



A drama on climate change

By Paul Symonloe

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### **Cast of Characters**

**Michael:** A man in his late twenties wearing a close-fitting suit. Serious and practical.

**Daphné:** A poised, fiery French woman in her mid-twenties. She's attractive, smartly dressed and business-like. She's completely bilingual with a very slight (but detectable) French accent. Not coquettish.

**Mungo:** A businessman of a little over 50.

**Raj:** An Asian man of around 60.

**Stephen:** A man in his late 50's, raffish in appearance.

**Youth:** A youth of 18 or so.

**Policewoman:** Young, efficient.

## ACT 1 SCENE 1

(To one side of the stage is part of a bridge, the rest having collapsed. On the other side is the bumper of a car, the rest being off-stage. In the far distance we hear sirens, while on-stage are two figures. One is a woman of around twenty-five, the other a man nearly thirty. Both are talking excitedly on their mobiles, occasionally looking at each other in a -rather overly-disinterested way, suggesting they are strangers. We are aware of distant thunder and lightning).

**DAPHNE:** (On mobile). It disappeared just like that! Jesus, ten seconds earlier and I'd be fucking dead right now! (*Sits down shocked on the bonnet of the car*) Yes, yes of course I will. It's just the shock, I'll be okay.

**MICHAEL:** (On the other side of the stage on his mobile) I'm telling you it's completely gone! I can't get back until someone comes up here. (*Pauses for a reply*) No, no it's totally backed up, no one can move in either direction. The road narrows at the bridge and there's no space to turn round. Plus I think the way I came must be completely flooded too. There's no going back. (*Pauses for a reply*) No! The water just took over! Helen listen is Sean okay? Did the school say anything about you know what? (*Pauses for a reply*) Okay, yes I'll call you again when something happens. (*Ends call*)

**DAPHNE:** (*still on mobile*). No, it's gone quiet now. I don't know anything else at the moment. I'll call you as soon as I do. (*Pauses for a reply*) Yes, me too, bye.

(*The two strangers look across at each other tentatively, not knowing whether to speak or not. The woman sits on the bonnet of the car again, leading us to think it's probably hers. They keep looking at each other and then looking away, waiting for the other to speak. Eventually the man opens the dialogue.*)

**MICHAEL:** (*showing concern*) Hi there, Michael. You okay?

**DAPHNE:** *(Slightly ironic, with feeling)* Yeah! I nearly died! Christ this is shit! *(Smiles)* Daphné, hi.

**MICHAEL:** What happened? You were right at the front right?

**DAPHNE:** Yes, I was the last one before it all fell apart. You know what's awful; I think a car could have gone over the edge. I'm not sure, because I couldn't see really with the rain and the river going crazy! Oh my god! If someone fell in people could be dead couldn't they?

**MICHAEL:** Jesus! Is that what happened?

**DAPHNE:** *(Not committing)*. Well, I don't know for sure. I'm not swearing to it. The rain was like a wall of water. I couldn't see a thing. I think I stopped my car out of instinct. Where are you?

**MICHAEL:** I'm five back. A guy in the car behind you went to sit in the white van right behind him. Maybe they know each other.

*(The woman looks sceptical)*

**DAPHNE:** Is there any evidence for that? Three cars in a convoy you mean? Sounds pretty unlikely.

**MICHAEL:** *(Less sure)* Okay, perhaps not, but as I say he went to sit in the white van. I expect he wanted company, reassurance that kind of thing.

**DAPHNE:** *(Unconvinced)* Maybe. Did you notice anyone else?

**MICHAEL:** No, I was freaked out by the bridge going down too, I didn't notice anything else. Maybe the police will tell us more.

**DAPHNE:** *(a little challenging)*. So you've called them?

**MICHAEL:** No, no I haven't. I thought someone would've done by now.

**DAPHNE:** *(Business-like)*. So you haven't and assumed someone else would?

**MICHAEL:** *(Simply)*. Yes.

**DAPHNE:** *(Energetic, not scolding)*. So, I'm going to! Somebody has to act right? *(She punches the numbers decisively in to her*

*mobile*) Merde! I think I'm in France! *(Starts again)* It's the shock.

**MICHAEL:** Don't worry, nobody's around to hear you, we're cut off.

**DAPHNE:** *(Factually)*. You're here. Anyway, I don't like being cut off - story of my life. Wait, they're answering now.

*(She walks off towards the bridge leaving the man and the audience excluded from what she is saying. Every so often she gestures towards the collapsed bridge, to the water, and in the direction of the stationary cars. Ends call and returns to the man's side).*

Ok so they know about it, but have no idea when they'll be able to send help. They say we might want to keep out of our vehicles "in case of inundation". But it's up to us. *(Suddenly angry)* Bloody hell, I was supposed to be doing something tonight!

**MICHAEL:** *(Triggered by her temperament)*. Me too as it happens! My boss was coming over to go through some figures. What a kerfuffle!

**DAPHNE:** *(Suddenly amused)*. A kerfuffle!? Not a disaster? Just a little local difficulty right? You English!

**MICHAEL:** *(With dignity)* Yes, I'm English. Is that okay?

**DAPHNE:** *(Still amused)*. Of course it's okay! We're in England aren't we?

**MICHAEL:** Yes we are ... *(Tails off)*

**DAPHNE:** *(Looks at him appraisingly)*. Do you think I'm having a go at you? *(He doesn't respond)* Well I'm not. Differences are good. They can be the lightning between us right? A connection in a storm! You react this way, I that. It's interesting, *(not coquettish)* exciting even.

**MICHAEL:** *(Ironical)*. This weather's pretty damned exciting! It's getting more exciting every year.

**DAPHNE:** Yes, its insanity! Are we going to wake up?

**MICHAEL:** The climate thing you mean?

**DAPHNE:** *(Incredulous)* Climate thing? Yes, the climate thing! How long have we got left, thirty years, fifty?

**MICHAEL:** *(Pause as he absorbs her temperament. Enter an Asian man of around 60, vocally relieved to see them)*

**RAJ:** Thanks to God! Are both of you alright? Do you know if anyone went over the edge? What a catastrophe! Oh goodness, I'm so glad you're both alive! Would you like some sandwiches? I'm in the van up here with a woman and a man. Come, come I'll give you food. I've got Fanta too.

*(The two younger adults look at each other for guidance, DAPHNE reacts first)*

**DAPHNE:** That's very kind of you Mr...

**RAJ:** Raj, just Raj. Please come, come.

**MICHAEL:** Thanks, but I reckon I'll stay here and keep an eye open for the emergency services. This is a good vantage point.

**RAJ:** Please, what is your name?

**MICHAEL:** Michael.

**RAJ:** Please Mr Michael, come with us. It's probably going to rain again soon and just here is perhaps not safe. The ground is too soft and it can give way. Please you come and Miss...

**DAPHNE:** Daphné

**RAJ:** ... Miss Daphné. Come to my van to eat and drink.

*(MICHAEL considers)*

**MICHAEL:** Okay, look I've just got a couple of calls to make, and then I'll be over. Which van is it?

**RAJ:** It is the only van. Come soon please. Miss Daphne, come with me please.

*(They leave. MICHAEL dials and puts the mobile to his ear)*

**MICHAEL:** Hi. *(Pause for reply)* No, don't worry I'm fine. Is this on the news by the way? *(Pause)* Shit! Really? *(With growing*

*emphasis*) So half the county's under water? Jesus! Okay, it looks like it'll be a long night. Sean's okay right? Yes I know. Okay, tell him I'll be home soon. *(Longish pause)* Are you serious Helen? Tonight of all nights? I'm up to my ears in flood-water and you're going out? Who's going to look after Sean? *(Pause)* Your mother? I thought you said she wasn't well? *(Pause, angry)* Right, well there's nothing I can do about it is there? Look I have to go. *(Rings off abruptly, dials again)*

Hi Nick? *(Pause)* Yes, me again. *(Pause)* ...in some kind of trouble? You don't know the half of it. No I'm on the B1077 near Little Millbridge. The old bridge went down in a flood. We're marooned on a single track road. *(Pause)*... No it's stopped raining for now. *(Pause)* Yes I just called her. *(Pause)* Oh she's fine. She's says she's going out tonight and leaving Sean with her sick mother would you believe?! *(Pause)* Yes, that is the kind of person she is! *(Pause)* Christ what a fuckup this all is. Listen, there's someone coming. Can you call me back? Great, thanks. *(Ends call)*

*(RAJ returns with a pack of sandwiches and a can of Fanta)*

**RAJ:** Mr Michael, I want you to have these to eat and drink please.

*(MICHAEL Looks guilty and takes the offerings with smile)*

**MICHAEL:** Look I'm sorry I haven't come over. I've got a health issue with my son. He needs round-the-clock attention, and tonight it turns out my wife's going out. Anyway, it's very good of you to think of me. Thanks so much for these. *(Holds up sandwiches)*

**RAJ:** Actually you are quite welcome. I'm sorry to hear about your son. How old is he? Is his mother going to leave him alone for long?

**MICHAEL:** *(Shocked)* Oh no, no, we'd never leave him on his own. His grandmother will be there to look after him. He's only seven.

**RAJ:** You don't trust her, your wife's mother?

**MICHAEL:** *(Again eager to be clear)* No, no it's not that. She's elderly and not well either that's all.

**RAJ:** If she's quite ill herself she should not be in charge. Do you wish me to ask my own mother to go there?

**MICHAEL:** *(Still slightly shocked)* No really, that's very kind but it's fine. I'm going to ask a friend of mine to check on him later. He needs his medication.

**RAJ:** You think that he can die? *(MICHAEL looks uncomfortable at this comment, turns away)*. I see you don't like to think about death. I'm sorry. Mine is a different background, sometimes you have to think about it. Look at tonight for example. Miss Daphne came very close to her death, really close. Maybe some people did die on that bridge. We have to wait patiently to find out.

**MICHAEL:** *(Mobile rings, putting it to his ear gestures he's got to take the call, looks apologetic. RAJ leaves)* Nick? *(Pause)* Thanks for calling back. Look can you do me a big favour? *(Pause)* Yes, you guessed. Do you mind? I'd be really grateful. *(Pause)* God thanks, I owe you. *(Ends call and puts his hands through his hair, then covers his face. After some seconds in this position he looks up to find Daphné next to him. Straightens up)*

**DAPHNE:** You okay? Michael right?

**MICHAEL:** Yes, Michael.

**DAPHNE:** I'm guessing there's something wrong?

**MICHAEL:** No, no... *(Relenting)* well yes, I suppose. I was just saying to that guy Raj I'm worried about my son's health. The medics can't pin down the problem. Tonight he's expecting me home and... *(Tails off)*

**DAPHNE:** *(Sympathetic.)* It sucks right?

**MICHAEL:** Yes.

**DAPHNE:** Look, why don't you come over to the van. There's a kind of weird guy there with Raj. Maybe it would take your mind off things?

**MICHAEL:** Weird guy?



**DAPHNE:** Yes. He's got a 1960's look, longish hair, a flowery shirt, that kind of thing, quite attractive in an out-dated way. *(Laughs)* Anyway come with me. It'll help, trust me.

**MICHAEL:** *(Not convinced)*. I think I'll play it safe. Didn't the police say it may be dangerous to be inside our vehicles? It may start coming down again. The hills can dump half a river on you without warning.

**DAPHNE:** *(Jokily)* Do you always play it safe Michael? They said it may be dangerous to be outside our vehicles too. *(Smiles, seeing he's decided)*. Okay, but I won't be saving your skin if it all goes the wrong. *(Makes to go)*

**MICHAEL:** Thanks for asking though. *(Experimentally)* Daphné.

**DAPHNE:** *(Lightly, friendly)*. No worries.

**MICHAEL:** *(Jokily)* Ok I'll be over in a couple of ...days.

**DAPHNE:** *(Laughs)* Sure. Don't get tempted by the river will you? Some people get a fatal fascination like that, and the next thing you know... *(Whistles a downward cadence suggesting a fall)*

**MICHAEL:** Don't worry I've got too many responsibilities. *(Sudden smile)* Anyway I'm a coward!

**DAPHNE:** *(Laughs)* Pleased to hear it! Loyalty to cowardice is still loyalty right? See you later. *(Exits, MICHAEL goes over to the bank, studies the running. He spends quite some time close to the edge. STEPHEN enters, approaches)*

**STEPHEN:** Man! Quite a spectacle right? A dreadful abyss with artistic possibilities! I should take some pictures, except you can't capture a sense of destruction or an undercurrent of chaos on a roll of film.

**MICHAEL:** *(Friendly)* Hi, Michael. *(Offers a hand)*

**STEPHEN:** *(Shakes)* Stephen, ciao. I've been in the van with Raj, and later with an attractive French woman, Daphné? Are you two friends?

**MICHAEL:** No. I was close behind when the bridge went down that's all. She was at the front. I guess she's already told you?

**STEPHEN:** She has. It must have been horrific. She must have thought she was going to die. *(Smiles, oddly out of keeping with the topic)* She seems completely together though. I reckon she's not easily fazed. You can tell by the way she talks and stands - body language - I notice stuff like that.

**MICHAEL:** *(Looks frankly at the other man)* Right. You seem pretty un-fazed yourself. Have you got any more news on this mess?

**STEPHEN:** *(Ignores the question)* I'm always on a natural high. Besides, I've looked in to many chasms. We're helpless as babies out here you know? Shall we cross the Acheron covering our ears to the screams of the Uncommitted?

**MICHAEL:** *(Puzzled)* Sorry, I don't know what you're talking about.

**STEPHEN:** Sorry, I'm being obscure. It's Dante's Inferno. This bridge and the angry waters reminds of his journey across the river Acheron, hearing the tormented screams of those who chose neither side in life - not good or evil - thinking only of themselves.

**MICHAEL:** Right! Cheerful!

**STEPHEN:** Yes, "abandon hope all ye who enter here" and all that jazz. It isn't exactly a bedtime story is it? Anyway, what's yours?

**MICHAEL:** My what?

**STEPHEN:** Your story? Everyone's got a story. Its funny how being thrown together like this makes you open up.

**MICHAEL:** *(Stiffly)* I'm not sure I am opening up.

**STEPHEN:** You will, if we're here long enough, believe me. Once the rat's maze of people's minds gets going. It should be interesting.

**MICHAEL:** Interesting?

**STEPHEN:** Sure.

**MICHAEL:** Sounds like a human experiment.

**STEPHEN:** Maybe. With people there's always subtext, a backstory. What happens if I do this or that. As long as we're trapped here, an experiment of some kind is inescapable.

*(They're interrupted by DAPHNE returning. She in turn looks round hearing a voice, seeing she's been followed on to the stage by MUNGO. He's just ending a call to the police. Broadcasts)*

**MUNGO:** You won't believe the breaking bloody news! There's a dam up on that ridge, *(points)* by the name of Tall Water, straining like a woman with sextuplets, to drop a million tons of water on our heads!

**MICHAEL:** *(Alarmed)* What?! What the hell are the police doing about getting us out?!

**MUNGO:** *(MUNGO issues his response generally, not an answer to MICHAEL).* The police say they've escorted most of the stranded drivers to safety back along the main road as far as the cutting. However, as of now, it's been deemed unsafe because of the ceaseless rain, hence we *(makes a circular motion with his finger)* are stuck here! That is until they pronounce it safe again or find another way of saving our skins!

**DAPHNE:** So we're just to sit here and wait to be swept away?

**STEPHEN:** Marvellous! A cliff-hanger. The thrill of waiting to see what happens next.

**MICHAEL:** It's no thrill for me thanks! Look, I'll call the police again. *(Puts his mobile to his ear, pause, and looks round at the others)* Shit! No signal!

*(RAJ enters. He seems excited to see MUNGO.)*

**RAJ:** There you are Mr Mungo. Please have some sandwiches. *(Offers a pack).*

**MUNGO:** Look, I've told you once I don't eat sandwiches!

**RAJ:** *(Philosophical)* Ok Mr Mungo just let me know when you change your mind. Every person must eat.

**MUNGO:** (*Looks around, sarcastic*). Maybe you can trade them with someone else.

**RAJ:** No, no I am not selling them, although they are one of our best lines I have to admit. Out here in this very bad storm they are for us all to share. We are all human people caught together in a difficult situation.

**DAPHNE:** Thank you Raj, I enjoyed mine. (*Meaningfully to MUNGO*) At least someone's thinking of others.

**MICHAEL:** Yes, good on you Raj.

**STEPHEN:** (*Facetious*) Yes, you may have a bit-part at the moment Raj, but it has distinct promise if we're stuck here without food for days.

**MICHAEL:** (*Piqued*). I don't see a joke. We're cut off in the cold and dark. What's sure is that we'll need each other.

**MUNGO:** (*Looks at him appraisingly, sceptical*) I can't say I know what you mean. As things stand I'm simply stuck on the road to nowhere with a few other specimens of humanity. When help arrives that's it.

**DAPHNE:** That's never it! Why do you talk as though you're the only one who counts?

**MUNGO:** Do I? Well let me clarify. I have no horse in this race. I'll be out of here shortly and shall, without intending offence, forget you all instantly.

**DAPHNE:** Without intending offence? You seem very sure you won't need anyone out here in the dark.

**MUNGO:** (*Dry*). It isn't actually dark yet. Anyway, must I suppress what I say to "keep in" with you all? Am I to choose my words from a menu?

**DAPHNE:** No, but it's probably unintelligent to ignore the facts.

**MUNGO:** Which are?

**DAPHNE:** That we may be in danger, and if so, relationships count. (*Glances at him*) Like family ties, if you have one that is.

**MUNGO:** (*Faces her down*). You're very young aren't you? Do you really view this assemblage as your saviours? Seems your geese are all swans.

**Daphne:** So I shouldn't see the good in people?

**MUNGO:** We all think that way at first, seeing the best in people. If I can offer a little fatherly advice, you should start making smart choices.

**DAPHNE:** Such as?

**MUNGO:** Such as searching out those who've made their mark in the world.

**MICHAEL:** Bullies perhaps?

**MUNGO:** Winners perhaps.

**STEPHEN:** (*Grinning, at MUNGO*). Talking of winners, is your car the Range Rover?

**MUNGO:** (*Dry*). Yes, why?

**STEPHEN:** Oh nothing, just asking.

**MUNGO:** There's a motive behind all questions.

**DAPHNE:** A sad view.

**MUNGO:** Actually not. It's human nature. We're all in it for ourselves. If this guy asks me about my car it's because either he's jealous or he's got one.

**DAPHNE:** And what if he's just making conversation?

**MUNGO:** Words matter, even to a clown. (*Turns to STEPHEN*) Okay, so tell us, why did you ask the question?

**STEPHEN:** (*Not insulted*). I'm just interested in people's choices. I reckon you see an expensive car as an ingredient in your worth to the world.

**MUNGO:** And my number plates?

**STEPHEN:** Those are your footprints in the sand.

**MUNGO:** Based on what theory?

**STEPHEN:** (*Grins*). That they make you appear more attractive than your personal skills suggest.

**MUNGO:** (*Dismissive*). Plates like mine are common enough. That sounds like a lame theory to me. You're big on observation, but what have you ever done?

**STEPHEN:** Neatly proving my point that you confuse wealth with worth. I don't need a number-plate to justify myself.

**DAPHNE:** (*Jumping in*). Damn the number plate! Time's against us here. The road's unstable and where is the help they promised?

**STEPHEN:** She's right. We are in a spot of bother. The dam just over that hill must be bursting. It's getting late. What is it...? (*Looks at his phone*) 8pm? The light's going and it's getting cold. We don't know if sitting in our cars is safe. We're like the sea-farers in *The Tempest*, salvaged but muddled.

**MUNGO:** (*Knowledgeable, dry*). However our storm, we assume, wasn't summoned up by magic. Moreover, if this is a story of sibling rivalry and betrayal we may all be in danger. Maybe we should ask if we're in acceptable company. (*Sarcastic*) Except of course that we have no choice regarding the company do we?

**DAPHNE:** You do. You can choose to avoid us.

**MICHAEL:** (*Also irritated*). I don't know which nuthouse you've all escaped from but can we just focus?

**STEPHEN:** Ok let's each put forward a plan to get us out of here. Maybe give some background on who we are, and any relevant skills. (*Smiles*) It could be life or death.

**DAPHNE:** (*Incredulous*). Life or death? That's just nuts. We're just waiting for the emergency services to arrive. Why the drama?

**STEPHEN:** Ok no drama, but I think we should know more about each other. Anyway, it'll help pass the time until help arrives.

**RAJ:** Actually I think Mr Stephen is right in this particular matter. We should all listen respectfully to each person. Maybe say who we are and what we are able to do to help.

**MICHAEL:** Ok, I'm with Raj. I'll suggest a plan, but help may arrive in an hour or two.

**DAPHNE:** Or ten. We can't exactly check-out any time we like can we?

**STEPHEN:** Brilliant! A Hotel California clause!

**MUNGO:** On just that theme, *(To STEPHEN)* if the spirit of sixty-nine over here thinks we're as good as shipwrecked on an island of magic and mischief, maybe we should get on with going through the runners and riders?

**STEPHEN:** *(Laughing, flippant)*. Ok right. Who are we all then and what are our combined skills?

**DAPHNE:** *(To Stephen)*. Ok, you start. Who are you?

**STEPHEN:** *(Still flippant)*. I would say, but who I am kind of depends on who you all are. Why don't we find out who we want the others to think we are?

**MICHAEL:** *(Annoyed)*. Jesus Christ! Look, I'll share my ideas but I'm not going in to detail about myself.

**MUNGO:** *(Mock surprise)* No? Well the devil's in the detail they say.

**MICHAEL:** *(Enigmatic)*. You bet.

**MUNGO:** *(Changing tone)*. Actually one need only engage in this "show and tell" if one wishes. In this instance I choose to because it makes sense. Maybe *(looking around)* someone can start and we can get this out of the way? *(To MICHAEL)* Maybe you have a tale to tell?

**MICHAEL:** *(Dry)*. Maybe we all do.

**MUNGO:** *(Impatient)*. For Christ's sake! *(To STEPHEN)* It was your idea, perhaps you can get on with it!

**STEPHEN:** *(Smiling, arch)*. You know your temper may be your downfall.

**MUNGO:** And flippancy may be yours.

**DAPHNE:** *(to MUNGO)* I really don't know who you are, or your name come to that, but hasn't anyone ever told you you're bloody rude?

**MUNGO:** *(Simply)*. Yes, and its Mungo.

**DAPHNE:** You're a bit thin on friends I guess Mungo?

**MUNGO:** I don't consider making friends paramount actually, and since I'm already speaking, I'll say what I would do in this situation.

**STEPHEN:** Hallelujah!

**MUNGO:** I'm Mungo De Fren. I don't have a huge number of friends as we've just established...

**STEPHEN:** *(Sarcastic)*. Really?

**MUNGO:** *(Not distracted)* ... But I'm true to myself, if that's a measure of anything, which perhaps it is. I don't consider being nice hugely useful.

**MICHAEL:** *(Quietly)*. You can say that again.

**MUNGO:** *(Ignoring him)*. Invariably people are nice to win favour and so advance their own lives. I'm Oxford-educated and have worked in finance most of my life. I like to see things as they are. I feel my job should be to challenge any ideas or plans put forward. I'll be an adjudicator. *(Signals with a finger to his throat he's finished his story)*.

**STEPHEN:** And a truly modest one.

**DAPHNE:** *(Business-like)* Ok I'll go next. I'm Daphné and *(Looking at MUNGO)* I hope I'm different from this guy.

**MUNGO:** Mungo.

**DAPHNE:** *(Ignoring him)* I think my skills are balancing out one risk against another. I'm a lawyer. I work on testaments and inheritance between the English and French legal systems.

**STEPHEN:** Great! Huge scope for familial intrigues!

**DAPHNE:** *(Coolly)*. It's mostly dull actually, but I see in to the lives of the bereaved. Death brings out the good in people and



the opposite of course. Often an acid test of a person's humanity. (*Looks at MUNGO*)

**MUNGO:** (*Reacting*) Forgive me, are you suggesting that my not being overly nice to people makes me a bad person? Maybe you think, going on this hippy's plotline, I'm some kind of erratic monster?

**DAPHNE:** Monster is too loaded, but you clearly have a knack for offending people. Why refer to him as a hippy? Can't you just ask his name?

**STEPHEN:** Hey, I downed the cup of love and peace. I'm okay with it.

**MUNGO:** (*Ignoring him*). And why exactly would the term hippy be offensive? He dresses like one and I'm quite sure his look is entirely intentional. I see things as they are, that's all. I see no negatives here.

**STEPHEN:** Nor me. I'm still spangling in the afterglow.

**DAPHNE:** (*To MUNGO*) No, but you understand the power of words. You claim to see things as they are, but it's all subjective. You see things one way and I another. The truth may lie anywhere in between, or we may both be totally wrong.

**MUNGO:** So it's subjective; that's true for everyone.

**DAPHNE:** Yes, and we should be challenged for it, especially for under-the-radar prejudice, our prejudice "software".

**MUNGO:** Software?

**DAPHNE:** Yes. The thinking we start life with, our default. How many of us walk well clear of beggars, privately wishing they'd disappear? They make us feel uncomfortable, as do people with mental problems. We edge away.

**MUNGO:** Ok What about the youth of today, despising us illogically for trashing the planet and their future?

**DAPHNE:** And you can't see their point?

**MUNGO:** I can't, or not enough to lay charges against everyone who came before. Try second-guessing what your children will blame you for. That's a so-called software prejudice.

**DAPHNE:** But your generation had a choice. Your default with the young is their lack of experience.

**MUNGO:** Perhaps.

**DAPHNE:** You view them as unable to see the full picture. You argue they can't possibly know. But giving the lie to that is over there! (*Points to the river*) That's what they know; a disaster in real time.

**MUNGO:** And you think we conspired to destroy the planet and have all life perish? There were two wars remember? Nobody was even aware of the science. Plus we have to believe the science. Just what would your generation have done differently?

**DAPHNE:** (*Avoiding*). To conclude, I have a boyfriend, also a lawyer, and no children I'm pleased to say. I wouldn't bring them in to a toppling world like this. Oh yes, and I never knew my father, which is sad. C'est finis.

**MUNGO:** Maybe you should keep your powder dry until you do have children, which you will.

**DAPHNE:** Don't think you can speak for me.

**STEPHEN:** (*Jumping in*). You're right about the power of words. There's no force greater for working a sea-change on the mind. Maybe I'll speak now. I'm Stephen, a university lecturer in literature and drama.

**DAPHNE:** Ok and what do you bring to the table Stephen?

**STEPHEN:** I can feedback on our reactions to the situation. My work here is off the page you might say. Yes, we're in a bind, but I can show that it's also an amazing opportunity.

**MICHAEL:** What do you mean by an opportunity?

**STEPHEN:** It'll force us to see what we're capable of. We're in a highly charged situation. In my teaching, I've seen how dramatic

events uncover our inner sense of theatre. This chasm in nature is liable to unmask us.

**MICHAEL:** (*Practical tone*). Let's hope what's underneath is pleasant then!

**MUNGO:** Yes, and that the bloated dam up there doesn't spill its guts on us.

**STEPHEN:** (*Jocular*) I also care for my mother part-time. Oh yes, there have been a few girls of course, though I'm officially single again now. Not forever I hope! (*Laughs*)

**DAPHNE:** (*Dry*). So your mother can still hope for grandchildren?

**STEPHEN:** (*Laughs*). She can hope, if I escape a watery end that is.

**MICHAEL:** Personally I'm not in to all this self-knowledge. Shall we focus on getting help?

**DAPHNE:** Yes. Let's finish this and call them back.

**MUNGO:** Okay, who's next up for charades?

**RAJ:** Yes please. I can tell you my plan, but first I want to tell you about myself, which is very quick and easy.

**DAPHNE:** Come on Raj, what's your story?

**RAJ:** Yes please. I first came to the UK in the nineteen seventies after the expelling of many people from Uganda under the rule of the terrible dictator, Idi Amin.

**MUNGO:** Is this a long story?

**DAPHNE:** Ignore him. Carry on Raj.

**RAJ:** Ok, so I came to Birmingham with my mother. Two years' later I went to assist my brother in West London where he had a small grocery shop. I helped him with his business, and now he has a factory very near to here making sandwiches for many, many Asian grocers across the UK.

**MUNGO:** (*Dry tone*). Ah yes, the sandwiches.

**RAJ:** Yes that's right. What I can do is to supply food and drink. It's very important in this case where we can be trapped for a long while.

**MUNGO:** Superb, an unvarying diet of Coronation Chicken.

**RAJ:** Yes and please Mr Mungo, take some now you must be very hungry! *(He tosses a pack gently to MUNGO)*

**MUNGO:** For God's sake! *(MUNGO catches the packet and hurls it over the edge of the chasm. The assembled including MUNGO fall silent at this demonstration of anger and rejection).*

**RAJ:** *(Looks shocked).* I am now very sorry. I didn't know you were feeling like this.

**DAPHNE:** You're not the one who should be sorry! *(Directly to MUNGO)* I'm appalled by your crass behaviour!

**MUNGO:** Look I just don't want the sandwiches! How many times have I got to say it? It's nothing personal.

**MICHAEL:** *(Angry, but not loud).* It seemed damned personal to me. If I acted like that I'd certainly consider myself a monster!

**MUNGO:** *(Sarcastic tone).* Maybe it's acting that's your problem. You're really quite bad at hiding things.

**MICHAEL:** *(looks caught-out).* Fuck you Mungo!

**MUNGO:** *(Unmoved, changing tack).* So, how were you brought up, Michael, is it? We're all excited to hear your life story.

**MICHAEL:** *(Recovering his poise)* Okay, yes. I'm a practical person, so my plans would focus on as series of practical steps. First off I'd call the police back to check what's going on. If we can't raise help I'd make plans for spending the night here. Without being too fussy, as we may be picked up in an hour or two.

**DAPHNE:** And your life?

**MICHAEL:** Yes, okay. I'm a risk assessor. I live with my wife and young son about half an hour from here. I'm trying to source good medical care for him. My work takes me away from home a lot and I

was on my way back from a two day work thing. I wish I'd started earlier in the day. I might be home by now.

**DAPHNE:** What's your wife's name?

**MICHAEL:** Helen, why?

**DAPHNE:** Oh nothing, I just wondered.

**STEPHEN:** *(Pleased to stir)*. That's an odd question.

**DAPHNE:** *(Cross)* Why? Why is it odd?

**STEPHEN:** Just because a more obvious question might be to do with his son's health. Asking his wife's name sounds like one woman checking out another. How do you assess that risk Michal?

*(Laughs)*

**DAPHNE:** I think you're allowing your imagination to run away with you drama guy. We're all strangers here. I'm just being civil. I wouldn't have asked such a personal question without knowing him better.

**MICHAEL:** *(Earnest)*. I don't exactly mind discussing my son's condition. I'm trying to raise awareness. *(He and DAPHNE exchange a look)*.

**MUNGO:** So have we exhausted the playground games now?

*(Before anyone can answer thunder cracks sharply)*

**DAPHNE:** That sounds pretty nasty. This isn't case closed by any means.

**RAJ:** Please everyone come to my van. We can shelter from the storm which can be very dangerous! Please, please!

*(All depart except DAPHNE and MICHAEL who remain standing at the edge of the collapsed bridge)*

**DAPHNE:** What if the dam gives way? We'll be done for, and I'll lose my chance wont I?

**MICHAEL:** Sorry, I'm not with you.

**DAPHNE:** You know. Love, a family, children. The usual.

**MICHAEL:** Is that what you want?

**DAPHNE:** Yes, despite everything.

**MICHAEL:** It's not what everyone wants. You said yourself, the world's in a state. I sometimes question bringing Sean in to it.

**DAPHNE:** I know what I said, but people aren't going to stop having children are they?

**MICHAEL:** I reckon some will.

**DAPHNE:** Perhaps, but isn't the idea to teach them to be part of the solution? Anyway, who else will lead us out of this mess if not our children and their children? I'm going to give up law and do something.

**MICHAEL:** Something?

**DAPHNE:** Yes, shake the establishment, stir people up. Get change.

**MICHAEL:** It's a huge commitment. Are you prepared to give your life to it?

**DAPHNE:** Yes, it is a huge commitment, but cometh the hour cometh the woman right? Besides, if we all wait for someone else to act we're screwed right?

*(A light rain starts)*

**MICHAEL:** Here, come under my jacket.

*(They stand very close under MICHAEL'S jacket. They sense the intimacy of this.)*

**DAPHNE:** What's your view on the climate then? If you have a view.

**MICHAEL:** *(Animated)* Yes I have a view. I think it would be chilling if parents weren't sharing the experience with their children. Sean's doing a project on it at the moment. Loving him connects me to whatever he's doing, at school or wherever.

**DAPHNE:** I wish my father had thought that way.

**MICHAEL:** How did he think?

**DAPHNE:** I have no idea. As I said earlier he wasn't around to share his thoughts.

**MICHAEL:** Sorry to hear it. I could never do that to Sean.

**DAPHNE:** Do you believe that one hundred percent? None of us really know ourselves until we're tested. Maybe you haven't been tested. Maybe I haven't either.

**MICHAEL:** (*Stiffly*) I do think I've been tested actually. I can't imagine how going through this nightmare with Sean's could have been more of a test.

**DAPHNE:** Maybe, but some of your sex are casual enough on the issue of responsibility.

**MICHAEL:** (*Piqued*) I don't think you can generalise.

**DAPHNE:** Generalisations form opinions, like it or not.

**MICHAEL:** (*Pulling his coat off them*). Clearly we see the world differently.

**DAPHNE:** (*Pacifying*). You're too easily offended. I can't escape my own experience, but now I'm talking generally. So, you're the exception, that's great.

**MICHAEL:** (*More gently*). Look when I said we're different it doesn't mean I don't like you. I do. But I have a child, which makes my outlook different from yours.

**DAPHNE:** (*Challenging*). So I can't relate to the calamity the current generation face because I haven't personally conceived?

**MICHAEL:** Look I didn't mean it like that. I simply say that having your own child makes it real. The pain of knowing that they may have a lesser life than you did because of these massive challenges.

**DAPHNE:** (*Frank, to his face*). As it goes Michael, I like you too. I felt that straight off. But you can't claim extra points because of your son, however wonderful he is.

**MICHAEL:** That's not what I was saying.

**DAPHNE:** *(Continuing her theme)*. It's quite likely all of us, everywhere will face huge turmoil.

**MICHAEL:** What do you think will happen?

**DAPHNE:** Serious environmental events, extremes of weather, maybe not always equal or equivalent, but affecting us all in the end.

**MICHAEL:** Can't we build defences?

**DAPHNE:** Against gradually encroaching sea-level floods, ones affecting entire communities?

**MICHAEL:** Have they happened?

**DAPHNE:** On some islands, yes!

*(Very loud thunder)*

**MICHAEL:** Talking of hell or high water, I think both are on the way!

**DAPHNE:** Yes, I really hate this. Let's get back to the cars shall we?

*(They exit)*

## **ACT 1 SCENE 11**

*(DAPHNE and MICHAEL are still on stage alone. The rain has stopped).*

**MICHAEL:** Where were you born?

**DAPHNE:** That's a strange question.

**MICHAEL:** Why?



**DAPHNE:** Oh just that here we are in this très dodgy situation and you want to know where I was born.

**MICHAEL:** It's just that you have this slight French accent, so I wondered if you were born here or there.

**DAPHNE:** Here, though I was schooled in France 'till I was ten. My mother was French and my father's English.

**MICHAEL:** Was?

**DAPHNE:** Yes, she's dead, but she told me about this place. The house up this road is where my father was born. As you know, he left us when I was a child, and I've never seen his birthplace. That's why I'm here. I'm, well I was, staying in a local B&B tonight then taking a look around tomorrow.

**MICHAEL:** I'm sorry about your father. Every child needs a happy home life. I suppose you miss him.

**DAPHNE:** You don't miss what you've never had right?

**MICHAEL:** (*Understanding*) I'm sorry I didn't mean to pry.

**DAPHNE:** Its okay - all water under the bridge right? (*Look at each other and laugh*)

**MICHAEL:** What bridge?!

**DAPHNE:** Yes! Exactly! Still, plenty of water! (*Laughs then looks back seriously*) It's no joke though is it? Not for anybody.

**MICHAEL:** No, I want to believe there's hope though don't you?

**DAPHNE:** Yes, but we're not going to be saved by some benign island spirit. It's our choice, and it's right now. There's huge anger in nature. If the torrent over there doesn't get us, the dam up there damned-well will! Look at it. (*Motions to the savaged bridge*) We're fiddling with the air-conditioning while Rome topples in flames.

**MICHAEL:** I wish I had a plan.

**DAPHNE:** Nobody does. (*Looks down, thinking*) Anyway, what do you make of that Mungo guy?

**MICHAEL:** Him! Obnoxious right?

**DAPHNE:** He is, but I know the type. My stepfather's the same. I take it personally, as you can see. I can't stay rational round that attitude, which really pisses me off.

**MICHAEL:** He'd piss anyone off!

**DAPHNE:** Yes, but it's not that simple with me. I feel pissed off at myself. I feel like a child again, angry but safe. He churns me up.

**MICHAEL:** You sound as though he has some hold over you.

**DAPHNE:** Yes, exactly! I guess in some perverse way I view a man like that as a father-figure. It's like I'm frozen in time near him. Bizarre I know, but you can't fight what you feel right?

**MICHAEL:** I suppose not. My life's in limbo. Everything revolves round Sean.

**DAPHNE:** What has he got?

**MICHAEL:** *(MICHAEL, not ready for the, looks down silently)*

**DAPHNE:** Ok tell me when you're ready Michael. *(Uses his name a little self-consciously)*

**MICHAEL:** Thank you. Have you got kids?

**DAPHNE:** No! Oh god no! I'd be terrible at it. I'm still too much of a child myself. My mother called me quixotic.

**MICHAEL:** Which is?

**DAPHNE:** Idealistic, unrealistic. A bit mad maybe.

**MICHAEL:** Having a child changes you. You grow up - you have to.

**DAPHNE:** *(Loud thunder. DAPHNE and MICHAEL move closer).* Jesus! Listen to that! Let's hope I have the chance to grow up. The river's going bananas and this ground's soggy as hell. If we sink it'll be our own stupid fault!

**MICHAEL:** Are you frightened?

**DAPHNE:** *(DAPHNE smiling).* You realise women don't need men to protect them anymore?

**MICHAEL:** *(Smiles back)* I didn't say it for that reason, but okay, you're on your own then!

**DAPHNE:** *(Again smiling)*. Well, perhaps we won't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Maybe if the need arises...

*(More thunder, lightning)*

**MICHAEL:** Sure, giving you the best of both worlds.

**DAPHNE:** *(DAPHNE voice charged by the approaching storm)* Yes, brave new worlds!

**MICHAEL:** Aldous Huxley right? I don't know much about literature, but surely his world isn't what we're looking for?

**DAPHNE:** No?

**MICHAEL:** No, it was my GCSE. Huxley imagined a dystopia where humans were mechanically engineered.

**DAPHNE:** *(Animated)*. Yes, yes, but I'm thinking of the spell-binding story of Shakespeare's *Tempest*. That's my brave new world.

**MICHAEL:** Don't know it. I'll have to talk to that drama guy.

**DAPHNE:** We don't need him. I know it. It's where Miranda meets Ferdinand. He's the first young male she's ever laid eyes on in her life. She's utterly smitten.

**MICHAEL:** Oh?

**DAPHNE:** Yes, it's what I did at GCSE.

O wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,

That has such people in't.

**MICHAEL:** Sounds good, though as I say I'm not one for literature.

**DAPHNE:** *(DAPHNE incredulous)* Good?! Ravishing, magical, bewitching you mean! They're on a magical island. They fall rapturously in love.

**MICHAEL:** Right.

**DAPHNE:** (*Laughing, excited*). It helps that he's a prince of course!

**MICHAEL:** Ah.

**DAPHNE:** Mon Dieu! Talk about the poetry and the prose!

**MICHAEL:** Sorry?

**DAPHNE:** You English! You could do with a little more romance in the soul!

**MICHAEL:** I'm sorry. That ship's already sailed.

**DAPHNE:** Oh? Will it ever return, or has it been hopelessly shipwrecked? Are there no survivors?

**MICHAEL:** (*Abashed*). Who knows? ... Anyway you swing wildly between Shakespeare and Huxley don't you?

**DAPHNE:** (*Getting more in to her theme, still excited*) Yes! That's right, the poetry and prose. They, we, need each other! We'll need each more as survivors of the storm. If we survive! I'm going to see just what watery grave we're escaping from! (*Runs erratically towards the edge of the river*)

**MICHAEL:** Christ! Be careful!

(*DAPHNE runs heedlessly towards the edge*)

**DAPHNE:** Of what exactly? The end of the world? Who's being careful of that?

(*Runs to the very edge, MICHAEL alarmed, runs after her catching her arm at brink*)

**MICHAEL:** Stop this! Are you mad? It could all give way at any moment!

**DAPHNE:** (*Excited, wild*). And what difference would it make?!

**MICHAEL:** (*Suddenly piqued*). Don't you care about your life? Don't you have anything to live for?

**DAPHNE:** (*Animated*) Oh, perhaps you mean a relationship?

**MICHAEL:** I'm not sure what I mean. I just think you should stay away from danger.

**DAPHNE:** I'm worth saving you mean?

**MICHAEL:** Of course you are. We all are. It's like you've popped a pill! Where has all of this come from?

**DAPHNE:** *(Defiant)*. Why do you ask that? After all you don't actually know me from Eve do you? We're not all what we seem. In fact very little of what we think is so, is really so.

**MICHAEL:** Aren't you being bleak?

**DAPHNE:** *(Wild but lucid)* Am I? Should I be hopeful then? After all, I have a standard quota of internet "friends". I enjoy an antiseptic social-media profile: who I am, where I was born, who I know and where I work. I am not a number! No, I am an icon on a flat-screen. Christ! We're already in Orwell's nightmare! Google, and further ghouls, work tirelessly at neutering us with a joyless inventory of emotions. Happy face, sad face, angry face! Michael, we're heading for extinction by blandness, submitting to the terrifying pied-pipers of the internet. They're luring us, like lost children, to the abyss. Instead of raging about even seeing a future, we're all sending each other pictures of our fucking meals and pets! *(She dares herself closer to the edge)*

**MICHAEL:** What in hell are you doing?

**DAPHNE:** *(Abandoned)*. In hell? Aren't we all at the edge of hell; the inferno that drama guy talks about? I'm doing what we should all do.

**MICHAEL:** Which is?

**DAPHNE:** Do or die!

**MICHAEL:** *(Fearful and angry)* If you throw yourself in you'll never know if you can "do" will you?

**DAPHNE:** It's my choice!

**MICHAEL:** *(Exasperated and angry)*. So throw yourself in then!

**DAPHNE:** Yeah, wouldn't you like that?

**MICHAEL:** It's the absolute last thing I'd want!

**DAPHNE:** (Searches his face intently for truth, softens) Okay, I believe you.

**MICHAEL:** (*MICHAEL bemused*). Anyway what can we do about the state of the world?

**DAPHNE:** (*She steps away from the bridge and approaches him earnestly*) Do?! Out of nowhere some random woman, to whom you have no connection, goes nuts at the edge of a chasm scoured out of the earth, probably caused by us, and rages about the state of the planet.

**MICHAEL:** Ok.

**DAPHNE:** So that's what we can do!

**MICHAEL:** What?

**DAPHNE:** Rage! Rage! Each of us in our own way. Go nuts, because going nuts over it is in reality going sane! God! It's probably already too late. People have children. You have a child. What about their chances to live and have children, or simply live out their lives as they wish?

**MICHAEL:** How are you going to mobilise us then, with fear?

**DAPHNE:** If necessary. What's the alternative? Annihilation can only be avoided by a tempestuous sea-change in our ways! Common-place monsters control us, wearing grey suits, and talking deceit in reasonable voices. And who buy's their snake-oil in pretty bottles? We do!

**MICHAEL:** Yes, maybe you're right. People don't want to see it though. How are you going to tackle that?

**DAPHNE:** With your help!

**MICHAEL:** Me?

**DAPHNE:** You or people like you. You don't know yourself. None of us know ourselves until we're made to.

*(Thunder and lightning - They look at each other intently)*

**MICHAEL:** Listen, it's going to bucket down again. Let's get the others and call the police back. This has to end soon surely? Come under my umbrella.

**DAPHNE:** *(Long pause)* It's everyone's umbrella. Look I'm sorry I should go. *(DAPHNE exits)*