

THEATREWORKS
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(PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL)

"SMALL TALK"

(Outline)

by

Paul Davies (c)

November 1989

"In the first two hours of my sojourn in Melbourne 29 people asked me how long I was staying; everyone else to whom I was introduced inquired when I had arrived. It is time they began teaching small talk in Australian schools"

Clement Freud

Lois and Katherine have settled into a very comfortable existence in a small bayside terrace, and have been there for a couple of years when the landlord suddenly announces that the place is on the market.

This sends them into a bit of a panic. They are quite upset at the idea of having to move on. At their age (late 30s) and with their kind of jobs (Kathy's a photographer, Lois teaches Anthropology) they should really be more secure than this. But times are hard, interest rates are high, the economy is becoming distinctly recessional. In order to make a bid for their home they urgently need a third party.

Re-enter George, Katherine's long absent brother. For most of their adult life George has been the prodigal son- moving straight from university to journalism and eventually to a rather high powered job as a foreign correspondent. Various incidents that have filtered back would seem to indicate that there is a bit more to George's job than just writing news copy. That in fact he may have become something a bit more shadowy perhaps even an agent of some kind. But what exactly for and for whom is never really clear.

So, for the last 14 years George has been overseas and out of touch. Now, however, he has come back to Melbourne and just as mysteriously, thrown in the high powered job. After a stint of unemployment Katherine learns that he is working in a drive-in bottle department.

The salient fact remains, however, that he has accumulated the required nest-egg. And with his contribution the 3 of them could just manage a viable deposit.

The only glitch is that Peter does not come solo. He arrives on the doorstep arm in arm with Mandy. Mandy works on one of the make-up counters at Myers. And she clearly wears her work home. She and Peter are "a couple". Katherine and Lois find the idea of make-up profoundly ideologically unsound.

Mandy is a decade younger than Katherine and Lois and a world away in both class and interests. Her instincts seem entirely superficial. Her deepest concerns apparently revolve around what colour make-up to wear to work the next day. Her cultural pursuits extend no further than television game shows and the soap operas.

At first Katherine is fascinated by someone so different. Her burning passion is to shape a kind of ideological framework for the ecology movement: a bringing together of greenie consciousness and socialism. She is convinced that what the world needs now is a new Marx- someone who can provide an analysis that fuses social equality with planetary survival and thus hands to the green movement a programme of action that encompasses all areas of parliamentary activity. No longer would the greens be relegated to the status of a one issue party. What Katherine dreams of is a "quality of life" party- because, of course, everything is connected; industrial, economic, culutral and social habits HAVE to change. She takes on Mandy as precisely the kind of person who needs to be converted if there is to be any hope for the world.

Lois, for her part, finds it impossible to concentrate on her great work: a doctoral thesis attempting to reconstruct the pristine world of the Yarra tribes prior to 1770. She is much less tolerant than Katherine of the yawning, gaps between them and Mandy. And even after a short time the strain begins to show.

George appears congenitally or emotionally incapable of taking sides, or even talking about his long exile in Europe- despite Lois's prodding. He seems fundamentally incapable of realising or even caring about his early promise. All Lois can glean from it is that something happened to him overseas which produced a sort of personal about face. But he won't talk about it. His preferred tactic is to withdraw and avoid. Which effectively, of course, only serves to incite and inflame the situation. George epitomises a generation that shook the world in the late sixties but which now seems to have settled for a comfortable and unruffled existence. He is a little burnt out and seemingly unable to comprehend or care about the sheer apolitical frivolity of the "me-generation" which succeeded his and which is now clearly represented by the shallow interests and mind numbing self obsession of Mandy's age group. Katherine thinks he's having a mid-life crisis.

So, in place of George's brooding silences, Mandy talks all the time. Her capacity for chatter and gossip and small talk is inexhaustible. It begins to drive Katherine and Lois to distraction and, when pushed sufficiently, George is forced to defend his partner. Things move swiftly towards crisis point. But a large common mortgage is powerful cement. The atmosphere becomes poisonous, claustrophobic.

Eventually, mortgage or no mortgage, Lois is at the point of moving out when suddenly George and Katherine's father dies. There's a third child, a brother between Katherine and George who in the wake of the father's death seems to have gone quite berserk. A large sum of money is missing along with all the family furniture. The brother has done a bunk. This new crisis directs their attention elsewhere. And for a while the heat shifts off Mandy.

The father had clearly been a powerful figure in both Katherine and George's lives. A generous and devoted self-made man. Despite the depression childhood, despite "the war" he only ever saw the good in people. He always seemed to have his hand in his pocket for someone and of course he also got ripped off. But even that didn't seem to bother him. People genuinely liked him, he was an exceptional man.

Katherine in particular is shaken by his death, especially the suddenness and stupidity of it (a heart attack in the water after his small dinghy is overturned by a freak wave). Everything about his life was meticulously planned and catered for- except the manner of it's ending and as they soon discover the estate also is in a mess- a lot of loose ends, largely the result of his boundless philanthropy.

Lois becomes fascinated by the family saga and starts to zero in on George teasing out the reasons for his going overseas in the first place. What went on over there? Why did he come back? At first George brick-walls and accuses her of making an anthropological study of him. He's going to write his own biography thanks very much, he doesn't want to turn up in someone else's doctoral thesis. But Lois is genuinely fascinated by the idea of someone changing so dramatically half way through their career. George denies that he's changed. The only "problem" lies in the way Lois views things. There is a continuity there- she just can't see it. Even articulating this much, however, represents a kind of loosening up in George and he surprises himself by suddenly pouring out his heart to Lois. She feels embarrassed about having unleashed this pent up whirlwind of emotions and the dialogue breaks off as suddenly as it began. But a bond has been established between them which, while it sits on the back burner for a while, is nevertheless there bubbling away behind the foreground action.

Meanwhile, Mandy develops certain worrying symptoms- bleeding between periods, a certain uncharacteristic listlessness and loss of energy. At first she ascribes it all to the fraught nature of her domestic situation and later, to the turmoil surrounding the father's death. The debate over the will, the break down in communication with the other brother, the calling in of solicitors and accountants, selling the parental home on a declining market, the number of bad debts, more distant relatives who gather around the furniture and silverware like vultures around the rotting corpse- or so it seems to George. Who for the first time is allowing more of his emotions surface.

Katherine sifts through some photographs of them as kids, recounting their common history while in a corner George weeps so quietly that for a while nobody notices.

But really it's Mandy who's suffering. Eventually Katherine cajols her into seeing a doctor and twenty four hours later when the pathology the tests come back her world caves in. A gynaecologist unemotionally tells her that there's something nasty involved and she needs more than just a pap smear. George finds the euphemisms infuriating and when pressed the specialist admits that he suspects cervical cancer stage 1A. A radical hysterectomy will probably be required almost immediately.

All of them are deeply shocked by the situation and as the differences between the women are quickly buried the sympathy flows. George and Mandy are deluged with information and advice from friends and friends of friends offering all sorts of alternatives and solutions. Mandy resists the idea of the operation. She always wanted to have children. She clutches at any possible alternative no matter how new age or bizarre. George, however, ultimately rests his faith in Western Medicine. It's tough, but childlessness is better than dying. The only good news is that cervical cancer is curable, albeit at this terrible cost.

Reluctantly Katherine and Lois are forced to agree. It does seem the only reliable way. Homeopathic or meditative cures are fine in theory and obviously work for some people, but the urgency of Mandy's predicament forces the making of a clearcut decision, an acceptance of the inevitable. When the chips are down wheatgrass juice and muscle kineseology just aren't enough. You don't question it, you can't afford to.

At which point they discover a specialist who while locked into the traditions of empirical science nevertheless contemplates and even encourages all sorts of alternatives. He is compassionate and accessible, helpful, concerned, optimistic and above all doesn't treat you like an idiot. He's a faint reminder of that fiction we used to have about the doctor as hero. Someone you could trust.

And so Mandy undergoes an operation in which her uterus, the top third of her vagina, one ovary and a dozen or so lymph glands are removed. Clearly the cancer had spread further than anyone predicted. In the bed beside her a woman is on the phone, in tears, asking her son in law to come and collect her because she drank a cup of tea by mistake and her operation has had to be postponed. In hospital Mandy grows up.

Six weeks of radiotherapy later she is pronounced cured. There will of course be further tests and annual cat-scans. But the major trauma of it is behind her. Things return to a kind of normality- apart from the mess of Peter and Katherine's family estate. The missing brother turns up but minus the money and so a protracted court battle ensues in which George attempts to recover some of it. The issue consumes him to such an extent that Mandy accuses him of neglecting her.

Their relationship reaches a low point. Mandy begins to manifest a certain independence and maturity. She changes. All of a sudden life seems very precious and very short. She stops watching television, she starts reading books. She mourns the children she can't ever have. It's Xmas. She buys a tree and a lot of coloured lights. For the first time with just the four of them there. . . there does seem to be something missing.

Mandy's been reading reading "The Age"- attracted in particular to the articles about In Vitro Fertilisation. She discovers that with her one functioning ovary she may still theoretically have a child. Of course she would need a surrogate mother- and lot of money. . . and a lot of luck. .

The issue divides them immediately. Lois is dead against it: male technology doing it in test tubes because they can't do it themselves. The fortune and brain power spent on it ! Why not save the 1000s of third world babies that die every day. If Mandy's that desperate why not consider adoption ?

But at 41 George no longer qualifies for a new born baby and in any case with Mandy's precarious symptoms she cannot guarantee the necessary 18 year life span required in an adoptive mother. Even if they could get a child which seems unlikely given the current demand.

Katherine begins to take issue with Lois's hard line attitude. Why not take advantage of the technology available to them? She imagines a future in which the 60s philosophy of living and loving together may in fact become a biological necessity. IVF lays open the possibility of a family where several parents can actually, biologically share the one child. If nothing else it should solve the eternal problems of motherhood versus career. She quite warms to the idea of sharing a child with George and Mandy. All of which reveals for the first time that if something has been going on between George and Lois then clearly there is also a burgeoning connection between Katherine and Mandy. But would this be a kind of bizarre incest or what?

Lois recoils from the very thought of it. This is a nightmare of unconsonable proportions. To Katherine that is precisely the point. The human race has to develop a new conscience. Our intellect is fashioning a world in which the old values created for and out of old technologies no longer have any purchase. Unless we develop a new ethics to accommodate our new science we really will be doomed. Nuclear weapons render the nation state obsolete. Already the world is ruled by corporations. The challenge is to recognise this and humanise what IS working.

George tends to agree with Lois. Science has brought nothing but problems. Our bodies are already walking chemistry sets. Our air is unbreathable. It is happening no more clearly than in Europe. The cities are clogged with cars, with pollution, even the soil is exhausted.

Katherine rejects this as alarmist nonsense. We are much better off than our ancestors. Materially speaking we live like kings compared to earlier generations. This isn't another dark age-it is a science led recovery of infinite potential. We only have to realise it and give technology back its soul. "Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will" says George cynically, and somewhat unnecessarily. But Katherine shocks them all. She offers to become the surrogate mother for George and Mandy's child. Life is short, we must look to the future-not backwards.

Lois is appalled. She accuses Katherine of trying to recreate some wierd image of her father. This whole idea of having a child- it's so bound up with the ego, of procreating an image of oneself. The world is already grossly overpopulated. It's obscene to be squandering precious resources on yet more children.

But Mandy cuts across all this. It's her body, whats left of it. She feels she has a right to do what she wants with it. Well this is her want ! Neither Lois nor Katherine can fundamentally argue with the feminist implications of this.

And George for his part is feeling entirely left out of it. Nobody is even considering it from his point of view. They still need him don't they ? Surely procreation hasn't become monogamous yet has it ? What about his feelings ? Is he going to be the father or what ? It's all becoming very contorted and confusing.

As the dust settles Mandy declares herself grateful for Katherine's offer. The only problem is a legal one. In Victoria for some peculiar reason the surrogate mother has to be infertile. There is, what Peter describes as a spectacularly pregnant pause. Katherine looks to Lois who doesn't respond so Katherine volunteers the information: Lois has had her tubes tied.

Lois and Peter share a look.

It's Xmas Eve exactly one year later. Katherine is setting the table. Peter lounges with the paper, making small talk. Lois taps away at her computer. Someone is playing "Gypsy Kings" on the CD. A gayly decorated tree stands in one corner of the lounge room. It's a scene of ordinary domestic bliss. Mandy enters with the turkey. It smells delicious. And as they converge on the exquisitely laid table Mandy jokes that from a certain point of view George could be accused of living in a harem. They all laugh. Suddenly a baby is heard crying off. Whose turn is it ? They can't agree. It's the usual parental squabble only this time spread across four people. Festive goodwill descends into an terribly familiar domestic free for all.

PRODUCTION NOTES

I've been thinking about producing "Small Talk" in the TheatreWorks space and applying some of the possibilities we've uncovered in the location theatre pieces- using it in deliberately "studio" sense.

One possibility is to divide the audience into two groups in a traverse arrangement (opposite sides facing each other) and stage the play in such a way that sometimes both groups watch the same scene in the playing space between them (ie large scenes set in the dining room or living room or hospital ward, say). At other times (through the insertion of a common wall across the middle of this space) the two audience groups would witness separate scenes that are performed simultaneously (ie smaller, more intimate scenes set in bedrooms or the kitchen or the bathroom).

Thus there would be a number of painted & soundproofed walls that could be rolled in from the sides to divide the space in two and to change the location of the action. Sometimes these smaller scenes would be repeated for each audience group. At other times they may not be. Effectively this means that each audience group would see a slightly different play. Which if nothing else should make interval fairly interesting.

All this depends on getting the "walls" (and possibility the ceiling) sufficiently sound proofed- perhaps using the panels we've got in mind for the acoustics anyway. (paintable canvas stretched over pink batts ?). In any case a certain spillage of sound might not be prohibitive- it's what happens in a house anyway and could sometimes be useful to the plot.

Perhaps also (like "Living Rooms" and "Full House/ No Vacancies") characters could wander from scene to scene during the one simultaneous sequence.

SMALL TALK

(4 lives in 17 scenes)

by

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ST1 HOSPITALS

Three beds against a plain white wall. One is empty, one has a woman asleep in it (with her TV on) and a third has a curtain pulled round- behind which there is the sound of someone being violently ill. When the vomiting stops Mick emerges holding a "kidney" dish.

He presses a call button on the wall but nobody comes.

He looks around the ward, pauses for a moment at the TV and presses the call button again.

Still no sign of anybody. So he spots the sink and goes to pour the yellowy-green bile into it.

As soon as he pours. . .

Mandy
(urgent, from behind the curtain)
Micky !

He races to get the dish back to her. But we hear her heaving before he can quite make it.

He leaves the dish with her, re-emerges to slam the call button.

Mick
Forcrissake !

And goes out looking for a nurse.

As soon as he's gone Kate comes in. She wears smart business-type clothes. Looks around the ward. Checks the name on the chart of the sleeping patient and leaving that comes to the curtained bed. This must be who she's looking for, but the curtain stops her.

She's wondering whether to peek through when Mick walks back in. There's a moment of doubt, then

Mick
Jesus !

Kate
Hullo Michael.

Mick
You've got short hair.

Kate
I've always had short hair.

Mick
Has it been that long ?

Kate
You're a hopeless communicator.

Mick
Yeah I know.

Kate
When Mum died we had absolutely no idea where to contact you.

He feels guilty. Shrugs.

Kate
You could've let us know Michael

Mick
It was hard to know myself.

Kate
Oh yeah.

Mick
I was moving around a lot.

Kate
You didn't even tell us you'd come back.

Mick
I was going to ring.
Mandy didn't want people to fuss.

Kate
Forgodsake that's what families are for.

Mick
We choose our friends but have our families are thrust upon us.

Kate
Didn't stop you relying on Dad when you had to.

Mick
Only because he insisted.

Kate
He wanted to help, Michael. We all do.

Mick
He gave us money because he felt guilty.

Kate
Is that so appalling ?

Mick
He was never around when it was important.

Kate
Which is no reason for taking it out on the rest of us.

There's a standoff.

Kate
How is she- your friend ?

Mick
She'd be a lot better if this bloody hospital worked.

Kate
Welcome back to Australia, mate.

Mick
Nah, it's the same everywhere.

Blackout.

The same ward a day later.

The curtain on Mandy's bed is drawn back and the other patient is gone.

She lies asleep. The daytime soap operas are on her television.

Mick enters with a bunch of flowers, walks quietly over to the bed and looks down at her, concerned.

He finds the chair behind him and sits. Waiting. After some moments he drops his head onto the sheets, still holding the flowers. The audio from the soap operas rolls on. Absurd voices having absurd relationships.

Blackout

The next day.

He lies asleep with his head on the sheets in exactly the same position as before- only with a different clutch of flowers. The previous bunch is in a vase on her side table.

From one day to the next the dialogue from the soap operas seems to be as little varied as the two bunches of flowers.

She is awake watching the television with a sunken, bored expression.

She changes channels (by remote) but they all seem the same. Eventually she switches it off.

Mandy
What a horrible place to die.

He jerks awake.

Mick
What ?

Mandy
Hospitals.

He looks around.

Mick
You've got a nice view of the city. . .

Mandy
Funny how you never think about it, but for most people
life ends here.
Next to a stranger.
With the television on.
It's so ordinary.

Mick
Forgodsake Mandy cheer up.
You've got to have strength.

Mandy
I've run out of strength.

Mick
You've just had major surgery.

Mandy
Are you listening to me, I'm dying !

Mick
We're all dying. *Pause*
From the moment we're born, we're dying.
What's the difference ?

Mandy
A lot of time.

Mick
Well, yes- OK eventually you, me, we're all going to
die. But not yet. ~~Not for a long time.~~

well yet not going to die yet

Mandy
You haven't got cancer.

Mick
Neither have you, now, that's the whole point of ~~all this~~ ^{isn't}. The radical hysterectomy ~~takes most of it~~.
The radiotherapy cleans up the rest.

Mandy
What if it doesn't work?

Mick
It'll work.

Mandy
What if it doesn't?

Mick
We'll try something else.

Mandy
I'm scared, Micky.

He takes her hand.

Mandy
I wish I believed in something.

Mick
There is a higher power, you know.

Mandy
(doubtful)
Oh yeah.

Mick
. . . looking over us- there is.
There's a hand that guides us.

Mandy
Don't bullshit me, Micky, I know what you believe in.

Mick
OK I'm an atheist.
But there are these times when I think it's like I'm
in somebody's else's movie. Like everything around me is
a kind of test. Designed to see how I go. Someone up
there, looking down, smirking. . . ^{watching the script of your} ^{life.} ^{life.}

Mandy
There's no one looking down on anything.
When you go you go that's it.

②

from p. 6

*you may not all
need the radio
I need the radio
sure when
since this man
you saw his
morning?
I thought he said
his magnets were
clear
it's just to
make sure
it's disused
with both
doctors.*

←
PPD

Mick ①
You've got to want to be cured, Mandy.
That's the whole point.
It won't work if you keep worrying about it.

She looks at him for a long moment then switches "General Hospital" back on.

Blackout

ST2 MOVING IN

The soap opera dialogue fades through to soothing music.
Someone lights a candle
A soft voice is heard on tape.

Voice

I want you to imagine a brilliant white beach, in the middle of which is a warm, clear lagoon. You're floating there head up, arms outstretched, body relaxed. Just floating on the surface, letting go. . . .
And as you float there all the tension drains from your body, with your arms relaxed, your legs relaxed, just letting go. . . .

Music fades in and out.

Voice

Gradually this wonderful feeling spreads through your whole body, you feel your jaw relax, your shoulders drop, your whole body just melting into the clear sparkling water, letting go. . . . letting go.

A door bell rings off, shattering the mood somewhat.

A still mind in a still body.

So relaxed your eyes open slightly and there above you

The doorbell again.

a deep blue sky, so blue and immense your tension just evaporates up into it, into this deep blue immensity. Letting go. . . . letting go. . . .

The doorbell a third time.

Lois stops the tape and snaps on a table lamp above her head
We see that she has been lying on the floor meditating. She sits up, and moves to open the door.

Mick is there.

Mick

Hullo, I'm Michael.

Kate's brother.

I got held up at the hospital.

Lois

Oh right, yes, come in.

We were expecting you this morning.

He comes in, she blows the candle out.

Mick
Hope it isn't inconvenient

Lois
I usually like to have the house quite for an hour or
so in the afternoons .

Mick
Perhaps I could come back.

Lois
It doesn't matter now.

He only holds a small bag.

Lois
I thought you'd be bringing your things over.

Mick
These are my things.

Lois
All of them ?

Mick
(bit self-conscious)
'Fraid so.

He puts the bag down. Notices an old sundial on the wall,
reads the inscription.

Mick
"Seize the present moment. . . the evening hour is nigh"
Very apt.

Lois
Yes.

Mick
Should have it out in the sun though.

Lois
I don't want it to wear out.

Mick
(smiles)
Well, that's solar power for you.

Lois
How is she, your ah. . . friend.

Mick

Mandy ? Terrible.

I had no idea.

I thought if the vomiting doesn't stop soon I'M going to go crazy. It must've been ghastly for her. I was sick just watching it. No one really told us how bad it would be.

Lois

Hell of a thing.

Mick

Yeah.

Lois

Everywoman's nightmare.

Mick

What I don't understand is: they've had 50 years to find a cure for cancer and they still know buggerall.

Lois

Doctors never look at it holistically.

Mick

Yet it's going to get a third of us

ST3 HOUSE WARMING

Kate and Lois have prepared a sumptuous meal to celebrate Mandy and Mick's moving in with them. They're relaxing with some drinks afterwards.

Lois is in full flight.

Lois

Of course there's nothing on paper. There didn't need to be anything on paper. The CIA didn't have to send a telegram to Canberra saying "Start the coup now, remove Whitlam immediately" because there were people in the right places programmed to do exactly that. That's what their lifelong function was. Why they were recruited in the first place- to avoid having things on paper.

Mick

So what? Nobody cares about that stuff anymore.

Lois

That's why we're still a colony, darling, and it's why we always will be. Because nobody cares anymore. We do what our leaders tell us. We believe what the newspapers say.

Kate

The problem with Australia is that in order to win government you have to please a handfull of apathetic voters in a pile of marginal seats. Nobody is game to do anything radical because the parties are so evenly balanced.

Lois

So all the parties start to look the same. Something that Mum and Dad in the suburbs will vote for.

Kate

As far as I'm concerned Gough Whitlam is the last legitimately elected prime minister of this country. Until he's restored to power there is no democracy here

Mandy

Who's Gough Whitlam?

Mick tries to bury his embarrassment.

Mick

Just an old tv personality.

Lois
Now making ads for fax machines.

Kate
We've all got to earn a living, darling.
At least it's not cigarettes.

Mick
Speaking of which, does anybody mind if I smoke ?

Kate
I didn't know you smoked.

Mick
I have an occasional puff.

Mandy
Occasional puff !
He's had so many fags today he's already on his third
lighter!

Kate
Everyone shortening his life by 10 minutes.

Mick
I'm not really committing suicide I'm just trying to
fast forward my life to its natural conclusion.

Mandy
Unnatural conclusion.

Mick
(lighting up)
Well here goes another half hour or so.

Lois
Actually I'd prefer it if you didn't.

Kate
Yes, I don't see why we all have to breathe it.

Mick
(bit pissed off)
I'll blow it out the window then.

He goes over to stand near the window.

Mandy
Micky said you're being evicted.

Lois
The auction's on Saturday.

Kate
Funny when you rent a place for so long you
you kind of forget it isn't your own.

Mandy
Can't you buy it ?

Simultaneously:

Kate	Lois
Possibly	Not really

Kate
We'd like to but the interest's a worry.

Mick
You could afford it if Mandy and I chipped in.

Lois
I don't think its a good time to buy.

Mick
Do you like the place or what ?

Kate
It'd be great if we didn't have to move.

Lois
You'd be buying on a falling market. It's ridiculous.

Mandy
But if you buy real estate you can't lose in the long
term, can you ?

Lois
You can if we're going into a depression.

Kate
We'd save a lot of time if we didn't have to move all
your archives.
Lois can't throw anything away. The roof is groaning
with her stuff. Boxes and boxes of papers.

Lois
It'll all be worth a fortune one day.

Kate
If the silverfish leave anything.

Lois
I know several colleges in California would fall over
themselves to get their hands on that stuff.

Mick
Sell it to them now and you could raise the deposit.

Mandy
What is it ?
What's in the boxes ?

Kate
Lois is just finishing a dictionary of Walpiri.

Mandy frowns.

Mick
Aboriginal language.

Mandy
"Oh, that's nice.

Blackout.

Some time later.
Kate clears away the meal. Lois and Mandy are at the table.
Mick is standing by the window again, lighting yet another
cigarette.

Kate
Mick, is someone with a brilliant future behind him.

Mick
Bullshit.

Kate
(to Mandy)
Dux of the school.
Got a commonwealth scholarship.
Did 3 years of a Law Degree.

Mick
Aw, Kate.

Mandy
I didn't know that.

Kate
He could've been anything he wanted.

Mick
There was nothing I liked.

Kate

It's a waste.

You fritted it all away. On this "kink" Mum called it, this always wandering off, never putting down roots, just him and his typewriter and no forwarding address.

Mick

So I had a Kerouac fantasy.

Kate

The whole family was so disappointed.

Mick

I don't know what the key to success is but the key to failure was trying to please everyone.

Mandy

I think I've heard that somewhere before.

Kate

Nothing he does now is original.

Mick

Give it a rest, Kate.

Kate

It used to be. You could've been a true original.

Lois

Is he afraid of doing well or just having a mid-life crisis ?

Mick

What's particular about the mid-life version ?
Some people I know are having them all the time.

Kate

You could do a bit better than the racing pages of the Daily Sun.

Mick

What ? Too low brow for you is it ?
And ordinary working class paper ?

Kate

It's not what I'm saying and you know it.

Mick

That's what really shits me about the Whitlam generation. You're so goddamn fucking middle class.

Lois

Yeah but at least we had a vision.
Which's a hell of a lot more than you can say for what
came after us.

Mick

I was covering a bombing in Northern Ireland once.
Someone had blown up a school bus by mistake.
When I got to the scene there was this child's leg
with a shoe on it. The shoe was perfectly
untouched. It was just lying there on the roadway.
A leg in a school shoe. A little scuffed on the front of
course- the wear and tear of the playground. But totally
untouched by the bomb. Somehow it seemed absurd
to me that the shoe was untouched. But the child wasn't.
I'm afraid I lost the language to be able to describe
that to people reading the paper over breakfast.
Afterwards I decided to try advertising for awhile.

No one speaks for a few moments.

Mick

I mean is there any language that can describe that?

Lois

I think we have to find one.

Blackout

ST4 WALLS AND VOICES

It's 3am. Mandy is finding it hard to sleep. She comes into the living room wrapping a dressing gown around her and carrying a glass of milk. As she goes to sit on the couch she's startled to hear Lois and Kate's voices through the bedroom/living wall.

Lois

It's not Mandy who's sick it's your fucking brother.

Kate

We're not just putting a roof over their heads, they're enabling us keep the house.

Lois

She didn't even know who Germaine Greer was !

Mandy decides she doesn't really want to hear this and makes a move to go but somehow is drawn back into listening.

Kate

Well, she's younger than us, it's a different generation.

Lois

You tried to be a wife to your father and now you're going to be a mother to him.

Kate

I'm not mothering him.
I'm just extending a helping hand.

Lois

Everything was so simple when it was just the two of us.

Kate

Do you want to keep the house or what ?

Lois

I'd prefer it if you could just let your men grow up.

Kate

And I'd prefer it if we didn't have to move out to Woop Woop.

Lois

I like my privacy. I went to boarding school remember. I got sick of living in dormitories.

Kate

I think there comes a point where some things are more important than how many bedrooms you've got.

Lois

They've only been here 5 minutes and already we're fighting.

Kate

You've got that tone again.

Lois

What tone ?

Kate

When you think you know everything.
I can't stand that superior edge you get.
It's so academic and infuriating.

Lois

You KNOW I'm always right.

Kate

I'll sleep on the couch.

Lois

No, no I'LL sleep on the couch.

Kate

Lois-

Lois

You've got an earlier start.

Mandy hurries out of the way.

And returns to the other bedroom, which rouses Mick.

Mick

(grumpy)

Are you going to sleep ?

Instead of answering him she just lies on top of the blankets and rolls away from him.

Mick

What ?

Still no response

Mick

What's the matter ?

She folds her arms.

Mandy
You don't like my body anymore.

Mick
Oh Mandy !

Mandy
It's damaged. All fucked up.

Mick
I like your body.

Mandy
I'm deformed.

Mick
You're not deformed.

Mandy *called*
They call it a bikini cut.
I'll never wear a bikini again.

*They've talked most of my
vaginal sin
deformed.*

Mick
Is that such a tragedy ?

Mandy
We haven't made love since I came out of hospital.

Mick
Don't get yourself in a big lather about it.

Mandy
Well, it's true isn't it ?
You couldn't bear to touch the scar.

Mick
Forcrissake they've only just taken the stitches out.

Mandy
The doctor said we should make love.

Mick
I can't make love on prescription.

He rolls away from her.

She starts crying.

Mick
Please Mandy.

Mick

We've got to give ourselves a break.
We both need some time out.

Mandy

I don't feel whole anymore.

Mick

God ! This is the last thing we should be doing is
having a brawl. We've got to be strong.
I have to be there for you and you have to be there
for me. Otherwise it'll just tear us apart.

She doesn't respond.

Mick

Mandy ?

She continues to ignore him so collects his pillow and walks
out.

ST5 MUSICAL BEDS

Mick comes out into the living room and is a trifle surprised to see a pillow and blanket on the settee. It seems odd but then maybe Kate heard them arguing. When he thinks about it he even becomes a little peeved that it was so predictable.

He looks around, shrugs, and lies down, gets up switches off the light and lies down again.

A moment later the toilet flushes and Lois enters from the bathroom. She comes through the darkened living room to the settee and is startled to find Mick in her temporary bed.

Lois
Oh !

He leaps out. She switches the light back on.
They stand there for a moment confused and embarrassed.

Mick
Sorry. . .

Lois can see the funny side.

Mick
I'll ah. . . try the ah. . .

Lois
'Afraid the bathroom's a bit cramped.

Mick
Oh

Lois
And I wouldn't recommend the laundry- too cold.

Mick
Well- (shrugs, smiles)

Lois
If you take these cushions and wrap that rug around them
I can sleep on the base.

She removes the three cushions from the settee

Mick
No, really, I'm just as comfortable on the floor.

Lois
Don't be silly, take the cushions.

Mick
Thanks.

Lois
So much for avoiding dormitories.

Mick
What ?

Lois
Nothing.

As they settle down again.

Mick
I suppose we're going to have to work out how to deal
with this kind of thing.

Lois
Short of some very expensive renovations I can't see
many options.

Mick
Excuse my prying but. . . do you ah- sleep out here
often ?

Lois
No, I usually sleep in my room.

Mick
(feeling the imposition)
Yeah, right.

After some moments in the blackout.

Lois
I think probably ultimately we all sleep better alone.

Mick
Yeah.

Another pause.

Lois
Is Mandy alright ?

Mick
Yeah, sort of. Up and down, you know.

Lois
To put it mildly.

Mick
She's alright.

Lois
Mmm.

Slight pause.

Lois
Are you OK ?

Mick
Don't ask me. How would I know ?
I'm the last to work that out.

Lois
You mustn't try to take it all on by yourself.

Mick
No.

Lois
Kate's very concerned.
We both are.

Mick
Yeah, I know.

Lois
Despite my exterior, ah. . . indications maybe to the
contrary.

Mick
That's OK.

Lois
Anyway, I just wanted to let you know.

Mick
We're not very good at expressing how we feel.
Are we ?

Lois
No, I suppose not.

Mick
Sometimes I think idle chatter is more important than
people realise.

Lois

Oh definitely, we have to perfect it. Small talk should be taught in schools. Afterall it's mostly how we define ourselves, engineer our relationships.

Mick

Yeah.

Lois

People dismiss it as minor, but really I think it's how we really convey what we're all about.

Mick

Then again, you are a linguist.

Lois

You've got to have hope. That's all I know. The mind does control the body. People do cure themselves- whether the doctors can explain it or not.

Mick

Yeah.

Slight pause

Lois

Goodnight, Mick.

Mick

See ya.

ST6 ON BEING HIT BY A TRUCK

Kate and Mandy are washing up the breakfast things.

Mandy

I'd never been sick in my life before. Never even been to hospital except for the time I fell asleep a hairdryer.

Kate

What ?

Mandy

Blistered my ear lobes.

They both laugh.

Mandy

It was a disaster at the time. My deb ball. Didn't half ruin the night. I wouldn't dance with anyone. I can laugh about it now. At the time I thought my life was virtually over.

Things go all tense and awkward again.

Kate

Life is what you make it.

Mandy

Yeah.

Kate

What were the symptoms ?

Mandy

At first just this odd bleeding that didn't seem to clear up. I thought it was the stress of trying to cope with life in Boston on Michael's salary. I'd always had pap smears. The one 6 months before was absolutely clear. A GP did another one and it also was clear. I distinctly remember her about to hang up reassuring me on the phone that everything was fine. But it wasn't fine. The bleeding persisted. So she passed me off onto a gyno who took one look and sent me straight to hospital. All he'd admit to was that it was something "nasty". I couldn't bear the uncertainty of that word. "Nasty." It was so vague. I loathed it. I loathed the fact that the word meant neither one thing or the other. Michael had to ask him straight out "was it cancer ?" and he said yes, he thought it probably was. It was like being hit by a truck. Micky and I hopped on the next plane back to Australia. That way I could get medicare, otherwise we'd be bankrupt by now.

Kate
Thank god for Medicare.

Mandy
Yes.
Eventually we found an oncologist who didn't treat us like idiots. He was the image of what you thought doctors ought to be. Someone who took the time, who seemed to care, who offered hope.

Kate
Was he right ?

Mandy
Not all the time. But you clutch onto any hope. Straws and drowning people and all that. His prognoses generally erred on the side of optimism. But we trusted him that was the important part. I'll always remember his diagrams. He'd explain it all by drawing the tumour on his prescription pad- the lymph nodes, the ovaries and all that. He was a terrible artist. My body ended up looking like a petty cartoon.

They laugh.

Mandy
He managed to save one ovary and tuck it up under my armpit- that way it would be out of the field of any radiation later.

*Kate + Rosie
Mandy
her best friend*

Kate
~~It's a hell of a thing.~~ *Joe yes.*

Mandy
Yeah.

~~Kate
What I don't understand is how it can just strike down normal, healthy people.~~

Patient
Mandy
They say we've all got cancer inside us all the time. Something just triggers it off.

Joe ~~Kate~~
A disease to match the times.

Mandy
~~All I know is Nuns don't get it and prostitutes do. It used to be regarded as a working-class disease.~~

Joe
He
Rosie costs a willow
glanced at him.
Kate looks out
Beats him
the slumps

Rosie tries to pull her off
Joe cons
with
flowers
to Rosie

ST7 THE BIG FOUR "O"

Kate is teaching herself keyboards by practising on a cheap Casiotone- doing the scales. Mick has sprawled with the "Sunday Age" after a few moments he reads out an item:

Mick

(reading)

"5,000 Alsations made redundant by the collapse of the Berlin Wall have been sent for sale to the West because nobody in East Germany wants to buy them."

Kate

Fair enough.

He puts the paper down, reflecting.

Mick

It's not their fault. They're only dogs afterall.

Kate

I never liked German Sheperd.

Mick

Love is a German Shepherd.

Kate

For some.

Mick

It's amazing isn't it, what's going on over there. All these fascist states coming down: Romania, Hungary, South Africa, Queensland. . .

Kate

Russia next.

Mick

Why, when I look at Russian politics do I always see tanks ? There could still be a catastrophe you know.

Kate

Wasn't that Tienanamin Square ?

Mick

Everything's going right except for Mandy.

She stops playing.

Mick

I'm not very good at. . . looking after her.

Kate
You're a good cook. You look after her.
Anyway, she's getting better isn't she ?

Mick
I don't know how to . . .
(searching for the best way to put it).
spend time with her.

Kate
It's a common male failure, darling. We girls aren't
surprised by that anymore.

Mick
Time's so short, it goes so fast. One Sunday I'm having
breakfast, sprawled with the Sunday papers and suddenly it's
next week and here I am with the Sunday papers again and I've
got buggerall idea what I've just done in the last 7 days.

Kate
Didn't you know- time speeds up as you get older.

Mick
I have to pinch myself to remember that I'm actually 40.
The dreaded big four-0. And it passed so casually by.
I didn't even have a proper birthday party.
I mean look at me.

Kate
Do I have to ?

Mick
People I went to university with have already been cabinet
ministers. ~~Some even Premiers at 38.~~

Kate
That's what I keep telling you, you're a failure.

Mick
Here I am 40 years old and I don't even own a suit. Somedays
I don't even shave and I sincerely believe that if I didn't
have to put in an appearance at work occasionally I'd
probably stay in my pyjamas all day.

Kate
Am I hearing things ? Have you finally seen the light ?

Mick
It finally hit me. The real mid-life crisis is that shift
from a fascination with the past to a concern for the present
and an ultimate horror about the future.

Kate

I think you ARE having a nervous breakdown.

Mick

You're right of course. Failure at 20 is just a learning experience, part of the growth process. Failure at 40 is failure with a capital "F".

Kate

Isn't today the first day of the rest of your life ?

Mick

You keep hoping there'll be some blue sky on the horizon, some wonderful project that will drop into your lap, make you famous overnight. But of course it never does happen like that.

Kate

You've got to work at it. You've got to make your opportunities.

Mick

There's no spark anymore. I haven't got any bounce. What did Christopher Skase say ?

Kate

He "took his eye off the ball."

Mick

Yes. He took his eye off the ball. The game of inner tennis.

Kate

You should take up a hobby or something ?

Mick

Yeah, model aeroplanes. I could handle the glue.

Kate

God you've got it bad today.

Mick

Dad would turn in his grave if he could see me now.

Kate

Our father who art in heaven.

Mick

He was a good man, though. A really "good" man. Wasn't he ? Always had his hand in his pocket for someone. Godknows how much he gave away. A small man with a big heart.

Kate

Yes, he was rare alright.

Mick
So if he went at 64 and Mum went at 56.

Kate
57.

Mick
57. How long does that give us ?

Kate
Oh Mick, really. . .

Mick
It's an intriguing question though, don't you think ?
Do we get biologically stronger or weaker than our parents ?

Mick
I used to think they had a deprived childhood- all that depression stuff about living on potatoes and what they could grow in the backyard. But looking at it now it was probably a far healthier start in life than our mars bar and milkshake childhood.

Kate
So ?

Mick
So we've probably got even less time. . .

Kate
I this conversation really quite unnecessary ?

Mick
They also had that fundamental belief system to steer them through it all. Mum was so fanatical about being a good Catholic.

Kate
Not towards the end.

Mick
No ?

Kate
When the crunch came and she really knew she was dying I suspect she just let it all go. The holy pictures were still there on the walls, the sacred heart over the doorway, but I just got this distinct impression she suddenly, deep down, didn't believe it anymore. It was like religion had failed her because she was mortal afterall.

Mick

Well, fancy that eh ? Mum the agnostic.
All those rosaries wasted, the novenas, the stations of the
cross, all that credit in heaven down the drain.

Kate

I wouldn't say wasted exactly.

Mick

Religion's a con.

Kate

A consolation.

Mick

Hoh !

Kate

For some.

Mick

A con is a con is a con.

Kate

But the whole concept of an afterlife. . .
Did we dream it up just so our massive egos could cope with
the concept that one day, eventually we wouldn't be around
anymore or- is it so common to all generations and so
widespread that there must be something in it ?

Mick

Look, you're born, you live for a while and then you die.
That's it. Blackout. No more nothing.

Kate

That's a terribly depressing attitude.

Mick

Only when people fully realise that they'll stop aiming for
an improbable afterlife and start doing something about the
appalling condition of the one they really have got for sure.

Kate

Is that the end of your sermon ?

Mick

Michael's epistle to the fundamentalists. Yes.
That'll do for this Sunday.

Kate

Good.

She turns back to her playing.

Mick returns to his paper.

ST8 COSMETIC ALTERATIONS

Mandy is sticking up a large Australian flag on the living room wall. Lois comes in from work. Mick is again ensconced in a lounge chair idly surveying the paper. Kate is setting the table for dinner.

Lois
Ohmygod, what's that ?

Mandy
Bit of interior decorating.

Lois
What happened to the Drysdale print ?

Mandy
I put that in the toilet

Lois
The toilet !

Mandy
Mmm. Brightens it up.

She stands back from the flag to consider it.

Mandy
Do you like it ?

Lois
Why not put the flag in the toilet ?

Mandy
You don't like it ?

Lois
Not much, no.

Kate
It's only a flag.

Mick
Men have died for that flag.

Lois
Precisely. Men- have- died.
And for what ?
It's absurd. A bit of coloured cloth.

Mick

Hang on, it's not the object itself it's what it stands for. Men have died for what it stands for. For the idea of the flag.

Lois

The idea of what ?

Mick

Our way of life.

Lois

Your way of life, not mine.

Kate

I think it's got a sort of Carnaby Street edge to it.

Lois

We can't possibly have something like that dominating the living room. It's grotesque. We'll be running a cell for the national front next.

Mandy

I'll take it down then.

Lois

No, no, it's just my opinion.

Kate

Oh Lois !

Mick

I must admit I never really did like Carnaby Street much.

Lois

Nationalism has caused more deaths. . .

Kate

(cutting her off)

Yes, we know.

Lois

Once it was the Japanese we were killing in the name of the flag. Before that it was the Turks and the Germans. Now they're our greatest mates. In the name of the flag. What was the point ?

Mick

They were threatening to kill us.

Lois

I'm sorry ? Kill us ?

We travelled half way round the world to invade Gallipoli

Mick
Because the Germans were shooting Nuns in Belgium

Lois
In the name of THEIR flag.

There's a tense pause.

Mandy
I'll take it down.

She does so.

Lois
No, no - I'll put the Drysdale in the bedroom.

But Mandy continues to fold the flag away.

Kate
It's ready when you want it.

They sit down to the meal.

For a while just the scraping of soup spoons on plates.

Kate
Did you see the publishers ?

Lois
Don't ask.

Kate
Oh no, what happened ?

Lois
They're not sure of the educational market.
Suddenly nobody wants a dictionary of Walpiri.

Mick
Not even the Walpirians ?

Kate
I thought the library sales alone would justify it.

Lois
Apparently not.

Mandy
I'm going to start work again next week.

This is news to Mick.

Mick
Eh ?

Kate
Are you sure ?

Mick
When did this happen ?

Mandy
I saw personnel today. They said they'd love to have me back.

Mick
You're old job ?

Mandy
Yes.

Kate
It's a bit soon isn't it

Mandy
I'm bored to death, why else would I be interior decorating?

Lois
I think work's an excellent idea.

Mandy
I mean if we're going to buy this place we'll need the cash
flow won't we ?

Lois
Of course.

Mandy
Honestly I'll die of boredom if I don't do something.
Besides I can get a staff discounts on any of the stuff we
sell. Not just the Elizabeth Arden counter.

Lois
Cosmetics ?

Mandy
Anything you want.

Kate and Lois share a look.

Kate
We don't really use make up all that much thanks, Mandy.

Mandy
You sure ?

Lois
Yes.

Mandy
Well, body lotions, soap . . . just let me know.
It's 50% off.

Kate
Thanks anyway.

Lois
Yeah, thanks.

Mick
You do use soap do you Kate ?

She just glares at him.

ST9 MOTHERHOOD ISN'T EVERYTHING

Mandy and Kate are laughing

Mandy

At first I couldn't believe it.

I thought, she's much too old to have children she must be a granny. I glanced inside the pram as she breezed past and there it was: a poodle ! Sitting up large as life looking like it owned the street.

Kate

Yeah, I've seen her.

It's like that around here. It always surprises you.

Mandy

I had to laugh.

Kate

They said a UFO landed near Fitzroy Street the other night and the police were at a loss because they couldn't tell the difference between any aliens and half the people you normally find there.

Mandy

I'd prefer to have people in the streets at night, at least you feel safer.

Kate

Until the pubs close.

Mandy

But you've seen her before ?

Kate

There's another one with a pram who keeps most of her possessions in it. She's a bag lady who sleeps in the park near the National. You'll see her collecting bottles from the rubbish bins.

Mandy

Funny sort of fate for a pram.
Carrying bottles instead of babies.
"Barren" like me.

Kate

Think of the advantages: no more worries about the pill or an IUD.

Kate

Oh yes, I blithely sweep past the tampon counters at the supermarket. No more monthly sickness for me.

Kate
Half your luck.

Mandy
"Cemetery belly" is another expression I came across.
An infertile woman's womb: "The place where babies die."

Kate
That's a terrible expression.

Mandy
Still, it's what some people think.

Kate
No. That's terrible.

Mandy
It shits me at work when they ask you, you know, the inevitable question: "when are you going to have kids?" It's all can think about half of them. And when you say you're not planning a family they assume you must be going to have a career instead. So if you're not a mother or not ambitious there's no place for you. It's all so goddamn predictable.

Kate
You should tell them what's happened.

Mandy
I don't want to go into all that again. I get sick of telling the same tedious old story. Of course people are sympathetic but nobody really understands. It's funny how you tend to avoid old friends who've got kids. There's really nothing to say. You get to hate pregnant women with their self contained far away looks and that satisfied glow.

Kate
Motherhood isn't everything.

Mandy
Try telling my relatives that.
They're all reproducing like rabbits.
Suddenly the world seems full of women with nappies and "capsules" for car seats. I feel like inventing a new sticker: "childless couple on board."

Kate
You mustn't let it get to you. Not all of us want kids.

Mandy
Oh I don't envy them really. I know I shouldn't be so angry. It's not their fault they're fertile and I'm not. It's hard either way. Rationally I know that. Just sometimes it shits me.

Kate

I think sometimes you've got to be angry.
It's important to be angry.

Mandy

The irony of course is that before. . . I genuinely didn't want kids. It hardly even occurred to us. Financially it wasn't an option anyway. Then, as soon as they told me the results of the biopsy it was like I went into mourning or something, grieving for the children I now couldn't have.

Kate

As if you didn't have enough to worry about.

Mandy

Oh the cancer was secondary really. Somehow all that seemed remote. In hospital anyway there are too many other things to worry about. Like the Vietnamese woman opposite who had an ectopic pregnancy and couldn't understand a word the doctors were saying, or the options they were giving her. I found it difficult enough, she had no chance. Because they all say, "you've got to ask questions" "you've got to know the choices". But you've got to know what questions to ask. You've got to be almost as skilled as they are. The woman I went through intensive care with never questioned anything. To her the surgeon clearly was god. Her son and husband seemed to be only a minor ranking below that. All through the recovery all she worried about was whether they had enough ironed shirts and cooked meals in the freezer. The day before she came in for her radical hysterectomy she did ten loads of washing so they wouldn't have to bother. I think they only visited once or twice, and looked utterly unsupportive sitting there like death warmed up with minds in neutral hardly even making small talk. I really wondered why she bothered.

Kate

Hospitals ! God.

We've to heal ourselves.

Hospitals are a measure of our failure. They only exist because something has gone fundamentally wrong.

Mandy

Yeah.

ST10 THE POLITICS OF HEALING

In the living room Lois is showing Mandy some alternative health books: Ainslie Meares, Ian Gawler etc.

Lois

When you cut yourself the wound heals. Automatically. We don't have to think about it. It just happens. That huge part of the mind that we don't use consciously goes into action and does it for us. We have within us this enormous capacity for healing.

Mandy

But with cancer- how ?

Lois

A still mind in a still body. What most people call meditation. You relax the body and calm the mind to a point of absolute stillness. I can't describe the feeling you get any more than I can describe the taste of a banana. All I can say is your mind shuts down but remains alert, you experience a profound relaxation through which the healing energy of the mind is released.

Mandy

I wish I had more confidence. I don't know what to believe. I've tried iridology, naturopathy, muscle kineaseology, acupuncture, orthomolecular therapy, vitamins, reiki, crystals, massage . . . I asked the oncologist "is there any other way?" He says "no, they're all quacks defrauding people, giving false hope."

Lois

Nobody's saying don't take the chemo or the radiotherapy but really doctors, by definition only have a narrow view. At best they're sort of mechanics fiddling with an unbelievably sophisticated machines called bodies. And bodies tend to also have this thing called a mind about which we know as little as the far side of the moon.

Mandy

It seems to me though that if what you're saying is true I'd have to really believe it. Believe that it would work.

Lois

What other choice have you got when even the doctors give up?

Mandy

I want to believe something I just don't know what.

Lois

All I can offer you now is the power to heal yourself. I know we've got this extraordinary ability within us.

Mandy
But what if I can't believe that ?

Lois
All you've got to do is try it. And the best part about it is that it's so easy.

Mandy still looks doubtful.

Lois
Let me take you through it.

The lights fade, we hear the voice on Lois's tape come back.

Voice
(on tape)
I want you to imagine a brilliant white beach in the middle of which is a warm clear lagoon. . .

Blackout

Later. . .

Kate is standing in the living room holding out textas and a stencil.

Mick
I beg your pardon ?

Kate
We're picketing a ship that's just brought a load of timber from South American rainforests.

Mick
Oh give us a break.

Kate
Come on Mick this is important. It'll give you a warm inner glow.

Mick
The last demo I went to was so long ago people actually got arrested.

Kate
Those rainforests took thousands of years to create. Every second they're destroying an area the size of a football field.

Mick

We don't have any moral right to tell the third world how to make a living. Brazil has the largest foreign debt of any country in the world.

Kate

And whose fault is that ?
The West engineered a fall in commodity prices so they could off-load all their surplus oil money onto the third world.

Mick

You've got more conspiracy theories than an American soap opera.

Kate

If you're too lazy to come just admit it, at least give me hand with some placards.

Mick

How about "Save The Shark"

Kate

Oh Jesus.

She gives up and starts trying to stencil a slogan.

Mick

I'm serious-
"Save the Shark, Stop Driftnet fishing."

She ignores him.

Mick

Alright, so I promise to renew my subscription to the Conservation Foundation. Isn't that enough brownie points for the week ?

Kate

You've really done a back flip on just about everything haven't you ?

Mick

Excuse me I'm faced with a life threatening illness here.

Kate ignores him again.

Mick

Look- alright, of course it's important.

Really.

I'm amazed people still have the energy to do this kind of thing. Fancy getting up at dawn to paddle around a nuclear powered aircraft carrier.

Mick (cont.)

In a way it is unbelievably admirable.
But I dream of a future where we will colonise the planets.
And the moons of planets and when that happens the global
pressure on this little world will be off.
Then it wouldn't matter if we stuffed up the forests because
there'd be whole new worlds to expand into. Suddenly again,
literally the sky's the limit.

Kate

Yeah, and how much will it cost to get there ?
It's the same old trap, Michael.
Exploitation without thought for the consequences- the profit
motive. Why just pollute the earth when you can pollute the
whole universe.

Mick

Ages of expansion come and go.

Kate

I think your faith in technology is self deluding daydream.
Meanwhile if you don't mind I'll just try and save a few
trees here because if we don't have forests the world doesn't
get to breathe anymore. We might just as well put our heads
in a plastic bag and tie a string around it.

Mick

Placing Nature at the centre of things is just as wrong just
as silly as placing God or People.
There can be nothing at the centre of things. Because that's
the nature of the universe: there is no centre.

Kate

Sometimes I think you're smart Michael and sometimes I think
you're incredibly dumb.

ST11 ON THE PHONE

Blackout

The phone is ringing
Lights come up as Mick answers it.

Mick

Hi Nikki, how are things ?

Oh she's fine, yeah.

No, she bounced back from the chemo really well-
a little nausea at first, that's gone now thank god.

We're just taking it one day at a time, got our fingers
crossed.

(listens)

Thanks, but really there's nothing anybody can do.

I'll let you know for sure.

Just send all your good vibes our way, eh ?

Blackout

Mick has taken another phone call

Mick

Oh she's not bad.

Got her old job back in fact.

(listens)

Well, she seems to think so.

(listens)

Chemo, yeah, she bounced back from it really well.

That was a few months ago now.

The nausea at first was a bit of a worry.

(listens)

No, no, thanks, that's very kind of you to offer, but we'll
be fine really. Yeah, thanks Trish, see ya.

Blackout

Another phone call

Mick

Jim ! G'day how are you.

(listens)

Fine, yeah, she's good. Starting to boss me around again,
always a sign that she's on the mend. Yeah.

Bit of a shock with the chemo at first. That's settled down
now thank god.

Blackout

Another phone call.

Mick

She bounced back from it really well. The nausea was a bit of a shock at first. Lot of vomiting. She's over that now.

(listens)

Well, there's nothing anybody can do really. But I'll let your know for sure. Just send all your good vibes, eh.

Blackout

Phone again

Mick

It was a hell of a shock at first. We really had no idea, the vomiting was incredible. But she's bounced back from it really well.

(listens)

Well, thanks but there's nothing anybody can do really. It's just a matter of keeping our fingers crossed and hope it's all going to work like it's supposed to. I'll let you know if we need anything, I can't think at the moment.

Blackout

And again.

Mick

Hi Richard,

(listens)

Yeah, we've been back a couple of months.

(listens)

Well the hospital system in America's stuffed. Private enterprise and all that. They won't look at you until they see the balance in your cheque book. I think the term for us was "indigents". You know the heads of some of these hospitals are earning 6 million a year while patients die on their doorstep because they can't pay for casualty. So if the corporate world of fast foods, polluted atmospheres, and private transport doesn't kill you the corporate world of private medicine will.

Blackout

Yet again.

Mick

Chemotherapy. That's all they can offer her now. It's like a blanket approach. It stops all your cells from dividing and they just expect the noncancerous ones will recover.

Blackout

And again.

Mick

But she's bounced back from it really well, thank god- after a rocky start. Well, there's nothing anybody can do really. Just send us all your good vibes.

Blackout

Phone

Mick

Thank god for Medicare that's all I can say. If we had to pay for any of this we'd both be dead by now.

Blackout

Phone

Mick:

"Magnetism" ? No, I hadn't heard about that, Terri, but I'll pass it on to her. How does it work again ?

(listens)

Uh huh. Yeah well, I think there was a clinic in San Diego did something like that. Anyway give me the number.

(listens- writes phone number down)

So far only Chemo. It's all that western medicine can offer now. But she's bounced back from that pretty well- after a shaky start.

(listens)

Yeah, well thanks anyway. I'll let her know.

He finally hangs up.

Sighs.

Kate is there.

Mick

We've got to get an answering machine.

Kate

You sound like an answering machine.

Mick

That was another old friend of Mandy's offering us money. People are marvellous. But of course I can't take it.

Kate

You should take it. You could do the Ian Gawler programme.

Mick

It's so unexpected. I had no idea so many people cared. It kind of restores your faith.

Kate

People care, Michael, they want to help. Giving money is a very practical way of doing something that demonstrates their love, their concern.

Mick

But I don't feel right about taking it.

Kate

That's just your bourgeois sensibility. For God's sake take it. She's sick. You're in a crisis you need it.

Mick

She's not sick anymore.

She's

Kate

What ?

Mick

Getting better.

ST12 MISSING CHILDREN

They're lounging with a few drinks after dinner.
There's a small potted palm tree dressed like an Xmas tree.
They seem to be enjoying the moment.

Lois is feeling particularly contented.

Lois

I like Christmas.

I like the luxury we give ourselves of being permanently out
to lunch, the way whole offices just sort of break into
anarchy for a couple of weeks. People need it don't they,
they need to break out of the mould.

Mick

The familyness of it though, the terrible price you pay
having to reconnect with all those ghastly relatives you've
spent the last 12 months successfully avoiding.

Kate

If it wasn't for Xmas you'd never see them at all.

Mick

Precisely.

It's horrible.

I don't even want to think about it.

Mandy

Life would be really boring if we didn't have some rituals.
They give you something different. I dunno. . .

Kate

It's great isn't it. Snow on window panes, carols by
candlelight. Somehow even the stars seem brighter.

Mick

Snow on window panes !

Mandy

I like all that.

Mick

But snow ! In Australia !

Kate

Look, now that I've brought you all together I'd just like to
say a few words. . .

Mick

Put a sock in it Kate.

Kate

No, no, this IS a formal time, and well it's been 3 months since Mandy and Michael moved in and I'd just like to say . .

Mick

That you're totally inebriated. . .

Lois

It's been a horror stretch, I've never had a worse 3 months in my entire laugh.

And then she laughs.

Kate

No, we're lucky. We are very lucky. This is serious, listen to me. We're young, we're . . .

Lois

Now who's bullshitting.

Kate

We're not too badly off, all things considering, I know we've had our hard times, I know it isn't always easy sharing but we own the roof over our heads.

Mick

The bank owns that, sweetheart, not us.

Kate

We have access to one and half cars.
We live in a sort of democracy,
We have our health, our jobs, this turkey, and lots and lots of blue sky to look forward too.

Mick and Lois clap.

Lois

Now shut-up and pour me another brandy.

Mandy is still hanging back from it.

Mandy

There is something missing.

Mandy becomes distant.

Mick

We've got port, cigars, truffles . . .

Lois

Distended tummies.

Kate
Hard livers.

Lois
(raising her glass)
Oh we're all hard livers here.

Mick
What more could you want ?

Mandy
Children.

It brings the conversation to a dead halt.

Blackout

Later in Mandy and Mick's bedroom:

Mick
Children !

Mandy
Yes. What's wrong with that ?

Mick
Get real Mandy.

Mandy
It doesn't seem complete: an Xmas tree without children.

Mick
Oh !

Mandy
I'm not just day dreaming you know.

Mick
You can't have them Mandy it's pointless to even think about it.

Mandy
I can want something can't I ?
I thought Christmas was supposed to be a time we got what we wanted.

Mick
I've got a slight shock for you darling, there IS no Santa Claus.

Mandy
That's your theory.

Mick

Mandy, you've barely recovered from a life threatening disease.

Mandy

It is possible though

Mick

You can't have children, you've had major surgery down there.

Mandy

There are other ways.

Mick

What ?

Mandy

I could have it done in a tube- in the laboratory.

Mick

Oh Mandy !

Mandy

Mr. Simpson said they could take the eggs from my one ovary and fertilise it with your sperm.

Mick

Hang on- when did all this happen ?

Mandy

I was reading an article in the paper. Even without a womb you can do it. In America they pay women to carry the child for you.

Mick

Mr. Simpson told you this.

Mandy

I asked him about it that's all.

Mick

Thanks for letting me ~~go~~ know.

Mandy

I'm letting you know now.

Mick

Well I think it's premature until you're fully recovered.

Mandy

I only wanted to find out, it doesn't mean I'll do it. I just wanted to know if it was possible that's all.

Mick
And. . .

Mandy
Well, he said there's a chance.

Mick
A chance.

Mandy
Yes there's a chance.

Mick
What sort of chance.

Mandy
I don't know he didn't get mathematical. I just asked him that's all. There's no need to blow your stack about it.

There's a standoff

Mandy
Anyway we'd have to find a surrogate mother.
It wouldn't be easy.

Mick
Hang on you're talking about my sperm here.
I mean you are talking about my sperm aren't you ?
You're not going for a Nobel Prize Winner or something ?

Mandy
Don't be disgusting.

Mick
Jesus, Mandy.
I'd like to think about it, you know. I mean, having ANY children- let alone this way. I'm just not sure. It's hard enough just doing it normally.

Mandy
I just asked him that's all it's no big deal.
Just forget it.

She hops into bed and turns away from him.
Mick just stands there perplexed, half undressed, kind of flabbergasted. Eventually his shoulders drop.

Mick
I'd just like, you know, to be consulted.

Mandy
I am consulting you.

Blackout.

ST13 IN THE BATHROOM

Lois is in the bath with the light out and a candle on, meditating. New Age music is on a small cassette player.

Mick comes in and switches the light on. Immediately realises his mistake.

Mick
Oh sorry--

Lois
That's alright.

Mick
I'll come back.

Lois
It doesn't worry me.

Mick
Only wanted to use the loo.

Lois
Be my guest.

Mick hangs there in the doorway.

Mick
Anyway I'm interrupting your meditation.

Lois
I'd just finished.

He lowers his trousers and sits on the toilet.

Mick
(grins)
We've got to stop meeting like this.

Lois smiles back.

Mick
I never did go for these open bathrooms.

Lois
They're like open relationships, it's all the rage.

Mick
As a kid it used to fascinate me that in the movies, people never went to the toilet.

Lois

Well, there you go, that's Hollywood for you. Nothing is real.

Mick
Perhaps people like you and me should've been screenwriters.

Mick twists round and takes a newspaper from the pile beside the toilet. Partly to read, partly to cover himself.

Lois
Did you really have an illustrious career ahead of you ?

Mick
That's Kate's fanatasy.

Lois
Why throw it away ?

Mick
Who said I did that ?

Lois
Seems odd that you haven't kept it up.

Mick
(shrugs)
Things change.

Lois
So what happened ? What changed ?

Mick
It's the usual story. Nothing to write home about.

Lois
Depends who you're writing to.

Mick
Thanks but I'd prefer to do my own biography.

Lois
They're always the worst sort. Most unreliable.

Slight pause.

Lois
I've always found it fascinating- on trains or in airports you'll find some people will strike up a conversation with a total stranger and tell them their whole life's story.

Mick
Perhaps it's the anonymity of it.

Lois

Yes, I think it must be. It is fascinating though.

Mick

On the other hand some people can't help themselves, they'd talk underwater.

Lois

Well, no one will ever accuse you of that.

Mick sighs.

Mick

Being a journalist lost its appeal.
You've only got to look at this to see why.
(indicating the paper- drops it back in the bin)

Lois

Some journalists are alright.

Mick

The best things in there are the cartoons.

Lois

I'm fascinated by the burn-out syndrome. You're a classic case.

Mick

I had visions. I had a five year plan.

Lois

They never work.

Mick

Trouble is it takes five years to find out.
You go in thinking you can change the system.
You'll give it a short burst, create new agendas,
take the establishment by storm. But of course you can't,
you never can.

Lois

And by the time you realise it you're already sucked in ?

Mick

Something like that.

Lois

There must be exceptions though. Otherwise nothing would change.

Mick

I read "The Greening of America" and thought I'd try copywriting. The theory was that if enough people looking at beautiful couples cavorting in tropical paradises they

Mick (cont.)
ultimately become intensely dissatisfied with life in
downtown Detroit and actually demand change.

Lois
And did they ?

Mick
No, not really.

Lois
You don't have to play in the mainstream.

Mick
Oh yes you do. It's the only game that matters.

Lois
There are alternatives.

Mick
None that work as far as I can see.

Lois
You are a classic case you know, you start off thinking
you're something special and the world's going to be your
oyster and when eventually you realise that you're just
another ordinary mortal like everyone else with bills to pay
and compromises to make suddenly your ideals are out the
window.

Mick
We've only got one life and this unfortunately is it.

Lois
You still haven't told me "why" you changed.

Mick
Lois, I really don't want to turn up in your next doctoral
thesis.

Lois
There's no danger of that I'm afraid.

Mick
Who says I've changed, anyway ? The problem just might be in
the way you see things. What if there is a continuity there
and you just can't see it ?

Lois
I had a dream about you last night.

That's a bit of a shock

Mick
Oh, really ?

Lois
Well, it's inevitable I suppose. Living together.

Mick
What sort of dream ?

She pulls the plug on the bath and wraps a towel around herself as she gets out.

Lois
We were at a dinner party with Gough Whitlam and the conversation got around to working out how many people an average human being could know in their lifetime. People you know well enough to ring up and say "hullo" to. Friends, you know, acquaintances. I thought about 1000, Gough of course being a politician thought about 10,000 and you said- "what if there were people who never got to know anyone"

He flushes the toilet and pulls his strides back on.

Mick
I said that ?

Lois
Yes.

Mick
That's pretty depressing.

Lois
Yes, I thought so too.

Mick
I suppose it depends what you mean by "know".

Lois
Would you say, for example,- we know each other ?

There's a significant pause. They stand opposite each other.

Mick
Yes.

She holds his look.
Then looks away.
Emotions are bubbling up in both of them.

She slips on some track suit pants under her towel.
He just hangs there looking at her.

She turns back to him.
He slowly takes her.
They kiss.

She pulls apart.
Confusion.

Lois
This is. . . this is silly.

He takes her again, she doesn't resist.
They kiss more passionately and then pull apart.

They're both embarrassed. Don't know quite where to look.

She puts a top on.

Mick
I- I'm sorry.

Lois is struggling with her own emotions.

Mick
God this is crazy.

At which point Mandy comes in with a toothbrush.
They look at her.
The confusion is now three way.

Mandy senses something is wrong.
Lois gathers her towel and goes out.

Mandy stares at Mick.
Until Mick too, goes out.

Blackout

Later- in Mick and Mandy's bedroom.

Mick
Look Mandy. . .

Mandy
Don't say anything.
Just don't say it.

Mick
I have to explain.

Mandy
I don't want to hear it, I don't want to hear any more lies.

He slumps on the bed.

Mick
Christ this is so stupid.

Mandy
You've really scraped the bottom of the barrel this time,
haven't you, doing it with a lesbian.

Mick
Mandy we didn't DO anything.

Mandy
I knew there was something wrong with this whole- moving in
here. It wasn't natural.
She's got her own relationship.

Mick
Just because two people live together doesn't mean they're
having a sexual relationship.

Mandy
They sleep in the same bedroom !

Mick
Because we moved in.

Mandy
It's because I'm not as smart as the three of you.
Is that it ? I don't talk like a dictionary or keep pace with
the latest ideas.

Mick
Mandy-

Mandy
You heard Kate. You threw your career away because you threw
it away on me.

Mick gives up.

Mandy
Well she said as much didn't she ? You all think I don't know
Jack from Adam, but that doesn't mean I'm stupid.

Mick
Oh Jesus !

Mandy
Intelligent people can be stupid too you know.

Mick
I know. I'm one of them !

There's a pause.

Mick

There is nothing going on between me and Lois
So let's just get that clear for a start.

Mandy

I want to get out of here.

Mick

Now you ARE being stupid.

Mandy

I want to leave, can you read my lips ?

Mick

We can't afford to leave.

Mandy

That's your problem. I'm off.

Mick

Mandy, you can't leave, you need people to look after you.

Mandy

(screams at him)

I'M NOT SICK !

I'M NOT SICK !

I'M NOT SICK !

I'M NOT SICK !

She throws herself on the bed, weeping.

Mick

You're sick alright.

For some peculiar reason she finds that amusing.
The shaking from tears turns to laughter.

Mick smiles back at her.

He rolls her over, the laughter builds.

Mandy

Don't.

Blackout.

ST14 MOTHER'S DAY

Mick has a toothbrush in his mouth and is clearing the answer machine. A woman's voice is heard.

Woman's Voice

Just wanted to let you know that we're here for you, mate. I know it must be pretty hard for you, so look after yourself too, alright? And if there's anything we can do. . anything at all.

The next message is a hangup.
Mick sighs as he presses fast forward.
The next voice is Mandy's Dad.

Mandy's Dad

Mandy? Are you there? It's father, darling. Is everything alright? Mother is well. Love to you both. . .

Man's Voice

Lois, we need those results for the second years, can you drop them by my office tomorrow?

Louise's Voice

Mandy, it's Louise, Louise Peterson. I've just heard that you were going through a rough patch. We've been overseas for a couple of years. I'm married now. Two children would you believe! Anyway we must catch up. It's been too long. And if there's anything we can do. We'd love to come and see you. Give us a call. . .

The next message is also a hangup.
Mandy comes in as he fast forwards it.

Mick

(toothbrush still in his mouth)
I hate people who don't leave messages.

Mandy

What?

Mick

I wish we'd never got the damn thing.

Mandy

Don't talk with your mouthfull.
I hate it when you walk around with your toothbrush like that.

Mick

(removes the brush)
I said, I think we should sell the answer machine. .

Mandy

If it wasn't for that thing we'd hardly have any social life at all.

He sighs and disappears into the bathroom.

Mandy

We rarely go out anymore.
And nobody comes round.

Mick

Thank god.

Mandy

We shouldn't cut ourselves off, Mick. It- it's not right. How you really live is how you spend your days and ours have become so boring.

Mick

I don't think anybody "drops in" anymore. I think it's a side effect of television. It's just something you do for a while when you're young. Before you get married and settle down.

Mandy

Well, we're not married and I certainly don't feel settled down.

Mick

You've been reading books again, I can tell.

Mandy

Yes, surprising as that may seem I have been reading, and I've been thinking too.

Mick

Oh god. This could be dangerous.

Mandy

And I've come to the conclusion that life is very precious and very short and ours is just disappearing.

Mick

I told you, nothing but tears would come from reading books.

Mandy

I'm serious Mick, our life is going nowhere.

Mick

Before we get onto the meaning of the universe- your old man called.

Mandy
Oh shit. That's to make me feel guilty.

Mick
Eh ?

Mandy
You know what today is, don't you ?

Mick
Sunday ?

Mandy
The 5th of May.

Mick
Yeah.

Mandy
Mother's Day.

Mick
Oh- I see. . . a curtain lifts.

Mandy takes a deep breath

Mandy
I want to have a child, Mick

Mick
Jesus Mandy !

Mandy
I don't see what's so horrible about it.

Mick
Brilliant gynö he may be but Mr. Simpson is not God.

Mandy
There is a chance though.
My one ovary is still functioning.

Mick
He told you that.

Mandy
He said it's possible.

Mick
He wants you for a test case. You'd be his biggest challenge.
I can see the headlines now.

Mandy
I need **something** Mick
I need to be. . . fulfilled.

Mick
Mandy, get well first. Alright.
Then we can talk about fulfillment.

Mandy
What would you know. You like being cut off.
Sitting in there all day with your bloody typewriter.
You don't feel the pain I do everytime I walk down the
footpath and pass some lucky woman pushing a pram.

Mick
I know her, she collects bottles in it.

Mandy
I WANT A CHILD !

Mick
It's a minor aberration brought on by Mother's Day
It'll soon pass.

Mandy
You don't have to be involved if you don't want to.

Mick
Oh no, don't shoot me I'm only the penis.

Mandy
Jesus !

Kate and Lois emerge from different parts of the house.
Lois with a pile of student essays that she's been
correcting.

Kate
What's going on ? What's all the yelling about.

Mick
Mandy wants to have a child, since we live together I think
we should all discuss it.

Kate
That's wonderful.

Lois
What do you mean have a child ? You can't have a child.

Mandy
I don't see why we have to discuss it, it's my decision..

Kate
Of course it is.

Lois
You mean adopt a child ?

Mick
Mandy's been reading articles about IVF in "The Age."
I've warned her about it. I said she was much happier when
all she needed was "The Sun". The Age would only put
dangerous radical ideas in her head.

Lois
You've GOT to be joking.

Mandy
I'm not joking.

Kate
It's fairly risky isn't it ?

Mandy
There's a chance. A good chance.

Lois
10 per cent.

Mandy
20. It's getting better. They're getting better at it.

Kate
Well go for it.

Lois
Do you have any idea what you'd be putting yourself through ?

Mandy
There'd be some drugs to get the ovulationg happening.

Lois
Some drugs !
Superovulation it's called. With all sorts of dangerous side
effects. Not the least of which is that you might end up with
four or five kids.

Mick
Five kids !? Oh Jesus !

Lois
One woman in Perth the other day wanted to give them all
back.

Mick
Wasn't IVF invented by Vets to increase milk production ?

Lois
It's a con, Mandy. It's . . . it's male doctors doing it in test tubes because they can't do it themselves. Playing God with women's bodies, women who are so desperate to reproduce they'll try anything, suffer any humiliation - too terrified to even question the doctors in case they get dropped from the programme.

Kate
What's wrong with playing god ?

Lois
The money it costs for a start. The brain power and the fortune that's spent on getting a few women pregnant. A mere handful at best.

Mick
Meanwhile millions of kids starve to death because they can't even get a handfull of rice.

Kate
That's another the issue, surely.

Mick
No it isn't

Kate
It's not Mandy's fault science has provided her with an opportunity. If the technology exists then she has every right to use it. Don't you see what this means for women ? If we ignore science we end up back in the days when they burned us because they thought we were witches.

Lois
Now who's confusing the issue.

Mick
I thought you were against science.

Kate
I'm not against a future in which the old 60s ideal of living truly together may in fact become a biological necessity. What we're talking about is a situation in which several adults will share one child. I think that could be great.

Mick
We've got enough trouble with two people sharing them.

Kate
It's an opportunity to try something really new.

Mandy

It would make childminding a little easier.

Lois

If that's the future it really is a nightmare

Kate

It's only a nightmare because we're not used to it.

All I'm saying is that our minds are fashioning a world in which the old values no longer have any meaning

Unless we embrace this future and develop a new ethic to cope with these changes we really are doomed. The challenge is to recognise what IS working and go for it.

You can't blame science just because it's doing its job.

Mick

Science IS the problem. Of course you can blame it.

You've said yourself- our bodies are walking chemistry sets, cities are chocking with cars, the soil is exhausted.

Kate

And what about aiming for the stars ?

Lois

We don't have to use something just because it's available.

Kate

We live like kings compared to earlier generations.

This isn't a dark age. We just might be at the summit of our achievement.

Lois

We just might be the last organic humans too. After us it's children by numbers. You'll be able to order what colour hair you want.

Mandy

It's my body, I've got a right to decide what happens to it haven't I ?

Kate

Yes you have. You'd agree with that wouldn't you Lois.

Lois

What is this obsession with reproduction ?

It's so middle class so narcissistic.

Why all this mania to make something in our own image.

Mandy

I don't expect someone like you would understand my desire to be a mother.

This brings Lois up short.

Lois
I beg your pardon.

There's a tense pause.

Mandy
Someone of your persuasion.

Lois
I don't believe I'm hearing this.

Mandy
Are you hearing it? Do you hear anything you don't agree with? You're precious and dead like the languages you study. Up there on a shelf, artificially preserved.

Mick
Jesus!

Mandy
If we all thought like you we'd die out in the next generation.

Lois
You only want to reproduce because that's what your mother did. The whole idea of having a child it's so bound up with the ego. In a world that's already grossly overpopulated it's obscene to be producing even more children at such a huge expense.

Kate
There are alternatives of course.

Mandy
I can't adopt a child.
The waiting lists are closed.

Lois
Not for kids with disabilities.

Mandy
I can't guarantee the 18 year life span required.
Besides, George is already too old to qualify for a baby.

Kate
Does it have to be a baby?

Mandy
It's virtually impossible- any kid.
The waiting lists are closed.

Mick

Christ, you know, when you had the chance you didn't want kids. How long were you on the pill?

Mandy

Well, I've changed my mind.

Mick

And what about my mind? I mean, you know, do I have a say or what?

Mandy

Yes, you have a say.

Mick

Well, thank you, that's very kind. I mean we're talking about a life long commitment here.

Mandy

Unlike our relationship.

Mick

What is this parenthood thing anyway?

You've only got em for a dozen years before they want to leave home anyway.

It's like religion. It's all these vague impulses.

I wanna be this, I wanna be that. Well I don't know if I want to be a father. I don't think I'd be a very good one.

Mandy

You don't have to be the father.

Mick

Oh thanks.

Mandy

It's my body, what's left of it, and I can do what I want with it. Well this is my want. I don't need a father, but I do need a surrogate mother.

Mick

Well it's not possible is it?

I mean who the fuck is that going to be?

ST15 **STANDING IN FOR SOMEONE ELSE**

Lois and Kate's bedroom.

Lois
You're not serious.

Kate
Mandy needs a break. It's something I can do for her.

Lois
Do you have any idea of what you're about to go through ?

Kate
I've never have really wanted my own child. Exclusively.
Well, this way it's different. It's not just mine.

Lois
Do you really think you'd be able to give a child away that
you had carried for 9 months ?

Kate
But if we're living together I won't be giving it away.
It'll be here with us.

Lois
It will be your child.

Kate
Yes, yes it will. That's true. But maybe Mandy's right,
having a child is always a question of giving. It goes to the
heart of what being human is anyway.

Lois
I really don't think I'm ready for menage a trois
thanks very much

Kate
a quatre.

Lois
What ?

Kate
There'll be four of us.

Lois
Any sort of family.

Kate
I don't find the idea of a family something to be ashamed of.

Lois
This would never have happened before your father died.

Kate
I'm not trying to procreate some image of my father!

Lois
I didn't say that.

Kate
No, but that's what you think.

Blackout

Later with Kate and Mandy and Mick in the bathroom.
Mick is shaving. Mandy on the toilet, Kate in the bath.

Mick
Are you seriously suggesting that my sister carry my child?

Kate
If it's what Mandy wants.

Mick
Isn't that incest or something?

Mandy
She's only carrying it.

Kate
I'd only be carrying it, it wouldn't BE my child.

Mandy
Technically, yes but unfortunately it's not not possible.

Kate
Oh course it's possible. We've got to at least say we tried it.

Mandy
You can't do it.

Kate
Let's face it when are we ever going to be this healthy again.

Mandy
It's partly because you're able to that you can't.

Kate
What?

Mandy
In Victoria the surrogate mother's got to be married.

Kate
That's no big problem.

Mandy
And infertile.

Mick
Thank god.
You can't

Kate
That's ridiculous.

Mandy
be married and infertile.
I also have to be married and infertile.

Kate
We could get somebody else then, pay some one.

Mandy
And you certainly can't pay anyone to do it.

Mick
You're saying we'd have to get married anyway ?

Mandy
That's the easy part.

Lois comes home from work.

Kate
Lois is married

Lois
Oh don't remind me of my mistakes I've had a hard day.

Kate
And you've had your tubes tied.

Lois realises what they're talking about.
Can hardly believe it.

Lois
I thought we'd been through all this.

Mick
Of course it would mean carrying my baby.

Lois has to think about it.

Kate
Well that was certainly a pregnant pause.

Blackout

72

ST16 TIEING KNOTS

Kate is holding a framed wedding photograph of her parents

Mick comes in wearing the trousers to a black suit, carrying the coat and fiddling with a bow tie.

Mick

I'm not sure whether I should be marrying Lois or Mandy.
Is this really the right thing ?

Kate

(indicating their doubts)
They didn't have any doubts.

Mick

So we think.

Kate

All I know is- their marriages lasted them lifetimes. Ours seem to average about 7 years.

Mick

And here I am getting things arse about again.
Marriage at the end rather than the beginning.
I can just see the old man now, throwing his hands up unable to comprehend it.

Kate

I came across his wallet again the other day.
The leather was all salty from the water, I remember it was still wet when the police gave it back to me.

Mick

And practically empty of money.

Kate

Behind the photo of mum was this thing he'd written about being a publican and having to sell grog and how that wasn't such a great thing all things considered but how it was also about conviviality and camaraderie and having a good time.

Mick

Yeah there always was that contradiction about him.

Kate

It wasn't the text of the message so much as the fact of his beautiful handwriting. You know how he always had beautiful handwriting ?

Mick

Yeah, that's another thing he used to ride me about. I told him I was a journalist. Bad handwriting is an occupational hazard.

Kate

It was so rounded, almost like calligraphy. And I thought how many figures and ledgers did he have to fill in? How many calculations had to pass through his brain about dozens of Fourx and hours worked plus holiday pay. And it was like in the biro strokes there on the page he was almost alive again. The writing was still there, miraculously on the page while the living body that'd formed them was gone. The little curl at the end of each "two" was like a upward tick. Very firm and precise. Most determined and self satisfied.

Mick

Made by a man counting his money.

Kate

Who was proud of what he was doing. When I think of the millions of calculations that must have gone through his brain.

Mick

To arrive at our pathetic little inheritance.

Kate

He always said there was purgatory and there was a place for those who had run pubs.

Mick

Yeah.

Kate

You really don't want this fatherhood thing do you?

Mick

Piece of cake.

Pause

Mick

You know you're right about one thing.

Kate

Can't believe I'd ever hear you admit it.

Mick

We've got to have dreams of a brilliant future. That's the only thing that makes it possible to go on.

Kate

Am I hearing things. Mick Logan, optimist.

Mick

Personally I'm banking on Triton.
I think there will be life on Triton.
There's heat and there's ammonia. It's a promising start.

Lois comes in with glasses and an open bottle of champagne.

Lois

Well here's to a happy life.

Kate

To the best of times and the worst of times.

Mandy comes in dressed like the others in a formal dress and carrying small bunch of flowers.

Mick

You look fantastic.

Mandy

(smiles)

Thanks.

Kate

To Mick and Mandy

Mick

I'll second that.

They drink.

Mandy

I don't know if I can go through with this.

Mick

You'd be surprised what champagne will make you do.

Mandy

We're just going through it for the motions.
It's not right.

Mick

Oh Christ.

Mandy

I must've been drunk when I agreed to it.

Lois

There's always divorce.
You haven't really lived until you've been married at least once.

Mandy feels a sudden urge to vomit.
She drops the flowers and goes out pressing a hankie to her
lips.

Concerned, Mick puts his glass down and follows her.

Blackout.

ST17 FULL CIRCLE

Three beds as before along a wall.

Mandy holds Mick's arm, he carries a small suitcase as they come in.

She sits on the bed, he pulls the curtain round.

Mandy
I don't know if I can face another operation.

Mick
It's your best chance darling.

Mandy
But the other one didn't work why should this ?

Mick
Ultimately I think it's a question of faith.

Mandy
I just don't know if I can face it.

Mick
Look if it gives you five years its worth it surely.

Mandy
And what if it doesn't work ?

Mick
It'll work.

Mandy
What if it doesn't.

Mick
He said he wouldn't do it unless he thought it was going to work.

Mandy
It's only a fifty per cent chance.

Mick
I don't really think you've got much choice.

Mandy
But to lose my bladder ?

Mick
Well you know what they say, love is changing a cholostomy bottle at 3am

Mandy
Why did it come back. I don't understand.

Mick
Nobody does, that's the problem with cancer.

Mandy
Just when you think you're cured.

Mick
Yeah, I know. Hell of a thing.

Blackout

A couple of days later.
Mandy lies asleep, a drip going into one arm,
various fluids drain into bottles at the side of the bed.

Mick comes in with a bunch of flowers.
He quietly moves to a chair beside the bed.

After some moments she opens her eyes.

Mick
Hi

Mandy
Hi

She seems distant, listless, sleepy.

Mick
How you goin' ?

Mandy
Alright

Mick
You look good.

Mandy
Thanks
(pause)
Feel better when it's over.

Mick
That's for sure.

Mandy
Can't wait to get home.

Mick
I'll bet.

Pause

Mandy
So what's happening out in the world ?

Mick
I think I've finally shaken off my addiction to the 6 oclock news.

Mandy
That's progress.

Mick
Yeah, I've started jogging instead.

Mandy
Amazing.

Mick
Seems such a waste on these long summer twilights, sitting inside, staring at the box.

Mandy
Yeah.

Mick
I started feeling like something in a Leunig cartoon.

She smiles.

Mick
They treating you alright ?

Mandy
Yeah, fine.
Just miss my bed that's all.

Mick
(looking around)
You've still got a nice view of the city.

Mandy
Yeah

Mick
Do you need anything ?

Mandy
Just a new body.

Mick
Don't we all.

Mandy
Have you seen Mr. Simpson ?

Mick
No I couldn't find him.
Has he said anything to you ?

Mandy
No.

Mick
I'm sure it went fine.

Mandy
Yeah. He should be round soon.

Mick
Doesn't matter what he says, we'll have to try the Gawler
programme now.

Mandy
Not much other choice is there when the Doctors give up.

Mick
They haven't given up. That's what this is all about.

Mandy
Still, it's good to have alternatives.

Mick
Yeah. That's what they're there for.

Mandy
How are Kate and Lois ?

Mick
Fine.
They send all their love.

Mandy
And mine to them.

Mick
Sure.
(pause)
They should be in later.

Mandy
That's nice.

Mick
Life goes on, eh ?

Mandy
Sometimes it's the hardest thing.

Mick
Yeah. well, we know as little about where we came from as
know about where we're going.

Mandy
Bit of a mystery alright.

Mick
Yeah.

Pause

Mandy
Nothing really changed did it ?

Mick
No, not not much

Pause

Mick
Anything I can get you ?

Mandy
No I'm fine.
Thanks.

Mick
Good.
That's . . . good.

Blackout

