

The Simplest Things

Diane is a middle aged woman, sitting on the sofa in a living room with the curtains closed, flicking absent-mindedly through the TV channels. She is running her fingers up and down the stem of a wine glass.

... And another thing, he was never, never any good at um... ironing. Utterly incapable, he was. "Well just press the black button", I'd say. "Where?" he'd say, and I'd do it for him and he'd just sort of look at it like this, all gormless. Such, such an idiot, that man. Such a childish idiot.

People always say that I must've loved him once or we wouldn't have got married. And I think to myself, "Yes, OK, maybe you're right", but then actually, I remember when Ben introduced us, it was at erm... I don't know, I think it was a party - I'd had a few - but what I'd um, what I do remember is that, oh yes, when Ben introduced us I thought "Well he's a bit short". Tiny little legs he had.

Anyway that's irrelevant now. What I do resent though, I mean the thing I really, really hate him for, is taking my kids away from me. See look there's another thing - manipulative... all the time in arguments he'd... "Oh you need to sort yourself out, you're a mess, sober up, it's not fair on the kids" and all this. And I felt like, I was screaming in my head, "No! It's you! You're the problem! The odd drink can hardly compare to you, when you can't even use a vacuum cleaner!" God, the trouble he had with that bloody vacuum cleaner. Pathetic really/, isn't it? Fully grown man and he can't work a vacuum cleaner! Can't look after himself, let alone my Kids. Oh sorry, apparently he can though, according to the courts, because they let him take them from me when they could never understand really what was going on. He could barely even erm... do toast, make toast. Airs and graces don't make him a nice man. Nobody should have taken them away from me. I wonder if he's sat them down and told them the truth. "The bad man at the court said that Mummy couldn't cope, and it's my fault because I lied to them and told them that Mummy was struggling"... Er.

Diane drains the final sip of wine left in the glass.

Spend all my time now worrying about them. Don't really eat anymore. Sleep a lot, but that's probably through the exhaustion of feeling sick everyday... erm, with worry. He tried to make me see a doctor a few times, but all the time I was saying "No, I can look after myself, and he just pulls that face when really he knows nothing - like everyone.

Oh another thing actually - I don't think I ever trusted him right from the start. I don't know what it was. You know sometimes you erm, you get a feeling about someone and you just think that there's something not right? Not something I can put my finger on as such, but you know. It was the little things. Like one time, actually, early on, he didn't even remember I had a sister. We were talking with, I don't know, a couple from down the road at the pub, and I brought up Sandy and he didn't have a clue. How can I trust someone who can't remember the simplest things? But it's not just that, it's other things too. Like why was he always in meetings? And why did his phone ring so much? Suppliers don't need to talk at nine at night... I don't know why he always told me I had a problem. Not when he was the one who couldn't navigate a few bloody buttons on a dishwasher.

(643 words)

Fade to black.

Light on living room. The front door slams. Light up on Diane, who storms in, throwing herself onto the sofa.

Unbelievable. Abso-bloody-lutely unbelievable, that man. Trying to undermine me in front of my sodding kids. He... unbelievable. I've been busy! That's it, that's why I... erm. Bloody telling me I need help... It's understandable though, I've had a lot to deal with! And it's not like birthdays are important anyway at my age! You should've seen the kids... their little faces. Um... And the unbelievable cheek of turning up like that! Turning up at my door and making me look stupid! He's unbelievable. Why WOULD I remember it was my birthday? Nothing special is it? Not really... Just a number, everyone says. I never liked to erm, to make a fuss... Don't know where to put the card. See this is just another burden. He's giving me trouble even after all this,... Jessica's writing has improved a lot since... erm. That man. Why does he do it? Unbelievable.

(814 words)

Monologue commentary

My narrator, the middle-aged Diane, was influenced by 'Keith' in 'Marion & Geoff'¹, and his use of foreshadowing and pathos. I chose this narrator because I'm familiar with the idiolect of the middle-aged, and felt that her alcoholism would be a convincing situation, invoking empathy. The theme of delusion in my monologue is broad enough to appeal to almost anyone. I wanted to create a sense of naivety reminiscent of Joanna Lumley's² character, portrayed in Diane's denial of her problems, and her diminished confidence in the second scene, seen in her use of interrogatives ("Nothing special is it?") as tentative tag questions, showing uncertainty.

Diane uses filled pauses frequently ("... never any good at erm... ironing") to show her confusion and foreshadow her alcoholism through fragmented thought processes. She uses deictic referencing ("... he'd just sort of look at it like this") to give a sense of authentic speech. She rarely refers to her husband by name, preferring the pronoun 'he', showing her contempt towards him.

My monologue has two scenes to show Diane before and after an event, showing she is an artless, self-deceiving narrator. Minor sentences ("Such a childish idiot") are an authentic speech feature, and their prevalence in the second scene show that she is trying to disguise the truth. I also used direct speech to add truth and show a different perspective ("Oh you need to sort yourself out...."). Diane also uses imperatives ("See, look") and interrogatives ("Pathetic really, isn't it?") to interact with the audience, like when Joanna Lumley says "Don't you think?"². The fact that she frequently uses non-fluency features suggests incoherent thought, owing both to the context (her alcoholism) and her inner turmoil. I have also created a link between the scenes, with "How can I trust someone who can't remember the simplest things?" and "Why WOULD I remember it was my birthday?" to show irony. I have shown a different part of her idiolect in the second scene, with taboo lexis ('bloody'), to show her change in emotional state between scenes.

Pragmatics allows irony to be created through Diane's criticism of her husband. The audience can see that it is Diane who is in the wrong in her use of excuses ('I've been busy') She also avoids self-criticism by using ellipsis and pauses to show that she is evading chances to reveal her own flaws ("That's why I, erm..."). It is her way of saying that she knows that she is criticising herself, but in accusing her husband she shuns the responsibility. It also adds to the irony by contrasting her own views with those of the audience. When she calls her husband 'pathetic', we know that she is the pathetic one, increasing dramatic irony.

My piece is most influenced by Marion & Geoff, with filled pauses being the most significant feature. I have learnt the importance of pragmatics and that often what isn't said can be more important than what is.

(492 words)