

## Scene 1

*Julia's kitchen. Grant comes dashing in muddy from the garden closely followed by Connor holding a football.*

Grant: What's for tea Mam?

Connor: 'Ere Mam, Jason's got the new town shirt he has, it's dead cool, can I have one? Can I?

Julia: Sorry mate I've still got to find the money to pay Mrs Chambers for that bloody vase you broke remember?

Connor: Oh go on Mam.....

Julia: I've told you no, I'm not made of money.

Grant: I need a digimon Mam, can I have one?

Julia: I've just said, I'm not made of money Grant. If your Dad would just send us some money it would make a difference.

Connor: When's tea ready Mam, I'm starvin'. Can I have a packet of crisps?

*(Switches on the T.V. and flops down on the chair)*

Julia: Tea will be about ten minutes, so no crisps or you'll spoil your tea.

Grant: Can I have fish fingers Mam?

Julia: It's Cottage pie and beans, you can have fish fingers tomorrow.

Connor: Uugh! I hate cottage pie, I'm not havin' it. Get us a packet of crisps and a can of pepsi can you.

Julia: I've just said "No" to crisps! Didn't you hear me? God you're getting just like your father. He never listened to me either. And another thing Connor, I've told you before about manners. When you ask for something you should remember to say please.

Connor: Oh stop your witterin' woman....

Julia: Connor! I won't have you talkin' to me like that, or anybody else for that matter.

Connor: Why?

Julia: Because I'd like a bit more respect from you thank you very much.

Connor: Well, it's what Dad used to say.....

Julia: That's precisely the reason. I don't want to hear you talking to anyone like that do you hear? It's very rude.

*Julia is interrupted by a knock on the door and Sheila enters.*

Sheila: Get kettle on Jules. I'm gaggin' for a cuppa. Owt good on L.K. today?

Julia: Yeah, how to lose 3 stone in 2 hours *(pause as sinks in)*... bloody liposuction, if you've got a few grand to spare.

Sheila: I'll bear it in mind if I ever win the Jackpot. *(Sheila groans and grabs roles of fat)*

Julia: Oh by the way, that reminds me, I can't make Bingo this week, got to go in to see Connor's teacher again. God knows what the little git's been up to now.

Sheila: Never mind you can come out with us on Friday instead *(look at each other)* it's me birthday remember. We're all off to Lloyd's for the karaoke and a pizza after. You are comin' aren't you?

Julia: I can't love, I'm sorry, I wish I could but....you know.... *(pause while they look at each other)*

Sheila: No money from shit'ead again? Christ, with all the money 'e must be rakin' in, .... You let him get away with it every time.

Julia: Don't go on She...you only work yourself up.

Sheila: Well, it makes my bloody blood boil. He walks out on you. Why? "'Cos you're a borin' cow" *(Mimicking Barrie)*. And leaves you and the kids with next to nowt while he's probably out every night with any tart that'll 'ave 'im.

Julia: Just drop it can't you. *(Getting visibly upset)*

Sheila: I'm sorry Jule, it just winds me up *(Pause)*...And you're not a boring cow. *(Hugging her)*....Not if you change your mind and come out Friday you're not.

Julia: I've told you I can't

Sheila: If that no good bloody ex of yours was made to pay up you could. Why do you let him get away with it Jules?

Julia: I've tried telling him. The last time he called to talk to the boys I asked him to send some money for new school uniforms

Sheila: And what did he say?

Julia: He said he'd see what he could do

Sheila: Well that's bloody big of him. So did he?

Julia: Yeah...

*Beat*

Sheila: Well?

Julia: (*quietly*) He sent forty pounds

Sheila: Forty quid! Forty measly quid! What planet is he livin' on if he thinks that'll cover the cost of two lots of school uniforms! For God's sake...

Julia: Well it's better than nothing I suppose, besides what more can I do?

Sheila: Grass him up to the C.S.A. That'd be a start

Julia: I can't

Sheila: You're too bloody soft you are.

Julia: Look, I'll have another go at him next time I speak to him.

Sheila: But you've got the forms I know you have. I went and bloody got them for you didn't I.

Julia: Just drop it why can't you

Sheila: But it's so simple

Julia: Not for me it isn't (*becoming increasingly anxious*)

Sheila: Why not? You've got a pen haven't you?

Julia: Yes of course

Sheila: Well then?

Julia: I can't, that all. O.K. Just leave it, please. Please Sheila. I mean it.

Sheila: But if you've got the forms and you've got a pen then why can't you. There's no time like the present, so where are they? Tell me and I'll get them

Julia: God, you're like a flamin' terrier down a rabbit hole. JUST LEAVE IT!!

Sheila: No, I want to see that turd get 'is comeuppance

Julia: Did you see Kaz up at school earlier? She's meant to be comin' round. Wants me to go to this new exercise class with her, but I can't afford.....

Sheila: (*Interrupts her exasperated*) Stop trying to change the subject Julia! We're gonna get this thing done once and for all or I want to know the reason why.

Julia: Oooh, Julia. You're soundin' like me mother now.

Sheila: Well, grow up and tell me what the problem is, why can't you bring yourself to send off those forms?

Julia: I've told you, I can't. Now give it a rest can't you?

Sheila: It isn't that you can't is it, it's 'cos you won't. Is it 'cos you're scared of Barrie?

Julia: 'Course not

Sheila: There must be something that's stopping you. What **are** you scared of then?

Julia: I'm not scared of anything..... (*Julia is close to tears*)

Sheila: Jules? What's wrong love? I'm sorry, I'm a pushy cow sometimes, just ignore me, eh?

*Silence*

Sheila: You know whatever it is you can tell me, mmm? (*Places arm around Julia's neck*)  
Come on love I want to help, please.

Julia: I know you do Sheila (*hesitates*).... It's not that I'm scared.....

Sheila: What is it then?

Julia: I'm...I'm... ashamed

Sheila: Ashamed?

Julia: Yes

Sheila: Ashamed of what? **You've** got nothing to be ashamed of. It's bloody Barrie that should be ashamed of himself, abandoning you and the boys and not facing up to his responsibilities.

Julia: Look, I know you don't think I should give him the time of day She, but I wish you'd stop putting him down like that all the time. There's things you don't know about Barrie, another side to him that others didn't see....

Sheila: Well, you're a better man than I Gunga Din. Don't think I could ever possess such a forgiving nature as you. Still, that just goes to show it isn't you who should be feeling ashamed of herself.

Julia: Well you asked me and that's what's bothering me.

Sheila: But you've got nothing to be ashamed of.

Julia: I have.

Sheila: Like what?

*Silence*

Julia: Oh, just ..... things, you know.

Sheila: No, I don't know. Tell me, then I might be able to understand

*Julia pauses while she thinks of how to explain.*

Julia: Things like letting people do things for me, letting people boss me about, control me. Of feeling helpless sometimes, taking the easy way out, not facing up to things....not trying enough.

Sheila: Woh there, just a minute. Where's all this come from?

Julia: All my life if I couldn't do something I'd let other people to do it for me ... or just not bother

Sheila: I still don't understand

Julia: *(Pause....then in a small voice)* The reason I can't fill the forms in is 'cos.....

Sheila: Go on ...

Julia: I ... I can't

Sheila: What?

Julia: I can't ...understand them

Sheila: Oh I know, they're full of jargon, but we can get to grips with the questions together.

Julia: Well you can, yes.

Sheila: Oh come on Jules....

Julia: I can't

Sheila: But...

Julia: No Sheila I can't understand them because I ...

Sheila: Because what?

Julia: I can't ...

Sheila: What Julia? What can't you do? What are you trying to say?

Julia: I ... can't read.

Sheila: That's bullshit! Come on pull the other one...

Julia: It's true.

Sheila: But everyone can read.

Julia: Yeah, well that's precisely why I'm ashamed – that attitude. Even you can't believe it.

Sheila: Shit, you really are serious

Julia: Ha, at last the penny's dropped!

Sheila: Listen, I'm sorry Jules, I really am. I just thought it was some kind of a joke.

Julia: It's no joke. That's why I keep it a secret. I don't understand those fancy forms. I can't grass him up, 'cos I can't fill the forms in 'cos I can't bloody read what the questions are! *(This needs to said getting increasingly louder due to her frustration with herself and the shame she feels)*

Sheila: Oh love, *(hugs Julia)* don't worry we'll do this together. If only you'd told me before. We could have got this sorted out yonks ago. *(Pause)* Oh Christ!.... What I don't understand is how you manage, you know shopping say or reading instructions for things.

Julia: Well, I don't know, I just stick to stuff I know in the shops and if I need to know how something works I ask someone to explain. Why do you think I'd get you to read my horoscope in the Echo every week?

Sheila: Oh you crafty little minx! Yes, now then, now you come to mention it you did didn't you. Oh well, the main thing is we can nail the bastard now. Hee hee, He won't know what's hit him will he? *(Squeezes Julia's shoulders)*

Julia: I'm still not sure about this...

Sheila: Well I am, go get those bloody papers.... On one condition *(look at each other)*... you come out Friday night!

Julia: God, you never give up do you. What about a sitter?

Sheila: I'll get that no good useless brother of mine round, he's got nothin' better to do.

Julia: Christ Sheila, I want a bloody house to come back to, they'll be nothin' left of it with your brother in charge! Don't you remember the last time he babysat?

Sheila: I've already told him he's banned from playing with fireworks in the house.

Julia: Puttin' bloody sparklers in the boys' drinks. It's not a flamin' cocktail bar.

Sheila: Anyway, does that mean you'll come then?

Julia: ‘Suppose so (*smiling*)

Sheila: Wahoo!! (*They hug*)

## Scene 2

*Sheila is singing “I’m too sexy” in the Karaoke Bar. Julia is propped up against the bar singing along. A man is staring at Julia from the other end of the bar. Julia catches sight of him. The man walks over to Julia.*

Darren: Are you having a go then?

Julia: Sorry?

Darren: Karaoke, are you getting up?

Julia: Oh God, no! I wouldn’t dare!

Darren: Why not? You seem to be enjoying the singing. Nothing to it. The words are on the screens.

Julia: Oh, I haven’t brought my glasses. I wouldn’t be able to read them. Anyway what about you?

Darren: I’d have to knock a few more of these back before I got up there.... Dutch courage

Julia: Oh, right.

Darren: She a friend of yours? (*Nodding to Sheila singing*)

Julia: For my sins

Darren: She looks like someone I used to go to school with. What’s her name?

Julia: Sheila

Darren: God yeah, that’s right Sheila Hardy if I remember right

Julia: Probably. I only know her as Pearson. Oh look, you can ask her yourself, she’s heading this way.

*Sheila returns slightly the worse for wear*

Sheila: Now then you sly old bugger, you gonna introduce us then?

Julia: I was just going to ask the same.

Sheila: Eh?

Darren: It is Sheila isn't it? Sheila Hardy?

Sheila: God, I haven't been called that for years. (*Looks at him closer*) Darren, Darren Freeman?

Darren: Got it in one.

Sheila: Bloody 'ell. I haven't seen you since.....(*gives up trying to remember*) since we were this high (*indicates with hand*)

Darren: I think we'd have been about 11. Anyway, introductions? (*Indicating Julia*)

Sheila: Oh sorry. Darren, Julia. Julia this is Darren we used to go to school together.

Julia: Hi.

Darren: Hi, pleased to meet you

Sheila: Didn't you used to sit next to Tanya Pickersgill? God, she used to be always pickin' the dry skin off her lips do you remember? Ha, you should see her now, swannin' around like Lady Muck. Married this professional football player I think, talk about dressed to kill, don't suppose she suffers from dry lips now, they're probably pumped regularly with collagen injections. (*pouts her lips*)

Darren: Really? Well, can you remember that Simon lad, forget his last name. What a prat he was, always had to be best at everything. Cricket, Football, Rounders. He'd throw a right wobbler if he lost.

Sheila: I know, but all the lasses fancied him though.

Darren: Jesus, that just makes it worse. (*More to himself whilst taking a drink*)

Sheila: God Jules, I'm feeling a bit rough lass, do you mind if we go home now?

Julia: I guess so. Makes a change you being first to want to leave. (*Turns to Darren*) Nice to have met you Darren, I'm sorry we've got to leave. Maybe see you again sometime.

Darren: Yeah, I hope so. Take care of her, she looks like she needs it. Bye.

Julia: See ya

Sheila: Best round up the rest. T'ra Daz, see ya.

*Girls exit.*

### **Scene 3**

*Julia's kitchen the next day. Sheila enters*

Sheila: All right love? God, my head's bangin' - feels like I've got two marching bands in there. Why do I always drink too bloody much? Got any aspirin?

Julia: Yeah, I've got them out ready. And black coffee, I knew you'd be suffering this morning. *Pause.*

That old friend of yours seemed nice last night.

Sheila: What Darren you mean? Yeah, funny how you see people differently when you're all grown up. I don't remember that much about him – you know, he was the sort of kid that blended into the background, let other people take the limelight. *(Takes a sip of coffee.)*

Julia: Yeah, I could imagine him being like that.

Sheila: Ooh, except for the time he was an angel in the school nativity play.

Julia: Go on...

Sheila: God yes, I remember he got caught short in the middle of "shining glory all around". Instead of telling the shepherds of the coming of baby Jesus, he stuck his hand up and said "Please Miss can I go to the toilet?" Caused a right uproar amongst all the mums and dads and old biddies from the local Old Folks Home. Took him a while to live it down I can tell you.

Julia: I bet!

*(Both women laugh)*

Sheila: He was never much good at sports either, the other boys used to take the piss out of him summat rotten. Except for Ian Harris. Well he was the same sort I suppose.

Julia: How do you mean?

Sheila: Both brainy, great at writing stories, they had fantastic imaginations y'know. *(Pause)* You two seemed to be getting on all right.

Julia: Yeah. God, it seems like years since I've had a proper conversation with a man.

Sheila: What **were** you talking about?

Julia: He was trying to get me to sing, but I fobbed him off, said I need glasses to see the screen.

Sheila: Ooh, you know all the tricks don't you. I'll never believe a word you say anymore.

Julia: How do you think I've managed all these years?

Sheila: I can't begin to guess, you cunning little ... ooo, that reminds me, have you thought anymore about my suggestion?

Julia: You what? (*Sheila gives her a look*) Oh, not that again.

Sheila: Come on Jules, it's worth a try at least. Just give it the once over, if you don't like it, we'll say no more about it. (*Pause*) Well, what do you think?

Julia: How did I ever get landed with a naggin' bugger like you for a mate?

Sheila: You know it's 'cos I care about you, you ungrateful witch. I got you the leaflets from that Learn Direct place, which we've been through. You know it starts tomorrow night, 7 o'clock, St. Martins Church Hall. All you have to do is turn up. (*Waits for an answer*) Well?

Julia: Oh if it'll shut you up, it's worth going, but just tomorrow. I'm not promising anymore.

Sheila: Well that's a start I suppose. Here, I've bought you a present (*gives her a brown paper bag*)

*Julia opens it.*

Julia: A pencil case! Oh She. (*Hugs her clearly touched*). Hang on, how did you know I would agree to go?

Sheila: Just call me the eternal optimist! Besides, I knew I'd wheedle you down eventually. (*Julia bats her gently on the arm with the pencil case*) I'll expect you to make good use of it young lady (*Sheila wagging her finger at Julia and mimicking a school teacher*)

#### **Scene 4**

*Julia is standing outside the Adult Learning Centre nervously clutching her new pencil case. Darren walks up to her*

Darren: Hello. Julia isn't it?

Julia: Oh Hi, Darren right?

Darren: How was Sheila after the other night?

Julia: Oh she was suffering the next day, but she's survived

Darren: Have you come for one of the classes?

Julia: Oh Yes. (*A little flustered and self-conscious*) Yes, that's right, one of the classes. And yourself?

Darren: Yeah – the Adult literacy class. What about you? Which one have you come for?

Julia: The same actually. (*Warming to him and feeling she has found a fellow student*) Have you been coming long?

Darren: Quite a while yeah. Haven't seen you here before though, is it your first night?

Julia: First and quite possibly the last. Probably be some old battle axe like the teachers we used to have at school. Anyway, I'll see how it goes. I'm only trying it out because Sheila bullied me into it

Darren: Good for her. I'm sure you'll enjoy it. Just try to relax, it's not that bad. You never know, you might enjoy it.

Julia: Ha, I doubt it.

Darren: *(smiling)* Just what are you expecting? We're not ogres you know

Julia: *(Taken aback slightly)* We?

Darren: Sorry?

Julia: You said "We". What do you mean "We"? We who?

Darren: The teachers here. We don't bite and we hardly ever get the slipper out any more...quite civilized these days really...

Julia: Oh my God, you mean... you're the...this is so embarrassing...

Darren: No need to be. Anyway, come on let's go in. It's time I got the class started.

Julia: I'm really not sure about this...*(feeling self-conscious again and unsure whether she can trust him)*

Darren: Well, it's either face this or face the wrath of Sheila and I know what I'd rather tackle...*(Waits for her to make the decision)*

Julia: Mmm, put like that I guess it makes sense. Better lead the way then

*Both exit*

## **Scene 5**

*A few months later. Julia is sat at her kitchen table flicking through a magazine. Enter Sheila*

Sheila: Now then. How was class last night? And lover boy?

Julia: Class went well thank you very much, and his name's Darren and he's my *teacher* not *Lover boy* as you like to call him

Sheila: Oh come on Jules, spill the beans, give us all the juicy details...

Julia: *(Carrying on looking at her magazine)* What do you think to this hair style? Do you think it would suit me?

Sheila: Changing the subject as usual, must have gone well then. (*Looks at mag*) Mmm, nice. Yeah I could see you with that. So just tell me, did you go out after for a drink again?

Julia: Does that say “highlights”?

Sheila: (*Looks*) Yes.

*Beat*

Well?

Julia: Do you think they’d suit me?

Sheila: What?

Julia: Highlights

Sheila: Never mind that, did Darren take you out after?

Julia: (*Mysteriously*) Might have

*Sheila groans*