

ACT 1

SCENE 1. (Front of Stage)

SERENA'S BEDROOM. DRESSING TABLE AND CHAIR.

*(SERENA is sitting down, brushing her hair)*

**SERENA:** Dear diary, I just don't know if I can take anymore. My stepmother just never lets up; study, study, study when all I want to do is sing. She is so spiteful to me. Why does she have to keep pushing me to work in dad's media empire? I'd be stifled, suffocated, like a nightingale in a gilded cage.

*(Humms the first lines of a song, starts singing and uses the hair brush as a microphone)*

*(SONG . . . .)*

*(Song ends)*

**SERENA:** Hey, I like the sound of that. Think I'll upload it to YouTube.

BLACKOUT

**ACT I SCENE 2. (Full Stage)**

THE LOUNGE OF THE FAMILY MANSION IN KENSINGTON, LONDON.  
STAGE R THERE IS A DOOR LEADING INTO THE LOUNGE. THE ROOM IS VERY COMFORTABLY FURNISHED WITH A SOFA (CENTRE STAGE). BEHIND THE SOFA IS A TABLE ON WHICH THERE IS A COMPUTER WITH SCREEN AND A MOBILE PHONE. STAGE LEFT IS A FIREPLACE.

*(ENTER LOUISE LE CHANTE dressed in modern designer clothes, with a magazine tucked under her arm.  
Enter SERENA)*

LOUISE: Was that you singing just now?

SERENA: Yes. I love singing. Did you like it?

LOUISE: It was rubbish! Serena! Get back to your studies.

SERENA: It's not rubbish Louise and you know it. Why do you always put me down?

LOUISE: I'm 'mother' not Louise and I don't always put you down.

SERENA: You're not my real mother, she died.

LOUISE: I'm married to your father remember?

SERENA: Yes - *STEP*-mother! *(EXITS)*

*(LOUISE sits down at her computer desk, flicks the pages of the magazine and stops at a page.)*

LOUISE: The review is good; the photograph is terrible. *She studies it with a contented smile on her face)* But I am Number One in the charts.

*(ENTER VERONICA)*

VERONICA: Of course you're number one. I don't know why you keep bothering to check those magazines; it's becoming an obsession with you. The fact is that the money keeps rolling in, Simon's happy and as his Chief Executive, I'm happy writing out the cheques. So why don't you just sit back and enjoy it?

LOUISE: It's easy for you.

VERONICA: As Simon's sister, I hold down a very important job in his organisation.

LOUISE: A job made for you! I have to think about my fans.

VERONICA: Of course you do darling. However, marrying my brother helped your career tremendously.

LOUISE: It may have helped, but I had to have talent to get there.

VERONICA: *(Pause)* Was that Serena singing earlier? She has a lovely voice.

LOUISE: Still chasing her foolish dreams and neglecting her business studies. Simon is adamant that she must study.

VERONICA: I know he wants her to go into the business, but he wasn't so worried at first though was he?

LOUISE: What do you mean?

VERONICA: Well, wasn't studying your idea. He was quite happy for her to find her own way in life; even if it was singing, but you got him to change his mind.

LOUISE: She has no talent! Not like me! Businesses are passed down through the generations. Look at the Murdochs!!!

VERONICA: Yes, quite!

LOUISE: Your divorce hasn't affected your daughters Della and Kay.

VERONICA: No, thank goodness. Moving in here for the time being has helped them a lot, especially being so close to Serena; they get on so well together.

LOUISE: Yes, it's good to have us all here and saves you the worry of finding a place to stay. Excuse me a moment, *(Calling off stage, loud voice)* Potts, is that the TV reporter?

*(ENTER SARAH BAXTER, and TRUDI. SARAH is carrying a notepad/pen. TRUDI has earphones draped around her neck and carries a walkie-talkie.)*

LOUISE: *(To SARAH)* Hello, I'm Louise le Chante.

SARAH: Nice to meet you at last. I am Sarah Baxter from Global Television and *(indicating TRUDI)* this is the programme producer, Trudi.

LOUISE: This my Sister-in Law, Veronica, Simon's sister and Chief Executive of Starman Worldwide Enterprises.

SARAH: Hello. *(They shake hands).*

TRUDI:       *(Shaking hands)* Pleased to meet you both.

LOUISE:       I'm just going to freshen up. *(EXITS)*

VERONICA:     Baxter . . . Baxter? *(To SARAH)* Are you related to . . .

SARAH:        Yes, but it was a long time ago and I would rather Ms Le Chante wasn't made aware of it please.

VERONICA:     Yes, it was; very sad affair. Rest assured, I'll say nothing. *(To TRUDI)* So, you're the producer. I expect you have got lots to organise?

TRUDI:        Yes, interviews are never simple; even though they may appear to be when you see them on the television. MS Le Chante was very particular about what questions should be asked. Setting up all the equipment is going to be tricky, especially outside our own studios.

VERONICA:     Well you can't blame her for being careful.

TRUDI:        No, it's only natural, but we are supposed to be objective and it's very unusual to have preconditions laid out beforehand. Unfortunately, it was the only way we could get an exclusive interview, plus the fact that Ms Le Chante has a lot of influence and has been known to ruin a few careers. I'd like to keep mine if I can.

VERONICA:     *(Laughing)* Oh, she's not such an ogre as you think. She's been very kind to my two girls even though they're full of energy and always on the go. It might be good for them to go away and have a break sometime; give Louise a rest.

SARAH:        Yes, girls can be a bit of a handle full at times. I have six and a boy, but they seem to get on okay. Being out in the countryside helps and keeps them occupied.

VERONICA:     In the countryside? Now there's a thing.

SARAH:        If your two need a break, perhaps they'd like a weekend at my place. I'm sure they'd love it.

TRUDI:        They sure would. I've stayed there several times. Birds singing, glorious forest, lovely walks.

VERONICA:     Sounds excellent! I'll tell them. Thank you. *(PAUSE)*  
Well, I must get going. All the best for the interview.  
*(To TRUDI)* I'm sure Potts will show you everything you need for your crew. *(EXITS)*

TRUDI: (To SARAH) I still don't know why you agreed to do this interview. The way that Louise treated your late husband, Johnny, was atrocious.

SARAH: As you said, we are supposed to be objective. Well, with interviews at least. I'm just trying to be professional about it and do my job.

(ENTER LOUISE)

LOUISE: (Looking at them both in turn then looks down at her dress) I'm not sure about this dress. (Looking up to SARAH) What do you think?

SARAH: I . . .

TRUDI: Looks fi . . .

LOUISE: (Ignores them) Simon will go berserk if I look bad on screen.

TRUDI: It isn't going to clash with anything; the lighting will be fine.

SARAH: It'll be fine Ms Le Chante.

LOUISE: None of you have any taste - I'm changing it. (EXITS)

TRUDI: Oops! Somebody's got the hump already.

SARAH: She's always got the hump!

(ENTER POTTS)

POTTS: Everything alright? Anything I can do for you?

TRUDI: Yes, you could show me and my crew where the electric sockets are please.

POTTS: Certainly. Follow me. (Goes to leave)

SARAH: Have you worked for her long?

POTTS: For Mr Starman, many, many years. Louise Le Chante has only been with him for a short while.

TRUDI: Enjoy working for them?

POTTS: Mr Starman? Yes, thoroughly enjoy my work.

TRUDI: But?

POTTS: Well, (*Looking around, lowering voice*) Louise Le Chante is a real tyrant, a selfish diva whose talent has gone completely to her head. And as for the way she treats Serena, well . . .

SARAH: Does she treat her badly then? Why's that?

POTTS: I really don't know; jealousy perhaps. After all, young Serena does have a beautiful voice and Louise absolutely hates any sort of competition, even from her own daughter.

TRUDI: Causes a bit of friction then?

POTTS: Yes, but luckily, now that Della and Kay are staying here, Serena has some friends to take her mind off it all.

SARAH: Veronica seems nice.

POTTS: Their mum? Veronica? Yes, she is, but has the wool pulled over her eyes by Louise, especially when it comes to Serena. She tends to side with Louise a bit, but deep down really likes Serena.

LOUISE: (*Off Stage*) You stupid man! I nearly tripped on that cable.

POTTS: We'd better go.

(*EXIT TRUDI AND POTTS. ENTER LOUISE*)

LOUISE: I can't find anything better to wear! High definition! I hate HD television!

SARAH: It'll be fine (*PAUSE*) I hear you have a daughter, Serena and that she loves singing.

LOUISE: I'm her stepmother. Her singing is very limited. Simon totally spoils her and neglects me.

SARAH: Oh! I am sure that is not true Ms Le Chante.

LOUISE: I am the star. I need more attention. Simon should cancel all those trips abroad.

SARAH: I am sure he'll be home as soon as his commitments allow.

LOUISE: Enough of this small talk. (*Shouting off stage*) Are the crew ready to go yet?

TRUDI: *(Off stage)* Not just yet, Mrs Le Chante.

LOUISE: Oh, for goodness sake!

SARAH: I'll go and chase them up a bit. *(EXITS)*

*(LOUISE picks up the magazine and sits down on the sofa. ENTER DELLA and KAY)*

DELLA: Have you seen Serena?

LOUISE: She's in her bedroom; singing instead of studying.

KAY: Well, that wouldn't surprise me. She loves her singing and is very good at it.

LOUISE: I'll be the judge of that! What makes you an authority?

KAY: Oh, I was just saying, that's all. Hey, is that you on that magazine you're reading

LOUISE: It's a complete fiasco! Simon will sue them.

*(ENTER SERENA)*

SERENA: Louise, have you spoken to Daddy lately? It's going to be ages before he comes back. The last time was last week when he was in Japan.

LOUISE: We spoke yesterday.

SERENA: Why didn't you tell me? I miss him and could have had a word with him.

LOUISE: He's too busy to spare the time. Get back to your studies.

DELLA: No peace for the wicked!

KAY: *(Staring pointedly at LOUISE)* Or Serena.

*(LOUISE sees KAY staring at her)*

LOUISE: And what do you mean by that young lady?

DELLA: Oh, she's just making fun, that's all; doesn't mean anything by it.

LOUISE: Just remember who gave you a home! Serena, back to your studying!

SERENA: I'm fed up with it all. I don't want to end up in some fusty boring office, even if it is for Daddy.

LOUISE: I would remind you that I started out as computer programmer in an office; good salary and security. Then I started singing and became the fantastic star that I am today.

SERENA: *(Gets up)* Yes and no doubt got there by trampling over everyone else on the way.

LOUISE: Serena! How dare you! Go to your room immediately.

SERENA: Yes mother! Oh, and just for your information, I have been recording songs on my computer and uploading them on to YouTube. If you can be a star, so can I!

LOUISE: Uploading songs onto YouTube?

KAY: It's very popular with our generation; we all use it.

DELLA: Yes, we don't half have some fun don't we Kay. Mind you, we're more into uploading funny video clips, especially animals.

LOUISE: YouTube, it's all a big joke; it will never last.

SERENA: Well you will see stepmother dear. I am very determined and will make a huge success of it.

LOUISE: *(Scoffs)* Remember, your studies come first.

SERENA: *(Sarcastically)* Good night mother *(Pause)* Stepmother *(Pause)* Super star! *(EXITS)*

TRUDI: *(Off stage)* We're ready now Ms Le Chante.

LOUISE: Good! About time! *(EXITS)*

*(DELLA and KAY pick up the magazine, point to the pictures, burst out laughing)*

DELLA: It's alright us laughing but I wish I had her money!

KAY: Money isn't everything!

DELLA: But it does help.

KAY: Well, what would you do with lots of dosh.

DELLA: Spend, spend, spend . . . .

KAY: OK. But on what?

DELLA: First of all I would buy a big red sports car.

KAY: You can't drive. You are not old enough!

DELLA: No, but I can dream. I would settle down with a rich, handsome husband, with 2, no maybe 4 kids, a large house and . . . servants.

KAY: People don't have servants, now-a-days.

DELLA: Well, I would make it trendy to have servants.

KAY: *(looking at watch)* Never mind all your day dreams. I thought we were going shopping?

DELLA: Let's go to Oxford Street.

KAY: Yes and that lovely little dress boutique just off Regent Street; they've got a marvellous little black dress that I have got my eye on.

*(DELLA and KAY 'high Five')*

It's a good job that mother gave us both credit cards for our birthdays. You must be near your credit limit?

DELLA: Not quite. Come on, let's go

*(Both EXIT)*

**BLACKOUT**

**ACT I SCENE 3. (Full Stage)**

SAME ROOM A FEW HOURS LATER.

*(Enter LOUISE, in her dressing gown, she sits at the computer.)*

**LOUISE:** I'm totally paranoid and obsessed with my star ratings. Keep checking and checking again. So insecure.

*(She logs on to the computer and waits.)*

**Why am I like this? Look what I've achieved. Is it because I'm afraid of losing my darling Simon?**

*(She waits for the computer to log on to the rating page)*

**Right, let's check the rating status.**

*(She drums her fingers on the desk as she impatiently waits for them to appear on the screen).*

**What?! Who the hell is Narese? Where has she come from? I've never heard of her. (Shouting) Potts?! (Louder) Potts!**

*(ENTER POTTS followed by TRUDI)*

**POTTS:** *(Slightly flustered)* Yes, Mrs Starman?

**LOUISE:** Ms Le Chante! You call me Ms Le Chante. *(Pointing to TRUDI)* What on earth is she still doing here?

**TRUDI:** Oh. . . . errr . . . just finished clearing away the gear. Must say the interview went well.

**LOUISE:** Never mind the interview! There's something wrong with my computer. All the star ratings have gone to pot.

**TRUDI:** Here let me have a look for you. *(checks the computer)* No, no, everything seems okay here.

**LOUISE:** *(To TRUDI)* What do you know?! You say you're all finished? Good! Off you go then.

**TRUDI:** Oh! Errr yes. Thank you for the interview.

*(EXIT TRUDI)*

LOUISE: *(Shouting after her)* And don't forget the cheque! *PAUSE*  
Who's this Nareese? She has had a million downloads in less than twenty four hours.

POTTS: Yes, I've heard about her. Apparently her song is going viral; she will be a global sensation.

LOUISE: Global sensation? But who is she?

POTTS: I don't know. A bit of a mystery it seems, but then, that's not unusual when things like this happen on YouTube.

LOUISE: YouTube, that amateur rubbish again! I wonder who she is? If she's signed up with a record company, Veronica will know.

POTTS: I doubt it Ms Le Chante . . .

LOUISE: *(Gesturing with her hand)* Oh, You're useless! You're supposed to know all these things. Get out! Get out!

POTTS: Yes, yes Ms Le Chante *(EXITS)*

LOUISE: *(Shouting loudly and angrily)* Serena?! Serena?! Get yourself in here!

*(ENTER SERENA, followed by DELLA and KAY carrying several shopping bags)*

It's unbelievable! My top rating is being challenged. It must be a mistake. The computer's wrong.

SERENA: Are you sure you've logged on to the right page?

LOUISE: Of course I have, I was a programmer, you stupid girl.

SERENA: *(Looking away from Louise)* I've never heard of a singer called Nareese.

*(DELLA and KAY look at each other and smile knowingly, put down their shopping bags)*

LOUISE: No, you wouldn't have clue anyway; what would you know about the pop world?

DELLA: *(Looking at the screen)* She's right you know.

KAY: *(Joining DELLA at the screen)* Ooh yes, the ratings clearly show Nareese is Number 2 in the charts.

*(DELLA AND KAY smile at each other again and giggle. ENTER VERONICA)*

VERONICA: What's all the hullabaloo about?

DELLA: Aunty Louise isn't happy about her ratings.

SERENA: Is she ever?

VERONICA: Now, now Serena. Louise, you shouldn't worry so much. You know the music business is like that: up and down.

LOUISE: *(To VERONICA)* Hello? Your brother's empire totally relies on me and the money I bring in.

VERONICA: Now that isn't strictly true Louise. It was already thriving before you arrived and one could say that all you've done is just enhance it a little.

KAY: *(Looking at DELLA and giggling)* Oops! *(Della giggles back)*

LOUISE: Enhance it a little? *(Scoffs!)* Get out, the lot of you!

VERONICA: It wouldn't surprise me if Simon is seeking her out right now and hoping to sign her up - whoever she is.

LOUISE: *(Starting to be tearful)* Just go!

VERONICA: Come on girls. I think it's time to leave Aunty Louise alone.

*(DELLA and KAY, pick up their bags and EXIT with VERONICA. SERENA stares at LOUISE feeling a little sorry for her)*

SERENA: Are you okay? *(Silence)* Louise, are you OK? You're just staring into space.

LOUISE: *(Calmly)* Yes, dear and it's 'Mother'. Thank you for your concern. *(Dries her eyes)* How are your studies?

SERENA: I'm coping, pacing myself carefully. The exams are in two weeks.

LOUISE: How is your singing on YouTube coming along?

SERENA: *(Innocently)* Oh, it's just a bit of fun.

LOUISE: As long as that is all it is, dear.

SERENA: Are you sure you're OK?

LOUISE: Yes, stop fussing. Go back to bed.

SERENA: Night - mother (EXITS).

LOUISE: Narese? (*Scribbles with a pencil*) Surely not? Anagram of Serena? Can't be. Number 2 in the charts? Why the . . . . (*Stands, PAUSE, thinks hard*) Right! 'Just a bit of fun' is it? I'll soon put a stop to your little game! (EXITS)

BLACKOUT

**ACT I SCENE 4. (Side Podium Stage Left)**

THE LONDON OFFICE OF STARMAN PRODUCTION INC.  
THERE IS A DESK, CHAIR, COMPUTER AND MOBILE ON THE DESK. LARGE  
SIGN ON THE FRONT OF THE DESK STATES 'STARMAN WORLDWIDE  
PRODUCTIONS INC. OFFICES IN LONDON, LOS ANGELES AND SYDNEY'.

*(Spotlight comes on to show SERENA, wearing warm outdoor clothing, sitting at the desk. ENTER LOUISE, also in warm outdoor clothing. As she comes in, she stares angrily at SERENA.)*

LOUISE: What do you think you are doing?

SERENA: Waiting for you and just passing time away on your computer.

LOUISE: Precisely. MY computer! I've told you time and time again not to touch it. Heaven knows what would happen to the business, if you erased any of the files.

SERENA: But aren't they all stored on daddy's main computer server in Los Angeles?

LOUISE: That shows how much you know about the music business! As the star of your father's empire, don't you think that it is quite logical for me to have some of the business data on my computer?

SERENA: Errrrr - Yes, if you say so.

LOUISE: I do say so.

SERENA: Why exactly are you taking me out? It's bitterly cold.

LOUISE: I had used one of the chauffeur driven cars last night and I had left my own car here at the office. I needed to pick it up and thought I'd take you out at the same time. The cold air and open space will do your voice some good.

SERENA: I can sing loud enough out in the garden at home. I'm sure that our stockbroker neighbours won't object.

LOUISE: *(Calming down)* Oh, my darling, best not to take a risk upsetting them old fuddy duddies. Anyhow, it is not just the cold air and open space; I am taking you somewhere special, somewhere that means a lot to me. After spending a bit of time in the open air, I'll take you to a studio that I know of nearby and you can have a go with some real professional equipment.

**SERENA:** Wow! Really! Absolutely brilliant! *(Gives LOUISE a hug)*  
Hope you've got something warm to take with us. *(PAUSE)*  
Louise?

**LOUISE:** Mother! Yes?

**SERENA:** I'm pleased that you are taking an interest in my  
singing career at last.

**LOUISE:** I have come to realise that with your talent and obvious  
dedication, it is about time I recognised it and started  
supporting you. Right! Let's go. I have filled a flask  
with hot drinking chocolate that we can share.  
*(Jokingly)* You do like chocolate, don't you?

**SERENA:** My favourite! You think of everything, mother dear.

*(SERENA gets up, EXITS. LOUISE follows, looks at  
audience)*

**LOUISE:** *(Smirking, holding up flask and tapping it with her  
finger)* Yes. I guess I do.

**BLACKOUT**

**ACT I SCENE 5. (Front Of Stage)**

THE FOREST. THERE IS A SMALL WOODEN BENCH STAGE L.

*(Enter LOUISE and SERENA)*

SERENA: I can't go on much further, mother. I must stop for a rest. It's so cold.

LOUISE: OK. Let's rest on this bench for a while. I've never known anyone whinge so much as you do!

SERENA: *(Shivering)* But I'm freezing and my feet ache terribly.

*(LOUISE and SERENA sit on the bench and cuddle up to get warm)*

Why have we walked so far into the forest? It's been ages since we parked the car. The air is so cold.

LOUISE: Oh, come, come, it's not as bad as you make out. I remember this place very well. I've very fond memories of it.

SERENA: Why?

LOUISE: I used to come here a lot when I started singing. This place is very special.

SERENA: How sweet. You're quite a romantic at heart, mother dear.

LOUISE: Yes, I suppose I am.

SERENA: I know what. Why don't we sing a song together?

LOUISE: Do you really think so, Serena?

SERENA: Why not? It'll remind you of the old times, here.

LOUISE: Yes, why not, it will bond us closer together.

*(SONG . . . .)*

You know; you have got the makings of a great voice, Serena. It's a pity you cannot practice more, but you have your exams to think of, naturally. I think we deserve that chocolate now *(opens flask, pours some for SERENA)*

SERENA: Ooh yes, I am so looking forward to a cup of hot chocolate.

*(LOUISE hands SERENA the cup, she drinks)*

LOUISE: I didn't bring a spare cup, but I can have mine when you've finished yours.

SERENA: Yummy, this is really nice! It's certainly warming me up  
*(Looks around)* I'm glad we came prepared; you could freeze to death out here. *(Hands cup back to LOUISE)*

LOUISE: Are you feeling okay Serena?

SERENA: *(Slurring words)* Err . . . no, I feel a bit drowsy.  
*(PAUSE, looks at LOUISE)* Not drinking mother? It's . . . it's really tasty.

LOUISE: That's probably because of the extra ingredient.

SERENA: Extra . . . extra in . . . ingredient?

LOUISE: Sleeping pills. The ones the doctor prescribes for me for when I can't sleep because of your attitude. YOU can have a nice sleep now. The problem is that by the time it wears off . . .

SERENA: Wear . . . wears of?

LOUISE: As you said, one could freeze to death out here.

*(SERENA falls asleep. LOUISE screws the cup back onto the flask, gives a wicked smile)*

Night, night *(EXITS)*

*(LIGHTS DIM then LIGHTS GO UP AGAIN)*

*(Off stage there is laughing and giggling. ENTER SUSIE and JACK)*

SUSIE: I don't know how Chloe the hermit survives in that makeshift den of hers, especially in winter.

JACK: Well, if she'd left it as just a tent, she probably wouldn't have, but now that I've added to it with stuff from the forest for insulation it's not so bad.

SUSIE: It could still do with some more improvements though.

JACK: I'll see what I can come up with; might be able to do something for her. What about the plumbing, you know, water and so on? I can't fit in a mains water pipe; couldn't even do that at home. I do have my limits.  
*(JACK laughs, SUSIE joins in)*

SUSIE: Yes, you just do it as a hobby. You haven't . . . err . . . served an apprenticeship yet; not old enough.

*(BOTH laugh again)*

JACK: One day, one day and I'll have my own business building houses while you lot sit around singing.

SUSIE: Ah, not me, I'll be helping people with my herbs, potions and healthy eating advice. You needn't worry about plumbing and pipes Jack, her den's by the stream and *(Sees SERENA, goes to her)* *(To SERENA)* Hello, hello? Are you alright? Hello?

JACK: Maybe she's just nodded off?

SUSIE: *(Inspecting SERENA)* No, no, it's obviously something more serious than that.

JACK: We need to get her somewhere warm. She'll die out here in the cold.

SUSIE: It's quite a way back to the cottage and I don't know how we are going to get her there in that state. How far is Chloe's den?

JACK: A lot further than our place. It's either the cottage or nothing.

SUSIE: Look, there's two of us. I'm sure we can manage between us, especially if we can rouse her a bit and get her on her feet.

*(They rouse SERENA to the point where she is a coherent enough to stand when supported either side. SERENA is not fully aware of where she is)*

Hold her close to you and your body heat should help her warm up.

*(ALL EXIT)*

**SLOW CURTAIN**

**ACT I SCENE 6. (Full Stage)**

THE SISTER'S COTTAGE - EARLY AFTERNOON.  
THE INTERIOR IS MODESTLY FURNISHED WITH A TABLE AND 8 CHAIRS CENTRE STAGE. ON THE TABLE IS A LAPTOP COMPUTER AND A PLATE OF SANDWICHES. THERE IS A FIREPLACE STAGE RIGHT. THE DOOR TO THE ROOM IS STAGE LEFT AND THE BEDROOM DOOR IS UPSTAGE RIGHT.

*(RUBY is clearing the table. ABBIE is sitting down using her laptop. KATIE is reading a book. LILY is out. EMILY is hurriedly finishing her sandwich. ANNA is overseeing it all.)*

**ANNA:** Come on, hurry up Emily. We've got to get back to the studio. Hope Lily gets back soon. I can't understand why she has to go jogging twice a day. I'd have thought just an early morning run was enough without doing a quick sprint at lunchtime.

**EMILY:** Nearly finished Anna.

**RUBY:** C'mon Emily, *(Taking plate from EMILY)* you won't need this anymore. *(EMILY grabs rest of sandwich, Ruby takes plate away).*

*(ENTER LILY, dressed in tracksuit.)*

**LILY:** *(Panting)* a personal best! Get quicker every time.

**ANNA:** You haven't eaten any lunch, no wonder you were fast.

**LILY:** Oh, that's okay. I'll take a sandwich with me to the studio.

**ABBIE:** *(Looking up from laptop)* Mum wouldn't like that.

**LILY:** Fortunately, she's not here to see it thanks to another television assignment.

**ANNA:** Interviewing some diva in London apparently.

**KATIE:** *(Without looking up from book)* she won't be away long then. *(RUBY takes book from KATIE and puts it on table.)*  
Hey!

**RUBY:** Longer than you think. She's going on to Europe for a few days. Katie, time to get back to work.

**ANNA:** And that includes you too Abbie, so turn off the laptop.

**EMILY:** Yes, you'll get square eyes *(Laughs)*.

ABBIE: Don't be cheeky you little squirt. Just remember that it's me that keeps all the studio equipment up to spec'. What do you know anyway?

EMILY: You don't have to talk to me like that just because I'm the youngest. I know quite a lot actually.

ABBIE: *(Mockingly)* Actually! *(closes lid of laptop)*

LILY: What sandwiches have we got left?

EMILY: Cheese and pickle, Pickle and cheese or you can have my half of this one if you like, it's cheese. *(Giggles, waves half a sandwich at her)*

Lily: Hah bloomin' hah! I'm the one who's supposed to be the comic around here - nice try. *(Grabs a sandwich)* This'll do.

ANNA: Right everyone, c'mon, let's get moving, back to the studio. We've got a song to finish and upload.

*(LILY opens door, Jumps back as SUSIE and Jack enter with SERENA. They take her to the sofa. The others look on in astonishment. KATIE bends down and looks at her.)*

LILY: What's going on? Who is she?

KATIE: She's dead!

ANNA: *(Nudging KATIE aside)* Don't be silly. Here, I'll give you a hand Susie. *(PAUSE)* She's deathly pale.

SUSIE: She must have been out there for ages; couldn't see any injuries. I reckon she's suffering with exposure.

JACK: We found her like that on the bench in the clearing.

SUSIE: It was quicker to bring her here rather than take her all the way to Chloe's.

EMILY: Is she going to die then? I've never seen anyone die before.

Abbie: For goodness sake, grow up Emily.

LILY: I know all about exposure. We've got to wrap her up and get her warm. If we can do that, I'm sure she'll be okay.

**ANNA:** I think you're right Lily *(PAUSE)* but we mustn't warm here up too quickly; it'll be a shock to her system.

**SUSIE:** I'll get a blanket *(EXITS)*.

**SERENA:** *(Shivering, gradually coming round)* Help me. Please, please help me. I am so cold.

*(LILY and ANNA help SERENA sit up)*

**RUBY:** Katie, make a hot drink for her please.

**KATIE:** What sort of. . . .

**RUBY:** Anything, just so long as it's hot.

*(KATIE EXITS, SUSIE returns with a blanket, wraps it around SERENA)*

**SERENA:** Thank you, thank you. I'm so cold.

**ANNA:** Who are you? How did you get like this?

*(KATIE returns with a drink, gives it to SERENA)*

**KATIE:** Here, this chocolate will warm you up; make you feel good.

*(SERENA shrinks back in fear)*

**SERENA:** Chocolate?

**KATIE:** It's okay, quite safe, come on have a sip.

**EMILY:** Yes, we all drink it; all the time if Ruby would let us.

*(SERENA has a few tentative sips, brightens up a little)*

**ANNA:** Well? How did you get like this?

**SERENA:** I . . . I . . . she abandoned me, out there in the middle of nowhere. That's how she did it; put sleeping pills in the hot chocolate. I . . . I nearly died *(PAUSE)* How could she? Her own step-daughter *(Sobs)*.

**ABBIE:** No wonder you didn't fancy that one at first.

**SUSIE:** You're obviously distraught, totally worn out and I suggest you get some rest.

RUBY: You're right. Maybe it would be best if she slept for a while and we had a talk later.

ANNA: *(Looks at SERENA)* what is your name?

SERENA: S . . . Serena.

ANNA: She can have my bed. *(Looks at SERENA)* Is that okay with you? *(SERENA nods in agreement)*. Right, let's get you tucked up all snug and warm then.

*(RUBY and ANNA help her to exit to bedroom. The others follow, but RUBY stops them)*

RUBY: It doesn't need all of us. The rest of you can go to the studio and get on with the work.

JACK: I'll pop over to Chloe; my first builder's contract and I'm behind with it already.

LILY: *(Laughing, teasing Jack)* Hark at him 'Contract' 'Work', who's a right Bob the Builder then? Very professional I must say. In the circumstances though, I think I'd better come too; watch the master at work.

SUSIE: I've got stuff to do in the garden.

ABBIE: Well, Emily and Katie, that just leaves us then. At least someone's prepared to go to the studio and carry on with the family tradition. *(PAUSE)* Shall we? *(Makes grandiose gesture with her hand)*

*(All EXIT)*

CURTAIN.

**ACT I SCENE 7. (Side Podium Stage Left)**

THE LONDON OFFICE - LATE EVENING THE SAME DAY.

*(LOUISE is walking up and down, deep in thought)*

**LOUISE:** I wonder if I can convince Simon that Serena has run away? Would he believe me?

*(ENTER VERONICA holding a sheaf of papers)*

**VERONICA:** Have you heard anything from Serena?

**LOUISE:** No, not a thing. She has run off just to get back at me I expect.

**VERONICA:** Well, you were rather harsh on her at times. Anyway, she is far too intelligent to do something silly like that.

**LOUISE:** Wouldn't put it past her *(PAUSE. Looks at VERONICA studying her paperwork)* You haven't come in here to do that have you?

**VERONICA:** *(Looking up)* Uh? Oh, no, just wondered about Serena.

**LOUISE:** *(SHOUTING)* Potts!

**VERONICA:** You need to be careful. The way your treat you P.A. she might run off herself one day and join Serena. I think I'd better go *(EXITS)*

*(ENTER POTTS carrying several folders)*

**LOUISE:** Where the hell have you been! As my personal Assistant, you're at my beck and call twenty four hours a day. Have you got those contracts for me to sign?

**POTTS:** Yes, Mrs Le Chante. *(Hands papers to LOUISE who signs them, hands them back)*

**LOUISE:** At least you got something right!

**POTTS:** Mrs Le Chante? Have you seen the latest star ratings? I checked the computer before I came out. *(Hesitantly)* There is a new uploaded song by . . . Err . . . I don't think I should be saying this.

**LOUISE:** *(Sharply)* Not that wretched Narese again. Surely not?

**POTTS:** I'm afraid so. She is causing quite a sensation.

LOUISE: *(Very angry)* To hell with her! I am the star! Not this newcomer.

POTTS: I read an article in the newspaper yesterday. Rumour has it the songs are coming from Johnny Baxter's old studio.

LOUISE: Johnny Baxter, that friend of Simon's? They fell out a few years ago; couldn't stand the smarmy creep.

POTTS: I've never met the man.

LOUISE: No, of course you haven't! Okay, off you go Potts.

*(EXIT POTTS)*

Baxter, Baxter? Oh my goodness! That studio is near where I left Serena!

*(Runs to office door, Shouts off stage)*

Potts! Potts?! Get one of our chauffeurs and a car. I'm off to that studio! Hurry up woman!

*(Grabs her handbag struts towards door)*

Serena! Mummy is coming for you! *(To audience)* This time I will finish it once and for all. *(LOUISE EXITS stage L)*

CURTAIN

INTERVAL

ACT IISCENE 1. (Full Stage)

THE SISTER'S COTTAGE - FOLLOWING MORNING.

*(All the sisters are finishing breakfast. LILY is doing some warm up exercises, ABBIE is on her laptop, KATIE is reading a book. The dialogue is continually interrupted by hammering off stage)*

- EMILY:** Too cold for you out there this morning Lily? *(Laughs)*
- LILY:** *(Pokes her tongue out)* No, Just waiting to see what Serena has to say when she gets up. What on earth's Jack up to out there?
- ANNA:** I don't know. He just grabbed a piece of toast and went straight out. *(To Lily)* You won't have time for a jog.
- KATIE:** I don't know why you bother. Reading is much more enjoyable and exercises the brain.
- LILY:** Oh, I'm sure this fantastically fit body of mine can miss just one day of excellence. *(Poses, laughs, they all laugh)*
- SUSIE:** Well, your body might be happy to miss a day, but the vegetable patch won't. *(Gets up to leave)* Anything in particular you need Ruby?
- RUBY:** A bit of fresh Rosemary and some greens of some sort.
- SUSIE:** Okay. *(EXITS)*
- (Jack ENTERS at the same time, starts looking for something)*
- KATIE:** *(Pulls a face)* I hate greens!
- JACK:** Eh?
- KATIE:** Hate greens. Susie is going to get some.
- JACK:** Oh.
- EMILY:** Lost something Jack? Your marbles for instance?
- JACK:** Huh, very funny. Anyone seen my screwdriver?
- ABBIE:** *(Without looking up from laptop)* They're good for you; mix them in with the gravy.

*(Everyone stops, stares at ABBIE)*

JACK: *(To ABBIE)* What?

ABBIE: *(Looking up)* Greens.

JACK: Oh! Well, has anyone seen it?

ABBIE: Yes, I have.

JACK: And?

ABBIE: Used it to upgrade the computer yesterday. It's in the studio.

EMILY: What you building then Jack?

JACK: A chair.

EMILY: *(Surprised)* A chair?

JACK: Yes.

ANNA: *(Surprised)* What? You mean 'a chair'?

JACK: Yes.

ALL: *(Mockingly)* Ooooh!

JACK: Okay, okay, you needn't be so funny. I'm quite capable. It's a present for Chloe; she hasn't got one.

ANNA: *(Ruffling JACK's Hair)* It's very sweet of you Jack. I'm sure it will be very comfortable.

*(SERENA ENTERS, wrapped in a blanket, yawns)*

RUBY: Morning. Have a seat Serena. Do you want anything to eat?

ANNA: How are you this morning?

SERENA: Feeling much better thank you. I'm starving, if you could spare something.

RUBY: Sure we can.

JACK: *(To SERENA)* Hi, I'm Jack. Remember me? I found you in the forest.

SERENA: Yes . . . yes, I do. Thank you for saving me.

JACK: Pleasure. Well, I must get on. See you later *(EXITS)*

ANNA: Well, we all know who you are, but you don't know anything about us. We are all sisters. I'm Anna, the oldest and look after this lot when mum's away on assignments. She's a TV presenter. Ruby?

RUBY: Oh! Thought you were going to introduce us formally. Yes, I'm Ruby and a sort of deputy to Anna. Su . . . .

KATIE: *(Looking up from book)* I thought you were dead yesterday, but you're not are you?

SERENA: Errrrr no; very much alive thanks to you.

RUBY: Katie, do you mind? As I was saying, Susie is Katie's twin . . .

KATIE: *(Reading book, not looking up)* That's me - Katie.

*(RUBY sighs, stares at KATIE)*

RUBY: Katie's health isn't so good, but it doesn't stop her continually interrupting. Anyway, Susie is out getting some stuff for dinner at the moment. She loves her gardening. Has a magic touch with herbs too, learned it all from Chloe the hermit who lives in the forest.

LILY: *(Stops exercising)* You have to know what you're doing out there; can easily get lost. I'm always out walking or jogging *(PAUSE)* at least when I'm not running after Emily that is. Anyway, I'm Lily.

EMILY: *(To LILY)* What do you mean 'When you're not running after me'? I enjoy the forest just as much as you do.

LILY: Yes, but you keep slipping away and you know you're not old enough to go out alone.

EMILY: Yes I am! Just because I'm the youngest, you lot always treat me like a child.

ANNA: But you are Emily and mum told us to take special care of you . . . and Katie.

EMILY: Well, I don't like being molly coddled.

KATIE: *(Looking up from book)* Nor do I . . . well, unless it's one of my days when I'm not so well.

ANNA: So how did you end up like this Serena?

SERENA: My stepmother tricked me - should have known. She's been against my singing all along. I want to be a professional singer; should have realised her change of heart was just a trick.

ABBIE: Just a trick?

SERENA: She's always hated my singing and then suddenly is all for it; treated me to a trip to the forest and supposed visit to a studio. Some treat!

ANNA: I am sure there must have been some sort of mistake?

SERENA: No, the great Louise Le Chante does not make mistakes; put her own sleeping pills in my drink.

SISTERS: (ALL) Louise Le Chante!

SERENA: (Looking up in surprise) you know her?

ABBIE: She put our father out of business when he built our studio next door. He died soon after and we all put it down to what she did to him. He was heartbroken.

KATIE: (Pointing to award) that's his award over there. She was absolutely fuming when he won it. That's when it all started and she had it in for him.

EMILY: It's a Brit award for the song he wrote.

ANNA: He gave it to somebody else to sing and Louise didn't like that, especially as it became such a hit.

EMILY: What are you going to do Serena? Will you stay and be my friend?

LILY: Don't be silly. You've already got six sisters and a brother, what do you need another friend for? (PAUSE) What are you going to do Serena?

SERENA: I don't know. There's Veronica, my aunt, but she does seem to be influenced by Louise. My cousins, Della and Kay, are fine. Maybe I'll contact them, but not yet, not yet.

ANNA: Then you can stay here for a while until you work out what's best.

RUBY: We all have chores to do and so you will be expected to muck in.

EMILY: See, you can be my friend now.

SERENA: *(Laughing)* Yes, I can be your friend. Thank you, thank you so much. I need some time to recover and work out what to do.

ANNA: We spend every week day working in the studio; upload songs to the internet.

SERENA: Really? Why, that's what I do.

KATIE: Do you? Are you any good? Can you sing as well as Lily? She's our best singer.

SERENA: Here's one of my favourites. If you know it, you can join in if you like.

*(SONG . . . .)*

*(All join in, Song ends)*

LILY: Pretty good! I can see I have some competition.

ANNA: Well, sorry Serena, but we have work to do. Make yourself at home for now. C'mon everyone, let's get going.

*(They all exit apart from SERENA. She sits at the table and starts to eat. PAUSE. There is a knock at the door. SERENA opens it and shrinks back in horror. ENTER LOUISE LE CHANTE)*

SERENA: M ... M ... Louise! Mother! Wha . . . what are you. . . .

LOUISE: *(Soothingly)* Now, now darling. Do not fret. I'm so glad you are safe. I've come to apologise, I'm really sorry and I love you so much.

SERENA: But you. . . .

LOUISE: I don't know what on earth came over me. It must be all the stress of coping with your father's business while he's away.

SERENA: But why do such a terrible thing?

LOUISE: I know, I know, can't understand it myself even. It . . . it was after our duet, the sound of your singing, something just came over me. Can you ever forgive me?

**I will see that you get everything you need for your career** (*Moves towards SERENA with arms outstretched*)  
**Give me a hug, let me make it up to you** (*Puts her hands on SERENA's shoulders*).

**SERENA:** **No! Never! Never! I don't trust you. I'm going to tell father all about what you have done!**

**LOUISE:** **You can't do that. (LOUDLY) You can't do that!**

*(LOUISE puts her hands around SERENA's throat and tries to strangle her. SERENA resists, but eventually falls unconscious. ENTER SUSIE carrying some vegetables)*

**SUSIE:** *(Loudly)* **Hey! What are you doing?**

*(JACK ENTERS with his homemade chair. LOUISE dashes out of the room, pushing JACK over in her haste. SUSIE goes to SERENA's aid.)*

**CURTAIN**

Act II SCENE 2. (Side Podium Stage Left)

A PARK IN LONDON.

*(Enter LOUISE stage L. She walks across the stage and sits down on a wooden bench)*

LOUISE: What have I done? What a mess to get into. Still, I had to do it. Nobody but nobody is going to topple me from my pedestal at the top of the ratings - not even my own step-daughter. I am the superstar. *(Pause)* How did I stupidly think that I could have reasoned with Serena after she has persisted with her never-ending prattle of songs on the internet.

*(Enter POTTS stage L with a large shopping bag)*

POTTS: Oh! Hello, Ms Le Chante. I am surprised to see you here. I thought you had gone to Johnny Baxter's studio.

LOUISE: Never mind where I have been. What are you doing here? You have enough work in the office to keep you busy for several hours.

POTTS: I have almost finished all of that. So for a break, I just popped out to do some shopping. . . .

LOUISE: Shopping, Potts? I give you that enormous salary to work, not to enjoy yourself shopping.

POTTS: I'm entitled to have some spare time.

LOUISE: Don't answer me back Potts. Get back and do the work I gave you; to the office immediately.

*(POTTS starts to leave - then stops)*

POTTS: Oh, by the way, I overheard Della and Kay talking.

LOUISE: So what?!

POTTS: It sounded like they'd had an email from Serena.

LOUISE: Serena! It can't be . . . I mean . . . what were they saying?

POTTS: I didn't hear much. Only that, then they saw me there and changed the subject.

LOUISE: Oh, right. Well, run along now, Potts. You've plenty to do

*(POTTS exits)*

**LOUISE:** So, my attempt to rid myself of that upstart Serena has failed. I shall have to be more cunning - more cold and calculating. I must pull myself together. Now let's think. What can I do next?

*(LOUISE walks up and down, thinking)*

If I am not too careful, my beloved daughter, Serena will poison my career. *(PAUSE)* That's it, poison. Yes, that's what she's doing - poisoning my career. I'll give her a few fatal drops of her own medicine. *(EXITS)*

**CURTAIN**

**Act II SCENE 3. (Full Stage)**

THE SISTER'S COTTAGE - MID-DAY.

*(KATIE, EMILY and SERENA are sitting at the table.  
Katie is reading her book)*

**EMILY:** *(To SERENA)* I have decided to make you my special friend. You treat me different to everyone else. They always treat me like a child just because I'm the youngest.

**KATIE:** *(Looking up)* Don't act like a child then.

*(Shakes her head in despair, looks back down again).*

**SERENA:** Why, thank you Emily.

**EMILY:** After what that horrible lady did to you, I think you deserve to be a special friend.

**SERENA:** Where are the others? Lily and . . .

**KATIE:** *(Without looking up)* Lily is doing the usual . . .

**EMILY:** Running herself into the ground.

*(KATIE gives EMILY a playful prod)*

**KATIE:** *(Pointedly)* Jogging. Anna, Ruby, Abbie and Susie have already gone to the studio. I expect Lily will pop in when she finishes.

**SERENA:** She certainly loves her sport then.

**EMILY:** I wouldn't call that sport.

**SERENA:** Well, she obviously loves being fit and so she must love sport.

**KATIE:** *(Looking up)* She doesn't do anything else, just jogging; started soon after Daddy died. He used to love going for walks you see and she used to run out after him, but Mummy always called her back in. Apart from Sundays, that is and then we would all go out for walks.

**SERENA:** How lovely! I wish my Daddy had done that when I was younger.

**EMILY:** I used to sit on Daddy's shoulders.

**KATIE:** Correction, some of us used to go out for a walk. (*Looks at her book again*) Is your neck okay? It did look a bit sore.

**SERENA:** Yes, it will be okay, I'm sure.

*(KATIE closes her book)*

**KATIE:** I'm so pleased; you had us worried there for a while. (*To EMILY*) Time to get back Miss 'Grown up' Emily.

**EMILY:** (*To SERENA*) See what I mean?

*(There's a knock on the door, Emily answers. Enter Della and Kay)*

**SERENA:** Oh, wow! You made it. (*Hugs them both*)

**DELLA:** Yes, What have you been up to? Everyone is worried about you.

**KAY:** Why the big secret? Surely you'd want them to know you're safe?

**SERENA:** Yes, but I'll explain it all later (*To Emily and Katie*) Hey, these are my cousins, Della and Kay, the ones I sent the email to.

**DELLA:** So where's this studio you mentioned?

**Kay:** Can't wait to see it.

**EMILY:** We're just going back to it.

**KATIE:** You might as well come with us. (*To SERENA*) Remember what Anna said: if anyone comes to the door, check through the window first to see who it is.

**SERENA:** I will, I will. Bye.

*(EXIT KATIE, EMILY, DELLA and KAY. SERENA starts dusting, picks up the award, admires it)*

Oh, I am so glad Della and Kay are here.

*(There is a knock on the door. SERENA puts the award down, looks out of the window.)*

**SERENA:** It's an old woman . . . Oh, it must be that Chloe, the hermit. I've heard so much about her, she seems really special. It'll be so good to see her (*Opens the door*)

LOUISE: *(Off stage, disguised voice)* Hello! Hello! . . .

SERENA: You must be Chloe?

LOUISE: *(Pause)* Yes that's right dear. I'm *(Pause)* Chloe.

SERENA: Come in, come in and sit down. I have heard so much about you.

*(LOUISE ENTERS, disguised as an old woman, sits at the table)*

Jack was taking a chair to you this morning and was going to do some more work on your den. Funny that you've missed him.

LOUISE: Jack? *(Pause)* Oh yes, Jack. Must have missed him . .

SERENA: He won't mind, I'm sure. Susie's out there in the garden somewhere.

LOUISE: Susie.

SERENA: Yes, Susie, the girl who learned all about herbs and potions from you.

LOUISE: Of course ... Yes. She's so enthusiastic about such things.

SERENA: Loves her garden.

LOUISE: You have a lovely voice. I bet you sing a lot when no one is around.

SERENA: *(Laughs)* I do, I do! And not always when I'm on my own. I even upload my singing to the internet.

LOUISE: Internet? What's an internet?

SERENA: *(Laughs)* You must know about the internet. They use it all the time here.

LOUISE: I've heard of it - but hate gadgets. I prefer simple things - like herbs and so on. You must look after your voice.

SERENA: Well, I try to.

LOUISE: I've got a new potion, that even your Susie doesn't know about. Specially designed for throats

SERENA: Really? Will it help my voice?

**LOUISE:** Of course it will. I have some here. You should test it. I'll leave the recipe for *(pause)* for. . . .

**SERENA:** Susie.

**LOUISE:** Yes, that's right - Susie.

*(LOUISE takes a small bottle from her basket, removes the top, offers the bottle to SERENA)*

**There's only a little, drink it straight from the bottle. You'll know if it is working when your throat warms up.**

*(SERENA drinks from the bottle, puts it down, LOUISE takes back the bottle, puts it in her basket.)*

**SERENA:** Gosh! You're right! I can feel the warmth; it's working *(Smiles, starts to hummm)*. Wait a minute, I feel strange . . . faint. I think. . . .

**LOUISE:** *(Stops disguising her voice, removes wig etc)* You will never be the best singer in the World. That potion might help your voice, but it will do you no good from the grave.

**SERENA:** Mother! It's you! What have you done to me?! *(Falls to her knees and starts vomiting)*

**LOUISE:** *(Rushing over and putting her hand over SERENA's mouth)* I've cut short your career - your life.

*(Puts hand on Serena's throat)*

**Don't try and be sick - swallow it. Then I can have the charts all to myself.**

*(Enter LILY in a tracksuit, rushes to SERENA's aid, pulls LOUISE away)*

**LILY:** Hey! Get off! Leave her alone!

*(LOUISE rushes out of the door)*

**Serena! Serena, What's happened?**

**SERENA:** *(Coughing and sputtering)* I ... I've been poisoned!

**CURTAIN.**

Act II SCENE 4. (Full Stage)

THE SISTER'S COTTAGE - MORNING.

*(THE SISTERS are having breakfast)*

RUBY: Gosh! I can't believe what you have just told me!

LILY: Well, it's true. She's in bed resting right now.

KATIE: *(Looking up from book)* And to think, I was enjoying how peaceful it was around here; now this. *(PAUSE)* Is she alright?

ANNA: She brought it all up and so, hopefully, she will be.

SUSIE: Lucky she vomited. Obviously her mother doesn't know a thing about poisons. One of the ingredients must have been an emetic. Why did she let her in anyway?

EMILY: Because she is kind, that's why.

*(ENTER SERENA, who is still a bit poorly)*

SERENA: Morning every . . . *(Looks at LILY)*

ABBIE: *(Looking up)* Lily saved your bacon.

LILY: Got here just in time.

EMILY: Pulled that woman off of you.

SERENA: Oh! Hey, thanks for what you did for me.

LILY: I was going to go straight to the studio, but then I heard a commotion in here and thought I had better check. I'm a bit surprised that you let a stranger in.

SERENA: A lot better than yesterday. I thought she was you; seemed nice enough - at first.

SUSIE: You thought she was Chloe?

SERENA: Yes; I did look out of the window first.

ANNA: Even so, there's a big difference in age between Chloe and Louise.

SERENA: But I haven't seen Chloe before.  
*(Sound of hammering off stage)*

RUBY: Goodness me! What's he making this time, another chair?

EMILY: No, he's making something for Chloe; a tray to put her things on.

SUSIE: Ah, bless him. He so good to her.

*(Hammering stops. ENTER JACK who starts looking around)*

LILY: What is it this time?

JACK: Glue, I can't find the glue. *(To Chloe)* Nearly finished it.

EMILY: Tell you what. Instead of making a tray, why don't you make yourself a tool box? You won't lose anything then.

*(JACK stops, ponders on not having thought of something so obvious himself)*

JACK: Hey, you're right. Silly me. *(Looks at SERENA)* How are you Serena? That was a close call yesterday.

SERENA: My throat's a bit bruised, but I'm okay.

JACK: So's my bottom! She was going like a tank on full throttle when she knocked me over.

SUSIE: *(TO RUBY)* RUBY, do you still have some of that balm I gave you the other day?

RUBY: Think so.

SUSIE: That's good for bruises as well as muscle ache; rub some of that on him.

JACK: *(Embarrassed)* Errrr . . . no thanks, I'll manage, it's not that bad.

ANNA: *(To SUSIE)* Wasn't you fixing something yesterday? Gluing something?

SUSIE: Oops! Yes, sorry Jack. It's in the potting shed.

JACK: *(To SUSIE)* You was fixing something? I'm beginning to feel a bit redundant. I'm supposed to do all the fixing around here. Hmmm . . . toolbox and maybe put a padlock on it! See you later Serena *(EXITS)*

*(ENTER DELLA and KAY)*

ANNA: Hi, hope you didn't mind bedding down on the studio floor?

DELLA: No, didn't mind at all. Slept quite well actually.

KAY: Not surprising considering we spent most of the night on the computer. Those cushions were nearly as good as any mattress and the sleeping bags were quite cosy.

RUBY: Serena, I think you should report Louise to the police. She has obviously got it in for you. There must be something wrong with her.

SERENA: Who will believe me? Don't forget how famous she is and I'm just supposed to be a rebellious teenager.

KAY: No point talking to mum. Thanks to Louise' influence she'll never believe us without good evidence.

DELLA: No witnesses and she took the poison bottle away with her anyway.

SERENA: If only I can hang on until my father gets back, he might believe me. Even then, she seems to have a spell over him.

EMILY: Oooh! Spell over him? Is she a witch then?

KATIE: What do you mean by 'spell'

SERENA: Basically, she can do whatever she likes. I'm sure he'd have more time for me if it wasn't for her.

KAY: Love is blind, as they say.

EMILY: Witches do that you know; bamboozle men and put them under a magic spell.

ANNA: Yes, that's as maybe Emily. I think it will do Serena some good to get outside for a while. Susie, you needn't work in the studio, you can spend the day in the garden. Serena can go with you and then you can look after her.

ABBIE: *(TO DELLA and KAY)* Time to show you the gear, you can come with us as well.

- SERENA: I've never done any gardening before; never allowed to get my hands dirty. I'd like that.
- SUSIE: Oh, you'll get them dirty alright as well as freezing cold in this weather!
- LILY: *(In German accent)* Yes, your tiny hands will be frozen.  
*(They all giggle)*
- ABBIE: Why don't we take Serena into the studio, record her singing and upload it? That'll certainly cheer you up Serena, won't it?
- SERENA: Errr, yes, well. . . .
- ANNA: Not such a bad idea Abbie. Tell you what, go with Susie while we finish that job for Della and Kay, and then come to the studio later.
- RUBY: Not with filthy hands though. Come back here and have a clean-up first.
- SERENA: Naturally, of course I will.
- EMILY: Better make a good job of it if you're facing one of Ruby's inspections. *(Holds her arms out straight ready for a mock inspection)*
- RUBY: For goodness sake Emily, I'm not that strict. Put your arms down. *(Laughter)*
- ANNA: Right everyone, let's get moving.
- (They all pack up and EXIT, but DELLA pulls Kay back on stage)*
- DELLA: Do we have to go with them to the studio? I thought it would be a good idea to come down here, but now I'm here I'm not so sure.
- KAY: Why? Serena's here and the girls are great fun.
- DELLA: Yes, but I miss the bright lights of central London. Don't you? It's going to be Samantha Brown's party soon. I need to get a new outfit to go there.
- KAY: I like it here. We can fit all of that in when we get back.
- DELLA: Kay! *(PAUSE)* There's something I ought to tell you.
- KAY: We've never had any secrets between us, so spit it out.

DELLA: I've (PAUSE) I've . . . .

KAY: Della! Why are you hesitating? Come on, tell me.

DELLA: I've had a letter from the credit card company.

KAY: Della!

DELLA: It came last week in the post and I don't know what to do . . . .

KAY: What did it say?

DELLA: That I had (PAUSE) overdrawn.

KAY: Overdrawn! By how much?

DELLA: Not much.

KAY: How much? Mum will go ballistic when she finds out. When she gave us those cards she told us how much the limit was. I can see her taking them off us.

DELLA: (PAUSE) It's not much. Just under one hundred pounds.

KAY: You idiot!

DELLA: They want payment now.

KAY: I'm sure they do. Well, there's one thing for sure; you are going to have to tell mum.

DELLA: (PAUSE) Would you tell her for me?

KAY: Certainly not! This will teach you a lesson. Tell her next time you see her.

DELLA: If you think I should.

KAY: Yes, I do. Come on, we need to catch up with the others.

*(DELLA and KAY run off stage)*

*(PAUSE)*

*(Enter LOUISE. She is creeping around, looking into drawers etc, sees the award, picks it up, stares at it)*

**LOUISE:** Ah! As I thought! Johnny Baxter! It's your family that's causing all this trouble. Your ghost has hounded me long enough. *(holds award up in the air)* This trophy is mine . . . it has always been mine!

*(SERENA ENTERS with her filthy hands outstretched as if ready to wash. She sees LOUISE and freezes on the spot. Louise hides the award behind her back.)*

**SERENA:** Mother!

**LOUISE:** *(Creeping towards her)* Look at you, with your grubby little hands digging in the dirt! You're not a singer, never will be. You're just fit for labouring.

**SERENA:** Stop it mother! Stop it or I'll call the police.

**LOUISE:** Call the police? I'll get you before they come.

*(SERENA starts calling for help, screaming. LOUISE rushes to her, hits her with the award. Serena falls to the floor. LOUISE raises the award again as if to strike. Off stage SARAH and TRUDI are calling the girls)*

**SARAH:** *(Off Stage, shouting)* Hello? Hello? I'm home! Where are you all? Mummy's home!

**TRUDI:** *(Off stage, shouting)* Trudi's got some nick-nacks for you - first come first served!

**LOUISE:** Damn! *(Drops the award, EXITS rapidly.)*

*(ENTER SARAH and TRUDI, see SERENA on the floor)*

**SARAH:** My goodness! *(Bends down to help her)*

**TRUDI:** What on earth's going on? *(Cradles SERENA's head in her lap)* Are you alright?

**SARAH:** Are you hurt?

*(SERENA starts coming round, groans. ENTER SUSIE)*

**SUSIE:** Mum! Trudi! What a lovely surprise . . . *(Shocked)* Serena! She's been here again hasn't she! Will she never stop? I'll get the others *(EXITS)*.

**SERENA:** *(Groggily)* Who . . . who are you? Where am I?

SARAH: I'm Sarah. Do you remember me? I interviewed your mother. This is my home.

TRUDI: I'm Trudi, remember me?

SERENA: But the girls, Anna, Ruby ...

SARAH: I'm their mother, but never mind that. What has happened to you?

TRUDI: Are you in pain, any injuries?

SERENA: I don't think so *(Feels her head)* just a bump on the head and a headache.

SARAH: *(Picking up award)* Did she hit you with this?

SERENA: *(Looking at award)* I think so.

SARAH: You are pretty lucky to get away with just a bump then; it is quite heavy.

TRUDI: Here, let me help you up.

*(TRUDI helps SERENA get up and onto a chair. ENTER THE GIRLS, JACK, DELLA and KAY. General chorus of exclamation and surprise)*

SARAH: Ruby, get something cold to put on her head.

*(RUBY EXITS)*

Well, Serena, you seem to have got yourself in a right mess.

ANNA: It not her fault. It's her mother, Louise Le Chante.

KATIE: We thought she had killed Serena once.

LILY: For goodness sake Katie. *(To SARAH)* Louise abandoned Serena in the forest in the hope that she'd die of exposure.

ABBIE: Hypothermia. Luckily, Jack and Susie found her and we looked after her.

EMILY: Then she tried to poison her.

SUSIE: Didn't work though.

EMILY: She obviously hasn't got a clue about potions.

SUSIE: I could make a better poison than her.

SARAH: Susie! Don't talk like that.

TRUDI: Louise, the great diva eh? I haven't forgotten what an obnoxious woman she is!

SARAH: It took all my strength to remain professional and not lose my temper during that interview.

TRUDI: Same here!

SARAH: *(To the children)* Why have you allowed this to go on? You should have contacted someone about it.

KAY: We haven't been here long.

DELLA: Didn't realise that Louise was so obsessed with Serena.

SARAH: Anna, Ruby, surely you should have known better?

SERENA: It's not their fault: it was me. I didn't think anyone would believe me and we had no proof.

SARAH: Well, you have all been a bit foolish. Something must be done right now before it gets any worse. Where is your father, Simon?

*(TRUDI takes DELLA and KAY aside, whispers to them)*

SERENA: He was in Australia, but I am not sure where he is right now.

JACK: I could dig a hole by the gate and cover it with branches so that Louise falls in next time. Or, failing that, I could rig a trip wire and large mallet above the door in case she comes in here.

*(Everyone stops and stares at him blankly)*

Just a thought that's all. *(PAUSE)* Electric shocks . . . perhaps not.

ANNA: Aw, Jack, bless you, but I think that would be a bit extreme, don't you?

*(TRUDI steps forward)*

TRUDI: *(To SARAH)* I have an idea. We can utilise the very things Louise is obsessed with and turn them against her.

**SARAH:** What do you mean?

**TRUDI:** *(Whispers in SARAH's ear)* . . . *(Normal speech)* **And I've just had a word with Della and Kay. I'm sure I can get Veronica on side.**

**SARAH:** *(Smiling)* **Trudi, you cunning little fox! That's a fantastic idea!**

**CURTAIN.**

**ACT II SCENE 5. (Side Podium Stage Left)**

THE LONDON OFFICE.

*(VERONICA is sitting at the desk, speaking on the telephone)*

**VERONICA: Hi! Is that you, Louise. (PAUSE) Yes, it's me. Do you remember that TV station interview that you did the other day?**

*(Puts her hand over the mouthpiece)*

**Doesn't she like the sound of her own voice. (Speaking into the phone) Alright! Alright! Forget about the mess you say they made in the house**

*(Puts her head in her hands as she listens)*

**Louise! Shut up! (PAUSE) Look, they've contacted me this morning and have an interesting proposition for you; lots of coverage, maybe a pilot for your own show.**

*(PAUSE)*

**They want to introduce new bands and singers to give them an opportunity to show what they can do.**

*(PAUSE)*

**Louise! They are not a second rate channel! (getting annoyed) Look! The focus would be on you. It will pay very well. You would be the presenter.**

*(Still holding the phone in one hand, raises both hands in aggravation)*

*(Speaking into the phone)* **They're coming to see me this afternoon. Leave it to me and Potts to sort out. Bye Louise. Speak to you soon.**

*(Replaces the receiver)*

**Potts!**

*(ENTER POTTS)*

**POTTS: The TV people are here. Shall I show them in?**

**VERONICA: Yes please Potts.**

*(POTTS EXITS, RE-ENTERS with SARAH and TRUDI Mutual greetings and handshaking. POTTS turns to leave)*

VERONICA: Hello, everyone. Nice to meet you again. Potts, will you take the minutes, please

POTTS: Yes Veronica

VERONICA: Sorry, there's a shortage of chairs in the office. We could go to the boardroom?

TRUDI: No, this is fine. We have just had a long tiring car journey to get here, so to stand would be a relief.

SARAH: And it is only a preliminary meeting after all.

VERONICA: So what is this idea of yours?

TRUDI: We are piloting a new show for new bands, singers etc, but we really need a super star to front it. The network's approval really depends on that and if we get the right star they'll provide the budget to match it.

SARAH: Naturally, when we thought of super star, Louise le Chante was the first person to come to mind. She is, in fact, I'd say leagues ahead of any of the others.

*(VERONICA suppresses a laugh)*

POTTS: This sounds very interesting.

VERONICA: If the pilot is successful, will it end up being syndicated globally. Is that right Trudi?

TRUDI: Oh, absolutely.

VERONICA: Well, I would think that Louise would agree to a contract on that basis. Leave it to me to speak to her.

POTTS: If you will send all the fine details to me, I will draw up a contract for signature.

TRUDI: Fine. I'll wait to hear from you.

POTTS: Make sure they provide the usual extras, champagne in the dressing room and so on.

TRUDI: I will Potts.

*(POTTS EXIT)*

**VERONICA:** *(Smiling, to TRUDI and SARAH)* I'll brief Louise. It should be an excellent show.

**SARAH:** Thanks for your help in arranging all of this. Much appreciated.

**VERONICA:** Now you know what a Diva she is ..... Don't forget the champagne.

*(All burst out laughing)*

**CURTAIN.**

**ACT II SCENE 6. (Full Stage)**

TELEVISION STUDIO.

*(SERENA [thinly disguised], JACK and SISTERS are lining up ready to sing. TRUDI is guiding them into their set positions. SARAH and POTTS stand to one side)*

**TRUDI:** *(Guiding Jack)* **That's it Jack, stand just here on this mark in the middle next to Serena.** *(stands back to look at them)*

**SARAH:** **They look fine to me, Trudi.**

**TRUDI:** **Yes** *(taking one last look at them)* **We're ready.** *(talking into headset)* **Everyone ready for go? (PAUSE) Sound? Where are you? Are you ready? (PAUSE) Good! Standby everyone.** *(too POTTS)* **Where's Ms Le Chante? Is she always late?**

**POTTS:** **Yes, she's a super star, comes with the territory.**

**SARAH:** **Can you go and get her please? The whole studio is waiting on her.**

**POTTS:** **I'll do my best** *(EXITS)*

*(TRUDI goes over to SARAH)*

**TRUDI:** **People and their oversized egos! Veronica here?**

**SARAH:** **Yes, she's waiting in the green room.**

**TRUDI:** **Green room? But . . .**

**SARAH:** **It's okay. Don't forget, Louise insisted on her own dressing room. Remember? Champagne etc She won't see her.**

**TRUDI:** **Has Veronica spoken to . . .**

**SARAH:** **Yes, he's absolutely fuming! Ms Le Chante isn't going to like what Veronica has got to tell her.**

**TRUDI:** **Good!**

*(ENTER LOUISE and POTTS. LOUISE has a makeup bib around her neck. She throws it to the floor)*

**LOUISE:** **Why are they rushing me? Without me, the show would be nothing.**

*(POTTS goes over to SARAH)*

**TRUDI:** Are you ready Ms Le Chante?

**LOUISE:** For goodness sake! *(Posing haughtily)* Yes, I'm ready.

**TRUDI:** *(Speaking into headset)* **Standby!** *(holds up hand and does finger countdown, indicates a 'go' for LOUISE)*

**LOUISE:** We have a fabulous new band to start off the new series of Louise Le Chante's Search for Stars. I'm sure you'll be amazed at their talent and so don't forget to vote. Here they are, the sensational Shakelas!

*(Song . . .)*

*(End of song. LOUISE stands in front with back to band. SERENA removes disguise and steps forward)*

**LOUISE:** The number for you to vote for them will . . .

**SERENA:** Mother, stepmother!

*(LOUISE looks left and right in panic)*

**Louise!**

*(LOUISE turns round, gasps in shock. The girls start to giggle. VERONICA ENTERS, goes to LOUISE)*

**Surprised mother? Your reign of terror is over and right in front of the cameras!**

**EMILY:** *(Shouting)* Payback time for Daddy!

*(SARAH looks at EMILY indicates to be quiet)*

**LOUISE:** What?! It can't be! You are a curse on my career! I strangled you! *(Grabs SERENA by the shoulders)* Poisoned you, hit you over the head! Will I never, ever be rid of you?! *(Screams, growls in anger)*

*(VERONICA pulls LOUISE away)*

VERONICA: Condemned by your own mouth. So it is definitely true and Simon knows all about it. He's on a plane right now; should arrive later today.

LOUISE: Simon! (*Gasps*) He'll understand . . .

VERONICA: Oh, he certainly understands what's been happening. In the meantime, he has given me a message for you. Your marriage and career are over. You will never, ever work again. He wants your stuff out of the house by the time he gets home.

LOUISE: But, they're ly . . . .

VERONICA: (*LOUDLY*) Just go! Think yourself lucky that he hasn't got the police involved! Go! You are finished you hear me? *Finished!*

(*LOUISE starts to leave, pauses beside POTTS*)

LOUISE: Come on Potts. We'll show them. I'll go it alone!

POTTS: No!

LOUISE: No? What do you mean no? How dare you!

POTTS: I've been bullied and treated like a slave by you for far too long. I'm not coming.

LOUISE: You'll never get another job! (*EXITS*)

VERONICA: Potts is going to work for me! (*POTTS grins*) (*To BAND*) Your singing was very impressive. Maybe we can work out a contract to sign?

SARAH: A contract? What do you think girls?

(*Whoops of joy from the BAND*)

EMILY: Only if it includes my special friend Serena.

VERONICA: That's up to her. She might prefer working in an office for her father and me.

SERENA: Hardly! But I'll only be in the band if you all want me to. (*girls shout yes*) In that case, how can I refuse?

(*Everyone jumps for joy. SARAH hugs VERONICA*)

(*Song . . . .*)

FINAL CURTAIN