

“Educating Rita”

Frank is sitting in a chair by the window desk with a mug in his hand and a bottle of whisky on the desk in front of him, listening to the radio. There is a knock at the door.

FRANK
Come in.

Rita enters and goes to the swivel chair behind Frank's desk.

FRANK
What the—what the hell are you doing here? I'm not seeing you until next week.

RITA
Are you sober? Are you?

FRANK
If you mean am I still this side of reasonable comprehension, then yes.

RITA
Good, because I want you to hear this when you're sober. These are brilliant. Frank, you've got to start writing again. They're brilliant. They're witty. They're profound. Full of style.

FRANK
Ah... tell me again and again.

RITA
They are, Frank. It isn't only me that thinks so. Me and Trish sat up all night and read them. She agrees with me. Why did you stop writing? Why did you stop when you can produce work like this? We stayed up most of the night, just talking about it. At first we just saw it as contemporary poetry in its own right, you know, as something particular to this century. But look, Frank, what makes it more... more -- What did Trish say? -- More resonant than... purely contemporary poetry in that you can see in it a direct line through to the nineteenth-century traditions of... of wit and classical allusion.

FRANK
Oh. That's marvelous, Rita. How fortunate I didn't let you see them earlier. Just think if I'd let you see them when you first came here.

RITA
I know... I wouldn't have understood it, Frank.

FRANK
You would have thrown them across the room and dismissed them as a heap of shit, wouldn't you?

RITA
I know... but I couldn't have understood them then, Frank, because I wouldn't have been able to recognize and understand the allusions.

FRANK

Oh, I've done a fine job on you, haven't I?

RITA

It's true, Frank. I can see now.

FRANK

You know, Rita, like you, I think I'm going to change my name. From now on I am going to insist on being called Mary. Mary Shelley. Do you understand that allusion, Rita?

RITA

What?

FRANK

Mary Shelley wrote a little Gothic number called *Frankenstein*.

Rita: So?

FRANK

This – this clever, pyrotechnical pile of self-conscious allusion is worthless, talentless shit and would be recognized as such by anyone with a shred of common sense. It's the sort of thing that gives publishing a bad name. Wit? You'll find more wit in the telephone book and, probably, more insight. Its one advantage over the telephone directory is that it's easier to rip. (*He rips the poems up.*) It is pretentious, characterless and without style.

RITA

It's not.

FRANK

Oh, I don't expect you to believe me, Rita. You recognize the hallmark of literature now, don't you? Why don't you just go away? I don't think I can bear it any longer.

RITA

Can't bear what, Frank?

FRANK

You, my dear--You..

RITA

Yeah, well I'll tell you what you can't bear, Mr Self-Pitying -Piss Artist; what you can't bear is that I'm educated now. What's up, Frank, don't you like me now that the little girl's grown up, now that you can no longer bounce me on daddy's knee and watch me stare back in wide-eyed wonder at everything he has to say? I'm educated. I've got what you have and you don't like it because you'd rather see me as the peasant I once was. You're like the rest of them – you like to keep your natives thick, because that way they still look charming and delightful. I don't need you. I've got a room full of books! I know what clothes to wear, what wine to buy, what plays to see, what papers and books to read. I can do it without you.

FRANK

Is that all you wanted? Have you come all this way for so very, very little?

RITA

Oh, yeah, it's little to you, isn't it, Frank? It's little to you who squanders every opportunity and mocks and takes it for granted.

FRANK

Found a culture, have you, Rita? Found a better song to sing, have you? No. You found a different song, that's all--And, on your lips, it's shrill and hollow and tuneless. Oh, Rita, Rita...

RITA

Rita? Rita? Nobody calls me Rita but you. I dropped that pretentious crap as soon as I saw it for what it was. You stupid..Nobody calls me Rita.

Rita exits.

FRANK

What is it now, then, eh? Emily or Charlotte or Jane or Virginia?