

The Masterpiece

By Lila Whelan

28 Plays Later - Challenge 19

1.30am, Saturday morning.

A modern, stylish bedroom that is strewn in half drunken mugs of coffee, clothes piled up in heaps on the floor, books stacked up on every surface and typed papers covered in notes and crossing-outs surround the bed on the floor.

On the bed sits Emma, 30, typing on her laptop. She wears stained pyjamas, her hair is greasy and tied up in a straggly pony tail.

Michael, 34, enters. He is slightly drunk, wearing a suit and a loosened tie. He is carrying several brightly coloured paper gift bags - bags containing birthday presents. Michael takes in the scene of disarray and wrinkles his nose at the smell. Emma glances up at him briefly, holds out a hand indicating 'give me a minute' then resumes typing.

Michael nods to himself. He drops the bags on the dresser and starts to take off his suit. He strips to his boxers and turns to look at Emma. She ignores him. He fishes out his phone from his pocket and throws it on the bed near Emma. She stops typing and looks at it, looks at him confused.

Michael gives her a tight smile then exits into the bathroom. Offstage the shower is turned on.. Emma clocks the birthday gifts for the first time. Her face drops. She looks at his phone then quickly closes the laptop, puts it to one side and starts looking around - in the folds of the duvet, under the bed, on the dressing table.

Eventually she finds her own phone in the pocket of a handbag. She picks it up, taps for a moment or two then a look of growing horror appears on her face.

Michael re-enters with a towel around his waist. He stares at her, she looks at him apologetically. She goes to touch him, he steps out of her way and moves around the bed to his phone. He picks it up and taps. Emma's phone rings. He smiles bitterly.

Emma tries to touch him again. He recoils. He picks up a towel from the floor and throws it at her. She picks it up, stares at it for a moment. Michael turns his back and sits on the bed. She gets up and goes into the bathroom. The shower is heard again.

Michael goes to the dresser, he opens drawers and takes out jeans, t-shirt, boxers, socks and a jumper. He puts them on. He then takes a small suitcase down from the top of the wardrobe.

Emma re-enters wearing a dressing gown with wet hair. She walks up behind Michael and hugs him. She kisses his back, Michael drops the bag and turns to face her. Emma takes his face in her hands and pulls him down to kiss him.

They kiss for a moment, Michael places his hands on top of hers and takes them off his face. Staring down at the floor, he shakes his head slightly. He steps back, picks up the bag and starts to fill it with underwear, shoes, t-shirts. Emma stands in shock for a moment then tries to grab the bag from him. Michael moves it away from her. She clings to his arm, he pushes her gently but firmly on to the bed.

She lands and begins to cry. At the sound Michael stops. He trembles, drops the bag onto the bed and walks into the bathroom.

Emma wipes her eyes and walks to the wardrobe. She pulls out a box from the bottom and opens it up as Michael re-enters carrying toothbrush, deodorant and electric razor in his arms.

Emma turns and points a gun at him. Michael freezes. Emma's face crumples, her arm shakes. Michael opens his mouth to speak as he steps towards her, Emma shoots him.

Michael falls to the floor. Emma drops the gun and rushes to him. She cradles him in her arms. She kisses him. Michael dies and she rocks him back and forth crying.

After a moment, she wipes her eyes and stands. She puts on Michael's discarded shirt and boxers then sits back on the bed. She opens the laptop and resumes typing. She stops typing, tapping the last few letters in a satisfied way. She saves the document, smiles, looks at Michael, picks up the gun and shoots herself in the head. Police sirens are heard getting louder.