

'NOT QUITE AS PLANNED' - (50 minutes in length)

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SYNOPSIS

Psychotherapist **Esme** is struggling to fully understand the psyche of **Charles**, the new man in her life. In an attempt to unearth more she has invited him around to her house but, unbeknownst to him, also her daughter **Steph** as a third wheel. Esme is convinced that Charles is hiding something and she needs to peel away his staid, formal exterior to reach what lies beneath.

On a wet night things start to unravel as soon as Steph turns up with her baby daughter **Savannah** (Savvy) in tow due to her husband having a stomach bug. Unfortunately, she quickly realises she's not feeling very well herself and there's an immediate pass the baby situation.

When the door goes again Esme is preparing to explain the situation to Charles only to see her ex-husband **Don** there instead, a man who left her for 'younger model' **Molly** a few years back. He is the polar opposite of Charles in every way possible and has turned up because he's now cheated on Molly and – after being evicted - is looking for somewhere to stay.

After Don gets ejected, and while Steph is toilet-hopping, Charles turns up and with the two women off faffing around he rehearses a speech he intends to deliver to Esme whilst giving her a USB stick which 'explains why he is not worthy of her, plus his inability to express feelings/emotion'. He hears Savvy cry and drops the stick, which rolls under the sofa edge out of sight. The women then return.

Things worsen when Esme gets a call from a therapy 'client' - having a meltdown – and has to go and visit him. With Steph and Charles stuck together their awkwardness is broken when she has to visit the bathroom again. As he resumes his search for the USB stick Don quietly lets himself back in and not seeing the crouched Charles walks straight through the lounge unnoticed and off again.

The door goes and - still unable to find the stick - Charles opens it. In breezes **Flo**, another client of Esme suffering from 'no filter syndrome' who also wants to see her out of hours. She is very candid about her views on Charles...and also Don when he comes in. In fact she wants everyone out the house, including the waning Steph, so she can see Esme alone on her return.

With Charles feeling increasingly ill at ease – and still unable to find his USB stick – Esme rings Steph to warn that Flo has left a message and is on her way around and to keep her away from Charles at all costs due to her manner, but as she's on speakerphone everyone hears, irking all in the room.

With the night unravelling Molly then turns up to discuss things with Don but her **Gran** has followed her, determined she doesn't patch things back up with him, and with Flo hindering with her blunt comments the two older women square up. Esme rings again – still on speakerphone – and things deteriorate even further, with only Charles trying to be helpful and care for both Steph & Savvy.

When Esme eventually returns she has to deal with the fallout: Steph's ailing, Don and Flo left together and Charles has disappeared altogether. She finds his USB stick, plays it on her laptop and as she's listening to Charles emptying his heart he returns. Don also turns back up as Flo's fed up with him already. Steph reluctantly says he can stay with her, leaving Esme and Charles together. Strangely, the evening's events have helped to 'loosen up' Charles after all.

CAST OF CHARACTERS (F = 5/M = 2)

Esme.....free-spirited psychotherapist in her mid-40's – early 50's
Charles.....very formal, staid man in his mid-40's – early 50's
Steph.....daughter of Esme & Don in her mid-late 20's and mother of baby Savannah
Don.....ageing lothario, ex-husband of Esme/father of Steph in his mid-40's – early 50's
Flo.....loose cannon client of Esme who has no filter in her 40's
Molly.....mid 20's – early 30's woman who Don left Esme for
Gran.....Molly's maternal grandmother in late 60's – mid 70's

(The simple set is the lounge of a bungalow. Downstage left is the front door that exits outside and a TV set is to the left of that in the corner of the stage. A curtained window is in the left wall upstage from the door. Along the back wall is a bookcase. Downstage right is an exit, through which the kitchen, bedrooms, bathroom, conservatory etc are all reached. A sideboard is against the right wall upstage from this exit. In the centre of the room is a sofa angled towards the TV set with an armchair to its left. Wedged up behind the sofa is a table with a couple of hard chairs at it.)

(**ESME** is pacing anxiously up and down in the room, pausing to look out through the curtained window then pacing again. F/X: Car door slamming. **ESME** looks back out the window and becalms. Seconds later she hears another car door slam, looks perplexed and runs back to the window. Her calmness then disappears as she opens the front door then stands nervously in the doorway. **STEPH** then arrives with an umbrella over her head and holding a baby seat in her other hand, with her handbag around her shoulder. She drops the umbrella by the coat stand at the side of the door.)

ESME: What...? Why have you brought Savvy?

STEPH: (Drolly.) And a good, wet and windy evening to you too mother.

ESME: Sorry, I'm a bag of nerves, I really want this to work and need you to be focussed so that...

STEPH: I'm sorry but Sam's got a bug so I **had** to bring her. And another thing...as I was driving over...

(F/X: Loud gurgling sound.)

STEPH: (Holding tummy.) I started feeling a bit jippy myself, so I'm wondering if I've caught it off him

(**STEPH** puts the car seat and her handbag on the table.)

ESME: Look, I know this is all a bit odd, especially as I've only been going out with him a few months, but I just think there's something within him that needs teasing out.

STEPH: But...**you're** the therapist. What makes you think that introducing him to your daughter is going to somehow help 'crack the nut'?

ESME: I'm just not sure if it's because he's got something to hide, or because he's painfully shy, or both. I just thought you could help me 'peel the onion', as it were.

STEPH: Remember that peeling an onion can end in tears.

ESME: I just thought that by having a third wheel here it might...

STEPH: Scare him off...if he's **that** shy?

ESME: Hmm, good point.

STEPH: I'm not being funny mum...but from what you've told me about him...he sounds...I don't know...a little fragile? A bit of a wuss perhaps? Not macho...like dad, the opposite in fact.

ESME: If by that you mean he's not a womanising cheat then no...he's happily his **polar** opposite.

STEPH: Hmm, good point.

(F/X: Loud gurgling sound.)

STEPH: (Rubbing stomach.) Sorry mum, I'm going to have to visit the little girl's room.

(**STEPH** runs off downstage right and **ESME** walks to the table where she peeks into the car seat.)

ESME: (In childish voice) Hello Savannah, it's Nana...yes it is...

(**STEPH** pokes her head back inside the room.)

STEPH: Oh...and I forgot to tell you mum...leave Savvy be as she's only just...

(F/X: The sound of a baby crying is immediately heard.)

STEPH: Dropped off.

(**STEPH** exits again. As the crying continues **ESME** starts gently swaying the car seat back and forth.)

ESME: (Singing.) Rock-a-bye Savvy, On a tree top, Crying so loud, Now please make it stop...

(The baby cries louder still so **ESME** takes her out of the car seat and cuddles her to her shoulder. As the crying gradually subsides, the sound of a car door slamming outside is heard and she starts crying again. **ESME** panics, thinks about giving the baby to **STEPH** but the crying subsides again, so she goes to put her back in the car seat. F/X: Loud doorbell chiming a tune and baby crying again.)

ESME: Ssh ssh ssh...there's a good girl...(walking downstage right: calling out.)...are you nearly done in there? He's here...(tersely to baby.)...oh shush...(putting baby back in car seat.)...sorry Savannah, I meant **please** be quiet for Nana...

(F/X: Toilet flush being pulled. **ESME** puts the car seat onto the sofa so not immediately visible and the crying subsides. She then goes to door and opens it but is disappointed to see it's **DON**, scruffily dressed in jeans, t-shirt, a gaudy sport-themed jacket and trainers. He darts in out of the rain.)

DON: About time, it's like an elephant relieving itself out there.

ESME: (Shocked.) Wh...what the hell are **you** doing here? (Looking out then closing door.)

DON: Charming.

(**STEPH** wearily enters downstage right.)

DON: **Here** she is, I **thought** I saw you, that's why I made a detour so that I could see my two women ...*(seeing car seat excitedly.)*...or should I say three?

STEPH: Dad don't...she's only just...

(**DON** picks up the car seat. F/X: The sound of a baby crying again.)

STEPH: Dropped off.

ESME: Firstly, I am **not** your woman, I **was** your wife...and secondly, to re-iterate my earlier question ...what the hell are you doing here?

DON: I **told** you, I saw our darling daughter so diverted to where **she** was going...namely here.

ESME: Yes, but you live miles from here...

DON: (Sighing.) If you must know Ez...Molly's kicked me out.

STEPH: Why?

DON: (Sheepishly.) Um...

ESME: You've cheated on **her** now, haven't you?

(**DON** hangs his head.)

ESME: We haven't got time for this now...you **have** to leave. I'm expecting someone any minute.

DON: But...what about Steph being here?

ESME: **That's** planned...I want her to meet him.

DON: **Him?** You mean...you've moved on?

ESME: Well, at least I waited till the marriage was over.

DON: Ooh, that hurt. Look Ez, as I'm here, is there anything you want me to do?

ESME: Yes...leave...*(ushering DON towards the front door.)*. Now...goodbye.

DON: But...where am I going to stay?

ESME: Why not crawl back into the hole you came out of?

DON: Ooh you're hard, you've got a half brick for a heart you have.

ESME: Well, you made me like that...*(opening door.)*...now...goodnight.

(**ESME** pushes **DON** outside and closes the door behind him.)

ESME: Oh, this is all going wrong.

STEPH: It'll be okay mum, we're getting all the gremlins out the works at the start.

ESME: (Nodding serenely.) Right, you're right...(taking a long, deep breath in through her nose then exhaling lengthily and melodically.)...c...a...l...mmmmmmmmmmmm.

STEPH: That's new.

ESME: I find it helps.

STEPH: Um...you were quite harsh on dad just then.

ESME: It was the only way I could get rid of him...I couldn't risk him still being here when Charles arrives, nor can he crop up in conversation. Nor, for that matter, can Charles's divorce, **his** family history, **his** state of mind...

STEPH: So, what you're saying is...it's going to be like treading on eggshells...

ESME: (Nodding.) Softly softly catchee monkey, gently does it, kid gloves...all those things.

STEPH: Is there anything we **can** talk about?

ESME: Yes, of course...just follow my lead.

STEPH: You're...you're not treating him more as a patient than a boyfriend...are you?

(F/X: Car door slamming outside.)

ESME: I'll open the door, we don't want the chime setting Savvy off again...(walking towards front door.)...and it's 'client'...not patient.

(F/X: Loud gurgling sound.)

STEPH: Oh dear, I think I'm going to have to go again.

ESME: Well, can you take Savvy with you so that you can be introduced together in a minute?

STEPH: (Sighing heavily.) This guy better be worth it.

(**STEPH** picks up the car seat and hurriedly exits downstage right. **ESME** opens the front door and **CHARLES** enters wearing a three piece suit, with a waterproofed jacket over his head.)

CHARLES: It's raining canines and felines out there.

ESME: No elephant then?

CHARLES: What? No, no pachyderms outside.

(**ESME** holds out her arms for a hug and kiss but **CHARLES** just drapes his jacket over them.)

CHARLES: Thanks...it's a bit wet so I should hang it up quick. That car driving away just then...it looks like the same one that did a u-turn in front of me not ten minutes ago...forced me off the road it did.

(**ESME** cringes then shakes the jacket and hangs it on the coat stand.)

ESME: Oh dear. I...um...need to check on something a minute, make yourself at home.

(**ESME** exits downstage right then **CHARLES** pulls a small USB stick out of his pocket. He starts mentally rehearsing a speech then gets upset but manages to pull himself together.)

CHARLES: (Sniffing.) Dearest Esmerelda, I have things to tell you...but as I am so poor at expressing my feelings – and incapable of conveying emotions - I have had to express everything in this recorded message...which I'd like you to watch in your own time. So, farewell fair Esmerelda and...

(F/X: Baby screaming loudly off.)

(**CHARLES** is so surprised by the sudden sound that he drops the USB stick on the floor behind the sofa/under the table but before he can stoop to look for it **ESME** enters.)

ESME: (Looking back.) Well, I didn't expect to see her in the hallway, did I?

STEPH: (Entering with the baby seat.) Well, I could hardly take her in with me, could I?

(**CHARLES** freezes and stands back against the table as he and **STEPH** catch sight of each other.)

ESME: Charles, let me introduce to you my daughter Steph and my granddaughter Savvy.

CHARLES: That's Stephanie and Savannah, am I right?

(**STEPH** and **ESME** look at each other.)

ESME: Um...Charles likes to use people's full names, don't you Charles?

CHARLES: That's correct Esmerelda.

STEPH: Well, personally speaking...I prefer brevity. I like to save my breath and use as few syllables as possible. You're lucky...Charles is only one syllable...so I can't really shorten it. Who knows though...if we get to know each other I might stretch it to Charlie...or even shorten it to Chas.

(**CHARLES** holds his chest and sways in shock. **STEPH** holds her stomach. F/X: Loud gurgling sound.)

STEPH: Will you excuse me for a minute?

(**STEPH** hands the baby seat to **ESME** then quickly exits downstage right.)

ESME: Sorry about that, she's a little...you know...forthright. Now, why don't you...?

(**ESME's** mobile phone rings. She takes it out, looks at it then puts the baby seat on the table.)

ESME: I'm going to have to take this. Sorry.

(**CHARLES** smiles and nods then as **ESME** walks away towards the window he leans down by the sofa/table looking for the USB stick on the floor.)

ESME: (Into phone.) Hello Tim? Yes...yes, calm down...calm down, tell me what's happened...

(**CHARLES** looks and feels frantically around on the floor for the stick whilst looking up occasionally to ensure **ESME** is looking the other way.)

ESME: (Into the phone.) Wh...what do you mean...you looked in the mirror and didn't see yourself? Who was it then? No-one? No...no I don't think this means you're a vampire. Okay...I'm **sure** you're not one. **No**, no don't smash it...that won't solve anything. Look Tim...you know that this is just another manifestation of your low self-esteem. You **are** worthy. You are **not** a nonentity. Got that?

(In sweeping around on the floor for the stick **CHARLES** knocks the table and this starts the baby off again. F/X: Baby crying. **CHARLES** quickly stands up and looks innocently at **ESME** as she turns.)

STEPH: (Shouting: off.) **Who** started her off again?

ESME: (Shouting back.) She's just missing her mum...that's all...(into phone.)...sorry Tim...not you. Yes, I know you miss your mum **too**...it's all part of what we've been...no, no please don't cry Tim...

(F/X: Flush going: off. As **ESME** turns back away to resume her phone call **CHARLES** gently shushes the baby but to no avail then lowers to his knees so his eyes are at table top level while he feels around for the stick on the floor beneath. **STEPH** then re-enters downstage right and looks at **CHARLES**. He sees her then slowly stands up.)

CHARLES: I...I was...um playing pee-po...to try and...and...

ESME: (Into phone.) All right...all right Tim...calm down...(sharply.)...no, don't come round, stay there, I'll come over to you...but I won't be able to stay long...see you in a bit.

(Both **CHARLES** and **STEPH** look horrified. **ESME** closes her phone.)

ESME: I have to go.

STEPH: (Through gritted teeth.) Yes, I gathered.

ESME: Well, **you've** been 'having to go' ever since you've been here.

STEPH: Not through choice I can assure you.

ESME: I won't be long I promise...(pecking **CHARLES** on cheek.)...you'll be okay, won't you?

CHARLES: (Smiling falsely.) Course I will...(walking her to door: quietly.)...be quick though... please.

(**CHARLES** slowly closes the door then equally slowly turns and he and **STEPH** look awkwardly at each other. The baby is still crying.)

STEPH: I...I'm going to feed her, see if that calms her down.

(They both stare at each other for a while.)

CHARLES: Um...all right...(realising.)...oh, do you want me to go while you...?

STEPH: No, it's okay, I'll go into a bedroom. Will you be all right out here...on your own?

CHARLES: (Bemused.) Um...yes, I think I'll be fine.

(**STEPH** nods, picks up the car seat and exits downstage right. **CHARLES** breathes a sigh of relief then drops down under the table to look again for the stick. The front door then quietly unlocks and a wet **DON** enters stealthily, closing the door behind him. He is bemused to see no-one in the room. He then tiptoes quickly straight through the room with **CHARLES** not seeing him and vice versa, exiting downstage right. **CHARLES** then stands up - still unable to locate the stick – and is about to push the sofa forward to look under it when the doorbell chimes. He decides he will have to answer it. As he opens it a wet **FLO** pushes her way in then looks at **CHARLES** as he closes the door behind her.)

FLO: Who the hell are you? Oh, don't say she's got another patient...I mean client...here already. I need to see her urgently so you're going to have to take a hike I'm afraid. My need is greater than yours. What **is** your problem by the way? Oh, don't tell me...you're obviously formal and uptight... the way you're dressed like a store mannequin. This is Esme Clark's...not Savile Row.

(**CHARLES** goes to answer but **DON** re-enters downstage right with his shirt undone and his jacket in his hand, which he throws over an armchair. He is wiping his hair with a towel.)

FLO: Hello...hello, what's going on in here tonight?

(**DON** stops drying his hair and all three look at each other.)

CHARLES: You! Didn't you just drive off? And didn't you run me off the road earlier?

DON: Whoa. Questions questions. I have a few of my own. Who the hell are you two and what are you doing in my house?

FLO: **Your** house? Oh, I know who **you** are. You're the cheating ex-husband who threw her aside for a younger model, aren't you? I bet you had a mid-life crisis then continued acting twenty years younger than you were...no matter how ridiculous you looked.

DON: Excuse me but who are you...and did she tell you these things herself?

FLO: I'm Flo, a client of hers...and I didn't know, I just guessed. I can tell just by looking at you that you're an ageing lothario.

CHARLES: Look, I'm sorry to put my foot down here Florence - and I'm guessing your name is Donald - but as far as I know I'm the only one who is actually **meant** to be here.

FLO: What's with the full names? Ah, you must be the new boyfriend? All preened, prim and proper.

CHARLES: (Hurt.) She...she told you things about me?

FLO: No, again I guessed. I say as I find. Now, I can't be doing with full names...or even shortened ones for that matter...I'm more into nicknames, so **you**...(to **DON**.)...Peter Pan...I will refer to as PP...and you...(to **CHARLES**.)...Stuffed Shirt...I will call Stuff. So...PP and Stuff.

CHARLES: Well, strictly speaking then I should be SS...but I can see how that might sound so I... (pausing.)...heh, hang on a minute.

FLO: Right, that's enough chit-chat from you pair of goobers...I need to speak to the main woman without either of you distracting us, so where **is** she?

(**STEPH** wearily enters from downstage right.)

FLO: Now who's **this**? It's like Paddington Station in here, so again I must ask everyone to vacate so that I can talk with Esme.

DON: Where's Savvy?

FLO: What...there's someone else **again**?

STEPH: (Wearily slumping into sofa.) Don't mind me.

CHARLES: Um...did it...um...go all right?

STEPH: No, she wouldn't take it.

CHARLES: (Naively.) Take what?

STEPH: (Sighing heavily.) The fifth amendment...what do you think? My teat. She obviously knows I'm not feeling right.

DON: What...and you've left her in a bedroom on her own? I'm going to get her...

STEPH: (Snapping.) **Leave** her dad. She wakes at the drop of a hat and it's like King's Cross out here.

FLO: I thought Paddington but King's Cross works as well.

STEPH: Excuse me...but who **are** you?

FLO: I'm someone desperately searching for your mum...

STEPH: A patient?

FLO: Client, yes.

CHARLES: Well Florence you're out of luck I'm afraid, she's just left to see another troublesome client, Timothy.

DON: What **is** it with you and all these full names? The only people that ever called me Donald were my parents...and that was only when I was naughty.

FLO: Which I'm guessing was all the time...and seemingly you haven't changed much...(turning to **CHARLES**)...and what did **you** mean by **another** troublesome client?

STEPH: (Tersely.) Look, the only ones meant to be here are me and him...(lying down and pointing to **CHARLES**)...so why don't you two just leave and...

(F/X: Baby crying off.)

DON: **Now** you've done it. Mister Formal there has already muscled in on my wife...I'm damned if he's going to muscle in on my daughter and granddaughter too. I'm seeing to her...

(**DON** storms off and exits downstage right.)

FLO: Him? Muscle? Don't make me laugh.

CHARLES: Um...you never divulged what you're seeing Esmerelda about?

(F/X: Muffled sound of mobile phone ringing.)

STEPH: (Clicking fingers at **CHARLES**.) Can you get my phone? (Wearily pointing backwards to the table.) It's in my bag.

(**CHARLES** dutifully picks up the bag and hands it to **STEPH**. She delves inside and produces a phone.)

FLO: There's a good boy.

STEPH: (Seeing phone.) It's mum. I'll put it on speaker so I don't have to relay...(pressing button.)

ESME'S VOICE: I had a missed call from this client of mine while I was chatting to Tim who then text to say she was on her way around. Her name's Flo and for God's sake keep her away from Charles. She's a nightmare. She's got no filter and I don't want her telling him what she thinks about him. She's a right pain in the ass who I've got no hope of helping...but she helps pay the bills I guess...

STEPH: (Wearily.) Um...you're on speakerphone, she's already here and she's already told him.

(There is a long silence as **CHARLES** looks crestfallen and **FLO** looks perplexed.)

ESME'S VOICE: Um, so...how you feeling now? Savvy okay? I can't hear her crying so that's good...

STEPH: I'm feeling like crap and dad's in seeing to Savvy now?

ESME'S VOICE: (Shocked.) What? What's **he** doing back?

STEPH: I don't know...I was 'indisposed' at the time. Charles must've let him in.

CHARLES: Actually I didn't, he just appeared from nowhere.

ESME'S VOICE: Oh Charles, I'm so sorry, I'll be back very soon and we can...(pausing)...yes...I **am** leaving Tim and no...I'm **not** on the meter...I came here out of the kindness of my...no, I don't think **that** of **all** my clients...you must snap out of this inferiority complex. No...please don't cry Tim... (returning to phone call)...I'll be back in a bit. Keep everyone sweet...(hanging up.)

(**STEPH** clicks off the phone and there is a long silence.)

STEPH: **This**, I believe, is what is commonly referred to as a pregnant pause.

CHARLES: Well, as I came around here to have what I thought was a quiet night in with....with my... my...and she's the only one not here I...I...

STEPH: Yes, what **do** you refer to my mother as Charles? A partner? A girlfriend? Or perhaps even... just a friend?

CHARLES: I...I must go.

FLO: Night.

(**CHARLES** opens the front door and exits.)

STEPH: Ah well, no loss.

FLO: You know...up to a minute ago I'd have said your mum could do so much better than him, now I'm not so sure.

(F/X: Car doors slamming outside.)

STEPH: You know...there seems little point in **you** remaining now either.

FLO: Oh no, I'm not going anywhere. In addition to the original reason I came around for I'd now like an explanation about her description of me.

(The door chimes ring erratically. F/X: Baby crying off.)

DON: (Shouting: off.) No-o-o-o-o-o-o.

STEPH: (Sighing wearily and lying out.) Well, at least make yourself useful and let him back in.

(**FLO** walks to the front door and opens it. **MOLLY**, wet from the rain runs in.)

MOLLY: Quick, close the door behind me.

FLO: Oh, he's harmless...you haven't got to worry about him.

MOLLY: Eh? No, it's...

STEPH: Mol? Is that you?

MOLLY: Oh, hi Steph...(shoving **FLO** out of way.)...I'll shut it then...

(**MOLLY** is just about closing the door when a rolling pin pokes inside so that the door cannot shut.)

MOLLY: Too late. Quick, where's your dad?

STEPH: Just follow the sound of the screaming baby.

(As **MOLLY** lets go of the front door **GRAN**, in a waterproof poncho enters, wielding the rolling pin.)

MOLLY: (Running downstage right.) Go away Gran, it's up to **me** what I do with my life...

GRAN: He's hurt you once and he'll do it again. He's a man after all.

FLO: (Grinning.) Amen to that sister.

MOLLY: No he won't. It will be different this time...(exiting downstage right.)

GRAN: (Hobbling after **MOLLY**.) Yes, this time **he'll** be the one who gets hurt...literally...(exiting downstage right waving rolling pin.)

FLO: (Rubbing hands excitedly.) Woo-hoo, I don't want to miss this...(exiting downstage right.)

STEPH: (Slowly swivelling off the sofa then realising.) Heh, that's **my** dad, **my** baby...(standing up and holding stomach.)...ooh...**my** guts.

(**STEPH** runs quickly off downstage right. **CHARLES** then peeks back inside the still ajar front door.)

CHARLES: Um...I forgot my waterproof jacket...

(As he enters, his suit jacket can be seen wet from the rain.)

CHARLES: Although it's a bit late now...

(**CHARLES** takes off the suit jacket then looks confused at seeing no-one in room. He hangs the jacket up on the coat stand next to his waterproof jacket.)

CHARLES: I'll put it with the other so that I don't for-...(wandering aimlessly.)...is there anyone here?

(Realising he's all alone he then goes over to the sofa/table where he resumes his search for the stick on the floor. **FLO** then returns from downstage right and doesn't see **CHARLES** under the table.)

FLO: Well, that was a bit of a damp squib...(looking at sofa.)...hmm, where's **she** gone?

(Still out of view - behind the sofa and under the table - **CHARLES** moves and the table drags. **FLO** looks scared then sees the front door open and is horrified. She then tiptoes over to the door and picks up the umbrella which she folds up into its spear-like shape. She then tiptoes around the right side of the sofa and as she approaches the table **CHARLES** sticks his head out from under it.)

FLO: (Screaming.) Aaaagh...(instinctively clunking him over the head with the umbrella.)...banzai.

(**CHARLES** falls to the floor then turns around and looks up.)

FLO: You? I thought we'd got rid of you. What are you doing back?

CHARLES: (Sitting up, rubbing the back of his head.) Banzai?

FLO: Yeah, I went on holiday to China last year.

CHARLES: Banzai is Japanese.

FLO: I was lying anyway...I went to Bognor. So, you're back then. Can't keep away from me, can you?

CHARLES: I can assure you madam that I am not remotely interested in you.

FLO: So, what are you doing back here then...and what were you doing down there?

CHARLES: I...um...I...um...my contact lens fell out and I was looking for it.

FLO: Really? I'd have thought someone as square as you would wear glasses. Didn't you realise you'd lost it at the time?

CHARLES: Um...no...I just lost it when I came back in.

FLO: Huh, hope I haven't just hit the **other** one out.

CHARLES: No, it's fine...and...um...(pretending to pick a lens up off floor.)...ah here it is...(blowing on nothing and standing up.)...I'll just put this back in...(pretending to put lens in eye.)...there.

FLO: So, why did you **actually** come back in then?

CHARLES: Um...um...(pensively.)...ah...yes...I came in to find out who owned all the cars that are now blocking me in.

FLO: Well, I'm obviously one and surely you saw the other two arrive. PP's floosy and her gran... they're both running after him around the conservatory now...but for totally different reasons. What happened to your suit top? Did you get it chiselled off?

CHARLES: You...you really **do** say things as they are, don't you?

FLO: That's right. Anyway Stuffy, I'm bored talking to you now...(walking downstage.)...I'm going out the back where hopefully there's some action. The damp squib might have now ignited after all.

(F/X: Flush being pulled: off. **FLO** exits downstage right. **CHARLES** then once again drops to his knees to look and feel around for the stick. As he does, **STEPH** wearily re-enters from downstage right.)

STEPH: If you're playing pee-po again you ought to know that Savvy's not there this time...(walking around front of sofa.)...I thought you'd gone.

(**STEPH** slumps into the sofa, much to Charles's chagrin.)

CHARLES: Um...if you're feeling that bad...why don't you go and lie down in a bedroom?

STEPH: Oh I'm too drained to get back up. Perhaps you could go in the kitchen and get me a drink of water, oh...and some medicine, oh...and there should be a heat pad out there somewhere that you can pop in the microwave and...

CHARLES: I can't go rooting around in someone else's kitchen.

STEPH: But she's your partner, your girlfriend...isn't she?

(**CHARLES** goes to answer then the front door flies open. **DON** runs in quickly followed by **MOLLY**.)

DON: I'd have preferred your **mum** and her saucepan. Quick, close the door.

(**MOLLY** goes to close the door but the rolling pin comes in from outside and the door cannot close.)

DON: My, that woman is unfeasibly quick for her age.

GRAN: (Raising rolling-pin at **DON**.) Right you, I'm going to make sure your philandering days are over...once and for all.

(**MOLLY** jumps in and holds **GRAN**'s raised arm.)

CHARLES: (Shouting.) Wait. Where's Savannah?

DON: There he goes with the full names again.

CHARLES: Oh God, she's back there with that...that woman.

DON: Who...Flo? She's harmless.

GRAN: Who's **she**...another one of your harem?

MOLLY: Gran, will you drop it? (To **DON**.) **Is** she?

DON: How many more times? There is no-one else. I just had a one-night stand, it meant nothing.

GRAN: That's even worse.

(**GRAN** wields the rolling pin again but once more **MOLLY** holds her arm. **CHARLES** looks at **STEPH** who is too weary to move.)

CHARLES: (Sighing.) I'll go and see to her while you lot carry on your bickering.

(**CHARLES** turns and exits downstage right.)

DON: What is it with that guy?

MOLLY: Who is he anyway?

DON: He's Esme's new bloke.

(F/X: **STEPH**'s phone goes off. She picks it up.)

STEPH: Talk of the devil.

GRAN: At least he dresses and acts his age...not like you.

(**STEPH** shushes the rest then presses the button. **ESME**'s voice blurts straight out.)

ESME'S VOICE: I was desperately leaving Tim's house – God, that man is so pathetic - when I saw what I thought was that weak-kneed strumpet Molly – followed by her psychopathic grandmother – driving at speed in the direction of my house. They must know that your idiot father is there.

(**CHARLES** appears downstage right holding the baby to him, with **FLO** at his side.)

ESME'S VOICE: The last thing we need is another couple of nutters around so for God's sake don't let **them** in as well, we don't want even more of a freakshow in the house than there is already... because that will really freak Charles out...pardon the pun.

STEPH: You're still on speakerphone, they're already here...and Charles freaked out some time ago.

ESME'S VOICE: Um...um...so, are you feeling any better now?

STEPH: No, worse by the minute. I'm as weak as a kitten. How long are you going to be?

ESME'S VOICE: I'm stuck in traffic, there's roadworks up ahead. Oh no...he's followed me on foot... (away from phone.)...Tim, please go back home...you'll get soaked. What do you mean ...'what do I care?' Of course I care...would I have come out tonight if I didn't care? No, I'm not coming back...you have to start helping yourself...I'll see you next week. Now...(shouting.)...just go away will you?

(F/X: Car loudly screeching off. Phone ringing off. There is a pregnant pause as **STEPH** lies out on sofa and gradually closes her eyes.)

FLO: Well, I don't think much of her bedside manner.

MOLLY: (To **DON**.) I can see why you left her if this is how she thinks – and talks – about people.

GRAN: Look, we're getting off the point here. The ex-wife's not done anything wrong...it's all the fault of the ex-husband...and his wandering you-know-what.

FLO: Huh, 'you-know-what'? I thought I had a rival to my straight-talking crown until then.

GRAN: What?

FLO: Straight-talking. You just edged around that then. I say it how it is.

GRAN: Oh please, I was 'saying it how it is' before you were born. I'm the queen of saying it how it is.

FLO: Well, if you're the queen...I'm the goddess.

GRAN: Don't make me laugh...it's innate, natural with me, formed by a grizzled life of putting up with bozos like Don Juan there. It comes with age, not some new psychobabble syndrome that seems to turn up every two minutes these days.

FLO: Are you saying I'm putting this on? That I choose to be like this? Because if you are then that's fighting talk...(brandishing umbrella.)

GRAN: Right, bring it on. On guard...(raising rolling pin.)

FLO: (Raising umbrella to meet rolling-pin as if in a duel.) Banzai.

(They start fencing, moving gingerly around the room.)

CHARLES: Will you two please stop it? This is not good for Savannah. Babies pick up on negative atmosphere, it can affect how they're feeling and can make them sick.

DON: Who are you...Mister Spock?

CHARLES: Actually it's Doctor Spock, Doctor Benjamin Spock the renowned American paediatrician and author. **Mister** Spock was the Science Officer on the Starship Enterprise in Star Trek.

DON: Well, Mr Know-all, looks like you were right...she **is** sick, she's spit up over your back.

(**CHARLES** holds the baby out then over his shoulder and his face drops. He then hands the baby over to **DON** who takes her at arm's length. **CHARLES** then dejectedly turns and exits downstage right.)

DON: Ah well, at least she can't hit me while I'm holding the baby.

GRAN: Enjoy the break Casanova...I shall be back over to you when I've finished with this one.

FLO: Okay Grandma...bring it on.

(**MOLLY** jumps into the middle of the weapons.)

MOLLY: Right, that's it. Will you two just shut up and give it rest. There's nothing good about 'saying it how it is' or, for that matter, 'being no holds barred', or 'not beating around the bush', or 'calling a spade a spade', or 'giving both barrels' etcetera. Sometimes you can keep things under wraps and save people's feelings. How would **you** like it if everyone who didn't like you told you why? Just didn't hold back and rattled off everything about you that annoyed **them**?

GRAN: I wouldn't care.

FLO: Nor would I.

MOLLY: Well Flo...I don't know **you** but – Grandmother dearest – did you know that you're the main reason my dad left? You were just so overbearing, always siding with my mum – your precious daughter – even when she was wrong. He told me this. There, how does that make you feel?

GRAN: Well, she...she was better off without him...

MOLLY: And that losing a father figure in my life is what probably led me to look for an older man? So, my relationship with Don is...well, basically, **your** fault.

GRAN: What? But...that's crazy logic, besides...I'm trying to stop you now from making the same mistake twice with him. I mean...look at him...you're half his age, he's the same age as your dad, he's a grandfather and is generally just a big waste of space. He cheated on you – just like he did on his wife – and now you want him back. Explain how all that is **my** fault?

MOLLY: Why did you have to be the archetypal mother-in-law from Hell and make my dad's life a misery? (Sniffing.) Why did you ruin **my** life?

(**GRAN** is about to respond but sees how upset **MOLLY** is then looks at **FLO**, watching on intently.)

GRAN: I...I...well he...he was...(bowing head.)...I'm sorry Molly.

FLO: Well, well, well...look who stopped short of 'saying it how it is' ...again.

(**GRAN** seethes. **CHARLES** enters downstage right holding his wetted waistcoat and damp tie.)

DON: Blimey Stuffy, no waistcoat or tie...you're positively naked.

(**DON** goes to speak again but then his face crumples as he clearly sniffs the baby, smells her bottom then almost retches. He then holds her at arms' length.)

CHARLES: My tie dipped in the sink as I was washing the you-know-what out of my waistcoat... (walking towards coat stand.)...so I'll just hang them up here with my other items of wet clothing... (hanging items on coat stand.)...now, what have I missed out here?

DON: Funny you should ask that...Savvy got disgruntled the moment you left...so here...(handing the baby to **CHARLES**.)...she's all yours again.

(As **CHARLES** reluctantly takes the baby back he immediately smells the nappy situation but before he can speak, **GRAN** hobbles quickly over towards **DON**.)

GRAN: Not holding the baby anymore...(wielding rolling pin.)...so you're fair game now.

CHARLES: No, think of the baby...

GRAN: I'll stop your urges once and for all...

CHARLES: No...(moving in front of **DON**)...stop this **now**.

(**GRAN** doesn't listen and swings the rolling pin but instead of it hitting **DON** in the groin it hits **CHARLES** in his groin instead. He winces as quietly as he can but doubles over, lowering the baby down towards **STEPH**'s head. F/X: Baby crying. **STEPH**'s eyes open at the smell and sound then she puts her hand over her mouth, swivels around then jumps off the sofa and runs downstage right.)

CHARLES: But...she needs changing and...

(**STEPH** ignores **CHARLES** and exits downstage right.)

DON: What's wrong with **her**?

CHARLES: You mean you've not noticed how out of sorts your own daughter is?

DON: I've been sort of pre-occupied, in case you hadn't noticed.

CHARLES: Yes, I had but...(stopping as he whiffs the nappy.)

DON: Hah, that...um...that must've happened just as I was handing her back to you.

CHARLES: (Unconvinced.) Yes, I'm starting to see why Esmerelda left you. I think you're a bit of a cad if truth be told.

FLO: Look Stuffy, why don't you get off **PP**'s back and get that horrible smell sorted out? **You're** left holding the baby so it's your job to step up to the mark. Now, get that starch out of your underpants and jump to it. (To **GRAN**.) There, **that's** telling someone how it is.

(**DON** looks impressed and holds up his hand which **FLO** high fives.)

DON: You really **do** say it how it is. I like that. I like that a lot, especially when it's at Stuffy's expense.

FLO: I don't like it when someone picks on someone else...that's **my** job.

MOLLY: Look, instead of this mutual admiration society why don't help out Stuf-...I mean Charles with the job in hand?

GRAN: Now, hold on Mol. I think these two make a good, well age-matched couple and they should be left alone to see where this is going.

MOLLY: Why don't you just butt out of what doesn't concern you.

CHARLES: (Tetchily.) Look, does anyone here know where Stephanie's baby-changing bag is? I'm assuming there **is** one.

FLO: Ooooh, look who's getting forceful.

DON: It's probably in the back room with the car seat.

CHARLES: Right, can someone at least hold Savannah while I go and look?

MOLLY: (Sighing heavily.) Oh, give her here then.

(**CHARLES** hands the still crying baby to **MOLLY** who immediately winces at the smelly nappy.

CHARLES then hurriedly exits downstage right.)

GRAN: Make the most of it...that's the closest you'll get to a baby if you take this drongo back.

FLO: Right, that's it...(holding umbrella back up.)...let's go again. On guard.

GRAN: Not banzai this time? You've mellowed already.

FLO: Takes one to know one.

(**CHARLES** enters downstage right with the car seat.)

CHARLES: The bag's not there.

DON: So you brought the car seat in instead?

CHARLES: Yes, because clearly actually holding little Savannah is such a chore...(taking baby from **MOLLY** and putting her in car seat.)...so any other ideas where the bag might be?

DON: She must've left it in her car then.

CHARLES: Perhaps you'd like to get it then?

DON: Oh I daren't go out there with this tinderbox situation going on in here. Besides, you're already wet...so a bit more isn't going to hurt you.

(**FLO** smiles and hold up her hand which **DON** high fives. **CHARLES** sighs heavily, shakes his head then turns and walks towards downstage right.)

CHARLES: I have to visit the you-know-where before I venture back out...(exiting downstage right.)

FLO: Cuh, everything's a production with that guy. He should be more relaxed...(to **DON**.)...like you.

DON: Is that a compliment?

FLO: It's the closest to one you're going to get.

DON: Then I'll take it.

MOLLY: Oh, you two make me sick...

GRAN: Now, wait a minute Mol, don't you think they make an endearing couple?

MOLLY: (Walking to car seat.) I'm giving this one a cuddle out amongst the plants and flowers in the conservatory...(taking baby out of car seat.)...innocents amongst the innocence...(exiting downstage right carrying the baby in her arms.)

GRAN: Well, it looks like my work here is done after all.

FLO: Yes, goodnight grandma.

GRAN: Oh, I'm finished with **him**...but not with **you**.

(**CHARLES** enters downstage right.)

CHARLES: Right, well I couldn't get in the you-know-where so I'm going out to the car now. Which one is hers?

DON: It's the blue one.

CHARLES: They're **all** blue...including the one you u-turned - and forced me off the road – in.

DON: Well, as she was first here it's probably safe to assume hers is the nearest to the house? I thought you knew everything...(holding up hand which **FLO** high fives.). Oh and you'll find her car keys in her bag no doubt.

(**CHARLES** huffs, puts his hand in **STEPH**'s bag and fishes her car keys out.)

CHARLES: (Quietly seething.) Well...(walking to **FLO**.)...can I at least have the umbrella?

FLO: Are you kidding me? I'm not letting go of this while the Wild Woman of Borneo has **her** weapon.

GRAN: (Shaking head.) Here...have this if you want.

(**GRAN** awkwardly slips out of the poncho whilst switching the rolling pin from hand to hand.)

CHARLES: Oh really, I don't want to put you to any...

GRAN: (Snapping.) You're having it now.

(**GRAN** throws the poncho at **CHARLES** and he almost reluctantly puts it on. **DON** and **FLO** snigger.)

FLO: Very fetching.

DON: Not so much a Stuffed Shirt now...more a Pathetic Poncho.

FLO: Yeah, heh...that makes him PP now as well. Ah well, I'll just re-name **you**...(looking into **DON**'s eyes.)...I'll just call you Donny from now on.

CHARLES: Ah...you two make me feel nauseous...(picking up the car seat without looking.)...I'm taking her with me as I don't trust any of you to take care of her.

(**CHARLES** storms out of the front door, slamming it shut behind him. **DON**, **FLO** and **GRAN** look at each other in wonderment.)

FLO: Cuh, there goes PP...on his high horse again.

DON: Do...do you think we should have told him Savvy wasn't in the car seat?

FLO: What...and spoil the fun when he finds out she's not there? No way.

GRAN: You know...as disgusted as I am by your behaviours I also think you make a well-matched pair, so I now believe that Molly is well and truly rid of you and that my work here is truly done...

(**MOLLY** re-enters downstage right carrying a now becalmed baby.)

MOLLY: All calmed down in here now...I hope. You know...I think you're right Gran, as smelly as this little one is, I want one...maybe more, so Don...I release you from whatever was left of our relationship...with my blessing.

FLO: What? Me? With this one? He's immature, lazy, worthless, unfaithful and – to quote PP – a cad.

DON: But otherwise?

FLO: We'll see.

GRAN: Right, well I'm off...(walking towards front door.)...still time to get down to the Legion and see who'll be the lucky man tonight.

FLO: Heh...you're okay Gran: a worthy adversary. You've shown me the future of 'saying it how it is'.

GRAN: And?

FLO: Well, I must want to be cured, to have some sort of filter installed, otherwise...why would I be spending so much money coming to see Esme the charlatan?

(**FLO** offers her hand and **GRAN** nods then shakes it.)

GRAN: (Pointing rolling pin forwards.) To the Legion.

(**GRAN** opens the door and runs out, closing the door behind her.)

MOLLY: Well, if you two do make a go of it I wish you all the best...I'm going to be looking for a man who can give me one of these.

FLO: And who also doesn't cheat on you, of course.

DON: Heh, I don't need **you** getting on my case about it too.

FLO: Look, I say it how it is...you **know** that and I doubt that will change, well not any time soon at least. When you've been dumped on as much as I have you either go into your shell or come out fighting. I guess my 'syndrome' has meant I've always done the latter.

DON: Well, perhaps your days of being dumped on are now over. Perhaps you've just never met the right man before.

FLO: Maybe.

(F/X: Reversing lights and noise are seen and heard from outside. The baby then starts crying.)

DON: Hey-up, looks like Stuff's tried to get in the wrong car.

MOLLY: Heh, instead of deriding him all the time why don't you do something to help?

FLO: Yeah, besides...it's not a vehicle alarm it's a reversing sound...and it's **PP** remember?

DON: I'm going to have to watch you, aren't I?

FLO: Maybe.

(F/X: Loud, angry banging on the front door.)

DON: Okay, I'll do my bit to help...(walking to front door.)...I'll let him in.

(**DON** opens the door and standing there is **CHARLES**. He is no longer wearing the poncho, is soaking wet, bedraggled and with his shirt hanging out. He is carrying the empty baby seat, a changing bag and also a big parcel. He sees **MOLLY** holding the baby then looks angrily at **DON** and **FLO**.)

DON: Oh yes, you ran out with the car seat before we could tell you Savvy wasn't in it. Rookie mistake on your part that was.

(As **CHARLES** seethes **MOLLY** quickly goes over to him.)

MOLLY: Here...(taking changing bag.)...I'll change her while you...do whatever you have to do.

(**MOLLY** also takes the car seat then exits downstage right with the baby, bag and car seat.)

FLO: So, what happened to your poncho...PP?

CHARLES: That...that woman insisted on me giving it back to her...right there and then. Now, I really must insist on an apology from...

(**STEPH** trudges wearily in from downstage right, unaware of - and disinterested in - what is going on in the room. She then flops onto the sofa.)

CHARLES: Oh no Stephanie, you really should lie down in a bedroom, it's not good for you being out here...

DON: Nor for the rest of us if you've got a bug.

(**DON** looks at **FLO** for re-assurance and she nods.)

STEPH: (Lying out on sofa.) I'll stay and the rest of you can go.

FLO: Um...in case you're remotely interested...your dad's ex is taking care of your baby. PP here... (pointing to **CHARLES**.)...relinquished control to her.

STEPH: (Tiredly.) Ex? Oh...Molly. PP? But I thought **dad** was PP...

FLO: He was...but then Stuffy put on a poncho and looked pathetic so he then became PP. It's lost now...you really had to be there.

STEPH: I'm glad I wasn't. Is mum still not back?

(F/X: **STEPH**'s phone goes off. She picks it up.)

FLO: Talk of the devil no doubt.

(**STEPH** presses the button. **ESME**'s voice blurts straight out.)

ESME'S VOICE: Right, before I start...I'm not on speakerphone, am I?

STEPH: (Sighing wearily.) No.

ESME'S VOICE: Good. I've been pulled over for speeding now so I'm in the foulest mood imaginable ...and it's all down to these bloody clients of mine. Firstly that idiot Tim insists I come out to see him ...then that Flo turns up so I know I have to rush back to limit any damage her and that runaway mouth of hers has caused...now I'm going to get points and a fine. Whatever next?

FLO: (Wrenching phone from **STEPH** and rasping into it.) Heh, Sigmund Freud, perhaps you ought to give **yourself** therapy...anger management maybe. Oh, and you can look for someone else to 'pay your bills' as I'll be looking for a new therapist.

DON: (Caressing **FLO'S** shoulders from behind.) Heh, who knows, perhaps you won't need another therapist...ever again.

(Gradually calming down, **FLO** hands the phone back to **STEPH**.)

ESME'S VOICE: What's **he** still doing there? And why did you say I wasn't on speakerphone when I was?

STEPH: You said, "I'm not on speakerphone, am I?" ...and I said, "no".

ESME: That's the answer you'd have given if I'd asked, "Am I **on** speakerphone?". Can't you see that?

STEPH: (Sighing.) Questions...questions. Have you any idea how ill I feel...and how little I care?

CHARLES: Stephanie, I really think you should go and lie down in a...

ESME'S VOICE: Is that Charles? He's still there then?

STEPH: (Sighing.) Yes, he's **still** here...obsessed with me not lying out on the sofa for some reason.

ESME'S VOICE: How is he?

STEPH: **He's** fine...**I'm** the one who is suffering.

ESME'S VOICE: Okay, well I shouldn't be too long now...the officer's just letting me go. Oh, by the way, I forgot to say that I'm expecting a parcel...

(**CHARLES** holds up the parcel.)

ESME'S VOICE: The usual ridiculously long timeframe given by their stupid delivery team meant it would be a late...(pausing.)...they're not there, are they?

STEPH: **They're** not but the parcel is.

FLO: (Leaning down to phone.) No, this time you miraculously **haven't** done a sasquatch and put your bigfoot in it.

(DON chuckles and pats FLO on the back.)

ESME'S VOICE: Right, well I'm on my way...(quietly.)...and can I suggest you take your phone off speaker...(pointedly.)...now.

(The phone cuts off and STEPH just flips it wearily back into her handbag and closes her eyes.)

DON: (To FLO.) Do you still want that chat with her?

FLO: No, I don't think so, I've already decided she can't treat me any more so I'm off.

DON: Do you want company?

FLO: Look, I've been hurt a lot in my life...and you're a cheat. Esme's a strong woman who clearly 'says it how it is' and you cheated on her. A leopard can't change its spots.

DON: But that's just it. When we were married she never said it how it was, in fact she was so interested in getting her career off the ground, then with the kids...and grandkids that I never got a look in...I was ignored...left to my own devices...so I ended up just doing my own thing.

FLO: Yes...Molly. You're chasing your youth that you're never going to catch up with. It's pulling away from you all the time.

DON: Look, the woman I just had the fling with was actually older than me and wanted a toyboy... but then she said I was too old for her. She told me 'how it was'...and I liked it, I respected her for it. I knew where I was for once...and I liked that.

FLO: Look, there's something endearing about you but you're a pretty pathetic guy. The last thing I want is a pushover...but you're nothing like PP who's an out and out doormat, I'll give you that.

(CHARLES, already beaten and deflated, just hangs his head.)

DON: So?

FLO: Let's get out of here, you follow me back to mine, we'll have a chat and see where it leads.

(DON grins then eagerly grabs his jacket from the armchair. As FLO walks towards the front door he follows in her wake.)

CHARLES: But what about your daughter and granddaughter?

(STEPH snores loudly.)

DON: I don't think I need to worry about her...and Molly's got Savvy under control. Chill out Chas.

(FLO opens the front door and exits followed by DON, closing the door behind him. CHARLES sighs at his dishevelled state, plonks the parcel on the table, trudges over to the coat stand and unhooks all his wet clothing. He's about to walk to the front door with it all then remembers the memory stick. Walking to the sofa he tuts at STEPH asleep on it then tries to move it anyway but his back spasms. He yells out and drops the clothes. The yell wakes up STEPH and occurs just as MOLLY is entering downstage right with the baby. CHARLES is doubled over and holding his back. F/X: Baby crying.)

STEPH: What the...?

MOLLY: Oh Charles, she'd just dropped off after I changed her.

(**CHARLES** crouches down - squealing in pain as he does - and picks his wet clothing back up.)

CHARLES: I'm sorry...(trudging towards front door.)...I'm off now though...out of everyone's hair...
(opening front door.)...once and for all...(exiting, closing the door behind him.).

STEPH: Huh, that man will not be missed. He looks like a cross between Quasimodo and Worzel Gummidge. Thanks for looking after Savvy Mol, I just feel so...so...

MOLLY: (Rocking the baby.) Actually, I've hardly done anything. Charles was the only one here who was caring about her...and **you** for that matter. That horrible Flo woman, my gran and - I'm afraid to say - your dad were no use whatsoever. All they cared about was their own situations.

STEPH: Oh, really?

MOLLY: Yes, but in a way it was good...for me at least. It helped crystalize my thoughts about my gran, your dad and how I now know - for certain - that I want one of these for myself...(resting the now quietened baby on her shoulder.)...I just need to sort out the other part of the equation now.

STEPH: Well, you certainly seem to have a way with her, I'll give you that.

MOLLY: Um...when I was changing her...(pulling out a small bottle of milk from pocket.)...I found this in the bag. Do you want me to warm it up and feed her?

STEPH: I'm tempted to say no as she's so quiet...but she **is** overdue.

MOLLY: Leave it with me.

STEPH: Thanks. Oh, any suggestions on what I should say to mum as I seem to have missed so much?

MOLLY: Well, she's clearly taken with this Charles...although - going by her phone calls at least - she seems more worried about his state of mind than anything else...

STEPH: Like he's less a boyfriend...and more of a...?

MOLLY & STEPH: (Together.) Client...(both laughing.).

(F/X: Baby noises.)

MOLLY: Ah well, she's awake now so I'll go and feed her.

STEPH: Thanks Mol, it's much appreciated.

(**MOLLY** exits downstage right with the baby and the bottle. **STEPH** sighs heavily and spins around so that she's sitting on the edge of the sofa. She puts her head in her hands.)

(F/X: Car screeching and pulling up abruptly outside, followed by the opening and slamming shut of a car door.)

(**STEPH** rises gingerly from the sofa then sways a bit so holds onto the arm for balance. She slowly walks around the side then stops and looks down. She tentatively bends down to look under the gap at the side of the sofa. The front door then swings open and **ESME** rushes in.)

ESME: (Panting.) Where is he? Was that him I just saw driving off? Is anyone here?

(**STEPH** straightens up and re-appears from behind the sofa looking perplexed at the memory stick she has just found.)

ESME: What's happened in here? What's **that**?

STEPH: What's **not** happened is more the question...and **this**...I'm guessing belongs to Charles. He must've dropped it as he's been fixated by the sofa. It must've rolled under.

ESME: What did he seem like when he left?

STEPH: Well, he **looked** nothing like he did when he arrived.

ESME: (Slumping onto sofa) Oh no, it's all ruined. What about the circus...please tell me **that's** also left town.

STEPH: All except Molly...

ESME: Molly? What's **she** still doing here?

STEPH: Actually, she's been great with Savvy while I've been flagging...and she also said that Charles was the most caring out of everyone here...about me **and** Savvy. Dad was no use at all and that Flo woman is what I'd call...um...(coughing)...an acquired taste?

ESME: Very politely – and diplomatically – put...(putting head back in hands)...oh...poor Charles.

STEPH: Mum, don't you think that pity and sympathy aren't really the main emotions someone should have for their other half?

ESME: Like I said to you what seems like an eternity ago now...there's something that needs unearthing...what you see **isn't** what you get with him.

STEPH: Well, perhaps what's on that memory stick will give you a clue as to why he's like he is.

ESME: I can't go looking at someone else's private property.

STEPH: Look, he **brought** it here, he clearly had it in his hand when he **dropped** it here...so must've wanted to **allude** to it in some way while he was here. Besides, what have you got to lose?

ESME: (Sighing.) I'll give it a try...(taking stick from **STEPH**.)...he's probably password-protected it anyway...(getting laptop from sideboard.)...he seems the sort of guy who'd do that... (sitting at table with laptop and switching it on.)...we'll soon see...(inserting memory stick.)... this feels so wrong.

STEPH: Well, he left without it...so he can't be that worried about it being found and played.

ESME: True. Hmm, no password required. Right, here goes...

(**ESME** presses the keyboard then **MOLLY** enters downstage right carrying Savvy in her seat. **ESME** quickly presses the keyboard again to pause what's on screen in front of her, but **MOLLY** can see it.)

MOLLY: Oh, is that Charles?

ESME: Ah Molly, I hear you've been a great help to Steph and Savvy...so thanks for that.

MOLLY: It's **that** man there who was the most concerned about them both. I feel so sorry for him. He's such a nice, decent man. I hope I find one like him...but younger of course this time. Anyway, on that point, I've just received a phone call from my gran at the Legion saying that she's met a man whose grandson's there...he was my first ever love. I'm hoping he'll make me forget all about Don.

ESME: Huh, that shouldn't be difficult.

MOLLY: Well, I was going to apologise again for taking him away from you. I just fell for his lies and charm. You **know** he kept swearing your marriage was over, dead as a dodo his actual words were...

ESME: It's okay Molly...you did me a favour, it would never have lasted anyway. And, for what it's worth, I'm sorry I called you a strumpet earlier. In fact, I'm sorry for a lot of things I've said tonight.

MOLLY: (Nodding.) Right, well I'd better get to the Legion...(walking away then stopping.)...oops, almost forgot about this little darling. Um...(holding out bottle.)...I only got as far as warming it up I'm afraid before my gran rang: when I looked around though she'd dropped back off to sleep anyway. Perhaps the change of nappy and quiet environment was all she needed.

(**ESME** and **MOLLY** look at **STEPH** who sways slightly then slumps back into the sofa.)

STEPH: I can't take her. The stomach bug and all that.

ESME: (Rolling eyes.) Just put her in the armchair please Molly...and thanks again.

MOLLY: (Putting bottle on table.) Well, I guess this is it...our paths shouldn't have to cross ever again...(placing car seat carefully in armchair.)...goodnight...(walking towards front door.)

STEPH: If you ever want to visit and see Savvy Mol...that will be fine.

MOLLY: (Smiling broadly.) Thanks.

(**MOLLY** exits the front door, closing it behind her. **ESME** turns back to the laptop screen.)

STEPH: She's okay really.

ESME: Hmm-hmm, we both know that your dad was to blame...as he is for most things. Right, here we go...(pressing keyboard.)...it's show time.

CHARLES'S VOICE: Hello Esmerelda, it's me...Charles. As I am so poor at expressing my feelings I have had to resort to recording this message for you. As you know, you hid what you did for a living from me for a while because you thought I might think you were analysing me all the time. But I was hiding something from you as well. Basically, I suffer from two psychological conditions...

(**ESME** looks horrified and buries her head in her hands.)

CHARLES'S VOICE: The first is Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, which is why I'm so formal, rigid and obsessed with routine. I can't shorten people's names, as you know. I can't use slang, jargon leaves me cold and I detest informality. Everything has to be neat, tidy and in its place...**all** the time.

(**STEPH** sits up on the sofa and looks askance at **ESME** who is bemused and shrugs her shoulders.)

CHARLES'S VOICE: The second condition is much more recent and is Post Infidelity Stress Disorder.

(**ESME** again looks horrified and buries her head back in her hands.)

CHARLES'S VOICE: I was married once to the only woman I'd ever loved. She got pregnant then just as I was preparing to become a father she left me and said that the baby wasn't mine. To make matters worse...the other man was my brother. They then emigrated to Canada and raised together who I thought was going to be my baby daughter. So, I was doubly betrayed then deprived in the cruellest way possible of the one thing I had been looking forward to most in life... being a father.

(**CHARLES** appears downstage right. He is soaking wet, totally dishevelled and bent over holding his back. As he winces **ESME** hears him, stops the laptop playing and turns around.)

CHARLES: I was hoping I could creep in and find it before...

ESME: (Pausing screen and crying out.) Oh Charles, why didn't I **know** something was wrong instead of just thinking you were a closed book? What sort of therapist am I?

CHARLES: Well, I can't speak for your professional attributes but I know what sort of **woman** you are...and that's one that I can trust and want to be with.

(**ESME** turns quickly and is shocked to see **CHARLES** in his dishevelled state.)

ESME: But...all those things I said over the phone...how do you know you can trust me?

CHARLES: Because they were all true. They were are all things you knew about people here and were all things I know about myself. So, I know I can trust you to tell the truth. Look, I've been hit on the head by a broolly, hit in the nads by a rolling pin, puked up on by a baby, drenched to my very core, put my back in spasm and generally been humiliated by all and sundry but...

(**ESME** and **STEPH** both look startled at **CHARLES**.)

STEPH: Charles?

CHARLES: What?

STEPH: You...you sound...different.

CHARLES: How do you mean?

ESME: Broolly instead of umbrella, puke instead of vomit...

STEPH: Nads instead of...

ESME: Yes Steph, I think we've got it. Charles, what's happened to you? You're saying things dare I say...chilled, normal even?

CHARLES: I...I think...I think everything that's happened tonight has somehow...released me from my shackles. I've been either angry, annoyed, upset...a whole mass of emotions since you went out... and it feels as if I've been unlocked as a result of this tumult.

ESME: You know...I've lost two clients tonight, been charged with speeding, alienated people I know ...but I don't care about any of that. All I care about...(sniffing.)...is losing you.

CHARLES: (Walking to **ESME**.) You won't lose me. You're the only woman I feel I've been able to trust since I thought I could trust my wife all those years ago.

(**ESME** runs to **CHARLES** and hugs him but then recoils as he winces with pain and is so wet.)

ESME: Oh Charles, you're soaked. Look, I know this might seem a bit radical but I've treated you to a few things that...well...you might like if we should perhaps venture on a holiday...away...together... (picking up the parcel and giving it to **CHARLES**.)...take it in my bedroom and see what you think.

(**CHARLES** nods, takes the parcel and exits downstage right.)

STEPH: Is that the same guy, or have the body-snatchers returned?

ESME: I don't know, perhaps he's right and that everything that's happened tonight has somehow cracked open his outer shell.

STEPH: And unleashed what?

ESME: Whatever it is he's still more reliable, more sweet, more refined, more caring, more suave, more...more everything than your dad.

STEPH: Yes, yes you said...he's his polar opposite, but isn't he also **your** polar opposite?

ESME: Well? What's wrong with that? They say opposites attract don't they?

STEPH: Was **dad** your polar opposite?

ESME: Well...yes...in that I was always a faithful wife and he became a lecherous philanderer.

(A key is heard turning in the front door.)

ESME: Ah, talk of the devil.

(The door opens and **DON** furtively enters.)

ESME: How did you get in here...now and earlier?

DON: Um...the door was on the latch.

ESME: The truth.

DON: I got another key cut before handing the old one over when the divorce was finalised.

ESME: Hmm. So, what are you doing back...again?

DON: Um...I think I forgot something.

ESME: The truth.

DON: Flo's had enough of me already. Also, she told me to say she won't be coming to you anymore.

ESME: I guessed as much, Tim too...(holding up mobile phone.)...according to his text. That's a third of my clients gone in one night. Can't say I blame either of them really, I clearly don't have the nous or patience to deal with people with issues.

DON: On the plus side though, she said that despite your descriptions of her...she admires you for saying it how it is...and that you're still the best therapist she's ever had.

ESME: That's something I guess. Did she say what it was she needed to see me about tonight?

DON: Yes...(pulling some paper from pocket.)...she gave me this to give to you...(giving it to **ESME**).

ESME: Hmm, it's the list I told her to compile about possible triggers for her lack of filter...(reading out.)...'men, women, children, animals, the world, life in general really'. Hmm, that doesn't leave a lot...(to **DON**.)...I guess you two never had a chance really...(turning paper.)...what's this on the back? (Reading out.) 'It's the quiet ones you have to watch. He's not so much a wolf in sheep's clothing but a sheep in tailor's dummy clothing'. Hmm, is this about Charles?

DON: Who else? Even her written words say it 'how it is'. Where is old Stuff by the way?

ESME: While you're in this house please be respectful to him.

DON: Why are all the females in my life suddenly turning against me?

ESME: It's not **suddenly** with me...it started when you ran off with Molly.

(**CHARLES** enters downstage right wearing a Hawaiian shirt, Bermuda shorts and flip-flops but still with his socks on. **DON** laughs out loudly which wakes up Savvy. F/X: Baby crying.)

STEPH: (Snapping.) DAD!

DON: (Chortling.) Sorry but...but...words fail me.

ESME: Well, **that's** a first.

DON: (Still chuckling.) I've heard about going from the sublime to the ridiculous but that's...that's...

ESME: Right that's enough. This is the third time you've been here tonight...each time uninvited. You've more than outstayed your welcome...(ushering **DON** towards front door.)...it's time for you to leave...for good.

DON: But...I've got nowhere to go. Are there any takers?

ESME: Yes, I'll take this key off you for starters...(pulling key from his fingers.)...the days of you 'letting yourself in' are over.

DON: But...what if I'm needed urgently, in a hurry?

ESME: You won't be, but if a man is needed...(walking to **CHARLES**.)...if one is required...(holding **CHARLES's** shoulder.)...I'll know who to call upon.

DON: Huh, Flo was right...except he was a sheep in beach bum's clothing all the time.

STEPH: (Sighing heavily.) Right dad, I think you've said enough. You'll have to come home and stay with us I guess, but you'll have to earn your keep...(picking up car seat, in which Savvy is still crying.)...starting with taking your granddaughter...(handing **DON** car seat.)...the one female who might actually need you around...(ushering **DON** towards the front door then picking up all her things.) Goodnight both...enjoy the rest of your night.

DON: (Opening front door.) When's she going to stop crying? (Exiting.)

STEPH: Welcome to my world.

CHARLES: Goodnight Stephanie. Say goodnight to Savannah for me.

STEPH: Goodnight Charles, I will...and thanks for everything...(exiting and closing front door behind her.)

ESME: Do you think – in view of your recent change – that you could at least shorten **my** name? Not Ez...like Don calls me...but perhaps Esme instead of Esmerelda? It'll save you two syllables every time...plus I think Charles and Esme has a sort of ring to it.

CHARLES: I'll see what I can do...Esme.

ESME: We can compromise though as - if I'm being honest - I prefer to call my granddaughter Savannah rather than Savvy, so we can call her that from now on?

CHARLES: Agreed.

ESME: (Walking downstage right.) Perhaps I can give you a private showing of what I bought for myself? (Holding out hand.)

(**CHARLES** reaches out and holds her hand.)

ESME: One thing though...do you think you could take your socks off?

(They exit downstage right.)

Ends