

THE STRANGENESS OF CAGED ANIMALS
CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND FULL LENGTH PLAY

by

SAYAN KENT

A thesis submitted to
The University of Birmingham
for the degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Drama and Theatre Arts
College of Arts and Law
The University of Birmingham
September 2009

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

Abstract

The Strangeness of Caged Animals is set in a trendy urban apartment block overlooking the river, one midsummer night. It concerns the relationships of six people in three couples who are intrinsically connected to the apartments. The main character is Della, a woman approaching fifty, who wants to move out, but when her plan falls apart she spins out of control, affecting all the other people around her. Essentially each couple has its own story but as the play unfolds they unwittingly become more involved with each other, forcing them to deal with the uncomfortable truth and its sometimes devastating consequences.

This thesis contains a critical analysis essay followed by the play text. The essay aims to show how the play came into being, from original concept through to final draft, by looking at the process undertaken and the lessons learnt in the craft of playwriting.

Contents

Introduction	1
Beginnings	2
Six Characters	3
The World of the Play	7
Objects, Symbols, Imagery	10
A Question of Structure	11
Plotting and Actions	13
The Workshop	14
Comedy or Tragedy	15
Conclusion	16
The Strangeness of Caged Animals – Play text	17
Bibliography	110

Introduction

This critical analysis essay aims to reveal the process behind the writing of *The Strangeness of Caged Animals*, referred to from now on as *Strangeness*, by examining key questions that were engaged with and looking at how I addressed the building blocks and met the challenges that the evolving play threw up. It discusses the development of the narrative, characters, imagery, and overall aesthetic, starting from the very beginning with one word, through the pitch and all the various drafts to the final struggle with last minute changes, revisions, cuts and rewrites of the third draft. It also reveals some of what I have learnt about my writing and the craft of playwriting, as to whether or not I approached the task in the best way, the challenges of theatricality with its own particular aesthetic and if I achieved ultimately what I set out to do a year ago.

Beginnings

I went into my first supervision knowing only one thing, that I thought I would like to write a character driven play about love.

I was aware that love, as a subject, was about as broad as you could get as a starting point, short of saying I want to write a play about people, and I didn't quite know where to start or how the love in my story was to be manifested. But I knew I wanted it to be about love and lovers and the manipulation of love. In my life at that time, I was seeing relationships change, fall apart, and I was curious at the kinds of love and power on display. The extreme happiness or pain that was evident was prompting me to question what love is, and why it is, and how none of it made a lot of sense to me. Yet there the spectre of love is, in all our lives, present or absent.

Steve Waters and I talked around the subject and he made some suggestions regarding exploring archetypal stories from Phaedra through to the explorations of desire in Shakespeare to build up a set of narrative possibilities, "but also thinking about a very specific set of circumstances where love still has consequences – whether through social taboo or simply social restraint." *Waters, Steve (2008.)*

In my scribbled notes from that supervision I jotted phrases which I found I was to later return to, "its impact is specific and devastating... something that refreshes the idea...perhaps suburbia, what is really going on... the excruciating predicament where love plays out, or where it isn't allowed to... a Midsummer Night's Dream... engineer love... could start with a husband and wife."

I went away and decided on a set of characters and a situation.

Pitch Day was the first test of the idea. At that early stage I had been influenced by reading John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* and was hooked on the notion of that fluid form and structure, and of one character who affects all the others, but I also wanted to explore the technique of the absent character, as used in *Abigail's Party*. My pitch was therefore geared towards this and was titled *Anthony* who was the absent anti-

hero. However as soon as I starting writing the script I realised that working with an absent character was proving difficult. I wanted action to be happening in front of me and I was finding the role I had created for this absentee was making the play back-story heavy. So he slipped out of his eponymous role into a less obvious but crucial part of the back-story and I found myself without a title.

Six Characters

I was interested in relationships where people are tied to each other in some way, unable to break the bond even though they know they should. I originally had in mind two couples but didn't feel that offered me the scope to encompass the different kinds of love I wanted to explore. I wanted to broaden the observation into wider themes, to be more universal about the nature of love, people in confined spaces and humanity. Three couples also offered more potential to come together and interconnect, while still having their own stories within the overall. I had seen David Eldridge's *Under the Blue Sky* earlier in the year and was interested in the notion of three separate relationships, but I wanted ones which could have much more of an impact on the others, couples that would begin as separate entities but gradually show how closely linked they each are beneath the surface, revealing connections that would bubble up and infect the other relationships.

Della was always my main character. She was the person through whom I entered the story. I wanted to have a woman approaching fifty as this is such a momentous time in a woman's life, in terms of relationships. She is on the threshold of a new world, emotionally and physically, confronting her fears over what has been lost, what lies ahead, the changes that present themselves with impending age, menopause, loss of looks, and dealing with losing her status as a sexual entity. Some women of course come into their prime at this age but in Della's case she hasn't confronted the ghosts of her past and she can't move on until she does. It's make or break time, her last chance to establish her right to the life that she wants, to be rid of the guilt she has burdened herself with, to get out of the vortex that threatens nihilism, where there is nothing to live for at all.

Leo is Della's husband. He's not in a happy place either but compared to her he appears long suffering, yet underneath his acquiescence is a 'coward's kiss', a manipulation that has kept Della in her guilty place for years, allowing her to shrivel while he carries on with his life and interests. I wanted a man who only possessed half the passion of the woman to whom he was married. An absorber, someone who lets the other person do all the emotional work. Consequently Leo remained quite a passive character right up to the workshop. Eventually that decision proved not to work and I needed to make him more of an active participant in Della's story, this decision also made him more dynamic and interesting.

The question I found myself asking about this relationship was how they got this far if things were so bad. I concluded that their relationship had been a gradual deterioration, which is triggered into full blown confrontation on this evening because of Leo's obstruction to Della's biggest desire, to escape from her current dwelling and move to a little cottage in the country. It is the straw that breaks Della's back, and in plot terms the inciting incident for the play.

Della You knew what this move meant to me. You could have persuaded them. You let them go on purpose. You don't want to move, you want me to stay in here going madder by the day. I can't breathe. (*She snatches at breaths*)

Leo I'm not throwing money away.

Della You can't be bothered to do anything for me. You spineless wart.

(*Kent 2009, p.27*)

George Steiner says in *The Death of Tragedy* that tragedy as a form of drama... "has become so much a part of our sense of the possibilities of human conduct, the *Oresteia*, *Hamlet*, and *Phedre* are so ingrained in our habits of spirit, that we forget what a strange and complex idea it is to re-enact private anguish on a public stage." I think what is key in the re-enacting of private anguish on a public stage is the justification of it, and how much an audience will accept before it becomes melodramatic. In my early draft of *Strangeness* Della's re-enacted private anguish was much more extreme. I had originally seen her as a neurotic, over sensitive woman with almost psychotic outbursts. But as the

play developed I found that this behaviour made her unsympathetic in its ugliness. I wanted the audience to be sympathetic to her, not to alienate them. So in that light I toned her down, and she now only has a couple of outbursts in reaction to the way she feels she is being treated. However, in looking back over the drafts I can see that perhaps it could have worked if I had given Leo a stronger character to balance out her neurosis, but then the play may have gone in a different direction at an earlier stage.

In contrast to the married life of Della and Leo, Aidan and Jane are friends who occasionally sleep together. Neither has managed to form a long lasting relationship with someone and they are now in their late thirties. What interested me about this type of casual relationship is where it goes and how it ends. To have such a level of understanding the two people must enjoy a trust between them that allows it to work. So there had to be a familiarity between Aidan and Jane, while at the same time the friendship as it was couldn't continue any longer once they were officially dating. I wanted to explore the breakdown in communication whereby both these people really love each other but they've never got their timing right, and never know what the other feels until it's too late. Jane is a woman who always falls in love with the wrong man and Aidan never falls in love but sleeps around a lot. Jane is about to leave his life but in a last ditch attempt at survival she says to Aidan,

Jane Ask me out.

Aidan What?

Jane Ask me out. Let's go out together for two minutes. Just two. Then I'll dump you.

(Kent 2009, p.57)

As a result, he does, but floodgates open and they fall in love, but in moving out of familiar territory, the relationship isn't so stable anymore.

Like Della and Leo, this relationship reached a stagnant point around the second draft. One of the ways I used to shake things up was to change a character's name. Jane had been called Hannah up until this point. I had never felt the name Hannah was quite right and I found the change helped me to refocus the relationship.

My third relationship is about two women, Alix and Vicky, who have already split up three months prior to the start of the play. My first instinct was to present them in a totally positive light with a tenuously happy ending once they'd got over their troubles, but after the workshop it seemed too neat a resolution, and I decided in the third draft to force them into a deeper predicament, out of which it would be harder for them to climb. The big obstacle Alix and Vicky have had to face is Alix wanting a baby exclusive of anything else and Vicky having deserted her as a result. I wanted to contrast their reproductive issues with Aidan and Jane who probably could have a baby easily if they wanted to, and Della and Leo who did have one and then alienated him as he grew older.

After the public workshop I knew the characters were still not working in as dynamic a way as I wanted them to and during my third draft stage I struggled to define what was wrong. I remembered what Lin Coghlan said in her seminar on *Story-telling through Character*, "The qualities that you find difficult in your character and don't like are the ones that make them interesting and 3 dimensional." This made me realise what I had been avoiding. My characters had become rather polite and nice, even Della. I needed to tease out some of the less likeable aspects of them again to make them more interesting and introduce potential contradictions and conflicts. Doing this also pushed me into another important area that I had not made the most of, which April de Angelis talked about in her seminar: "A boundary needs to be transgressed ... whether it is in language or physical behaviour ... breaking them creates energy". I agree that this drives the action forward as the characters say or do things that the audience daren't. But she also said, "... the character must have a strong impulse to transgress." I already had a line where Della says she's wants one last orgasm with another human being before she's fifty, but it previously hadn't been built upon. So I upped the stakes in my third draft where Leo picks her up on what she's said, and then Della transgresses the boundary further:

Leo I thought you always faked them.

Della Only with you.

(Kent 2009, p.34)

As I began to look for transgressed boundaries in the play I noticed how compelling they are as long as they are true to the moment. They can be uncomfortable as in where Alix overreacts to Della and says, “You want me to show you? You want me to fuck you?” and they can appear heartless, as in the way Jane dumps Aidan, but transgressed boundaries are the stuff of conflict and drama, and much more interesting to witness than the talking heads I had in my earlier drafts.

The World of the Play

Regarding my original concept from a visual design perspective, I wrote about the play

—

“Using one set that can function in many ways it should be more expressionistic than naturalistic. We can drop into any scene from within another scene rather than someone relating back-story. The stories of the three couples happen in the same space, so what is Della’s house becomes Jane’s flat or Alix’s. Other characters may not even leave the set and at times all their stories will interlink.” (*Kent 2008, Pitch Document*)

This is from my original pitch, which, during my writing of the first draft, I moved away from quite quickly, deciding it wasn’t going to be possible as I thought I needed a more literally designed setting. The place that I have arrived at now is a mixture of the two. Gwenda Hughes, who directed *Strangeness* for the workshop, saw the play as happening in different areas of light which swiftly lit and then moved on to the next area where the scene was happening, very similar to the way that I had originally conceived the idea but had abandoned. This prompted me to think about how rigid, wholesome and word-bound the play had become, and what I needed to do for my third draft was to allow the air in more, play with the form, and relax it some. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Bryony Lavery commented, “think about the spaces between the scenes.” I began to take this on board for my third draft and returned to my original pitch idea.

Both Meredith Oakes and Anthony Weigh in their seminars, (*Birmingham, 2008*), talked about how their stories were influenced early on by space/location and, similarly, *Strangeness* is influenced by the claustrophobia of its space/location. It takes place in a refurbished ex-council trendy block of flat in London, overlooking the river. Not a hugely tall block but it has great views of the boats, the bridge, the city and it's inhabitants. The main characters all reside on the same landing in this block and there are shared narratives, problems with the dodgy lift, the troublesome neighbours and the old lady downstairs who complains all the time. They initially appear to have little to do with one another, getting on with their own lives. As they live in such close proximity I wanted to look at the blurred lines of privacy. How easy is it to keep your life private from your neighbours, how much should you share, and what is conventionally appropriate and polite behaviour?

Della is quite determinedly neighbourly,

DELLA I'll show her I'm a good neighbour if I have to climb onto her balcony and break in.

(*Kent, 2009, p.22*)

Where as Alix isn't so,

VICKY Your balconies join, how can you avoid them in this weather.

ALIX I don't want to get involved. When she's out there I come in. You know me.

(*Kent, 2009, p.49*)

But they can't really avoid each other and so their lives become intertwined.

From quite early on I had in my mind that these people were captive animals, even though my title was not to come into place until the later stages of the second draft. I always saw Della as a tiger, pacing, frustrated, wanting to be in the wild, in a visceral world, but that somewhere early in her life she had become complicit in her socialisation and surrendered her autonomy. In the second act of the play they all

become more animalistic, Jane howls like a wolf, Leo scratches like a demented animal, Mrs Peabody throws sweets off her balcony, their behaviour becomes less civilised.

Physically, the apartment block acts as a literal cage during the course of the play. They never get any further from it than just outside, while the rest of the time they are in their own flats, on the shared landing by the lift, or on the rooftop garden. Metaphorically they are caged in their relationships and their emotions. Through this metaphor I am looking at how we structure and live our lives, the chains we tie around ourselves, the cages we put ourselves into and the contradictions within that.

Della I'll kill myself, Leo, if I don't get out of here. And I don't mean to dinner with a dimwit Bishop. I'll throw myself off the balcony and plummet into your city vista.

(Kent 2009, p.33)

From their cages they look out on the world that promises so much while they are unable to reach it and as such I wanted to explore the voyeurism in the play. Voyeurism is a huge part of our lives. Without realising it, we watch other people, we judge our standards by theirs, we consume TV reality shows by the bucket load, we watch plays about other people who are having a harder time of it than we are, we watch animals in a zoo and they watch us watching them. I thought as an interesting opener for act two I would hint that the characters were aware of their audience, like animals in a zoo. Jane looks out of the window through her binoculars onto the audience:

Jane This is fascinating. Us. Watching them. Watching us. Watching them.

(Kent 2009, p.65)

Later in the same scene after she thinks she has seen a woman fall from the bridge, she implicates the audience again. Suggesting they saw everything. Aidan also mentions that his father's use of the binoculars turned him into a stalker.

As an enhancement to the world of the play and its aesthetic I have included suggestions for music. Music can be used to comment on or to reflect the mood of a scene and the

two versions of *'My Funny Valentine'* I suggest are very different for this reason. The music Aidan hears coming through the walls from another flat also comments on the design of the living space:

Aidan Thin walls.

Della Very thin walls.

Leo Too thin.

(Kent 2009, p.40)

In the roof garden scene, the song, *'Up On the Roof'* adds a magical touch. It is too appropriate to be a coincidence and offers a touch of humour and self irony but it also fulfils the essence of what the scene is about, getting away from the real world.

Objects, Symbols, Imagery.

The use of objects within the play began to appear early on as part of the physical action. Della had a rope that she wanted Leo to use to tie her up, Aidan returned a sugar bowl he'd borrowed, a cliché of neighbourly cohesion. I wanted to find ways of using these and other objects on a deeper level to reinforce themes, and link the couples. It was then I realised how powerful the objects had become within the story. As Jane says to Aidan, "They start off as objects but become symbols." She is referring here to his binoculars, which on one hand provide the excitement of seeing more than the naked eye but conversely introduce the notion of illegal intrusion. The skipping rope turns out to belong to Alix, but to Della it symbolises her imprisonment, the sugar bowl becomes an object of betrayal, the little penguin a symbol of lost childhood, the frozen lollies symbolic of all that Leo doesn't know about Della after all their years together. Then in Act two Leo's physical possessions go missing, stripping him of his married identity, Della has abandoned civilised subtlety and grabs objects by the arm load and carries her world with her to next door. Vicky brings her pink fluffy handcuffs back with her because she thinks Alix likes them. They are also symbolic of her unfulfilled desire to join the Police. Objects are physical but symbols work on a metaphorical and allegorical level that reinforces the unity of the world they are in. They also contribute to an underlying force throughout the play that the characters have no control over.

Within the realms of love, the notion of children cannot be totally ignored and, I found, without making a conscious decision about it, that all of the female characters had an attitude to children and their lives. I suspect this comes from my own thoughts about children and my life and the questions that are raised as a woman when you reach a certain age and have to make certain choices. So children also became symbolic in the play and have great significance for the women. Della's son has rejected her, but he is also a symbol of the battle between her and Leo, Alix has been through IVF to try and conceive a baby which eventually drove Vicky away from her, symbolic of a vision together they didn't share, Jane is in the unusual position of not actually wanting a child which is symbolic of modern women, but also her self-contained quality which is what actually keeps her going in a tough competitive job but makes her really bad at relationships.

The motifs I originally employed are also symbolic. The water motif and the lunar motif in particular. The water motif expresses the unravelling emotions through the river, drowning, the impending storm. The lunar motif suggest the magical night time, where guards are dropped, animals come out to play and humans become more beastlike, where shadows and ghosts and dreams come to life. However by the time I'd reached my third draft the motifs had become less obvious in the text, but I hope they still come through.

A Question of Structure.

Throughout this year one of the most fundamental lessons I have learnt is the importance of structure. I was fully aware that every piece of drama has a structure, as does everything in life, but I understand now that if the structure of the piece is well thought out, then the rest of the play falls into place more readily and has a stronger chance of hanging together as a coherent whole. David Edgar referred to structure in his seminar and book, "in all plays, the plot is expressed through a structure, in which the narrative is organised into segments of space and time. Like emplotment, structure is not just a convenient way of organising material, but is a conveyor of meaning."

I started without a structure. I wrote two scenes, one with Della and Leo, the other with Jane and Aidan, to vaguely fit the situation and characters I had come up with and to get the ball rolling. It was only when I had to plan the first draft and deliver a script I actually applied myself to the necessities of structural constraints starting with the three act structure, thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis model. My play has a linear notion of story telling and now operates in a ‘single time cycle in one place’ mode, meaning it happens in one location, over the course one night. But it wasn’t always so. In the beginning I had several different locations as well as the apartments. Both Kara Reilly and Steve Waters responded positively to the idea of the stories emanating from one apartment block, the contained space, but I wasn’t totally convinced at that stage that all of it should happen there. It was much further down the line during my second draft phase where almost all of the action had returned to the block, but I hadn’t made the final leap of faith, that I realised the play would be stronger if I kept all of it with in the apartments. It also coincided with the shrinking of my timescale down to one night.

In *The Crafty Art of Playmaking* Alan Ayckbourn writes, “The question I always ask is: in how *short* a time can I hope to tell my story – both according to the foyer and on stage?” Timescale is hugely important in both these respects and originally I had my timescale spread out over several months, with a big leap of a couple of months during the interval. Steve Waters rightly questioned what was happening during that gap and I realised that I didn’t know. Over the course of the play’s development the timescale reduced until it was down to three days and eventually to one night. I found the added pressure of time and space gave me a stronger focus and clearer meaning. The constraints of time and space are liberating.

In terms of ‘foyer time’ *Strangeness* got longer and longer as I put more into it, until in the end I was forced to drastically reduce the epic that it had become. Martin Esslin points out in *The Field of Drama*, “Dramatic time and space are the axes along which the multifarious sign systems of drama unfold themselves to its audiences.” My ‘axes’ had become clouded by too much information and by the final rewrite it became imperative that I got extraneous matter out of the way so that my drama had a chance to unfold itself to an audience. Cutting the play turned out to be another hugely revealing and also consolidating process.

Plotting and Actions

I had set out to write a character driven drama, and initially I didn't want to get drawn into too much plotting. This got me off to a slow start as the characters meandered around. Eventually I had to start putting obstacles in their way and be more specific about defining their stories and clarifying their objectives in the time and place that they existed. Lajos Egri, in *The Art of Dramatic Writing* quotes Hegel's *The Science of Logic* when talking about contradiction and motion: 'It is only because a thing contains a contradiction within itself that it moves and acquires impulse and activity. That is the process of all motion and all development.' My solution to the issue of character versus plot was to ensure that the momentum of the story came out of the characters' behaviour and not from external influences, so that when the plot finally solidified it was there to serve the characters contradictions and impulses and not the other way round.

My instinctive writing style comes from a verbal tradition and one of the things I have had to learn during this process is to incorporate much more visual/physical action to enhance the theatricality. Anthony Weigh talked in his seminar about the importance of characters' physical actions and in his play *2000 Feet Away* this technique is used to great effect. I found that with all of my characters when I began to give them more defined physical actions to augment and complement their internal actions the energy and momentum picked up in the scenes.

In moving into my third draft I revisited '*A Midsummer Nights Dream*' because there were parallels appearing. I had three pairs of lovers, one of whom fulfilled the parental role, a changeling (Anthony), and a rooftop garden. Small connections but useful. This reference also fed into the developing idea of the rooftop garden as a more beautiful place than I originally imagined, and allowed my play to expand a little into that subliminal area where dream-like things happen and you're not sure the next day if they actually did but something life changing has occurred somehow.

The Workshop

Any performance moves the process on in a more profound way than just words on paper can possibly achieve, mainly because of the intense focus and scrutiny you and others put upon the work in even the shortest rehearsal period. Like in the actual play, the actions move the story forward, so the momentum of putting the play into the arena moved it up to a new level. The public workshop was an important part of the process, and forced another rewrite, significant because probably for the first time I began to think of the piece beyond the page.

During the rehearsal, time was spent discussing the characters, dialogue and story. It was helpful to get the responses and reactions from actors and the director. I learnt more about my writing, and overwriting, and that I needed to make character voices more distinctive and less articulate. We talked about the world of the play and the style of writing and potential staging ideas. Gwenda Hughes, my director, thought the play could go darker, and indeed Steve Waters and I had discussed this already. This is an area which I have been edging towards during the final stages of rewrites.

The reading was staged in a stylish and simple way, which was effective but also very revealing of my flaws as a writer. In that respect it was a little painful, but valuable nonetheless. It showed a lack of action and pace in the early part of the play and indeed in watching the play it did seem like there was a lot of talking. The panel's observations reflected this, revealing opinions that a lack of narrative drive allowed the momentum to drop and didn't let the story get going soon enough. For my final draft I have taken all of those comments on board.

By the time I'd reached the workshop stage I had finally settled on a title. The title was late in the process not because the animal imagery wasn't there, it had been there from the start, the idea of them being part of a human zoo was there at the beginning. But I was focusing on a title around the love and water themes for the early drafts. My titles were as follows, *'Anthony'*, *'Drowning'* *'Frailty in the Execution of Love'* (ideas of grandeur here) and finally the more prosaic *'The Strangeness of Caged Animals'*.

Comedy or Tragedy

“If the course of tragedy is a direct line towards the unavoidable, a collision with fate, that of comedy is the circle. Comedy tells its stories in curlicues and zigzags rather than the clean unbroken rhythm of tragedy.... The experience of tragedy, in life as in art, alters us.” *Hirsh, Foster (2001)*

Throughout my supervisions we discussed my style of writing, which is to observe and bring out the comic in situations, and my wanting to write a ‘serious’ play. My previous writing had had a strong comedy element and I was keen to try something different. I specifically set out in October to move away from this style and work on character development towards a serious and darker work, more of a tragedy, or so I thought. But every time I wrote something I was pulled towards the comedy in the situation, whether it was the physical language or the verbal wit. And when I found myself writing what I thought was ‘serious’ and without comedy, it was boring and lifeless.

From where I am now, nearing the end of the process, I can look back and see that my attempt to journey into a style of writing that wasn’t me was never going to be a fruitful one. What I did discover, though, was that my wit needn’t prevent me from writing the ‘serious’ or dark play that I feel I want to write. In fact I have often chosen serious subjects and marginal areas to explore but always also seen the funny side of them. The valuable lesson learnt was that I didn’t have to prove myself as a writer of so called ‘serious’ plays. Indeed that phrase was deemed unhelpful, and that comedy, or more appropriately ‘wit’ could go hand in hand with the tragedy and it would work as long as it was true to the characters and their situation. Life can be truly ridiculous, tragic and hilarious at the same time. So *Strangeness* is a blend of tragedy and comedy.

Technically, as it doesn’t offer a happy ending it is not a comedy but neither I hope is it a tragedy. Jane says in the play the reason why she watches romantic comedies is, “I need to know there’s happiness out there”. I would like there to be more than a whisper of hope that my characters will one day find their happiness.

Conclusion

During the journey from original concept to final draft there have been times when I had no idea what I was doing, and actually felt quite despairing that the play wasn't going anywhere at all. But as I persevered and applied lessons I was learning, I found a way to be able to progress to this final stage. I hope it is a strong piece but I know there are still weaknesses and areas to be developed. I feel I am in a more comfortable place with it, and with each new draft know there is more that I want to do with it, still push it darker, still allow more physicality into it and develop the characters further. But in terms of my original objective I have written a play about love, lovers and the manipulation of love.

I have been able to push the form into a fluid mould but would want to do more of this in future drafts. I have learnt about my writing and the fact that I still have a lot to learn in my development as a writer but that I am moving in the right direction. I have learnt that dramatic writing is about not just filling the page with words but allowing for silences and the space within the story and around the developing lives of the characters - not always a physical space but an awareness. *The Strangeness of Caged Animals* demonstrates what I have achieved this year.

THE STRANGENESS OF CAGED ANIMALS

PLAY TEXT

‘Yet each man kills the thing he loves,
By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword!’

The Ballad of Reading Gaol
Oscar Wilde

Character list

Della, 49 is married to Leo.

Leo, 50, married to Della.

Alix, 30, lives on her own, moved to the flats two months ago.

Vicky, 30, ex-girlfriend of Alix.

Aidan, 39, single, lives on his own.

Jane, 38, friend of Aidan.

Setting

The play is set in and around three apartments/flats on the same floor in an urban, trendy block, overlooking the river. Della and Alix's apartments have adjoining balconies with French windows, Aidan's window looks out over the audience. There is also a roof garden space full of exotic flowers and a street area below the flats.

The realisation of these settings may be achieved partly through the use of light to define specific areas, a device that allows for swift and even overlapping movement between scenes.

I use the terms 'apartments' and 'flats' interchangeably but they mean the same.

Act One

Scene 1

Opening montage to music, My Funny Valentine, (Stan Getz / Oscar Peterson version.)

It is midsummer, in the middle of a heat wave. Early Friday evening.

Outside the flats. Vicky walks on and stops. She looks up at the flats. She is hot, wears sunglasses and has a can of coke. Her bearing is slightly suspicious as if she shouldn't be there. She checks the time and waits, deciding what to do.

Alix's flat. Alix is dressed in jogging shorts and top. She goes to her handbag and takes out a chemists bag. In it she finds a pregnancy testing kit. She looks at it. Takes out the contents and studies them, then puts it away again. She begins to put her jogging shoes on.

Aidan's flat. Aidan and Jane are sitting. He is massaging her tired feet. They are both still in their work suits. She has a glass of wine and is watching him.

Della's flat. Della and Leo are slumped in chairs. They are both in cotton kimonos, her in slippers, him in socks. They look like dead bodies. He holds a folded newspaper in one hand. There is a desk fan close by that isn't on.

The music fades and the lights dim on all the other scenes as Della begins to fan herself with an envelope. A fly can be heard buzzing intermittently.

Della I'm dying.

Pause.

(A little louder) I'm dying.

Pause.

(Louder) I'm dying

Pause.

(Louder) I'm –

Leo slaps the paper loudly on the chair in irritation. Della jumps.

Leo For God's sake.

Della You made me jump.

Leo You're not dying.

Della I don't want to grow old.

Leo You're only fifty.

Della I am forty-nine. Forty-nine. It's alright for you, you're a man. Wrinkles suit you.

Leo Women of fifty can still be attractive.

Della Who do you know of fifty who's attractive?

Leo Theoretically.

Della I'm shrivelling up in this heat.

Leo You're a woman, by definition you're attractive.

Della Don't try and dig yourself out.

Leo I brought you a fan back from the office.

Della It doesn't work. I'll be like beef jerky by the time this hot spell ends.

Leo suddenly gets up and starts scratching his neck. Della fans herself.

Leo Jesus.

Della Mrs Peabrain wants me to back up her complaint about the family on the second floor with the children. I said it's not a crime to have children.

Leo picks up a glass of water and slowly drinks.

She said they throw sweets at her off the balcony. I said she was lucky they didn't throw bikes and what did she expect from ex-council tenants.

Leo She's an ex- council tenant.

Della She called me a snob. I told her she was a moaning old windbag and that we were leaving this dump.

Leo It's not a dump.

Della The lift has broken down three times in four days.

Leo And you weren't in it.

Leo goes off. We hear the sound of a bath running.

Della She was. *(Laughs)* God, this heat.

Leo enters with a towel slung over his shoulder and holding an evening suit and shirt, which he arranges over a chair. He notices how creased his shirt is.

Della The girl next door has been here two months, two months, and I've only met her once. Whenever I go on the balcony she goes in. I've knocked on her door, several times, she ignores me. I'll show her I'm a good neighbour if I have to climb onto her balcony and break in.

Leo gets out the ironing board.

Leo Let's invite her round for a drink.

Della Why?

Leo To be neighbourly.

Della You've never invited a neighbour in for drink before. Do you fancy her?

Leo I'm not the slightest bit interested in young nubile brunettes.

Leo gets out the iron and unravels the cable. He whistles 'My Funny Valentine'.

She watches him.

Della I went to work today. I stood on the other side of the road from the office. I stepped forward on the kerb as if I was about to cross and I burst into tears. I stepped back and I stopped. I did that twice and then went to the shops. *(She waits for a response, but nothing.)* How was your day?

Leo Same as usual.

Della Exactly the same?

Leo Exactly.

Della Did you fill in the same forms and talk to the same crustaceans?

Leo Yes.

She gets up. He goes to reach for his shirt but she stands in his way so he can't get it. She places her hands on his chest and moves them lower, seductively.

Della Let's not go out tonight.

Leo We have to, it's a charity event.

Della So?

Leo With the bishop.

Della He's boring.

Leo He's got my shrimps on the menu.

Her hand moves lower onto his crotch area.

Della They're only shrimps.

He stops her hand.

Leo They're my shrimps.

Della *(Very close to him)* What's it in aid of this year?

Leo Tsunami relief.

Della Where for?

Leo Grimsby.

Pause.

Della They don't have tsunamis in Grimsby.

Leo According to the Bishop they're going to. One day.

Della The man's an imbecile.

Leo He was born there. Very proud of his working class roots.

Pause then Leo laughs and moves away from Della. He gets his shirt and places it on the ironing board. She goes to the balcony.

Della Ha ha.

Leo Tsunami in Grimsby! That's a good one. *(Laughs, then stops)* The bath.

He hurries towards the bathroom and treads on Della's shoe, twisting his ankle.

Ow. Ow. What are your shoes doing in the middle of the floor?

He limps off.

Della There's a warm breeze. Almost tropical. Maybe the Bishop's right.

Tsunami weather.

We hear the bath stop running. Della picks up some jewellery from the side.

Della *(Shouts to him)* Which jewellery shall I wear? Low key, humble and bohemian or filthy rich footballers wife? We don't want to make it look like we're rolling in it and end up sponsoring a village.

Leo limps on and goes to a seat and nurses his ankle.

Leo Wear what you like.

Della I'll wear whatever you want.

Leo I don't care.

Della You do.

Leo It doesn't matter.

Della You choose. What shall I wear?

Leo Have we got any frozen peas?

She stares at him.

Della I am not wearing peas.

Leo For my ankle. It's swelling.

Della Why?

Leo I trod on your shoe.

Della Did you break it?

Leo No but it hurts.

Della I meant my shoe.

Leo Just get me some peas.

Della Please.

Leo I don't want to rush you.

Della turns and heads for the kitchen.

Della There's always time for manners.

Leo We were late last year.

Della *(Off)* A whole year has gone by and we haven't learnt how not to be late.
It's a tragedy. The Bishop will flog us.

Della enters with a bag of ice lollies and goes over to him. She gently holds them to his ankle.

Leo Ah, cold, that's good.

Della Better?

Leo notices what she is holding to his ankle.

Leo Where are the peas?

Della We don't have any peas. Ice lollies are just as good.

Leo Why have we got ice lollies?

Della I like them.

She touches his hair affectionately. He subtly moves his head away from her. She stops.

Leo He's a stickler for time.

Della He should be grateful that you turn up at all to his Grimsby tsunami appeal.

Leo He might make Archbishop one day so be nice to him.

Della I'm always nice to him. Last year I stroked his beard. But then he wanted to take me for a dirty weekend in Amsterdam.

Leo You stroked his beard?

Leo takes the ice lollies from her and continues to hold them against his ankle. She gets up and goes to the jewellery.

Della Tonight I'll seduce him with diamonds, spice up the evening, or I'll be crying tears of tedium into my lobster compote.

Leo He's a man of the cloth.

Della He's still a man. *(She looks at him pointedly.)* I'm so excited about moving. I like the new people. City types. Did they give us a date when they wanted to move in?

Leo Didn't I mention? It's fallen through.

She stops. This news winds her.

Della Fallen through?

She sits in shock.

 They were champing at the bit.

Leo They wouldn't meet the price.

Della I told you to drop the price.

Leo It was too much.

Della It wasn't too much. I told you to drop. How can you do this to me? Get the agents on the phone. Get their number. Drop the bloody price.

Leo It's Friday evening.

Della I don't care if it's Christmas day get them the on the phone. Leo, you promised me. You promised me we wouldn't lose another buyer. You promised we'd sell, whatever they offered. I can't stay here. You promised.

Leo It was a ridiculous offer.

Della When did you know?

Leo Yesterday.

Della *(Rising anger)* Yesterday? You stingy, penny pinching miser.

Leo Why don't you shout it so the whole city can hear?

Della *(Shouts over the balcony)* My husband's a stingy, penny pinching miser.

Leo *(He sings to drown out her shouting)* La la la la la –

Della You knew what this move meant to me. You could have persuaded them. You let them go on purpose. You don't want to move, you want me to stay in here going madder by the day. I can't breathe. *(She snatches at breaths)*

Leo I'm not throwing money away.

Della You can't be bothered to do anything for me. You spineless wart.

Leo Warts don't have spines.

Della Smartarse. An answer for everything. I was wrong, you're not a spineless wart. You're just a wart. Without a heart. Or a spine. Or legs.

Leo Are you going to stand there bleating all night?

Della Yes, if I want to I'll bleat until the cows come home.

Leo Sheep.

Della I'll moo until the cows come home. Moooooo! *(She moos out of the window)*

Leo That's right. Keep mooing until all the neighbours complain about you. Until we're driven out.

Della I want to be driven out. I don't want to stay here with spineless warts and old windbags. *(She moos out of the window.)* Moooooooooo. Mooooo.

Scene 2

Outside the flats. Vicky is loitering again. She looks up, deciding whether to ring the bell. Alix exits the flats beginning her jog and bumps into Vicky, spilling some of her drink.

Alix Oh!

Vicky Sorry.

They brush off any liquid then an awkward moment as recognition dawns on both of them.

Alix Vicky.

Vicky Hi.

Alix I wasn't looking –

Vicky Me neither.

The voice of Della 'Mooing' is heard. They both look up. Then back to the awkward situation.

Alix I was going for a jog.

Vicky In this heat?

Alix What you doing here?

Vicky *(Making it up)* I was on an errand – for someone – What about you?

Alix I live here.

Vicky You don't?

Alix Flat 18.

Vicky Coincidence.

Alix What is?

Vicky That I was just passing and you live here. I knew you'd moved.

Alix I didn't change my mobile.

Vicky shifts uncomfortably.

Vicky They did this whole area up about fifteen years ago. Used to be council. It was a right dump. Nice now though, great view of the river.

Alix Yeah.

Vicky Cool.

Pause.

Alix Everything okay with you and thingy – Mel?

Vicky *(Reluctant to talk about it)* Gill. Big mistake.

Alix Wow. You know how to make life choices.

Vicky I didn't –

Alix Don't –

Pause.

Vicky If you – if you ever want to –

Alix I think it's too hot to jog. I might go in.

Vicky Are you living with someone?

Alix What?

Vicky Sorry. You look good.

Alix Vick –

Vicky See you around.

Vicky walks off.

Alix Bye.

Alix goes in. Once she's gone Vicky walks back into view again and waits on the periphery.

Scene 3

Aidan's flat. Aidan is massaging Jane's toes. She is a little tipsy, sipping her white wine. Next to her is a fat briefcase on wheels.

Jane I don't know why they call it happy hour. Anyone who has to drink that much that quickly at that price is not a happy person. Before or after. It's

a violation of the Trade Descriptions Act. They should call it vomit hour. Or desperation hour. Call a spade a spade. Spade hour. I'm going to join the campaign for plain language, plain English, whatever it's called. This language skirts around what it really means. Legal language is worse. It skirts around the skirts and then grabs you by the balls when you've lost track of where it is. And if you don't have balls it just pulls off your skirt and bites your bum. Bloody magistrates. Bloody everyone. I've had it with the law. I'm going to emigrate to India and dedicate my life to yoga. Shit it's hot.

Aidan picks up a Chinese fan and starts fanning her. She appreciates it.

Aidan What type of yoga?

Jane The bendy one.

Aidan Claudia was into yoga.

Jane I hear she's very bendy.

She drains her wine and picks up the bottle off the floor to refill.

Aidan Where's Skinny?

Jane *(With vehemence)* Skinner is a shit. I adore him.

Aidan But he's not here.

Jane You're remarkably correct. That observation would stand up in court. Witness number one.

Aidan You were drinking on your own.

Jane No banging Claudia?

Aidan No.

Jane But it's Friday.

Aidan Claudia and I are banging no more. Not even on a Friday.

Jane Oh. Who dumped who?

Aidan Does it matter?

Jane Are you serious? It's all that matters.

Aidan I ended it.

Jane I knew it. You would never allow anyone to dump you. Was the sex terrible?

Aidan The sex was great but she's got the intelligence of a gnome.

Jane You need intellectual stimulation as well?

Aidan I'm getting old. I'm starting to think.

Jane Don't do it. You might discover there's nothing there. Stick to what you know. *(She notices the sugar bowl)* Is that sugar or cocaine?

Aidan It's empty. I'm having a clear out.

Jane Just one sugar bowl?

Aidan No, all sorts, clearing cobwebs.

Jane *(Suddenly realising and sitting up)* Ha! You fell for her. You fell for Claudia.

Aidan I didn't fall for her.

Jane You're in love with her.

Aidan I don't do love. You know that.

Pause. She looks at him with gentleness.

Jane I only do love. It's my tragic flaw. Have you never allowed yourself to get lost in a woman?

Aidan No.

She gives him her disbelieving look.

Once.

Jane Name her and shame her, sir.

Aidan *(Quietly)* No.

Jane Clearly not forgotten or forgiven.

Aidan It was a ripple in my life.

Jane We are not ripples. We are waves. Everything happens in waves. We have to succumb to them and let them roll over us. And when they're done with turning over our soil and crashing down on our lives we get up and let the calm return. But we're never the same again. Skinner is a wave. You are a wave. I've had it with waves. They say time heals – time doesn't heal, it makes you suffer until you can do nothing else but grow scabs over the wound and in the course of time realise that there's no point in scratching them off every time you want to relive the pain. That, in fact, it's okay to heal. You're allowed. You're supposed to forget people. You're meant to hate them and move on. You must, above all else, stop loving them. Because you don't really love them, you're just desperately lonely with no one to fill the gaping hole they've left in your life.

Aidan Let's go to bed.

Jane Why should I drown my sorrows in lustful exploits with you?

Aidan Because you're desperately lonely.

Jane Oh God. I am more than that. I'm not that woman anymore. I'm hanging on to my ha'penny. You mark my words, sir.

Aidan You're getting pissed.

Jane Then you mustn't take advantage of me. I'm having a fabudoodlus time. Life's a gas – and then someone lights a fag and your head blows off. Whoosh. *(She drains her glass and attempts to get up)* I'm going home.

She gets to her feet and pulls her bag to the door. He grabs her hand.

Aidan Come on.

Jane No, no you Lothario. I am not a vessel for your seed to find a home in. Where's the door?

Aidan Here.

He tries to help her with her bag but she holds up her hand.

Jane No, I'm strong as an ox, a big fat feminist ox.

Aidan I'll book you a cab then.

Jane I don't want one. Farewell, you bad beautiful creature.

Aidan You're turning me down.

Jane I am. I'm sending you down. I sentence you to ten years penile servitude.

She hiccups and leaves. He picks up the sugar bowl and looks at it.

Scene 4

Della's flat. Della is now wearing a long red evening dress with the zip still open at the back. She is throwing books and ornaments into a packing box. Things are breaking.

Leo enters with a towel around his neck. He's had his bath and now has his trousers on. He is still limping. He turns on the iron and then rubs his hair dry.

Leo For Christ sake.

Della I'm preparing to move. You may not want to move but I do and it's so much easier and satisfying to throw things in a box than waste time packing them up in bubble wrap. Especially if you've always hated them.

She throws an ornament in, it smashes.

Leo That came from Florence.

Della I don't care if it came from Mother Theresa. It clutters up my head. If I can't get away from all this, it's going to have to get away from me.

Leo goes to the ironing board and begins to iron his shirt, slowly and methodically.

Leo The taxi will be here any minute and look at us.

Della I'll kill myself, Leo, if I don't get out of here. And I don't mean to dinner with a dimwit Bishop. I'll throw myself off the balcony and plummet into your city vista. I'll jump off a bridge and my body will float downstream

with all the other women who can't take it any more. A mass of bodies and hair clogging up the river and you men will sweep us away with your dragnets and complain that we've got no consideration for the river traffic. Or I'll take to the streets wearing nothing but garters and give my body to any man who wants it and try and have one last orgasm with another human being before I'm fifty.

Leo I thought you always faked them.

Della Only with you. If it wasn't for him next door I wouldn't have any. Thin walls.

Leo I don't listen.

Leo shakes out his shirt and puts it on.

Della You should. It might jog your memory. He took me last night. In our bed. Aidan was next door having sex with someone else. But I was having sex with him. Just me. On my own. To his rhythm. You were snoring. Loudly. To your own rhythm. I even moaned and you didn't wake up. Quite loudly.

Leo I didn't hear you.

Della He brings out the animal in me.

Leo In our bed?

She goes and stands with her back to Leo so he can do up the zip on her dress.

Della Or when I'm hoovering. Sometimes he comes to borrow a bowl of sugar for the electrician and we have sex in the kitchen. Or in the lift he'll slide himself up my skirt, all the way up to the top floor. Once he followed me to the car park and ravished me over the bonnet of a Daewoo Nubria. Red. Go faster stripes.

He zips up the dress quickly, she winces. Then he sits and holds the lollies to his ankle.

Leo Well, now I know.

Della Is this turning you on?

Leo Not in the slightest but I find it fascinating, what you get up to.

She finds a small box which she opens.

Della Ho ho ho, Christmas decorations.

Leo Della, these lollies are leaking.

Leo lifts his hand off the lollies in disgust

She finds a little Christmas penguin and is moved to tears.

Della Oh, this... this was Anthony's penguin.

Leo I'm all sticky.

Della He loved this. Do you remember? He used to sleep with it.

Leo glares at her then gets up and limps towards the kitchen.

Are you going punish me for giving you leaky lollies?

She kisses the penguin and puts it on the side.

We could stay home and watch a film. There's a comedy on at nine pm. The Virgin Suicides.

Leo limps back on carrying his trousers. She takes them from him, turns them inside out and lays them on the ironing board. She irons, flirtatiously. Leo combs his hair and starts trying to tie his bow tie. He checks his watch.

What a waste, to die a virgin. Though I'm beginning to know what that feels like.

Leo Angus climbed Everest last year.

Della Did he? With Mrs Angus?

Leo They asked me to go with them.

Della They can't come my birthday party now. I'm not having any Everest climbers, they might shin up the curtains while I'm not looking.

She stops ironing and goes to the antique clock and turns it round to face the wall. Leo turns off the iron and puts on his trousers.

Leo It was a doomed venture. One of their team fell off.

She stops and looks at him, fascinated.

Della Of Everest?

Leo Right off the top.

Della Did he get blown?

Leo They don't talk about it.

Della Maybe he jumped.

Leo They never found a body.

Della Sometimes I wonder what it must be like to free fall into oblivion, to peg out to the music you love. To know the end is seconds away and to embrace it. A defining moment. Finally in control. Why are we scared of death?

Leo It hurts.

Della Death doesn't hurt. Pain hurts. What are we afraid of leaving behind?

Leo Money.

Leo turns the clock back round and checks his watch against it.

Della Bad impressions. We don't want people to think we were sad and depressed, when the thought of it is thrilling. I could die to Mozart. He makes you feel like you are rising to heaven. Which is very clever if you don't believe in heaven. Then you must be merely rising to the top of Everest. That's what happened to their friend. He rose to the top of Everest with Mozart in his heart, then someone turned the music off and he fell. It happens.

Doorbell rings. They look at each other. Della goes off to see who it is. Leo grabs his jacket.

Leo There's the taxi now.

Della rushes back on flustered.

Della It's him.

Leo stops and looks at her.

Scene 5

The landing outside Della's flat. Aidan is at Della's door with the sugar bowl. Alix is trying not to look as puffed out as she feels.

Alix Those stairs are a killer.

Aidan You should use the lift.

Alix *(Smiles)* It's playing up again. Stopping on every floor except the one you want. It's quicker to walk.

Aidan But sweatier.

Alix Thanks.

Pause.

Alix I don't know them very well yet.

Aidan Who?

Alix The neighbours. I've been kind of busy.

Aidan I'm not sure if they're in, actually.

Pause.

Alix See you then.

Aidan See you.

Alix walks away. He watches her.

No news on the – other front?

She turns quickly relieved he's saved her departure.

Alix Not yet. I'm due to find out. I'm going to do it later. I just have to pluck up the courage, though it probably won't come to anything.

They stand awkwardly for a few moments.

Aidan I hope it works.

Alix crosses her fingers.

Scene 6

Della's flat. Della is tidying her hair.

Leo Him?

Della I don't want him to see me like this.

Leo makes for the door.

Leo.

Aidan is at the door alone. Leo enters his light. Della tries to hide some of the mess behind the cushions. She picks up a skipping rope up off the floor and arranges herself on the settee.

Leo Aidan. We were just talking about you. Della's been telling me all sorts of interesting things.

They step back into the Della's light.

Della Leo was saying how he doesn't know his neighbours very well.

Leo Not as well as you do, is what I meant.

Della I make the effort.

Leo How well do you know your neighbours, Aidan?

Aidan I try to be friendly.

Leo Friendly. That's a good word for it.

Della Excuse Leo, he's been talking to shrimps all day.

Leo Della's a miserable cow because her escape plan has aborted.

Della You horrible dog. He botched it. He's incompetent.

Aidan The lift's playing up again. It's stopping on all floors.

Leo Just like you, so I hear.

Aidan I'm sorry?

Della Mrs Peabrain got stuck in it during the week. We'll have to stay in now
Leo and amuse each other. It's too muggy to be walking up and down
stairs. Tropical weather. We're expecting a tsunami.

Leo Not here.

Della In Grimsby.

Aidan I've got friends in Grimsby.

Della Are you related to a Bishop?

Leo Of course he's not.

Della Are you working class? Have you dragged yourself up by your boot laces?

Aidan All the way.

Leo Then let's go for a beer one evening.

Della And talk about shrimps.

Leo Neighbour to neighbour. Man to man. Have you ever been married, Aidan?

Aidan Not so far.

Leo My advice, don't waste your life on work.

Della You have and look what we have to show for it. Though he used to teach
in a secondary school until the shrimps seduced him.

Leo The shrimps are getting boring now.

Della Okay, until he got punched on the nose by a fourteen year old.

Leo On the head with a Bunsen burner. I had sixteen stitches.

Della So he needed to work with a species even smaller than children to feel safe. Hence the tasty defenceless miniature sea creatures.

Aidan I came to return this.

Aidan hands Leo a sugar bowl.

Leo A sugar bowl.

Aidan Your sugar bowl.

Pause. Leo smiles unconvincingly. Della sits up more alert.

Leo Our sugar bowl?

Aidan Della leant it to me. For the electrician.

Leo When?

Della Keep it.

Aidan It's yours.

Della You might need it. Keep it.

Leo How long have you had it?

Aidan I can't remember.

Della A year.

Some soft music wafts through from another flat. They all listen.

Lights fade up on Alix in her flat. She is looking at a CD cover of the music that is playing, My Funny Valentine (Stan Getz / Oscar Peterson version.) She goes to the holdall that contains Vicky's possessions and takes out a leather jacket. This scene is secondary to Della and Leo and the lights stay lower on it.

Aidan catches Della's eye.

Aidan Thin walls.

Della Very thin walls.

Leo Too thin.

Della You don't know what I have to put up with. Drives me wild.

Leo I'll call you about the beer.

Leo steers Aidan out.

Aidan Nice skipping rope, Della.

Della I thought you'd like it.

Aidan exits.

Lights and music slowly fade down on Alix.

Leo puts the sugar bowl down. He is quietly annoyed. Della takes the rope to him.

Della Tie me up.

He ignores her.

I want you to tie me up.

He walks away from her. She follows him.

Fuck me.

Leo Where are my cufflinks?

Della Tie me up and fuck me.

She is pushing the skipping rope onto him. He pulls the rope tightly so she is pulled closely to him. He speaks calmly into her face.

Leo Have you seen my cufflinks?

She tries to kiss him. He eases her away.

Della Don't push me away.

She tries to loop him with the rope. He grabs it. Gets it out of her hands.

Della Just fuck me and I'll tell you where your cufflinks are.

He throws the rope over the balcony.

Della Bend me over the table and fuck me hard from behind. Like a real man.

He looks at her with disdain.

There is a female shout of pain from below (Jane).

Then another female voice shouts up.

Vicky *(off)* Oi. Watch what your throwing out.

They both look towards the balcony.

Della starts laughing.

Della You could have killed someone.

Leo No I couldn't.

Della You lost your temper and could have killed someone. I aroused a passion in you. You're jealous.

Leo Jealous of who?

Della Me and him. It's burning you up.

Leo *(Laughs)* Jealous? Ha! A man like Aidan wouldn't look twice at you.

The music from next door is suddenly loud, as if to drown out their argument.

Scene 7

Alix's flat. Alix is dancing with the leather jacket as her partner, immersed in the loud music (Herecica Latino – Nitin Sawhney). Then she stops dancing puts the jacket on a hanger and hangs it carefully on a peg. She goes to the chemist bag she had earlier, takes out the pregnancy kit and places it on the chair looks at it. Then she suddenly turns the music off, takes the relevant pieces out of the pregnancy packet with the instructions and goes to the bathroom.

Scene 8

Aidan's flat. Jane flops into a chair. Vicky enters with the brief case on wheels, exhausted. She also has the skipping rope in her hand. They get their breath back. Aidan is cleaning a pair of old binoculars. Jane rubs her head.

Vicky What have you got in those bags, weights?

Jane Briefs.

Vicky Rubber?

Jane Paper. We had to walk up. Your lift's not working.

Aidan I thought you'd gone home.

Vicky She's had an accident. Some idiot threw a skipping rope out of the window and it landed on her head.

Jane I told you not to book me a taxi.

Aidan I didn't book you a taxi.

Jane Well one came. So I sent him away. He was bloody rude about it as well.

Vicky These things aren't heavy but from a height they can hurt.

Aidan notices Vicky holding up the rope. He stifles a laugh.

Aidan Ooo, skipping ropes can be painful.

Vicky She was dazed.

Aidan She always looks dazed, it's her natural demeanour.

Jane Oh, hilarious. Let's all roll about for five.

Vicky If you want to press charges it'll be easy to find out who it belongs to.

Aidan Are you the police?

Vicky laughs off the question.

Jane I don't want to press charges. It's not worth the effort.

Aidan Jane's a disillusioned lawyer.

Jane Aidan's a disillusioned architect.

Vicky I'm Vicky, not disillusioned at all.

They look at her in surprise.

Jane Oh.

Vicky What?

Jane I've never met anyone who wasn't disillusioned. How can you ever appreciate true happiness if you don't come from a prior position of disillusionment?

Vicky That's very sad.

Aidan That's the law, according to Jane.

Jane Sad? Am I sad?

Aidan You're entitled to be.

Jane Is there any more wine?

Aidan I've got something even better.

Aidan leaves the binoculars and exits.

Vicky You'll have a nice egg on your head for a day or so. Small but perfectly formed.

Jane's face crinkles as she begins to cry. Vicky watches her.

Jane I've drunk too much.

Vicky Emotional tears contain high levels of manganese and prolactin, and a reduction of those in the body helps keep depression away. So keep blubbing.

Vicky hands her a tissue.

Jane I hope you don't have as many problems with men as I do.

Vicky I don't have any problems with men.

Jane Lucky you. *(Wipes her eyes dry)* Thanks for lugging up my briefs.

Vicky It's a new one for me.

Jane You're strong.

Vicky Just trying to impress. I was coming up anyway.

Aidan enters with three bottles of water and give one to each.

Aidan Not to make an arrest, I hope? Water?

Vicky My friend Alix lives across the landing.

Aidan Did you say you were Vicky? She's mentioned you. You pissed on her from a great height.

Pause. Vicky and Jane stare at him.

Jane There will, of course, be two sides to the story.

Vicky Is that what she said?

Aidan She was rather more polite about it.

Jane It's none of our business.

Pause. Then Vicky makes to go. Holds up the rope.

Vicky If I find out who threw this I'll give them a piece of my mind. *(To Aidan)*
Some people need to learn about the consequences of their actions. *(To Jane)* You take it easy.

Vicky leaves. They watch her leave. Pause.

Jane What was that about?

Aidan Nothing. Are you going to tell me about Skinner?

Jane I've been dumped. Again. *(She gets a tissue)*

Aidan What happened?

Jane Last Sunday I was in the zoo with my sister's kids and he came up to me, bold as brass, this blonde bit on his arm, and said he'd been seeing someone else and we were over. He dumped me in front of the chimpanzees and the kids. The chimps laughed. The kids threw peanuts at him. Why don't men love me?

Aidan I do.

Jane You're my friend. I want a boyfriend. I'm entitled to a regular boyfriend. I have a good salary, own house and I'm tolerant of certain types of male behaviour.

Aidan And you're beautiful.

Jane Public school prick. I'm a partner. He's professionally my inferior but he still makes me feel worthless. He lied to me. He cheated on me. I don't want to be lied to anymore. I want someone I can trust. Someone I can be with. I want forever.

Aidan You watch too many romantic comedies.

Jane I have to. I need to know that there is more to life than acrimonious splits. That there is such a thing as happily ever after.

Aidan Life isn't a romantic comedy.

Jane I never see any marriages that last.

Aidan You specialise in divorce.

Jane All the more reason.

Aidan Leo and Della next door have been married for donkey's years.

She looks at him.

Jane Leo has shifty eyes.

Aidan So do you sometimes.

Jane It's all in the eyes. Go to the zoo. Look the animals in the eye. It's the only way to tell what they're thinking.

Aidan What are they thinking?

Jane Usually, 'what the fuck am I doing here?' Your neighbour doesn't have that. Scary advert for marriage.

Aidan He's not an animal.

Jane We're all animals. In a cosmic zoo, and we all want to know what the fuck we're doing here. We want to know what it's all about. We want to feel safe in someone's arms. We want eternity. What is it about men and commitment?

Aidan moves in to kiss her. Jane pulls away.

Aidan, I didn't come here for sex, I came because I needed to explain why we can't sleep together anymore. Every time I'm out of a relationship you comfort me with sex and friendship, and then I like it, and it doesn't mean anything to you, and so I meet someone else, but it never works out. This thing you and I do is taking away my chance of meeting Mr Right.

Aidan hides his rejection behind a smile.

Aidan Okay.

Jane I mean you're not even my type, I only go out with bastards. Queuing up for me.

Aidan Okay.

Jane What do you mean, 'okay'?

Aidan No more sex. No more kissing.

Jane Oh.

Aidan To friends. Just friends.

He raises his water to her. She is bemused and hurt by his response.

Scene 9

Alix's flat. Vicky and Alix are standing on opposite sides of the room. Vicky has the skipping rope in her hand.

Alix Do you skip?

Vicky Only when I'm happy.

Vicky smiles.

Alix Thanks for finding my rope.

Vicky It's yours?

Alix It's got tape round the handle, right?

Vicky holds out the rope. Alix takes it and examines it.

Alix Where was it?

Vicky Downstairs.

Alix Course. Silly me.

Vicky You should be careful where you – leave it.

Alix I shut the handle in the door.

Holds up the taped handle.

Vicky smiles.

Vicky I walked up with your neighbour, Jane.

Alix looks confused.

My height, dark, pleasant friendly face, hiding a tough core but probably a woman who had been through some emotional distress sometime today prior to the incident.

Alix What incident?

Vicky *(Slightly discomforted)* Nothing. The lift's broken. She's with Aidan.

Alix Aidan's fantastic. He's been a rock to me.

Vicky I wouldn't trust him.

Alix I don't know Jane.

Vicky She's extremely fit, probably has regular aerobic exercise. She's a lawyer and I suspect she has strong principles and a fiery determination to win an argument when she thinks she's right. She follows her actions through once she's made up her mind with no backing down and I'm guessing the kind of law she practices has a lot to do with her belief structures and intrinsic values.

Alix You got all that just by walking up the stairs with her.

Vicky I got all that just by watching her arse.

Uncomfortable silence.

Sorry, I didn't mean that. It was a joke.

Alix I haven't lost my sense of humour, it's just not funny. Try again in six months.

Vicky Sorry.

Alix Did you get an interview for the police?

Vicky I didn't bother.

Alix Why not? It's what you wanted to do.

Vicky Didn't seem important.

Alix You should. You have a gift, you care. You possess handcuffs. Albeit pink fluffy ones.

They laugh. It breaks the ice. Vicky goes to the balcony and looks out.

Vicky Who's next door?

Alix Middle aged couple. I hardly ever see them.

Vicky Your balconies join, how can you avoid them in this weather.

Alix I don't want to get involved. When she's out there I come in. You know me.

Vicky See those boats on the river? I went on a disco on one of those when I was sixteen. This spotty boy with an erection grabbed me for a slow dance and I couldn't escape. Put me off boys for life.

Alix That's your excuse. I bought some new saucepans today.

Vicky What happened to the old ones?

Alix They're yours.

Vicky Ours.

Alix I'm going to be a walking cordon bleu, a female Gordon Ramsey. I'm going to skittle the starfish and sauté my spuds. Because I have realised that cooking is

a state of mind. Not a flustery blustery argument with a frying pan or a reason to call out the fire brigade but a true Zen experience.

Vicky looks at her.

You don't believe me.

Vicky I do.

Alix You did that squinty thing. The one where you're about to put me down.

Vicky No I didn't.

Alix But you don't believe me.

Vicky It doesn't matter what I believe. Not if you're having a true Zen experience.

Alix pushes Vicky, playfully.

I need to do some shopping. This place I'm living in. It's okay.

Furnished. But I like my own utensils and things.

Alix Oh, of course that's why you're here. Your things, your stuff, it's all in the spare room and that bag. And there's your jacket.

She points to the jacket hanging.

Vicky No. That's not why I'm here. I wanted to see you.

Alix I didn't know what to do with it all. I should have left it behind in the old place but I couldn't. I've thought about throwing it out the window but I just divided the CDs in half, my favourites, your favourites and split whatever else was left over.

Vicky You can keep them.

Alix I don't want to be reminded. I don't want to hear your favourite song. If you want anything else, take it.

Vicky I don't.

Alix Anything, photos.

Vicky Do you throw a lot of stuff out of the window?

Alix Here, you can have a spare key, if you can't manage it all tonight.

Alix gets her a key.

Vicky You're giving me a key?

Alix To collect your stuff. Be easier if I'm not here.

Vicky notices a painting on the wall.

Vicky You're now an art collector as well?

Alix It was a gift.

Vicky Who from, a sadist?

Alix Lara. From the Compass.

Vicky The cruisy bar?

Alix That's where she works. She paints in her spare time.

Vicky You went to the Compass?

Alix I do have a life. My world didn't completely come to an end after you.

Silence.

Vicky I'll come back another time and get my stuff.

Alix Stay for dinner.

Vicky Why?

Pause.

Alix Because... I don't know, you're the only person I know who owns pink fluffy handcuffs.

Scene 10

Della's flat. Della is lying on the floor. Leo is looking over the balcony, on the phone.

Leo I'm telling you the taxi didn't come. I've been waiting. *(Listens)* No I did not send it away. *(Listens)* How could I send it away if it didn't even arrive?

He turns off the phone and steels himself.

Leo We're going by bus.

Della I'm not coming.

Leo *(Pause)* I need to lean on you.

Della Lean on the ski sticks. They make better wives.

Leo I don't know why you agreed to come in the first place.

Della I want Anthony.

Leo He's not coming. Get it into your head.

Della Just because he didn't come to your fiftieth.

Leo I had a nice quiet evening with good friends and good wine.

Della *(Sits up)* It was catatonic.

Leo I enjoyed it.

Della Anthony isn't like you. He's vibrant.

Leo So was I before I met you.

Della He's like me.

Leo He's a man for starters and we understand each other.

Della Men, you slap each other on the back. Pledge lifelong loyalty and then fuck each other's wives.

Leo We're talking about my son.

Leo finds an old long umbrella, which he tries out as a walking stick.

Della He isn't your son.

Leo He's more like me than you.

Della He's more like the milkman than you. Don't you remember the milkman? The one in Furlong Road.

Leo We never had a milkman in Furlong Road. You went to the supermarket. We never liked the look of the milkman. He was too pushy, wanted to sell us eggs, potatoes, stationery, cosmetics.

Della He was industrious.

Leo I remember him.

Della Anthony's industrious.

Leo Is that the best you can do?

Della Aren't you upset? You empty, hollow shell.

Leo No I'm not. I'm not upset at what you say.

Della You keep me imprisoned in this tower –

Leo There's the door, there's the door, here's the door. Use it.

Della *(Getting hysterical)* Why are you doing this to me? Why are you treating like this? In this appalling way? I don't deserve it. What have I done to deserve it? I've given you everything. I've sacrificed my life for you. Given you everything.

She grabs the clock and threatens to drop it.

Leo Della. Della. Don't be childish. It was my grandfather's grandfather's.

Della That's too many grandfathers.

Leo Put it down.

Della Will this upset you? Will this send a wave of emotion bouncing off your shiny inner wall?

Leo Della

She drops it into the box. It smashes. Leo's shoulders sag briefly. But he keeps his cool. This angers her even more.

Della Why don't you leave me?

They stare at each other.

Leo You selfish cow.

Della That's more like it. Kick me when I'm down.

Leo There's nothing wrong with you. You just don't get enough attention.

Della Go for it.

Leo You can't bear people not needing you to make their lives liveable.

Della You don't know what it feels like to be locked in here all day. You've no idea how much it took to even get out the door today.

Leo Go back to work. You'll get over it.

Della I'm on tablets. Those morons talk about me behind my back.

Leo Nobody cares enough to talk about you.

Della You're hard. You don't have feelings. I love and I cry and I feel pain. You're nothing. Nothing. You live for shrimps. You can't even buy me a decent home. You made me live in this hell hole. You could have got me out. You could have saved me. You could have provided like any other husband.

Leo I've done nothing but provide.

Della It's driving me mad.

Leo Everywhere drives you mad. You're never happy anywhere.

Della I was happy in Furlong Road.

Leo No you weren't. There was always something to moan about. The neighbours, the noise, the schools. You think that everyone else has so much more than you. They don't. No one has it better than you. They just make better of it. They don't complain day in day out. They find the good in life, the good in people, not the bad, not the canker that you bring out. You are a walking sore. You make people feel uncomfortable. You can't bear anyone being happy around you. That's why we lost Anthony. My son couldn't come home because he couldn't stand you, his own mother. He hates you. He despises you. You

suck the life out of everyone you meet, you empty them out. Sometimes I leave here and I want to blow my fucking head off.

Della Why didn't you tell me this before?

Leo You're a nihilistic vacuum.

Della Thankyou.

She puts on some music, Mozart's requiem.

Goodbye Leo.

She goes onto the balcony and climbs over the rail. She leans out into the breeze. He watches her, then he grabs the umbrella and leaves.

Scene 11

Aidan's flat. There are screwed up tissues scattered on the floor.

Aidan holds up two pizza boxes.

Aidan Feeding time.

Jane snorts like a pig. She gets a couple of tea towels, which she tucks under their chins as bibs. They begin to eat, ravenously.

Aidan You haven't seen the new roof yet. Mrs Peabody, the old woman on the first floor, has turned it into a garden. Green §fingers. I wish I had a talent.

Jane You do have a talent. You buy nice big houses then cut them up into little boxes, which you sell at inflated prices to deluded young people who think they have to own a property so they can be like everyone else and then imprison themselves in a mortgage they'll never pay off in a hovel they'll soon grow out of but will never be able to sell at the price they paid for it. And you make a fortune.

Aidan Are you having a go at me?

Jane It's what you do.

Aidan I was converting a church into gym recently and all I could think was, here I am in God's old house, would he like angelic yellow or celestial pink?

Jane Oh Jesus, I ate a chilli.

Aidan There must be more to life.

Jane *(Drinks water)* Burning. Ouch.

Aidan Children, for instance.

Jane Trust me, they're not a necessary accessory anymore. We don't need to procreate to make life complete. Life is complete. Well it would be if I had a boyfriend.

Her face screws up and she reaches for a tissue.

Aidan Don't cry anymore, you'll get dehydrated.

Jane I'm trying not to.

She sees his binoculars.

Are they for looking in women's bedroom windows?

Aidan I used to go bird watching with my old man.

Jane Ornithology, sweet.

Aidan Until he was done was for stalking.

Jane Oh.

Aidan You can have them.

Jane I don't want a stalker's old bins.

Aidan They're just objects.

Jane They start off as objects but become symbols. I've been getting rid of memories too. I had a big thing about you once upon a time. Ha! Shock, horror. Well I did. Okay, I know you've always known. *(She takes a little charm out of her pocket and gives it to him.)* You bought it for me in

Prague a few years back, when we were with the old gang. I harboured hopes that you and I would hit it off. I've kept it on me ever since. I have to return it to you now because it used to be a symbol of hope. Objects just perpetuate the myth that once was.

Aidan is deflated. Stops eating.

Aidan I don't want it. It was a gift.

Jane You can give it to me back, as a friend.

Aidan takes it reluctantly. He puts it in his pocket and carries on eating.

Jane Oh.

The mood is broken now. She wipes her hands and gets up.

I'll go then.

She gathers her things together, puts her shoes on and then stops just before she leaves.

Ask me out.

Aidan What?

Jane Ask me out. Let's go out together for two minutes. Then I'll dump you.

Aidan You'll dump me?

Jane It's no skin off your nose. I've never dumped anyone before, I'm always the dumpee. It'll be a new experience for both of us. It's purely academic. I just want to know what it feels like.

Aidan To dump me?

Jane And to be your girlfriend. Two minutes. Please please please. Ask me out.

Aidan No.

Jane I won't tell anyone. You'll be helping a poor lovelorn damsel. And then I'll go home and we'll be best friends. Two minutes. I dare you.

Pause.

Aidan Two minutes?

Jane Don't make me humiliate myself further.

Pause. They look into each other's eyes.

Aidan Alright. (*He looks at his watch.*) Starting – now. D'you want to go out?

Jane Yes please. Where to?

Aidan I don't know.

Jane Think of somewhere.

Aidan You think of somewhere.

Jane Is that what you say to your girlfriends?

Aidan You're not my girlfriend.

Jane Yes I am, you just asked me out. Where are we going?

Aidan The pub.

Jane That's not very romantic.

Aidan The dogs.

Jane Nobody under fifty goes to the dogs.

Aidan The pictures.

Jane Mmm that's nice. We can sit in the back row. You can put your hand on my knee.

She sits and beckons to him.

Jane Come on then. Your hand. My knee.

Aidan does it in a bored manner.

Jane Bit more enthusiasm needed.

Aidan One minute.

Jane is pretending to watch the big screen.

Jane Sshh. This is the bit where he lights two cigarettes, one for him, one for her. Do you smoke?

Aidan Fifty seconds.

Jane Sssh. (*Whispers*) Now put your arm round me and put your other hand up my skirt.

Aidan Why?

Jane Because I've still got forty seconds. We're in the back row. No one can see us. Look, everyone's doing it along this row.

He places his hand just above her knee. She places it further up.

Jane Higher. This is the bit where he kisses her. Kiss me.

He kisses her on the cheek.

Jane On the lips. I'm not dumping you till you do it properly.

Aidan Fifteen seconds.

They kiss, his hand still up her skirt. She begins to moan.

Scene 12

Alix's flat. Vicky has two holdalls of her possessions. She is balancing some pans on the top. Alix appears in the kitchen doorway wearing oven gloves.

Alix The trout's on.

Vicky Would that be with garlic and a glass of chilled Pouilly Fume?

Alix With spaghetti and lager. (*smiles*) Rosie went on maternity leave this week.

Vicky Already? Are you okay?

Alix She's asked me to be a Godparent. I'm buying knitting patterns and all sorts.

Vicky You've learnt to knit?

Alix I'm all arts and crafts now. I'll knit you a scarf if you like. That's all I can manage at the moment. I might take up painting if I get time. Lara wants to teach me.

Vicky examines Lara's painting.

Pause.

Vicky *(Quietly)* You slept with her.

Alix You left me –

Vicky It was a mistake.

Alix You can't say that.

Vicky I didn't know what I was doing.

Alix You killed me – for Mel – Ginger – Posh.

Vicky Gill. She was just there.

Alix So was I.

Vicky It wasn't about you.

Alix It was me I could feel hurting.

Vicky That's what I mean. This past year has been all about you. You think you're the only one who felt anything. The only one whose pain mattered. You didn't look at me properly for over a year. Not since you started the treatment.

Alix Don't blame that. We went into it together.

Vicky I was there for you –

Alix We knew it wouldn't be easy. All I wanted was your support.

Vicky – one hundred percent.

Alix Why did you come here? You could have phoned. I could have dropped this lot off.

Vicky You won't believe me.

Alix Probably not.

Pause. They don't break eye contact.

Vicky I can't live without you.

Silence.

Alix Bollocks.

Vicky I mean it.

Alix Two years.

Vicky You became a different person.

Alix And you didn't?

Vicky You wanted a baby more than anything, more than me.

Alix It was important to me.

Vicky I gave you everything I could. But I couldn't give you a child.

Alix I never asked you to.

Vicky And then when you couldn't conceive –

Alix I didn't conceive. I can conceive. There's nothing wrong with me. It just didn't work. It's language like that. You shouldn't say that. There's nothing wrong with me. I had the tests. It just didn't work. I didn't have access to a constant supply of sperm or a limitless overdraft facility. That's all there is to it. I came to terms with it. But I was grieving. And then you left.

Silence.

Vicky I didn't want to be a parent.

Alix Oh yes you did.

Vicky Only because it's what you wanted.

Alix I don't believe you.

Vicky Not at that price. Not at the expense of you.

Alix I was hormonal, things would have got back to normal.

Vicky You wanted a reason, this is it. I didn't want what it did to us. I didn't want it that much. I had to leave you free to meet someone who did.

Alix You fucking liar. It's because you weren't getting enough sex.

Vicky Is that all you think I am?

Alix And she came along and spread her legs for you.

Vicky Fuck off. I could talk to her.

Alix You could have talked to me.

Vicky No I couldn't, you had a one track mind that didn't include me. You didn't want to know what I really wanted because it wasn't what you wanted.

Alix I wanted us to be a family.

Vicky I need some fresh air.

Vicky moves towards the door.

Alix You were everything to me.

Vicky You're too much.

Alix Well it doesn't matter anymore. This is a pointless argument because we clearly weren't suited and never will be. I don't even know why I thought we were ready to talk. I'm glad you left me. I'm happier without you.

Vicky Me too.

Alix I'm sorry I cooked for you.

Vicky I didn't want it anyway.

Alix You always turned your nose up at my cooking.

Vicky I'm sorry, trout with spaghetti and lager, are you fucking mental?

Alix No, I'm learning to cook. I may not be brilliant but have the grace to give me some credit for trying. You haven't the guts to risk failure. You haven't even the guts to be honest with me.

Vicky I need wine to be honest.

Alix That's right run away and get drunk.

Vicky You drive me nuts. But I still want you.

Alix How much?

Vicky Desperately.

Alix Prove it.

Vicky I will prove it. I will give my life to you. I will paint the stars for you but I will not have trout and spaghetti without a simple glass of white wine. Jesus, give me a break.

Silence. They stare at each other, then begin to relax and smile.

Vicky Come here.

Vicky holds Alix and kisses her. They hold tightly to each other.

Alix I've got something for you.

Alix breaks away and goes to the kitchen.

Vicky looks around. Sees the pregnancy test box. She looks at it.

Alix enters with a bottle of Pouilly Fume and presents it to Vicky

Alix Da da! I've had it since I moved in. Just in case you came by.

Vicky holds up the pregnancy test box to Alix.

Vicky Going it alone?

Pause.

I thought you couldn't afford any more treatment.

Alix doesn't respond.

Oh Christ.

Vicky sits, she is gutted.

Alix I want a baby.

Vicky Enough to fuck a man?

Alix Men aren't the enemy.

Vicky I always knew you'd go back to them.

Alix God you don't change.

Vicky looks in the box and finds it empty. She gets up and goes to the bathroom.

All Alix can do is watch her.

Vicky returns with the tester in her hand. She is stunned.

Vicky Who is he?

Alix doesn't reply. Vicky shouts, almost violent.

Who is he?

Vicky is distraught, pacing, pulling at her hair.

We wasted all that fucking money, all that heartache and you can suddenly find a 'donor' just like that? Or is he a boyfriend? Does he have a big dick? Does he make you come really quickly?

Alix Don't make me feel like I've done something wrong. This is all I've wanted for so long.

Vicky I hate you.

Alix You know – you know what this means to me.

Vicky I hate you.

Alix Then piss off.

Vicky You piss off.

Alix I never want to see you again.

Vicky You won't. Congratulations. Mummy.

Vicky leaves.

Alix is shocked, her breathing turns to stabs.

Leo enters his flat. It is dark except for a lamp. The balcony windows are still open. He looks around for Della.

Leo Della?

Pause. He becomes concerned.

Della?

Pause. He fears the worst. Desperate.

Della?

In Aidan's flat the lights are low. Aidan and Jane are wrapped around each other, sleeping lovers.

End of Act One.

Act Two

Scene 13

Music, My Funny Valentine (Chet Baker version).

Outside the flats. *It's 3am. There is a big moon.*

Vicky walks on. She scuffs her heels and paces up and down undecided. She looks up at the flats and at the key in her hand.

Leo comes out and passes her. He is an odd sight, in socks and rolled up shirt sleeves. He walks across the stage and then stops as if he's remembered something.

A Tarzan call comes from the flats. Both look up to where it's coming from.

Music stops.

Scene 14

Aidan's flat. Clothing from the night before is strewn across the floor. Jane, wearing Aidan's T-shirt is standing at the window, looking through the binoculars as if at the audience. Aidan is standing on a chair in a Tarzan pose. He wears a pair of boxers with a giraffe print on. It's hot, close.

Aidan *(Tarzan voice)* Me, Tarzan.

Jane This is fascinating. Us. Watching them. Watching us. Watching them.

Aidan *(Tarzan voice)* You, Jane.

Jane We're all watching each other. I've clocked at least four other pairs of binoculars staring back. I can see right in their windows.

He goes up behind her and nuzzles her.

Aidan Tarzan want Jane in hammock.

Jane The whole city is awake with this heat.

Aidan Jane very hot.

Jane Humans are so much messier than animals.

Aidan Tarzan horny.

Jane They clean the streets at night so we never know how dirty we are. It's a conspiracy, to make us think we're superior and clean, when we're not. We can't even lick our own arses.

Aidan That's got to be a good thing.

She stops looking through the binoculars.

Jane I had a nightmare earlier. I was at work and I couldn't stop smiling. A client told me she'd caught her husband in bed with another woman. I smiled. Another client lost his house and half his income in a settlement. I smiled. Boris the Bastard patted my behind... I smiled.

Aidan That was me.

Jane And then I realised I wasn't smiling at all. It was a mask. Women smile more than men, it's placatory, suggesting a submissive quality which men like.

Aidan And the nicest, warmest thing one person can give to another. No animal can do that, however clean its arse is.

She turns to hold him.

Jane Hey baby.

Aidan Hey gorgeous.

Jane What happened to those two minutes?

Aidan The strangest thing, my watch stopped with three seconds to go.

Jane Does that mean we're stuck in time?

Aidan Unable to do anything about it.

They hold each other tightly.

Jane *(Quietly)* I love you.

She smiles at him and picks up the binoculars to look out. He holds her, strokes her.

Jane If you look long enough at one spot something eventually happens. People suddenly appear where you didn't think there were any. In and out of the shadows. A couple kissing, a woman on the bridge. I think it's a woman. I keep losing her. She's pacing up and down.

Aidan A beautiful woman.

Jane Backwards and forwards.

Aidan You can never get out of your mind.

Jane Gone again.

Aidan From the first night he spent with her everyone else was an imitation.

Jane Who?

She rubs her eyes. Aidan hesitates.

Aidan Your woman. She has a story.

Jane looks out again.

Jane She's a flamenco dancer –

Aidan Running from her lover because he wouldn't marry her –

Jane And she thinks life isn't worth living without him –

Aidan So she's gone to the river to end it all.

Jane Stop jogging me. It's hard to focus.

Aidan But her lover is trying to find her because –

Jane She's looking down into the river.

Aidan – in the hundred and seventeenth second he suddenly realised –

Jane O my God. O my God. What's she doing? O my God. She fell. She fell. She jumped. She jumped into the river. She did it.

Aidan What?

Jane She climbed over the rail and let herself fall. She didn't jump she let herself fall. She fell.

Aidan What are you talking about?

He takes the binoculars.

Jane The bridge. The bridge. The middle.

Aidan There's no one there.

Jane She's in the water. She climbed over, she leaned out, then opened her arms.

Aidan It's too dark to make out anything.

Jane Look closer. Look longer. We have to call the police.

Aidan It's impossible to see anything clearly.

She takes the binoculars from him and scans the audience again.

Jane They saw. The man with the binoculars in those flats, the couple who were kissing, they're all watching. Someone will have phoned the police. Everyone's awake. Everyone saw.

Aidan takes the binoculars back. She is wringing her hands, patting her head trying to think.

Aidan Calm down.

Jane I have to do something.

Aidan There's nothing you can do.

Jane You make it sound like reasonable behaviour. People don't just throw themselves into rivers.

Aidan I'm not saying it's reasonable but it's not our business.

Jane That's terrible. She's a human being. She was in distress.

Aidan You don't know that. You don't know anything. You don't even know if it was a woman.

Jane She was wearing a dress.

Aidan It could have been a man.

Jane In a dress?

Aidan It's the middle of the night.

Jane A man in a dress. Well, that makes it okay.

Aidan Jane.

Jane takes the binoculars and scans the audience.

Jane We're so fragile. We take it all for granted.

Aidan gently takes the binoculars from her and holds her.

Aidan Then let's not take it all for granted.

She holds onto him. Then takes his hand and leads him towards the bedroom. She notices some pants on the floor and stops to pick them up. They have an elephant print on.

Jane Elephants?

Aidan Designer elephants.

She notices what he's wearing.

Jane Giraffes?

Aidan Designer giraffes.

Jane Oh, that won't do. Really won't do.

Aidan Not my giraffes.

He playfully backs away towards the bedroom, and she follows.

Scene 15

Outside the flats. Someone is throwing sweets at Leo from the flats, they hit him. Vicky is watching. She's fed up.

Leo Ow.

He sees her watching him.

Leo Toffee?

Vicky I'm not allowed to take sweets off of strange men.

Another one hits him.

Leo Ouch.

Vicky Who's throwing them?

Leo Mrs Peabody. First floor.

They look up to the flats.

 She's seen you now. We won't get any more.

He unwraps one and pops it in his mouth.

Vicky People throw a lot of things out of these flats. A skipping rope was thrown out of these flats yesterday evening. Landed on someone's head.

Leo Shocking.

She notices his feet.

Vicky There might be glass on the floor. You could cut yourself.

Leo Worse things have happened.

Vicky But with cut feet you could get an infection.

Leo Are you a doctor?

Vicky Then you wouldn't be able to walk, let alone get free toffees. And if it gets bad you might have to have your legs amputated.

Leo Don't you have anything nice to say?

Vicky No.

Leo Woman on her own shouldn't be out this late.

Vicky Says a man in socks.

Leo chuckles. He sees a toffee on the floor. Picks it up and opens it. Discards the wrapper. Smells the toffee and discards that as well. He continues to scavenge for toffees. Then he starts sniffing as if he smells a scent. He scratches his neck and under arms. Heat rash. Leo squints, thinking. She watches him.

Leo The tide's going out. I have to go.

Vicky It's your loss.

Leo What is?

Vicky Your feet.

Leo Mind your own business.

Vicky You'll have stumps.

Leo Is that your problem?

Vicky I pay national insurance so yes, it is.

Leo You're a bit funny.

Vicky I can be funnier.

Leo Do you want to sell me a bible? – *(He checks his pockets)* – I haven't got any change on me.

Vicky I haven't got a bible.

Leo My Grandmother was Jewish. It's fashionable now, but it wasn't then. My father had us baptised Catholics. Just to make sure.

Vicky I'm an atheist.

Leo God has a special place for atheists.

He starts to go then he stops.

Have you ever thought about shrimps? They don't make very good pets. *(He thinks)* The containers come in down at the docks. Sometimes I go down there to watch. Just down there, down the river. Used to go fishing with my boy. Used to lark about together for hours. That's what matters,

what you are to each other. Everyday. Not where you come from. Father and son. Growing together. Good days.

He comes back to her to share a confidence.

My wife wanted the cottage in the country with the hollyhocks and bullrushes. But I like it here. They are nice apartments, aren't they?

Suddenly there is the noise of what sounds like a howling wolf from up in the apartments. It is Jane. They look up.

Vicky Very nice. Quality residents.

A pair of men's underpants fly down from the apartments and land between them. Vicky picks them up. She holds them up and looks at Leo.

Vicky Giraffes.

He offers her another toffee. She takes it, opens it, pops it in her mouth. He looks at his socks and then wanders back to the flats leaving Vicky alone.

Scene 16

Aidan's flat. Aidan is getting dressed.

Jane Ha! Immature? You're calling me immature? Look at the way you're stomping about like I've taken away your jelly and ice cream.

Aidan I'm not stomping.

Jane They're part of the urban jungle now.

Aidan I don't want my pants to be part of the 'urban jungle'.

Jane Why? Is your name sewn in the back?

Aidan How would you like it if I threw your undies out of the window?

Jane Ravished. *(She picks up the binoculars and looks out)*

Aidan Leave the binoculars alone.

Jane I want to see.

Aidan There's nothing to see. You imagined it.

She retracts the binoculars to the street.

Jane So the reason I can't see your pants is because I imagined them and you never had any on.

Aidan They're giraffes, they're camouflaged.

Jane I can see Vicky down there. Or maybe I'm just hallucinating. She might arrest you for littering if you go down now. But then if you can't see her, she can't arrest you.

The doorbell rings. They look to the door and then back at each other in puzzlement.

Jane Too late for the Avon Lady.

Jane exits to the bedroom. Aidan steps into Leo's light. He is surprised to see Leo.

Aidan Leo?

Leo puts his hands around Aidan's throat. They struggle. Aidan escapes and Leo follows him into the flat. Leo is agitated and keeps scratching his heat rash. Aidan picks up a chair and holds it like a lion tamer towards Leo.

Leo Where is she?

Aidan Who?

Leo New cushions?

Aidan No.

Leo roughly picks up a cushion and squeezes it. Places it against his face lovingly.

Leo I've lost some.

Aidan Help yourself.

Leo replaces the cushion and continues looking around.

Aidan Do you know what the time is?

Leo A sugar bowl.

Aidan I returned it. Have you run out of sugar?

Leo You're sex mad.

Jane enters, now dressed casually in Aidan's jogging clothes.

Jane Hello. I'm Jane.

She looks at Aidan who realises he's over reacting and puts the chair down.

Leo Who's she?

Aidan My girlfriend.

Leo Another one?

Jane We've met before, in the lift.

Leo moves close to her and looks into her eyes. Taking his time.

Leo Nice tits.

Jane stares at him open mouthed.

I was complimenting your tits. But if you can't take a compliment –

Jane I'm speechless.

Aidan Leo's lost some cushions.

Leo And a picture off the wall.

Jane Have you been burgled?

Leo No. Maybe. No. I don't know. Possibly. Yes. No.

Jane and Aidan catch each other's eye. Leo notices.

Leo My shoes have gone as well.

Aidan laughs out of embarrassment and nerves. Leo is menacing.

Leo You think it's funny?

Aidan It's not funny at all, Leo.

Leo You think it's funny?

Leo grabs Aidan's chair and is about to bring it down on his head. Aidan grabs him round the waist. They stagger around the room, all shouting.

Jane He doesn't think it's funny.

Leo I'll show you funny.

Jane Leo.

Aidan Get the chair.

The doorbell rings. Leo is distracted by it and stops mid air. Then he realises what he's doing and puts the chair down and sits on it. Aidan turns to go to the door. Jane steps away from Leo.

Vicky steps out of her light and into the flat. She is holding Aidan's pants.

Jane Vicky.

Vicky Your neighbour's door is open.

Leo I've lost my keys.

Vicky and Leo look at each other. She deflects the situation by holding up the pants.

Vicky Anyone missing these?

Jane How ridiculous.

Aidan Leo, I might have some shoes you can borrow, if you'd like?

Aidan leaves and Leo follows. Aidan is wary. Jane and Vicky are left alone. Vicky wipes her brow and neck, absently, with the pants. Jane winces.

Vicky How's your head?

Jane Fine, apart from hallucinations of suicidal female flamenco dancers.

Vicky I have those all the time. Close your eyes.

Vicky stands behind her and places her hands on Jane's head. Jane closes her eyes.

Jane You're a dark horse.

Vicky Relax.

Jane *(Relaxing)* This is divine.

Vicky You've got a lot of tension.

Jane I've been saving it up for a rainy day.

Vicky Let it go.

Jane I'm frightened I'll fall apart.

A moment of stillness while Vicky holds Jane's head.

Vicky (*Concentrating*) I'm taking all the tension from you. It's in my hands now.

She takes her hands away from Jane's head. Jane opens her eyes and yawns.

Jane (*Quietly*) Thankyou.

Aidan and Leo enter. Leo is wearing some very white trainers. Vicky moves away from Jane but Jane keeps looking at her a few seconds longer.

Leo Della said the flat was haunted. I didn't believe her. But when I went to put my hand in the tea caddy to get a teabag, the tea caddy had gone. There was just a space. How can a tea caddy just disappear?

Vicky Ruling out supernatural causes, assume someone's removed it.

They look at her.

Leo Like the sugar bowl.

Aidan I returned the sugar bowl.

Jane You had your own sugar bowl.

Aidan I borrowed theirs.

Leo I've got the sugar bowl. But I didn't notice it was missing because I don't take sugar.

Vicky When was it missing?

Leo When Della lent it to him.

Aidan But I gave it back.

Leo What else did she 'lend' you?

Aidan Nothing.

Leo What car do you drive?

Aidan Daewoo.

Leo Nubria?

Aidan Yes.

Leo Red?

Aidan Yes.

Leo Go faster stripes?

Vicky Wo. Stop. Does Della take sugar?

Leo No.

Vicky Then why do you have a sugar bowl?

Leo doesn't have an answer.

 What else is missing?

Leo A blue glass fruit bowl, my shaving razor, the remote control.

Aidan Who would steal a remote control?

Vicky A remote control freak.

Jane What does Della think?

Leo I don't know.

Vicky Have you asked her?

Leo No.

Jane Why not?

Pause.

Leo Della's missing.

Aidan laughs nervously. They look at him. Leo's face is beginning to crumple in pain.

Aidan Sorry, indigestion.

Jane What do you mean, Della's missing?

Vicky Where is she?

Leo (*Choking up*) She's not anymore – there.

Jane What do you mean?

Leo Ask him. He knows where she is.

Aidan What's it got to do with me?

Leo See, defensive.

Vicky When was the last time you saw her?

Leo Last night. We were going to dinner. She changed her mind and stayed at home. I left her standing on the balcony. When I returned, she'd gone. She's gone.

They wait for something more revealing. He sobs.

We've been married twenty-five years.

Jane Congratulations, that's a miracle.

Leo She's never stayed out this late.

Aidan What about when you're away?

Leo (*Accusing Aidan*) You – tell – me.

Aidan backs away from him.

Vicky Does Della work?

Leo She's in human resources, but she's on sick leave.

Jane With what?

Leo Depression.

On another part of the stage, a low light comes up on Alix asleep in an armchair.

Leo looks at them staring at him. He is fearful.

She's dead, isn't she?

Vicky No.

Jane No.

Vicky Why would she be?

Jane You mustn't think like that.

Leo *(He begins to cry)* I know she is. She said things.

Jane What things?

Leo I didn't think – she didn't mean – she –

Vicky What things?

Leo I didn't think she'd do it.

Jane takes this in.

Vicky Do what?

Leo She said she'd jump in the river.

Vicky There's no reason to think she has. People say all sorts of things they have no intention of doing.

Jane *(Quietly)* I saw her.

Aidan Jane.

Vicky If it puts your mind at rest I'll phone round the hospitals. But I'm sure she'll turn up soon. Or call home.

Jane I saw it happen.

Aidan You saw nothing.

Leo I don't think I can cope without her.

Jane I know what I saw.

Aidan Shut up Jane.

Leo *(Louder, but they ignore him)* I can't cope.

Jane Don't tell me to shut up.

Leo She told me she'd do it and I left her. God forgive me.

Jane I saw a woman jump off a bridge.

Leo Off a bridge. Floating down the river. Hair and snot.

Vicky When?

Jane An hour ago possibly.

Leo My Della.

Aidan It wasn't Della.

Jane Who was it then?

Aidan Your imagination.

Vicky Did you call the police?

Leo I can't tell the police, she'd be so cross. You don't know what she's like.
I have to go to her.

Jane Imagination? How dare you?

Leo is scratching his rash. Vicky stops him and gently looks at his neck.

Leo Not Della. Not my Della.

Vicky Try not to scratch. It's a heat rash. Have a shower, change your shirt and get some rest. If I find out anything I'll let you know. But I'm sure she's absolutely fine.

Leo *(Getting up to leave)* I'm nothing without her. I have to be with her.

Vicky Where are you going?

Leo She's waiting for me.

Vicky Get his shoes.

Aidan What?

Vicky He can't go far without shoes.

Aidan Leo, I've given you the wrong shoes.

Leo You leave my shoes.

Vicky That was effective.

Vicky stands in Leo's way, as he tries to barge past her, she shoulders him and winds him. They bring him to the floor. A mass of arms and legs. They make a grab for his shoes but he is kicking.

Leo You beasts.

Jane I can't undo the knots.

Vicky Just pull them off.

Leo Leave my shoes.

Aidan cries out in agony as he gets kicked in the balls during the struggle. This gives Leo enough time to get up and run, still limping slightly.

Vicky Parrots who threaten to jump off their perches rarely do.

Vicky leaves.

Jane and Aidan are alone. He is rolling on the floor in agony. She picks up the binoculars and looks out.

Scene 17

Alix's flat. Items from Della's apartment are there, cushions, Leo's shoes. The painting where Lara's was is now the one from Della's flat. Vicky's bag of things is still on the floor.

Alix is asleep in an armchair hugging an empty bottle of Pouilly Fume.

A voice can be heard off stage humming. It is Della. She walks on wearing rubber gloves, tidying up. She sees the bottle that Alix is hugging and tries to prise it out of her arms without waking her up.

Della Give it to mummy.

Alix *(Still asleep but clinging on)* Don't leave me.

Della You don't want this anymore and I do.

They struggle. Della gets the bottle and Alix wakes up.

Alix is bleary eyed and hungover. She stares at Della.

Alix Mum?

Della Sorry to wake you.

Alix Who are you?

Della You know who I am. You're very drunk.

Alix Where am I?

Della At home. I'm looking after you.

Alix I feel terrible, what time is it?

Della Past your bedtime.

Alix groans and staggers away, then stops and turns.

Della plumps up the cushions. Straightens the picture on the wall.

Alix You're not my mum. I know my mum.

Della I'm not your mum.

Alix You're – next door.

Della Della.

Della looks at her then pours some water in a glass and drops in an Alka Seltzer.

Alix How did you get in?

Della I climbed over.

Alix Climbed over what?

Della The balcony. My dress got stuck halfway and tore, but I think I can repair it.

Alix You climbed over the balcony?

Della I heard crying, I was worried about you. I'm a good neighbour.

Alix What's wrong with the front door?

Della You don't answer the door. (*Gently*) Drink this.

Alix looks at it suspiciously.

 It's Alka Selter. Make you feel better.

Alix I haven't got any Alka Seltzer.

Della I nipped back to get some.

Alix Over the balcony?

Della No, I went through the door that time. Drink.

Alix sips the drink.

 I tidied up in the kitchen for you. It looked like a class of six year olds had run amok. And I found some pans in that bag, much better than the others. So I put them in the cupboard.

Alix They're Vicky's. That's Vicky's bag. Don't touch Vicky's things.

Della stares at her. Alix holds her head and groans.

Della If it's any consolation I know how you're feeling.

Alix How can you?

Della A broken heart is the same whoever it belongs to. (*Pause*) Will the baby's father be moving in?

Alix No.

Della I couldn't help overhearing. I'm sorry.

Alix It's a mess. I played it all wrong.

Della I'm going to help you.

Alix I want her back.

Della I noticed you're vegetarian. I've always wanted to be vegetarian but Leo can't survive without meat. They say the animals are traumatised before they're killed, and the trauma stays in the meat. That's why there's so much depression, people get depressed from eating depressed animals.

Alix What's the point of it all if you haven't got the person you love?

Della There's no point. No reason. No meaning.

Alix looks at her.

Alix I'm going to bed.

Della I've made up the spare room for myself.

Alix stops.

I'll stroke you, help you get to sleep.

Alix looks at her incredulously then notices Leo's shoes. Della puts Vicky's jacket on.

On another part of the stage Vicky appears on the rooftop. She opens up a deck chair and sits, looking at the stars.

Alix Whose shoes are these?

Della Mine.

Alix And these cushions –

Della Did you know humans are the only animals who experience passion? With the exception of Leo, my husband. Leo's idea of passion is to explain the lifecycle of a shrimp. They can lay up to a million eggs at a time.

Alix notices the painting on the wall. She stares.

Alix Where's my painting?

Della I changed it. The other one was so violent.

Alix notices Della is wearing Vicky's Jacket.

Alix That's Vicky's jacket. Take it off.

Della strokes the jacket.

Della I watched a programme about clothes last week. I need to change my style. I've never worn leather before. Does that surprise you?

Alix Take it off, please and go home.

Della It's heavier than I thought.

Alix Della. I want to be alone.

Della Would you like to play cards? I play a lot of Patience these days.

Alix I'm not playing games with you.

Della I'm not playing games with you.

Alix Get out. Or I'll call the Police.

Della is offended. But she doesn't make to leave. She walks around Alix.

Della I've always wondered what you women do. What all the fuss is about. I've experienced a lot in my life but I've never been with a woman.

Alix Don't you know when to stop?

Della I'm just curious. No need to be rude.

Alix You want me to show you? You want me to fuck you? Is that what you want?

Della You make it sound so crude.

Alix It is fucking crude, and not to mention rude, that you should even bring it up.

Della I didn't mean that. You're making me sound awful.

Alix You're mad, you're complete fucking bonkers. I'm grieving for the love of my life and you're trying to get your leg over.

Della That's enough. Enough. Don't humiliate me. I didn't mean that. I don't want anything like that.

Della picks up the skipping rope, shaking. She flexes it and walks towards Alix.

Alix Get out of my flat.

Della Don't make me do this.

Alix Now.

Della I can't help it.

Della loops the rope over Alix.

Scene 18

The roof top. Vicky is watching flying lanterns sail across the sky. She is smoking a joint. Jane enters.

Jane They're so pretty.

Vicky Chinese flying lanterns.

Jane Floating silently. Little boats in the sky.

They watch them float away.

I love the city. Especially in summer. You can smell it.

She takes a deep breathe in. Then, recognising a pungent smell, takes a few more sniffs.

Vicky holds up the joint. She offers the remains to Jane who hesitates, then takes it.

They sit quietly for a few seconds.

Aidan went to look for Leo. Any news on Della?

Vicky shakes her head. Jane puffs on the joint.

You okay?

Vicky nods. She gets up and goes round the roof garden smelling the flowers. Jane notices the flowers for the first time.

Vicky Oxlips, honeysuckle.

Jane It's beautiful.

Vicky Sweet musk.

Jane How do you know all these?

Vicky I grew up in the country. Smell.

Jane goes to smell. They catch each other's eye, and then walk away from each other.

Vicky Wild Thyme. Even herbs.

Jane Rooftop, smoke, all I need is music.

Just at that point someone in the flats puts some music on, 'Up on the roof' (Carole King version).

They listen for a few moments then laugh.

Jane *(Pointing to the pants)* Why are you still carrying those things?

Vicky It's my OCD. I can't put them down. I have to hang onto them until I find who they belong to. I'm not squeamish. I'm a nurse.

Jane A nurse?

Vicky What?

Jane Nothing.

Vicky We don't wear starched uniforms and sexy black tights all the time.

Jane smiles.

Pause.

Jane I dared Aidan to ask me out last night so that I could dump him.

Vicky But you don't want to dump him.

Jane 'Oh what a tangled web we weave.'

Vicky You said it.

Pause.

Jane Will you and Alix get back together?

Vicky She's pregnant and it isn't mine.

Jane Oh.

The music fades out.

Vicky I don't resent her that, we wanted a baby when we were together, but it took us a year and a broken relationship for her not to conceive. Then we split up and within three months she's up the duff. She doesn't know any male donors as far as I know. She hasn't been meeting any men and she hasn't been to the clinic. I've been following her.

Pause.

There's going to be a storm later on. It's in the air.

Jane touches Vicky's arm. Vicky walks away.

Jane Do you think we imagine we see things that don't actually happen?

Vicky Probably. No one really knows what the brain is capable of. If we wanted to we could create rocket scientists out of 10 years olds.

Jane But where would they send their rockets?

Vicky Through old ladies letterboxes.

They smile. Their eye contact lingers.

Jane Do you believe in chemistry?

Vicky As in rocket science?

Jane No.

Jane takes Vicky's hand. They kiss. It becomes a hungry kiss. They remain holding one another.

Vicky Jane?

Jane Yes.

Vicky There's something I should tell you.

Jane Yes.

Vicky I'm a woman.

Pause.

Jane I know. I spotted. No stubble.

Vicky You're straight.

Jane Are you heterophobic?

Vicky No.

Jane Is it my kissing? Do I kiss straight? I can improve.

Vicky Your kissing is sensational.

Jane Sensational? No man has said that to me before. It takes a woman to tell me I'm a sensational kisser.

Jane strokes Vicky's face.

 You're so soft. Why do men have beards?

Vicky To catch crumbs which would otherwise end up in their leopard skin loincloths.

They hold each other and look out over the city.

Jane Let's run away together. Let's escape. We could rent a cottage on a island.

Vicky A Greek Island.

Jane And open a little bar.

Vicky With a dog.

Jane Big or small?

Vicky To fit in your beach bag.

Jane And we'd live by the beach. Do you play volleyball?

Vicky I do now.

Jane And every year our friends would come and spend the summer with us.

Vicky What would we do in the winter?

Jane smiles at her.

Jane Stay in bed of course.

Vicky Naturally.

Pause.

Jane Why do I pick the wrong men? All I want is a trustworthy man who's willing to fight for me. Is that so much to ask? What is it about me? (*Slowly it dawns on her*) Oh God – I'm gay. I'm gay. What will I tell them at work? I don't have to tell them, I can be in the closet. Then come out at weekends and spread my

rainbow wings. I'm going to have to change my wardrobe as well. Do you still wear dungarees?

Vicky I never wore dungarees.

Jane No dungarees then. Didn't Madonna wear dungarees?

Vicky Forget the dungarees.

Jane This is wonderful. It's clarity. Oh God, what about my parents? And my sister? They'll love it. They'll finally accept me. No, my Sister won't, she'll hate it. Sod it. I'm gay and I'm proud. *(She gets up and goes to the edge of the roof and shouts to the world)* I'm gay and I'm proud.

Vicky gets up to stop her going too close to the edge.

Jane Oops. Long way down.

Jane turns to Vicky.

Jane Meet me tomorrow.

Vicky What time?

Jane In exactly twelve hours.

Vicky Where?

Jane On the bridge. You will come?

Vicky Maybe.

Jane You are the most exciting thing that's ever happened to me. I want you.

Vicky You love Aidan.

Jane I want you. I'm gay. Oh God, I'm going to die a spinster.

Vicky Spinster and proud.

Jane We could be a double act, I'm Spinster

Vicky And I'm Proud.

Jane You should try me in bed.

Vicky Now?

Jane Definitely now.

Vicky Your place?

Jane I'll go and get my keys.

Vicky pulls her into a kiss as she is about to leave. Aidan enters and watches.

Aidan What is the matter with you? Can't you keep it in your pants?

They turn to him. Pause.

Jane Are you talking to me?

Aidan Her. Pawing you.

Jane I like her paws.

Aidan She's bewitched you.

Vicky Twenty-first century calling.

Aidan approaches threateningly. Jane holds them at arms length.

Aidan You've been ogling her since we met.

Vicky She's very oglable.

Jane Just for the record. I know exactly what I'm doing.

Aidan She's using you like she used Alix. She'll fuck you and disappear.

Jane You've been doing that to me for years. Oh, you're a man, it's okay.

Aidan Jane, this isn't you.

Vicky Alix is none of your business.

Aidan Alix wouldn't try and steal my girlfriend from under my nose.

Jane She's not stealing me, I'm not a possession.

Vicky is watching Aidan.

Aidan She's a woman. You're a woman. You're straight. Trust me on that. You're just trying something out. Testing the water. But now it's over. The fun's over, isn't it Vicky?

Vicky Why are you so protective of Alix?
Aidan I'm a good friend.
Vicky You're the only new man she's met.
Aidan I wouldn't know.
Vicky I would. The only new man in her life.

Aidan understands what she's getting at.

Aidan You come near here again and you'll be flying down the fast way.
Vicky Have you told her? (*Jane*)
Jane Told me what?
Aidan She likes flying.
Jane I'm confused.
Vicky (*Leaving*) Don't be. The fun's over. I have other victims lined up.
Jane Vicky?
Vicky He's willing to fight for you. For what it's worth.

Vicky exits.

Silence.

Aidan You're mine.
Jane Why are you behaving like this?
Aidan You are mine.
Jane Really?
Aidan All mine.
Jane Really?
Aidan No one is going to take you away from me.

Pause. Jane smiles.

Jane Really?

Aidan And I'm yours. Don't say 'really'.

Pause. He holds her.

Jane Look at that moon.

Aidan Our moon.

They look out over the city.

Jane Have you slept with Della.

Pause.

Aidan Why do you ask that?

Jane Is it a difficult question to answer?

Pause.

Aidan No. I haven't.

Scene 19

Alix's flat. Della is standing close to Alix with the rope still around her.

Della Tie me up.

Alix What?

Della Tie me up.

Alix No.

Della Do it.

Alix I can't.

Della Just a little bit.

Alix You need help.

Della It's liberating.

Alix It's not liberating.

Della Why won't anyone tie me up?

Alix Join an S&M group, they'll tie you up.

Della I don't want to join an S&M group.

Alix Don't shout at me.

Della I know I'm emotional. I know it. I don't know what comes over me. *(She takes some deep breaths)* I don't want to be like this. I get anxious. I need someone to hold me once in a while. That's all. Just hold me. Most people get that from someone. I don't. I should probably buy a pet but I'm allergic to fur.

Pause. Della tries controlling her hysteria. Alix is in two minds as to what to do. She goes closer. She tentatively reaches out and puts her arms around Della. Della melts into her at the touch. Alix holds her. Della calms.

I only wanted for us to be friends. That's all I wanted.

Alix We are friends.

Della Why do want to kick me out?

Alix Because you live next door.

Della You've got two rooms. I'll kill myself rather than go back to him. He's in bed now, snoring his head off as if I'm nothing to him. I can't go back to a man like that. I can just disappear. People disappear all the time. One minute they're there, the next they're not.

Alix You can't disappear, not next door.

Della Just for a while. I'll make a lovely home for you. I'll help you get over Vicky.

Alix I don't want to get over her.

Della That's just selfish.

Alix Can we not talk about Vicky?

Della All you think about is yourself. All my life I've been used. I'm not living for me anymore. Why do you want to ruin my life?

Alix I'm not ruining your life. Why would I want to ruin your life, I hardly know you?

Della is holding Alix tightly. Her hysterical outburst builds.

Della What have I done to deserve this? Why are you doing this to me? You can't talk to me like I'm some doormat that you use and throw out. I only want to make you happy. I can't breathe. I can't breathe.

Alix Relax. Breathe out slowly.

Della Nobody – wants – me.

Alix Ssh.

Della moves away from Alix, swiftly gets Leo's razor out of her pocket and removes the blade.

Della I'll show you.

Alix Put it down.

Della I'm not going back to him.

Alix Della, you're scaring me.

Della holds it to her wrist.

Della I've nothing, no one to live for.

Alix You have.

Della I want to die. Then I'll feel better.

Alix If you cut across the nerves in your wrist you won't die because I won't let you but you will probably lose the use of your hand.

Della I don't care.

Alix I care.

Della Tie me up.

Alix No.

Della I'll do it. I'll do it.

Della drags the razor across her wrist. Alix makes a grab for her and slaps the razor out of her hand.

Alix Stop it.

Alix picks up the rope and quickly wraps it around Della.

Della Tighter.

Alix pulls a little tighter.

Della Tighter.

Della begins to relax.

Della Thank you.

Alix Is that too tight?

Della It's good. It's good. I feel much better already. *(Pause)* But I might scream.

Alix No, don't scream.

Doorbell rings. Della looks up surprised.

Della Leo.

Alix I'm going to answer it.

Della If you do I'll scream.

Alix Then scream.

Della He'll kill you if he sees me like this. You don't know him.

Little scream like noises are emitting from Della. Alix is torn.

 It's coming. I can't stop it.

Alix quickly tears off the gaffer tape around the skipping rope handle and sticks it over Della's mouth just as she takes a big breath in preparation for the big scream. Della is surprised and swallows the scream. They look at each other.

Vicky *(Off, quietly)* Alix? It's me.

Della and Alix look towards the door. Della frowns. Alix is alarmed. She shoves Della onto the balcony out of sight.

Vicky enters. She still carries the giraffe pants.

Vicky Sorry, I leant on the bell.

Alix Hi.

Vicky You okay?

Alix No I'm not okay.

Vicky I wanted to –

Alix It's all where you left it.

Vicky – apologise.

Alix is worried that Vicky will find Della and is flustered.

Alix The saucepans are somewhere.

Vicky picks up the empty bottle of Pouilly Fume and reads the label.

Vicky I'll get my stuff then.

Alix You do that.

Vicky I was wrong to behave the way I did. Unforgivable. I was wrong to leave you. I accept it. But it wasn't all my fault. It takes two to get together and two to split up. By the way, congratulations on your choice of father. It didn't take much to figure out.

Alix There's nothing to figure out. I was going to tell you.

Vicky Are they his shoes?

Alix No.

Vicky There's another man as well?

Alix There are hundreds. I can't keep my hands off them. One every night.

Vicky I preferred Lara's painting to that one.

Alix Just go.

Vicky A blue fruit bowl? Wow, they're really popular around here.

Vicky spots the razor blade. She picks it up. She looks at Alix. There is a muffled sobbing sound coming from the balcony.

Vicky Is someone here?

Alix No

Vicky walks towards the balcony, Alix tries to stop her.

Alix Vicky.

Vicky stares round the windows, then reaches out and pulls Della into view.

Vicky Jesus, Alix.

Vicky pulls off the gaffer tape.

Della Easy tiger.

Vicky puts down the pants she is holding and undoes the rope.

Vicky Is this your skipping rope?

Alix You know it is.

Della We're both consenting adults.

Vicky begins to back out.

Vicky I've obviously walked in on something.

Della Yes you have. Please leave us.

Alix No, don't Vicky.

Della I'll have your key if you don't mind.

Vicky is surprised but gives it to her.

Alix You can keep the key.

Della What does she need a key for?

Vicky I don't.

Alix Keep it.

Della Have some sense Alix. You're tired. You go off to bed, I'll get rid of her.

Alix I don't want to get rid of her.

Della It's for your own good.

Alix Give it to me.

Della I know how her type behave, how they wheedle their way back in.

Alix Della, give me the key.

Della hands it over.

Vicky You're Della? Unbelievable.

Della What?

Vicky I've been phoning round hospitals looking for you. People are worrying themselves sick about you. And you're wearing my jacket.

Della Who's worried about me?

Vicky Your husband thinks you've drowned. A woman jumped into the river and he thinks it's you.

Della Why would I jump into a river? Just tell him I'm not coming home.

Alix She climbed over the balcony. Forced her way in. I can't get rid of her.

Della And I tied myself up and put tape over my mouth.

Vicky is still watching Della.

Vicky Kidnapping is serious, Alix.

Alix I haven't kidnapped her. I'm a qualified Vet.

Vicky Shut it, you can explain yourself down at the station.

Alix What?

Vicky I'm arresting you.

Alix You can't arrest me.

Della You're a policewoman? She kept that a secret. Look, I'm not being kidnapped. Leave us alone. We'll sort it out.

Vicky I'm calling my Sergeant.

Alix You don't have a –

Vicky You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say may be used against you in a court of law.

Alix You joined the police? You did it.

Della You don't have to mention me in any of this.

Della takes off Vicky's jacket.

Alix Vicky, it'll ruin my career. You can't hate me that much.

Vicky You should have thought about that before you committed your heinous crimes. Hold out your hands.

Alix Don't you dare handcuff me. I will never speak to you again.

Vicky It's what you deserve, punk.

Vicky gets some handcuffs out of her pocket and goes to Alix.

Alix Don't touch me. I mean it.

Vicky Save the crap. *(to Della)* Madam, you are free to go home.

Vicky snaps the handcuffs onto Alix, they are pink and fluffy but Alix doesn't see them as she has her eyes closed trying not to cry. Neither does Della see them.

Della I'll stay here, if that's okay.

Vicky *(Angry)* It's not okay. I'm designating this flat a crime scene. Move it or I'll do you for wasting police time.

Della Charming.

Della slowly walks towards the door.

Vicky waits, then pretends to speak into a crackly radio.

Vicky Back up requested. Sixth floor Riverside Wharf. Alpha Bravo Stella
 McCartney. Over.

Alix opens her eyes when she hears this and then sees the handcuffs. Vicky winks at her.

Della notices the pants on the chair. She holds them up.

Della He's been here as well?

Della takes them. Vicky and Alix watch her go. Vicky goes to collect her stuff.

Alix Thanks.

Vicky What I haven't taken just chuck away.

Alix Where are you going?

Vicky Home.

Alix Stay with me.

Vicky I don't know you anymore.

Alix She barged her way in.

Vicky It's not her.

Alix *(Pause)* I didn't sleep with him. I wouldn't.

Silence. In another part of the stage Della walks to her balcony and looks out. She stands in the moonlight.

Vicky You don't need me. You can do it without me.

Alix I don't know if I can.

Vicky hesitates.

Vicky I don't know if I can either.

Vicky takes her bags and leaves Alix on her own still in the pink fluffy handcuffs.

Scene 20

Della's flat. Della is standing in the darkness, looking out through the balcony doors. The sun is beginning to rise. Aidan enters.

Aidan Leo?

Silence

The door was open.

Della I wasn't sure if I was staying.

Aidan Della.

Della Everything's wasted.

Aidan Are you alright?

Della I'm drowning. Everyday I wake up and drown. Suffocating. It washes over me. Sometimes I hold my breath and go with it and that's easy, but some days I try and fight it, and then I'm waving to the shore, hanging onto driftwood, clinging to anything, anyone that will briefly take my weight. But I know I'm going under again and no one can hear me.

Aidan Leo's been frantic.

Pause.

Della I wish you'd kept the sugar bowl. While you had it, you had something of me.

Aidan It was just a sugar bowl.

Della It meant more.

Aidan You have to move on.

Della Exactly one year. Did I mean so little to you?

Aidan A year's a long time. A lot's happened since then.

Della Nothing's happened to me. I'm still here.

Aidan I'm sorry.

Della Sorry? Big word for a small man.

He makes to leave.

I found your boxers. The ones I gave you.

She gives the pants to him and stops him from going.

Aidan They're not mine.

He puts them down.

Della I found them in her flat.

Aidan Whose flat?

Della Alix's, your new conquest.

Aidan She's not my conquest.

Della *(Looks into his eyes)* She's pregnant.

Aidan *(Unemotionally)* Is she?

Della Nothing to do with you then?

Aidan I have a girlfriend. Jane.

Della Plain Jane?

Aidan We're getting married. I'm in love. Jane's the one.

Della You wouldn't know 'the one' if it smacked you in the face.

Aidan Your problem, Della, is that you've let yourself down and you can't blame yourself and can't forgive anyone else.

Della And you're the expert on disappointment.

Aidan You chose to marry a weak excuse for a man with no personality. You didn't have to stay with him.

Della You're talking about my husband.

Aidan Come on. If you want out, deal with the shit and get out. Pack your bags and go. Don't just make idle threats.

Leo appears in the doorway.

Leo Della.

She sees him. He goes to her and hugs her.

Thank God. Thank God.

She moves out of his grasp and focuses on Aidan to stop him leaving.

Della Everyone's dispensable to you.

Aidan No they're not.

Della You're not in love. You're infatuated. It won't last.

Aidan Be happy for me.

Della People shouldn't expect to live out their lives with one person. If we didn't expect it we wouldn't feel obliged to do it. Cooped together day in, day out. Finishing each other's sentences, picking fluff off their clothes, throwing wine at each other. You loved me once.

Aidan *(Aware of Leo)* No I didn't.

Della Those afternoons. Looking at me. Touching me. Making me laugh. Making love to me. Freeing me. *(She turns to Leo)* I should have left you then. What have I got in my life? What have I got?

Leo You've got me and Anthony.

Della *(She holds her chest)* In here I'm on my own. I used to have a light inside. I used to shine brightly. I've been imprisoned with mediocrity and indifference for so long there's nothing left but inertia. I should never have married you. I was in love with someone else. I was in love with the milkman. But he was married. *(To Aidan)* I fell pregnant and when Leo found out about the baby he proposed. Leo did the honourable thing. Anthony isn't his.

Leo That's enough.

Jane enters.

Della Leo's the perfect gentleman, except for one thing. He won't fuck me. He won't screw me. Not like you did. You made me feel alive.

Jane What's going on?

Aidan Jane.

Della Tell me you love me.

Aidan *(To Jane)* Let's go.

Della Tell me you love me. Just once.

Jane *(Quietly)* I trusted you.

Della Say it. Say the words, Della I love you. Say it.

Jane *(Turning to leave)* How could you?

Aidan *(Stopping her)* I haven't done anything.

Della *(Whispers)* Please.

Leo Della.

Della Don't.

Jane You lied to me.

Aidan I didn't lie. You asked me about her in the most seismic moment of my life. I didn't want to be thinking about her then.

Jane I asked because I needed the truth. The actual answer didn't matter, the truth did.

Aidan She means nothing to me. It was a year ago.

Jane The principle is trust Aidan. And that's blown away. It's ruined.

Aidan No it isn't. I've never felt this right about anyone.

Della That's what he told me.

Aidan You interfering bitch.

Leo Don't speak to her like that.

Aidan If you'd been more attentive as a husband she wouldn't be in such a mess. If you'd been more of a man.

Leo And your idea of a man is to sleep with any female that moves.

Aidan I helped her.

Leo You destroyed her.

Aidan No, you've done that.

Leo I stood by her. I love her. I love my son.

Jane That's how you see yourself, as a man who helps women. That's what you did for me all those years. You serviced me when I needed it.

Aidan Don't belittle what's happened between us. I was blind then.

Jane Nothing's changed.

Aidan What do you want me to do? Make an honest woman of you? I will. Marry me.

Jane No. *(beat)* You're dumped.

She walks out of Della's light and into the area of Aidan's flat. Aidan follows her.

The lights remain low on Della and Leo. Leo takes Della's hand and kneels down holding her round the waist. She strokes his hair.

Alix holds Vicky's jacket. Still in handcuffs she makes a phone call and waits.

Thunder is approaching. Followed by rain.

Aidan Jane.

Jane You only asked me out because it was a game. You didn't want to go out with me. You've had plenty of opportunity in the past. I know you too well, Aidan. I adore you, but I couldn't trust a man who cheats on women as much as you. I don't want to always be jealous, watching over my shoulder for any beauty that catches your eye.

Aidan I've never given my love to another woman. I promise you.

Jane We weren't made for each other. We were good friends who have had a wonderful night pretending, and now it's over. I've dumped you. You knew I would. I've done it, I'm a dumper. And it feels shit. I thought I would feel good. But I feel shit. It's easier being dumped.

Aidan Don't take it out on me. Don't blame me for the way other men have treated you. I'm not them.

Jane You lied. Small or big it's still a lie. Don't you get it?

Pause. He is deeply upset but holds it in.

Aidan You've just given up the best thing that ever happened to you. Look at yourself. You're not getting any younger. I only asked you out because I felt sorry for you. So don't think you're dumping me. You can't dump me. Do you hear? You – can't – dump – me.

Pause. Jane looks at him then leaves.

The rain is now heavy. Aidan stands alone.

Alix puts down the phone and hugs Vicky's jacket.

Leo takes off the trainers and places them down neatly. Della gets a first aid box and takes out a bandage.

The sun comes up.

Scene 21

Della's flat. She is bandaging Leo's bad ankle, gently and lovingly.

Della Did your shrimps go down well?

Leo Swimmingly. Angus sent his regards.

Della Was Mrs Angus there?

Leo Her name's Alesha.

Della Oh yes, Alesha.

Leo I was wrong about their friend on Everest.

Della The one who fell off the top?

Leo Yes. Well he didn't. He came home and opened a climbing shop in Dunstable.

Della In Dunstable?

Leo He's doing very well.

He picks a piece of fluff off her shoulder. She notices. She finishes his bandage but she doesn't let go of his foot yet.

Della Mrs Peabody came up this morning to tell us a body washed up in the river.

Leo How awful.

Della I'm sorry I worried you. And there's some terrible storm damage up and down the country. *(She finishes the bandage)* How does that feel?

Leo Good. Do you want to go to Africa? The Bishop asked me to help with his project getting water into remote villages where the wells have dried up. I'm bored of shrimps. We've nothing to –

Della – nothing to stay here for.

Leo I said I'd talk to you, see if you liked the idea. There'll be a job for you too. We could maybe stop off in Canada on the way.

Della I like the idea.

They smile.

Leo It was a nice dinner but you were right, he is a boring bastard.

Alix has fallen asleep hugging Vicky's jacket, and still in the handcuffs.

Aidan picks up the binoculars and looks out.

Della tidies up the first aid box. Leo tries walking on his foot.

Della I might invite Alesha round for coffee before we leave.

Leo Good idea.

He picks up the giraffe pants. She sees him and takes them off him. She throws them out the window.

Della I don't think I'll celebrate my birthday this year after all.

Leo It's how you feel that matters. I'm going to phone Anthony later.

Della looks at Leo. He smiles tentatively at her. She remembers something.

Della The bishop was right about one thing, they had a tsunami in Grimsby. No one forecast it. No one saw it coming.

She straightens the cushions.

I may start going to church. What do you think?

Lights fade to black.

End of play.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Coghlan, Lin (2008) *Seminar: Story-telling through Character*, 11th November 2008, University of Birmingham.
- De Angelis, April (2008) *Seminar: Transgressing Boundaries*. 13th October 2008, University of Birmingham 2008.
- Kent, Sayan (2008) *Pitch Document: Anthony*. For Pitch Day, October 2008, University of Birmingham.
- Kent, Sayan (2009) *The Strangeness of Caged Animals*, Submission draft, unpublished play script, University of Birmingham.
- Waters, Steve (2008) *Supervision*, University of Birmingham, 5th October 2008.

Secondary Sources / Works Cited

- Ayckbourn, Alan (2004) *The Crafty Art of Playmaking*, London, Faber and Faber.
- Edgar, David (2009) *How Plays Work*, London, Nick Hern Books.
- Egri, Lajos (1960) *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, New York, Simon and Shuster.
- Esslin, Martin (1988) *The Field of Drama*, London, Methuen.
- Hirsh, Foster (2001) *Love, Sex, Death and the Meaning of Life, The Films of Woody Allen*, USA, Da Capo Press.
- Lavery, Bryony (2009) *Interview with Laura Barnett*, The Guardian Online.
www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2009/jun/09/bryony-lavery-interview
- Steiner, George (1982) *The Death Of Tragedy*, London, Faber and Faber.