

The Mothering Kind

written by
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Characters

Chrissy - 45

Location

Chrissy's kitchen in her flat.

Notes

- indicates speech broken off or an abrupt change of direction.

... indicates hesitation, or speech trailing off.

/ indicates where the next line begins.

A question without a question mark is delivered in a flat tone.

Scene 1

CHRISSEY paces back and forth in her kitchen, checking her notes. We hear her steps and rustling paper, and her talking very quietly to herself.

CHRISSEY: My name is Chrissy, I'm 45 and I live in South Shields. Do I need that? No, I don't need that. Okay. So why do I want to do this? Why do I want to do this. Alright.

The scrape of a chair as she takes a seat at her kitchen table. When she first starts speaking, her voice is a bit deliberate and formal, but she soon warms up and speaks in her own natural flow.

CHRISSEY: So, why do I want to do this? This might be a weird place to start but I never really wanted kids. Even when I was little, I'd see people making a fuss of a new baby and think... it can't even do anything? I didn't see the appeal. And then you realise how much work they are, and see your mates' lives changing when they have kids, and I just knew it weren't for me. And it weren't for Pete either, which worked out nicely. We got married at twenty, which was young even then. And I think people kept expecting us to break up, but we motored on and proved them all wrong. When it's right, it's right. We wanted the same life. And that didn't include kids. People would ask sometimes - people are fucking cheeky, aren't they? Shit. Language, Chrissy! Okay. *(Beat.)* People would ask sometimes but Pete would just laugh and say *Chrissy's not the mothering kind*. And I'd smack him but I had to laugh cos he was right. Not that he was any different.

There comes a point where you start to wonder if you should do it anyway. What if you regretted not having them after it's too late? But then we'd look at all the things we'd miss and it wasn't even close. We go on two or three holidays a year - or we did, before. I should probably be embarrassed but it was what we loved doing. We went everywhere. And when we weren't on holiday, we were doing things here. Weekend breaks, long walks, boat trips. My sister says I give better advice than a travel agent because I've actually done it all. And the courses! God, Pete and his courses. Anything from welding to photography, he wanted

to try it and of course I'd tag along because that energy and enthusiasm was what I fell in love with. That desire to experience everything. To *live*.

She takes a moment, takes a breath, speaks to herself:

I'm going on too much about him. Maybe. I don't know. Where am I?

Paper rustles as she checks and arranges her notes again.

Alright. So that's how it was before. Things have obviously changed quite a lot since. And whether you plan it or not, kids come into your life, don't they? My sister Lizzie definitely is the mothering kind. She's exactly what you'd want in a mam. She struggled for years, couldn't conceive. It was hard to watch. Husband left her. Good riddance, frankly. Then she met Kev and they had Charlie a few years ago. Well, he's six now, so that's how many years ago. And I might not be parent material but I'm a fu-- I'm a bloody good auntie. Like they say, it's a lot easier when you can give them back at the end of the day.

So that's the background. But what changed everything... well, you know what changed everything. The bloody pandemic. And I'm going to try not to get angry because this isn't about that, but we've lost so much. And we didn't have to! Britain is an island, for god's sake! If they'd just taken it seriously from the start then we'd never-- No. Come on. Don't go off on one.

She clears her throat and starts again, more calmly.

So, the pandemic happened and everything got turned upside down. Not at first. Me and Pete were actually alright. He had a good job, IT, working from home. I was a facilities manager for a big company. So I was in the building a couple days a week, home the rest of

the time. Loads of people got laid off or furloughed or were working out of their kitchens but we were set up nice with two spare rooms, two full salaries. The worst part was having no social life - and no, online stuff does *not* count. If I never do a zoom quiz again it'll be too bloody soon.

But Lizzie was having a shite time of it. (*Under her breath.*) Language. Is shite that bad though? I don't know. (*Pulling herself together.*) Lizzie was having a hard time of it. Her Kev was useless, didn't want to help with home schooling the bairn, didn't want to help with housework. Didn't want to stop going and getting pissed at his mate's. And he was always like that but they always had help, and Lizzie would've been getting pissed with him. Then suddenly she's all on her own taking care of him and poor Charlie who's just bored out of his nut. And she's starting to lose it. I'd stand there in the drive for a catch-up and she'd be at the front door looking like she'd been dragged through a hedge both ways saying, could I watch Charlie play in the front garden while she took a shower? And of course I did because god, can you imagine? Can't even get a decent shower. Then things opened up a bit and it seemed like it was going to be alright. Everyone sort of took a deep breath. We had Charlie a couple of times, giving her a break. Then it just all went to hell.

Because he brought it home, didn't he? Bloody Kev. Gave it to Lizzie. And maybe Charlie got it but he never got sick. It was bad. They were both in hospital and forgive me but all I could think was, if you've got to take one of them, take him. Just let Lizzie get better. But Kev got better and Lizzie stayed sick. And we got Charlie.

Nothing new there, right? We had Charlie over all the time before all this. We love him to bits. But doing it full-time was challenging, shall we say. When the schools closed again... If anyone tries to tell you teachers didn't work when schools were closed - oh my god, did they work! I could hear the teacher going, *Charlie? Charlie? Click the microphone picture, Charlie. Charlie? Do you know the answer?* And Charlie's going, *I've got new shoes, Miss.*

That's not what she's asking about, pet. He's a good boy but he's hard work. My work suffered. And I don't think it's a coincidence that I was one of the ones that got laid off when the redundancies started up again. It meant I had more time at least, which was good cos Lizzie was still sick and Kev was gone. Not dead, just gone. (*With contempt.*) Because having Covid made him think about what he really wanted, and that wasn't his family, apparently. And Lizzie couldn't manage on her own. Even after she got out of hospital, it was weeks before she could be on her feet for any length of time. She'd just shake and collapse. So I was going and helping her as well. And I kept thinking, *where is the support?* Then I realised - it's me. I'm the support, me and Pete. We're all she's got. (*Beat*) Had.

She clears her throat, maybe checks her notes again. When she begins speaking again, her tone is deliberately more positive, almost forced.

Charlie's such a love, he really is. I dread to think what it's like to be locked down with a load of twisty little terrors. Because it's relentless, looking after a kid. They're just constantly on your radar. And this wasn't being the fun auntie, this was... well, parenting. And what's weird is... it was alright. We'd spend an evening watching *Moana* for the thousandth time with him squashed between us on the sofa, asking a million questions, and we'd be happy. Just happy. Me and Pete would wet ourselves laughing over some silly thing Charlie said and look at each other, like... do we want this? We never got to have that conversation, though.

Pause. She takes a couple of breaths, already starting to tear up.

I don't know how Pete caught it. We were so careful! We hardly ever went anywhere. Why him and not me? (*Beat. Emotional.*) It hit him hard. He just... Went. I don't remember the last conversation I had with him. I didn't know it was going to be the last, I didn't know I needed to pay attention! And in the end I didn't even get to...

Her chair scrapes the kitchen floor as she suddenly stands and moves away.

We hear a couple of quiet sobs and deep breaths. She quietly berates herself.

Come on, come on, Chrissy! You can't do this in the actual meeting. Get it out now.

She takes a couple more deep breaths and sits down again.

We lost him. We lost Pete. And I hate that it then becomes about money, because I lost my only income as well. So I sold the house and moved in with Lizzie. I thought that was better for Charlie anyway. And it helped, not rattling around in our old place on my own. Lizzie was better and getting back to work, and me babysitting helped but she didn't need me all the time. She was being my support, really.

Then guess who comes strolling back one day after being A.W.O.L. for *months*. Yep. Kev. (*With contempt.*) Oh, he'd made a mistake, Covid messed with his head, he wanted to be with Lizzie really. Got sick of taking care of himself, more like. Well, what was she going to do? She took him back, and I didn't want to hang around so I got a nice flat nearby. And a job at the supermarket, which I quite enjoy so far. I still watch Charlie sometimes but for the most part, that's it. Because I don't want to go out to places I went with Pete. I don't want to do anything. I want him to wake me up one morning and say, *Chrissy, let's learn how to sail a boat*. I could try and do those things on my own but it wouldn't be the same. And yet, I need *something*. So why do I want to do this? Because I've got room in my life for something else. Someone else. I don't mean a man, I don't care about that. I mean a child. Or children, maybe. I don't know how it works when you first start out as a foster parent. But I think I'm a good candidate. I've got stability and experience, and I just... want to do it. I know I can do it. Care for a kid that's not mine, really care. Because there's really no such thing as the mothering kind, is there? We're all just doing our best.

