

# BLACK MARY

Production Draft

By James Harker

**ONE**

You're sweating.

Sick.

Shirt clinging to your chest.

Hand clinging to the half-full plastic inhaler which you suck

Suck as the tyres screech and bounce on the runway.

Suck as hundreds of Jamaicans spring to their feet, cheering.

And all the while your mind stays fixed:

That tiny, battered shoebox of human remains in the overhead locked.

And you wonder

Here, in this strange land, you wonder:

"How the hell did you get into this?"

**SOUND OF CHILDREN CHANTING,**

**A PLAYGROUND RHYME**

**GROWING IN VOLUME:**

*Black Mary's filthy*

*Black Mary lies.*

*Black Mary's caked in bed lice and flies*

*Black Mary's ugly*

*Hair's made of rope*

*Never ever touched a bar of white soap*

**OVER THIS:**

Shut your eyes.

Right now.

Close them.

Listen:

That chanting ...

Those girls ...

You're nine again.

White socks and woollen knickers.

Cold of the playground.

Back of the children's home.

Right here: in Lancaster

**YOUNG ALI:**            Come on!

You growl.

Black face metres from yours.

**YOUNG ALI:**            Come on then!

Her name is Lucy Heywood.

She'd called you a gypsy.

You'd called her a coon.

And the other girls -- however much they hated you before

All of them back you now

Gathered round, chanting, dancing.

**YOUNG ALI:**    Come on then, goliwog!

### **THE CHANTING INTENSIFIES**

Lucy lunges, grabs for your hair.

Arms whirling like a Catherine Wheel.

You dodge.

She grabs.

### **THE CHANTING REACHES PITCH**

She brings a knee up, right into your gut.

But you catch it, twist her leg, throw her down to the gravel.

Shoving as she falls.

### **THE CHANTING STOPS, MID-RHYME, WE MAYBE HEAR A COLLECTIVE GASP**

And Lucy looks up, shocked

Blood spilling from her broken lip.

Already soaking her blazer.

And for a moment

Just a moment

You're surprised:

Her blood is red

Like yours

## TWO

### SILENCE

#### A CHILD TRYING HER HARDEST NOT TO SOB, DISTANT

Follow me

Down here

Downhill

Quick.

You're standing in the eighties now

Eleven.

Alone.

Two days since their car came

Since carrot-faced Alice hauled you into the day-room

Huge smile on her toothless face

Bursting with 'good news' you'd never asked for.

#### THAT HALF-SOBBING AGAIN, INTIMATE NOW

The strangest thing is the silence

Darkness of your own bedroom.

No one to fear.

No one to touch.

No screaming to keep you awake.

Alone here your body shakes.

Soundless tears fall to the duvet.

Sleep just feels distant, unreachable.

**YOUNG ALI:** Mr Barber?

Daytime is better.

**YOUNG ALI:** Mr Barber.

You ask, pointing to the alcove by the window.

**MRS BARBER:** Your father is busy Ali.

**YOUNG ALI :** He's not my father, and he isn't busy.

Mr Barber!

The big man sits at his typewriter: never typing, never moving.

His office is cavernous,

Plastered with portraits, with heirlooms ...

**YOUNG ALI:** Mr Barber, what's that?

He looks up from his manuscript

Follows your finger to the strange black object:

Mounted, like a hunting trophy on the wall.

**MR BARBER:** That ...

Mr Barber says

**MR BARBER:** Well, that belonged to your grandmother.

**YOUNG ALI:** Yes but –

**MRS BARBER (*Sharp:*)** It's a hand.

Mrs Barber says.

**MRS BARBER:** From Jamaica.  
Our family's favourite slave.  
Now stop pestering your father or I'll chop yours off too.

### THREE

In the week since you saw it you saw it, that black hand obsesses you.

Mrs Barber's gone silent, barred you from asking

Mr Barber: he's absent as usual

Julia, the maid ...

She knows a few scraps:

That they had a plantation: the Barbers, out there

That its owner was a young girl – 18 perhaps

Was she alive, you wonder, when they cut the hand from her.

Dead? Mummified? Pickled?

But the office is locked.

Since the moment you left it.

And tonight is your first chance.

*(Beat)*

Barber's are busy, entertaining downstairs

Julia's out

### SOUNDS OF THE PARTY GROW LOUDER AS ALI CREEPS DOWN THE HALL

You find the key in her empty dresser drawer

Her room: much smaller than yours.

Gingerly creep down the hall.

Strings of Mantovani rise through the floorboards.

Turn the key in the heavy office-door.

Inside: there's darkness.

You navigate by memory.

Climb the chair to the table.

Grope your way past the window.

And suddenly you touch it.

So cold, so smooth

You yank it from the wall.

Lighter than you'd think.

Race back to your room.

And under covers, by torchlight

You examine it

Skin: full of scratches ... tiny, ingrained.

Nails: dried and wrinkled.

The palm: almost pale, almost white.

Then something strange happens.

Not magic, as such.

But by instinct you raise it

Hold it to your chest

This ancient, shrivelled hand.

And you imagine ... her pain, her loneliness, her life on the plantation.

And, as you hold her,

Your nightly tears stop.

You even give her a name:

Black Mary

Little Black Mary: the hand you vow to hold every night that you spend here.

And, finally

You let your eyes close.

## FOUR

### AN EAR-PIERCING SCREAM

Flash forward to the present.

Same bedroom: different life.

Marcella, your cleaner, stands pressed against the wall: pure fear etched into her face.

**MARCELLA:** Ms Barber, Ms Barber!

She stutters.

**MARCELLA:** Ms Barber. I think it's a human hand.

It's been years since your dad died.

[Years] since Black Mary made her way from your bed to the back of the cupboard.

**MARCELLA:** It's got fingers and nails and —

**ALI:** It's not what it looks like Marcella.

**MARCELLA:** It isn't a hand?

**ALI:** Not that ...

I mean ...

It belonged to a servant.

**MARCELLA:** Oh my god, another cleaner!

**ALI:** A slave.  
Centuries ago.

**MARCELLA:** A slave!

She says, staring.

**MARCELLA:** Is that ... is that legal?

Marcella wavers, starts to tear at her apron.

**MARCELLA:** I'm sorry Miss Barber, I can't work here anymore

**ALI:** Marcella.

**MARCELLA:** That was a person.

**ALI:** I know, but –

**MARCELLA:** It's wrong Ms Barber, sick and awful.

**ALI:** Wait! Marcella!  
Marcella.

**MARCELLA:** You can't leave it here Ms Barber.

**ALI:** I'll have it removed, tomorrow, I promise.

**MARCELLA:** I don't mean that Ms Barber.  
I want you to take it home.

**FIVE**

**SILENCE:**

**SOUND OF A ROARING AIRPLANE**

So here you are.

Sweating, ill.

Tarmac of Montego Bay.

**CUSTOMS OFFICER:** Passport please.

First time in your life, you fall foul of customs.

**CUSTOMS OFFICER:** Passport. Please.

The officer is butch: unblinking, unsmiling.

**ALI LAUGHS AWKWARDLY**

**ALI:** It's a terrible photo.

**CUSTOMS OFFICER:** Bag please.

You lay down your bag on the table, by her warty Chinese assistant.

**CUSTOMS OFFICER:** *And* the shoebox.

**ALI:** This thing?

**CUSTOMS OFFICER:** And the shoebox Miss Barber.

You hold out the box.

She grabs it, roughly.

Squints at the label on the side.

**CUSTOMS OFFICER:** Laboutin.

She says, smiling with approval.

**CUSTOMS OFFICER:** Impeccable taste Miss Barber.

Welcome to Jamaica

### **STREET NOISE**

The heat out here is murderous.

Churches, markets, dust in every street.

Finding a burial site is ... difficult.

For a start, it's a big place — this little island.

The Barber plantation's gone.

And the graveyards: old, overgrown ...

Somehow they seem wrong.

Seem ... beneath her.

You wonder what your driver thinks.

David: from the hotel.

Frantically going from churchyard to churchyard, graveyard to graveyard.

But he isn't the questioning sort

Just sits there, wearing the same false smile.

Revolver strapped to his belt

**DAVID:**           Here for your safety

He explains, a hint of violence glistening in his smile.

**DAVID:**           Here only for your safety.

On Day Three, you change tack.

'Beauty spots' you think.

Somewhere untouched.

Somewhere quiet.

That's where you'll take her.

But this country is against you.

The sickness is worse.

Two days you lose to Diarrhoea.

Sitting in bed.

Sweltering heat.

Strange, religious TV shows.

Those nights you take Mary from her box

Clutch her to your chest: like you did as a child

Interlace your fingers with hers.

Fall asleep smiling.

And on Day Five you find it:

Vulture's Point, Lucea

Secluded, serene

Overlooking the ocean.

You tell David to wait in the car, say you'll shout if you need him

And you set off alone

Trowel in hand

Black Mary in the shoebox.

By the time you reach the clearing, the sun's already setting

Scratching with your trowel

Clearing out the scrub.

It hits you.

Just how real she was.

Her skin had touched this soil

Her body knew this island.

Those scratches, you're sure now, from the rough cotton barbs that cover this soil.

**ALI:**            Goodbye

You whisper

Though there's no need to whisper; no need to speak.

**ALI:** Goodbye my friend.

**LUCY:** Oh. My. God!

The voice makes your heart stop.

[You] jump, twisting, to your feet.

**LUCY:** Oh my God!

She repeats, black beaming smile.

**LUCY:** Ali Shipman?

Little Ali Shipman?

**ALI:** Lucy?

**LUCY:** What the hell are you doing here?

Then suddenly her face drops.

Gaze falls on the trowel.

Fresh pile of dug dirt.

Black Mary left in the pit.

You look at her, silent

... all hell breaks loose up there.

SIX

BACKGROUND CHATTER: WE'RE IN A HOTEL BAR

**LUCY:** I remember what you did.

Lucy says, coldly.

You're back at the hotel now.

Propping up the bar.

For a second, on the mountain, you thought she might have killed you.

Then came David, running, gun in hand.

Now she seems calm, almost serene.

Though the shock has stripped her politeness.

**LUCY:** It's not that you won, that time in the playground.

It's what you did to me afterwards:

The names. The mocking.

You used me, didn't you?

Used my weakness to give you strength, [and] power.

**ALI:** We were kids.

You offer, lamely.

**LUCY:** You were maybe.

I was something different.

One black face in a crowd of loathing whiteness.

**ALI:** Did you ever ...

**LUCY:** Eventually.

She says

**LUCY:** Quiet couple from Blackpool.

Think I seemed exotic to them.

Didn't find myself till I left and moved here.

Lucy leans across the table.

There's something almost pitying in her eyes.

**LUCY:** Don't bury it Ali.

Don't bury the hand.

It's too easy that way.

Too easy to run from the truth.

**ALI:** I'm sorry.

You say

**LUCY:** What for?

**ALI:** For everything.

**LUCY:** That's OK.

Says Lucy.

**LUCY:** I'm sorry too.

**SEVEN**

**SILENCE**

So here you are at last:

Back home.

Back here.

Back in your office.

Your father's old office.

Marcella beside you

Shoebox open on the desk

**MARCELLA:**            Are you ready?

Marcella asks.

**ALI:**                      Ready

You say.

Marcella draws out the chair.

You climb onto table.

Hammer in hand.

Nails in hand.

You place Black Mary back in her alcove.

And then ...

**SOUND: A NAIL IS HAMMERED THROUGH FLESH, INTO THE WALL: HARD UNPLEASANT SQUELCHING**

**BEAT**

**AGAIN**

**BEAT**

**AGAIN**

Lucy was right

**HAMMERING CONTINUES, SLOWLY**

The past is ugly, always was ...

But you can't forget it.

Can't hide from it.

Can't scrub off its stains, its dirt.

Can't *bury* it out of sight.

The Barbers reaped the fruits of Mary's suffering.

Wrecked her youth just as thoughtlessly as they'd saved yours

Used her.

Objectified her.

Turned her remnants into an ornament.

And there's no simple ending to a story like this.

All you do is turn to Marcella.

And you smile.

And she smiles back.

And you look at Black Mary.

Proud, grotesque, mounted again

And somehow ...

Somehow after years, centuries of silence ...

Blood.

Not red but thin

Oily

Black

Blood.

Dripping down from wall to carpet

**ALI:** Welcome home Mary

You say to yourself

**ALI:** May your spectre haunt us forever.

**END**