



Opera Libretto

by

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## Characters

in order of appearance

Katie: Home carer and single mother – thirties

Myrtle: Wealthy widow living alone – eighties

Joyce: Retired factory worker married to Harry – eighties

Harry: Retired miner married to Joyce – eighties

Eileen: Confined to bed, can no longer speak but sings hymns – nineties.

Vivian: Myrtle's daughter, high-flying businesswoman - early fifties

Chorus members: Playing Katie's conscience, paramedics etc.

*Eileen is played by a puppet*

## Overture

*Sound of rain. Katie is taking her daughter to nursery.*

Katie

But you like nursery, yes you do, you like nursery...let's  
jump over the puddles, today we can't splash, we have to dash,  
please or mum will be late, you'll be late – we'll all be late.

*Katie enters onstage and stands outside Myrtle's house.*

I am here, today begins now. I will be cheerful, maybe I am  
the only one they will see today. I am here, the day begins now  
for Myrtle. I will be cheerful. I am here.

**Scene One**

Myrtle  
*Dreaming*  
Ah... ah...oh.

Katie  
Good morning Myrtle. It's been raining but now it's stopped. Just my  
luck to get caught. Look the sun's coming out.  
*Opens curtains.*

Myrtle  
Ah... what?

Katie  
Sorry, so sorry Myrtle, it's only me Katie...

Myrtle  
Oh dear Katie, you gave me a shock, I thought you were someone else.

Katie  
My apologies Myrtle, are you Ok? And would you like a cup of tea?

Myrtle  
Thank you dear, I'll sit up in a minute when I come to!

Katie  
Of course – no rush! *She leaves to make tea.*

Myrtle

Another day's dawned – no, there's a surprise, and the sun is too bright for my tired old eyes. It's too early to think, too early to drink, too early for me to cheerfully rise. I was dreaming of you as we lay on the beach, now you've gone out of reach.

Come on Myrtle, don't moan, you're alive and at home and Katie is making your tea. I'll sit up in a minute when I come to.

Katie

*enters with the tea*

Just how you like it, not too much milk and only a bit of sugar...

Myrtle

I know it's silly, I should give it up but just a little sweetness is nice.

Katie

What do you fancy wearing today, Myrtle? There's still some warmth in the air – so how about the coral?

Myrtle

I can't think at the moment, dear. I'll get up in a minute when I come to...

Katie

Or the white top with the yellow flowers, nice and summery. You have so many lovely things. I like the blue striped, how about this one?

Myrtle

Whatever you say dear, you choose.

Katie

I'll put out the flowery one, and then run a shower, lovely shower...

Myrtle

Oh god! Not another shower!

Katie

And then you'll be ready for breakfast!

Myrtle

Her and her showers.....

## Scene Two

*Outside Joyce and Harry's house. Joyce, wearing nightclothes, is watering pot plants.*

Katie

How lovely they look, Joyce, you keep them very well.

Joyce

Well, they don't die before they have to!

Katie

It's chilly out here Joyce, shall we go in and get you dressed?

Joyce

You have to water from the bottom, so they all get a good soak...

Katie

Yes dear I know...

Joyce

They have to be watered well in their roots you see.

Katie

Yes that's very interesting, but it's cold...

Joyce

You're not listening, as I said to the manager at Tesco's you should be telling people to water plants from the bottom...

Katie

Yes dear, but it's time to get dressed.

Joyce

You're not my boss, I used to run a department you know...

Katie

Yes I know, but it's cold!

Joyce

Go and bully Harry, he's waiting for you, no one listens to me, I ran a department at the hosiery factory. I ran a department at the hosiery factory...

Katie

I'll find something to keep you warm.

*She goes in the house and returns with a blanket which she attempts to put around Joyce's shoulders.*

Joyce

I'm not a parcel to be wrapped up – go away! I'm telling you I'm not a parcel to be wrapped up!

Katie

Well Joyce, how about I make some nice hot tea? I'll put the kettle on. The blanket's here if you feel cold.

*Katie puts the blanket on a seat and goes indoors to find Harry.*

*Harry is also in his nightclothes and is looking out of the window through binoculars.*

Katie

Good morning, Harry – how are you? Would you like a cup of tea?

Harry

In a mo. I'm busy looking...

Katie

Ok I'll put the kettle on, what are you looking at?

Harry

The birds, they're all lined up on the wire, they're looking this way. We're all boys together, sometimes I think they're watching me,

Harry

“What's he doing, what's he doing now – sitting on an egg?” Me and the birds – just waiting...

*Katie brings in tea and toast.*

Katie

Harry I've made some toast, would you like some?

Harry

Yes please, I'm hungry.

Katie

I don't think either of you have had breakfast, have you?

Joyce! Tea and toast!

Harry

*Looking out of the window through his binoculars*

I can't see Joyce, she's disappeared. The toast smells good,

With plenty of butter please.

Katie

Are you sure – wouldn't spread be better for you?

Harry

Huh! Joyce's cholesterol spread, no thanks! Don't eat this  
it's not good for your weight - don't eat that it's not good  
for your heart...

Katie

Joyce where are you? I hope she hasn't wandered off...

Harry

I'm a working man...was... look how thin my arms are  
now I can hardly lift these... *his binoculars*

Katie  
Joyce!

Harry

*Looking through binoculars*

Oh me, oh my look! There's a great tit – oh no it's Joyce!

Katie

Stop that Harry it's so rude!

*Joyce enters holding a flower*

Joyce

Look, look! Have you looked at this flower? No, I mean really looked at it?

Harry

I'll eat all of it if you don't hurry up – spread or butter, I don't mind...

Joyce

Shut up, you old fool, no one's talking to you!

Katie

Let's all sit down and eat our tea and toast and maybe then we can think about getting dressed.

Joyce

Oh, you're getting dressed too are you Katie, or maybe  
undressed? Harry would like that!

Harry

Bugger off!

Harry and Joyce

Ha ha!

Chorus

Ba ba!

### Scene Three

*Katie is rubbing cream on Myrtle's legs.*

Myrtle

Touch, touch, touch,  
Touch, touch, touch.  
Someone is touching my skin,  
Such a sure hand on my leg from ankle to shin.  
A kindness which travels along the veined line,  
So all the aches from a fall, the bruises and scars  
Feel divine! Touch, touch, touch, touch,  
Someone is touching my skin!

Myrtle

You are gentle dear lady

Katie

Oh, it's because I have a little girl, but thank you.

Myrtle

She's coming to see me.

Katie

Oh, that's nice, who is that then?

Myrtle

My little girl, when will she be here?

Katie

I don't know perhaps...

Myrtle

We left her with a nanny, and then she went away to school.

Katie

Oh, I see, I didn't know that...

Myrtle

My little girl, so grown up now.

Katie

How often does she come to visit?

Myrtle

My little Vivian...

Katie

How often does she visit?

Myrtle

Grown up now, so clever...

Katie

Will she come soon?

Myrtle

I don't know, you don't know – maybe Vivian knows!

Katie

I'm sure Vivian knows.

Myrtle

So clever my big daughter...

Katie

I'm sure she'll come soon ..

Myrtle

She's a stranger to me!

Katie

*Riffling through her notes.*

It seems that she's coming to see you Myrtle – it's never too late to get to know someone...

Myrtle

Are you my daughter?

Katie

No, I'm Katie.

Myrtle

When is...?

Katie

I'm looking after you.

Myrtle

When is she coming? I don't know, you don't know, someone should know.

Katie

It says here she'll visit a week on Tuesday.

Myrtle

What?

Katie

It says that she's coming to visit a week from this Tuesday.

Myrtle

That's nice for you!

Katie

Oh, Myrtle I mean your daughter, I mean...

*She begins to bandage Myrtle's legs*

Myrtle

Round and round and round and round and round  
my legs she goes...

Katie

Round and round the garden...

Myrtle

Round and round and round my legs she goes...

Katie

...one step, two step...

Myrtle

I can't move...

Katie

There we go, there we go...

Myrtle

Tight, tight, someone is holding me tight...

Katie

...nice and firm – that should stay on without falling down  
this time.

Myrtle

Oh, oh squeezing me so – hot little fingers!

Katie

There we go, all done now.

Myrtle

Don't go don't go, please not away...

Katie

All done now.

Myrtle

Don't go, don't go, I have to say, my dearest love...

Goodnight!

Katie

*Katie is alone filling in her list. The chorus join her..*

Gave out the meds and made the beds – tick

Prepared a sandwich for lunch and left on the tray – tick

Helped the client to wash and dress

Likes sandwiches of egg and cress – tick

Bottom still sore and cream applied – tick

She wet herself and sat and cried...

Don't worry dear there's only me here – tick

Knickers changed, pad changed, fresh towel  
And pads for later – tick  
Washed the pots and wiped the tops – tick  
Toilet cleaned, basin cleaned, bins cleaned  
Lifeline on, TV on  
Door locked  
Left 10.15 – tick tock!

#### **Scene Four**

*Harry on his own – outside the house. Inside Joyce is watching  
Motor racing on TV.*

Harry

Here's a riddle. What can't I hold in my hands and yet lies heavy on them? Time! Look at the marks it has left – all that work and now nothing. I used to have a hand full of callouses like a rhino she said "Don't touch me you old rhino!" I'd never get my nails clean, no matter how hard I scrubbed they were always blue around the edge. She washed my back where I couldn't reach.

## Scene Five

*Eileen (a puppet) is being given a blanket bath by Katie.*

*Eileen can't speak; she sings hymns*

Eileen

Ah ah ah!

Katie

Ah ah ah!

Eileen

Ah!

Katie

Eileen, now I'm going wash you all over – is that Ok with you?

Eileen

Ah!

Katie

The water is so nice and warm.

Eileen

Ah, ah!

Katie

*She is washing one arm then another*

Remember how much you liked it last time?

Eileen

Ah, ah!

Katie

That's it, now the other.

Eileen

*Singing a hymn*

Lead kindly light, amid the encircling gloom...

Katie

That's lovely, we'll soon have you ready.

Eileen

...lead thou me on, the night is dark and I am far from  
home...

Katie

May I just wash your face, is that Ok?

So please close your lips.

Eileen

...lead thou me on...

Katie

That's it, Eileen, we'll soon have you nice and clean.

Eileen

...keep thou my feet...ah ah!

Katie

That's it, Eileen, I remember my dad washing my face,  
round and round he went with the flannel, till I was dizzy.  
"Remember to keep your eyes closed," he said. You too  
Eileen, we don't want soap in your eyes.

Eileen

Ah, ah!

Katie

He did his best, bless him. Now for your legs. Oh you've  
got a great pair – did you go dancing Eileen?

Eileen

Ah ah!

Katie

The right leg out, the right leg in. In, out, oh the hokey  
cokey! Do you remember Eileen? I'd like to go dancing me.  
Get all dressed up in glitter and glam, get my hair done,  
maybe my nails... Hitch up now while I go down below.  
*Katie removes an incontinence pad, washes Eileen's bottom,  
changes the pad.*

Eileen

Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me  
on. The night is dark and I am far from home...

Katie

That's the ticket, now you're ready to begin your day.

*Katie picks up her work log and fills it in, as Eileen  
continues to sing*

Katie

I was fifteen minutes late – tick  
Because I had to wait to see my boss  
Who was cross about my time keeping – tick  
Eileen is fine, just sings all the time, she's so happy  
But what about me? What about me?

Katie

Gave client a bath, tried to make her laugh  
Telling her about my own life...

*Eileen stops singing, her life slips away. Katie doesn't  
notice and continues filling in her log.*

Katie

Changed her pad – tick  
Yes – tick, tick yep, tick, ahmm tick, tick, tick, tick...

*Silence, after a few seconds, Katie drops her notes, rushes  
To Eileen and checks her vital signs. Realising she is dead,  
she takes her in her arms and sings...*

Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me  
on. The night is dark and I am far from home, lead thou me  
on.

*She picks up her phone and calls emergency services and  
her office. She mouths the words which cannot be heard.*

*Eileen, now a distant voice, sings.*

Eileen

Keep thou my feet, I do not ask to see...

*She is joined by the chorus*

Chorus

Lead kindly light, amid the encircling gloom...

Eileen

The distant scene, one step enough for me...

Chorus

Ah...ah...

*Eileen rises to heaven!*

### Scene Six

*Katie is travelling to her next appointment with Joyce and Harry. The chorus (her conscience) follows.*

Chorus

Me  
bad me bad me bad me bad me bad me bad me bad me bad me bad me bad my  
bad my bad my bad my bad my bad my bad my bad my bad bad bad  
bad bad. I did a bad thing, did a bad thing a bad thing a bad thing bad  
bad bad bad bad bad bad bad bad bad I did a bad thing did a bad thing  
bad thing I did a bad thing did a bad thing bad bad bad bad bad  
bad bad bad bad bad bad bad bad bad bad bad bad bad bad bad a bad  
thing bad thing bad thing bad thing bad thing bad thing bad thing...

*Katie arrives at Joyce and Harry's house. She greets Harry who is sitting outside. She knocks on the door a few times, then enters, as she does so there is a very loud sound of motor racing from the TV. Katie has to shout to be heard.*

Chorus

Bad bad...

Joyce

Door!

Katie

Do you need anything Joyce?

Katie

Everything OK? Joyce? Do you need anything? Would you like anything? A cup of tea?

Joyce

What?

Katie

Like anything? A cup of tea? A cup of tea?

*Katie gets no response from Joyce, so she goes back to Harry.*

Joyce

Door!

Harry

Leave Joyce be and stay with me...

Katie

But...

Harry

But me no buts... you look all in...

Katie

But what about her pills?

Harry

I gave them to her – check the Dossett box...

Katie

Oh Harry, you shouldn't...

Harry

Look I've got more marbles than she has...and she's my wife

Katie

Well, I'll make you both a cup of tea...

Harry

No more tea please, I'll pee myself. All this rushing about doesn't get you anywhere. Give us a hand me duck.

*Katie thinks Harry needs helping up but instead he pulls her down onto the seat next to him. She laughs but continues to sit and hold his hand.*

Katie

Oh Harry you are awful! And such big hands!

Harry

That's what all the girls used to say. Here's a riddle! What can't I hold in my hands yet lies heavy on them? TIME! Look at the marks time has left...

Katie

Ah yes!

Harry

I could lift a hundred weight of coal – nine tons a day I got out, nine tons a day – I use to have hands like a rhino. She said, “don't touch me you old rhino no!” But she washed my back where I couldn't, I couldn't reach. Not anymore!

Katie

Oh Harry, I'm sorry!

Harry

Well the old girl can't bend down!

Katie

You are awful!

Harry

But I like you!

Sometimes I think they're watching me...

Katie

The birds?

Harry

They're all lined up on the wire...

Sitting here in the sun – outside my own home...

Katie

There is a lack of someone I knew...

Harry

...sitting here with a girl holding my hand...

Katie

...no one told me it might happen... I held her...

Harry

...it's grand!

Katie

I've never seen anyone... before, when my nan died, they wouldn't let me see her...

Harry

Would Joyce notice I'd gone?

Katie

Where have they gone - all the beloved ones?

Harry

Sitting here in the sun outside my own home...

Katie

There is an absence of someone I knew...

Harry

Sitting here with a girl holding my hand...

Katie

...no one prepared me for this to happen...

Harry

It's grand! I'm a lucky old man!

Katie

...I held her but until that moment,

Harry

Wouldn't it be nice to slip away now?

Katie

I'd never seen somebody dead before...where have they gone, all the beloved ones? All those that died – all the beloved ones.

Harry

Would Joyce notice I'd died?

Katie

That stillness and silence, is it really peace?

Harry

Oh, for some peace!

Katie

All I found was an absence of singing...

*Joyce suddenly pokes her head out and sees them holding hands*

Joyce  
GOTCHA!!

## Scene Seven

*Katie is in Myrtle's house with Vivian, Myrtle's daughter. Vivian is dressed in a business suit. Myrtle is dozing in an armchair.*

Katie

...but Myrtle can cope ...

Vivian

... and as I have already explained to your agency...

Katie

...with support,

Vivian

...we have entered a different scenario...

Katie

...she responds well to me...

Vivian

...and they agree with me...

Katie

...she knows me

Vivian

...that mother is losing capacity

Katie

I have seen an improvement...

Vivian

... And we should act sooner rather than later...

Katie

I have seen an improvement...

Vivian

...and secure her future permanently...

Katie

May I visit her there...may I visit her?

Vivian

Well, we'll see, maybe in a while, maybe when she's settled, we don't want to confuse her further.

Katie

I'll write a list. First thing in the morning Myrtle likes what she calls a 'good cup' of tea, with only a bit of sugar. She needs plenty of time to wake up – she doesn't like to be rushed. Then I get out her favourite clothes for her to choose – she seems reluctant to say what she wants, she needs to be encouraged – she has so many lovely things. And every

day – every morning and evening, I put cream on her legs, which she enjoys – she likes to be touched...

*Vivian interrupts Katie and hands her a business card*

Vivian

Yes, a list is a very good idea. Email me and I'll pass it on.

You're a hero Katie, what would we do without people like you? And now I don't want to delay you further, I'm sure you have other clients.

*Katie turns to go but on an afterthought walks past Vivian and bends over the sleeping Myrtle.*

Katie

Bye bye Myrtle, I will try to come and see you soon.

Take care of my friend new home people. Take care, take care.

Bye bye Myrtle, I promise to come and see you soon.

*To Vivian* And I hope to see you there too! *She exits*

Myrtle

*Myrtle wakes and looks around*

Katie, is that you? I'll get up in a minute when I come to.

## Scene Eight

*Katie arrives at Harry and Joyce's house. She can't get in with her key because Joyce has left her own key in the lock.*

Katie

Oh, she's left the key in the lock again!

*After several attempts at knocking on the door she calls through the letterbox.*

Katie

Joyce! Harry! Open the door!

*Through the letterbox slit she can see Harry lying on the floor*

Katie

Joyce, Joyce! Open the door!

Joyce

Whaaat?

Katie

Joyce, Joyce! Open the door please, it's very urgent

Joyce

Go away and mind your own business...

Katie

Joyce, I need you to come to the door and open it!

Joyce

I'm busy, I'm darning a sock and can't stop now...

Katie

Joyce, Harry has had a fall – you must see that?

Joyce

The silly old bugger won't listen to me...

Katie

Joyce, you must let me in so I can help him. He's lying on the floor Joyce, we have to help him...

*Pause*

OK, let's play a game – do you remember that game we played Joyce – do you remember that game?

*Katie appears at the window outside*

Joyce

Oh look – it's Peter Pan!

*As Katie climbs through the window Joyce turns away, goes to the door and opens it*

Peter Pan Peter Pan Peter Pan Peter Pan Peter Pan...

*Joyce looks around outside*

She's gone, I knew it was Katie – so not much of a game anyway!

*Joyce continues to fiddle with the sock she is darning, steps over Harry lying on the floor and goes out.*

*Katie rushes over to the prone Harry*

Harry

Help me!

Katie

It's ok Harry

*Katie checks his pulse and looks for her phone to call 111 services*

Harry

Help me! Oh, thank God! ...I can't remember...

*Harry seizes Katie's hand and won't let go. With great difficulty and with one hand she finally gets through to the 111 service.*

Katie

Hello my name is Katie Moore and I'm a carer. Er...

I've arrived to find my client collapsed on the floor.

His name is Harry Collins. He's eighty-five (*to herself*) he's still alive. What?

Yes ...no I don't have his exact date of birth...why? Because I don't have his notes in front of me...I'm kneeling on the floor at the moment with Harry...

Don't you want the address? Yes, he's conscious and yes, he's breathing...no signs of bleeding...can he raise his arms above his head (Christ!) I don't

know. Harry, can you raise your arms above your head? Harry is shaking his

head – so he can move that! Look don't you want the address – is someone

coming? A physician will phone me? No...not vomited blood. Harry, she

wants to speak to you... *she passes the phone to Harry who speaks into it*

Harry

I need a wee!

Katie

It's Ok Harry don't worry...

*Back to the operator*

Look, there's only me here, hang on...please don't go away... Joyce, come here I need your help...

Joyce

Don't bother with him...he's just trying to get attention...

Harry

She tried to kill me!

Katie

What! Joyce come in here...this is not a game.

Harry

I need a wee!

Katie

Joyce, please come at once!

*Joyce enters in a long dressing gown carrying a spoon*

*Katie speaks into the phone again*

Can you hang on?

Joyce

There's no need to shout, I've got my ears in now...

Katie

*into phone*

I've another client who needs my attention. Hello? Fuck it - she's gone!

Joyce

Such language from a young lady!

*She looks at Harry lying on the floor*

And what are you lying down there for?

Katie

Joyce, I need you to get him a bowl...

Joyce

Lazy old bugger!

Katie

...and a blanket...

Joyce

Getting attention

Katie

And maybe a pillow...

Joyce

He fancies you!

Harry

I need a wee!

Katie

Let go of my hand Harry...

Joyce

Get him a bottle...

Katie

That's a good idea, Joyce, do you think you could...

Joyce

No, you go, it's your job...

*Katie manages to get her hand free and dashes out.*

*Joyce stands over Harry looking down at him*

Why are you lying there? Why can't you move?

Harry

You tried to kill me!

Joyce

I never!

Harry

You tried to kill me!

Joyce

I never did!

Harry

You did!

Joyce

I never!

*Katie returns with a milk bottle. She helps Harry unzip his fly and holds the bottle for him to pee into it.*

Katie

It's Ok Harry you should feel better now – all done now?

Harry

She tried to kill me! She tried to kill me you know!

Joyce

I couldn't lift him...

Harry

She tied my legs together...

Joyce

I couldn't take his weight...

Harry

...with cloth

Joyce

I didn't no no no no no no no no no!

*Joyce bursts into tears and runs off. There is the sound of doors opening and closing, running water and a big crash.*

Katie

Joyce – what are you doing?

*Joyce returns. She is wearing an elaborate hat and is carrying a wet flannel, a pillow and a handbag. She shoos Katie away, kneels down beside Harry and puts a pillow under his head and the flannel on his forehead. From her handbag she takes a thermometer and sticks it in his mouth, then she takes off her dressing gown and puts it over him.*

*Katie takes out her phone and dials 999*

Katie

Ambulance please, twenty-seven Knighton Road – an elderly man has had a bad fall – I'm not sure what happened, I'm his carer Kate Moore and I think he might be...I mean it's only my instinct but I feel he might be...thank you please hurry.

Joyce

*Staring at Harry transfixed*

Have I loved you for a long time?

Your face is so familiar was it once mine?

Have I loved you for a long time – for a long time?

Chorus of Paramedics

Open the door, open the door, open the door, open the door  
Is there a man on the floor, open the door.  
Is there a man on the floor?  
Open the door, open the door.  
We're here to help you...  
We're here to help you...  
Can you tell me your name?

Harry

Harry.

Chorus

We're here to help you...  
Ok Harry let's sit you up and see what's the problem...  
Gently, gently, steady, steady...

Katie

*On her phone*

Hello, can you keep...

Chorus

...steady, steady...

Katie

...Milly at nursery for a couple of hours. A client has had a fall and I just can't leave him...

Chorus

Gently, gently, gently...

Katie

The ambulance has come – oh thank you! Thank you so much.

Chorus

We're here to help you...

Katie

I'm here to help you...

Harry

They're all lined up, they're all lined up on the wire...

Chorus

We're here to help you...

Katie

I'm here to help you...

Chorus

Steady, steady, gently, gently...

*The chorus lift Harry into a wheelchair and slowly wheel him out.*

END

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