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Whale Music

A Play

Anthony Minghella

Samuel French – London
New York – Sydney – Toronto – Hollywood



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WHALE MUSIC

Whale Music was originally written for Eileen Ryan, Tina Perry, Jane Dale, Alison Watt, Alison Head, Audrey Middleton, and Siv Janssen who performed the play at The Gulbenkian Centre, University of Hull, in June 1980.

The play received its first professional production in April 1981 at the Haymarket, Leicester, with the following cast:

Caroline	Michele Copsey
Stella	Carol Leader
Fran	Camille Davis
Kate	Julie Legrand
D	Sadie Hamilton
Waitress \	
Veronica /	Mary Waterhouse
Sheelagh O'Brien	Anne Jameson

The play directed by Colin George

A television version was made by Granada TV the following year with Howard Baker producing and Pedr James directing. The cast was as follows:

Caroline	Leonie Mellinger
Stella	Susan Littler
Fran	Janet Rawson
Kate	Janet Dale
D	Sara Sugarman
Sheelagh O'Brien	Jean Rimmer
Veronica	Heather Williams
Waitress	Anne-Marie Gwatkin
Nurse	Judy Elrington
Staff Nurse	Sarah Livesey

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(See also page ii)

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CHARACTERS

Caroline

Stella

Fran

Kate

D

Sheelagh O'Brien

Veronica

Unhappy Waitress

Nurse

Staff Nurse

ACT I Winter

- SCENE 1 Stella's Flat
- SCENE 2 A café
- SCENE 3 Stella's Flat
- SCENE 4 Stella's Flat
- SCENE 5 Outside
- SCENE 6 Stella's Flat

ACT II Spring

- SCENE 1 The Seafront
- SCENE 2 Stella's Flat
- SCENE 3 The Promenade
- SCENE 4 Stella's Flat
- SCENE 5 Stella's Flat
- SCENE 6 The Beach
- SCENE 7 A hospital side room
- SCENE 8 The hospital
- SCENE 9 Outside

The setting is a southern coastal resort—probably the Isle of Wight

Time—the present

The setting should allow the play to move simply and fluidly from scene to scene

There are several original songs which are available for the production. Details may be obtained from Judy Daish Associates Ltd

ACT I

SCENE 1

Stella's Flat. Winter

Stella is on stage, showing Caroline the bedroom

Stella This is it. Not enormous.

Caroline (*not looking at the room much; checking the window*) No, it's fine.

Do you want a deposit? I can write you a cheque.

Stella The wardrobe's full, I'm afraid. I'll clear it out tomorrow.

Caroline That's OK. I don't have much with me.

Stella I use this as a dark room in the summer. There's a blind. Great if you're into meditation.

Caroline goes to the window

Caroline The sea.

Stella Oh yeah. It's everywhere. The gulls will probably keep you awake at first. You'll get used to them. They scream at the weather.

Caroline I was born here.

Stella Oh. That makes sense. You're either born in this place or you come here to die. Listen, you couldn't manage cash, could you? A cheque's a bit . . .

Caroline Of course.

Stella Just, I don't work in the winter. I sign on as a beach photographer. But the facts of life don't interest Social Security much. They think it's my fault that nobody sunbathes in November. But they DO pay the rent and they wouldn't like it if they found out you did too. As it is I keep getting visits from unpleasant men before breakfast, demanding to examine the mattress for signs of co-habitation. Which is pretty absurd. However high in protein sperm's supposed to be, it can hardly amount to dependency. I keep telling them it would never stand up in court. They don't even manage a smile. Miserable buggers. Did you tell me your name?

Caroline It's Caroline.

Stella I'm Stella. Listen, forget the deposit—but you can give me a week's rent in advance if you like.

Caroline Thanks. Oh—is there a bathroom?

Stella Yeah. It's downstairs. If you want hot water there's a meter—10ps—you have to kick the coinbox. (*She takes the rent*) Great. If anyone asks, I'm going to say you're an old school friend come to stay. Is that OK?

Caroline Yes, that's fine.

Stella Tremendous. (*She offers her hand*) Good to see you, old school friend.

Caroline Good to see you.

Stella Anything wrong?

Caroline No. *(Pause)* Why? *(Pause)*

Stella Hey, do you cook?

Caroline A little.

Stella A girl who cooks! I cook tins and packets. Oh—and I can thaw frozen things.

Caroline I reheat take-aways.

Stella Never touch them. I'm working hard at getting anorexia.

Caroline Why's that?

Stella Oh, it's the fashion to be unhealthy. Anyone who's anyone looks as if they could do with a good square meal. I've never lived with another girl before. When you moving in?

Caroline Now?

Stella I'll make some tea.

Caroline Uh—no thanks.

Stella Coffee? Booze?

Caroline No, I'm fine. But don't let me stop you.

Stella Is it a man?

Caroline Is what a man?

Stella Why you're here?

Caroline I didn't like the Y.W.C.A.

Stella Sorry. I know. I ask too many questions.

Caroline No. Depends what kind of reply you want. How are you?—fine—
or, how are you?—falling apart, suicidal. You know—polite or honest. I'm fine on the polite.

Stella settles down with a cigarette

Stella It's cold in here. I hate the winter. I try not to go outside. The idea is to raid a supermarket in September and lock the door until April. Go in a slug; emerge a butterfly.

Caroline What do you do?

Stella Paint. No. Plan paintings. Think about them. In fact, nothing much. I mean preferably I find a man to lock in with me. Else I go maudlin. On balance I've been better off maudlin. I set one loose yesterday. There was something VERY wrong with him. He's left a smell. Did you notice? Musty. He's gone off to find a cave in Greece.

Caroline Really?

Stella My dear, welcome to 'sixty-eight revisited. This is the dregs of the beautiful people you're moving in with, you know. Record collection stops at Hendrix. South coast trying hard to be West coast. Marijuana and muesli.

Caroline You don't sound very convinced.

Stella It pales like everything else. How long do you plan to stay?

Caroline I don't know. Until the Spring.

Stella A fellow hibernator.

Caroline Oh yes.

Stella There are some things I can't work out.

Caroline Yes?

Stella Strictly polite questions. Like why not stay with parents? Where school friends?

Caroline Easy. Parents not here. Moved to Derbyshire. School friend here. Has family. I want to see her but I wouldn't want to stay. I'd trip all over the acquisitions.

Stella I see. And what—have you been at college or something?

Caroline Yes. Leeds. I'm taking a year off. That's my speciality. I took a year off before I went, too.

Stella Good?

Caroline My year off? No. Well good, yes, to have . . . to get around. That was good. The bits in between were on the whole not good. At all.

Stella Where d'you go?

Caroline Most places on the Underground. Islington the longest.

Stella Funny—you left here and went to London. With me it was the reverse. I came down here for a festival and never left.

Caroline It's the air.

Stella It's laziness. Nobody minds here. It's a lazy place. If you give up in London, half the caring agencies in the world are fighting over you. Compared to the noise those vultures make, the seagulls sound terrific.

Caroline I'm going to walk and walk and walk.

Stella Wonderful.

Caroline We used to hate tourists. Grockles, we called them. Armies of little fat red people in vests collapsing on the beach, wobbling into the water. When I think of the Summer that's all I see. Now you could shoot a gun down the high street. You can walk for hours. You can breathe a bit. I want to get my lungs full. Throw some stones.

Stella Well, don't worry about me. I won't clutter up the landscape. I'll wobble about here. You haven't got a thing about mice, have you?

Caroline No. Why?

Stella They've moved in too. I think the Greek god must have brought them with him. I went to make my toast this morning and it looked like a Polo mint.

Caroline Perhaps you'd better get a trap or something.

Stella I've got a trap. I've got two traps. I've also got poison and I'm thinking of getting an air rifle. I tell you—it's them or me.

Caroline A cat's more effective. (*She eyes Stella*) You don't like cats.

Stella At least mice just nick food. Cats expect you to buy them the stuff. I adopted a cat once. I thought it was dying or something. I'm bloody certain it gave me worms. And it stank. AND it was permanently on heat.

Caroline I thought that was supposed to be strictly OUR privilege.

Stella Yeah, well who wrote the books? Hey, are you sure you're all right?

Caroline It's nothing. I just feel a bit tired. I'll be OK in a second. Could I have some water?

Stella Sure. What about soda-water? I've got some next door.

Caroline Fine. Anything. (*She sighs*)

Caroline lies down on the bed. She suddenly retches and scrabbles for a tissue in her bag

Stella Hey, don't die on me.

Caroline I'm really sorry.

Stella Listen, have you seen a doctor?

Caroline Yes. Thanks. I feel much better.

Stella Well, what did he say?

Caroline It's a she and she said I was pregnant.

Black-out

SCENE 2

A café. Caroline is sitting at a table stirring coffee

Fran enters, "Clothkits" to the nines, carrying a couple of carrier bags

Fran (*with genuine pleasure*) Hello!

Fran and Caroline embrace

Caroline (*with genuine pleasure*) Hello!

Fran (*breathlessly*) I'm really sorry I'm late. I've had heaps to do. Absolutely mad. And I forgot to put the timer on the casserole.

Caroline Don't worry. Where's Heidi?

Fran At mum's.

Caroline What a shame. I'm dying to see her.

Fran Oh yes. She's a terror. Honestly, she's a real scream. She's crawling.

Caroline Really.

Fran You should see the house. She can destroy a room in five minutes. She tried to eat the liquidiser this morning.

Caroline Let me get you a cup of tea.

Fran Please. I'm parched. This is lovely. Five minutes peace.

Caroline Could we have two teas, please? (*To Fran*) You hungry?

Fran I'd love a scone or something.

Caroline And a scone please.

Fran Well. I got your letter.

Caroline Good.

Fran I think you're really brave. I really do.

Caroline Oh Fran.

Fran No really. I mean if Heidi had come along and I hadn't been. . . . What I mean to say is that so many girls, you know . . . just take the easy way out.

Caroline I didn't know there was an easy way out. If there had of been I would have grabbed it.

Fran No, I know. Of course. You look so well. I went all blotchy and cow-like and my hair fell out in chunks.

Caroline I feel terrible.

Fran Oh love.

Caroline I'm getting morning, afternoon and evening sickness.

Fran Ah, it'll be a girl. Have you done the needle test?

Caroline What?

Fran Dangle a needle over your lump. It works. If it goes up and down it's a

boy, and if it goes round and round in circles it's a girl. It's something to do with electricity.

A Waitress brings tea and a scone. She is not a happy waitress

Caroline Thanks.

Fran I'll get them.

Waitress You pay at the counter.

The Waitress goes

Fran I know her. You know who she is, don't you? She was in the third year when we were prefects. She was Maureen thing's friend—the one who pushed drugs.

Caroline Is it? Anyway, you do exaggerate, Fran. She told you she'd smoked a joint once.

Fran Well. Do you know who else I saw recently? Launa Carter. Vast. Like the side of a house. She was a size eight in the sixth form. Poor thing. She looked really depressed. Do you see anyone?

Caroline No. Just you.

Fran How's Miss Lawrence?

Caroline OK. Don't call her Miss Lawrence, Fran. She doesn't teach us any more.

Fran I know. But I can't think of her as Kate, somehow. It seems blasphemous.

Caroline Well don't call her Miss Lawrence when you see her. She'll have a fit.

Fran Why, is she here?

Caroline No. Not yet. But she will be.

Fran Really?

Caroline She's coming for my birthday, definitely.

Fran That will be nice. She's so fond of you, isn't she? That must have been great when she got the job in Leeds.

Caroline Yes, it was.

Fran I didn't realize you were actually sharing together.

Caroline It's Kate's house. I just have a room.

Fran It's amazing how things work out. You couldn't have guessed, could you, that you'd both end up in Leeds together?

Caroline And you a mum.

Fran Oh, come on, I was marked down as a breeder from the word go. All my brains are in my womb.

Caroline Rubbish.

Fran It's true. When Heidi appeared, something in me went click. Into overdrive. *(Pause)* I'm sorry Caroline, we're talking babies. I promised myself I wouldn't.

Caroline It's all right.

Fran No. It's thoughtless. But you get a bit obsessed. I spend so much time just looking at her. Her hands. She's so perfect. She's got Graeme's hair. Not that she's got much.

Caroline How is Graeme?

Fran Busy. He's fine. In and out like a maniac. They've made him a partner. Can you imagine? He wears a suit!

Caroline Amazing.

Fran He said to say hello.

Caroline Say hello back.

Fran Right. *(Pause)* I've brought you some things. Don't be insulted. Everything's so expensive.

Caroline Stupid. What sort of things?

Fran Here. There's a couple of sleep bras. You'll need those. And a really nice smock and trouser thing from Clothkits. The trousers have an elasticated waist so they grow with you.

Caroline You're a dear, Fran. Bless you. *(She looks in the bag. What she sees upsets her)* Thank you.

Fran I hope I'll have to ask for them back soon. *(Quietly)* Oh, Caroline. Why don't you come and stay with us? We'd love to have you. I'd be ever so useful—I'm encyclopaedic about pregnancy.

Caroline I'm not good company just now. But thanks.

Fran Think about it. It's an open invitation. It would be nice to have a grown-up around.

Caroline Grown-up! Anyway, doesn't Graeme qualify?

Fran Of course. When he's in. It's hard for men. They don't get so excited by feeds and nappies. And I believe in the family bed.

Caroline The what? No, don't tell me. Heidi sleeps with the two of you. Right?

Fran You disapprove.

Caroline Not at all. It's not my business.

Fran Graeme says it's ridiculous. But I think it'll make so much difference later on. Besides, it's marvellous. We all cuddle up and she can help herself if she gets hungry in the night.

Caroline Yes, but what about you and Graeme?

Fran What about us?

Caroline I mean, what if you want a second baby?

Fran We haven't worked that out yet.

The Waitress comes forward

Waitress We're closing.

Fran Sorry. *(She devours the scone)* Mmm. Just the job. *(Pause)* It's so nice to see you again.

Caroline Good old Fran. Constant as ever.

Fran What d'you mean?

Caroline Nothing. It's just good to see you too.

Fran I'm a twit. I almost forgot. Two special pressies. *(She produces a record)* Now, this is wonderful.

Caroline *(reading the back of the record sleeve)* Whale Music?

Fran Yes, they sing to each other. It's ever so strange. What you do is play it and relax. It's supposed to comfort the baby.

Caroline Ta.

Fran No, really. It's tremendous. It's like being very deep under water. Womb-like.

Caroline But it's already in the womb.

Fran Well, Heidi loved it. And there's simulated heart beats and things and some Purcell. Only that side's a bit scratched.

Caroline I'll play it, I promise.

Fran (*holding up a book*) And there's this. *Essential exercises for the child-bearing year.*

Caroline Oh God, Fran.

Fran They're a must, Caroline. Otherwise you'll look like a deflated balloon afterwards. And it makes such a difference for your labour. Don't make that face. It's going to happen. It's no use pretending it won't.

Caroline We'd better go.

Fran Listen, I can help with those. Graeme used to do all the counting and things for me. It's easier with someone else. We could do them at our house if you'd like.

Caroline Fran, do you think we could change the subject for a minute?

Fran Oh, sugar! I'm sorry. I know, I'm like a steamroller when I get going. That's what Graeme says. I'm sorry love. Do you want to go for a walk? You must walk a lot.

Caroline I'd like to go down to the beach.

Fran Lovely. You sit there and I'll pay this.

Caroline, alone for a second, gathers up the things. She inspects them

Fran (*to the Waitress*) How much is that then?

Waitress Fifty-five P.

Fran (*much too sweetly*) It was a lovely scone. (*To Caroline*) I wish I'd brought Heidi now. She loves sand. And you wouldn't have minded, would you?

Caroline Of course not.

Fran I thought she might have upset you.

Caroline Nobody's going to die, Fran.

Fran I know, I know. It's just I know how I'd feel.

Caroline I feel like there's glass in my guts. That's all. Everything else is just numb.

Fran Well, I'm sure a walk will do you good.

Waitress D'you think you might hurry up?

Fran I shouldn't bother with the Clearasil. It just joins the spots together.

Caroline Oh Fran!

Fran Want to hear the noise the whales make? It's like this . . . (*She makes whale noises*)

The Waitress stacks chairs on table

Waitress (*to an unseen partner*) D'you know her trouble? The husband goes up every skirt in the town . . . except hers.

Black-out

SCENE 3

Stella's Flat

Caroline and Fran are doing an essential exercise for the child-bearing year. Stella is in a chair, smoking and drinking. Fran reads aloud an instruction from the manual

Stella That thing in there will be mentally disturbed by the time it drops out.

It probably won't ever come out now. You can see it thinking bugger that, mate, if it's this bad in the padded cell you can forget the great outdoors.

Caroline Stella's right. This is killing me. What about my twenty minutes total relaxation, Fran?

Fran Once more.

Caroline Once more.

Fran Come on. Big effort. (*She yells out instructions*)

Stella I know what it is. It's the Karma Sutra done single-handed.

Caroline (*laughing*) I think I'm breaking something.

Fran That's good!

Stella That's good, Caroline. Break something!

Caroline Oh come on, Stella. It's great for the anorexia.

Stella So's dying. (*Getting up*) This bloody rain will drive me crazy. Who's for a drink?

Fran and Caroline loll about, exhausted

Fran I've brought some Lucozade. Do you fancy some, Caroline?

Caroline (*laughing*) I do, actually.

Stella Terrific!

Fran Your day will come. Have you got a boyfriend?

Stella Oh yeah. He's in the wardrobe right now. I keep him in kit form. No, my day won't come. I don't have Caroline's scruples.

Fran Oh, I don't know. I think you might feel different if it happened. You see—well, this is my theory anyway—it's not just a question of giving house-room to an egg for a few months . . . no, all kinds of things—hormones and what have you—are rushing about, sort of educating you for motherhood. It's very animal, I think. I mean, it's like the way your milk suddenly comes, for instance.

Caroline (*bitterly*) Where does that leave me?

Stella Right.

Fran Well, I don't know. I don't know, but it's love I'm talking about really, isn't it? I mean, I don't think that can hurt you.

Stella Oh! Come on!

Fran I think Caroline knows what I mean.

Caroline No, I don't.

Fran I wish I hadn't started this.

Stella It strikes me, Fran, you wouldn't have a problem if it came up and bit you. Well, love's great. I hear you can buy it from Habitat.

Fran I'm sorry. I don't know what you're trying to say.

Stella Yeah, well, we're on different wavelengths.

Fran I think we're probably on different planets.

Stella Welcome to Earth.

Fran looks to Caroline

Caroline Don't look at me. I lose both ways, don't I? Do you know, when I told my mother what had happened, she said, "Only a whore would sleep in two men's beds". No, not "sleep in"—"go to"—those were her words. "Only a whore would go to two men's beds." She was in the garden, pruning roses. She had a pair of those secateur things in her hand. She didn't look at me, she stared at the roses and told me it would kill my father. The strange thing is I know she didn't mean it. Basically she's kind. But those are the words that stick. Anyway, then we went indoors and everybody cried and then we had a cup of tea. From then on I've just gone from cup of tea to cup of tea. Sod the hormones, Fran.

There is a pause

Fran You haven't drunk your Lucozade.

Stella I didn't realize there were two men involved.

Caroline Oh, yes.

Stella Have you told them?

Caroline They both think the other is the father. It seemed simplest. They don't know I'm here. Just at the moment I don't think I could stomach honourable intentions.

Stella If they have any.

Fran I think you're right. Tell a man he's going to be a father and you burst a door marked hero.

Stella You're really sold on the metaphysics, aren't you?

Fran I've seen it in action.

Stella Well I don't know if it's such a good idea. Why should they get off?

Caroline I don't want to see them.

Stella Bugger seeing them. What about money? What about a bit of moral support? Why should you have to cope by yourself?

Caroline I'm not. I'm here.

Stella What kind of set-up is this? What is it when we're all clucking about like hens with our Lucozade and knitting and sticking our bloody bums in the air? Can you see a man doing that?

Fran Are you saying you think men ought to have more to do with their families? Because if that's what you mean you don't know them. Have you seen men with babies? It's laughable. I think it's a crime to leave a child with a man.

Caroline Come off it, Fran.

Stella That's just crap.

Fran Is it? I'm sorry. I wouldn't go out to work and leave Heidi with Graeme. I wouldn't trust him. They push prams—have you watched them? You'd think they were walking on nails. His idea of playing with Heidi is to sit her

Hungry for More?

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