

Love and Understanding

by Ellie Horne

Characters

Jen, *mid-forties*

Mary, *her mother, early seventies*

Dave, *her husband, mid-forties*

James, *her son, nine*

Becky, *her daughter, seventeen*

Chloe, *Becky's friend, seventeen*

‘/’ indicates where the next character should begin to overlap the current speaker.

The scene changes are left to the discretion of the director. Blackouts are probably unnecessary; Christmas music could perhaps be used in the transitions, including Shakin’ Stevens’ ‘Merry Christmas Everyone’ (since the play’s title is derived from its lyrics).

Scene One: 5.30am on Christmas day.

The living room/dining room of a smart semi-detached house in West London. We can see parts of the kitchen through an archway upstage left. The door to the hallway and the rest of the house is upstage right. The main room contains, stage left, a dining table with chairs and, stage right, sofas, armchair, coffee table, television etc. The house has been decorated for Christmas: a tree in the corner with wrapped presents underneath. It is not decorated with any particular design but mostly old-style decorations. A few newer, more garish ones have been added by the children in the house. There are paper chains in the doorways and above picture frames.

Jen enters from the kitchen carrying a large white, thick tablecloth which she uses to cover the dining room table. She then continues laying the table, moving back and forth from the kitchen carrying plates, cutlery etc. Dave enters from the hallway, unnoticed by Jen, and he stands watching her for a moment.

Dave: Jen –

Jen: Oh, hello. Didn't expect/ you to –

Dave: Is everything ok?

Beat.

Jen: Yeah. (*Beat.*) Yeah, fine.

Pause.

Dave: Do you need a –

Jen: Nope. Nope, all good.

Dave: Got/the –

Jen: Timetable. Yep, it's all...

Pause.

Dave: It's just...

Pause.

Dave: Well, it's just that it's half past five, Jen.

Beat.

Jen: Yeah, I know, yeah. (*Beat.*) Just thought, y'know, early bird and all.

Dave: Early bird?!

Jen: Being prepared. Less stress later when everyone's downstairs and there's presents and –

Dave: They aren't going to up for hours yet, you've got plenty of time to... (*Beat.*) Come on, come back/ to bed.

Jen: N – Let me just finish/this.

Dave: Jen, just leave it, we can –

Jen: I couldn't sleep.

Pause.

Jen: I was just lying there. Since two when we finished sorting all the presents, I've been... So I thought might as well get on with...

Pause.

Dave: I'm sorry.

Jen: For what?

Dave: That you couldn't sleep.

Jen: Oh.

Pause.

Dave: What? (*Beat.*) Wh –

Jen: No, nothing. (*Beat.*) I just thought maybe... (*Beat.*) Never mi – No, I just –

Dave: What is it –?

Jen: I thought, maybe, you were... apologising.

Beat.

Dave: Well, is there something I'm supposed to be apologising for?

Jen looks at Dave.

Jen: Huh, well I guess not –

Dave: Oh come on don't make me guess –

Jen: I think maybe you're right. We should just go to bed. No one gets up at this time to lay the table!

Jen laughs weakly.

Dave: Is this about last night?

Pause.

Dave: She's ok Jen –

Jen: She's not.

Pause.

Dave: It's expected that... well we knew it was going to get w –

Jen: Two weeks. (*Beat.*) I saw her two weeks ago.

Dave: Good days and bad days they said. Yesterday, well maybe that was a bad day.

Jen: Yeah.

Dave: So hopefully today will be a good one.

Dave goes and envelops Jen in a hug but she remains still.

Dave: We're doing the right thing, ok? Everything they told us. And I know you feel, sometimes feel, guilty – your words, not mine – because you can't be there all the time/

Jen: You were rude to her.

Dave (*continuing*): but she's got Sinead who's been fantastic and – What?

Pause.

Dave: I was... (*Beat.*) When?

Jen: James was asking her about prime ministers and/ she was listing them but you kept interrupting.

Dave: What – that? (*Beat.*) Jen, I was trying to help –

Jen: No, you were being a smart arse –

Dave: She was struggling! I was helping –

Jen: No you weren't! Helping isn't talking over her. She knows. She's not stupid, she just needs a bit more time, she needs us to be patient –

Dave: I was.

Pause.

Dave: I'm doing my best, Jen. It's difficult.

Jen makes a sound.

Dave: I know, it's harder for you but it's still tough for me too.

Silence.

Jen: I'm losing/ her.

Dave: You're not.

Pause.

Jen: Sometimes... she'll look me right in the eye and I can see hers are glazing over and I wonder if she even knows for sure who I –

Dave: Of course she does. (*Beat.*) She does.

Beat.

Dave tentatively goes to hug Jen again. Jen raises her arms slightly as he approaches. They hug and stay there, still for a moment.

Dave: Bed? Some calm before the inevitable storm?

Jen: Yeah. (*Beat.*) You go, I'll just...

Jen indicates the table.

Dave: Ok.

Dave heads towards the door to the hallway, then glances back at Jen who gives him a small smile. He exits. Jen finishes setting out the cutlery.

She stands back to look at her work.

Pause.

Jen sighs and slowly walks towards the door to the hallway. She exits.

End of Scene One.

Scene Two: 1.45pm, the same day, the same room.

Mary sits on one of the dining room chairs. Jen is standing in the archway to the kitchen, glass of wine in hand. James sits on the arm of the sofa, flicking through his new iPod. There are signs that Christmas has been underway for a few hours: piles of unwrapped presents but more still under the tree, discarded stockings and empty Quality Street wrappers. Wrapping paper has been folded in a pile ready to be recycled. We can see in the kitchen that the washing up board is stacked with already cleaned champagne glasses and breakfast bowls etc.

Pause.

Mary: And dinner is at what time, dear?

Jen knocks back the rest of her glass of wine.

Beat.

Jen: Two. (*Beat.*) Two o'clock.

Mary: Oh perfect. That sounds...l – uh...

Jen looks at Mary.

Beat.

Mary: Well it sounds just...perfect. (*Beat.*) Looking forward to dinner, James?

James is engrossed in his newly-opened iPod.

James: Uh huh.

Jen: James, answer your Gran when she talks to you!

James (*protesting*): I di – (*Beat.*) Yes Gran, I am. I know it's going to taste amazing.

Mary: Amazing! Yes. Christmas dinner, all the trimmings: roasties, little sausages, sprouts, parsnips/ bread sauce...

Jen: No parsnips this year though.

Beat.

Mary: No parsnips! Wha –

Jen: Well Becky and James aren't that keen on them and I just thought it wasn't worth the fuss.

Mary: So Christmas dinner. Without parsnips.

Jen: Yes, this year. That's right.

Pause.

Jen: Problem?

Mary: Oh no. (*Beat.*) No dear, of course not. Probably, yes, very sensible.

Pause.

Mary: I do love parsnips.

Jen (*calling*): Dave!

Jen exits to the hallway.

Mary: They've just got that Christmassy smell, haven't they? You only really have them at Christmas.

Jen re-enters and cuts straight through to the kitchen to baste the turkey.

Mary: She does a good recipe. That, um, woman –

James (*without looking up*): Nigella.

Mary: No, the other one.

James: Delia.

Mary: Delia. Yes, Delia. No nonsense, she knows what to do. (*Beat.*) She says there's something you've got to put on the roasties, what is it?

Jen (*calling from the kitchen*): James, can you carry on with the table please? Are the crackers out?

James (*calling*): Uh.... Nope.

Jen (*calling*): Box under the stairs

James exits to the hallway and returns with a box of crackers. He starts laying them at the table as Mary stays seated, still lost in thought.

James (*calling*): Mum? Are we doing red, gold, red, gold? Or red for boys, gold for girls?

Jen (*calling*): Whatever you think.

Beat.

James starts putting gold crackers where the women will sit and red where the men will sit.

Jen (*calling*): Red, gold, red, gold I think.

James changes the crackers round to suit this new arrangement then goes back to the sofa and his iPod. Jen re-enters from the kitchen.

Mary: Goose fat!

Jen: What? / Oh right, yes.

Mary: Knew I'd get it, told you. Goose fat. That's what Delia says.

Jen: I'm not actually the biggest fan of Delia.

Mary: Though why they've put her with that, whatshisname? Bald fellow, I don't know. Silly name, silly man! (*Beat.*) Silly recipes. Wouldn't surprise me if he suggested rubbing a goose... foetus on the roast potatoes! Delia probably suggested the fat as a compromise –

Jen: Heston Blumenthal? Oh he's not that bad, just a bit experimental. James?

Mary: Experimental? Well, experimental is not what I expect from Waitrose. Be selling, I don't know... snail chutney next.

Jen: James, I think your Gran wants you to show her all your Christmas presents. (*Under her breath*) In alphabetical order.

Mary: Are you sure there's nothing I can do dear?

Jen: No, honestly –

Mary: Because I do miss making the dinner. And I know it can be such a pain. The timetable, first one up in the morning, turkey in the oven, all the veg to chop –

Jen: Nope, fine, fine. That's the last basting done now anyway.

Mary: Second or third?

Jen: Second. I only baste twice.

Mary: Twice? (*Beat.*) Well I'm sure you know what you're doing dear. I'm sure you've checked a recipe or... Well you've done it before, haven't you?

Jen: Yes, Mum, quite a few times.

Mary: Yes, exactly, so you know what you're doing.

Pause.

Mary: Won't let it get dry.

Beat.

Jen: No.

Mary: And it does smell wonderful. (*Beat.*) Lovely smells! (*Beat.*) Oh I did give you the sauce, the cranberry sauce, didn't I?

Jen: Yes, Mum, yes, last night, it's in the fridge.

Mary: I do hope it's ok. I've made plenty. Plenty.

Jen: Mmm, good. (*Pause.*) Thank you.

Mary: You're welcome, dear.

Jen goes back to the kitchen and starts to dry the washing up.

Mary: Washing up already?

Jen: Well, yes, I thought it would be best to do it as we went along so... Maybe you could give me a hand, James?

James (*looking up*): Yep, what? Yes/ helping, right.

Mary: Oh leave him, he's playing with his new 'I' Whatsit. I can help with washing up, really –

Jen: Yes, it's just drying and putting away now and you don't know where everything lives/ so I think it would just be best if I did it.

Mary: No, I suppose you're right. I don't do I? Struggle enough in my own kitchen!

Pause.

Jen: Mum, I didn't mean it like... (*Beat.*) How is – Did you sort the post-it thing?

Mary: Mhmm, yes, it's working – Except occasionally when they fall off the cupboard doors and then I'm not sure. (*Beat.*) But I can work it out, very simple really!

Pause.

Jen enters the main room properly.

Jen: Right, why isn't the Christmas CD on?

James: I'll do it, I'll do it! Disc 1 or 2?

Jen: Oh, do you have to ask?!

James smiles and puts the first disc of the set into the CD player. Shakin' Stevens' 'Merry Christmas Everyone' plays and James immediately joins in, word and note perfect.

Mary: What's wrong with the other disc dear?

James: It's all the rubbish ones. Westlife, Britney, Proper Chrimbo/ Mistletoe and Wine.

Mary: Proper Chrimbo? What's that?

James: Disc 1 is all the ones you actually want. Apart from 1 song. They'll put one key song on disc 2.

James picks up the CD box and checks the back.

James (indicating the track-listing): *Fairy-tale of New York*, see.

Jen interrupts with an exaggerated impression of The Pogues singer, Shane MacGowan.

James: So you have to buy the double disc because it's not Christmas properly without the growly man who manages to sing with only two teeth.

James joins back in with the Shakin' Stevens track.

Mary (to **Jen**): Don't you ever... Well –

Jen: What?

Mary: You know. Worry. That he's –

Jen: What? (*Beat.*) No. I mean, yes, I think. But no. I don't worry, Mum.

Dave throws open the living room door, joining in the song.

Jen (*loudly*): See, just like his dad!

Dave (to **Jen**): Nowhere is open I'm afraid. Can't get any parsnips for love nor money.

Jen (to **Dave**): Well, she'll just have to do without then, won't she?

Mary: I think it's time for stockings!

James: We've had stockings Gran.

Beat.

Mary: Oh yes. I knew that, yes! I got a lovely... And some... Yes, they were wonderful. Wonderful! I meant that I think it's time for another present or two. Let me get my special present bag.

Mary exits.

Pause.

James turns down the music, muting it.

James: Mum. Is Gran –?

Jen: Roasties. I need to check the roasties...

Jen exits to the kitchen. Dave goes over to James and puts his arm around his shoulders.

Dave: Don't worry, Gran's ok. She's just like all old people, forgetting the occasional thing or two –

James: Yeah, like you: “Oh where did I put my glasses, I'm sure I-” “THEY'RE ON YOUR HEAD DAD!”

Dave: Yeah, alright, cheeky!

Pause.

James: But you, you're just a bit silly sometimes. Gran's... worse, isn't she?

Dave: Yes, well like we told you, she has a special kind of condition –

James: Yeah I looked it up.

Dave: On the internet?/ James.

James: Yeah, Wikipedia. It said it means madness. (*Beat.*) ‘De’ – without, ‘ment’ – the mind. So she's lost/ her mind.

Dave: No. (*Beat.*) She hasn't –

Jen enters the main room.

Jen: What are you two gossiping about then? Oh, should I not be listening? Surprises/ for later?

James: We're talking about/ Gran.

Dave: James, no.

Beat.

Jen: What about Gran, sweetie?

James: About whether she's mad.

Pause.

Jen: And what did Dad say?

Dave: Jen, I –

Jen: Is that what Dad told you? That she's mad?

Dave: Oh course/ not Jen.

James: No, Mum, he didn't –

Jen: She just forgets, sometimes she forgets. That's what happens when you get old, poppet. (*Beat.*) But there's nothing wrong with her, ok? (*Beat.*) Ok?

James: Yes –

Dave: Why don't you go and see if Gran needs help with her present bag? I reckon it's pretty full!

James: Ok.

James exits to the hallway.

Pause.

Jen: Why –?

Dave: I didn't Jen.

Pause.

Dave: He looked it up. You know, online.

Jen: What?

Dave: He Googled it. And apparently it means madness. Originally. Latin-

Jen: Why was he Googling dementia?

Dave: Well, that's what they do, isn't it? All the answers, they just ask the computer. (*Beat.*) Like looking it up in the dictionary I suppose –

Jen: But it's not though, is it? Because they'll be horror stories online about –

Pause.

Dave: Maybe this is a wake-up call?

Beat.

Jen: For who, Dave?

Dave: No. (*Beat.*) Well, I mean for us. To speak to them. We should speak to them more –

Jen: I speak to them!

Dave: Yes, I know, of course, I know you do. I mean more about the... difficult things. So they don't feel they have to ask Jeeves or whatever –

Jen: But we do, don't we? I talk to Becky all the time. (*Beat.*) I mean we've had *those* talks. (*Beat.*) You've had them with James, right?

Dave: Uh... no. I mean not yet. A year or two maybe –

Jen: I think it needs to happen now.

Beat.

Dave: ...Today?

Jen: No, obviously not today. It's just if he's searching dementia who knows what else he's looking up. Things he hears at school.

Pause.

Jen: Do you... Do you think we should check?

Dave: What?

Beat.

Jen: His umm... laptop, his search/ history?

Dave: No! (*Beat.*) No, Jen. I think that would be a... No, I don't think that's necessary.

James enters carrying a large worn red sack, Mary following.

James: Ho, ho, ho!

Jen: Ah well, look who it is, Santa's little helper!

Mary: Yes, isn't he good?

Jen: Of course he is.

Jen kisses the top of James' head.

Mary: We had better all sit down to open things.

Mary and Jen take a seat on the sofa, James perches on the arm of the sofa, Dave sits on a dining chair.

Mary (to Jen): I think you deserve one first dear, you've been slaving away in that kitchen all day!

Mary searches in the sack for a present.

Mary: I put tags on them, so – Ah ha, here!

Mary pulls out a present and gives it to Jen.

Jen: Thank you, Mum. You shouldn't have –

Mary: It's Christmas! Got to have presents at Christmas.

Jen opens the present. It is a 'Top Gear' Annual.

Jen: Oh. *Top Gear*. Thank you Mum, that's, that's, very kind –

Mary: No. No, you weren't supposed to open that! (*Beat.*) That's not for you, that's for James. Clearly.

Mary gets up and snatches the present off Jen, leaning to hand it to James.

Mary: Why did you open that?

Beat.

Jen: I... Uh –

Dave: Mary, you handed it to/ Jennifer.

Jen: No, no, it was my mistake, Mum. I picked up the wrong present. (*Beat.*) Must have misread the writing on the tag. Jennifer, James/ easy mistake.

Mary: Oh well dear, you've spoiled the surprise now, haven't you?

Jen: He can open one of mine –

Dave: Jen, don't encour –

Mary (*above the noise*): Where's my jumper?

Pause.

Dave exits towards the hallway to find it.

Mary: My Mr Snowman? (*Beat.*) Arthur would be – Well, if he knew, I wasn't –

Jen: It's alright Mum I think Dave's gone to get it –

Mary: It must be... gosh, how old?... Fort – No, fif...I... Well, very old, very old.

Dave re-enters with a hand-knitted Christmas jumper with a large snowman on the front.

Dave: Here you go. It was in the case.

Dave hands Mary the jumper and she holds it fondly.

Pause.

Dave: 2 o'clock/ time to take it out the oven?

Jen: Turkey time!

Jen hurries to the kitchen.

Dave: Carving, my assigned help shift. Something simple that even I couldn't cock up. (*Beat.*) Man use knife. (*Beat.*) Cut meat.

*Dave goes towards the kitchen but notices **Mary** struggling to put on the jumper.*

Dave (to **James**): Perhaps you could help Gran with her jumper?

Dave exits to the kitchen.

Pause.

James: Here Gran, let me –

*James gets up and walks over to **Mary**. **James** goes to take the jumper to navigate the sleeves and neck.*

Mary: No!

*Mary slaps **James** across the face.*

Silence.

James stands. He hesitates. He is about to go to the kitchen but instead exits to the hallway.

Mary sits looking at the jumper in her lap.

Pause.

Jen enters carrying glasses for dinner and lays them at the table.

Jen: Mum? (Beat.) Mum?

Mary smiles.

Mary: Hello dear.

Beat.

Jen: Everything alright?

Mary: Yes. (Beat.) Yes, I think so.

The sound of the front door slamming.

Jen: Oh gosh, that'll be Becky and Chloe.

Jen heads towards the hallway door then changes her mind and goes back to the table.

Jen (to herself): Right, no, calm, it must be calm. (Calling) Hi girls!

*Becky enters the living room from the hall, **Chloe** following.*

Becky: Hi Mum.

Jen: Everything o –

Becky: Yep, yeah fine.

Jen: Hi Chloe dear.

Chloe: Hi Mrs Stockton.

Jen: Oh, please, Jennifer, Jen.

Becky: This is my Gran.

Chloe: Oh, hello.

Mary: Hello, who's this?

Becky: Chloe. My friend from school, Gran.

Mary: Will you be eating with us too?

Becky: Yes, Chloe's come for dinner and she's staying tonight as well.

Mary: That's nice dear. (*Beat.*) And you're Becky's friend?

Jen: Yes Mum, Becky's school friend. (*Beat.*) Chloe's had... well she's been very brave, having a bit of... yes a bit of a difficult/ time.

Becky: Mum –

Jen: No, I just... Well anyway, we thought it would be nice for her to spend some time/ with us.

Becky: Mum always makes too much/ anyway.

Chloe: It's very kind of you, Mrs – Jennifer.

Jen: Not at all/ lovely. Anything to help.

Becky: It's just nice to have someone else here to be honest.

Pause.

Jen: Where has he got to? (*Calling*) James? James, Chloe's here, come and say hi!

Dave (*calling from the kitchen*): Jen? Carving knife? Is it in with the other knives? Or with the big implements?

Jen: Sorry, I'd better – You make yourselves at home.

Becky: Can I help/ Mum?

Jen: No, no, you stay here, that's fine.

Jen exits to the kitchen.

Pause.

Becky (*to Chloe*): Do you want to go to my room –?

Mary: How are you dear? How's school?

Becky: Umm, yes, not too bad thanks. (*Beat.*) Got exams in January though.

Mary: Oh dear. That's no good –

Becky: Yeah. Maths/ C3.

Mary: Maths, oh I hated Maths. All those... that...

Becky: Algebra? Yeah you said you hated algebra. (*To Chloe*). Shall we...?

Mary: Yes, algebra. With Mrs, Mrs... Trevitt. Oh, she was a right madam!

Becky: Chloe?

Chloe: Oh right, yes. If you – I'm happy to stay here with –

Becky: Let's put your bags upstairs/ and stuff.

Chloe: Ok, yeah sure, I'll –

Becky and Chloe go to exit to the hallway as Jen enters from the kitchen carrying serving bowls containing steaming vegetables.

Jen: Where are you two going?/ We're about to serve up.

Becky: Just going to dump Chloe's stuff upstairs.

Jen: Well, do that after. Come on, sit up. (*Calling.*) James, dinner!

Mary, Becky and Chloe take their seats at the dining table ushered by Jen. James enters from the hallway.

Jen: James, where have you been?

James: Just sorting presents

Becky (*to Chloe*): You ok?

Jen: Right, well come and be sociable
now please.

Chloe: Yeah, sure. (*Beat.*)
Can't wait, it smells
lovely.

Becky: Yeah, you can't beat
Mum's cooking.

Pause.

Becky: I mean my mum's... (*Beat.*) No. (*Beat.*) Chloe, I – I'm so/ sorry.

Chloe: It's fine, don't –

Becky: No, really I didn't mean to stick my foot in it, I...

Jen: I'd better go and get the rest of the veg.

Jen exits.

Silence.

Jen enters with more vegetables and gravy. Dave follows carrying a large plate of carved meat. They place them all on the table.

Pause.

Jen (*indicating the food*): Please...

Everyone starts serving themselves in silence.

Mary: Hold on, where are the parsnips?

End of Scene Two.

Scene Three: 5.45pm, the same day, the same room.

*The sound of water filling the kettle in the kitchen, the kettle being replaced on the stand and then flicked on. **Mary** enters from the kitchen and sits on the sofa, scanning through the Christmas double edition of the Radio Times.*

***Chloe** enters from the hallway.*

Chloe (*calling offstage to **Becky***): No, it's ok I know where they are.

Mary: Hello/ dear

Chloe: Oh! Sorry, I didn't – We thought you'd gone on the walk.

Mary: What walk?

Chloe: The um... 'Let's burn off the Christmas/ dinner' one

Mary: Oh yes, of course. No, no didn't fancy it. It's the Strictly special in 5 minutes, wouldn't want to miss that now, would we?

Chloe: Oh no. Too right. Yes.

Pause.

Mary: It's all about the Latin dances. Anyone can do ballroom. Almost. No, it's about rhythm, hips.

***Mary** starts to dance, **Chloe** smiles politely.*

Mary: Obviously I could. Once. Not so much anymore. (*Beat.*) Though still better than Widdicome, eh?

They both smile.

Beat.

Chloe: Well/ I had better –

Mary: Gosh, you are just so alike.

Chloe: Sorry?

Mary: That smile. You should smile more often!

Chloe: I – um, yes. I could I suppose?

Mary: Yes, do dear.

Beat. The kettle boils. They listen in silence. Mary walks to the kitchen. We see her open a few cupboards until she finds the mugs, takes two then repeats the same action to find the teabags, putting a bag in each mug.

Mary (*calling*): Milk, sugar?

Pause. Chloe realises she will be staying a while.

Chloe: Milk, no sugar.

Beat.

Chloe: Can I...?

Mary: No dear, honestly, I can make tea.

Chloe takes a seat quietly at the table. Mary enters the dining room with mugs.

Mary: So, school. How's it going, you like school?

Chloe: Um, yeah. Yes. It's alright I suppose. Lots of work/ but good.

Mary: Yes, of course. But then you'll be off to university, won't you? Time of your life, they say.

Chloe: Perhaps, yeah. Hope so.

Mary: You'll love it! Lots of new friends, lots of fun. (*Beat.*) Lots of drinking. I suppose you do that anyway.

Chloe: A bit –

Mary: What do you like? It was always cocktails for me. Well, for special occasions. Not when you were getting sloshed though. Something cheaper, make our own... punch. (*Beat.*) We were always so drunk. (*Beat.*) I bet you're all the same too?

Chloe: Yeah, some people. I'm... I'm not so keen –

Mary: Really? What do you do instead? Perhaps, yes, we were just bored. So much more for you lot to do now.

Pause.

Mary: Oh biscuits! I didn't even get us biscuits.

Mary gets up, goes to the kitchen, opens the first cupboard and coincidentally finds the biscuit tin.

Mary: See first time. I do know where things are.

Mary brings the tin to the table.

Mary: Cookies or Garibaldis?/ Ah well, no question, cookies.

Chloe: A Garibaldi please.

Mary: Really? Garibaldis? No-one likes those. That's why there are so many left, no-one eats them. Except your mother of course.

Pause.

Chloe: My. (*Beat*). My mother.

Mary: Loves them, doesn't she?

Pause.

Chloe (*with surprise, truthfully*): Yes. (*Beat.*) Yes, she does. We both love them.

Mary: Do you? Well that would make sense. It was you who got her hooked!

Chloe: What?

Mary: Cravings. When she was pregnant with you it was all she was asking for. So bizarre! One night, near the end, I was staying. Just in case you came early, you see, I was early, it's in the family. So anyway, it was about three in the morning I was sleeping on the sofa bed and I heard someone pacing in the kitchen.

Becky enters the room quietly, listening.

Mary: I crept through and your mother's in there, waddling up and down. "I need them" she said "The biscuits". Next thing I know I'm driving round Chiswick looking for a 24-hour convenience shop that sells Garibaldis.

Becky: Gran.

Neither Mary nor Chloe hear. Mary squeezes Chloe's hand.

Mary: That was all your fault. But your Mum always said that she would give you whatever you asked for, whatever it took.

Becky comes into the room.

Becky: Gran. It's me. (*To Chloe*) Chloe, I'm so... (*Becky squeezes Mary's shoulders*). I'm here, it's me. This is Chloe, she's my friend from school. (*To Chloe*). I'm so sorry –

Chloe: No – I – it's... It was just... a story, it was a story.

Mary: Sorry dear. Did I get confused? Did I get it wrong?

Chloe: No.

Becky: Come on Gran. (*Becky helps Mary out of her seat.*) I think I should probably-

Becky takes Mary's weight and walks her to the door leading to the hallway.

Becky: I'm just going to help her to bed. I'm so sorry. I hope she didn't say anything embarrassing. It's just y'know – part of the condition, her age. (*Beat.*) I'll be back down in a bit.

Becky and Mary exit to the hallway. Chloe is left onstage alone.

Pause.

She quietly eats the Garibaldi biscuit.

End of Scene Three.

Scene Four: A couple of months later in the same room, 11am.

Jen is standing centre stage in shoes, jacket etc., ready to leave the house. She is reading through a glossy brochure.

Dave (*entering from hallway*): So I think that's nearly everything in the car now, we're pretty much ready.

Dave notices that Jen isn't listening but decides not to say anything.

Silence.

Dave can take the silence no longer.

Dave: Set to be a good day by all accounts, well BBC Weather anyway. (*Beat.*) Sunny, then a bit cloudy about one. Then nice for the rest of the day. (*Beat.*) 15 degrees. 15! Huh, probably won't even need my scarf!

Pause.

Dave: James isn't... I think he's got some homework so he's going to stay to do that... (*Beat.*) Becky's coming though. Just straightening her hair or whatever. (*Beat.*) It always looks pretty straight to me though, I don't know...

Pause.

Dave: What's... what's that? Is it the, um –

Jen: Yeah. (*Beat.*) Pretty impressive isn't it? The facilities –

Dave: Oh yes. Mobile library, exercise classes, three course dinners, basically a five-star hotel! (*Beat.*) Not a holiday though, I just meant...

Pause.

Dave: The best one though, couldn't do better.

Jen: Really? (*Beat.*) This is the best thing to do/ is it?

Dave: Yes Jen.

Jen: Ok –

Dave: Look, can we not do this today? Please? (*Beat.*) You did agree with me about this once/

Jen: Yeah once, one time.

Dave (*continuing over Jen*): that this is the best solution to the problem –

Jen: Problem? Right, well, I'm sorry for the inconvenience –

Dave: Jen, don't, you know I didn't mean it like that. But you know we had to deal with this somehow. She couldn't be left on her own in the house anymore. She was taking her clothes off in public, paying three times for an orthopaedic bed she doesn't need, hitting people –

Jen: I still don't believe that –

Dave: Why Jen? (*Beat.*) Why would he lie to us?

Pause.

Jen: I don't kn...

Pause.

Jen looks back at the paperwork in her hands.

Pause.

Dave: You won't have to worry so much if she's there –

Jen: What, you think this is going to stop me worrying?! (*Beat.*) God, this is just you all over, isn't it? Give up, pass on *the problem* to someone else!

Dave: What?!

Jen (*continuing*): pay someone to do it, even better. Doesn't matter how much –

Dave: I can't believe you... I wanted her to be in the best place *for her*! Don't tell me you don't want that too?

Jen: Here! The best place would be here where I can –

Dave: You're not qualified! As it gets worse, she's going to need people who are trained –

Jen: I could –

Dave: Jen, don't be ridiculous –

Jen: Oh, ridiculous, ok, so I'm being ridiculous now, am I?

Dave: Yes, actually, because you can't just train to be a domestic care helper or whatever. Mary needs someone professional who knows how to handle her, there's nothing you can do anymore –

Silence as the words hang in the air.

Jen: Well. At least you've finally come out and said it.

Silence.

Mary enters the room from the hallway carrying a small bag and a jacket.

Dave: Oh Mary! Here let me take that for you, I'll go put it in the car.

Dave takes the bag and swiftly exits. Mary takes a seat on the sofa.

Pause.

Jen (*indicating the jacket*): Might not even need that! Going to be warm apparently.

Pause.

Jen: It's a nice one though, good old M&S I'm guessing?

Silence.

Jen: Mum. (*Beat.*) I... I'm so sorr –

Dave enters.

Pause.

Dave: Right well, we had probably better get going. I told them to expect us at midday.
(*Calling.*) Becky, we're about to go!

Mary stands and goes to leave the room.

Dave: Urm, where are my glasses?

Mary (*immediately, without turning*): They're on your head.

Mary exits to the hallway.

Silence as Jen turns to stare at Dave.

Pause.

Dave: I... I'll see you in the car.

Dave exits.

Jen stands alone and fights back her tears as the lights fade to black.

The end.