

GOING UNDER

A 45-Minute Radio Drama

by

Mira Dovreni

Mira Dovreni
Nelson Browne Management
+44 7796 891388

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

ACTOR 1

TOSH (Any age) Rich expressive voice.

Our narrator, the one who takes us on the journey, so we have to enjoy being with him. But he's also ambiguous - do we trust him or not?

VERN (40s) A South Londoner who works too hard.

ACTOR 2

QUEEN RAT (Any age) Commanding, unpredictable.

ROSE (40s) South London mum. Nice. Tired.

ACTOR 3

DONNA (15) South London teen. Lots of attitude, but also very vulnerable. Deeply shaken by her mum leaving

ACTOR 4

DIGS (20s) Male or female. Written as Welsh but any slightly naive accent would work.

OTHER ROLES PLAYED BY MEMBERS OF THE CAST

NB. the doubling of TOSH/VERN and the QUEEN RAT/ROSE is essential for the story to work.

GOING UNDER

AN EMPTY MUSIC HALL

A WOMAN SINGING ALONE ON STAGE

WOMAN: My baby has gone down the plughole
 My baby has slipped down the drain.
 He always was small
 And terribly thin
 He was just like a skeleton wrapped up in
 skin

FADE OUT

SCENE 1

THE PERKINS FLAT - MORNING

LOCAL RADIO PLAYING

LOCAL DJ: ...another beautiful morning here in the capital but there's bad news on the way for all you sun lovers out there with heavy rains forecast for the...

INTERFERENCE AS IF SOMEONE IS FIDDLING WITH THE STATIONS

cold front...pressure forming...warnings

A DIFFERENT VOICE CUTS IN - RICH, DEEP AND STRANGE

TOSH: Did you know that there are two Londons? The one above, with its bright lights and noisy streets. And its secret reflection, the London under. Beneath a skein of stone and pavement lies a hidden city, a city of dark rivers, silent tunnels and endless misty streams. Its not on any map and most Londoners have no idea its there, but if you put your ear to the ground you can hear it.

A TOILET FLUSHES

Maybe you feel safe because you live in well lit streets, filled with endless traffic and busy people. But there are cracks everywhere and if you don't look where you're going, you might just slip through.

VERN EMERGES FROM BATHROOM

VERN: Are you up yet Donna? Happy Birthday!

DONNA'S BEDROOM DOOR OPENS

DONNA: Thanks Dad. Are we still going? You haven't changed your mind have you?

VERN: Dunno know what you're talking about.

DONNA: Dad! You said I could when I was fifteen! You promised, everyone else has got them

GOING UNDER

and [BEAT] you're winding me up aren't
you?

VERN:

No, what d'you mean?

BUT HE'S LAUGHING

ON RADIO 'WATERLOO' BY ABBA FADES UP

SCENE 2

LEWISHAM NAIL BAR

NAIL DRILLS, BACKGROUND CHATTER,
DOORBELL BUZZES AS CUSTOMERS ENTER
AND LEAVE

WATERLOO BY ABBA ON THE RADIO (OR ANY
OTHER WATER THEMED HIT)

NAIL TECHNICIAN: Acrylic is set now, you want colour?

DONNA: This one please

NAIL TECHNICIAN: Black glitter. Good choice

LOCAL DJ: [FADE IN] Waterloo by Abba there, and a very different type of loo coming up with our next feature - we're looking at the jobs of everyday Londoners - 200 years ago! Ever heard of the Toshers? Well they spent their lives digging in the sewers, trying to find things that had been dropped down the toilet! All of a sudden that job in IT's not looking so bad is it! Apparently 'toshing' was one of the most dangerous ways that the Victorians could earn their living, with flash floods, cholera and giant sewer rats all taking their toll [FADE TO BACKGROUND]

NAIL TECHNICIAN: What do you think? Nails look good yes?

DONNA: Beautiful. They're perfect [SHE TAPS THEM ON THE COUNTER] Thank you very much!

(CALLS) Dad!

VERN: Lets have a look.

Bloody hell Donna, I thought you were getting the basic length.

DONNA: This is the basic length.

SOUND OF CREDIT CARD MACHINE BEEP AS
HE PAYS FOR NAILS

VERN: Happy fifteenth Don.

GOING UNDER

DONNA: Thank you [HUGS HIM]

LOCAL DJ: [FADE UP] and to any Toshiers out there -
this one's for you.

GOING UNDERGROUND BY THE JAM COMES ON

VERN: Come on let's get out of here

DOOR BUZZES AS DONNA & VERN LEAVE

LEWISHAM HIGH STREET / STREET SOUNDS

DONNA: I'll stick a photo on Instagram shall I? I
might send one to mum too, or I could just
show her when she Facetimes me...I mean
there's no way she wont call tonight is
there [VOICES FADE AS THEY WALK AWAY] Can
we get takeout for a change Dad? Cos its
my birthday - can we? Please?

GOING UNDER

SCENE 3

DONNA'S BEDROOM, SAME NIGHT

DONNA IN BED MAKING A CALL

BEEP OF VOICEMAIL

DONNA: Hi mum, I've been trying to get hold of you all day but its midnight now so I'm going to go sleep. Say hello to Auntie Poppy and the girls for me [BEAT] I had a nice birthday thanks for asking.

RUSTLE OF BEDCLOTHES, BED CREAKS

SCENE 4

SUMMER, NOISE OF TRAFFIC, KIDS
KICKING A BALL ABOUT OUTSIDE, CLATTER
OF PLATES FROM ANOTHER FLAT

DONNA & VERN'S KITCHEN, FOLLOWING
EVENING

VERN UNWRAPS A RAW FISH & SLAPS IT ON
THE CHOPPING BOARD

VERN: Mm. Look at that. You can tell its fresh by the shine on the scales.

DONNA: I'm not touching that. It stinks.

VERN: Donna this is what fish looks like before it's fried and stuck in a box with chips. We got 4 trays to prep tonight so we might as well get on with it.

DONNA: No one else I know has to do stuff like this. They go on Instagram or watch telly or do normal life stuff.

VERN: This is normal life stuff.

DONNA: Ripping the guts out of giant tuna is not normal life stuff!

VERN: It is if you run a Caribbean Kitchen! And it's haddock not tuna, seeing as we're in Lewisham and not Hong Kong [SIGHS]. And with things as they are we're short staffed. Pass us the knife

DONNA RIFLES THROUGH CUTLERY DRAWER

That one, with the curved blade.

SOUND OF KNIFE BEING SHARPENED

There you go, nice and sharp

DONNA: It's looking at me.

VERN: Huh?

DONNA: [TO FISH] What are you thinking with your sad dead eyes?

VERN: Oh for gods sake.

GUTTING FISH

Cut off the head, then the tail. Slit up through the belly and scoop out the bits. Set aside for later. Rinse the cavity, loosen the spine, pull out slowly along with the smaller bones. Oh look. It's done.

Just chop the onion will you.

SOUND OF DONNA CHOPPING INEXPERTLY

DONNA: Dad where's mum?

VERN OPENS CUPBOARD GETS INGREDIENTS

VERN: Chilies, cumin, coriander...

DONNA: She's not with Auntie Poppy is she?

VERN STARTS CHOPPING HERBS VERY FAST

DONNA: Why is her phone off all the time?

CHOPPING INTENSIFIES TO AN INSANE SPEED

DONNA: Dad will you just talk to me!

CHOPPING STOPS

VERN: How many times do I have to tell you? Your mum is visiting her sister. She'll be back soon and everything will go back to normal. Until then it's just me doing all the work and if you're not going to help me go and do some Facebook or homework or something.

DONNA: Dad! Listen to me /

VERN: Trust me Don.

VERN STARTS CHOPPING

AFTER A MOMENT DONNA LEAVES KITCHEN

3.50

SCENE 5

DONNA'S BEDROOM. SAME EVENING

DONNA ON THE PHONE

DONNA: Hi Auntie Poppy its Donna...yeah I'm good thanks, we're all fine...yes school's fine, well sort of, its hard to tell sometimes...I'm trying to auntie but I just don't understand some of the...I am doing my best I really am but it's hard to know if...Yes auntie I will. How are the girls?...OK give them my love... [BEAT] You want to speak to Mum? [BEAT] Um she's out at the moment and I'm not sure when... Yes auntie, I'll tell her...You too...Bye.

SHE RINGS HER VOICEMAIL

VOICEMAIL: You have 3 new messages. [BEEP] Donna its Aisha, what's the matter with you, why haven't you been answering your [BEEP] Donna we're all going swimming on [BEEP] Donna its Miss Chindipha here do you think you could call me we're all a bit worried about [BEEP]

BEAT

DONNA: Dad! I'm going to bed. See you in the morning.

VERN: [CALLS] Bright and early! School tomorrow.

DONNA: Yeah.

SCENE 6

PERKINS KITCHEN. FOLLOWING AFTERNOON

VERN IS FLICKING THROUGH RECIPES

VERN: [TURNING PAGES] Ginger, garlic, brown sugar, lime, allspice, chilies - why deseeded? Defeats the object doesn't it? I'm doing all of that so why doesn't it taste the same as when Rose makes it?

FRONT DOOR OPENS

DONNA: Hi Dad

VERN: School OK?

DONNA: Yeah

VERN: What did you get up to?

DONNA: Different things. Stuff you wouldn't know.

PAUSE

Think I'll go do some revising, in my room

DONNA LEAVES KITCHEN, SHUTTING DOOR

VERN: OK

SHE GOES TO HER BEDROOM, THE BED
CREAKS AS SHE FLOPS DOWN

GETS OUT HER PHONE

VOICEMAIL: You have no new messages

BEAT

DONNA SIGHS AND IMAGINES THE
CONVERSATION SHE'D LIKE TO HAVE WITH
HER MUM, FILLING IN HER MUMS VOICE
HERSELF

DONNA: Oh hi mum nice of you to call! *Donna, I'm so sorry about missing your birthday and disappearing off the face of the planet. How's it going?* Oh well, you know. Dad's really moody all the time, I don't understand anything we're doing at school, I keep having these crazy dreams. Apart

GOING UNDER

from that it's great. *Oh Donna this is all my fault, I'm such a useless mother. Tell me about these dreams then...*

WATER & SQUELCH FX UNDER THIS SECTION
[LIGHTLY]

I've got my hand stuck down the toilet and I'm looking for something. Obviously I would never EVER do this in real life, but in the dream I've got to find this thing whatever it is and I don't care about germs or setting my asthma off or giving myself cancer or even breaking my new nails. I shove my hand down and that's when I trip, slip, and next thing is - I'm sliding down into the toilet.

I know, right. It's tight at first but then I squeeze round a bend and pop out into light and bubbles. A flip flop floats by, a Lego Darth Vader shakes his fist at me, soft chunks drift about like - oh my god is that last night's curry? [PANIC SETS IN] I'm tangled up in hair and dental floss, shoals of cotton buds are coming at me I'm going to die down here and I've never even had a boyfriend or a Youtube channel and where are they going to put the flowers for a tragic teenage death - round the toilet? Dad won't have it, he hates bathroom clutter. I'm choking and kicking and taking in rank water but just in time I shoot down a drain into the soft wet dark and I [INHALES] breathe.

PANTING

What's all that about?

SCENE 7

DONNA'S BEDROOM, NEXT MORNING

RUSH HOUR TRAFFIC, PEOPLE GOING TO
WORK, VERN CLATTERING IN THE KITCHEN,
RADIO ON IN BACKGROUND

LOCAL DJ:a trip down memory lane with these
classic tunes from the 1980s...

VERN: [CALLS] You up yet Don?

DONNA: [GROGGY] Yeah

VERN: I'm off to work, there's fish stew in the
fridge for tonight, see you later.

FRONT DOOR SLAMS

DONNA: [ASLEEP] s'later

BEDCLOTHES RUSTLE, BED CREAKS AS SHE
TURNS OVER

'HERE COMES THE RAIN AGAIN' BY
EURYTHMICS FADES INTO 'DON'T PAY THE
FERRYMAN' BY CHRIS DE BURGH

TIME PASSING

DONNA: What time is it? [BEAT] Uh oh. Overslept.
Again.

SHE STUMBLES TO THE BATHROOM, WASHES
HER FACE

Oh my god my eyes are all swollen, I must
be having an allergic reaction. Its
probably the fish...

A CHITTERING NOISE,

DONNA TURNS & SEES LARGE RAT

Ahhhh! There's a rat in here! Help! Dad!
Get out! Arghh!

SHE CLAPS HER HANDS AND THE RAT
CHITTERS AT HER BUT DOESN'T GO

GOING UNDER

What are you looking at? Boo! Shoo! Take that!

SHE THROWS A GLASS AT IT - IT SMASHES

THE RAT CHITTERS ANGRILY & DISAPPEARS

DONNA: Ha! How do you like that you furry little freak! [BEAT] Oh no, where did it go? There's gotta be a hole in here somewhere.

PICKS UP PHONE & CALLS HER DAD

DONNA: Dad? Listen there's...

VERN: [VOICEMAIL] "Vern" is not available at the moment so please leave a message.

DONNA: Dad you've got to come home there's a [BEAT] You know what I can sort this out myself...see you later.

DONNA ENDS THE CALL, LOOKS FOR COUNCIL WEBSITE ON PHONE

DONNA: Right, council helpline, Lewisham Homes, repairs and maintenance, pest control - boom [DIALS]

FEMALE VOICE: Hello and welcome to Lewisham Homes. To have your say on the proposed all-weather football pitch, please press 1. For all other enquiries please hold.

COUNTRY & WESTERN MUSIC: I BEG YOUR PARDON I NEVER PROMISED YOU A ROSE GARDEN BY LYNNE ANDERSON

Did you know that this year we have received a gold standard award for dog control and pet vaccination?

EXTERMINATOR: [CUTTING IN] Pest Control

DONNA: Um yes hi, there's a rat in my flat, in the bathroom, it must have come up a pipe or something and

EXTERMINATOR: What's your address?

DONNA: Waverley House, Cross Trees Estate

EXTERMINATOR: Cross Trees Estate? Well that explains it. They're working on the old drains under

Mira Dovreni 07905 322432

GOING UNDER

your building at the moment. She must have come up one of the pipes, she's probably trying to get away from all the noise

DONNA: She?

EXTERMINATOR: Probably got a litter somewhere. They're excellent mothers rats, very nurturing, but they can get aggressive if you get between them and their pups. Nearly had my leg bitten off by a queen rat this one time when we were flushing out the

DONNA: Right. Anyway -

EXTERMINATOR: Work's due for completion [CHECKS] end of today, so you shouldn't get any more problems. Have a good day. [HANGS UP]

DONNA: Hang on, do I need to block up the... hello? hello? [BEAT] Right Mrs Rat. Where did you get in?

SHE MOVES TOILET BRUSH, BLEACH
BOTTLES, ETC OUT OF THE WAY

Ew its minging back here [RUSTLE OF PAPER]
What's this? [PULLS OUT A LETTER] Mum's writing. The 17th - that's a month ago!

TEARS IT OPEN

DONNA: [READS] Dear Donna, I've been trying to find the right words to tell you this but I don't think there are any - so I'm just going to come right out with it. I've left your dad.

BEAT

I have to try to be a different person for a while, even if it's the biggest mistake I've ever made

ROSES VOICE REPLACES DONNA'S - AND
THE LETTER BECOMES A CONVERSATION
BETWEEN MOTHER & DAUGHTER - THE ONE
THEY SHOULD HAVE HAD

ROSE: I'm not saying your dad was a mistake Donna, he was more like a habit I got into, then you came along and everything changed.

Mira Dovreni 07905 322432

DONNA: What's your point mum?

ROSE: He's a good man and I'll always think the world of him, but I don't want to be married to him anymore. Sometimes I feel like my whole life has shrunk down to Jerk-z Caribbean Kitchen, and if I don't make a move now I'll still be dishing up ackee and dumplings in 20 years time

DONNA: What's wrong with that? Its what you do.

ROSE: My whole life I've wanted to travel, go somewhere different, like South America

DONNA: You've been! We went to Disney World Florida remember /

ROSE: Florida's not in South America Don, how many times do I have to tell you that? I want to wake up somewhere new, where I can

ROSE'S VOICE IN THE BACKGROUND SAYING
THE ODD PHRASE, AS DONNA IMITATES AND
TALKS OVER HER

DONNA: Here we go [IMITATES ROSE'S VOICE] 'I haven't done any of the things I wanted to do'

ROSE: [UNDER] climb a mountain when the sun's just /

DONNA: 'I'm having a midlife crisis...the menopause is coming to get me'

ROSE: [UNDER] drift down through corals the colour of /

DONNA: 'I could have gone to college but we opened the takeaway instead and now I'm stuck here blah blah blah'

DONNA FLICKS THROUGH THE LETTER
READING OUT BITS & PIECES

"What does rain smell like in the Amazon?"
[TURNS PAGE] "Do mangroves walk around at night? Are monitor lizards responsible?"
Mum I think you've really lost it this time...

GOING UNDER

ROSE: I'll explain it all properly when I see you. I'm working double shifts in a bar called Don't Be Shellfish near Aberystwyth

DONNA: Aberwhatswith? Where's that?

ROSE: that's in Wales

DONNA: I know!

ROSE: but I'll take time off when you come. There's no reception or internet but everything you need to get here is in this letter; train tickets, directions, and most important of all - my front door key. Come whenever you want, day or night. Just don't lose it like you do everything else!

DONNA REACHES INTO THE ENVELOPE & PULLS OUT A KEY

DONNA: Lose everything do I? That right? Oh whoops the key just slipped out my hand!

SHE OPENS THE TOILET LID, CHUCKS THE KEY IN AND FLUSHES

And its gone down the toilet. Silly me!

ROSE: I'm counting the days till you get here Donna, we can drink hot chocolate in bed and listen to the waves on the rocks outside. All my love to my best girl. Mum

A PAUSE

DONNA SWALLOWS

Mum [HOLDING BACK TEARS] Oh Mum [BEAT]

Oh no - the key

SHE SCRAMBLES TO OPEN THE TOILET LID & STICKS HER HEAD IN

[ECHOEY] Where is it?

TAKES HER HEAD OUT

It can't have gone far. OK I can do this.

SHE TAKES A DEEP BREATH & STICKS HER HAND DOWN THE TOILET.

GOING UNDER

SPLASH & SQUELCH FX

EEEEOW! That wasn't a key! [RETCHES] I just need to get a bit further in and [SQUELCH] reach...the...

RAT CHITTERS

Ahhhh! The rat!

CRUNCH OF BROKEN GLASS AS DONNA SLIPS AND BANGS HER HEAD ON THE TOILET

Oof!

COTTON WOOL FX. SHE SLIDES DOWN INTO THE TOILET AND PASSES OUT.

SQUELCHING, SQUEEZING, BUBBLING

LIKE THE DREAM SEQUENCE BUT MORE PRESENT

CROSSFADES INTO RADIO DJ & CHRIS DE BURGH DON'T PAY THE FERRYMAN.

LOCAL DJ: Things are going from bad to worse with heavy storms right across the region and many areas in danger of

TOSH: Take a last look at the bright sky then let the darkness wrap you up like a blanket [FEET TAP ON METAL RUNGS] There's a warm wind blowing, the air's wet and heavy on your face [INHALES] Almost pleasant isn't it, like well hung meat. Keep climbing down and see the centuries unfolding in the soft London clay; Roman bones, a mammoth's tooth, a baby's wooden rattle, all sinking down together. Going under.

UNDERWATER FX

DONNA SHOOTS OUT OF PIPE ONTO A PILE OF MUD, COUGHING & SPLUTTERING

SILENCE / SEWERS ATMOS