

BITS and PIECES

Four Monologues:

BEATEN – Albert

STAYED – Louise

FIXED – Noelle

LEFT – Joy

Characters:

Albert – early 30's, Joy's husband

Louise – early 60's, mother of Joy and Noelle, Albert's mother-in-law

Joy – late 20's, Albert's wife, Louise's daughter, Noelle's sister

Noelle – early 30's, Louise's daughter, Joy's sister

Setting:

Four spaces:

BEATEN – a café table

STAYED – swimming pool changing room

FIXED - kitchen table

LEFT – small boarding house room/office

BEATEN

Albert speaks to his mother-in-law Louise

ALBERT:

Albert places two drinks on the table – a beer and a glass of wine.

I got you a wine. White.

You still like white don't you?

Raises his beer

Cheers!

Looks at the building across the road with the binoculars and then checks his watch.

Like clockwork he is, absolute clockwork. I could set my second hand to him.

Everyday, on the dot, 5.03 p.m. exactly.

He's the accountant. He's got the big office on the second floor. It's a nice office.

You get a better look at it at night time. He always leaves the light on.

I've recorded his arrival time here and his departure time here.

Always the same.

8.56 a.m. through to 5.03 p.m. Never changes. Unbelievable.

Once, you know, I would have thought that was boring but now I think, 'good on him, he knows what works for him.'

We'll see the beautician next.

Her name's Shanti, used to be Jennifer but she changed it.

Yep, there she is! 5.05p.m. She's keeping good time today.

I've got all her details. She wears certain colours on certain days. Today is Wednesday so she'll have on purple.

Bingo! Purple!

Records the details in his notebook.

You probably think I'm nuts - all this detective stuff. I just wanted to know. So, I started coming here. I have a coffee, watch the building, see who comes and goes and write it down in my notebook. No big deal. I'm hurting anyone.

Detective Albert Creswell.

Sounds good hey? I wrote it in the front of my notepad.

I always wanted to be a detective you know.

Don't laugh, it's true! Joy used to laugh at me too. Back in the days when she still laughed.

Ever since I was a kid I wanted to join the Police Force but my dad wouldn't let me. He didn't like the police. He was suspicious of them, even when he hadn't done anything wrong. He was suss of everything. I reckon that gets you into more trouble, acting suss. Better to be cool. Less obvious that way.

He liked the Army. He'd been in the Army. He wanted me to join up, so I did. I got an apprenticeship. Electrical fitter.

Did Joy tell you I'd been in the Army?

No?

I think it embarrassed her.

I didn't last long though. I didn't like it. I ran away.

It was a Saturday afternoon. I remember that 'cause I was listening to the races. I didn't know what else to do. Dad used to listen to the races at home so that's what I did.

All the others had gone away for the weekend but I didn't have anywhere to go. So I just stayed there. I'd been there by myself since Friday afternoon and I was sick of it and bored and a bit lonely. I decided to go into the City. I just walked around, you know, looking at the shops and people, but then I got lost. Disoriented. I couldn't work out how to get back to the station and I was too scared to ask anyone.

So, I just kept walking around and around and by the time it got dark I was really scared. I didn't know what I was going to do. I'd never been in the city at night before. There was other people hanging around and I didn't like the look of them. Bunch of weirdos. Then I seen these cops looking at me, and I don't know why, but I ran!

I just took off and they chased me. And when they caught me I remember I flew off the handle, mate, I totally lost it, so they put the cuffs on me. That just made me spin out completely! I was a 15 year old kid from the country and suddenly I'm being chased and cuffed by the cops! Jesus Christ!

I was hysterical, screaming and crying and my face was covered in snot. They had to sit on me, right there in the mall with everyone having a good old gawk.

They called the Army and well the rest is history. I got discharged. My form said, "Albert is dismissed from the Army on grounds of mental instability." That's what it said! Mental instability. That really shat me. I was bloody lonely, not mental!

I'm no good with loneliness.

Anyway, after that there was no way Dad was gunna let me be a cop.

“If ya can’t hack the Army mate, there’s no way they’ll let you into the bloody Police Force. No way in the world.”

So I became an electrician. But I would have liked to have been a cop. A detective. I look good in a suit.

I wish I’d never told Joy that bit about the mental instability.

I just got it into my head, what’s good for the goose is good for the gander, or you know, the other way round.

Sometimes I reckon I’m a lot like my dad. Real suspicious. Being suspicious makes you sneaky. And being sneaky makes you sort of crazy. You know the song? Suspicious minds.

Points across the road

It was that bloody office! If she hadn’t of taken the office, I wouldn’t have started checking up on her. I didn’t want to check up on her, but she was acting all suspicious, so you know how it is, one thing leads to another. Goes round in a circle.

I knew she wasn’t happy. I was trying. I was. All sorts of things. Nothing fancy, just the regular stuff, you know, buying her flowers, sending her off for massages and trying to look after Janey as much as I could on the weekends to give her a break.

She’d be happy for a bit but then it’d start again. She’d just close up. Go into herself. I’d ask her what was wrong and she’d say, “nothing and everything”. What sort of an answer is that?

You know, your daughter’s a really smart woman, but for a smart woman she’s bloody hopeless at explaining things.

Look, I know I’m no genius but I’m not an idiot neither and I hated it when she treated me like one.

It was that bloody office!

She reckoned she'd be happier if she had a place where she could go and work on her writing and painting. I realise now that I said the wrong thing. I should have just said yes straight away but the thing was I just felt that we couldn't really afford it.

But she wouldn't listen. You know what she's like. She gets an idea into her head and that's that. She screamed at me and said I didn't support her, or didn't appreciate her or some other shit. The thing was, I couldn't help but think that if she wanted to write or paint so badly, then why couldn't she just do it at home, in the kitchen, or I could do up the shed for her. It's what other artists do isn't it? Well, fuck me, that really annoyed her! "How many artists do you actually know Albert?"

I didn't know any, really, only her.

So I thought, "aw, fuck it, hang the expense, I'll get her the office". It didn't cost that much really. Look at the building, it's pretty run down, nothing fancy. So we moved in a desk and a chair and kettle, all the things she'd need and she seemed to be happy.

She'd come home and sing and whistle.

We even started to have sex again. Good sex, really good sex, like we used to have when we first met. I'm not embarrassing you am I?

See I reckon that's where Joy and I really sparked.

I remember when I first saw her in the gallery where she worked, I was doing the wiring, and I really liked the look of her but I thought, "nah, she's outta my league". But she came onto me! I loved that and we had bloody great sex! She used to say to me that I was real. I liked that. A lot.

I thought maybe we were lucky, that we were going to get a second chance, get another go at it, get it right, make it work. That's what I wanted. You know that. I really did love her.

We even started talking about having another kid, a playmate for Janey. Gees, I'm bloody glad that didn't happen. I'd be looking after both of them now.

But for a moment there, it was all working again. That should have made me happy. But it didn't. It made me suspicious.

See, I don't reckon people just change overnight. Something happens that makes them change.

So I got to thinking, why did the office make her so happy? And then it dawned on me! Why hadn't I seen it all along? It was obvious. She'd set herself up a little old love nest and who was the fucker paying for it? Me! She didn't contribute one bloody cent. Not much money in writing is there?!

I should've just confronted her. But I didn't. I wanted to know who he was. Who was making her whistle!

So, that's when I started coming here and watching. I'd write down all the times that people came and went, how long they stayed, what they wore, everything. I thought that eventually I'd work it out. Work out who he was.

I'd ask her what she was working on and she'd say, "Oh you know, bits and pieces". Bits and pieces! What kind of a fucking answer is that?! Bits and pieces of what?

It's hard once you get a picture in your head. I used to picture Joy and him in the office. I always had them doing really full on stuff, you know, stuff she'd never do with me. And then I'd imagine them laughing at me. That was the worse part because no man likes to be laughed at.

It started to get out of hand. I was turning up late for work appointments or not even showing up at all. I couldn't leave this spot. I just had to sit here and watch. If I wasn't here, it was all I could think about.

That's how I met Rene. She was working here. One day she asked me if I was writer and I said yes! Couldn't help myself. Seemed harmless enough. Should have realised then that I was starting to loose the plot. She asked me what I wrote and you know what I said? Bits and pieces. Bits and bloody pieces!

Well one thing just led to another, like I said, what's good for the goose..... and the next thing I know is that I'm sneaking around, acting suspicious, having my bit on the side with Rene.

Fuck!

Remember when the office got broken into? It was me! I just had to see the place where she was doing it. In my mind I had it all decked out in red velvet and candles but it wasn't like that at all. You saw it; you know what it was like. It was a bloody little shit box. One desk, one little sink, one chair and one tea cup. Not even two tea cups.

She didn't even offer him a cuppa.

I found her writing book. And you know what was in it? Signatures. Hers. Done over and over again. But not with my name. Our name. Our married name. No. Only hers. Joy Sommers. J. Sommers. J.J. Sommers. Joy Jane Sommers. Ms. J Sommers. Ms Joy Sommers. That's all. Pages of them. That's what I was paying rent on an office for. Jesus Christ! Talk about bloody mentally unstable.

So I thought, fuck her, I'm out of here. I'm not sticking around while she fucks me over. No way in the world. I'm not gunna get trapped like that.

I had Rene waiting in the wings, urging me to leave and shack up with her, so why not? What did I have to loose? I could beat her at her own little game.

But things are never what you think they are. Are they? I hate that. I just wish things could be straight forward. You know, what you see is what you get. Like arriving at work every day at 8.56 and leaving at 5.03. You know exactly what's going on.

And what a dickhead she let me become.

When all she's doing is planning on leaving us. Leaving! Us. Me and Janey.

Fuck it! She beat me!

And now look at me, stuck at home with a six year old. Don't get me wrong, I love that kid, really love her. You know that. But don't kids need their mothers? Isn't that how it works?

You wouldn't do it would you?

And now Rene's shot through. She decided she didn't want someone else's kid and she then found out I was just an electrician.

Just

An

Electrician.

I reckon I could have understood it better, maybe even accepted it, if there'd been another bloke involved. I wouldn't have liked it but at least there'd be a reason. But not this.

I used to look at Joy sometimes and wonder what was really going on in her head. But I didn't have a clue.

Picks up binoculars and looks

There she is! 5.20p.m. Bit earlier than normal. Don't know how she stands living in that place.

Looks through binoculars again.

Gees, I tell you what, between you and me, she's stacked on the weight. Nah, sorry, can't leave now. I have to record what time she goes out to get her dinner. I do it each day now. Bit of a habit I suppose.

I'll see you round then.

Picks up the binoculars and goes back to writing in the notebook.

Whistles/hums/sings

"We can't go on together with suspicious minds"

End

STAYED

Louise speaks to Noelle.

Louise has just finished swimming laps. She is wearing swimming togs, a bathing cap and goggles. She is wrapped in a towel and carry's a sports bag. There is a tracksuit in the bag and a make up bag including a small hand mirror.

Throughout the monologue, Louise dries herself, puts on her tracksuit and does her make up.

LOUSIE:

pulls off her goggles and throws them in the bag.

They leak! Twenty dollars and they leak! When I tighten them, they cut into my face.

God, it's freezing in there today. I wish they'd heat it a bit more.

And it's too crowded. I got scratched by someone's toenail!

I only did twelve.

Looks at herself in a compact mirror.

Oh god! I look like a racoon.

Begins to get dressed and do her make up

I went to see her. I offered her money but she says he doesn't need it. I assumed that this was about money. That if they had enough money things would be easier
But she says it's not about money. She said it's about happiness.

Happiness?!

What kind of a reason is that?

All Joy ever wanted was to be a mother and, what, she just doesn't want it any more?

Just like that. Over and out.

I went to see Albert. He looked exhausted. Absolutely worn out. He said Janey was having trouble sleeping too.

I took them a casserole. A nice one. Lamb shanks. Nutritious. It's the least I can do.

I'm trying to keep up the contact because you just don't know what he might do. Anything could happen now; he could end our relationship with Janey completely.

And he'd have every right to.

I'm glad your father's dead. He wouldn't have handled this. Your father liked Al. Thought he was practical and good for her. But I knew it wouldn't last. I knew, I knew it, I knew it!

I always thought she'd marry someone more, you know, someone more professional, someone more educated, someone more challenging.

I know he's a good man, but he's no real match for our Joy, is he?

What do you think people think about when they're swimming laps?

I try not to think about anything. I mainly sing. In my head. Sometimes I cheat. Stupid really, I know. No-one else cares how many laps I've done but I tell myself I've done 18 when I know I've only done 16, and then I only have two more to go.

I wonder what Joy would make of that? How would she analyse it? What label would she give to such personal dishonesty?

I don't like these indoor pools. Too much chlorine. I like the outdoor ones. With sun. These ones feels tooclose.

Do you remember going to the swimming pool every Saturday?

I asked Joy to come swimming with us today but she said no. She told me she hates swimming pools, hates the cold water, hates the chlorine, hates doing laps, hates everything.

It's a pity really because I think swimming is good for her.

Helps to keep her weight down and her mood up.

I couldn't do it you know. I just couldn't do it. I wouldn't be able to face people; wouldn't be able to face their disapproval. And believe me people will be disapproving. She doesn't realise that yet. She's so caught up in herself that she has no idea. No idea at all. But believe me, I know, people can be very cruel. They'll say that it's not natural, and I agree, it's not!

Happiness? For God's sake, who does she think she is?

I know why she hates going to the pool.

There are things that Joy tells me now that I'd virtually forgotten. But I can't change those things now. And she can't keep punishing me for them.

She told me she still hates Saturday afternoons.

The irony of it is that I spent most of those Saturday afternoons at the pool thinking what a great mother I was for taking you both there.

I should have learnt to drive.

The number of times I stood outside that pool waiting for your father to come and collect us. Saying no to all the offers of lifts. “No thanks, we’re fine, Frank’ll be here to pick us up any minute now, thanks any way.”

And knowing. Knowing what they were thinking, “poor Louise” Poor old bloody Louise. Always waiting.

Recites

“Waiting waiting waiting for the party to begin,
waiting waiting waiting for the laughter and the din.”

You see I believed him, or at least I wanted to believe him. He’d say, “I’ll be back at 5. Five p.m. On the dot. So be ready, all right?”

And I believed him.

He’d say, “I’ll have three drinks, three drinks, that’s all, and maybe a couple of bets. That’s it. I promise. Cross my heart and hope to die.”

Ha!

Three drinks my arse! He’d never had only three drinks in his life! I’d know he’d be well and truly on his way to getting rotten. Rotten as a chop. Full as a goog. Full as a tick. Full as a fat girl’s sock!

Sometimes it’s easier to just accept the lie, because then you can prepare yourself for the disappointment. You know where you stand, what is up and what is down.

Once, and only once, I accepted a lift home from one of the fathers down the road and I certainly paid for that.

Fluffs the back of her hair and examines it in the mirror.

I read an article once that said if you're lost or walking by yourself you should always walk as though you know where you're going or as though you want to be out walking. That way you don't look vulnerable and you can avoid being attacked or mugged or whatever.

So I'd walk fast, with my head held high, saying to the world, "This is exactly what I want to be doing at 6.30p.m. on a Saturday night."

But I remember Joy saying to me, "Don't start anything when we get home Mum, please, don't say anything to him, don't start anything!"

I don't think I really understood what it was that she was saying. It was only later that I realised.

I always thought I was so clever, so smart. I'd bait him with words. But really, I was just as bad as him, only different.

Probably worse because at least I was sober.

And I knew people talked about us. I could feel it. I thought I had everything so carefully hidden but there are some things you just can't hide, not really.

And Joy remembers it all.

One night I waited and waited for him to come home. I should have gone to bed but I wouldn't have slept. I used to lie there and worry about car accidents. I used to think about his funeral and what I'd wear and what I'd say and how good it would feel to be widow.

Funnily enough I never worried about other women. I think I would have been relieved if he'd had another woman, would have taken the pressure off me.

Joy got out of bed and came and sat with me and she started her pleading. “Don’t start anything when he comes home mum, please, promise you won’t?”

That pleading used to annoy me because I’d think, “What about him? What are you going to say to him?”

But if I’d thought about it, I would have seen that she was actually smarter than both of us. She was just scared. A scared little girl.

I didn’t think I was doing anything wrong. I was doing it for you kids. For you. For her.

If you do something often enough it just seems like second nature and that in itself seems to make it, well, right.

And then I had an idea.

Your father was such a creature of habit.

Whenever he came home, he’d always take his shoes off in the laundry first and then go to the kitchen and get a beer. It didn’t matter how drunk he was he always did the same thing. If it was there, he’d drink it. I’d say, “leave it and have it tomorrow, it won’t go off overnight!” But no, he always had to have one more.

So I said to Joy, “go and see how much beer he has.”

She found a whole unopened carton. She asked me if I was going to drink them. I remember I laughed and said, “No Joy, we’re going to smash them!”

And we did. Every single bottle. We smashed them all.

We made a ring around the fridge of broken and shattered glass. Then we blocked off the doorway to the kitchen.

We were such a busy pair, ripping open the carton, pulling out the beers, smashing them and arranging the broken glass that I don't think I actually thought about what it was that we were doing. We used his work boots. It gave me such pleasure to use those work boots to smash his precious beers.

She checks her hair in the mirror.

He loved his boots.

Do you remember how Aunty Cathy and I used to go to the hairdressers every Wednesday? We'd have a perm or a set and chat to the girls in the salon. The salon we went to was called "La Petite", well that used to make us laugh, "the little what?" we'd say to each other! We were so superior.

And then one day the hairdresser asked me about the bumps and cuts on my head.

So I stopped going.

I taught myself how to do it, how to do the back the right way. I told myself that I didn't like the hairdressers anymore.

And when we finished breaking all the bottles I sat in the middle of the kitchen and looked at what we'd done and I knew it was wrong. Wrong to involve Joy, wrong to be so destructive and wrong to enjoy it so much.

But I did nothing about it. I just sat there in the pool of sticky beer. And Joy asked me if he'd hurt his feet when he stood on the glass and I said it depended on how drunk he was. I told her if he was too drunk he probably wouldn't even feel it. And she said, "Well, I hope he's really, really drunk."

He didn't come home that night; he stayed at his sister's. He'd do that sometimes, I suppose it was his way of ensuring a little peace.

In the morning I just cleaned it all up. All it had done was create more work for me and a terrible memory. The smell of the beer lingered for days. I hate the smell of stale beer and the smell of chlorine. Both stick in the back of my throat; make me feel sick, unsteady.

I just assumed Joy had forgotten about it. She never mentioned it. Not until now. Not until this.

I stayed for you children you know.

So you'd have a home and a family and enough money. I was prepared to put up with anything for you girls. It's what mothers do.

And even though it was only me that Frank liked to punch and kick, I would never have left you girls in order to save me. I would never have put myself before you.

Her daughter will never forgive her for this. Never.

I haven't been able to tell anyone, not a soul, not even Aunty Cathy. I'm too ashamed. I'd rather lie about where she is, than tell the truth.

Packs everything in her bag.

Should we come again later in the week? I'd like to get my twenty laps done. That would make me feel better. We could ask Joy again. Maybe she's changed her mind. Maybe she's calmed down. Maybe she's feeling better.

Looks at her watch.

Alicia might be here by now. Don't want to leave her waiting. There's nothing worse.

End

FIXED

Noelle speaks to Joy. She folds the washing and drinks wine.

NOELLE

We're not discussing it! We're having a night off! We're going to have normal conversation. Like normal people do.

I ran into Ebony's mum at the post office this morning. You know, Ebony in Janey's class.

You do know her! I've seen you talking to her. Her husband looks like Vince Colosimo.

I knew you knew her! Well, anyway, she's changed her name. I was so relieved when she told me that because I was standing there thinking, 'what's her name?'

It's Eden now. She told me she'd never liked Fiona.

Last school holidays when they were in Thailand... They all went. His two sons from his first marriage, and her daughter from her first marriage and Ebony, from their marriage.

You must have known that she was married before. She's always talking about her "new husband", or "my second husband". I always feel tempted to say, "Have you met my first husband Graham?"

I know he's my only husband!

Anyway, while she was in Thailand she had some sort of spiritual healing and the name Eden came up. Sounds Catholic don't you think? So I looked it up. And it's Hebrew. Hebrew! For pleasure or a place of pleasure! Ooh lala! Foxy Fiona!

She said she's going to have a name changing party and that she's going to invite me. I'll get an invitation for you too. It'll be fun!

I wonder if she'll invite her parents. Do you invite your parents to your name changing party?

I was surprised. She didn't seem like the type. I don't suppose there is a 'name changing' type, but she always just looks so confident, as though she's got everything all worked out and sewn up. But she told me that she'd never felt as though her name was right. So why not?

New house, new husband, new car, new kid, new name. All goes together, I suppose.

I don't think I could be bothered. Too much pressure trying to think up a better name! I think if I was going to change something about myself it wouldn't be my name.

I'd renovate the kitchen!

I'm not mocking it! It's just that I don't think it's real. How does it actually change who you are?

She did look pretty good though. I'd look good too if I'd spent the school holidays in Thailand rather than in the Tarago!

What's that expression, you can't teach an old dog new tricks? A leopard never changes its spots? I meet people all the time and I just know what they were like as children, like Fiona, I mean Eden, see, that's what everyone's going to do, they're going to say "You know Eden who used to be Fiona, or, you know Fiona, oops, sorry I mean Eden"!

Anyway, I meet people and I can just tell that they were the class bully or the scape goat, or the princess or the clown.

They might have got older and perhaps a bit more mature but essentially they are still exactly the same! There are some things you can't change. They just are.

Changing your name is like changing your address or your hair colour – the reality is, you're still there, you, just with a different name or house or hair colour.

Anyway, Eden's been going to all those workshops inner peace workshops and all that.

It's all right for the Dalai Lama, to talk about inner peace, he didn't have four kids under seven!

Okay, so I'm taking the piss. But there are some things you just can't change. They just are. Like being a parent.

No matter what happens once you're a parent, that's it, you'll always be a parent, no matter what your name is!

I know, I know! I said I wasn't going to talk about it. I'm not. It's just that I'm saying you can't put those kids back once they've been born. I'm not saying another word! I'm not!

You know what I think.

If Graham came home from work tonight and I said, "Cindy's sleeping over at Clare's and Josh has gone to basketball and Emily and Alicia are watching t.v. and I've changed my name to Star Power." Well he'd be surprised wouldn't he?

Actually he'd probably just say, "That's nice Noelle. What's for tea?"

Mum would be completely pissed off though wouldn't she? She'd take it personally.

Sings

"Noelle, Noelle, Noelle, Noelle, born is the king of Israel."

Laughs

I'm not even pissed yet!

I don't know about going to Eden's party. Would it make me a hypocrite? And what about a present? I don't know. You take one for a baby naming ceremony and everyone congratulates the parents for coming up with such a perfect name. But what about for an adult? And what would I write on the card? "Congratulations on your new name, your old one was shit, so it's a good thing you changed it. All the best, love Noelle"!!

What's the name changing etiquette? Someone should write a book about new etiquette. "How to introduce your ex husband and his new wife and their new twins at the primary school presentation night." "What to write on the card for a gender change acknowledgement." "How to introduce your old friend with a new name." Maybe I should write it! I'd make a fortune.

Hey, see if you can work this out. It's a sort of lateral thinking exercise. I know a woman called Karen Fayeddaughter. Got that? Karen Fayeddaughter. So, if that's her name, what's her mother's Christian name?

Give in?

Faye!

Her mother's name is Faye. Fayeddaughter. Like Thomson, or Jackson or Davidson. It's good don't you reckon? Wouldn't work for every name but it sounds good with Faye, sort of Scandinavian, like Erickson or Peterson. Noellesdaughter?
Nah, can't see my kids wanting to do that.

Joysdaughter. Janie Joysdaughter. That actually works.

Sings

"Joy to the world, the lord has come!"

You once told me that you thought your name was a cruel joke.

I'd be hurt if my kids decided to change their names. I've always felt that their names were a real reflection of me, and that by changing their names they'd be rejecting me.

The thing is when you name your child you do it believing that it is the best and right name for them.

And anyway, no matter what name you pick, even if the kids name is Tomato Vine, everyone goes, "Oh lovely name, yes yes, lovely". No one says "That's a completely ridiculous name"! Well not to your face anyway.

I guess the question you ask yourself is what real difference does a name make?

People remember us by what we've done. And those things define us for most of our lives.

I'm not talking about you, I'm talking about me! I'll always be defined as the mother who told the last school principal to get fucked!

Laughs

It's true! It doesn't matter how many bloody committees I go on, that's how most of the people at our school will remember me. Even if I changed my name, everyone would still know it was me!

It's like anti-depressants. I would probably take them except for the name.

The name would keep me locked in the state of being depressed. If they were called 'euphoriant' for instant I'd be more open to the idea. Why don't we define them in terms of the new state that will be produced? Because things are always defined by their past.

I probably am mad! Bring on the euphorians!

Maybe I'm just lazy or too set in my ways, but I just can't see the point of some forms of change.

I just feel that some things are fixed, it's just the way that they are.

I have thought about changing husbands. I have. You're not the only one with problems. You're not the only one to question things. Not the only one to wonder what's there on the other side.

But I actually couldn't be bothered changing. I'd rather be lonely with someone, than lonely by myself.

And anyway what would be the point of leaving him? I'd get someone new and then eventually I'd feel the same way about them. Better the devil you know.

It's just that I like everything in its place – I like knowing where my kids are, where my husband is, where my dog is, where my car keys are, everything.

I don't think there is anything wrong with that. If I started to change everything, well the whole family, our whole system would be thrown into turmoil, and who would that actually benefit?

I did think about having an affair once. I had an offer. Believe it or not! Think we were both sort of lonely. I was genuinely interested in him. Well sort of genuinely!

I went to his house and I was instantly disappointed. It was so much like my place; clothes everywhere, dirty dishes, toys.

We kissed which was nice, and I did get that feeling in my stomach and I thought it might work, but you know what he said?

He was holding me and doing that sort of deep breathing thing that only men seem to do, you know breathing you in deeply and he said, “You smell like, you smell like.....my mother”

And then I just knew that I couldn't sleep with him. Maybe if I'd had a couple of beers he would have said that I smelt like his father!

Anyway, that was then and this is now and nothing has changed. I'm still me.

You know, I think I will go to Fiona's party. It would fun to do something different instead of spending every Friday night like this. I've always wanted to have a look at her house! And I'll take a present. Something special to mark the event.

What is it that they say, “a change is as good as a holiday?”

And I could do with a little change.

Continues to fold washing and drink her wine

End

LEFT

Joy is doing her hand washing in the basin. She speaks to Albert

JOY:

I knew you'd come. I hoped you'd come. I wanted you to come.

Well, this is it. I know it's not much of a place, bit of a dump really, but, I like it. It's easy to keep clean! I like this window. I can see the whole street from here. I watched you as you walked up the street. I was standing here doing my washing and I could see you coming. I knew it was you even before I could make out your face. You've always walked the same way. Its funny isn't how things like that don't ever change.

I panicked at first when I saw you and thought about locking the door and pretending I wasn't here. Mum used to do that when people visited that she didn't want to see.

But I wanted to see you. I thought it would be good to see you. Good for both of us probably.

There's no washing machine, but I have everything else I need, for the moment at least.

Mum came. Her response was exactly what I expected. I don't know why she was so disappointed. She's usually so fond of being right.

She brought a cake. Can you believe that? A sort of dry cream cake! I hate cakes. She knows that. I like savoury foods! I've always liked savoury foods. I told her that and she made out that I was ungrateful.

"Where's the casserole?" That's what I wanted to say! I bet she took a casserole around to you and Jane. But not for me, no, she punished me and brought a stale old sponge.

I fed it to the stray cat after she'd gone. "Here pussy pussy, come and have some cake. Nice pussy, good girl. Yes, good girl. Eat it all up."

I enjoyed feeding her but now I'm worried that she's going to keep hanging around waiting for more. Meowing and crying.

I remember when our cat had kittens and my dad put them in a hessian bag and drowned them in the creek. "It's quick," he said. Yes, quick. I remember him saying that. I held the mother cat while Noelle and dad put the kittens in the bag. I couldn't watch. And old white cat, god, she scratched and howled! Caterwauling.

Poor old white cat. It's weird that we never named her?

I played a game at a party once where you had to work out your porn star name. You put together the name of your first pet, with the name of the first street you lived in. I'd both be Old White Cat Darling. Funny hey.

You'd be Smokey Field. That's quite nice.

I pleaded with dad, "Please, I can look after them, please dad, let me keep them". But he said, "No Joy, it's for the best". For the best. For whom? They were just four little kittens.

I'll make us a cup of tea when I finish this. I should have made the tea first I suppose. I'm sorry, I'm not very organised. I haven't had many visitors. Only you and mum. None of my friends have come. Not one. Too hard I suppose. Too hard to know what to say. For both them and me.

I lie. One person came. One of the Dads from school. The one who looks like Vince Colosimo. I don't think I'd ever spoken more than ten words to him. It was pretty awkward. I couldn't think of anything to say. I wished I had a tap or something for him to fix.

And then he said, “You know Joy, I’ve always thought you were a very attractive woman”.

And it clicked. I realised why he was here.

“Lock up your husbands and your sons ‘cause Old white cat Darling is on the prowl!”
Stupid prick!

Returns to her hand washing. She looks at her arms as she washes.

I remember dad’s arms. I have his arms and his feet. Janey has my arms. Everything else is yours, even the way she walks!

I always thought that my children would look like me, that I’d have a set, like babushka dolls, all lined up in matching outfits.

There was a girl at my Sunday school who wore those matching mother and daughter outfits? I always wanted something like that. I remember asking mum what she thought of them and she said it was vulgar. Vulgar? I’d always thought they were so cute, such an outlandish statement of belonging.

I looked at dad’s arms as he held the bag under the water. Watched the line of his muscles as he tensed and then relaxed. First there were bubbles and then, no bubbles. It only took a few moments for their little lungs to fill with water and then.....nothing.

I wonder what he felt. I was too angry with him to actually even care about how he felt. I wanted to look after those kittens. They were so soft and fluffy, but I imagine he must have thought that I’d get tired of the responsibility once they grew into cats.

It often happens, you know, with children and pets.

He said it was an act of kindness. But wouldn’t it have been kinder to have drowned Old white cat as well? Or would that just have been cruelty?

And where was the father cat?

You know, mum said to me once, when I was a kid, “you’re dad’s the sort of man who shouldn’t have had children.” What a fucked thing to say to a kid. She was always judging him. And me.

You haven’t come to judge me have you? I wouldn’t do that to you. But then, this wouldn’t be you, would it?

I’m sorry if that hurts you but I’m not trying to hurt you or anyone! That’s exactly why I’m here.

You can’t possibly think I woke up one morning and just thought; okay today I’m going to leave you and my child! I know you’re not that stupid. I’ve been trying to understand this for, well, it feels like forever.

But you know, no-one has actually asked me how I feel. Just like dad and the kittens. No-one actually wants to know because it’s too difficult to hear.

Do you want to know what I was going to do? I was going to kill myself! Thought it would just be easier. Easier for all of you.

Then mum could take her casseroles around to you and Janey without any of these confused feelings. You could be the martyr, the poor widower, to the poor motherless child, lapping up the sympathy about the loss of your darling but somewhat sensitive and deranged wife!

I had it all worked out. I was going to gas myself in the car. Suicide. It’s the ultimate statement in self-loathing don’t you think. And let’s think, what’s the ultimate statement in self approval? Reproduction?

And guess who told me how to do it? You! Yes! We had a conversation, an animated conversation about how it is done and you didn’t ask me what I was thinking.

Nothing!

After all the years of me trying to tell you how I actually felt about about being a mother and my sense of disappointment and frustration and loneliness and the battle to try and be my own person and do my work, my art, you just happily explained all the details of how people do it!

And my mother had the audacity to ask me where I thought I went wrong in our relationship!

For fuck's sake!

I was surprised at how straight forward it was. I got the things ready, the towels for blocking up the window, the length of hose that would fit from the exhaust pipe through the window, and I then got in the car and started to drive out of town.

But just on the outskirts of town I noticed that the fuel gauge was on empty. I pulled off the highway and sat there weighing it up. I needed to go further into the bush so that no-one would see me, but if I did that I mightn't have enough fuel to do the job properly and then what would happen? Would I be brain dead but still alive?

Or brain still alive but body paralysed? I'd be half dead but half alive. I already felt like that! What I wanted was one permanent state.

So I decided to drive back into town to get more petrol.

But by the time I'd turned the car around and had gone back into town and got the petrol and a packet of cigarettes, the whole momentum was gone, lost.

I went to MacDonald's, to the drive-through and sat in the car and stuffed myself.

And then I went and picked up Jane from school. She kept saying, "I can smell MacDonald's mummy". I told her it was just her imagination. And so that was that! And it had seemed like such an easy thing to do.

Of course I didn't tell you! I didn't want you watching me, wondering 'what will Joy do next'?

And then I remembered the kittens. How easily we disposed of them. Do you think the kittens smelt fear? They must have, with their mother screaming like that.

I began to picture it. I thought I could start at the top of the hill and let the car roll into the lake. I planned on taking Janey with me. Perhaps that was the answer. Well, after all, she is my responsibility. That's what you all think isn't it?

I planned on locking the doors. I imagined that Janey would start to scream, like the kittens, but I'd put my hand over her mouth and get really close to her so I could comfort her. We'd look into each others eyes and I'd mouth the words, "I love you".

And then perhaps I'd see my life flash across my mind. That's what people say happens just before you die, that your life flashes before you.

I wonder if you see the edited version, which is just all the good bits, so you die feeling as though your life has been one long success.

Or if it's the fast forward version and you go with a feeling of emotional turmoil. Like a spin cycle on the washing machine.

But I liked to I imagine that it would be all slow motion, arms waving, bubbles rising, waiting for our lungs to fill ...

They say drowning is very beautiful, very silent, no screams.

But I couldn't do that to Jane. I love her too much to do that. That's the thing. I had to go alone. I couldn't stay any longer. If I did, I would have to turn my misery into hers. And that's not fair. I owe her a greater chance at happiness.

And the truth is, as much as I might think about dying, I'm actually too much of a coward to make it happen myself.

And once I realised that then I knew what I had to do.

This is the right thing to do. For me. For now.

But I can't help wondering, does being left feel different from being taken?

I remember how the cat cried, how she howled. It sounded like a crying baby. But I made no sound at all and I felt nothing, just relief.

Hangs four washed socks on the window sill.

I can't remember what dad did with the bag of dead kittens? Did he bury it there by the creek or did he bring it home and bury it there? Or did he just let it sink to the bottom of the creek? Did he say anything? I can't remember.

And I can't remember if I said anything to Janey. Just being quick.

And that, that was the right thing to do.

End