

LUV ME!

Screenplay by Klaus Witting

Based on "If I should die before I wake" by Michelle
Morris

- EXTRACT -

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INT. MADDOG'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ghostly white light seeps through a curtainless window. Strong gusts of wind buffet the street light outside, which in turn makes the light inside the bedroom move. The CAMERA pulls back, across bedroom furniture, carelessly discarded man's trousers, socks, shirt, tie and underwear. Eventually, the large figure of a man comes into shot. He lies on a king-sized bed, curled up like a giant baby, the top sheet twisted, only partly obscuring his nudity. He is fast asleep. As the CAMERA continues its searching move away from the man, a large motionless revolver comes into view. It is aimed at the sleeping man. The army revolver is held up by STELLA'S slim hand. Her eyes are fixed on the sleeping figure. Slowly she lowers the gun and rests it gently in her lap. About thirteen years old, with pale complexion and big dark eyes, she sits on a large armchair and is surrounded by four puppets with almost human expressions; MYMOUSE, LEOLY, PUNKEY and KRISTEL. In contrast to Stella's serene calm, the puppets seem to gaze at the sleeping man with hate. The first one to talk is Punkey, the monkey.

PUNKEY

(hushed, without moving
his lips)

Let's finish him off ... Let's do
him, once and for all!

Silence. Stella, her eyes half closed, does not seem to hear him.

PUNKEY (INSISTING) (CONT'D)

Let's! Let's!

Leoly, an unfortunate cross - it seems - between a lion and a donkey with a rasping yet considerate sounding voice and, Mymouse, a dormouse with a large cone as a nose and a thin voice, join in.

LEOLY

(hushed)

We mustn't interfere, we shouldn't,
we shouldn't; not our show!

The one to reply is Kristel, a goldlocked emaciated little doll, whose broken porcelain face is stuck together with sticky tape.

KRISTEL

(hushed and slightly
irritated)

Hush now, you monkey or you'll wake
him up!

MYMOUSE

(hurriedly)

Quite, quite! Kristel knows best,
knows best!

A toss of the arm on the bed is responded to by the revolver shooting up from Stella's lap and the hammer inching backwards, as her left index finger squeezes the trigger.

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

The swing doors crash open with a big bang to reveal Stella pushing a large modified and intricately painted pram with her puppet theatre equipment through the open doors. She is followed by a horde of young school children, shouting and meandering around her, trying to catch a glimpse under the blue canopy. The crowd disperses as Stella enters her classroom.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Stella remains unnoticed by her fellow students as she pushes the pram into a far corner of the room and walks over to her desk. She has dark rings under her eyes; her school uniform is ill-fitting. GEORGE, a bullish looking, grossly overweight classmate half turns towards her. Other eyes follow.

GEORGE

Had another rough night, have we?
Goldilocks?

Some of the other pupils start to jeer, but are stopped by Punkey's disembodied, angry voice.

PUNKEY (O.S.)

Fuckwitt!

Laughter breaks out, as George's massive frame moves in to block Stella's way.

GEORGE

(threateningly)

Sorry, I didn't hear you. What was
that?

STELLA

(quietly)

Nothing.

The headmaster, MR. BURNETT, comes to her rescue when he enters the class room with an attractive, young woman, MS. SILVA, the new social science teacher.

There is an instant eye contact between Stella and her. The split second it takes her to scan the classroom, the new teacher seems to have read the situation. Headmaster and teacher stop at the teacher's desk, while George withdraws.

BURNETT

(cheerfully)

Take your seats please, ladies and gentlemen ...

(he smiles benevolently)

I am pleased to present to you your new social science teacher ... Ms. Silva. Enjoy!

Burnett bows theatrically and leaves the classroom.

MS. SILVA

Some introduction! Well, I am pleased to meet you all and I do hope to succeed in conveying some of the fascination of the subject of social science to you.

Laughter and jeering from the class.

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

The school corridor is empty. The laughter from Stella's classroom can be heard but after that dies down, the corridor remains quiet. A strangely melancholic, yet at the same time haunting piece of music commences to lead into the next scene.

EXT. LITTLETON - AFTERNOON

An exterior shot of Stella's school leads into a series of general views of LITTLETON, which reveal a sleepy and prosperous seaside town. The initially wider, establishing shots gradually give way to TRACKING SHOTS of a variety of houses, some poorer, some richer.

FELIX MADDOG (O.S.)

(smooth, voiced with pathos)

One's really got the best of two worlds here - you've got the beaches, you've got splendid countryside all round and the thing I like best is the quiet privacy of a small town. On the other hand, you've got London only an hour's drive away.

(MORE)

FELIX MADDOG (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 I guarantee you'll fall in love
 with this place in no time!

A 10 year old BMW pulls through frame. The CAMERA stays with the car and its three occupants. FELIX MADDOG is driving. A middle aged woman, MRS. HOLT, is sitting next to him, her husband, MR. HOLT, is in the back.

FEMALE PASSENGER (O.S.)
 We already have, Mr. Maddog, we
 already have. It's just finding
 the right house we are anxious
 about. It has to be just right,
 otherwise my husband can't work.

INT. BMW - AFTERNOON

Maddog looks into the rear mirror. Mr. Holt is sitting in the back seat.

MADDOG
 What do you do, Mr. Holt, if you
 don't mind me asking?

HOLT
 I write.

MADDOG
 A journalist. Fancy that! I
 almost sold a very nice house to a
 colleague of yours only a few weeks
 ago. Unfortunately he pulled out
 at the last minute, couldn't raise
 the mortgage. Tough out there,
 isn't it?

MRS. HOLT
 My husband writes books on child
 psychology, and he works from home,
 that's why we need a house with a
 special ambience. It needs to be
 right for him to write.

She smiles at her own pun. Maddog laughs as steers the car off the main road and into a pretty, leafy street.

MADDOG
 I know exactly what you mean.
 Fascinating subject ... child
 psychology. Not that I know much
 about it, except the usual parental
 wisdom.

(MORE)

MADDOG (CONT'D)
 I've got a teenage daughter of my
 own, you see, and I can tell you
 she doesn't half drive me
 psychological at times.

MADDOG (CONT'D)
 (continuing; grandly)
 Here we are! Sommerville Cottage.

While Maddog leads his prospective buyers up the front lawn
 towards the house, past a forest of 'For Sale' signs, we hear
 Punkey's disembodied voice.

PUNKEY (O.S.)
 (appreciating)
 What - a - worm!
 (hastily)
 Let's kill him!

INT. SCHOOL LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

Punkey and Mymouse are walking through a forest made of
 painted cardboard and cloth. They have just stumbled across
 a juicy, wriggly, earthworm.

MYMOUSE
 (fretting)
 What for? Why? What for, Punkey?

PUNKEY
 (slapping his forehead)
 For Kristel, of course, you silly
 mouse! Birthday present. Can't
 turn up without a present, can we?
 Quick now, help me put him in this
 sack of mine!

While Punkey struggles with the worm which is almost as long
 as he is tall, Mymouse is being quite ineffective with
 holding open the sack.

MYMOUSE
 But he's so slimy, Punkey, I ... I
 ... I thought we could pick some
 flowers on the way. I don't think
 she ... she likes worms ...

PUNKEY
 (agitated)
 Of course she likes worms.
 Everybody likes worms. You eat
 worms!

MYMOUSE

Only whe ... whe...when I'm
desperate!

PUNKEY

Come on, get on with it and hold
that sack open!

With a lot of huffing and puffing, the wriggling worm is finally bagged. The audience of about two dozen children cheer and clap. Punkey and Mymouse start to walk towards Kristel's house as the little set rotates and the scenery changes. Behind the small set we see Stella. She is single handedly operating the puppets, the props and lending voices to her stars. The voices are the same as the ones with whom we are already acquainted. Every now and again, Stella peeks through a little hole in her set. Her POV reveals two female teachers present. Neither of them seem in the least interested in the show. One reads a magazine, the other is busily knitting a flowery jumper. On reaching the little house, Punkey knocks on the door with his walking staff. Kristel emerges.

PUNKEY (CONT'D)

(continuing)

Good day, my dear - we're here.
Have you got cake for us?

CHILDREN

(cheering)

Cake! Where's the cake?

MYMOUSE

(agitated)

Haven't you got any m... m...
manners? You're supposed to wish
Kristel Ha... Ha... Happy
Birthday, not ask for cake! Really,
Punkey!

KRISTEL

It's alright, Mymouse, he doesn't
mean to.

She takes the sack from Punkey who holds it up without uttering a word, but he turns to the audience, sniggering.

KRISTEL (CONT'D)

(continuing; touched)

For me? A present?

CHILDREN

(shouting)

It's a worm!

But Kristel cannot hear them as Leoly's booming voice cuts in. Already inside Kristel's house, he puts his head through the window.

LEOLY
(cheerful)
Greetings friends!

PUNKEY
(disappointed)
The donkey!
(to Mymouse)
Now we know how much cake we are gonna see.

LEOLY
(irritated)
Lion , if you please, monkey!

Mymouse nudges Punkey, trying to avoid the two getting into an argument, while Leoly lets loose an almighty, and sustained roar, which makes the whole scenery tremble. Stella, behind the screen, roars and shakes the set, while at the same time, she is peeking through the hole in the curtain. She looks happy about her audience's reaction. Some children join in the roar until Punkey, fed up, shouts at Leoly.

PUNKEY
Oh shut up you! I know - we'll ask the children!

Leoly's roar fizzles out to a curious little noise, awkwardly reminiscent of a donkey's holler.

PUNKEY (CONT'D)
(continuing)
Is he a lion, or is he a donkey?

Some children shout back -

CHILDREN
Donkey!

LEOLY
Lion!

Another group of children cheer in support.

CHILDREN
Lion!

A shouting match develops between the two fractions of children as Punkey and Leoly jockey them into increasing frenzy. Kristel, still holding the sack, tries to make herself heard.

KRISTEL
Please, everybody! Please, calm
down!

Eventually the children calm down and Kristel, in a spontaneous fit of euphoria, makes the round amongst her three friends, planting big kisses on each of their noses.

KRISTEL (CONT'D)
(continuing)
I am so happy - so lucky to have
you all here - my dear, dear
friends!
(she turns and walk
towards the door)
Come on now, let's have some cake
and tea. Let's have a nice party
and all be happy!

Punkey wipes his nose as he follows Mymouse, who follows Kristel, into the house. Leoly's head disappears from the window. From inside, Kristel's voice is heard again.

KRISTEL (CONT'D)
(continuing)
But first, first let me open
Punkey's present! Let's all have a
look!

The children start to giggle; a little boy shouts 'Worm!'. A heart-stopping shriek follows from inside Kristel's house. Then follows the sound of the puppet hitting the floor.

MYMOUSE
(agitated)
Water quick! Sh... sh... she has
fainted!

Mymouse's thin voice is all but lost in the explosion of the kid's laughter.

EXT. STREET - AFTERNOON

A quiet, leafy street with pretty houses. Stella is pushing her pram. She seems in deep thought. Suddenly there is a brief HONK, which makes her jump. A car pulls up beside her. It is Ms. Silva.

MS. SILVA
Hi, Stella!

STELLA
(without stopping,
noncommittal)
Hello.

MS. SILVA
I am sorry, I couldn't make your
show...

STELLA
(interrupting)
That's alright. Wasn't brilliant.

As Stella makes no attempt to stop, Ms. Silva has to drive alongside her, leaning across the passenger seat, while talking.

MS. SILVA
(stopping)
Would you like a lift?

STELLA
No thanks.

MS. SILVA
It's really no bother!

Stella points at a large house in mid-distance.

STELLA
I live just there. But thanks.

MS. SILVA
(smiling again)
That's funny... I've just moved
into that blue house down the road.

Stella follows her pointed finger to a small cottage-style house just past a small crossroads.

MS. SILVA (CONT'D)
(continuing)
Well, I'd better be off! See you
soon, Stella.

She drives off. Stella's reaches the imposing but neglected looking house. It has a front garden with a short drive which leads to the garage at one side. The only spot of colour is provided by a wild, yellow rose bush by the entrance door. Stella picks a bud and walks to the garage.

INT. GARAGE - AFTERNOON

The garage is almost totally full of packing cases. There are two small, vertically stretching windows in the wooden garage door. One of the windows is temporarily blocked as Stella walks up to the door, outside. A lock is being turned, and the heavy door swings upwards. Stella pushes her pram up against a wall.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

The connecting door to the garage opens and Stella comes into the kitchen, carrying her puppets like babies. The kitchen has a gloomy atmosphere. Stella's elbow connects with the switch by the door. The light comes on. Her eyes seek out a 'memo' board by the door. On it is a handwritten note from her father: "Working late tonight. Dinner 8.30pm. D." The battered kitchen clock shows 5.45. Stella places the puppets onto a tea chest and takes a large covered dish from the fridge. She takes the lid off and sprinkles Parmesan on top. Then she pushes it into the oven, and selects a 'low' setting. The red indicator light clicks on. Having picked up her puppets again, she walks through to the hall.

INT. HALL, STAIRCASE

A noticeable feature of the house is that all its windows have long sides which meet at the top in a Gothic curve giving the place an unusual, church-like feel. Stella walks up the squeaky staircase, and towards her bedroom, turning on lights along the way. There are packing cases everywhere. To reach her room, Stella has to pass her father's bedroom. The door is half open. She hesitates, then walks on.

INT. STELLA'S ROOM

First thing Stella does is to turn on the light which, at this time in the afternoon, does not make any difference. Then she carefully places Kristel, Punkey, Mymouse and Leoly under her four-poster bed. After locking her door, she lies down on an old duvet next to her bed. Outside Stella's window stands a large, rusty beech tree. Stella watches the playful shadows of its leaves on her ceiling. Her eyes become heavy and she gradually falls asleep.

EXT. SCHOOL GROUNDS - DAY

The CAMERA glides, free as a bird, above Stella's school. We hear the SONG OF A SKYLARK. The schoolyard down below is packed with students in their break.

The CAMERA descends towards a slim, handsome, boy of about fifteen. DEAN leans against the perimeter fence, occasionally sucking juice from a carton. He is on his own, jotting down notes onto a reporter's pad. His writing is interrupted by SAMANTHA, a busty fellow student, sure of herself and of her effect on male students. She leans against the fence next to him.

SAMANTHA

New piece for the school mag?

DEAN

(looks up)

Hi. Yes, possibly.

SAMANTHA

There's plenty of gossip around if you want to put some of that in.

DEAN

(taking a sip of juice)

I don't think so.

SAMANTHA

Suit yourself, but I've some personal info if you're interested. Wanna hear it?

DEAN

(not looking too interested)

Fire away.

Samantha tosses her long blond hair to one side and takes on a confidential pose.

SAMANTHA

Don't look now but - you know Stella ...

DEAN

Yes.

Dean cannot resist a glance. His eyes find Stella. She is sitting on her own under a tree, some thirty feet away, and is reading.

SAMANTHA

Don't look! She wants to meet you at her locker after the next class. I think she wants to talk to you. Be there or be square!

With this the school bell rings and Samantha walks off, leaving Dean to contemplate her message.

INT. SCHOOL ENTRANCE - DAY

Hordes of pupils push through the swing doors. Stella is carried along by the tide. DOREEN and PATSY, two classmates, catch up with her.

PATSY

Stella, we've got a message for you.

She pauses for effect. Stella feels uneasy.

STELLA

Who from?
(she answers her own question)
Burnett ...

PATSY

No, No. A good one.

DOREEN

(winks)
Depends which way you look at it.

Patsy gives here a discreet push.

PATSY

Dean wants to talk to you.

STELLA

(trying to gain time)
Who?

DOREEN

You know ... the boy with the lovely eye lashes.

STELLA

To me? Why?

PATSY

I'm not sure but I think it is something to do with the Midsummernight's party. I think he wants to ask you to go with him.

Stella is visibly ruffled by the news which does not escape the two messengers. They wink at each other as Stella walks away.

DOREEN
(calling after her)
He wants to meet you at your locker
at eleven.

Stella slows down as if to say something, but decides not to, and walks on.

INT. SCHOOL, LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The school corridor is empty and quiet. The big arm of the school clock moves onto the full hour. It is eleven o'clock. Suddenly a bell starts to RING, signalling the end of class. Immediately, classroom doors, to the left and right of the corridor, are being flung open and pupils come racing out. Especially the young school children seem set on trying to run holes into the walls. The noise is infernal. Stella appears. She glances around suspiciously as she approaches the door to the locker room. Nobody seems to take any notice of her. She pushes the door open and peeks inside. Empty.

INT. LOCKER ROOM

She moves in and slowly starts to walk down the middle isle, towards her own locker. Dean is not there. It dawns on her that she has been set up. But she wants to make sure, so she walks along the isles, up to her own locker.

STELLA
(quietly, to herself)
Bastards!

As she turns to leave, the door opens. She barely manages to fumble her key into the slot and open her locker, before Dean comes around the corner. He stops in front of her, with a gentle smile on his handsome face. A packet of sanitary towels tumbles out as she opens the locker door. Dean gallantly ignores the towels, but Stella cannot. She dives down to hastily retrieve the embarrassing pads and bangs her head on the locker door in the process. Suddenly, there is commotion around them, but Stella is too busy stuffing the towels back into her locker. When she eventually dares to look up, she finds that she and Dean are surrounded by a group of giggling girls, all her classmates; among them, Patsy, Doreen, and Samantha. Dean looks unruffled. He ignores them. Then, unexpectedly, he walks up to her and puts his mouth next to her ear. Stella instinctively tries to move back, but he gently holds her by the arm.

DEAN

(whispering)

Do what I tell you. Smile and say,
yes, so they all can hear.

STELLA

(loud)

Yes.

She even manages something like a smile. But she turns red when Dean slips his arm around her waist and kisses her on the cheek. He then turns around and walks away, head high, the rest of his body loose and easy. There is the penetrating sound of the school bell as Dean opens the door to the corridor and leaves. Stella turns to her locker and starts rummaging unnecessarily.

DOREEN

(disappointedly)

Shit - he really does likes her.

The girls file out sheepishly. Stella takes a deep breath and leans her hot forehead against the cool metal locker.

EXT. FIELD, ADJOINING SCHOOL - DAY

A skylark soars high up in the blue sky and sings its heart out.

KRISTEL (O.S.)

I love the song of the skylark. I
really do.

LEOLY (O.S.)

Why, Kristel?

KRISTEL (O.S.)

It is as clean as a silver stream.

MYMOUSE (O.S.)

It reminds me, that there are no
buzzards around and that I can have
fun in the corn.

LEOLY (O.S.)

Don't be silly Mymouse. I am
serious.

KRISTEL (O.S.)

It also reminds me of her. Her
sandy hair and lovely face, and her
blue eyes, as blue as the sky
that's watching over us.

There is a sharp WHISTLE which momentarily drowns out the skylark's song. The CAMERA tilts down from the sky and we discover Stella, sitting next to a cricket pitch. She is mending her puppet's cloths. Dean approaches. On reaching Stella, he sits down opposite her.

DEAN
(smiling)
Hi.

Stella is embarrassed. She nods, avoiding eye contact.

DEAN (CONT'D)
(continuing)
Another show?

STELLA
Yes, at two.

DEAN
Hey, I'm sorry about the other day.

Stella shakes her head.

DEAN (CONT'D)
(continuing)
You just have to ignore that whole group.

Stella, still not knowing what to say, nods again.

DEAN (CONT'D)
(continuing)
Anyway, I hope I didn't upset you or anything. But I thought we handled it okay.

STELLA
(slightly rushed)
You did.

Dean gives her a dazzling, warm, smile.

DEAN
No. You played your part well, Stella.

The way he says this last sentence, throws Stella off balance. Dean gives her another penetrating look.

DEAN (CONT'D)
(continuing)
I'd always wanted to get to know you better
(MORE)

DEAN (CONT'D)
(he pauses)
You know why they did it.

Stella shakes her head. With an air of resolve, Dean draws his legs up smoothly into the lotus position and wraps his fingers around his slender ankles.

DEAN (CONT'D)
(continuing)
I assumed you knew. They think they've got me all figured out.
(his jaw locks tight)
They think I'm ... weird ... you know?

Stella loosens up, her shyness seems to dissolve. She looks at him.

DEAN (CONT'D)
(continuing)
Not what guys are supposed to be anyway.

Stella folds her hands in her lap.

STELLA
But you're beautiful.

His hands clinch a tuft of grass.

DEAN
Right. Only I think that's the wrong adjective, don't you? But thanks anyway.

There is a long pause. Finally Dean breaks the silence. He sounds bitter.

DEAN (CONT'D)
(continuing)
My grandmother always used to say things like that about me. Like how my eyelashes were much too marvellous to waste on a boy.

With one swift move, he is on his feet and brushing off his clothing.

DEAN (CONT'D)
(continuing)
Well - I have to go.

He turns and walks away. Having watched him disappear behind a row of white lilac trees, Stella pulls a blade of grass from a tuft next to her, puts it in her mouth and lies back. She looks up to the sky and the skylark which still sings its song high above her. Tears form in her eyes. Gradually, the bird's song becomes more monotonous and sharper. Stella wipes her eyes with the back of her hand. The skylark is still soaring above but its song is undergoing a dramatic change as it starts to sound more and more aggressive. Manic music, reminiscent of the cacophony of a funfair mixes with the birdsong. As the noise is intensifying, a large shadow starts to swoop down towards Stella. There is the sound of a door bell. She screams.

INT. STELLA'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Stella jumps up, panic stricken. It takes her a few moments to calm down and straighten herself out. She checks her puppets. They are still under the bed. Then suddenly there is the JINGLE of the musical doorbell again. Stella rushes to the window overlooking the front garden. Her father's car is parked in the drive. He himself is in the process of taking the rubbish bags to the road. He waves as he sees Stella and blows her a kiss. Stella rushes away from the window.

INT. STAIRCASE

She rushes down the stairs, clutching the yellow rose she picked earlier, and continues into the dining room.

INT. DINING ROOM

Here she grabs a tablecloth from a chest of drawers and hurriedly spreads it over the table. Then, with trained precision, she places cutlery at opposite ends, a water glass at hers, and a wine glass at her father's end. Finally she lights two candles and submerges the yellow rose into a crystal bud vase, by his wine glass.

INT. KITCHEN

Stella barely manages to straighten out her school uniform and retrieve a can of Budweiser from the fridge, before Felix Maddog enters. His broad, flushed face is radiating with pride.

MADDOG
Stella! I did it!

She hands him the opened can and he gives her a big kiss on the cheek.

STELLA

What, dad?

Maddog lifts the can to his mouth for a second, then lowers it again before drinking.

MADDOG

That Johnson property, remember?
The one that needed everything -
new plumbing, electricity, the
works. Johnson priced it right out
of the market - which isn't hard
these days since there isn't any
fucking market. Anyway, baby, I
sold it!

He takes a deep swig from the can, then takes his jacket off. Stella takes it from him and hangs it neatly over a kitchen chair.

STELLA

That's wonderful, dad.

She turns to the oven to check the casserole and pushes two plates in, to heat up. Maddog moves around the kitchen like a big blond bear, the beaming smile still on his face.

MADDOG

All day I just knew it in my bones.
Couple called the Holts bought it.
He's a writer. Didn't blink an eye
over the financing either. Last of
the big-time spenders.

He reaches for a biscuit tin on a shelf, removes the lid, and drops two twenty pound notes inside it.

MADDOG (CONT'D)

(continuing; with a boyish
smile)

Household - sorry it's late.

STELLA

That's okay, dad.

Stella is doing her best to partake in her father's success story. She grunts, smiles and shakes her head in appreciation, as she listens to him, while at the same time, getting dinner prepared.

MADDOG

I'm propping up the whole goddamned office at this point, Baby. Don't think I mind it, that's just the way it is. I wish it reflected a little more in the old pay-packet.

After a last, long swig of beer, Maddog opens the fridge and takes out a half-filled bottle of wine. Stella carries the tray through to the dining room. Her father follows.

INT. DINING ROOM

MADDOG

Sure, problems develop with deals sometimes. That's the name of the game. Risk. But that's what I thrive on.

(He seats himself at the end of the table)

I need that like I need air to breathe. Your dad's a fighter, baby!

Having poured himself a glass of wine, he holds out his plate for Stella to serve him. The casserole looks burnt, but Maddog, wrapped up in his monologue, does not seem to notice.

MADDOG (CONT'D)

(continuing)

Magnificent - thanks darling!

Stella serves herself and sits down at the other end of the long table.

MADDOG (CONT'D)

(continuing)

I can't wait for that bitch Harrison to hear about the deal. Before I arrived, she was Ms. Bigcheese. This'll teach her some respect. Hasn't sold as much as a chickenshed this year. But thinks she's hot because she's screwing the chief.

Stella scoops up a fork full off her plate but almost chokes as she is overcome by giggles.

STELLA

(giggling)

Chickenshed ...

(MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)
Probably thinks she knows the
business inside out ...

Maddog frowns. With his mouth full, he points at his plate.

MADDOG
Hey, this shit is the worst, baby!

He pushes his plate away, swallows and gulps a mouthful of wine.

MADDOG (CONT'D)
(continuing)
We're supposed to be celebrating
tonight, and here we are eating
crap like this!

He drains his wine glass. Stella, caught off guard by his sudden swing of mood, and as if to prove that it was edible, takes a large mouthful of the casserole. Maddog drains his wine glass and shakes his head in silence. Then, with a touch of sadness and resignation, he reaches over to spear another bite from his plate.

MADDOG (CONT'D)
(continuing; with sadness)
Why do you do this to me?

STELLA
(quietly)
Sorry dad. It's the oven. It's
been overheating, ever since the
cat got into it.

With a final look of disgust, Maddog lays down his fork and refills his crystal goblet with wine. He lifts the glass to his lips.

MADDOG
Of course, selling is what I've
always been best at, Baby. Even as
a kid. I was the one with most
newspaper subscriptions, most
shopping orders ... But did it
ever impress my old man? Certainly
not. He was always knocking
business. And here I am, making
ten times the money he ever did -
even after he was made captain in
the fire brigade. What I would
give to see his stupid face now.
(he sweeps his arm in a
wide arc)
(MORE)

MADDOG (CONT'D)

This place we've got ... It'd
knock his eyes out!

He picks up the wine bottle and pours out what is left.
Stella, uneasy, is playing with her napkin ring.

STELLA

It's a brilliant place.
(she looks around, trying
to be cheerful)
A lot of work but it'll be lovely
once we've finished doing it up.

MADDOG

Yeah, it's a good place. No, my
old man, he was one of the real
losers in life. When my turn came
to go out and earn money, he
decided I was to become a fireman
or a soldier. Not satisfied unless
I got burned to death or had my
head blown off or something. Well
I tried the army, Baby, like I told
you, and it's strictly for losers.
Those guys have no fucking future
at all. Human garbage.
(he pauses and looks at
her)
Dead, baby.

STELLA

What?

She does not understand at first, but then sees her father's
eyes staring at the empty wine bottle as though it had
betrayed him.

MADDOG

This one's dead. What else is
there?

STELLA

The Burgundy.
(she stands up)
Or the Chablis.

MADDOG

(without taking his eyes
off the bottle)
Either one.

Stella disappears into the kitchen. Her father suddenly
seems to discover the yellow rose. His eyes glisten
unexpectedly in the candlelight.

MADDOG (CONT'D)
 (continuing; gently)
 Nice.

Stella reappears from the kitchen, places the open bottle next to her father and returns to her seat.

MADDOG (CONT'D)
 (continuing)
 Get it from the garden?

Stella nods.

MADDOG (CONT'D)
 (continuing)
 That's sweet, baby.
 (he touches the petals)
 It's as if you knew we'd be celebrating tonight. It's this thing between the two of us. Like telepathy or something. The way we always know what's going on with each other.

Stella seems slightly uneasy with the tenderness of the moment. She watches the rose and smiles.

STELLA
 We'll have your flowers soon.

Her father leans forward heavily, then gives her a broad sentimental smile.

MADDOG
 I already do.

Stella looks down at her plate.

MADDOG (CONT'D)
 (continuing)
 I have you.

He clears his throat and turns to the wine bottle to pour himself another glass. Then he raises it to a toast.

MADDOG (CONT'D)
 (continuing)
 My little flower.

STELLA
 (embarrassed)
 Oh, daddy.
 (she lifts her glass)
 Success, Dad.

Maddog waves her over and pulls her down onto his lap. Stella closes her eyes. He puts his arms around her and presses her head against his shoulder.

MADDOG
Love you, darling.

INT. MADDOG'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The army revolver is on Stella's lap. Her hand is still clutching the heavy gun, but her fingers are loose around the handle. Her eyes are shut and she looks as though she has fallen asleep but she is sitting upright. The puppets next to her, stare at Maddog who is sound asleep on the king-sized bed. He breathes deeply and regularly.

INT. LEFT-HAND DRIVE CAR, MOTORWAY - NIGHT

FLASHBACK: STELLA 5 YEARS

Maddog, about ten years younger, squints his tired eyes against the on-coming headlights.

MADDOG
Baby!

His voice is barely audible above the deep roar of the engine. Stella, five years old, is asleep on the passenger seat.

MADDOG (CONT'D)
(continuing)
Baby!

Stella rubs her eyes.

STELLA
Yes, Daddy.

MADDOG
Put your head on my lap, darling.
It's more comfy.

Stella, half asleep and clutching a little red dumper truck, moves over. On the back seat, sat on top of a pile of bags and blankets, are Punkey, Mymouse, Leoly, and Kristel.

INT. MADDOG'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

ON STELLA. Sound and voices from FLASHBACK sequence carried through.

STELLA (V.O.)
Daddy, my tummy hurts.

MADDOG (V.O.)
Can't stop now, baby. Try to go to sleep.

The sound of a car radio being tuned follows his voice. A few German speaking stations are scanned through. Slowly, the SOUNDS from the previous scene fade out and we are left with the stillness of Maddog's bedroom. Stella is staring at her sleeping father; the gun is pointed at him.

INT. SHOOTING RANGE - EARLY EVENING

About half a dozen out of a dozen lanes are floodlit. Little clouds of smoke rise from the cubicles to the ceiling; the noise is infernal. The CAMERA tracks along the balcony, looking down onto the marksmen and women who are shooting the hell out of human cardboard cutouts. The CAMERA ends its track as Maddog and Stella come into shot. Maddog is in the middle of firing off a volley of shots from his army revolver. He is wearing ear-mufflers, as is Stella who is watching him shoot. When eventually the gun is pumped dry of ammunition, Maddog removes the clip and pushes a new one in. He hands the gun to Stella.

MADDOG
(shouting above the noise)
Last round, yours!

Stella looks confident as she takes the gun. Assuming a stable shooting position, legs apart, both arms raised, left hand cupped under right hand, she takes aim. A new cardboard man flicks into position. Two men, BUCKY and PETE, friends of Maddog's, stop on the gangway above the pit to watch. Maddog nods at them with undisguised pride. They smile and wave. Stella's shots are fired in quick succession. She does not take aim between shots but fires until the clip is empty. The cardboard cutout remains intact, except for a nearly perfect circle of bullet holes around its groin. There is whistling and cheering from the gangway. Stella smiles. Bucky and Pete gesture that they intend to go for a drink. Maddog raises his thumb before lovingly placing the gun into a small carrying case.

MADDOG (CONT'D)

(continuing)

Very good, Baby. Keep remembering to hold the gun up properly. The whole thing a foot higher and you're onto a full bull's eye.

INT. SHOOTING CLUB

They exit the pit, walk through the lobby and out into the car park. Maddog is greeted by various shooting pals on the way; some in police uniforms.

EXT. CAR PARK - EVENING

As they walk towards his BMW, Stella slows down.

STELLA

Dad, please. I'd rather not.

Maddog keeps walking.

MADDOG

Not, what?

STELLA

I'd rather not go to the Shooter's tonight.

MADDOG

(with a leer in his voice)

Oh really?

They reach the car. Maddog unlocks the boot and places the gun case under a blanket. Then he unlocks the driver's door. Stella is still trailing behind.

STELLA

I don't feel very well.

Maddog slumps into his seat and leans across to open the passenger door. Stella gets in.

MADDOG

(sardonically)

You're sick?

(he starts the engine)

That's terrific. Awfully convenient, wouldn't you say?

He pulls out of the parking space and exits the car park at high speed.

STELLA
 (begging)
 I have cramps.

Maddog turns his head and looks at her with a triumphant smile on his face.

MADDOG
 You had your period two weeks ago.
 Try again.

Stella stares at him like a cornered animal, then looks down at her folded hands.

STELLA
 I know, dad. But I've been sort of irregular lately.

MADDOG
 Sure - in the last five minutes. I know. And I know you, girl. How you are when you don't want to do something.

A car, seemingly stuck behind the BMW at a small roundabout, BLOWS its horn. Maddog looks into the rear view mirror and shakes his loose fist.

MADDOG (CONT'D)
 (continuing)
 Fucking wanker!
 (he looks at Stella)
 I know every single one of your bloody excuses, Stella.

STELLA
 (despairingly)
 The Shooter's Inn is for adults.

Maddog hits the steering wheel with his fist.

MADDOG
 (trying to keep calm)
 Don't give me that shit!

Stella twitches. The car behind, HONKS again. Maddog turns around, furiously.

MADDOG (CONT'D)
 (continuing)
 What the fu...

His POV reveals Ms. Silva who is waving with a friendly smile.

MADDOG (CONT'D)
 (continuing)
 Who's that chick, does she know us?

Stella turns around to check. Ms. Silva waves and mouths the word "Hi". Stella puts on a happy smile and waves back.

STELLA
 She's a teacher.

Maddog grins sheepishly and waves back.

MADDOG
 New, is she?

Ms. Silva pulls her car forward obviously intending to say hello.

STELLA
 Yes.

As Ms. Silva draws up level with his car, Maddog takes advantage of a gap in the traffic and pulls away. Ms. Silva is left behind.

MADDOG
 (grinning)
 Ups, I think she was trying to say something.

Stella also smiles.

MADDOG (CONT'D)
 (continuing)
 Now back to you, what's this you don't wanna come, business?

Maddog drives the car off the roundabout and towards a public house in the middle distance.

STELLA
 (meekly)
 OK, I'll come.

MADDOG
 (softly but dangerously)
 You'll come? What on earth do you mean, you'll come? Was there ever any doubt?

His eyes glisten dangerously as he pulls into the car park of the Shooter's Inn. Then suddenly, he changes tactics.

MADDOG (CONT'D)
 (continuing)
 Look, baby - I know you want to
 come. Don't you? Baby?

STELLA
 (resigned)
 Yes, dad.

MADDOG
 (smiling at her)
 Why don't you say it then.

STELLA
 (with a forced smile)
 I want to come.

He smiles, leans over and kisses her on the cheek, then opens her door.

INT. SHOOTER'S INN - EVENING

The pub is dark and smoky. It is quite full. Bucky and Pete are sitting in a far corner of the room. They wave to Maddog and Stella as they enter. Maddog stops at the bar. TONI, the landlord, comes over, smiling.

MADDOG
 Hi Toni. How're you doing?

TONI
 Good to see you. And you, young
 lady. What'll it be, Charlie?

MADDOG
 (pointing towards his
 friends)
 Make it two of whatever they're
 having, and a Budweiser for me. Oh,
 and an orange squash.
 (he turns to Stella)
 That alright?

STELLA
 Lemon, please.

MADDOG
 Lemon squash that is, Toni, please.

Toni pulls three pints of lager.

TONI
 How's business, Charlie?

MADDOG
 (beaming)
 Not too bad Toni. Ticking over
 alright.

Toni places three full pint glasses onto the counter and starts siphoning off a half pint of lemon squash.

MADDOG (CONT'D)
 (continuing; reaching for
 his money)
 How about you? How's the Misses?

TONI
 Fine, but pregnant again.

He looks up in a gesture of exasperation.

MADDOG
 Wow! Congratulations.

TONI
 Yeah - another mouth to feed.
 Great! That's five fifty
 altogether, please, Charlie.

Maddog hands him the money and Stella two of the full glasses.

MADDOG
 Take it easy, Toni. They're worth
 it in the end, you'll see.

He laughs, winks, and moves on. Stella follows him. Toni waves his hand at him in a sort of a 'get away' gesture and turns to another customer.

CUSTOMER
 I see your clientele is getting
 ever younger.

TONI
 (pulling a pint of bitter)
 Well, I'm usually quite strict but
 he's alright. He's like a mother
 to that child - never lets her out
 of his sight.

CUSTOMER
 Just wondered about the old bill.

TONI

Never bothered me. Most of them know him from the riffle club, anyway. One thirty five, please, Graham.

Pete and Bucky applaud as Maddog and Stella arrive at their table and sit down.

PETE

I'm telling you guys, I've never seen a kid being such a natural with a weapon.

(he looks at Maddog)

I'm telling you, Charlie, she's definite Wren material, mate.

BUCKY

How about the Force, Stella? You and I on the same beat, wouldn't you fancy that?

He laughs heartily. Stella smiles back. Maddog takes a long swig, half emptying his pint glass. Bucky, short, fat and in his mid-forties, forcefully puts his empty pint glass down.

BUCKY (CONT'D)

(continuing)

Let's give the girl a break, she's only thirteen - aren't you darling?

STELLA

Almost.

Bucky strokes the back of her head.

BUCKY

(smiles warmly)

Almost.

(turns to Pete)

I bet you couldn't even count to a hundred at that age, never mind deciding what career to take.

PETE

Me - at fifteen, I was in the middle of my army career, mate. Peeling potatoes, mucking out the bogs, cleaning boots. Private Dogsboddy. Didn't get my mitts on a gun until I was seventeen.

Maddog drains his glass and nods in approval. Bucky turns to Stella, while Pete and Maddog continue talking amongst themselves.

BUCKY

What do you want to do when you grow up, sweetheart?

STELLA

Don't know yet.

BUCKY

Well, do you want to go to university? Do you fancy becoming an 'ologist' of some kind? You must have some dreams?

Maddog butts in before Stella can reply.

MADDOG

Dreams? You must be joking. I've never come across a more sober soul in my life.

The joke falls flat.

BUCKY

Oh....

(to Stella)

Listen to him. If I didn't know better, I'd probably think he's into giving you a hard time.

He laughs. Pete jumps up.

PETE

My round then. Don't go away.

BUCKY

Like where? To the bleeding Munich Bierfest, or something?

He laughs. Pete gives him the finger and leaves for the bar.

MADDOG

Stop staring holes into the air, Stella, drink up. You asked for it.

Stella seems a million miles away.

STELLA (O.S.)

Daddy, I need to go to the loo.

INT. CAR ON MOTORWAY - NIGHT

FLASHBACK: STELLA 5 YEARS

Maddog's hand rests on Stella's head on his lap. His fingers play with her curly blond hair. We see him from Stella's POV.

MADDOG

Can't stop now, we're on the
motorway. You'll have to wait
until the next resthouse. OK?

There is a short pause. The music from the radio is almost totally drowned by the rumble of the engine. Stella watches her father's tense features as they light up sporadically and then disappear again with the vanishing beams of passing headlights. It is an eerie, almost ghostly effect.

STELLA

I can't hold it, daddy.

Maddog doesn't take his eyes off the road.

INT. SHOOTER'S INN - NIGHT

Maddog, Pete and Bucky have started to play darts on a board next to their table. Maddog pulls his darts out of the board and sits down next to Stella. He drinks from his beer and watches Bucky taking aim for his first throw. ON STELLA. She looks in Bucky's direction but her stare goes through him.

MADDOG (V.O.)

I'll hold it for you.

INT. CAR ON MOTORWAY - NIGHT

FLASHBACK: STELLA 5 YEARS

Stella moves closer and Maddog pushes his hand under her skirt. She closes her eyes and squints. After a few moments, Maddog retrieves his hand in disgust. It is wet.

MADDOG

Shit!

INT. SHOOTER'S IN - NIGHT

Bucky's dart thuds smack into the centre of the board. Maddog jumps up from his seat and by doing so, knocks Stella's drink over.

MADDOG

Damn! Sorry, darling.

He fusses with beer mats trying to stem the flow.

INT. CAR ON MOTORWAY - NIGHT

FLASHBACK: STELLA 5 YEARS

MADDOG

You got the fucking car seat all wet. That's a bad girl!

Stella presses her little fists into her crutch. She has tears in her eyes.

STELLA

I'm sorry, daddy.

MADDOG

(shouting)

Look at you! Piss in your panties, piss all over my seat! Take them off!

INT. SHOOTER'S INN - NIGHT

Maddog's hand touches Stella's hand. She flinches.

MADDOG

You alright, Stella?
(His eyes look blurry)
Give it to me, it's wet.

Stella doesn't understand.

STELLA

(confused)

What dad?

MADDOG

Your jacket. I'll hang it over the radiator. It'll dry soon.

STELLA
I feel sick.

She jumps up and rushes off to the toilet.

INT. TOILET

Stella splashes cold water into her face. She is breathing heavily as she stares at her mirror image.

END OF EXTRACT - PLEASE SEND AN EMAIL TO POST@KLAUSWITTING.DE
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