

**For private reading purposes only**

**All rights whatsoever in this play are strictly reserved and application for performance etc. must be made before rehearsal to Casarotto Ramsay & Associates Ltd., National House, 60-66 Wardour Street, London W1V 4ND. No performance may be given unless a licence has been obtained.**

**THE SOUND BARRIER**

By

Sarah Daniels

**Scene 1.**

**AUDREY'S BEDROOM.**

**FX: BABY CRYING FROM FLAT UNDERNEATH HERS**

1. AUDREY: It doesn't matter, I wasn't asleep anyway. One day I would like to be able to warn people, write an article for Saga magazine, I'd even be prepared to go on a television programme if necessary and say it out loud. 'If when you get older and you're thinking of selling your house and buying a flat - think a-gain.' Oh yes, it's more manageable maintenance-wise, but it comes at a price - noise. Unfortunately, more often than not, it's one you can't go into detail about. People make such a racket having sexual intercourse these days. Heaven knows where they get the idea that so much sound is essential. From Sky and Channel five, I suppose. How I'm expected to find the words at my age to complain about it, I don't know. Of course a baby crying isn't embarrassing to put into words but equally I can't say to my downstairs neighbour, 'Please keep your baby quiet.'

## Scene 2

1. IAN:

At first I've forgotten where I am. Then I look at the clock by her bed and realise I'm already late for work. She comes in with a cup of tea. I pick up a pad and pen which is lying on the floor from the night before and write. 'Please can you telephone my work and tell them I'll be late?' and I write the number. She puts the tea down and writes, 'Can't you take the day off?' And smiles. I reach to take the pen back but she takes my hand and lets her dressing gown slip on to the floor just like it would in a film. Then she gets back into bed and kisses me. I worry that my breath must smell, that they'll be worried about me at work, that the baby will have woken up but another part of my body doesn't seem worried about any of that at all.

**Scene 3**

**FX:** \_\_\_\_\_ **RADIO.**

1. JENNY: I'm not due in to work for a couple of hours. I sit in the kitchen and go over the care plan. It would be much more comfortable to sit in the living room but I can't face going in there because of the piano. Ludicrous. The only reason I bought this house was because it was end of terrace, and with the door to the hall shut it meant I could bang away on it any hours of the day or night without fear that the neighbours would hear. Now just sitting there like a stone elephant, grey with dust. As if on automatic pilot, I then get up and rummage under the sink for a cloth. But then I catch myself staring at the S bend and start fretting about the baby I've got to take into care.

**Scene 4**

**FX: INSIDE OF BUS.**

1. AUDREY: It's an ill wind, an ill wind, maybe that's what it is with the baby. Wind. I wouldn't mind, well I probably would, but it's not just the flat beneath mine it's the one above as well. At first when Ian moved in, I thought, 'Deaf man, godsend. I won't have to put up with any loud music, TV etc.' But I was in for a rude awakening. He has no idea how to do anything quietly. Clomping about, banging around in his cupboards, always seeming to want the pan at the bottom. My daughter suggested earplugs. All very well for her, but while I'm blocking out the noise of the neighbours, the mad axe man is breaking in and the first thing I'll know about it is the crack on my skull.

2. Still it's got me out and about before the rush hour and it's high time I got back into my swimming routine. Part of the regime for the new hip. I don't think doctors can have any idea when they blithely tell you to go swimming twice a week what a nightmare public baths are. Most of the day is booked out with schools and the rest of the time it's clogged with screaming, dive-bombing, phlegm-throwing truants. So although early morning is still a gamble, it the only time I can possibly even consider going. The odds are that it'll only be me and a few bods who take their exercise very seriously. As long as I keep to the edge and give way as necessary it'll be perfectly fine. Only I know. I know, before I even get off the bus, that I'm not going swimming.

**FX: AUDREY GETS OFF THE BUS,  
BUSY ROAD.**

3. Instead I walk to the stop for the bus to Lakeside Shopping Centre. It's still too early to use my pass and it also means that I'll have to drag my swimming clobber around with me but it's not as if the fare breaks the bank or that I ever do any shopping anyway.

**Scene 5**

**FX: MEL'S FLAT.**

---

1. IAN: Mel has gone to telephone my work. I'm on my own again in the bed. I don't know if I should get up and have a shower and get dressed? I feel embarrassed about trying to find her bathroom with no clothes on, so I just let myself lie here and think about last night. She'd never really talked to me before. Only nodded and smiled. But when I got back from the deaf club yesterday evening she was waiting for me by the wheelie bins. It was quite dark and hard to lip-read but I understood that she wanted me to come in and have a look in her flat.
  
- 2 I was worried it might be mice or, worse, rats. I don't know why. I couldn't think what else she'd want me for. I was in a bad mood as well. I'd been trying to organise a scuba diving holiday. Not everyone thought it was a good idea. Amy, this girl on the holiday committee, said that some deaf people don't like going underwater because it wasn't good for their ears. I said a lot of deaf people like it because it is impossible to speak under water and everyone deaf and hearing has to use sign language. It is also a beautiful experience, like another world. Then she said I was elitist. I didn't know what the word meant so she had to explain and I felt stupid. I told her that I organise lots of other holidays. Which aren't expensive or elitist. She knows this anyway. She's been on the committee for two years. I don't know why.
  
- 3 She does go on some of the holidays but doesn't do much to help organise them. I like organising them as much as going on them.  
Like lots of deaf people, I've always loved maps. Why? Because I think with a map you know what is coming next. You know if you follow a map you will get where you want to be. But you can never be certain of this with other things. Especially talking to hearing people.

1. IAN (cont):           So all I knew was that Mel wanted me to go into her flat but I could only imagine why.
  
2.                           When she opened the door I suddenly forgot about rats and mice because I remembered she had a baby. I asked her where it was. She understood what I meant. The sign for baby - arms over each other slowly going from side to side - can be understood by anyone in the world. I couldn't understand properly what she was saying and I am a good lip reader - but then I saw a bottle of wine - only this full, and I realised why. She showed me his room where he was sleeping. Then we went back in the living room. She asked me if I would like a drink. That is a very easy sign too. She pointed to the bottle but I shook my head and asked for a cup of tea. Again easy to sign.

**Scene 6**

**FX:**

**JENNY DUSTING THE PIANO.**

1. JENNY:           Before I leave for work I make myself go into the living room, telling myself that I can't possibly carry out my job if I'm scared of such a stupid thing as looking at a piano; but I know it's not really that I'm scared, it's just that don't want to be reminded. My parents ran a pub and when I was a kid there was always a piano in the corner of the lounge bar until I was a teenager and the jukebox arrived. Dad wanting to keep up with the times and, like everyone else who had a piano in those days, wanted rid of it. I'm sure if I'd said something he'd have kept it. Only I had allowed myself to be persuaded that, like acoustic guitars and recorders, they were embarrassing and uncool. I wouldn't be seen dead by my mates listening to one, never mind trying to play it. A bit like doing any work for O levels because that was seen as a pastime for losers. Though by the time I got to do them, I was already planning my wedding, which wouldn't have come about if Dad hadn't got rid of the piano in the first place. He wasn't prepared to simply give it to the local church or the rag-and-bone-man, he wanted to get into The Guinness Book of Records by trying to beat the record for chopping up a piano and passing it through a six-inch hole. It was a serious attempt: they sent someone to make sure it was carried out properly. And even though he had to tell my dad he hadn't succeeded, six years later he became his son-in-law.
  
2.                    But before that, before boys, before sex, before the piano went through the six-inch non-record-breaking hole I used to play it in secret, when the pub was shut and everyone was asleep. I could play by ear, something I think I must have inherited from my Granddad and I had learnt to read music at school.



1. JENNY (cont) So while all my classmates were using their pocket money to buy 45's from the top ten each week, I would spend mine at a market stall buying the sheet music instead. I was only about 13 or 14 but the feeling still haunts me - a mixture of teenage angst and secret excitement of waiting for my life to start, dreaming of changing the world, like I suppose so many of my generation, wanting to use my life to make a difference.

2. I used to listen to the Top Twenty every Sunday evening on a tiny little transistor radio which was considered to be cutting edge technology in those days. Bridge Over Troubled Water was number one for weeks and I'd learnt it off by heart. I played and played it until I could to it with my eyes closed, not knowing where I ended and the piano began - a feeling as an adult I can only liken to the second or third wave of orgasm - being sort of over whelmed and awash with unstoppable pleasure of the moment. Only now it's as much as I can do to wipe the keys with a cloth as though they were a child's sticky fingers, not harshly but out of a sense of it having to be done, and without a trace of sensual delight or joy.

## Scene 7

1. IAN: I never got to drink any of the tea. When Mel put it down, she sat down next to me and she smiled, her really nice smile and turned the notebook over and opened it at the other end where she already had written down some questions.
  
2. The first was, ' Do you have a girlfriend?' I shook my head. I didn't.  
She turned over another page. The question on that was ' Are you gay?'  
Again I shook my head and took the pen. 'No, I am not.' I wrote in capital letters. She wasn't the first person to ask me that and I was fed up with it. I asked Steve, who is, why do people think I am too? He said maybe because I'm his friend. But also because my clothes are always very nicely ironed. My Mother taught me to do this. I once asked her if she did because she thought I would never get married. That made her laugh. She did it was because she hoped I would get married and would never treat a wife as a servant. She was a feminist. You don't hear of that much now. Amy saw me telling this to Steve and she just signed, 'Yes because if you treated a woman like a servant now she'd punch you in the mouth.' One of the problems with signing is that you can be understood from long distances.
  
3. If Steve has too much to drink himself he sometimes tries to kiss me and asks me why I'm not gay? Sometimes I've wished I was. Why? Because I think I would like to live with Steve. We get on well and I wouldn't be so lonely. But I'm not so I wrote N-O in bigger letters than I meant to.

1. IAN (cont)

So far though the written- down conversation with Mel was one I could cope with. I didn't have any idea where it was going but it seemed logical. I could understand it, so I was grateful. Then she turned over the next page. On that one she had already written.
2.

Would you like me to be your girlfriend?  
I didn't know what to say. I thought this must be a trick question. I did not dare say anything. She looked straight into my eyes. Then took the pad and underneath she wrote 'I would like you to be my boyfriend' Then she said in a way I could lip-read, 'Do you understand?'  
I nodded.  
'So, what do you think?' she said in a slow, wide-mouthed, twinkly kind of way?  
Again I nodded, waiting for something to go wrong. I was afraid I might spoil it or she might laugh and say it was a joke.
3.

She put her hands on either side of my face. Then pulled me towards her and kissed me. I cannot explain how I felt. In my mind I had made love to her a thousand times. I had imagined so many things, her in my arms crying while I stroked her hair, like you see on films. I had watched her. I hadn't meant to. I couldn't help it. I'd thought and thought about her, knowing all the time it could never happen to me in real life but it was...
4.

I wanted to ask why, why would she want me, a deaf bloke with a wonky nose and an ugly voice for her boyfriend, but by then I didn't want to know anything that might make it stop.

Scene 8

**FX: INT. LAKESIDE SHOPPING CENTRE.**

1. AUDREY: Every time I do it, I tell myself it's got to stop. But then I immediately think why, it's not as if it's harming anyone. I'm only sitting in a shopping centre imagining I'm still out there, with my daughter and her family. Because they live in the States I only get to see them every other year when I go out there for a week. Their nearest shopping centre, or mall as they call them, is also called Lakeside. So I find a seat and I let myself believe that I'm still there: that I'm just having a little sit-down and any minute now they'll come tumbling out of a shop. Or I'm reading to my grandchildren while my daughter and son-in-law do the grocery shopping or my daughter is asking my opinion about whether she should buy this dress or that or a pair of shoes; Something she never actually does in real life. It's got worse, I come here more often than I care to admit. So much so that I no longer get a good night's sleep. (THEN) Come on, Audrey. It's not just that. It's Mel Double-barrel- whatsname, famous journalist and her fractious baby in the basement flat.
  
2. To think I was actually quite chuffed when she moved in. Slight concern that there might be raucous celebrity-filled cocktail parties but back then I entertained an embarrassingly misguided hope that I might be able to inveigle an invitation. Not, as it turns out, that there were any. Mostly she was out till the small hours. On occasion she'd return home with an extra loud beau in tow, but more often than not alone, and then the record player would go on at on full volume. Not awful music, no. Classical. Well, most of it was the Top Ten; bit of Vaughan Williams, Rachmaninov, Enigma Variations, Snatches of Sibelius, that sort of thing but nothing to complain of taste-wise. Ironically no Brahms or Liszt, because I dare say that inebriation had a lot to do with it.

1. AUDREY<sub>(cont)</sub>: Even so, I wish my daughter were that cultured, music-wise. Apart from the noise, I wish my daughter were more like her, full stop. It wasn't that she didn't have the education. The money we spent but she maintains she's perfectly happy waiting tables and I've learnt by now that if I throw my two pennies in, it'll cost me in terms of our relationship more than I can afford. I have to be so careful not to do or say anything that would jeopardise the precious few days I do get to spend with them. Then again I've never been subjected to the Pearl Fisher's duet at three AM in morning in my daughter's apartment.
  
2. Then second time this happened, I had to steel myself to have a quiet word with Mel. She apologised straight away. Went out that very same day and bought a pair of headphones. Showed them to me that evening and brought me a bottle of wine as an apology - quite a pleasant Chablis. Since then apart from general stumbling about noises, taking a shower late at night and, like I said, one or two Sky, Channel Five brouhahas - not a dickie bird - until the baby.

**Scene 9**

**FX:**

**MEL'S FLAT FROM IAN'S POV (?) I.E.  
SILENCE?**

1. IAN:                   When Mel came back into the room, she brought Rory and I think the look on her face was sort of saying, 'Is this okay?' I smiled. I couldn't help smiling. I was smiling, smiling, smiling that this beautiful, sexy, woman wanted to be my girlfriend and asked me to go to bed to prove it. Then she put Rory into my arms. I tried not to stop smiling but I didn't want to her to do that. I have never held a baby before. He is too tiny. His face is sort of squashed like an elf in a fairy book and he was crying so much he was vibrating. She then wrote down that she phoned my work and told them I had toothache and needed the day off. I've never lied about being off work ever but today it doesn't matter. I didn't mind at all.
  
2.                           She started to ask me about myself. First she wrote down, 'are your mother and father still alive?' I shook my head. My father was an accountant but he died twelve days after he retired. My mother said, 'his work was his life'. She was a teacher. After she had me, she trained to be a teacher of the deaf. Then Mel asked me the signs for Mum and Dad. There are two signs for mother. One is - you make the letter M twice on the palm of your hand. And the other one is tapping the letter M twice on one side of the forehead - and the way to remember this sign is, it's like the kiss your mother gives you when you are small when she leaves you at the school gates every morning.
  
3.                           My mother died nearly five years ago of cancer. First it was in her breast but she got better from that. Then after about seven years it came back and it was in her bones and her liver and you can't get better from that.

1. IAN(cont): Even now when I talk about her I have to do the sign on my hand. If I forget and do the one on my forehead, my eyes mist up and I have to suck a mint to stop myself crying.
  
2. I lived at home until after my Dad died. Then when my Mum knew the cancer had come back again she helped me buy this flat with the money she said Dad wanted me to have. So I don't have a mortgage and even though I only work in the post room that still leaves me with quite a bit of money to go on holiday. So when Mel asked me if I had any hobbies I wrote down. 'Yes, I am the chair of the deaf club holiday committee. I used to be called the chairman but now because of sexism I'm just called, 'the chair.' And I look up and she's laughing. And I laugh, and I forget to worry about how it might sound because I am happy.

**Scene 10.**

**FX:**

**JENNY DRIVING TO WORK. MUSIC/ITEM  
FROM 70'S ON THE RADIO.**

1. JENNY: (SWITCHES THE RADIO OFF) Everyone warned me that Social Work was a thankless task but I was still fuelled by an adolescent enthusiasm. I waited patiently until the kids were at uni so I could start the second half of my life. I even believed that my life experience would be of real benefit to my work. Only, after years of hoping I'd graduate from the Friends Reunited Profile. I.e. married, two kids divorced to a professional person who can be successfully Googled, I now dread it; because it will mean something else has gone badly wrong and this time it will have made the papers. Journalists like Mel would take me apart. I could never leave the house again. Not that I would probably ever want to.



**Scene 11.**

**FX: LAKESIDE SHOPPING CENTRE.**

1. AUDREY: Last year Mel became pregnant. Not that she told me. After the Chablis I got the impression that she tried to steer clear of me. Nod of a hello, if we met in the street or on the path. I didn't have any idea until it was visibly obvious. No visibly obvious sign of a boyfriend either.
  
2. But, as my daughter's fond of reminding me, we are in the 21st century. So I'd popped out and bought a little something for when it was born as you do. Just a packet of vests, always useful because they get through them at a rate of knots. I know what it's like when you've just had a baby you're all over the place and intrusion from visitors however well intentioned is often mistimed and more aggravation than it's worth, so I've still not given them to her. In fact I only know that she's had it because of the crying. I don't know how she stands it. There is nothing like the cry of your own baby - nothing. It is like an invisible electrified wire running through your core until you feel that you will do anything to make it stop. Much as I loved and cherished my daughter, there were times when I would put her screaming in her cot and go into another room and turn the wireless up. Actually though, looking back, she didn't cry very much, hardly at all compared to...

1. AUDREY<sub>(cont)</sub> Oh. Oh my... I've been too self-absorbed to think why. Why does the baby cry continuously? What is Mel doing? Don't get carried away now. She wouldn't do anything like that. She's a respected journalist. And I've never heard her shouting... but then maybe she's doing something she doesn't want anyone to hear. People torture and murder their babies and their neighbours do nothing. In my case worse than nothing.
  
2. How could I account for myself? I can't pretend that I didn't hear it continuously crying... It? I don't even know if it's a boy or a girl. Take some deep breaths Audrey, collect yourself, and go home.

**Scene 12.**

**FX: MEL'S FLAT.**

1. IAN: She's still smiling at me. I wait and then I think she's waiting for me. I say, shall I go back to my flat now? Only of course I don't use my voice. Why? Because my voice is awful. People say to me, 'how do you know if you've never heard it?' I know because if I use it, everyone turns around to stare at me. Even if they are at the other end of the street and they look shocked, sometimes frightened and they walk away very fast. It's the same reason why lots of deaf people not just me, like best to sign with no voice. So that people don't start staring, or pointing or laughing. I don't say any of this to her but I have time to think it as she writes 'I don't want you to go back to your flat. I want you to spend the day with me.' Then she looks at the carrycot and writes, 'us'.

**Scene 13**

**FX: OFFICE.**

1. JENNY: I'm in my Team Manger's office for a final briefing but my mind keeps wandering. I start to think, of the other baby, the little girl who will now never have full use of her left arm because of me. The one who is probably only alive because a neighbour had had the courage to call the NSPCC.
  
2. Despite all my training, I was completely taken in by the mother. I didn't believe she was capable of, and as I subsequently found out, of deliberately breaking her baby's arm in three different places.  
Chris, my Team Manager, looks up from the application for an emergency protection order and asks if I'm all right. I nod. She tries to reassure me. She says ' We're in this together'.  
But it's of no real comfort. A baby on the Child Protection Register dies and the name of the person who's murdered it is forgotten long before the Social Worker's. I phone the foster parents who are on standby. Then we take my car and go.

**Scene 14**

**FX:** \_\_\_\_\_ **MEL'S FLAT.**

1. IAN:

I have a shower at her flat but she doesn't even want me to go back to mine to get some clean clothes. I don't mind so much about my shirt because I only put it on yesterday evening, but I don't like wearing the same pair of pants. I don't want to upset her so I turn them inside out and put them back on. Then she asks if I will help bath Rory. I don't mind helping but she gently puts my hand in the water and sort of leans him against my palm. He is very, very small. His rigid little body seems more relaxed in the water and I have to hold my other hand over his tummy to stop him slipping under. I'm really hoping she's going to show me what to do next but she's picked up the notebook and is writing lots very fast.

**Scene 15**

**FX:**

**BUSY ROAD. AUDREY WALKING BACK TO  
HER FLAT.**

1. AUDREY: When I get in I'm going to get the vests. I haven't even wrapped them up. They're still in the bag with the receipt and they'll probably be too small. I should never have bought 0-3months, but she can take them back. I'll just say that's why I haven't wrapped them up. I'll say I've been away. Well, I have. I have. Only for a week ...four weeks ago. But I'm seventy five. I have an excuse not to know what day of the week, month of the year it is. Say I've been away and ask to have a peek at the baby. Yes, yes. Suppose she's not in? You can leave a note and then you can say you tried -when the film crew from Crime Watch come round and ask you questions. The answer is easy. It's always, 'she kept herself to herself. '

**Scene 16**

**FX:** \_\_\_\_\_ **MEL'S FLAT.**

1. IAN:

When she's finished writing, Mel holds up the notebook for me to read. It's difficult because she's shaking a bit. It says, 'Rory is so small because he was premature and because of that I have a social worker. The social worker is going to call here today. Is it okay if I tell them that you are my boyfriend?' I am still holding Rory in the bath with both hands so I can't do anything but nod and then she goes to answer the door. When she's gone the panic-feeling comes back. Suppose she's hurt him and she's going to blame me? I look at him carefully but can't see any bruises. She comes back into the room with two women who smile tight-no-teeth-showing-type of smiles and it takes all my concentration to keep Rory's head above the water.

## Scene 17

**FX: GOES UP TO MEL'S DOOR AND RINGS THE BELL.**

1. AUDREY: The side gate is already open and she comes to the door holding the baby. Greets me very warmly. Kisses me on the cheek. I nearly fall over. Not literally, more mentally. I try not to let it show though because I can see she's got company - two women, and Ian the deaf man from upstairs. I start to mumble apologetically about the vests but she takes them and effuses all over me, says, once she's got Rory settled, she'll pop up and see me as though it was an everyday occurrence. Of course I didn't stop to contradict her in front of her visitors. I was just relieved that I'd found out the baby's name and sex without having to ask. From what I could see he's a tiny mite. So much for all my anxiety - the vests will swamp him.



## **Scene 18**

### **FX: JENNY'S LIVING ROOM.**

1. JENNY: Of course up until then I'd been worried that Mel had no support and thought the boyfriend was fiction. Certainly there had never been any mention of him being deaf and so we hadn't brought a sign-language interpreter with us. I did challenge her on this and she said, 'Would you expect me to tell you if he was Black or Catholic or had a wooden leg?' I didn't have an answer for that. Then she started to accuse me of being over zealous. Chris interrupted her mid-rant and calmly told her that whatever her perception of Social Services was, the reality is we will do anything, everything we can to keep children out of care. I was slightly concerned by this because I still thought we should go ahead with the care proceedings. But just then the other neighbour arrived with some new vests for the baby and when she left Mel told us; 'She's like a mother to me' - even signed the word to her boyfriend. - And that was enough to convince Chris that Mel was trying to work with us. So, having told her, that Rory would still be on the Child Protection register and she would continue to get regular visits we left. Once we were in the car, I said; 'I thought if there was a decision to be made we were supposed to err on the side of caution.'
  
2. 'It's always a fine line, a balancing act' Chris said not really answering the question.  
Fine line? To me it feels like walking the plank blind-folded with someone else's baby in your arms. When I get home I decide that the piano is too big and ugly for the house and the solution is to invite my recently separated-husband round for one last attempt - at the chopping up piano record...

**Scene 19**

**FX: AUDREY'S FLAT.**

1. AUDREY: Of course I thought that was the last I'd seen of Mel but, blow me, good as her word she came up to thank me later that week. And to my surprise she said yes to the suggestion made really for politeness' sake that she come in for a cup of tea or coffee. When she was settled on the sofa she said it was a bit late in the day for caffeine and so I found myself rootling in the back of the cupboard hoping I didn't throw out the bottle of port I got for Christmas. I don't like to think how many years ago. She asked about my trip to the States. I even got out the photographs - well, I say got out. They were in their envelope on the table where I get them out once or twice a day. I asked her about Rory and she came out with it, how he'd been premature, how they weren't sure what might be wrong with him. All sorts by the sounds of it. He could even be deaf and this had led her into looking at Ian in a different way.
2. I thought she was going to go only when I offered her another port by way of a hint she said yes, and then told me that the two women who were there, were from Social Services because of Rory.

1. AUDREY<sub>(cont)</sub>: Oh I said but not as a question. I didn't want to pry. She said, 'You know what it is really about, don't you? The fact that I've written articles on the amount of public money and resources we waste on hopeless social workers who let children die under their noses on the one hand and accusing defenceless innocent people of child abuse on the other.' 'Yes,' I told her. 'Often when I've read one of your pieces I've said, 'Hurrah, for you for saying it.' Well, she said, 'I'm paying the price for it now.' As she was saying it, we started to hear Rory cry. Not from downstairs but as if he were in the room with us. She showed me she had the baby alarm in her bag and said she should be getting back. I'd assumed she left him with Ian. A look must have passed over my face because she said, 'in Victorian times this would have been one house so it's only like I've run upstairs.' I suppose, I said, but next time please do bring him with you.

2. Okay, she said and I still thought that was that. Probably the next time I'd see them he'd be in his school uniform or something...just shows you're never too old too be entirely wrong.

## Scene 20

1. IAN: From then on I stayed most nights in Mel's flat. She gave me a key. I got a flashing light baby alarm for Rory and lots of times it was me who got up. I didn't mind.
  
2. She started to come to the deaf club with me. Sometimes we took Rory and sometimes Audrey looked after him. Most people at the deaf club liked Mel. But the first time I took her Amy was very funny with me.
  
3. Steve was there so I said to him, 'What is the matter with her?' He took me into the toilets - no not for anything like that. But because you cannot whisper in sign. He said for some one as clever as me I must be thick. 'She's in love with you, that's what'.  
How? How can she be? She always argues with me?'  
'It's the only way she can get your attention, isn't it?' he said.
  
4. Because of what Steve said. I had to re-wind all my memories of how she'd been with me like an old videotape in my head and when I started to play it forward again, it was a completely different story to what I thought it was.

## Scene 21

1. JENNY:

Estranged-husband came round and laughed his head off that I'd bought a piano I couldn't afford. But instead of suggesting he chopped it up, he offered to pay for it. I was so touched that when he said it was all ridiculous, us living apart, that he really missed me and why didn't we give it another go, I didn't really know what to say. I bought myself some time by fixing us a drink. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw him do one of his dust checks by wiping his finger across the lid and I thought, you've just shot yourself in the foot with that finger. He saw me smiling and took it as a signal to give me a hug but I pull away and start telling him about Rory and Mel. Something happened today which I wish I could put my finger on.

2.

At last I'd managed to get an interpreter. I was concerned because she already knew Ian but she used her voice the whole time so we knew everything was interpreted accurately. Nothing new was said so I don't really know why I feel so uneasy. Maybe it's like Chris says and I've let my anxiety about what happened in the other case seep over into this one. My amorously inclined but soon to be ex- husband tried to conceal a yawn and said, I thought you were supposed to be trained to leave work problems at work. Thereby shooting himself in the mouth as well as the foot.

3.

My only regret is that I kicked him out before I could ask him how to go about putting the piano on e-bay.

FX:

**BANGS ON THE KEYS (?) AND SHUTS  
PIANO LID WITH A BANG**

## Scene 22

1. IAN:  
I still wasn't sure why we had to keep seeing the social workers. Mel was quite good at communicating what they were saying to me but she also told me that if I didn't understand to try and look like I did. As this is what a lot of life is like for deaf people, it wasn't hard. But this visit Social Services had found an interpreter and so I understood some things for the first time. The interpreter's name's Carol and she is someone I used to work with when I first left school. It's not really a coincidence. The deaf world is small and there are still very few interpreters in it.
  
2.  
I showed her how to sign and then she went to college to train to be a social worker and she's worked with deaf people since then. Carol told them we knew each other and that we worked together. The others were a bit worried about this. I could see Mel wasn't pleased. But I didn't mind at all. I was really pleased to see Carol again.
  
3.  
Her signing is very good.  
And I learnt for the first time lots of things I was supposed to know already. It was difficult to get used to it. I felt very shocked.  
When the meeting finished I went to get the car and bring it round to the front of the office to pick them up, Carol came after me, caught up with me and signed how nice it was to see me again. I just nodded. I was still wobbly from what I'd just learnt.  
Then she touched my arm and signed ' Ian, can't you see she's using you'?

## Scene 23

1. AUDREY: I'd been used to looking after Rory when they'd had to go out in the evening. Ian would come to the door, with the nappies and feeds made up and I would have my notepad ready but increasingly he had come to understand more and more of what I said so that he only had to write down his side of the conversation. So I was sorry that I hadn't seen him for a while and wondered if something had happened. I was going to ask Mel when she brought Rory round this afternoon so she could do some shopping but he was asleep and we didn't want to disturb him.
  
2. An hour or so later I was wondering if I should wake him up - because obviously the more he slept in the day the less he would at night. It wasn't me I was concerned for but Mel. I'd long since given in to earplugs and put my faith in double- deadlocking the front door,- when I heard a car draw up and, as I went to the window, it struck me that I hadn't been to Lakeside in fact I hadn't even thought about it, for two weeks. I saw them coming down the path. One I recognised as the older social worker from that first time but I hadn't seen the other one before. When they realised Mel wasn't in, they came up to the front door and rang my bell. They introduced themselves. Turned out that the other one was from a support organisation for women who had babies like Rory. The social worker, Jenny, said how lucky Mel was to have me - that she'd described me as being like a Mum to her- I could have punched the air with pride - yes, like you see young soccer hooligans on the telly do. The one from the organisation had a stack of leaflets and such like in an envelope which she put on the hall table for me to give to Mel.

1. AUDREY<sub>(cont)</sub>: Rory woke up and started to grizzle, so I picked him up and the other one from the organisation cooed over him and said something about all FAS babies being big criers. She could remember her own at that age. 'FAS' I asked, is that an acronym?
2. She looked at me. I thought she hadn't understood what I was asking but I now realise she was stalling.
3. 'F.- A.- S? , I said. What does it stand for?' 'Sorry' she said, but that's our shorthand. And I was still smiling when she looked down, shame-faced, and admitted, 'It's more than that - It's hard to say to anyone, my baby has Foetal Alcohol Syndrome.'



## **Scene 24**

1. IAN: I have never felt like this in my life. Steve said to me ' It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all' I went mad. What do you know? You have sex five times a week with different men whose names you don't even know '

2. I would rather just have been the way I was forever than feel like I do now. I can't stop thinking about my mum how pleased I thought she'd be if she could see me with Mel and Rory. But now how relieved I am that she's not here. Because she wouldn't have be able to bear me being this upset and when I think that, I upset myself more.

**FX: KNOCK, AT AUDREY'S DOOR.**

3.AUDREY: I thought it was Mel at first and I did nothing. but then I heard him blow his nose. Unmistakably Ian, like an elephant tunelessly trumpeting the last post.

**FX: TAKING CHAIN OFF ETC.**

4.AUDREY: (CONT/G) I think I sort of pulled him in. I didn't want to say anything for fear of raising my voice so Mel could hear.

5. IAN: I thought Audrey should know.

**FX: GO IN SHUT DOOR BEHIND THEM.**

1. AUDREY: Just as I was thinking how am I going to manage this, he pulled out a notebook and pen. He had already written the first question. Do you know about why Rory is like he is? I was too angry to trust myself to be able to speak clearly so I just snatched the pen and wrote, yes I do and I am very angry. She hasn't even tried to give up drinking.
2. IAN: I wrote, yes, I know. She tricked us both into helping her so he wouldn't go into care.
3. AUDREY: On reading that, I grabbed the pen back and wrote 'She has used both of us. Despiciously'
4. IAN: That was the second woman who had said that but I didn't see it like that. I don't think if you want to have sex with someone and you enjoy it that they have used you, not really, how can they? But I didn't want to talk about sex with Audrey, as she is old enough to be my mother so I just wrote. 'I am very sad.'
5. AUDREY: I didn't know what to say. Then he sort of gestured by pointing downstairs and rocking his arms, and running his finger down his face asking 'Does Rory still cry at night?' I said I don't know and I showed him my earplugs. Now you know what it's like to be like me, he wrote. But I don't know, not really.

## Scene 25

1. IAN:

I went back to my flat, pleased to be on my own again but only for about two minutes, then I felt so lonely that my body ached as though it was about to get cramp all over. I thought there should be a tablet for this. There should be something to take it away. Then the light flashed to let me know someone was at the door. I was really hoping it was Mel, that it had all been wrong, that it was a mistake and she did really want me. But it was Amy. I was furious. Why? Because I didn't want her to see my flat. I didn't want her to see me upset. She wanted to ask me why I hadn't gone to the holiday meeting. I just shrugged. She said but what about the scuba diving? I said, but in a nasty way, that I agreed with her it was elitist and oppressive to deaf people. She said she didn't really mean it. She was just saying it - and I told her to go and play games with someone else. I called her names and told her to just f off out of my flat and it was such a relief to be able to sign what I meant to someone who understood that I had forgotten I was doing it to the wrong person. When she'd gone I sat down and wrote down everything I wanted to say to Mel and thought I'd just go and put it through her letterbox.

**Scene 26**

**FX:**

**CLOCK RADIO - NIGHT PROG (?)**

1. JENNY: I couldn't sleep that night anyway. I'd visited Mel that afternoon and acted really unprofessionally. She accused me of not understanding alcohol. I couldn't resist telling her that I grew up in a pub, so actually there was nothing new she could teach me about booze. So she changed tack and accused me of being judgmental. And then, I can't believe I did this, I told her about the other time I'd done my job badly because I'd empathised with the mother, not just the child.  
'But I love Rory' she said 'I would never hurt him'
2. I could have said you hurt him the minute he was conceived until the day he was born and the damage can never be undone but I took a deep breath and said instead;
3. 'If you drink you are not allowed to drive a car so why do you think you should you be considered capable of looking after a small baby?'
4. I am though. Here's the proof, she said holding him up - although she did have the grace not to look proud as she showed me his squished-up little face.
5. Damn right I'm judgemental. With the protection of her fame and smug bigotry - she's still ready to blame me rather than herself. It is only when I think this does it occur to me that her behaviour this afternoon was a clever smoke screen. That something was wrong and her best defence was to attack. That's why I've given the night duty team my home number.

**Scene 27**

1. IAN:

I walked through the side gate and I was about to leave the letter but something very bad ran through me. Like I had swallowed mercury and it had set solid and hardened the inside of me. I opened the door with the key she'd given me. I knew this would scare her. That is why I did it.

**FX:**

**OPENS THE DOOR WITH HIS KEY AND GOES IN CLOSING THE DOOR BEHIND HIM.**

2.

But as usual it was her who scared me. She was on the floor, not moving at all and whatever I did I couldn't make her wake up. I went to look at Rory. He was lying in his cot crying. I could tell from the minute I opened the door that he badly needed changing. Then it was like the mercury inside me warmed up and started to spill in all directions. I didn't know what to do. I know if you dial 999 and even if you don't speak they will come because they can trace the call. But then I started thinking, what if she's dead. They'll blame me. I'm not supposed to be in here. How will I explain to the police? I thought I'll just go. I'll just go and pretend I wasn't here. All the time I'm thinking this I'm standing completely still but in my mind I'm running back and forward from room to room. Then I thought of my Mum and Dad and of Rory when he grows up and how running away is not an example to set children. And I telephoned 999, and left the phone off the hook. Then I put Rory in his carrycot and went to try and wake Audrey up.

## **Scene 28**

1. AUDREY: Things often happen just like they do in your imagination but the context is never the same. What woke me was the flashing light of the police car outside. Although I couldn't work out what it was straight away. When I sat up and took the earplugs out I heard the banging on the door.

**FX: BANGING ON DOOR. LETTER BOX.**

2. This is it, I thought, it's him, the mad axe man. Then the letterbox flapping open followed by the most reassuring, beautiful sound in the world. Ian shouting.

**FX: IAN SHOUTING AUDREY, AUDREY WAKE  
UP**

## Scene 29

1. JENNY: Ian made up a feed for Rory and changed him. Then we tried to sober up Mel and were so successful that when the ambulance arrived she refused to get in it. Only when it was made clear to her that Rory would then have to go without her did she agree. Ian, unable or unwilling to watch the ambulance pull away, abruptly turns and goes back to his own flat. Audrey then said out loud what I'd been thinking 'In the long run, Rory might well be better off without her.'
  
2. And much as I want to agree, I find myself putting the other side; 'She couldn't cope with life before Rory without alcohol, and now Rory's here and the damage has been done, she thinks she needs it more than ever.' I can see Audrey's too upset to sleep and even though it's nearly three in the morning I accept her offer of a cup of tea. When it's safely in my hand I risk saying, 'We can't give up on her now.'

### **Scene 30**

1. IAN:

The next evening I'm looking out of the window wondering what's happened to them both. Then I see Mel coming up the path without him. I wanted to rush down to her flat but I couldn't. Instead I asked Audrey. And she told me that Mel can not have Rory back until she's sober.



## Scene 31

1. AUDREY: Spurred on by my conversation with Jenny, the social worker, I went down to see Mel. I asked her if she'd read the leaflets the young woman left for her. No, she said. I said, 'then I expect you don't know but you have to go to AA.' To my surprise she said she did know. So I suggested she phoned the organisation and asked someone to go with her. She didn't say anything. I thought I'll offer if she asks. But then I remembered how Jenny had sat and talked with me until I'd felt better when she didn't have to. Nobody had asked her. So I said, brightly as I could, because I didn't want to, 'Would you like me to go with you?'
  
2. It's a fifteen minute walk and it's a road I know really well, but I had no idea it was there. A small door opens into the back of room in the church - like a secret society. Immediately we're offered tea or coffee and I thought back to the night I let her sink the port. She agrees to have a coffee. I decline. I say I'm not staying. They assure me that I can. I wait until she's sitting down with her coffee. I make to go, when suddenly she grabs my hand. I am back in the playground of my daughter's school on her first day. But this time I don't know what to do for the best. I tell her I'll wait outside for her if she wants. I'll come back but she won't let go of my hand. And so I sit and feel fraudulent, cos I'm not one of them.
  
3. Mel is just staring, a mixture of fear and anticipation on her face just like my daughter when she started school. The stories are hair-raising.

1. AUDREY<sub>(cont)</sub>: It's impossible to believe that these people have survived, waking up in skips, cutting themselves, wishing they were dead,- and she then talks about herself, just an admission that she can't manage without drink, nothing dreadful until she says,
  
2. ' It's not just me, my son has foetal alcohol syndrome' And I don't even realise that she's crying until she lifts her hand -forgetting that it's still clutching mine -to try and wipe the tears away. At the end of the meeting - these strangers come up to us and say how blessed she is to have a supportive mother like me. 'She's not my mother', she corrects them, 'she's my friend'
  
3. And I am grateful to her and ashamed of myself at the same time. I realise I no longer want a daughter like her. And consciously think, how lucky I am to have the daughter I have.

## Scene 32

1. IAN: Steve persuaded me to go back to the deaf club today. The first person I saw was Amy who says sorry to me. What for? I said. For coming round to your flat and upsetting you. I laugh, for all the things she could have said sorry for, arguing in meetings, trying to turn people against my holiday ideas, but no -she says sorry for something which wasn't her fault. I say sorry to her and Steve for how I was. I tell her I wasn't angry with them, just with Mel. Not Rory then she asks?  
No, of course I'm not. He's only a baby.
  
2. Then she said, in the same cross way she uses in the holiday committee. 'So why have you stopped seeing him? None of this is his fault.' Only of course she is right about this. So I said thank you and she smiled with her eyes and her mouth and signed 'anytime'. So I went to see Mel. She hadn't had a drink for five days. She looked terrible and was shaking so much she couldn't finger spell properly. She just said sorry over and over and held on to me and cried.
  
3. I feel so sad. When dreams come true they are never like they are in your imagination. My Mum used to say something which I never ever understood. 'Be careful what you wish for.' Thinking about my Mum makes me say, 'Whatever happens I will help with Rory ... '

### **Scene 33**

1. JENNY:

I telephoned Audrey to ask if she and Ian could make an appointment to see me. I couldn't get hold of an interpreter but we muddled along. I explained that if they felt able to support Mel again we could start -for as long as she continues to remain sober- to allow Mel to have access, to Rory with a view to her being able to get him back for good. As they left we shook hands and Ian made a sign with the palm of his hand and pointed at me. That means, 'Thank you' Audrey told me. And that goes for me to'

## Scene 34

### FX: SATURDAY IN THE LOCAL SWIMMING BATHS.

1. AUDREY: I am standing in the swimming pool, holding this little tiny piece of life. His bones sticking out each and every which way. He only stops crying when he feels the water and then his tiny elfin face looks up at me and that thin top lip twitches into a wind-induced smile. And I smile back and for the first time in a long time I feel the piercing joy of being needed. Ian points at me and gives me a thumbs up sign. I know this means, are you alright? I nod vigorously and cup the insides of my palms together which is the sign for happy. Mel is at the deep end, moving through the water slowly and seemingly determined to take pleasure in it. This is the end of her first week without alcohol and she knows Rory is only on loan to us until she can prove herself. As she turns to swim back towards us she lifts her head and smiles then puts her head down in the water and quickens her pace.
  
2. IAN: I don't know what the map of Rory's life will be like, but I expect it will be the sort of journey which involves more rock climbing than it will lying on sunny beaches. I've promised Mel, and him, though he's too young to understand, that I'll help him try and negotiate it if I can. He is smiling at me, Audrey is smiling, so is Mel. And the thought that I am here in the middle of a triangle of smiles make me laugh out loud - only no one turns round or even stares - in fact nobody seems to be able hear.

**Scene 35**

**FX:**

**JENNY'S LIVING ROOM.**

1. JENNY: I am waiting for someone to come and look at the piano with a view to buying it. He'd said on the phone that it was a present and would I be able to play something on it as he didn't know how.
  
2. I told him that if I was to play it, I probably wouldn't want to sell it but he just laughed and said that was a risk he and I would just have to take. And of course that makes me think about Mel. She came to the office yesterday, completely unprompted. She said she'd come to apologise for how she'd been with me. I told her there was no need.  
'And,' she went on, 'for all the negative, terrible stuff I've written about social workers in the past.'
  
3. I nodded. I didn't know what to say.  
Then she said, 'I know it isn't enough just to say it. I want to do something more.'  
Is this because of the AA 12-step programme? I asked, knowing full well that step eight is:  
Make a list of all the persons you have harmed and become willing to make amends to all of them.
  
4. Yes, partly, she admitted. But I started it before I even knew about that. I wanted to write something, about me -what I've been through.  
But I'm sacred of using my real name'  
I bit my lip from saying, 'never been scared about using the real names of social workers in your newspaper articles though.'

1. JENNY(Cont): She goes on, 'So I've changed the names but I won't do anything with it without your approval,' and tries to hand me a sheaf of paper. I can see it's some sort of playscript. Only I didn't take it. Instead I said, ' Will it make me feel better about my chosen career'?
  
2. 'I don't know' she said, looking quite anxious. ' I don't think it's life-changing or anything. It's only written about me, and Rory and the diffence your input's made to our lives.' I'm half wondering now if I should have read it but I stop thinking about it because I'm not even conscious of the fact that I have lifted the lid and started to play.

**FX: JENNY STARTS TO PLAY THE PIANO.**  
**'Bridge Over Troubled water'**

The End.