

Moving On

A one-woman musical to warm your heart

“... a most engrossing piece which I’m sure many will be able to relate to. It has a strong script which probes, enabling the highs and lows of this family to emerge and has music and lyrics which form an integral part of the story ... it’s a compelling piece. You’ll laugh, you’ll cry and I think come away totally satisfied. In other words, it’s a winner. It’s highly recommended.”

Curtain Up

Moving On is moving. It’s a wonderful musical with its share of surprises and sadness. The story and songs may well have you laughing out loud or shedding a tear.

Waverley Theatre Inc

In *Moving On*, Maggie has some truly thought-provoking material and the songs are fantastic.

Cheryl Threadgold

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Moving On



A one-woman play with songs by Cenarth Fox

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Musical Score and CD

Moving On can be staged using the backing CD or live using piano and/or band. Band parts are available for hire. The CD has instrumental rehearse and perform versions of the songs.

Production Package

Groups staging a **FOX** play or musical receive free production notes [*set-design, costumes, lighting, props, etc*] and with each large-cast musical there are free lyric sheets for chorus members. Free art work for your poster and tickets is provided plus a free activity booklet for your performers with activities related to each show's themes. Your local agent may have colour photos and video recordings of previous productions and offers friendly, helpful service.

Synopsis

“All women become like their mothers.” Oscar Wilde

Maggie is middle-aged. She returns to her childhood home to “go through” her recently-deceased, widowed-mother’s estate. Edna lived there for half a century. Longer. The house is full of “things”. Maggie’s memories flood back. There are long-forgotten photos, toys, newspapers, and knick-knacks. Edna was a hoarder. Who gets what? What do you keep? What will Maggie discover?

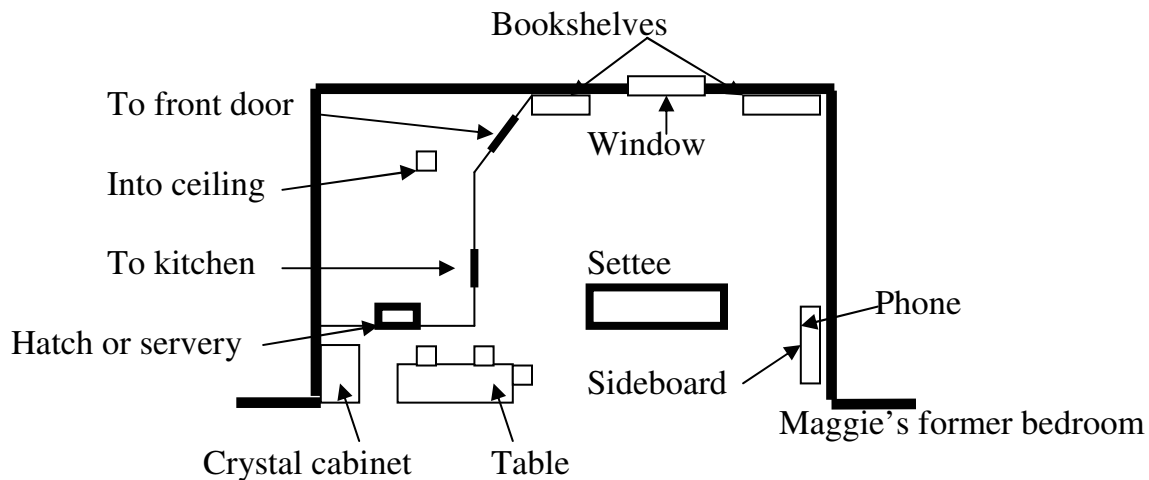
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Costumes and Movement

Maggie arrives dressed casually. She knows she has to roll up her sleeves and get her hands dirty. She knows she'll be alone. She knows the house is empty of people but not empty of possessions. Some of these become props for Maggie to wear/handle. Maggie learnt ballet as a young girl. She entered many competitions and can still remember at least one of her childhood routines – just.

Set Design

There is only one set – the lounge/dining-room in Maggie's mother's house. The house is full of all sorts of stuff. Maggie's mum was a magpie. She kept things. There are enough towels, sheets and pillow-slips in the linen-cupboard to open a haberdashery shop. The kitchen too is well stocked but is off-stage. On-stage the crystal-cabinet is chockers, the sideboard is bursting and the furniture is old and solid. If only it could speak. In the first production, the set consisted only of the dining-room with kitchen unseen upstage and lounge offstage.



Character

MAGGIE is fifty five or take the odd decade and has gone through most of life's experiences. But she is still able to be surprised and inspired, to be hurt and helped. Her mother died last week. After school, Maggie dropped out of university and worked in her grandfather's hardware store for several years. After her children were born she started work as a teacher's aide at her local primary school.

Local Language

Some words in the script refer to local events and places. Definitions are given after such words. Directors may wish to insert the equivalent term for their location.

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No. 1 Overture

[It's mid-morning. Curtain rises or lights come up on lounge-dining room and phone is ringing. From offstage] I'm coming. I'm coming. [Pause. Upstage door rattles as MAGGIE tries to open it. Phone continues to ring. Suddenly MAGGIE opens door and enters heading for phone. She has plastic tag with keys in her mouth, string bags with cleaning materials on one arm, mail under other arm and carries a plastic bucket and mop. She gets closer to the phone and is worried that it will stop ringing before she gets to it]

[With difficulty taking keys out her mouth] All right, yes, I'm here. [She puts down bucket and mop, reaches for the phone. The mop starts to fall and she lunges at it thus knocking a small table with knick knacks. The table topples and the knick knacks begin a new journey. The mail and mop fall where gravity chooses. The carry bags and keys are dropped]

Oh shit! *[Will she make it to the phone before it stops ringing? She lifts the phone and almost snaps] Yes. Hello? [It's her brother Clive. The small words in brackets are Clive's unheard mutterings] [It's me] Oh it's you. [Have you finished yet?] Finished? I've just arrived. Literally. [I just wanted to remind you] I know, I haven't forgotten. [About the paintings] What paintings? [Takes scrap of paper from pocket and reads] Grandpa Dean's golf clubs, old cigarette tins, sherry glasses and decanter from crystal cabinet. [I want the Nolan paintings] They're prints, Clive. You can buy them in any secondhand shop. [They have sentimental value] Sentimental value? You haven't got a sentimental bone in your body. [Well Fiona thinks they'll suit] Fiona likes them? Oh well that explains it. She is a true art lover. No, don't tell me. She's got a blank wall in bedroom number five. [So if you wouldn't mind] All right, I'll put the prints in the box marked culture-lover. [And I'm not sure what time I'll get there] Yes, I know. Fiona's got a headache, you've got to take the kids to ballet and you'll be here as soon as you can. Bye.*

[MAGGIE speaks indirectly to audience as she replaces phone, surveys her mini mess and picks up knick-knacks, re-sets table, collects mail, generally tidies up]

That was family. Baby brother Clive. Desperate to be here but we can all read the subtitles. Women's work is women's work. Sometimes I think women's liberation is men's liberation. I've heard some men described as totally useless. My brother for one. Not true. He's brilliant - at making excuses. *[Surveys slightly tidied mess] Right, now. [She sits on sofa or chair and looks through the mail] Bill, bill, begging letter, bill, junk mail, junk mail, bill, bill, bill. [Referring to mail] Whatever happened to letter writers? I bet half of these keep coming. You hear about widows getting mail for their dead husbands years after the funeral. [Mimics reading fictitious letter] "Dear Sir, Sorry to hear you're dead but here's an offer you can't refuse."*

[Stops handling mail and makes a confession. This is the first time she directly addresses the audience] Look, I might as well come clean. I've never done this sort of thing before. So if I seem nervous, forgetful or mutter, well, please put it down to first-time nerves. Y'see it doesn't matter how old we are, there's always something new in life, a first time for everything. This is mine.

Moving On 4

Mum died last week. The funeral was Friday and I'm here to tackle the world's hardest task – going through your mother's possessions.

The funeral went as well as could be expected. It didn't rain. The celebrant only got Mum's name wrong twice and Mum did the right thing by turning up on time. *[Smiles]* That was one of her favourite sayings to Dad. *[Imitates Mother]* "Get a move on Charlie. You'll be late for y'own funeral." Dad's name was Robert but everyone called him Charlie.

And I'd forgotten how much of a social occasion funerals can be. Talk about a home town reunion. Cousins, long-lost aunts and uncles, former neighbours, friends you haven't heard from in twenty years – there they are, large as life, only fatter, greyer and wrinklier. *[She touches her face to feel her own ageing situation]* I know the feeling.

They're looking at you thinking, "Hasn't *she* got old" and you're looking at them thinking, "My God, that's gotta be a wig". And some of the outfits. Believe me there is such a thing as a suit for weddings and funerals, except most should have been cremated years ago. Where are the fashion police when you need them?

[Looks at more mail]

And what about the *cost* of funerals. I mean what's the point of expensive timber and fancy french polishing if you're going to bury or burn it? A thing of beauty is a joy for five minutes in a funeral parlour.

Of course the family want to do one last decent thing and nobody wants to be branded a cheapskate. I mean who walks into an undertaker and says *[Mimics customer]* "Ah excuse me, what's the cheapest funeral you've got?" or "I can get it for five grand up the road, what's *your* best price?" I'm in favour of cardboard coffins.

And I'd give funerals a makeover. Make every celebrant a part-time comedian. Dignity yes, morbidity no. Have you ever been to a funeral and heard the mourners break out in spontaneous laughter? Maybe we need something like those Las Vegas wedding chapels. *[Imagines billboards]* *No Fuss Funerals ... Cut Price Cremations ... You pop 'em, we drop 'em.*

[Stops her frivolity and looks around] Sorry, I'm still a bit wound-up. You've only got one mother and some experts say the mother-daughter relationship is the closest and the death of your mother is supposed to be a major event. Well it is for me. More or less. Wonder if my daughter will think like this when I go?

So, here I sit, Mummy's little girl, ready for "clean-out-the-cupboards day". I'm not the only daughter mind. Mum had three kids. Sheila, me and Clive. Big sister Sheila lives interstate and seldom keeps in touch. *She* won't be helping today. And you know about Clive.

Moving On 5

Mum lived here for three hundred and twenty-nine years. I lie. It was actually longer. Could we get her to move? Ha. *[Smiles. Remembers. Imitates Mother]* “I’m not leaving. Your father and I bought this house and made it our home.” I used to tell her the only way she’d leave’d be in a box. *[Reflects]* I was right.

[Places mail in pile then goes to and sorts cleaning materials in string bags, mop and bucket]

Don’t know why I brought this cleaning stuff. There’ll be detergents and a million cleaning rags under the sink. Mum was a hoarder. Linen, jars, newspapers, cards, calendars, clothes and even those little clips and ties you get on plastic bread bags. *[Mimics Mother]* “You never know when they’ll come in handy.”

And because Mum refused to have her linen neutered, naturally it started to breed. You cram a linen press with twenty tea-towels and pretty soon they start getting friendly. The Irish tea-towel says, *[Irish accent]* “Ah, top of the mornin’. I’m from Ireland. Cousin Norma bought me in Kilkenny.” And the Aussie Wildflowers tea-towel says, *[Flattened vowels]* “G’day. Granddaughter Debbie bought me at the Red Hill *[market town]* market.” Next thing you know the linen stork delivers another tea-towel. It’s true.

[She goes exploring the room]

I spent the first twenty-two years of my life here. *[Moves to one side and points offstage]* My bedroom’s up the hall. Had a few thousand sleeps in there. And after twenty-two years of full-time residency, I’ve been in and out ever since. Birthdays, Christmas, anniversaries, disasters – real and imagined - when sick, when broke, whenever the magnet of love, desperation or obligation dragged me back. Amazing how that magnet never seems to lose its power.

[Looks around] Not sure I wanna do this. Memories can be pretty scary. *[Thinks]* I wonder who invented memories? Some shyster. *[Slick accent]* “Yes folks, you can have memories. Happy, sad, vague or vivid. And for a few bucks, our merchandise will stimulate your memories. Photo albums, postcards, kitsch. Buy now and tomorrow, you’ll remember today.”

[She’s wound up by everything. Almost Angry] Stop! As Mum would say, *[Mimics her mother]* “This won’t buy the child a frock” *[In despair]* But where do I start? *[Looks around then moves to upstage door]* From the beginning. The front-hall cupboard *[closet]*. *[She exits but leaves door open. From off-stage]* “Opens cupboard door” and ... Oh no! And I’ve got seven more rooms after this. Oh well, one small step for the cleaner, one giant leap for What! It can’t be! It is! Mum, you didn’t!?

[Pause. MAGGIE appears in doorway wearing a brightly coloured picture-hat]

Moving On 6

Da-dah! *[She enters gracefully repeating a stage movement she made about 40 years ago when wearing this hat. Removes hat and inspects it]* I can't believe it's still in one piece. I wore this hat for the Under Ten Song and Dance at the Mordialloc *[local suburb]* Eisteddfod ... *[Softer]* forty-four *[or appropriate figure]* years ago. *[Happy memories]* I sang beautifully, I came second and ... *[Mock anger]* *[MUSIC BEGINS]* I ...was ... robbed!

No. 2 I Like Butter

*You can tell if you like butter, with a buttercup under your chin
And if there's a glow, you are sure to know
That your taste buds soon will grin.
It's a tried and tested method when the gold shines on your skin
You can tell if you like butter with a buttercup under your chin.*

[MAGGIE dances, repeats song. It ends and MAGGIE collapses on settee and lovingly fondles hat]

[Puffing slightly] A lot of water under the bridge since those days. A lot of bridges. A lot of hats. Whatever happened to hats? I mean, look at an old movie. Everyone wore a hat. Not today. Apart from the Melbourne Cup, *[popular horse race meeting]* weddings and funerals - oh and we had quite a few hats last week – no-one wears a hat.

[Gets up, places hat on settee, heads to sideboard/chest of drawers to open drawer]

I bet there are hats in these old photos. *[Opens drawer and starts moving/removing things. It's a mess]* What am I going to do? I'll need months to sort and shift this lot. *[Gets idea]* Why not a match? Check the fire insurance is up to date, save myself weeks of work. *[Looks around]* But then I'd lose my lovely old hat and the family photos. They breed as well. *[Opens album. Looks at photos]*

Would you look at that? I've got my grandmother's eyes, my grandfather's nose and definitely Mum's hair. Not sure where the boobs came from. *[Looks closely]* It certainly wasn't Grandma Dean. Not only was she the farmer's wife, she doubled as the cow.

[Discovers photo with people wearing hats] There, look. One, two, three, four ... seven women all wearing a hat. And the men too. Sunburn was unheard of in those days.

[Phone rings. MAGGIE keeps staring at photo then shakes head. She places album on settee and moves to phone. We can hear the other person on the line. Use a pre-recorded actor or even a live actor offstage if you wish. The pre-recorded voice could/should be MAGGIE disguising her voice thus making it literally a one-woman show. SYLVIA is a feisty octogenarian and friend of Maggie's mother. The speeches overlap especially from Edna]

Moving On 7

- Maggie** *[Answers phone. Sound effects of phone ringing stop]* Hello.
- Sylvia** Edna, it's me. I'm home early. Did you get all my cards and letters? Keep them dear. I want to check a few things.
- Maggie** Hello Sylvia. I've got ...
- Sylvia** It's just so nice to be home. Believe me, there's nothing like sleeping in your own bed.
- Maggie** Sylvia, this is Maggie.
- Sylvia** You don't sound too good, Edna. Have you got the flu?
- Maggie** Sylvia, it's not Edna.
- Sylvia** I got some bug in China. Couldn't stop coughing. Fortunately there was a young doctor in our party and he soon fixed me up. The secret is to take your own water. You can't be too careful.
- Maggie** Sylvia, please stop and listen to me.
- Sylvia** What's that? I can't hear you, Edna. Speak up. Now I've got you a lovely present. Bought it in Hong Kong. I'll drop it 'round this week. Make sure you're home. All right?
- Maggie** I won't be here, Sylvia.
- Sylvia** What's that you said?
- Maggie** I won't be here. I'm dead.
- Sylvia** Oh is that all? Well must go, Edna. And I've got something nice for Maggie. See you on Thursday. Bye.

[FX Click and burr of phone line. MAGGIE looks at receiver then replaces it. FX killed]

Senility has its own rewards. Sylvia is, *was* Mum's best friend. She'll be really cut up about Mum's passing and even more so knowing she missed the funeral. I decided not to spoil her holiday. What was the point? She was trekking in some remote part of China and couldn't have got home in time anyway.

[Wanders back to settee and picks up album] Sylvia and Edna. Now there's a couple of old-fashioned names. I'm actually Margaret but only on my passport. Been Maggie all my life. Funny how some people use their second name. Fred's first name is Nathaniel or Horatio. And Jenny's not too keen on Millicent or Desdemona.

Names change all right. So do clothes and lifestyles. When my parents first moved into this house, life was not like it is today. *[MUSIC BEGINS]*

No. 3 Where Are You, Constance?

*You can sometimes tell a person's age by the sight or sound of their name
Reg is not young and Fanny's quite old and Horace and Doris the same.
Now yesterday's gone and with it old folk, no longer their stories they tell
And sadly it's not just the people who die, their names have departed as well.*

Moving On 8

*Where are you, Millicent? Where are you Maude?
Gone and lost you, Algenon. Not a trace of Claude.
Bertha, you're extinct I fear, Gladys you're no more
Where are you, Peregrine? Come back Theodore.*

*[Looking at photos]
Where are those hats and gloves? Corsets and bow-ties?
Where are those trousers now with buttons on their flies?
Seldom see a petticoat, bloomers, pinafore
Where are old swimming trunks? Drifted far from shore.*

*Jason, Jordan, Kylie, Chase and Zak
Chelsea, Chloe, Jodie, Josh and Jack.
Tattoos, tee-shirts, track-suits, trainers, hey!
Flirts in skinny mini-skirts, it sure ain't yesterday.*

*Where are you, Marjorie? Can't find Yvonne
Arthur's gone and Cecil too, Randolph followed Don.
Freda, I just cannot find, Letitia slipped away
Ernest faded long ago when Oswald had his day.*

*Eugene, Walter, Morton, Stan. Doris, Bessie, Fay
Where are you, Constance? Names that fade away.*

[Song ends. MAGGIE takes album and tries to place it in drawer from whence it came]

There's got to be a law of physics here. Photo albums will not return to the place from whence they came. *[She struggles then places album on top of sideboard and tries to make space. She moves things and discovers another album]* Oh is that where it got to? *[She moves back to settee with new album]* I thought it was lost.

[Turns page. Amused] I don't believe it. You can be arrested for wearing that. *[Indicating photo]* It's baby brother Clive. Looking at him then you'd swear butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. How come little angels grow up to be such big bastards?

[Twigs] Ah! They were only *pretending* to be angels. And would you look at moi. *[Touches her hair]* Natural colour, natural curls. *[Depressed]* It's not so much dyed today – just dead.

[Turns page] And there's Edna. Hello Mum. *[Pause. She touches her fingers to her lips and then the photo]* Can't say we were ever bosom buddies but, you've only got one Mum. *[Gets idea]* Hang on. Why not Mother swaps? Come to the Mother-Swap Meet next week in the Malvern *[local suburb]* Town Hall. *[Likes the idea]* We've got swap meets for computers, car parts, books and records – why not mothers?

Moving On 9

[Sees photo of her father] Of course you couldn't do that with fathers. Dads are gentle and kind, long-suffering, full of love and understanding. *[She looks at photo]* I still miss you, mate. *[She kisses photo of her father]*

You can't beat the old photos, especially the black and white ones. No silly grins, just people as they were. The aunts who sucked lemons for a living, the men who went to war or did hard, physical work. Look at them. Every picture a story. Your ancestors, your flesh and blood. And it's true. You can pick your friends but not your relatives.

[Turns page. Surprised/excited] Oh not him. It can't be. It is! *[Tilts her head. Sighs]* My first boyfriend. My God he was sexy. I think he was Auntie Gwen's godson. He came to tea on Sundays and boy did I have the hots for him. He was tall and thin and spoke with this incredibly soft voice. Always called me *[Imitates boyfriend]* Margaret. He must have been eighteen when I was sweet sixteen and Little Miss Innocent. Well, sexually. I wonder what happened to him? Probably married some dopey debutante and had a million kids.

[Turns another page and sees more of her first love] That's when we went on a picnic and were allowed to walk in the gardens, *alone!* That's when we shared our first kiss. Now I remember. Do I ever! *[Purses lips]* We went behind this huge tree and just looked at each other. My heart was racing and he bent down and we both closed our eyes and moved closer and closer and then we ... missed.

Embarrassed giggles, mainly from him, and we tried again for a perfect contact. *[She touches, licks or purses her lips]* I can still taste him. *[Pause]* What the hell was his name?

[Moves back to open drawer with second album] I sometimes think about the "what if" situation. "What if" you married someone else? What would've happened? I mean let's say I married *[Excited]* Donald! Donald!! That's his name. Donald. Dashing, debonair Donald. I knew I'd remember. Just a minor seniors' moment. *[Deflated]* Funny how a name can be sexy and alluring when you like the person but dead ordinary when there's no spark there. *[Boring, bored voice]* Donald? Is that you, Donald?

[Back to normal voice but now keen to explain/explore her theory] What I mean is, what would have happened if I'd married Donald? What would our kids look like? If he didn't like my parents would I have been here as often? Would I be here now? Would Mum still be alive? Would I still be alive? One decision changes your life. Big time. Forever. *[MUSIC BEGINS]* Marry him, get this. Marry him, get that.

No. 4 What If I'd Married Donald

*What if I'd married Donald? Where would I be today?
Would I be rich? Much more of a bitch? A saint or a bit risqué?
Would I take risks, be a gambler or a dull automaton?
Who would I? What would I? Where would I be?
If only I had married Don?
What if I'd married Donald? What would I look like now?
Hair all a thatch, complexion to match, a menopausal, middle-aged cow?
Would I be fat and wrinkly with all my good features gone?
Or maybe instead I'd be truly divine, if only I had married Don.
Think of the places I might have been seen in
Think of the children I might have produced
Think of the lifestyle I might have been stuck with
Think of the lovers I might have seduced
Think of the troubles I might have encountered
Think of the debts when I might have been poor
Think of the fights with my husband, his family
Think of another, mother-in-law
What if I'd married Donald? How would my life have changed?
Would I be nice, have many a vice or would I be quite deranged?
Would I find love and give love or fall for some dreadful con?
Who would I be this moment in time if only I had married Don?
What if I'd married Donald? Would I have wealth and thrive?
Would I be kind or out of my mind or would I be still alive?
Would I have faith, a conscience? Be famous or quite anon?
Who would I? What would I? Where would I be
If only I had married Don?*

[Song ends and she re-examines photos]

And the “what if” situation affects us all. Mum said she was keen on some young stud who finished up mayor of Melbourne [*major city*]. Or was it Manangatang? [*very small country town in a remote area*] Point being that if I had a different father I might have been taller or had brown [*green/blue*] eyes or been naturally blonde. [*Stops herself. Realises the folly of her logic*] What am I saying? If I'd had a different father I wouldn't be me. Idiot.

[Goes to put photo album away. Has trouble. Takes out more things and finds an envelope]

What's this? [*Examines envelope*] Mysterious, hidden envelope addressed to Mum. [*Opening envelope, removes letter*] Secret love letters. Mother, you wicked, old Presbyterian you. [*Reads letter*] “Dear Madam. This is to advise that future, interest-payments will be paid into your account by direct credit and not as a cheque [*check*] to your address.” [*Stops reading. In shock*] Interest payments? What account? [*Returns to reading*] “If you have any questions, please call the number below.”

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[Stunned] This has to be a joke. *[To her mother]* Mum, I'm the only one of your children who kept in constant touch. You trusted me. I have power-of-attorney and I'm the executrix of your will for God's sake. So what's this? And why was I never told? *[Nodding. Now she understands]*

I bet Clive's involved. He persuaded Mum not to tell me. And he'll have some pathetic excuse. *[Mimics her brother]* "Mum said I was not to worry you. Mum wanted *me* to handle her investments."

What investments? So much for trust. *[Pause]* I wonder how much is in here? What's a third of ten million?

[Looking at letter] What can I do? Ring the company. And say what? Has my late mother got an account? What's it worth? What's my share? *[Taking it back to drawer in sideboard. Settles]* Ah, f'get it, Maggie. There'll be a simple explanation and a balance of fifteen dollars *[quid]*. *[Looking around]* Right, Margaret Jane, you're here to work. So. What's next? *[Gets happy thought. Procrastinates yet again]* I know. A nice cup of tea. *[Exits to kitchen. Kitchen door left open. We hear her filling kettle and busying herself in kitchen. Louder from offstage]*

Plain tea bags, Edna. None of this fancy herbal stuff. *[Finds tea-bags]* Ah. Here they are. Use-by date probably 1960. Is there a use-by date on tea? Now, milk. *[Smells]* Oh yuk. Any long-life? Nope. *[Finds it]* Yes! Well done, Mum. You knew I'd be here. Now mugs? No. No, no, no! I am going to do this in style.

[Reappears and heads to crystal cabinet] The crystal cabinet. A treasure-trove of heirlooms and kitsch, a monumental shrine to suburbia. Your family history in one piece of furniture. *[Takes out cup and saucer]* There was a definite rule in this house. Best china for best people.

We never saw this stuff. We got the kitchen crockery, mugs and old jam jars. And Mum bought that lemon-spread stuff to build up her supply of kids' cordial glasses.

[Indicates fine china] Now who scored these? The vicar and Dad's mother. Funny how Mum never brought it out for her parents. Or did she? There was more carry on with Sunday afternoon tea for Grandma Dean than over a million family dinners. *[Fetches table cloths]*

The dining-room table had a rug then a plain white table cloth and then some fancy lace tablecloth full of holes like a giant doily. Whatever happened to doilies?

[Moves to dining table to lay cloths then places cup and saucer thereon] Mum was especially fussy when her mother-in-law came to visit. They never got on, very formal and polite. You could cut the cake and the air with the same knife. I can hear Mum now.

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[Imitates her mother] “Your grandmother never liked me. She thought her son could have done much better than a shopkeeper’s daughter.”

[Looks at table] Now what else? *[Back to crystal cabinet]* Bread and butter plate, all matching of course. *[Places them on table then goes to sideboard cutlery drawer and produces a fork]* Cake fork. Can you still buy these things? Second hand markets I guess. Oh and serviettes. Starched serviettes. None of those paper ones. *[Goes to sideboard, finds small cloth serviette and places it on table]* What am I going to do with all this stuff?

My “terribly modern” daughter won’t want it. Big sister hates clutter and sister-in-law Fiona wouldn’t have this “junk” anywhere near her pristine palace.

[FX - Kettle boils in kitchen. MAGGIE exits to kitchen]

Kettle boiling. *[We hear her banging around]* Now boiling water in the teapot. Swish around. *[Opens hatch, pokes head out to speak directly to audience]* I’m using teabags but pretending it’s real tea. *[Exits back to kitchen]* Now one for each person and one for the pot.

[Pause. Suddenly she appears and heads for the sideboard] Forgot the most important thing. *[Looks for and finds tea cosy]* Da-dah! The tea-cosy! *[Exits back to kitchen]* Now. Milk and sugar ... cubes, Mother. Where are the cubes. *[Finds them]* Yes! *[Heads back to cabinet]* And we must have the sugar tongs. *[Then to crystal cabinet]* And of course the dainty milk jug with its fancy cover. *[Takes these items back to kitchen]* And where’s the cake? We must have the cake. *[Looks at herself]* Sorry about my outfit, Mum, but at least the table looks great. Right. Here goes. *[Pause then she enters with mock ceremony holding tray with items just mentioned. Maybe she added a flower behind her ear or in small vase. She places tray on dining table. Posh voice]* Good afternoon, Grandma Dean. Lovely weather we’re having. Shall I be mother? *[Prepares to pour tea]* Milk or lemon? *[Looks around. Back out of character]* Oh dear. Social disaster. *[Heads to crystal cabinet]* No tea-strainer. I’ve failed! I’ve failed! *[She collects strainer and returns to table]*

I remember afternoon teas with Grandma Dean. *[She pours the tea]* You caused an international incident if you put the milk in first. Of course some regard it as a mortal sin if you don’t. But the strainer. *[Does so as she speaks]* You rest the strainer on the cup and pour carefully. Look, the tea-leaves remain in the strainer. Now the essential social skill. *[Does so]* Remove said strainer without dripping a drop. Well done, Margaret.

What a business. But afternoon tea was suburbia’s pomp and circumstance. *[Raises cup to toast]* Here’s to the old-style afternoon tea. Oh and to Mother’s new passbook. *[She sips]* Nice one, Edna. *[Puts down cup, picks up plate]*

Moving On 13

Then there was the passing of the food. *[Mimes as she speaks]* “Would you care for a sandwich, Margaret?” We were told to take only *one*. I remember when Clive took two. Grandma Dean gasped, Mum shot him red hot daggers and, later, boy did he cop it. *[Imitates her angry mother]*

“Don’t you ever behave like that again, Clive. How many times have I told you not to take more than one sandwich.” *[Back to herself]* You’d think he’d knocked off the crown jewels or spat in the soup. Of course Dad would tell Mum to go easy and that’d make her worse. *[Imitates mother again]* “Manners maketh the man, Robert. Heaven knows what your mother thinks.” When Mum was angry she called Dad by his real name. Me too. When I was called Margaret I knew I was in trouble.

Funny how some of us worry about what other people think. We must have their approval. Dad couldn’t care less what others thought of him. “Do your best, kid,” he’d say, “and ignore the snobs.”

[Enjoying her cuppa] Chalk and cheese my parents. Mum was terrified people would find fault with her housekeeping, children, clothes, her afternoon teas. And Dad just took people at face value. *[Thinks]* So how come they married each other? Opposites attract? Maybe it was love.

It’s easy to criticise your parents. When we’re kids, they were in charge, their word was law. But when we become adults, we see our mother and father in a different light. Our perfect parents are human after all.

And what about me? What sort of parent am I? My darling daughter isn’t here to explain. She’s got a disease called travel. Last known address, Vietnam. She sure ain’t the hubby, kids and mortgage type.

“I want to see the world, Mum,” she said. And not your London, New York or Paris world. Try Uganda, Chile and Vietnam. “Your generation bombed it, my generation wants to understand it.” She’s right. Each new generation points out their parents’ faults.

And right now I’m Ms In-Between. Middle-aged. The time when your kids leave home and your parents move into one. The time when you criticise your parents while your kids criticise you. Interesting time. Interesting and strange. *[MUSIC BEGINS]*

No. 5 Middle Age

*Youth is great, youth is grand, those dare-we, carefree days
You can’t beat blissful childhood, we all should sing its praise
And autumn times, those twilight years, let’s hope we reach that stage
But here’s a useful warning, beware of middle age.*

Moving On 14

*You're caught between the devil and the deep, blue sea
When you attain that magic middle age
Your kids are chasing thrills, your parents popping pills
No need to guess who cleans the mess and gets to pay the bills
They say that life is great when all your kids leave home
But then your senile parents need you more
Your kids and folks mean trouble, you've got the losing double
I tell you now this middle-age it's tough.*

*You're in-between a rocker and the blue rinse set
When you attain that ripe old middle age
Your kids are in a trance, your father's wet his pants
Now any plan to visit Cannes, you know has got no chance
They say that life begins when forty you have reached
But never has that fact been more untrue
The parent-children mixture - a really tricky fixture
I tell you now this middle age it's tough.*

[Dialogue during song] Life begins at forty? Yeah but what sort of life? How many people have a teenage child and a pensioner parent? Drugs, sex and rock 'n roll dominate your dear one's life. And your kids are vulnerable too! Life began for me at forty. I had a teenage daughter and a widowed mum. My daughter had guys hanging round with fast cars and more wild oats than a farmer. And my sweet, old Mum was courted by gold-digging geezers with slow cars and a life's subscription to Viagra. And here's Muggins in the middle. Middle age? It ain't real flash.

*You've got yourself a problem with some friendly fire
When you attain that so-called middle age
Your kid is coming out, your Dad has signs of gout
And now it seems your mid-life dreams are definitely in doubt
They say that life is great when both your folks retire
And love to have the grandkids come to stay
It sounds so cute and cosy, the truth's a lot less rosy
I tell you now this middle age, this crisis-ridden riddle-age
I tell you now this middle age it's tough.*

[Song ends, MAGGIE places items on the tray and removes them to the kitchen. She might chat briefly through the hatch as she works] Well now Grandma Dean's gone, I can tidy up. The washing up was never done while guests were in the house and the biggest sin of all was when a guest offered to do the dishes. That was worse than murder.

The kitchen was Mum's domain. No uninvited guests. Mum may not have liked her kitchen. In fact I think she hated it but by God it was hers and boy, did she protect it.

Moving On 15

Before the plastic drip tray, we washed a cup then leaned the plates on the cup. Mum would yell at Dad because he'd start drying the cup when she wanted it to support the plates.

And when Dad was doing the washing, he'd always rinse everything to get rid of the suds. Waste of water of course but who knows what was in washing liquids then. Come to think of it, who knows what's in today's "all new" products.

[When table is cleared, she removes, folds and returns table cloths to original position]

Don't you just love the labels on packets and bottles. "New". "Ozone Friendly". "Added riboflavin". "Tastier". Tastier than what? And then there's "Contains *real* fruit". As opposed to *plastic* fruit? Or pet food. "Suitable for adult cats or Seniors". I'm sure the cats take it seriously.

[Tries to snap out of her chatting and lack-of-work-situation] I must stop this mindless banter and *[louder]* start working! *[Looks around]* Right, Mum's bedroom. *[Is distracted. Looks offstage]* What was that? *[Moves to one side and looks into neighbour's backyard]* There's someone in Mrs Gale's backyard. It's a man. *[Worries]* Not a burglar. *[She moves chair to get a better look. Stands on it]* He's just ducked down behind that hedge. *[Relief]* Oh, it's all right - it's her gardener.

[Chastises herself, replaces chair] I'm paranoid. Got burglars on the brain. Easy to understand why. We've had so many burglars, my street's been renamed *Break and Enter Boulevard*. The exceptional houses are those which *haven't* been broken into.

Dad used to tell us about suburbs where people didn't even lock their doors. Everyone knew their neighbours *and* spoke to them. Not today. My brother only knows his neighbours if they've got cash and colonnades.

Right, Maggie, stop. You are here to clean out your mother's house. Get cracking. Right. *[Looks around]* Sideboard. *[Moves to sideboard, removes a drawer or box and takes same to coffee table or dining-room table to sort things]*

Of course it's easier to toss the lot but what if there's a gem like Grandma's lost engagement ring or a photo of Pa. *[Sorting]* On the other hand, I may find ... *[Holds up cards. Dismayed]* Christmas cards. Oh Mum!

[Reading cards] And they're not even from *last* Christmas. Why keep them? I know. They're the *have-to* cards. *Have-to* send to cousin Rhonda, *have-to* send to the Jamiesons. "We have to keep in touch", Mum would say. *[Reading]* "Hope you are well. Love to all the family."

[Moves upstage] This is where Dad used to put our Christmas tree. *[Lighting changes to that of night at Christmas. If a decorated tree could easily fly in, do so]* None of those crummy plastic models. We had the real thing. I used to get the tree with Dad. We'd tie it to the car roof.

Moving On 16

Mum'd grumble. *[Mimics Mother]* "Look at the pine needles. Who's going to clean the mess?" She came round when the decorations went up. Then the presents. There were only five of us but we filled the whole room. I used to love buying presents. *[Smiles]* It wasn't my money then.

Funny how when you get older the buying and wrapping goes from being fun and exciting to a real pain in the neck. And Mum insisted on buying things for everyone - her children, grand children - her cleaning-lady's, stepson's, best-friend's dog. And guess who did the buying? *[Nods. Yep, it was me]* Why give presents to someone you don't know?

[Thinking] I'm really looking forward to heaven. I'm busting to see how Mum and those like her handle bumping into people they scrubbed from their Christmas card list. There'll be a lot of crossing to the other side of the street in paradise.

The trouble with Christmas is it's a two-edged sword. It's a time of happiness with wide-eyed kids, family reunions, fabulous food and high hopes for the new year. But it can also be a sharp, stabbing reminder of what used to be and never will be again.

I'll never spend another Christmas with Mum. It was almost Christmas fourteen years ago when my dearly beloved announced a rethink of his marriage vows. He wanted out. He walked out. *[Nodding]* For many people, Christmas brings an uneven mix of pleasure and pain.

Everyone who's lost a loved one. People whose marriage is over. People on their own or worse, people obliged to attend some family function when they'd rather have a tooth pulled without anaesthetic. And what is Christmas, anyway? Today the whole thing's been hijacked. *[MUSIC BEGINS]* I reckon old Ebenezer Scrooge ... was right.

No. 6 Oh Don't You Love Christmas!

*There's perfume for Polly and choc'lates for Dolly
And soap on a rope for dear John
There's whisky for Patrick and Fosters for fat Mick
And socks and some jocks for our Ron
Oh why do we leave shopping late? And give to a person we hate?
But cometh the season we all lose our reason
And Ho! Ho! Ho! Don't you love Christmas!*

*There are daisies from Darrell and cactus from Carole
And that's what they gave you last year
There's a key-ring from Kerrie, a loud tie from Terri
With prices abundantly clear
They say it's the thought of the deed. Yet most of the stuff you don't need
You're forced to remember the end of December
And Ho! Ho! Ho! Don't you love Christmas!*

Moving On 17

Bah humbug!
No stooge was Scrooge he sussed out the whole Christmas lark
Bah humbug!
*That geezer *E-be-nez-er's right on the mark!*
[* Deliberate mispronunciation to create rhyme]
There are drinkies with Dustin, a junket with Justin
And phone calls to friends far and wide
There's a visit to Grandma, a grave stop for Grandpa
And neighbours you cannot abide
Bonhomie and love's out on show. Sincere? Well you really don't know
The calendar's calling behaviour appalling
And Ho! Ho! Ho! Don't you love Christmas!

And now we come to the big change in behaviour at yuletide
I refer to that millstone, the Christmas family newsletter
We no longer write a personal note to our loved ones
Now computers make a screed which is quintessentially boring
We learn of Uncle Ray's radishes and some
Partner's, cousin's, godson becoming a chartered accountant
So in the words of the great Neddy Seagoon, I say
Thank you! I don't wish to know that!

There's a card from a bloke who you gladly would choke
But you feel that you have to reply
So you draw up a list but there's someone you missed
And you have to cross off those who die
The post office only can win. Thank God for the re-cycle bin.
The stamps and addresses - The cramps and the messes
The ribbon and wrapping - The fibbin' and napping
The cooking and cleaning - The sooking and preening
The buying and stuffing - The crying and puffing
The sum of the whole bloody lot!
Don't you just love Christmas! [Spoken] Bah, humbug!

[MAGGIE is thinking. She's despondent. She returns drawer to sideboard. Christmas lights crossfade and normal lighting returns]

I've just had a terrible thought. So far I've done bugger all, there's a mountain of mess to climb and I've just remembered *another* storage place. *[Points upstage]* In the ceiling.

Some years ago, brother Clive, the apple of his old mother's eye, persuaded Mum to have a loft installed. *[Imitating brother]* "It's just what you need, Mother. Perfect spot to store things."

Moving On 18

What my sneaky sibling didn't say was that *he* wanted more space. I bet most of the junk up there is his.

[She exits to kitchen then returns carrying small step-ladder] I haven't looked up there for ages. Who knows? I might find a family skeleton. *[She exits to hall passage via original entry point. We hear but can't see her. She ascends ladder and fiddles with ceiling]*

Good job I'm not scared of ...*[Screams]* Spiders! Sorry, Tarantula, this won't take long. *[Struggles to remove box]* Ow! *[Dust dumped from above. She coughs/splutters]* Just what I needed. *[Pause. She enters holding large cardboard box but with powder/dust in her hair and on her shoulders. Perhaps a little on her face. She blows top of box and dust-powder erupts. She places box on settee or table and dusts herself]* Sorry about the mess Mum. I promise I'll vac before I go.

[Once tidier] Funny, I've started already. I'm talking to Mum as if she's still here. Maybe now we'll be totally honest. Maybe now we can have a serious chat about death. *[Amused at irony]*

No-one teaches you about death. At Sunday school there's heaven and angels but who tells you about the nuts and bolts of dying? Mum didn't. *[Posh]* "Not a nice subject."

I had a friend, Grace, who died last year. Only fifty-one. I used to visit a lot towards the end. Grace was like me. Talk of death didn't spring easily to our lips. Joking was fine but no heavy conversation. Then another of Grace's friends dropped in and she was the exact opposite – came straight out with it.

[Imitates this other visitor] "Funeral arrangements, Grace. Burial or cremation? Burning's better, you don't have to pay some poxy cemetery for parking rights."

"Church or funeral home? Priest or celebrant? Any special flowers or music? Anyone you *don't* want to speak at the service?"

Grace muttered this and that and her friend took notes.

"Now accounts and business affairs. What needs paying? Who needs to know you're not long for this world?" I was gobsmacked and then I got angry but Grace was fine. In fact she was relieved, like a weight was lifted from her shoulders. She obviously appreciated this down-to-earth approach. *[Realises pun]* Sorry.

We avoid some subjects and suffer because of it. Having a good cry's fine but someone has to make the sandwiches.

Moving On 19

[Sighs, the whole thing is starting to strain] What a mess. I've been here an hour and haven't done a thing. New rule. Never let family clean out a relative's house. *[Goes to box]* Now what's in here? *[Discovers old teddy bear. Very emotional]* Teddy! *[She hugs her childhood toy]* Oh Ted.

It's lovely to see you after so long. I thought you were lost. Oh Ted, I promise, cross my heart and hope to die, I'll never leave you alone again – ever. *[More kisses]* Now you sit there and watch me tidy this place. *[Places him somewhere safe so he can watch. Surveys what she hasn't done]* From now on I won't stop for anything. *[Changes her mind again as she discovers paper]*

Until I find an old TV guide. *[From when her family first started watching TV]* Would you look at this! *[She remembers fondly the titles of the shows]* *The Mickey Mouse Club*. *[If MAGGIE is a child of the 1950s, the script is fine. If she grew up in the 1960s, you will need to change the titles of the TV shows to reflect the times]*

[To TEDDY] You remember *The Mickey Mouse Club*. Who was your favourite Ted? Mine was *[Spots another show]* ... *I Love Lucy* ... *77 Sunset Strip* ... *[Touches hair, sighs]* Oh Kookie.

I was born BT. Before Televison. *[ET. Early Television]* And once we got our set, talk about change your lifestyle. We watched till all hours when I was only ten. Mum would say it was time for bed and we'd kick up an almighty stink. *[Mimics herself as a child]* "Ah, Mum, just another five minutes."

And Grandma Dean thought television was the devil in disguise. She said TV was bad for our eyes and we should never watch it in the dark. Ha!

Of course there were no tapes and DVDs then. No replays, no video stores. And the sets. Rock solid boxes with microscopic screens and all in glorious black and white. What was colour TV?

Now we have a glut of channels, home-theatre, surround sound and interactive viewing. But here's the big question. Do we get as much enjoyment now as we did with those grainy, old, black and white shows like *The Lone Ranger* and *Superman*? I reckon the more channels you have, the less likely you are to find anything worth watching. *[Leans back and adjusts TEDDY so he can see better]* Eh, Ted.

And do you remember when we went to the drive-in? I'd be in me jamies and dressing-gown and play on the swings under the big screen and then Dad'd come and get us and we'd have some lollies *[candy/sweeties]* and ... sorry?

No, I can't remember the films either. I only stayed awake for the first cartoon. *Heckle and Jeckle* or *Mighty Mouse*. When we came home, I guess we were carried inside and put to bed.

Moving On 20

Look, I haven't told you this, Ted, but I went to the drive-in when I was older and I didn't take you with me. Boyfriends weren't too keen on sharing. And I didn't go to sleep after the first cartoon, although I didn't always watch the movie. *[Shaking head]* And I'm not answering any questions on the grounds that I might die laughing. Or crying. Or both. Sorry I dumped you, Ted. Boyfriends can be very possessive. *[Cuddles TEDDY]* Back then I didn't know about *real* cuddles. I do now. *[MUSIC BEGINS]*

No. 7 Teddy Never Snores

[Dialogue under music] You're my first best friend, Ted. I'm so sorry for leaving you in that box. And I've never told you how much you helped me. When I dropped out of uni and got dumped by my first boyfriend, you gave me unconditional cuddles. When I fell for that married guy who used me, you were always there to listen. Thanks a million, Ted. I should've called on you when that other thing happened. You would've helped. Thanks Ted. You're my best friend - ever.

*A man just might be sensitive, inquisitive and kind
Show affection, think of others and exercise his mind
A man might be considerate and help out with the chores
But even if that's possible, a Teddy never snores.*

*A man might be quite sensual, quite sexual and hot
So inviting and uniting, exciting in the cot
A man might be a work of art with healthy, hunky pores
But even if that's possible, a Teddy never snores.*

*Your Teddy will cuddle you close
He makes a great listener, he is a true friend
Your Teddy will not let you down
Dependable and loyal, he's with you till the end.*

*A man just might be rational, international and gay
Be well travelled and good company with witty things to say
A man might be intelligent with hardly any flaws
But even if that's possible, a Teddy never snores
But even if that's possible, a Teddy *[kisses Ted]* never
[Makes snoring sound. Mock reprimand] Ted! Snores. *[kisses Ted after song]**

[Song ends and MAGGIE places TEDDY carefully on a chair or the settee. Lights crossfade back to original lighting]

Moving On 21

Now, back to that box from the ceiling. *[Back to ceiling box]* I think at this rate I'll finish one drawer of one cupboard in about a week. *[Sorting]* Why did Mum keep this box in the ceiling? Most of her personal stuff's in the bedroom. *[Stops. Has found something]*

Hello? *[Produces envelope]* Another mysterious envelope. *[Opens same and produces passbook]* There is a passbook! *[Reads]* "Equity Union Savings Account - Edna Mary Dean". *[Turns page and screams]* Bloody hell! This has to be a joke. Mum! You had just enough to pay for your funeral. *[Shaking head reads passbook]*. Current balance. Two hundred and ninety-seven ... thousand dollars *[pounds]*.

[Removes glasses. Stunned] Edna, what have you done? You were on the pension. You hated gambling. You couldn't even *spell* "toy-boy". Where did this come from?

[Phone starts to ring] Oh not now. *[She heads to phone]* If this is Clive, he's dead meat.

[Picks up phone] Hello. *[It's me]* Ah, just the criminal I want. *[So you've been up in the loft?]* Yes, Clive and I found the passbook. Explain. And this had better be good. *[You won't believe me so what's the use?]*

I understand you conning Mum and telling me nothing. I don't understand where the hell the money came from. *[I didn't con you or Mum]* Cut the crap, Clive. This is serious. *[You're obviously upset]* Of course I'm upset. I've just discovered the pass-book. Now talk. *[It's all explained in Mum's letter and her new will]* What letter? *New will!* What new will? *[Talk to me when you've read the other stuff]* *[He hangs up]* Clive! *[Louder]* Clive! Don't you hang up on me! *[Slams down receiver]* Bastard! *[Deep breath or two]* What is happening?

[Returns to box and searches] So much for a quiet clean. *[Thinking]* I can't believe there's a new will. *[Stops searching to give her opinion]*

I reckon the most dangerous people are middle-aged children waiting for their parents to die. The over fifties desperate to inherit. They can erase the mortgage, buy a new car, travel and kill their debts with all that free money. And they justify their greed. "Look at all I've done," they say. "Given them grandchildren. Handled their business affairs. Paid for the anniversary bash." It's the natural order of things. Parents get old and die, their middle-aged kids get the cash.

[Resumes searching in box. Finds envelope] Ah. *[Opens envelope, removes contents]* There is a new will. Mother! *[Sits. Reads]* "This is the last will of blah, blah, blah My estate divided into three equal parts." That's not new.

"... to be shared between my children Margaret Jane and Clive Edward with the third share distributed equally between all my grandchildren living at the time of my death." Mum! What about your eldest child? You can't chop her off without a cent!

Moving On 22

[Looks at Teddy] Ted, you were in the box. What was said when the envelope was shoved under your backside? *[Pause]* Eh? ... *[Quickly skims document]* No, sorry. You're not a beneficiary.

[Discovers letter attached to will] The letter. *[Reads]* Attention Margaret Jane Dean, executrix. *[Nervous pause]* Why am I suddenly nervous?

[Continues reading letter] "My darling Margaret." That's a worry for a start. "Please forgive me. This news will come as a great shock. All your life I've kept something from you. No, don't worry, you're not illegitimate.

But, and this is really difficult, your sister Sheila is not your sister." Not my sister! *[Continues reading]* "She is Auntie Gwen's daughter and your cousin." *[MAGGIE momentarily stops reading. She is stunned].*

"As a teenager, my sister Gwen became pregnant and our parents insisted the baby be given to me and raised as my daughter. That was the way it was in those days. Mother made Gwen, your father and me promise never to tell anyone." *[The shocks increase]* Bloody hell.

"Your father and I loved Sheila as if she was our own daughter and I know you and Clive loved her too." *[Thinking aloud]* Well, most of the time.

"Sheila wondered why she was older than you and Clive and after Gwen died, Sheila traced her birth mother. She showed me the certificate and we both cried and cried. It was very emotional." *[MAGGIE is still in shock]* I bet it was.

"Then Sheila told me she could never repay the love her foster parents had given her and wanted her share of my will to go to my grandchildren. That's why I changed my will. And now another matter."

Another matter? *[Continues reading]*

"Sheila has been very successful in her business and opened an account for me. The money is to be part of my new will. You'll find the passbook in this box." *[Shaking head in disbelief]* I'm ahead of you there, Mum.

"I've done nothing to be ashamed of but I didn't have the heart to tell you this while I was alive and I hope you will forgive me. I love you very much. Edna." *[MAGGIE speechless]* My God!

Some people say they never knew their mother or father. Now I know what they mean. What must it have been like when Gwen fell pregnant? My grandparents would have been mortified. Grandpa was an elder in the church. But look what they did. Kept the baby and within the family. And they lived with that secret for sixty years. *[Shaking head]* Tolstoy was right. Every happy family's the same. Every unhappy family's unique.

Moving On 23

[MAGGIE in shock. Gets up to think on the move] I drop in for a spring clean and discover my mother is secretly rich thanks to my sister who's really my cousin. So much for my boring family

But why didn't Mum tell me? She did nothing wrong. On the contrary, she was a minor saint. Must have been guilt. And blind family loyalty. Gets back to that business of worrying what others think of us. It's a scandal but we'll be all right so long as no-one finds out.

And now they're all dead. Mum's parents, Dad, Gwen and Mum.

[To TEDDY] Wotcha reckon, Ted? Any more surprises? Any skeletons in the linen press? *[Goes to box and searches some more]* I've had my quota of shocks for today. Time to muck in and *[Sudden mood change. Pause]* I don't believe it. *[Removes small album]* This is not fair. She promised never to remind me.

[Talks directly to EDNA] We were going so well, Mum. The hidden cash, the changed will, the family secret. Fine. But not this, Edna! *[Suddenly angry and highly emotional. Throws album onto floor]* Not this!

Yes, I know, I should be moving on. But you aren't so perfect and as you used to say, we work out our own salvation.

Oh and you're wrong about giving up on God. Life is even worse. I mean for starters you lose a perfectly good crutch. And whilst I'd love to give Him one heck of a serve, having gone all agnostic, who do you yell at?

[Pause, retrieves the photo album and suddenly yells skywards] Come on, God, one more chance. If you're on-line, give me a sign. No miracle. No reversal of time. Just a simple, credible explanation. Tell me I've got mail.

[Settles down and becomes calm] Sorry, Ted. I'm being a bit emotional. *[Shows TED a photo]* You remember little Mister Wonderful. You were in his cot just like you were in mine. Golden days.

[Addresses audience] Many years ago, my son, my little nine year old boy, got sick. He died. He was the best kid in the universe. Daylight came second. Oh he was cheeky and naughty and a perfect devil at times but he was my son. And God, fate or some fucking ill wind blew him away. From me, his family, his friends, his world. And all I want, apart from having him back of course, is a reason. I prayed. I promised God I'd do anything if my boy got better. But answer came there none.

Moving On 24

Okay, fair enough. There's an annual quota for heartache and someone has to win the tragedy prize. Why not me? But even today, I'm still looking for answers.

A reason would help. I mean if God made us, knows everything and has total power, why can't He tell me why my son died?

[Quoting] "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away". Fine. Understood. We all die. But whatever happened to three score and ten? Why must a child die? And why mine?

You know, apart from not having a reason, what's worse is my never-ending sadness. Look at me. Sixteen years later it's like the bloody thing happened this morning. I can't forget. Having the knife plunged into your heart is terrible. But does the knife have to be twisted – every single day?

It's not the pain of the tragedy, it's the constant, on-going memory.

[Back at God] I'm not complaining about my win in the lottery of grief, God, but I'm really pissed off that I can't forget my victory. Why do I have days like today when I stumble across my Mum's heartache which only increases mine? Again? And again and again and again!

[Pause. Takes her time. Draws breath]

Actually it is possible to forget your troubles. I use the look-around method. I check out others. Not that I want to get into some sort of competition. Oh my agony is worse than your disaster. No, sadness is sadness. But just by looking at the misery of others, sometimes I feel better. Well, less miserable.

I think the worst type of suffering is when your heart breaks, when you can't forget it and when you're robbed of justice.

I heard about a Jewish family in Germany in the 1930s. They copped the usual hatred and persecution then fled. No time to pack, not even their child's favourite Teddy. They escaped, avoided the camps and after the war, made it back to Germany.

Their lives were a mess. They had nothing. No ID, possessions, contacts. They returned to their old town, their old street. They walked past houses they knew and stopped outside their front gate. The house hadn't changed. No bomb damage. They walked up the garden path. The garden was just as they left it, tidy and blooming. They approached the front door and heard music from the radio. They heard happy voices. People were inside. Life was normal. It was just like it was ten years before.

Should they ring the door bell? Who lives there? If important people are inside, the Jewish family might be arrested for trespass or making some false claim.

Moving On 25

They crept to the windows and peered inside. The interior looked familiar. It should. The furniture's exactly as it was when they fled the Nazis. A family is enjoying a meal using their dining-room table, their chairs and their cutlery and crockery.

What would you think? How would you react?

But that's not the end of the problem. They've endured heart-ache, on-going sad memories and now face no justice. The Jewish family has no ID, no proof this is their house. They bought it, cared for it and loved it for years and now a wall of bureaucrats stand ready to fight them every inch of the way. Sometimes the law and justice aren't odd bedfellows, they're on different planets.

It took years for the Jewish family to establish their true identity and who'll compensate them for their losses? Have I got problems? Is justice available to all? Ha!

[Looks through the album]

I wonder how many people feel pain at the memory of some event in their life? Anniversaries can be joyful, stimulating, wonderful occasions. They can also dredge up a horrible past and haunt and hurt you for days. Forever.

Many of us live with sadness. And sometimes that sadness is like an inoperable growth. It follows you to bed, to work, on your holiday.

And often it's a compound sadness. There are spinoffs.

I was never deliriously happy in my marriage. Sure there were good times, even great times but when our son got sick and died, the domino-effect kicked in. My ex stopped talking. He couldn't express his grief. He wanted to blame someone or something. The doctors, God, his parents, my parents, me.

We split and the marriage quietly died. Just another flow-on, the compound agony. Of course a strong marriage can withstand tragedy. A child's death can bring the parents closer together. But that's the interesting thing about life.

We never know how we'll react to trauma.

On my son's birthday, I think about my former husband. Is he as miserable as me? Does the fact that he re-married and inherited a new family stop him thinking about the death of his own son?

Who knows? Maybe the happiest people are sad people who can master their misery. It's not what happens to you that counts. It's how you react to what happens.

Moving On 26

So, after all this gloom 'n doom, what's my next move? I mean, after I tidy this mess? Grow even more bitter? Give up?

I wonder what my daughter would say. Would she want me to chuck it in? Would my Mum?
[Shakes head] No. And right now I can hear my little boy. "Come on, Mummy. You can do it."
[She looks at photo] Goodnight sweet prince. And you be good for your dear, old Mum. [MUSIC BEGINS] [She kisses a photo of her son then closes the album]

No. 8 I Got Me

*When you hit rock bottom, when life turns out cruel
There's always hope to help you cope if you follow the golden rule
The most important person is still old number one
You by yourself, out on your own, here's how it is done.*

*I got me and that's enough and more
"I got me" can open any door
With old persistence, my cornerstone
I'll make a difference all on my own
I got me and that is all I need to make this world a better place
So much can be done with just the power of one
Hey world, I got me.*

*When you lose the battle, you're still in the war
But with each day there comes a way to help make your prospects soar
The path to any progress will help you handle grief.
Trust in yourself, take the first step, go with self-belief.*

[Curtain]

No. 9 Curtain Calls

No. 10 Playout

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