Baby Bird

Matt Williamson | Act One, Scene 4

Nico and his father, Anders, watch a mare and her newborn foal. Anders has dementia; an AI recreation of his late wife, Mara, has become part of the household.

SETTING / STAGING NOTE

The AI characters are played by live actors visible to the audience. The human characters cannot see them and interact with them only through their voices.

READING THIS SAMPLE

Stage directions appear in italics. ... indicates speech trailing off or being drowned out. (CONT'D) means the same character continues speaking. (CONTINUED) means the scene continues on the next page.

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A FIELD

Nico stands with a horse blanket, a bucket is nearby.

Anders stands with his hands on his hips.

Both of them are watching something off stage.

ANDERS

Amazing, isn't she?

NICO

Beautiful. She'll be a great Mum. How long has it been?

Anders shrugs.

ANDERS

How should I know?

Beat.

NICO

Dad? I asked you to time it?

ANDERS

Time what?

NICO

She needs to stand within one hour or we call the vet?

ANDERS

It's a horse! You know...

(Points out to the horses.)

...they have been doing this for a few million years, I am sure she'll cope!

Nico gets his phone out and checks the time.

NICO

How's the new medication feeling?

Anders shrugs

ANDERS

I don't know. I'm confused.

(CONTINUED)

NICO

Seems like you’re a bit better?

ANDERS

Perhaps.

(Points out at the horses.)

There we go! Standing on her own!

Nico nods, smiles.

NICO

Dad. Listen. We need to talk about something. You are getting older right?

ANDERS

You’ve always been observant...

NICO

And we have had a good life, our family, mostly right?

ANDERS

Yes mostly.

NICO

But there are some things, that don’t... make sense. Back then, before the city.

ANDERS

(A stock answer.)

The longer we get from “now” the more murky “then” gets.

NICO

I want to get a clear understanding of the “then” bit...

Anders notices something, moves forward.

ANDERS

Come on ... that’s it.

(Turns to Nico.)

Look at that, will you! Good girl...

Anders moves over and puts his arm around Nico, smiling.

ANDERS (CONT’D)

Look! She’s feeding! The shed will do for a night or two but we need to get the stable finished.

Nico nods, turns to face his father.

NICO

Sure. Dad? Look. Having a ghost of Mum around playing happy families is...

ANDERS

Oh! Back on this. Righto. What? You want me to fight with my wife more? Sorry... just got distracted by a moment of universal wonderment. You want to turn Mara off? Is that it?

NICO

Dad! Mum can’t speak for what happened. Is it right the model speaks for her?

(CONTINUED)

ANDERS

Let the past be the past! The model isn’t your Mum... I know that! It’s getting cold. Let’s get back to the house.

NICO

(Sharp.)

Dad! My past makes no fucking sense!

Pause.

ANDERS

Fark! Worse for me!

NICO

(Imploring.)

I’ve got two brothers who don’t talk to us, fuck knows where, or if, they are? And a sister who sends a Christmas card once a year to me. Now... I’ve fucking stuck around!

(Beat.)

So don’t you owe it to me, to set the record straight? Whatever you did!

Pause.

ANDERS

Whatever I did! We had a few bad years! Should have stayed in Wangaratta! And you got absolutely the best of me. The best!

NICO

And the others? Or were they the practice kids?

Anders shakes his head.

The affable old guy transforming into a hardened country man.

ANDERS

Get. Back. In. Your. Fucking. Box, boy.

Beat.

NICO

What?

ANDERS

Know your place. Know your fucking place!

NICO

Know my place? You know whose house you are living in? Dad?

ANDERS

Well. Depends on how much you count the handouts we gave you kids. Fucking year after year.

(Looks around.)

And you end up with a shack in the country? I told Mara... “don’t give them handouts... the bank of Mum and Dad will become the fucking wishing well of waste.” And I was fucking right!

NICO

This is the real you? Right? This is what Mum put up with?

(CONTINUED)

ANDERS

I’m a guy who worked his arse off to keep you being able to do whatever the fuck you wanted. I did whatever job there was! And you? What... three failed businesses? A cookie hut. A fucking “cookie hut” with a mascot that looked like a teddy bear that has been hit by a truck! Two degrees. Philosophy! Shit! We paid that uni debt right?

NICO

This is your illness.

ANDERS

Ha! No - it’s me telling you the truth! Hang on? You just said you wanted the truth? What? Not now?

NICO

You burn people.

ANDERS

I survive! I survived your fucking mother!

Anders has shocked himself.

NICO

What did you do to my mother?

Beat.

Anders shakes his head and bitterly mouths...

ANDERS

(Nearly silent.)

Fuck!

(Beat.)

Please! Just help me get the horses into the shed? You want to bring this family together? Drop this shit and focus on now.

Anders reaches out his hand. But Nico turns and moves off.

He stops and turns around.

Beat.

NICO

What did you do to my Mother?

ANDERS

Perhaps this forgetting business isn’t all bad, Nico?

BLACKOUT.

End of selected excerpt. Original script pages 31-36.