

Nonna, Mum and Me

Written By

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INT.FAMILY HOME - DAY

FRAN (40s) Stares with a fading black eye at a botanical calendar. Each date is filled with reminders, appointments colour coded with obsessive precision.

She pulls away the page to reveal today's date. It's circled, the rest of the month bare. An impatient car horn signals it's time to leave.

MUM (O.S)

Nonna?

FRAN

It's Fran mum

MUM (O.S)

There's a car here

FRAN

Do you want to get your coat on? I got your posh one out - by the front door.

We remain here as the conversation moves towards the front door until we hear them leave.

Melancholic silence sits heavy in the air. This place appears outwardly clean but feels dusty. Old family photos of these women's lives together scatter the surfaces - we finally rest on a brochure.

THORNTON NURSING & RESIDENTIAL CARE

INT.HALLWAY - DAY

Keys scramble in the lock as Fran returns alone. Casting a solitary figure she makes her way through the skeleton of her family home.

INT.LOUNGE - DAY

Voices from an gaudy American Rom Com echo through the house as Fran fills her emotional void with a takeaway. Her mother's empty armchair stares at her.

Fran's only company, a sad pot plant. She offers a despondent "Cheers" towards it with her glass of wine.

The American voices fade, leaving a heavy silence behind only an absence can bring. Fran stops mid chew.

CUT TO TITLE:

NONNA, MUM AND ME

A brief pause before Fran springs off the sofa, she needs to be sick.

INT.FRAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

The toilet flushes behind her, taking a last sip of wine to rid the taste of vomit before throwing herself face first onto the bedclothes.

The silence in the house is torturous, she has to do - *something*? She catches her gauche reflection. Bruised, old, unrecognisable.

Fran spurs into action pulling a dusty backpack from under the bed.

INT.HALLWAY - DAY

Eclipsed by the backpack she inhales a final moment in the house. Stuffing cold Chinese food into her mouth before pulling the door gently closed behind her.

EXT.COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Casting a lonely figure against the vast country landscape, Fran soldiers towards a cottage in the distance. She's bought her pot plant for company.

She stops. Something isn't right. Behind her she sees a trail of her belongings along the dirt road. Her backpack gapes open, ripped at its base.

FRAN

FUCK!

Having retrieved her breadcrumbs of possessions and cradling her backpack like a large child - pot plant awkwardly balancing on the top she finally approaches the cottage.

INT.COTTAGE -EVENING

With a donkey kick the door closes behind her and exhales of sweet relief as she pulls her bra through the arm of her jumper. This place holds echos of life. It's nice, or was

once. Almost bare save the simplest of home furnishings. She picks up a letter behind the door, it's addressed to MR HENRY BRIGGS.

A lonely record player gets Fran's attention, keen to escape the silence Fran fires up the player - BIG BAND music fills the house. A half empty bottle of Scotch sits by the player, she spins the top off playfully and takes a large gulp.

INT.COTTAGE UPSTAIRS - DAY

Gliding her fingers along the weathered wallpaper she meets a bedroom door. Locked.

INT.MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

The last bedroom opens. A hand embroidered picture greets her on the bedclothes:

'WELCOME FRANCESCA SIMPSON'

Softening at the greeting she takes in the musty oddness of this place. A tatty trunk piques her curiosity. It aches open to reveal dresses, shoes and costume jewelry. A pristine vintage dress catches her eye - *she couldn't, could she?*

INT.LOUNGE - DAY

Fran appears wearing the vintage dress. The warmth of the alcohol driving her adventurous curiosity. A GUEST BOOK she hadn't noticed earlier gets her attention - it's empty.

INT.KITCHEN - DAY

Gliding into the kitchen there's nothing of character except a blandness. Fran scans across the room until her eyes rest on a handwritten note:

180. 20 MINS. HELP YOURSELF

Next to the note sits an immaculate fruit pie. Without hesitation the pie is thrown into the oven. The timer is set, while she sits idly watching it the Big Band music takes her into a tipsy calm.

The timer SHRIEKS snapping Fran back. Opening the oven door the fire light extinguishes but the gas remains on. Fran is frozen- transfixed by the hissing of the gas.

Her head slowly enters the oven.

HENRY
You got it workin then?

Startled she ducks out to meet HENRY (70s- Hardy)

FRAN
(startled)
Fucking 'ell

HENRY CONT.
Aye. It can be temperamental. (Awkward
pause)

He grabs himself a bowl and serves himself a portion of pie.

FRAN
I wasn't. I'm sorry - who are you?

HENRY
Henry

He makes his way into the lounge expecting Fran to follow.

INT.LOUNGE - DAY

HENRY CONT.
Henry Briggs, this ere is my 'ome. I
see you've been upstairs.

He hints at the dress while removing Fran's discarded bra
from his armchair.

FRAN
Oh god, I'm so sorry. I don't know
what I was thinking. I shouldn't...

HENRY
Just set it back when you're done
wi'it.

An awkward silence between them as Henry finishes his pie.

HENRY CONT.
Right that's me, I'll not be in yer
way.

FRAN
Oh, okay so you're - staying?

HENRY
Eye, like I said it's my 'ome but you

wont hear from me. I'll see you on the
morrow.

He shuffles upstairs leaving Fran in stunned silence. Taking the serving spoon she begins to shovel the remaining fruit pie into her mouth.

INT.LOUNGE- MORNING (DAY 2)

The house appears slightly more genial than the night before. Items have appeared. Over-sized cushions surround Fran like a protective tomb.

The pie dish sits empty. A kettle screams.

HENRY (O.S)
(To the kettle)
Oh shush you.

Henry appears with a mug of tea.

HENRY
No Coffee but there's nowt better than
hot tea, bit of honey in there for
you. You do 'ave a room you know.

FRAN
Thanks. Look, I don't want to sound
rude but I didn't know anyone was
going to be here. The advertisement --

HENRY
Looking for a country escape? Secluded
cottage offering lodgin for short and
long term stay. Competitive rates.

FRAN
(Beat) Yeah

HENRY
Aye lodging. E.G You are a lodger
lodging at my 'ome.

FRAN
And you don't think that could have
been a bit clearer?

HENRY
Well I've had no complaints.

Fran eyes the empty guest book - he's right no complaints and

no guests.

FRAN

I hope you don't think I'm being rude
Mr Briggs -

HENRY

-Henry

FRAN

Henry. I really wanted some time by
myself.

HENRY

Aye. I could see that.

Henry sits drinking his tea oblivious to the hint.

FRAN

Okay... I best get dressed.

INT.BATHROOM - DAY

She turns on both taps, nothing comes out, but something gets her attention - voices coming from the plug hole. Moving closer we hear American voices. Happy and loud melodrama - the same we heard earlier in Fran's home. She leans in.

Suddenly the boiler moans, the voices stop. She cups her hands ready before freezing water pours out.

INT.HALLWAY - DAY

Fran knocks on Henry's bedroom door impatiently.

FRAN

Henry? Is the water on? Henry?

Slowly she pulls on the handle pushing the door open.

INT.HENRY'S BEDROOM - DAY

The room takes Fran's breath away. Feminine and light, each wall neatly adorned with cross stitch tapestries. Henry sits hunched over a small desk with a cross stitch, not bothering to turn around.

HENRY

Closed doors mean nowt it seems.

FRAN
I didn't mean to interrupt

HENRY
Yet ere you are.

FRAN
Did you do all of these?

Henry lets out a heavy sigh - she's not taken the hint.

HENRY
Not all no.

FRAN
They're amazing.

Fran welcomes herself into the room, taking in each tapestry.

HENRY
I can't take all the credit. Those up there - the good ones. Belong to me wife Trudy.

FRAN
Didn't know you where married.

HENRY
Well you never asked and I'm not. Widowed. I'm not as good as her but it keeps her with me. She always loved the country. Cant stand it meself but what can you do.

FRAN
You could just leave.

We sit with Henry for a moment. He changes the subject.

HENRY
You never told me why you're ere. I thought yesterday it were because you wanted to kill yerself, but then I thought what fool would pay for a month and kill themselves on the first day.

FRAN
(Embarrassed)
I'm not sure. I mean I'm not sure why I'm. Maybe a bit of headspace to

think, you know?

HENRY
Sounds to me like you do too much
thinkin.

FRAN
Maybe.

HENRY
Married?

FRAN
That an offer?

Awkward silence at Fran's attempt at humour.

FRAN
Erm no, no. Not Married

HENRY
Right. Well, come in if your stayin
and set the door closed. Keeps the
warm in. So, no husband. What about
family, what do they think of all
this?

FRAN
(Disjointed)
They don't. No-one knows I'm here. My
mother is sick, but it's okay, she
doesn't know she's sick.

Henry's back remains to Fran. The silence spurs Fran to
speak.

FRAN
She calls me Nonna - which was her
grandmother's name and a horrible
woman by all accounts. I gave up
everything to look after her and she
replaced me with a woman she despised.
And I know it's not her fault but
sometimes it feels like a punishment.
Like I wasn't enough to help her you
know and every time she forgot my name
it felt like a part of me disappeared
and now I don't exist. Sorry, I don't
know where all that came from, you
asked me one question and blurg you
get my life story.

Henry makes his way to sit next to Fran on the bed.

HENRY

When you're my age lass you hear a lot of life stories. But I must say, yours might be the most borin one I've ever heard.

The joke relaxes the atmosphere.

HENRY (CONT)

What does this other life look like eh, the one you think the world owed you?

FRAN

Married, children, travel maybe I don't know?

HENRY

Well if you don't know, how could you miss it.

They share a sincere moment. Suddenly a sharp pain jolts Fran to her feet, a sewing needle protrudes from the back of her hand.

FRAN

FUCK!

HENRY

Ya felt that didn't you?

FRAN

You stabbed me!?!

She pulls the needle out - the wound is superficial but hurts like hell.

HENRY

Aye you're very much alive lass, perhaps now you'll stop feeling sorry for yerself.

FRAN

Fuck you! FUCK YOU! Just what gives you the right to judge *me*? A sad lonely old hermit that smells of ...What *is* that smell?... Wet wool! (Beat) I'm sorry, I'm so sorry I didn't mean that.

HENRY

Yea you did. Perhaps I'll see you for
tea later on.

Fran takes the cue and leaves. Henry self-consciously smells himself.

EXT.COTTAGE PATH - EVENING

Picking up the Scotch bottle from earlier she walks down the country lane.

THUD

Face first she slams into an **invisible wall** throwing her off balance. She sits up stunned and stretches her fingers out. Her hand meets this unseen boundary. Surrendering she plonks herself back into the dirt road looking up to the sky. Distant footsteps can be heard.

HENRY (O.S)

Ya alright?

FRAN

Yeah

Distant thunder echos

HENRY (O.S)

Looks like rain

FRAN

Yeah

The rain begins.

EXT.COTTAGE PATH - NIGHT

Stubbornness keeps the soaked Fran rooted as she lazily throws small stones at the "wall", watching them bounce off. She's no choice, its cold and the booze finished long ago. She returns to the house.

INT.COTTAGE - NIGHT

The interior of the house appears **Warmer, more homely**. The empty bottle of Scotch in her hands has refilled. Fran stumbles to her room hoping to avoid Henry.

INT. FRANS BEDROOM - NIGHT

Throwing herself under the bedclothes there's something there. She pulls out a warm hot water bottle - a peace offering?

Pulling the duvet around her head, a few moments pass before the duvet begins to grow to unrealistic proportions creating a cocoon around her.

Beginning to panic she tries to pull herself out as it swells until - she stops, allowing the warm embrace to swaddle her. She finally closes her eyes.

INT. LOUNGE - MORNING - (DAY 3)

Fran sheepishly walks down the stairs.

Henry sits, eyes closed basking in the sunshine pouring through the window across his face giving him an ethereal quality.

The house again appearing comfortable as though their presence was breathing life into it. Opening the front door she marches down the dirt path.

EXT. COTTAGE PATH - MORNING

Picking up a small stone she throws it towards the "wall", the stone bounces off. Fran returns to the house.

INT. LOUNGE - MORNING

HENRY

(Eyes remain closed)

There's tea in the pot

She notices the pot plant looking sickly.

FRAN

Is it dead?

HENRY

No,no. It's just changing.

FRAN

Looks dead.

HENRY

Aye.

(Offering his empty mug)

I'll have a fresh en.

FRAN

I'm sorry.

HENRY

What for?

Henry has closed the matter.

HENRY (CONT)

So, you staying then?

FRAN

I'd like to. But I'd prefer it if you didn't, you know, stab me again.

HENRY

I'll be here everyday. 8 while 4.
After then the sun goes over past the
hill and I'll let you in peace.
There's books, papers whatever you
want.

A cross stitch tapestry gets her attention Henry pushes a basket full of threads towards her with his foot.

HENRY (CONT)

And you need to stop doing that face.
You know the one I'm talking about.
Like you're waiting for a tip. It's
annoying.

They sit in silence as Fran begins the cross stitch which bleeds into a montage of moments between them.

MONTAGE OF TIME - OVER 4 WEEKS.

We glide through the cottage capturing pockets of time in different rooms. It appears as though Fran and Henry occupy every room all the time. During the montage the house slowly fills with LIFE and Light. A welcome hug from an old friend.

INT. FRAN'S BEDROOM - DAY (MONTAGE)

Fran lays asleep holding a family photo. Henry creeps through the door, swapping the bedside Scotch with a cup of tea. He takes the photo and slides it under her pillow, the duvet swells like before, Fran welcomes it's embrace.

Henry walks to the window, through his POV we see Fran.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY (MONTAGE)

She's walking down the path, throws a stone at the "wall", it bounces back. She returns to the house.

INT. KITCHEN -DAY (MONTAGE)

Henry is making a cup of tea. Suddenly BIG BAND music BURSTS through the house startling him. He curses as Fran appears in the kitchen.

Taking his hands she encourages a grumpy Henry to dance. As they dance together the kitchen brightens. We travel down the sink to the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM -EVENING (MONTAGE)

Fran stares into the plughole, the American voices still talking. She places the plug into the sink, the voices stop.

Noticing she has come on her period she goes through the cabinets finding boxes of old pills, bottles and peroxide, she toys with both in her hands.

INT. HENRY'S BEDROOM (CONT FROM PREVIOUS SCENE)

Fran frantically shouts for Henry!! He runs to her.

HENRY (O.S)

"**What have you done?!?**"

Silence - hysterical laughter. Henry stumbles back to his room followed by Fran who looks stunned revealing her new patchy blonde hair.

INT. FRANS BEDROOM - MORNING (MONTAGE)

While getting dressed notices the hair growth on her armpits before catching her reflection. There's a change. She runs downstairs and outside.

EXT. COTTAGE PATH - MORNING (MONTAGE)

Running from the cottage towards us. She stops and throws a stone. Her face gives nothing away. She slowly returns to the house.

INT: LOUNGE - MORNING (4 WEEKS LATER)

Fran enters the Home that has **Transformed FULLY**, filled with **LIFE**. The pot plant sapling now holds several leaves. Henry

is heard in the kitchen. Fran notices a letter behind the front door, mirroring the first time she arrived here.

FRAN
Letter for you Henry

HENRY (O.S)
Aye to just set it down.

FRAN
I've been thinking-

Placing it on his armchair she notices something stuffed in the cushion. Reaching in she pulls out dozens of unopened letters addressed to Henry. She opens one envelope. The letter is **blank.**

HENRY (O.S)
Oh aye. What have I told you? No good will come of it.

Henry is coming, she quickly hides the letters.

HENRY
So?

FRAN
(Conflicted)
I'm going home.

HENRY
(Playfully)
Bout time to. Still wanting to kill yourself?

FRAN
(Amused)
Not today. You still upset I said you smell of wet wool.

HENRY
Not today. Will you be seeing your ma?
(Pause) Whatever name she calls you,
I'm sure she's missed your face.

FRAN
Am I bad person? For leaving her.

HENRY
You never left her, bit like my Trudy never leaves me. So, are you going to

show me what you've been hiding?

Fran pulls out the letters sheepishly.

FRAN

I shouldn't have opened them. I'm sorry.

HENRY

Oh, I see. You know I'd forgotten what it's like to have a woman about the place. Nosy buggers, all of you.

FRAN

Why didn't you tell me? If I'd have known you were lonely -

HENRY

Don't talk daft woman. People like me and you, we need to remind the world that we exist. (Pause) Any road, if I didn't write these how would the postman know if I were dead. I were actually talking about that.

He gestures to Fran's cross stitch.

FRAN (CONT)

It's not finished.

HENRY

Well, you can finish it if you ever feel you want to come back lass, I'll be here. (PAUSE) We should all have a place we can go. (PAUSE)

You asked me why I don't leave. Well, why would I? This is *my* place... Well if you're off it's probably a good job I saw to this then.

Pulling out Fran's repaired backpack from beside his chair.

HENRY (CONT)

You'll find something in there for you.

FRAN

Thank you.

HENRY
Aye. You said.

EXT. COTTAGE DOORWAY - DAY

The door opens to reveal Fran. Trudy's vintage dress clashing with muddy walking boots, backpack and potted plant. Stepping out she approaches the "**wall**". She slows her pace. In one final breath she steps forward. Without looking back she continues down the path.

CUT TO WHITE

AN ESTIMATED 10.6 MILLION PEOPLE ARE UNPAID CAREGIVERS IN THE UK.

1 IN 5 ADULTS

71% SUFFER MENTAL ILL HEALTH

WE ALL NEED A PLACE WE CAN GO