

WILD JUSTICE

a one-act play by
Roger Elliott

“Revenge is a kind of wild justice...”

Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

WILD JUSTICE

CHARACTERS

LINA (short for Karolina)

22. A student from Germany attending a language course locally in Leicester to improve her English.

JACK

Early 40s. Ex-soldier, now a postman, so starts work early but home early. Married to Suzi. Married young, something of a shotgun wedding,. Their daughter Mel is now at University.

SUZI

Early 40s. Works as a Solicitor's clerk and sings in the local church choir. Married to Jack. Somewhat frustrated by career, life, and husband.

SET

Jack & Suzi's terraced house on the edge of the city. The action of the play takes place in the side bedroom.

The Bedroom looks like it belongs to a teenage girl (it does ... Mel) and there are signs of her youth everywhere ... posters, soft toys etc. The door leads out to the landing and there is a window that overlooks the street below (and, though we can't see it, a bus-stop).

SCENE 1 : A SPOT IN THE DARK

SUZIE I remember the first time I met her. Karolina. .. or Lina as she likes to be called. I had popped down to the corner shop for milk and bread, and she was in there talking to Mr Khan. She was asking if he knew anyone locally who had a spare room that she might be able to rent for a few weeks. He said he didn't but would ask around.

I picked up what I wanted and went to the counter to pay. As Mr Khan scanned my items we chatted and he asked how Mel was doing at uni. I told him, rather too proudly in retrospect, how well she was doing and then as I was leaving Karolina stopped me and asked, if Mel was at uni was her room empty? and could she rent it, just for a few weeks?

She told me she's on a six week language course at that new college on City Road - you know, the ugly one with those big windows - but when she arrived she discovered the room she had booked was filthy, the bed was broken, and there were signs of mouse droppings everywhere. She felt she just couldn't stay there.

She sounded so desperate I took pity on her and brought her home to ask Jack what he thought. It was only for a few weeks and yes, she was right, Mel's room was empty ... Jack wasn't sure at first but we both agreed some extra money coming in would be helpful. And it is just for six weeks. So that's how she came to stay here. Lina.

She's a nice girl ... I like her ... and I'm intrigued how different she is to Mel given they are more or less the same age. Maybe it's because she's German .. or maybe she's not an only child like Mel, but she seems more mature ... more confident in herself. Mel is still a little girl in many ways ... oh, she's bright and clever and doing well at uni but when it comes to the big decisions ... making plans for the future ... boys ... she's uncertain what to do ... uncertain of herself, poor little lamb.

But Lina ... she fascinates me. She seems so mature for her age .. so confident ... so grounded. She hasn't told us much about herself, mind ... about her family. Actually she seems more than a little secretive about that. Maybe its not a happy place to her... but she has told us her main reason for coming here to improve her English is so she can move to London and get a job in the fashion industry. She says she wants to work for someone like Stella McCartney. I've heard the name of course but I've no idea what her clothes are like.... but I am sure they're not for anyone like me.

Still, its lovely to have her here. It's given me someone to look after ... I mean as well as Jack of course ... and I like that. It's what I do. Looking after people. I sometimes regret never having had a more children. Or a proper career. I wanted to be a doctor when I was little but wasn't bright enough. I didn't pass the exams. Shame, I think I might have been a good doctor ... well, that's also a sort of caring too, isn't it?

It's been good having someone else to cook for too .. someone more adventurous than Jack I mean. We have even had some proper meals, the last few weeks, all sat round the kitchen table, instead of in front of the telly. I'm surprised Jack hasn't complained about that .. but he hasn't.

But what's really interesting ...at least what's fascinated me ... is the way Jack has been behaving, how he's changed since Lina has been here. He gets up early of course, being a postman ... then gets back in the middle of the afternoon. Before he used to just collapse in front of the telly with a cup of tea, and sit there until I put supper in front of him, saying he was tired .. but now ... now he bustles around, offering to help ... it's a truly confusing transformation. He offers to put the washing on ... but doesn't know how. He offers to help get the supper, but doesn't know how to more than the most basic preparation. I'm not sure who he is trying to impress ... me or Lina ... but usually she's not even here.

He's changed .. not only how he behaves, but also how he looks. He's got his hair cut .. and takes more care of his personal hygiene - which is, I have to say, very nice. He now has a shower when he gets home and changes his clothes. He's even started wearing jeans again. He hasn't done that for years. I'm not sure why - he usually wears saggy jogging bottoms around the house. I suppose he thinks jeans makes him look younger ... as though Lina would ever be interested in him. I mean he's old enough to be her father, but he's that vain he doesn't realise how silly he looks in tight trousers .. strutting about like an old turkey. Thank goodness Lina's far too sensible for any of that nonsense.

(In the darkness the bed squeaks ... then squeaks again)

He probably thinks I haven't noticed *any* of this. But I have . Poor Jack. I hope he won't be too disappointed when she goes next week when her course finishes and he's only got me at home again.

(SUZI'S spot goes out)

(The headboard starts banging against the wall. Rhythmically. JACK breathes faster with the exertion)

(Slowly the room lightens. We can just make out the couple making love on the bed, and the window to the street lit by streetlights and passing headlights. We can also make out the door to the landing which is ajar, and the landing light is on)

(The pace of the lovers quickens to a short climax. JACK gasps ... then grunts as he rolls off LINA onto his back)

(The room goes quiet for a moment. Pause.)

JACK That was bloody wonderful.

(We can just see LINA as she slips from the bed and puts on her wrap. She turns on the bedside light then crosses to the door. She pauses for a moment, as though listening, then closes the door. Though we don't see, she also locks the door and pockets the key.)

JACK Lina ... you OK?

(LINA doesn't reply. She crosses back to a chest of drawers and switches on another light. Then she crosses to the bed and looks down at JACK. He stretches out to take her hand but she doesn't move. JACK sits up on the side of the bed. He is wearing a T-shirt and still has his socks on.)

JACK I can't stay long ... Suzi will be back soon and I said I would start supper. Chop a few veg. A stir-fry alright for you?

(JACK fumbles in the bed for his pants, and puts them on, still sitting on the bed.)

JACK You're going next Thursday, aren't you?

(LINA doesn't reply)

JACK Lina? What is it?

LINA What? Sorry ... I wasn't really listening...

JACK I asked when you are leaving us?

LINA Well my course, it finishes next Wednesday ... but actually I go tomorrow.

JACK What? I didn't know that why?

LINA I need to get home...

(BEAT)

JACK I'll miss you.

(LINA doesn't react.)

JACK Really, I will. It's been wonderful having you here... having someone young sharing the house again ...

Mary doesn't get home much anymore so I think I'll redecorate this room after you've gone ... get rid of some of these silly toys and those bloody posters...

LINA I like this room ... it is much bigger than my room at home ... and a lot warmer. It has been nice living here while I am at college ... so thank you ...

JACK Its Suzi you need to thank ... it was her idea to let you stay ... as you know I wasn't sure when you came and asked, but she liked you and wanted to help so that was it ...

(JACK pats at the bed)

Of course, as it turned out, I'm thrilled you came here ... Lina, this ... this being with you ... has been just wonderful.

LINA You think everything is wonderful.

JACK Well, I certainly see the glass as half-full if that's what you mean ... but making love with you *is* wonderful ..

(JACK puts on his shirt and trousers)

I will miss you, you know....

LINA I think you will miss the sex more...

JACK That's not fair ... but maybe you are right. And if you are leaving tomorrow this is obviously our last time...

LINA I agree ... our last time ... and my last opportunity.

(LINA crosses to the window and peeps out round the curtain.)

(PAUSE)

JACK Lina ... Lina? Are you alright?

LINA I will miss Suzi.

JACK Well, we will miss you too ... we're both very fond of you.

(LINA doesn't answer)

JACK Lina...

(LINA still doesn't answer)

JACK What is it?

LINA (Distant) Today is her birthday...

JACK Suzi's? No it isnt....

(LINA doesn't answer)

JACK What? Who's birthday?

LINA My mother. I was thinking of my mother.

JACK (SURPRISED) Your mother?

LINA Yes. I am sometimes surprised about how much
I miss seeing her.... not being with her.

JACK Well, you'll be home soon.

(PAUSE)

LINA Did I tell you she was a nurse?

JACK No.

(JACK crosses to LINA and tries to put his arms round her)

LINA (ANGRILY) Take your hands off me!

JACK (SURPRISED) What's wrong?

(BEAT)

Lina, what's wrong? Tell me please?

(PAUSE)

Is it something I've done?

LINA Yes, you could say that.

JACK What?

LINA Patience...just listen ... I was telling you about my mother.

(JACK walks away and sits down on the bed again. LINA fiddles with some items on a shelf - one of them a heavy glass paperweight)

JACK OK ... you said she was a nurse?

LINA Yes ... in Munster. But she was not there long.

JACK What happened?

LINA You know.

JACK I've no idea what you are talking about.

LINA Really? You say you still don't know? I thought your conscience would tell you by now, but perhaps you are not that clever, eh? Or maybe you have no conscience.

JACK I really don't understand what you're saying ...

LINA Then I will tell you ... she came back to her home town one weekend to see her parents and was cycling home after a drink with friends when she was stopped by some English soldiers. Three drunk English soldiers. They were teasing her and tried to kiss her, to touch her ... but when she tried to escape it turned nasty. Really nasty. Two of them held her down while the third one raped her.

JACK Why are you telling me all this?

LINA You know why.

JACK I haven't a clue.

LINA Her hometown, where her parents live, is Gutersloh. You know Gutersloh ... you were stationed near there weren't you? At the army barracks there...when you were a soldier.

JACK Yes, but I really don't understand...

LINA Ha ... you watch too many movies. You can not claim innocence. It has taken me many months ... years ... to find you ... but now I have.

(LINA opens the drawer of the bedside table and takes out an envelope. She opens it and takes out some papers.)

LINA Jack Matthew Hopkinson born 4th June 1979 ... and you lived in Wembley .. or was that where your parents lived?

JACK How do you know all this?

LINA *(HANDING HIM THE PAPER)* Your old driving licence...

JACK How on earth?...

LINA *(HANDING HIM A SMALL PHOTO)* ... and this is a photograph taken in one of the bars in Gutersloh... back in 1999 ... when you were based near there.

There, you see ... that's you in the photo isn't it? ... in the middle ... with your army friends, drinking and laughing... it looks like you were all having a good time ...

Now ... you can go on denying it all you want ... you can say it wasn't you ... you can even say you weren't there .. but you know, and I know ... it was you. You raped my mother.

Do you want me to go on?

(JACK shakes his head)

LINA Ah you do not deny it now I see. Now you remember ... yes?

(BEAT ... then JACK nods his head a little)

JACK How did you find me?

LINA The one mistake my mother made was not to report the incident straight away. She was frightened. And ashamed. She comes from a very strong catholic community you understand, and she feared for her family and friends if they knew.... about the rape I mean. But she still wanted revenge for what had happened, for what you did to her, so she needed to know your name.

She remembered your face. How could she ever forget it ... watching it as you lay on top of her. And she remembered the tattoo of the serpent on your arm. Its faded now, but you can still see it ...

JACK (QUIETLY) It's just a snake ...

LINA Serpent ... snake ... it's the same thing, no? It is the same word in german ... schlange. But it doesn't matter . When I saw the snake on your arm I knew I had found the right man.

Anyway, she watched the barracks for many days till she saw you. And followed you. Huh ... you British are so predictable. The same bars. The same cinemas. A few weeks later you lost your wallet in a bar, didn't you? You probably thought it was a pickpocket. Well, it was ... and it cost my mother two month's wages to pay him.

JACK And the driving licence...

LINA Was in the wallet yes ... and the photo.

(LINA holds out her hand and JACK hands her back the licence and the photo. She picks up a box of matches, and striking a match sets fire to both the licence and the photo then drops them into the wastepaper basket where they burn away)

JACK Why are you burning those? Don't you need them?

LINA For what? No ... I don't need them anymore ... now you believe me. Now you remember...

(BEAT)

LINA The tattoo ... on your arm ... does it mean anything?

JACK I have been told a snake is a sign of rebirth, of continuation ... something to do with it shedding its skin and starting again ... but I didn't know any of that when I got it done. I just liked the design.

LINA A snake means a lot to the Chinese. Were you stationed abroad?

JACK No. Had it done in Aldershot... during basic training. It was on one of the few days leave we had. I thought it would make me look older ... tougher ...

LINA And did it?

JACK Not really ... no.

(PAUSE)

JACK (UNCERTAIN OF WHERE HE STANDS) ... So what happened... after that night?

LINA At last you show a little interest. You really want to know?

JACK Tell me.

LINA A short time later my mother realised she was pregnant. By you.

JACK Pregnant! Oh my God!

LINA And as I have told you, she was from a very strict catholic family... a family that believed that everything, good or bad, is part of God's great plan ... a family that did not believe in abortion...

JACK You don't mean she kept it? Then what became of ... not ... you don't...

LINA (INTERUPTING) Yes. It's me. Heaven forgive me but you are my father!

JACK But you and I ... we just ...

LINA Yes ... and in your daughter's bed too. Very appropriate, no?

JACK Its disgusting! I mean ... its ... its incest!

LINA I know. I find it distasteful too, but it was the only way.

JACK The only way to what?

LINA 'Denn alle Schuld racht auf Erden'...

JACK What?

(LINA hears a bus approaching the bus-stop outside and rushes to the window, grabbing there paperweight as she goes. She peeps round the curtain)

LINA (SUDDENLY SHOUTING). Stop it! No! Please don't! Rape! No ... no... RAPE!...

(JACK is frozen to the spot, uncertain what to do)

(LINA hurls the paperweight at the window, breaking the glass. She moves closer to the broken window, still shouting...)

LINA Help me please! No... no ... stop it... STOP! PLEASE!

(JACK springs into action. He rushes to LINA and pulls her away from the window)

JACK Lina! Stop it! Be quiet!

(LINA screams. She seems hysterical and JACK slaps her hard across the face. LINA stops screaming and steps away from JACK.)

LINA (CALMLY) It was good of you to join in the shouting. It makes it all more real, don't you think?

JACK I don't know what you are doing, or what you want, but I'm going.

(JACK crosses to the door but finds its locked. And the key has gone. He tries to open it but it doesn't budge. He turns back to LINA trying to control his rising anger)

JACK Unlock this door.

LINA Not yet.

JACK Now!!

LINA I said not yet.

JACK Look, Suzi will be back soon. You don't want her to find us here, like this, do you?

LINA Maybe ... maybe not...

JACK What the hell are you up to?

LINA 'Denn alle Schuld racht sich auf Erden.'

JACK What?

LINA Its Goethe ... you have heard of Goethe, the german Shakespeare? ... it means 'for all guilt is punished on earth' ... you see, you have to pay for what you did.

JACK Is that it? Money? You want money?

LINA No, of course not ... how could you think that?

JACK But you said I should pay...

LINA Yes, pay ... but not in that way.

JACK But I would if that's what you want ... give you money ... just tell me how much...

LINA (ANGRY) I don't want your money!

JACK Then what do you want?

(LINA doesn't reply)

- JACK Look, it was all a long time ago. As you said I was drunk. You're right, I was. Very drunk. It was my birthday, my twentieth birthday, earlier that week and my friends had taken me out. I didn't know what I was doing. We didn't really mean that girl any harm. We were just having a bit of a laugh till it all got out of hand...
- LINA A bit of a laugh! How on earth can you say that?
- JACK I know it was wrong. What I did was bad ... very bad ...and ever since that day I've regretted it. You say I have to pay. ..well, I have. I think of what I did every day...
- LINA Don't lie! You haven't thought of it for years. Or if you have, not with sadness. Or regret. And certainly not with shame.
- JACK Lina, please... I've said I'm sorry. I really am. What else do you want me to do?
- LINA You haven't even asked about my mother. How she is. If she suffered. You haven't even asked her name. But I want you to know it all. Everything.

(PAUSE)

Gisela. Her name. Gisela. .. with two sisters and one brother. Her father, my grandfather, is a teacher in a college of engineering. He still works there. We were a happy family that loved each other. Good times. But when she is pregnant she moves away from Munster to Koblenz, where she knew nobody and nobody knew her. You see, she left her family so that they would not share the shame.

In Koblenz she told them she was a widow. I grew up thinking my father was dead. She got a job in a shop. It did not pay good money and we were always poor. Then, when I was nineteen my mother told me. About that night. She thought I ought to know the truth.

(PAUSE)

Then ... then she killed herself. She said she had lived with the disgrace for twenty years, and that was enough.

JACK Oh my God! I'm so sorry...

LINA It's too late for that.

JACK Why didn't she write to me if she had my address?

LINA Write to you!! For God's sake you raped her, you weren't her lover! You're impossible. You hit her, you hurt her, you rape her and you think she should write you Sundays!?

Do you not realise yet what you did? You completely ruined her life. And mine. And her parents. And her sisters and brother. All of us. Our lives broken because of what you did.

(BEAT)

JACK What are you going to do now?

LINA It's not what am I going to do, it's what are they going to do with you. The police.

JACK The police?

LINA Of course. Any minute now they should be here. What did you think all that shouting was for? At the window?

JACK You have really thought all this out, haven't you?

LINA Since my mother told me ... and since she killed herself ... I have thought of little else. How to find you. How to do it. I could have killed you ... or at least tried to kill you. I thought of it ... and that might even have been easier ... but unfair.

JACK Unfair?

LINA Yes ... I want you to pay for rape, nothing more.

(LIGHT CHANGE)

JACK

Why now? After all this time ... that ... that business was all a lifetime ago ... I was a different person then, a completely different person ... young ... God I was so immature ... a boy really, not a man ... but a boy trying to be a man, trying to fit into the army ... pretending I was tough ... I remember being shit scared most of the time ... scared I wasn't up to what was being asked of me ... scared I would let my mates down ... scared I would be shown up for what I was.

But Lina is right ... I haven't thought of that night for years ... its as though it was part of a different life ... a parallel lifetime ... almost as though it wasn't me. But it was. I know it was. Yes, my mates took me out. They got me drunk ... I was a virgin and we were on the way to a brothel when this girl ... Gisella as I now know ... came past ... and then ... then ... well you know what happened...

But I wasn't lying when I said I regretted it ... truly regretted it ... those fifteen minutes were the lowest point of my life. It was the most stupid, wasteful, hateful, wrong thing to do... and I know it ... and I am ashamed...

I was terrified for weeks afterwards ... terrified that I would be found out ... but nobody came asking questions ... and it slowly became apparent that she hadn't reported it. It felt as though I was being given a second chance. I know I had behaved badly ... appallingly ... and deserved to be punished but it looked as though that wasn't going to happen. That my life wasn't going to be ruined.

But it did change me. Made me a better person. I wasn't going to screw up a second time. I drank less. Behaved better ... treated others better ... even became a better soldier and got promotion for it.

But I can't excuse what I did ... it was, and still is, inexcusable however much I have changed. Suzi knows nothing of this of course ... she's going to be devastated and I can't do anything about that now . All I can do is accept what happens ...

(LIGHT CHANGE)

LINA Now do you begin to understand?

JACK You've led me on ever since you got here, haven't you? Every bit of this was planned?

LINA I did not know the plan till I came, but when I found the language college in the town ... and I heard you had an empty room because your daughter is at university ... then I know what I have to do. But if you mean the sex, then yes. It is not difficult for a young girl to get an older man to look at her.

I could feel you watching me ... especially when I come out of the bathroom in just this costume. I see you looking ... so when Suzi went out, the rest was easy...

JACK You calculating bitch!

(A distant POLICE SIREN can be heard. It rapidly gets closer. LINA crosses to the window and peeps out)

LINA The Police ... oh, and Suzi too I see ... back from work.

JACK (GETTING DESPERATE) No! Quick ... give me the key! Lina! Please!

(LIGHT CHANGE)

LINA There Mamma, I've done it ... well, nearly ... I've started the process .. like I have tipped over the first of a row of dominoes, each one knocking over the next. There's no going back now. I hope this is what you wanted. I think so ... why else would you have told me everything? ... why would you have given me his papers? I know you didn't tell me to do this, or even ask me ... but then you drank the bottle of wine and took the pills ... if that wasn't a cry for help and for revenge ... I don't know what it was. He will pay for what he did Mamma, I promise. And on your birthday too.

It wasn't easy.... for me I mean ... to do these things. To pretend I wanted him touching me ... wanted him inside me ... it was unpleasant, uncomfortable, but all the time I thought of you, of that night. You had no choice then, had no choice when he forced himself on you ... so this had to be done.

I know I won't get pregnant. I was that sensible at least .. and I don't think he will argue. People saw him hit me ... and his semen is inside me ... how can he argue? ... we have him Mamma. He will pay. It was not too difficult to trap him . The poor man, he didn't know what was happening, right to the end ... I almost feel sorry for him.

I think he was very young when that night happened ... I mean simple like a child whatever his real age ... and drunk ... but that is no excuse.

What he did was dreadful. Inexcusable. I know you thought of it every day. All day. How could you not when my very presence was a constant reminder? I think I am very like you Mamma, but you must have looked at me and wondered ... wondered which bits of me were from him .. from the man that ruined your life.

Well, now I have ruined his ... and Suzi's. Poor Suzi. She's done nothing to deserve this. She kindly took me in when she thought I had nowhere to go and needed a room here ... and she has been like a mother. Looking after me. Helping. Hurting her will be my biggest regret in all this. It is a great shame, but she will recover ... in time.

So, Mamma ... please ... rest in peace. It is over.

(LIGHT CHANGE)

JACK Lina! ... PLEASE! The key...

LINA In a minute.

(JACK starts frantically searching the room)

JACK Where have you hidden it?

(JACK doesn't find anything. He crosses to LINA and takes her by the shoulders)

JACK Please ... for the love of God, Suzi doesn't deserve to find out this way.

LINA Not yet...

JACK You bitch!

LINA Go on ... hit me again. You know you want to and it will make it look better.

(JACK walks away and sits on the bed. Very nearly beaten)

(The POLICE SIREN is close now. In a momentary lull we hear the front door open and footsteps)

SUZI (CALLING OFF) Jack? I'm home.....

(NO ANSWER)

Jack, where are you?

The POLICE SIREN is outside now. We hear the police car squeal to a stop ... BEAT ... then the Police hammering on the front door ... the siren stops)

SUZI (OFF) What? (THEN CALLING) I'm coming...

(In the Bedroom LINA takes the key from the pocket of her wrap and offers it to JACK.)

(JACK leaps up and takes the key. LINA smiles. In frustration JACK slaps her again)

JACK (ANGRILY) Now you've got everything you want.

(LINA sinks onto the bed)

SUZI (OFF) Hang on ... I'm coming...

(SUZI is opening the front door as JACK rushes to the bedroom door and opens it. He goes out onto the landing where SUZI sees him. He freezes in panic, framed in the door.)

SUZI (OFF) Jack? Jack!!

(SNAP BLACKOUT)

THE END