

## Characters

- Kat (F)** - Middle aged and moneyed. Once, a high flyer in a workplace she has left to bring up kids
- Jude (F)** - A compulsive with home improvements on a constant quest for the perfect home.
- Carolyn (F)** - A smart and trendy young mum. An avid viewer of Grand Designs.
- Stewart (M)** - An architect and recently single father. A little scruffy and a little bewildered.
- Nadia (F)** - A serious, traditional, practical woman.
- Sophie (F)** - A slightly alternative overworked mum of 3. Constantly in a rush.
- Auctioneer (M/F)** - Voice over only.
- Children (F)** - Six children, each belonging to one of the main characters. The children do not speak or perform any independent actions in the play. They could be real, mimed, or staged in some other way.

## ACT 1

### Scene 1 – Outside School Gates

**(Lights up, tabs open to reveal the gates of a private girl’s school. The gates are ajar, awaiting the early morning rush of “the drop-off”. We are outside. Behind, the backdrop reveals an expensive looking school building. Enter, Kat. Middle aged, well dressed. Perhaps too well dressed for the school-run, but carrying three large bags emblazoned with the school logo. She hurries her daughter in front of her.)**

**Kat:** Bye, Darling! Flute! Don’t forget flute lesson - Bye -bye!

**(She pushes her daughter forward towards the open gates - and then pulls her back again.)**

**Kat:** Oh - oh - Don’t forget, flute.

**(Pushes a flute bag onto her and then pushes her forward. Then pulls her back again.)**

**Kat:** Gym kit - Gym kit! You know you really are old enough to remember this stuff for yourself! Mummy can’t -

**(She thrusts a gym bag onto her daughter.)**

**Kat:** And books - here books.

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**(She bundles the last bag onto her daughter and pushes her at the gates, then and at the last moment jerks her back again.)**

**Kat:** Really? No kiss for Mummy? Really? Mummy pays the school fees, you know.

**(She attempts a noisy kiss, but pulls back at the last moment.)**

**Kat:** Make up - make up. No smudgy smudgy.

**(Kat finally pushes her daughter through the gates and waves after her. She addresses the audience)**

**Kat:** So you’re thinking of sending your daughter here? Can you afford the fees? Are you sure? Appearances can be deceiving, I suppose. Well, coming to me first was a good move. Nothing happens here without me knowing about it. And getting in early was

a good decision too. Before the fight starts. Out there, right now there's a war going on. Eight twenty on the first day of term. A thousand four-by-fours whose drivers only ever drive this one road - And four parking spaces. Well, three now I'm here. You don't get to year six without learning a few things. I've been through this before with my older girls. I know the ropes. Plus, I'm an old girl myself. That's why they - all the other mothers - they all - you know. There's no hierarchy here. But if there was, I'd be at the top of it. Another reason to be here early on the first day of term. Can't let the gossip train leave without one. The fight out there is nothing to what goes on behind those gates. Year six, in case you don't know, is the big one. End of the year - the Birchley entrance exam - the one hour that decides whether you get into Birchley House Ladies College or, God forbid, you have to fight for a place at the local comp - which in our case is Feltham Young Offenders Institution, or might as well be. The rest of your life sorted right there at the age of 11 - So no pressure. Don't worry - they've put a lot of research and a lot of resources here into finding out just how much stress a pre-teen girl can take before she snaps. What's the matter? Changing your mind? Maybe your precious little one needs a more nurturing environment. Well, there isn't one. Not in this city. Perhaps you need to move to the country. But Make no mistake - that next generation of powerful, successful women you keep hearing about - the ones who are going to take on the world? This is where they're made. Welcome to Anorexia High. So- First come the Nannies -

**(Enter a group of 4 nannies. They sweep across the stage, talking loudly amongst themselves. Many accents are present. They fire the children through the gates, and exit as fast as they came. If no cast members are available, nannies could simply be audio SFX.)**

**Kat:** They get in early because nannies don't drive. Nannies walk or cycle to school, so, if they survive they don't have to park. That's because nannies are aspirational. Nannies are there to raise your kids in the way you imagine you would if you had time. "No, darling - we cycle everywhere", "TV? No! Tate Modern!", "Oh, no - no, no - we cook everything from scratch. I don't think they know what a Macdonalds is do they? Sophia? Sophia?". I don't do nannies. Nothing wrong with them - each nanny represents a mum who kept her high powered job - but for me, it's a matter of principle - the principle being that then I'd have to go back to work - and - well, things move on. Too late for me now. **(Gesturing through the gates)** Candida - She's my last one to go through. After this, they're all in big school - and I get my life back and - Well, I suppose I have to decide who I am then.

**(Enter Nadia, pushing a child before her. The child is loaded with bags, neatly packed and packaged.)**

**Kat:** Veena - Nadia's little one - model pupil - top of the class for everything. The FTSE 100 will be fighting over her one day.

**Nadia:** **(to the child)** You go now. And, Veena, remember, maths at lunch-break, not games. You have missed a lot in the holidays.

**(Nadia pushes her child through the gates.)**

**Kat:** Nadia, Darling!

**Nadia:** Kat.

**Kat:** Points of order - Hockey's now Wednesdays not Tuesdays, Mandarin is now compulsory as from this term. Candida's 11th birthday is next month - invites to follow at pick-up, there's a new girl starting this year.

**Nadia:** Just for one year? What is the mother thinking?

**Kat:** I'll tell you when I meet her. How was your summer?

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**Nadia:** Fraught.

**Kat:** Did you get away?

**Nadia:** No.

**Kat:** We had a bit of luck - Ben's department had a bit of a rush on and one of the traders had to cancel his leave so we picked up their trip to Barbados - all inclusive.

**Nadia:** And Ben?

**Kat:** He had to stay on at work - in demand, you know.

**Nadia:** You went on your own - again?

**Kat:** Just me and the kids.

**Nadia:** Lovely.

**Kat:** Why fraught?

**Nadia:** Do you know any private tutors?

**Kat:** I know them all. Subject? Maths, English? Mandarin?

**Nadia:** Birchley House, Obviously.

**Kat:** Already? Miss Cranshaw?

**Nadia:** Yes already. You preparing yet? We tried Cranshaw. Fully booked.

**Kat:** My other two are already there - Chandler?

**Nadia:** And her. They don't have a sibling policy, you know.

**Kat:** Not officially - Are you having trouble with Veena?

**Nadia:** She doesn't seem to understand - it's not enough to pass anymore. She has to pass well. Veena is a clever girl - but she has to buckle down. She's capable of so much more.

**Kat:** I'll email you a list. And your Mum? Is she still criticising everything you - is she still living in -

**Nadia:** No.

**Kat:** - your house?

**Nadia:** Her house - No.

**Kat:** No?

**Nadia:** It was her house.

**Kat:** Was?

**Nadia:** Last week.

**Kat:** I'm so sorry.

**Nadia:** It was -

**Kat:** A shock?

**Nadia:** No.

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**Kat:** A relief.

**Nadia:** No.

**Kat:** A - A shame?

**Nadia:** It changes things. It makes things a lot clearer for us.

**Kat:** We should so do coffee.

**Nadia:** No.

**Kat:** If there's anything I can do. Anything at all.

**Nadia:** There isn't.

**(Nadia leaves.)**

**Kat:** Oops. **(Looking out to the side of the stage)** Ah - Jude and Carolyn. I put them together in year four - put the right people together and great things happen - it's what I do. Back when I was working, I - well, anyway, I was very good, and I can't seem to give it up. Call it a hobby.

**(Enter Jude and Carolyn. Jude is dressed practically - as though she's come from a (very clean) building site. Carolyn, less so. Each ushers a child in front of her.)**

**Jude:** No - no, I've taken it all out. Guttled it. I don't like walls. RSJ's are going in on Friday.

**Carolyn:** Right across?

**Jude:** Right across. Whole of the ground floor. It'll be hell to heat, but I just don't care.

**Carolyn:** Under floor.

**Jude:** What?

**Carolyn:** Under floor heating. I'm doing it everywhere.

**Jude:** Not for me - I've sourced some Edwardian radiators.

**Carolyn:** Salvage?

**Jude:** Original.

**Carolyn:** Iron?

**Jude:** Shot-blasted.

**Carolyn:** Hate them.

**Jude:** How can you?

**Carolyn:** Underfloor is better - You have to move out while they put it down - but it's worth it for the warm feet.

**Jude:** We're all living in a caravan anyway - you should see what I've got to cook on.

**Carolyn:** And you don't have to look at radiators. Which is such a positive step. Because I like white - and you need clean lines for white. People think an empty white room is easy.

**Jude:** I know.

**Carolyn:** It's not easy.

**Jude:** I know.

**Carolyn:** When you need clean lines, details matter.

**Jude:** Everything matters.

**Carolyn:** I know - The arguments I'm having with Emily about the goldfish. She wants one of those terrible patchy ones. Can you imagine? I said "what next? - Lego?"

**Kat:** Girls!

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**Jude:** Good summer?

**Kat:** We staggered through. You? Bathroom finished?

**Jude:** A bit behind - turns out the joists are rotten. Sharing a portaloos with the builders, but hey ho!

**Kat:** Points of order - Hockey's now Wednesdays, Mandarin's compulsory. Spin at the new gym is awful, but the pool boy is hot, Candida's 11th next month - invites to follow, there's a new girl starting this year - and Nadia's Mum's dead.

**Carolyn:** Did I tell you I'm having the windows replaced?

**Jude:** The windows?

**Carolyn:** Yes.

**Jude:** No!

**Carolyn:** Smart Glass. Kat. We must organise a play date. Soon soon.

**Kat:** Diaries - Facebook me!

**Jude:** Smart -

**Carolyn:** Glass. Smart Glass.

**Carolyn:** Electric glass. You turn it on. It goes opaque. You don't need curtains. I hate curtains - and doors. Hate doors...

**(Exit Carolyn and Jude)**

**Kat:** You watch - something will come out of those two...

**(Enter Stewart guiding a child. He's not sure where he's going.)**

**Kat:** **(To the child)** Hello. Year 6? You must be the new girl.

**Stewart:** Hello. Is this - er - where we -

**Kat:** I'm Kat. We were expecting a new girl. You must be Jessica?

**Stewart:** Do you work here?

**Kat:** Work here? Ha! No! **(Thinks about it)** well - sort of - No. No! Class Rep. I'm Kat. Call me Kat.

**Stewart:** Class Rep?

**(Kat starts to guide Jessica and Stewart to the gates, eventually waving the child through.)**

**Kat:** That's right. I'm a sort of go-between for teachers and parents - I sort out any - I make sure everybody - It's mostly organising coffee mornings and drinks nights. It's what I do.

**Stewart:** **(to Jessica)** Goodbye. Have a lovely time. No, you'll be fine! Do you want me to come with you?

**(He starts to follow her in. Kat stops him.)**

**Kat:** Nobody gets in.

**Stewart:** Sorry?

**Kat:** Security - you have to drop off at the gates. You need a pass, fingerprint scan. No exceptions. Trust me: they'll take you down before you get past the trophy cabinet.

**Stewart:** Fingerprint scan?

**Kat:** Nobody gets in without a chaperone.

**Stewart:** Are you sure you don't work here?

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**Kat:** I have a job title, but not a job. I'm a busybody, basically. It's a volunteer role. You're Jessica's Dad? I can't call you Jessica's Dad all year...

**Stewart:** Stewart.

**Kat:** And you're doing drop-off. How sweet. And when will we be meeting Mrs. ah - Jessica's mummy?

**Stewart:** Let me know if you do.

**Kat:** Does she work?

**Stewart:** I don't know. Perhaps you should ask her boyfriend.

**Kat:** Oh. Single parent?

**Stewart:** Lone parent.

**Kat:** Well, if you need someone to show you around -

**Stewart:** Thank you. I probably do. Maybe, I'll see you at pickup - or one of your coffee mornings.

**Kat:** You're inviting me for coffee, and we've hardly met. I'm going to have to watch you aren't I?

**Stewart:** I'd better get to work.

**(Exit Stewart.)**

**Kat:** Coffee? Cheeky! I suppose I shouldn't be surprised. I get a lot of attention. Not that I'd - Ben and I might not be like teenagers anymore, and he does drive me mad, but I love him - well, perhaps love is too strong a word - I used to think love was a jigsaw -

assembling your perfect partner bit by bit. But it's not. Turns out it's more like musical chairs. What matters is what you're sitting on when the music stops. I've got a lot of time for Ben. Well, not a lot of time, obviously. Neither of us has much time for anything. This place keeps us both busy, what with the fees and the events... Oh, God, the events! Don't get me wrong - I love making dioramas. I should've taken that at Uni instead of Finance and Human Resource Management. More of a life skill, as it turns out.

**(Enter Sophie - a bundle of bags and three children - in a frantic rush.)**

**Kat:** Ah. Sophie - our other "lone" parent. What? No. not a hope. Not a chance in hell! Sophie! Points of order - Hockey Wednesdays, Mandarin compulsory. Candida's birthday - invites to follow, new girl, single dad. Nadia's mum's dead, and Jude's house is still not finished if you can believe that.

**Sophie:** Can't stop. New drop off times at the boys' schools - Fourteen minutes to drop Jonathan off at Sterlingwood, then James at Castlemere. There's a diversion at Hardy's Road and everything's backed up to the traffic lights and I had to go around. Plus Verity forgot her hockey shoes and we had to go back. Then I couldn't find them, so she's got her gym shoes instead. That's OK isn't it? Gym shoes instead of hockey shoes? Should be - Oh, no - it's Wednesdays now you said? I was going by last year's calendar. Did someone say we were doing swimming today? Or is that at Sterlingwood? Damn idiot! Now come on, quick Verity in you go (**she pushes one of the children through the gates**) And when you see Charlotte H, tell her you've got one of her gym shoes. Hold this, will you Kat, dear?

**(Sophie hands Kat a bag of bottles, and starts rummaging in another bag.)**

**Kat:** What are these?

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**Sophie:** Samples.

**(Kat pulls out a small bottle. It contains a vibrant yellow liquid filled with glitter. Kat looks at it suspiciously.)**

**Kat:** Samples? It's a bit -

**Sophie:** What?

**Kat:** Glittery.

**(Sophie pulls out another bottle. This one is bright green and filled with drifting sparkling stars. The next one out of the bag is a disturbing swirling red.)**

**Sophie:** Yes, great, aren't they - calming jars.

**Kat:** Calming-

**Sophie:** Jars. I'm starting a business. I've really got into it over the summer. It totally rebalances your energy. I'm just finishing setting up the website. It looks amazing! And you wouldn't believe how easy they are to make.

**Kat:** You know, I think I might. What - what do you do with them?

**Sophie:** It's an offshoot of chromatherapy, but more - you know - researched, yeh? There's papers and everything. We should totally do a coffee morning on it. I'll bring it all along.

**Kat:** What happened to the Reiki?

**Sophie:** Oh - you know - Basically you have to find the right colours to resonate with your energies...

**Kat:** And you do what with them?

**Sophie:** You stare at them.

**Kat:** Stare at them?

**Sophie:** Watch the glitter.

**(She holds up a bottle. Kat begins to watch the glitter swirling around inside the jar.)**

**Sophie:** Originally they were designed to calm babies. Stop tantrums. Hypnotic, isn't it?

**(Despite herself, Kat is staring at the liquid. Sophie becomes distracted too until they're both staring at the glitter floating inside the jar in silence.)**

**Kat:** **(Eventually)** So, any chance of your - issue - being sorted out? Has he come up with the goods yet?

**Sophie:** No. He's still being an arse. But the solicitor says he can't delay much longer, so -

**(Sophie puts the jar away.)**

**Kat:** And these jars help?

**Sophie:** If I can sell enough of them - but they just resonate total calm. I am so much more relaxed - I mean I used to be - Wow, is that the time? Look got to go. See you at pickup. Bye. bye...

**(She grabs the bottles, stuffs them into the bag, and rushes offstage.)**

**Kat:** **(Looking around)** Right - coffee, I think. And then - busy day. Candida's birthday to plan, then, I need to change. Can't wear this for pickup, can I? **(pulls out a phone)** Oooh, text from the headmaster! See - I don't give everyone my personal number - but, well, he sort of depends on me. Maybe I'll see you around - if you get in.

**(Exit Kat. Lights down. Tabs close.)**

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**Scene 2 – School gates**

**(Lights up. Tabs open. Scenery unchanged. Outside the school gates. It's now just before 4pm, and the parents are gathering to pick up their children. Jude and Carolyn are together, discussing their building work. On the other side of the stage, Nadia is waiting patiently. Between them, Stewart is shifting awkwardly, reassuring himself he's in the right place, and pretending to check his phone. Downstage, Sophie is waiting impatiently, constantly checking her watch and remembering various items she either should have brought with her, but hasn't or did bring but doesn't need. Enter Kat. Talking loudly on the phone.)**

**Kat:** Yes, Headmaster. Yes, yes. Leave it to me. I'll talk to some people. We can have a - yes -or that. No, leave it to me. Leave it to me. No, really, leave it to me! Headmaster, it's what I do!

**(Kat puts phone away, beaming, and looks around. She gathers all the mothers.)**

**Kat:** Girls, Girls? And you, Stephan.

**Stewart:** Stewart.

**Kat:** Yes, yes. **(she gathers everyone around her, exchanging greetings with each other)** 5C! No - 6C now 6C! Day 1 of year 6 - Points of order: My conversation with the headmaster just now - Exciting news - I'll get to that. Candida's birthday - Invites:

**(She hands an envelope to each mother.)**

**Nadia:** And so, it starts.

**Jude:** First day of term. First party invites.

**Kat:** **(Handing an envelope to Stewart)** I did one for Jessica. I'm sure they'll be glorious friends. Everyone, This is Stephan he's the new girl.

**(Stewart takes the envelope)**

**Stewart:** Stewart.

**Jude:** Jessica?

**Carolyn:** Stewart?

**Stewart:** Jessica.

**Nadia:** Jessica.

**Jude:** Stewart.

**Carolyn:** Jessica.

**Kat:** Nadia, Carolyn, Jude. Stewart is single, so watch out! He's already invited me in for coffee.

**Stewart:** No, I -

**Kat:** **(to Stewart)** Give me your email.

**Stewart:** Sorry?

**Kat:** There are *A lot* of mailings, so I usually do a digest for the class - just the stuff you absolutely need - ten or twelve headlines - every Wednesday and Friday.

**Stewart:** How many?

**Kat:** I hope everyone's been getting my emails, so you're all up to date on the timetables - and the clubs. Lacrosse is now a paid extra - we all got that didn't we?

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**Sophie:** I didn't get that.

**Nadia:** It's year six. We don't have time for games.

**Sophie:** I've had to change my email - and I'm not sure who's got the new one and who's got the old one, and I was on the phone to them for - but my phone is rubbish so the battery died and I got cut off - then I complained about that and when they upgraded that I lost all my addresses so I can't contact the email people -

**Stewart:** Ok - my address is Stewart dot - Look, here, I'll type it in **(Kat gives him her phone and he taps in an address)**.

**Kat:** Oh, and Re: birthdays - we have a bit of a rule - no plastic crap. The last thing we want is bedrooms full of Barbies, ponies and jewellery making kits. We do Amazon vouchers here - makes the whole thing a lot simpler.

**Stewart:** Amazon vouchers?

**Jude:** (to Kat) What does he do?

**Nadia:** Something in the city, I expect.

**Stewart:** Architect.

**Carolyn:** I need an architect. Mine is too -

**Kat:** Expensive?

**Carolyn:** Practical. Too practical. He keeps telling me what I can't do. Do you do extensions?

**Stewart:** Not by choice- Nudging public buildings in a more eco-direction - that's my -

**Carolyn:** I do love eco architecture - wood and everything.

**Stewart:** Well, it's not necessarily -

**Carolyn:** Anything we'd recognise?

**Stewart:** Um - I put the wind turbines on the Unit7 building.

**Carolyn:** That new one in the city? My husband works opposite that. Says it makes an awful noise.

**Jude:** Mine works in the next bank along. Not right next, but the one after that. We're quite close.

**Carolyn:** You need to make the lines sharper.

**Stewart:** The lines?

**Carolyn:** Yes. You know that Dyson fan?

**Stewart:** Yes -

**Jude:** Oh, yes. That's nice, that is.

**Carolyn:** They did that with no blades, didn't they?

**Jude:** Oh, yes, that would be much nicer.

**Stewart:** Well, I'm not going to be doing much of that I don't think. I might have to - change direction I've had to go freelance you see - I'm doing all the childcare, so -

**Kat:** Mummy's out of the picture.

**All:** Oh -

**Stewart:** So I may have to take on some smaller projects.

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**Carolyn:** Extensions?

**Stewart:** Hmm...

**Nadia:** Dead?

**Stewart:** Sorry?

**Nadia:** She's dead, then?

**Stewart:** No.

**Nadia:** Well, what's wrong with her? Why isn't she here?

**Stewart:** Last time I saw her, she was in a -

**Kat:** Hospital?

**Stewart:** No.

**Kat:** Relationship?

**Stewart:** Sports car.

**Kat:** Oh.

**Stewart:** She seemed fine.

**Kat:** I wish Ben would die. Well, not die exactly - I don't wish him ill - but just be dead. You know?

**Nadia:** No.

**Kat:** A widow is mysterious - I don't fancy the process of becoming one - that's just masses of paperwork, but being one - being one is romantic. Don't you think?

**Stewart:** Not really.

**Kat:** I could pull that off, don't you think? - At least I'd know where he was if he was dead. Maybe I should have an affair - Not really - I just meant one needs a hobby. I don't think Ben would even care. What I need is -

**Nadia:** **(to Stewart)** How do you think you're going to do this on your own?

**Stewart:** I expect I'll muddle through.

**Nadia:** **(to Stewart)** A support network. That's what you need.

**Stewart:** I'm sure.

**Jude:** No nanny?

**Carolyn:** Or a nanny. They're nearly as good, some of them.

**Jude:** I think I'd feel a bit uncomfortable with that.

**Nadia:** It's harder than it looks; you know you'll find that out.

**Carolyn:** He will. You will find that.

**Jude:** Au-Pairs, then. Do you fancy an Au-pair?

**Kat:** That depends on who she is, doesn't it Stewart?

**Sophie:** Well, I've got three - not au-pairs - all at different schools. And it's fine. Absolutely fine. Christ!

**Stewart:** What is it?

**Sophie:** I've forgotten something.

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**Stewart:** What?

**Sophie:** Not a clue.

**(Sophie starts rummaging through bags.)**

**Nadia:** **(To Stewart)** Make sure she studies. And make sure she eats. Men, they like to get one thing right at a time - then they think it's OK to let everything else slide.

**Stewart:** Ok.

**Nadia:** And do not forget the ironing. She cannot learn if she feels crumpled.

**Stewart:** I was thinking since I'm new, I could organise a coffee morning next week. Just to get to know -

**Kat:** I organise the coffee mornings!

**Stewart:** Ok -

**Kat:** Oh, you know all about the coffee shops round here, do you?

**Stewart:** No - I -

**Kat:** Grace's serves something that tastes like luke-warm water, and the one with the sourdough bread in the window does excellent courgette cake, but they refuse outright to serve you a coffee until you've picked the bean variety and selected which breed you want your milk from. Is that what you want? I think we'll make it The Bridge again girls? I'll email you the details, Stewart.

**Stewart:** Ok. Thank you.

**Kat:** How did you get in?

**Stewart:** Sorry?

**Kat:** To the school. How come you got a place?

**Stewart:** I -

**Kat:** Do you know someone?

**Stewart:** Should I?

**Nadia:** Places here are like gold dust!

**Stewart:** We just applied. We moved down from North London and -

**Nadia:** He just applied.

**Stewart:** Yes.

**Kat:** Just like that?

**Stewart:** Pretty much.

**Jude:** She must be very bright.

**Nadia:** Do you know what I had to do to get Veena in? We had six months of private tutoring just to get through the entrance exam - and that was when she was 5!

**Kat:** I think we all had tutoring.

**Carolyn:** Who was yours?

**Nadia:** We had Mrs Bradlington.

**Jude:** We couldn't get Bradlington. There was a waiting list for her. We had to go to Dickens.

**Kat:** Bradlington's always got a waiting list.

**Nadia:** We had to pre-tutor with Mrs. Wishbone first. Wishbone is like a feeder for Bradlington.

**Stewart:** You had your kids tutored to get into the school? At 5?

**Jude:** Only way.

**Stewart:** And you had to have them tutored to qualify for the tutor?

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**Nadia:** There's a lot of competition here.

**Kat:** Normally.

**Stewart:** I assumed you just paid your money and joined up. I suppose they had a gap.

**Kat:** They don't have gaps.

**Nadia:** You probably fit into a quota.

**Stewart:** What?

**Kat:** So, I've just been talking to God.

**Stewart:** To who?

**Sophie:** The headmaster. She means the headmaster.

**Kat:** And he has asked me - he's insisted that I organise a charity do - a little Christmas charity do just before the end of term. I'm thinking a ball - and a raffle - a party bag -

**Jude:** Oh, super.

**Sophie:** Kids or grownups?

**Kat:** Grownups, darling. The "friends of-" could've thrown something together, of course, but the headmaster was very keen I should do it - especially after the Prague fiasco - and I don't like to see a grown man beg - well, I do, but we can talk about that later, Stewart. Only joking. I'm thinking Black Tie, dinner, it'll be a couple of hundred a head. You think people will go for that?

**Carolyn:** Of course they will.

**Nadia:** I won't.

**Kat:** You've got a dinner suit, Stewart?

**Stewart:** I -

**Kat:** I'm sure Ben's got an old one he can lend you. What's your inside leg?

**Stewart:** I'm sure I can find something.

**Jude:** You'll be sold out - it'll be a top night!

**Kat:** Marvellous. Keep your eyes peeled for prizes. Anything shiny.

**Stewart:** What's the charity?

**Kat:** Sorry?

**Sophie:** Which charity is it for?

**Kat:** Not sure - didn't ask - awareness, I think.

**Sophie:** Oh.

**Nadia:** Of what?

**Kat:** What?

**Stewart:** Awareness is usually to make you aware of something specific.

**Kat:** I don't know - just general awareness.

**Stewart:** Perhaps you should check.

**Kat:** Perhaps I should. It'll be something - you know - worthy.

**Jude:** (To Nadia) - Did I see you on Rightmove?

**Carolyn:** Yes! Yes! - I saw that - it was your house, wasn't it?

**Jude:** It looked just like - was it, Nadia? Was it?

**Carolyn:** It was. I'm sure it was.

**Nadia:** Yes, We are selling our home.

**Jude:** It wasn't up on Saturday

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**Nadia:** No, it wasn't.

**Carolyn:** How exciting! Tell all!

**Nadia:** That is all.

**Jude:** I know! I check Rightmove most days! - I'm totally an addict.

**Carolyn:** Oh, so am I. (she pulls out her phone) I've got a widget on my phone - look - local search - the moment anything comes up I get a ping! It's like "hello? House for sale! Hello."

**Jude:** I so have to get that!

**Carolyn:** Here it is: "Three bedroom Victorian semi-detached. This beautiful-"

**Jude:** Hardly!

**Carolyn:** Could be -

**Jude:** Oh, yes - in the right hands.

**Carolyn:** Could be lovely - "in need of some updating"

**Jude:** No kidding! Sorry, Nadia, no offence, but -

**Carolyn:** Why are you moving?

**Nadia:** Personal reasons.

**Carolyn:** Your Mum's died.

**Nadia:** Yes.

**Jude:** So you can finally get the house YOU want!

**Carolyn:** It's a good time. A very good time to trade up.

**Nadia:** Down. I'm trading down.

**Jude:** Would you take an offer?

**Nadia:** Are you moving?

**Jude:** Good lord, no! With the amount of work I'm having done? Mind you -

**Carolyn:** It's a good time - prices are -

**Nadia:** Not such a good time.

**Sophie:** Take this. **(rummages in her bag and pulls out a bottle of coloured liquid)** It will help.

**Nadia:** **(Regarding the bottle)** Thank you.

**Kat:** It's a sample.

**Stewart:** A what?

**Kat:** You stare at it.

**(They all stare, hypnotised.)**

**Jude:** **(Eventually)** And it was her property?

**Sophie:** If it's not the right shade, we can do a session. I'm free on - actually just call me - once I've got my phone sorted out -

**Nadia:** Yes.

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**Jude:** The photos aren't up yet. Just the floor plan.

**Carolyn:** Gives you time to decorate.

**Nadia:** I'm not going to decorate. I'm moving.

**Jude:** You need to decorate first.

**Sophie:** Yellow is good.

**Carolyn:** White.

**Jude:** At the very least. It's expected.

**Sophie:** White walls cause suicides. Statistically more dangerous than smoking!

**Carolyn:** Refit - new kitchen.

**Jude:** Gloss cupboards. Butler sink.

**Carolyn:** **(Together)** Floorboards!

**Jude:** **(Together)** Floorboards!

**Jude:** You haven't extended?

**Nadia:** No.

**Carolyn:** You so should.

**Nadia:** It is not an option.

**Carolyn:** Why not?

**Nadia:** None of your business.

**Carolyn:** Someone will get a bargain! Motivated seller, and all that.

**Jude:** A developer.

**Carolyn:** Someone...

**Jude:** Sophie! Sophie you should so buy Nadia's house.

**Kat:** The money hasn't come through yet.

**Carolyn:** Still? Why not? It's been months.

**Sophie:** 18 -

**Jude:** Still in limbo. You poor thing.

**Kat:** The solicitors are still fighting it out. Her ex is being an arse!

**Carolyn:** Waiting to restart her life.

**Sophie:** Oh, it's fine. Fine. Just a matter of time. Paperwork. The affairs are a bit more complicated than I thought. It's a bit stretched right now - and a bit cramped in the flat - but it could be anytime now - which reminds me, I have to run some papers over to - oh, which means we'll have to do chemistry homework in the car. Is it going to be a messy one, do you think?

**Nadia:** We can't wait. We're selling now. We may go to auction.

**Carolyn:** **(Together)** Oooh - Auction!

**Jude:** **(Together)** Oooh - Auction!

**Carolyn:** I'd so love to buy at auction.

**Sophie:** I could never do that!

**Carolyn:** You'll be able to when your settlement comes through.

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**Sophie:** Not if it needed work.

**Jude:** You shouldn't be afraid of a bit of work.

**Sophie:** We couldn't live on a building site - have you seen my life? - Oh Christ!

**Kat:** What is it?

**Sophie:** I think I left the key in the door again.

**Jude:** We've been living on a building site for months. It's fine.

**Carolyn:** I can't do that - I have to move out while work's being done.

**Carolyn:** **(to Nadia)** Where are you going?

**Nadia:** What?

**Carolyn:** Where are you moving?

**Sophie:** I've just got this image in my head of the key in the lock and me walking away.

**Nadia:** Somewhere further out.

**Carolyn:** Somewhere cheaper.

**Nadia:** Possibly Croydon.

**Jude:** Croydon?

**Carolyn:** Really?

**Nadia:** Possibly.

**Jude:** Could be good.

**Carolyn:** Could it?

**Jude:** It's due to come up.

**Carolyn:** Parts maybe...

**Jude:** A lot of smart money heading that way. Good links.

**Carolyn:** but Croydon?

**Jude:** Which school will you go to?

**Nadia:** This one!

**Carolyn:** It's a long school-run.

**Nadia:** Then we will get up earlier!

**Carolyn:** I don't see why you'd want to move out of area.

**Nadia:** We don't want to. We can afford the school or the house. We choose the school.

**(Pause)**

**Carolyn:** But, Croydon?

**Jude:** We could help you look.

**Carolyn:** We have an eye...

**Jude:** **(to Carolyn)** We DO have an eye.

**Carolyn:** What's your budget?

**Sophie:** **(Finding her key)** No, it's here! It must be the car key - I've left the car key in the door! **(Exit Sophie in a rush)**

**Stewart:** When do they come out?

**Kat:** Any second.

**Nadia:** You see - how will you remember birthdays if you can't remember that?

**Stewart:** I know my daughter's birthday. It's -

**(Everyone looks expectantly at him)**

**Stewart:** It's in March.

**Nadia:** March, he says!

**(SFX. a bell rings. The adults all turn to the gates. In a moment, five children run out of the gates all at the same time. The adults rush around, grabbing their own, say their goodbyes and bundle their children offstage, fussing over them. One child is left until last, and once everyone but Kat has gone, Sophie enters quickly, and grabs her child.)**

**Sophie:** Everyone gone? Stewart seems -

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**Kat:** I don't know how he got in. There's a waiting list, you know. A lot of people were disappointed this year. A lot of people.

**Sophie:** - I'm a minute and a half behind picking up Alice now - if I don't get to the crossing before the 4:12 comes through, I'll be stuck in the one way for an hour...

**(She rushes off. Kat is left alone with her child. SFX. Mobile phone rings.)**

**Kat:** Yes, Ben? **(To her child)** Shh! Candida! **(To ben)** What? What is it? Oh, well, there's a surprise. Yes, yes, I know. Clients, blah blah. Working late, blah, blah. Microwave? No, I don't think there will, actually! Yes, you do that, why don't you?

Fine. Just make sure you book the Saturday off for Candida's birthday! **(To Candida)** Daddy says goodnight.

**(Kat turns the phone off and drags Candida offstage. Lights down. Curtain.)**

### Scene 3 – School Gates

**(Lights up. Tabs open. It's the end of another school day. Kat, Nadia, Jude and Carolyn are on stage waiting for the children. Stewart is with them, but is trying to work on a tablet, and ignore the rest. Sophie rushes on stage.)**

**Sophie:** Am I late? Thank God I'm not late. It's impossible, these new pick-up times are mad!

**Kat:** You are late - you're a day late!

**Sophie:** What? It's Monday - I was sure it was - Tuesday?

**Stewart:** **(Looking up from his tablet)** Relax - she just means you missed Candida's birthday party.

**Kat:** What you missed was the best party ever! Worth every penny. Candida was so disappointed you weren't there, but I expect you had a reason.

**Sophie:** Oh god, yes, the boys both had other parties yesterday - and then I had to go to the solicitor again because we're waiting again for him to respond with - how did it go?

**Kat:** I don't like to blow my own trumpet, as you know, but it was - it was -

**Stewart:** It was an Orwellian nightmare.

**Sophie:** Where was it again?

**Kat:** Kidzania!

**Sophie:** Kid's - what?

**Nadia:** Kidzania.

**Stewart:** Imagine an I.S. training camp but run by venture capitalists.

**Sophie:** A what?

**Kat:** It's a whole town - in miniature - there are shops and travel agents and a bank, and a little restaurant - and the children get to dress up and work in them.

**Stewart:** Like in a sweatshop –

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**Kat:** Like in a dressing up game!

**Stewart:** Oh, yes, that's right - If your little one wants to buy anything, she'll need to go to the job centre and get a job to earn money she can spend.

**Kat:** Not real money.

**Sophie:** Toy money?

**Stewart:** To train them to be good little consumers.

**Kat:** **(To Stewart)** Go and play on your iPad.

**Stewart:** Do you know what they had Jessica doing?

**Kat:** Whatever she wanted to do - that's the point of it!

**Stewart:** She joined the police force.

**Sophie:** Sounds like fun.

**(Enter Nadia)**

**Stewart:** They had her on patrol, searching the town for terrorist bombs.

**Kat:** How adorable!

**Stewart:** You think that's OK, do you?

**Kat:** It's just a bit of fun.

**Stewart:** What would they have done if they'd caught a suspect - waterboarding, perhaps?

**Kat:** You just don't understand girls.

**Stewart:** You remind me of my ex-wife.

**Kat:** I'm not sure how to take that.

**Stewart:** Neither am I.

**Nadia:** Veena spent the whole day in the theatre! What a waste of time that was.

**Sophie:** As long as she enjoyed it -

**Nadia:** She could have worked in the bank - got some experience is all I'm saying.

**(Enter Carolyn and Jude)**

**Jude:** No- building control doesn't care what it looks like as long as it doesn't fall down - the planning department doesn't care if it falls down as long as it looks like everything else.

**Carolyn:** Well who makes sure you can live in it?

**Jude:** Nobody cares about that - keep up.

**Nadia:** **(To Sophie)** With Veena, you need to keep her focussed - otherwise she - We were planning her new homework schedule last week. Just blocking out the weekends until the Birchley entrance exam - and do you know what she did?

**Sophie:** What?

**Nadia:** She just suddenly burst into tears.

**Sophie:** Poor thing -

**Kat:** **(To Carolyn and Jude)** Well, you had fun, didn't you girls?

**Jude:** Glorious fun! We worked in the estate agent's didn't we?

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**Carolyn:** Yes.

**Stewart:** What did the girls do?

**Nadia:** **(To Sophie)** I eventually got out of her what it was. Do you know what she was crying about?

**Sophie:** Wrong colour calming jar?

**Nadia:** Global warming! I'm going to have a word with the teacher. It's irresponsible - That's not what they should be worried about at their age!

**Sophie:** What should they be worrying about?

**Nadia:** Their schoolwork! She's got plenty to worry about there, I can tell you.

**Kat:** **(Noticing what's on Stewart's tablet and grabbing it)** What's this?

**Stewart:** Work! I have to finish it tonight.

**Jude:** Your latest eco-tower? **(Looking at the screen)** What is it?

**Stewart:** Nothing - it's - it's horrible.

**Carolyn:** Tell us!

**Stewart:** When you're freelance you have to - you can't always -

**Jude:** It looks like a church - look - altar, pews - is it a church?

**Stewart:** Funny you should say that.

**Kat:** What then?

**Stewart:** It's a kitchen extension.

**Carolyn:** Oh yes - so it is!

**Stewart:** It's awful. I'm working for this awful woman. She's got this amazing Victorian house.

**Jude:** Where?

**Stewart:** Carnegie Road.

**Carolyn:** I looked at one of those - they're lovely -

**Jude:** Pricey.

**Carolyn:** Oh yes -

**Stewart:** But all she cares about is having the biggest kitchen in the road. It's like she's obsessed.

**Kat:** So you fancy her.

**Stewart:** What? No! No! She's a monster.

**Kat:** Is that your type?

**Nadia:** **(To Sophie)** I thought talking about the auction would take her mind off it.

**Sophie:** Did it help?

**Nadia:** No - she just started screaming that she didn't want to move - I told her - none of us want to move - we're only doing it for her - You know what she said?

**Kat:** What?

**Nadia:** Terrorists! Croydon is full of terrorists, apparently she said. What are they teaching her?

**Stewart:** **(To Kat, Jude and Carolyn)** It's hideous. She's stripping everything out so the whole ground floor is just a shell.

**Carolyn:** **(Looking at the design)** Good move.

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**Stewart:** Awful!

**Carolyn:** Look, double height kitchen.

**Jude:** Lovely vaulted ceiling. What's that - church organ thing?

**Stewart:** It's an Aga.

**Carolyn:** Nice.

**Jude:** And the - altar?

**Stewart:** Horrid stone slab of a breakfast bar.

**Jude:** I do like a breakfast bar.

**Stewart:** I can just picture her standing behind it like some pagan goddess, with a sacrificial knife in one hand as she dishes out symbolic bread and wine and delivers sermons to her family of disciples in the open plan lounge. It's the most disgusting piece of architectural vandalism.

**Kat:** **(Looking at the design)** I want this kitchen!

**Stewart:** It would suit you.

**Carolyn:** Can you do it in white?

**Kat:** **(Looking at the design)** I could get you so much work.

**Stewart:** I don't want it!

**Kat:** Oh, I think you do want it.

**Carolyn:** (To Nadia) Did you say auction? You're really doing an auction? Really.

**Nadia:** Yes, really. We are putting our home into an auction.

**Carolyn:** That's marvellous! Can we all go?

**Jude:** Auction party!

**Carolyn:** I would so like to get my teeth stuck into your house. You still have the back wall, don't you?

**Nadia:** Instead of?

**Carolyn:** Glass bifolds, darling. Everyone has glass bifolds at the back now. It brings the garden into the house.

**Nadia:** Why on Earth would I want to do that?

**Jude:** Oh, yes. Sophie, you come along too - go on - buy the house. Buy the house - we'll give you advice.

**Sophie:** Still no money. And even if -

**Carolyn:** What do you mean no money?

**Sophie:** The divorce money hasn't come through yet.

**Carolyn:** Oh, it must have by now.

**Sophie:** It hasn't.

**Carolyn:** But it must have!

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**Sophie:** No, really. I'm still waiting. Anyway - I told you - I need somewhere we can move straight in.

**Nadia:** It's on the same night as Kat's ball.

**Kat:** It's not *my* ball - well I suppose - It's *ours* - and, no, you can't go to the auction, I need you there.

**Jude:** But -

**Carolyn:** Oh - but -

**Kat:** You're my team!

**Carolyn:** We can be a remote team.

**Kat:** You'll be there, won't you Stewart, Sophie?

**Stewart:** I'm not sure -

**Sophie:** Babysitting is the thing -

**Kat:** It's for charity for God's sake!

**Nadia:** Go to the ball! Why don't you just live-stream my house auction onto big screens? That way the whole school can watch!

**Carolyn:** Can we do that?

**Kat:** Right! This is what's going to happen. **(To Jude and Carolyn)** You two toddle off to the auction and buy Nadia's house. Get back to the ball in time for the dancing, and bring champagne. Then, once you've got over the hangover, you do the refurb. **(To Stewart)** You can design it. **(To Sophie)** All you need to do is watch a few episodes of Grand Designs and tell them what you want. Then by the time they're finished, you'll have your settlement and you can buy it off them. You're welcome. It's what I do.

**(Pause. The others look at each other. SFX. the school bell rings. Five children run out of the gate. Everyone grabs one, and makes their way offstage. Eventually, Kat is left alone with her child.)**

**Kat:** No, Candida, Mummy's not in a good mood. Mummy used to get a kick out of this sort of thing. Mummy is surrounded by idiots. Mummy needs a challenge.

**(Blackout. Curtain.)**

#### Scene 4 – The Auction

(Tabs open. The stage is divided in two. On one side, a table festooned with wine glasses, Christmas baubles and the remnants of a dinner. Sophie and Kat are at the table. Behind, a microphone from which Kat can address the room. On the other side of the stage, Jude and Carolyn sit side by side at a house auction, waiting for their lot number to come up. Lights up on the party table.)

**Kat:** (A little drunk, and talking to someone offstage) Yes, headmaster. All shipshape and tickety-boo, Sir! No problem - it's what I do, sir. It's what I do (To Sophie) I am, if I say so myself, doing an absolutely marvellous job! I should do this - I should do events!

**Sophie:** I should go.

**Kat:** You should stay.

**Sophie:** I really shouldn't.

**Kat:** But I need you here. You're my rock!

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**Sophie:** I should be there.

**Kat:** You should be here.

**Sophie:** It could be anytime now.

**Kat:** - and that's why you need to be here. What would you do at the auction? Exactly! You'd worry and panic and probably buy the wrong house by accident.

**Sophie:** I'm not buying it.

**Kat:** Exactly! They're buying it and doing the refit and you get to sit around here having a good time and when they've bought it, they'll come over here, and we can all drink champagne, and talk about colour schemes. It's a good plan. Stick to the plan.

(Enter Stewart carrying drinks for the three of them.)

**Stewart:** Here. I'm celebrating.

**Kat:** We're all celebrating. What's changed since you went to the bar?

**Stewart:** More work.

**Kat:** You see - being freelance is working out for you.

**Stewart:** Yes, lucky me. Went to the bar for a bottle of Chablis - got asked for another two god-awful kitchen refits before I got served.

**Sophie:** I thought you didn't like doing kitchens.

**Stewart:** It appears I've got a reputation for them.

**Kat:** Well, I may have dropped your name to a few of the girls.

**Stewart:** I can't afford to turn them down.

**Sophie:** There's nothing else?

**Stewart:** Maybe - there's a community building project on the cards. A group doing all the building work themselves - they want a sort of log cabin development.

**Sophie:** Sounds exciting.

**Stewart:** Yes - if I can afford to do it. In the meantime-

**Kat:** Always happy to help. It's what I do. **(Raises her glass)** And in actual fact I am fantastic at it! I've saved your business, Stewart. That's worth a drink.

**Stewart:** Thanks for that.

**Kat:** - I've organised this fantastic event, and I've got you a house, Sophie - all on the same day. The same day. I am so wasted here.

**Stewart:** Yes, you're completely wasted.

**Kat:** And, Sophie, this is a big night for you.

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**Sophie:** I know.

**Kat:** It's huge.

**Sophie:** I know.

**Kat:** Massive.

**Sophie:** Yes.

**Kat:** Just waiting for the phone call.

**Sophie:** Two phone calls.

**Stewart:** Two?

**Sophie:** The solicitor said she'd call.

**Kat:** She's working late.

**Sophie:** She's going to confirm the final transfer.

**Kat:** Of what?

**Sophie:** The divorce money.

**Stewart:** It's finally over?

**Sophie:** Yes.

**Kat:** He's coughed up.

**Sophie:** Yes.

**Kat:** Tonight?

**Sophie:** She'll call when it's in my account.

**Kat:** That deserves a drink.

**Stewart:** Are you OK?

**Sophie:** Fine.

**(She pulls a calming jar out of her bag and stares at it.)**

**Kat:** I wouldn't be.

**Sophie:** No.

**Kat:** I'd be cacking myself.

**Sophie:** I should go.

**Kat:** Nonsense. Where would you rather be when the news comes through? at home in your flat, or here, with champagne and music, and your best friend?

**Stewart:** Stay.

**(Sophie's phone rings. She grabs it instantly and listens.)**

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**Sophie:** **(on the phone)** Yes, Mum - I thought you were the solicitor. No, I haven't heard - no not from the auction either - and my battery - yes, he can have the pasta, Mum, but make sure you use the wheat free one - it's the brown one - with the - oh - no, he doesn't mean he wants more tea - just give him a raw one to crunch on. Well, give him some of the dried mango. **(She wanders away with her phone, continuing her conversation)**

**Kat:** **(Raising her glass to Stewart)** To bigger and better kitchens!

**Stewart:** I'm not used to women handing me their numbers at the bar.

**Kat:** I can't believe that. You're a very attractive man.

**Sophie:** I know I know. Yes, it probably is bedtime. What time is it? Oh, God! Do you want me to come back?

**Stewart:** Sorry?

**Kat:** You know, I'm joking. Just having a bit of fun with you.

**Stewart:** Right.

**Kat:** I am capable of having a bit of fun, you know. Was she high maintenance?

**Stewart:** Who?

**Kat:** Your wife - she was high maintenance?

**Stewart:** I didn't think so until I saw what she was like without me. Where's your husband?

**Kat:** He's in the dad's room. No maintenance required there. I might as well not exist.

**Stewart:** There's a dad's room?

**Kat:** You're an honorary mum.

**Stewart:** Thanks.

**Kat:** They're talking about derivatives. He'll be there all night.

**Stewart:** Oh.

**Kat:** Networking his little socks off.

**Stewart:** Right.

**Kat:** It's what excites him. Is that what excites you?

**Stewart:** Not really.

**Kat:** You're welcome to join them.

**Stewart:** No, thank you.

**Kat:** Do you know what's funny? If I was in that job, I'd piss on the lot of them.

**Stewart:** I wonder if Sophie's OK.

**Kat:** Don't worry about her. I don't excite him.

**Stewart:** Oh.

**Kat:** I excite you, though, don't I? I know I do.

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**Stewart:** I -

**Kat:** Just having fun with you. It's harmless. I'd never - You can admit it though. No harm in that - I can tell.

**Stewart:** you're - um -

**Kat:** I need you to design me a new room.

**Stewart:** In your house?

**Kat:** God no. Somewhere else. Imagine there was a room you could go to -

**Stewart:** I don't understand

**Kat:** Where you could just go in, and close the door - just for an hour - and do whatever you wanted -

**Stewart:** Like what?

**Kat:** Anything. You could just go to the room, do what you needed to do and then leave and close the door and go back to real life. And nobody would ever need to talk about what happened in the room. How does that sound to you?

**Stewart:** It sounds like a toilet.

**Kat:** There are lots of classrooms in this school. All empty -

**Stewart:** Kat.

**Kat:** Yes?

**Stewart:** I've always been attracted to women like you.

**Kat:** Darling, there are no women like me.

**Stewart:** Strong women. clever, powerful women.

**Kat:** I see.

**Stewart:** Up to now.

**Kat:** Up to now?

**Stewart:** But -

**Kat:** Not anymore?

**Stewart:** I've decided not to be.

**Kat:** Decided?

**Stewart:** Recently.

**Kat:** Can you do that? Just decide?

**Stewart:** I don't know.

**Kat:** Good luck.

**Stewart:** I need someone easier.

**Kat:** I'm not sure how I could have been easier.

**Stewart:** Softer, then. Someone softer.

**Sophie:** **(Returning)** I should probably go. Mum can't find anything.

**Kat:** Yes, maybe you should leave us.

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**Stewart:** Your Mum can cope, I'm sure!

**Sophie:** She's never looked after children.

**Stewart:** Didn't she look after you?

**Sophie:** You're right - I should go!

**Stewart:** Please stay.

**Kat:** You can't monopolise me all evening, I'm afraid. I have to go and do my thing on stage.

**Sophie:** Your thing?

**Kat:** Oh yes. My thing. My little speech.

**Sophie:** Oh.

**(Kat leaves him, steps up to the stage, and takes the microphone.)**

**Kat:** When the headmaster asked me to organise this evening, my first question was "what's the charity?" And when he told me, I was thrilled - Aisha lives in a place where life is hard. It's - it's - I don't know - somewhere in Africa, I think - Aisha has few options. She may be intelligent - but she can't achieve anything with that intelligence. It's a life which revolves around the kitchen - around child-care - She feels trapped. The point is: When you educate girls, everything changes. Education gives us choices. An educated girl will be more productive at home, and better paid in the workplace. She will take an active role in personal, economic, and political decision making. When you educate girls, you create a better, stronger, more compassionate nation - and that is what we are raising money for today. To provide education for young women in some of the most difficult areas of the world.

**(As she continues to speak, an 80's style ballad is playing in the background. She watches as Stewart and Sophie start dancing together. First hesitantly, and then in full embrace.)**

**Kat:** So, now, it's time for the charity auction. The first lot is one I know you've all been waiting for. One parking space in the teacher's car park for drop-off and pickup for the whole year. Can I start the bidding at £1000?

**(Lights down on Kat. The music fades out. Lights up on Carolyn and Jude at the other side of the stage. Their auction is just beginning. They both hold cards with numbers on.)**

**Carolyn:** So she can't practice the violin at home because of all the building noise - now they've stopped her from practicing at the swimming pool!

**Jude:** Where?

**Carolyn:** I know - she has to be there every morning from six if she wants to stay in the team, but how's she going to get to grade 5 violin if she doesn't practice?

**Jude:** Not fair, making her choose, is it? And I imagine the acoustics are better.

**Carolyn:** Concrete shell with a steel frame.

**Jude:** Nice.

**Carolyn:** Wait - What lot number was that?

**Jude:** 136. We're up next! - remember 1.1 is our limit.

**Auctioneer:** **(VO)** next up, lot 137 a 9 room period house in need of some work. Can I start the bidding at £800,000

**Carolyn:** Oh, God - here we go! **(She starts to raise her card)**

**Jude:** What are you doing?

**Carolyn:** Bidding.

**Jude:** Not yet. They start high and then drop until someone bids. Have you never seen "Homes under the hammer?"

**Auctioneer:** £600,000

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**Carolyn:** Well, it always goes up later.

**Jude:** Yes, but we don't want to show our hand early. We have to see how the land lies. Check out the competition.

**Auctioneer:** £500?

**Carolyn:** £500 is a great deal!

**Jude:** It won't go for £500 - calm down! There, look.

**Auctioneer:** I have £500,000 - 6 do I hear 6?

**Carolyn:** Who was that?

**Jude:** Over there - look - the guy with the dark glasses with the open shirt.

**Carolyn:** Developer?

**Jude:** Reseller. Chancer - he'll drop out if there's no quick buck.

**Auctioneer:** 6 I have, 7?

**Jude:** That's a developer! Look, Italian suit, muddy work boots.

**Auctioneer:** 7, sir? no?

**Carolyn:** Mafia man has dropped out.

**Jude:** He didn't last long.

**Auctioneer:** 7 at the back. Thank you madam.

**Jude:** Oh dear.

**Carolyn:** What?

**Jude:** Young family - pregnant too. Could be dangerous.

**Carolyn:** Nest builder - Desperate.

**Auctioneer:** 8, sir? 8 it is. 9 at the back, thank you madam.

**Carolyn:** Daddy's money.

**Jude:** Obvs. it's a family house - it's not like a family can afford it!

**Carolyn:** Shall we bid? come on, let's bid.

**Auctioneer:** Do I hear 1 million?

**(Carolyn starts to raise her number card. Jude beats her to it.)**

**Jude:** 1 million.

**Auctioneer:** 1 million! We have a new bidder.

**Carolyn:** Yes!

**Jude:** That felt good!

**Auctioneer:** Lady at the back? 1.1? 1 million and fifty then? yes. 1 million and fifty.

**(Carolyn raises her number.)**

**Auctioneer:** 1 million, 1 hundred thousand. Any advance?

**Carolyn:** Oh God! It feels so good!

**Jude:** She's thinking about it - look, they're arguing.

**Carolyn:** She'd be better off in a flat. Get a flat!

**Auctioneer:** I'll take 50? 10 thousand, then? 10 it is. At 1 million 110 thousand - Ladies?

**Jude:** Damn.

**Carolyn:** It's only 10 - come on - let me go again! Let me go again!

**Jude:** There's no margin in it -

**Carolyn:** They're going up all the time - in six weeks it'll go up 10.

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**Auctioneer:** Any more bids? All done?

**Carolyn:** We're so close!

**Jude:** I don't know - we agreed.

**Carolyn:** I'm going to do it - I'm going to do it!

**Auctioneer:** Going at 1 million 110 thousand.

**(Both women start to raise their cards. Jude gets there first)**

**Auctioneer:** Twenty.

**(But Carolyn is only a second behind.)**

**Auctioneer:** Thirty!

**Jude:** What did you do that for?

**Carolyn:** Yes! - What?

**Jude:** You just bid against me!

**Auctioneer:** All done at 1.13? All done.

**Carolyn:** It was my turn!

**Jude:** No it wasn't. It was my turn!

**Auctioneer:** Sold at 1 million one hundred and thirty thousand pounds! Please hold your number up.

**(Carolyn reluctantly holds her number up. Lights down on them and up on the other side of the stage. By now, Kat has returned to her seat and is slumped with a glass of wine. Sophie and Stewart are still dancing, but the music has stopped. Kat watches as the couple lean in and are about to kiss. SFX. a mobile phone rings, breaking the moment.)**

**Sophie:** What? What? I can't hear you? I'll have to go outside.

**(She runs offstage trying to hear her phone. Kat gives Stewart a sarcastic round of applause.)**

**Stewart:** What?

**Kat:** Really?

**Stewart:** Maybe.

**Kat:** That's "easier" is it?

**Stewart:** I don't know - maybe.

**Kat:** Piss off.

**(Enter Sophie - her phone call over. She is in shock.)**

**Kat:** Have they bought Nadia's little house for you - your little Grand Designs team? Got it all sewn up there, haven't you? Got your architect on board. I'm sure he'll give you a cheap deal.

**Sophie:** It wasn't them.

**Stewart:** What is it?

**Sophie:** That was the solicitor.

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**Kat:** Isn't it all going terribly well for you!

**Sophie:** There's no money. That's why Roger's been delaying. All the figures were faked. He's bankrupt. We've got nothing.

**Kat:** You can't afford the house?

**Sophie:** The house? - What about the school?

**(Sophie is shaking. Stewart tries to console her. Enter Jude and Carolyn laughing and carrying a bottle of champagne and a bundle of magazines.)**

**Jude:** We got it!

**Carolyn:** and we got champagne.

**Jude:** - And Elle Decoration!

**Kat:** Sorry to piss on your party, girls - but you're going to have to find another buyer.

**(Blackout. Curtain.)**

**Act 2**

**Scene 1 – Nadia’s living room**

**(Tabs open. Lights up. The house is packed up, ready to move, but around the boxes, party decorations are arranged. From another room, the sounds of a girl’s party are heard. Jude and Carolyn are poking around, knocking on walls and examining the ceiling.)**

**Jude:** It’s hilarious!

**Carolyn:** It’s like an old lady’s house!

**Jude:** Carpets - who has carpets? It’s just perfect.

**Carolyn:** It has to go. All of it.

**Jude:** A blank canvas.

**(Kat enters quickly from another room.)**

**Kat:** Don’t go in there - It’s a catastrophe!

**Jude:** We have no intention of going in there!

**Carolyn:** I can’t believe she went through with it -

**Jude:** Hosting a kids party the day before she hands over the house?

**Carolyn:** I imagine she didn’t want kids tramping through the new house.

**Kat:** More likely she didn’t want us in the new house.

**Carolyn:** Croydon.

**Jude:** **(Starting to peel back the carpet)** Help me with this **(Carolyn helps)**.

**(Enter Nadia.)**

**Nadia:** Believe me, I don’t want this party - And could you not wait for me to move out?

**Carolyn:** We take possession tomorrow.

**Nadia:** then you can tear up the carpets tomorrow.

**Jude:** **(Bouncing on the floorboards)** Boards are sound, anyway.

**Carolyn:** Oh, good.

**Jude:** They'll be fine. Sanded.

**Carolyn:** Stained.

**Kat:** Why are you doing this?

**Jude:** We'll find another buyer.

**Carolyn:** It'll be fine!

**Kat:** I didn't mean you - Nadia - Why?

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**Nadia:** It's a disaster isn't it?

**Kat:** Darling, it's an 11 year old's party- how can it be anything else?

**Nadia:** I don't know what to do.

**Kat:** They're bored.

**Nadia:** They're all sitting in there on Facebook!

**Jude:** At least they're reading.

**Carolyn:** You could have organised some games - We had a scientist at ours-

**Jude:** We had the animal man-

**Kat:** I remember. He brought cockroaches.

**(Nadia has her head in her hands)**

**Jude:** It's only a party!

**Carolyn:** She's worried about the move.

**Nadia:** I grew up in this house. I can still smell her cooking here. Her hands were always white with a dust of fine flour and she left white fingerprints on everything she touched. You could tell when she had just left the room from the flour dust floating in the air like the trail of a ghost.

**Jude:** We move every 18 months. It's always a bit of a wrench, but you get used to it.

**(She wanders off to where Carolyn is standing, and they start silently disagreeing about the furnishings.)**

**Nadia:** It's not the move.

**Kat:** What then?

**Nadia:** The exam - the Birchley House Ladies entrance exam. It's at the end of the week!

**Carolyn:** We've all got to take it -

**Kat:** She'll be fine.

**(Nadia shakes her head.)**

**Kat:** But all that extra tuition -she's been cramming all year! At the mocks she was top of the class.

**Nadia:** It's like she hit a wall. I try to make her understand what we are giving up for her - I've tried everything. But she's going backwards. Last Sunday, after the last tutor left, she told me she was going to study in her room. Then I started to smell smoke. I thought she had a cigarette in there.

**Kat:** She's 11.

**Jude:** These girls do a lot we don't know about.

**Nadia:** Her door was jammed shut. When I eventually broke in, do you know what i found?

**Kat:** What?

**Nadia:** She had made a big pile of all her notes, and her study aids and all her schoolbooks, and she was just watching them burn. And right at the top there was this doll - this stupid plastic thing she's had since she was four - she got it in a party bag - stupid piece of plastic rubbish - and it was right at the top like a fairy on a tree, burning. And she was just staring like a mad thing watching it all burn. What gets into a girl like that?

**Kat:** It's only an exam. She'll do fine in any school.

**Nadia:** You don't get it, do you? It's just a game, isn't it? These girls can be whatever they want to be?

**Kat:** That's why they're here. When they leave this school, they'll be the best educated girls anywhere in the world - So, yes - anything they want.

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**Nadia:** Really? In this city? What will they be? Doctors? Lawyers? Teachers? Scientists?

**Kat:** If they want to -

**Nadia:** The people who do those jobs are sleeping on couches now. Rent is 70% of salary in this town. You need three times the average wage for a 1 bed flat.

**Kat:** They'll be fine.

**Nadia:** Fine isn't good enough anymore. This city has been hollowed out - these girls - if they earn twice what we do, they'll have nowhere to live. For them, it is The City - the money markets, or property or nothing. There's no other choice.

**(Enter Stewart from the party room, looking flustered.)**

**Stewart:** I think you'd better go in there.

**Nadia:** I told you - he can't cope on his own.

**Stewart:** She's crying her eyes out in there.

**Nadia:** What did you do?

**Stewart:** She says she hates everybody. You may need to calm her down.

**Nadia:** You see what I have to deal with! I give her a party and she cries like a baby.

**(Exit Nadia with an air of determination.)**

**Kat:** I hear Sophie moved in with you.

**Stewart:** Yes.

**Kat:** And the kids.

**Stewart:** Yes.

**Kat:** That was quick work.

**Stewart:** Needs must.

**Kat:** Must be crowded.

**Stewart:** I'm extending.

**Kat:** I bet you are. Where is she?

**Stewart:** Just dropping Jonathan off at another party. She'll be along in a moment.

**(In her argument with Jude, Carolyn appeals to the other two for support.)**

**Carolyn:** She wants to keep these grotesque stair rails. Tell her!

**Jude:** They're beautiful!

**Stewart:** They are in keeping with the tiling in the hall -

**Jude:** There, you see!

**Carolyn:** You can't mean you want to keep the tiles!

**Jude:** You want to lose the tiles now?

**Carolyn:** I thought the tiles were a given! It looks like a garden centre out there.

**Kat:** I rather like it.

**Stewart:** They may be listed - you might not be allowed to -

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**Carolyn:** It's our house - we can do what we like!

**Kat:** Not yet.

**Jude:** This is supposed to be renovation, not ethnic cleansing!

**(Sophie has entered unnoticed in the middle of this melee. She is a completely different person from the character we know. She radiates an aura of calm and stillness. She puts her fingers to her lips.)**

**Sophie:** Shh.

**(Everyone is silenced.)**

**Sophie:** Only when you allow the house to speak to you will hear your answer.

**(Pause. Everyone tries to hear the house speaking.)**

**Sophie:** where are the children? I have only a few minutes.

**(Kat gestures to the other room. Exit Sophie into the children's room. The others watch her leave. The screaming from the other room abates immediately. Everyone watches her go.)**

**Sophie:** **(Offstage)** Let's play charades.

**Carolyn:** Was that Sophie?

**Stewart:** She's calmed down a lot.

**Kat:** Yes, she has.

**Jude:** Stewart, we need you.

**Jude:** **(Indicating the wall)** We want to get rid of this.

**Carolyn:** All of it.

**Stewart:** This is a supporting wall.

**Jude:** Your point being?

**Stewart:** It holds the house up.

**Jude:** An RSJ will sort that right out.

**Stewart:** You'll need a structural engineer to tell you that.

**Jude:** An RSJ can fix anything.

**Stewart:** That's not strictly -

**Jude:** But we want to keep the fireplace -

**Stewart:** The fireplace?

**Carolyn:** Do we?

**Jude:** Period details!

**Stewart:** Yes, but if you're removing the wall it's in

**Carolyn:** can't it be free standing?

**Stewart:** Free standing?

**Carolyn:** Yes.

**Stewart:** With no chimney?

**Carolyn:** Ornamental.

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**Stewart:** And no wall?

**Jude:** Could we put it on that wall over there?

**Carolyn:** Now, bathrooms-

**Stewart:** Ah, now there are some really good energy saving -

**Carolyn:** Now everyone has hot and cold water, obvs.

**Stewart:** You can have most of your heating done with solar now - what you do is -

**Carolyn:** But hot and cold is boring.

**Jude:** Boring!

**Stewart:** Boring?

**Jude:** We want boiling as well.

**Stewart:** You can get those but they waste a lot of energy.

**Carolyn:** And ice.

**Stewart:** Ice? An ice tap?

**Carolyn:** Liquid ice.

**Stewart:** You mean water?

**Carolyn:** No. Liquid ice. Like a sorbet.

**Stewart:** A sorbet? You want a sorbet tap?

**Carolyn:** Could we do it as a waterfall? Like a constantly flowing sheet from the ceiling - and you change the temperature with - gestures?

**(Sophie enters. Behind her, the party room has become noticeably more rowdy since her exit from it.)**

**Carolyn:** Sophie! What do you think of Ice taps?

**(She waits for everyone on stage to be quiet.)**

**Sophie:** I never think about the temperature of water. Only its purity matters. Stewart, shopping in four minutes.

**(Exit Sophie)**

**Stewart:** Coming.

**Kat:** **(To Stewart)** Don't look so pleased with yourself.

**Carolyn:** This place is a mess - what were we thinking?

**Jude:** We'll be fine.

**Carolyn:** We don't even have a buyer!

**Jude:** It's a seller's market. we'll be fine.

**Carolyn:** **(To Stewart)** You two don't want to buy this house, do you?

**Stewart:** I'd better go.

**Kat:** I'm having an affair.

**(Everyone looks at Kat.)**

**Kat:** It's obvious Ben is, so why not?

**Stewart:** Is it?

**Kat:** Why else is he never home?

**Jude:** Who?

**Kat:** Gym man. Works at the gym. Just came up to me one day and started telling me what he'd like to do to me.

**Jude:** And?

**Kat:** I'm a good listener.

**Jude:** I don't think I'd like to meet someone at the gym. I look dreadful at the gym.

**Kat:** It's my second gym.

**Jude:** Your second gym?

**Kat:** Yes. I've had to take out a membership at another gym to do my actual exercise. I can't risk Gym Man seeing that. So, I started going down there to wander about as if I'm just going into the sauna. Accidentally run into him when I've just got out of the pool.

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**Stewart:** I have to go.

**Kat:** Call it a hobby. Let's me know I'm not dead from the waist down.

**Carolyn:** The more I look, the more cracks appear.

**Jude:** Harmless, really -

**Kat:** Then on Thursday -

**Stewart:** What?

**Carolyn:** What do you think about lighting?

**Kat:** It was in a leisure centre storage cupboard. Lighting wasn't uppermost in my mind.

**Jude:** We were thinking of ripping out this wall, and taking the whole thing through to the kitchen.

**Carolyn:** Totally open plan.

**Kat:** I was wearing this -

**Stewart:** What?

**Jude:** Skirting -

**Carolyn:** God no!

**Kat:** That's right. A thin one, quite simple.

**Jude:** Exactly.

**Carolyn:** I hate them.

**Jude:** Period.

**Kat:** What?

**Jude:** And a dado rail - Stewart - a dado rail?

**Stewart:** If you like -

**Carolyn:** Yuck!

**Jude:** You've got to work with what you've got.

**Stewart:** It's always good to emphasise your -

**Kat:** My what?

**Stewart:** Attributes.

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**Carolyn:** What we've got is a rotting, peeling old husk. Look, nothing's straight. I'm amazed it's still standing.

**Jude:** No! Look at the lovely crinkly edges. A bit of a clean-up - restore some of those beautiful features. It's a bit of a mess, but all it needs is a makeover.

**Kat:** I just shagged a personal trainer in cupboard full of birthing balls and you're talking about dado rails?

**Carolyn:** I'm not talking about dado rails.

**Kat:** Thank you.

**Carolyn:** I hate dado rails. For me, it's got to be flat, smooth and white.

**Jude:** It would just end up covered in finger-marks.

**Kat:** Always a danger - Come on - I'm inviting you to live out your fantasies vicariously through me! Ask me for the gory details - you know you want to!

**Stewart:** Well -

**Kat:** Ask me anything.

**Stewart:** I have to go.

**(Exit Stewart.)**

**Jude:** Well, there is one thing I'd like to know.

**Kat:** Yes?

**Jude:** Hard wood or marble?

**Kat:** Why are you asking me?

**Carolyn:** We need to design the spec around our ideal customer.

**Kat:** And that is?

**Jude:** You.

**Kat:** Me?

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**Carolyn:** Plenty of money,

**Jude:** Big family.

**Carolyn:** Husband in the city.

**Jude:** Maybe second time around.

**Carolyn:** Downsizing.

**Jude:** Stay at home mum.

**Carolyn:** Older woman.

**Jude:** Imagine you were starting again.

**Carolyn:** With your lover

**Kat:** Lover? Hardly! Not his role, darling. Hired help at best.

**Jude:** But you see the point? You're our ideal buyer.

**Kat:** Am I?

**Carolyn:** Not you -

**Jude:** But a woman like you.

**Kat:** Why do people keep saying that?

**Carolyn:** It's a big market.

**Jude:** Growing.

**Kat:** **(Sighing)** Corian. Everyone's doing Corian now.

**Carolyn:** There, you see.

**Jude:** Corian!

**Carolyn:** You're going to be so useful.

**Jude:** What's your feeling about the cornices? I love them.

**Carolyn:** I hate them!

**Kat:** Forget it! I'm not your ideal buyer. I love my house - I love my life! And I wouldn't move to this shithole if you paid me!

**(Enter Nadia)**

**Kat:** **(To Jude)** Isn't it your turn to check on the girls?

**Jude:** Oh, all right. Come on, we can check out the kitchen.

**Carolyn:** Corian!

**Carolyn:** It's all going to have to go.

**(Nadia and Kat are left alone in an uncomfortable silence.)**

**Kat:** Are the kids OK in there?

**Nadia:** I don't know - I've been getting the food ready.

**(Pause)**

**Kat:** (Eventually) I didn't mean - It's a lovely house -

**Nadia:** What?

(Pause)

**Kat:** I'm having an affair.

**Nadia:** I always assumed you were.

**Kat:** No. but I am now.

**Nadia:** Nobody is interested in your sex life.

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**Kat:** So it appears.

(Enter Jude - running)

**Jude:** Somebody get an ambulance. Veena has taken an overdose.

(Blackout. Curtain)

## Scene 2 – Empty house

**(Tabs open. Lights up. The stage is empty. Enter Nadia, alone. She looks around the empty house, saying goodbye to it for the last time, picks up a box, and exits. Others (stagehands) enter, and remove all the other boxes, perhaps replacing them with ladders, building equipment, etc. Lights down slowly. Curtain.)**

### Scene 3 – Empty house

**(Tabs open. Lights up on the same house. The boxes are now gone. The refurbishment is underway. Enter, Jude followed by Stewart, who is taking notes. She leads him briskly around the room.)**

**Jude:** - we want a light touch in here.

**Stewart:** A light touch? I thought you wanted to get rid of this wall.

**Jude:** Not anymore. The more I see it - it's all so beautiful. The cornices, the fireplace - you see?

**Stewart:** I see.

**Jude:** We want the kitchen extension on the back - but only out to three meters. And the loft - we want a new loft room.

**Stewart:** There's not enough space in the loft -

**Jude:** Well, work your magic.

**Stewart:** How? - you can't stand up in the loft and you can't raise the roof.

**Jude:** I don't know - the ceilings in the bedrooms are all quite high, aren't they?

**Stewart:** Yes -

**Jude:** Simple, then. Bring them down a couple of feet and you'll have plenty of room in the loft.

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**Stewart:** Bring the ceilings down?

**Jude:** But don't damage the ceiling rose and those lovely cornices! Are you writing this down?

**(They exit. Enter Carolyn followed by Stewart; still trying to keep up.)**

**Carolyn:** I want demolition to start as soon as possible.

**Stewart:** Demolition?

**Carolyn:** We're keeping the facade - the external walls.

**Stewart:** Probably best - they're shared with the house next door.

**Carolyn:** But everything inside is going to be open plan.

**Stewart:** But-

**Carolyn:** And get rid of all this crap (**pointing at the walls**) Who needs a bloody picture rail in these days and ages?

**Stewart:** Jude does.

**Carolyn:** No - we've discussed it and she agrees with me. Now, I wonder if wood is the best material for floorboards.

**Stewart:** What else is there?

**Carolyn:** I don't know? Glass? aluminium? Herringbone parquet in shades of leather?

**Stewart:** What?

**Carolyn:** What about that bouncy stuff they do children's playgrounds in?

**Stewart:** Bonded rubber mulch?

**Carolyn:** Yes.

**Stewart:** Made of recycled tyres?

**Carolyn:** It'd be easy to clean. Does it come in white?

**Stewart:** I'd have to check.

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**Carolyn:** Now - the kitchen. This is where I want to get a bit experimental -

**(Exit Stewart and Carolyn. Enter Stewart and Jude.)**

**Jude:** Well, she's an idiot. We can't have bifold doors on the extension. They won't be in keeping. We need it to look like an old Victorian warehouse at the back. If we put in modern doors, how's the Aga going to look? How's the butler sink going to fit in? I've bought an original ornamental salting barrel - Where's that going to go? Under the microwave?

**Stewart:** I'm a bit worried about some of this plaster. If you're having bare walls they'll need replastering at least and the budget is -

**Jude:** Bare walls? God no! What's she been saying now? I've sourced William Morris wallpaper. Now, then, the hall -

**(Exit Stewart and Jude. Enter Stewart and Carolyn, heading for the kitchen.)**

**Carolyn:** Why on Earth would I want banisters? It's health and safety gone mad! Did she mention the floating bathroom?

**Stewart:** Floating? You mean a wet room?

**Carolyn:** Wet room? No, no, no! The bathroom should be on wheels so it can be placed wherever it's needed. I've seen it done.

**Stewart:** Jude says you've changed the kitchen design again - Look I've sketched out a layout here **(he shows her a design on a tablet)**

**Carolyn:** What? This isn't what we discussed! Where's the Teppanyaki module?

**(Exit Stewart and Jude. Enter Stewart pursued by Jude and Carolyn - each carrying plans. They are arguing over the top of him. He has given up.)**

**Carolyn:** What the hell is this?

**Jude:** It's our kitchen!

**Carolyn:** If I was in a dead person's shoes!

**Jude:** It'll be in keeping.

**Carolyn:** In keeping with what?

**Jude:** Once we restore the original windows, it'll be in keeping with those -

**Carolyn:** Restore? We're creating a contemporary interior here - not doing a remake of *Pride and Prejudice*!

**Jude:** There's this delightful reclamation yard in New Cross. The owner smokes cigars - it's perfect - he's got original sash window pulleys!

**Carolyn:** Sash windows? Who ever heard of bifold sash windows?

**Jude:** Oh - and I picked up this butler's bell - we could put it in the kitchen so you'd ring it when dinner was ready - can you imagine?

**Carolyn:** Sounds ghastly - I'm not having someone's old junk in my house.

**Jude:** It's not going to be your house.

**Stewart:** Ok, both of you - just for a second. Let me get this straight. **(To Jude)** You want me to basically take this house back to how it was in the 1880s -

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**Jude:** That's right.

**Stewart:** But, presumably with electricity and an inside lavatory.

**Jude:** Umm -

**Stewart:** Really? **(To Carolyn)** - and you want a glass roof,

**Carolyn:** Smart glass, yes.

**Stewart:** - LED floor lighting. No walls, waterfall taps - whatever the hell they are - and the dining room laid with AstroTurf?

**Carolyn:** **(To Jude)** It would be easy to clean.

**Stewart:** I'm leaving now.

**Jude:** What?

**Stewart:** I quit.

**Carolyn:** You can't.

**Stewart:** I've got an offer to work on a development of carbon neutral eco houses.

**Jude:** What are they paying you?

**Stewart:** I don't care - because they're only asking for the impossible! You two are living on two separate bloody planets! You've done no work, you keep changing your minds, you've got no idea what you want, and you will be out of money before the end of term - which is next week!

**Carolyn:** You can't just quit.

**Stewart:** Look at the contract.

**Jude:** We haven't got a contract.

**Stewart:** Exactly.

**(Exit Stewart.)**

**Jude:** He's right. We're going to be doing this on credit cards as it is.

**Carolyn:** That's it - I'm calling my lawyer!

**Jude:** You can't sue him - your job was to draw up the contract and you never did it!

**Carolyn:** I'm not suing him - I'm suing you!

**(Blackout. Curtain.)**

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#### **Scene 4 – School Gates**

**(Curtain. Lights up. Outside the school gates. It is the last day of term. Jude, Carolyn, Sophie, Stewart, Nadia and Kat are all there, waiting for their children.)**

**Stewart:** Well, this is it.

**Nadia:** This is it.

**Stewart:** What do we do now?

**Sophie:** We wait.

**(Pause)**

**Stewart:** Right. For what?

**Kat:** They'll send them out as soon as they get their results.

**Nadia:** And we find out if they've passed- if they've got a place at Birchley House.

**Stewart:** How is she?

**Nadia:** They let her out of hospital in time to take the exam, at least.

**Stewart:** Has she told you why she -?

**Nadia:** I just wish she could have waited a couple of weeks - until the holidays. Sometimes I think I don't understand my child at all.

**Kat:** Will she pass?

**Nadia:** She has to. After everything. She has to.

**Kat:** Let's see who's up first.

**(One child appears through the gates. Sophie gathers her up and takes a letter from her hand.)**

**Stewart:** Fingers crossed.

**Sophie:** The choices have already been made.

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**(She opens the letter, and smiles.)**

**Sophie:** I will collect the others. When Jessica comes out, we will be celebrating - in the yoghurt bar.

**(Exit Sophie with her child in tow. Kat and Stewart watch her go.)**

**Kat:** You think this is you?

**Stewart:** Sorry?

**Kat:** She's been in my class since pre-school. I've seen this before.

**Stewart:** What?

**Kat:** This Zen goddess thing - You think she's like this just because she's getting some?

**Stewart:** She's just less stressed. That's all.

**Kat:** Don't flatter yourself.

**Stewart:** I don't know what you mean.

**Kat:** She's always like this when she's pregnant. **(Stewart looks horrified)**. The moment she drops, she'll be back to her old self. Congratulations. I hope you've kept hold of the calming jars.

**(The gate opens again. Another two children come out. This time, Jude and Carolyn claim them, opening and reading their envelopes. They look uncomfortably at each other.)**

**Jude:** We have to talk.

**Carolyn:** I don't see why.

**Jude:** We're haemorrhaging money. No work is getting done - the place is like a -

**Carolyn:** Building site?

**Jude:** How long can you afford this?

**Carolyn:** As long as you can.

**Jude:** We have to sell.

**Carolyn:** Have you seen the state of it?

**Jude:** Everything sells. We just have to accept the loss.

**Carolyn:** I can't afford to.

**Jude:** Neither can I - but if we can't agree –

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**Carolyn:** Did Jane get in?

**Jude:** Yes - did Emily?

**(Carolyn reads her letter, and nods.)**

**Carolyn:** Can you afford to send her now?

**Jude:** Not unless we sell - You?

**Carolyn:** Just - but Emily says she won't go. Not unless Jane does.

**Jude:** That's it then.

**Carolyn:** We could -

**Jude:** What?

**Carolyn:** Magnolia.

**Jude:** God!

**(Exit Jude and Carolyn, pushing their children. The gates open and another child emerges.)**

**Kat:** Yours, Nadia.

**(Nadia steps forward to claim her, and take the envelope.)**

**Nadia:** **(To her daughter)** Veena, I want you to know that whatever is in here, it is fine. It's only an exam. The only thing that matters is that you are happy.

**(Nadia steels herself, takes an envelope from the child and opens it. Her face falls.)**

**Nadia:** It is fine. It doesn't matter. We'll find you a good school, I promise. **(Leading her offstage)** And, over the summer, we can get you a new tutor, and if you revise all year, we can retake the exam and get you into Birchley next year. There's bound to be openings - there are always dropouts when it starts getting tough. You'd like that, wouldn't you? Of course you would.

**(The child starts to cry.)**

**Nadia:** Why are you crying?

**(Kat and Stewart are left alone.)**

**Kat:** This was my school. I've been coming here since I was 5.

**Stewart:** Last day, then.

**Kat:** Yes. **(Pause)** Ben and I had a long talk last night. He knows.

**Stewart:** About your gym man? How?

**Kat:** Because I can't keep my mouth shut. I thought you might have noticed this about me.

**Stewart:** I'm sorry.

**Kat:** Actually, I told him it was you.

**Stewart:** What? Why?

**Kat:** I don't know. Heat of the moment. Maybe I thought it would hurt him more. Maybe I thought it made me seem less - I don't know - desperate.

**Stewart:** I don't know how to take that.

**Kat:** I've finished it, of course - but the bottom line is Ben doesn't love me anymore.

**Stewart:** You don't love him.

**Kat:** Turns out I do.

**Stewart:** What?

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**Kat:** Love him.

**Stewart:** Doesn't sound like it.

**Kat:** You forget these things.

**Stewart:** No you don't.

**Kat:** At least we had something! Not like you and Sophie.

**Stewart:** That's not fair.

**Kat:** You're with her because she's spineless, and she's with you because you've got money. Tell me it's not true.

**Stewart:** It's not true.

**Kat:** I blame the fridge.

**Stewart:** What?

**Kat:** For years, we've communicated mostly using fridge magnets. Bills posted under magnets - post-it notes stuck on. Letters and dates and questions and answers written in those coloured letters. It starts off as a sweet, affectionate thing. We used to do love letters with word magnets. Then, at some point, you're just too busy to talk any other way. You never meet. Just clip instructions to the fridge. Eventually you're not saying anything anymore. So there it is - my kitchen design tip for a happy marriage: Ditch the Smeg and get built in appliances. Stick that in Jude and Carolyn's refit.

**Stewart:** I'm through with kitchens.

**Kat:** Really?

**Stewart:** Really.

**Kat:** We'll see. You know what the worst thing is? All those nights when he told me he was working late. All those kids parties he missed and holidays he cancelled. Do you know what he was really doing?

**Stewart:** Another woman?

**Kat:** No. He was just working late. Apparently, I'm a lot more expensive than I thought I was. Me and this place.

**Stewart:** What will you do?

**Kat:** Anything I like. The kids are all in big school. He'll cover fees. I'm set up for life now - I just don't have one.

**Stewart:** So, you're selling up?

**Kat:** I suppose so.

**(The gates open and Jessica emerges. Stewart steps forward to claim her. He opens the letter. Kat looks over his shoulder.)**

**Kat:** Well done. So where does that leave you?

**Stewart:** Very happy!

**Kat:** **(To Jessica)** So, let's do some maths, shall we, Jessica That's you and Sophie's little darling at Birchley - that's £3000 per month. And her two boys, let's say £6,000 per month - and - oh, there's another one on the way. So are Daddy's Eco Log cabins going to cover that? **(To Stewart)** Or do you think maybe there's something to be said for Jude and Carolyn's kitchen after all?

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**Stewart:** I -

**Kat:** Why don't you run along and tell them I'd like to buy their little house?

**(Exit Stewart and child.)**

**Kat:** - And we can choose the fittings together. That will be nice, won't it?

**(Kat is left alone on stage. Candida comes out through the open gates. Kat takes the letter from her, looks at it, shrugs noncommittally, looks up at the school gates for the last time, and exits. Lights fade. Curtain.)**