

CARE

A One Act Play

by **Claire Jones**

SchoolPlay Productions Ltd

CARE
and
SHADOWS

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SchoolPlay Productions Limited,
15 Inglis Road,
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CAST

Kate

Anne

Angie

Carol

Hazel

Sue

Penny

Rachel

Naomi

All the girls are aged between 14 and 17, except Naomi and Rachel who are twins aged about 12. Hazel, the Housemother, is in her mid to late 20s.

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(The Scene is a residential home for girls in need of care. It is a comfortable, if shabby, furnished room. KATE sits propped up in front of the TV Set which has its back to the audience. Her leg is on a stool, with a blanket over it. KATE is about 16, pale and thin. A drool of early evening television comes out of the set. KATE isn't very interested. A door slams off. She sighs and looks round).

Anne: *(Off)*. Anyone in?

Kate: No.

(ANNE enters. She is cheerful, practical and very institutionalised. Hard as nails. Nothing normally touches her).

Anne: Don't be a wally, you're in aren't you?

Kate: Yes, but I didn't think you meant me. Anyway, you know I'm here. I'm hardly likely to get up and go and run the Marathon.

Anne: D'you want the telly?

Kate: No, not really. I dropped the control thing.

(ANNE turns the set off. She fidgets, looking at KATE. There's something on her mind).

Kate: Hazel's gone to the shop. She was making a cake earlier.

Anne: Oh Gawd!

Kate: I know.

Anne: I wish she wouldn't bother.

Kate: David gives her these lectures about cementing home situations by cooking wholesome meals.

Anne: That's all right if you can cook in the first place.

Kate: She thinks its a chance to forge relationships.

Anne: Yeah - bad ones. How are you today?

Kate: Much the same.

Anne: Doctor been?

Kate: Looked in quickly. Took SOME MORE blood, can you believe it? I shan't have any left. Then the District Nurse came later. God, she's a bag. She's got a beard.

Anne: She hasn't!

Kate: Oh yes, she has. And she spits when she talks.

Anne: But what did they say?

Kate: *(Imitating their voices)*. Stay there. Keep your cool. Rest your leg. Don't strain your stitches. And so on, and so on

Anne: Haven't they taken the stitches out yet? It's three weeks.

Kate: No. They reckon there's an infection.

Anne: Perhaps that's why you've been so rough.

Kate: *(Sleepy)*. P'raps

Anne: Tired?

Kate: Yes, I am. Funny, isn't it, when I've done nothing all day. But I keep on getting tired. Sorry

Anne: What you apologising for? You're only a flaming nuisance that's all. Kate can you listen a minute, I want to talk to you.

Kate: Mmmmmmm

Anne: I've got to tell someone, Kate, it's going round and round in my head. *(Silence)*. Kate!

(But KATE is suddenly asleep. ANNE moves away, frustrated. The door bangs again and ANGIE and CAROL come in. ANGIE is outgoing, cheeky and disruptive. She carries a huge stereo radio. CAROL is quiet and stands back from the others, from whom she seems a little different).

Angie: *(Talking as she enters)*. So I said to him, "Get lost you great fat nelly", and he goes. "All right then, Angela, if that's the way you want it", and I goes. "Yeah, naff off", and then he started to cry I mean, real wet, and I laughed right in the middle of the High Street, nearly fell under a bus

(She switches on her stereo. It blasts out).

Anne: Angie, shut that row.

Angie: No. Why should I?

Anne: 'Cos Kate's asleep.

Angie: Oh blimey, she down here again? All take your shoes off, girls.

Carol: Don't be so mean.

Anne: What d'you expect her to do? She's been in that room of hers ever since she came home from the hospital with nothing to do. At least she can watch telly down here and talk to people.

Angie: Only she doesn't, does she? She goes to sleep all the time, and we have to creep about and whisper.

Carol: Selfish cat.

Anne: Yeah - just imagine if it was you. We'd hear you grumbling in the next street.

Angie: (*Spreading belongings everywhere and flopping down*). All right, all right.

Anne: And before you spread yourself all over the room, it's your turn to lay the table.

Angie: Oh no!

Anne: Oh yes!

Angie: I hate laying the table. Can't she (*Carol*) do it?

Carol: No I can't. I've got to start my homework.

Anne: Already?

Carol: Three subjects. They're supposed to take half an hour each and I'll be lucky if I finish before midnight.

Angie: Hazel won't let you.

Carol: She's got to.

Anne: You know her rules.

Carol: Then I'll ask David.

Anne: Last time I did that he did it all for me, and I got detention.

Angie: And little Carol must be a good little girl and be in her beddy-byes by ten, so Auntie Hazel can tuck her up.

Carol: Oh, shut up.

Anne: You all right, Carol?

Carol: If you must know, I've got a splitting head.

Angie: Aaaaah!

Carol: And it wasn't helped by you playing that thing all the way home. Honestly Anne, we nearly got chucked off the bus.

Angie: Don't sit with me then.

Carol: You know very well, if I don't, I get all sorts of aggro from you and your moronic friends.

Angie: Well, what do you expect when you go to a posh school?

Carol: Oh, here we go again. You know Angie, you're a snob, not me. You think it's smart to look down on me and make rude remarks just because I don't go to your school.

Angie: You're no different to any of us.

Carol: I never said I was. You've never forgiven me for getting that scholarship.

Angie: And where's it going to get you? When they know your 'family background'?

Carol: Angie

Angie: Well, I'm sick of this dump. They know all about it at school, you know. You hear them gabbing behind your back. "SHE lives in one of them homes.

Hasn't got a mother, only some do-gooder."

Anne: Oh, give it a rest.

(HAZEL enters. She isn't much older than the others, but an earth mother in the making. Anxious to do her best, sometimes over-protective. She is married, and her relationship with DAVID, her husband is very happy, which spills over into her life. The GIRLS are really fond of her, but treat her like a slapdash older sister).

Hazel: Sorry I'm late. I met Sue and gave her a hand with the push chair. What's going on? Angela? You're up to something.

Angie: No I'm not. Don't pick on me.

Hazel: What's the matter then?

Anne: Just feeling a bit institutionalised.

Hazel: Oh, not again. Angie, I've told you again and again not to brood on the past. Look, what's happened to you before you came here doesn't matter see? It's how you relate to David and me and all the rest of us, and us to you, that's important, right?

Angie: *(Under her breath).* Shut your face

Hazel: Angela....

Angie: ALL RIGHT!!

(There is a pause and HAZEL decides to change the subject).

Hazel: Kate all right?

Anne: Yes.. I was talking to her and she suddenly fell asleep, and you know her, once she drops off.

Hazel: Yes, those pills she's getting are rather strong. Well.. now you're all in we'll have some tea. David's got a meeting tonight, so I want to get on. Sue's in the kitchen getting Barry's feed, and the twins have just come in.

Anne: Penny?

Hazel: She's around somewhere. She came in with us. Has anyone seen my slippers? I took them off somewhere before I went out, and now they're gone.
(She searches, rather ineffectually).

Carol: Not again?

Hazel: Afraid so, sorry.

(ANNE gets up and helps look).

Carol: Well, you'll have to let me off this time, Hazel. If I go now I can get about

three quarters of an hour done on my maths before tea.

Hazel: How much tonight?

Carol: Three subjects. *(Pause)*. I've got to get on with them, Hazel. The mocks are only a few weeks away.

Hazel: All right, go on then. We don't want your headmistress saying I don't encourage you. Carol listen you are to have something to eat.

Carol: I'm not hungry.

Hazel: That's what I mean. You never are. You're far too thin.

Carol: Have you got any aspirin?

Hazel: In my bag. And don't change the subject.

(SUE comes in. She is much the same age as the others, but appears and thinks much older. She is shy, diffident and a peacemaker. She wears an apron and carries a baby's dish and HAZEL'S slippers).

Sue: Hazel, if you're looking for these, I found them in Barry's push-chair basket. Don't ask me how they got there.

Hazel: Oh, good Lord, I must be going off my head. Thanks. Sue.

Sue: Do you think this tinned food looks all right for Barry? It doesn't smell all that good.

Hazel: How long has it been in the fridge?

Sue: Don't know.

Hazel: I wouldn't risk it then. Look - I'll come and find something else. All right, Carol, I can see you're itching to get on. Whose turn to lay tea?

Anne: *(Indicating ANGIE)*. Her.

Hazel: Well, hurry up, Angie. We're all behind.

(CAROL collects her things and goes out. ANNE picks up a magazine. ANGIE does her best to stare out HAZEL and loses).

Angie: *(Gets up slowly)*. Oh, all right.

Hazel: And DON'T bang things about. You'll break something.

Angie: And the Local Council will have to pay for another. What a shame!

(She slams out and the others wince).

Sue: Oh Gawd, she's in one of her moods.

Hazel: *(Brightly)*. Nothing we can't cure.

Anne: Oh, don't go all inter-personal relationships on us. You know perfectly well that when Angie's like that, she's not maladjusted, just plain bloody-minded.

Sue: *(Rather smugly).* Don't I know it. I used to be like that myself.

Anne: Well let's hope that she doesn't have to have a baby to snap her out of it.

(There is a horrified and embarrassed pause).

Hazel: *(Gently).* Anne

Sue: *(Hastily).* I expect I asked for that.

(ANNE is horrified, she puts out a hand to SUE, who ignores it).

Sue: It's all right Anne. Honest. I'd better go and get on. Barry's probably yelling his head off.

(She starts off in a dignified manner, but breaks into a run).

Hazel: *(After her).* I'll be along in a minute. *(SUE's gone).* Anne

Anne: I'm SORRY Hazel. I'm a bitch. I'll go after her.

Hazel: I should think so too. But hang on a minute

Anne: I don't know what got into me - a crack like that. Why should I suddenly say that? I don't blame Sue for having Barry.

Hazel: Tell her then. She sometimes feels very low about it. Listen, Anne I want a word. Where were you this afternoon?

Anne: Well at school.

Hazel: No you weren't. They rang me. *(ANNE begins to speak angrily).* You know they have to

Anne: Yes.

Hazel: Well?

Anne: Hazel, I

(But at this point, KATE wakes up and PENNY comes in. PENNY is small. She's older than she looks, but for some reason HAZEL treats her like an infant. PENNY is withdrawn, but this is not social, but because she inhabits a world of her own).

Kate: *(Breaking into the conversation).* I've done it again, haven't I?

Hazel: Hello Love. Had a good sleep? Here's Penny to see you.

Kate: Drop off in mid-sentence like a flaming dormouse. Why don't you yell at me and make loud noises?

Anne: We did the next best thing, and got Angie in with her ghetto-blaster, but you were out like a light.

Kate: Hello Penny, been here long?

Penny: Just come in. Hazel

Kate: Hazel, you'll have to speak to the Doctor about those pills, I feel like a zombie.

Hazel: I did this morning. He wants you to go on with them.

Kate: Oh hell!

Anne: I'll go down and see Sue.

Penny: Hazel

Hazel: Anne, wait, I want

(The phone rings. ANNE escapes).

Hazel: Oh blast! Later then.

(She answers the phone. PENNY finds a Mars bar in her bag and gives KATE half).

Hazel: *(Interrupting her conversation).* Not before supper, please.

(PENNY is unaware that HAZEL means her, and continues).

Hazel: *(To her caller).* Excuse me. Penny!

Penny: Yes?

Hazel: No sweets at tea time, dear. OK?

Penny: I'm hungry.

Hazel: You're always hungry. You'll have to wait.

Kate: I'll put it away for you Pen. Look.... under my pillow.

Hazel: *(To caller).* Sorry, what was that?... Yes, they do live here why, what have they Oh no! No, look, please don't do that yet. No, I'll try to deal with it. Leave it to me Oh, I will, I promise you What's your number?
(She writes it down). Thank you. I'll call you back. *(Rings off).* Kate, do you know where the twins are?

Kate: No.

Hazel: Penny? *(PENNY looks up vaguely).* HAVE YOU SEEN THE TWINS?

Penny: No. Where are they?

Hazel: Oh Lord. I'd better go and look.

Kate: What's the matter?

Hazel: You name it.

(She hurries out).

Kate: Something's happened.

Penny: (*Glancing round*). Has it?

Kate: Not that you'd notice, of course. The Bomb could go off and all you'd want to know was what's for tea.

Penny: What is?

Kate: How do I know? Think I've got a hole bored through the floor to the kitchen?

Penny: Have you?

Kate: Penny! Have you heard a word I've been saying?

Penny: Not really.

Kate: I give up. Come and sit down.

Penny: Get my sketch book first.

Kate: You don't want to draw me again.

Penny: You've just woken up.. (*She sketches*). Where's Mittens?

Kate: In the garden, mousing, I expect.

Penny: I've got a surprise for him.

Kate: (*Watching her*). Here - You don't show those sketches at school do you?

Penny: No. I hate school. I'm not going any more.

Kate: You've got to.

Penny: What's the point? We only get two art lessons a week.

Kate: But they teach you other things.

Penny: There's nothing else I want to learn.

Kate: You'd be in dead trouble.

Penny: It doesn't matter.

Kate: You know, I honestly think you will walk out of school one day, because you don't feel like it.

Penny: I probably will. The kids are rotten. They say things. The other day I lit a candle in the inkwell, because I wanted to see the light effect on the wood. They called me a loony.

Kate: (*Amused*). Oh

Penny: They've no idea of the concept of art at all. Anyhow, now I've started on my big project. I won't have to listen to them gossiping about us.

Kate: They gossip?

Penny: Oh yes. Listen, Kate, I tried to tell Hazel about my idea. She

Kate: What do they gossip about, Penny?

Penny: I don't listen - or I try not to. But I did hear them when they talked about Sue

Kate: Oh, they've started on that now, have they?

Penny: I like Sue. I can't understand people

Kate: Take no notice. Sue doesn't. Talk to her about it. Let her tell you. She's no

slag, honest. Barry was a dreadful mistake that could happen to anyone. People come and go here - you get to know them for five minutes and they're gone, so there's no point in exploring histories, and most of the time it's not our business. But I do know about Sue, and it's all right. Really. *(Silence)*. Penny, are you listening?

Penny: What?

Kate: *(To herself)*. Oh, save your breath, Kate.

Penny: Then there's Anne.

Kate: What about Anne?

Penny: They talk about her too.

Kate: Anne? Penny, what did they say?

Penny: Oh, they just talk. Excuse me, I've remembered I've got something to do.

(She walks out calmly. KATE lunges forward, calling after her and jars her leg. She yells).

Kate: Penny! Come back here! What about Anne? OWWW!

(Enter the TWINS, NAOMI and RACHEL. They are not very alike, about 12, a bit sly and fiercely protective to each other).

Naomi: Has Hazel been in here? *(No answer. KATE is struggling with the pain in her leg)*. I asked a question didn't I?

Rachel: Dumb! Just like that twit, Penny outside. No good asking her anything, she's probably drawing the cat's portrait for the fiftieth time.

Naomi: Angie's the only one with any life round here.

Rachel: What a dump!

Kate: *(Through her teeth)*. Don't be so cheeky!

Rachel: Oh, you can speak, then.

Kate: Hazel wants you.

Rachel: We know. But we don't want her.

Kate: What have you done now?

Naomi: Marvellous, that is. Everyone's so suspicious of everyone else in this place.

Rachel: Makes you sick.

Kate: I'm not suspicious. But you two look dead guilty. And if you haven't been up to something, you wouldn't be avoiding Hazel. Been smoking again?

Naomi: Course not.

Rachel: Where'd we get the money?

Kate: I dunno, you always seem to have some. I wish you wouldn't, you'll ruin

your health.

Rachel: Oh, you're such a goody-goody.

Kate: (*Wearily*). I'm not.

Naomi: Come on, we're not wanted in here Rach. Let's go and find Angie.

Rachel: OK.

(*They turn to go but HAZEL enters and forestalls them*).

Hazel: Oh, no you don't. I want you two.

Naomi: (*Indicating KATE*). She told us.

Rachel: What do you want?

Hazel: Do you mind, Kate? I know you need some peace, but they've been playing hide-and-seek with me all over the house.

Kate: That's all right. (*Picks up a book*).

Hazel: Now then. I've had a phone call about you two. From Debenhams. You were in there after school weren't you?

Rachel: No law against it.

Hazel: WERE'NT YOU?

Naomi: Yes, what about it?

Hazel: Two cologne sprays, a mascara, a nail-varnish and a pair of ear-rings, that's what.

Naomi: Don't know what you're talking about.

Hazel: Oh yes you do. You're lucky this interview isn't in the police station. The assistant who spotted you lives down the street. She knows you, so she rang me first to give me a chance to put it right.

(*RACHEL yawns and flops into a chair*).

Hazel: And get up when I'm speaking to you!

Rachel: (*Under her breath as she gets up*). Bossy old cow!

Naomi: It's always the same. "SHE comes from a home, so she must be given special treatment"

Hazel: Oh, so you'd like me to go to the police?

Naomi: We haven't said we did anything yet.

Hazel: It isn't the first time.Naomi.

Rachel: So what?

Hazel: Turn out your pockets. I've been through your school bags already, they were in the kitchen.

Rachel: You've no business to search our things.

Hazel: Look, I'm losing my patience, so TURN OUT YOUR POCKETS!

(They do. The missing articles are revealed with help from HAZEL).

Naomi: We bought these.

Hazel: No, you didn't.

Rachel: Telling us we're lying?

Naomi: Paid for them as we went out, didn't we?

Hazel: Oh, I dunno. *(She sits down and puts her head in her hands).* Where have I gone wrong with you? You swore you wouldn't do this again. I BELIEVED you. How many times have you done it since and I haven't found out, I ask myself.

Rachel: Hazel

Hazel: No, shut up. I've had enough. You'll take those things and put them back. I'll go with you to make sure you do. And I'll talk to David about it - if he can find time with all that paperwork for his meeting, poor dear. Perhaps he can make you see sense.

Naomi: He'll only give us a lecture about society.

Rachel: Yes, we're just members in a case-folder to him.

Hazel: You know that's not true.

Rachel: Anyway, we don't care. And why pick on us? We're not the only ones who do anything wrong.

Naomi: Yes, what about Anne?

Rachel: Yeah.

Naomi: We saw her, didn't we?

Hazel: This afternoon?

Naomi: Yeah.

(KATE looks up from her book).

Hazel: Well, whatever it was, it's nothing to do with you. That's between Anne and me.

Naomi: Bet you don't scream at her like you do us.

Kate: Excuse me Hazel *(To TWINS).* What was she doing?

(But the TWINS stay irritatingly silent).

Hazel: Oh, go and get your coats.

Rachel: But, it's raining.

Hazel: You should have thought of that before.

(She herds the TWINS out. KATE looks after them, worried. There is a series of

thuds and ANGIE and CAROL rush in. CAROL is [very unusually] in a violent temper).

Carol: You're an untidy little pig.

Angie: Just 'cos you can't find something.

Carol: NO-ONE could find anything in that room. I spent HOURS at the weekend straightening it up and the minute I turn my back you reduce it to a pigsty.

Angie: Takes one to know one.

Carol: You never lift a finger to tidy up after yourself. Oh no! You just leave it to your little tame skivvy.

Angie: You shouldn't use words when you don't know what they mean.

Carol: I know the meaning of the word slut.

Angie: What did you call me.

Carol: You heard.

Angie: You take that back.

Carol: No.

Angie: No-one calls me that.

Carol: Well I do. SLUT! SLUT! SLUT!

(ANGIE leaps forward and thumps CAROL, who thumps her back. This develops into a full-scale fight and CAROL proves to give as good as she gets. KATE, horrified, yells for help and the others pour in. The TWINS are highly excited and yelling encouragement to ANGIE. They are all there, except ANNE, and finally HAZEL arrives and separates them).

Hazel: Stop it! Stop it! Where do you think this is? Oh, look at you both. You ought to be ashamed. I shall have that nosy welfare officer asking me where you got those bruises. Angela, I'm really going to punish you this time.

Angie: Why me? She started it.

Hazel: If she did, it'll be the first time ever.

Angie: *(Struggling)*. Calling me names. You tell her not to call me names.

Hazel: Now stop it. Apologise to each other.

Carol: *(Firmly)*. No.

Hazel: Do as you're told.

Carol: *(Near to tears)*. I said NO! I've had enough, Hazel. I have to share a room with her and her rotten habits - well, not any more. You can answer that letter, Hazel and tell them, YES I am going to boarding school.

Sue: Carol, you're going?

Hazel: We had a letter from the boarding section of Carol's school. They've got a place for her, up in Yorkshire. They've found a foster-home nearby, so she

can spend holidays there. I left it to Carol to decide whether she wanted to go or not.

Carol: And now I've made up my mind.

Sue: Carol, you can't go.

Carol: There's no reason why not.

Kate: We'll miss you.

Carol: Thanks. But it doesn't make any difference.

Hazel: Well, if that's what you want, Carol. I'll write and tell them. I'll be sorry to see you go.

Angie: I won't.

Carol: I never thought for one moment that you would be. Excuse ME.

(She marches out without looking at anyone).

Sue: Wow! Whatever's got into our Carol?

Angie: Just the general atmosphere of the place rubbing off on her.

Rachel: *(Excited).* What a left hook! Just like Frank Bruno! *[Another boxer's name can be substituted].*

Hazel: That'll do! GO AND GET YOUR TEA! ALL OF YOU! You'll drive me into a loony bin before you're done. I'll see you later Angela. My God, I'm beginning to see why people take to drink.

Sue: You OK Kate?

Kate: Yes, I think so. My leg's beginning to hurt again.

Hazel: Sue, can you go and get her pills?

Sue: Sure.

Hazel: Right - the excitement's over so downstairs the lot of you.

(SUE crosses the stage and goes out on one side and HAZEL takes the OTHERS off. KATE is in more pain than she'll say. She rubs at her leg. After a minute, ANNE sneaks in).

Kate: Where've you been?

Anne: Outside.

Kate: Avoiding Hazel?

Anne: *(Ignoring this).* What was all the screaming and yelling?

Kate: Angie and Carol had a fight.

Anne: Carol!!!!

Kate: Yeah - takes a bit of believing, doesn't it? Never mind that. Anne - what's going on?

Anne: Tried to talk to you earlier but you were asleep.

Kate: Sorry.

Anne: 'Sall right.

(Pause. ANNE fidgets).

Kate: Well, COME ON. I'm awake now. *(Silence)*. Anne! Are you going to tell me why you bunked off school this afternoon, and why everyone's going nudge-nudge, wink-wink, about you?

Anne: *(Horried)*. Are they?

Kate: Penny says.

Anne: Oh God, that's all I need. *(She buries her face in KATE'S blanket)*.

Kate: Here, mind my leg. Anne! Don't cry! It can't be as bad as all that.

Anne: It can. It is.

Kate: *(Irritated)*. WHAT? Look, I'm not a mindreader.

Anne: I've been seeing this boy, Kate.

Kate: You've got a boy friend - great! Why are you crying then? Has he finished with you?

Anne: Yes. Oh, Kate, it all sounds like something out of Jackie. *[Another teen magazine title can be substituted]*. Girl meets Boy. Falls in love with Boy. Boy Only Out for One Thing. So - Girl loses Boy. Amen.

Kate: Nothing unusual.

Anne: No, not till it happens to you.

Kate: What was he like?

Anne: I thought he was really nice. He was a bit rough, didn't have a very good reputation, but I thought I could change all that. You know, I honestly believed it - he was so nice to me.

Kate: So now he's thrown you over, he's the original Frankenstein monster?

Anne: Not really.

Kate: But that doesn't explain why you bunked off.

Anne: Oh, it's quite simple.

Kate: The twins said they saw you.

Anne: They did. Coming out of the Doc's. I'd been in for a test.

Kate: *(Quite speechless)*. Anne!

Anne: Yeah, that's right.

Kate: What did he say?

Anne: Dunno yet. They'll let me know.

Kate: You stupid little

Anne: I know! I know! Don't keep on. God knows what I'm going to do. What'll I tell Hazel? I mean, she's got enough with Sue. Two of us! We'll have every snooping case-worker for miles round here.

Kate: That's the least of your worries. What's the name of this fella? Do I know him?

(SUE enters unseen with KATE'S pills).

Anne: Yes, you knew him at school. Kevin Young.

Kate: But that's

(SUE starts violently and drops the pill bottle).

Kate: Oh, Sue, I didn't see you.

Sue: Sorry I've been so long. I couldn't find them. *(She gives KATE her pills).* I'm not going to pretend I didn't hear. What's the famous Kevin Young been up to now?

Anne: You know him?

Sue: Yes I do, so answer the question. Or, wait a minute, there's no need, I can guess. Given his track record, there's only one answer.

Kate: He ought to be locked up.

Anne: It was partly my fault anyway. I didn't have to encourage him.

Sue: Believe me, he needs very little encouragement.

Kate: Then, it's true isn't it, Sue? I've often suspected it.

Sue: That he's Barry's Dad? Yeah, that's right. I know I don't talk about it, but there's no real secret.

Kate: Doesn't he know?

Sue: Oh, he knows all right. But being the charming, sweet-natured little louse he is, he doesn't even give it a second thought. Oh, he's all over you at the start - you never suspect that you're just another notch on the bedpost. When I told him about Barry, he stared at me, then he smirked and said "It's not mine, so you're on your own, girl". Then he walked away.

Anne: I wonder you went through with it.

Sue: There was plenty of pressure not to - but I dunno, I felt sorry for the poor little brat. It didn't seem fair. I've seen Kevin quite a few times since. Can't avoid it really. But when I see him in the street he ignores me - even when Barry's with me. And he makes remarks to his friends. There's something very odd about a guy who doesn't even wonder what his own son looks like. You all right, Anne? You look a bit sick.

Anne: Fine.

Sue: Oh God - you don't mean you think you're in the club too?

Anne: Yeah.

Sue: I dunno. Stinking men. You'll have to tell Hazel.

Anne: I can't

Kate: Well, you can't wait till you're ready to go into hospital. She went for a test this afternoon, Sue. Do you reckon there's any hope?

Sue: Stranger things have happened.

Anne: The Doctor said he'd let me know. Oh My God, I've just thought - he wouldn't ring me here, would he?

Sue: Might.

Anne: Suppose Hazel answers it?

Kate: You'll have to try and get there first. Keep listening.

Anne: Sue if I tell Kevin, is there any chance he might?

Sue: Sorry love, not a hope in hell. Unless he's a completely reformed character, and that's not very likely. Forget him, it's you that's important.

Kate: He sounds like a real charmer, Sue.

Sue: I suppose if he weren't, he wouldn't be interesting. Tell you something though, when this sort of thing happens, you learn a lot about people. When Hazel said she'd have me here, she never once preached at me, or made me feel small. I could always go and talk to them if I wanted, and she was so good with Barry. David's obviously mad about her - well, it made me feel a lot different about all sorts of things.

Anne: But what shall I do?

Sue: There's nothing you can do right now. Just try to relax.

Anne: Relax!

Sue: Sounds daft, but there's no point in getting in a state.

(CAROL enters, looking puzzled).

Sue: Hello - feeling better?

Carol: Yes. Sorry about just now. Listen - you are NEVER going to believe this.

Sue: What's going on?

Carol: I just looked out of the bedroom window, and there's a dog in the front garden.

Kate: That's nothing special. David never gets round to mending the front fence.

Carol: But it's tied up. To the garage door!

Sue: *(Peering out of the window).* Oh yes, so it is!

Anne: *(Joining her).* My God, whatever is it? It's huge!

Carol: A Great Dane, I think.

Anne: Looks more like something out of the zoo.

Sue: Oh dear, here comes David.

Carol: Doesn't he look cross?

Sue: I'm not surprised. It's dug up all his begonia seedlings, and he only planted

them yesterday.

Carol: And there's great paw marks all over the lawn.

Kate: I don't understand. D'you mean that somebody's brought a Great Dane into the front garden, and tied it up. Why?

Angie: (*Entering*). Table's laid. What are you all looking out of the window for?

Sue: Take a look.

Angie: What is THAT?

Anne: You didn't bring it in, then?

Angie: Do us a favour. I hate dogs. Anyway, ask her. (*Indicating CAROL*). She walked home with me.

Carol: True.

Penny: (*Coming in quietly*). Hello.

Sue: Hi Penny.

Carol: Have you seen the front garden?

Penny: What about it?

Hazel: (*Coming in, blazing mad*). Who the HELL has tied a great slavering dog to the garage door? David's going spare. All his seedlings ruined. I hope for your sakes it isn't one of you.

Kate: Could it be the twins idea of a joke?

Hazel: If it is, I'll murder them.

Penny: Oh, is that what the fuss is all about? It's all right, it's only Cuddles.

Hazel: Who??

Penny: He's mine. I got him from the Animal Lifeline.

(*HAZEL sits down. The OTHERS stare in disbelief, except KATE, who is beginning to drowse again*).

Carol: You brought that dog here?

Angie: He's as big as you are.

Hazel: I have to ask it, Penny, but why? What for?

Penny: Oh, it's all right, Hazel, it's for my art. I did try to tell you when I first came in, but you were busy, so I left him out there till I could make up a bed.

Hazel: He's staying?

Penny: Of course - I TOLD you. It's the Borough Young Artists' Trophy.

Hazel: (*Faintly*). What is?

Penny: I'm going to win it this year. You have to do a collage, so I picked the theme of Care, represented by different colours and textures for each member of the house. It shows their love for each other and for their animals and small children. I wanted to use Mittens, and the twins' gerbils and the dog.

Sue: We haven't got a dog.

Penny: There had to be a dog.

Carol: Why?

Penny: There just had to, that's all. That was the way I saw it.

Hazel: Then let me get this straight - you went to the Animal Lifeline and asked them to lend you a dog.

Penny: Oh no, they gave him to us. They said he liked big families, and that they'd ring you later.

Hazel: Penny dear - why did you choose such a big dog? I mean, I think I could accept a poodle, or a spaniel or something like that, but he's such a size!

Penny: I liked his skin tone. The texture's right. It goes with my colour scheme.

Angie: She's barmy.

Anne: Shhhh!

Angie: Well, she is. She's off her nut. I mean, nobody but a complete loony would bring a Great Dane home, because she liked his skin.

Penny: (*Defiant*). Well, I did.

(There is silence while they consider this, then someone starts to giggle. Bit by bit they join in, and the laughter grows. All except HAZEL, and PENNY who is getting cross).

Penny: What's so funny?

Carol: The SIZE of it!

Angie: Dragging her along the road.

(More laughter).

Sue: What did she call it?

Carol: CUDDLES!

(This is too much for HAZEL who starts laughing).

Penny: Oh really, you're all Philistines. No idea of art at all! No appreciation of intellectualism.

Angie: You what?

Hazel: Oh Penny we're sorry. It's been one of those days. It was just the sight of David's face when he opened the back door, and (*Splutter*). er Cuddles jumped up at him.

Penny: He's very affectionate.

Hazel: Yes, but he knocked David flat in the rose bushes.

(More laughter).

Carol: And as for the love of animals, or whatever you said, Mittens is cowering in my wardrobe.

Hazel: Well, I don't know what to do with him. I'd better find him something to eat.

Anne: Yeah unless he's chewed David up. *(Looking out)*. He's lying down.

Hazel: Who David?

Anne: No, the dog.

Penny: There you are, he likes it here! I'll get my paints. I thought, a central gold panel with blocks of colour for each individual and your faces superimposed.

Hazel: Penny! First things first. Look, you go and take the dog round the back.

Carol: She'll never manage him on her own. I'll come too.

Angie: So will I.

(CAROL looks round, startled).

Angie: Can't miss this can I? Coming? Oh, and by the way Sorry.

Carol: So am I.

Angie: You're not really leaving are you?

Carol: I'm not sure.

Angie: Think about it, eh? Dead boring, boarding school. Like being inside. You'll be better off here. I mean, they don't have any Great Danes there, do they?

Carol: That's true.

Hazel: Look, will you PLEASE discuss this later, or that dog will turn the garden into a no-go area.

Angie: OK. Come on, you lot.

Penny: You don't have to. I can manage him, he knows me.

(The phone rings).

Anne: *(After a moment of frozen panic)*. I'll get it. *(Grabs the phone)*.

(HAZEL, PENNY, ANGIE and CAROL are busy planning their dog hunt so take no notice. But SUE watches ANNE closely. KATE is asleep).

Anne: Hello.... yes, this is Anne. Yes....Yes.... I see, thank you very much. *(Her face gives nothing away)*. You want Hazel? But why? oh, I seeWhat? *(She looks at KATE, worried)*. Yes, I'll call her. Hazel!

(HAZEL comes to the phone).

Anne: It's Doctor Wright. He wants you

(HAZEL takes the phone).

Sue: *(Quietly).* Well?

Anne: Can't talk. Tell you later. There's something about Kate.

Sue: Kate?

(The others hear and gather to listen to HAZEL).

Hazel: Hello, Doctor, I was expecting you to call yes you have? is it?
Oh! Oh yes, I see what a relief thank you so much for telling me
yes, she will yes thank you again. Goodbye *(She hangs up and
faces them).*

Sue: What is it?

Carol: What's wrong with Kate?

(HAZEL sits down again in a dazed manner).

Anne: Please, tell us, Hazel, whatever it is.

Hazel: The doctor took some more blood from Kate this morning. We didn't tell
her why. You see she's had a bad infection as you know, but what none of
you knew, is that it was so bad, there was a chance of her losing her leg.

Anne: Oh God! *(The others murmur).*

Hazel: But it's all right. He's done the tests and it's improving at last. She may
have to have another small operation, but she'll get well again. *(She is so
distraught she is close to tears of relief and they all make a fuss of her).*
Sorry to make a fuss like this, but you don't know what a relief it is. The poor
dear has been so brave and you don't know what it's been like hiding it all
from her.

Penny: I always knew she'd be all right in the end.

Angie: That's really great!

Sue: Hey let's celebrate!

Hazel: Oh yes, let's! Tell you what, blow lentil soup and salad, I'll get David to
get the car out and go down to Macdonalds and bring us back a takeaway.

(General chorus of Approval).

Anne: You'd better move Cuddles then, or he won't be able to get the car out.

Carol: Yes, imagine him charging down the High Street, with a Great Dane perched on the bonnet!

Hazel: Yes, we must. Come on, you lot.

Anne: I'll stay with Barry and warm some plates.

Sue: No, that's all right, you sit with Kate.

Hazel: Suit yourselves. Everyone else set?

(They go out laughing and talking, leaving SUE and ANNE with KATE).

Sue: Well?

Anne: He told me. It was negative Sue. I'm not, it was a false alarm.

Sue: Oh, thank God

Anne: Oh Sue! *(Hugs her)*. Thank you! I never knew what you must have gone through. Sorry, about being a bitch earlier, I was so wound up, I didn't know what I was saying.

Sue: It's all right. Kate you waking up? **Anne:** Got to tell her the news. **Sue:** Leave the other news to Hazel.

Anne: Oh sure! but she'll be over the moon anyway. Kate are you with us again?

Kate: *(Yawning)*. I think so. Have I missed a lot?

Anne: We'll bring you up to date

Kate: Oooooooh! *(She stretches)*. I feel better. I'm hungry. What's for tea?

Anne: Big Mac and chips.

THE END