

ETHEL, a frail-looking woman in her late-seventies, sits in an armchair working on a crossword. In front of her is a very large, sturdy, metallic-looking trunk, partially covered by a piece of lace-trimmed decorative fabric. Atop the trunk, facing ETHEL, is a picture frame. To the side of the armchair, R, is a small table holding a lamp, a porcelain ornament of some description, and a cup and saucer.

ETHEL

(After a yawn.)

Oh, it's no good, Wilf, this one's got me stumped, good an' proper. I dunno if it's 'cause these er gettin' 'arder, or if me brain's gettin' smaller.

(To no one in particular.)

They say that's what 'appens, don't they?

(Looking over at the picture frame.)

Pr'aps you know, Wilf? You were always a dab 'and with a crossword.

(Reading from the newspaper.)

Thirty-six down: "The perfect alibi?" – eight letters?

(Looking back at the picture frame.)

No? Well, never mind, Wilf, I s'pect we're both too tired to think straight, don't you? Time I took me achin' bones to bed, I'd say.

(Just then a loud smashing of glass is heard.)

ETHEL

(Petrified.)

Gawd alive, whatever's that? Ooh, Gawd 'elp us! Wilf?

(She grabs the picture frame and holds it close to her.)

Wilf? Summit's 'appenin'! Summit's 'appenin', Wilf, and I dunno what! Oh Gawd, Wilf, I do miss ya! I miss ya ever so much!

(A figure slowly appears from the darkness at the back of the room. ETHEL turns her head to one side, sensing his presence.)

ETHEL

(Her voice shaking.)

Who is it? What d'ya want?

THUG

(From the darkness.)

Ohhh fuck!

ETHEL

Who's there? Who are ya?

THUG

Oh, fuck me!

ETHEL

Don't 'urt me darlin'! I'm old – I ain't gonna do ya no 'arm!

THUG

You stupid old cow! Why ain't ya got ya bloody lights on?

ETHEL

They are on, darlin'. Got me lamp on, ain't I?

THUG

That piddly fuckin' thing? 'Ow's a professional criminal, the likes o' me, s'posed to know if you're at 'ome or not with that bollocky fuckin' excuse for a light? Might as well 'ave a bleedin' candle goin'.

ETHEL

I can't 'ave lights blazin' all night on a pension, darlin'. It's expensive, the 'lectric. Gotta economise, ain't I?

THUG

Gordon-friggin-Bennett, just my bloody luck!

ETHEL

(Meekly.)

Where are ya then, darlin'? Don't stand back there in the dark, you're makin' me ever so nervous.

(The THUG moves downstage R, a short distance from ETHEL. He is wearing a stocking mask and carrying a piece of lead piping.)

ETHEL

(Tentatively.)

Oh, there you are, darlin'. See, I told ya, I'm ever so old, ain't I? I ain't gonna 'urt ya, now am I?

THUG

(Raising his hand to cover his nose.)

Gor, bloody 'ell, what an evil stink!

ETHEL

I can't 'elp it, can I? Look at me – I'm seventy-eight.

THUG

Christ, you old people – ya stink, all of ya!

ETHEL

Don't say that, darlin', I can't 'elp it. It's embarrassin', but what can I do – I can't 'elp bein' old, can I?

THUG

Gawd almighty, I got the luck o' the bleedin' devil, I 'ave. You got no idea, 'ave ya? D'ya know 'ow much more complicated my job gets when there's someone 'ome? It's a bloody 'eadache, that's what it is.

ETHEL

I'm ever so sorry, luv.

THUG

Just shut up, will ya? I gotta think, ain't I?  
(Suddenly turning his head to one side.)  
Gor, bloody 'ell, you don't 'alf pong!

ETHEL

I keep tellin' ya, darlin', I can't 'elp it – I'm seventy-eight.

THUG

I know, I know, now just shut it!

ETHEL

If I was a bit younger I wouldn't 'ave the smell. Wouldn't 'ave no problem, would I? But I ain't young no more, see? I'm old – I'm ever so old.

THUG

Are you gonna shut that stinkin' gob, or am I gonna 'ave to smack this pipe across that skull o' yours?

ETHEL

(Terrified.)  
Oh, don't 'urt me, luv, please! I wont say nothin' more - promise!

THUG

(To himself.)  
What a bloody mess. Alright, what ya gonna do?  
(As he eyes her speculatively.)

THUG (Cont'd.)

S'pose I could kill ya right now? Mmm...pr'aps? Could make ya an 'ostage, I s'pose? Nah...who's gonna pay good money for a sack o' stinkin' old bones like you?

(Pause.)

ETHEL

(Attempting to forge a relationship.)

What's your name then, sonny?

THUG

What?

ETHEL

What's your name then?

THUG

I ain't gotta name.

ETHEL

'Course you gotta name. We all got names. Even thugs an' 'ooligans got names.

THUG

Well I ain't. And as far as you're concerned, I never will. As far as you know I'm just a thug. Just ya common-or-garden, neighbour'ood thug. Gottit?

ETHEL

All right, darlin'.

(Pause.)

What's that you got there on yer 'ead then, Mr. Thug?

THUG

This? What's it look like? It's a bleedin' stockin', innit?

ETHEL

A stockin'? What d'ya wanna stockin' on yer 'ead for? Got allergies, 'ave ya? I got allergies, an' all. Specially come summer – all the pollens, an' that. Me eyes all red an' runnin'. Ooh, it's wicked, it is. Makes my life misery.

THUG

Look, just shut yer jabberin', will ya? There's only one thing I'm allergic to right now, an' that's smelly old people that can't keep their trap shut!

ETHEL

Sorry, Mr. Thug.