

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

by
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CHARACTERS:

SARAH

WILL, Sarah's boyfriend

JUDY, Sarah's mother

MONTY, Sarah's brother

SAM, Sarah's father

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SCENE 1

All the action of the play takes place in a spacious, stylish but traditional kitchen. There's a dresser, cooker, fridge, sink and worktops round the sides and a rectangular pine table in the middle, the narrow end up/downstage. There are four chairs at the table and there's another chair against the wall. There's also an upright piano, next to a door to the hall, plus a back door leading straight to the outside.

It's the middle of the day. We hear keys unlocking the back door, which is then opened and Sarah enters, followed by Will. They are both mid-20's. Will is carrying a bunch of flowers.

Sarah: *(Calling out loudly)* We're here!

Will: Very nice. Generously proportioned I'd say.

Sarah: You sound like an estate agent.

Will: Heaven forbid! Who plays the piano?

Sarah: My brother really. I used to but I haven't for years. Mummy thought it would be good for us.

Will: And was it?

Sarah: Who can tell? Only you know if I'm a good girl or a bad girl.

(They embrace)

Sarah: She's probably upstairs. *(Loudly)* Mummy! We're here!

(To Will) Daddy could be anywhere.

Will: *(Looking at a framed photo on the wall)* Oh where's that?

Sarah: When we were in Cyprus. Daddy was posted there.

Will: Nice. You look so young!

Sarah: Wasn't that long ago. My last year at school - Easter holidays. Mummy always made sure we went out in the holidays, wherever he was. In the later years anyway.

Will: That must have been great.

Sarah: An "article of faith" she called it, keeping the family together.

Will: And did it?

Sarah: Oh yes. But that was Daddy's last posting. Doesn't he look smart in his uniform?

Will: I know - girls and men in uniform! But you weren't quite the foxy lady you are now.

Sarah: You smoothie you! Urban foxes get a bad press these days actually. Mummy's always complaining about them.

Will: Is she? She looks quite glam in that photo.

Sarah: Oh they loved the ex-pat life. Think it's been quite difficult for them back here. Certainly for Daddy.

Will: But you know, as one door closes...

Enter Judy from the hall door. She is a stylish mid 50's.

Judy: Sarah darling! Sorry, got distracted. Doing a bit of sorting out. *(Kisses Sarah)*. Hello – you must be Will.

Will: Mrs Brown - how do you do. *(Offers his hand)*

Judy: *(Shaking hands)* Oh call me Judy, for goodness' sake. Mrs Brown always makes me think of Paddington.

Will: These are for you then, Judy. *(Hands her the flowers)*

Judy: Oh they're lovely! Thank you!

Sarah: I love Paddington. Can't remember who played Mrs Brown in the film.

Will: Sally Hawkins.

Judy: Really? I just remember the books. *(She gets some scissors and a vase to arrange the flowers)*

Will: There were loads weren't there? I always thought there should be one called "Bear with Me". Just have to wait ages for it to be published though.

Sarah: Oh Will!

Judy: We read them all the time when Sarah and Monty were little. Great favourites they were.

Will: And wasn't Gordon Brown's wife called Sarah? Sarah Brown.

Enter Monty (who has heard this) from the hall door. He is 20ish.

Monty: Hello Sarah Brown. *(Gives her a perfunctory peck on the cheek)* Let's not get into politics. We're never going to agree.

Sarah: My little brother.

Will: Hi!

Monty: Hi

Sarah: No politics, religion or sex at the dinner table Mummy used to say.

Judy: Quite right.

Monty: Certainly no sex. Not with all the plates and glasses around.

Judy: Monty! It's lovely to meet you Will. Sarah's told us so much about you.

Sarah: Have I?

Monty: That must have been the last one.

Judy: Anyway Will, how were Sarah's directions?

Will: No problem at all. She's the perfect navigator.

Sarah: Will's got a really lovely little Mini.

Judy: Oh, one of the new ones? They look rather nice.

Will: No, one of the old ones I'm afraid. Thought it would be like 'The Italian Job' but it's basically just very little, noisy and bouncy.

Monty: People have said that about my sister. Also gives you a pain in the backside.

Judy: Monty, please!

Will: I was just admiring the picture of you all in Cyprus.

Judy: Oh that was wonderful. Think we all miss it. I certainly do.

Sarah: Oh yes! Swimming every day. Lunch on the terrace. Even someone to cook it for you.

Judy: I'm afraid we can't exactly provide that here. You'll have to make do with my efforts.

Sarah: Oh Mummy!

Judy: It's been quite an adjustment I can tell you. Oh, I meant to check – you're not vegetarian are you?

Sarah: Bit late now. No, Will's a carnivore like the rest of us.

Will: Yes, I eat anything, thanks. Omnivore's the word in fact.

Monty: Red in tooth and claw.

Sarah: That's a complete misquote Monty. You don't know what you're talking about.

Monty: And you do of course.

Will: You must have had some quite unusual things to eat on all your travels.

Judy: Well there was that time we were taken out in Brunei. Can't even bring myself to think about it. Never want to go there again!

Will: "Taking someone out" can mean something else in the army, can't it?

Judy: Yes, I think so. Don't know what's happened to your father.

Monty: Nothing's happened. He's always been like that.

Enter Sam from the hall door, carrying glasses upside down in one hand and two bottles of wine in the other. He struggles to get through the door and then narrowly misses bumping into the piano.

Sam: Bloody silly place for a piano. Said we needed a bigger house. *(Managing to put the glasses and bottles down)* My darling girl!

Sarah: Daddy! *(Embraces him)*

Sam: You just arrived? I was in the shed.

Will: Ah, men in sheds.

Sam: Got to have a bolt hole you know. You must be William. *(Offering his hand)*

Will: Will. How do you do.

Sam: Of course. Will. Sam. Every red-blooded male has to have a one-syllable name these days. Ed, Nick, Matt.

Will: But not Gloss.

Sam: What? No. No, indeed.

Monty: Short of name, short of temper. *(Starts checking his phone)*

Sam: Rubbish. *(Putting the glasses down)* I'm a complete pussycat aren't I darling?

Sarah: Well... most of the time.

Judy: Rubbish is what's in the shed. Last time I ventured down there anyway. You managed quite well without one when we were abroad.

Sam: Didn't need it then. Where'd I keep the lawnmower and all the barbecue things if I didn't have a shed?

Will: Everyone stores things in the Cloud these days.

Sarah: Will!

Monty: Joke's lost on him. Hasn't the foggiest idea what you're talking about.

Sam: Cloud, foggy? You talk in riddles man. Speak English.

Monty: You have to have your own shed to be a real man.

Judy: Well in my view it needs a jolly good tidy up. Let's leave it at that shall we? *(She puts the flowers on the table)*

Now, as there are five of us I'm going to move next to Sarah. So we're two and two. You're at the head as usual Belty. *(She moves a chair from the downstage end and puts it on one of the longer sides.)*

Will: Belty? Where's that from, if I may ask?

Sarah: It's what they called him in the army. Sam Browne - it's a kind of belt they wear. Goes sort of diagonally across the chest as well as round the waist.

Will: Oh I know. A Sam Browne – Belty, of course. Belty, Judy, Monty. Sure you don't want to call me Willie?

Sarah: I don't think so.

Judy: *(Taking the spare chair from against the wall and putting it on the other long side of the table.)* I thought I'd put you here Will, next to Monty, if that's alright. You and Monty can get to know each other.

Monty: *(Briefly looking up from his phone)* Very cosy. Bit boys versus girls though isn't it Mum?

Sarah: Oh alright. I'll sit next to Will if it bothers you.

Will: If you must!

Sarah: Can I do anything Mummy?

Judy: No thank you darling. Won't be a minute.

Sam: *(Putting the bottle of white wine in the fridge)* God, do you remember that dinner where we found there was a Leavers team all lined up on one side and Remainers on the other? Two opposing battalions. Quite heated I seem to recall.

Judy: It was ghastly! Worst dinner party we've ever had.

Monty: Except family ones.

Judy: *(Busy at the cooker)* Offer them a drink Belty.

Sam: Exactly what I'm about to do. Suggest we dive straight into the red. Like your bank account Monty. The white's only just gone in the fridge.

Will: I'd be happy to support that proposal.

Monty: There speaks a lawyer.

Sam: *(Opening the bottle)* This one's Chilean; Tony recommended it. At least it's got a cork, not one of those screw cap things.

Sarah: Daddy's working for a friend in the wine business at the moment.

Sam: Just helping out an old chum. You know.

Will: Can't get used to the idea of Pinot Noir coming from the land of Pinochet.

Sam: Ah, you're a traditionalist are you? Good man. Decent reds come from France or Italy, or possibly Spain if you like that Rioja stuff. We can move onto the white later. There's no starter is there darling? *(He starts handing round glasses of red wine)*

Judy: Afraid not. I've been at the village hall, clearing up from yesterday. Can you put that away please Monty?

Monty: *(Finishing typing a message)* Done! *(He puts away his phone)*

Sam: Always think someone should invent a blue wine, so we could have red, white then blue. The Yanks would love it.

Judy: Why not us? The Union Jack's red, white and blue. I hate it when the only people who seem to be proud of our flag are the far right. If that's the right word.

Sarah: Politics again Mum!

Judy: Oh I'm sorry. But it's true. You see it on the telly - horrible. That's not what the Union Jack's about at all. *(She starts putting plates and little dishes on the table)*

Will: Well, on the question of blue wine, there's always Blue Nun.

Monty: God no! Parents' drinks in the boarding house. We might have been desperate for booze, but even we despised that. About as alcoholic as Lucozade. We called it "none at all".

Sarah: That's because you were used to neat Smirnoff I should think.
Judy: Were you Monty?
Will: The Russian flag's red, white and blue as well you know.
Sam: You're not from the KGB are you?
Sarah: Daddy!
Monty: Blue Nun was like it had come straight from a monastery. A dry monastery.
Will: Nunnery you mean.
Sam: Nothing wrong with nuns. Won't have anything said against them. Plenty of good jokes about nuns.
Judy: That's enough Belty. *(Beat)* Do sit down everyone.

(All except Judy start to sit down at the table)

Sarah: What was on at the village hall Mummy?
Judy: Oh it was a craft fair. But they left it in such a mess!
Will: Craft for them means graft for you then.
Judy: I suppose so. But there were three of us so it didn't take long.
Sam: Enough of this chit chat. Where do you come from Will?. Where do your parents live?
Will: So, Mum's up in Glasgow, Dad's in Portsmouth. They're separated.
Monty: That's quite a separation. Glasgow to Portsmouth.
Will: Just happened like that. I grew up in Portsmouth but my sister's a GP in Glasgow, so Mum's gone up there. She and Katie were both Remainers - Glasgow's more their kind of place.
Judy: Ah yes. Scotland voted to remain didn't they? Sorry, politics again.
Sarah: Only religion and sex to go.
Judy: Sarah!
Sam: Hear you do human rights, is that right?
Will: Yes. Allegedly.
Sam: Hope you're not one of those bleeding hearts.
Will: Well, it rather depends what you mean by a "bleeding heart".
Sam: You're not sure?
Sarah: Daddy!
Monty: More the bleeding obvious I'd say. Of course my sister's going out with a human rights lawyer! The last one was an "activist". As he called it.

Sam: Thank God that didn't last long.

Judy: No table manners at all.

Monty: *(To Sarah)* You're so predictable.

Sarah: And you're not? Give me a break Monty.

Will: Actually I started in family law. Arguments about children mostly. And money.

Monty: You've come to the right place here then.

Judy: Monty!

(Awkward Beat)

Did you hear Peter Wilkinson's been knighted? Daddy was with him in Afghanistan. And they overlapped in Cyprus for a bit.

Sam: Yeah, funny sort of chap Peter. Argumentative. Used to kind of, swallow his words somehow. *(Takes a gulp of wine, and continues doing so)*

Judy: Did he? I didn't notice.

Sam: Went on to run something called NewTeq. With a "q" at the end. You'd think they could spell it properly.

Sarah: They do it to make it memorable Daddy. You've remembered what it's called haven't you?

Sam: Huh. Juvenile is what I call it.

Will: NewTeq are big. In the footsie 100 I think.

Judy: I assume that's nothing to do with football Will. Peter definitely wasn't a sportsman.

Will: No it isn't. Aren't NewTeq in the defence industry? Electronics or something?

Sam: No idea. Not my field old boy.

Monty: Bet he made shedloads.

Judy: Think we've had enough about sheds, thank you Monty.

Monty: Getting knighted as well.

Sarah: Government contracts I bet. Mutual back-scratching. Isn't the honours thing just so out of date though? Who cares if they're called "sir"? Or "lady" anything?

Monty: There speaks our resident Republican.

Judy: Not sure I agree with you there darling. Civil honours are for public service, and they serve a terribly useful purpose. It means we can recognise people who've done some wonderful things.

Sarah: Like hosting chat shows and scoring goals in football matches?

Judy: Well...

Will: My dad's joke is he says the ones who get knighted are the most benighted ones. In blissful ignorance of how the real world lives.

Sam: Plenty of others meet that description.

Monty: Speak for yourself Dad. You wouldn't have turned it down I bet, if you'd been offered a K.

Judy: I think Peter Wilkinson knew the real world very well. He was lining up his second career years before he left the army. Certainly before you were darling.

Sam: Not true! Anyway he retired from the regiment well before I did.

Sarah: You were just too busy doing your day job weren't you Daddy?

Judy: Day and night job you mean. No-one could say you were really prepared for civvie street Belty. Anyway. It's Moroccan lamb with couscous. Because your father does still like his meat, and I rather like couscous.

Sam: Gets stuck in your teeth. Bloody annoying.

Sarah: Sounds lovely! Not too much for me though Mummy.

Judy: Alright darling. A dainty portion.

Sarah: Mummy still cooking for you Monty? Waiting on you hand and foot?

Monty: Hardly. Seems to be couscous every day. Like being in the kasbah. We had something with decimated coconut in the other day.

Will: Think you mean dessicated coconut.

Monty: Whatever.

Sam: Good posting that, Morocco. Not sure what we were doing there. Political probably – "advisory support" and all that.

Judy: *(Coming to the table with a large dish)* Now Will. How much would you like?

Will: Oh just pop it on if that's alright and I'll say when...That's fine thanks...How did you find that in Morocco, basically being an instrument of politics?

Sam: Not aware I've ever been an "instrument" of anything.

Will: Isn't that the point though? Sometimes we're not aware. We don't know someone else is pulling the strings.

Sam: Damn sure I'm not a puppet.

Will: Sorry. I mean, it's a form of unconscious compliance. That's what they call it.

Sam: Oh they do, do they?

Will: What I'm saying is, there must have been times when you had to do something which came straight from the politicians.

Sam: Plenty of times. Goes with the territory.

Monty: And you went along with it.

Sam: Be naïve if you didn't think the British Army was under orders from government. Which is responsible to Parliament. Who vote on the defence budget by the way. You don't bite the hand that feeds you Monty.

Sarah: Certainly not when it's Moroccan lamb and couscous.

Judy: Oh there are various things here. Yoghurt, harissa, extra nuts. Cucumber. Not sure if that's really Moroccan but I think it goes quite well. *(She serves Sam)*. That alright darling? Bit more? Don't forget your tablet.

Sam: Bloody blood pressure. *(He pops a tablet in his mouth and glugs it down with some wine)*

Monty: You and Peter Wilkinson were only Lieutenant Colonels, now he's a Sir. Where did it all go wrong for you?

Judy: Monty - no loose talk at the dinner table please.

Monty: Well you're level pegging, now he's a knight of the realm and you're... helping a mate in a wine shop. Can I have a bit more? *(Judy serves him a little more)*

Sam: Think you need to button your lip young man.

Sarah: Yeah, you can't get the privilege of home comforts and then diss them all at the same time.

(By now everyone is served. Judy puts the dish on the table and sits down next to Monty.)

Will: This is delicious. Compliments to the chef.

Monty: You always take his side don't you?

Sarah: I do not!

Monty: Least I'll be a qualified accountant while you're still swanning about in the lower reaches of some flakey consultancy.

Sarah: You're just jealous.

Monty: Of a job at a tinpot outfit called "Passionate PR"? You've must be joking!

Sarah: At least it's creative.

Judy: Children! Stop bickering, please!

Monty: That's what you think we are don't you? Children.

Will: Same at my place. Or was, till they split up.

Sam: Ah.

Judy: Sarah darling, I know what PR stands for – public relations isn't it - but what exactly is it, this new job of yours?

Sarah: Well when someone wants to promote something, or there's a good news story, we get it into the media for them.

Judy: That's nice. There's so much bad news in the press these days.

Monty: Don't you do it for bad news stories too? People who've got a point to prove. Want to expose something. A politician or someone.

Sarah: Well sometimes. But generally we don't work for them.

Judy: Thank Goodness!

Monty: Too expensive no doubt. But I bet you do scandal stories.

Will: Yes. Bad news makes good copy and all that.

Sarah: I wouldn't call them scandals. You've just got to argue your case, or the client's case.

Monty: Isn't that what lawyers do? Argue a case, even if they don't believe it.

Will: Well...

Sarah: Our job is to get the arguments out into the public domain. In the media.

Monty: Oh come off it Sarah! It's about getting invited to the right parties. And all the press want is a juicy picture.

Sarah: Well there is that. But they'll only print a picture if they think there's something in the story.

Judy: Some papers these days – the tabloids I suppose – seem to be almost all pictures. More like comics than newspapers.

Sarah: Oh Mummy! You're so old-fashioned!

Judy: I don't think it's old-fashioned to want news in a newspaper, rather than just trivia and gossip.

Sam: Hear hear! Some of them are just bloody rags. *(He refills his glass)*

Judy: And this obsession with celebrities. Those horrible photographers chasing after them. The pappardelle or whatever.

Sarah: Pappardelle's a kind of pasta Mum. You mean paparazzi.

Judy: Well you know.

Will: Comes from that character, the photographer in *La Dolce Vita*.

Monty: It is Italian though. You got that bit right Mum.

Judy: Well there you are then.

Monty: You mean here we are. Stuck in the middle of nowhere, living off the pension.

Sarah: Which includes you Monty. If it wasn't for Daddy's army pension you'd be in trouble.

Monty: Bit of a come-down from regimental dinners in Cyprus though. Just saying.

Sarah: Saying what?

Monty: Dad hasn't faced up to not being the big cheese. Except at home. Isn't even any cheese at the wine shop.

Sam: Cut it out Monty!

Monty: How are the mighty fallen.

Sarah: You always have to have the last word don't you?

(Monty goes to say something)

Sarah: *(Holding up a finger)* A, Agh...

(Monty's phone pings with a new message and he takes it out of his pocket to read it)

Typical!

Judy: Please Monty!

Sam: Top up anyone? Except you Monty - you need to keep that lip buttoned. And that blasted phone.

(Sam tops up Will, Sarah and Judy's glasses, which have hardly been touched, and refills his own empty one.)

Monty: See what I mean? He thinks we're children! I don't get a sweetie because I'm not being nicely behaved. He's the one who's keenest on the grapeshot.

Sam: Good God man! Can't you just put a sock in it? *(He takes a good slug of wine)*

Sarah: Don't think we'd want one of Monty's socks at the table. Urgh!

Monty: Come on! When did you ever put a sock in it? Greatest bore this side of an oil well.

Will: That's quite good actually!

Sarah: Don't encourage him Will.

Monty: Encourage me? Never much of that. Sarah of course, yes, the little princess. Don't get her started on the oil industry though – we'll be here all night.

Sarah: Oh stop being such a shit Monty!

Sam: Yes, have some... *(starts slurring his speech)*...some manners.

Judy: Some what darling?

Sam: *(Indistinctly)* Manners. Manners.

Monty: Would have been nice if you'd shown me some.

Sam: *(Drops his wineglass)* Wha..? I aaah...

Judy: Belty!

Sam: Aaah... *(His face contorts)*

Judy: *(Getting up)* Darling! You alright?!

Monty: Pissed again.

Sarah: What is it Daddy?

Judy: Belty! Belty! Look at me!

Sarah: Daddy! What's happening?!

Will: I think he might be having a stroke.

Sarah: *(Rushing to his side)* Daddy!

Sam: Aaah...

Judy: My God! This is what we were worried about. Don't worry Belty. Ring an ambulance someone!

Sarah: *(Getting out her phone)* I'll do it. This is your fault Monty.
(Sam has slumped sideways in his chair, Judy bending over him.)

Monty: *(Standing)* My fault? How do you make that out?

Sarah: *(Into her phone)* Ambulance. *(She moves upstage)*

Will: I can take him to A&E. I've hardly had anything to drink.

Judy: Best to get an ambulance. They'll know what to do. Belty, Belty! Aspirin! Monty – get some aspirin. There's some upstairs.

Sam: Aaah...

Will: That's for a heart attack. If it's a bleed it'll just make it worse.

Monty: You know a lot about it!

Will: Sister's a GP.

Monty: That makes you an expert does it?

Will: Just trying to help. You know.

Judy: You're going to be alright darling, I promise. Sarah's calling an ambulance. They'll get you in in no time.

Sam: Aaah...

Sarah: *(Coming back downstage)*. It's on its way.

Judy: Thank God. Only round the corner. Won't take them a minute darling.

Monty: Don't you believe it. Might be hours. Or we might get one of those first responders. They're not real paramedics – more like Dad's Army.

Judy: That's very unfair. Your Auntie Alison's a first responder and she was a nurse. They do a wonderful job. Sarah – get some things together will you? Pyjamas, toothbrush, razor.

Sarah: I want to stay with him Mummy. We can sort that out later. Daddy – can you hear me?

Sam: Aaah...

Monty: If he can he'll just hear us arguing. SNAFU he'd say.

Will: Situation Normal, All Fucked Up.

Monty: Thank you Will. We do know what SNAFU means. Bloody hell!

Sarah: He looks terrible. All sort of... one-sided.

Monty: One-sided? God, no change there then.

Judy: This side's gone all dead. Let's see if we can get you sitting up a bit. Don't know what you're supposed to do with a stroke.

Sarah: Will - get something so I can keep him cool. Daddy – say something. Do you, do you remember when you used to come and cheer at my netball matches? Always the loudest, by far.

(Will grabs a napkin from the table, puts it under the tap and gives it to Sarah)

Sarah: There. Is that better?

Sam: Aaah...

Monty: I think there were other reasons he went to see schoolgirls playing netball. Never came to see me playing rugby.

Sarah: You weren't in any school teams that's why. Daddy - look at me!

Monty: Whereas you could do no wrong. Is he really having a stroke?

Sarah: Of course he is! Daddy – remember those lovely postcards you used to send me at school? Such a treat. My friends were so envious.

Judy: There's all this glass. We'll have to clear it up before the ambulance arrives.

Sarah: Sure they're used to it Mummy. Now's not the time to be house-proud.

Monty: Looks very gory, all that wine. Crime scene.

Will: They'll want to know if he's fallen or anything.

Sarah: Of course he hasn't fallen! You saw it. He just sort of collapsed.

Will: But the glass and everything. They'll need to check for injuries.

Monty: You know it all don't you?

Will: My grandfather died of a stroke.

Sarah: Will! Don't say that!

Will: That was Scotland. Mortality's much worse there, from stroke. For some reason.

Monty: Deep fried Mars bars I should think.

Will: No that's heart attacks again.

Judy: We think you've maybe had a stroke darling. Ambulance is on its way.

Sarah: They'll be here soon. Just hang on Daddy.

Monty: There's soon, and there's soon. Probably doesn't matter though.

Sarah: Monty!

Monty: Well if he's had a stroke, the damage is done isn't it?

Sarah: You've done enough damage already Monty.

Will: Rapid early treatment, that's the critical thing.

(We hear a siren approaching)

Judy: Oh thank God.

(A flashing blue light appears)

Monty: Looks like he got his wish.

Sarah: What?

Monty: Red, then white, though we never got to that, now blue.

Sarah: For God's sake Monty. He may be dying.

Monty: Yes. And your point is?

(Blackout)

SCENE 2

It's morning of the next day. The glasses and plates have been cleared away but there are some coffee mugs and maybe a cereal bowl around. Monty is playing the piano – the opening of the second movement of Beethoven's Appassionata sonata. He plays like an angel.

After a couple of minutes, Sarah enters from the hall door. Monty keeps on playing.

Sarah: Monty -we ought to be going. I want to get some cream on the way. His hands are terribly dry.

Monty: Cream? Better not be clotted. Not good for strokes.

Sarah: Very funny. Can you stop playing for a minute?

Monty: Yeah, when we need to go.

(Beat)

Sarah: You're always avoiding things

Monty: What?

Sarah: Avoidance. Escapism.

Monty: Escapism? From what?

Sarah: Responsibility. Daddy.

Monty: *(He stops playing)* I've been working on an escape tunnel for years.

Sarah: But you're still living at home.

Monty: Only till I qualify.

Sarah: And so you've got the piano. You always played when you'd had a row. You really shouldn't be so hard on him you know.

Monty: *(Getting up from the piano)* Shouldn't I? Why ever not? He gave you all the soft strokes.

Sarah: You don't even know when you're being ironic Monty. He's always done his best for both of us.

Sarah's mobile rings. Monty goes to the fridge and gets out a can of beer.

Sarah: Hello darling. *(Beat)* Well Mummy needs me here I think. *(Beat)* He's going to be in for a while. Hasn't got his swallow reflex back yet and they say that's a key marker. *(Beat)* Well then there's all the rehab. I really don't know. *(Beat)* Yes, I'll ring you. Work alright? *(Beat)*. Yes, love you too. *(She rings off)*

Monty: What is it about the swallow thing?

Sarah: It's a key sign in stroke recovery. You must know that Monty.

Monty: So when he starts swallowing again, he'll be OK.

Sarah: Hardly. That's barely the start.

Monty: One swallow doesn't make a summer, as it were. *(He takes a swig of beer)*

Sarah: No it doesn't. There's a long long road after that.

Monty: Maybe if they put a drip up with some Beaujolais in that would get the reflex going.

Sarah: Don't think so. They're already hydrating him with a drip. But if he doesn't swallow soon they're going to have to feed him with a tube.

Monty: Bloody hell.

Sarah: Exactly. Are you ready? We ought to get there and take over from Mummy.

Monty: Yeah. Second shift. Just need to check a couple of messages.

Sarah: Why didn't you do that before? Instead of playing the piano? What was it anyway?

Monty: *(Checking his phone distractedly)* Beethoven. Appassionata. When he was in his heroic phase.

Sarah: Ah. Beethoven's always been your hero hasn't he? All that anger.

Monty: Bigger off Sarah! It's not angry. You completely deaf?

Sarah: Angry and frustrated.

Monty: Speak for yourself.

Sarah: No, you and Beethoven. Frustrated and angry. Frangry maybe.

Monty: God, you PR people! It's just all froth. Like those things for kids in cafes – a babycino. Just frothy milk, no actual coffee at all. I need my caffeine. Not the stuff Mum uses - that's crap.

Sarah: Mr frustrated! I rest my case, as Will would say. *(Beat)* Didn't Beethoven go deaf?

Monty: What?

Sarah: Didn't Beethoven... oh very funny.

Monty: He did, but that was later. *(Beat)* Anyway, I could say passionata's been your thing. Revolving door of boyfriends. Different one every time.

Sarah: That's not true! Anyway, why didn't you do more with your music? That's what you've always been into.

Monty: You know why! *(Starts typing a text message)* Dad didn't think a second or third rate pianist was a very stable career. You can always get a job as an accountant.

Sarah: Not quite as exciting though is it? Bit frustrating I should think.

Monty: *(Trying to text as well as speak)* Well... when you've done your hundredth gig in Scunthorpe... or taught your hundredth little Grade 3 pupil... maybe that's not very exciting either.

Sarah: No regrets about going for the safer option then?

Monty: Hang on. (*Sends his text message*) It's not the safer option. It's the... the order, the structure. Everything has to go in the right slot.

Sarah: Your life's a spreadsheet. That's a bit of a change Monty! Are you ready now?

Monty: (*Going back to his phone*) Hang on. It's like the piano. Putting some organisation on a messy world. Oh fuck!

Sarah: I get that. Look at what's happening to Daddy.

Monty: What?

Sarah: Things were pretty messy when you were a teenager. But maybe you just don't have negative capability these days.

Monty: (*Not looking up from his phone*) I can be negative when I want to.

Sarah: You can say that again! (*Gets a slice of bread and takes it to the toaster*)

It's about whether you're comfortable with uncertainty or confusion. Whether you can live with ambiguity, not putting things neatly into slots. (*Puts the toaster down*) Not knowing if there *are* any slots. It was Keats called it "negative capability".

Monty: Thank you for that, Professor Brown. (*Finishing on his phone*) Is that the best you learnt on an English degree? You're the one who said we ought to be going.

Sarah: I've been waiting for you! Just need a bit of dry toast.

Monty: Dry toast? What's the matter with you?

Sarah: Just need something to settle my tummy.

Monty: There's a girl on my course who's pregnant. She's always eating dry toast, and cheese crackers and things. She is a bit crackers actually.

Sarah: Being pregnant doesn't make you crackers.

Monty: (*Looking at Sarah closely*) You're not...are you?

Sarah: Don't tell Mummy!

Monty: Christ Sarah! Is it whatisname – Will?

Sarah: Of course it is. Well. Almost certainly.

Monty: Almost certainly?

Sarah: Stop it Monty.

Monty: That'll change Dad's view a bit. Princess no more! If he can get his brain cells round it. His remaining ones.

Sarah: Well we're not going to tell him are we? Even if he could understand.

Monty: Open that will you?

Sarah: What?

Monty: The bin.

(Sarah sighs and opens a pedal bin with her foot. Monty finishes his can of beer, crunches it up and throws it into the bin)

Sarah: Why do you always do that?

Monty: What?

Sarah: Crunch the can up and throw it like that. Looks so aggressive. Like a football hooligan or something.

Monty: Rugby player maybe? Not sure why - but I'm quite comfortable with not being sure. That negative enough for you?

Sarah: Ha ha. *(She gets her toast and starts eating it with nothing on and no plate)*

Monty: Or is it just not refined enough for you, my lady? My lady tart.

Sarah: God you can be a shit Monty!

Monty: Thank you so much.

Sarah: I think we should take some music for Daddy. What have we got?

Monty: A CD or something? He hasn't got a phone and I'm not going to leave him mine.

Sarah: There's probably hospital radio but that'll be awful. Suppose the CD's are just the same as when I was at home. What about some jazz?

Monty: OK.

(Exit Sarah through the hall door. Monty goes to the piano and starts noodling with something jazzy.)

(Enter Sarah with a CD)

Sarah: Bix Beiderbecke, how's that?

Monty: *(Still playing)* Alright.

Sarah: Maybe Daddy's sort of thing. Though he doesn't really know much about it.

Monty: Nor do you.

Sarah: No OK. Just happened to be next to Beethoven, the piano concertos. I always said they should organise them by category, not alphabetically.

Monty: *(He stops playing)* But when did they ever listen to anything sensible? When are you going to tell them?

Sarah: About the baby?

Monty: Duh!

Sarah: I may not.

Monty: What do you mean?

Sarah: I may not have it.

Monty: Ah. What does Will think about that?

Sarah: He doesn't know.

Monty: Bloody hell Sarah. Doesn't he have a right to know?

Sarah: Not really.

Monty: You realise we need something to play that on?

Sarah: Right. Where's the CD player?

Monty: No idea.

Sarah: Oh you're such a help Monty.

Monty: Hang on. I think Mum took it to her WI or something, so it might be here somewhere. *(He rummages around and finds it)*

(Taking a CD out of the player) Here we are. Jerusalem, Land of Hope and Glory, Rule Britannia, load of other stuff.

Sarah: Maybe we should take that. Good solid patriotism.

Monty: No, Bix is better. More provocative. Unconventional anyway, more than Dad ever was.

Sarah: Is, you mean. He's still with us Monty.

Monty: Alright. Might shake him up a bit anyway.

Sarah: Do you remember when we took that radio in for Grandpa, and somehow it turned itself on in the bag so it was making a continuous buzzing noise?

Monty: They thought it might be a bomb so we were pinned against the wall and searched.

Sarah: Hardly. As I remember, someone just said "What's that you've got in your bag?" and we were taken aside. You're such a drama queen Monty.

Monty: I thought that was your job. PR people make a drama out of everything.

Sarah: Stop going on about PR! It's just a job.

Monty: It was the radio I had at school – my contact with the outside world. Only thing that got through the walls of the boarding house.

Sarah: All your problems Mummy and Daddy had to deal with - at long distance. Pretty difficult negotiating with your housemaster when they were out of the country. But I know you had a bad time.

Monty: Still have dreams about it.

Sarah: Well we had a lovely time at St Margaret's, left to our own devices.

Monty: Oh yes - well-behaved young ladies. In blissful ignorance of the real world. Didn't Whatisname - Will - say something about that? People who get honours or something?

Sarah: Yeah. They don't deserve it. Just cronies handing goodies to other cronies. Treats all round.

Monty: Ah, there's some chocolate in the fridge. Shall we take it?

Sarah: He can't eat, remember?

Monty: Not for him. For us. We may be a while.

Sarah: If you want. I won't have any though.

Monty: *(Going to the fridge)* So you going to do the indecent thing and get rid of it?

Sarah: Don't beat about the bush Monty. That's not very nice.

Monty: Well it isn't is it?

Sarah: I don't know. Haven't decided yet.

Monty: How much is it worth, me not to tell Mum? *(He starts eating the chocolate)*

Sarah: God Monty! Don't you ever think of anyone but yourself? Can't you show just the teeniest bit of sympathy? For Daddy if not for me?

Monty: Sympathy? Like when he packed us off to boarding school?

Sarah: For God's sake Monty!

Monty: He just barged ahead because that's where he'd been. Mum didn't have a say in it. She couldn't even make up a proper tuck box when they were abroad.

Sarah: Yes she did! I remember wonderful things she gave us to take back. Fantastic dates, and nuts. The nougat made me very popular. And pistachios - we thought they were terribly sophisticated.

Monty: Pistachios? Rather have got pissed.

Sarah: Well they obviously couldn't put booze in. Or jelly and ice cream.

Monty: Could have put a tin of custard in at least. Or some decent biscuits. There was never anything I really liked.

Sarah: Well don't go on about it. You can't carry a boarding school grudge for the rest of your life.

Monty: Let me hear some of that. *(He takes the CD and puts it in the player)*

Sarah: We need to go. *(Her mobile rings again)*

Monty: That'll be the unwitting father. Mum's the word.

Sarah: Shut up Monty. Hello Mummy. *(Monty stops the CD player)* Oh God! How bad? *(Beat)* You alright? *(Beat)* Yes, we're on our way. *(She rings off)*

God! He's had another stroke. Conscious but seems very paralysed.

Monty: Talk about stringing us along. Be far better if he just went, or didn't, instead of keeping us all in this, sort of twilight.

Sarah: You're unbelievable. You need some negative capability. Get used to uncertainty.

Monty: You certain about that?

Sarah: Hang on. Think I'm going to be sick. *(She goes to the sink and wretches)*

Monty: Now who's being the drama queen? *(He puts the CD back in the player and we hear Bix Beiderbecke. Then he goes to the fridge and gets another can of beer)*

Sarah: *(Recovering, grabbing a glass and taking a swig of water from the tap)* God. Probably ought to take some earphones. Don't want him broadcasting to the whole ward. *(She starts looking around on the dresser)*

Monty: Remember when I was in that military hospital in Cyprus for my appendix? Consultant came on the ward in full uniform, including a swagger stick.

Sarah: Some people! There's a time and a place.

Monty: That's where we might agree.

Sarah: Where are they then? Those earphones.

Monty: Don't know if they'd fit the CD player. It's pretty retro.

Sarah: Well they're not here. Let's just go. No point in taking the CD if he can't listen to it.

Monty: Hear hear. *(He finishes his beer, crunches the can and throws it into the bin, on which the lid has stayed open. Then he grabs the chocolate)* Need this though.

Sarah: Monty, you're such....a baby. You've just had two beers, so I'll have to drive Dad's car. Which is also pretty retro. Thanks for that.

Monty: My pleasure.

Sarah: And we might need the keys.

Monty: Piano keys are over there. Car keys on the hall table.

(Exit Sarah and Monty through the hall door. We hear Bix Beiderbecke, increasing in volume)

(Blackout)

SCENE 3

*Afternoon of the same day. The mugs etc from the morning are still around but there are now papers and other mess on the worktops as well. The landline telephone rings. Enter **Judy**, looking exhausted. She picks up the phone.*

Judy: Hello, Judy Brown.--- Oh, Peter! Hello. Many, many congratulations! We were so thrilled when we heard..... Well it must have been richly deserved..... What?....Oh gosh! The regimental grapevine does work fast. He's on the stroke unit. Not great I'm afraid – hasn't got his swallow reflex back, so they've had to put a feeding tube in..... Yes horrible..... I think he can hear us, but I don't know.....Oh thank you. Yes I'm fine.....

Sorry Peter, didn't get that....Oh yes, I did see something in the paper about it....Right.... That's very good of you Peter, must be difficult for you too.....Thank you Peter.... Yes, let's keep in touch. Definitely. Really good of you to call.....Thank you Peter. Thanks for ringing. Bye. *(She puts the phone down)*

God. All we need. *(She sits down, then gets up again and starts tidying up a bit. She sees the CD player and presses Play – we hear Bix Beiderbecke again. She stops it playing and gives a sigh of frustration. Then she starts the CD again. The doorbell goes. Exit **Judy**)*

*(Enter **Judy** and **Will** through the hall door)*

Will: She said she might be back about now. Hope you don't mind.

Judy: No, course not. You'll have to forgive the mess I'm afraid. *(She turns the CD off)*

Will: Was that Bix Beiderbecke?

Judy: Yes. Reminds me of cocktail parties. No-one does those any more do they?

Like some coffee? *(She start making it with a cafetiere)*

Will: Thanks, yes, I could go along with that. Cocktail bars are back in fashion though. Definitely.

Judy: Bely and I were quite the party people in our day. Seems a long time ago.

Will: Party animals you'd be called nowadays.

Judy: People, animals. Same thing.

Will: In evolutionary terms. But I know what you mean. Football riots, race riots.

Judy: Yes absolutely. Horrible.

Will: Or when the police run amok. Or soldiers I suppose.

Judy: *(Uncertainly)* Yes. Do you ever have to defend rioters in your work? I mean protesters.

Will: Oh yes. But you were saying about the party scene. I presume that was before you had Sarah and Monty?

Judy: And after. There was always a babysitter you could find on base. Sorry Will, I just need to sit down. *(She sits at the table)* Sarah won't be long I'm sure. They've been there since about nine and it doesn't really need the two of them.

Will: Must be very draining for you.

Judy: Completely whacked. But keep pressing on. As Belty says. He's been in some tight spots before.

Will: Yes. Did you ever think he was at risk of a stroke?

Judy: Well he's been taking tablets for his blood pressure. But you know. He thought – we all thought – he was invincible really.

(We hear a rattle of keys in the back door)

Judy: Ah, that'll be Sarah.

(Enter Monty through the back door)

Judy: *(Getting up)* Hello darling!

Monty: Sarah said she wanted to stay.

Judy: Oh right. Sorry Will!

Monty: I know, sorry. Hate to be a disappointment.

Will: No that's fine. Quite understand. Do you mind if I hang around for a bit and wait for Sarah?

Judy: Of course. I'll have to go and take over though. How is he?

Monty: Just the same. Tube down, being monitored, looking ga-ga.

Judy: Oh God. It's a nightmare. I need this coffee before I go. Monty? You probably need some.

Monty: Rather have a beer. *(He goes to the fridge)* There isn't any!

Judy: That's because whoever had the last one didn't put any back. You'll have to have one from the cupboard. And put a couple in the fridge while you're at it.

(Monty gets a four-pack of beer out of a cupboard and opens one)

Judy: Will - black or white?

Will: Oh black for me thanks.

Monty: No prejudice here with Dad away.

Judy: Monty, that's not fair! Anyway, as if we hadn't got enough to worry about, Peter Wilkinson just rang.

Monty: Oh yeah?

Judy: *(She hands Will a mug of coffee and starts drinking her own)* Said he and your father might be embroiled in this Afghan thing in the press. Human rights charges against soldiers.

Monty: That's against squaddies, not senior officers.

Judy: Your father wasn't a Lieutenant Colonel in those days. And officers can still be implicated, apparently. Peter thinks he's a bit of a target, because of his knighthood.

Monty: Serves him right. But Afghanistan was donkeys years ago. Who said "lions led by donkeys"?

Will: Cases can be brought up to ten years after the event, and there's a proposal to reduce it to five.

Judy: Of course - human rights is your area isn't Will?

Will: Indeed it is.

Judy: Who do you usually act for in human rights cases?

Will: The claimants.

Judy: Ah. The people who claim their human rights have been ignored. Or abused or something.

Will: That's it. Where the authorities have stepped out of line.

Monty: The authorities?

Will: Could be any organisation really. Mostly public bodies. Local authorities, hospitals, prisons, that sort of thing.

Monty: And the army?

Will: Yes, the army as well.

Monty: But if you're shagging the daughter of a Lieutenant Colonel...

Judy: Monty please!

Monty: That must be a conflict if ever there was one. You're not an uninterested party are you?

Will: I think you mean "disinterested".

Monty: Oh yeah, like they're dissing him. But trying to skewer your girlfriend's Dad. That'd be brilliant!

Judy: Look, he can't even speak at the moment. So I don't think there'll be any skewering going on.

Monty: Shame. I do like a barbecue. *(Takes a swig of beer)*

Will: It's not like that actually.

Judy: I just don't know what it must be like for him right now. We don't even know if he can hear us. *(She sits down again)* Can't bear to think about it. Being trapped. Can't

move, unable to speak, unable to communicate in any way. But maybe his brain is working.

Monty: I've often wondered about that.

Judy: Oh Monty. He's your father for Goodness sake. Show a bit of compassion will you, instead of making a joke all the time. *(Beat)* Do you think we should take him something to listen to?

Monty: We were looking for some earphones for the CD player, but they're nowhere around.

Judy: Well you were never much good at looking were you? *(She starts looking herself)*

Will: I've got some. Maybe they'll fit. *(Takes some out of his pocket)*

Judy: Oh they're those little tiny ones. I thought you meant the big headphone things. Make you look like a pilot or something. Though Belty's never had much time for the RAF.

Monty: The Raff you mean. Riff-raff. Army versus the Raff at Twickenham always got him going.

Will: These are fine. Really. You don't get the quality of proper headphones but they're much easier to carry around. Look, they fit.

Judy: Maybe not his style, but I'm sure he'll cope with the baby ones.

Monty: Rather than "Big Daddy" ones you mean. For his big head.

Judy: Yes, who was Big Daddy?

Will: He was that wrestler wasn't he? Famous for fights that were rigged.

Judy: What do you mean rigged?

Will: Have you ever been to a wrestling match?

Monty: Have you?

Will: No, but let me explain. They plan it all out beforehand and just throw each other around in pre-rehearsed moves. It's a performance to please the crowd, not a contest at all. Bit of a fraud in fact.

Monty: Quite a fun one, you've got to admit.

Will: Fraud as fun. An interesting concept.

Monty: Conflict as a performance art. Isn't that what barristers do?

Will: Not really.

Monty: Well wrestling must break health and safety rules all over the place. Or human rights or something. You can't bloody move without someone claiming you've infringed their human rights.

Will: That's a bit strong.

Monty: Bit strong? Like a bit more milk in your coffee would you m'lord? What did Dad say about bleeding hearts?

Judy: Bely could never abide those HR people they brought in to the regiment. *(She finishes her coffee and picks up the CD player)*

Will: That's human resources, not human rights.

Judy: Oh yes. All these acronyms.

Will: Abbreviations.

Judy: I better go and relieve Sarah.

Will: Should I give you a lift? You haven't had much sleep. So your concentration'll probably be impaired.

Judy: I'm fine, thank you Will. Might just have a lie down when I get back.

Will: OK, no worries.

Judy: I wish that were true.

Will: Sorry. Poor choice of words. Tactless of me. Mea culpa.

Monty: Mea culpa? That's what Dad says. You really are a stuffed shirt aren't you?

Judy: No need for that Monty. I must be off.

Will: Bye. Hope it's OK.

(Exit Judy through the back door)

Monty: OK? You never know do you?

Will: Know what?

Monty: How things are going to turn out. How everyone's going to react.

Will: No. Indeed not.

Monty: Indeed? Mum's no angel, God knows, but Dad's always been so full of himself.

Will: Really?

Monty: Yeah. Light the blue touch paper!

Will: Wasn't he taking blood pressure tablets though?

Monty: Yeah but who'd have thought he'd have a stroke?

Will: That'll be the reason for the antihypertensives.

Monty: The what?

Will: The blood pressure tablets.

Monty: You really do know it all don't you?

Will: You probably know a lot about accountancy.

Monty: Yeah. Who'd have thought I'd be an accountant eh?

Will: Bit different if you're really interested in music.

Monty: Well I was OK at maths, you know, but it was pressure from him made me drop the music. Just hate it more and more.

Will: Because you were... bullied into it? And that makes you hate your father?

Monty: Heh, don't get all psychological on me. Didn't you have that, parents getting you to be a lawyer? Law, medicine, accountancy – that's what parents want for their offspring.

Will: Not the army in your case?

Monty: Didn't think I was up to it. Not tough enough, never any good at rugby, you know. But you're a lawyer and your sister's a GP. So that's very neat and tidy.

Will: Wasn't my parents or anything. Entirely our choice.

Monty: Must be weird though, being a parent. From the moment you realise you're going to be one. How much you should control your offspring, steer them, influence, whatever.

Will: Yeah, they say even what an embryo hears in the womb has an effect, and what the mother eats when they're pregnant. So babies born in India already like curries, that sort of thing.

Monty: God, Dad and his curries! *(Beat)* You know Sarah's pregnant don't you?

Will: What?!

Monty: Oh yeah. Surprised she hasn't told you. That's assuming it's yours of course.

Will: That's a bit below the belt Monty.

Monty: Well exactly. Below the belt.

Will: Phew! Bit of a shocker.

(Will sits down. Awkward Beat)

Monty: Hey, problem.

Will: I'll say it is.

Monty: No. I mean if Sarah's bringing the car back, how's Mum going to get home later? She's not thinking straight. We'll have to do a shuttle service.

Will: Yeah.

Monty: We could sort of car swap I suppose. Whoever goes and takes over gives the car to whoever's leaving.

Will: You won't be insured on my car.

Monty: It's only round the corner.

Will: Afraid not. Wouldn't go down well, uninsured driving.

Monty: Bit too rule-breaking for you?

Will: God. Why didn't she tell me!

Monty: My sister is a mystery. Sistry.

Will: I better go and pick her up.

Monty: You'll probably miss her. Mum'll be there by now, so Sarah'll have left with the car.

Will: OK, yeah. God, what a shambles.

Monty: SNAFU. *(He sits down at the piano)*

Will: As your father would say. All fucked up indeed.

(Monty starts playing a loud honky-tonk tune – "Yes Sir, that's my Baby")

Will: Monty!

(Monty doesn't react but plays with even more gusto)

Will: Monty!!

Monty: *(Not looking up)* What?

Will: Oh never mind.

(Monty starts singing the chorus)

Monty: Yes sir, that's my baby
No sir, I don't mean maybe
Yes sir, that's my baby now!

Will: *(Over Monty's singing)* Jesus Monty, you're a bloody menace. She'll be back in a minute!

(Blackout)

SCENE 4

Early evening of the same day. Sarah and Will are sitting opposite each other at the kitchen table.

- Sarah: God, I can't bear it. Who'd have thought he'd have another one, and then another one?
- Will: I'm so sorry. One stroke after another.
- Sarah: They tell me now It often happens like that.
- Will: At the third stroke.
- Sarah: Don't Will, please don't. Actually they said this last time it was "respiratory arrest". Never heard that before.
- Will: Ah. Cardiac arrest is when the heart stops. Respiratory arrest is when you stop breathing.
- Sarah: Right.
- Will: Might need to find out about these things.
- Sarah: Alright, alright, bossy boots. They've put him on a ventilator, but he's hanging on.
- Will: You wonder how many times you can be arrested for the same thing.
- Sarah: Please stop it Will. *(Beat)* You think of all the things you wanted to tell him. I wanted to tell him.
- Will: Yeah. Course. *(Beat)* Tell him or tell me?
- Sarah: What do you mean?
- Will: You tell me.
- Sarah: You're being very cryptic Will.
- Will: Look, I've got to be at the office tomorrow, but if you came back to town say tonight, we could... maybe go out for a drink or something. Does there have to be someone with him all day every day?
- Sarah: I don't know. My head's a bit of a mess right now.
- Will: Listen. Sarah.
- Sarah: What?
- (Beat)*
- Will: Monty told me. *(Beat. Looking directly at Sarah)*
You're pregnant aren't you?
- Sarah: Fucking hell!
- Will: Well I have a right to know, don't you think?
- Sarah: I would have told you, course I would.

Will: Yup. Sure.

Sarah: I just need time to work things out.

Will: Yeah right. On your own. Isn't that a bit... selfish, don't you think?

Sarah: I've got to deal with this Will. In my own way.

Will: Have you told your mum?

Sarah: Not yet. She's got enough to worry about.

Will: Well, early decisions might be needed. How many weeks are you?

Sarah: God Will! Steady on!

Will: There's a clock ticking Sarah! Or a heartbeat. Maybe.

Sarah: I don't know.

Will: I don't know either. But the sooner we decide what we're going to do the better.

Sarah: You talking about a termination?

Will: It's an option. *(Beat)* Isn't it? Well isn't it?

Sarah: For God's sake Will! Talk about barging in! I need to think about it.

Will: *We* need to think about it.

Sarah: Alright. But it's me that's carrying it.

Will: I know that! But I'm the father. Aren't I?

Sarah: Yes. Yes. Sure you are.

Will: Might I not be?!

Sarah: *(Getting up)* Oh Will. Just leave it for a minute.

Will: So should I take that as a "No" then?

Sarah: No. I mean, it's not a "No".

Will: But it's not a "Yes" either?

Sarah: Look, I'm pretty certain.

Will: Great. Just not 100% certain. That's really great. Who else's could it be?

Sarah: None of your business.

Will: I think it is my fucking business!

(Enter Monty through the hall door)

Sarah: Look – right now I've got to get my head round what's happening to Daddy.

Monty: Nothing's happening. That's what.

Sarah: He's going downhill.

Monty: Yeah. Not like he doesn't want to engage. Which would be pretty normal. He just can't.

Sarah: But he's still there. I know he is.

Monty: It's just he may be a vegetable.

Will: Persistent vegetative state. PVS. I doubt it's got to that yet. But I realise it must be difficult for you.

Sarah: That's just trite Will. You have no idea.

Monty: All the gear, no idea. You may be a lawyer, but as Dad said, you're one of those not in the real world.

Will: *(Getting up)* That's a bit unnecessary.

Monty: Maybe lawyers are unneccasry. You going to tell Mum Sarah?

Sarah: What about?

Monty: What do you think? Or do you want me to do it?

Sarah: Don't you dare! You're a fucking menace Monty, that's what you are. I'll tell her when I'm ready.

Monty: OK, OK. Keep your knickers on. Which obviously isn't your usual style.

Sarah: Oh fuck off Monty!

Will: Don't you think you might need a bit of support? To make the right decision.

Sarah: God, not you too! Just back off guys will you?

(The landline telephone rings and Monty answers it. Will starts looking at some CD's on a worktop)

Monty: Hello?... What?... I'm his son, Monty.... Yes, I heard.... OK, I can ask her to ring you back.... Don't know. She's at the hospital at the moment.... Yeah, I'll give her the message. OK. Bye.

(He puts the phone down)

That was some guy from the regiment. That human rights thing's kicking off. If Dad wasn't in hospital, or even if he was but he was able to speak, they'd want to interview him.

Sarah: Well he can't speak. So they can bugger off.

Monty: They're getting the story from Peter Wilkinson, so he'll probably put the knife into Dad.

Will: The sword you mean. Wilkinson Sword. Live by the sword and all that.

Sarah: Stop it Will. What do you mean Monty? Why would Peter Wilkinson want to put the knife in?

Monty: You don't know?

Sarah: Know what?

Monty: Mum's fling with Peter. Sir Peter. When they were in Cyprus.

Sarah: My God!

Will: That might change things a bit. Defence might have to disclose it.

Sarah: Will – this is our parents we're talking about, not some legal case.

Will: Could be both.

Sarah: Peter Wilkinson? How could she?

Monty: Well he is a knight. Night-time was probably what he was interested in.

Sarah: Stop it Monty! I can't believe it! Poor Daddy!

Will: He may never know. We don't know if he's going to recover.

Monty: Get the famous swallow reflex back. So he's not swallowing his words like Sir Peter. Or like Mum used to swallow his... words.

Sarah: God Monty!

Will: You argue quite a lot don't you?

Sarah: Don't all families?

Monty: Makes us feel alive. Well, not dead let's say.

Will: How can you feel "not dead"? You don't know what feeling dead would feel like.

Monty: No-one does. That's the point about being dead.

Will: So what are you saying?

Monty: No, what are **you** saying? You don't know what it feels like to be dead is such an obvious, facile thing to say. Has no meaning at all.

Will: This is what I mean.

Sarah: What?

Will: You arguing. I thought lawyers did a lot of it, but you guys have gone professional.

Sarah: For God's sake Will! Monty! Where did this thing about Mummy and Peter Wilkinson come from?

Monty: Heard her on the phone once. Put the proverbial two and two together. When we were off at school there was no-one in the house for hours, sometimes days on end.

Sarah: Don't! Don't! Who cares anyway? It's in the past. We need to think about Daddy.

Monty: Not sure she was. Thinking about him.

Sarah: Well she is now! So should we be. We need to have a family meeting.

Monty: A what?

Sarah: You, me and mum.

Monty: So you can formally announce your pregnancy?

Sarah: We need to talk about Daddy! What we're going to do. Just the three of us.

Will: Yes, just the three of you. I'm unnecessary am I?

Monty: You're not family.

Sarah: I just don't know what to do. How long should we hang on?

Monty: You mean waiting for him to swallow?

Sarah: We need to try and stimulate him, and maybe that'll work. But you know...

Will: You going to take these CD's in then?

Sarah: Might. If he can hear, he's probably a bit bored with Bix Beiderbecke by now.

Monty: Is the Dizzy Gillespie there? Or Louis Armstrong?

Will: What a wonderful world.

Sarah: Hardly. They should be there though.

Will: Yep, here's Dizzy Gillespie. There's "Woman, you must be crazy" as well. I'm saying nothing.

Monty: Ah yes, that's T Bone Walker. Not the steak.

Will: No, that would be a mistake. Is jazz your thing then Monty?

Monty: Sort of.

Sarah: Monty will play anything. Mostly the idiot. We really need to talk about what happens now.

Will: Alright, I'll go and collect your mother. If she's OK to leave him. But you and I need to talk as well. Very soon.

(Monty goes to the piano and starts quietly noodling with something jazzy)

Sarah: Yes, alright Will. One thing at a time.

(Exit Will through the hall door)

Sarah: Monty?

(Monty carries on playing)

Sarah: Monty - you avoiding things again?

(Monty suddenly stops playing)

Monty: Maybe we'll have to pull the plug.

Sarah: What do you mean?

Monty: How long can we keep him alive on a ventilator? For God's sake. He's had three strokes in two days. He's not going to recover.

Sarah: You don't know that. He might.

Monty: He's a vegetable Sarah. What was it Will called it? Persistent vegetative state?

Sarah: That's not true! Even Will said it hadn't got to that!

Monty: He who knows everything. But that's obviously where it's going. Face the facts Sarah. We might have to put him out of his misery.

Sarah: Turn things off? Stop him breathing you mean? How can you even think about that?! Christ Monty!

Monty: It's just reality Sarah.

Sarah: Your reality, not mine.

Monty: And then what about the feeding tube? Even if he comes through on the ventilator, how long do we keep the feeding tube in?

Sarah: You mean should we starve him to death? You're impossible! Anyway, we need to see what Mummy thinks.

Monty: So that's why you think we should have a "family meeting".

Sarah: Exactly.

Monty: Two items on the agenda then. Whether to continue Dad's existence, and whether to end another one that's just started.

Sarah: Maybe start with Apologies. Like sorry I'm being a complete and utter shit. Daddy's lying in a hospital bed, paralysed, and all you can do is make fun of it all.

Monty: He always made fun of me. When he wasn't raging at me. Piano was for pansies he said.

Sarah: Pansies? Oh, he always brought me lovely flowers when he came to school.

Monty: And that deserves a medal or something?

Sarah: His medals were wonderful! I was so proud when he wore them. Unbearably proud.

Monty: But you bore it. Boring boring. You've got to tell him about the baby, Sarah. If you really do think he can hear.

Sarah: He wouldn't understand.

Monty: What now, or ever?

Sarah: Well definitely now. And I can't bother Mummy with my problems while he's in the state he is.

Monty: But it's the same argument isn't it? Dad and the baby. Do we want to play God with either of them?

Sarah: It's not like that. Christ Monty! Don't you know anything?

Monty: Like what?

Sarah: You can have a termination any time up to 24 weeks.

Monty: So, is that what you're thinking?

Sarah: I don't know! I don't know!

I need a drink. Is there any wine in the fridge?

Monty: Dunno. See for yourself. *(He goes back to playing the piano)*

(Sarah goes to the fridge and takes out the white wine Sam put in earlier. She finds a corkscrew but struggles to open it)

Sarah: Bloody hell. Can you open this?

(Monty doesn't respond)

Sarah: Monty!

Monty: What?

Sarah: Open this bottle will you?

Monty: *(Sighing and getting up from the piano)* I wonder how long he can hold out against screw caps on wine bottles. Doing his King Canute. We both need a drink. *(He gets the cork out and looks for some glasses)*

Do you want to tell Dad about Peter Wilkinson or shall I?

Sarah: The press thing you mean?

Monty: And the other thing. Mum playing away from home.

Sarah: You wouldn't Monty! Surely not! Not even you could be that cruel, when he's in a hospital bed. That would be unforgivably...

Monty: Uncaring you mean?

Sarah: God Monty! He's at death's door, he's speechless, defenceless, and you want to inflict more pain on him? You may want to get back at him somehow – I don't really see why – but that's like, a nuclear option isn't it? He and Mummy – he's always believed she's devoted to him.

Monty: Nuclear option? Maybe we should ask lawyer Will for his views on the nuclear option. *(Imitating Will)* There's a case for saying one could put an argument...

Sarah: Stop it Monty! Or I'll break that bottle over your stupid head!

Monty: That's what you call a deterrent. Waste of good wine. You're probably not supposed to be drinking. If you're going to keep the baby that is.

Sarah: God, I don't know.

Monty: I'd have it anyway. The wine I mean.

Sarah: Not the baby?

Monty: That's more difficult. Here - one glass won't hurt.

(Sarah takes a swig of wine)

Monty: Never let it be said I didn't support my sister in her drinking.

Sarah: You're a degenerate you are!

Monty: No change there then.

Sarah: Oh Monty. What have I done? *(She sits at the table)*

Monty: I think we both know what you've done. Spare me the details. The question is what to do now.

(Beat)

Sarah: Do you remember in Cyprus when Daddy took us to see the Green Line?

Monty: What's that got to do with it?

Sarah: He said it was an example of an "insoluble argument". Military zone dividing the island in two. Since 1964!

Monty: Can you actually "solve" an argument?

Sarah: I don't know. Maybe it's "resolve". You sound like Will.

Monty: God no!

Sarah: Greeks on one side, Turks on the other. I remember. Sixty years and no-one's found an answer.

Monty: At least they're not killing each other.

Sarah: No. But whichever way you look at it, it's not good. Anything anyone suggests, it's going to be against someone's interests. So it's stalemate.

Monty: Barmy! The barmy army - patrolling an arbitrary line across some tiny island in the middle of the Med – for generations. Makes the Berlin Wall seem short-lived.

Sarah: But we had a good day that day, didn't we? Posh car and driver from the base, sunshine, nice café.

Monty: Yeah, we did.

Sarah: All the decorations and everything out for Easter.

Monty: I remember, cakes and things. But they're not so big on chocolate. Green Line, Green and Black's nowhere to be seen.

Sarah: Too hot I suppose. But Daddy was on good form.

Monty: Demob happy I should think.

Sarah: Oh, he didn't want to leave! You know that Monty.

Monty: Yeah, cut him in half and you'd find he was khaki inside.

Sarah: That's not very nice. But that day - we even got there and back without having an argument I think.

Monty: Happy days eh? Wasn't that long ago either.

Sarah: Seems like a different century. I remember I had a bit of a crush on his driver.

Monty: Did you? Really?

Sarah: Oh yes. It was a regular occurrence.

Monty: And then you went back to school and pined for him.

Sarah: I did. Actually it was quite cool to have a crush on a grown-up soldier in foreign parts.

Monty: I think you were always quite cool, in a way. Having an older, moderately good-looking sister helped my street cred a bit. I needed that.

Sarah: Monty! You've never said that before!

Monty: If you weren't good at games you had a tough time at my place. So every bit of reputation I could get from you – and you did have a bit of a reputation – was a help.

Sarah: I won't answer that! I was just envious of all the applause you got when you did a concert. I thought you were a hero.

Monty: That didn't last long.

Sarah: Just in the moment. You know. Don't get big headed.

Monty: Thanks for the reminder. Long time since I've had any applause anyway.

Sarah: Well if you hate accountancy so much, why don't you go back to it?

Monty: You know why.

Sarah: But can't you follow the dream? Now's the time to do it.

Monty: That's such a cliché Sarah. But I suppose that's what you do in PR. Stock in trade.

Sarah: Look. If you don't give it a go you'll regret it for the rest of your life. That's not a cliché, it's true.

Monty: Ah regrets. I've had a few.

Sarah: But not too few to mention.

Monty: I did get a buzz from it.

Sarah: Well there you are then. *(Beat)* I wonder if Mummy ever regretted the army life, compared to the life she could have had.

Monty: You mean with us both at home? Don't think so.

Sarah: No, but looking back, I think Daddy was more married to the regiment than he was to her.

Monty: Oh she was quite happy with that I think. And sending me back to school always seemed a relief. Couldn't wait to pack me off. And we know she had some other entertainment available.

Sarah: That's unfair!

Monty: In my teens she just wanted to separate me and Dad, so we wouldn't argue all the time. I argued with Dad about music college till I was blue in the face.

Sarah: Don't I know it.

Monty: I suppose he's the one now blue in the face. Or nearly.

Sarah: God, you can be tactless Monty. Or morbid. Anyway, couldn't you bank an accountancy qualification just as insurance...?

Monty: Banking or insurance? No thank you!

Sarah: You could bank it and then go to music college. At least you'd have something as a fall-back - which is more than I've got. Mummy always used to say maths and music go together. That's you.

(Monty sits at the table with Sarah)

Monty: I don't know.

Sarah: Take the plunge Monty! You don't want to be frustrated all your life.

Monty: You mean actually do what I want to do? Dad would go ballistic.

Sarah: That never stopped you when you were at school. Anyway, he's not in a fit state to go ballistic is he?

Monty: True.

Sarah: I used to love hearing you play. I was so disappointed when we didn't have a piano that first year in Cyprus. Really missed it.

(Beat)

Play something Monty, something relaxing. Think we need it.

*(We hear the front door open. Enter **Judy** and **Will** through the hall door)*

Sarah: *(Standing)* Hello Mummy!

Judy: Hello darling. *(She gives Sarah a hug)*

Sarah: How is he?

Judy: Not good I'm afraid. Not good at all. *(She gives Monty a hug)* They've no idea when his swallow's going to come back.

Will: Or if it's going to.

Monty: You can never be quite sure when something's going to come back. Or someone. Can you Mum?

Judy: I don't know. The staff are wonderful of course, but they say there's almost certainly going to be some brain damage. Long term.

Will: The extent of that's open to debate. Very much so.

Sarah: Oh God. It's a nightmare.

Judy: I'm not sure I can bear it. They're already asking about continued treatment if something else happens. If we want to say "Do not resuscitate". "DNR" they call it.

Sarah: *(Giving Judy another hug)* Oh Mummy! Don't leave him now.

Judy: What do you mean, leave him?

Sarah: We've got to stand by him. Absolutely stand by him.

Monty: *(Standing to attention and saluting)* Absolutely! The regiment called by the way.

Judy: What now?

Monty: They think Dad's going to be named in the press tomorrow. With Peter Wilkinson. About the Afghan thing.

Sarah: God! Have they got no feelings at all? He's had a stroke for God's sake! Journalists - they're like jackals.

Will: I suspect jackals do have some feelings. Maybe not as... developed as ours. But they must have some.

Sarah: Clever clogs.

Will: Clever dogs you mean.

Judy: That would explain it. I had a strange call on my mobile.

Sarah: What kind of strange?

Judy: Turned out it was some kind of journalist, asking about your father. Didn't say he was a journalist at first, but he was very pushy.

Sarah: You didn't say anything did you?

Judy: Well... I didn't want to be rude if that's what you mean.

Sarah: Oh mummy! Just say "no comment".

Judy: But he said they're going to publish something about Afghanistan. He wanted to get "my side of the story" as he called it. Which sounded quite reasonable to me. What your father was really like – as a family man, that sort of thing.

Monty: Family man? Huh!

Sarah: Sounds like it's coming to a bit of a head. You didn't get the paper he writes for did you?

Judy: No I didn't. And we've got enough to worry about. *(She sits down)* He's in hospital, on the stroke unit! You'd think they'd let it rest.

Will: But if they gave people an exemption, some kind of protection from the media if they were ill, where would it end?

Monty: There speaks the lawyer.

Sarah: What do you mean?

Will: Well, how ill would you have to be? Is flu bad enough, or a broken leg? And people'd just start inventing illnesses wouldn't they? There's got to be some sort of accountability.

Sarah: It's common decency Will! I can't believe you're defending the press against Daddy. He was just doing his job.

Will: But - you've got to allow investigations into abuse, alleged abuse. The army's job is basically to kill people, so it must be right it's held to account.

Sarah: Daddy's job wasn't like that at all. He was in logistics. Used to be the Royal Corps of Transport, RCT

Monty: Radio Cabs and Taxis. Not exactly the SAS.

Will: Notwithstanding, my point is the army is basically there to kill people, is it not? The logistics are just to enable that.

Sarah: And protect people. Peace missions for the UN. The Green Line in Cyprus.

Will: But with a gun in its hand. The army's "heroes" still get medals for killing people. Afghanistan or wherever.

Sarah: God, are you a pacifist now?

Will: No, not as such.

Sarah: What's that supposed to mean? Are you or aren't you?

Will: Come on Sarah, it's not as simple as that.

Sarah: Isn't it?

Judy: Oh stop it you two, will you?! I've got a terrible headache.

Will: I forgot you don't do subtlety or nuance in PR. Look, I was going to protest at the arms fair at Excel but that doesn't make me a pacifist. It's the whole military machine, and that event is just sick.

Sarah: Sick did you say?

Will: I did. It's just glorifying warfare.

Sarah: Glorifying? Who said anything about glorifying?

Will: It's a figure of speech Sarah. In Portsmouth, where my Dad is, the navy's almost sacred. It's absurd. And immoral.

Sarah: Absurd and immoral now is it? The army and navy are completely honourable professions, and it's absolutely not fair to say they're not. Daddy went in from a genuine sense of duty. Loyalty to our country, if you can understand that.

Will: For queen, sorry king, and country. Where's the resident Republican now then?

Sarah: For God's sake Will! You can be a Republican and still be loyal to your country.

Will: Well I'm sorry but...

Sarah: No you're not! You're not sorry at all. In any case, Daddy wouldn't hurt anyone, never mind actually killing someone.

Will: That's not the point.

Sarah: It is if you're the person being killed!

Will: You don't have to pull the trigger to be complicit. I mean even Peter – whatisname...

Monty: Wilkinson. The man who eats his words.

Will: Yes Peter Wilkinson. He's left the army, but that company of his, NewTeq, still supplies it. He's providing the capability to pull the trigger.

Sarah: Oh come on! That's completely different Will.

Will: No it isn't! Who has the right to take another human life, or provide the means for someone else to do that? At a profit.

Sarah: What?

Will: You don't support capital punishment do you?

Sarah: No, but...

Will: There's no difference Sarah.

Sarah: Of course there is....

Monty: And abortion...

Sarah: What?

Monty: Abortion. That's taking a life. Isn't it?

Will: It's allowable, in certain circumstances. And there's the whole debate about when it becomes a viable life anyway. There are strict legal tests for abortion.

Monty: And there aren't for capital punishment? In places they still use it?

Will: You mean Saudi Arabia? Or China? I don't think so! All the evidence...

Sarah: Oh come on Will. You're so inconsistent! You're the one who said the clock's ticking.

Judy: What clock's that darling?

Monty: Yes, what are you talking about Sarah?

Sarah: You can't have it both ways Will. You can't be all holier than thou about the army and then say "abortion? Oh, that's all fine".

Will: I didn't say that!

Monty: Isn't that what they call a hypocrite? Dad would say you're a "part time conchie" – conscientious objector, but only when it suits you.

Will: If you mean have I got a conscience, then guilty as charged. Unlike some, I do have a conscience.

Sarah: So what about your commitment to human rights then?

Judy: Come on you two. I think we should get back to what we're going to do.

Monty: On abortion you mean?

Judy: No. Your father of course.

Will: No, let's talk about abortion. We need to.

Judy: I think we've had enough of that Will.... Haven't we?

(Beat)

Monty: Is that a pregnant pause?

Sarah: Mummy. I think.... I think I'm pregnant.

(Beat)

Judy: *(Getting up and hugging Sarah)* Oh darling! That's... wonderful! Wonderful!

Sarah: Not feeling wonderful at the moment.

Judy: Perfectly natural. Course, you know that. How many weeks are you?

Sarah: Six. Maybe seven.

Judy: I was terribly sick with you, you know.

Monty: Not with me though? I was the good baby was I?

Sarah: That didn't last long. Maybe you could be a better uncle.

Will: Well thanks for involving me.

Judy: Oh Will. Of course.

Will: Yes, I was involved. Or at least I might have been. According to Sarah.

Sarah: Will, that's not fair.

Will: Isn't it? Seems perfectly fair to me. You've just decided, apparently, off your own bat, you're going to have it.

Sarah: Have I?

Will: No consultation, no discussion. That's fair is it?

Sarah: It's my body Will.

Monty: She hasn't decided yet.

Sarah: And doesn't the baby have some basic human rights? Like the right to a life?

Will: It's not a baby yet. It's hardly even a blob! Don't you know anything?!

Monty: Calm down, for God's sake.

Will: Calm down? Calm down he says!

Monty: She doesn't need you shooting your mouth off!

Will: Shooting my mouth off? I thought you were the ones who liked the shooting. Romance of the military. Unbelievable. So incredibly... naïve. And stupid.

Judy: Oh Will!

Monty: Just shut your know-it-all mouth and give us some space will you?

Will: Oh, I can give you space alright. If that's what you want. *(Goes towards the door to the hall)*

Sarah: Will – come back!

Monty: Fucking lawyers.

Will: Yeah fucking lawyers. As opposed to screwed-up narcissists, living in some kind of... colonial time-warp.

Sarah: Will!

Will: This family's so totally... fucked up. Never seen anything like it. I'm out of here!

Sarah: Will! Don't! *(She starts going after him)*

Will: Just let me know when the baby's eighteen.

(Exit Will though the hall door. We then hear the front door slam)

(Beat)

Monty: Well. Another one bites the dust. As Dad would say. If he could say anything.

Sarah: *(Sitting down again)* Don't!

Judy: Think I'll make some more coffee. *(She takes the cafetiere)*

Monty: You heard of "coffee jazz"? Meant to de-stress you. Maybe it's decaff or something..

Judy: I think we could do with some of that.

Sarah: No, I need the caffeine right now Mummy. Even if I'm not meant to.

Judy: Darling – I'm sorry. He is quite highly strung isn't he?

Monty: Should be. From a great height. We haven't got anything like coffee jazz have we? *(Looks through the CDs again)*. Don't know who plays it. Sort of seamless, endless sort of stuff.

Sarah: Thought you liked structure.

Judy: We're all full of contradictions aren't we?

Monty: No we're not!

Sarah: Very funny. What do you mean Mummy? Full of contradictions?

Judy: Well, I love your father dearly for example, but he is quite difficult to live with.

Monty: Now she says.

Sarah: That's because you don't understand him.

Judy: Oh I think I do! I saw the vulnerable side of him, which no-one else ever did.

Sarah: You gave up on him in Cyprus.

Judy: What?

Sarah: Peter Wilkinson.

Monty: Sir Peter.

Judy: What about him? I've no idea what you're talking about Sarah.

Sarah: You and Peter Wilkinson. You had an affair didn't you?

Judy: Me and Peter Wilkinson? Heavens, no! Never! Whatever made you think that? For a start, he's gay.

Sarah: What?

Judy: He came out, as they say, but not publicly, when we were in Cyprus. He was leaving just as we arrived.

Sarah: Really?

Judy: Oh yes. I didn't understand it - still don't - but I spent a lot of time on the phone trying to support him.

Sarah: Oh Mummy! Did you really? I never knew.

Judy: Peter's been married for years. And that's very important to him, so I just kept quiet about it.

Sarah: Oh that's such a relief.

Monty: Well well. Waddya know!

Sarah: You always jump to conclusions Monty.

Judy: You thought Peter and I were having an affair did you? You silly boy!

Monty: Well he obviously had a secret. Senior officer with a double life. "I'm not the man they think I am".

Sarah: Ah yes, 'Rocket Man' was that? Elton John.

Judy: I used to think your father as a bit of a rocket man. Sometimes rather difficult, but always so confident, so strong. He was defending our country, and proud of it, but he once said to me "You keep me safe". I think maybe that's the thing about strong men, what makes them attractive. We want to get behind the outer shell, and when

we do we find the inner man isn't so strong after all, and they actually need us. If you're married to a man like that, it makes you feel – I don't know – privileged in some way. You know a secret no-one else does.

Sarah: Really?

Monty: I wonder what Peter Wilkinson's wife thought about his secret.

(Judy's mobile rings. She answers it)

Judy: Judy Brown (beat) Yes? (beat). Oh, that sounds a bit... sudden (beat). OK. Yes. Well thank you for telling me.

(She rings off)

Sarah: How is he?

Judy: That was the journalist. They're publishing the Afghanistan thing tomorrow.

Sarah: Oh God!

Judy: Well I like to think of your father in Afghanistan. In his prime. Standing firm.

Monty: Well he's not standing firm now. Can't even get out of bed. And once Sarah's media friends have got their teeth into him, who knows?

Sarah: They're not my friends!

Judy: The thing is, I can't think of him as disabled or anything, or brain damaged, God forbid. It's like it's not really him in that bed at all.

Sarah: I know. He was always the Rocket Man to me as well.

(Beat)

Remember your Elton John impersonations? Had me in stitches.

Monty: Spent ages on the glasses.

Sarah: They really worked. Really. 'Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me', I remember that.

Monty: 'These cuts I have, they need love to help them heal'.

Sarah: Yes!

Monty: Maybe 'Goodbye Yellow Brick Road's more appropriate right now.

Judy: What are we going to do children? What *are* we going to do?

Monty: We can tell them to stop ventilating him. Least I think we can.

Judy: Oh Monty. Don't say that!

Monty: He wouldn't have much of a life if he... if he did come back to earth. Not sure what the rules are. Where's a bloody lawyer when you need one? Call for back-up, as they say.

Judy: Oh please, we can't go down that route. We just can't. Even if he *is* disabled.

Monty: We may have to decide quite soon.

Judy: But who are we to decide?

Sarah: We're his family, that's who!

Judy: I sometimes think the regiment was his family. That's why he was so lost when he retired; he'd have carried on for years if he could have. Fifty five's no age at all these days. *(She pushes the plunger down on the cafetiere)* No age at all.

(Beat)

He'd be so proud you're going to give him a grandchild though darling.

Sarah: Would he? You think he'd be proud Mummy? Really?

Judy: Oh yes! We both would. Will.

Monty: Not Will again, please.

Sarah: Even "out of wedlock"? Daddy's such a traditionalist.

Judy: Oh he'll love it. He was always very good with you two when you were little.

Monty: I remember him building Airfix kits with me. Not aeroplanes, but little lorries and things. There was a Land Rover we did which I was very proud of. But he's not going to be able to enjoy any grandchildren is he? Be honest.

Judy: Well no, not at the moment obviously. But there must be hope. We've just got to have faith.

Sarah: If he can understand, maybe just a new life coming into the world will give him some sort of stimulus.

Judy: Exactly. He's got to know there's something positive. And we're thinking of him. It's the extremes of life – when people are vulnerable, right at the edge, when they need us most – like babies – those moments which show if we're really civilised or not. Whether we're, you know, fully human.

Sarah: Gosh, Mummy. Moments of life and death.

Monty: As Bill Shankly said about football, it's not a question of life and death - it's more important than that.

Judy: Oh Monty!

Sarah: Some of us have to make jokes just because we can't face the extremes.

Monty: I can face the extremes alright. Are we going to keep him on a ventilator? What about "Do not resuscitate"? Wouldn't it be kinder to say that? Or is it kinder not to take that away from him.

Sarah: Kindness from my brother. That's a novelty!

Monty: Well are we saying we don't want to take anything away? At this point. Is that what we're saying? Is it?

Sarah: Yes. Yes.

Judy: Yes, and we've got to keep talking to him. The brain can do amazing things you know.

Monty: Negative capability isn't all it's cracked up to be then.

Sarah: What?

Monty: That uncertainty, the twilight zone. It's not really where we want to be. Not for long anyway.

Sarah: You're right, it isn't. I'll come home for a bit Mummy and help.

Judy: Oh would you darling?

Sarah: Of course, course. And one of us should be with him as much as possible - try and get him out of the twilight. Either you, me or Monty.

Judy: We've got to keep talking to him. I'm sure he can hear us.

Monty: Don't tell him I might go to music college though.

Judy: Goodness! Might you darling? That's news!

Sarah: Really?

Monty: Yeah, think so. If I can get in.

Sarah: Oh Monty! Course you will. You'll be brilliant!

Monty: Need to get back into practice. Live a little. Even if I won't earn enough to feed myself. Even down a tube.

Judy: Oh darling! You brave boy!

Sarah: That's fantastic!

(Sarah and Monty embrace. The landline telephone rings)

Sarah: I'll get it Mummy.

Judy: Oh thank you darling.

Monty: Bloody Peter Wilkinson I bet. Calling to argue about what happened in Afghan.

Sarah: *(Picking up the phone)* Hello.... No it's her daughter....Oh! Right.... Right....My God!...I see, yes. We'll come straight over.... Thank you....Yes. Yes. Thank you for ringing. *(She puts the phone down)*

He's going.

(Beat)

Monty: Not AWOL I presume.

Sarah: No, another stroke. Massive one.

Judy: Oh my God! Belty!

Sarah: Mummy! *(She embraces Judy)*

Monty: *(Sitting down)* Just when we'd managed to actually agree on something.

Sarah: Oh don't change the habit of a lifetime Monty.

Judy: *(Vaguely)* A lifetime?

(Sarah goes to Monty and puts a hand on his shoulder)

Oh children! My children! *(Beat)* I think we've all got to be very brave.

(We hear the Appassionata playing softly. It's the same passage as before, but this time it gradually fades out, as the lights fade to blackness)

SCENE 5

Spotlight on Sam, at the centre of a dark stage. He's younger and in uniform.

Sam: Argument's always good for the soul I think. Flexes those mental muscles. Makes you think about your point of view. What you believe in.

You've got to have some sort of belief in this job. Some sort of conviction, otherwise you couldn't do it. Killing people.

Courage of your convictions I suppose - funny phrase that. We're big on courage in the army.

But we're not killing people exactly. We're in logistics. The regiment only kills, and only very rarely, in order to stop other people getting killed. I think that's what we're doing. Terms of engagement are always a bit ambiguous.

Not really sure what the belief thing is exactly. Traditional values - wife, children, career, yes. Maybe not in quite that order. And on the side of freedom of course. Western democracy and all that. Taking a stand against tyranny, dictatorship, fundamentalism. The bad guys.

And the good old Church of England. Because that's what the padre is. Good man the padre. Christmas. Easter. And where we got married of course. All seemed a bit clearer, bit more certain then.

Wars of religion are the most vicious, so they say. And civil wars. They're mean and vicious. And confused. Like other wars I suppose. No real courage in any of them. And nothing about "love thy neighbour", that's for sure. Beating the shit out of them more like.

But everyone says the most important thing, what they believe in most, is family, capital "F". I never really understood that. Politicians stepping down to "spend more time with their families". Celebrities and industry big shots saying their pile isn't worth anything compared to the "love and support of their family". Aah! And then they get divorced, and there's an almighty bloody battle between the lawyers.

God, lawyers. Bloody know-alls, they just muddy the water. On the one hand this, on the other hand that.

But families are always fighting and arguing aren't they? Couples all the time. Parents and children. Children fighting amongst themselves. Part of human nature.

Children. Your legacy, supposedly. But they're never what you expect them to be, or what you want them to be.

Is that the point though? Does everyone have a different life to live? Their life and no-one else's, no matter what other people think. Even those tribesmen; they had their own lives to live. Their own things to believe in, nothing to do with us. Doesn't every life, whatever it is, have its own value?

They called themselves freedom fighters, those tribesmen. We called them terrorists, or "insurgents". Depends which side you're on I suppose.

I came so close to dying in Afghan. Really close. Death looked in at the window, as it were, just as we were about to go home. Thank God we got out and shut the door. But you know it's going to open again, you just don't know when.

Didn't have the family with me of course. Not like Cyprus, that was later. And no sign of a Green Line – just an unholy bloody mess. You didn't know who was who. Friend, foe or fanatic. The fog of war.

Judy: *(Off stage)* Belty darling? Can you hear me?

Sam: My God, it was a near thing. Mines everywhere, RPG's round every corner, all kinds of weapons, some of them so primitive, machetes and things, hidden all over the village. I was sure he had a weapon. Absolutely sure. They all did. But could I find it? Could I hell!

It was the middle of the day – so hot in a helmet, I thought I was going to pass out. Didn't seem to bother them. Used to it I suppose, in their long, dirty nightshirts.

We put them all up against the wall. We had to search them. Had to. Had to strip them. And their houses. Or what passed for houses. And the bloody women were screaming - you wouldn't believe the noise. And they all seemed to have babies; they were bloody bawling as well.

Judy: Belty darling, are you there? The children are here with me.

Sarah: We're rooting for you Daddy, all of us. Monty's here as well.

Sam: So we've got them all lined up, facing the wall, starkers, nothing but their beards, and there's this God-awful screaming going on from the women, crazy gibberish it was, so loud you couldn't hear yourself think. And Peter, the smart Alec, says "Are we supposed to be doing this?"

"It's a bloody war you idiot" I shout.

"But they're not soldiers" says Peter, above the din. "They're not combatants".

"What do you mean, not combatants?" - I'm yelling. "They're all combatants! If you know which ones have got weapons we can let the other ones go, but if not we treat them all as enemy". Sweat's pouring down my face, stinging my eyes so I can hardly see.

Monty: *(Off stage)* Don't think he can hear you Mum. He's gone.

Sam: "This can't be right" says Peter, the smartarse, cool as you like. As if it's all cut and dried.

"Now's a fine time to have a conscience" I shout. "We're in a fucking war!" I'm bellowing, but I don't think he heard me.

Sarah: *(Off stage)* Come on Daddy. Keep on fighting!

Sam: Then one of the bastards pulls out a knife. From nowhere. He's starkers for God's sake! Bloody huge it was. And quick as a flash he's got it on my throat. And he means it. God, did he mean it! Stinking breath in my face. Broken, rotting teeth, bleeding gums.

Tough guys say they thrive on conflict. But no-one really does, even those who want to be a hero. We all just... pretend. That's how we get through life. And death. But when it hits you in the face, the throat, then it really is vicious. You can't hide behind the bluff. Once you've seen the jaws of the monster, you know what conflict really is.

Judy: Come on Belty, be brave!

Sam: No-one ever understands that. The sheer wet-your-pants terror of the moment. Argument, politics, rights and wrongs, they haven't got anything to do with it – the moment when the little boy, the little boy's caught by the monster, at the mercy of something seething with anger, so primaeval, so unbelievably... terrifying. *(He starts to shiver and cry)*

I was so bloody frightened. I tell you. Really fucking terrified. Nothing flashed before my eyes, I just shook and whimpered, whimpered like a baby, and then ...

Monty: Go on old man, you can do it, I know you can do it.

Sam: ...then something happened. I can't... I can't quite remember what, a rocket or something, but I'm standing there, so scared, so bloody scared... and all of a sudden...

(There is an enormous bang and the spotlight goes out)

(Blackout)