

# **GHOSTWRITER**

**WRITER:** CERISE DE GELDER

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**CHARACTERS:**

LUCY:            *Woman, thirties/forties.*

AGNES:          *Mother of Lucy.*

PERCY:          *Father of Lucy.*

BEN:             *Husband of Lucy.*

**SETTING:**

*Living room of Agnes and Percy.*

*(All enter removing coats.)*

AGNES:          Right. Who's for a cuppa, then?

PERCY:          Thanks, love.

BEN:             Count me in.

AGNES:          Nothing better than a hot cup of tea on a cold night, I always say.

PERCY:          First thing my old mum used to do when she walked in the house. Put on the kettle and break open the biscuit tin.

AGNES:          Yep, mine too.

PERCY:          She'd bake the best biscuits I've ever tasted...apart from yours, love, of course. Melt in your mouth, they did.

AGNES:          Or a teacake. My mum would make a teacake with spicy apple and lots of cinnamon. Mmmm, I can still smell that cinnamon.

BEN:             Couldn't possibly be better than your fruitcake, Mum. I'm always saying you should sell that recipe, you'd make a fortune. Lucy won't make it for me. She always says/...

LUCY:            *(Angrily)* What the hell is wrong with you people?

*(They all stop in their tracks and stare at her.)*

AGNES: Something wrong, dear?

LUCY: Something wrong? Yes, as a matter of fact, something is very wrong.

PERCY: What's on your mind, sweetheart?

LUCY: Well, let me see. I've been writing plays for what...five years now? Five years without a single production. And finally...finally someone shows some interest. Finally I get a play on and guess what? It's good! People like it! They actually laugh in all the right bits, cry in the sad part and applaud at the end. So I take everyone I know and love to see my play...my friends, my parents, my husband...thinking that maybe they'll like it too. So they come and they watch and the lights come up and we all go home and not one of you has said a bloody word about it since! So I was just wondering, what the hell is wrong with you people?

*(Pause)*

AGNES: Well, you can't always be the centre of attention, my love. I mean there are other things going on in our lives, you know.

LUCY: We spent thirty minutes in the car talking about the freaking weather! And now it's a fascinating exploration of the baking prowess of every mother since the beginning of time! Is anybody ever going to mention my play?

*(Long pause, while Agnes, Percy and Ben look embarrassed.)*

BEN: I thought it was...really interesting.

*(Pause)*

LUCY: That's it? Interesting?

BEN: No, *really* interesting. It was a really interesting little play.

LUCY: So that's the best you can do?

PERCY: You know me, love. I've never been one of those arty farty theatre people.

LUCY: I can't believe you hated it when everyone else loved it.

AGNES: We didn't hate it, dear. It's just...You've already got a good career, why don't you concentrate on that?

PERCY: All this poncing about on stage, droning on about life and love...

AGNES: I thought you liked being a policewoman.

PERCY: Sit me in a dark, warm room and in five minutes I'm off to La-La Land...

LUCY: I'm hardly going to give up my day job. Everybody knows you can't make money from writing plays.

AGNES: Well, why do it then?

LUCY: Because there's more to life than making money.

BEN: She's right. Everybody needs a hobby. I've got my fishing and Lucy's got her little plays.

LUCY: Stop calling them my little plays! It's so condescending!

PERCY: Ha! That reminds me of that joke about the Greek parachutist...

BEN: Hey, don't yell at me, I was trying to support you.

PERCY: Get it? Con descending...Greek parachutist...

LUCY: Support me! You've *never* supported me. You won't even turn the TV down when I'm trying to write. You always want sex just when my ideas start flowing /...

AGNES: Lucy!

LUCY: I couldn't go to the writers' festival last weekend because you wanted to go to some wedding which was just an excuse for a boozy night with the boys.

BEN: Dicko's a good mate!

LUCY: You met him once on a drunken weekend in Apollo Bay.

BEN: Once you've shared bait and beer on a boat with a bloke he's a mate for life.

AGNES: Look, let's have a nice cuppa and all calm down.

LUCY: I won't calm down! I want to know why you didn't like my play, dammit!

AGNES: It's not that we didn't like it, dear.

LUCY: Well, what is it?

AGNES: I was just a little...hurt.

LUCY: Hurt! Hurt by what?

AGNES: Is that what you really think of me?

LUCY: What? What are you talking about?

AGNES: You think I'm a nagging neurotic old cow who married her husband for money?

LUCY: Mum! That was a character in the play, it's not you.

AGNES: Because I've always loved your father...God knows he had no money.

PERCY: And I love your mother. And I have *never* been unfaithful, I'd swear to that on a stack of bibles.

LUCY: I know you haven't. Well, I don't *know*, but I never said/...

AGNES: And I was *not* pregnant with his brother's child when we met. I never even clapped eyes on your Uncle Basil until our wedding day. Even back then he weighed four hundred pounds and had a face like the back end of a baboon. You really think I'd give myself to a man like that? I do have some standards, y'know.

PERCY: And maybe I enjoyed a whiskey or two in my youth, but I've never been drunk enough to strike your mother.

LUCY: I wasn't writing about you. Is this what you're all thinking?

PERCY: God knows, I've wanted to more than once.

AGNES: Percy!

PERCY: Well, Mother, you are a bit of a nag at times...

AGNES: I nag because you never listen. And as for liking a whiskey or two, it would take more fingers than I possess to count the number of times you staggered home past three in the morning wailing like a Banshee at the window because you'd lost your key.

PERCY: Well, I wasn't the one fooling around with my husband's cousin on my wedding day because I'd downed too many shandies.

AGNES: It was just one kiss and it only happened because you plied me with so much liquor that I went temporarily blind.

- PERCY: Just one kiss! I thought you'd accidentally super-glued your tongues together you were locked so tight.
- LUCY: Oh, for God's sake! *(to Ben)* You can see it wasn't based on them, can't you?
- BEN: Yeah, yeah, of course. It's just a play, guys. Just Lucy's crazy imagination gone completely wild. You should read some of her stuff. Absolutely whacko...
- LUCY: Hey, enough with the whacko...it wasn't that unbelievable.
- AGNES: Ha! So it *was* based on us. I knew it.
- LUCY: It was not based on anyone. It's creative writing, for crying out loud!
- AGNES: Well you have to admit there were a lot of similarities.
- LUCY: Do you live in a council flat?
- AGNES: No, but/...
- LUCY: Do you have a three-legged cat?
- PERCY: No...
- LUCY: Does Dad have a venereal disease that he caught from a hooker?  
*(Agnes and Percy look awkward.)*  
Oh, my God.
- AGNES: I'm going to put the kettle on.  
*(She leaves. They are silent for a moment.)*
- BEN: So...was the stripper thing before you met me?
- LUCY: What?
- BEN: Y'know, when you worked as a stripper.

LUCY: You know I've never worked as a stripper! I joined the force when I was eighteen and I met you three weeks later. When would I have time to be a stripper?

BEN: It's just...you seemed to know an awful lot about...stripping.

LUCY: Well, I do take my clothes off every night before bed.

BEN: Not like that, you don't.

LUCY: I have never stripped in my life, okay!

*(She thinks about it.)*

Okay once at the Builders' Arms on a hen's night, but I was off my face and I needed taxi fare home.

BEN: And the drugs?

LUCY: What drugs?

BEN: If you want to tell me anything...I'm here for you, babe.

LUCY: *You're* on drugs if you think that character was me, you imbecile!

PERCY: Hey, show some respect to your husband, girl. Not every man would marry a drug-addicted stripper.

LUCY: And I suppose you all think I murdered my sister as well.

BEN: You never told me you had a sister.

LUCY: I *don't* have a sister!

BEN: Well, not now you don't. You took care of that.

LUCY: I've *never* had a sister, you moron! I've never had any siblings!

PERCY: *(Sighing)* Sad but true. Your mother wouldn't touch me after the hooker incident.

LUCY: I was alone in this nuthouse until you rescued me at the age of nineteen.

PERCY: I keep telling her, syphilis isn't as bad as it sounds if you treat it early.

LUCY: How do you suppose I got hooked on drugs, worked as a stripper and killed my sister before my eighteenth birthday?

PERCY: Lots of famous people had STDs. Tolstoy, Abraham Lincoln, Adolf Hilter...

BEN: I don't know, but you were damn lucky the cops didn't find out or they'd have never let you on the job.

PERCY: I bet *their* wives didn't banish them from the bedroom because they had a couple of sores on their/...

AGNES: (*Sticking her head in 'the door'.*) Percy! Could you put the heater on?

PERCY: Yes, dear.

LUCY: Okay. So if all this is based on fact, where do you fit in?

BEN: What?

LUCY: If I was a drug-crazed stripper who killed her sister, and my parents are the nagging neurotic gold-digger married to the STD-riddled alcoholic wife-basher, where do you fit in?

BEN: Well...I assumed I was the priest.

LUCY: The priest.

BEN: Yeah.

LUCY: Have you ever been a priest?

BEN: No, but...I thought you were trying to disguise the fact that it was me.

LUCY: Bloody hell!

PERCY: Hey, we'll have no rough talk in this house, thank you.

LUCY: You're not even religious!

BEN: I went to a Catholic school.

LUCY: Yeah, and you haven't seen the inside of a church since you were sixteen, unless you count your dear friend Dicko's wedding.

BEN: I've never fancied men, y'know.

LUCY: I know you don't/...

BEN: I don't know why you would even think that.

LUCY: I don't think that...

*(Agnes enters.)*

AGNES: Kettle's on.

BEN: All we do is go fishing and drink beer on these trips. Just because I shared a sleeping bag with Dicko a couple of times it doesn't make me a poofter. He forgot to bring his bag and it was cold.

LUCY: The priest is not you, Ben.

BEN: And is it my fault I had a dream and thought it was you in there with me?

LUCY: What the hell did you do with him?

PERCY: These things happen to all of us, my boy, there's no shame. A little experimentation...it's all a part of finding yourself.

LUCY: Sounds like you found Dicko!

AGNES: *(To Lucy)* The main thing is, dear, that you know you always have us to turn to. We're not perfect but we're here for you.

LUCY: *(Confused)* Okay.

AGNES: No matter how bad things seem, life is a precious gift and no one has the right to throw it away.

LUCY: Who's throwing it away?

PERCY: You know you can always come to me, chicken.

BEN: And me. I love you, you know that don't you, sweet pea?

LUCY: Oh God, you think...

AGNES: I know it's tough to ask for help.

PERCY: But sometimes life gets on top of you.

BEN: And from time to time you need a helping hand.

LUCY: I am *not* suicidal. That character is not me, don't you get it! You're not them, I'm not her and I'm not going to top myself!

BEN: Nobody could blame you after the childhood you've had. Maybe you should get some professional help.

LUCY: Oh, for Christ's sake, I didn't even write the fucking play, all right!

PERCY: Lucy! You don't use language like that in front of your mother.

AGNES: What do you mean, you didn't write the fucking play?

*(Pause)*

LUCY: I was called to a murder investigation...a young woman was found dead. I was searching her house and I found the play and I...I don't know why, I just stuffed it in my coat pocket. And when I read it, it was so good...For five years I've been trying to write something worth performing and here was this great play just sitting there waiting for me. It was like a gift from God. I kept it for six months. She didn't seem to have any friends or family. No one seemed to know she was a writer. So one day I just...

*(Pause)*

BEN: You stole evidence in a murder investigation?

LUCY: Turns out it was suicide.

*(Pause)*

So I wasn't writing about you. I wasn't writing about anyone. Happy now?

*(Pause. Ben puts his arms around her.)*

BEN: You could write something just as good, Luce. Your stuff isn't that bad.

PERCY: At least you've got their attention now, love.

AGNES: Maybe all you needed was a foot in the door.

LUCY: Maybe. I'm not proud of what I've done. I shouldn't have put my name on it, but...I was so desperate to be a writer.

AGNES: Well, at least people are hearing her story now.

LUCY: Yeah, I guess. Look, I'm kinda tired. *(To Ben)* Could we head home?

BEN: Sure, babe.

*(Agnes kisses her on the cheek.)*

AGNES: Goodnight, my love.

PERCY: Goodnight, sweetheart. Night Ben.

BEN: Night all.

*(Lucy and Ben leave. Agnes and Percy are pensive for a moment.)*

AGNES: How about that cuppa, now?

PERCY: Lovely. And maybe some of your wonderful fruit cake?

AGNES: Coming right up.

*(She starts to leave.)*

PERCY: Do you believe that story of hers, Mother?

AGNES: She's lying through her teeth, the little hound. How could a complete stranger know so much about us? I'd watch what you say and do around her in future, Percy. She could be writing a sequel.

*(She exits.)*

**THE END**