

Water Child

By Emma Wood

Cast List:

Jeannie

Mark

Angela

Katie

Denise

Page Count: 48

Length: 1 hour 50 minutes

Synopsis

Jeannie and Mark are an admirable couple. They are successful, confident, fulfilled - or so it appears. But unlike others who have effortlessly brought children into the world, they have not. Jeannie's 40th birthday is a night planned for celebration, but events lead them to an abyss which threatens to engulf them and all they have built together. Family and friends weigh in with well-meant but not always well worded advice. But what do you say when no one knows why you can't do what everyone else can? And when it's too hard to talk about it at all? And how do you prevent two people mired in shame and panic pushing you away? One in six couples struggle with fertility. And yet the subject remains taboo. Award winning Australian play *Water Child*, with both humour and pathos, offers a rare glimpse the myriad of difficulties faced by so many – and talked about by so few.

Setting

A modern living room lived in by a professional couple. One door leads to the hallway / bedroom, and there is a door leading out of the house.

SCENE ONE

(Jeannie is standing quite still, one hand on her stomach. She checks the time. She hums a little, then sits on the couch, picks up an ultrasound image and examines it contentedly. After a moment, Mark enters.)

JEANNIE: Morning.

MARK: Morning. You're up early. And dressed – wow.

JEANNIE: And looking more lively than you!

MARK: Yeah - well. I got used to your long sleep ins. I usually get an hour for my face to fall into place before you see it.

JEANNIE: *(laughs)* That over now I think. We're 12 weeks. I'll be springing out of bed before you every morning.

MARK: To do what?

JEANNIE: I don't know. Hot yoga?

MARK: Please no. Come here. *(They take hands. Beat)*.

JEANNIE: Mark?

MARK: Yes – sorry. I just needed to breathe.

JEANNIE: Breathe?

MARK: I just haven't done it much lately. That's how it felt, anyway.

JEANNIE: Hon...

MARK: I can't believe we made it.

JEANNIE: I know.

MARK: How long to go?

JEANNIE: 28 more weeks I hope!

MARK: I mean till the appointment.

JEANNIE: Oh. Two hours.

MARK: That's so long.

JEANNIE: Yeah. But so much to do to fill in the time.

MARK: Like what?

JEANNIE: Well, when you've finished breathing, a happy birthday would be nice.

MARK: But you made me swear not to say anything till after the ultrasound! It was the last thing you said before you went to sleep.

JEANNIE: I know. But maybe just a little one?

MARK: Jeannie!

JEANNIE: I'm hormonal.

MARK: So?

JEANNIE: So it's my prerogative to change my mind.

MARK: You are – I don't even know what you are.

JEANNIE: 40?

MARK: Yes. Yes, you are. Happy birthday. The big four-o. *(Beat.)* Am I in trouble for saying it now?

JEANNIE: No. Thank you. But save the rest till later. After the ultrasound. That's the only present I want. Oh – and a stupendous buffet breakfast.

MARK: Oh shit – I've got to email my lessons in for the relief teacher...

JEANNIE: Hurry up then. I need you slavishly attached to me all day. So we can obsess over the ultrasound images. And so I can present you with my long shortlist of names.

MARK: Long shortlist?

JEANNIE: Yep. It's got my top twenty for each gender.

MARK: Sounds like a long long-list...

JWANNIE: Oh - and you can then lavish me with other presents, if you feel the need.

MARK: *(Laughs)* I'll see what I can do. *(Beat.)* Jeannie.

JEANNIE: What is it?

MARK: I haven't made a shortlist. Or any kind of list.

JEANNIE: Why not? I thought we were going to show each other today.
(Beat.)

MARK: I'm petrified.

JEANNIE: Mark – don't. There's nothing to be scared of. I feel fine – I feel good. If it was going to – you know – we'd already know about it.

MARK: It's just – it's so hard to believe it will actually...

JEANNIE: What?

MARK: You know... work out.

JEANNIE: It will. We deserve it. Good things come to those who wait.

MARK: I hope so Jeannie. If something's wrong this time I'll just...

JEANNIE: You'll what?

MARK: I don't know what I'll do. This just – this has to be the one. *(Beat)* I'm sorry. This is not the way to talk on your birthday. I'm just so tired. Didn't sleep. At all. You know how it is.

JEANNIE: Actually, I don't. I slept really well. I'm not worried anymore. I've done everything right. Everything. No caffeine, no alcohol, no deli food, no late nights – the whole bit.

(Beat)

MARK: You did all that last time too.

JEANNIE: Mark, stop it. Please. The other times were... Look, I know this is the one. I can feel it. Call it maternal instinct. In two hours from now we'll see our baby – a little bit bigger this time (*She indicates the other photo*). And tonight you can sleep sound.

MARK: Good. Good.

JEANNIE: Oh – I mean after the little family soiree.

(*A merry knock at the door, then Denise pops her head in, and enters with a cake box.*)

DENISE: Hello?

JEANNIE: Mum.

DENISE: Ooh! Goody, you're up! It was open – I thought you might still be asleep. Happy birthday darling! (*a flurry of blown kisses with her free hand. She finds a place to put the cake box*)

JEANNIE: Thanks Mum. But – what are you doing here? You're twelve hours early.

DENISE: Look, sorry, I had to pick up the cake on the way to work. I won't have time after school because I'm picking Courtney up from pre-school and dropping her over to Katie, then I've got to rush to the hair dresser for a blow wave, then pop into Lola's to start organising the fundraiser and...

MARK: Denise – it's fine. It's always lovely to see you. Even at eight in the morning. Jeannie's been up for hours anyway.

DENISE: Oh stop it...

JEANNIE: It's true. I'm not feeling as tired anymore. The first trimester's over.

DENISE. Well thank goodness for that! I've been holding my breath for the last 12 weeks!

MARK: Haven't we all.

DENISE: I just – I really didn't think it would happen. You're so old to be pregnant!

JEANNIE: Mum!!

DENISE: Oh – but you know what I mean. I've just been so nervous for you – after the other times you know - but that's all behind us now. Come here!

JEANNIE: Alright, alright! If I have to. Mum! You can let go now!

DENISE: Sorry...couldn't help myself.

MARK: Oh, Denise...

DENISE: Well, the world works in mysterious ways. Third time lucky it seems. Now you can just sit back and enjoy it.

JEANNIE: Starting with a day off!!

DENISE: Oh that was good timing! How did you pull that off?

JEANNIE: Called in sick.

DENISE: But you don't look sick at all darling!

JEANNIE: I'm not. But John doesn't know that, does he?

DENISE: Oh Jeannie! Shame on you.

JEANNIE: It's entirely legitimate, I have an ultrasound.

DENISE: I know. It's written big and bold in my diary. But that won't take all day will it?

MARK: No. But our blissful breakfast and baby celebration will.

DENISE: Oh well my darlings. Far be it from me to tell you what to do with your life. You've joined me in middle age now.

JEANNIE: Mum! No.

DENISE: Oh, you'll love it. You can be as naughty as you like. No one ever suspects an old dear of any wrongdoing.

JEANNIE: Think I'm a way off the 'old dear' category...

DENISE: Comes quicker than you think. Work it to your advantage. Now Mark – will you find somewhere for the cake?

MARK: What's wrong with there?

DENISE: It's an ice cream cake!

MARK: *(Seeing it properly for first time.)* Denise! It's a small family gathering!

JEANNIE: Mum – it's still all about the early nights. You know I don't want a big thing...

DENISE: Well ice cream doesn't go off! It'll be a lovely treat you can keep enjoying for days.

JEANNIE: Or weeks!

MARK: Or years.

JEANNIE: Not the way you eat!

DENISE: Now, now you two! No squabbling on birthdays.

MARK: Anything you say Denise. Until you're out of the room anyway.

DENISE: Cheeky! Now, I must go – ooh, mustn't forget to pick up your present either - I'll see you tonight. And I will be thinking of you this morning.

JEANNIE: Thanks Mum.

MARK: Bye Denise.

JEANNIE: Bye Mum! (*Denise exits*) She is -

MARK: One of a kind. In the best way of course.

JEANNIE: Of course.

MARK: Well. I'll just find somewhere for this monster.

(He exits to the hallway. Jeannie checks her handbag for some medical forms. The home phone rings. She goes to it, then pauses and decides to leave it to the answering machine.)

KATIE: *(on answer machine)* Jeannie? It's Katie. Rise and shine!... Are you there? Sorry, I know it's early but the girls couldn't wait... are you there J? Well, here we go anyway. Ready girls? One, two three: happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday Auntie Jeannie, happy birthday to you... hip hip ...hooray *(girls hooray while Katie leads them in)*. J?? Hello? *(Mark enters. Jeannie holds up a hand to him.)* I can't believe that didn't wake you!! Try to get out of bed sometime today... Alright – well – I guess we've missed you - see you tonight! Have a great 40th, you old trout! Say bye girls! *(The children singsong a goodbye.)*

JEANNIE: *(suddenly rushes to pick up the phone...)* Hello?? Katie?? *(...but too late. Replacing the receiver, she considers calling back, then looks sheepishly at Mark.)*

MARK: I hope you're going to be nice tonight. She's never done anything wrong.

JEANNIE: No. Just been her happy, healthy, insensitive self.

MARK: Jeannie...

JEANNIE: I know, ok? I know it's not her fault. And after today I am sure I will be able to handle her much, much better. Just – tonight, ok?

MARK: Okay. *(Taking a small present out of his pocket.)* I can't wait. I have to give this to you now.

JEANNIE: No – afterwards.

MARK: Please J – I'm not usually into this sort of stuff, but I feel like it's a lucky charm.

JEANNIE: We don't need luck.

MARK: Please, just open it.

JEANNIE: Do I have to?

MARK: For me. And for him or her. *(He indicates her tummy)*.

JEANNIE: Well – can't say no to that appeal, can I? Come on then. *(She takes it and admires the packaging.)* Hmm – I think I like it already... *(She opens it, finds a jeweller's box inside and lifts the lid to reveal a necklace with a tree of life pendant.)* Oooh.... I know this one. The tree of life.

MARK: Yes. It's for you – and for the baby. You're the tree and she's the seed, growing under your care.

JEANNIE: Which bit are you?

MARK: I don't know. I didn't really think about me. Actually – maybe I'm the seed?

JEANNIE: Oh no...

MARK: So the baby must be the flower? Or the fruit... which makes you – the trunk? The foliage??

JEANNIE: *(Laughing)* Enough! The metaphor is insanely stretched...

MARK: It needs its own hot yoga class.

JEANNIE: Please - stop. Will you put it on...? *(He does.)* How does it look?

MARK: Beautiful. How does it feel?

JEANNIE: Just right. Thank you. I love it.

MARK: J...

JEANNIE: Yes?

MARK: Is it too early to go?

JEANNIE: No. Thank goodness you said it. I can hardly wait.

MARK: We can just wait in the car park. It'll feel more real there.

JEANNIE: You can buy me a birthday decaf. *(She picks up a handbag.)*

MARK: Come on. *(He takes her hand and squeezes it. She puts it to her tummy. They exchange an anxious, excited look.)* It's our time.

(They exit through the front door.)

Scene Two

(Mark opens the door and holds it for Jeannie who enters slowly. They don't make eye contact. Jeannie takes a couple of steps forward then stops. Mark closes the door and stands facing it. A moment. Everything is slow and heavy. At a loss, she sits down. Mark turns and takes a few aimless steps, but remains at a distance.)

JEANNIE: I did everything right. Everything.

(Beat)

MARK: Do you need to – go to bed? Do you want a cup of tea? Or...

JEANNIE: It doesn't matter now. It doesn't matter what I do. *(A moment. Then she gets up, and heads to the interior door/hallway. She stops before walking through it, lost in thought. Then turns and looks at him.)* I did everything right, Mark. I did, you know. And it didn't mean a thing. *(She looks at him, but he won't make eye contact. After some time, she exits.)*

MARK: Almost everything. *(A moment, then he sits on the couch. He sees the ultrasound image and picks it up slowly. He holds it against his chest and slowly collapses into the couch, in foetal position.)*

Scene Three

(Jeannie is on the couch looking at the ultrasound image. A phone starts ringing. Jeannie appears not to hear it. It stops. It rings again after some time and she takes the phone off the hook. Then the mobile starts and she rises in fury, finds it and switches it off. A moment, then a knock on the door. Jeannie rises, first in anger at the interruption, then she remembers with trepidation what the knock is for.)

ANGELA: Jeannie? You going to let me in? I've got my hands full, hon!

(Jeannie opens the door to find Angela brandishing champagne bottles and various bags. During the next speech she is busy unpacking her goodies.)

ANGELA: Christ the traffic was bad. How can it be so awful at 8:30 on a weeknight? Anyway, happy birthday! *(no response)* Hey, are you ok?

JEANNIE: Yeah.... I... umm... fell asleep...

ANGELA: Bloody hell woman, you look an absolute mess and you've got guests arriving. I brought champagne! – non alcoholic of course. *(no response)* Don't you think you should be getting changed? Seriously – pajamas?? *(no response)* God, this pregnancy has really knocked you about, hasn't it? Just go and change and I'll get the place ready. *(She helps Jeannie towards the bedroom door. Angela begins to cleaning and finds the ultrasound image.)* Well hello there little one. Your mummy is so excited about you. So am I! You will be my honorary niece. Or nephew. I will be your glamorous aunt who spoils you with gifts and gives you sage advice. Hey Jeannie, I found the picture of Pebbles. Hasn't moved much beyond pebble stage has she?? Or he. I don't know why we all think it's a girl. How was the ultrasound? *(No response.)* Hey, tell me you're not really going to call her Pebbles? I have met some frightfully named children recently, and I just want to be sure this is a joke. I mean - Charlize? Apple? Tyrone? Come on. I don't know how Mark copes in the classroom. I mean, even keep a straight face. *(notices lack of response)* J? You need a hand?

JEANNIE: *(entering slightly better dressed)* Ange.

ANGELA: Yes gorgeous?

JEANNIE: Can you call off the party?

ANGELA: God, is it that bad? Can't you stay awake an hour at least? They'll all be on their way!

JEANNIE: Ange. I can't do it.

ANGELA: J, what is it? Where's Mark? Have you had a fight?

JEANNIE: Mark isn't here. Mark may not rush back.

ANGELA: Jesus Christ. Tell me what's happening.

JEANNIE: *(indicating picture)* This isn't the photo from today. This is four weeks old.

ANGELA: Well where's today's?

JEANNIE: They don't give you a souvenir for a 'non-viable foetus'.

ANGELA: Oh god.

JEANNIE: *(after a pause)* You know, I'm pretty sure there is no God.

ANGELA: Honey, tell me what happened.

JEANNIE: There's really not much to tell

ANGELA: But – non viable foetus..? What does it mean?

JEANNIE: Dead, Ange. It means dead.

ANGELA: But...how..?

JEANNIE: No heartbeat.

ANGELA: Oh darling. I'm so sorry. I – I thought this time would be different.

JEANNIE: I know. Me too.
(silence and sorrow)

ANGELA: And Mark just – took off?

JEANNIE: He brought me home – then - I don't know. I don't know where he is. We didn't really speak.

ANGELA: So. How do you want to handle tonight?

JEANNIE: I don't. *(Beat.)* Have you got any alcohol? I can't possibly do this without a drink.

ANGELA: I can get some. Are you going to tell them?

JEANNIE: How can I hide it? Look at me. I'm a shipwreck. I wish I was like you. Tell me how you do it?

ANGELA: Do what?

JEANNIE: How do you – not want them? I would do anything to let go of the dream. Or anything to have a child. But I can't do either. I'm stuck.

ANGELA: Look – it wasn't quite that simple.

JEANNIE: I know. But... you know what I mean.

ANGELA: I do. Look – I don't know what to say. It's been too hard for you. It's not fair.

JEANNIE: I know!! Almost every other woman I know just gets pregnant – bang! Baby – bang!! More babies, the minute she wants them – bang, bang, bang!! I can't even have one Ange! Fucking Katie. And every other fucking woman I know. Fertile women everywhere I look. I need a drink. *(door knock)* God help me. Please don't let it be Katie.

ANGELA: Shall I..? *(opens door.)* Katie...I need to -

KATIE: *(breezing in with more bags of food and drink, and a gaudy happy birthday sign and decorations which make it hard for her to see the state of the others.)* Sorry, the babysitter was late, and then I had to go through the whole bloody thing with her all over again about not letting the kids fall asleep in front of the TV – for a 17 year old she's pretty dopey I have to say. But hey,

she's cheap! Anyway – how are you?? Happy birthday! 40 today! Never mind. Come here! (*Katie smothers Jeannie with hugs and kisses until Jeannie fights her off*). Sorry! I was just trying to... Hey. Are you ok?

(*Beat.*)

ANGE: She...

JEANNIE: I feel asleep. And I...

KATIE: Not again! You're hopeless! Wait till you've actually got one waking up eight times a night – then you'll know what tired is!

JEANNIE: Will I?

KATIE: The first four months after Charlize was born I couldn't even remember my name I was so tired. It was bloody awful – but it's all worth it – just to see her little eyes light up for her night feed -

JEANNIE: Please stop. I can't do this. I'm going out for some air. Ange, you tell her while I'm gone.

KATIE: What? Tell me what?

JEANNIE: (*turning as she leaves*) Don't make me tell you all one by one.

KATIE: Tell me what? What's the matter? Jeannie? (*Turning to Angela*) What's going on?

ANGELA: The – uh - the ultrasound...

KATIE: Oh no...

ANGELA: The foetus – the baby – it's not alive.

KATIE: Oh no. Oh no, no no! Not again. It's not right. She's 12 weeks. She should be home free!

ANGELA: Yes. She should. But she's not.

(*silence descends*)

KATIE: But are they sure?? Should she get a second opinion or something? It doesn't seem right.

ANGELA: Katie – I don't think there's much room to doubt a diagnosis of 'no heartbeat'.

KATIE: Well if it's - not alive - then why hasn't she had a miscarriage? I mean... (*she trails off*)

ANGELA: Shit. I didn't think of that. I didn't ask. (*horrified pause*) I don't know, I've never been... I guess she just has to – wait.

KATIE: Wait? Can't they help her? Get it over with? That's inhumane!

ANGELA: Katie, please. I don't know. I don't know any more than I've told you. I'm sure the doctors know how to handle this situation. It happens... all the time.

KATIE: I'm going after her.

ANGELA: Don't Katie – just let her be for a bit. She'll be back soon enough.

KATIE: We have to do something! We can't just let her wander around the streets like this on her 40th birthday!

ANGELA: What can we do? There's nothing we can do or say that will make it any better for her.

KATIE: That's bullshit! She needs to be with people now. She needs to talk about it.

ANGELA: I don't mean to be rude, Katie, but you're probably not her person of choice to talk to at the moment.

KATIE: What? Why not? I've known her all my life! What can't she tell me?

ANGELA: It's not that she can't tell you, it's that you can't understand.

KATIE: Oh, don't tell me this is because I have my own children. I hate that people think that. Don't you think that, as a mother, I have more empathy than ever?

ANGELA: You may do Katie, but no matter how *empathic* you are, you nevertheless have all the things she wants, and that's not a reminder she needs tonight.

KATIE: Right. Well, it sounds like you know best. What do you propose then?

ANGELA: Katie, for goodness sake, let's not make this about me or you. Let's just sit tight and wait till she comes back. Last I heard she wanted to call off the whole evening. Maybe we could. Have you got your Mum's number?

KATIE: She doesn't know how to answer her mobile.

ANGELA: What? I thought she went to that senior's course on how to use one.

KATIE: She did. Apparently it was all over her head. She still doesn't know how to unlock the keypad.

ANGELA: Unbelievable. You'd think she was in her dotage. She's barely sixty.

KATIE: I know. She's unique.

ANGELA: Well, maybe seeing Denise will be a good for her. It's hardly a party anyway – just a few women and some non alcoholic champagne. *(they are at a bit of loss for how to progress)*

KATIE: Where's Mark?

ANGELA: We don't know. I don't imagine he's taken the news very well.

KATIE: No, he wouldn't. Poor Mark.

ANGELA: I know. It's too awful. Three times is too much bad luck for any couple to bear.

KATIE: Three? But this is only the second...isn't it?

ANGELA: Ummm.... Oh shit. I forgot you didn't know.

KATIE: What? There was another one..?

ANGELA: She was pregnant about this time last year. She was only a few weeks behind you. She didn't tell you because you were quite, ummm, caught up in your own excitement –

KATIE: But I...

ANGELA: ...and she wanted to be sure she could be excited too before she made a big fanfare. But then she lost it at eight weeks, and you were – well. She just couldn't bear to bring the whole thing up.

KATIE: No – really? That can't be true. Why would she hide that from me?

ANGELA: God Katie, isn't it obvious? You've had three children without any mishaps, and she has been... less blessed. It hurts.

KATIE: Right. Ok. So I get my children but I lose my sister? She can't talk to me anymore because I'm fertile?

ANGELA: Try to understand Katie. The whole thing has been so hard for her – and it's not easy for her to share. Not with you anyway.

KATIE: Well, why you?? How would you know what it's like?

ANGELA: You mean, being gay and all?

KATIE: You know that's not what I mean! You don't even want children! How could you possibly understand her yearning to be a mother?

ANGELA: Oh for god's sake shut up! Will you stop trying to make a fight out of this? Tonight is not about you!

(An awkward silence.)

ANGELA: I'm going out to get some real alcohol. I'll be back soon – hopefully before Jeannie is. *(she exits)*

(Katie is unsure what to do, begins pacing the room. She tries to call her Mum without success. A merry knock at the door and Denise pokes her head in.)

DENISE: Where's my baby girl?? Jeannie? *(Looking in a puzzled way at her ringing mobile phone, before realizing Katie is calling)* Oh – hello to my other baby girl! *(She enters with a conspicuous present.)* I've got it! *(She opens it and pulls out a glamorous maternity gown.)* This is some party – where's the birthday girl got to? Not asleep again is she?

KATIE: Oh Mum. She's not here.

DENISE: Well where on earth is she?

KATIE: I don't know. She went for a walk. She'll be back soon – I hope.

DENISE: A walk? What on earth for?

KATIE: She's – she's...

DENISE: Katie. Tell me.

KATIE: She's lost the baby.

DENISE: ...What? What do you mean – lost it? I saw her this morning!

KATIE: No heartbeat. That's all I know. I haven't spoken to her yet. She was too upset. Angela had to tell me. And now I have to tell you. Sorry.

DENISE: Oh no! Oh, my little Jeannie. *(Silent for a time. Realises she is still holding the box and puts it down somewhere conspicuous)* How did she seem?

KATIE: I don't know. Angela told me.

DENISE: Oh Katie. I just saw her – she was so happy... Oh my poor girl... not again... *(She breaks down and Katie comes to offer support. Denise is unable to act – then forces herself.)* Right. Well, that's that then. I think three times is enough. She'll just have to turn her mind to other things.

KATIE: So you knew about the last time too? I can't believe you didn't tell me!

DENISE: Last time..? Oh don't be silly Katie, it's hardly important now.

KATIE: It is to me! I feel like I've been deliberately kept in the dark – by all of you - been punished because I've managed to have children!

DENISE: Oh, stop it darling. Jeannie didn't want to talk about it with you and she asked me not to as well. I had to respect her wishes.

KATIE: Well who else knew?? Am I the only one out of the loop? Do you know how it makes me feel not be able to share my sister's burdens??

DENISE: Darling – really, save it for the drama club. Just hush for a minute and let me think. We need to try and divert her attention...

KATIE: You can't divert her attention! She hasn't even lost the baby yet!

DENISE: What?

KATIE: Well there's no heartbeat, but it doesn't just come out on cue!

DENISE: But... what?

KATIE: She's waiting for...

DENISE: ...another miscarriage. Oh dear me no. My poor girl.

KATIE: Oh Mum – I know. *(They hold each other.)*

DENISE: Right. Well. When are we expecting her? What do we do? We can't give her that present. *(She attempts to place it somewhere inconspicuous.)* Better get the cake ready.

KATIE: Mum – I really don't think the cake will be needed tonight.

DENISE: Nonsense – it's still her birthday. It's a big milestone you know – turning forty.

KATIE: Mum!

DENISE: Katie! What do you want me to do?? How do you want me to handle it?

KATIE: I don't know, but a birthday cake is not the answer!

DENISE: What is? Look – she'll be back soon. All we can offer her is a bit of warmth and comfort. We can't fix it. We should have expected it after, ... well. All we can do is help her cope, help her see a way forward. She has a lot of other wonderful things in life to enjoy. A marvellous job, a lovely husband. Where is Mark?

KATIE: No one knows. I think he's feeling a bit less than lovely tonight.

DENISE: Oh yes – the poor man. He... well he'll be back. He won't miss Jeannie's birthday for anything! *(Doorbell)* That must be him now.

KATIE: He doesn't need to ring the doorbell to his own house.

DENISE: Oh. No. Of course not. *(She opens door to find Jeannie)*

JEANNIE: Hi Mum. I forgot my key.

DENISE: *(attempts an awkward hug)*. Happy birthday, darling.

JEANNIE: Thanks. It's been terrific so far.

DENISE: Oh my girl. I'm so sorry. I really am Jeannie. You've suffered too much.

JEANNIE: Thanks Mum.

DENISE: Look – I uh – I thought it best we go ahead with a little celebration anyway. I mean – just light some candles and wish you a happy birthday.

JEANNIE: Mum! No celebration. No candles. No anything. I would prefer if you just went home. Please.

DENISE: Nonsense! You'll be even more miserable alone. We'll stay and help take your mind off things.

JEANNIE: Mum, please just go. Katie, please take her – I can't cope with company now – I just need to be alone.

DENISE: Oh honey, we know how you must be feeling but surely...

JEANNIE: No you do not know how I must be feeling! Neither one of you has the first clue how I am feeling. Don't dare to say that to me again.

KATIE: She's just trying to help.

JEANNIE: I don't want her help! I don't want your help! Just go back to your children – your grandchildren – and leave me alone!

KATIE: Come on Mum. I think we've been told.
(Angela quietly lets herself in during this – unseen by others.)

DENISE: No! I'm not going anywhere. I won't leave you alone on a night like this. Now listen, Jeannie. My heart is breaking for you, believe me. I've been here with you twice already. I've comforted you, I've cried with you, I've let you dream about next time. Now I say to you as your mother – let it go. It's too late. It's not going to happen for you.

JEANNIE: Women older than me are having babies – I'm only just forty!

DENISE: I'm sorry, but I can't stand by and watch this any longer! Only forty?? There is no 'only'! You've missed the boat, Jeannie.

JEANNIE: But it's all I want – it's all I've ever wanted.

DENISE: I'm sorry to be so harsh, Jeannie, but that is just not true. All you wanted before was a glamorous career and a la-di-da lifestyle and brunches and sleep ins and overseas getaways.

KATIE: Mum...

DENISE: And you had them! You didn't start trying till you were thirty seven years old! If you'd wanted motherhood that badly you would have started years ago.

KATIE: Mum!

DENISE: You and Mark have been together since university! He's been wanting this for years and you have put him off and put him off.

JEANNIE: Jesus Christ Mum – is this your idea of support?? I can't believe you're saying this while I'm enduring the worst day of my life!

DENISE: I'm saying it because I don't want to see any more 'worst days of your life'!! It hurts me as your mother to watch this terrible process. It's over! Some things aren't meant to be. It seems you were not meant to be a mother.

JEANNIE: But I am Mum – I know I am! It's not too late! I can...feel the baby – I know her – I talk to her – I can still sense her little heart inside me even though I know it's not beating anymore...

(Angela comes forward and quietly holds her in her arms.)

ANGELA: What do you want J? What shall we do?

JEANNIE: A drink. Please. *(Katie gets up and pours her a drink. Jeannie drinks, and Katie refills it.)* Don't go. I don't want to celebrate, but maybe we could just – you know. Spend some time.

DENISE: Alright darling.

JEANNIE: You know, I had names picked out. I didn't tell anyone yet. Even Mark. We agreed not to discuss it till after the ultrasound, but in my head I'd already chosen. I was calling our boy Laurence...

DENISE: Oh... like in Little Women.

JEANNIE: Yes. Just like that. And a girl would have been Joy. It's old fashioned, I know, but that's how she made me feel...

DENISE: They're beautiful names darling. *(Pause)* Look, I know it's rather soon be thinking about it, but I've heard that in times of grief a pet can really help the healing. Maybe you could get a dog? *(Jeannie drinks. Silence)* Or perhaps a cat in this apartment..? *(Angela grabs Jeannie's glass and gulps too. More silence)* Hmm. Well, maybe down the track.

KATIE: Hang on - that's not a bad idea. I mean, not the pet, but doing something to – you know - start the healing. Maybe you could maybe plant a tree and have a sort of a funeral type thing – a ceremony or something, to commemorate...

JEANNIE: ...the life that never was? No... please - I can't bear it... I know you're trying to help – but just – leave it, ok? I mean – I haven't even lost her yet..! Please can we – just - talk about something else?

ANGELA: *(finally)* Another drink?

JEANNIE: Sure, why not? Here for a good time, not a long time. *(realizes the implication)*. You know, actually, I think I need to go to the toilet. I feel a bit – I

haven't had a drink since... well. *(she gets up, wobbly. They all rise with her.)*
I'm ok... just – give me a minute. *(She exits to bedroom.)*

ANGELA: I tried to call Mark. His phone's off.

KATIE: Oh, he'll be back soon. Let's just think about J.

ANGELA: I hope you're right.

DENISE: What do you mean?

ANGELA: Only - they've had some tough years. It was only the pregnancy that started to bring some joy back. He's wanted it as badly as she has. I don't know how he'll handle this.

KATIE: I know. Grief can really mess things up. Darren didn't speak to me for weeks after I ran over his dog. I thought we'd never move on from it.

ANGELA: ...right.

DENISE: Yes that was awful, wasn't it dear? I remember. He was devastated. And the girls! Especially little Courtney. Such a soft heart that one.

KATIE: I know. She's just darling isn't she? Oh – look I know it's not quite the moment but I brought those photos you wanted from her little concert – shall I..? *(sees the look on Angela's face)* Or maybe....

ANGELA: Maybe another night, hey Katie?

KATIE: Right. Yes, you're right.

(a grief stricken sob is heard from the back bedroom. Jeannie's voice is heard from within).

JEANNIE: Oh no!! No, not this soon!

DENISE: Jeannie? Are you alright? Do you need help?

JEANNIE: *(from offstage)* Mum... help. I'm losing her.

(blackout)

Scene Four

(The next day. Scene as it was before. Mark bursts through the door.)

MARK: Jeannie? Jeannie? *(He looks in the bedroom door to find it empty.)* Shit. Where is she?

(After a useless minute prowling around he notices the answering machine blinking. He flips it on: Katie's cheerful message of yesterday. When the kids start singing he turns it off. He goes to the couch, where he sits, head in hands. After a time he looks up and sees the ultrasound image sitting on the table. He picks it up with reverence.)

MARK: Hello angel. I didn't know you'd – you'd still be here. Can you hear me? It's daddy.

(He kisses the picture with great tenderness. Noticing a lap rug on the couch near him, he is seized with a sudden instinct. He lays it out on the table gently, and puts the photo inside it, wrapping it as well as he can, and then holding it in his arms, he moves around the flat, rocking the bundle. Angela enters)

ANGELA: Mark! I'm sorry. I didn't think you'd be here.

MARK: I'm here.

ANGELA: Are you...ok?

MARK: Never better.

ANGELA: What do have there?

MARK: I have - nothing.

ANGELA: Mark, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry for both of you.

MARK: I want to keep her. I want to keep her Angie. Why can't I have a child? I'd be a good father.

ANGELA: You'd be better than good. You'd be the best. Shall I take the blanket? *(He gives it up in sudden despair. She opens the rug and realizes with shock he has been nursing the photo.)* Oh, Mark. *(She lays it on the table. He snatches it up and places it in his breast pocket.)*

MARK: Where is she? Why are you here?

ANGELA: She – she had to go to hospital.

MARK: What?

ANGELA: The bleeding started last night.

MARK: So soon..? I didn't know it would be so soon...or I would have...

ANGELA: It got messy – she was scared. I tried to call but - your phone was off. So we took her in. She had to have a D and C.

MARK: A what?

ANGELA: An procedure to – make sure it's all gone.

MARK: Oh. *(Beat.)* That didn't happen the other times. She just...

ANGELA: I know. It was – it was more developed.

MARK: Ah. *(Beat.)* I should have been here. How is she?

ANGELA: Well, you know. Not good. She'll be glad you're back. Denise is bringing her home soon.

MARK: How soon?

ANGELA: Not sure. She was still waiting for the all clear when I left. I came ahead to get things ready for her. I am so glad you're here. I'm afraid this time might break her if we don't treat her carefully.

(Beat.)

MARK: Ange - ummm - I won't be staying long.

ANGELA: You're not going to work?

MARK: No. No, I couldn't. But I have to leave.

ANGELA: What?

MARK: You heard.

ANGELA: You can't. It will destroy her.

MARK: I have to do it. I can't stay here and pretend.

ANGELA: Pretend what?

MARK: That... there's something left between us. There's not.

ANGELA: Mark – I know. I'm not blind to what's been happening. But you can rebuild. I know it won't be easy – but it's possible.

MARK: It might be if there were two willing parties.

ANGELA: Well she's willing!

MARK: That's one.

ANGELA: Come on! I've known you most of my life – I know how you react to things. You can't handle it now but give it time and you will. You two can find other ways to enjoy life – parenthood isn't everything.

MARK: If you know me so well, Ange, how can you say that to me? I still want to be a father. Nothing has diminished that.

ANGELA: But Mark – you can't force a child into the world. You've tried so hard and still... well. There may not be any children, but you still have a marriage worth saving.

MARK: No, I don't. I have no heart left for it. I don't feel how I should feel anymore.

ANGELA: How should you feel?

MARK: Not like this. *(Beat.)* I'm just so fucking angry with her! She's done this to us!

ANGELA: That's not true and you know it.

MARK: It bloody is true.

ANGELA: You can't think about it like that...

MARK: I can think how I want to think. Women seem to think miscarriage is exclusively their own tragedy! They were my children too!

ANGELA: Mark – I know. I have thought of you every time. I'm your friend too. Even though you never wanted to talk about it, I've seen what it's done to you. But

– it is worse for her. She’s the one bleeding – she’s the one who can’t hold the baby safely inside her.

MARK: I know she can’t!! That’s what I hate about it! I wish I could. But a man just has to stand and watch and pray and hope and I swore to myself last night that I won’t go there again. I won’t do it.

ANGELA: She knows. She knows it’s over. Give her some time and she’ll be ready to think about a life without children again.

MARK: But I’m not. That’s why I’m leaving.

ANGELA: You’re not making any sense.

MARK: I can still have children. Just not with her.

ANGELA: Oh my god. Are you seeing someone else?

MARK: No! I’m not. Christ, don’t you think you would have noticed? But Ange, it’s different for me. She may be too old - but I’m not.

ANGELA: Are you going to say that to her?

MARK: What else can I tell her? It’s the truth. (*Beat.*) I don’t want to hurt her, but I’ve wanted to be a father for as long as I can remember, and she’s held back on me. I’ve had to grit my teeth and wait for her career to flourish, and her next promotion, and ‘oh don’t worry darling there’ll be plenty of time! Women have children well into their forties now’ - and ‘stop worrying honey, fertility is not an issue in my family’. But she was wrong. She was wrong and I’ve had to suffer. But I’m done with that. I still want a child. At any cost.

ANGELA: Whoa - Mark - you’re scaring me. I think you need to take some time to think about it. You’ve been together for sixteen years! Since the night she graduated – remember? You used to be the happiest couple I knew!

MARK: That was a bloody long time ago.

ANGELA: Please – not today!! Just go and find somewhere to stay and come back in a few days when she’s had a chance to recover.

MARK: I can’t Ange. You know me. I’m not heartless, but I’ve been up all night thinking about this. I have to do it for me. I have to do it now or I won’t do it at all.

ANGELA: Mark, listen to me. She’s been in hospital all night. She’s lost a baby. She’s lost a lot of blood. She’s weak and broken, and I’m begging you not to lay this on her now. Think of what you’re doing – you’ve been out all night, and you’re a mess too. You’ve lost a baby too. Give yourself some time for god’s sake, because walking out of a marriage is a not a decision that should be taken overnight!

MARK: Do you really think this is the first time I’ve thought about it? We’ve already been here twice. These thoughts aren’t new – but the resolve is new, and if I let go of it I will still be here in a year, and two years, and three years, and the family I’ve dreamed of will never be. I have to do it.

ANGELA: Mark! I won't let this happen. Not now. Give her just a few days to recover. Just go – go and find somewhere to stay and take care of yourself if you can't take care of her – I'll make up something to tell her. Just go. Go. Now!

MARK: Alright. Alright. I'll go. I want to be gone before she comes back. *(he exits to bedroom. Angela is left alone for a moment. The door opens and Katie and Denise help Jeannie into the room slowly)*

DENISE: Easy, easy. That's it darling. We'll get you straight to bed.

KATIE: Hi Ange. Is Mark back yet?

ANGELA: Ummm – he – oh God.

(Mark comes to the bedroom door carrying an overnight bag. Katie and Denise see Mark before Jeannie does. He lowers the bag uncertainly. It is them stopping to look at him that makes her look up.)

JEANNIE: Hello Mark. *(No one speaks)* It's done. It's finished. I'm so sorry.

MARK: So am I, J. As sorry as I'll ever be. *(Pause)*

JEANNIE: I'm glad you're home. I was afraid you wouldn't come.

MARK: *(after a long pause in which he has trouble meeting her eyes)* I'm here Jeannie. I'm here.

(She lowers herself gingerly to the couch and reaches for him. He goes to her, first concealing the bag somewhere, and puts an awkward arm around her. She leans into him for comfort. He meets Angela's eye over her head.)

(Lights down)

Scene Five

(The next day. The large present is missing from its place. Angela is sleeping on the couch. Jeannie is in the bedroom. There is a knock at the door. A moment, then another knock stirs Angela.)

ANGELA: Coming... *(she opens the door)* Katie.

KATIE: Umm – sorry, I didn't think you'd still be asleep. It's past nine.

ANGELA: ...uhh. I'm up now. Hi.

KATIE: How is she?

ANGELA: Still asleep, mercifully.

KATIE: How come you stayed over?

ANGELA: Um – Mark texted me at midnight – he – uh – had to go out to – to clear his head. I didn't know when he'd be back. I didn't want her to wake up on her own.

KATIE: Oh. Did he come home? (*Angela shrugs and avoids eye contact*). Poor sod. Listen, I'm sorry I'm so early – it's just, well, you know kids. Up at the crack of bloody dawn. Courtney was up to something. She made this package and wanted to bring it over for Aunty Jeannie.

ANGELA: She's not here is she?

KATIE: Angela! No. I'm not as stupid as you think I am. She's at home with Darren.

ANGELA: Sorry.

KATIE: I told her J was a bit sick and she couldn't see her, so she made me promise to give it to her.

ANGELA: Oh – well. That's sweet of her. What is it?

KATIE: No idea. She wouldn't tell me. She was very solemn about it though – I had to swear on her favourite teddy not to open it, but give it straight to Aunty J. How is she?

ANGELA: I'm not sure. She's sleeping in too I guess.

KATIE: Right. Look, I'm actually glad I caught you first. I couldn't sleep for hours last night. Charlize had a toothache, and she kept coming in, and of course I kept thinking about Jeannie.

ANGELA: (*drily*) Of course.

KATIE: And what I think is this: we will really have to pull together to help her through this.

ANGELA: Um – ok. I agree.

KATIE: No, I mean really, Angie. Look, I know you think I'm not the one to help, you pretty much said so the other night. But I've thought about it heaps since then, and I have to admit I was pretty angry that you had all decided to keep such a huge secret from me last year, but I'm trying to move on from that because it's important that we work together and help J get back on her feet.

ANGELA: Look, Katie – I do agree that a united approach is probably a good thing, but can I suggest that obsessing about your own hurt feelings is not really a step towards supporting Jeannie? I mean, this really, really isn't about you.

KATIE: It is! I'm her family, and that's what she needs to know.

ANGELA: Look, sorry Katie, I'm really not following here. She knows you're family, she knows we all care – what is it you think we need to talk about?

KATIE: I have a plan – to help her out of her current state.

ANGELA: Ok.

KATIE: Well, do you want to hear it, or not?

ANGELA: I'm not sure.

KATIE: Well, you know Darren and I have been saving for an overseas trip for a while?

ANGELA: ...yes...? Greece, isn't it?

KATIE: Yes! The Greek Islands. But it's still been a bit out of reach, with the kids and all, you know. I mean, they're too young for that sort of trip – the culture and stuff would be wasted on them. Well, I have thought of a way to make it happen, and to help give Jeanie something to focus on.

ANGELA: Aha. Which is?

KATIE: I thought she could move in to our house while Darren and I go!

ANGELA: Sorry – what?

KATIE: You know, she could come and look after the girls. They just adore her, and it would give her something to focus on other than her own situation. You know, it's really hard to brood when you've got three kids badgering you all day long. It's just what she needs.

ANGELA: Dear God. Have you told anyone else about this?

KATIE: Not yet – I didn't want to disappoint Darren if she said no.

ANGELA: Oh no, his feelings are paramount. But why on earth would she say no?? What could Jeannie possibly want more right now than a month looking after someone else's children to remind her of the how she will never be a mum herself?

KATIE: Hey! Before you judge it so harshly, exactly like I knew you would, you have to hear the other part of the plan's success.

ANGELA: You mean there is one, other than you and Darren getting a holiday in Greece, leaving your fragile and grieving sister to take responsibility for your family?

KATIE: Just hang on a minute Angie! Don't you dare suggest I am in any way an irresponsible mother – I haven't been away more than one night from my kids in over five years! You're down on me like always, but there is a point here if you'd listen long enough to hear it.

ANGELA: I'm listening.

KATIE: I want her to see that being a Mum is no picnic. She's spent so much time in the last few years longing for it that she has totally lost sight of what being a mother is! A month running around after three girls under five, waking up early, sitting at home watching Dora re-runs and cooking mushy dinners might jolt her into reality! It's not all 'cuddles and mum' moments you know.

ANGELA: Katie, I just don't understand you. I know you love Jeannie, but have you really thought this through? You're one of the ones who's been fanning her imagination about the joys of motherhood for years.

KATIE: Well how was I to...

ANGELA: Even last night you were raving about the matchless joy that moments of holding a tiny baby can bring to a woman. Do you really think a month with her nieces will dampen her ardour?

KATIE: Dampen her what?

ANGELA: Her...enthusiasm. (*Katie is still blank.*) For being a mum.

KATIE: Oh. Why didn't you just say so?

ANGELA: I did. You just didn't get it. But if you want plainer language – your plan stinks! Your three little blonde moppets will hardly be an antidote to her longing. They'll show her ever more clearly all the things she doesn't have.

KATIE: But...

ANGELA: But not to worry, because there will be a payoff – she'll at least have the satisfaction of knowing that you're downing pina colodas in the Mediterranean on your second honeymoon! Jesus Christ – you're just unbelievable sometimes.

KATIE: And you're just a bloody close minded, morally superior pain in the arse, who thinks you've got all the answers even though you've never wanted to be a mum!

(*Enter Jeannie*)

JEANNIE: Good morning ladies. (*They both get a jolt when they see her clothed in a stunning maternity dress, with a small false bump/cushion in place, made up and hair done.*)

KATIE: Jeannie! What are you wearing?

JEANNIE: Funny question from the person who bought it for me! Or did Mum choose it?

KATIE: We were together – but Jeannie – you can't wear it!

JEANNIE: Why not? I love it.

ANGELA: J – what are you doing? Don't you think you should be in bed? The doctors suggested a couple of easy days... remember?

JEANNIE: Oh no, I'm feeling fine. Ultrasounds aren't that traumatic you know.

ANGELA: But – you didn't have an ultrasound. You had an operation.

JEANNIE: Well, it's all much of a muchness really. You get used to so many indignities when you're pregnant they all get a bit mixed up in your head.

ANGELA: But J – you're not pregnant.

JEANNIE: (*pause*) Anyone want some breakfast? Thought I'd go out for a smoothie.

KATIE: You can't go in that.

JEANNIE: Why not? You chose it – I imagined you must like it? Doesn't it suit me?

KATIE: Jeannie, stop it. This is sick. Take it off.

JEANNIE: But it's my birthday present. I love it.

KATIE: I'm serious – take it off. This is – not right. I'll return it.

JEANNIE: No! I'm keeping it!

ANGELA: Honey, come on. It's a bit macabre, don't you think?

JEANNIE: *(Still sunny)* No I don't think. I think it's better than buying a dog. So – last chance – smoothie for anyone? My shout. No? Ok - see you in a minute.
(She heads for door only to find Denise already letting herself in.)

DENISE: Jeannie! What on earth? What are you doing in that dress?

JEANNIE: Well, at the moment I'm taking orders for the juice bar. Can I get anything for you?

DENISE: Uh – no thank you. Too many calories masquerading as vitamins. But Jeannie – really – you can't go in that.

JEANNIE: In what? In the dress you gave me? Why can't I wear my own birthday present? I love it.

ANGELA: J – because you're not pregnant anymore. We're all feeling your pain, but this isn't going to help.

JEANNIE: It's already helping. I feel a million dollars. There's no text book response, you know. I don't want to plant a tree. I want to wear my new dress.

KATIE: Jesus J, wear the dress if you have to, but take out the bloody cushion.
(Beat.)

JEANNIE: Her name is Joy.

KATIE: Oh Jeannie, come on – stop it. It hurts to watch you.

JEANNIE: It hurts me to watch you too Katie.

KATIE: What on earth does that mean?

JEANNIE: It means it hurts to look at you being mummy all the time, and it hurt to look at you being pregnant, and it hurts to look at you having the life I want.

KATIE: Jeannie, I... I'm sorry. It's just – its my life. What do you want me to do?

JEANNIE: You can't even begin to imagine what it's like..!

DENISE: Jeannie, stop this. Stop doing this to yourself. Your sister's good fortune should not be a cause for your pain.

JEANNIE: I know it shouldn't Mum, but it is! I can hardly bear to look at her! Or any of the other cooing, pram-pushing mums who've taken over the parks and the shops and cafes and even the footpath! They're everywhere! And it hurts to look at every single one - especially the ones you know. They don't know how hard it is to be the one who can't do it.

DENISE: You're not 'the one'! Thousands of women try and fail to have children. Who can say why? Sometimes you just have to accept your fate, even if it seems

bitter. But don't let it break you darling. Don't let it turn you into something you're not.

JEANNIE: It's too late Mum. I'm already there. I've lost the joy in life. I've lost her. *(The women go towards her to comfort. She holds them at bay)* No! I won't do this. I woke up feeling good. I can keep feeling good. Just let me – handle it my own way.

DENISE: Jeannie – no. This is not a good way. You're just prolonging the pain.

JEANNIE: Thanks Doctor Denise, but you can let me be the judge of how to handle my own little tragedy.

DENISE: No I can't. Give me that wretched cushion! I've had enough of this. *(she struggles to wrench the cushion away from Jeannie, but Jeannie fights back.)*

KATIE: Mum! *(she tries to go in and separate them.)*

ANGELA: Stop it! Let her go Denise. Let her go.

JEANNIE: *(after some time)* I'm sorry. I just wanted to have her for one more day. One last day of being pregnant with her. *(She removes the cushion gently and hands it to Denise. Sympathetic approaches from the others.)* No – I'm ok. I'm ok, really. Just – give me a minute to go and get changed ok? *(She exits)*

(The three women try to regroup in their own way. They tidy a little and restore order. DENISE finds the present Katie brought.)

DENISE: What's this darling? A present from the children?

KATIE: Yeah. Courtney wrapped it up sometime last night. I don't know what it is.

ANGELA: Please tell me it's not another maternity gown.

KATIE: I'm pretty sure it's not that. It's probably just some silly toy. It'll be harmless. Maybe it'll cheer her up. I can put it away if you think...

ANGELA: No – give it to her. It was nice of you to bring it over

KATIE: Yeah – well. Maybe it's better than some other ideas I've had.

DENISE: Where's Mark? Surely he hasn't gone to work?

ANGELA: Ah – no. He – went out late last night to – I'm not sure where to. He just needed some time alone. So I said I'd be here.

DENISE: Oh... well, I suppose he must deal with it as best he can. I just hope he doesn't forget Jeannie in all of this. She really needs his strength now.

(Jeannie enters from the bedroom looking normal again.)

JEANNIE: Well, here I am. Does anyone know where Mark went?

ANGELA: He...uh... not sure. He's been gone awhile. He texted me so I could...

JEANNIE: Oh. Ok. I don't remember him leaving. Was I asleep? Maybe the anaesthetic... Why did he tell you and not me?

ANGELA: Umm – I guess he didn't wanted to let you rest.

JEANNIE: Yeah... I guess he did..

DENISE: Never mind Mark for now darling! He has his own feelings to sort through in his own way. What would you like to do today?

JEANNIE: Just a quiet day at home Mum. I'm feeling a little – off kilter. Sorry.

DENISE: Don't be silly – nothing to be sorry for. Just let us know if there's anything we can do to cheer you up a little.

JEANNIE: Look – just don't expect too much too soon, alright?

KATIE: Look – J – I'm not sure if this is a good time but - Courtney made you a present – she wrapped it herself and everything.

JEANNIE: Oh – thanks. Thanks Katie. What a sweetheart. Is it a birthday present?

KATIE: I guess so. Not sure why she suddenly decided to do it, late and all. But maybe it'll cheer you up anyway.

JEANNIE: Maybe. Well – let's have a look. *(she opens card first and reads aloud, struggling with the childish script.)* Dear Aunty Jeannie, Mummy say-ed on the phone you losed your baby. Here is my best one for the one you losed. She's name is Georgie. *(She slowly opens the childlike wrapping and a life like baby doll is revealed. She holds it out helplessly in her arms then draws it in to a cradling position. The door opens and Mark enters.)*

MARK: Jeannie. What are you doing? *(She stands still, a little thunderstruck by the gift and his reaction. He goes to her and looks at the doll with a touch of fear and awe, not even sure it's a doll till he has checked.)* Ladies, would you please leave us?

(Angela starts to object but Mark silences her with a glance. The ladies leave. There is a pause.)

JEANNIE: Don't say it Mark.

MARK: *(placing the doll away from them)* We need to talk.

(A silence. Mark prowls around, looking for a way to start.)

MARK: Right. Ok. I've been thinking about this for a long time. I was going to tell you this yesterday, but I didn't know you'd been in hospital and I decided to - wait – and – now I can't. I thought this.... *(he indicates the doll)*... Never mind. I'm just not sure how to start.

JEANNIE: Mark – you're making no sense at all.

MARK: Sorry. I'll start again. I...

JEANNIE: Yes..?

MARK: I just feel that – like with what happened last night – it's always your problem and I'm just the guy in the back ground. It's been like that for years. Not just with – the pregnancies – but with – your career, and other stuff. I've just been expected to stand by and support while you – decide things that affect both of us. Profoundly. I just – shit...

JEANNIE: Sorry? Mark – this is all a bit complicated. I've just had an operation, I've barely slept, I've had to deal with Mum and Katie, and all I want to do is go to bed and cry for about a year.

MARK: I haven't slept either. I've been walking all night.

JEANNIE: Oh. That's why you're not making sense. Can you – simplify??

MARK: I'm leaving you.

JEANNIE: Ah. *(Beat.)* Are you having an affair?

MARK: No. How could you even think it?

JEANNIE: What else should I think?

MARK: That I'm better than that. All I've ever done is care for you, help you with your career, support you with your pregnancies, and your miscarriages, which were also mine.

JEANNIE: Don't worry Mark. I won't ask you for any more support in that regard. I'm through with pregnancy. It's too late. We've missed our chance. We'll just have to come to terms with it.

MARK: No 'we' won't. You will.

JEANNIE: I'm sorry?

MARK: It is too late for you. But not for me.

JEANNIE: Forgive my drug addled brain, but I'm not following.
(Beat.)

MARK: I can still father a child. I'm not too old. That's why I'm leaving you.
(Beat.)

JEANNIE: You bastard.

MARK: Is that all you can say?

JEANNIE: Is there a more fitting term for a man who leaves his wife on the day after her third miscarriage, which he didn't bother to attend?

MARK: Didn't bother...? I didn't know...

JEANNIE: You turned off your phone Mark. I needed you and you were – gone. Whado you want me to call you?

MARK: *(Beat.)* You're right. Call me what you want. But I can't entirely blame myself for this. You know how much I've wanted this, and for how long.

JEANNIE: Oh spare me!! Haven't I longed for it too?

MARK: Not soon enough to make it happen J! We should have started years ago. I should have children in primary school now. My friends do. I'm tired of being uncle. I want to be Dad.

JEANNIE: And I want to be Mum!! But I can't!! And you're going to leave me to face life without children on my own? The husband whom I have loved and nurtured for sixteen years is going to be the one to twist the knife?

MARK: Have you loved me J? Have you nurtured me? Or has it been the other way around? You've put my needs on hold for years – literally years - and shot yourself into the journalistic stratosphere, at my expense, at our children's expense, and what have you left for me? Nothing. No glittering career – no children to come home to. You didn't care about me – or them – as much as you cared about your job.

JEANNIE: What the hell, Mark? Are you blaming me for your own crappy career choices?? How on earth could I have held you back I'd like to know?

MARK: You knew Jeannie. You've knew why I went into teaching – it gave me the time to be the home guy. And I didn't mind teaching Year 9 media studies instead of being out there in the field like you – because I would be here for – our children. You knew that was the plan. You knew that's why I walked away from the high pressure world. And you let me do it – without taking a moment's pause to try for babies when your body was young enough to cope.

JEANNIE: Am I hearing this right? Are you, as well as blaming me for your misguided career change, also blaming me for the miscarriages?

MARK: No. *(Beat.)* Yes! I'm blaming you for never listening when I wanted try earlier. I'm blaming you for being too stubborn to see that late thirties is not the best bloody time to start! What was wrong with ten years earlier?? Oh yeah – I forgot – you were too busy career building!

JEANNIE: Oh, it's so easy for a man to lecture on the subject of career, isn't it! You don't know what it feels like to have to compete with men who are ready to grab your spot the minute you mention the words 'maternity leave'! You have no idea how hard I have had to fight to keep ahead.

MARK: I do have an idea J. I used to work in the same field – remember? And I've been hearing about it every night for years. I've been listening. But you haven't. And all this -

JEANNIE: This what?

MARK: Loss. Failure. You don't know what it's done to me. Turning up day after day to teach other people's children while we - . You never asked what that was like. You found it more convenient not to notice. And now look at us. Forty, fighting, fucked – and fruitless.

JEANNIE: So your solution to this great desolation is just to saunter off and find some younger meat?

MARK: Jeannie. I'm only human. I want what I want. I'm not doing this to hurt you – but I owe myself a duty before anyone else. Even you. I'm the only child of a single mother who died years ago. I'm not a brother, or even a son. I'm going to be a father, with or without you. I have to go.

JEANNIE: Good!! Go on then and go with your healthy, ageless sperm, and don't come back!

MARK: Jeannie – please. It doesn't have to be like this.

JEANNIE: Are you out of your mind? What did you think I would say? 'Oh sure honey – go off and find some sweet faced under-grad with masses of blooming eggs and make merry with her!!

MARK: Ok. Ok. Make me the villain of the piece. It won't be hard to do. I'll just have to wear it. But I hope one day you can understand. Maybe, down the track, we can even be friends.

JEANNIE: Yeah, I'd like that. *(Beat.)* Send me a photo of your fucking family, you bastard! Get out!

(Mark goes to respond, then thinks better of it. He leaves. Jeannie puts her hand to her stomach instinctively in a protective way then realizes with desolation there's nothing there.)

(Black out.)

INTERVAL

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