim as we hear the chorus of 'Change' by Lana del Rey which slowly fades out.

THE END