



Island Life

by Jenny McLeod

This is a scanned copy of the published script for **Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company's** 1988-89 co-production with Nottingham Playhouse of *Island Life*, written for the company by Jenny McLeod.

Set in an old people's home over a bank holiday weekend, full information about the show can be found in its **Productions** page on the company's website (www.monstrousregiment.co.uk).

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ISLAND LIFE

by Jenny McLeod

JENNY McLEOD, born in Nottingham in 1963, won the competition *Writing '87* set up by Nottingham and Derby Playhouses with her first play *Cricket at Camp David*, which was later given a full production by the Bolton Octagon Theatre in 1988. She was commissioned to write *The Mango Tree* for Strange Fruit Theatre Company and *Island Life* for Monstrous Regiment. *Island Life* opened at Nottingham Playhouse as a co-production in 1988. Her children's play, *Just Like a Genie*, toured schools and was performed at the Lilian Baylis Theatre and her television play, *The Wake*, produced by Phillipa Giles and Vicky Licorish was screened in 1990. She is currently working on a television play with the producers of *The Wake*, writing a studio play, a situation comedy, a radio and a stage play.

Characters

SOFIA, EMMY and VERA, residents in an OAP home.

KATE, a young woman.

The action takes place in an OAP home, over a Bank Holiday weekend.

Island Life was first performed by Monstrous Regiment in co-production with the Nottingham Playhouse at the Nottingham Studio Space from 19–29 October 1988. It toured from 13 March–22 April. The cast was as follows:

SOFIA	Joanna Field
EMMY	Corinne Skinner Carter
KATE	Marcia Tucker
VERA	Stella Tanner

Written by Jenny McLeod

Directed by Jane Collins

Designed by Iona McLeish

Lighting and technical advice by Veronica Wood

Graphic Design by Jo Angel at Paton Walker Associated

Lighting Technician: Janet Cantrill

Stage Manager: Lesley Chenery

Administration: Ferelith Lean

Rose Sharp

Photographer: Mary Tisserand

Cast changes for the tour

EMMY	Joan Hooley
KATE	Irma Inniss

ACT ONE

Scene One

A lounge in semi-darkness. A light shines from outside in through a window. Slowly the window is opened from the outside and hands appear on the ledge, climbing up.

SOFIA. Go on . . . go up!

VERA. Is it enough to say I'm stuck?

SOFIA. Stuck! You can't be stuck.

VERA. Well stuck I am . . . Oh hang on. There . . . there . . .

EMMY. You alright Vera?

SOFIA. Wouldn't believe you were only two feet off the ground.

VERA. I told you I don't like heights.

SOFIA. Vera, in no way could two feet be construed as a height.
Now get your leg over! Surely you've had enough practice in that department.

VERA. Oh! I've somehow managed to sit on the ledge.

SOFIA. Despite being stuck.

VERA sits straddling the window ledge.

VERA. Wasn't that clever. Oh but I've pulled a stocking. Look!

SOFIA. Vera, get off the ledge and let us in.

VERA. Five pence from Oxfam and look at them, ruined!

SOFIA. Now!

VERA. Alright, don't shout.

VERA jumps down, switches on the light and then exits. Shortly she returns with SOFIA in a wheelchair and EMMY on foot.

SOFIA. Switch that light off. No lights until the curtains are drawn.

VERA *switches the light off and SOFIA puts the torch on.*

VERA. Who's gonna see with that wall out there?

SOFIA. The lights stay off. Got it? Check upstairs.

VERA. Why me?

SOFIA. 'Cause I say so.

VERA. But it's dark.

SOFIA. Get moving.

VERA. Only if I can borrow the torch.

SOFIA. And leave me in the dark?

EMMY. It really dark.

VERA. But you'll have Emmy.

SOFIA. Emmy is a fool!

EMMY. We have night like this back home. When it so black you can hold the darkness with two hand.

SOFIA. Sooner you go, sooner we can get the lights on.

VERA. Will you listen out for me then?

VERA *moves to the door.*

VERA. I said . . .

SOFIA. Vera!

VERA. Alright, I'm going.

SOFIA. Well go!

VERA. You promise to listen out for me?

SOFIA. Vera unless you've got one of your geriatric boyfriends up there, you should be perfectly safe.

EMMY. Me will promise you.

VERA. Thanks Em . . . I won't be long . . . Sofia you listening?

SOFIA. If you don't move your . . .

VERA. I'm going, see I'm gone!

Exit VERA.

SOFIA. How the hell am I gonna get through a whole weekend with her?

EMMY. Is just her way.

You don't say things for the sake of saying, Miss Sofia?

SOFIA. 'Course not.

EMMY. Sometime me just like talk. That alright though . . . The house look funny tonight.

SOFIA. You can't see anything.

EMMY. Then it no feel funny to you Miss Sofia?

SOFIA. What you on about? On second thoughts I don't really care.

EMMY *moves away from* SOFIA.

Now where are you? I can't see you.

EMMY. Me is here, Miss Sofia.

SOFIA (*fiddling with the torch*). I think the batteries are going. You think the batteries are going?

EMMY. Me don't know. You think the battery them going?

SOFIA. That's what I asked you.

EMMY. Maybe is the battery them?

SOFIA. Oh shut up . . . What's keeping Vera?

EMMY. Make me go look for her.

SOFIA. No! Get back over here where I can see you.

EMMY *moves back and* VERA *comes rushing in*.

VERA. Oh . . . ! It's, all, clear.

And I turned the bedclothes down in our room Em.

EMMY. Oh good! Me like the bed to catch breeze before me lay down.

SOFIA (*imitating VERA's voice*). 'I turned the bedclothes down Em'. Lights!

VERA *puts the lights on*.

Doubt if anyone'll see the lights with that wall out there anyway.

VERA (*aside*). I said that all along.

SOFIA. What?

VERA. What?

SOFIA. What did you say? I can guess and I'm not gonna put up with it.

EMMY. Maybe you should.

SOFIA. What?

EMMY. Put up with it. We should put up with each other.

SOFIA (*to* EMMY). What are you going on about?

VERA. Put up or shut up!

SOFIA. What?

VERA. Lord Hawthorne-Wood! 'Vera, either put up or shut up.'

I did neither and that really got his pecker up – only time too I remember.

I had a quick peep in Phipps' room when I was upstairs.

Reminded me of a room I once shared with him. Both let in little warmth and little light even at the height of summer . . .

The infants hated it. Why I left him really, because of the infants. He never treated them right and a mother should always put her infants before any man . . .

And Phipps, she has this beautiful vase of fresh flowers just waiting for me to bring down. Beautiful they are . . .

Maybe I'll bring them down for the table.

SOFIA. No flowers!

EMMY. You ever sit an' wonder why anyone would want build a big everlasting wall like that?

SOFIA. Unlike you, most of us don't have to sit down to think.

EMMY. Me think the person who build that wall must full up a pure darkness. How else you explain it?

SOFIA. It's to keep us in and them out.

VERA. Them, what them do you mean Sofia? Let me say I've never found any 'them' to fit the silly confines of that 'them

and us' phrase, since I've always found that people were the same wherever you went and I've been and seen plenty.

SOFIA. Nonsense!

EMMY. Me never see no wall big so till me come a England.

SOFIA. Curtains!

VERA. You saying they don't have walls on your Jamaican island Emmy, because if you are I can't believe it; people as I said are the same anywhere in the world and they build walls. Take for instance . . .

SOFIA. Curtains! Draw the damn curtains and stop staring at that wall!

EMMY. When me was pickney back home, me never see none. Is only now me turn old an' come a England me see so many.

EMMY pulls the curtains.

SOFIA. Look how long it's been there and you two just decide to hold an inquest.

EMMY. Sometime these things just come to you. You see them, but you no see them, then one day you just see them.

VERA. I thought to myself the other day, how long has that wall been there and what has it seen? It must have seen a lot of life and it's still standing.

SOFIA. Oh God!

EMMY. Is long time it stand up there.

VERA. What, sweet?

EMMY. The wall.

SOFIA (*to* VERA). Isn't it a good thing one of us can cut through your incessant ramblings and remember the question.

VERA. What question? I was talking about people and how alike they are. Take me for instance, I can't believe there's only one of me, there must be two or three or even more all with beautiful arses!

SOFIA. God forbid!

EMMY. Well looking at it from here it look about . . .

SOFIA. About Vera's age.

VERA. You and your silly jokes, Sofia. They can't hurt me; you only have to look at the ripeness of my beautiful arse to see that I'm only fifty-four and a bit, so if that was a joke . . .

SOFIA. Judge for yourself.

EMMY. An' it strong, you know. Me know storm back home that lift up whole house, wash 'way beast and flatten banana crop, but I bet it wouldn't touch that wall.

VERA. Sounds a touch like my second husband: he could stand up to anything and everyone, except me, and he always used to say . . .

SOFIA. Shut up!

When're you two gonna stop this dismal trip down memory lane?

VERA. Trip! Oh, I wonder how Phipps is getting on with the others. Bet it's dire; bet she's wishing I'd gone now, only I can get them going and stop them from going too, for that matter. Do you know she couldn't even let Mrs Sherman have her tea before they set off and that's sad really because Mrs Sherman can't do without . . .

SOFIA. Vera?

VERA. Yes, sweet?

VERA has a personal hi-fi set which she now plugs in and puts over her ears.

SOFIA. We have come back for a reason, or have you forgotten?

EMMY. Me no forget, Miss Sofia.

SOFIA. Pass my bag; let me get the table ready. Vera, take those bloody things off and get the chairs.

EMMY passes the bag over.

VERA. Oh this is the one . . .

She rushes over to EMMY and puts her arms around her ready to dance.

This is the one . . . The one I used to dance to with Finnbar Willis . . . Come on Em. Hold me tight. Tighter, Em.

VERA. Finnbar had a masterful hold right here in the small of my back. Dadadadaaa . . .

They begin to dance.

EMMY. But you know me can't hear the music. Me can't dance so.

VERA. 'Course you can, sweet. Come on now follow me, sweet. Dadadadaaa . . . Finnbar Willis! What a man! He used to bring me kippers. He was a fishmonger and he always used to save the best kippers for me, said it made my hair shine. Long and black it was and it did have a shine . . . Said it enhanced my beauty.

SOFIA. And foolishly you believed him.

VERA. And my hair's remained the same all these years. I'm convinced it's because of the kippers Finnbar always brought me.

SOFIA. Really!

VERA and EMMY begin tripping over each other's feet.

VERA. You're not concentrating, sweet.

EMMY. But me can't hear the music.

VERA. 'Course you can, sweet. Dadadadaaa . . .

Ow! Emmyryha!

They part.

SOFIA. I ask again. Have you both forgotten why we're here?

EMMY. Me remember, Miss Sofia.

VERA (*taking her head-sets off*). You remember what, sweet?

EMMY. Why we come back.

VERA. And so do I, who's been saying I don't, because I remember as much as anyone.

SOFIA. What do you remember?

VERA. I . . . I . . . I remember it all.

She puts her head-sets back on and begins dancing around by herself.

SOFIA. Tell her to get those things off and pay attention.

EMMY. Yes, Miss Sofia.

EMMY moves to VERA and stops her.

EMMY. Miss Sofia soon ready to start the talking.

VERA. What, sweet?

EMMY. Miss Sofia soon ready to start the talking.

VERA. Oh yes the seance! It might turn out fun if we approach it right. I did something like this once. We all wore long black gowns, stood at altars and drank this red stuff. I thought it was red wine but how wrong, it was blood!

SOFIA *spreads a cloth over the table.*

SOFIA. Well, nothing like that will go on here.

VERA. Oh, and I was looking forward to inviting some of the boys from next door; I know if I did everyone would enjoy themselves, even you Sofia.

SOFIA. Take one step near that place and you'll have me to answer to. Got it?

VERA. If you expect me to stay cooped up in here with you all weekend you're wrong.

SOFIA. We'll see about that.

EMMY. But me a consider now whether we should . . .

VERA. Whether we should what, sweet?

EMMY. Do what we come to. Me no sure 'bout it. Me kinna afraid.

SOFIA. You got more to be afraid of sharing a room with her – and I use the word sharing in its loosest form.

EMMY. Me to be afraid of Vera? How you mean, Miss Sofia?

VERA. I know what she means and there's nothing wrong with me . . . any more!

SOFIA. Oh no?

VERA. And I can get medical evidence to prove it . . . if you want.

SOFIA. I don't want nothing from you, 'sweet'! And just you remember, I want you cooking all my food this weekend, Emmy.

VERA. I don't have to take this.

SOFIA. You take worse. Why you can't take this is beyond me.

VERA. Everything's beyond you.

SOFIA. Except the fact that you're a walking, talking, breathing, disgrace!

EMMY. Oh, Miss Sofia!

VERA. Jealous!

SOFIA. Me?

VERA. Because they need me.

SOFIA. I can do without that kind of need.

VERA. And you frequently do, since no one needs or wants you.

EMMY. Oh Vera!

VERA. Just as well she's never had a man with her wetting the bed the way she does. Imagine the embarrassment of waking up the next morning to find you've pissed over him.

SOFIA. Bitch! Bitch!

SOFIA stares at VERA and then wheels herself away to one side of the room for a sulk.

VERA. Did you hear what she called me?

EMMY. You shouldn't say that, Vera.

VERA. But did you hear, Emmyryha?

EMMY. You shouldn't say it.

VERA. She goads me!

EMMY. And you still shouldn't. It not nice.

VERA. She's one of the least nicest people I know and I know plenty.

EMMY. She not so bad.

VERA. Why're you always sticking up for her when she treats you as bad as me? You shouldn't take it.

EMMY. Maybe me should.

VERA. What?

EMMY. Call her and beg her pardon.

VERA. No.

EMMY. Do it, no?

VERA. I will not!

SOFIA *wheels herself forward again.*

SOFIA. I don't wet the bed. Got it?

But speaking of food, as we were, where is it?

EMMY. Where the food?

SOFIA. Who's job was it to take the food out the freezer?

EMMY. Well . . . well me did have to leave the latch on the window open and you Miss Sofia, did have to get the things ready for later and . . .

VERA. She knows it was me because I remember her looking straight at me and saying . . .

SOFIA (*to EMMY*). Ask her where it is.

EMMY. . . . Me? Me to ask Vera, Miss Sofia? (*Giggling.*) But . . .

SOFIA. Do it!

EMMY. Vera . . . ?

VERA. The food's in the kitchen where I left it. Now I'm off to get that vase of flowers I saw in Phipps's room: should brighten up the place no end.

SOFIA. No flowers!

Exit VERA.

EMMY. Miss Sofia. Vera say . . .

SOFIA. Start cooking.

EMMY. Yes, Miss Sofia.

Exit EMMY. SOFIA goes back to the table and continues arranging. Shortly EMMY returns; standing uncomfortably at the door she stares at SOFIA.

SOFIA. What?

EMMY. You hear exactly where Vera say she put the food?

SOFIA. What you on about?

EMMY. The food! Me don't see it.

SOFIA. It's not there?

EMMY. No.

SOFIA. So! The silly old cow did forget.

Re-enter VERA with the vase of flowers. SOFIA turns her back to her and continues arranging the table.

EMMY (*whispering*). Where you put the food?

VERA. What?

EMMY. Where you put the . . . ?

SOFIA. I'll deal with this.

SOFIA turns to them now.

The food's missing.

EMMY. Me look high and me look low.

SOFIA. She look high and she look low.

VERA. What're you talking about?

SOFIA. There's no food in the kitchen.

VERA. Of course there is, I put it there myself on the work top and . . . and . . . I remember, I moved it out by the back door because Phipps was snooping around and if I'd left it on the work top she would've found it. A leg of lamb, three pork chops, a chicken for Sunday dinner and some vegetables.

SOFIA (*to EMMY*). Look!

EMMY. Yes, Miss Sofia.

Exit EMMY. VERA moves further in with the vase of flowers and places them on the table.

VERA. Leg of lamb, three pork chops, chicken for Sunday dinner, and some vegetables, all in two white carrier bags . . . I remember how easily they fitted . . . Don't the flowers look lovely?

VERA stands back admiring them. EMMY returns.

By the back door, weren't they sweet, just like I said by the . . . Where are they . . . ?

EMMY. Me don't see them.

VERA. By the back door, sweet?

SOFIA. You did forget.

VERA. You sure you looked properly, sweet, maybe I should look because I know exactly where I put them, I put them by the back door against the . . .

Exit VERA.

EMMY. Maybe me never look good?

SOFIA. I'm sure you did.

Shortly VERA returns.

EMMY. Maybe is dog thief them?

SOFIA. Vegetables as well?

EMMY. Back home dog eat anything. Even turn cornmeal!

SOFIA. Well you are not bloody back home now. What are we going to do? All the cupboards locked and no food – except the things for Daphne's tea, and we can't eat them can we?

EMMY. No we can't eat them.

SOFIA. That was the sole idea of getting the food out before, because the cupboards would be locked when we came back.

VERA sits down.

EMMY. It no that bad Miss Sofia. We can go down the village go buy more.

VERA looks agonised at SOFIA. SOFIA smiles.

We cannot be seen in the village. We are not supposed to be here. Remember?

SOFIA. And even if we could, which one of us could make the journey there and back?

EMMY. Oh . . .

EMMY comforts VERA, who is sobbing.

Don't worry! We will get through.

VERA. But I put them there. Where could they have gone?

SOFIA. Vanished maybe?

EMMY. But things just don't vanish, Miss Sofia.

SOFIA. Well maybe . . . Maybe, someone stole them. Some pedlar who deals in frozen lambs and so forth.

VERA. Really?

SOFIA. He hides in wait for old women putting food out and then when they've gone, he emerges like a sick coward . . .

VERA. Sick, you say?

SOFIA. . . . Sick coward – he emerges from his hiding place and pounces on the neat white plastic bags.

VERA. That would make sense.

EMMY. But . . .

SOFIA. They say it's the smell of white plastic that urges him on. The urge is so strong sometimes, that he has been known not to wait for these elderly women to leave and he jumps out in full view of them and . . .

VERA. And what?

SOFIA. And is gone! In a puff of white plastic . . . (SOFIA *laughs*.)
Gone! Just like you, you silly old cow!

VERA *begins crying loudly*.

EMMY. Done, done. We will get through.

VERA. But I'm not, I'm not a silly old cow.

EMMY. No, you not.

VERA. I'm not, am I?

EMMY. No.

SOFIA. Alright, for the sake of peace and quiet you're not.

VERA *still sobs*.

Oh shut up!

EMMY. Take time with her, no, Miss Sofia?

SOFIA. Time? Thanks to her we don't have any food.

EMMY. But is not Vera fault.

SOFIA. If only you knew.

EMMY. Know what, Miss . . . ?

VERA. . . . That Miss Sofia's right! I am a silly old cow.

EMMY. Maybe me can open one of the cupboard? Break the lock with hammer or something. Make me go look . . .

Exit EMMY. SOFIA wheels herself in front of VERA and VERA looks up at her.

SOFIA. Go and help her with that lock.

VERA. Yes Miss Sofia . . .

VERA moves to leave.

SOFIA. And take those bloody flowers with you.

VERA. Yes, Miss Sofia.

VERA moves back to the table and picks up the vase of flowers and begins to leave.

SOFIA. I did say, no flowers!

Exit VERA.

Scene Two

EMMY enters with a tray of food. She is followed by VERA who has her head-sets on, carrying the tea.

EMMY. Oh Miss Sofia all we could manage to get out is little flour, so me make . . .

SOFIA. What the hell are those?

EMMY. Fry dumplings.

SOFIA. They're foreign!

EMMY. Is not really foreign, is Jamaican.

SOFIA. How much more foreign can you get?

VERA (*begins eating, taking her head-sets off*). Tastes nice.

EMMY. Is only flour and water. Smell just like back home.

SOFIA. This is your home. Like the rest of us.

You live here because no one wants you.

EMMY. That not true. You shouldn't say that Miss Sofia . . . You should never say a thing like that. My Daphne coming for me.

VERA. 'Course she is, sweet. She wrote and said she was, didn't she?

EMMY. She coming to take me out!

EMMY opens her handbag and takes out a letter and reads it.

'Dear Mum, Coming to take you shopping tomorrow. Love Daphne.'

SOFIA. Postmarked July nineteen seventy-one!

EMMY begins sobbing.

VERA. That is an absolutely vicious observation!

SOFIA. Truth usually is. Sooner you both wake up to your pathetic little selves, the better. No one wants us, difference between me and you two is that I've accepted it and not let it bother me.

VERA. Don't worry Em, I'm here and so will Daphne be. Sofia's only jealous. Our infants mean the world to us. I understand.

SOFIA. And you have a very short memory. (*To EMMY.*) Throw that muck out. The smell of it gets everywhere, and I don't want it everywhere. Got it?

EMMY. Yes Miss Sofia.

EMMY begins clearing the plates.

SOFIA (*to VERA*). Get the chairs to the table.

Exit EMMY with the plates. VERA stands moving the chairs.

VERA. She'll be alright soon. You know how she gets when she's expecting Daphne . . . But maybe if you had infants, you'd understand. What I like best is having them all around. I always have liked that. And I always wanted a picture, with me sat in a big armchair, a really comfortable one and they'd be sat and stood around me, all fully grown men and women and we'd all be smiling and there I'd be in the exact middle of all my infants . . .

SOFIA. So why didn't you?

VERA. Oh we will. We will! It's not easy arranging a time for me to smile in the middle . . . when we all lead such busy lives . . . If you had infants you'd understand that. But you don't, do you?

You know you should've tried one of Emmy's fried dumplings.

SOFIA. Never! I've always kept myself to myself. It wouldn't suit me.

VERA. Well I liked it; it tasted like bread.

SOFIA. Some of us are more choosy.

VERA. Like me, I'm very choosy. You like the blouse?

VERA begins combing her hair.

Nice isn't it. Chose it myself at the Oxfam shop; fifty pence, should go well with that skirt I bought last month.

Re-enter EMMY.

EMMY. Me dash it away Miss Sofia.

SOFIA. Good! We'll start.

Emmy you sit there, between me and her.

EMMY. Here so, Miss Sofia?

SOFIA. Yes.

They all sit down.

And you stop combing that bloody hair and pay attention.

VERA stops.

Relax . . . I'll ask the questions. Are you ready?

VERA . . . steady, go!

SOFIA. If you can't act in an adult manner, then leave the table.

Now . . . is there anyone there? . . . Is there anyone there?

EMMY. We must answer Miss Sofia?

SOFIA. For the last time. Shut your stupid mouths.

VERA. Just because no one's answering there's no need to take it out on us. Perhaps they don't want to talk to you; wouldn't be the first time.

SOFIA. One more word, just one more . . . Now . . . Is, there, anyone, there? Give two knocks if there is anyone there.

Nothing is heard for a while.

Is, there, anyone, there? Give two knocks if there is anyone there . . . !

Shortly, two loud knocks are heard.

Which one of you did that?

EMMY. Not me!

SOFIA. Vera?

VERA. Sofia, I know it was you, you don't expect me to believe you've actually . . .

SOFIA. It was not!

VERA. Then who was . . . ? Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me for I have sinned, Sofia hold my hand.

EMMY. She already have mine.

There comes another two knocks.

EMMY. Speak to it, Miss Sofia.

VERA. Before it strikes us dead or something.

SOFIA. Alright . . . Is there anyone there?

Unnoticed by the three a shadow enters and stands by the door.

KATE. Yes.

SOFIA. Oh Christ!

VERA. Should we bow or something?

SOFIA. Don't be stupid. Keep quiet, I'm getting quite good at this. (*Looking at her book.*) Now, what's the next question? Oh yes! Who do you wish to speak to?

KATE. I don't know, anyone . . .

VERA. Anyone? Well how about me?

SOFIA. Me! It must be me.

EMMY becomes aware of KATE and stands, letting go of SOFIA's hand.

SOFIA. Don't let go of my hand. Emmy hold my hand!

VERA (*to EMMY*). What you looking at?

EMMY. The duppy!

VERA. What?

VERA also stands looking at KATE.

SOFIA. Keep quiet!

EMMY. Miss Sofia, look. Open you eye and look!

SOFIA. And make me lose my train of thought?

VERA. I think you should lose it.

EMMY. Miss Sofia?

SOFIA (*turning*). Oh what? What is it?

EMMY. The duppy!

SOFIA. What . . . ? Ararar . . . !

EMMY. You is who?

KATE. I saw your light and . . .

EMMY. You want Miss Phipps, the supervisor? Well she away on a trip with all the other ladies and won't be back until the day after . . .

SOFIA. Leave, this, to, me!

KATE takes a step forward.

Stay, where, you, are! What, do, you, want?

EMMY. She must be the new nurse, Miss Sofia.

SOFIA. What're you on about?

VERA. You mean she's not a, I thought you were a . . .

KATE. What?

SOFIA. Noth . . . nothing . . . You the . . . police?

EMMY. Or the new nurse?

KATE. Could you shine that somewhere else?

VERA. I'll put the lights on since you're not the police.

VERA puts the lights on.

SOFIA. We haven't established that, have we?

VERA turns the lights off and SOFIA again shines the torch at KATE.

Well, are you?

KATE. No.

SOFIA. Lights on.

The lights come on again and SOFIA switches the torch off.

EMMY. Maybe is the new nurse?

SOFIA. Doesn't look like any nurse.

KATE. Can I sit down?

EMMY. Of course. Sit in my chair.

KATE moves to the chair offered and sits down.

KATE. Could I have a drink? Feels like I've been walking miles.
How long is that wall?

SOFIA. One, we don't fetch, and two, this place is as dry as
Vera's ovaries.

VERA. Take no notice. She's jealous because I'm only fifty-four
and a bit.

EMMY (*moving forward and offering a hand*). You must be the nurse?
And concerning the wall, I don't think anybody really know
how long it is, or how old it is.

SOFIA. She doesn't look like a nurse, new or otherwise.

EMMY. She must be the new nurse. Who else could she be?

SOFIA. She looks familiar.

VERA. Not to me.

SOFIA. Who are you and what do you want?

EMMY. If you're the new nurse . . .

SOFIA. She's not.

EMMY. But if she is. (*To KATE.*) If you is, you should know 'bout
Miss Phipps. She's the supervisor.

SOFIA. Emmy, shut up. She's not the new nurse.

EMMY. But if she is . . .

KATE. I'm not the new nurse.

EMMY. Oh! Well my name is Emmyryha. Emmyryha C.
Waspkiss! Them call me Emmy and sometime Vera she call me
Em.

You visiting? Maybe me know you kin? Although is holiday
weekend and everybody gone beside we. And not even we is
really here. Maybe you should a rung first? You did ring first?

KATE. I'm not visiting anyone.

EMMY. You not the police, and you not the new nurse, and you not visiting no kin. Oh! So you come to stay?

VERA. Well kiss my beautiful arse! Another young beauty just like myself.

SOFIA. You should tell Vera your secret, 'sweet!' With you looking so young and pretty, I'm sure she's gonna want to know how. Aren't you Vera, 'sweet'?

VERA *rushes to sit beside* KATE.

VERA. Fruit or just good old fashioned vanishing cream? Bet it's vanishing cream isn't it, I tried that a couple of months ago . . .

KATE. Tried what?

SOFIA. One of Vera's favourite words, couple.

VERA . . . but I don't need much help with my complexion. (*Holding her face up.*) What d'you think sweet? A good female friend of mine . . .

SOFIA. She always distinguishes between her friends by calling them male or female, it's the way her world's constructed.

VERA. . . . well she died a virgin 'bout our age (*She gestures to herself and KATE.*) and young-looking just like us and do you know she swore by it - saying no I mean, swore it kept her young she did. Personally, I find it's the complete opposite with me 'cause that little word 'no' just doesn't do for me.

SOFIA. We all know about your inability with that word Vera.

EMMY. What Miss Sofia mean is that Vera's still active.

KATE. What?

EMMY. She still do things . . .

SOFIA. She's a prostitute.

EMMY. . . . with men!

KATE. What?

SOFIA. Prostitute. Serving Crompton Park for retired and almost defunct gentlemen.

VERA. The pay's not great because of the pension you see, but I manage.

KATE. You manage?

VERA. And very well too, since I'm only fifty-four and a bit!

EMMY. You know something? If I never knew you before, I would've took you for the new nurse.

KATE. You don't know me.

SOFIA. I'm sure I do. What you say your name was?

EMMY. You alright?

KATE. Emmy is it?

EMMY. Emmyryha C. Waspkiss. But them call me Emmy and sometime Vera she call me Em. What them call you?

KATE. Kate . . .

EMMY. Kate? Is you did married to sweet Winston Pickett?

KATE. What?

EMMY. Sweet Winston Pickett! Him did married to a woman name Kate. '

SOFIA. Hell, that must be over fifty years or more.

EMMY (*peering into KATE's face*). She wear well eeh! Sweet Winston . . . Him was going married to me you know! But Kate she go get herself pregnant, an' sweet Winston did have to married to she instead . . . And that's why me get left with Husband.

VERA. These days us girls have abortions.

EMMY (*to KATE*). You ever have one?

SOFIA. Where're you from anyway?

KATE. What?

SOFIA. Where're you from?

EMMY. You want to lay down? You look tired. Which room she to have, Miss Sofia?

SOFIA. Apart from mine, any.

VERA. And apart from ours, too. We share don't we Em?

EMMY. Yes, we share.

SOFIA. Why're you staying in a place like this? Although it's a nice place. Nice isolated place.

VERA. Nice place my beautiful arse, if you know what's good for you you'll start walking, I've been trying for years.

SOFIA. Gets as far as the men's dormitory and turns back . . . exhausted.

VERA. Ignore Sofia, everyone usually does.

SOFIA (*to KATE*). And your biggest mistake would be to listen to that old bat.

VERA. Fifty-four and a bit, that's me.

SOFIA. Really? I'm gonna get some proper food. Food I can eat.

Exit SOFIA.

VERA. I'll show her. She's always criticising; as if I ever mention the fact that she never gets invited out.

EMMY. Oh Vera!

VERA. I will, I'll show her.

VERA puts on her head-sets and exits.

KATE. Something wrong?

EMMY. Is just them way. Miss Sofia have a way 'bout her, but she not so bad when you get to know her. And Vera and she always a cuss and quarrel. You feeling alright? You don't look good.

KATE. I am. I'm alright.

EMMY looks out through the curtains.

EMMY. The wall look dark tonight.

KATE. I had to walk round it.

EMMY. Maybe you should climb over?

KATE. Climbing walls is for the young.

EMMY. You alright?

VERA returns dressed to go out, wearing an extravagant hat.

You going out?

VERA. Yes!

EMMY. But Miss Sofia not going 'llow you.

VERA. Miss Sofia can kiss my beautiful arse! It's because of her I'm going. I can't stand being stuck here under orders with her,

and anyway just remembered I've got a date with Tucker and if I know old Tucker he'll be up pacing the floor on his rickety old legs. Sometimes he gets so impatient . . . gives a girl heart it does . . . Maybe I'll bring us back some drink?

EMMY. Food would be better.

VERA. Oh dear I forgot . . . I mean I . . .

EMMY. Don't worry yourself. We will get through.

VERA. I'll bring some back if I re . . . Well I'll see you all later!

VERA begins to leave, putting her head-sets on as she goes.

EMMY. If Miss Sofia ever find out say Vera gone out, we never hear the end of it. She don't like Vera to go next door. But it good for Vera. Vera start to forget things. Nothing much. Except she forget the food and now we don't have much to eat. She think me don't know she getting that way, and me make she think it. 'Cause it suit her. It important that me don't know. We all alike in that respect, even Miss Sofia . . . But me glad she gone out. She can't do without her friends from next door . . .

VERA returns.

VERA. Oh Em, I forgot. If any of my infants call, take a message and say I'll call back. Okay!

EMMY. Alright Vera.

Exit VERA.

She call them her infants . . . And she call him rickety . . . Just like one granddaddy me did have. Rickety as hell, but was he the brute a that word MAN! Joshua them call him. Joshua! What a damn confounded name. Damn confounded name, for a damn confounded man, with a damn confounded piece a manhood.

Re-enter SOFIA.

EMMY. Me remember the time him have one wound. One foot long or more. From thigh to groin, groin to thigh. An' him lay down inna the yard, naked as the day, for me grandmother to dress it. Him hand them stretch out so . . . And the high Jamaican sun just a bawl down 'pon him, and him a bawl down profanities 'pon me grandmother. And she! She a scurry come, black, shine and stink with sweat, and the white crepe

bandage inna her hand. Days later the foot turn yellow and them chop it clean off!

SOFIA. If you stay long enough, you'll get used to Emmy rambling on and then declining.

KATE *stands and picks up her case*. SOFIA *watches her*.

It can't be that bad . . . whatever it is . . . Well what is it?

KATE. What's what?

SOFIA. The reason you're here.

KATE. What reason?

SOFIA. There must be one.

KATE. Well there isn't.

SOFIA. People don't just turn up.

KATE. Whatever the reason, it's my business.

SOFIA (*smiling*). So there is one?

KATE (*to SOFIA*). You did say any room?

EMMY. You want sleep with me, Kate? My bed big you know

SOFIA. 'Course she bloody doesn't. Who ever heard of two grown women sharing a bed? Unless they're a bit queer.

EMMY. Sometime me and Vera sleep.

SOFIA. Just show her to the room next to Phipps's.

EMMY. Yes, Miss Sofia.

KATE (*to EMMY*). Thanks, all the same.

SOFIA. By the way, where is she?

EMMY. Miss Phipps gone on the trip, Miss Sofia.

SOFIA. Vera you idiot!

EMMY. She . . .

SOFIA. She what?

KATE. She's gone to bed.

SOFIA. Oh, what a pity. 'Cause I've just broken the lock on the freezer and guess what I've found? Two white carrier bags of food . . . frozen food!

EMMY. But where you find them, Miss Sofia?

SOFIA. The freezer, dummy. One leg of lamb, three pork chops, some vegetables and a chicken for Sunday dinner . . . all frozen solid. Silly old cow locked them back in. All neat in two, white, plastic bags, just waiting to be lifted and she locks them back in. Well at least we won't have to endure any more of your foreign muck, Emmy.

EMMY. No.

SOFIA. And now I've found them, I'll cook my own dinner.

EMMY. But you can't reach the stove Miss Sofia?

SOFIA. 'Course I bloody can.

Exit SOFIA.

EMMY. I hope she will reach this time. Last time her sleeve catch fire and if it wasn't for nine, nine, nine and Vera, she would dead. Vera say she go in the kitchen the morning and Miss Sofia was cooking breakfast. Miss Sofia have on her gown and because she low down in her chair she have to lean it catch fire. Well Vera never see the fire at first and when she turn round, she see Miss Sofia eye them full up her head. Vera say all Miss Sofia a do is bat, bat the fire. 'Bat, bat, bat!' Vera say. Miss Sofia down in her chair and the flame a ride her, and she couldn't even call out for help. So Vera grab the towel, dash it over Miss Sofia and wrap it tight round her and kill the fire dead. And that's when Vera run out go call nine, nine, nine and Miss Sofia save.

KATE. You like it here?

EMMY. It alright. Is where them put we. But my Daphne coming for me, you know. She coming to take me out this weekend. (*EMMY takes a letter out of her handbag and reads.*) 'Dear Mum, Coming to take you shopping tomorrow. Love Daphne.'

And Miss Sofia, she get this notion . . . She always get them. Me remember one notion she get. She used to write these letters – chain letter she call them. She used to like write them, but she stop. Cost too much she say . . . That was years ago. Then she start write these other letters. She hide write, but me see. And though Miss Sofia always first for the letters and newspapers, me never one day see any reply come from foreign for her . . . Me know is foreign she write, because the envelope

them blue and red . . . Now this new notion she have is talking to the dead. She get book from library and everything. Me not too sure though, cause me kinna fraid . . . But is what Miss Sofia want.

KATE. That's what you were doing when I came in?

EMMY. Yes. Why you laughing?

KATE. Nothing. Show me the room.

EMMY. Come then.

KATE picks up her case and they leave.

Scene Three

SOFIA is waiting for VERA.

A loud noise outside and VERA enters staggering and clutching her bag - she looks a mess.

VERA. Oh!

SOFIA. . . . Oh! Here she comes, blacker and bluer, repentful as hell, two pounds more in the kitty and full of nevers! Thought I told you not to leave this house?

VERA. Never, never again that trumped up little Hitler bastard! He's gonna have to beg for my services the next time he's feeling randy, 'cause till then he can kiss my beautiful arse!

SOFIA. Sure you remember which he it was this time?

VERA. Of course I do!

SOFIA. You're sure now? Because your memory's not . . .

VERA. Tucker! I remember!

SOFIA. Perhaps it's the beatings before you remember?

VERA. I said I remember!

SOFIA. You said you took the food out, but do you know where I found it?

Ask me where I found the food, Vera.

VERA. I don't want to talk about food.

SOFIA. Well I do. I spent the good part of ten minutes breaking into the freezer to rescue food you had locked back in. I think your memory's getting worse.

VERA. I'm fine!

KATE *enters*.

KATE. What's the matter?

VERA. Sofia?

SOFIA. Well ask me where I found the food.

VERA. But my head hurts.

SOFIA. Ask me!

VERA. Where then, where?

SOFIA. . . . Did I find the food, Sofia?

VERA. Where did you find the food, Sofia?

Enter EMMY.

SOFIA (*to EMMY*). Bed ah? I'll deal with you later, liar.

KATE. I said that, not Emmy.

SOFIA. And she condoned it.

VERA. Where then?

SOFIA (*to EMMY*). Later!

VERA. Where?

SOFIA. In the freezer.

KATE. Is there something going on?

VERA. No.

SOFIA. Oh, I think they should know, don't you Vera? Especially sweet darling Em!

VERA (*looks at SOFIA*). Don't.

KATE. Don't what?

SOFIA. It's just . . .

VERA. Did my infants call?

KATE. What?

VERA. My infants, did they call?

KATE. What's happened?

SOFIA. Just, just Vera back from one of her illicit sojourns. Illicit being the operative word.

KATE. She's been attacked.

SOFIA. I reckon it does something for her. Aren't I right Vera . . . sweet?

EMMY. Me will go for the aid box.

Exit EMMY.

KATE. Shall I call the police?

SOFIA. Do no such thing.

VERA. I'm alright.

Re-enter EMMY *with the First Aid box. She begins attending to* VERA.

I am really . . .

But my infants? Did they call while I was out? I was expecting

. . .

EMMY. Husband used to beat me. Used to beat me bad. If Husband never beat me, me never used to feel it was a real week. The week just never feel right . . . One time me even go blind. Me just close me eye them so. Doctor tell me is nothing. All in me head. And favour it was true, cause it just get better. Soon as Husband died it get better. Husband was a big everlasting black man who did so black, him kinna blue with it . . . Black blue, with a dullness over him whole self. Him eye them red and weak and all day long them run water . . . Every morning him wake them stuck shut with yellow matter and him can't see. Blind! That's when me used to bathe them. The closest we ever get was me bathing him eye . . . So anyway, Husband used to bawl, 'Emmyryha!' Him would bawl, 'Emmyryha! Get the switch!' An' me go for it; me go for it, just like me a one a him pickeny. Then Husband would whip me. And when him done, him ask me if me know why him whip me. And me say, 'yes Sir! Yes Sir, cause you a Husband.' Then he died on me. I know the exact second Husband died. It was when I turned oak on him . . . The switch broke on my back - wood on wood . . . Afterwards he lingered for a few days, like a pestilence: moaning and fawning for food, but dead! Eyes stuck shut and me refusing to bathe them. No ordering,

no beatings . . . dead! He just never knew the sap of a weed could up and turn oak on him. And when he did, it killed him. Killed him, biff!

(To KATE.) You should find out 'bout oak. Best way to kill a man like Husband . . . But if it wasn't for all them pickeny Husband gimme, me think me would a turn oak on him long before. Twelve a them! And no girls.

SOFIA. Kids! Nature's way of slapping women in the face. Every year or so, 'slap', right in the face. 'Slap!' Right in our beautiful liberated arses, ah Vera!

EMMY. You got babies, Kate?

KATE. No . . . I have a husband though. It's our anniversary tomorrow.

SOFIA. So that's why you're here.

KATE. What?

SOFIA. The reason you've run away.

KATE. My husband doesn't have much to do with it.

SOFIA. So you have run away?

EMMY. How long you married, Kate?

KATE. Eight years.

SOFIA. But more like eighty, ah?

KATE. There's nothing wrong with my marriage.

SOFIA. Really?

KATE. Really!

SOFIA. Married! You don't look old enough. But you look young enough, fool enough.

VERA. My longest lasted three years. He died. He was good to me and I was good to him. Whenever we walked out he would put his arm around me and in those days you looped arms and that was it, but he would always put his arm around me. He liked to touch me. It was like he needed to touch me. Like his whole life depended on . . . touching me . . . Made me feel needed. Had my first orgasm with him. Thirty-eight and losing control. But you can do that with someone who cares.

SOFIA. Sex! Sex! Sex! Anything and you turn it round to sex!

EMMY. How you meet you husband, Kate?

KATE. He was my father's best friend.

But it was stupid because as soon as I married him my father stopped being his best friend. And then I realised that was why I'd married him.

SOFIA. You're not happy with him are you? Go on admit it; you're not ecstatic with him.

KATE (to EMMY). Let me finish that for you.

KATE takes over attending to VERA.

EMMY. I have a girl. Only one . . . Daphne!

She coming tomorrow. (EMMY takes the letter out of her handbag and reads) 'Dear Mum, Coming to take you shopping tomorrow. Love Daphne.'

She look just like her father. Beautiful!

SOFIA wheels herself away.

EMMY. She wearing a thin summer dress and her lovely shiny black hair tie up with ribbon, and she six months pregnant with her first child . . .

KATE (to VERA). How's that?

VERA. Oh better, sweet.

EMMY. . . . she says her ankles are swollen. But they look just the same, slim and strong.

And then she smiles; as I take the picture she smiles . . .

EMMY takes a picture out of her handbag staring at it.

VERA. There's no bruising is there sweet? (She takes a mirror out of her handbag and looks at her face.)

KATE. Not much.

VERA. No, not much . . .

EMMY. . . . And as me click done . . . she start laugh.

She got a beautiful smile, but she got a laugh you can feel with you two hand them . . .

(EMMY now has her hands up). Feel with two hand.

SOFIA. Emmy . . . go to bed . . .

EMMY. Yes, Miss Sofia.

Exit EMMY.

VERA. My head still hurts. But I got a call from one of my infants today, one of my sons, says his wife has just given birth to a lovely girl and could I come over as soon as possible . . . They're going to call her Vera, what an honour ah . . . ! But how can I go over like this? I'm all bruised and . . . What do you think Sofia, you think make-up will help?

SOFIA. Make-up? Stop talking bloody nonsense. Look at you. Just look at you. You're a disgrace.

VERA (*looking in her mirror*). Oh . . .

SOFIA. I'm gonna see about some food, don't be here when I get back.

Exit SOFIA.

Scene Four

The next morning. Present is SOFIA looking out the window. Enter EMMY dressed in a fancy dress and made up.

EMMY. How me look, Miss Sofia?

SOFIA (*still looking out the window*). Fine.

EMMY. I hope Daphne going like it. You think she going like it, Miss Sofia?

SOFIA. You haven't seen that wretched paper boy have you?

EMMY. Me see him last week.

SOFIA. This morning!

EMMY. No. But when me see him last week, him tell me him don't name Richard, him name Edwin!

SOFIA. That wretched boy I said dummy.

EMMY. Edwin! Him no name Richard. Him name Edwin.

SOFIA. Oh shut up.

EMMY. You like these?

EMMY (*she holds up a string of pearls around her neck*). Vera lend me. Them nice eeh! Vera say them got style. That mean me going have style too?

SOFIA. Impossible!

EMMY. And Vera was going lend me the ears ring to match, but me tell her me ears don't bore. She even make up me face . . . she say Daphne going like it.

SOFIA. Where is he?

SOFIA *turns now*.

What the hell're you doing?

EMMY. Doing?

SOFIA. We're supposed to be making contact with the other side, not scaring them half to death.

EMMY. But them dead already, Miss Sofia.

SOFIA. Keep quiet! Look at the state of you!

EMMY *looks down at herself*.

EMMY. Then it no look good, Miss Sofia?

SOFIA. No it bloody doesn't. Get upstairs and scrub that muck off before it sets fast. You let Vera do that to you?

EMMY. But she say it look good.

SOFIA. Vera is a whore. She would, she doesn't know any better. But you!

EMMY. Yes, Miss Sofia.

Enter KATE with the newspapers.

SOFIA. There they are. Hand them over.

KATE *drops them on the table and SOFIA picks them up and starts reading*.

EMMY. Kate, Miss Sofia say me no look good.

KATE. You look as good as you feel is what my mother always said. Never said an original thing, my mother.

SOFIA. You have one of those weird and wonderful creatures.

And the relationship doesn't sound too good from that last remark. You should abstain, like me.

EMMY. Miss Sofia no have no mother. Is inna toilet them find her and call her Sofia. No true Miss Sofia? Miss Sofia live inna children's home all . . .

SOFIA. It was not a home of any kind. I lived in an orphanage.

EMMY. Three months old, that's all she was.

SOFIA. And I don't see why I should have to apologise for it.

EMMY. No Miss Sofia. You no have to sorry for nothing.

SOFIA. There are some who would've benefited from my upbringing. That Vera for one. She flits from one disgusting liaison to another . . . as if her life depended on it. If she had had my upbringing that would've set her right.

KATE. I think Vera would've been Vera, even if she had had your upbringing.

SOFIA. And what the hell do you know about Vera or any of us to be saying that?

KATE. Well . . .

SOFIA. You don't know anything. Nothing!

And all I can say is I'm glad I have none of the needs or desires that seem to have afflicted her.

EMMY. Is just her way, Miss Sofia.

SOFIA. Just her way indeed!

Exit SOFIA.

EMMY. She no mean it, but because she no have no one, it kinna rest on her mind and . . .

KATE. I don't care.

EMMY. Me and Vera have we memories . . . And even though Vera infant no come look for her, she know them out there . . . But sometimes the thought of them not enough, and only the touch of them will suffice . . . I think the newspaper help Miss Sofia. She read 'bout other people and them life and she can pretend . . . And me call her Miss Sofia. That make her feel good. And she and Vera cuss and quarrel, but that good for her too. I wonder sometime if Vera know the tonic she is to Miss

Sofia. Me scared to ask in case she don't and she stop out of spite. Vera little bit quick tempered . . . But maybe talking to the dead will help Miss Sofia . . .

KATE. My father's just died.

EMMY. Maybe you want talk to him?

KATE. No.

EMMY. You don't want talk to him?

KATE. We never had much to say to each other when he was alive.

EMMY. Maybe is time? You never like you father?

KATE. It's not that simple. You wouldn't understand.

EMMY. When you old, people think you can't grasp anything. You going help me with the tea and sandwich for when Daphne come? You will like my Daphne. She nice. Just like you.

KATE. You think I'm nice?

EMMY. Of course you nice.

KATE. You only think so because you don't know me.

EMMY. Me no have to know you to know you nice. You going help me with the food?

KATE. Okay then.

EMMY. Good. Vera tell me last night that she have a new granddaughter and them going call her Vera. You want see her when she tell me. She kick up her heel and we hold each other and we dance. Me glad for her I can hardly tell you . . . Anyway come we make the tea before Daphne come.

Exit KATE and EMMY.

Scene Five

Enter VERA. She hobbles over to a chair and sits. She takes a hand mirror out of her handbag and peers into it, applies some make-up and combs her hair. After a while KATE and EMMY enter talking together and carrying plates of sandwiches, they stop when they see VERA.

VERA. What you two staring at?

EMMY. You.

KATE. How're you feeling?

VERA. I'm used to it. Did any of my infants call?

EMMY. No. We make tea for Daphne. You want some now?

VERA. No I'll wait. Anyway I'm on a diet. You think I'm gaining weight, sweet?

EMMY. No.

VERA. Oh I think so, I'm sure this extra cheek wasn't on my beautiful arse, or maybe I don't remember . . . ?

EMMY. You look alright.

VERA. You're only saying that because you don't want me to worry. She knows I worry, she's a good friend . . . but I worry . . . Even now, don't know why. You worry yourself too, don't you sweet? Worse than me. She worries about anything . . . Dear God, why am I babbling?

EMMY. Why worry? You have me.

VERA. Because my head feels like shit and I look like shit and I sound like Sofia.

KATE. Maybe you got up too soon?

VERA. No I'm fine and anyway I've got my new granddaughter to cheer me up . . . Oh I didn't tell you did I Em? One of my infants called, my daughter. She's had a girl! Called and wanted me to go over, said her husband would come and fetch me, wanted me to come over right away. Today! But I said, this is what I said Em, I said 'No sweet, I can't, not without my best friend Emmy.' And then do you know what she said when I said that?

EMMY. What?

VERA. She said, 'Bring your friend.' That's what she said.

EMMY. Really?

VERA. Really! But then I said, 'No we couldn't, Emmy's having a treat herself today, her daughter Daphne's visiting.' So we agreed on another day. Some time next week. Hope you'll come.

EMMY. Oh yes. Me will come . . .

VERA. What an honour, ah! Vera!

EMMY. Is really a honour.

VERA. But right now we've got a tea to organise for when your Daphne comes haven't we, sweet?

EMMY. Oh yes. Make me go for the tea.

EMMY puts her sandwiches down and exits. KATE also puts her sandwiches down and begins laying the table.

KATE. She's looking forward to seeing her daughter.

VERA. Mmm?

KATE. Emmy, she's looking . . .

VERA (*laughing*). She's not really coming, sweet.

KATE. Who?

VERA. Daphne! Em's daughter, she's not really coming.

KATE. I don't understand.

VERA. God, Emmy hasn't seen or heard from her Daphne in years. There's nobody coming to tea except us, sweet. (*Touching her head.*) It's all up here.

KATE. What do you mean?

VERA. Well there's me, you, Sofia and Emmy. One, two, three, four for tea.

KATE. But . . .

EMMY returns with the tea.

VERA. Oh Em, sweet, there're only four places set. There'll be five for tea remember? You mustn't forget Kate. Me, you, Sofia, Daphne and Kate, makes five.

EMMY. Oh yes, you right. And me remember Daphne like her tea well mash, so me put the water on it.

VERA. Yes put the pot in the middle of the table next to the flowers, by the way where are they? I remember flowers somewhere.

EMMY puts the tea down.

EMMY. Make me go for the extra setting. Little most me forget you Kate.

Exit EMMY who then returns with extra tea things and lays them on the table.

Daphne soon come now.

EMMY looks out the window. KATE watches her.

VERA. You wouldn't think so to look at me but I'm a Lady. The last man I married was a Lord so that makes me a Lady. Lady Vera Hawthorne-Wood! Horrendous! So was he. Meanest man I ever lived with, he didn't have a stately house or anything, but he had a big enough one. We lived in three rooms, one bedroom each and a dining room. Separate bedrooms were his idea . . . I don't think he liked me. Couldn't tolerate me and I needed the company, all I ever needed from them really, so I left . . . Left them all one way or the other, all six of them!

KATE. What does a woman do with six husbands?

VERA. If she's clever she'll kill four, divorce one and leave the other one. Beautiful infants though. They really look after me . . . Because they love me . . . because I was a good mother, because I am a good mother . . .

No sign yet, Em?

EMMY. Not yet.

VERA goes to EMMY.

VERA. You know my eyes're younger, let me.

EMMY. Maybe we should wait outside?

VERA. Yeah, that way we'll see her as soon as she gets round the wall.

Exit VERA and EMMY. KATE moves to the window and looks out. SOFIA enters. She moves to the table and begins eating the sandwiches.

SOFIA. So! You're still here.

KATE. Emmy's looking for Daphne.

SOFIA. Great sandwiches. Want one?

We might get somewhere tonight. We'd better anyway. Last night before they all come shuffling back. And you won't know the place once they all get back. All that dribbling and pissing

and a terrible waiting silence . . .

KATE. They're waiting . . . for Daphne.

Vera told me. About Emmy and her daughter. Her Daphne.

SOFIA. Bet that's all she told you.

KATE. She waits every holiday then?

SOFIA. Try one, they're really nice. Oh Emmy'll be upset for a few days but she'll carry on . . . Until the next holiday . . . when it'll all start up again . . . If she's lucky . . .

KATE. Lucky? It can't be good for her . . . Everytime . . . Every holiday . . . Why, why don't you tell her she's dead or something? That Daphne's dead.

SOFIA. You don't know what you're talking about.

KATE. I suppose you enjoy it?

SOFIA throws the sandwich on the table.

SOFIA. I was.

KATE. I'm going to talk to her. You can't let her go on like this.

SOFIA. Just stay out of it. You don't know anything about it. She needs it.

Enter VERA comforting EMMY who is sobbing.

VERA. Don't worry, sweet. She'll come, she's probably just been delayed.

EMMY. You think so?

SOFIA. Vera, stop talking nonsense and get the chairs, we've wasted enough time as it is.

KATE. Is that all you're bothered about? Your seance?

SOFIA. What else is there? Oh she's fine. I've seen it all before. Vera get the chairs.

VERA. I'm busy.

SOFIA. Busy mothering her, because you don't have your own to mother.

VERA. You never know when to stop do you?

SOFIA. Says the woman with her face hanging off.

Quickly VERA lets go of EMMY, opens her handbag and takes out her mirror peering into it.

VERA. My face isn't hanging off. Em's my face hanging off?

VERA begins applying some make-up.

EMMY. I feel so tired.

KATE rushes over to EMMY and sits her down in a chair.

KATE. Why? Why do it? You shouldn't put yourself through this.

EMMY. Maybe she late or maybe is tomorrow she coming? She never reach nowhere on time you know! Me remember the night she born . . .

KATE. Emmy . . .

EMMY. Three week over me carry her and still she take the whole night. But in the end she come . . .

KATE. Em . . .

EMMY. In the end . . . *(She begins sobbing again.)*

KATE. Em look. I've got some bad news. Hold my hand.

SOFIA. Keep out of it.

KATE. Hold my hand. Tighter Em!

SOFIA. I said . . .

KATE. There was a phone call. While you were outside. About your daughter.

VERA. My daughter? My daughter?

SOFIA *(to KATE)*. Keep out!

KATE. About Daphne.

EMMY. Daphne?

KATE. I'm sorry, Em. She's dead. She died on her way to see you. Car crash. She didn't suffer . . . She did love you and she needed you and she . . .

EMMY. Oh Daphne . . .

EMMY begins breathing heavily and then slumps back in the chair.

Ohohoh . . . !

SOFIA. You bitch!

VERA. Emmy!

VERA *rushes to EMMY.*

SOFIA (*to KATE*). Look at her.

EMMY. Uhuh . . . !

KATE. But . . . Emmy . . . ?

SOFIA. Get out! Get out!

VERA. Emmy what's wrong?

SOFIA *wheels herself towards them.*

SOFIA. How stupid are you? Sit her up. You do realise this is our last night?

VERA. She's not up to it.

SOFIA. Just a little shock. Wasn't it Em? Go and put the kettle on.

VERA. But . . .

SOFIA. Do it!

Exit VERA.

(*To KATE.*) Satisfied?

KATE. I didn't think she'd . . .

SOFIA. No you didn't. Just get out and leave her to me.

KATE. Emmy, I'm sorry. I'm . . .

SOFIA. Get out!

(*To EMMY.*) Just a little shock. And your friend Vera's gone to make the tea.

EMMY. Ohohoh . . .

Exit KATE.

EMMY. Daphne dead . . . !

SOFIA. But I'm sure we can get in touch for you. Talk to your Daphne.

EMMY. Talk to Daphne . . . ?

SOFIA. If we do the seance . . .

VERA *returns.*

VERA. I've put the kettle on. How is she?

SOFIA. Better. She wants to do the seance.

VERA. You don't have to, Em.

SOFIA. She wants to. Get the chairs. Sit her on one.

VERA. But . . .

SOFIA. Do it!

VERA *puts the chairs up to the table and helps EMMY on to one and then sits down herself.*

Now! Same procedure as last night. Place hands on the table and we'll begin.

Hands are placed on the table.

VERA. How you feeling, sweet?

SOFIA. Keep quiet. I'm not having you talk through the whole thing again.

VERA. I did not talk through the whole . . .

SOFIA. Quiet! I think I'm getting there.

Is there anyone there? Is there anyone there?

Nothing is heard for a while.

Knock twice if there is anyone there.

SOFIA. Is there anyone there?

After a while EMMY begins to breathe heavily and then she gasps and falls off her chair.

EMMY. Uhuhuhu . . . ! Uhuhu . . . !

VERA. Oh no!

SOFIA. What now?

VERA *stoops over her.*

EMMY. Uhuh . . . ! Uhuh . . . !

VERA. Emmy?

ACT TWO

Scene One

EMMY *is still on the floor and VERA is still over her.*

VERA. Oh Christ!

EMMY *appears to be choking, gasping for breath.*

EMMY. Uhuh . . .

SOFIA. What's the matter now?

VERA. I think she's choking.

SOFIA. Oh God, no!

VERA. What should I do?

SOFIA. Get her up and lay her out.

VERA. Don't you mean down?

SOFIA. What?

VERA. Lay her down!

SOFIA. Down! Out! What's the difference at her age?

VERA *helps EMMY up and lays her on the sofa.*

SOFIA. Maybe she's thirsty?

VERA. Do you want some tea Em?

EMMY. Uhuhu . . .

SOFIA. Told you she was.

VERA. I'll get the tea then.

Exit VERA. SOFIA wheels herself to EMMY, peering at her.

SOFIA. I bet you're having us on. Aren't you? Trying to ruin it for me.

Are you listening to me Emmyryha C. Waspkiss? Are you?

SOFIA *slaps EMMY's face.*

Can you hear me? Bet you can, can't you?

The slaps become harder and faster. EMMY sobs and SOFIA peers at her.

SOFIA. Maybe you can't.

Offstage VERA is heard.

VERA. Here it is, sweet.

Enter VERA with EMMY's tea. SOFIA moves back as VERA rushes over to EMMY.

There there don't cry. You drink this up and you'll be fine, I know you will. Lots of sugar and no milk, ah sweet!

VERA *kisses EMMY and SOFIA moves even further away.*

EMMY. Feel sick.

VERA. It was just a turn and I haven't even sent for the doctor because I know it was just a turn, wasn't it Sofia?

EMMY. Hold my hand.

VERA (*grabbing EMMY's hand*). I am sweet, I am I'm holding on for the two of us . . .

EMMY. Feel nice.

VERA. I know, something I first discovered with my mother, she always held my hand. It's good holding hands.

EMMY. Me dead?

VERA. No. What would I do without you to snuggle up to?

SOFIA. Find someone else.

VERA. 'Course you're not dead.

EMMY. I think so.

VERA. No!

EMMY. Me go look for Daphne and me see Husband instead! See him walking . . .

VERA. Your imagination.

SOFIA (to EMMY). What did you say?

EMMY. Him put his hand round my throat and I dropped down and I can hardly breathe for life . . . I never drop down?

VERA. Yes, but . . .

SOFIA. You're telling me you saw your husband? You made contact with your rotten husband?

VERA. She needs to rest.

SOFIA. Rest? You bitches! You planned it didn't you?

VERA. Planned what?

SOFIA. Soon as I told you what I wanted, what I needed, you both started planning how to ruin it. How to make it work for yourselves!

SOFIA *wheels herself forward.*

VERA. What're you talking about?

SOFIA. You hijacked my seance!

VERA. We did what?

SOFIA. Don't pretend. My seance!

EMMY. . . . And his hand cold, and them squeeze and squeeze and all I can do is drop down. And I feel a warmth . . . Like a quick fire. It run through me. And someone dragging me back and squeezing my hand and is you . . .

VERA. Don't say any more. Sofia's finally lost her mind.

SOFIA. And why don't you want her to say any more? Afraid she'll let it slip? And you with the brain of a fruit cake. How did you manage it?

VERA. Let what slip? Quite frankly I'm appalled at your attitude, hounding me and Emmy like this, and Emmy not well . . . !

SOFIA. You bitches! You stole my seance!

VERA. Stole? We did nothing of the kind; we only joined in for your sake and now you accuse us, accuse me . . .

SOFIA. Shut up.

VERA . . . accuse me of stealing your seance. I never stole a thing in my life and what would I want with a seance of all things, not exactly one of the most appealing things to steal is . . .

SOFIA. Quiet!

VERA. . . . shouting! And Emmy not well, Emmy flat out on her back because she's lost her daughter and you shouting at the top of your . . .

Suddenly SOFIA slaps EMMY around the face and VERA screams out and is then quiet.

SOFIA. Keep quiet I said . . . please . . . keep . . . quiet . . .

EMMY. Uhuhuh . . .

VERA. You hit her.

SOFIA. You have her. She has you. You have each other.

I only wanted to talk to my mother . . . I only wanted . . . to ask her . . . And you wouldn't even let me. You couldn't even let me do that . . .

EMMY. Me don't see Daphne . . .

VERA. It's alright Em. Don't worry, sweet.

Quickly VERA helps EMMY up.

SOFIA. Where're you taking her? Vera where're you taking her?

SOFIA moves to them.

You going now? I'm sorry Vera, Vera, I'm . . .

VERA exits with EMMY, ignoring SOFIA. SOFIA goes to the window and sits alone looking out and then she looks down at her hands and clasps them together, shaking them as she raises them. KATE enters and stands watching her.

You caught me.

KATE. Doing what?

SOFIA. Holding hands. Apparently there's something to be had from it.

KATE. It helps if you have someone with you.

SOFIA. I thought I told you to get out?

KATE. I came back.

SOFIA. What for?

KATE. To see Emmy. I thought . . . I mean I . . .

SOFIA. It doesn't seem to be working.

KATE. What doesn't?

SOFIA. Do you like my hands? A little bit even? They pretty? They hands you could hold on to? In case you're wondering they've ruined everything and gone to bed . . . together! Was my last chance too.

KATE. What was?

SOFIA. The seance! They did it for themselves. They didn't do it for me . . . And now they've gone off together. Which is quite normal. As this, me alone here, is quite normal. And though it doesn't get any easier, everything is quite normal.

KATE. Sofia . . . ?

Enter VERA.

SOFIA. What's wrong with you? Is she dead?

KATE. Who?

VERA. Why?

SOFIA. She's dead, isn't she?

VERA. Why are you you?

SOFIA. What?

VERA begins to move slowly forward all the while she is speaking.

VERA. I said why're you you? I thought it was me. But it's Emmy too. You hate Emmy too.

SOFIA. Well is she or isn't she?

VERA. You hate Emmy.

SOFIA. Nonsense!

VERA. I thought it was me rubbing you up the wrong way. But you hate Emmy.

SOFIA. She's dead, isn't she? And you don't know how to say it. Well let me: 'she's dead!' There, it's been said. Now let me say it's a blow, but you'll need someone, not to take her place, but someone to ease your pain. Take it from me, the worst way is trying to get through alone and you'll grieve and you'll pine, but let me say, let me tell you straight, I will not shirk my duty;

I am willing, more than willing to take Emmyryah's place and become . . . your friend!

VERA. She's not dead.

SOFIA. What?

VERA. She's not dead.

SOFIA. 'Course she is.

VERA. You hate her.

SOFIA. I know she is. She is! And you don't know how to say it.

VERA. Why do you hate her?

SOFIA. What . . . ?

VERA. You've hated her for years. Haven't you? I know you have.

SOFIA. I don't know what you're . . .

VERA. I know!

SOFIA. What?

VERA. That you hate my friend.

SOFIA. Shut up!

VERA. I know!

SOFIA. Emmy's not dead?

VERA. Say you hate her.

SOFIA. She should be dead. If she were . . .

VERA. Say it!

SOFIA. Yes! Yes!

VERA. Why?

SOFIA. Because . . .

VERA. Why?

SOFIA. Because . . . it's not natural the way you two carry on.

Kissing. Holding bloody hands. Dancing . . . together!

Whispering. Telling each other things. Keeping sordid . . .

VERA. Sordid . . . ?

SOFIA. Sordid, little secrets. Like spiteful children . . .

VERA. I went to your room . . .

SOFIA. But I bet there're some secrets you haven't told your dear, sweet, darling Em!

VERA. Emmy was cold. I went to a room. Got a spare quilt. She was still cold. Went to another room. Got another. But she was still cold . . . Then I went to your room. To get an extra quilt . . . that's all I went for . . .

SOFIA. Scared she won't want you if she knows that at the drop of one of your ridiculous hats you become a blithering idiot?

VERA. I said I went to your room! I found these.

VERA opens her hands and reveals a bundle of letters and photographs – SOFIA doesn't really look.

SOFIA. But I thought best friends told each other everything.

VERA. I went to your room!

SOFIA. I thought! But it's no good asking me. What would I know . . .

VERA. What are they?

SOFIA. . . . never having had a best friend. And you two keeping spiteful, sordid secrets and . . .

VERA. What are they?

SOFIA. What're what?

SOFIA turns now looking at them.

VERA. These. I read them, but I don't know.

SOFIA. Neither do I . . . know.

VERA. Ask me where I found them, Sofia.

SOFIA. No.

VERA. I want you to.

SOFIA. No.

VERA. Ask me!

SOFIA. Where then? Where?

VERA. Did I find them, Vera?

SOFIA. Go away . . .

VERA. Say it! Ask it! Ask me!

SOFIA. Where, did you find them, Vera?

VERA. In your room.

SOFIA. They are mine . . . that's all.

VERA. What're yours?

SOFIA. Those. In your hand!

SOFIA wheels herself forward to take them but VERA sidesteps her.

They are . . . are mine.

VERA. And I found them. Under your mattress. Pushed under.

Emmy was cold. I went to your room. To get an extra quilt. I pulled and I pulled and I pulled. I couldn't get it off . . . I lifted the mattress. Found these. Pushed under.

SOFIA. You had no right.

VERA. I found them under your mattress.

SOFIA. It's none of your business! (*She begins sobbing.*) They are mine . . .

VERA. Don't cry. Please don't cry Sofia. You bitch!

VERA rushes at her but KATE stops her.

KATE. What?

As VERA is pulled away the photographs and the letters fall to the floor.

VERA. She even has the nerve to sit there and cry.

VERA tries to rush at SOFIA again, but KATE holds on to her.

KATE. Stop it.

VERA (*pointing to the letters*). Those! Under her bed! All of them! Stuffed under her bed.

KATE. So?

VERA. Stuffed under her sodding bed. And you do piss the bed you incontinent bitch.

KATE. Vera . . .

VERA. God! They're Emmy's!

SOFIA. She's lying. They're mine.

VERA. Letters from Daphne! And now she's dead . . .

KATE. What? I don't under . . .

VERA. All these years. Stealing Emmy's letters. And we all thought Daphne didn't care.

KATE looks now at SOFIA and then picks up one of the pictures, looking at it.

SOFIA. They are mine you know. *(She holds out her hand for KATE to pass it to her.)* They really are.

KATE hands it to SOFIA and on seeing this VERA rushes between them and the picture falls to the floor again.

VERA. She's not supposed to have it. She's not supposed to!

KATE holds on to VERA.

KATE. Vera . . .

VERA. And now Daphne's dead . . .

KATE. No she's not . . .

VERA. What?

KATE. Daphne's not dead.

VERA. Oh no! Is it all in here again? *(She touches her head.)*

KATE. No. It's not your fault.

KATE begins to lead her away.

VERA. Em loves her, Daphne. I love my infants . . . They really love me . . . They do. And they look after me. All of them, they do . . .

Exit VERA and KATE. SOFIA looks down at the pictures and letters on the floor.

SOFIA. They are mine. They are.

She reaches out for them and topples helplessly out of her wheelchair. She lays flat out and then begins sobbing. Unobserved KATE returns and watches her.

I don't need any of you anyway. I can do it on my own. I always have and I always will. I can.

KATE watches as SOFIA reaches for her walking stick. It is too far and

she has to shuffle along her stomach to reach it. KATE moves forward to help her.

SOFIA. Don't come any closer.

KATE stoops to help her.

KATE. Let me . . .

SOFIA. Take, your, hands, off, me!

KATE. Sofia.

SOFIA. Get off me! I never asked for help.

KATE stands up from her and watches her.

And I don't piss the bed. I don't!

At some point she reaches her stick and manages to use it to slowly haul herself up into a sitting position on the floor. KATE watches as she begins collecting the letters and pictures into some kind of order.

SOFIA. One two, three. Picture, letter . . . (*She turns one of the pictures over reading the back.*) Dear Mum, this is me and the brood around the barbecue on Angela's sixteenth. Angela's the one in the silly hat. Write soon. Love Daphne.

KATE moves to leave, but stops when SOFIA speaks.

You can't bear it can you? Can't bear to look at what you'll one day become. Me! You remind me of me.

KATE. I'm not like you.

SOFIA. Of course you are. They hate me. Both of them, they do.

They never kiss me. Emmy never kisses me the way she kisses Vera; Vera never dances with me the way she dances with Em.

KATE. But you won't dance Sofia, you can't dance.

SOFIA. I could've learned, maybe. A little bit, perhaps. Have you seen them dance?

KATE. No.

SOFIA. They're not very good. They're always tripping over each other's feet. But one thing; one thing they do; they hold each other a certain way and . . . I don't know how to describe it. I spied on them one night. Emmy was sitting in that chair over there. Vera came in. Beaten by Tommy Tucker. She was shaking and couldn't stand. Em sat her down and took her

hands. Then one finger at a time she kissed them. Emmy kissed them all. All ten of them really slow and gentle. When she finished, Vera was sobbing on her shoulder, but she seemed so calmer.

That bloody Vera! Who does she think she is? Just because she's a sodding Lady. Imagine being a whore and a Lady! And wearing a wig! I'd suspected a long time and then one day when we were alone. 'Pick that up for me Vera.' And the silly old cow did. I yanked it clean off with my walking stick. Clean being the operative word. As a baby's backside. And she a Lady too! She screamed, thrashed about and cursed just like she was drowning or something . . . And I flung it away and she chased after it like it was her lifeline . . . Like it was her lifeline . . . But no matter how she preens and prods it, it'll never be her hair. Because it's not hers . . . Not really. And that's one of her secrets. You see she has them too and she comes shouting at me. Who does she think she is?

(Looking at a picture). I could've been your mother.

Enter EMMY, a quilt around her. SOFIA looks at her.

EMMY. Miss Sofia, what you doing down there? You alright?

KATE. Emmy . . . ?

SOFIA. Keep quiet. You'll only confuse her.

EMMY. It cold up there. You cold too?

EMMY sits beside SOFIA on the floor and wraps the quilt around the both of them.

EMMY. Vera say she gone get cover for me. But me don't see her come back yet.

SOFIA. She hates me.

EMMY. You not to mind her so much, Miss Sofia. Is just her way.

SOFIA. Look. *(She hands EMMY one of the pictures.)*

EMMY. Is who? Is Daphne. Is she this?

SOFIA. I stole her . . .

KATE. Sofia . . . ?

SOFIA. Stay out of it this time.

EMMY. Is where you get Daphne?

SOFIA. I stole her.

EMMY. You bring back Daphne.

SOFIA. I thought she could be mine for a week or so. Then it got to months, then years.

VERA has returned and stands watching them unobserved.

SOFIA. She does you know, Vera hates me.

VERA. Yes I do.

EMMY. Vera, look. Miss Sofia bring back Daphne!

EMMY stands rushing to VERA showing her the picture.

VERA. I know.

EMMY rushes back to SOFIA, and sits beside her kissing and holding her hands.

EMMY. Daphne! Me know her straight away.

EMMY kisses SOFIA and embraces her.

VERA (*to* EMMY). What're you doing? Has she told you? Has she explained?

EMMY. How you mean?

VERA. What she did.

EMMY. Bring back Daphne?

VERA. She stole your daughter!

EMMY. But Miss Sofia bring back Daphne.

VERA. You don't understand Em.

(To SOFIA.) You haven't explained to her have you? Haven't told her what you did.

(To EMMY.) All these years she hid the letters because she didn't want you to be happy.

SOFIA. That's a lie.

EMMY. No Vera, Miss Sofia bring back Daphne.

VERA. Emmy listen. Listen to me. She stole . . .

EMMY. Miss Sofia bring back Daphne.

VERA. You forgive her?

EMMY. What else me to do . . .

EMMY *embraces* SOFIA *again*.

. . . when she bring back Daphne?

VERA. You can't! I won't! I won't forgive you!

SOFIA. But you have nothing to forgive me for.

VERA. I know what you want. Emmy, I know what she's after.
She's been wearing me down for years. Wearing us down . . .

(*To* SOFIA). Emmy's my friend. She is my friend!

EMMY. Miss Sofia look Daphne put on weight. (*She shows* SOFIA *the picture*.) Vera look, look how Daphne put on weight.

VERA *turns and leaves quietly*.

Vera look! Look!

Exit EMMY *after* VERA.

Scene Two

KATE *enters and goes to the window looking out and then* SOFIA *walks in aided by two walking sticks. She looks very unsure and* KATE *watches her closely*.

KATE. Where's your chair, Sofia?

Ignoring her SOFIA *stands staring at an armchair unable to reach it*.

SOFIA. So! The papers haven't arrived yet?

KATE. No.

SOFIA. How did you sleep?

KATE. Not so well.

SOFIA. I slept well . . . In fact it was the best night's sleep I've had for years.

KATE. Have you seen Emmy this morning? How is she?

SOFIA. No and I don't know.

KATE *watches* SOFIA, *who is shaking*.

KATE. Why don't you sit down?

SOFIA. When I'm good and ready.

I thought maybe I'd take a walk outside. Perhaps to the wall and back. It's been years. Arthritis. It makes me weak.

Somehow I've just let it come on me. Just let it override me. It was easier than fighting it. Now it has me . . .

KATE. It wasn't something you could help.

SOFIA. Oh I think so. I think so.

Enter VERA, taking her head-sets off.

KATE. Morning.

VERA. So it is.

KATE. Didn't you sleep either?

VERA. Went next door and had some sex.

VERA takes some money out of her pocket and throws it on the table.

Fifty pence! All he had the old bastard! But the old fools can't do without me. They'd go quite blind, if you know what I mean . . . I suppose I can get some new stockings with that. And I've made a decision. I'm getting married.

KATE. Who to?

VERA. Tucker. He asked. I said why not. He's asked before and I've always said no. But then I said yes. So here I am, getting married. Soon as I can. Maybe next weekend.

SOFIA. Looks like a lovely morning. Very dry, bright, and warm. I can feel myself. Hot, sticky and sweaty . . . Feel like I'm awash with it. But somewhere there's a lovely, fresh line of washing drying in the sun.

VERA. I'll be leaving in a week or so. And I've got so much to do before I go and all in a week. Write to the infants, and of course they'll all want to come to their mother's wedding and . . . Tucker has a good pension so we should get a nice bungalow. Look what he gave me. Pure silk. *(She holds up a headscarf.)* I've got just the dress and gloves to go with it.

Enter EMMY reading the letters.

EMMY. Vera look, look at Daphne grandson.

VERA ignores EMMY, puts her head-sets on and walks out.

KATE. She's getting married. To Tommy Tucker. Next weekend.

Exit KATE.

EMMY. Me never know say Vera love Mr Tucker. She never tell me.

SOFIA *now makes her way slowly to a chair.*

SOFIA. She's not talking to you.

EMMY. Why? What me do her?

SOFIA. How stupid are you?

EMMY. How you mean?

EMMY *sits beside SOFIA and SOFIA reaches for one of the pictures in EMMY's hand.*

SOFIA. That's Jerry, Daphne's only grandson. Isn't he beautiful?

EMMY. Him look just like sweet Winston Pickett. How much him weigh when him born?

SOFIA. Nine pounds five ounces. He was a big boy. He stays at Daphne's every weekend.

EMMY. She always been happy?

SOFIA. In general.

EMMY. It hard for me to think of her in America.

Now, which one of Daphne daughter this?

SOFIA. That's Angela, she's the one studying law . . .

Scene Three

Enter KATE with her case, followed by VERA who is dressed in her red dress, gloves and new scarf.

VERA. This is the dress. Will it do? What do you think? Tucker likes me in red. Says it suits me. I've gone and lost my batteries though.

KATE. Looks okay.

VERA. Only okay? Not very free with your compliments, sweet. I put them down somewhere.

KATE. Okay, it looks like Vera. Like you.

VERA. And I always look great so the dress and me together must look doubly great. What do you think about me having my hair up for the day? Perhaps with my new scarf round it? I like a man who gives presents don't you?

VERA begins looking around under the table down the sides of chairs etc.

KATE. Suppose it could be pleasant.

VERA. Pleasant! Where is your enthusiasm, sweet? Take it from me, men who give presents are a phenomenon.

KATE. I've only ever had one. What you looking for?

VERA. Only ever had one present, sweet? What a disgrace . . .

KATE. Only ever had one man.

VERA suddenly stops searching.

VERA. One man?

KATE. My husband.

VERA. One?

KATE. Yes.

VERA. Well, kiss my beautiful arse . . . one man!

KATE. What's wrong with that?

VERA. Wrong? Did I say anything was wrong, sweet? In fact it sounds quite . . . sweet.

Enter EMMY. VERA starts searching again.

EMMY. Vera, you look lovely. That frock did always suit you. What you looking for? You lost something?

VERA (*to KATE*). Did you hear someone speak?

EMMY. Kate tell me you getting married.

VERA. There it is again.

KATE. There what is?

VERA. That voice.

EMMY. Vera, is me.

Me think me will wear the purple frock with the frill round it. And you can make me up and fix me up and . . .

VERA *walks around, performing a mock search.*

VERA. Sounds like someone talking, but not to me, it couldn't be to me and the strangest thing is I don't see anyone do you?

EMMY. See me here, see me here Vera! And me was wondering what you and Mr Tucker want for the wedding present? Me have a set of bath towel that me never use upstairs in me trunk. Or if you want we can go choose something together. But me have some news too. After you married and gone, me think me might go look for Daphne in America.

VERA. You're going?

EMMY. Daphne say, 'Come and stay six months or for good if you want.'

VERA. For good?

EMMY. After the wedding, though. Daphne say she will pay for me and one of me friend to come out.

VERA. You're leaving me?

EMMY. Sofia say maybe she would like go with me for a month and come back. When she talk it seem like is she alone should go and not me. Fancy we going travel at our age.

VERA. Fancy!

EMMY. So you think the purple one will do?

KATE. Purple what?

EMMY. Me purple frock. I think is chiffon make that frock. That sound alright to you Kate?

KATE. Sounds great.

VERA. Oh so you are free with your compliments as long as they're for the right person.

EMMY. You remember the frock me talking Vera? You think it will do?

VERA. Go! Go to bloody America. See if I care. I can get by without you. I don't need you. I can cope on my own.

Exit VERA.

EMMY. Something wrong with Vera?

KATE. Why do you think she suddenly said yes to him?

EMMY. How you mean?

KATE. Nothing. Have you never thought of getting married again?

EMMY. Me? No love. Husband married me when me young. Then him dead and me get Daphne. And then me come to England with the big belly before me.

KATE. You never been back?

EMMY. Thirty-five years and never. Sometimes all me remember 'bout back home is how it nice, then another time me remember Husband and how him a beat me. But me have my Daphne now. Me have my Daphne . . .

KATE. I have a child.

EMMY. You have baby?

KATE. He's nine months. He's not a baby; he never was to me. I keep him in his play pen. Upstairs. In his room. All day. Where he can't spill out into me. My husband comes home, picks him up, brings him down, throws him up, and he's sick on the sofa. The first thing I do is rush for a wet cloth.

EMMY. Oh child. Make me hold you. Make me hold you.

EMMY embraces KATE and then VERA returns with her personal hi-fi and begins searching again.

VERA. I still haven't found them.

KATE. Found what?

VERA. My batteries. I left them here. On the table. And now they've gone. Someone's moved them. Deliberately.

KATE. Who?

VERA. I can think of two names.

KATE. You've mislaid them.

VERA. Just here is where I left them. And now they've gone.

VERA bends looking under the table.

I know they sometimes roll off but not this time.

EMMY. Vera . . .

VERA. And you know, Kate, that's the reason I moved my things to another room.

KATE. What reason, Vera?

VERA. People interfering. Trying to take my things, trying to make it affect me. I've always wanted that room, but I've always been afraid alone . . . But I have to be now they've forced me . . . But if I can get settled before Phipps comes back she won't have the heart to put me back will she, 'cause it'll only be a few days before I leave and get married. I can't wait to go before they take everything. They've taken my batteries and now they want everything else.

EMMY. But me think you would stay with me till you married, Vera. You not going stay with me any more? Eeh Vera?

VERA. No I'm not.

EMMY. But why?

VERA. My batteries, Kate! I need my batteries! (*Pointing at EMMY.*) And I'm not talking to you until you give them back. I know you've got them. Usually it's that Sofia. But you've joined up with her haven't you?

EMMY. No Vera. You not to say that.

VERA. I can and I am. Because it's true. And you're not invited!

EMMY. What?

VERA. I said you're not . . .

Enter SOFIA.

. . . invited!

EMMY. Vera.

VERA (*pointing at SOFIA*). And that bitch! Your new friend. Who you're taking half way round the world to see the daughter she stole from you, the daughter I found for you - she, her, the bitch, I hope she gives you exactly what you deserve. (*To SOFIA.*) You finally got what you wanted. You finally got her.

SOFIA. What're you on about now?

VERA. You! You're trying to leave me on my own; trying to leave me all alone. But I won't be. Not even for a minute. Because, I'm marrying Tucker, so I won't be. I won't be . . . I'll do anything not to end up like you.

EMMY. Oh Vera.

SOFIA. But you have, haven't you?

VERA. I have not.

SOFIA. I mean, look at your hair Vera.

VERA. There's nothing wrong with my hair.

SOFIA. No there isn't. Pity it's not yours.

VERA. You liar. He said it enhanced my beauty and Finnbar would never lie.

EMMY. No him wouldn't Vera and you hair lovely.

VERA. Just like me, Finnbar said. He had a masterful hold right here in the small of my back. Great big huge man. He had a face like . . . I remember . . .

SOFIA. The time you had your 'infants'?

EMMY. Oh Miss Sofia!

VERA. I used to know that. I did, I used to know what his face looked like . . . It was, like something but I can't remember what now. If I screwed my eyes up I could see him. I could see them all . . . My infants too. Because you see, Finnbar once had eyes and a mouth, perhaps even a little dimple – but it's all gone now – all of them gone into a black hole where I can't follow . . . I often wonder what became of him . . .

SOFIA. I used to wonder why you called them 'infants'.

VERA. They have nothing to do with this.

SOFIA. Then I knew.

VERA. Shut up.

SOFIA. It's how you remember them.

VERA. Shut up! Shut up!

EMMY. Miss Sofia . . .

SOFIA. You don't have any!

VERA. Liar! I'm not listening.

SOFIA. You gave them all away.

VERA *fumbles about putting her head-sets on.*

VERA. Don't any of you listen. I'm not listening!

VERA *sits in a chair with her head-sets clamped over her ears.*

SOFIA. I know you can hear me. I know! You gave them all away.

KATE (*to* SOFIA). What're you doing?

SOFIA. They hate you!

VERA. Liar!

SOFIA. Don't they?

VERA. Liar!

SOFIA. Sure you remember how many infants you had?

KATE. Stop it!

SOFIA. Had being the operative word of course.

VERA. Where are my batteries?

KATE. Vera it's okay. It's okay.

VERA. Six! Six babies Kate. Six! And they do love me. And it is my hair, Kate. It is. Comb it and see. Comb my hair, Kate. Here . . . here . . . comb . . .

VERA *fumbles about in her handbag and shoves the comb in KATE's hand.*

Here . . .

She suddenly stops and looks in her handbag and takes out two batteries.

Here they are . . . Where they belong . . .

VERA *collapses sobbing into a chair.*

EMMY. Why you do that Sofia? It never important to anyone except Vera . . .

SOFIA. What?

EMMY. We all know 'bout each other. But it never important.

EMMY *comforts* VERA. SOFIA and KATE *look on.*

SOFIA. Emmy . . . ?