

GREAT AND FAIR

By Lou Sutcliffe

Content Warnings: Death/dying (in an elevator), Poisoning, Confinement, Family trauma/conflict.

Mentions/Discussion of: Violence, War, Miscarriage/Loss of a child, Period typical misogyny (various), Homophobia, Colonialism, Epidemic disease, Supernatural threat, Witchcraft/magic, Religious discrimination (Christianity, Wicca)

SFX: Loud machinery, buzzing

[INT. THE CORRIDOR OF AN EDINBURGH TENEMENT. MOIRA AND FIONA HAVE JUST COME IN AND ARE WAITING FOR THE LIFT]

FIONA: *(cheerfully flustered)* Och, what a lovely evening! A braw night to get out and up high. Feel the wind in one's drawers...

[SHE PUSHES THE LIFT BUTTON]

MOIRA: *(amused)* Drawers, eh? Very 1890.

FIONA: Well, ye ken what I mean. Couldn't wear drawers these days, can't fit them under the jeans. *(giggles)* Remember when we didn't bother with underwear at all?

MOIRA: Aye. It was chilly round the nethers when the wind caught you. Unless you had the heavy quilted petticoats.

FIONA: *(cheeky, implying something filthy)* Very convenient for some activities....

MOIRA: *(deliberately ignoring that implication)* I remember. Folk pissing in the streets wherever they felt like. And I shall never miss farthingales, wandering around with half a wicker basket strapped around your waist.

FIONA: Not just that. I [remember...]

[LIFT PINGS INTERRUPTING HER, DOOR OPENS]

MOIRA: *(muttering)* Thank goodness for that.

[THEY GO INSIDE, THE DOOR SLIDES SHUT AND THE LIFT BEGINS TO MOVE, SLOW AND CLANKING, GETTING SLOWER AS THEY TALK]

FIONA: Lovely weather for a meeting though, wasn't it. All shrouded in cloud, very atmospheric. Plenty of cover from prying eyes.

MOIRA: Awfully dreich. Don't much like it, myself. What do you think of this new coven then?

FIONA: (*affectionately*) Bless their wee hearts.

MOIRA: There's a little power there by my reckoning - perhaps one or two of them have something real. The wee dark shy lass certainly. With the long nose and the muckle great pentagram around her neck.

FIONA: The one with the silly name? Charnelle or Chardonnay or something.

MOIRA: That's the one. The rest are the usual; lost girls, bored wiveys, eco-hippies and (*she pauses in distaste*) sociology lecturers.

FIONA: Och, you're no still bitter about that article? It was 1986!

MOIRA: Tch. I should have turned that woman into something nasty. "A vocabulary of sexual deviancy", my eye. More fool me for letting her do an interview. And! These ones, these new ones. They're doing the Wicca but they're not calling it the Wicca. *Again*.

FIONA: They probably don't know. Don't tell them about the [Gardner](#) man who came up with most of it. You did that with the last coven, and they got terribly upset.

MOIRA: I just think they should know he was a nudist ...

FIONA: You never even met him.

MOIRA: Did you?

FIONA: Aye, I did, once, at a party.

MOIRA: You didn't.....with him?

FIONA: Oh, no. Not my type.

MOIRA: Well, I prefer to keep my clothes on, thank you. In public anyway. Thank goodness all that skyclad nonsense fell out of fashion forty years ago. All very well frolicking around without your....*drawers*... on... down on the south coast but you'll freeze your bits off if you try that nonsense up here. Well, most folk would.

FIONA: (*wistful*) I didn't mind it so much.

MOIRA: (*distasteful*) You would say that. Look, I just think young witches should know their history. Their *real* history. Take a keek at the advertisement on the Facebook. "Mystic Full Moon Esbat on Arthur's Seat." "Mystic Full Moon Esbat"! For heaven's sake.

FIONA: They've been calling them [Esbats](#) for years.

MOIRA: Aye! That [Margaret Murray](#) woman's got a lot to answer for. Havering on about secret cults worshipping goodness knows what.

FIONA: This old lift is so *slow*.

MOIRA: (*ignoring her*) As if we'd be so foolish. When suspicion falls on any woman who steps a toe out of line. Well, you might be that foolish, I suppose. But every Sunday, I was there at the kirk, *without fail*. Call on [St Anthony](#) to find what's lost and [St Christopher](#) to protect you as you travel. Start your charms with a prayer and fill your grimoires with the many names of God. And even then, better hope nobody finds your books and brings them to the Justice as proof of your compact with the devil. The next time somebody starts [havering](#) at me about "secret sisterhoods" I shall give them a piece of my mind.

FIONA: Be nice to them or they won't invite us back for Yule.

MOIRA: Ugh... Fine, [but I]

[THE LIFT, WHICH HAS BEEN GRADUALLY SLOWING, STOPS WITH A CLUNK, INTERRUPTING HER]

[THEY WAIT FOR THE DOOR TO OPEN]

[FIONA PUSHES THE BUTTON]

FIONA: Silly old thing. Come on, open the door.

[SHE PUSHES IT SEVERAL TIMES]

MOIRA: It's not listening. Push the other button, for the wee body in the speaker.

FIONA: In the speaker?

MOIRA: Och, don't be a fool, ye ken what I mean. The wee concierge body, to call the lift fixing man.

[FIONA PUSHES THE CONCIERGE BUZZER]

CONCIERGE: (*over the microphone*) [Berwick](#) House Concierge Service, how can I help you today?

FIONA: Hello there! Our lift seems to have stopped.

MOIRA: Between the 7th and 8th floors.

FIONA: Could you come up and sort it out?

CONCIERGE: You're at 13 St Giles' Crescent...?

MOIRA: Aye, that's right. Moira and Fiona McMorran, Flat 8/2.

CONCIERGE: Thank you. And is anyone in the lift in any medical distress, or requiring the emergency services?

MOIRA: No dear, we're just stuck in the lift. Me and my sister.

FIONA: (*thoughtfully*) I'll be needing a wee sooner or later but it's not what I would call a medical emergency. Might be a mop and bucket situation mind....

CONCIERGE: Oh dear.... I'm just completing the form to request the engineer, sorry this system is a wee bit slow. Ah... there we are, sent it.

MOIRA: And how long will it be?

CONCIERGE: I'm afraid I'm not sure at this time of night, madam. They'll have to send out the on-call engineer.

MOIRA: (*coldly*) I see.

CONCIERGE: (*contrite*) I'm really very sorry madam.

FIONA: You can't just come up here and let us out?

CONCIERGE: I'm afraid I'm just the concierge service, madam. There isn't an onsite engineer anymore.

FIONA: Aye we did get a letter about that now I think of it.

MOIRA: Tsch. And the fees we pay on top of the ever-spiralling rent, what are they for?

CONCIERGE: I'm afraid you would have to contact Berwick House regarding that madam, again I am very sorry, and I promise I will update you as soon as I have a response from the engineer.

FIONA: Och, leave the poor wee concierge alone Moira, it's not their fault.

MOIRA: I shall be sending a *strongly* worded letter. Leaving two ladies alone in a lift for heaven knows how long.

CONCIERGE: Very sorry again.

[CUTS OFF]

FIONA: Looks like we'll be here a while. I shall have a wee sit.

MOIRA: On the floor?

FIONA: Aye, we pay through the nose for cleaning it, don't we? Might as well take advantage.

[SHE SITS DOWN AND LEANS AGAINST THE LIFT WALL, EFFORTS PLZ?]

MOIRA: Could be cleaner.

[MOIRA ALSO SITS DOWN, MORE EFFORTS]

FIONA: Ahh, they'll have someone round in a jiffy. We've had far worse in our time anyway. Remember the siege of Dunbar?

MOIRA: (*remembering fondly*) [Agnes Randolph](#). I believe she held that castle better than her husband ever would have. Dusting off the parapets with her kerchief after the English cannonballs hit, as if they'd only scuffed them.

"Of Scotland's King I haud my house, I pay him meat and fee, And I will keep my gude auld house, while my house will keep me"

FIONA: (*grinning*) Remember when old sour-faced Montagu showed up with her brother and said they'd hang him unless she surrendered the castle.

MOIRA: (*amused*) And she said..

FIONA: (*laughing*) ... "Hang him if you please, for my sister and I will inherit his lands."

MOIRA: A braw fine woman.

FIONA: A braw fine woman indeed.

[PAUSE, TO REMEMBER A BRAW FINE WOMAN]

MOIRA: We'd have been cooked if it wasn't for Sandy Ramsay showing up and sneaking in the shoreside postern gate at the last minute. Bless him. Folk were so hungry they were about to eat the dead.

FIONA: Not a problem for us of course.

MOIRA: Well, no, but it was tiresome having to put chalk on my face all the time to make it *look* like I was starving hungry...

FIONA: I did a glamour.

MOIRA: Aye, I remember.

FIONA: (*giggling*) Made it look like my teeth were bleeding. From scurvy.

MOIRA: Did you no do something like that back in 1819? In Kolkata. The cholera epidemic.

FIONA: [Ola Bibi's](#) Wrath? (*giggles*) No glamour needed there, just soil the sheets and run to the toilet a lot.

MOIRA: Disgusting.

FIONA: My sweet Colonel, she got him all right though. Shitting his guts out until he expired a week after [Durga Puja](#). (*sighs*) He was one of my favourite husbands.

MOIRA: He was no good for you. Having it away with half the garrison's wives.

FIONA: Aye, but I was having it away with half the garrison, *and* some of the wives. Fair's fair.

MOIRA: Monstrous behaviour.

FIONA: Och wheesht with your judging, always looking down your long nose at all and sundry. Everyone was doing it ye ken? In and out of each other's bungalows like mongooses in a cobra's nest.

MOIRA: Surprised you never got caught.

FIONA: (*cheeky*) I'm a tricky one to catch, me.

MOIRA: Mph. What about that time in 1598? We near as had to snatch you from the pyre.

FIONA: Witch-mad King Jamie Stuart. We should have left England as soon as he started publishing his wee tracts.

MOIRA: Full of nonsense of course.

FIONA: I wasn't even doing any of the things I was accused of, you ken? Ann Fortescue lost her child because she barely ate during her pregnancy and everything else was down to the plague.

MOIRA: Aye.... the plague wasn't you?

FIONA: Not that one! Bloody Jamie Stuart. Spent more time in [George Villiers'](#) chambers than his wife's and has the gall to accuse *me* of sinfulness and fornication.

MOIRA: You *were* being sinful and fornicating. You were always being sinful and fornicating.

FIONA: Aye...but...pot, kettle, ye ken? And I was careful! He just made a... lucky guess. Not like you and old [Karl Hundason](#), Witch-Queening all over Moray.

MOIRA: Don't you call him that. That's an insult. That's what the northmen called him.

FIONA: The Red King. [MacFinlay](#)

MOIRA: Better. (*fondly*) Och, he was a handful.

FIONA: My second least favourite of your husbands I reckon. After that German fellow.

MOIRA: Adalbert.

FIONA: Aye. Bertie. Weasel of a man. Couldn't stand him.

MOIRA: You leave Bertie be. I'll admit, you're right about me and MacFinlay though. We were far too obvious about the witching and the murdering. Ought to have found some subtler ways to get rid of our rivals. Especially mac Máil Brigti. Cursed him with ill luck in battle or something. Nobody would even have noticed.

FIONA: Setting fire to his house was a bit obvious, aye. Hard to miss. How did he incur your ire anyway?

MOIRA: Killed Finlay

FIONA: Your father-in-law? I thought you didn't like him.

MOIRA: Not much, but it's the principle of the thing. Start on a family line you'd better be prepared to slaughter every single one of them.

FIONA: Shakespeare was right about that part at least, eh?

MOIRA: Don't you dare bring up that hack. That play was insulting.

FIONA: At least you've got a play about you. Fourteen hundred years and barely a paragraph about me.

MOIRA: Where is that engineer? *(she gets up to push the buzzer again)*

[BUZZER. CRACKLING SPEAKER]

CONCIERGE: Berwick House Concierge Service.

MOIRA: We are *still* in this lift.

CONCIERGE: Yes, I'm very sorry madam. The engineer has confirmed he's on his way, should be no more than fifteen minutes. Are you all right there?

MOIRA: We're managing.

CONCIERGE: Hopefully won't be long now.

[SPEAKER CLICKS OFF]

FIONA: Well, that's good news at least. *(muttering)* I've been holding it in so long I'm starting to feel a bit queer in my tummy.

MOIRA: (*concerned*) Oh?

FIONA: Aye, a bit queasy. Must be the bladder pressing on my stomach. Odd, haven't felt like this for a long time. Not since.. (*chuckling*) Och, you remember back in Paris.. at the Hôtel de Soubise when someone tried to poison me? That silly girl who thought I'd seduced her brother?

MOIRA: Aye. Hercule. Lovely calves.

FIONA: Och, you never. Was it you then?

MOIRA: (*concerned*) Was it me what?

FIONA: Seduced him.

MOIRA: (*relieved*) Oh! No. Other way around. Are you sure it wasn't because you seduced her sister?

FIONA: (*grinning*) Other way around.

[THEY BOTH CHUCKLE]

MOIRA: What did she use that it gave you a stomach ache?

FIONA: Water hemlock.

MOIRA: Ah. Close but not quite.

FIONA: I wonder how she knew?

MOIRA: Probably read about it.

FIONA: You never. Are we in books?

MOIRA: Folklore books, aye! I've shown you, I'm sure. All wrong of course. The usual hagiographical nonsense. I saw a version in one of the books they sell in that new witchcraft museum down [Chalmers Close](#).

FIONA: Oh? Do tell?

MOIRA: The usual; "And it came to pass that St Kentigern who some call [St Mungo](#) arrived in Alt Clut and sought to preach the word of God, and set him up a hermitage by the river Clyde, where the faithful came to him. But Alt Clut was ruled by King Morken, a pagan from a clan of witches, and when he heard that St Kentigern was preaching the word of God, he was angered and came with fire and sword to drive him out.

St Kentigern fled into the hills and sought refuge in the glen of Fealla Bog. When he bent down to drink from the stream there, two beautiful young women appeared and introduced themselves

as Mór and Fionn - Great and Fair. They showed him to the cave where they both lived and offered him a bed for the night and a bowl of the broth boiling in a cauldron by the fire. St Kentigern accepted gratefully, for he was weary and hungry from travelling.

Just as he lifted the spoon to his lips, a robin alighted on his shoulder and sang out a warning: "Hemlock, Red Hemlock in the broth!". St Kentigern made the sign of the cross, and the broth boiled away in his spoon, and the two women were transformed into ugly crones, the witch daughters of King Morken...."

FIONA: Rude.

MOIRA: And then, Saint Kentigern curses them both to never be admitted to heaven but to walk the earth forever and he storms off to Wales to take a long holiday with St David.

FIONA: (*tutting*) It's always evil crone this and begone vile [cailleach](#) that.

MOIRA: Well, complicated stories don't make for good hagiography. And you wouldn't catch anyone saying anything sympathetic about a witch until oooh.. well into the 18th century.

FIONA: They missed a bit. "There was but one dreadful reprieve from their curse - if they were to be slain by the very hemlock they had tried to poison St Kentigern with, then their eternity upon the earth would end - but the devil would come to claim their souls himself."

MOIRA: I suspect that bit has been... forgotten.

FIONA: Hah. Forgotten.

MOIRA: Things do get forgotten when you make sure everyone who knows them isn't in a position to write them down.

[THEY PAUSE]

FIONA: You would have made a terrible missionary.

MOIRA: Father would have killed me.

FIONA: True.

[THEY PAUSE AGAIN]

MOIRA: I know it was you. That poisoned Kentigern's broth.

FIONA: I couldn't lose you.

MOIRA: Aye.

[THEY PAUSE AGAIN]

FIONA: It was you in Paris that told the girl what to use wasn't it?

MOIRA: Aye. As you say, silly chit got the wrong kind of hemlock. I should have given her mine.

FIONA: Why did you do it?

MOIRA: I was angry at you. And tired. Mostly angry. Forgotten why. And you, how many did you poison?

FIONA: Och, I lost count long ago.

MOIRA: Hercule? MacFinlay?

FIONA: Not MacFinlay, he was just mad. The two of you kept driving each other on to be worse and worse. I was about to do something, but then he died at Lumphanan before I could.

[PAUSE]

MOIRA: Why? Why must we keep doing this? Each killing everything the other loves?

FIONA: Better that than being left alone. To walk the earth for all eternity.

[PAUSE]

[AS THE CONVERSATION PROGRESSES THEIR VOICES START TO CRACK AND GET WEAKER AS IF THEY ARE WITHERING AWAY]

FIONA: My stomach hurts.

MOIRA: As does mine. Did you put something in my wine?

FIONA: At the Esbat, aye. While you were talking to ...Chardonnay.

[PAUSE]

MOIRA: I put it in the tea before we left.

FIONA: I thought you'd bought a new blend. Where did you get it?

MOIRA: Flew back to the Glen last Thursday while you were off getting your hair done. You?

FIONA: On the ebay.

MOIRA: The *ebay*?

FIONA: You can get anything on the ebay these days.

[PAUSE]

[VERY FAINTLY AND SADLY NOW]

FIONA: Mór?

MOIRA: Fionn.

FIONA: I'm sorry.

MOIRA: *(gently)* As am I.

[HISSING AS BOTH CRUMBLE TO DUST]

[PAUSE]

[LIFT STARTS CLANKING UPWARDS]

[LIFT DOOR CLANKS OPEN]

CONCIERGE: Hello! The engineer has sorted the lift..... Are you both all right in the....*(pause)*
Misses McMorran? Hello?

(calling to the engineer) They must have got out somehow.

(to themselves) Why is it so dusty in here?

[CREDITS]

Great and Fair was written, directed, sound designed and scored by Lou Sutcliffe, with script editing by Motzie Dapul and using sound effects from freesound.org. "Fiona" was Erika Sanderson. "Moira" was Fay Roberts. And the Concierge was CL Hendry. Executive production by Tal Minear.

Foley

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<https://freesound.org/people/Sheyvan/sounds/475232/>

<https://freesound.org/people/ceejay/sounds/61078/>

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VSTs

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