

SCENE 1: A DIY EVENING CLASS AT A LOCAL COLLEGE.

There are four workbenches, on each of which are some basic tools: tenon saw, hand drill, screwdriver etc. Alongside each bench is a stool and a small pile of wood, planks and smaller pieces. There is also another bench or desk UL. There are three women standing in a group by one of the two benches centre stage: Linda, a woman of about 40, smartly dressed with a longish skirt and boots – too smartly dressed for DIY – she also always seems to have a bag of crisps on the go; Tracy, a girl of about 25, looking slightly ill at ease and wearing a pair of jeans and shirt; and Jo who's about 35 and the only one of the group who appears to be wearing proper work clothes – a pair of overalls.

JO: Let's hope we move on a bit faster this week.

LINDA: It was only the second week Jo, we've hardly mastered the basics yet have we?

TRACY: I found it quite interesting.

JO: Yes, well...

Enter Helen, a motherly looking woman about 60.

HELEN: Oh, hello, I was looking for the DIY class. *(She looks around)* It looks like I've found it.

LINDA: You certainly have, love. Joining us, are you?

HELEN: Yes, it's about time I knew how to handle a screwdriver.

LINDA: Have this bench here, love. *(She indicates one of the two benches centre stage)* There was some bloke here the first week, but he didn't turn up last time, so he's probably dropped out.

JO: Couldn't stand the pace probably.

HELEN: Oh, is it a bit demanding?

LINDA: No love, it's fine – very relaxing. Just ignore Jo, she's always like this. *(She picks up her packet of crisps and offers them to Helen)* Want a crisp?

HELEN: Ah, er no thanks.

LINDA: Oh, excuse me love, I must take these boots off – they're killing me.

She sits down on a stool and winces as she pulls off first one boot, then the other.

LINDA: Ah, that's better.

She massages her toes

So what's your name then?

HELEN: Me? Oh, it's Helen. Helen Barber.

LINDA: Well welcome to DIY for the uninitiated! I'm Linda Bennett.

TRACY: And I'm Tracy.

JO: Jo.

Jo goes immediately over to her bench DR and starts rearranging the tools on it. Helen looks slightly put out but answers her anyway.

HELEN: Pleased to meet you.

LINDA: So you fancy becoming a bit of a DIY fanatic do you?

HELEN: No, not really. But when my husband died it made me realise just how little I knew about doing things around the house. And, now I'm retired, I've plenty of time to learn.

LINDA: What did you used to do then?

HELEN: Teacher, primary school. And now I'm coming back to school!

LINDA: Yeah, well this is slightly different. It's not like learning languages or something like that. That'd be too much like proper school for me – and it'd bring back too many bad memories.

HELEN: You didn't get on at school then?

LINDA: School didn't get on with me, more like.

TRACY: Me neither. I couldn't wait to get out of the place.

Jo reaches into her overall's pocket and pulls out a copy of Practical Woodworking magazine or similar and begins to flick through it.

LINDA: Your husband, was he a teacher too then?

HELEN: No, John worked in shipping. He was only fifty when he died.

LINDA: How awful.

She pauses

LINDA: Mr Rees, that's our tutor, should be here soon. He fusses around a bit too much for my liking. And he's a bit... you know, treats us like women.

JO: He – slows – his – voice – down – when – he – speaks – to us.

HELEN: Oh, right. Well, I'm sure that will suit me fine.

She picks up some of the tools and inspects them

What are we doing tonight then?

LINDA: Starting to make a set of shelves, apparently. Anyway that's the theory.

HELEN: They'll come in handy then. You should see the books I've got. I can't move for them. And there are what seems like hundreds of John's which I'll never get round to reading.

LINDA: I don't get round to reading full stop. Except for the newspaper and odd magazine and things.

JO: Want me to lend you mine, Linda?

LINDA: No thanks, I'll survive.

HELEN: John would have loved to have had all the time I've got now to read.

LINDA: Yeah, enjoy retirement together you mean?

HELEN: Mm. But there's no telling when cancer will strike is there?

LINDA: No, suppose not.

HELEN: Funny thing is they could probably cure it nowadays.

TRACY: Pity they didn't have that – what's it called, when they freeze you until they can find a cure?

HELEN: Cryogenics.

TRACY: That's it cryowatsit.

LINDA: If I had my way, I wouldn't freeze my husband, I'd vacuum pack him.

HELEN: Oh, dear, that wouldn't do him any good.

LINDA: Too right it wouldn't. No more than he deserves though.

HELEN: Do I detect a certain degree of animosity?

LINDA: You do. After 20 odd years of marriage, what's the bastard go and do?

HELEN: I – er...

LINDA: Discovers the love of his life – or so he thinks.

HELEN: Ah.

LINDA: The thing is you never know do you? I mean he was having this affair for six months and I didn't suspect a thing. All I knew was he appeared to be depressed and I – muggings me! – felt sorry for him. Of course he was bloody depressed, that's when he was with me – instead of with his fancy bit!

HELEN: But how did he manage to carry on so long without you knowing?

LINDA: He's a van driver isn't he? Often has to stay away for the night when he's got a long distance delivery. Of course, I had no idea what it was he was delivering. But I can imagine. *(She imitates Gordon's voice)* 'Look what I've got for you tonight, Samantha.' Hah!

Jo looks up from her magazine with a 'I don't believe it' expression on her face.

JO: She wasn't really called Samantha was she?

LINDA: That's what he said, but I wouldn't believe a word of it. It was probably one of those common as muck names like Sharon or Tra –. Sorry love I didn't mean anything by that.

TRACY: No, s'alright.

HELEN: She was young though was she, Linda? From what you were saying, I gather she wasn't your age.

LINDA: No, she wasn't much more than twenty. How she could have been taken in by a slimy old creep like Gordon I'll never know. If I'd been her, I'd have told him where he could stick it.

JO: It seems to me that's exactly what she did do.

LINDA: Yes, thank you, Jo.

Jo goes back to the magazine

HELEN: So, now it's a matter of picking up the pieces and getting on with your life, right?

LINDA: In a manner of speaking, yes. I'm bloody determined I'm going to look after No 1 from now on. I'm getting out and doing things. Getting on with my life. One thing I'm not going to be doing is sitting at home and moping, waiting for something to happen.

TRACY: What sort of things do you do, Linda?

LINDA: Dance class on Mondays, art class on Wednesdays and this one now. And I've got myself a nice little job in the local travel agents. I can get really good deals you know.

HELEN: So what brings you here Tracy?

TRACY: Same reason I suppose. I mean I've got to be able to do things for myself haven't I?

LINDA: No boyfriend at the moment then?

TRACY: No, I split with Dave two years ago. We were about to be engaged. At least he said we were. Then he just upped and left.

HELEN: Just like that?

TRACY: Yes. It turned out he'd been two-timing me for ages. He said he hadn't broken it off earlier because he didn't want to hurt me.

LINDA: How considerate. Just like a man!

TRACY: Before that, there was Rod. Big Rod his mates called him.

LINDA: Big Rod eh, that sounds hopeful.

TRACY: What?

LINDA: Never mind.

TRACY: I called him Rod the Sod.

LINDA: Before or after you split up?

She doesn't answer

LINDA: No one on the horizon then?

TRACY: Well, there is one. But...

LINDA: Come one, tell us!

TRACY: No, it's nothing really. It might not turn out to be anything. I'm a bit superstitious you see. I want to be sure first, You understand?

LINDA: Yes course we do love.

Helen goes over to her bench and picks up a tool or too and examines it – from her expression she is obviously perplexed by them.

HELEN: What time is this – Mr Rees, was it? – the tutor supposed to turn up then? I thought the class started at half six.

LINDA: It does, love. Typical bloody man, always keeps us waiting, but he's never been this long before.

TRACY: Should I go and look for him?

LINDA: No he's bound to turn up soon.

Jo slaps her magazine shut and throws it on the bench.

JO: Well, frankly, I don't see why we should wait any longer. I'm paying good money for these lessons. I say we should get on with these shelves ourselves.

LINDA: You're right. After all, they call this class 'Do It Yourself', don't they?

HELEN: But I've no idea what we're supposed to be doing.

LINDA: All he did last week was go through the basics. You know, how to hold a saw and suchlike. It's not rocket science. Look, here's what we're supposed to be making...

She goes over to the bench at the back and comes back with a sheet of A3 paper with plans for a bookshelf on it.

LINDA: See, one handy set of bookshelves. Ideal for the smaller room.

HELEN: Oh, can we really make them?

LINDA: Of course we can, love. You just need a bit of confidence in yourself, that's all.

HELEN: That's what I fear is lacking.

LINDA: Oh nonsense! Look it's a very simple construction.

She holds up the plans and Helen joins Linda and Tracy. The three of them look at the plans, peering at them quizzically.

LINDA: That bit supports the bottom shelf here. And this bit goes there and I think that goes -

TRACY: No, it's the other way round surely?

LINDA: Oh I see, maybe you're right Trace. But then surely...

Jo has been viewing the charade with increasing disbelief. She marches over takes the plans from Linda and in one movement turns them up the other (and right) way. She points or rather jabs at parts of the plans while talking.

JO: Top. Bottom shelf. Bottom shelf support. Left hand side. Right hand side. Backing. Shelf brackets x 4. Shelves x 2. Got it?

LINDA: Oh, right. Not exactly Ikea is it?

JO: Not exactly, no.

She goes back to her bench, picks up a pencil and starts marking her pieces of wood.

Helen looks at Jo and then at Linda.

HELEN: She looks so competent.

LINDA: Appearances can be deceptive Helen.

HELEN: I know. But I feel so useless now. There are all these things that you take for granted, you know. Daft things like changing a fuse. Mind you, John wasn't so hot on electricity. I remember he put a wall light in the bedroom once and called me in to show me. He was looking very pleased with himself and I must say it did look nice. Only trouble was, when he turned it on, the main light in the room also went on – only sort of half bright. And, when he turned the wall light off, the main light came back on and the wall light went dim.

TRACY: What did you do?

HELEN: Nothing we could do, had to get an electrician in.

TRACY: Oh, right.

HELEN: Funny thing was, the electrician was a woman. Now that's not something you often get is it?

JO: More's the pity. Why should electricity be the domain of men, eh? No reason.

TRACY: I suppose they're naturally more practical aren't they? You know, good with their hands.

LINDA: My Gordon was certainly good with his hands. Couldn't stop them from wandering. Only trouble was it wasn't me they were wandering over.

TRACY: Come to think of it, my brother in law was an electrician, well a sort of electrician – electrical fitter I think he was called. And he made Frank Spencer, look good.

LINDA: I find that hard to believe.

TRACY: Oh yes, he was amazing. He decorated my sister's kitchen, new tiles and all that, and he was just putting up this spice rack when his drill went through a pipe that was buried in the wall.

HELEN: Oh dear.

TRACY: There was water absolutely everywhere! He tried to stop it with his finger but that didn't work, so he started pulling drawers open frantically, looking for something to stop the flow. Then he remembered he'd put a tube of that sealant stuff he'd used for the tiles, in one of the wall cupboards. Well he tried to get to it while still plugging the hole with his finger, stretched right across the room he did. Then his foot slipped on the wet floor and he grabbed at the wall cupboard to stop himself from falling.

LINDA: I think we can guess what happened next!

TRACY: My sister was having a bath at the time. She heard this almighty crash and scream, so she came rushing down, dripping wet, just clutching a towel, only to find Vince lying on the floor, knocked out by the wall cupboard. She dropped the towel and ran into the hall starkers to call an ambulance. But she forgot that the hall phone wasn't working, ever since Vince had put an extension in the bedroom, so she had to run back up the stairs again, all the time with water pouring out of the pipe over poor Vince.

JO (*sarcastically*): Poor Vince!

TRACY: But as she rushed into the bedroom to get to the phone, she didn't notice that a window cleaner had just started work. But he saw her all right. He was just getting his squeegee out when he saw this naked woman running towards him. Well he panicked, lost his footing and the next thing he knew he was in the hydrangea bush.

HELEN: I bet the ambulance men were surprised.

JO: They didn't necessarily have to be men.

HELEN: Oh, you know what I mean.

TRACY: Well, by the time they arrived, Vince had come to. What with all that water pouring over him, I suppose that's not surprising. And the window cleaner was more or less OK. Just a bit shocked that's all.

LINDA: I bet he was.

TRACY: The funny thing was a week later, my sister noticed there was still some water on the work surface even though Vince had repaired the pipe and retiled the wall. He couldn't understand it. But what he'd done, was drill through both sides of the pipe. So when he repaired one side, the other side was still leaking!

JO: And you wonder why we're doing this DIY course! The sooner we do without men entirely the better, as far as I can see.

LINDA: Yes, well don't you think we all ought to be getting on with this project?

HELEN: Well, I'm not sure we ought to really, should we? I mean when he turns up, he might say we've been doing it all wrong.

LINDA: Well, tough tits. If he wants to show us how to handle a tool, he ought to show up. Just like a man to expect us to do all the work.

She picks up a saw

LINDA: Come on, he's been through the basic techniques with us three. Now's our chance to put some of it into practice. Don't worry Helen, we'll show you what to do.

HELEN: Well thank you, Linda. But, on reflection, I rather feel that if I'm paying for tuition, there ought to be a tutor.

TRACY: Maybe he's looking after the advanced class too. They're terribly short staffed here.

HELEN: Well, he shouldn't be. When I was teaching, I wouldn't expect to be asked to look after two classes at the same time, even if we were short staffed.

JO: And you're a woman, Helen. Imagine how difficult it must be to –

LINDA: Don't say another word, Jo! All right? Let's just see what we can make out of a few bits of wood, shall we?

Jo holds up two short pieces of wood.

JO: Mm, I wonder what you can make out of two short planks?

As she holds them up, turning them round and considering their possibilities, a college administrator enters.

ADMINISTRATOR: Oh, hello, I'm afraid Mr Rees won't be with you tonight. He's had a bit of an accident.

HELEN: Oh, dear, nothing serious I hope?

ADMINISTRATOR: Well, yes, I'm afraid so, he's in hospital with a broken leg.

TRACY: How did he break his leg?

ADMINISTRATOR: I'm not exactly sure – doing some DIY I think. Ah... not that... um...

Linda fights hard to stop herself laughing

LINDA: Oh well, accidents do happen!

ADMINISTRATOR: Yes, well in the circumstances, we obviously can't hold the class tonight.

LINDA: Don't you worry about us, love. Mr Rees gave us very clear instructions as to what he wanted to see completed. So we'll just get on best we can without him.

ADMINISTRATOR: I'm not sure that's quite –

LINDA: It'll be fine, love. We'll be OK. No problem.

ADMINISTRATOR: Well, if you don't mind...

LINDA: Not at all. Send him our best wishes for a speedy recovery won't you?

ADMINISTRATOR: Yes, thanks. I expect he'll be back with us next week.

LINDA: We'll make a nice pair of crutches specially for him!

ADMINISTRATOR: Right, er thanks. He'll like that.

She exits

The four women all look at each other for an instant then burst out laughing.

JO: In hospital, I ask you!

HELEN: Poor man.

JO: Poor man be arsed. We're better off without him.

She picks up her two pieces of wood and holds them together.

JO: Here, meet Mr Rees's replacement.

Blackout

SCENE 2. THE DIY CLASS HALF AN HOUR LATER.

All four women are at their benches. Jo DR; Linda, DCR; Helen DCL; and Tracy DL. They are all busy working on their projects. Helen is measuring and marking a piece of wood.

HELEN: Oh, I don't know I'll ever get the hang of this.

LINDA: 'Course you will, love. There's nothing to it. Can't be, if Gordon managed it.

HELEN: Wasn't he any good then?

LINDA: What at?

HELEN: You know, DIY.

LINDA: I don't think he believed in doing it himself.

HELEN: He wasn't what you'd call a bit of a Barry Bucknell then?

LINDA: A who?

HELEN: Barry Bucknell. You know. Oh, John used to like him, he made everything look so easy.

LINDA: Who, John?

HELEN: No, Barry. He would have had these shelves made in two minutes flat, mark my words.

LINDA: I'm sorry love, you've lost me. I just dunno what you're on about.

Linda goes over to Helen's bench.

LINDA: Look, you have to measure from that point there, that's all.

She shows Helen, watched, from her bench, by Tracy. Helen begins to measure, as does Tracy. Linda goes back to her bench. Jo picks up a saw and begins sawing a plank of wood. After a pause, Helen talks again.

HELEN: Barry Bucknell. He was the original DIY king – on television, you know. I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't invent the term DIY. That'd be just like Barry.

LINDA: Yeah, well Gordon was more your DIY SOS type.

HELEN: Oh, I'm sure he couldn't have been that bad.

Jo stops sawing and looks up.

JO: Who says? Most men can't do anything constructive. They're far happier demolishing things.

HELEN: You do have a rather jaded view of men don't you, Jo?

JO: Experience. I know what they're like. Men just don't interest me.

HELEN: Yes, well we gathered that, dear.

Helen's finished marking up her piece of wood and picks up a tenon saw. After a couple of attempts, she's clearly not managing to cut into the wood.

HELEN: Oh, this is no good. I can't do it. It's hopeless.

LINDA: Nonsense, give it here.

Linda goes over to Helen's bench again, takes the saw and in a couple of saws manages to get it started.

LINDA: There we are. Now you can just carry on with it.

HELEN: Oh great. Thank you Linda. How did you manage to do that so easily?

LINDA: Easy, I just imagine I'm cutting off what Gordon would no doubt regard as his vital equipment.

HELEN: Oh that's terrible, Linda!

LINDA: You better believe it! I'm just waiting for him to come crawling back. It would give such satisfaction to tell him where to go!

HELEN: Do you think he ever will come back, dear?

LINDA: Oh, he'll be back, if I know Gordon! He puts on this really macho image, but underneath he's soft as shit. Pardon my French.

HELEN: You don't think this Samantha fling will last then?

LINDA: Not a snowball's chance in hell. He was just flattered that some young tart fancied him that's all. A bit of rough and tumble and once he's shot his load a few times, he'll come to his senses.

HELEN: You do have a graphic way of describing the situation dear.

Linda picks goes to the desk at the back, picks up a power drill, brings it back to her workbench and, holding it like a gun in the air, pulls the trigger once or twice. Satisfied it is working, she then, with obvious relish, drills into the wood.

LINDA: Right Gordon... Left kneecap.

Then, with equally obvious relish, she drills into the wood again.

