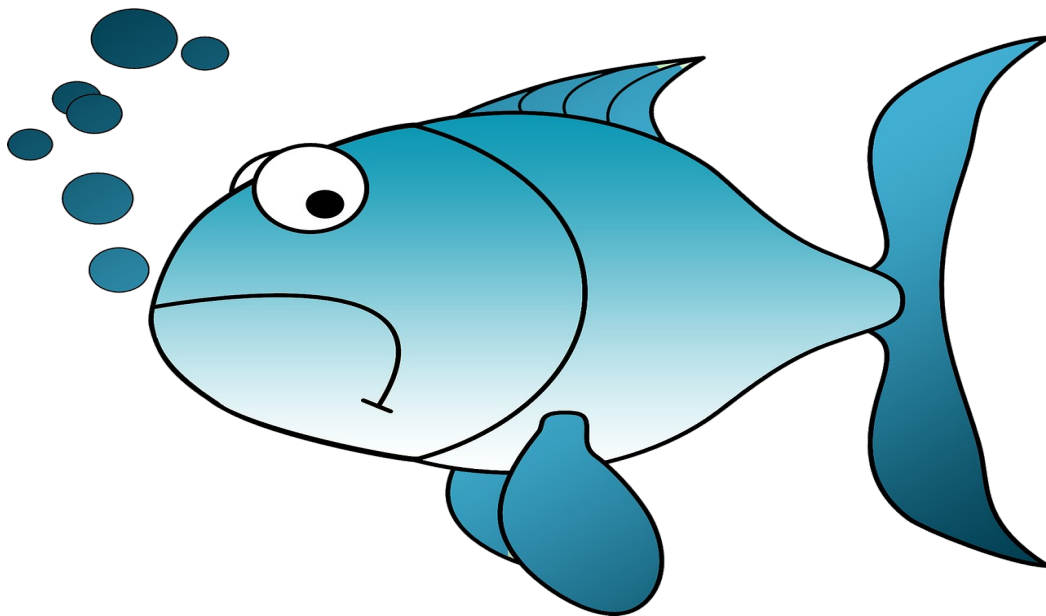


A LOAD OF CARP



by Troy Banyan

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'A LOAD OF CARP'

A One-Act Play (45 minutes in length) written by Troy Banyan

Cast (F – 5/M – 2)

Ernest Moffat.....**Councillor in 40's-50's**
Betty Moffat.....**Ernest's wife in 40's 50's**
Emily Moffat.....**Ernest's daughter in 20's**
Fred(eric) 'The Enigma'.....**Emily's boyfriend in 20's**
May.....**Ernest's therapist in 30's – 40's**
Julia.....**Ernest's constituency co-councillor in 30's-40's**
Nora.....**Ernest's neighbour in 40's – 50's**

Synopsis

Conservative councillor Ernest Moffat is recovering from a breakdown and through online research he has learned about the positive outcomes of keeping koi carp, so the play starts at the opening ceremony for his new garden haven 'Carpe Diem', combined with a naming ceremony for the twelve koi he has introduced. Unfortunately for Ernest it appears that he has more enemies in attendance than friends. He has a fractious relationship with his rebellious daughter Emily and her layabout boyfriend Fred (using the moniker The Enigma) and the three women he's invited along to the ceremonies are May, the therapist he no longer uses because of the koi therapy; Julia, his fellow ward councillor who covers for him all the time; and Nora, his long-standing neighbour who he regularly puts upon. The only person who doesn't appear to have a grudge against him is his wife Betty.

Night arrives. Splashing is heard. The following morning Ernest goes to the pond for his therapy but realises that one of the carp is missing. His blind panic soon brings around the same people again and May, in particular, sees this as an opportunity to hypnotise Fred into trying to get in Ernest's good books, thinking that this will make the councillor get paranoid and return to her for more (expensive) therapy; also his high profile status was a good magnet for work coming in thick and fast. Julia and Nora also believe that Ernest was more bearable when he was incapacitated, so are happy to go along with her strange plan. There are many accusations flying around as to what has happened to Clarence Carp.

Night arrives. Splashing is heard. The following morning and Fred has slept on the garden bench throughout the night, supposedly keeping vigil, and is covered by the newly acquired pond net when discovered by Ernest coming out to see his beloved remaining carp, only to find that another one has now gone missing, Columbo Carp. As Ernest melts down again all five women soon arrive on the scene and contrary to helping out Ernest Fred is seen as being the culprit as the net is over him when he wakes up. In addition to her anger at Fred (and Emily for bringing him into their lives) Betty has also had enough of the 'three witches' always being there, like harbingers of misfortune. Before leaving, May surreptitiously reinforces the hypnotic trance on Fred.

During that night, with Ernest now keeping watch in the garden – albeit asleep on the bench – splashing commotion is heard and Ernest awakens to a torchlight in his face. In his half asleep state Ernest first thinks that aliens have arrived and that it is they stealing his fish. He then realises that it is, again, Fred, this time with detective paraphernalia. The pond is again open and a third carp has disappeared. In no time the five women are on the scene and Fred, despite still being suspected, carries out an

investigation, especially when it is noticed that the last letters of Carpe Diem on the sign have been crossed through, leaving the words ‘Carp Die’.

With everyone a possible suspect, Fred correctly reveals who the fishnapper is and also the fact that he was never hypnotised, he just pretended to be, showing himself to actually be ‘an enigma’ after all. The ‘reveal’ also means that life in the Moffat household will never be the same again and that Ernest’s haven idyll – and his recuperation for that matter – has been ruined in the space of three days.

The Scene – The back garden of the Moffat household

(The simple set is a circular ridge centre stage, denoting a fish pond, which is covered by a sheet. Behind the pond to one side is a small bench with bush running behind it, and to the other side is a self-standing sign that is also covered by a sheet. Running from upstage to downstage left is a small picket fence with a gap in the downstage end of it).

(Standing around the pond are May, Julia & Nora, looking slightly bemused. Suddenly there’s a fanfare and Ernest enters upstage right, in pyjamas and a dressing-gown. On his right arm is Betty, with Emily on his left and they walk solemnly, as if royalty. They get to upstage centre and turn as one so that they are in a line. They then walk downstage as one then around the pond to where the bench is situated and stop.)

Ernest: (Clearing throat.) Hmm-mm. Thank you all for coming here on this special Sunday, to this, my back garden oasis, and without further ado I’ll let my darling wife Betty and my special daughter Emily do the revealing honours. I know it’s normally **me** performing this function but this time I just want to sit, watch and take it all in. So, Betty, will you please commence the unveiling.

(Betty kneels by the pond’s edge and grabs the edges of the covering sheet.)

May: (Whispering to Julia and Nora.) Who does he think he is, King Lear?

Julia: Or Canute, given the theme?

(They smile at each other but Nora looks bemused.)

Betty: (Pulling off the sheet: brightly.) Ta-Dah.

(May, Julia and Nora close in to look in the pond.)

Ernest: Please don’t crowd them, besides...the ‘naming ceremony’ is about to start. Emily dearest, please complete the unveiling.

(May, Julia and Nora back away again. Emily then saunters to the sign and wearily pulls off the sheet.)

Emily: (Deadpan.) Ta-dah.

(The sign reads, in big letters, ‘Carpe Diem’. Ernest then stands up and walks to the perimeter of the pond.)

Ernest: Thank you for that. Now, I wanted you three other ladies here to witness the unveiling of my new sanctuary as you have all been important to me during my recuperation over the last six months... and you all no doubt want that progress to continue. Firstly, the woman who got me back on track when I came off the rails, May.

(There is light applause. The spotlight falls on May and the rest stand, as if frozen in time.)

May: Huh, I've just lost one of the most lucrative and high profile clients I've ever had. I had months, if not years, more therapy to give him if he hadn't done his own online research and discovered the therapeutic benefits of keeping carp following a throw-away suggestion I happened to make once.

(The spotlight goes off May and the others re-animate.)

Ernest: Then, of course, there's my fellow ward councillor, without whose sterling work of taking up the slack for me when I was found wanting - hence not having to elect someone else - was invaluable: my co-worker Julia.

(There is light applause. The spotlight falls on Julia and the rest stand, as if frozen in time.)

Julia: Huh, I covered for him and lied for him for the sake of the party more like, and did the work of two people whilst still doing my own day-job, while he sat issuing orders...not lifting a finger. I thought he would fall on his sword and leave the party, not recover and bask again in non-existent glories.

(The spotlight goes off Julia and the others re-animate.)

Ernest: And then last, but not least, someone whose daily support with chores, errands and general bon viveur I don't know what I would've done without, my long-standing neighbour, Nora.

(There is light applause. The spotlight falls on Nora and the rest stand, as if frozen in time.)

Nora: Huh, long-suffering more like. What a pretentious load of prattle. He's always lorded it over me - and the others in The Close for that matter - and now **this. (Mockingly.)** "Ooh, look at me, I've got koi carp". What next, sturgeon...so he can get their roe and have caviar? I'm not even of the same political persuasion as him: bread and dripping does for me.

(The spotlight goes off Nora and the others re-animate. Ernest then approaches the pond and produces from his pocket several sheets of stapled together paper that are Carp ID papers.)

Ernest: Right, so this sanctuary has been named 'Carpe Diem' which, for those of you who don't know their Latin, means 'seize the day', or more aptly, 'enjoy the moment', and that's exactly what I intend to do in this haven, letting the trials and tribulations of the day - and, indeed, life - wash over me whilst watching the water wash over my beauties. So, without further ado, it's time for the carp-naming ceremony, or christening if you will.

Julia: (Whispering to May and Nora.) What does that make us, their carp-parents?

(They smile at each other but Nora just looks bemused. Ernest flattens out the papers then clears his throat.)

Ernest: I have worked on the suggestion of my darling daughter and that is to name them alliteratively like The...(mispronouncing.) Kardashians, is it?

(Emily rolls her eyes and shakes her head.)

Ernest: So, it's an official welcome to Carpe Diem, in no particular order, to **(reading from ID papers.)** my favourite historical characters Caesar and Cleopatra Carp...though I'll accept Cleo. My favourite detective, Columbo Carp. My favourite holiday destination, Cyprus Carp. My favourite film star, Charlie Chaplin Carp, Charlie or Chaplin will do. Now, my favourite TV personality has always been Jacques Cousteau, but to run more off the tongue I am naming this beauty after his boat, so welcome Calypso Carp... **(Looking studiously at papers.)**

Nora: (Whispering to May and Julia.) He could have had goldfish, or tropical fish, but no...he had to have-

Ernest: Next up we have...my favourite time of the year...Christmas Carp, then someone with whom I feel I share a lot - wisdom-wise - Confucius Carp. Then there's my favourite sport, Cricket Carp. Then there's my all-time hero - political and in life - Churchill Carp...without whom (**choking up.**) sorry, I always get emotional when I think about...

Betty: (Holding Ernest's arm.) You're nearly there now dear. Stiff upper lip.

Ernest: (Steeling himself.) And finally, again in memory of a different type of hero of mine, named after my late father, Clarence Carp.

Emily: (Sighing.) That's only eleven.

May: (Whispering to Julia and Nora.) Only?

Ernest: Are you sure? (**Frantically rustling papers.**) Oh yes, how could I forget? The place where I met my darling wife – and the place where my only offspring, my darling daughter, was conceived –

(Emily closes her eyes in embarrassment.)

Ernest: The birthplace of my favourite poet, William Wordsworth, that beautifully picturesque, heavenly tranquil Cumbrian haven...Cockermouth.

(There is an embarrassed silence as the three visitors look at each other and try not to laugh.)

Ernest: Yes, this is indeed a day to remember. A glorious day that basically marks the second coming of Councillor Ernest Moffat...which is, in effect, the first day of the rest of my life; the day I effectively re-join the human race. A day that is impossible to ruin.

(Fred appears downstage left and peers over the fence at proceedings.)

Fred: Yo-yo-yo. Am I too late for the fish doobry-wotsit? You know...the um...unveiling oojimer.

(Ernest closes his eyes and drops his head. Emily runs towards Fred excitedly as he enters the garden.)

Emily: You made it.

(Emily hugs and kisses Fred excitedly. Ernest visibly rankles, scrunches up the papers then slumps back onto the bench. Betty prises the papers from his hands and flattens them out.)

Julia: (Whispering to May and Nora mischievously.) Ah, the idyll has been ruined. This should be fun.

Betty: (To Emily.) Why did you invite **him** along today? (**Fanning Ernest with the papers.**) You **know** how he gets to your father.

Emily: Because I love him, that's why.

Betty: (Derisively.) You haven't known him long enough to even contemplate it. What your father and I have is 'love'.

Emily: God help us then.

(Betty goes to explode but Ernest holds her arm weakly.)

Ernest: I'm feeling rather weak all of a sudden. I think I'll go back inside for a lie-down, all this exertion has worn me out.

Nora: (Whispering to May and Julia.) Exertion? He's not even cut a ribbon this time.

Ernest: It is precisely this sort of stress that my dozen delights, my basking beauties, will help eliminate. So, thank you for coming but I must now bid you all farewell. However, feel free to admire the koi for as long as you wish.

(Ernest holds Betty's shoulder and indicates for her to lead the way, which she reluctantly does, and he follows her upstage right.)

Fred: (Calling out.) Take it easy pops, don't do anything that I – the proletariat – wouldn't do.

(Ernest's hackles go up but he doesn't respond. He just slowly follows Betty off upstage right.)

Fred: Was it something I said?

May: (Whispering to Julia and Nora.) It's always something he's said I've heard.

Julia: (Whispering to May and Nora.) Or done, I've heard.

Emily: (Suspiciously.) Um, you three may as well just go now, the party's over, you are dismissed.

Nora: (Whispering to May and Julia.) Huh, the apple never falls far from the tree, does it?

(Emily snootily turns away, holds Fred's arm and they exit downstage left, leaving May, Julia and Nora standing around the pond.)

May: Well, it's been nice meeting you. I doubt if we three will meet again, even though we are linked inextricably with his highness...and his precious pisces.

Julia: Despite his condescending, patronising tone...I am loathe to carp about the carp.

Nora: (Struggling for clever response and shrugs shoulders.) I'm coy about the koi?

(The three laugh and exit downstage left. The lights go down. Frantic splashing noises are heard then the lights come back up to denote night-time passing and the next morning arriving. Ernest enters upstage right with a mug, the ID papers and a fish-food bag in one hand and his mobile phone in the other, which he speaks into.)

Ernest: Oh, hi Julia. I shan't be able to be make surgery this morning as I'm feeling a bit under the weather. Sorry to dump on you yet again, I'll make it up to you, I promise. Bye.

(Ernest puts the mug on the floor, pulls the bench up to the pond's edge, sits down on it takes a deep breath through his nose and out his mouth, then surveys the pond.)

Ernest: Hello my beauties...and how are you this fine morning? That's it, just stay in that sort of line so that daddy can identify you as he feeds you. Now, as this is your first full day here I've got some special treats bought from the koi carp specialist store in town, 'Koinnoisseurs'. Okay, **(opening ID papers and nodding a head count.)** that's it, not much longer now, I just want to re-identify you so I can see which ones are guzzlers and which ones are a bit more...

(Ernest puts down the papers and the bag. He then anxiously points in the pond and counts on his fingers, clearly showing counting on two hands and only one finger. He then lies down on the ground to get a closer look, putting his hand in to look under pond weed. He then reaches up for the papers then starts looking at them and in the pond, getting closer all the time. Betty enters up right and sees Ernest lying down with his head over the edge of the pond.)

Betty: Aagh. What have you done?

Ernest: He's gone Betty.

Betty: Who has?

Ernest: Clarence. It's like losing my father all over again.

(Ernest wails out and crumples into a sobbing heap. Betty shakes her head dismissively, tuts then goes to him and grabs the papers out of his hand. His sobbing intensifies and Betty does a quick check between the pond and the papers.)

Betty: Hmm, could it – I mean **he** – be up under the lining of the pond somehow?

Ernest: (Stopping sobbing.) Of course, why didn't **I** think of that?

(Ernest starts crawling all around the pond on his knees, with his head inside looking up under the edging. Emily saunters on upstage right and derisively looks at Ernest.)

Emily: What's wrong with **him**? Does he love them so much that he has to be in there with them?

Betty: Clarence has gone missing. Anyway, what are you doing out here? Shouldn't you be at work?

Emily: I'm waiting for The Enigma to arrive. He's walking me there.

Betty: I wish he – and you for that matter – would drop that ridiculous nickname.

Ernest: (Kneeling up.) He's gone. Clarence Carp has gone.

Emily: Ah well, you have eleven others. Going back to my darling boyfriend, I would be very grateful if you could make him feel welcome when he visits.

Ernest: Quite apart from the fact he is a lazy, benefit-claiming scrounger who leeches off of you, who can barely string two words together and who goes out of his way to annoy me – politically and every which way possible – I refuse to recognise the existence of anyone who goes by the moniker 'Enigma'.

Emily: It's **The** Enigma, actually.

Ernest: I don't care. The only thing I care about is the disappearance from this pond of the koi carp that I, only yesterday, named after my late father. God...if only I wasn't such a heavy sleeper I would have heard something going on out here.

(Ernest buries his head in his hands and starts weeping. Nora rushes in downstage left.)

Nora: What is it? What's happened? I heard wailing and crying so thought I'd better...

Ernest: He's gone Nora.

Nora: Who has?

Ernest: Clarence. Clarence Carp, less than twenty-four hours before he entered Carpe Diem.

Nora: Oh, I thought something serious had happened by the noise. That's why I came haring around.

Ernest: (Exasperated.) What?

Betty: (Jumping in.) A heron around. Yes, I guess there **could** be, I've heard they know when there are new fish in an area.

Nora: What?

Ernest: (Suspiciously.) Or **cat** maybe. How's that plump one of yours Nora? Did it come in for breakfast when you called it this morning?

Betty: Now that's enough casting aspersions for one day, I'll get a net later and you keep guard at the pond until I get back with it. Okay?

(Julia appears downstage left having just listened to the message left on her mobile phone by Ernest and sees him still on his knees at the pond.)

Julia: Feeling better, are you?

Ernest: Um...I wasn't feeling right so came to Carpe Diem to help me recuperate: unfortunately, events have resulted in me taking a turn for the worse.

Julia: You're going to **have** to do some constituency work soon, the elections are on the horizon. What's happened then?

Emily: One of his precious fish has gone missing.

Julia: Huh, I don't know if all your absences are even legal.

Ernest: (Exasperated.) What?

Betty: (Jumping in.) Or a seagull, it **could** be...not necessarily a heron.

Julia: What?

Ernest: Or a political enemy maybe, **(suspiciously.)** or even an ally with a grudge perhaps.

Betty: Right...now that's quite enough excitement for one morning. Remember, my husband is still recuperating...so shouldn't be having to have conversations of this kind.

Ernest: (Crouching down again and holding head dramatically.) Oh what a terrible morning, what else can go wrong?

(Fred appears downstage left and peers over the fence at proceedings.)

Fred: Yo-yo-yo. Another garden gathering-type thingy. What's wrong **now** Pops?

Ernest: (Throwing his arms up.) Aaaagh.

(May enters slightly downstage left but hangs back to view proceedings out of everyone's sight.)

Emily: (Holding Fred's arm: through gritted teeth.) Remember what I said The Enigma, he doesn't even let me call him Pops.

Fred: What about Ernie then?

Betty: (Angrily.) Right, that's it. **(Walking to Fred.)** I know you think you are some sort of anti-authority, anti-establishment, anti-everything person who doesn't want to conform to the norms of society but if you want to keep coming here to see our daughter you will go by the name you were given at birth. Understand? Now, what is it?

Fred: (Quietly and politely.) It's Fred.

Ernest: (Smirking.) Fred?

Emily: Yes, it's Fred. Happy now? **(Starting to walk upstage right then turning to Fred.)** I'm going in to get my stuff then you can walk me to work, okay?

(Fred shrugs and Emily exits upstage right.)

Ernest: Well, that's certainly cheered me up a bit. Come on dear **(holding Betty's arm.)** let's go in and have some breakfast.

Betty: But, what about minding the pond?

Ernest: Oh, I won't be long, besides...our guests can keep a lookout. Or even Fred perhaps.

(Ernest exits upstage right chuckling on Betty's arm.)

Julia: The nerve of that man. He leaves me a message, there's clearly nothing wrong with him, then he disappears before I can have anything out with him.

Nora: I know what you mean, I rushed around here when I heard all this wailing and crying, all because of his missing fish.

(May enters furtively over the picket fence having heard everything.)

May: Morning all. Well, what do you know, we three **do** meet again. Dare I ask what's wrong with his lord and master?

Julia: One of his precious pisces has gone missing.

Nora: And he's blaming it on my cat, I think.

May: Really? **(Turning to Fred.)** And **you**. You're an interesting character aren't you, Fred?

Fred: (Shrugging.) I dunno.

May: (Staring at Fred.) Yes, the enigmatic Fred. Loathed by him as much as you loathe him, right?

Fred: Loathe's a strong word.

May: (Soothingly.) It is a strong word Fred. It is. Especially when deep down you want him to love you, so that he will approve of you and Emily, is that right Fred?

Fred: Love's a strong word.

May: It is a strong word Fred. It is: but deep down you know that you want to please him, don't you?

(May starts waving her hand slowly in front of Fred's eyes. He nods and starts to waver a bit.)

Nora: What's she doing?

Julia: If I didn't know better I'd say she was hypnotising him.

Nora: But why?

Julia: Beats me.

May: (Soporifically.) You know how you can get in Councillor Moffat's good books, don't you? Perhaps by...protecting his precious fish. What do you think you should do?

Fred: (Monotone.) Protect his precious fish.

(May leads Fred to the bench, sits him down and on it then waves her hands in front of his eyes again so that he stares intently at the pond. She then joins Julia and Nora.)

Julia: What are you doing?

Nora: Yeah, **he's** not done any harm.

May: **He** hasn't no, but can you truly, hands-on-heart, say that you actually **like** Ernest Moffat?

Julia: Honestly? No. I know I'm his ward co-councillor but I find him lazy, pompous, self-righteous and has got where he has off the backs of other people's hard work...and not just mine.

Nora: If I'm honest...I'm not a fan of his either. As a neighbour he's needy, self-important, stuck-up and arrogant, and these trophy fish are the final straw.

May: So, did either of you come here in the night and take one?

Julia: What? Well, **I** certainly didn't.

Nora: Neither did I. **(Suspiciously at May.)** Besides, what are **you** doing back here today?

Julia: And what, pray, do you expect to achieve by hypnotising The Enigma over there?

May: There isn't time to explain now as Emily will be back out any minute.

Nora: Well, **when** then? It's not as if we three will meet again, is it?

May: Oh, I think we all know we will...and soon.

(May walks away and back to Fred where she kneels in front of him and resumes her hypnotising of him with her hand-waving. Julia and Nora just watch on.)

Nora: Do you trust her?

Julia: Do **you?** Or **me** for that matter?

Nora: Good point. Do you trust me?

(Emily enters upstage right with her coat on and handbag over her shoulder. She sees May crouching in front of Fred.)

Emily: What are you doing with my boyfriend?

May: (Standing.) Nothing, I was just making sure he was all right after all the...

Emily: (Barging in between.) He doesn't need **your** help...and neither does my father, so what are you doing back here? **(Seeing the other two.)** Or you two for that matter? I thought I'd dismissed all three of you yesterday. Come on The Enigma.

(Emily holds the trancelike Fred's arm and ushers him quickly off downstage left. May rejoins Julia and Nora.)

Julia: What's happening here?

Nora: Yes, what's going on?

May: Look, despite us three being invited along to the opening of this pretentious piscine paradise yesterday...none of us really even like him, do we?

(Julia and Nora look down sheepishly.)

May: I make no bones about the fact I lost a high-profile client, which in itself I shouldn't gripe about – after all my job is to help people – but he's made such a deal about these ruddy carp, and self-help methods in general, that other clients are now looking to leave me. He has a lot to answer for has Councillor Moffat...and I could really do with things going back to how they were.

Julia: I couldn't agree more. Even though I'm younger than him I've been a standing councillor in our ward **longer** than he has. I really loved his predecessor who sadly died, we had such a good rapport, but when Moffat won the seat he arrived at Council like he owned the place and just saw me as a female junior to wait on him, cover for him and generally stay in his shadow. To be honest, when he had his breakdown I was hoping **that** was the end of him, but now he seems back with a vengeance.

Nora: I have to be honest. I hate him. He's a stuck-up snob who - because he's a councillor for this area - thinks he's the lord of the manor, with everyone at his beck and call. When he had his breakdown I was hoping he'd move away, perhaps out to the country to be with others more his kind, but no...instead he's created this...this Shangri-La, so he can look even further down his nose at us now. Hang on, what has all this got to do with you doing what you did?

May: Okay, who do you think Moffat hates more than anyone else? And what would Moffat do if Fred were to stop being an anarchic, lazy, scrounging, left-wing, waste of space and suddenly become future son-in-law material who can't do enough for the father of his girlfriend?

Nora: Um...he might like it?

Julia: Knowing him I think he'd be suspicious.

May: And perhaps a little paranoid maybe? Ladies...the blue touch paper has been lit.

Julia: I have a feeling we three will be meeting **yet** again.

Nora: Anyone fancy a celebratory cup of tea and biscuit, or is it too soon to gloat?

(The three women smile, put their hands out then rest them on top of each other in pact-style and exit together downstage left. The lights go down to darkness on stage. Frantic splashing noises are heard which then fade out. When the lights come back up Fred is lying curled up on the bench facing away from the pond, asleep and covered with pond netting. Ernest appears upstage right with papers in one hand and mobile phone in the other, which he speaks into.)

Ernest: Oh, hi Julia. I shan't be able to make the council meeting this morning, I'm still reeling from the shock of yesterday's events I'm afraid...and I know you wouldn't want me stressing myself with council duties and risk a relapse, would you? So, I'm just going to take things easy for today and...

(Ernest sees the uncovered pond then quickly looks at Fred on the bench.)

Ernest: (Yelling.) Aaagh.

(Fred stirs but as he is facing the other way he is disorientated. Ernest walks to him, sees the net and yanks it off of Fred.)

Ernest: You! What are you doing here...and with the net? **(Panicking.)** Oh God, **(kneeling by pond.)** there'd better not be...**(rifling through ID papers.)**...any more gone.

(As Ernest frantically looks at the papers then at the pond, counting with his eyes, Fred awakens and spins around to sit on the bench, rubbing his eyes.)

Fred: No, there can't be. I was keeping doofer...guard.

(Ernest stops in his tracks and looks incredulously at Fred.)

Ernest: What...by falling asleep under the protective net taken off the pond? What are you even **doing** here?

(Betty and Emily appear upstage right. Ernest resumes frantically checking the fish with the papers while others appear.)

Betty: That's what I'd like to know.

(Emily appears upstage right behind Betty.)

Emily: Me too.

Betty: You mean...**you** didn't know about this?

Emily: Do you think I'd let the love of my life stay out here while I was indoors?

Betty: I wish you'd stop calling him that.

Ernest: **(Crying out in anguish.)** N-o-o-o-o-o. It can't be true.

Emily: **(Tersely.)** What is it **now**?

Ernest: Another's gone. And, unless I'm very much mistaken, it's – somewhat ironically – Columbo Carp.

