

## THE SOAKING OF VERA SHRIMP by Alison Carr

### Extract

VERA: Death smells. It smells of casserole and macaroni cheese, soup, corn beef and potato pie, two of them – one's nice, the other's disgusting. People leave food on the door step. They ring the bell, but we don't answer, and then later I open the door and trip over all this tupperware.

I'm just in from school. My key is literally in the door when behind me I hear:

VERA (*as Dogs Trust Woman*): Yoo hoo!

VERA: She goes,

*as DTW*: Yoo hoo!

VERA: That's me as her.

*as DTW*: Hiya hi hi hi!

VERA: She says 'Hi' a lot.

*as DTW*: I'm glad I caught you.

VERA: Hello.

(*To audience:*) That's me as me.

*as DTW*: Hi. I would have come here sooner but we've been having our driveway done. You'll have seen.

(*Vera shrugs.*)

*as DTW*: Well, I haven't been able to walk on it – the drive, I mean. It's been ridiculous really – like being under house arrest.

VERA: Okay.

*as DTW*: It's hot, isn't it?

(*Vera shrugs.*)

*as DTW*: Are you not boiling in that jumper?

VERA: No

*as DTW*: I like it warm but this is ridiculous. I just want it to break, you know?

VERA: S'pose.

*as DTW*: Is your dad in?

VERA: Dunno.

*as DTW*: I did knock a couple of times but ...

VERA: He might be at work.

*as DTW*: His car's here.

(*Uncomfortably long pause.*)

VERA: (*to the audience*) The silence is THIS long. She stares me in the eyes the whole time, smiling

*as DTW*: Can you look for me?

VERA: I say I will go and look then I close the door on her. I kick a pizza box under the settee and I look for Dad. He might be at work, he might have gone in on his bike. They've stopped leaving messages on the answering machine so maybe he's gone in and just not said. But he's sitting at the dining table, staring out of the window. I have to tell him twice that there's some woman at the door.

*as DTW:* Hiya, sorry to bother you. I've come from number 24. I brought a quiche around when your wife... It was ham and cheese. So if I could just get it back – my dish.

VERA: Dad leaves her on the doorstep and goes to the kitchen. I wait. I see her spot the pile of unopened post spilling out from behind the door; the plate with the mouldy crust. She tries to peek around me but I just shuffle from side to side to block her. Her stupid Dogs Trust polo shirt is bright yellow and her jeans are new and stiff and she doesn't suit being in our house.

Dad's back. He has the door nearly closed before...

*as DTW:* This isn't my dish, my dish is green. Swirly, sort of avocado.

VERA: I go to look. I open every cupboard, every door. There's no swirly 'sort of avocado' dish. I even tip the bin out in case I've thrown it away. I gag at the smells and get rank bin juice on my hands.

(To DTW) Just take this one.

*as DTW:* I'd like my one back please.

VERA: (To DTW) Just fucking take /

(*To audience*) But dad shoves the dish-that's-not-hers dish at her. It drops and smashes on the step.

I stare at her polo shirt – 'Sponsor a dog today!'

Nobody leaves anymore food after that.