
TWO SISTERS

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A play for children and adults

by Ingeborg Eliassen

English translation by Katherine Stewart-Kreisman

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Published literature and staged plays in Norway

- 1979 Berre ei lita ert, children's book, Det Norske Samlaget
1981 Ka tru vest raset kjem, audio theatre for children, NRK Troms
1985 Stemora, bestemora og myrsnipa, one act, Vikateaterfestivalen
1985 Stemora, bestemora og myrsnipa, one act, Solum
1985 Englebarn og jævelunga (co-author), cabaret, Hålogaland Teater
1985 Bluesøm, monologue, Hålogaland Teater/ FINN
1987 Ildstålet (co-author), a play, BUL Nidaros
1992 Ingen ting å være redd for, a play for children, Trøndelag Teater
1995 To søstre, a play for children, Totalteatret/Hålogaland Teater
1998 Dramatisering av Katitzi, a play for children, Teater Fusentast
2000 To søstre, a play for children, Sogn og Fjordane Teater
2002 Dramatization of Den siste viking
2003 Sår, one act, version I, Propellen/Trøndelag Teater
2004 Sår, one act, version II, Propellen/Trondheim Kunstmuseum
2004 Gammel, installation/exhibition, Propellen/Trondheim Kunstmuseum
2005 Hvis æ hadde ei mor, musical drama, Propellen/Trøndelag teater
2007 Ein vakker dag, children's book, Orkana forlag
2008 Til Noreg der kjærleik ventar, documentary drama, Det Norske Teatret
2008 Hvem var Eugene Ejike Obiora?, documentary drama, Nordic Black Theatre
2009 Savnet fellesskap, a text for theatre, Sceneskrift, Margmedia
2009 Jatakk, monologue, Ådissjen, Transit Forlag
2010 To skodespel, two plays for children, Andre Akt Forlag

Two Sisters

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TWO SISTERS

A play for children and adults

by Ingeborg Eliassen

Characters:

LAVINIA, 8 years

DAVID, Lavinia's father, 40 years

LOUISA, 8 years

MOIRA, Louisa's mother, 40 years

The play is set in six different locations:

- 1. Lavinia and her father's house**
- 2. Louisa and her mother's house**
- 3. Lavinia's room**
- 4. Louisa's room**
- 5. The adults' room**
- 6. The bathroom**

I TWO PLUS TWO

LOUISA (*Alone and speaking to her father on the phone*)

Hello, Daddy. . . Mummy has a boyfriend. . . Yes, his name is David. Has she told you?. . . No, that's silly. I want her to get married to Arthur.

LAVINIA (*alone and praying*)

Mummy, I think I might be getting a new mother here on earth. Is that all right with you? She's called Moira. Do you want to know why I think so? Daddy talks to her on the phone in a soppy voice.

SCENE CHANGE to Louisa and Moira

(Moira enters with the post. She tears open a photo-envelope.)

LOUISA

The calf is coming now.

MOIRA

Hhmmm.

LOUISA

It was me who discovered it.

MOIRA

Aha. (*Looks at photograph.*)

LOUISA

I came into the barn and saw there was a big blue bag in the cow's bottom. I knew right away what it was and I ran up to Arthur, because I saw the moped was next to the kitchen stairs, so I knew he was at home. (*Gesturing to the photo*) Is that him?

MOIRA

Yes, that's David.

SCENE CHANGE to Lavinia and David. (David sits with a jigsaw puzzle.)

LAVINIA

You've done so much!

DAVID

Yes, there was just something I had to solve down here in the corner.

LAVINIA

That lady you met?

DAVID

Yes?

LAVINIA

Is she your friend?

DAVID

Yes, we've become friends.

LAVINIA

Is she your best friend?

DAVID

She could be . . . my best *grown-up* friend.

LAVINIA

A grown-up lady can't be your best *little* friend.

DAVID

No, sweetie, that's true. But she's a lovely lady, and I think you'll say that too, when you get to know her.

LAVINIA

How lovely?

DAVID

She does nice things that put me in a good mood.

LAVINIA

Has she got teeth?

SCENE CHANGE to Louisa and her mother

LOUISA

He's got dirt on his trousers.

MOIRA

A grieving man with dimensions.

LOUISA

Strange taste.

MOIRA

He needs me, dear. *(Tries to get Louisa to look at the photograph. Louisa shuts her eyes.)*

Oh! You're more interested in cows.

SCENE CHANGE to Lavinia and David

DAVID

Teeth? Of course she has teeth.

LAVINIA

Great. So you don't have to make special food for her, then?

DAVID

She has a girl who is your age. Her name's Louisa. Maybe we can do something fun one day with Louisa and her mother.

SCENE CHANGE to Moira and Louisa

MOIRA

He has a daughter who is also 8 years old. They live in the city. Her name is Lavinia.

LOUISA

Lavinia? Is that a name?

MOIRA

Yes, an uncommon name.

LOUISA

It sounds like a flower that stands in the snow.

MOIRA

You have a fantastic imagination! "A flower in the snow" Where do you find this stuff? What about "Moira", then. What is that?

LOUISA

It's very quick and hits like lightning.

MOIRA

What about "Louisa"?

LOUISA

It's way out.

MOIRA

What a fancy you have! You must remember to make it last. And "David"?

LOUISA

Nothing.

MOIRA

Don't you see anything when you think of David?

LOUISA

No, just "enough of that".

SCENE CHANGE to Lavinia and David

DAVID

Are you ready, love?

LAVINIA

I'm just waiting for you.

II THE BEACH AT LOW TIDE

MOIRA

Hello, you must be Lavinia. *(Tweaks Lavinia's cheek)* It's so nice to meet you. How big you are. This will be OK. . .Louisa.

DAVID

Hello, Louisa. I'm David, of course.

(Louisa does not answer.)

DAVID

Have you seen how calm the water is?

MOIRA

Not a ripple on the water!

DAVID

That it should be so fine today!

MOIRA

The air is so clear!

DAVID

We can see forever!

(Pause)

DAVID

A doughnut for your thoughts, sweetie.

MOIRA

I'm going to wade in. *(Removes her shoes and jumps into the water.)* Oh, no way! *(Jumps back onto dry land.)* I forgot to paint my toenails. I never go to the beach without painting my toenails.

(David laughs and Lavinia is curious.)

LAVINIA

Why not?

MOIRA

It protects against crab bites.

LAVINIA

Oh?

MOIRA

Yes. Crabs never bite nice ladies with red toenails.

LOUISA

She's crackers.

MOIRA

Red varnish on the toenails makes crabs think that toes are little baby crabs, so they don't bite them. *(Moirra goes to put on her shoes and stumbles into a heap of fish heads. David helps her up.)*

MOIRA

Now, that was stupid.

DAVID

Oh no. *(Helps her put on her shoes.)*

MOIRA

Louisa dear, go with Lavinia and find something to play with. (*Lavinia and Louisa collect fish eyes and play with them.*)

LAVINIA

If you stick your finger in like this, the eye pops out.

LOUISA

Isn't that gross?

LAVINIA

Oh no. We'll share them. (*They take the eyes out of the fish heads while they chatter and count.*)

LOUISA

One.

LAVINIA

One.

LOUISA

Two.

LAVINIA

Two. Is your dad dead?

LOUISA

Three. No, he just lives in Scotland.

LAVINIA

Three.

LOUISA

Four.

LOUISA

Five.

LAVINIA

Five. My mum is dead. I was only little when she died. She didn't want to die because she loved me very, very much. But she had to die because she had a fatal disease.

LOUISA

Six.

LAVINIA

Six.

LOUISA

Seven. I have a calf in the barn at Arthur's. *My* calf. He is named after me because I was there when he was born. He's called Lewis. Louisa. Lewis. Do you get it?

LAVINIA

Seven. We can use them for marbles. *(They put the eyes in their pockets.)*

(While the girls play, David and Moira are chatting, all loved up.)

DAVID

How well they're playing together today!

MOIRA

As if they had known each other forever.

DAVID

Louisa and Lavinia. The names have the same colour. Louisa is lovely, too.

MOIRA

Lavinia and Louisa.

DAVID

They can be best friends.

MOIRA

Sort of sisters, if we moved in together.

DAVID

Oh, love. . .it's so good to be two.

MOIRA

It's so good to find someone to share your secrets with.

DAVID

What do you say, Lavinia, if they moved in with us?

LAVINIA

That would be nice.

MOIRA

Wouldn't it be nice, Louisa?

LOUISA

Who would help Arthur in the barn, then?

MOIRA

We'll go to Yeovil on holiday, sweetheart, and then you can help Arthur at the barn. Lavinia can, too.

LOUISA

I don't want to.

MOIRA

Louisa, you know how you are; you don't want to go anywhere. But as soon as we arrive somewhere you don't want to go home.

LOUISA

I don't want to!

LAVINIA

If you come, you can play in my room. And we have another room where you can sleep.

MOIRA

Did you hear that? You can have your own room. Won't that be great?

III WELCOME

(David's house. He is tidying up the place. Lavinia is decorating a cake.)

LAVINIA

Dad - when someone has a sister, is it like a girlfriend staying overnight every day?

DAVID

Yes, that's about right.

LAVINIA

Yes.

DAVID

Do you think that will be all right?

LAVINIA

What if she gets homesick when she falls asleep?

DAVID

That won't happen. When this is Louisa's home she won't get homesick.

LAVINIA

No, then she can just shout, "Mum!" and *(snaps her fingers)* the homesickness will go.

(SCENE CHANGE to Moira and Louisa's house. Moira is combing Louisa's hair. It snags.)

LOUISA

Mum!

(SCENE CHANGE to David and Lavinia's house.)

LAVINIA

They're here now. They're here now!

(Moirira knocks on the door. Lavinia opens it.)

EVERYONE

Hiiiiiiiiiii!

(The «happiness-stress-chorus» is in motion. Each has his/her own lines and no-one is really taking in what the others are saying.)

MOIRA

My goodness! How lovely to see you, and it's so cosy here. Where shall I sit...?

DAVID

The cake is a bit flat but I think it'll taste good, anyway. Watch out, there - jigsaw puzzle!

LAVINIA

You can hang your jackets up here. *(Follows Moira and sniffs her.)*

LOUISA

Where am I going to sleep?

(All take up their lines 4 or 5 times. «Happiness-stress-chorus» stops when Louisa yells.)

LOUISA

WHERE AM I GOING TO SLEEP?

MOIRA

It's night time! You're going to bed now.

LOUISA

But it's only a cubby hole.

MOIRA

We can paint it, so it will be fine.

(They continue with their individual lines, but now the parents speak to their own children.)

MOIRA *(To Louisa.)*

It's all going to be fine, sweetheart. We'll take one day at a time. You need your beauty sleep. It's going to be fine. We'll take... *(and so on.)*

(Simultaneously.)

DAVID *(To Lavinia)*

This has been an eventful day. Lovely to have so much life and noise and activity in the house. This has been an eventful day... *(And so on.)*

LOUISA

'night!

MOIRA

Sleep well, my girl.

(David and Louisa are a little slower in tempo. He calls, «'night!» to Louisa. He follows Lavinia out. They return with duvets and pyjamas. They enter Lavinia's room and put everything in order.)

LAVINIA

Can you put this in with the dirty clothes? I've taken a clean one.

(David goes out with the dirty pyjamas and meets Moira as she comes out of the sitting room. They hug each other. Louisa comes to the door.)

LOUISA

I can't sleep.

DAVID

What time do you go to bed, Louisa?

LOUISA

At night.

MOIRA

Nonsense, Louisa. You go to bed in the evening and you sleep in the night.

(Moira follows Louisa to her bed.)

DAVID *(calling)*

'night, Louisa. *(He goes in to Lavinia.)*

MOIRA *(Tucking the duvet around Louisa and making her comfortable.)*

We take it one day at a time, sweetheart. I can see you're dog-tired. Call if you want anything. I'm right out there in the sitting room.

LOUISA

'night.

(Simultaneously, in Lavinia's room.)

LAVINIA

Daddy, were you naughty when you were a boy?

DAVID

Just a bit. But there was another boy I knew. . . he had a grandmother who was blind. He used to go for walks with her. And one day there were many mud puddles and Grandma didn't have her wellingtons on. "When we come to mud puddles," said Grandma, "you must tell me, so I can jump." "Now you have to jump," he said, and she jumped. He thought it was nice to see her jumping, so when they had gone a little further he said, "Now you have to jump," even though there was no puddle. But there

were some grown-ups who saw this and scolded the boy because he tricked his Grandma. Then the boy said, «I make my own grandmother jump as much as I want to. . .»

(Lavinia and David laugh.)

DAVID

You had the same laugh as your mother just there.

LAVINIA

Those who are blind have to feel everything with their fingers to know what it is.

DAVID

Yes, love, they must feel their way forward. Goodnight, my little one.

LAVINIA

Goodnight, Dad. Dad, do you think Moira smells good?

DAVID

Er, yes.

(David goes out. Moira is not in the sitting room. She is in the bedroom, lying on the bed in a cute negligee.)

DAVID

Ah, so that's where you are?

(He stands in the doorway and begins to unbutton his shirt.)

MOIRA

Louisa's been asleep for ages.

DAVID

Yes, we usually take our time in the evenings, just to round off the day.

LAVINIA *(As a ritual prayer.)*

'night, Mummy. Thanks for today and sleep well.

IV A NEW DAY

LOUISA (*From her bed.*)

Mummy! (*Stands up. Sees that David and Moira are sleeping. Makes a phone call.*) Hi, Daddy! ...I'm OK...No! What colour?...(*yells*) Mummy, Daddy has bought a mountain bike for me that I can have in Scotland...(*into the phone*) To put bags in?...(*yells*) with panniers!...We're going on a cycle trip and we're going to sleep in a tent! And make food on a bonfire! And fry fish that we catch!

DAVID

Is she never going to get off the phone?

MOIRA

Oh, you! She's talking to her father.

LOUISA (*Into the phone*)

Do you know what? I've got a calf, in Arthur's barn. He's called Lewis. Louisa - Lewis. Do you get it?

DAVID

Is it necessary to make phone calls so early?

MOIRA

It's actually ten past ten.

LOUISA (*On the phone.*)

Hmmm. (*Yells*) Mum! Is it OK if I go home by myself?

MOIRA

Yes, sure.

LOUISA (*into the phone.*)

Yes. Take care, Dad!

MOIRA (*Enters the sitting room, hugs Louisa.*) How lovely! And you've been wanting a new bicycle. And a mountain bike and everything! (*She fumbles around in her bags. Brings out a curtain that she tries to hang up.*)

LAVINIA

Shall I help with something?

MOIRA

We'll do it later. (*Takes a turn around the room.*)

LAVINIA

What are you looking for?

MOIRA

Pots and pans and so on, how...

(Lavinia leaves the room to search for a saucepan. Moira brings out a pouch of oatmeal from her bags. Lavinia returns with a saucepan and sees the oatmeal.)

LAVINIA

Dad likes his eggs soft boiled. I want mine hard. (*Sees Moira emptying the oatmeal in the saucepan.*) Are we going to have that for breakfast?

MOIRA

You must taste it. It's good and healthy food.

(David enters.)

LOUISA (*To David.*)

Daddy's bought me a bicycle. With tiger stripes. And panniers.

DAVID

Don't you have a bicycle, Louisa?

LOUISA

It's a mountain bike, that I'll have in Scotland.

LAVINIA *(To David.)*

That brown porridge that sticks to the roof of your mouth! Can't I be allowed to have something else, please?

(David disappears. Lavinia follows.)

LAVINIA

Daddy, are you going to eat that porridge? Are you going to eat that porridge?

(Moirra serves up the porridge. David comes in with his shoes. Lavinia follows.)

LAVINIA

Dad, can I have a new swimsuit when I go to Grandma's in Denmark?

DAVID

Well, is the one you have too small?

LOUISA

Can't I go with her?

LAVINIA

It's got a bit see-through.

MOIRA

But you don't know Lavinia's grandmother.

DAVID

Then you need a new one.

LOUISA

But I've never been to Denmark, and now she's going to get a new swimsuit and everything.

MOIRA

But she's not your grandma, you know.

DAVID

Another time we can travel to Denmark together. And we can go to Legoland.

LOUISA

Lavinia won't be with us then.

MOIRA

But you get things at your grandmother's that Lavinia doesn't get.

LOUISA

This is stupid!

DAVID

Now it's Lavinia's turn. Aren't you going to Scotland this summer? Another time it'll be you who gets the most. Each gets her turn, sweetie. Enough of this. Now, we eat.

LOUISA

Is it my fault that Dad lives in Scotland?

MOIRA

It's no-one's fault, Louisa. It's just something that *is*. You'll have to accept that.

LOUISA

You are stupid!

(She goes to her room. Lavinia goes to hers.)

PAUSE

DAVID

A doughnut for your thoughts, love.

MOIRA

Yes, please. *(She gets a doughnut.)* You feel that what I'm thinking of is trivial, but I'm thinking of something complex.

DAVID

Like a tornado has blown the roof off?

MOIRA

Much worse. I'm thinking about us.

DAVID

Yes, that is a complex thing. Shall we quit while the going is still good?

MOIRA

No, are you crazy? We can't turn back now. What would it be like, cycling through a life with no steep hills? We could never free-wheel

downhill. Sweetheart, we cannot run before we can walk. It will be tough to get to the top of those hills - but it's supposed to be - if it wasn't, we'd just pedal along without enjoying the view.

(Moira puts on loud music. They dance. Louisa and Lavinia enter and watch them.)

LOUISA

He's stupid.

LAVINIA

Not terribly. She makes horrid food.

LOUISA

Not terribly. Tag...you're "IT".

(Moira and David dance. The girls play «Tag». The jigsaw puzzle falls onto the floor.)

DAVID

It took a year to put that together!

MOIRA

You must be a bit more careful, Louisa!

DAVID

Tell me, are you 8 or 3?

LOUISA

Are you 80 or 300?

MOIRA

Louisa!

LOUISA

I only said, "Are you 80 or 300?"

DAVID

Louisa. In this house we show consideration for each other and don't tear around like that. We look where we're going.

LOUISA

You can't tell me what to do. You're not my dad!

(Louisa leaves. Moira goes after her.)

DAVID

I don't know what's going on, Lavinia, but we must be patient. It seems she can't admit that she's done anything wrong.

(Moira and Louisa return.)

MOIRA

Why are you so strict with Louisa? Why don't you say something to Lavinia?

DAVID

Who was it who broke up the jigsaw puzzle?

(Louisa runs out of the room.)

MOIRA

They both did it...

DAVID

Lavinia didn't touch the puzzle.

MOIRA

And another thing, that spare room for Louisa... it's only a cot. It's just a cupboard with a bed in it.

DAVID

Then she can have ours.

MOIRA

Honestly, do you think there'd be space for us in that cupboard?

LOUISA *(Comes in with her coat and shoes on.)*

We're going home now, Mum.

MOIRA

This is our home now, Louisa.

LAVINIA (*Interrupting.*)

Louisa can have my room and I can have the spare room. Louisa can have my room for a year. And I can have the spare room for a year. So, that's fair. Each will have a turn.

(She rushes out of the room, gets her duvet and jumps into Louisa's bed, where she digs herself in.)

V DON'T GET TOO CLOSE.

(The first part of this scene is silent. David and Lavinia have a teeth cleaning ritual. Moira enters the bathroom and pushes herself forward in such a way that she disturbs it. Lavinia throws Moira's toiletry bag onto the floor.)

Moira leaves the bathroom and brings out dirty clothes. Lavinia sits on a chair and plays with her small plastic cow. David leaves the bathroom and shoves Louisa away from the chair. He reads a newspaper.

Louisa plays with the cow on the newspaper, on the chair arm, and lets the cow «lick» his ear. David squirms away. Lavinia gets out some felt tipped pens and drawing paper. David takes the cow away from Louisa.)

DAVID

Mooooooooo!

(Moira has found a pair of paint-splashed trousers in with the dirty clothes.)

MOIRA

What is this? Torn as well! And paint! That's one of the worst things to get out.

LAVINIA

You are so cross.

MOIRA

I am not cross, dear. But you must understand that this should have been soaked first. Now I don't know if it's going to come out.

LAVINIA

You said you weren't cross.

MOIRA

And I'm not cross.

LAVINIA

Yes, you're raving.

MOIRA

Yes, but I'm just saying that you must let me know. You mustn't hide it underneath the dirty clothes when it's more difficult to remove the paint splashes.

LAVINIA

Now you've gone red in the face.

MOIRA *(Yelling.)*

I am not cross with you, Lavinia. I am angry with the splashes. Oh, sorry, sweetheart. Sorry. *(Gives Lavinia a hug.)*

(Pause. Everyone looks at everyone else.)

MOIRA

David, what do you say...shall we hang up these curtains?

DAVID

Yes, I think that's exactly what we should do.

(David and Moira get the curtains and a stepladder. David notices Moira's stomach and strokes it discreetly while they continue their lines several times.)

MOIRA

Bought it in the sale. Looks good. I love pink, green and yellow. Bought it in the sale...*(and so on.)*

DAVID

Great, great...*(and so on.)*

LOUISA *(to Lavinia)*

Who said you could use my felt tip pen?

LAVINIA

Yours?

LOUISA

Yes as a matter of fact!

LAVINIA

How was I supposed to know that it was yours?

LOUISA

Hah! I got those pens for my birthday, and you knew that very well.

LAVINIA

Why leave your stuff out if it's not supposed to be used?

LOUISA

Jesus! I don't hide them in my room, like you do! You're so frightened for your pens that you won't use them!

LAVINIA

And you! Who said you could use my hair grips?

LOUISA

I asked.

LAVINIA

I didn't hear you.

DAVID *(from the top of the ladder.)*

You should write your name on your things, love.

LOUISA

You didn't hear! You sat right next to me when I took it.

LAVINIA

I didn't say, "Yes, that's great Louisa, just use my hair grips until they are worn out!", at any rate.

LOUISA

Oh my God, you are so stingy! They won't get worn out if I only use them sometimes.

DAVID

Louisa, when your pens are left around other people think it's all right to use them.

(David stretches out over the ladder, loses his footing and is left hanging by his arms from the curtain rail.)

MOIRA *(yelling)*

David! David!!

(Louisa laughs.)

LAVINIA

Dad!

(David falls down. Sits up.)

IV NAKED ON THE SOFA

(Moirra enters with Lavinia's pyjamas. Hangs them over a chair. Sits down in a yoga position. David enters. He's wearing a neck brace.)

MOIRA

Yoga. Breathing exercises.

(Louisa enters. Lavinia enters.)

DAVID *(To Lavinia.)*

Yoga. Breathing exercises.

MOIRA

Lavinia, your pyjamas are finished now.

LAVINIA

They're great! Thanks.

(David snuggles up to Moira.)

LOUISA

Mum, aren't we going to eat soon?

(Moirra and Louisa leave. Moirra returns with a bag of oatmeal in her mouth, and her hands full of pots and spoons. Louisa follows with dishes. Moirra stirs the porridge and jokes with Louisa, who sits down with her dish.)

Moirra serves oatmeal porridge to Lavinia, Louisa and David. Lavinia sneaks away and empties her porridge into the bag of oatmeal. Moirra discovers this. Lavinia freezes.

Moira quietly ladles some food for herself, casts a glance at Lavinia, takes out a chair and sits with her back to the others and eats. Louisa copies Moira. Lavinia dares not look at David.

David empties his porridge back into the saucepan. They laugh. Lavinia tries to ladle her porridge from the bag and into the saucepan. Meanwhile they chatter.)

LAVINIA

Daddy? "Maternal love", who has that?

DAVID

What do you mean, Lavinia?

LAVINIA

If it's a cow that has a calf. Is it the cow or the calf that has the love?

DAVID

Ah, yes. It's the mother cow that has a special love for her young one, and she gives him food and takes the best care of him that she can.

LAVINIA

It's best when the mother doesn't die. Orphaned kids can get new parents, but I'm not sure if that is maternal love. You, Daddy, are not really Louisa's daddy, but she doesn't really want you to be, either.

(David hugs Lavinia. They do not hear the following conversation between Moira and Louisa.)

LOUISA

David is stupid.

MOIRA

I'm stupid sometimes, too, dear.

LOUISA

He's always sticking up for Lavinia.

MOIRA

Isn't there someone you stick up for?

LOUISA

No.

MOIRA

Is that true?

LOUISA

You ask a lot.

MOIRA

I think you know it, but I shall say it anyway: you are my little treasure that I love and am very proud of.

LOUISA

Why are we living with David, then?

MOIRA

Because I love him, too.

LOUISA

It doesn't look like it.

MOIRA

Nonsense.

LAVINIA

But if someone calls and says, «Can I talk to your mother?», I just say, «Moir, it's for you.»

LOUISA

You don't look as if you love him.

MOIRA

Nonsense.

(David goes over to Moira.)

DAVID

Moir, I thought that Lavinia could have a birthday party next Saturday?

MOIRA

I think that's absolutely ridiculous. A birthday is not a «day» any longer! First we celebrated the day this summer in Yeovil with chocolate and Pictionary, and then there was the day in Denmark, as well. Isn't that enough? Those who are born in the middle of the summer holiday are born in the middle of the summer holiday.

(Louisa sneaks out with the paint pot and closes the door on the adults.)

LOUISA *(to Lavinia)*

Oh, don't worry about them.

MOIRA *(holding forth in good voice.)*

You have to get used to it. But it's OK if you want to organise an «after birthday day». Can't you just call it something else? Call it a harvest festival! No. . .call it a birthday. I won't interfere with it. I can make another chocolate cake. Next Saturday? Whom will she invite? The girls in her class?

DAVID *(tries to answer, but can get in only the following words:)*

«Yes. . .No. . .Listen. . .But. . .You. . .

(Simultaneously, the girls.)

LOUISA

Shall we paint, Lavinia?

LAVINIA

Are we allowed to?

LOUISA

Of course. I can, if I don't spill anything.

(They paint a chair.)

LOUISA

My calf's got big, now.

LAVINIA

He's become a cow.

LOUISA

He's not really mine, but he's called Lewis. Cows are slaughtered in the end. And eaten. That's really horrid. But people are not so horrid. If only they would write on the packet, «This steak comes from Lewis. He was a nice cow and was 10 years old.» But the packet only says «0.750 grammes» and the price. But I don't think the meat from Lewis will come to the shops here.

LAVINIA

I was a baby when my mother died.

LOUISA

Were you at the funeral?

LAVINIA

I don't know.

LOUISA

Of course. It's very sad for those who die when their kids don't come to the funeral. They don't know when they're dead. But maybe they do know. Now she's in the cemetery.

LAVINIA

No. She's somewhere. Maybe it's called Narnia. Maybe it's called Paradise. Maybe it's not called anything. But in any case she's not in the cemetery. Right - now it's better than the others. *(The newly-painted chair.)* Moira is having a baby.

LOUISA

She's fat. Gross!!

LAVINIA

Gross!!

LOUISA

I don't want to be a baby-sitter.

LAVINIA

No, we don't want to do that.

(Moira and David's quarrel becomes louder. The girls put away the paint brushes and paint pots. David comes storming out to the girls.)

LAVINIA

Daddy, don't. . .

(David throws himself into the chair with his newspaper.)

LAVINIA

Oh no, Daddy!

(Louisa laughs. David sees what has happened.)

DAVID

Damned kids. What sort of pigsty is this?

LOUISA

It's paint.

DAVID

I can see it's paint!

LOUISA

Why did you sit on the chair when you could see it was painted?

DAVID

Now I can see it's painted! Stop whining!

LOUISA

You've spoiled the whole chair.

DAVID

Watch yourself! It's you who have spoiled the chair!

LOUISA

I got permission from Mum if I didn't spill any on the floor. . .and we haven't done!

LAVINIA

Dad! We got permission from Moira!

LOUISA

I just wanted to do things properly.

DAVID

Lavinia, sweetie, I didn't know you'd been given permission. I didn't see it in time. I'm sorry.

LOUISA

Did you know that Mummy has found a new boyfriend?

DAVID

What did you say?

LOUISA

He stayed here when you were at the hospital.

DAVID

Who?

LOUISA

Arthur.

DAVID

Arthur?

LOUISA

Mmm.

DAVID

Louisa, do you know what you're saying?

LOUISA

I saw it. . .they were sweethearts. You and Mum aren't married.

DAVID

What did you see?

LOUISA

. . .that they were lying on the sofa.

DAVID

Were they lying on the sofa?

LOUISA

Yes. . .naked!

DAVID

Lavinia?

LOUISA

Lavinia was asleep.

LAVINIA

He was here when I woke up.

DAVID (*Dashes out to Moira.*)

There's probably a reason why you forgot to mention this. . .

MOIRA

What?

DAVID

I said «There's probably a reason why you forgot to mention this. . .»

MOIRA

What is it?

DAVID

You know what.

LAVINIA

Did you lie?

LOUISA

Yes.

LAVINIA

Why did you lie?

LOUISA

I just did.

MOIRA

What's happened?

DAVID

Ask *her*.

LOUISA

I lied. I said that you and Arthur were sweethearts. . .naked.

MOIRA

How can you be so stupid as to believe that stuff?

DAVID

I don't care anymore.

MOIRA

You're a wimp. One small problem and you don't care anymore.

DAVID

I - am - so - fed-up - with - all - this - fuss!

(Lavinia switches on the radio. Moira turns it off.)

MOIRA

And you, Louisa - I want to speak to you!

(Louisa switches on the radio. David turns it off.)

DAVID

This kid! There's no talking to her. She's deaf to everyone. Everything is just chaotic. Paint and junk all over the house, and noise. You can't even have a private thought without someone getting in the way of it. She's taking up all the space here - Lavinia's space.

MOIRA

Lavinia! I never hear anything else! You don't have room for anyone else but her.

DAVID

I thought it would be great, this. But it's just. . .ugh! Now, I want peace.

MOIRA

That's just great. We're going. Louisa, get your belongings.

LOUISA

Where are we going?

MOIRA

I don't know. To Grandma's.

They leave.

VII YOU CAN ALWAYS QUARREL WITH ME.

(It is completely quiet. David brings out the jigsaw puzzle.)

LAVINIA

How much you've done!

DAVID

Yes, suddenly something fell into place down here in the corner. *(Pause)* It'll be fine. Just like before.

LAVINIA

Remember that time Louisa tore around in here?

DAVID

Yes, when the jigsaw puzzle was broken up.

LAVINIA

Yes. And when we painted the chair. It wasn't right that you shouted at her.

DAVID

No. I was so angry, sweetie. And I knew you; I knew that you wouldn't do something so stupid. So, that's why I shouted at her.

LAVINIA

It's not only Louisa who can play a prank.

DAVID

How like your mother you are now.

LAVINIA

She didn't want to leave me because she loved me a lot, but she had to.

DAVID

Perhaps she's listening to us now?

LAVINIA

Yes. Mummy, do you think it will be all right? *(Pause)* No, Mummy doesn't think anything. Mummy is dead. She doesn't think anything about it being all right. *(Pause)* Dad, I'm bored when it's just the two of us.

(Lavinia goes to her room.)

DAVID *(Calls to her:)*

Do you think Louisa is a grouch?

LAVINIA

Oh, yes. I like to quarrel.

DAVID

Well, you can quarrel with me, sweetie.

LAVINIA

You! You are just so sad.

DAVID

Me? About Moira, then - how do you feel about her?

LAVINIA

I don't know.

DAVID

But still you want them back; a grouchy girl and a lady about whom you don't know how you feel.

LAVINIA

Daddy, I'm only 9 years old. I can't know everything.

(Lavinia rings Moira.)

MOIRA

Hello, Moira speaking.

LAVINIA

Hello.

MOIRA

Lavinia, is that you, dear? How are you?

LAVINIA

In need of an «instead-of-mother».

MOIRA

Lavinia, good kid!

LAVINIA

Are you sad, now?

MOIRA

No. Very, very glad.

LAVINIA

Daddy wants to talk to Louisa.

(David spins around in surprise, but takes the telephone anyway.)

DAVID

Hello, Louisa, is that you?

LOUISA

Yes.

DAVID

I'm sorry I was so mad when you painted the chair, sweetie.

LOUISA

You are always mad.

DAVID

Am I?

LOUISA

Yes, you are.

DAVID

Am I a grouch?

LOUISA

Yes, you are.

DAVID

I'm not grouchy now. Is that OK?

VIII SOUP WITH FISH EYES

(David and Lavinia brush their teeth. Lavinia is not playing the game. There's a knock on the main door. Lavinia opens it.)

MOIRA

We were in the neighbourhood, so we thought we could pick up the chair.

LOUISA

And my felt-tip pens. There they are. Lavinia, have you used my pens?

DAVID

So good to see you. Lavinia has missed you, Louisa. So have I.

LAVINIA *(To Louisa.)*

Me?

LOUISA

Yes, you.

LAVINIA

Why were they left behind? Why did you leave them if you were so anxious about them? And, besides that, you are still walking around with my hair grips. Who said you could do that?

LOUISA

I asked you.

DAVID *(To Moira.)*

I've missed you. Sweetheart.

MOIRA

I've missed you, too.

(They embrace.)

LAVINIA *(To Louisa.)*

I didn't hear it. I certainly didn't say, «Yes, that's great. Just use my hair grips until they're completely worn out.» at any rate.

LOUISA

For heaven's sake. You are so stingy. They're not going to get worn out if I use them for a minute.

DAVID

You should have written your name on your things. *(David strokes Moira's belly; pats it.)*

LAVINIA

Dad, don't meddle. This is our quarrel. *(To Louisa)* But if these are your pens I can borrow them when you borrow my hair grips?

LOUISA

You can stop pretending that you haven't already used them, anyway.

MOIRA

I think you should admit that you've used the pens, Lavinia. And do stop arguing.

LOUISA

We ought to be allowed to argue without you butting in.

MOIRA

Yes, right then. We'd better see about going.

(Louisa prepares to leave. The others hesitate.)

DAVID

Louisa, have you been to Yeovil to see the calf? He must be big now.

LOUISA

Yes. Arthur has got married to a lady from Russia who doesn't speak English.

DAVID

That's lucky for me, then. I want you and Moira to be here. I have prepared myself a little. Do you think that Lavinia and I, you and Moira could go to Yeovil for our holiday?

LOUISA.

It's not fair for you two to keep screwing all the time, because we don't want a baby. You only care about yourselves, not other people.

LAVINIA

And another thing, we have a right to know if it's a girl or a boy.

MOIRA

We don't know, sweetheart.

LOUISA

Yes, because it affects us, too. You'll have to look after it yourselves, and you'll have to put it under your bed, because we're not going to keep it in our room to drool all over our toys.

(They move the chairs, lay the table and eat during the cacophony.)

LOUISA

What have you done with the fish eyes?

DAVID

I've got them in my soup.

LAVINIA

They were ours!

MOIRA

Gross!! Fish eye soup!

DAVID

A delicacy!

MOIRA

Could I have something else, please?

LAVINIA

Are you a snob or something?

(Repeated 3 times.)

THE END