How's Mum Doing?

by Mo Holkar

I originally started writing this scenario for Fastaval 2022, but then I got ill so I had to withdraw it from the event. It was on the shelf for a while, but I eventually got it completed in spring of 2025.

Introduction

This introduction is intended for the GM, the person who is going to make this scenario happen. A bit further on is a section which will help you explain it to your participants, but for now just read this yourself.

How's Mum Doing? is a scenario about two adult sisters and their family background. It's set in the real-world modern-day.

The scenario is for four participants and a GM (you). It should last about four hours. It can be played out around a table, or scenes can be larped if preferred.

How's Mum Doing? takes place while the two sisters and their partners are away on holiday together. They receive a phone call from their father, saying that their mother is ill. During the seven days of the holiday, there will be further calls, updating them on her progress. Her illness will become serious, but not so much so that they will break off the holiday. By the end of the week, she will be recovering.

Play proceeds over a series of scenes, which alternate between the present day and flashbacks to earlier times. In the present-day scenes, the four participants play the two sisters and their respective partners. In the flashback scenes, they play younger versions of the sisters and their parents.

How's Mum Doing? is intended as a slice-of-life low-key family drama. Nothing huge will change in the characters' lives, but they will maybe have different understandings of themselves and of each other, and maybe new configurations of relationships.

Content warning: *How's Mum Doing?* contains scenes of emotional difficulty, tending towards abuse, between parents and children; and scenes of violence between partners. It also includes a miscarriage in its backstory. It reflects upon generational trauma, among other things.

The role of the GM

Framing scenes

It is the GM's task to explain each scene to the participants, explaining where and when it is taking place, and what is happening and why. (In flashback scenes, the GM will also tell each participant who they are playing in this scene.) They will start off the scene and will mark when it has finished, and may intervene to speed it up if it's going too slowly – or to redirect it, if it's going way off course.

The scenes are listed on **page 18,** and then the briefings for each of them are on **pages 19–26.**

Playing the father

In the phone call scenes, the GM will play the role of the sister's father, Peter. As well as bringing this character to life – and influencing how the younger versions of him in the flashback scenes are understood and played – this role is important in regulating the 'emotional temperature' of the larp. The GM can use the father to make the characters more worried about their mother's health or less so, more angry about the past or calmer, and so on. They will need to judge what approach is best, in each phone call scene, for the overall emotional journey of the scenario.

The father can also ask about how everyone is, and how the holiday's going, and so on, of course. (Although during the serious part of the illness, this kind of social politeness thing might not be uppermost in his mind.)

A note about Mum's illness

The specifics of the illness and its symptoms have been left vague, because this is not intended to be a scenario about medical investigation, and we don't wish to trigger anyone's actual troubled memories of sickness. The characters only learn what Dad tells them, and he is not medically knowledgeable: so there's no point pressing him for details of treatments, the names of drugs being used, or anything like that. It's a kind of meta rule of the scenario that the characters shouldn't try to dig deeply into the nature of the illness, or of how it's being handled in the hospital.

How to run the scenario

Introduce it to the participants

Read this out to them:

Two thirty-something sisters, and their partners, go on holiday together. While they are away, their mother falls ill. During the week that follows, scenes from the present-day holiday alternate with flashback scenes from the sisters' earlier lives and those of their parents.

***Connie** is 'the sensible one', seven years older than her sister, working in retail management. She's been with her partner **Stefan** since forever: he's an amateur musician, and an adult education teacher. **Dee** is currently a charity worker. She's here with **Tom,** a freelance graphic designer, but it's not a very serious relationship – her life is too chaotic for that.*

*The parents are **Peter** and **Janet,** both now retired from work. Flashback scenes will reveal that they were not always the calm, quiet, predictable couple that they now seem to be.*

Janet recovers fully from her illness by the end of the week – the sisters will be concerned about her health, but not so much so as to break the holiday. This is not a scenario about serious illness or fear of bereavement – Janet's sickness is present as a reason to think about the family's dynamics and its history.

Safety

Tell the participants that these are the suggested safety provisions. If anyone needs anything different or more, then everyone should try to accommodate their wishes.

The Door is Open – anyone is free to leave the scenario at any point. They don't need to explain why (unless they want to, of course), but they should let you know, so you don't think they're just going to the bathroom or something and wait for them. You can play the missing character yourself in subsequent scenes involving them, or just omit them if you think it won't harm the scene.

Cut – anyone can use the word "Cut!" to stop a scene immediately, at any point during the scenario. It might be for an emotional/psychological reason, or for a practical one (dropped contact lens, etc). They can explain what they need help with, if appropriate, or can sit quietly or take a break before resuming.

Brake – anyone can request a reduction in intensity by saying "Brake!" The people in the scene should lower their voices, calm emotions, etc, as requested.

Choosing characters

On **page 6** are capsule descriptions of the four characters as they are in the present-day scenes. Offer these to the participants, so that they can each choose which character they wish to play.

Explain that they will play the same character throughout all of the present-day scenes.

Make it clear that Connie and Dee are the two lead roles – the scenario is mostly centred on them. Stefan and Tom are more supporting-type roles.

Tell them that in the flashback scenes, the players of Connie and Dee will still be playing (younger versions of) Connie and Dee, but the players of Stefan and Tom will be playing Peter and Janet.

Say that when everyone's chosen, they'll be given the full briefing for their character. They can of course still ask to swap then, if there's something in it that they aren't happy with.

Once they've decided, give each of them the appropriate full character briefing **(pages 7–14).** Give them a few minutes to read it. Ask if anyone wants to swap.

If any of them wants to change minor things about the character (eg. their job), because they're not comfortable with playing it, then that's fine – as long as it doesn't affect the basic relationships and dynamics between them. If they want to change more major things (eg. make Dee older than Connie, or change Stefan to non-binary gender) then be careful about saying yes to that, because it will probably mean more work for you dealing with the knock-on effects.

The background

Hand the page about the parents **(page 15)** to the participant on your left. Tell them to read out the first part, then pass it leftwards for the next person to read out the second part, and so on.

Repeat this same procedure with the page about the setting **(page 16).**

Leave both of these pages available on the table, so that the participants can check information on them if they might need to.

Explain scenes

Tell the participants that there are going to be 20 or so scenes, which are short – each one will only be between five and ten minutes long. Say that you will brief them for each scene, and will say how the scene will end – and will intervene if necessary to move it forward, or to get it back on track if it's got derailed. In general it will be up to them to choose the right moment to do the thing that you've told them will end the scene: but you will indicate if they seem to be taking too long to do so.

Tell them about the three types of scene (using **page 17).** You don't have to use that exact text – explain it in your own words however you think will work best, and answer any questions that they might have, as you go along.

Leave that page on the table for the participants to refer to, as well.

If you think it would be good to schedule a break partway through, then after the conclusion of the Wednesday scenes is a good place for that. But of course you can take a break after the end of any scene, if people need one.

Starting and finishing the scenario

Although this scenario is scene-based rather than immersive like a larp, we still find it helpful to mark the start and finish with a piece of transition music. We like to use *Mother / Oh Mein Papa,* by Siouxsie and the Banshees – but you may prefer to find something else that's appropriate.

Tell the participants that you will play the music to start the larp, and that during the three-and-a-bit minutes that it lasts, they should close their eyes and imagine their character in the seaside setting. When the music ends, they should open their eyes, and you will brief them on the first scene.

Tell them that you will play the music again after the conclusion of the final scene. They should again close their eyes, and use the time to come away from the character(s) and stories that they've been playing, and back into their real-world selves.

Tell them that you will then offer an optional debrief, if any of them would like that.

Suggest a quick comfort break, and then you should be ready to start *How's Mum Doing?* – wait for them all to be settled down, and start the music.

Debriefing

We suggest giving people a short break before debriefing, if you have time – to use the bathroom, drink water, etc. Taking part in the debrief should be optional for participants, but it is strongly recommended.

Start with a simple round – each person should have the opportunity to share any thoughts and feelings that they wish, for a minute or so, without being interrupted or drawn into conversation – everyone else should just listen in silence. People can pass, or come back to this later, if they prefer. Include yourself in the round, if you wish, after the participants have spoken.

Then the debrief can turn into more unstructured conversation and discussion.

Character capsules

Connie, 38

Connie is the older of the two sisters. She is practical, protective, and has always been ‘the grown-up’ in their relationship. She has had a steady career in retail management, although she is planning to abandon it to start her own business.

Dee, 31

Dee is the younger sister. She is unpredictable and inconsistent. Her life has been a succession of random triumphs and crises. She wants to make a mark on the world, but isn’t sure how. She currently works as receptionist at a local animal-welfare charity.

Connie’s husband Stefan, 36

Stefan is a teacher in a vocational skills college. He and Connie have been together for twelve years, although they only married five years ago. He is an amateur musician who at one time nursed dreams of being in a successful band.

Dee’s partner Tom, 30

Tom is a freelance graphic designer who makes and spends money quickly. He and Dee have been together for nine months, part of that overlapping with her on–off partner Suze. He often gives the impression of having just woken up.

Connie

You are the older of the two sisters. You are 38 years old. (Dee is 31.)

You are seen as 'the sensible one' – you are practical, protective, and have always been in a position of looking after your younger sister. When you were both small, you kept an eye on her when your parents were busy; in your teens and then in hers, you tried to keep her out of trouble; and as adults, it's still you that she turns to when she has a crisis of some kind.

Sometimes, you wonder how it is that you got stuck in this dynamic. Are you not allowed to be irresponsible, to be foolish, to be free? Do you always have to be the one giving wise advice and saying No?

Your husband, Stefan, is also practically-minded. You've been together for 12 years, and married for five of those. You'd known him for a while before you got together, via mutual friends – and when it happened that you were both single at the same time, you decided to try it out. He is a reliable, solid partner – you know you can trust him completely. Together you are a team.

You work in retail management, having gradually moved up the ladder from the very junior positions that you started in. Your current role is managing a group of six shops selling bread and cakes and other baked goods, spread around the town where you live – part of a large national company. It's challenging and rewarding work, but you've been feeling lately that you have maybe had enough of working for other people and doing what head office tells you to do.

You've been thinking about leaving, and setting up your own shop. It would be great to not have to just follow the orders of senior management. You could be more creative, have more freedom about marketing, have more flexibility about staff... but it would be a big risk. You'd have to put all of your and Stefan's savings into starting a shop. And what if it wasn't successful – what could you live on? Stefan's job is OK (he teaches maths and basic engineering at a vocational college) but it doesn't pay very well – it would be uncomfortable for you both to have to live on what he brings in.

You had hoped that by now you might have children together – you and Stefan had planned it out. He was going to be the main parent, as it's easier for him to take time away from work (and he earns less). But it didn't work out – it turned out that you just couldn't get pregnant. And neither of you were very keen to adopt children. So, by now you've accepted it, kind of. If it wasn't meant to be, then it wasn't meant to be. But you do feel a pang of envy sometimes, when you see people with kids, loving and happy.

(Note: this briefing deliberately doesn't go into too much detail about your past. That will be discovered/created during the scenario, when you play through the various flashback scenes together.)

Dee

You are the younger of the two sisters: you are 31. Connie is 38.

You feel like you grew up in Connie's shadow: she was enough older than you that she was always looking after you, telling you what to do, keeping you out of trouble. She was like an enforcer for your parents, really. Always sensible and always right: and somehow you were always wrong.

You've carried on being mostly wrong, you suppose: your life is a mess, by most people's standards. You've bounced from job to job, from city to city, from relationship to relationship, without ever finding something that you thought would last – would be worth sticking with. You feel like you do have a purpose in life, and it's still out there, and you will find it – just that you haven't done so yet. But you're still young, after all.

Your closest thing to a long-term partner is Suze, a sculptor, who you've known since you were students together. She is awesomely talented, but quite impossible to live with. You love her and she loves you, but you just can't be together for longer than a few weeks at a time – the arguments and shouting (from both of you) become unbearable. Perhaps you are just too similar.

You wouldn't take Suze on holiday with your sister and her husband, that's for sure. They know her a little, and are generally repelled by her attitude: and they judge you for loving her. So you've brought Tom – he is a newish partner, who they haven't yet met. He's sweet and funny and makes you happy. (And he has steady money, from his job as a

graphic designer, which for sure helps things go more smoothly. Your own current work, as receptionist at a small animal-welfare charity, doesn't pay at all well.)

To be honest, a holiday in a small seaside town is not really at all your thing. But it's something that you can do for Connie. You know that she and Stefan wanted to have children by now (they've been together for 12 years, and when they got married five years ago it seemed like it was with that aim), but for whatever reason, it hasn't worked out yet. You feel like this is the next best thing to holidaying with kids, for them: and it's easy for you to give it to them, despite how boring and frustrating most of the week is likely to be for you.

Stefan is kind of boring, but you guess he's good for Connie somehow. You do feel that he judges you, which is a bit much considering how little he's achieved. He wanted to be in a band when he was younger, but gave it up to become a teacher: how feeble! You generally get on OK with him: but he's very protective of Connie, and sometimes seems to think that she spends too much energy on you. As if!

(Note: this briefing deliberately doesn't go into too much detail about your past. That will be discovered/created during the scenario, when you play through the various flashback scenes together.)

Stefan

You are Connie's husband, aged 36. You have been together for twelve years, and married for five. You love Connie, and think of it as a good, solid partnership, that's held together despite the pressures that life has thrown at you.

You think of yourself as a realistic person, who accepts that things aren't always going to go your way. You are undemonstrative emotionally, but firm when you need to be. This comes in handy in your job – you teach maths and basic engineering at a vocational skills college. It's not your dream job (it's probably not anyone's dream job), but you feel like you're helping people: some of your students have gone on to achieve things.

Back in the day, you were a keen guitarist – quite obsessive, hours in the bedroom every night. Looking back, you can see that this was partly a way of coping with a tense home situation – you were an only child, your father was an alcoholic, and your mother seemed to delight in provoking his anger and in humiliating him. You'd hoped to join a band and become a successful musician, but somehow the opportunity never came along. The bands you tried out in were always wrong somehow, the wrong kind of people or the wrong kind of music. You still like to noodle away on the guitar, as a way of relaxing.

Connie wasn't exactly your dream, either, thinking back. She was part of your circle of friends, and you didn't think all that much of her, except that she was nice enough looking. You both happened to be single at the same time, so you thought why not give it a go. You were kind of surprised to gradually find out what an amazing person she was, when it was just the two of you together.

She was keen to have kids, and you wanted them too – maybe you wanted the chance to give them a happier childhood than your own had been. That was why you decided to formalize things by getting married, really. But, it didn't happen – women's biology issues. And you decided together that you didn't want to adopt children. Maybe it's just as well: at least you can concentrate on each other now.

Connie's sister Dee is hot but messy – the kind of girl you used to fantasize about but instinctively avoid, when you were an introverted teenager. But Connie loves her, and you can see her good side too: she's generous and kind, and usually means well. Connie is more judgemental, as big sisters can be, so you sometimes find yourself defending Dee to her (which you guess would probably amaze Dee, if she knew).

Dee's main partner Suze is a complete nightmare, an emotional wrecking ball. Hopefully this new person, Tom, will be a bit more reasonable. It's maybe asking too much for her to want to settle down with him: but at least you can hope he'll be good company on this holiday.

Tom

You like to think of yourself as a happy-go-lucky person, ready to deal with whatever turn up next in life: and it's in that spirit that you're coming away on this holiday. Your relationship with Dee is quite recent, it's been nine months or so, and is still exciting – although you suspect that in her case, it might remain exciting for quite a while, if not indefinitely.

Dee's main on-off partner, Suze, is like a wild force of nature – wonderful, but also kind of difficult to be around at times. You feel that you can be a good counterpart to that, if things work out and you and Dee can be together for a while.

Your philosophy of life is that one might as well be optimistic and positive. Tough things are going to happen, no matter what you do – but they're less hard to deal with, if you can remain aware of all the good things that are also going on. Worrying about stuff never made anyone's life better or happier.

From what Dee's said about them, her sister and brother-in-law are more the worrying types, and quite serious-minded – even judgemental, at times. It seems like they're a lot older – practically middle-aged. (You are 30, but people usually guess you as younger.) You hope that you won't get set in your ways and attitudes, when you reach that age. And you're pretty sure that Dee won't.

You are a writer – you've had quite a few stories published, and a play put on at a drama festival: and you sent a novel out a few years ago but didn't get much interest. It was probably a bit narrow – it was about young artistic people

falling in and out of each other's beds, much like your own actual social circle. But perhaps spending some time around Connie and Stefan will give you an insight into how ordinary bourgeois people live, and help to broaden your creative palette a little.

You also work as a (freelance) graphic designer, but that's just for the sake of money – sometimes it's fun and interesting, but mostly it's just routine. You're good at it, but you'll drop it right away when the writing takes off.

You guess that you had a happy enough childhood. Money always seemed to be tight – there were five of you kids (you are the second-youngest) and often miscellaneous guests staying, people who were down on their luck. Your parents were both members of a small Protestant church, which had an emphasis on community spirit. You liked it as a kid, but saw through the religion side of things as you got older. People can just be nice to each other without needing an old bearded guy sitting on a cloud to tell them so, you once told your parents. They just smiled, which was kind of nice but also kind of frustrating. Anyway though, it's not for you, and that's fine.

The parents

Peter, 73, is a retired plumber. He provided a steady income and a stable home for Connie and Dee as they were growing up. Now, he has a substantial pension, which allows him and Janet to live comfortably.

Janet, 66, was mostly a homekeeper during the sisters' childhood, but went on to work as a legal secretary when they were old enough to take care of themselves. She still works part-time, although she says it's more for the social side than for the money.

Their life as parents was, on the face of it, blamelessly petty-bourgeois: a nice house and garden, furnished in good taste, a circle of similar friends. But under that surface there was a great deal of anger and tension, and occasional violence. Their daughters may not have been fully aware of this when they were young, and may still be somewhat in denial of it.

Since Peter's retirement, he seems to have grown old quite quickly – the sisters think. He is smaller, white-haired, and with a narrowing range of interests. His health is still good, but most days he just reads the paper and watches TV.

Janet is still much more active – as well as going to work and doing shopping and so on, she has several friends who she sees frequently. She takes an interest in the wider world, and likes to talk about it with Connie and Dee, who she aims to call at least once per week.

Peter and Janet initially met via shared friends, in the medium-sized town of Winkworth – around forty years ago. Janet grew up there, Peter moved there to work (from the nearby city). He was handsome and glamorous, as well as having a good career already established.

Janet was vivacious and very much in demand, with a string of young men who she toyed with, moving them in and out of favour. Initially Peter was added to these, but when it became clear that he could not be manipulated in the same way, she was forced to take him more seriously.

They got married, with the blessing of both of their families, and not long after Janet was pregnant. Tragically, she lost that baby after six months – a girl, who was to have been named Milly. Thankfully, a little later, Connie came along: to be eventually joined by Dee, the baby of the family. Both daughters know about Milly, but it's not something that their parents ever liked to talk much about.

Peter and Janet still live in the family home, and it hasn't changed all that much since the girls were at school. They both live close enough that they can easily visit, although Connie does so rather more frequently than Dee.

The setting

In the present-day, the sisters and their partners are trying to enjoy a summer holiday together. There are some long-standing tensions between them, but there is goodwill and a desire to make it work. Ideally, it will be a nice break for them, and something of a bonding exercise (Connie and Stefan have not previously met Tom).

They have rented a holiday cottage in the small seaside town of St Mark's Bay. It's about a six-hour drive from where they, and their parents, live. Connie and Stefan paid for the cottage up front, and told Dee what her share was, but she has not yet paid them back.

Stefan and Connie shared the driving down to the cottage, in their eight-year-old Vauxhall Corsa. Tom hired an electric Kia GT (which, fortunately, the cottage has a charging point for – although he had not checked this beforehand) to bring himself and Dee (who does not drive).

The cottage is charming but extremely clichéd, with swarms of seaside-related decorations and inspirational messages all over the place. The owner kindly left a nice welcome hamper; although the biscuits had gluten, so Connie couldn't eat them.

There are two double bedrooms and a shared bathroom. Connie and Stefan have taken the master bedroom, of course. Dee and Tom have to be careful not to bang their heads when they enter their own bedroom.

The kitchen is well equipped, although the knives are not at all sharp. There is a large collection of DVDs of mostly family-type films of the 90s and 00s. There is a small back garden, with patio furniture.

St Mark's Bay has a handful of pubs, ice cream shops, pasty shops, chip shops, a lifeboat museum, and so on. There's a pier, and a big sandy beach with lots of activities. During the winter, the place is probably quite bleak and deserted: but at this time of year, it's bustling and cheerful.

The scenes

There are three types of scenes in *How's Mum Doing?* None of them should last more than five to ten minutes.

Regular scenes

... take place in the present day, during the beach holiday. They are ordinary holiday happenings, which provide opportunities for the characters to talk together while doing stuff or looking at stuff. All four characters are present: they might be in a group of four all talking together, or in two pairs, or in some other configuration as they wish.

It might be that these scenes start off light, but become more serious, and address interpersonal issues, as the week goes on. Each regular scene has a briefing that explains how it sets up and how it should end.

Phone call scenes (in bold)

... also take place in the present day, during the beach holiday. Peter (played by the GM) is calling one or other of the sisters, or is called by one of the characters, for an update on Janet's health situation. Who is calling who, on which phone, about what, is described in the briefing for each scene.

The other characters can hear only one end of the conversation (unless the person on the call decides to put it on speaker), and will need the person on the call to explain to them what Peter said. (Of course, the players can hear everything, it's just their characters who can't. So if the person on the call doesn't exactly relay what Peter said, the other players will know about it out-of-character.) Each phone call scene starts with the phone being picked up, and ends with someone hanging up.

If you want to play a ringtone (or a variety of ringtones depending on whose phone it is) to start phone call scenes, you can, but it's not necessary.

Flashback scenes (in italics)

... are episodes from the past lives of the sisters and their parents. They progress backwards in time through the scenario, ie. the first flashback is the most recent, the last one is the oldest. In each flashback scene, the sisters play the younger versions of themselves (when present in the scene), and the briefing indicates who is to play which of the parents.

Flashback scenes are based on memories, which may be vague and uncertain, or may have shifted over time. It's ok if they don't make perfect sense or don't correspond with the present-day understanding – go with the flow and see what happens.

List of scenes

Here's a summary list of the scenes, followed by the details of each. This is just for the GM's reference, it doesn't need to be shared with the participants.

Sunday

1. Unloading the cars (introductory scene)

Monday

2. **Phone call** – Mum woke up confused and feverish, GP has been called
3. *Flashback* – last Christmas, Mum angry at Dee for her failure, at Connie for her perceived snobbishness
4. Shopping trip, to get provisions for the week
5. *Flashback* – Connie talking to Mum about failed pregnancy attempts

Tuesday

6. Beach visit, with ice creams
7. *Flashback* – Dad scolds the sisters for upsetting their mother
8. More beach visit, with chips
9. **Phone call** – Mum into hospital for observation, suspected infection

Wednesday

10. *Flashback* – Connie comes home late, there is an angry scene
11. **Phone call** – delirium, sedation, intravenous antibiotics
12. *Flashback* – family trip to the beach, Mum gets drunk
13. Visit to cathedral
14. *Flashback* – Mum is at evening class, Dad cooks dinner

Thursday

15. **Phone call** – infection stabilized, treatment seems to be working
16. *Flashback* – Dee breaks something, Connie takes the blame
17. Visit to glass-blowing workshop and/or museum of lace-making
18. *Flashback* – Mum and Dad fight, when Dee is a baby

Friday

19. **Phone call** – doctors are optimistic
20. *Flashback* – Mum is pregnant with Connie
21. Beach visit, walk along the pier

Saturday

22. *Flashback* – Dad and Mum deciding to go steady together
23. **Phone call** – Mum doing much better, coming home tomorrow
24. Packing to go home

Sunday

Unloading the cars

Connie and Stefan have only been at the cottage for a few minutes – enough time to put the kettle on – when Dee and Tom arrive. The cars have to be unloaded. It's early evening, and everyone is a bit tired from the long journey, although some may be concealing that better than others.

Neither Connie nor Stefan have met Tom before this, although they know of his existence of course. So there will need to be introductions.

Tom will need to remember to plug his car in, to recharge the battery. Someone should suggest not worrying about cooking tonight: they can go out to eat this evening, and do a big food shop tomorrow.

The scene ends when they leave the cottage, hopefully locking the front door carefully behind them, to find a nearby pub to have dinner.

Monday

Phone call

Dad calls Connie on her phone. He seems concerned rather than worried. Mum woke up feeling confused and feverish. A doctor has been called, and will visit the house later today to check her over.

Flashback

Last Christmas, before dinner, both sisters are at home with Mum while Stefan and Dad are at the pub. Mum is played by the player of Tom. She has been in a grumpy mood all morning, and the scene starts as she snaps at Dee for not helping with making the dinner. This soon develops into a general criticism of Dee for not having a proper job and not having a proper partner. When Connie tries to defend Dee, Mum turns on her: does Connie think she's too good for this family, why doesn't she spend more time with her parents? It all seems quite irrational. Both sisters defend themselves only feebly, as if they are scared of their mother, not wanting to contradict her – but also, if they are upset, they try not to let her see it. It feels a bit like bullying. It is not clear what is really at the root of Mum's anger.

The scene ends when Dad and Stefan come back from the pub.

Shopping trip

All four characters are getting out of one of the cars (which one?), which they have taken to go to the big supermarket in the next town inland. The intention is to get all of the provisions that they will need to feed themselves (and to drink) for the week. Maybe they've decided who is going to cook which meal, and have planned it out in advance – maybe there's an organized shopping list – maybe not.

The scene finishes when two or more of the characters disagree, a little irritatedly, over a decision whether or not to purchase some particular (frivolous?) item.

Flashback

At some point in the last few years. Connie has dropped in on Mum to catch up with her, while Dad is out at work. The scene starts as she says that yes, they have been trying for a baby, but no luck yet. Mum (played by the Stefan player) is loving and sympathetic, but seems to have little understanding of why Connie and Stefan don't want to try medical intervention, or to adopt. The scene ends when Connie loses patience and snaps, and Mum becomes upset and defensive.

Tuesday

Beach visit

The group have had a morning coffee/tea at the cottage, plus some light breakfast for those who eat it, and the scene starts as they walk a few minutes to reach the beach. It's a fine sunny morning, and there are plenty of people about. Priority for at least one of the characters is to get some ice cream. They eat it while strolling along the beach and pointing out interesting things to one another.

If they tried to get Dad on the phone before this, they haven't been able to: he only has a landline, and it's been on answering machine all morning.

The scene ends after one of the characters has expressed concern to another about not having had an update on Mum's situation.

Flashback

Connie and Dee are young adults, visiting for their mother's birthday. Connie is partners with Stefan, but it's new enough that he has not been invited to join the gathering. Mum has just stormed tearfully upstairs because of something minor (such as noticing that Mum's dyed her hair, for example?) that Dee said. Dad (played by the player of Tom) scolds both of them for upsetting their mother. They know how sensitive she is, and they should be considerate of her. Dee is annoyed at being blamed, and shows it: Dad becomes angry with her. Connie tries to make peace.

The scene ends when she eventually succeeds in calming them both down, and offers to take a slice of cake up to Mum.

More beach visit

By now at least one message of concern has been left by one of the sisters on Dad's answering machine. The group return to the beach in the afternoon, but the weather is not as good. They huddle together against a wall, out of the wind, and eat chips (plus fish, sausages, etc, for those who want them).

The scene ends when someone throws a chip up in the air, and it is expertly caught by a wheeling seagull.

Phone call

Dad finally calls towards the end of the day, on Dee's phone. He explains that he's been in hospital and didn't have their numbers with him. Mum was admitted early in the morning for observation, on the recommendation of the doctor who came back to the house to check up on her – she was very feverish and in some pain. They've taken a bunch of blood for tests and so on, suspecting some kind of internal infection, she's being kept in overnight. He is concerned, naturally, but they've told him it's probably not serious, and he believes them.

Wednesday

Flashback

Connie is not long into her first job, still living at home. Dee is a teenager. The scene starts as a slightly drunken Connie comes home late from what was intended to be a quick drink or two after work, but turned into a big evening out – a nice chance to socialize with her new colleagues. Mum (played by the Tom player) and Dad (the Stefan player) have waited up and are not happy. They were worried sick about her, why didn't she answer her phone? (It was out of battery.) There is a mix of concern with lack of understanding. Connie tries to be placatory at first, but gets angry herself when it isn't working. She threatens to move out as soon as she can afford the rent: Mum is upset by this.

Dee comes to watch from the top of the stairs once voices are raised, but doesn't say anything.

The scene ends when one of the parents shouts at her to go back to bed, and the other shouts at Connie to do so too.

Phone call

Dad calls Connie's phone early in the morning, from the hospital. He is worried. Mum was delirious when he got there, and the medical staff have decided to put her under sedation. She is on an IV antibiotic drip. The hope is to stabilize her condition and control the infection.

Flashback

Connie is in her late teens, Dee is ten or so. The family are at the beach, on holiday. They had a fun morning together, but at lunch Mum (played by the Stefan player) had three glasses of wine and is now quite drunk, thanks to the hot dehydrating weather. She has another can of wine with her that she is swigging from as they alternately stroll along the promenade and sit on benches. Dad (played by the Tom player) is evidently concerned but trying not to make a fuss. Connie is maybe amused, Dee a little baffled, as to why Mum is behaving so oddly. If they show it too much, though, she will get angry. As it is, by default she is sentimental, loving, and apologetic for life (hers and theirs) not having turned out as she wished.

The scene ends when Mum decides that she would like to go to have a nap now.

Visit to cathedral

The group have driven (in whose car?) to the nearby cathedral city, which is small and very picturesque. One of Stefan or Tom (which?) is interested in ecclesiastical architecture, and talks knowledgeably about arches, buttresses, vaulted ceilings, and the like. No-one else is especially interested, but they feel it is part of the duty of being a tourist to visit these kinds of places.

A choir of young people starts practising, in the carved wooden stalls above the altar. The sound is beautiful – heavenly. One of the sisters (which?) starts to cry quietly, remembering how much Mum loves this kind of music. It may take a little while for anyone else to notice the tears.

The scene ends when at least two people have left the cathedral.

Flashback

Connie is in her early teens, Dee is quite small. Mum has gone out to evening class – she is studying for the A-levels that she never got to take, as she left school at 16. She wants to get a better job, once she's no longer having to look after the kids full-time. Dad (played by the Stefan player) is supporting her in this, looking after them and cooking dinner while she is out. But he is rather inept at it, and Connie is having to help. Eventually she makes it a bit too obvious that he really needs her help, and he gets annoyed. Dee starts crying and wanting Mum to come back home.

The scene ends when her key is heard in the lock (the Tom player should do this), and everyone becomes suddenly quiet and apprehensive.

Thursday

Phone call

Dad calls early in the morning again, on Dee's phone this time. It's cautiously maybe-a-bit-better news – the antibiotic treatment seems to be having an effect, and the medical staff hope that the infection has now stabilized. Mum will remain under sedation today, and everyone should keep their fingers crossed.

Flashback

Dee is around four years old, Connie around ten. She is looking after her sister in the living-room when Dee reaches up and knocks over a vase, which shatters on the floor. The scene starts with the crash, which will soon be followed by Mum (the Stefan player) and Dad (the Tom player) rushing in from the kitchen to see what's happened and who was responsible. Dee is too scared and upset to make much sense. Connie is also scared but she says that it was she who broke the vase. Both parents are furious, and Mum is also upset as it was precious to her. Mum tries to comfort Dee as Dad sends Connie upstairs, saying that she will be dealt with later.

The scene ends as she drags herself towards the stairs, consumed with dread.

Educational visit

Despite the tension, Stefan is gently insistent that they should stick to the plan of activities for the day. If they have to head back early, then so be it – but for now, Janet would want them to enjoy the holiday, as much as that's possible.

The options are either a glass-blowing workshop, or a museum of lace-making – both are in walking distance. Which do they choose (or both?), and what conversations and interactions do they have with each other there?

The scene ends when two of the characters argue with each other, quite angrily.

Flashback

Dee is a baby, Connie is seven or eight. Mum (the Tom player) and Dad (the Stefan player) have been unable to fix a leaking tap: in fact, they've made it worse. They argue bitterly.

This argument should be played out with only occasional words and phrases being comprehensible, because Connie (and even more so Dee of course) didn't really understand what it was about. Both parents bring up a range of inadequacies and faults in the other, as they get angrier, but most of it should be nonsense words. Eventually one of them grabs the other and starts shaking them – but suddenly stops, embarrassed and guilty, when they see that Connie is watching in horror. (That's the end of the scene.)

Friday

Phone call

Dad calls on Connie's phone, mid-morning after the medical round. He seems more cheerful, and says that the doctors are optimistic now that Mum will make a good recovery. She's still under sedation for now, but her life signs are returning towards normal – the infection has been defeated, it looks like. Although keep your fingers crossed!

Flashback

The not-long-married Mum (the Stefan player) and Dad (the Tom player) are sitting together one evening after dinner. There is a tense mood, which Dad is trying to lift with some pleasantries about his day at work, etc. Mum is being rather quiet but suddenly announces that she is pregnant. It is not clear whether she is happy about this, or alarmed, fearful, etc. They had evidently not been planning such a thing: it will be their first child. Dad is excited at first, but then concerned about Mum's reaction. He tries to comfort her and look at the positives – she is in tears, or nearly so. (It is understood that they will keep the baby, rather than getting an abortion – it seems that's something that is automatic in both of them, and doesn't need to be discussed.)

The scene ends when Dad says that maybe this is what they need to make things right between them – without specifying what exactly has been wrong – and Mum agrees, sounding perhaps not fully convinced.

(Important to remember that this pregnancy is not Connie – it is Milly, the earlier baby who was miscarried.)

Beach visit

The weather is wet and windy, but it's the last full day of the holiday, so it would be a shame to stay indoors. It's a good opportunity for people to say things to each other that they've maybe been wanting to say for a while, but haven't wanted to because of Janet's illness. Now, at last, it seems like she's in the clear. The sense of relief also maybe removes some inhibitions.

The scene ends when someone complains that they are cold and wet and want to go back to the cottage.

Saturday

Flashback

The young Mum (the Tom player) and Dad (the Stefan player) are in an alley nearby a rather tacky nightclub. Both are somewhat drunk. The scene begins as Mum emerges at the end of a night of dancing and having fun, to see Dad waiting there. She has been in the club with a different boyfriend, and Dad is angry about it – he wants her to commit to him, and drop these others. She does not feel that he's done enough to prove himself worthy of 'going steady'. It rapidly develops into a fierce argument, each trying to browbeat the other into agreeing. Eventually Dad says something that Mum finds unacceptable, and she hits him. He hits her back. (Both are serious, painful blows – not just slaps.) They stare at each other, both shocked and stunned. The scene ends.

Phone call

Dee calls Dad early in the morning, as they have to get ready to leave the holiday home. She manages to get hold of him first time. He says that Mum is awake and groggy but healthy. It's expected that she'll be able to come home tomorrow. This is a great relief for everyone concerned. The doctors told him that at Mum's age (which is also his own age) these kinds of systemic infections can carry someone off with very little notice. It's important to spot the signs and raise concerns quickly – which he did, so they gave him a metaphorical pat on the back, for possibly saving her life.

Packing to go home

The four characters are loading up their cars. It might involve dividing up leftover food and drink, etc. They say their goodbyes, perhaps talking about possible future plans to meet up – or even to repeat the holiday experience if it's gone well.

The scene ends after one of them puts the cottage key back into the lockbox; and those who feel it appropriate to do so, hug each other goodbye.