

# THE PARTY GUEST

*by Jacquie Penrose*

## Characters:

Jack

Alan

Lulu

## Setting:

A table and chair downstage facing front. Two more chairs at intervals further up, facing out.

## Running time:

50 minutes

**JACK:** Do you believe in coincidence? Of course you do. Happens all the time. You're on holiday somewhere far away, I don't know, Bangkok say - and the waiter at your table is English - well nothing odd about that of course - but you get chatting and it turns out that back home this waiter lives three streets away from you .Three streets, and you've never met, until suddenly on the other side of the world there you are, and you go that's amazing, what are the chances, blah blah. So you see it happens. Of course it does.

Still, it was a shock. There she was, right in front of me, in the street, bold as brass, looking a million dollars. OK maybe a bit old for the full million, but she was still my beautiful Lulu.

Well not *my* Lulu of course, that's ridiculous. It's been twenty seven years since.... And you see that's the funny thing, until I saw her standing there, arms out, calling my name - Jack, Jack, you old bastard! - I hadn't realised that I knew, exactly, to the day, how long it was since she... left me, *and* - and this came as a bit of a surprise an'all, I still wanted to know why she'd done it.

Because of course we got talking, went for a drink - amazing how twenty seven years can vanish, just like that - and do you know she's still drinking port and lemon, can you believe that? Judging by the look on the barman's face she's the last person on the planet still drinking port and lemon. Mind you, it's the kind of pub where the walls are still nicotine brown and the plush has got those shiny black patches from too many greasy fingers, so I don't know what he thought he was on about.

Anyway, she explained it all, and it made perfect sense. Sort of. I didn't let on, but I was hurt. Even after all these years. Why? Because she hadn't trusted me enough at the time to tell me the truth. Which is what I took it to be at the time. In good faith.

Actually she rather liked that pub - likes old-fashioned things, she said. What, like me? I said, (*we hear her laugh*) and she laughed. It's my local of course, handy for the theatre. And here's the thing - like when you run into that bloke in Bangkok - she's lived here for five years - right here! Well, the other side of town from me, of course, the posh side. Never thought to look me up but then why would she? Had no idea where I'd gone. Never goes to the theatre anymore either - gave all that up, she said. Until now, that is. She'd seen the advert in the paper, for *The Cherry Orchard*, and she was curious, she said. Came along to check it out, thinking of buying a ticket maybe, for old time's sake, that's what she said anyway though I don't think she really remembers. Then when I told her that Alan - did she remember Alan? Well of course she did - is actually in it - well she nearly choked on her lemon slice. I'd have to say I gagged a bit myself when I heard. Another production of *The Cherry Orchard*, back here in our little theatre by the sea - and then Alan, down there on the cast list. Of course 'a party guest' is a bit of a come-down from his role in our production, but still. He's working. More than I can claim. Front of House volunteer is an even bigger come down, of course, so there you go. Is that all you are now? she said.

You can put a lot into a little word like 'all'.

Lopakhin, Gayev, Madame Ranyevskaya. We were the making of that production, the three of us. Well this isn't London of course, just the provinces. Provincial rep, on its last legs even before Mrs T got her claws into it and put it out of its

misery. Before it all became musicals and tribute bands. Funny thing, nostalgia. It has you going all misty-eyed for things you knew even at the time were rubbish. Our Cherry Orchard wasn't rubbish really. For the provinces. And we three did make it just a little but special. Alan, Lulu and me. But this one here, now - not even really Chekhov at all. An 'adaptation'. Huh.

Alan got to play Lopakhin, lucky sod. They said he looked younger than me. In fact, he's two years older, but that didn't matter.

And now she's gone.

**ALAN :** I am also the Passer-by in Act 2 and a peasant in Act 4. Not just a party guest. I should say 'farm-hand' in Act 4, not peasant. Our director has a Concept, you see. Creating the Total Political Context of the Play. Apparently. So each of the acts is set in a different century. Different century? Is he completely insane? Of course it's Individuals Overrun by the Great Sweep of History. Costume department's having hysterics. All bollocks if you ask me. Pretentious bollocks at that. But he won't listen, our director - knows it all of course. Yes we know you've played Lopakhin, thank you Alan. Before the Flood - and gets all the other young things laughing along with him. He was still in nappies then so what does he know. Experience counts for nothing these days of course.

- Has the cherry orchard been sold?
- It has.
- And who bought it?
- I did.

What a moment. Electrifying. As if there was just Lopakhin and Ranyevskaya alone on the stage, eyes locked - we held that moment, Lulu and I, until you could hear it sing. Party guest indeed.

Well you can imagine - old Jack dodders in - and there was another thing, finding Jack here - "volunteering" - suppose he thinks it means he's still in the business - and so he says, out of the blue -

**JACK:** Lulu's here.

**ALAN:** Just like that, no build-up, no warning. He's probably forgotten - not much going on up there these days, the old fool. But I haven't forgotten, not a second of it. As soon as I heard her name I'm back there, in the wings, SM's called the five, and we're stealing a last kiss before the curtain. I open the play of course. 'The train has arrived, Dunyasha'.

She'd changed of course. Well we all have. Although I have to say I'm quite proud of my - general .... (*sucks in his belly*). She was spectacular back then. Regal. The only word for it. Like a - queen. We were quite a team. And not just on stage either. Attentive. Devoted. She taught me the meaning of that word - devoted. As if she couldn't do enough for me. And of course I adored her. Absolutely. When Jack told me she was here, right here, coming to see the show, I couldn't help wondering, would she remember? Of course she'll remember, how could she forget something like that. Why else would she come?

It's all been a horrible mistake.

I remember all of it, of course. Coming out of the theatre, we'd walk down to the beach, maybe pick up some fish and chips on the way. Funny, I can still hear the rattle of the pebbles underfoot - the hiss of the waves. Quite a different sound to what you get on a sandy beach. And maybe if it was quiet, and dark, under the pier, no one about - well you know how it is when you're young.

And of course it was never going to end. It was the real thing. After the run, there was even talk of... But then when I got offered the Shakespeare in Manchester it changed things somehow. Maybe she thought she couldn't compete. She never said. I had no idea.

*Pause*

Press night party last week. One spotty local reporter on loan from the sports desk, a local supermarket manager (assistant) - and the cast. And whoever they're currently groping. And of course Jack wandered in. The director insisted on Champagne - Cava, actually, on offer at Aldi's - and tried to get a conversation going about the Necessity of Innovative Interpretations of the Classics. He actually talks like that, in capital letters. He didn't get many takers and we were all in bed by midnight.

But back then? When Lulu and I were starring, press night party, everyone was there. All the local big-shots - a national reviewer had been and slipped discreetly away - wasn't half bad that review either - someone had even managed to bag Harry Cunningham. He parked his Beemer on a double yellow and left his chauffeur to keep watch. Typical.

It was dawn when Lulu and I headed back to our digs - well, my digs if the truth be told. There's something magical about that time of the morning, in June. For of course it was June. The town silent behind you as you walk along the prom, the deserted beach, the sky and sea slowly colouring as the sun comes up, coral pink, then gold. And the woman whose hand is deep in your back pocket is promising - everything.

*Pause*

I haven't thought about her in - years.

**JACK:** Course I had dreams once, didn't we all - West End stage, practicing Bafta acceptance speeches in the bath - well you grow up, don't you. And by the time 'getting work' means dressing up as a chicken and handing out leaflets outside Shoppers Paradise singing the Chicken Lickin' song you know your number's up. You have not made it, sunshine, and you are not going to. Get over it. Forget there was ever a time when all you wanted to do was be on a stage, any stage, God knows why, not like you ever got any encouragement at home - what, an *actor*? That's for poofs, get a proper job, boy - but you were hungry for it, would've killed for it. Well there you go. Not to be.

And I can't say it's been all bad since. I don't miss all the travelling around, the uncertainty. And customer service does require some acting skills as it goes, so I suppose I can't complain. And it's steady work. Or was. But I've got my redundancy and mother left me the house, all paid off, so.... And there's my shifts at the theatre. Alan may scoff, but for me.... Gets me out of an evening.

I was reasonably content with my life.

So I didn't need this. I should have - we should've.... Let sleeping dogs lie is what they say. And they're right.

*Pause*

Lulu didn't 'make it' either, not in that sense. She could have been great, in my humble opinion. There were some raised eyebrows when she got the Cherry Orchard part, which I thought most unfair. But she didn't really want it. She wanted other things, it seems.

Looked like she landed on her feet, though, from what she told me. Got one of those big houses up by the park, electric gates, plaster lions on the posts. Mother used to say all those houses were built on dodgy money. That's what he does, apparently, her old man - property development. Gone belly up now, of course.

Louisa, not Lulu. She told me off about that. No one had called her that in twenty years, she said. Started with the Cherry Orchard business she said. Never liked it. I'd forgotten about the Louisa. She was always Lulu to me.

God I can't believe this has happened.

*Pause*

It was good of Alan to invite me to the press night party. Except he spoiled it somewhat by acting as if he was the Lord of the Manor who'd let the servants into the big house for a do. He hasn't even got any lines in this production. Strictly non-speaking. Not that you'd know it to hear him carry on.

I played her dotty elder brother in our production. Can't help thinking of it as 'our' production. Maybe because it was the last decent role I ever had, before the chickens set in - and then there was Lulu.... Which made it memorable. Yes - the dotty, devoted brother hiding behind his game of billiards while their world comes crashing down around them, fending off misery with a cue. "Off the cushion into the top pocket...".

Well the press night back then - something else entirely. Place was heaving, everyone turned up, all the local bigwigs - everyone oohing and aahing over Harry Thing. We even got a national paper down - though that review was a bit of a

stinker. Alan was a bit stung but he didn't let on. Local press loved it though and it nearly sold out, so we must have done something right. But that night, I didn't care who was there or what the papers thought - I had my Lulu. Mind you we'd been fairly discreet, didn't want all that backstage gossip, and of course her being in digs made being together a bit difficult. There was my place of course but she said she felt awkward, what with mother.... Still, there were occasions, and it was always worth the wait.

**LULU:** They called me Lulu. Ridiculous name. I can't remember who started it. Alan probably, when we were doing Cherry Orchard. Louisa plays Liuba Ranyevskaya equals Lulu. He thought it was hilarious. The whole company took it up and it stuck. For the entire run. Which seemed to go on forever - incredibly long run for a poky little seaside rep.

- Who bought the cherry orchard?

- I did.

Intake of breath - hold - roll eyes - collapse into chair, hand on chest, sob.

Horrible. Glad to be out of it.

Don't know what made me want to come and see it after all this time.

Do you believe in coincidence? Of course, why not? But two at once? That's pushing it. Here I am on my way to the theatre thinking maybe I'll just go and check out the cast list, you know - old times' sake and all that, maybe see about buying a ticket, or maybe trying the 'I played the lead here in 19whatever' - maybe stir up a couple of comps, then suddenly there's this old guy waving and shouting Lulu! Took me a moment, but of course - Jack! Ancient now of course but still, brought back a few memories. Once I'd recognised him. Front of House volunteer. That's a bit sad.

Well we went for a drink, couldn't say no really, wouldn't have been kind, then bang, the second surprise. He tells me Alan - yes that Alan - is in the production - actually performing. I couldn't believe it. What are the chances? Just a walk-on part of course. That's a bit sad as well, not like the glory days of playing Lopakhin.... Well I had to say I'd go and see it after that, could hardly refuse.

I ordered port and lemon for a joke but I don't think he got it.

I knew what Harry would say if I told him. So I didn't. Not his sort of thing. And he never liked the idea of it, even in the old days. He still thinks actress is only one up from tart. Not that I ever really missed it. Maybe it was just the being at work. Being someone. People came to see me. Now they see Mrs Cunningham. Harry's wife.

It's a mistake, going back. And for me now, of course it's all over.

*Pause*

I was a pretty child. Yes really. Great cloud of blond curls, the life and soul. Hopeless at school of course - learning stuff just didn't come easy to me, though lord knows I tried. Then I suppose I stopped trying - what was the point? At some stage I seemed to have developed great tits to go with the blond curls and I got far more attention showing those off than I ever did with studying. I got to like it, the showing off. So what else does a thick, pretty girl do but go on the stage? Apart from, you know....

It went like a dream in those days. It seemed I was in demand. Can't say the parts were all that challenging. Just as well really. Like I said, studying wasn't really my thing - I couldn't have been doing with all that 'background research' some of my colleagues were always on about. It seemed I was always either donning a maid's outfit or a very tight top. You don't need to spend much time searching for your motivation with parts like that. Couple of film roles as well. Mostly for the video market. The casting couch was common enough in those days. It just seemed too much effort to keep on saying no. Some said that's how I got the part in the Cherry Orchard - weren't tarts with hearts more my line? Well, people like to gossip.

There's something very sad about two elderly men bellowing like rutting stags over something that happened over twenty years ago. It's not like I promised either of them anything. Although, to be fair, they probably did get that sort of impression. Maybe I could have done more to prevent that. Some would say I've got what I deserved.



Jack was quite sweet then. So very earnest. He was into a lot of hand-holding and little floral presents he'd nicked from people's gardens. Saying things like he thought I was worth waiting for. Life on the road with a penniless actor, or Harry's potential millions? Not much of a contest I'd say. You've got to laugh though - Jack'll miss me more than Harry will.

**JACK:** That summer, she was in her absolute prime. A real looker. And I wasn't the only one doing the looking I can tell you. And then some. Which was a why I felt ... honoured - OK, big word but that's the truth of it - honoured that she was with me. Of course I suppose I never really believed it would last - someone like her. With someone like me. But while it did last - I was the king.

She broke my heart of course. Just upped and left. A quick note to say it was over and she was off, and that was that. I thought the world had come to an end - the run was over, no job in sight, and she'd gone. And all those years I wanted to know why. Couldn't believe she'd just go, saying nothing. Then all these years later I get an explanation. Thought I'd get over her more quickly if she was brutal about it. So suddenly it's how she really cared for me but couldn't face life on the road with a poor actor and if we'd had kids she would only be a drag on my career - that's a laugh - and then she thought maybe I'd think her shallow for wanting things like a home and babies and she'd rather be thought heartless than shallow. I could have given her that. If she'd asked.

Only that wasn't the truth of it either. Just something from a play.

**LULU:** Funny how things come back round on themselves. Harry made his first million here. So eventually he decides to move back here, and then there's the Cherry Orchard, back in town. I could have stayed away, of course. The theatre's nothing to me now.

Jack was nice. At the time, I didn't think nice was enough. Everyone's in digs and having a good time and he's back with mum and her nice little semi. People laughed at him. I laughed too. Harry, on the other hand, could never be called nice.

**ALAN:** If I'm honest, the Shakespeare job in Manchester was a bit of a disappointment. Only a small speaking role. But of course excellent experience. Building up the CV. Poor Lulu would have been out of her depth. Even at the time I felt I'd been right not to suggest she come with me. No doubt she would have jumped at it, but it didn't feel right.

And of course I've had some good roles since then. Very good roles.

*Pause*

Actually I'm thinking of changing my agent. He can't even be bothered to return my calls these days. Straight to voice-mail, every time. And when he called to tell me about the Cherry Orchard auditions, he made out I should be grateful. Then when he heard what I'd been offered he said I should be grateful for anything. I wanted to hang on for something better - I wanted to play Firs, but he said not to bother. Obviously not to be counted on.

It's a nice little part, Firs, the old servant. But of course they give it to someone ridiculously too young, so they have to kit him out with a grey wig and he does the whole fake old man thing, bent double one hand on his kidneys. I could have done something with that part. Because of course he gets that great moment at the end of the play when the family all leave and Lophakin locks the house up for the winter and they all forget he's still inside. He sits there all trusting, waiting for what's never going to happen, but the audience know that he's going to die of cold and hunger. Such a futile death after so much loyal striving.

I could have done something with that. Brought some insight. When you have experience....These young actors, what can you say?

So yes. I'll put looking for a new agent on the agenda. Although who knows, after all this....

**JACK:** Mind you, I'm not sure whose idea it was, the three of us going together for a drink. Well, she'd been to see the show - I got a bit of a thrill, taking her ticket,

showing her to her seat, and all the way through I could see her down near the front - not much a crowd in as usual. I waited for her in the foyer afterwards, and we went round - she wanted to see Alan, wouldn't it be exciting she said, just like old times. Alan obviously liked playing the luvvy, inviting us in to his dressing room, offering drinks. I didn't notice any star on the door and he was sharing with most of the rest of the cast but still.

I think maybe it was Lulu - she said something about that funny little old-fashioned pub round the corner -

**LULU:** Why don't we all go there, like we used to?

**JACK:** So that's what we did.

**ALAN:** When I suggested a drink, Lulu said why don't we go to that funny little pub round the corner? Can't think why. Not my choice, but what a lady wants a lady gets. And Jack sitting there rubbing his hands and looking - well, overawed, frankly. It must be a long time since he's had any legitimate business backstage. Not his world at all anymore. So I didn't really appreciate him giving himself airs. Still, I suppose I'm not really being fair. He's a dear soul really and I suppose we do go back a bit. That has to count for something. So off we went, the three of us, to the funny little pub.

I have to admit I found it odd that Jack seemed to think he should be the one to take her arm.

**LULU:** So off we went. I thought it a bit of a laugh really, the two of them jostling each other like a couple of kids.

**JACK:** It's not very far, but I was a pleased as punch to have her on my arm. I wanted to buy the first round, but Alan beat me to it. She asked for a G and T.

*(Directly to Lulu - the three are now at the table in conversation)* Not a port and lemon then?

**LULU:** You must be joking.

**JACK:** You did the other day.

**ALAN:** The other day?

**LULU:** Just a bit of nostalgia. Wasn't even sure they did that anymore. Worth it for the look on the barman's face.

**ALAN:** When was this then?

**JACK:** I told you, I bumped into Lulu in the street. That's why she's here.

**ALAN:** I didn't hear anything about a drink.

**LULU:** Well why would you?

*Pause*

So. How's it going, the show? Good audiences?

**ALAN:** Not bad, not bad, considering. Of course it's a very experimental approach, quite innovative. Not everyone can handle that.

**JACK:** Bit pretentious, I thought.

**ALAN:** Well when you've studied it -

**JACK:** I've seen every performance. And you forget I know the play as well as you do.

**LULU:** I must admit I found it a bit heavy going. Best played straight, if you ask me, like in our day. Your version isn't even funny. Jack got some great laughs if you remember.

**JACK:** 'Clean shot into the corner pocket'.

**ALAN:** Well Lopakhin isn't written for laughs.

*Pause*

**JACK:** 'Anchovies and pickled herrings.'

**ALAN:** What?

**JACK:** 'I haven't eaten all day. Oh what I've been through!'

**LULU:** Oh that's right - poor old Gayev, just before Lopakhin's big speech, after your failure to prevent the sale of the cherry orchard.

**JACK:** Thinking about food.

**LULU:** I thought Arthur whatsisname did that speech brilliantly today. One thing I did like.

**ALAN:** Yes. Not bad I suppose.

*Pause*

Very ineffectual character, the brother. Gayev.

**LULU:** They all are. That's the point.

**ALAN:** Except Lopakhin. The self-made man who gets what he wants.

**LULU:** But not the woman. He doesn't get the woman.

*Pause*

**ALAN:** It's the last night next Saturday. Clive -

**JACK:** - that's the director -

**ALAN:** Yes thank you Jack - Clive'll be throwing one if his Cava-but-let's-pretend-it's-Champagne do's. You should come along.

**LULU:** I could bring Harry

**JACK:** Who's Harry?

**LULU:** My husband. Harry Cunningham.

**JACK:** It's not - not *that* Harry Cunningham, surely?

**LULU:** The very same.

**JACK:** I remember him. He was at the press night party for our Cherry Orchard. Is that when....

**LULU:** We probably met around then, yes.

**ALAN:** But it must have been later that you - because of course you were with me then.

**LULU:** I expect it was later. Must have been.

**JACK:** With you?

**ALAN:** Of course. I thought you knew. I thought everyone knew.

**JACK:** No. Because she was with me.

**ALAN:** With you? Don't be ridiculous.

**JACK:** Lulu?

**LULU:** Boys, boys.

*They separate again, and address the audience.*

**LULU:** The looks on their faces. I thought it was a bit of a laugh at the time. Well we were talking about events from decades ago. We've all moved on, or so I thought. So I told them the whole story. The pair of them sat there with flapping mouths like a couple of goldfish. I don't know what got them the most, that I was two-timing them - I think that was Jack's phrase -

**JACK:** You mean you were two-timing me with Alan?

**LULU:** - I think that's how he put it - or the fact that I'd dumped them both for

**JACK:** - Flash Harry.

**LULU:** Which is definitely how he put it.

Bit harsh, really. It was just.... I really didn't think either of them had taken it that seriously. I don't remember what excuse I gave them, at the last-night party - headache, probably, time of the month, I don't know - but I do know I left with

Harry. I knew Alan had got a job in Manchester or somewhere, so I didn't think - . I'm sure I left a note for Jack. And I suppose, if I'm honest, it wasn't just those two.... Anyway, I left with Harry. I thought things might be different with Harry.

Well - here we are in the funny little pub, and they're gawping and glaring a bit, but then they got over it, I thought. We finished our drinks, all civilised like, chatted about this and that - the good old days, country going to the dogs - the usual stuff. Said goodnight and that was that.

*Pause*

If I'm honest... well I'd have to call myself a bloody fool, wouldn't I? What was I thinking? Suggesting we meet up again. Sent a note round on the last night, didn't I, saying why not skip Clive Whatever's Cava, why don't we have a bit of a party of our own, just the three of us? They could have said no of course, but they didn't, which probably makes them as dumb as me.

It was June, I think, back then. No matter what time we came out of the theatre it was still light, and warm. Not like now. January, and a bad one at that. When I went to see the show the other day I got stuck behind a couple of OAPs on the way out, taking for ever to struggle into their coats, scarves, gloves - fretting about the play's ending. Did you see that? Left that poor old man to die of cold, locked in the house. The posh people, they just forgot about him. Took it quite personally, poor old dears. Some sort of tribute to the production if they took that so much to heart. Maybe the only bit they understood.

Walk down to the seafront here in this weather and you're not going to find anyone under the pier having a bit of a fumble. Or anyone doing anything at all. It's all grey - water, sky, town - and the wind cuts right through you.

So anyway, they accepted my little invitation. Alan took charge, suggested we go somewhere different to last time. But pretty grim choice he made, I thought. Doesn't this town have any decent pubs? I wouldn't know - Harry's not one for pubs. Anyway, this one was one of those big brick places that you find on ring-road roundabouts. Barn of a place, plenty of standing room for the big matches. Still, we were just relieved to be indoors, sleet coming off the sea like a storm of arrows.

**JACK:** It was a mistake, of course it was a bloody mistake, but I couldn't help it, could I? Couldn't get her out of my mind. All these years I thought I'd put it behind me, then she breezes back into my life and for a tiny moment lets me believe that she actually cared for me once and that she'd tried to spare my feelings, and then I find out...I admired Alan back then. As an actor, and as a man.

**ALAN:** It was a filthy night. I thought we'd shake Jack off but no such luck. Perhaps, if I'm honest, I could have chosen a better pub. Not that that would have made much difference in the end.

**LULU:** Maybe I just thought, I don't know, maybe it'd be a bit of a laugh. With Harry, these days, there's not much to laugh about. Never was, come to that. Not much of an excuse, I know.

*Pause*

We soon ran out of things to talk about. The awful weather kept us going for a few minutes. I told them all about Harry's business problems, well it's the same for everyone now isn't it. Jack said he was glad he was retired . Alan cuts in -

**ALAN:** - made redundant, wasn't it?

**LULU:** Which I thought a bit uncalled for. He hardly qualifies as a master of the universe, does he? Well then it all begins to get a bit sticky and so it's back to raking over the old coals. And I'm thinking, what is this? Three people come together by accident, getting on for thirty years ago, and it feels like something because they have this pretend relationship on stage, all very intense eight times a week but not real, not in any sense real - well OK I slept with them but so what? You'd think by now they'd've let it go.

**JACK:** I thought I was over it. Maybe I knew I wasn't. Maybe I accepted her invitation to prove to myself I didn't care. Or maybe I just wanted a second chance. Despite what she'd done. She must be, what, sixty by now? I don't care. I fell in love with her all over again. Crazy I know but there it is. That's what happened.

**ALAN:** An argument starts. You see, Jack wouldn't let it go. Kept on and on. Why had I slept with her? Well what did he think? Kept on insisting I must have known about their 'relationship' - well she wasn't letting on was she? And I said I thought it



was common knowledge about her and me, and he's banging on about how he thought they had something special and she's sitting there just sipping her drink and looking all Mona Lisaish. So when you come to think about it she's just a slut and always was so why are any of us bothering about it at all? I probably put that thought into words, maybe I could have phrased it better. Jack got mad. Next thing, there's furniture all over the place and Lulu is on the floor, not moving.

**JACK:** She slept with him, and Harry, and God knows who else, and all the time she's telling me.... Finally it sank in. Not a good time girl, not a party girl. Alan put his finger on it. Slut. No other word for it. A bitching, whoring, slut.

The place was almost deserted. Billiard table with a big rip in the baize. We were over in a corner by the fireplace. Fake coals of course, covered in crisp packets and torn beer-mats. People are really stupid, sometimes, throwing rubbish into a fake fire. Anyway it had a stone hearth, sticking out. That's where she hit her head, probably. When she fell. Tripped.

In a fight, you can't really say who started it. Not really. I was mad as hell, I know that much. Wanted to punch his lights out, if I'm honest.

*Pause*

Or maybe just hers.

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