

At rise: The lights come up to reveal MALCOLM sitting in front of a small table. Atop the table is a small, oval porcelain box. He stares affectionately at the box for a few moments before speaking.

MALCOLM

That's Mother, that is.

(beat)

Well...not her in the strict sense, I suppose...just the bits and pieces of her left over from the cremation, you know. Sort of a dried and granulated version of her, if you will. A bit like instant coffee, you might say, only without the flavour. Not that I've...you know...I mean...good heavens.

(beat)

That's Wedgwood, that is. Very expensive. Very expensive indeed. But worth it – worth every penny – 'cause Mother was worth it. Weren't you, Mother? She was. Worth every penny.

(beat)

It's glued shut, actually. The lid, that is. I glued it myself with superglue – I had to. Seems criminal, really, doing something like that to a beautiful piece of genuine Wedgwood bone china. I'm sure if the Wedgwood's knew what I'd done they'd be all up in arms and fit to be tied. But it had to be done. Even so, I was riddled with guilt. As I squeezed the glue around the rim, I felt just like a vandal...like one of those jobs on the corner of Wentworth Street, with their saggy trousers and their big hoods with their nasty little eyes peering out...I felt just like one of them. But I had no choice. Not after the, um...well...the incident.

(beat)

The thing is, I loved Mother, you see. I loved her ever so much. And when she passed on...well, I...it was, um...it was very hard. I missed her something terrible. Some days I'd...well, I won't get into that now.

(pause)

Anyway...some days...evenings...when I missed her most, I'd sit down and have a chat with her. Just me and her and a bottle of pale ale...having a chitchat. Well, I did most of the chatting. All of it, actually. But whatever I said, whatever I told her, I knew what she'd say in response, so it all made sense, you see. Anyway, I'd sit her down on the coffee table, take the lid off, open up a pale ale, light up a cigarette, and tell her all that was on my mind – just like before...before she...took her leave.

(beat)

In retrospect, I'm not entirely sure why I took the lid off to begin with. I think I thought she could probably hear me better, if that makes sense. Which I don't

think it does. Perhaps it just made me feel a little closer to her. In any event, that's what I would do.

(beat)

But then, one evening...oh, about two or three months ago now, I suppose...I had...let's just say, one of my "off days." It had all become a little bit too much, you see. The images had returned. The final ones. You don't forget those. I try very hard, you see, to...to banish them. But sometimes they come back. And that day...they'd come back.

(beat)

At first I tried to hide it from her. I just chatted about this and that – general things, you know – like how I'd shrunk yet another cardigan in the wash, and that Mrs. Tottle at number twenty-three apparently had a new fancy man in her life, from what I could tell. But I knew. I knew that she knew. And I didn't want to talk about it...think about it. So I'd keep talking, and pour another pale ale, and have another cigarette...and another pale ale, and another cigarette...and another, and another...and I suppose it all started to get a bit carried away, and all these feelings started bubbling up out of nowhere, and just as I was telling her how angry I was with her, I saw myself flick the ash from my cigarette into her little Wedgwood resting place instead of the ashtray!

(beat)

I froze.

(beat)

Even though the room was sort of spinning around me, I froze. I was horrified. Mortified. How could I have done such a thing? To my own Mother? It was the ultimate slap in the face. And what could I do? I couldn't fish it out – it all looked the same. I could've scooped out the top part, I suppose...but some of that was Mother. I felt sick – sick to my stomach. But what could I do? What would you have done? I wanted to throw up. And then I went to the toilet and I did throw up. And I was glad I did, because afterwards I felt a bit better...a bit more...sensible. And I walked back into the living room, apologized to Mother very sincerely and without a scene, and vowed that the next morning I would seal the lid of her little Wedgwood tomb permanently and for all eternity – just like the ancient Pharaohs and Cleopatra, etcetera.

(beat)

So yes, even though in most respects this *is* my Mother, I suppose that, strictly speaking, I would have to say that this is 99.8% my Mother...and a tiny little bit of Marlboro Light.

(beat)

I did, for a moment, have this horrible thought that perhaps in introducing her to cigarettes, I might have inadvertently turned her into some pack-a-day fiend in the afterlife. But then reason soon returned. I mean, it wouldn't matter, would it? It's not as if everyone in heaven's jogging around in parks and taking vitamin supplements in the hope of squeezing out a few more years of it. You're just there.