

CARAVAN

a touring play

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dramatis personae:

Bradley (Husband, father, son)
Sarah (Wife and mother)
Tracey, age 19 (daughter)
Matt, age 16 (son)
Gran (Bradley's Mum)

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Key to coloured text: **minimal stage directions** **brief music tracks**

Act 1 Scene 1: In the van

(in a field in Dorset, 5.45 am August 19th 2004)

Just after dawn; sound of torrential rain on a metal roof. Loud whispers in the dark:

BRAD: You awake, love? *(single light comes up slowly on him)*

SARAH: Course I am, that bloody racket woke me up. It's like having a revival of Riverdance just above your head...

BRAD: Well at least it's not thunder and lightning

SARAH: Thanks for mentioning that. Should we all be wearing rubber boots in bed?
(single light comes up on her)

BRAD: Funny. Very funny. But I make the jokes round here.

SARAH: Allegedly. Oh yeah, that's right, *men* are funnier than women! Tell that to Jo Brand, French and Saunders, Joan Rivers, Julie Walters, Kathy Burke.... *(interrupted)*

TRACEY: *Oi, you two*, shut it will you. The rain didn't wake me up but *you* did; I wished I'd slept in the tent now. But last night it was horrible in therelike that Brad Pitt film? "A River runs through it", so I had to come inAnd it's *rude* to whisper - you always used to tell us. Now I'll have to go and have a pee....if I can find the way out of this sleeping-bag.... *(single light comes up on her, struggling and cussing)*

MATT: And now you've woken *me* up, motormouth... *(tries to sit upright from mattress on floor, emerges into single light)*

TRACEY: Sorry bro, did I interrupt a *deeply* satisfying dream? I'm gutted for you...

BRAD: Don't start you two, you're like *bloody* Punch and Judy!

TRACEY: Well we are at the *seaside*....

SARAH: In a *way*.... the *website* said “within sight of a safe beach” which translates as about four inter-connecting fields away from a narrow pebble beach, and one of those fields has a bull in it. Never know which one he’s in. It’s like Russian Roulette only with disemboweling instead of a mercifully quick shot.

GRAN: Did somebody say something about *bowels*...? (*rouses and turns over, in single bed, single light comes up very slowly*)

BRAD: Yes, we’re talking about your favourite subject, Mum.

GRAN: Well **don’t**. Mind your own business. And don’t stick your nose in where it’s not wanted.

BRAD: **Stop!** That conjures up some terrible images. Look, I’m going to make a cup of tea: we’re all awake so we might as well. (*gets up, moves to the kitchen area and starts clinking around with cups, pumping water for the kettle, others start pulling on sweaters, dressing gowns etc*) OK, so its raining non-stop, it’s nearly 6 o’clock, and getting light so we won’t get back to sleep. Everyone’s finished the books they brought, no-one’s got any charge left in their phones ...so that just leaves a game of Monotony after breakfast.

GRAN: Isn’t it called Monopoly?

TRACEY: Don’t worry Gran, it’s Dad’s joke. I love watching his face when he says it – he’s like a little boy looking up and hoping for approval from his Mum and Dad, *hoping* they’ll find it funny. I think he did it this time last year, and that was the fourth or fifth time. Honestly, living in this family it’s like Groundhog Day, just waiting for the same things to happen *all* over again... like there’s a script...

BRAD: Ignoring your jealous sarcasm, on account of the fact that you have got *no* sense of humour *whatsoever*, I can tell you *exactly* when it was, it was August the 8th, year before last, in North Wales.

MATT: How on *earth* can you remember that?

BRAD: Because it was the anniversary of Nixon’s resignation. I remember thinking that maybe I should follow his example, as the joke bombed for the 3rd or 4th time.

TRACEY: It's because it's not a *joke*, Dad, it's a pun. It's not *funny*. It might have been quite clever, back in the day, when mucking around with words was considered witty, but now it's all stand-up and surrealism – even postmodernism is out of date, it's post something else.

BRAD: Whereas what you've just said *is* funny, even though it's just mucking around with words? I give up. Sometimes I think that it would be kinder just to shoot my generation.

TRACEY: I'd love to disagree, but....if you'd just come this way..

BRAD: Oh *piss* off and have piss, Tracey, you haven't been for half an hour. What's got into you at the moment, every day you use up half a rainforest of toilet paper.

TRACEY: Well *thanks* for bringing it to everyone's attention, Dad, just in case I didn't feel self-conscious enough about it already...

BRAD: Sorry, love, that wasn't very clever. I *mean* it. Someone get the board and set it up and I'll bring the tea to the table. (Tracey rises, starts to squeeze between people and furniture to go to the door, opens it, shrinks back, gets anorak, exits) FADE to darkness..... All leave, except Matt.

(a few bars of.....'Maybe it's because I'm a Londoner,.....)

Act 1, Scene 2: The Game

(Bring up lights again. Tracey is back and they are all seated round the table)

SARAH: Seven. 1,2,3,4,5,6, SE-VEN! Now, sweetie, if you could throw eleven we could have an action replay of our first meeting...

TRACEY: what are you *on* about?

SARAH: *Keep up, keep up.* Trafalgar Square: It's where your dad and I first met. On a Miners' Strike demonstration. The Telegraph called it a riot, but they *would*, wouldn't they. To be fair, it was a bit hairy.

I *might* have saved your Dad's life. He'd just chucked a banner pole at the police and one of them came after him through the crowd – who obliged by slowing him *down* – so I ran with him down a side street off the Strand, and *pulled* him into a doorway, *yanked* off his anorak, which was a *disgusting* bright red, so it was like a *beacon*, and then I snogged him very hard, so his face was obscured. Afterwards he said "How can I possibly thank you, I'd have *gone down* for years" and what did I reply, Brad?

BRAD: (*grinning broadly, and blushing slightly*) Well you made a joke I couldn't possibly repeat in front of Mum and the kids, and then you said "All in good time...actually quite soon: you can give me a good seeing-to, but not *here!*"

TRACEY: (*laughing*) Aaah. So sweet! And look at the two of them now, all loved-up., Matty, throw some cold water over them. It's not good to get too worked up at their age!

BRAD: That's ageist *crap* Trace, we obviously haven't brought you up right

MATT: Wasn't that like a bit forward, like you were a bit of a goer, Mum?

SARAH: You cheeky little *sod!* Listen to *you*, passing judgement. I'd been watching him for a while beforehand, and maybe got a bit bolder with the adrenalin in the situation. We're all *human*, all get carried *away* sometimes. It's better to be spontaneous, and live in the moment - we're too zipped up and inhibited. Anyway, as an emerging feminist, it

was only right to take the initiative....

TRACEY: So it was a political act...?

SARAH: Nah, I just fancied him. Hard to imagine, I know, but in the right light (i.e. not very much) and if you screw up your eyes, you can just about see it. Just joking Brad, don't say what you're thinking, you *know* you'll regret it...

The sound of flatulence...

GRAN: Oh excuse me, I'm **so** sorry.....

MATT: Don't worry, Gran it happens to everybody sometimes. Just a shame the dog's not here for you to blame it on. I'll put on the air-conditioning. (turns round, kneels and flaps window wildly)

GRAN: What do you expect, with all those Vegan beans and pulses our young lady serves up. At my age you're perfectly content to *have* a pulse, you don't need to eat them as well. Very hard for an old system to digest. Anyway, I can't help thinking that if it's in that much of a hurry to get out, it can't be very good for you. Better out than in, that's what I say...

BRAD: Yeah, you and the rest of the world. You know, I think we owe cows an apology: the experts have been saying for years that methane farts from cattle are destroying the ozone layer, but it's been Gran all along....

SARAH: *Brad!* Don't be so rude to your Mum, talking about her like she's not in the room. She's got feelings...

BRAD: Sounds like the cue for a song, but I'll spare you that.... You're very into all of this healthy food, fitness stuff, Trace, time was you'd only eat burgers and had 4 sugars in your tea.

TRACEY: It's never too late to look after your body. But now I'm looking at you and thinking you might be the *exception* to the rule.

BRAD: Cheeky mare – at your age I was a lot fitter than you are. I used to play football twice a week, 5-a-side on Wednesday nights at the leisure centre and 11-a-side on Sunday mornings, on Hackney Marshes.

MATT: Who did you play for Dad?

BRAD: Hackney Red Star, the footballing wing of the Hackney Young Communist Party. I wasn't a Commie but they all wanted to play left-wing or striker, so I made up the numbers. Football is a very energetic game, you have to be very fit to run for 90 minutes

MATT: Yeah but Dad, in that photo you've got in your study - of the football geezers with long hair and that, you're wearing a *goalkeeper's* jersey and no-one else is.....

BRAD: So? Goalkeepers run around a lot patrolling the area, from side to side, ready to spring into action, so they keep on their toes, literally....if you watch Ray Clemence when he was playing for England, he was on the balls of his feet the whole time. Looked more like a ballet dancer. Didn't play like one. I always preferred him to Shilton though – he looked like a sack of potatoes – until Clemence went to play for the Other Lot, up the road.

STACEY: and then there's all that bending down, picking the ball out of the back of the net, that must've been a *killer* – probably where your back trouble comes from...repetitive strain injury!

MATTY: But Dad, how could you score the winning goal in a cup final when you were a *goalkeeper*?

BRAD; Who told you that?

MATT: You did.

BRAD: (*slightly flustered*) Right. Well it was one of those situations where we had a corner with only a few seconds to go and so everybody went up for it. I just got lucky. Right place at the right time. (*Tracey half-rising, signalling she wants to get out, having to climb over Brad's legs* Anyway, go and have your pee Tracey, or there'll be a flood. (*Tracey gets up to go*)

TRACEY: You'd think they could make these things just a couple of feet wider, so you didn't have to stick your bum in people's faces just to struggle out. Not to mention ducking the washing when you can't dry it outside....

MATT: Shall I throw for you while you're out, keep things *going*?

TRACEY: Er, ... alright then, but you'd better believe I know exactly how many 500s and 100s I've got....And if you land me on 'go to jail', I've got an alibi – I'm outside so I can't have done it, whatever it was.

BRAD: My turn. 4. Nice one. Angel Islington, just down the road from Highbury, where we used to meet before the match in The Narrow Boat, that little pub by the canal. Lovely. I think I'll buy that, for old times' sake. Of course, the new stadium is coming along well: I wonder what they'll call it - which company will get the naming rights. Just so long as it's not Andrex, geddit? Arsenal managed by Arsene Wenger at the Andrex Stadium? Oh, forget itMum, wake up, you're supposed to be the banker. Is she alright, Tracey? (looking at Sarah, gesturing to the door)

SARAH: I think so, probably a little urinary infection, women get them more than men (Matt suddenly looks very interested), I won't explain why. I can take her into the doctor in town if it doesn't clear up.

BRAD: Mum. Your turn. Throw the dice and I'll move the boot for you if you can't reach. 8! Good: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8. Regent Street. Wanna buy it?

GRAN: Oh, I think so. You know I used to *work there* when I was a seamstress. Used to do the alterations for people while they waited. Had to be very quick and very accurate. Worked at Austin Reed, then Jaegers then Liberty's. I was very sought after, actually, so I could have a little auction for my services when I felt like a change. You soon get a reputation and they pay good money for good work. No-one wants to do that kind of work these days except the Mediterraneans, they're very good, and work hard.

BRAD: Some very famous brands, Mum...which one did you like best?

GRAN: Definitely Liberty's, so elegant, all that Arts & Crafts stuff and then Art Nouveau, and the Tudoric pewter, and their own gorgeous prints, obviously.

BRAD: / didn't realise you knew about all that kind of thing

GRAN: Well there you are, son: there's quite a bit you don't know about me: that's the trouble with lecturers, they think they know everything, and they're so sure they're always right – just because they're *supposed* to be: it's what they're paid for, but it doesn't actually mean that they *are*, does it?

BRAD: I'm suitably rebuked, Mum

MATT: This *is* interesting – *really*, but I can't have my go while Dad is grinding the dice together in *frustration*, while he has to stomach a telling-off from his Mum. You probably think, like, it's diminishing your status in the eyes of your adoring and respectful children - who look *up* to your knowledge like you're some kind of god. Am I *right*, Dad?

BRAD: Thanks so much Matty, you sarky little bugger. *Where's* the respect?

MATT: *What's* to respect?

SARAH: My go. Eleven. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ELEVEN. Whitechapel Road. This is like ROOTS, The Board Game

TRACEY: How come, Mum?

SARAH: Whitechapel. Near where I was *born*, and we lived there when I was little.

TRACEY: Really? You've never *talked* about that. Y'know the East End is getting *really* fashionable now - loads of creative people are going there - it's cheap and they can get big places as studios and so on. Probably discovered it after going to Columbia Road to the flower Market: *that's* been a middle-class haunt for years.

SARAH: Well it certainly wasn't middle class *then*. That's why it's the cheapest part of the board. It's *always* been the first destination for immigrants, and they're nearly always *poor*, obviously. My parents, Rose and Morris, weren't poor, but they were never rich either. My dad had a bit of a weakness for gambling. He gambled away his profits. He was a watchmaker and did a bit of diamond dealing as well, as he needed jewels for his best watches. So he brought his money with him when they came here – in diamonds. He'd learned from history. From the pogroms and the Jews being chased all over Europe. You needed liquid assets, in case you had to move on in a hurry.

BRAD: Yeah. Charles Dickens wasn't Jewish - but he understood that. He put this character Wemmick in Great Expectations who's always talking about '*portable property*'.

So your Grandfather had a craft which he could practise anywhere in the world. Some people say that's why you have so many Jews in education, the Law, medicine, and so on – the *qualifications* are portable, more or less. Probably why Jews place such a very high premium on education and professional status.

MATT: Mum, did you say they came from *Lithuania*, originally?

SARAH (looking guarded and hesitant): Yes, they did...there's a story involved, a very sad one. I've never wanted to upset you by telling you...not until you were older...perhaps now's the time....I don't know....

BRAD: I think so, you can't put it back in the box *now* you've told them there is one...

TRACEY: Please Mum...

SARAH: OK (takes very deep breath, compresses lips). Look... this is really tough for me, dredging this up: I **want** to tell you but it's so hard..... Can you just let me tell you, in my own time, without loads of interruptions and questions - like, till I've finished? This is not a *conversation*, *it's a story* and I want to tell it from beginning to end. And once I get going, I won't want to stop or go off at tangents. OK?

(all concur)

Back in Lithuania, in Kovno, my parents had twins, Aaron and Rebekah...very early in their marriage or maybe even before. I'm not sure when exactly. *Long* before I was born, anyway.

MATT: *Identical* twins? Oh sorry, no interruptions..... it's just a habit in this family...

SARAH: *No*, silly – identical twins are always the same sex. Anyway, they were very close. But when she was 18, Rebekah came *here*, to London, to be an au pair and learn English. She was *very* bright and her ambition was to go to Oxford or Cambridge – or maybe Harvard, even.

TRACEY: Wow, she must have been really clever to even *think* she could do that...

SARAH: Anyway, that was in 1938. Hitler was hardly making any secret of his ambitions, and there were terrible rumours of Jews being persecuted in Germany. Your Aunt Rebekah took the decision to go back to Lithuania and persuade Morris and Rose, your grandparents, to come back here with her, and Aaron, too, but he *wouldn't*. Apparently Rebekah was much sassier about politics, but *he* thought she was being too dramatic and pessimistic. And he didn't want to leave the country, and the forests where he'd built himself a secret hide for his bird-watching. He was *mad* on it, he was a 'twitcher'.

MATT: So he stayed?

SARAH: *Yep*. Even though the War had broken out. But once Rebekah had got Mum and Dad to England, to the East End, where they'd be with a community of refugees, she went back for him, her 'other half'. Not *immediately*, because she didn't know how to. But she missed him badly and was *terrified* of what might happen to him. After a couple of years she heard about the Underground Railroad.

MATT: *Wossat?*

SARAH Back in the days of the Slavery in America, there was a kind of 'underground' route out of the South for escaped slaves who wanted to head North without being recaptured. It was like a chain of 'safe houses' – and 'conductors' (or couriers) between them. It wasn't *literally* underground, but like we talk about the French underground in the war – the Resistance.

BRAD: *I'd* never even heard of this till your Mum told me: *amazing!*

SARAH: Anyway, this was our equivalent, a way of getting Jews out of Europe, to safety, here or further away. Rebekah figured she could use it to get *in*, and get Aaron out again – in the event she hardly used it at all, but it got her thinking and planning. However, the bad news from Europe was getting worse. By then Lithuania had been occupied by the Nazis. So she cut her hair short, dressed as a man and bought a passage on a South African cargo boat that was docked at Southampton, on the way to Danzig (which is called Gdansk now). She walked and hitchhiked to Kovno – about 350 miles – and very dangerous because the Germans had invaded, and were shooting Jews for fun.

TRACEY: You don't mean that, like *literally*....

SARAH: *Literally* - so were the Lithuanian collaborators – they were just killing Jews on the streets, for no reason, no excuse.

There was no sign of him at the old family house so she gathered up some clothes and headed for the forest – she knew where he'd be if he hadn't been rounded up. He'd built himself this tree-house, but way up high in the canopy of the forest. He was there.

They lived there for a while, teaching themselves how to live off forest fruits and trap animals. And *then* they were discovered. Not by the *Nazis*, but by Jewish partisans who'd escaped the ghetto in Vilnius and formed a resistance movement. They were attacking troop convoys and blowing up ammunition trains. *Very* brave.

It was a *great* development for my brother and sister. Aaron became a saboteur. He'd always been fearless, knew the forest backwards and could disappear at will if he was pursued. Rebekah learnt from him. But one day she took too big a risk, and was captured. They were determined to find out where the brigade was, so they *tortured* her....

TRACEY: NO! *Don't* tell us what they did, please...

SARAH: No I won't (*sobs*) I wouldn't ever....(*breaks down in tears*) Tracey goes to Sarah puts her arm round her, Brad puts his hand over Sarah's, on the board)

TRACEY: Mum, I'm so sorry, don't do this to yourself....

(*Sarah composes herself, blows her nose hard in a tissue....*)

SARAH: No, I'm OK now,honestly.....Rebekah knew that they would kill her, *one* way or another – through the torture, shooting her as a spy, or sending her off to a concentration camp. So she decided she would say nothing... and they couldn't break her. She was sent to a camp, already half-dead. Bergen-Belsen.

MATT: This is amazing...but I can't work out how you know all the details...?

SARAH: Two ways: they brought in an expert interrogator from Germany. The Jewish brigade had been responsible for hundreds - maybe thousands - of Nazi deaths and tons and tons of ammunition blown up. So they *had* to be snuffed out. As the number one celebrity torturer, he was tried at Nuremberg, so it all came out then. Plus some Bergen-Belsen survivors who knew her in her last days.

TRACEY: What about Uncle Aaron – what happened to him?

SARAH: He was *terribly* affected by the loss of Rebekah. I gather he lost it a bit – lost discipline, and went a bit wild, took risks. Eventually blew up a train, got caught in the shrapnel storm, and was immobilised, both legs useless. They caught up with him as he tried to heave himself away, just on his hands and arms. He was summarily executed on the spot, bullet in the back of the head.

TRACEY (*sobbing slightly and dabbing her eyes*): Oh Mum, your big brother and you never even knew him

SARAH: Much later we were contacted by a member of the brigade who knew them both. He witnessed Aaron's death from way up a tree, where he'd been a look-out.

Mum and Dad had stayed in the East End much longer than they wanted to in case anybody got in touch: don't forget, they didn't know what had happened, and maybe they hoped that somehow their kids had survived. When the truth was finally known, it *broke* my dad, his heart wasn't good anyway, and this finished him off.....and Rose died a few weeks later. Of a broken heart, they used to say, but probably pneumonia. So I lost all my family to Nazism.

I was fostered, and although the story is very sad, and violent, I think you need to know these things. It was a reality and your generation have such *cushioned* and protected lives.

MATT: I kinda know that, but when I think of my uncle coming down from trees to blow up ammunition trains, It's *like* a computer game - unreal to me, but real..

SARAH: It's not your fault Matty, but sometimes when I see you two fighting over the Game-Boy or whatever, I feel a terrible sensation coming over me: it's a kind of *cold anger* that just wells up and floods my body and my brain: that you're only here because my sister made it possible by getting my parents out. And my brother and sister died trying to stop more persecution of Jews there. However brave they were, they *failed*: 95% of Lithuanian Jewry were murdered one way or another. Not your fault, you're normal 2004 kids. But the trivia which dominates your lives, disturbs me – all that *terrible*, terrible sacrifice to preserve a world free for computer games.....! Sorry.....

MATT: There's no answer to that, Mum. But *isn't* the most important thing that they were heroes.....and now we know, we're honouring them. Really. I know it's not, like, my usual attempt to be cool, but I've got a big lump in my throat, as you can hear, and my eyes were getting hot and wet, and I feel so, so proud of them..... (reaches for tissue, wipes eyes, long blow of nose)

SARAH: Yes, they were real heroes, and they will *always* be heroes to me. It makes me so angry when I hear people ask why the Jews didn't fight back, why they went like lambs to the slaughter. It may seem ironic now, with Israel and the Palestinians, but Jews have always been *peaceful* people, and not worldly around guns and bombs and fighting. Not in our nature. And you can't organise people into an army when you're penned up in a sealed ghetto, without weapons: resistance was futile and simply suicidal. Literally. But they did resist.

TRACEY: There's something weird...I didn't *know* them...I've never *seen* them and yet I just *love* them for what they did. What they went through – we can't even imagine it.

GRAN: I had no idea about this going on, I never *knew* you'd lost family in this awful

way. Makes me feel quite guilty, somehow. We had terrible times in the War but there was also this fantastic camaraderie - some people still talk about it like it was the *best* time of their lives! I don't see it like that, though I know what they mean. But my friend Sybil was a war photographer, not at the front but in London, going round in the Blitz taking photographs of the damage and the injured. Terrible: I'll never forget some of those images: body parts, stuff like that...Sorry Sarah, I've spoiled your story...

SARAH: That's OK Gran, I'm done So, any questions?

MATT: No, I'm gutted. It's like a movie, with Aaron and Rebekah as the stars - someone should make one, it's such a story.....

TRACEY: Yeah, that would work better than a play, because of all the action in the forest with the Jewish brigade, explosions and stuff...

MATT: Mum, we *are* actually counted as Jewish, Trace and me, aren't we? Because of *you*? I mean it's really weird, because even before we knew it, I did feel a bit, like, *different*, like not *completely* English...I dunno, it's hard to explain

GRAN: I believe there's some Jewish blood on our side, somewhere, *too*.

MATT: So that makes us **more** than Jewish, like JEWISH + VAT!

TRACEY: Nice one, bro, you've finally made a funny. I'm in shock...

BRAD: Hey my little Schmoigels, don't get excited, there's a *whole world* out there that doesn't think it's such a great thing to be Jewish. *Trust* me.

TRACEY: Sounds like that came from the heart, Dad. What do you *mean*?

BRAD: It's Mum's story really. We used to have a really big group of friends, we'd do lots of things together but we don't really see them anymore...

SARAH:(**interrupts**) Let me tell it, love...it's more down to me than you. One of this group was a German guy, Dieter (we called him Dee), who came over here in the 70s and stayed. Nice guy, liberal views, apparently, almost naturalised really. A bit of a hippy, but got himself a trade, as a plumber. He'd travelled all over, but settled in Cricklewood - though he called it *West West Hampstead*! Anyway I was talking to him at a party, for our friend Barbara's birthday, and I happened to mention that I'd just been to a Holocaust Memorial Day event..... then thought it might not have been the best thing to say because some Germans are very

sensitive about the issue, understandably. But before I could come out with an apology, he said “You know, Sarah, I think the Holocaust was *terribly* exaggerated, don’t you?”.

TRACEY: You’re *kidding!*

SARAH: I couldn’t believe my ears, to say such a thing to someone who you absolutely *know* is Jewish? I said “*Whaat*, very loudly, and Brad turned round and said “What on earth’s the matter”. So, he repeated what he’d just said to me. And then Brad and I lost it and took him apart. I remember Brad saying, ” that’s Holocaust Denial – do you not even *know* that? Holocaust denial is not just for those nutters who say it never happened, it’s for *any* denial or *minimising* of the deaths of the six million“, then I chimed in with “the people who your parents’ generation *butchered* in an *industrialised murder machine*...how *dare* you deny their deaths’.

BRAD: So then I said something like “how ironic that the nation you’ve left behind, to live here, has at least had the *decency* to admit their crimes *and* pay reparations *and* make Holocaust Denial a crime: if you say those things in your own country, you’d be up in court!”. By this time there was *complete* silence in the rest of the room and everyone looked *aghast*. Some tried to intervene, Dee stalked off home. Some tried to explain it, on his behalf, as part of his anti-Israeli feelings because of the treatment of the Palestinians. I argued that many people, including Jews, are *horrified* by that, *but*, and it’s a big but, there are many anti-Semites who *use* that issue as a way of venting – and disguising – their anti-Jewish feelings. We decided to leave.

SARAH: Yeah: it felt *toxic* and unresolvable, It seemed like *more* people were concerned about having upset Dee than the issue itself. Even now I find it difficult to believe that he *said* that to someone of Jewish descent, repeated it and then defended it. He really believed it!. No-one thought to say “and what precisely is your *evidence* for saying that?” Shame, because it would *have* to have been things like David Irving’s books - he’s a Far Right, Nazi sympathiser, who poses as an academic historian. BRAD: That was five years ago, and we’ve never seen any of them since, except at a distance, like in Tesco’s: too embarrassed, I suppose: some things you can’t take back. What was said, is said forever.

(a few bars of Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves, Nabucco)

Act 1, Scene 3: True Confessions

(Tracey in the tent), Matt outside

MATT: Trace, can I come in?

TRACEY: **'ang on**, I'm changing. OK now . **(Matt crawls in)**

MATT: Jeez, it's worse than my bedroom, how do you *find* anything?

TRACEY: You know what they say: a tidy desk is the sign of a sick mind, well it's the same with tents. Which for some reason reminds me that Dad hasn't made his usual camping joke, about 'loitering within tent'

MATT: That's right. But give it time, we're only halfway through. There's a bit in Hamlet about " it follows as the night, the day....". Inevitably that joke *will be made*, you can count on it. How do you think the holiday's going so far?

TRACEY: As well as can be expected, when you're totally trapped by incessant rain in a tiny prison with 4 inmates you know only too well, warts and all. Farts an' all in Gran's case, bless her.. No escape, no telly and no friends. It can only get better, or someone will blow a valve.

Anyway, how do you know about Hamlet, I thought you couldn't even read yet...?

MATT: Haha, hilarious. I just did it for GCSE.

TRACEY: Really? That's the thing about being away at Uni. You miss things. I did it too. Don't you remember that row I had with Dad when he was helping me revise and said I wasn't taking it seriously enough? Just because I said Toblerone or not Toblerone, that is the question?"

MATT: That's quite good, actually. I like it. But I'd be a bit worried if I were you - Dad wouldn't have to take a DNA test – you really *are* his daughter, you poor cow.

TRACEY: He's not so bad – we're really hard on him, you know, he's amazing for his

age – I just can't *tell him* that, his ego would just inflate like a balloon, and explode or go whizzing round the room, when you accidentally release them....

MATT: Talking of explosions, I'm about to drop a bomb on the holiday and I want your take on how to handle it.

TRACEY: *Tell...*

MATT: Well my GCSE results are out tomorrow. I think Mum and Dad may have forgotten. *I* haven't because there's going to be a showdown.

TRACEY: But you *might* have done better than you think, it's happened before...

MATT: You don't get it. It doesn't matter if I got straight A stars, I *don't* want to do A-levels, and I don't want to go to University. I want to do an apprenticeship, I want to learn how to work in wood, *properly*. I know I've got some talent – I'm far and away the best at school in Design & Technology... and I just love *wood*.....I love the different grains, and how wood is hard and strong, but soft and workable too. And ***I love sawdust, too***it's *great* when you don't sweep it up and it lays over everything like snow- it really does. Cos it drifts, into contours and if you screw up your eyes it's like dunes in a desert. Brilliant...

TRACEY: Wow. My bruv the Poet. Well, you have to do *what you* want to do: no-one else can decide that for you. You have to be strong and put your foot down.

MATT: Yeah, well that sounds all very good, but I can't do it with him, he's so good with words it makes me flustered – it's like I'm trying to say it in French and can't find the words. So I put my foot in my mouth. The fact is, Dad believes that A-levels, University and a profession are the only things worth doing and he's going to go mentull. I've been dropping hints for two years, but he kind of filters them out, and pays no attention.

TRACEY: I'll support you Matt, you won't be on your own, and I'm sure Mum will, too. Even though she won't be seen to go against him, she'll calm him down.

MATT: Thanks Trace. Appreciated. Anything I can do for you in return?

TRACEY: Actually...yeah

MATT: Like what:

TRACEY: Same thing: give me support...

MATT: Well I can see you need a bigger bra these days...

TRACEY: You disgusting little perve, brothers aren't supposed to notice these things....

MATT: OmiGod, you're Harry Pegggers!

TRACEY: What?

MATT: Upper class slang for pregnant.

TRACEY: Oh. Yes...I am.

MATT: Wow. I didn't think anyone would ever fancy you enough to do *that!*

TRACEY: Thanks, dickhead. I can always rely on you, can't I, to make a joke and say something *really* inappropriate at *exactly* the wrong time...

MATT: *Serious*, I'm *really sorry*, if you didn't know it, all my mates really rate you, and I've always been dead chuffed to have a sister who looks like you. When it comes down to it, you must know I'd always do anything I could to help you. I'll cut out the banter. What do you want me to do? I could have a chat with Mum and see if she wants to break it to Dad gradually?

TRACEY: Appreciated. But no. I think I have to do it, and do it head-on. Which is good in theory, talking about it like this, with you. But it's one thing to talk about it like this, but quite another thing to actually drop the bomb on the whole Family Holiday...

MATT: I think that's an even bigger bombshell than mine. You can go first. I'm serious, for me this is a Good Thing. Yours will flatten everything and everyone in sight, and then mine will plop into the crater, roll around a bit and not even explode. Brilliant, my gorgeous sister, and so good of you to lay this on, just to benefit your little Bruv. And thank Paul too, for the pleasant surprise. And when do you think we should do this?

TRACEY: (*Tracey takes deep breath, and struggles to feet*) NOW.....RIGHT NOW, for me. You tomorrow, when you get your results, though you won't get my

support if I've been lynched. C'mon, NOW, before we lose our nerve

(both exit tent and Matt enters caravan first, Tracey turns to audience)

TRACEY: My Dad can be the sweetest person in the world, but if he loses it, he's got quite a temper on him. I know he doesn't like my boyfriend, Paul, he couldn't make it any more obvious And I don't mind telling you, he's not *completely* wrong. I wonder about him, too, BUT, I can't tell Dad that.....I've got to defend Paul until we both know what we really want. Paul doesn't know about the baby, either, but I think he'll stick with me. Over the long-term, I've no idea....He could go either way, and he's a long way from knowing what he wants to do in Life.....but honestly, it doesn't matter: there's plenty of stars in the sky and I'll have my baby....

(a few bars of Baby Love...Supremes)

Act 1, Scene 4: a pregnant silence

TRACEY: Dad, will you sit down with us, *please* (Brad is fiddling with something in the cupboard under sink)

BRAD: Is it urgent? I'm a bit involved here. The waste pipe has come off the sink and we're going to have a flood if we put anything down the plughole.

TRACEY: OK, I'll wait. (sits down, hands clasped on lap, head slightly down)

SARAH: What's the matter, hon, what's *happened*? it's something *bad*, it's all over your face, spit it out.

TRACEY: (Very deep breath, compresses lips) I'm three months pregnant....I'm *sorry*
(Brad shoots up and hits his head cupboard as he pulls out, moves towards Tracey)

BRAD: Alright, whose is it? Do you know?

TRACEY: (recoils) Don't ask *me*, how should I know? I can't help it if I'm popular! I've narrowed it down to a shortlist of seven....

SARAH: *Tracey!* Don't wind him up any more than he is already!

TRACEY: Well Mum, honestly, what a question....he's calling me a slag.....

MATT (Mockney voice): You slaaag....

TRACEY:..... There's only one – as you well know, Dad – and as far as I'm concerned there'll *only* be one: Paul.

BRAD: Oh. *The Drip*. Might have known it, he wouldn't look me in the eye last time he came round the house. For goodness sake Tracey, if you were going to *fall* you could have chosen someone with a bit more substance: he's like a pipe-cleaner. It's not that I don't like him. I just can't find anything in him to *like* or *dislike*...

SARAH: That's unfair Brad. He's *not* the finished article. Boys take longer than girls to mature. You don't give him a *chance*. You talk over him and you're always cutting him

off with a joke or a smart answer. You're his worst nightmare because he's *slower* to speak. He thinks first – unlike you. And you, Tracey, don't get smug cos I'm telling your Dad off – you're as bad as each other. Other people can't get a word in edgeways. Can they Matt...yes **you** Matt!

MATT: If you say so Mum (is that the right *answer*?)

SARAH: What I'm saying is Dad and Tracey are out of the same mould: quick, full of backchat, banter, whatever you call it, never stop, always looking for the clever remark or the quip. It's a wrestling match to try and get you to talk seriously. Whereas for me and Matty – and Paul, as it happens – we're slower, we're – what's the word - more contemplative.

BRAD: But I..

SARAH: (**aggressively**) And you butt in and talk over us, like right **now**...

We think about things then make up our minds to speak. Then we have to slide it in when you two pause for breath. You're not good conversationalists – you love to **talk** but you don't **listen** properly. Sometimes if Matty and I go for a walk on the Heath, sometimes we don't talk for minutes on end, and it's fine, absolutely fine. It's calm, and relaxing and you can think a bit, dream, plan things. There's no-one 'in yer face' or your ears, going yada yada yada, 90 mile an hour jokefest. And when I say joke, I'm being kind.

MATT: She's right Dad. I could strangle you sometimes when I've got something Important to say and you just won't let me: sometimes you see that I'm about to butt in and you just *speed up* so there's absolutely no gap for me to get into. You know what it's like, it's like, when you're driving and you go to overtake someone, and they accelerate, and you just have to give up and slip back into the line of traffic behind them, if you can...

SARAH: We're going right off the point. (**Puts arm around Tracey**). What do you want *to do*, darling?

TRACEY (**resentfully**): You mean do I want to get *rid* of it?

BRAD: Well, that's what it comes down to...

TRACEY: No, I don't want to have an abortion or have the baby adopted

GRAN: Quite right, Tracey, you're the important one here and you have to make your own decisions, just like I had to with your Dad here. It's not an easy road, but you'll have young Paul to support you

SARAH: Do you want to give up University.....that would be such a shame..

TRACEY: No, I want to do both. It's possible...

BRAD: They always drop out, students who have babies

TRACEY: Maybe at your place, which isn't exactly progressive. I'll find somewhere that doesn't require 3 A's and has to try a bit harder to get students, so it lays on a creche, and students run cooperative baby-sitting and playgroups, stuff like that. It can be done. And I can go part-time, take a bit longer, clock it up in modules – even switch to the OU. It can all be done. But it just doesn't fit with your traditional template, Dad. I don't fit in it, and I won't *try*, however much you try and force me. So **back off!**

BRAD: Blimey! All this resentment, like I'm some kind of ogre. I mean, I recognise some of what you're saying but it's all exaggerated, out of proportion. I'll back off when you get real. It's much more difficult than you think – you'll probably drop a degree class in the process, at least.

SARAH: That's not the end of the world..

TRACEY: And not necessarily true: at the moment the jobs situation is so bad you won't get one anyway other than shitwork. What's the difference between not getting a job with a 2:1 and not getting one with a 2:2. If you get run over by a car, does it matter *what make* it is?

BRAD: Funny. Very clever, like it's almost rehearsed.

TRACEY: No Dad, just borrowed from Stokely Carmichael, talking about different kinds of racism, as it happens....

BRAD Anyway I need a little break from this, and I want to think about it, outside, maybe sucking on a piece of grass – but definitely *not* the Silk Cut Extra I fundamentally crave, and have done for 5 years. It seems to be stopping raining ...

TRACEY: Really? Perfect timing, because I'm beginning to feel like a ship in a bottle - no scrub that, a sardine in a tin - at least the ship's got the space to itself!

GRAN: Brad, you'll get over it son, you did when *you* were the baby in question.. Tracey will be fine, she'll succeed at anything she wants to do, she's got the brains and the character - and the looks - can't think where from....and by the way, Tracey, I love the idea of getting to hold my great grandchild!

SARAH: (to Brad) I'll come with... because you don't actually think on your own, do you, you do your thinking by talking. The number of times I've heard you having this animated conversation with someone, and it's turned out to be the bathroom mirror.

TRACEY: Matty, why don't we take Gran into town for a treat, just to *remind us* what civilisation is like. Give us the car keys then. Don't look like that, Dad, you know I'm an ace driver...

BRAD: Here you are then: drive *very* slowly past the farm gate because there's that huge pool of muddy water and dilute cow dung and I don't want it sprayed all over the car. Here's a few quid, you might want to get a bit of lunch.

(*Maybe Baby.....Buddy holly*)

Act 1, Scene 5: Parental/Prenatal

(Mum and Dad alone, outside the caravan)

BRAD: nice to get out of the pressure cooker for a while. At least with them there's a safety valve! Did you know about this pregnancy bit?

SARAH: Not *for sure*. But it had *occurred* to me. She has changed in the last couple of months, hadn't you *noticed* she's put on weight?

BRAD: Yeah, but I'd also noticed she's been guzzling *chocolate bars*. I should have put two and two together. It's like the Cadbury's Dairy Milk Pregnancy Test. Could *catch on*. I also saw her putting some peanut butter and a gherkin on top of a fruit and nut bar, but I didn't suss it because I haven't got feminine intuition – *don't say it* - or any intuition, really.

How do you feel about her getting herself knocked up, be *honest*?

SARAH: Well, I'm a woman....

BRAD: *(interrupting very quickly)* I **knew** there was something different about you, you're not like the other boys...

SARAH: There you go again, Brad.....

BRAD: Sorry, love..

SARAH: Look, if she wanted a termination it *would fit* better with her finishing University with a degree and a meal ticket, of course. But that's *obvious* and I'm not going to *argue* that and put pressure on her to get rid of it. *No way*. But neither am I going to get sappy at the prospect of a new baby and encourage her to go through with it. It's up to *her* – and to a far lesser extent, to *him* – and our role is support and advice – when it's needed. No *sermonising*, no 'in our day' blah blah blah..., just *there* for her, literally, because she *can't do* this on her own in a student bedsit. It is what it is, Brad, just one of Life's curved balls that you've got to deal with because you haven't got a choice. And deal with it we *will*.

BRAD: You're *right*. Of course you're right. You usually *are*. It's just gonna take some getting used to. I s'pose I still see her as a *little girl* in some ways. You can't help hark back to that, can you? That perfect time when they idolise you, and they put their little arms around round your neck and kiss your face, and just for a moment you **are** perfect, to them, and you feel it too. I loved that so much. And then they grow older, and they *distance* themselves – I guess they *have* to. They *need* you less, and they want to grow up and not be cuddled or fussed by you all the time. And then they start taking the piss, because it's cool to have a joke at your expense. But it hurts a bit. And now they're getting better at things than us – all the digital stuff which we struggle with, it's second nature to them. So you start to feel a bit diminished, old, useless. And now with Trace getting pregnant, it's like the ultimate independence – starting her own family.

SARAH: *No* Brad, I know what you're saying, but you're just doing the glass-half-*empty* thing. For the next year or two Tracey's going to be *very* dependent on us. You have a *chance* here to carve out a brilliant new relationship with her, because she'll need your time and your energy, and don't forget *you'll* be the expert here, she hasn't had kids before, you have.

BRAD: Yup. It's true, Think *positive*. To be honest, she's not the problem for me, it's him. The Drip. It would be different if he was just the first boyfriend, gone in a few months. But as a permanent partner, he's close to a nightmare. I know I'm too influenced by the superficial things: that hair, the stringy White Dreadlocks, the fuzzy chin, the charity shop clothes, **not to mention** the cool attitude and complete absence of any prospects....and he smokes far too much weed.

SARAH: But you **did**. You did mention it again..... and again. You have such a *bias* against him that you're ready to criticise *everything* he does. He can't put a foot right. When he brings me some daffodils – probably picked out of somebody's garden, but it's the thought that counts – you say he's *sucking up*, or he's after something. It's a lose-lose situation for him. And you are *rigid* – you just don't accept any evidence that could put him in a good light. You know what's *funny*?

BRAD: Go on, make me laugh....

SARAH: Funny peculiar and ironic: You belong to Amnesty. You donate money. You're' in favour of Human Rights, all over the world, for everyone.....*except Paul !* You treat him like he's an Untouchable! Plus, all the time you make it you *versus* him. Well if you're not careful it's gonna be you versus *her and him* – and you won't like that. And I'm always stuck in the middle, the

peacemaker or the bloody umpire. So now, just for once, The Umpire Strikes Back – oh listen, I made a joke – so it's not your preserve, after all.

BRAD: What a brute... (*nodding head from side to side*)

SARAH: You see even in that, even now, in this very conversation, there's heavy irony. Harmless in this case, I grant you, but there. It's a reflex with you...

BRAD: (*plaintively*) But

SARAH: Don't *interrupt*: you need to feel like we feel when you just talk *over us*.

Look we *know* you love us to bits. That's right, and understood. Though **reminding** us every now and then with the odd explicit, non-ironic statement, like the three magic words might just help...

So along comes Paul, unprepossessing, seems like a *stranger* to the bathroom, the laundry and much of the English language. His baggage is like a very heavy *rucksack*: his Mum kicked his Dad out because he was a drunk and an adulterer, and his stepdad puts him down, out of jealousy, because he's stupid and Paul isn't

So he falls in love with Tracey and what does he find? She has a father who looks at him like he's something the dustmen spilled on the pavement, and misses no opportunity to take the piss out of him, his clothes, his hair, his very naïve political opinions and his capacity to ever earn a living...

BRAD: (*nodding*) Guilty as charged...

SARAH: And you give him a nickname: Appalling Paul. *Appalling!*? You always go for the joke, without any thought of the *effect*. It's a compulsion with you: you have to try and amuse, even when it's really just *abuse*.

And yet you're a kind man to other people. We all love you, jokes 'n' all, your students love you, you've got one of those faces which is so friendly it makes strangers smile at you spontaneously, but you've got a blind spot about Paul. I don't want to get all Freudian about it, but I do wonder if it's *not* Paul, it would be *anyone* who threatens to take away your daughter...

BRAD: Is that *it*; are you done? You're not *wrong*, but he just *frustrates me*: because she could do so much better...You know, our daughter has got *everything*: she's very

bright, very funny, a lovely nature, and she's good-looking. A great hand of cards she's been dealt. I know it's a cliché but she could have anyone she wanted to. I've always hoped she'd find someone who would look after her, or at least watch over her – not have to go through life propping up some inadequate...

SARAH: Mistake number *one*: she doesn't need looking after, she's a strong independent young woman. Mistake number *two*: you don't yet know what Paul's capable of, he's still young. You see him like he's further down the evolutionary ladder, but he's just *young*. He's not *there* yet, he might become *anything*. What about the band he plays in, they might hit it big and you'd look bloody silly then, the old-fashioned Dad disapproving of the daughter's millionaire rock star boyfriend, and having to eat humble pie later.

BRAD: Bring it on..!

SARAH: You're playing a role – the patriarch – it doesn't suit you and it's not appropriate. Mistake number THREE: she is perfectly capable of deciding what she wants in a man – or woman: you can't do it for her...

BRAD: Enough! Enough mistakes, already. I'll try, I really will. But while we're arguing about bloody Paul, there's an empty caravan, with children and pensioners safely tucked away in town, and I'm thinking we should be making the most of it. You wanna do that thing with me? You know...

SARAH: Do that thing? You mean, make love/have sex, delete where inapplicable

BRAD: Exactly, My dear Watson.....we've been stuck in that van for *four* days of heavy rain, where you can hear a fly fart from the other end, it's like bloody quarantine! We have a wonderful chance to express our undying love for each other in all its wondrous physical manifestations, without the inhibition of an audience and we're sitting out here just talking about it...

SARAH: C'mon then, you incurable romantic: back to the 60s, make love not war....

INTERVAL

(a few bars of Wooden Heart Elvis?)

Act 2 Scene 1: Wooden heart *(Next morning in the caravan)*

BRAD: I've been thinking, Matty, *aren't your* GCSE results due about now?

MATT: Yes they are..... today, actually.

BRAD: Well don't you want to *know*? Shouldn't we phone the Allisons next door and get them to go in - they've got the spare key?

MATT: Doesn't matter, really, won't change anything...

BRAD: *Course* it matters: they're your first public exams. It's not as important for your future as A-Levels or your degree, but it *is* important. I hadn't forgotten, it was just eclipsed by Tracey's news. C'mon we'll go into town and phone from there – get the mobiles charged up, too. *(Matt, exchanges glances with Tracey, bites his lip, then speaks nervously but with an attempt to be assertive) :*

MATT: I know you won't want to hear this, but I'm *not going to do A-levels* and *I'm not going to University*: I want to design and work in wood. I'm good at it, and I *love it*. End of. I've already signed off from school and I've got interviews for apprenticeships when we get back. It's all *decided*, Dad, and I'm *really*, really happy with it. I'm *not* academic like you – let's not pretend that I am. But I've got some gifts and what could be more intelligent than to spend your working life *doing something you love and are good at*? End of speech.

BRAD: I don't know what to say....

TRACEY:general sigh of relief!

BRAD: Did *you* know about this, love (turns to Sarah)

SARAH: Honestly, I had *no idea*. I *had* noticed he was spending a lot more time out in the shed than he was doing homework, but you don't question teenage boys too closely about things like that....

TRACEY: Mu-um, too much information...

BRAD: Well, you're right Matty, I *am* horrified. Yes, I just take it for granted that everybody these days has to *scrap* for a living in a dog-eat-dog world, and so they have to get the highest and best qualifications they can. Quite *apart* from all the benefits of University in broadening you, getting you away from home, meeting every kind of person – making friends that will last a lifetime.

TRACEY: Dad, *all our lives you've said to us*, "I just want you to be happy". Please don't say that you didn't mean it...

BRAD: That's a low blow Tracey, of *course* I did....

TRACEY: Well, live up to it then: it's obviously what he desperately *wants* to do. And so *what* if it doesn't work out? I'm sure it will. But if it doesn't, he goes on an Access course to do some A-levels and goes to Uni as a mature student. Simple. Dad, you're stuck on how rigid it all was when *you were a student*. It's much easier to switch around now. More expensive, though. Your lot had free everything, so there's not much left in the pot for us!

SARAH: She's not *wrong* Brad, we've been a very privileged generation. But Matty's privilege should be his freedom *not* to go to University, if he doesn't want to.

BRAD: I know that. But Matty, you could get the best of both worlds: Why can't you get an education, and a proper job and do your woodwork as a hobby?

MATT: Weird how '*your woodwork*' **makes it** into a little hobby, isn't it, puts it in its place, makes it not a 'proper job'. Really annoying....and *patronising*. It's very elitist, Dad, to just *assume* that only brain-work is acceptable for people like us. Besides, it requires a lot more brainwork, visualisation and problem-solving than working in an office. And it's creative – very, very creative.

BRAD: What, working, as a *chippy* on a building site?

MATT: If necessary, yes, maybe as work experience, or part of my training: but that's not what I'm thinking of doing for life. I'd like to make really beautiful furniture – the kind you ogle at in Habitat or Conrans. Or make musical instruments, guitars, violins, whatever...

BRAD: If you succeed, but you're not going to be the British Fender or Gibson without a huge investment in plant and factory space, and we don't have that kind of money. Anyway, are they made out of wood these days?

MATT: Acoustic stringed instruments are – don't know about Stratocasters, but they're part wooden. Anyways that's not the point – I wouldn't be limited to only working in wood.

Be honest, Dad, it's a class thing: like most middle-class socialists, you don't actually *want* your son to be a manual worker. But I don't want that either. I want to be a craftsman. It's different. I'd like to do really decorative inlay work, like the Victorians did on furniture, to carve, inlay, to match grains. IKEA is great, but Melamine is melamine and it can't be anything else, ever. It's a perfectly honourable craft – even profession – that I'm talking about.

BRAD: *Maybe*. The idea takes some getting used to, for me. Of course, the precedents aren't very good for Jewish boys and carpentry. End up carrying your own cross and getting nailed to it.....mind you, that was different.....that was because he didn't want to be a doctor...

MATT: *The old ones are the best ones*, eh Dad? Actually though, there's a parallel – I don't want to be a doctor of philosophy.....and it was never going to happen with my grades, anyway.

SARAH: Don't put yourself down, Matty, you always worked very hard, love

MATT: Yes, worked very hard to be *average* – or *less*, but never had to work hard with woodwork: very early on Mr Bullen said I had a gift.

BRAD: Talking of gifts, I'm looking at my responsibility for this: lavishing praise on you for the first thing you ever made – the pipe rack for the man who doesn't smoke a pipe. That was my first mistake...

MATT: Don't blame yourself! But give yourself a pat on the back if you can see your way to support me on this. I've never felt so enthusiastic about anything in my life....it

must be right.

BRAD: If that's what you want, *what you really, really want*. But you have to understand that you stopping education at 16 – it, well, goes against the grain...and you're certainly not a chip off the old block

TRACEY & MATT: Da-ad.....

BRAD: You know what, Matt, I've just remembered something which fits this situation perfectly. Saw it in an old black and white movie on the TV. An old boy is giving his son some advice about the grandson, who's a bit wayward, and he says "Let your son take his own path, and it will lead back to you..."

Probably true. I should really listen to myself more often, I can be quite *wise*, sometimes...even if it's somebody else's line.... (

(.....a few bars of *Teach your children.....CSNY*)

Act 2, Scene 2: Two White Bears

Sarah and Gran emerge from the van to where Brad, Tracey and Matt are sitting outside.

SARAH: Gran and I are going to have a run into Town - we need a few bits and pieces and it's market day. And I want to do the charity shops (kids groan). Anything you want?

BRAD: An Aston Martin would be nice..

SARAH: Brad! Saying something *thousands* of times doesn't make it happen. But I will buy you a lottery ticket, it's your only chance.

BRAD: The generosity! Breath-taking. You're some kind of saint.....bye love, bye Mum, don't spend all your pension at Ladbrokes.

TRACEY (visibly waiting till they've gone): Da-ad, I've got to ask you something: is Mum alright?

BRAD: Of course she is, she's fine, why?

TRACEY: I saw her taking some tablets last night and I asked her what was the matter and she said just a headache. But they weren't Neurofen, they were in a proper tablet bottle and she looked embarrassed. Look, if there's something wrong with her, we're entitled to know and we're both old enough. So what was she hiding?

Long pause, Brad head in hands, clearly struggling.

BRAD: OK. You remember when *Gran* took you off to Cornwall, last year, to her friend's cottage? You might have noticed at the time that it was a bit sudden?

TRACEY: Sort of, but I thought Sally just rung her up saying she'd had a cancellation at short notice, so it was free. And it was just at the beginning of the Summer holidays, so we could go.

MATT: I was a bit surprised you two didn't come too, but it was really nice, and then we had that two weeks in Spain with you two afterwards, that was cool.

TRACEY: Dad, don't go off the point, I don't want to reminisce about holidays, I wanna know what's up with Mum?

BRAD: No love, I'm right *on* the point. Just before then, Mum got a bit *strange*: Gran had noticed it before I did, because she spent more time with her in the day. Remember Mum was off work for a bit? There was that *child abuse* case and the whole team was suspended pending an investigation? Came to *nothing* in the end, the parents in question were *lying through their teeth*, but it was very stressful for the social workers. They were having to deal with reporters door-stepping them and paps with long lenses. And it was all over the newspapers, even the telly. Anyway, it was worrying at the time and she was very stressed, and rather depressed.

Then suddenly she flips into a really good mood, talking ten to the dozen, loads of energy, but somehow it was wrong, it was *too* good to be true, given that she was still under threat of dismissal. Gran and I decided that you two shouldn't be around it, and she took you away: which was the right thing, as Mum got much worse and it would have been difficult – and bad for you – to see her like that.

TRACEY: I think I know what's coming....

BRAD: Eventually she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Mum fought the diagnosis with total stubbornness and denial – she was terrified of being seen as mad, and it is a very serious thing. But don't panic, there's a kind of happy ending.

Anyway, I decided we should get away on our own, away from the stresses, and where her behaviour wouldn't be causing problems for her later, by alienating people. She agrees to come and takes over the process, and just books that brilliant house in Spain that we all loved so much. Trouble is, it was way out of our price-range, but people in that state spend money like there's no tomorrow – and that's why we've had austerity ever since: she spent thousands of pounds on whims – a car for herself, the big telly, the video camera – until I took her Visa cards out of her bag when she was asleep and cut them up. But unknown to me, she'd already spent nearly £14k, and stored half the stuff with friends – who broke ranks and told me.

MATT: Jeez, Dad you must have been shitting it – you're so disciplined with money..

BRAD: Beautifully put, Son, 'tight' as you like to call me, but you don't have much choice when you're a lecturer. But at the end of the day, money is just money. I was just gutted about Mum. She was getting more and more manic – actually that's not

right, she was *hypomanic*, which is, like, 'on the way to being fully manic, but not quite there yet'. She was totally in denial, refusing to admit there was anything wrong, so didn't need to see a doctor, said she was just very happy and excited with all the plans she'd made. That's typical, apparently, because people in this state have a *ferment* of ideas – *some of them very good* – of things to do and projects to do, and they often start businesses – problem is, they try and pursue *all of them*, and it's just impossible, there's not time in the day, nor the energy - so they founder, the whole house of cards comes crashing down and the person is wrecked, often broke and gets terribly depressed..

TRACEY: But that didn't happen to Mum, right?

BRAD: That's right

MATT: Why not?

BRAD: You may well ask. I think there were two things that saved her. One was that she was at the height of her menopause – you know, raging hormones. Maybe that gave her a rationalisation – something to blame it on which was not her fault – so she didn't get too far into the 'mad' role. She may even have been right, but either way she needed immediate treatment. Secondly, the trip to Spain was a brainwave because it took her away from all the familiar people. Like friends, who would be giving her all kinds of bad feedback, backing off her, looking shocked or getting angry that they couldn't get a word in edgeways, couldn't calm her down.

TRACEY:And us, we were starting to wonder....

BRAD: *Exactly*. In Spain she could be a little mad and just be the slightly crazy Englishwoman – they think we're all a bit nuts, anyway. There's an old Noël Coward song – long before your time – called "Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun".

TRACEY: It must have been fun getting her there...**not**

BRAD: Yeah, but I could tell that the stewardesses got her number very quickly and I prescribed a little alcohol which did the trick.

And she did 'act out' quite a bit in the village, but Spanish people are quite shy when they don't speak English, and because they wouldn't or couldn't engage with her, she slowly eased off on the jabbering. Not with me, though!

MATT: I'm believing everything you're saying Dad, but I just don't get it: how could she be so extreme, but be OK when we arrived? I don't remember anything that was crazy about her at all...we had a great couple of weeks in that beautiful village and down by the sea. It was the best holiday we've ever had. How come!

BRAD: But what happened at Malaga airport, when we met you off the plane?

TRACEY: Oh right, her *fall*. Weren't we supposed to meet you at the ramp down to the car hire bit, but when we came out of baggage reclaim, she spotted us and ran towards us and slipped on the floor. It was spectacular, like she was almost flying through the air, and then crunched into the floor head-first. It really was a crunch, you could hear it. There was a little blood and the side of her face started to swell up almost immediately. Somebody dialled 999 or whatever. It was scary, but she was alright.

BRAD: Yes, in every way. She hadn't fractured her skull, which they feared, but they kept her in for observation in case there was anything like bleeds on the brain. After a couple of days in hospital, she was discharged.

Do you remember that young English doctor, *Anna*? She came to talk to us during visiting? She was just qualified, and doing an internship thing, just because she wanted to work in South America and needed to improve her Spanish – and learn 'medical Spanish'. She talked *a lot* to Mum and a bit to me, and she worked out what had been going on. Brilliant. Mum was now 'in the system' – no choice, and no arguments – and could be treated 'in mind as well as body'. Anna confirmed it was bi-polar disorder and prescribed lithium, and wrote a letter to take to the Royal Free when we got home.

MATT: But Dad, even before that, when we were just chatting with her in hospital, she was perfectly normal – I remember saying to Tracey: "She doesn't seem to be affected by the fall at all, in fact she's better than she's seemed for a long time: we'll have to bop her on the head a bit more often".

TRACEY: He *did*. You see we were looking for it, not just because of the fall – flight more like it – but because we were worried when you shuffled us off to Cornwall with Gran – we had noticed Mum had gone a bit weird, we're not stupid.

BRAD: So, I sent for you when I thought she was getting a bit better, but then she got worse again – as we were driving along that coastal motorway to the airport, she suddenly screams at me to stop, and though I know it's illegal I pull onto the hard shoulder before she makes us crash.

TRACEY: Why would she do that....it's crazy...I mean *really* dangerous

BRAD: Why, because she's had a good idea for a little business that she could run from home, and give up social work and all the traumas. But you can *see it*, can't you, it *seemed* to be the answer to all her worst problems. And she had to write it down before she forgot it again. And she was right in a way – 'brilliant' ideas were passing through her brain every minute, and then get forgotten again when the next one came.

So I'm panicking: it was going to be a terrible shock for you, but you were in mid-air by then, what could I do?

TRACEY: *Poor you*. I can imagine it from hearing your tone of voice now, a year later. I can hear the panic.

MATT: So you're saying she was nuts right up till when we arrived, and two days later she was sane again?

BRAD: Yup. Nuts would not be the word I'd use, but '*over-excited*' doesn't quite cut it, either.

MATT: So what did it, then?

BRAD: *I think* it was the fall and the highly percussive trauma of the head and brain.

MATT: You mean it knocked some sense into her (*smirks*)

TRACEY: You *do* realise you're becoming just like your father, Matty, with your little jokes at inappropriate times. Shut up and listen...

BRAD: *No actually, Trace*, for the first time in his life he may actually be right – *in a way*. Hear me out. I've discussed this endlessly with my mate David at work, because he does some lectures in Clinical Psychology. We think there might be a parallel with ECT – Electro Convulsive Therapy. It's what they used to give to chronic depressives. Sounds horrendous, but they applied a controlled electric shock to the brain. Remember 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' with Jack Nicholson – only there they used it as a punishment. In real life it's used less and less, but they used it because it often *works* – to improve people's mood, or at least gets them off the very bottom of the pit of depression. It's crude, obviously; I remember that David, in his lectures, called it 'kicking the television set'.

TRACEY: But *how* does it work? Surely they must know or they wouldn't use it...

BRAD: Not necessarily. But the way I 'explain' it to myself is this: the brain has a natural, *normal* pattern of organisation, how it's supposed to be, if you like. Sometimes it might get a bit out of kilter, like when you're hypomanic – or just fallen in love – *which I think is pretty much the same thing*. But forget that. Things have gone a bit wrong and the scheme of things has changed. OK? Along comes a terrible blow, whether it's an electric current or a massive crunching blow to the skull. All the balls go up in the air. How do they fall? I think they are more likely to re-settle themselves into the 'natural' pattern, how they've been your whole life, rather than the disorganised pattern of the last few months' mania or depression. No idea if this is right, but it seems plausible to me...

So we've got the cleaners of AGP Malaga who polish their floors to an ice-rink sheen and a brilliant young expat doctor to thank for getting your Mum back to normal. Olé!

TRACEY: What a *story!*.....it's a miracle really..

MATT: I like it, it's *neat*.

BRAD: She's going to be on the lithium for at least a couple of years, to see her over her menopause. It's quite a heavy drug, but it does the trick. She thought it would iron out her emotions altogether so she resisted it. But Anna persuaded her to take it because it just puts a floor and a ceiling on the emotions, it doesn't abolish them.

TRACEY: I'm sorry I put her *on the spot* about the tablets...

BRAD: Don't worry, she's only kept it secret because she didn't want you to worry..

MATT: Typical *Mum*, she's totally unselfish like that...

BRAD:.....and, also she's very self-conscious about the whole thing: she knows she made an incredible exhibition of herself early on and that's so unlike her: it's pretty much a nightmare for her to remember it.

TRACEY: I love the way you two love each other, how you can put the other person first. I don't want to get schlocky – shoot me if I do – but I don't know any other couples who have as good a relationship as you two.

BRAD: Well, it's all down to me really, my endless tolerance for her brutish ways...

MATT: *Yeah, right*

TRACEY: No don't joke, Dad, I'm being serious....

BRAD: Sorry, I'm not used to you being *this nice* to me

TRACEY: I'm *not*, I'm being nice to *you both*, as a couple, it's different..

BRAD: I stand corrected

TRACEY: I'm just saying that you have a wonderful relationship with Mum, and it's an incredible model for Matty and me, just as we're getting to the time when we're choosing partners – or starting the sifting process...

MATT: Or an incredibly *hard* act to follow...maybe impossible

BRAD: Let's hope not. The only tips I can give you are, don't marry someone unless you are quite *sure* you are in love with them and can't visualise life without them; and when you marry them (or live with them) ***cherish*** them: it's an old fashioned word, but it has lots of extra meaning beyond 'love'.

I think I can hear the unmistakable engine note of an Aston Martin, so let's talk about something else and fake surprise when it arrives. I hope it's British Racing Green or black...

TRACEY: You're *incorri...corri..*

BRAD: Nah, I never liked Coronation Street, I'm an East Ender myself.....I think you mean incorrigible.

TRACEY: Right.

All 3 rise from their chairs Brad puts his right arm around Tracey's shoulders and raises his left hand for a high 5 with Matt, as Sarah and Gran approach.

MATT: Thank *god* for that, I thought you were going to *kiss* me for a moment

BRAD: *No worries, no danger!*

Kids run over to Mum and spontaneously embrace her.

SARAH (to Brad): You've told them, haven't you?

MATT: We didn't give him any choice Mum, we wouldn't let go of it.

BRAD: Direct questions, love, I couldn't lie about it...any more. Anyway, they're both fine with it.

TRACEY: You could have told us, Mum, I'm fully grown and Matt is probably as grown-up as he'll ever be....

MATT: One more word like that, and I *keell* you. Capiche?

SARAH: I just couldn't. A mother is always going to try to protect her children from the bad things. I plead guilty to that. Also, when you have a diagnosis like this it's very *powerful*. It's like a very sticky label, and people see *the label* and it becomes the first thing they think of when they see you: it feels like that anyway. And I didn't want you to see me like that – especially if it was only a single episode. I'm already sure *it is*. And, it's a very self-conscious thing and I couldn't stand the thought of being under constant surveillance, everybody checking everything I did or said for any sign of being mad. More importantly, I've got fish and chips in the car, so go get some plates.

TRACEY: Fresh fish and chips? Magic! God must have been female, and you are Her earthly representative, but I'm not buying the virgin birth bit, right?

SARAH: Let us eat...

BRAD: Afterwards Matty and I are going into town to that shop with the little internet bit. Can't call it a café, more of a telephone booth: email Mrs Allison Next door, see if she can send us the results or just phone her if she gets confused. Then we're going to do a bit of male-bonding on that little boating lake: get a couple of pedalos out, have a race.

MATT: Have you noticed that it's become a kind of family *tradition*; every year, as I get older Dad has to reassert his masculinity by finding something he can still beat me at...

BRAD: *Maybe* I won't beat you.....

MATT: Oh Yes you will. If you're losing you'll declare best of 3 or 5 or 7 until you win - or

either cheat, or invalid yourself out with a 'pulled muscle' or something – I've seen it all before. Or I'll just concede defeat because I can't stand to see my father being so transparently desperate to be the top man. So today it's the megalomaniac against the pedalomaniac. Anyone interested in a side bet? Don't forget I've got some woodwork muscles now...

(Listen, do you wanna know a secret.....Beatles)

Act 2 Scene 3: Secrets about secrets

GRAN: *(to audience, standing)* I'm sitting here listening to all this knockabout stuff for days, and I'm feeling uncomfortable. So much conflict and disappointment, so much frustration. It's kind of embarrassing and hard to hear when it's your own family. I know a lot of it's jokey, but there's often a hard edge to it. You just want to knock their heads together, get them to see sense and appreciate what they've got in each other.

BRAD: Yeah, I like the sound of the head-knocking, if I can do some of that...

GRAN: *(sits down at table)* Shut up Brad, I'm talking and I need you to be serious for once...I've been sitting on some news for a month or two, wondering what to do with it – and also how to tell you, because it's momentous and it's going to change things, and I don't know how you'll react...

BRAD: Please don't tell me *you're* pregnant too!

GRAN: *(slaps hand on table)* SHUT **UP**, Brad.....

No, I'm moving – emigrating, in fact..

BRAD: *Where to*, for chrissake?

GRAN: America, Florida, actually...Miami

TRACEY: *Gran*, are you feeling *alright*?

SARAH: How come, Gran?

GRAN: A gentleman I knew a long, long time ago, has just died. He didn't have any family left, so he's left his house and his business, in fact everything to me... the house is one of those beautiful, bright-painted Art Deco ones.. They are really expensive and the business is substantial. It's to do with furniture...

MATT: What making it, or just retailing it?

GRAN: Both I think, also bespoke furniture in people's homes – kitchens, built-in wardrobes and maybe conversions and stuff. Anyway I'm going to live in the house and live off the business, like he did, and not need anyone's time or money.

TRACEY: But we won't *see you*, Gran...

GRAN: Sure you will, sweetheart. First of all, you've seen too much of me recently since I moved into the granny flat. It's very difficult for a grandmother who loves her son and his family to *keep away*, it's like a magnetic force pulling you upstairs. I've been getting under your feet a bit, let's be honest (*others all demur*). Secondly, I've been talking to the solicitors, and they reckon the whole estate – house plus business - is going to be worth at least 3 million dollars (*collective gasps and whistles*) so I'll be backward and forwards like the 244 bus, and so will *you* if you want to.

BRAD: But you won't know anyone, Mum, you'll be lonely. People over here decide they're going to retire to the seaside and then discover that it's not so easy to make friends when you're knocking on a bit. Then one of them *dies* and the other is stranded. It's a *mistake* to move away from all your support at the very time you're going to need it, sooner or later.

GRAN: I don't think it'll be like that. There's a big British community out there; and who knows, with that dowry I might get very popular! If it doesn't work out I can sell up, move back, buy a very nice house and live comfortably here for the rest of my life. That's not such a bad fall-back position. But *staying* there and making it work is more *exciting*.

SARAH: It's a *real* adventure, and I think it's going to keep you young. He must have really liked you to leave you everything..?

GRAN: He did, certainly. And I really liked him too. But he had absolutely no other family, so the money was going to come to us, or the animal shelter, or the state.

BRAD: Why do I get a sneaking feeling that you're holding something back on this story?

GRAN: Maybe because I am.

BRAD: You gonna tell us *now*?

TRACEY: Go on Gran, I love family stories. Start at the beginning: what was his name?

GRAN: His name was.... *Bradley*....

SARAH: There's a coincidence...(then registers an expression of silent shock).

GRAN: Not really, I named Brad after him...

BRAD: *Because...?*

GRAN: (deep breath, swallows hard) Because he was your father...

BRAD: **Omigod!** But I thought my Dad died in a motorbike crash when I was tiny?

GRAN: That wasn't true: it was all I could come up with. You came home from nursery school, wanting to know why all the kids had dads and you didn't....

BRAD: But why didn't you tell me the *truth*?

GRAN: It's complicated. And it may well have been a mistake, but it was well-meant. Look, I didn't want you *pinning* for a Dad who didn't want us. So it seemed best you didn't know. Even worse if you knew, and he started to visit, or you went over there for holidays – what if you preferred it and wanted to live with him?

I was a single mum, when it was much more difficult than it is now. You were my whole world, pretty much, and the thought of losing you made my stomach dive. I didn't even tell *him* till 3 or 4 years later. I *could* have done: I got the pregnancy test result 2 days before he left, but I kept quiet: the relationship had run its course and if he'd stayed it would only have been *under duress*. We'd have split up sooner or later and then you'd have had all that heartache.

BRAD: But you gave me no *choice*...

GRAN: That's right, just as if he had died in a motorbike accident. *Same difference*.

BRAD: So he never came over, never wanted to *meet* me?

GRAN: Exactly, so he didn't reject *you* because he didn't *like* you, it was 'nothing personal', he just rejected being a *father*. Really he was a big kid himself: only child, indulgent parents, no siblings to have to share things with. To be honest I don't think he could have shared the limelight with a young kid. So rightly or wrongly, I didn't tell either

of you immediately – you were too young anyway. And you’ve lived out your lives at a distance, and let’s be honest, it’s worked out well for both of you.

BRAD: If you’d told him at the *start*, wasn’t there a chance he’d have wanted to stay?

GRAN: If I’d *thought* so I *would* have done. But he was half out the door, in a manner of speaking. He was excited about going home, and when he announced he was going back we talked it all through. We both knew it was over, that he wasn’t coming back. I couldn’t detonate on all his plans.

I didn’t want him to tear himself apart – which it would have done. He was immensely fond of me, but I guess I wasn’t enough, in the end. He missed his life there: his parents, his mates, the ballgame, the boardwalk, the Mustang, wieners, Thanksgiving, the sense of home. He never intended to live here, it was supposed to be a one-stop, one-off visit, then back to the familiar, the easy, the home comforts.

BRAD: I understand that. I’ve experienced it myself. Before Sarah, I had a brief and intense relationship with a girl who wanted me to come and live with her and her child. So I’d be moving from Finchley to South London. It’s another country.. Ridiculous! Next please.

TRACEY: Dad, be serious!

BRAD: Oh I’m *serious, sweetheart*, but the only way I can do this level of serious is to break it up with a bit of light relief. I’ve just had my life, and who I am, picked up and tumbled around like dice in a shaker, and I’m not sure what comes out when it’s thrown again.

GRAN: Besides, his parents were getting old and sick. They’d had him very late, no other kids, so the three of them were thick as thieves till he came over here in the war at the age of 20, in ‘43. We met in a tube station, when it was an air-raid shelter, sleeping on the platforms an’ that. He was on leave, and I was 15 but could pass for older, so I did. Obviously we didn’t – you know – do anything there and then, but we wanted to.

So one night we snuck off and found this building in Bloomsbury where nearly everyone had been evacuated, got into this really nice flat and went to bed. I shouldn’t be telling you this, should I? Setting you a bad example. But you know they were desperate times. Honestly, you went to bed every night without knowing whether you were going to wake up in the morning. So people got a bit reckless, enjoying

themselves while they could.

So, the bombing is really loud and there's a direct hit just a couple of houses away, I s'pose. "That's it, we gotta go back to the shelter", he says, so we scramble into our clothes to run for it. Suddenly there's a bang and I just hear him say, "I'm hit, they've got me, save yourself honey...". I went to switch on a light – it was an emergency – and then nearly wet myself laughing. In the dark, he'd only stuffed some of the curtain in his trousers, and when he went to move he pulled the pelmet down hard on the back of his head. But the valour, the valour! You couldn't make it up, could you, but it's true.

Handsome fella, lovely teeth, clear blue eyes, and a perfect gent. He was my dream, you could see him in the movies. And he gave me loads of nylons which were like gold dust to us.

TRACEY: Tell us a film star he was like, Gran, so we can picture him...

GRAN: Let me think, tell you what, he was a bit like that Leonardo di Capello

MATT: Di Caprio, Gran, Capello's the new England football manager!

GRAN: Whatever. Anyway he was taller, but the same boyish face, kind of innocent, like he should have been 14 not 20. He was a charmer. But he went off to Europe and ended up volunteering for some Special Forces thing, which took him all over the world for a couple of years after the War. He'd never say where he'd been, it was a big secret.

So he came back to London and bowled up at my flat, and stayed for 6 years! He treated me ever so well, but he was reluctant to marry. I think it was something to do with wanting to go back to the States eventually and not being sure I wanted to go with him - and I probably wouldn't have done then. A baby didn't come along, but I was starting my sewing business and doing well. Then he got news from home that his Mum was getting crippled with arthritis and heaving her around was aggravating his Dad's heart trouble. He had to go. There was no question in his mind. Then I missed my monthly, had a test, and bingo, little Bradley was on the way. I knew big Bradley would be torn in two if I told him. And to be honest, although we were knocking along alright, some of the gloss had come off the relationship, so it was just too much of a risk to up sticks and go with him. Like I said, the relationship had run its course – or nearly.

TRACEY: *That* was very brave Gran.

GRAN: You do what you have to, love. If I'd gone with him and it didn't work out, I'm divorced, in America, on my own with no friends or relatives, with a young child: I don't think so. I was just being protective of us, Bradley.

BRAD: I know Mum, you did what you had to. But it was *hard*. I wanted a Dad so badly, I was so envious that all my friends did and I was the odd one out. It wasn't that I wanted for affection. You gave me all I needed, and some. But I just wanted to have someone to play football with, to go to football with, to do everything with..... and you did everything you possibly could but you couldn't teach me how to do men's stuff. And just how to be a man, I suppose.

GRAN: But you did learn that, son, you just picked it up in other ways, from other men, from books, the movies and the television: and you were bright, you worked most of it out for yourself

BRAD: Yes, but there was still something that was missing: a space, a lack of something, maybe a vacuum – it's hard to define it.....

SARAH: But sweetheart, if you can't define it, can you really be missing it?

BRAD: Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence

MATT: What?

BRAD: Just because you haven't found something yet, it doesn't mean it's not there.

TRACEY: Crikey, Sir, I didn't realise you were so deep.....

MATT: Hardly still waters, though, is it? Can you have still, deep water when there's a mad water-skier on the surface?

BRAD: Better that than a timid soul doing dog-paddle, hardly moving...

MATT: But the 'dog' ain't gonna crash or drown or drive everyone else crazy. He's going slow, looking around him, thinking maybe day-dreaming. I know you mean me, Dad and you know I've cast you as the water-skier. Not all the time; but all the time you're *looking* for an opportunity to get on those skis, start some comic riff. It's a disease with you. Own it Dad...

BRAD: I can't deny it, it's just in me. But give me a break, love. I've just had one of the most devastating bits of information in my entire life, and I've got to take it in and adjust to it. Best do it on my own – for a bit – I can't think straight with Morecambe and Wise here in my face. So I'll walk for a bit, and Gran, I'll be coming back with a million questions. I've accepted what you've said but that doesn't mean I'm happy about it: you've kept shtum for so long, but now the cat's out of the bag. You absolutely have to tell me everything I need to know, honestly, that's the least you can do. (Brad leaves the caravan)

GRAN: Y'know I've been dreading this day for 52 years. It was always going to happen and in the end I'm glad it has, now. It's a weight off, I can tell you.

SARAH: I don't think you should reproach yourself, Gran, I think you did the right thing. Brad had a happy childhood with you, and I daresay there was the odd man around from time to time for a bit of novelty....

GRAN: Some of them were very odd indeed. I always seemed to collect the waifs and strays and outright losers. Sometimes I feel a bit jealous of you doing social work and getting *paid* for it!

SARAH: Well, that's one way of looking at it.....but Bradley was spared all that pain, the pain of long distance relationships, pining for the other person, waiting for them to get in touch, looking for the postman. And reading too much into silence and to every line of a letter – and between them. And when you think about it, Brad Senior just couldn't have wanted kids that much if he just stayed put in Florida when you **did** tell him. OK, so he loved his Mum and Dad, but he could have come over since they died and met his son. A big cheque at Christmas, every year, is very useful but it's not parenting. I totally understand if Brad's feeling rejected by him – and what a lousy model of manhood that would have been for him.

GRAN: You're right, love. But you know he was a lovely fella and there wasn't an ounce of malice in him. I don't like him being painted as uncaring or beastly, he just wasn't. What he was, was weak, I suppose.

SARAH: Weak? A Man? Who's ever heard of such a thing?

TRACEY: *Mum!* Please don't go off on a rant now. Dad always takes it personally and he really doesn't need a feminist dissection of his missing father, not now.

SARAH: Point taken. It just makes me angry that Brad should suffer because some

over-indulged American only-child isn't grown-up enough to realise – or manage – his responsibilities...

GRAN: But it's partly my feminism, back then, that's got us here. I was full of it, I could manage on my own, I wasn't going to need a mere man to help me, I was going to be a pioneer of parenting while running a successful career. That was virtually unknown then.

And maybe it was my determination to be independent that drove him away? He needed a woman more like his Mum, more of a nurturer, someone who'd cook his favourite things, be compliant, defer to his opinions and keep him as a big baby forever...

MATT: I know I'm only a sort of man, Gran, but I think you were really brave about it. Lots of women – probably most women – would have just said 'forget worrying about putting the arm on him - shackle him with his responsibility as a parent, stop him from running away to his parents and get all the support you need from him: then you can worry about whether you love each other or not - after you've taken care of business. It's very hard-nosed and it's not moon-in-June, but so what?. It's not that different from what Tracey's facing now. Will she stay with Paul, who is no way as bad as Dad thinks –

TRACEY: Well thanks Cynthia, you're a brick!

MATT:but he is on the limp side, and Dad's right, she could do better, just sticking a pin in the old telephone directory. I don't mind him for a brother-in-law, nothing personal, but I seriously doubt he's going to stay the course. No pun intended. But your student friends from your course were a bit uneasy with him at your birthday party, and he was *not* comfortable with them. Plus, at least two, maybe three of the blokes were hardly taking their eyes off you. Though maybe wearing a bra and an opaque top would avoid that.

TRACEY: MA-ATT. That's disgusting, you little nonce...

MATT: No it's not. What's disgusting is the hypocritical women who glare at men on the tube who glance in their direction, when *they* are wearing clothes which barely cover their nipples. There, I said it. Yes, of course women should be able to wear wherever they want, but get real: if you serve up your tits on a tray, someone is going to get an eyeful, if only by accident.

SARAH: Enough tittle-tattle....*Ooh missus!* Sorry, that was an accident. Seriously, you've made your point, Matt, and I'm really torn on the issue myself. I can't *believe* how much

cleavage – and more – is on display these days, it's either a dream or a nightmare for young men. But, yes, Tracey will take that decision at some point, and it is a bit like Gran's predicament, except Paul is not running off anywhere, despite Brad's best efforts...

I'm going to go and find Dad: I think he may need a bit of support – or at least, someone to prevent him winding himself up into a right state ...

Tracey and Matt leave, too, Gran come front of stage and addresses audience

You know most people - younger people - think that us Seniors are *stuck* in our ways, can't change. That's not right. Because some old people *do change* - but sadly they become *more like they already are*. That's not me. I *want to change, I'm bored being old*. I'm not going to vegetate, or live in the past. I've got a brain in my head which is *largely* intact, and I intend to *use* it. I'm independent, I'm *alive* and only too aware that I won't be *forever* - so I'm bloody well going to *do* something with my last few years. I've got an idea.....*no*, I'm not going to spoil the plot by giving it away to you lot - you can't be trusted. But watch me go.....My star is in the ascendant!

(Starry starry night (Vincent).... Don Maclean)

Act 2 Scene 4: Secrets about secrets

BRAD: Don't worry I'll get used to it – I will. It's just that I've lived all this time in ignorance of something really important.....and given no choice about it. I don't feel angry with you Mum, I understand the reasons, and they're good ones.....but I can't help feeling deceived.

GRAN: I hate that word, but you're *right*, strictly speaking. It was a sin of omission more than a lie, but that doesn't make it any better for you, I know that. I'm sorry, son, I had to make a decision about it and I tried to do what I thought was best for you, I always have...

SARAH: Don't be too hard on your Mum, Brad, people frequently tell lies *just* to avoid being hurtful, it happens all the time. How many times have children presented their parents with cookies they've made at school that are *grey* with their thumbprints all over them and virtually inedible – but praised up to the skies!

BRAD: Hardly the same thing: not fundamental, not life-changing, not going to the roots of their whole identity and slashing away at them...

TRACEY: That's over the top, Dad...it hasn't altered anything about your life – which has been a good one, and probably better than if you'd *known*, and felt *rejected* for 50 years

MATT: Tracey's right: no-one likes being conned, but it's only *now* that it matters, because it's come out. *Until now* it hasn't affected you *at all*....

TRACEY: Anyway Dad, it's kind of ironic because you're conveniently forgetting a far bigger deception that you and Mum worked on me and Matt....

BRAD: What on earth do you mean.....?

SARAH: God, I knew this would come back and bite us - you mean the Jewish thing?

TRACEY: Exactly. Until we got that letter, out of the blue, from cousin George in New Zealand, we had *no idea* that Mum was Jewish and so that we were half-Jewish - genetically. *None*. Maybe it was dumb of us, but you were not religious, ate pork and seafood, had no Jewish friends and no Jewish culture. When we found out it was a

shock: a *shock* to know and a *shock* that you'd concealed it, both of you.

MATT: You can say that again. My crew at school had a *good* laugh about it – they'd worked it out all along. I felt like an idiot. Also, it made me realise how easy it would have been for me to have *joined in* with some of the jokes and anti-semitism that went on in school – *then* how would I have felt when we found out...?

SARAH: But that was the point, Matty. We wanted to *protect* you from all of that. Don't forget that it's not that long since the National Front polled 25% of the votes in Bethnal Green. Anti-semitism has gone on for thousands of years across Europe and beyond - it's *why* you're here in England, because my sister Rebekah helped my Mum and Dad escape it in Lithuania, by fleeing. It subsides for a while and then it erupts again: synagogues get windows broken, Jewish graves defaced and the Far Right takes to the streets again, threatening and provoking. I'll never forget what Conor Cruise O'Brien said (he was an Irish politician and intellectual, a very wise man). He said "anti-Semitism is a light sleeper". Never a truer word.

TRACEY: OK Mum, but I'm going to be tough on you – and Dad, because Matt and I absolutely *weren't* tough on you when we found out. We let you off very lightly, never even confronted you both with it, We just gently let it be known that we knew, and little by little let it seep into the family arena. Aided by a few Jewish jokes here and there, the occasional Yiddish word slipped into the conversation.

There are *two* things that I want to say: one is, how exactly does *not* knowing we are Jewish protect us when it seems that the rest of the world does know? Secondly, it's absolutely right that *you* can choose to be assimilated and un-Jewish if that's what you want to be. But how can you justify imposing that on *us*? We haven't *had* that choice. We didn't even *know* the choice existed!

It's weird, because this *exact* same thing came up in something I was reading. It was recommended by one of our lecturers, it's a book by Ronnie Laing who was one of those far-out intellectuals from the 60s; he was a psychiatrist, but he called himself an anti-psychiatrist. He said, 'families often have secrets, no-one must know about them; so not only is there a secret to be concealed, but the *fact* that the secret *exists* must be a secret'.

I know it all sounds very conspiratorial, but how exactly is what *you* did different from that? Didn't we have a right to know and a right to choose for *ourselves*?

MATT: And while you're thinking about that I'm going to make it worse: at school,

because of all the black and Asian kids, we're taught about multiculturalism: how it's a good thing and makes for a 'richer, more varied society' (said slightly tongue-in-cheek), and all that stuff. What you've done to us is the opposite: you've blanked off half our heritage and our 'natural' diversity. If I want to know anything about Jewish history, religion, culture, and so on, I have to *read it up in a book* instead of getting it direct from the horse's mouth. It's ridiculous, really.

SARAH: Actually, Matty, I couldn't have told you *that* much about Judaism beyond the festivals. Because my upbringing was as un-Jewish as yours: Rose and Morris, your grandparents, were not observant, not even religious. We never went to Synagogue, never had Friday Night Dinner. He made watches and clocks and she was a Communist who sold the Daily Worker outside Liverpool Street Station. Opposites attract, I guess. But they were both atheists, who cursed religion, for exiling them in a foreign country, for fear of their lives...

TRACEY: But was it protecting us or protecting you? It's like Jews changing their surnames to assimilate or hide. Or at least not stand out. What was your parents' surname?

SARAH: Abramovich - and definitely no relation to the Chelsea owner! Look, I could give you 100 examples of Jews who have changed their names, dropped their religion, married out, defiantly eat bacon and seafood but are still fiercely proud of being Jewish, even if they don't shout about it: and that includes me - not just about the heroes in my family, but the incredible ones who have helped shape world history: Marx, Freud, Einstein, Sammy Davis Jr, Max Bygraves ha ha! Seriously, if you went through the list of every Nobel Prize winner in every category over the years, you would find that Jews were more numerous than any other group....

TRACEY: Fine, but the point is you wilfully *concealed* our ancestry from us. You started *out* right by not having us Christened 'so we could make up our own minds when we were older' but then at crucial points you *bottled it*. When we wanted to go to Sunday school because our friends did! And then the next step, when we were persuaded to be baptised at ages 10 and 13. **That** was the moment to tell us that, *actually*, we had a choice of heritage. We couldn't make a choice when we didn't *know* one even existed!

MATT: You know what the worst part is? It's nothing to do with religion. It's discovering that your parents have misled you, deceived you, bare-faced lied to you for years on end. That the people you have most trusted in your life have conned you, so you don't ever feel able to completely trust them again..... (Brad re-enters the van)

SARAH: Oh Matty, don't say that, it's so *awful*

BRAD: Bloody Hell, not more 'Happy Families', couldn't we call 'time' on this?

SARAH: Brad, I think we should own this.....we did mislead them. Yes, it was a sin of omission, not an outright lie, it's not like we ever told them they were **not Jewish**, but I can see how - at their end, it comes to the same thing. They were left not knowing.

BRAD: Sure. We *did* chew it over for a long time though, and I do believe that we thought about it positively - like it was giving them a clean slate, with no obligations, able to make up their own minds - or choose no religion, which is what they've done.

SARAH: In a way, it's the cultural thing I feel worse about - although that's really ironic because that's precisely what I was deprived of, too, so I would have found that hard to provide. And would we have needed to do the Christian thing too, to balance it up?

TRACEY: Well, effectively that happened, by default....Christmas not Chanukah!

BRAD: Not as simple as that. Lots of Jews exchange Christmas presents so as not to deprive their kids!

MATT: Look for myself, I accept that you didn't do this for bad motives, but good or bad, it's just **wrong**: parents should not knowingly deceive their kids. End of!

GRAN: Hang on Matty, are you including me in this, because I'm guilty, too. I didn't tell your Dad about his Dad for over 50 years, simply to avoid hurting him. Are you saying that was wrong of me? Because I would do the same thing all over again. I'm *glad* that I protected him from the truth.

BRAD: I do think people often do the wrong thing for the right reasons and even though you shocked me today with that news about my Dad, I think you were probably right. Even *you* Matty, you've 'allowed me to think' you would be following the conventional path through A-levels and University - yes, you've *mentioned* woodwork, and I knew you were keen on it, but you've never sat me down and said "Dad, I want to be a craftsman' until now, having decided on it yourself, *as a done deal*.. Was that a deception, and was it for my benefit or yours - avoiding the flak you knew it would cause? It's all done now, granted, and probably much more easily than you'd imagined. Just be careful about portraying you and Tracey being

the only ones wielding the Sword of Truth here - like most swords, it's two-edged...

MATT: Point taken, but we're not claiming to be saints. And we're not saying you're sinners. I think we both just needed you to acknowledge that **we** are the victims here; that you and Mum perpetrated something on us which was just plain wrong - whatever the motives - even if you've done most other things **right**.

BRAD: OK, *mea culpa*. We handled the Jewish thing wrong, we can see that now: and before you say anything, we should probably also have told you about Mum's weird episode - but she just didn't want to. So you can chalk that up to us. But can you *honestly* say your career-change decision is the only time you've ever misled us? I'm guessing there are a few things on your computer you'd rather us not see... and then there's your new girlfriend.....you've met her parents, but we're not supposed to know she exists. I happen to have met her Mum at a Labour Party do and I recognised her because she's Assistant Manager at HSBC, on the High Road. We had a nice chat....

MATT: Ok, I'm bang to rights. I was just waiting for the right time....but then again it's a big potential deal-breaker to introduce your first proper girlfriend to a Dad like mine....

GRAN: **ENOUGH!**..... Enough .I think we should stop, now. Everyone's had their say....some of it very hurtful. We're all going to remember it and think about it for quite a long time, and maybe *regret* some of it, but I still think 'better out than in' - no Brad, no crude jokes. Anyway, while you've been sparring, I've been thinking, and I've come up with a good idea, for once. It doesn't resolve any of these issues about lying - in the past, but it certainly does make the future look a lot better.....

MATT: Yo Gran! Don't build it up or anything, will you? Go on then, give it a go....

GRAN: I'm really hesitating because there's not been a proper chance to think it through; but then I'm thinking what my Dad used to do, when any of us had a good suggestion for something to do - or any kind of plan. He'd immediately come up with all the reasons *not to do that thing*: the risks, the disadvantages, the down-side. So negative and destructive. It killed our ideas stone dead, so we stopped suggesting them.

TRACEY: That's *really bad*...

GRAN: It was - but then *he'd* been brought up like that, *too*...anyway I was determined not to be like that, not to always think negatively and I made myself a motto: "*Do what*

you want to do, and do it NOW, while it still seems like a good idea” - don’t forget you can be your own worst enemy, and let the risks persuade you not to do stuff..

BRAD: Go on, go for it Mum, there’s not a wet-blanket in sight.....

GRAN: Right, in the first place, I go to Florida, to try it on for size, maybe for six months ...see if I do meet people, see whether I like the weather and stuff, get an idea about how the business works and whether I’d want to have some kind of active role in it: activity is the big thing at my age; I could live in the house, see if I’d I want to keep it or get something smaller, in some kind of retirement community, that sort of thing?

Meanwhile, young Matty here gets stuck into his apprenticeship, maybe takes a couple of evening courses in more specialist things - I dunno, maybe things like carving, inlay work, and so on. Then at some point, if I decide to stay, he *joins* me and completes his training *in* the business and learning the specific skills he needs for that. He’d have loads of help and mentoring from the men. So he’s not coming in just as the boss’s grandson, and he’s willing to be a hands-on worker till he’s ready to move higher up into management - if he does... And everything he learns is transferable back here if Florida doesn’t work out for either of us...

MATT: Gran, that’s ace, that’s **so** perfect for me, I can hardly believe it....it’s like a lottery win and a Premium Bond coming up, all at the same time!

GRAN: Wait, there’s another bit: if I’m **not** in the granny-flat, Tracey and Paul and Junior **can** be - with Brad and Sarah right on hand to be the perfect grandparents and child-minders while she’s doing her course - but the new family with their own space so that no-one gets in each other’s hair or dreadlocks.....it also means you have two guest rooms for when Matty and I want to come back for a bit - or if it just didn’t work out. So neat! A fresh start for everyone, with a line **firmly** drawn underneath all this aggravation we’ve been having.

TRACEY: There’s just *one* fly in the ointment....I never told you Dad, but Paul is a ...secret Spurs fan.....an Orthodox one.....in your house!

BRAD: I *knew* he was a loser. So, I’ll just have to convert him. My mission!

SARAH: I can’t believe what’s unfolding here... in a matter of minutes, we’ve gone from conflict and aggression, guilt and confessions, recriminations, secrets and lies - blood on the walls.....to **this**.....*Gran riding in on her white charger and rescuing us. I can’t take it in, it’s almost too good to be true.....It’s like a happy*

ending...

BRAD: (to audience) *Well, it is a **play**....* (gives high five gesture, bows, summons cast)

THE END



