

3's COMPANY

A One Act Play

by

DAVID WENDEN

SchoolPlay Productions Ltd

15 Inglis Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3HU

www.schoolplayproductions.co.uk

3's COMPANY

Copyright David Wenden 2005

This play is fully protected by copyright.

It is an infringement of the copyright to give any public performance or reading of this play in its entirety or in the form of excerpts without the prior consent in writing of the copyright owners.

No part of this publication may be transmitted, stored in a retrieval system, or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, typescript, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owners.

All rights are strictly reserved. Any enquiries about performing rights, professional or amateur, should be directed, before rehearsal, to

**SchoolPlay Productions Ltd,
15 Inglis Road,
Colchester, Essex CO3 3HU.**

No performance may be given unless a licence has been obtained.

ISBN 978 1 902472 27 0

Printed and published by
SchoolPlay Productions Limited,
15 Inglis Road,
Colchester, Essex, CO3 3HU

CAST LIST

In order of appearance:-

Sophie - *comediienne, streetwise and man mad, bit of a rebel.*

Lorna - *gullible but not stupid, caring and generous.*

Polly - *highly intelligent, not very gregarious, the 'mother-hen'.*

[All three went through university together and are extremely close.
They would do anything for each other].

New Girl - *a total outsider, a 'temp'.*

*The action of the play takes place over a period of a few months
on Monday mornings in the office.
Flashbacks take the characters back to their childhood and adolescence.*

This play was premiered at New Hall School, Chelmsford and had its first public performance at The Headgate Theatre, Colchester, during December 2005.

This play is dedicated to
Lorna, Polly & Sophie
without whom this play would not have been possible.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Originally improvised for performance by A Level students, this play lends itself to performance by older age groups as well. To this end, alternative dialogue has been written to facilitate credible characterisation by the more mature actor. The script is clearly marked where the *ALTERNATIVE DIALOGUE* begins and ends and should replace the original text between these demarcation points.

The play is not sequential and should not be treated as such. All *Flashbacks* are to be performed without props which should be mimed as may be necessary. *SCENE 2* is the odd one out as it should be treated in the same way as the *Flashbacks*. This provides a simple device for the audience to understand that everything that happens in the office takes place in 'real time' and the mimed scenes are memories.

The original production included the use of a four letter expletive, twice, which was very effective and any director wishing to reinsert them is at liberty to do so.

both are spoken by *POLLY*. They occurred:-

First, replacing "sodding" in the very first line she speaks on her first entrance, *SCENE 1, page 3*.

Second, replacing "hell", in the last line of her diatribe at *LORNA* after her (*Deliberate pause*); *SCENE 3, page 18*.

The set needs to be as simple and uncluttered as possible to allow the actors free range to express themselves and promote their very different personalities. An empty performance area in front of the desks is essential. Monitors are not part of the office paraphernalia on the desks as of course they would mask the actors. It is, however, important for the actors to direct focus, via precise eye contact, in order for this to be clearly understood by the audience. Entrances and exits should not include doors as, again, this clutters the performance area and becomes a problem in the mimed scenes. If the lighting is designed to focus on the immediate acting area and kept off the periphery it promotes concentration and attention to the dialogue and inevitably to the drama.

If the performers are able to demonstrate the characters' inseparability and can play as a very tight ensemble, the tragi-comedy of the play succeeds and the audience is able to empathise completely.

D.J.W.

3's COMPANY

by David Wenden

Three desks arranged in a semi-circle, convex to the audience. There should be enough room between each desk to allow passage. On each desk is the paraphernalia of the office and each must include a telephone, a keyboard and files. Desk SR has the most minimal clutter; desk SC must include an answerphone and the bulkier files; desk SL is full and files are spilling over on to the floor. Behind each desk is a wheeled, swivel office chair; the SL chair is clearly the oldest of the three and is in obvious need of repair.

SCENE 1. *The Office: Monday morning*

*(As the scene opens **MONDAY MONDAY** by the 'The Mamas and the Papas' is playing. The lights fade up and SOPHIE is discovered seated at the SL desk, her capacious handbag is on the floor by her feet. She is typing distractedly at her keyboard and she is obviously bored. She looks at her watch and fiddles with files. She looks around the room, sniffs and sighs loudly. She stretches, yawns and looks SR, which galvanises her into action; she stands and crosses to the SR desk. She sits in the chair and begins to type on the keyboard).*

Sophie: *(as she types)* And great big black ones! *(She glances SL, hears LORNA entering and springs to the telephone on the SC desk as if she is using it to speak confidentially and is unaware that LORNA has entered)* Yes Mr Jenkins of course Mr Jenkins table for two 7 o'clock...that would be lovely Mr Jenkins no I love Italian food yes Mr Jenkins ooh double room Mr Jenkins! you're so naughty Mr Jenkins I can't wait Mr Jenkins Ciao Mr Jenkins. *(She looks lingeringly at the phone and shudders with fake anticipation as she becomes aware of LORNA who has now moved to her desk SR. She replaces the receiver)* That was Mr Jenkins!

(She sits at the SC desk and points very obviously at LORNA'S feet which can be seen under the desk. LORNA removes her shoes. SOPHIE mimes using a mirror and lipstick and LORNA, oblivious to SOPHIE, takes a mirror and lipstick from her bag and checks her face and hair. LORNA drops her heavy handbag and turns to her keyboard).

Sophie: Mornin'.

Lorna: (*ignores SOPHIE and stares aghast at her imaginary screen*) I didn't know you could spell that word! (*She makes a deliberate point of deleting the typed expletives which amuses SOPHIE*).

Sophie: Did you have a good weekend then? (*No reply from LORNA*) That good eh? Did you go to the party?

Lorna: Maybe.

ALTERNATIVE DIALOGUE 1 - starts here

(See production notes and page 21)

Sophie: What was it this time - your excuse? Hamster died did it? Poor old hamster - deaded! Or was it poor old granny? Did poor old granny die? Again? (*still no response from LORNA*) So you didn't go to the party then? You didn't get laid?

Lorna: (*whips round in her seat to face SOPHIE then sheepishly returns to her work*) Sssshhh!

Sophie: (*nearly misses the inference - doubletakes*) Oh my god you did, you did get laid. You have to tell me all about it. (*The remainder of her lines come out in a torrential flow*). Oh my god, oh my god I can't believe it's finally happened you have to tell me everything

Lorna: Make me a coffee and I'll think about it.

ALTERNATIVE DIALOGUE 1 - ends here

Sophie: Right, cuppa coffee then you have to tell me everything. (*She rushes off SR still gabbling. Whilst the tirade continues offstage, LORNA smiles contentedly and continues smugly with her typing*). Oh my god! Oh my god! What was it like? What was he like? Was he good? Were you good? Did he have does he have a big was he big, I mean tall, I mean (*she is making coffee and the clinking and pouring can be heard off stage*) - Ow that's hot. What did he say? What did you say? Did you say anything? Tell me, tell me, put me out of my misery. I can't believe this. Did you meet him at the party? Did you know he was gonna be there? Did you know him? Do I know him? D'you like him? Silly, course you do? You do, don't you? I mean he wasn't just a you know, was he? Was he? I mean you wouldn't, you couldn't, I mean it's you for goodness sake! Oh my god I still can't believe it, you have to tell me, c'mon now spill the beans. (*Returning with two mugs of coffee which she puts down on LORNA'S desk*). C'mon tell me now

Lorna: Has that got sugar in?

Sophie: Yeah I think so.

Lorna: Well I don't have sugar.

Sophie: Here have mine then.

Lorna: But you have sugar!

Sophie: Well never mind don't have them. C'mon tell me did he have a name at least?

Lorna: Michael.

Sophie: Michael OK! Michael Jones or Michael Clark, did he have ginger hair or was he bald? Is he tall or small like Michael Bennett or fat Mike

Lorna: God! How many Michael's do you know?

Sophie: Oh a few! Go on tell me!

Lorna: I'm not going to tell you, am I?

Sophie: Why not? Oh come on! *(the phone rings)* Don't answer that!

(LORNA picks up the phone).

Sophie: Oooooooh!

Lorna: Morning, clients and research Oh hello Mr Jenkins No it's Lorna Polly's not in today no what I meant to say was Polly's not in yet right OK then well I'll give her the message as soon as she gets in.

(SOPHIE has noticed Polly's chair is so much better than hers. She exchanges them and places her chair at the SC desk. She wheels herself to station at SL desk).

Lorna: No I won't forget Mr Jenkins right you are Mr Jenkins I *(She stares at the phone before slamming it down)* Bloody cheek. Wants Polly.

Sophie: Yes where is Polly?

Lorna: Break down on the Circle Line

Sophie: Waterloo and City line is temporarily suspended

Lorna: Docklands Light Railway regret to inform you that

Sophie: Trains are not running till eight o'clock this evening!

Polly: *(enters SL in a rush in some consternation. She plumps down into her chair)* Sodding learner actually.

Lorna & Sophie: *(together)* Ooooooohhhhhh!

Polly: Smashed straight into the back of me and guess what? They were uninsured! *(gesturing to LORNA)* Is that coffee for me? Second thoughts it'll have milk in it! Never mind. *(She turns towards SOPHIE)* Sophie be a love!

(SOPHIE gets up with a big 'Tut' and storms off SR to make Polly a coffee).

Polly: Working on the O'Hagan report then Lorna?

Lorna: Yep!

Polly: That it there ?

Lorna: No!

Polly: So what are you working on?

Lorna: This.

Polly: And the O'Hagan report is?

Lorna: *(indicating SOPHIE'S desk)* Over there, she's got it!

Polly: Right, OK. *(Crosses to SOPHIE'S desk and begins a fairly frenzied search).*

Sophie: *(returns with coffee and stands behind POLLY watching with amusement. She finally puts the coffee down on desk SC and asks sarcastically)* Can I help?

Polly: *(a little startled and put out)* Yes, you have the O'Hagan report.

(SOPHIE sniffs disdainfully and picks up a file from underneath a pile on the floor under the desk. She hands the file to POLLY and sits down. POLLY sits down and in turn hands the file to LORNA who takes it whilst she still types).

Polly: The O'Hagan report.

Lorna: What were you doing with it? *(SOPHIE stifles a giggle).*

Polly: *(gives SOPHIE a look and puts her cup to her lips - she almost drops it as it is so hot)* Christ Almighty, Sophie, did you make this in a furnace or something?

Sophie: Oh, yeh, it's the new 'Mega Boil Kettle'. What can I say, lives up to its name!

Polly: It should come with a health warning, "Mega incineration of mouth equally guaranteed"! Oh for Christ's sake and you put sugar in it as well.

Sophie: You asked for sugar!

Polly: *(defensively)* Honestly I come in late for work one morning

Sophie: Every morning!

Polly: I heard that

Lorna: She heard that!

Polly: And that!

Lorna & Sophie: *(together)* Oooooohhhh!

Polly: I come in late for work just for one morning and everything falls apart. And all because some scatty, spotty seventeen year old decides to forget that a red light means stop, not cruise into the car in front, but stop! I swear if it were up to me I wouldn't encourage learners to penetrate the main roads. I'd dig a big hole and bury them all.

Sophie: That's a bit harsh. You were a learner once!

Polly: Well be that as it may, they're a pest and they should stick to haunting car parks and industrial estates until they're at least semi-competent! Anyway any messages? *(No reply. POLLY looks heavenwards)* From anyone? Soph?

Sophie: Erm no, I think Lorna took one.

Polly: Lorna, any messages?

Lorna: *(she hardly looks up from her work)* Er no thanks.

Polly: *(resignedly; she starts to speak to the audience during this speech)* Right, well I was only asking purely because I know you two have memories like sieves and quite frankly have done from a very early age. I seem to remember a birthday party, yes Lorna's sixth birthday party.

Flashback 1

The lights crossfade to the downstage area in front of the desks where all the flashback scenes tend to take place.

(LORNA and SOPHIE jump up from their desks and rush downstage).

[All three girls now play six year olds and this is reflected in their voice and movement. There are no props or furniture; they play on a bare stage].

Lorna: *(arriving DSR)* Party? *(She sits).*

Sophie: *(arriving DSC)* Parteeeee! *(She sits)* Where's Polly?

Polly: *(arriving DSL)* I'm here! *(She sits a little more demurely)* Mummy had to had to speak to the plumber. *(She mimes handing a present to LORNA)* Here you are, Happy Birthday!

Lorna: Thank you.

Polly: Do you like it?

Sophie: She hasn't opened it yet!

Polly: She's doing it now!

Sophie: No she's not!

Polly: Yes she is.

Sophie: S'not!

Polly: She is - look!

Lorna: Wow it's fab'lous, look it's smashin', I can't believe it! Oh, oh look, look, it's amazin', it's the bestest present ever I've always wanted one of these! What is it?

Polly: It's a pencil case!
Sophie: What's one of those for?
Polly: Put your pencils in silly!
Sophie: For why do I want to put my pencils in Lorna's pencil case for?
Polly: 'Cos it's not for your pencils it's for her pencils, that's why it's Lorna's pencil case!
Sophie: Well where do I put my pencils?
Polly: In your pencil case, silly!
Sophie: I knew that!
Polly: Didn't!
Sophie: Did!
Polly: Didn't!
Sophie: Did!
Polly: (*quietly*) Didn't!
Sophie: (*quieter still*) Did!
Polly: (*a small pause as they look around*) Lorna, where's all the other people?
Lorna: What people?
Polly: The other people at the party?
Sophie: (*really excited*) What party?
Polly: This party!
Lorna: (*really proud*) MY party!
Polly: Where are they?
Lorna: I dunno! (*uncertain pause*) Well mummy forgot to send the invitations!

(*All laugh*).

Sophie: What are intivations?
Polly: (*correcting her*) In-vi-ta-ions, invitations. They're..they're things you send out to get people to come.
Sophie: Come where?
Polly: To the party.
Sophie: What party?
Polly: This party!
Lorna: MY party!
Sophie: (*thinking hard*) So why're we here?
Polly: We're here 'cos Lorna asked us.
Sophie: (*looking around - turns to LORNA*) You got jelly?
Lorna: Jelly and ice cream.
Sophie: You got lots?
Lorna: Lots n' lots - 'cos there was supposed to be twelve people now there's only

.... (counts on her fingers) four!

Polly: (exchanges glances with SOPHIE) Three silly!

Lorna: No, four! You forgot Teresa! (She holds up imaginary doll).

Polly: (suitably chastened) Oh! Lorna what have you done to your hair?

Lorna: (preening) Oh mummy put it in a special pony whale!

Sophie: Wow a pony whale!

Polly: It's not a pony whale it's a pony tail - no brain!

Sophie: What's that?

Polly: It's a tail on the back of a pony.

Sophie: (slight giggle as she takes this in and then disregards it) Yeh but she's not a pony!

Lorna: I am a pony (She stands) I'm a princess!

Polly: I thought you were a pony?

Lorna: I am silly! I'm 'My Little Pony Princess'!

Sophie: (she stands by LORNA) Yeh, and I'm her prince!

Lorna: Who are you?

Polly: (pause for thought) I'm I'm a brontosaurus!

Lorna & Sophie: What's that? (POLLY roars and chases LORNA & SOPHIE back to the office where they resume their seats)

End of Flashback 1.

SCENE 1: continued.

Polly: (sitting at desk SC) Good Lord, I never want to be six again.

Sophie: Really? I'd kill to be six again, get your meals cooked for you, you get run around, you don't have to do anything, get your washing done, never mind all this grown up crap having to do everything for yourself. Get yourself to work every morning, get yourself home every evening, make your own bloomin' appointments, make sure you

Lorna: Shit! Shit, shit shit! Oh shit! (During this burst of expletives she rushes up from her chair and grabs her bag and runs halfway out before returning to grab her shoes from under the desk to exit SL).

Sophie: What's wrong with you?

(LORNA exits).

Sophie: Where are you going? (to POLLY) Where's she going?

Polly: Doctor's appointment or something medical, she cleared it with Mr Jenkins anyway.

Sophie: (slowly the thought forms) She's pregnant!

Polly: What Lorna? Surely not?

Sophie: Yeah! Oh my God she is!

Polly: With whom?

Sophie: With that Michael person she's been going with!

Polly: Since when?

Sophie: The weekend!

Polly: And today is?

Sophie: Monday.

Polly: And she's going for pregnancy scans already?

Sophie: Yeah well er some women know instinctively.

Polly: And Lorna is one of these women? I don't think so somehow. (*She continues working, SOPHIE sulks, the phone rings POLLY picks up phone rather flustered*) Hello, how can I (*holds phone away from ear as she is obviously being bawled out*) yes? Mr Jenkins I assure you I had no, I had no idea I no, I didn't get that message yes, I (*She holds phone away from ear again and looks to SOPHIE for sympathy who looks away to avoid giggling*) right no, I understand be right there yep, of course fine 'bye. (*She slams the phone down*) Trust Lorna not to give me messages the one time it really matters quite a lot. Do something useful while I'm gone and put my chair back! (*She exits SL with her bag*).

Sophie: I wonder what Lorna's appointments are really for? Maybe she really is pregnant? No I wouldn't be surprised though if she'd forgotten to take her pill, it's the kind of thing she'd do - always having to remind her - can never seem to think of things for herself! OK worst case scenario - pregnant! But who with? (*Sighs*) Don't think I'm going to ask her though! Yeah Polly can deal with it. (*She stands*). She's best at that kind of thing. (*She walks to front of desk CS and perches*). I wonder if it's the same with all intellectuals, her going to Uni. and getting her first class honours an' all - she's a bit like a mother hen. I remember when we looked for a new flat for me; we looked bloomin' everywhere with no success, no success at all. The one we looked at last I thought showed some promise - like you do when you're desperate! Polly soon put me right and when Lorna agreed with her I very nearly took it just to spite them but then, that's me all over!

Flashback 2

(During this flashback movements should be as frenetic as possible as the characters explore and check out the 'facilities'. The dialogue is 'Pinteresque' and should be pacy and irregular, not evenly spoken. The lights crossfade to the downstage playing area and SOPHIE moves to a SL window in the 'fourth wall' and tries to look through the grimy panes. She mimes wiping the glass and still unable to see much she notices her fingers are now black. She crosses SR to a sink and unable to get any water out of the tap she wipes her hand on her trousers. Meanwhile POLLY has entered SL and is standing arms folded watching this performance. SOPHIE turns to see her).

Sophie: No?

Polly: No!

Sophie: No? *(They constantly cross and recross the stage).*

Polly: No! Yes?

Sophie: *(resignedly)* No.

Lorna: *(enters SL)* Well? *(She perches on desk SL and massages her foot).*

Sophie: No - Oh I don't know - what about ?

Polly: No!

Sophie: Or even?

Polly: No!

Lorna: The cooker's a bit

Sophie: What?

Lorna: You know a bit

Polly: Dilapidated!

Lorna & Sophie: Yes what?

Polly: *(realising they have not understood)* Crap!

Sophie: So's the bath. *(moves DS to window)* The view?

(POLLY crosses to window and stares through the grime with SOPHIE. LORNA comes up behind them, unable to see through the other two she pushes them apart and takes a perfunctory look herself).

Lorna: It's a brickwall!
Polly: Is this the last one?
Sophie: Yeah!
Lorna: Are you gonna?
Sophie: I dunno!
Polly: So what d'you think?
Sophie: I dunno - what d'you think?
Polly: What do you think?
Sophie: D'you think what I think?
Polly: I think what I think you think! *(to LORNA)* What do you think?
Lorna: What DO I think?
Sophie: Yes, what do you think?
Lorna: I don't think! *(They dissolve into laughter).*
Polly: *(to SOPHIE)* So you think?
Sophie: *(wandering SR)* Oh I don't know.
Polly: Sorry. *(POLLY and LORNA turn to exit SL).*
Sophie: Where are you going?
Lorna: Any more flats to see?
Sophie: *(sighing)* No.
Lorna: No?
Polly: How about we go for a coffee, talk it over?
Sophie: Think I'd rather have tea.
Lorna: Blimey a decision at last! *(exeunt SL)*

End of **Flashback 2.**

SCENE 1: *continued.*

(SOPHIE is back at her desk, lost in reverie head in hands. POLLY enters with her bag and stands behind SOPHIE watching her do nothing).

Polly: *(loudly)* PLEASE tell me you've been doing something useful for the last hour?

Sophie: *(jumps visibly)* Yes!

(POLLY sits at her desk and continues to observe SOPHIE who is very aware of being watched and she begins to hammer on her keyboard, realises POLLY is slightly amused and continues to type evermore loudly and dramatically.

Eventually she stops and turns to POLLY)

Sophie: Poll?

Polly: Yes Sophie?

Sophie: D'you ever think what would have happened, you know, with your life if you had worked just a little bit, you know, harder?

Polly: I don't know how I could have worked any harder to be honest.

Sophie: Well, you know, when you were younger; done that little bit more revision for your exams.

Polly: Are you telling me that while I have been battling it out with the most ferocious minds in business you've been sitting here churning over your sodding A Levels and things? I'm surprised you can remember them!

Sophie: How can I forget!

Flashback 3.

(This time there is no move to the DS performance area and the action takes place at the desks. It is an examination room, the keyboards are pushed to the front of the desk to allow room to simulate answering of question papers. POLLY is working away quite steadily, SOPHIE is obviously stuck and mimes sucking her pencil. LORNA enters SL and looks forward to the imagined teacher glancing as she does over POLLY'S shoulder)

Lorna: Sorry I'm late miss no doctor's appointment yes Miss, sorry Miss.

(She exchanges mischievous looks with SOPHIE then seats herself at desk SR. She is immediately stuck after a cursory glance at the paper).

Sophie: *(throws pencil to the floor behind POLLY)* Can I get my pencil Miss?

(She gets up and goes behind POLLY, blatantly looking to see her work. POLLY is aware and eventually waves a pencil in SOPHIE'S face to get rid of her. SOPHIE grunts begrudgingly and takes pencil back to her desk).

Lorna: *(puts up her hand)* Can I borrow a calculator miss?

(She gets up to borrow one from POLLY and has a good look at POLLY'S work before the calculator is proffered and LORNA returns disgruntled to her desk).

ALTERNATIVE DIALOGUE 2 - starts here

(See production notes and page 21)

Polly: *(leans back in her chair to address the audience, LORNA and SOPHIE freeze heads in hands)* It was always like that, one craning over one shoulder and normally the other one over the other! Particularly in our early years. It wasn't even that I was always right; I'm not one of those naturally gifted sorts, more a sort of 'academicky' person who got where she got by sheer dogged persistence, learning parrot fashion and listening to the teacher. That's how I gained a reputation for being the clever one. Sophie never gave herself enough credit *(She gets up and wanders over to SOPHIE'S desk to look at her work)* not by half. Used to copy me all the time just because I had this 'clever' label. Looking at her exam paper there are things here that I wouldn't have thought of in a million years. She's always retained her rebellious instinct though. *(She crosses SR to behind LORNA)* Lorna, on the other hand. *(She turns a page of LORNA'S script)* They're not going to think too much of that. The Ancient Egyptians founded the Roman Empire! Good grief! Original still. *(She moves round in front of the desks to perch SC)*. Sophie was always going to be a rock star or TV presenter or model or something. Whilst Lorna's ambitions never extended beyond a childcare course somewhere - not that there's anything wrong with that, someone has to do it! *(Pause)* Me? Well I went to Uni., delivered the expected first class degree and ticked all the right boxes. What then? Well, Mr Jenkins, that's what! Having been one of my university tutors he asked me to get a team together to set up a business. So I did and my friends - both of them! - work with me as a super-efficient triumvirate, the three of us that is! *(She returns to her desk and sits)*. And the rest, as they say, is history.

ALTERNATIVE DIALOGUE 2 - ends here

SCENE 1 - continued.

(POLLY'S phone rings and LORNA and SOPHIE are unfrozen. They all replace their keyboards and work continues).

Polly: *(answers phone)* Hello, clientele and research section yes? no Mr Jenkins I haven't forgotten thank you Mr Jenkins yes I think it's an

excellent idea (*she looks at her watch*) be there in five OK 'bye (*puts the phone down, stands up puts bag on shoulder*). Meeting with Mr Jenkins on the second floor room 23. It's about the team building exercise this weekend; his latest brilliant idea to improve office co-operation. (*She starts to go*).

Sophie: OK, see you later Poll.

Polly: You two are coming too!

Sophie: What?

Polly: Remember - "no stress no strain, no strain good brain"? It's in your desk diaries if you have one and it's been updated of course! (*She exits SL*).

Sophie: (*standing and grabbing folders, she looks through them and puts one down on the seat of her chair*). I knew that! (*She exits SL*).

Lorna: (*dithering, grabs a folder, puts it down*) I didn't! (*She exits running off SL*).

SCENE 2. *In the countryside - somewhere.*

(*POLLY and SOPHIE enter DS in front of desks. They cross to SR and stand motionless; they are obviously annoyed*).

Lorna: (*enters SL and addresses the audience*) I knew this weekend was going to be hard but I didn't expect it to be this bad. We always share our thoughts with each other, our problems, our worries, our fears, our joys, our everything. I just don't seem to be able to find the right time to tell them. I thought this weekend offered an excellent opportunity but I just haven't found the right moment. I know they know something's up by the way they look at me but when I think, "right, now's the time", something or somebody crops up. God I'm depressed but I've got to put on a brave face. Don't want to spoil the weekend (*looks rueful*) actually I already have, I didn't set my alarm right and so we missed breakfast. Then I was elected map reader and so we missed lunch! And now we're (*She mimes taking map out of backpocket and perusing it*). God knows where! (*She crosses DSC and is joined by POLLY and SOPHIE*).

Sophie: God, I'm so hungry.

Lorna: Not surprising, we missed breakfast!

Sophie: And lunch - don't forget lunch!

Polly: And why did we miss lunch?

Sophie: 'Cos Lorna can't read a flippin' map!

Lorna: Yes I can!

Sophie: So why are we still lost?

Lorna: We're not - look OK. (*She looks at map*) If we're going up the map, right? Then right is right and left is left, right? And if we're coming down the map then right is left and left is right, right? So you have to make sure that

Sophie: Oh shut up!

Polly: (*looking at the map with LORNA*) That would have been the case, Lorna, had we been going down the map, (*She turns it round*) we were in fact very much going up the map, so right really was right and left really was left, compris? (*LORNA looks confused and deflated*). Can you at least tell us where we are now?

Lorna: (*struggling*) Er (*looks around in vain*) Here!

Polly: (*looks incredulous*) Never mind. We'll stop for the moment, get our bearings and pool our resources.

Sophie: What?

Polly: Pool our resources.

Sophie: (*sarcastically*) Oh damn, I didn't bring my bikini!

Polly: Are you really that simple?

Sophie: It was a joke!

Lorna: Shame, I quite fancy a swim actually.

Polly: (*looks at SOPHIE and rolls her eyes*) Yes, well, never mind, I saved some rolls from supper. (*She mimes extracting them from a bag she has placed on the ground*). If anyone would like one it'll keep you going for a bit.

Lorna & Sophie: Yes er thanks.

Sophie: That's very kind of you oh, but you haven't got one. Do you want mine?

Lorna: No, have mine!

Polly: No, that's all right thanks, seriously, you hang on to them I'm fine really!

Lorna & Sophie: (*They throw their rolls disconsolately over their respective DS shoulder*). Cheers!

Polly: (*looks to the heavens*) Kendal Mint Cake?

Sophie: What?

Lorna: Pardon?

Polly: Kendal Mint Cake Anyone want some?

Lorna: Cake?

Polly: Not really it's sort of sort of look try a bit. I've got some in my bag I think (*She rummages, breaks some off the imagined bar and hands LORNA and SOPHIE a chunk each; she does not take any for herself*). It's what

serious walkers and ramblers carry with them at all times; they swear by it!

Lorna & Sophie: (*biting their chunks greedily and then almost immediately and together they spit it out*) Bloody Hell!

Polly: Told you! (*She laughs*). Sorry, my little joke, foul isn't it? Forgive me, I couldn't resist! Right, they said we should be thinking of ways of team building, exercises and things so, let's play a game.

Sophie: I know - charades!

Polly: OK you start.

Sophie: Oh no, I don't like the acting bit!

Polly: That's a good start.

Lorna: I'll start. (*She pulls up her sock*).

Sophie: Trouser? Leg?

Lorna: I haven't started yet!

Polly: (*to SOPHIE*) She's not allowed to speak.

Sophie: Oh, right.

(*LORNA signals 'film', in 'charadespeak'*)

Sophie: Er, nose er, pencil sharpener?

Lorna: It's 'film' you idiot!

Polly: Have you ever played this game before?

Sophie: Yes I have.

Lorna: OK, OK let's go through them shall we? (*She signs as she speaks*). TV
Play Song Film and everyone knows this is a book obviously.

Sophie: Right.

Polly: OK.

(*LORNA signs 'film'*).

Sophie: Film! Right!

(*Suggested charades sequence*). (*LORNA indicates that she is doing 'the whole thing'. SOPHIE does not understand and keeps interjecting inanely. During this sequence POLLY shoulders her bag and exits unnoticed*).

Sophie: Praying praying to the Lord

(*LORNA is dancing disco style*).

Sophie: Dancing - dancing and praying - pointing - turning round - pointing -

cowboys - riding.
(LORNA dances holding her nose and wiggling her body as in 'down the toilet' style).

Sophie: Seaweed - dancing - water!

Polly: Good Grief!

(She exits SL. LORNA thumps her chest as if shot or stabbed and falls to the floor).

Sophie: Dying - you've been stabbed - you're dying - stabbed - dead - bleeding - bleeding to death - shot - you've got a knife in you - er - dead? What do you think, Polly?

Lorna: (looking up from floor) Where'd she go?

Sophie: I don't know. Hey, what was that?

Lorna: Titanic! Idiot, couldn't have been more obvious!

Sophie: Do we know our way back?

Lorna: No.

Sophie: Map?

Lorna: Yep (gets it out of back pocket and looks at it vaguely). Right we're going down the page so that means er right. (She starts to exit SR).

Sophie: Left, Lorna, left! (She storms off SL).

Lorna: (follows quickly throwing map over shoulder as she goes) Oooooooh!

SCENE 3. The office. Monday morning following the weekend excursion.

(Lights up on empty office. POLLY enters with ever present bag which she dumps in its usual place on the floor by her feet. She picks coffee mugs off her desk and LORNA's desk and takes them off SR. She returns immediately minus mugs, switches chairs with SOPHIE'S. She takes folder off her seat and puts it on SOPHIE'S seat. She sits at her desk and commences work. She listens to answerphone over headphones and looks at her watch. She is very aware that neither of her staff has arrived).

Sophie: (enters SL hoping that POLLY has not yet arrived, she sees her and decides to brazen it out. She dumps her bag down by her desk and picks up her coffee mug). No Lorna today? (She exits SR with her mug).

Polly: No! Sophie, I have just attended an hour long meeting with Mr Jenkins and then I was with a client. *(No response from SOPHIE)* So what time do you call this?

Sophie: *(offstage)* Oh, yeah, erm ... *(returning)* Sorry, there was this really big crash on the Jubilee Line. *(She notices she has the awful chair again and swaps hers with LORNA'S, she transfers the folder on its seat to the chair she will now sit in).*

Polly: *(sarcastically)* Oh, yes, a really horrendous crash, I've been hearing about it on the radio and news bulletins all morning. Hundreds of people trapped and the death toll is mounting by the minute. Some man was trapped by the legs in the rising tide in a vain attempt to levitate himself to safety! The government expects it to set their plans for self extinction back six years at least! *(She pauses to see the effect; there appears to be none).* You enjoy it then?

Sophie: *(She is typing and pretending not to listen)* What? *(looks at POLLY in disbelief).*

Polly: Not the crash, the weekend, the team building exercise?

Sophie: Oh yeah! *(She continues typing and then stops abruptly).* Oh I got the photos developed.

Polly: When?

Sophie: This morning, that's why I was late

Polly: And the Jubilee crash?

Sophie: *(handing POLLY the photos she has just extracted from her bag)* Oh lighten up! *(She stands next to POLLY to look through them with her).*

Polly: These are all blurred, it's like looking through fog!

Sophie: I thought that!

Polly: You can't see a thing in any of them!

Sophie: Yes you can, look! That's you or it could be Lorna and that's me or it could be somebody and that's

Polly: It could be the bloody Loch Ness monster for all any one can tell! *(She hands them back to SOPHIE)* Look, you keep the photos. *(She puts her head disconsolately in her hands).*

Sophie: *(puts the photos on her desk and then gently slips her arms around POLLY).* Come on love, how are we supposed to work together if we're just going to argue?

Polly: We're supposed to have been on a team building exercise!

Sophie: *(humorously)* Yeh, but that didn't work did it?

Polly: *(smiles and pats SOPHIE'S hand)* Yes it did Soph, yes it did. *(They embrace).* Now, the Bolder Account?

Sophie: OK I'm on it. *(She sits and produces a folder from beneath her. She*

laughs and waves it at POLLY). On it?

Polly: Very funny. I'm sorry Sophie, it's not you I'm meaning to flip at but we're somewhat understaffed at present. I don't know what Lorna thinks she's been playing at for the last few weeks, we could really do with her right now. I'm having to do all her work as well as mine. You do realise Mr Jenkins is asking for a review of all our individual client profiles by tomorrow? Not even the courtesy of the customary three day preparation time. I don't know what's got into that man. Are you up for some overtime?

Sophie: Erm well

(LORNA enters SL, shambles to her desk and removes her shoes).

Sophie: Lorna'll do some overtime won't you Lorna? Up for some overtime?

(LORNA drops her bag on the floor and sits at her desk).

Polly: *(rounding on her angrily)* Where the hell have you been?

Lorna: Not now Poll Where's the Taylor portfolio?

Polly: Never mind the damn portfolio, I asked you a question!

Lorna: I had an appointment at the Doctor's.

Sophie: *(jumping up gleefully)* You're pregnant!

Polly: *(springs up slamming both hands on the desk)* Shut up Sophie! *(to LORNA)* You've had an appointment, I've had an appointment, I've had appointments coming out of my ears. I've had so many appointments I've had to wade waist-deep through all my appointments. I can barely manage to do all my own work let alone yours as well. Who do you think I am, your bloody nursemaid? Are you that stupid that you think it's acceptable behaviour to just swan in here whenever you feel like it with no regard for what you've put me through? *(Deliberate pause).* Now, where the hell have you been?

Lorna: I told you, I had an appointment. *(She stands and faces POLLY).* It's been confirmed I've got cancer leukaemia actually.

(POLLY realising her dreadful faux pas moves to embrace LORNA who shrugs her off)

Lorna: Coffee anyone?

(She exits SR. SOPHIE and POLLY look at each other. POLLY goes to embrace SOPHIE but she stands up and rushes out in tears SL. LORNA returns with two coffees puts them on POLLY'S desk and turns POLLY round to face her)

Lorna: It's all right Polly. *(They embrace. The phone rings).*

Polly: Don't answer it. Leave it.

Lorna: *(picks up phone)* Hello? Oh Mr Jenkins right OK then no I'll tell her right away OK 'bye. *(she replaces receiver)* Mr Jenkins wants the Wye report. It's fine - go.

(Polly picks up file from desk and starts to go. She makes eye contact with LORNA and exits. LORNA watches her go and begins to tidy her desk. Suddenly and violently she sweeps everything off it onto the floor and breaks down sobbing, head in hands, kneeling at her desk. POLLY returns and stares stunned as the lights dim to BLACKOUT).

SCENE 4. The office. Sometime in the future - the Monday after LORNA's funeral.

(POLLY and SOPHIE are seated at their desks. LORNA is not there and her desk is neat and tidy).

Sophie: God, what is she doing? She's taking forever.

Polly: You know she's making coffee.

Sophie: Yeah, people could die waiting!

Polly: Look, give her a chance, things can't be easy for her you know.

Sophie: Whatever.

(A NEW GIRL enters with three coffees. She gives one mug to SOPHIE).

New Girl: There you go! *(She puts a mug on POLLY'S desk and one on her own).*

Sophie: Finally!

Polly: Oh no, that's my mug, this is Lorna's I mean this is yours I mean

New Girl: Does it matter? *(Sits at her desk SR).*

Sophie: *(shouting)* Of course it matters!

New Girl: *(astonished, exchanges mugs)* Sorry, fine! Where would you like me to start?

Polly: Yes right, I've left a report to to be written up in that file. If you could type that into the system that would be great.

New Girl: OK, sure. *(She makes a great show of taking off her shoes, stretching and wiggling her toes).*

(POLLY catches SOPHIE'S attention and they both look astounded at the gesture which mirrors LORNA'S former everyday routine).

(DREAMING by 'The Mamas and The Papas' fades up as the lights dim).

BLACKOUT.

The End

ALTERNATIVE DIALOGUE 1

(See production notes and SCENE 1, page 2)

Sophie: How did you get out of it this time then? Had to stay at home and finish that difficult bit of plumbing? Look after next door's tortoise? Wallpaper the lavatory? Bury your grandmother? Again? *(No response from LORNA)*. So you didn't go to the party then? You didn't meet the man of your dreams? You're not moving into five star luxury with a Brad Pitt lookalike? Or was it just sex?

Lorna: *(whips round in her seat to face SOPHIE)* Shut up! *(Returns to her typing sheepishly)*. Sssssh!

Sophie: *(nearly misses the inference - doubletakes)* Oh my god you finally did it! You went out and met someone! Tell me, tell me, tell me all about it, about him! Is he gorgeous? Is he nice? Is he rich? *(no response, SOPHIE ups a gear in her desperation for the 'goss')* Oh my god, I can't believe it, you've been a naughty woman! You bad girl! So tell me, c'mon, I need to know every last teeny weeny detail!

Lorna: Make me a coffee and I'll think about it.

End of alternative Dialogue 1.

ALTERNATIVE DIALOGUE 2

(See production notes and Flashback 3, page 12)

Polly: *(leans back in her chair to address the audience, LORNA and SOPHIE freeze heads in hands)*. It was always like that, one craning over one shoulder and the other over the other! Particularly at school. *(POLLY walks behind SOPHIE and then LORNA appraising the quality of each exam paper)* Gosh that's good Sophie! I wouldn't have thought of that in a million years! If only you believed in your own ability a little bit more. The Ancient Egyptians founded the Roman Empire did they Lorna? Well it's novel I suppose! *(walks round to the front of the desks and perches on the desk SC)* I'm not one of those naturally gifted sorts, more an 'academicky' person who got where she

got by learning parrot fashion, listening to the teacher and burying my head in my books. That's how I gained a reputation for being the clever one. The three of us have stayed friends through thick and thin and even went to University together. Sophie always wanted to be a journalist or TV presenter or even better some kind of 'rock chick'. Married twice, divorced twice she still retains her 'rebelliousness'. Lorna's aspirations never seemed to extend past a career in social work or nannying to the rich and famous but she scraped a second class degree and has become a valuable member of the triumvirate! She bears the distinction of having been jilted not once but twice and still lives in hope of meeting 'Mr Right'. Me? Well I ticked all the right boxes and delivered the expected Honours Degree but it was one hell of a slog, especially with these two to look after! Then, a few years ago now, out of the blue, like the proverbial manna, Mr Jenkins, an ex-tutor, rang and asked me if I'd like to get a team together to form the backbone of his financial advisory company. My life was going nowhere; my worthless husband had run off with his stunningly beautiful, half his age, secretary and I needed the money. So I canvassed my friends, both of them. Sophie was going through her second sticky divorce and Lorna was trying to keep her head above water with her own desktop publishing business. They needed little persuasion to join me and the rest, as they say, is history.

End of Alternative Dialogue 2

