



PACKAGE OF CARE  
BY  
JULIA SWAIN

Extract

A SMITH SCRIPT

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## CHARACTERS

SARAH MITCHELL	A middle aged woman with a significant alcohol dependence. She is educated and rather sarcastic. She walks with a limp.
GAVIN REYNOLDS	In his early 30s. An environmental health officer with the local council.
DAISY McCAIN	In her early to mid 30s. A social worker specialising in drug and alcohol work.
PETER GOUGH	In his 40s. An experienced nurse with the drug and alcohol treatment service.
PC CARTWRIGHT	A police officer played by the same actor as Daisy McCain.
DR MARSHALL	A GP played by the same actor as Gavin Reynolds.
MICHAEL RILEY	An environmental health officer played by the same actor as Peter Gough.

ACT I

SCENE 1

THE SCENE IS A LARGE LIVING ROOM IN A SUBURBAN HOME OF THE PRESENT DAY. THERE IS A LARGE SOFA CENTRE STAGE WITH A COFFEE TABLE IN FRONT OF IT. THE COFFEE TABLE IS EXTREMELY CLUTTERED WITH EMPTY GLASSES AND BOTTLES OF GIN AND RUM. ONE GLASS IS HALF FULL. THE REST OF THE ROOM IS ALSO VERY CLUTTERED.

THERE IS A SMALL DESK STAGE LEFT.

THERE ARE PATIO DOORS AT THE BACK OF THE STAGE AND WINDOWS TO BOTH SIDES.

GAVIN ENTERS BEHIND THE BACK OF THE SET AND WE SEE HIM AT THE PATIO DOORS, PEERING INTO THE ROOM. HE CARRIES A BRIEFCASE.

GAVIN: Hello. Hello. (RATTLES THE DOOR HANDLES. THERE IS NO RESPONSE. HE SHOUTS LOUDER). Hello! Hello! Are you in there, Mrs Mitchell? I'm Gavin Reynolds from Environmental Health.

SARAH ENTERS. SHE IS READING A GLOSSY BROCHURE THAT SHE PLACES ON THE COFFEE TABLE. SHE SHUFFLES ACROSS THE ROOM AS IF EACH STEP IS PAINFUL.

SARAH: Alright. Alright. (SHUFFLES UP TO THE DOOR BUT DOESN'T OPEN IT)

GAVIN: (HOLDS UP HIS ID BADGE) Gavin Reynolds. Environmental Health. I need to speak to you about your bins.

SARAH: My bins? Why?

GAVIN: They're causing a bit of a nuisance. One of your neighbours complained.

SARAH: Which one? The fat one? I bet it was the fat one. Or was it the one with the funny eye?

GAVIN: Do you think I could come in? It seems better to talk about this inside.

SARAH SHRUGS THEN OPENS THE PATIO DOOR. GAVIN COMES INTO THE ROOM, SHOWING HER HIS BADGE.

SARAH: No point wafting that at me. I haven't got my reading glasses on.

GAVIN: Sorry. I'm Gavin. Gavin Reynolds. Environmental Health Officer from the council. We make sure that the local environment is safe for the residents.

SARAH: I'm aware of that. I'm poorly sighted not poorly witted. Sit down if you want. (SARAH SITS IN THE ONLY SPACE ON THE CLUTTERED SOFA. SHE STARTS TO DRINK FROM THE HALF EMPTY GLASS)

GAVIN LOOKS AROUND FOR A PLACE TO SIT THEN DECIDES TO MOVE SOME OF THE CLUTTER FROM THE SOFA.

GAVIN: We've had a complaint from one of your neighbours..

SARAH: Who...

GAVIN: ... we're not at liberty to divulge the name of the concerned member of the public.

SARAH: I don't need his name. Just tell me his build. I can do the rest of the detective work myself.

GAVIN: I didn't say it was a 'he'

SARAH: It's a woman. I bet it's that nosey bitch with the anorexic daughter and the stupid handbag dog. She's a fine one to complain about environmental damage - the amount of pollution that gas guzzling 4x4 of hers pours out.

GAVIN: I am not going to reveal the name of the complainant nor any distinguishing features Mrs Mitchell so you can stop asking me. What I need to do, however, is discuss with you the nature of the problem and then we can come up with an action plan together on how the issue can be tackled.

SARAH: Really. Don't let me stop you then. You go ahead with your well rehearsed little speech.

GAVIN: The complaint we've had is that the refuse disposal area at the back of your property doesn't get cleared regularly leading to a build up of refuse

and that this has attracted rats who've then been spotted in neighbouring gardens.

SARAH: So, it is the fat bastard next door.

GAVIN: Mrs Mitchell, please, this is a very serious matter.

SARAH: (UNDER HER BREATH) No shit, Sherlock.

GAVIN: You leave your bins to overflow and that's attracting disease-carrying rats into the neighbourhood. Some of the houses have children in. How would you feel if one of them got bitten by a rat?

SARAH: Those little shits two doors down would deserve it. You should hear the way they talk to their grandmother in the morning.

GAVIN THROWS HER A DISAPPROVING GLANCE

Alright, alright. I know. I shouldn't let the bins get like that. It's just I struggle to get the bins around to the front of the house because of my ankle - and sometimes I struggle to remember that it's bin day in the first place.

GAVIN: (LOOKS AROUND THE ROOM) It seems it's not just the bins you struggle with.

SARAH: It's a big house and I live on my own.

GAVIN: (PAUSE) Do you work Mrs Mitchell?

SARAH: Not anymore. And I'm not 'Mrs' anymore either. Haven't been for several years. Not since the bastard ran away.

GAVIN: 'Miss' Mitchell? 'Ms'?

SARAH: Just call me Sarah.

GAVIN: OK, Sarah. So we need to put in place an action plan to sort out the bin situation.

SARAH: (TAKES A DRINK FROM THE GLASS) Yeah, yeah. No doubt that's what your local 'protocol' tells you.

GAVIN: Is that alcohol?

SARAH: I can see why they gave you your shiny badge. Your powers of deduction are phenomenal.

GAVIN: It's only 10:30.

SARAH: And he can tell the time. Excellent.

GAVIN: Do you think you might have a problem with alcohol?

SARAH: Not at all. I know where to get it, I have the means to purchase it and I know how to drink it. No problem at all.

GAVIN: I think you're avoiding the issue.

SARAH: No. What I'm trying to do is avoid talking at all to the little jumped up council official who conned his way into my home this morning before I'd had a chance to have my breakfast. Cheers.

GAVIN: I'd hardly call a tumbler of gin at 10:30 in the morning 'breakfast'.

SARAH: You're right. It's more like brunch.

GAVIN: (PAUSE) So, what's the matter with your ankle? Is that why you're off work? Because if you're signed off because of physical injury you can get some help covering the costs of the clean up. (STARTS TO PULL APPLICATION FORMS FROM HIS BRIEFCASE)

SARAH: It's an old sports injury. Yes. I once played sport. I haven't always been this sad excuse for a human being, you know. I broke it and then had the misfortune of having a cack handed orthopaedic surgeon try to repair it. Which is medical speak for 'he fucked it up even more'.

GAVIN: You should have sued for compensation. Where there's a blame...

SARAH: Not when the orthopaedic surgeon is the best friend of your good-for-nothing psychiatrist husband.

GAVIN: Ah. (PAUSE) Anyway. Back to the action plan. Now, we can arrange for someone to come around and clear up the environmental hazard and you might be able to claim some assistance with the cost of it. They could help you sort out the rest of the house as well if you'd like that.

SARAH: What do you mean, 'the rest of the house'?

GAVIN: Well it is very cluttered in here. You can hardly move. And some of these glasses look days old.

SARAH: I've not been well. I'm just a bit behind with my housework.

GAVIN: A bit behind! Mrs - Sarah. Seriously, this place looks like it hasn't been touched in years.

SARAH: I like it like this. I know where everything is.

GAVIN: But wouldn't you like a good old clear out? You can treat yourself to some new stuff then.

SARAH: I can't afford new stuff. Look, I know it's a nice big house in a 'desirable' part of town, but my darling ex-husband made me buy him out when we got divorced and I haven't worked since, so money's a bit tight, Gavin.

GAVIN: So, are you signed off because of your ankle problem?

SARAH: That and depression. There's the irony of it. A fucking psychiatrist for a husband and he didn't spot how depressed I was getting. Assumed I was just letting myself go. So he pissed off with a lovely little nurse from his team and now they live happily ever after with their son Michael. Meanwhile I'm stuck in this shit hole dealing with environmental health officers who think my back garden is the biggest biohazard to hit North London.

GAVIN: (WHO IS CLEARLY UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT THE WAY THE CONVERSATION IS NOW GOING) Sorry.

SARAH: Oh, everyone's fucking sorry. Sorry but we don't want to use your company anymore. Sorry but the bank can't give you another business loan. Sorry but we can't fix your ankle. Sorry but I don't love you anymore. You're all fucking sorry.

GAVIN: Do you really have to swear so much?

SARAH: Yes!

THERE IS A VERY AWKWARD PAUSE. GAVIN STARTS TO PUT HIS PAPER WORK BACK INTO HIS BRIEFCASE. HE NOTICES A

LETTER ON THE COFFEE TABLE WHICH HE PICKS UP AND READS.

SARAH SHUFFLES OFF STAGE LEFT AND RETURNS WITH A BOTTLE OF GIN. SHE TOPS UP HER GLASS.

GAVIN MOVES AS IF TO COMMENT ON THIS.

SARAH: Don't.

GAVIN: Do you have any other family?

SARAH: No. Both parents died a long time ago. And I don't have brothers or sisters.

GAVIN: What about children?

SARAH: Never had any. Tom and I agreed that we wanted to concentrate on our careers. He used to say that he was glad that he'd met me because he really didn't want kids and it was rare to find a woman who didn't either. First thing he did when he left me for Rachel was to have a child. He's a nice kid though. He was five a few weeks ago. I sent him a card I think. It's not the kid's fault is it?

GAVIN: So, are you a doctor too?

SARAH: Good God no. I was a businesswoman. I ran my own company. We did health and safety training for other businesses. I used to lecture at the local uni as well. I even won a few pathetic awards - business woman of the year, that kind of nonsense.

GAVIN: And now you're swigging from a gin bottle twenty four seven.

SARAH: What are you? My fucking mother? Oops. Sorry Mum. I swore again.

GAVIN: Alcohol doesn't help.

SARAH: Oh, I think it helps massively.

GAVIN: You're just papering over the cracks with alcohol. It doesn't solve anything in the long run.

SARAH: Oh really. Well, I'll be the judge of that. Besides which, what else have I got now? I lost my

business, I lost my husband and now it seems I'm losing my health.

GAVIN: I did notice this letter.

SARAH: What letter?

GAVIN: This one for the hospital appointment. With gastro-entomology.

SARAH: Gastroenterology. I think that's for the stomach pain I've been having. I've undoubtedly got stomach cancer on top of everything else now.

GAVIN: Don't say things like that. The letter says you had to phone them to book an appointment - by last Thursday. Did you do it?

SARAH: I don't think so.

GAVIN: Why not? Your health is important.

SARAH: It's none of your bloody business. And you shouldn't be reading my private correspondence. I'll make a complaint about you.

GAVIN: Well, if you can't be bothered to pick up the phone to make an important hospital appointment I hardly think you'd phone the council to complain about me.

SARAH: Why do you care anyway? If I drop dead one day, you lot can come in here and clean up as much as you like. You can have a field day with your marigolds and j-cloths.

GAVIN: Why are you so angry with me? I'm only trying to do my job.

SARAH: You're poking your nose in my business. That's not your job. You wouldn't like it if I started asking you about your private life.

GAVIN: I wouldn't mind. Go on. Ask me something.

SARAH: I'm not that interested to be honest.

GAVIN: Well, I'll tell you anyway. I'm married to Abigail and we have an eighteen month old called Lydia. Abigail is pregnant with our second child and she's due in about a month.

SARAH: God. I said I wasn't interested. What is this? Chapter one in the 'how to get them to open up to you' rule book for council employees? You reveal something about your personal life so that I see you as a friend and then I open up to you? Is that what it is?

GAVIN: No. I was just..... Oh, I don't know.

SARAH: Or were you just bragging about how you keep your lovely little wife barefoot and pregnant?

GAVIN: I'll have you know that I'm a very modern father. I get up in the middle of the night when Lydia can't sleep, which is most nights, so that Abigail can get her rest.

SARAH: So, was it Abi's choice to have two kids so close together or was that something you decided?

GAVIN: She's Abigail, not Abi - she hates Abi - and no, it wasn't anyone's choice. This one was an accident.

SARAH: That's foolish. Who's fault was it?

GAVIN: Elvis.

SARAH: Pardon?

GAVIN: We decided to go on a last minute break to Butlins but we didn't realise that it was an Elvis weekend so, in order to escape all those wobbling pelvises, we spent most of the time in our room getting pissed on prosecco.

SARAH: And having unprotected sex.

GAVIN: Obviously.

SARAH: You weren't in control of your environmental waste that weekend, were you (LAUGHS).

GAVIN: Oh, very funny.

SARAH: Oh, for fuck sake. Seriously, though, that's going to be a lot for your wife. Two kids under two. Does she work?

GAVIN: She was working. She was a teaching assistant but once the kids are in school she wants to go back to uni and do teacher training. She'd be good at it. She's got a way with children.

SARAH: She certainly seems good at making them.

GAVIN: She's amazing.

SARAH: You're proud of her.

GAVIN: Yeah, I am.

SARAH: Your face lights up when you talk about her. I don't think Tom's face ever did that when he talked about me. She's a lucky woman your Abigail. You hold onto her - even if she is a bit of a brood mare.

GAVIN: That's not a very nice thing to say.

SARAH: Sorry. I'm an old lush and I make inappropriate comments sometimes. Cheers.

GAVIN: So, you admit you've got a drink problem.

SARAH: Don't look so smug Gavin. Like you're the first person who's got me to admit to drinking too much.

GAVIN: So, who else picked it up?

SARAH: My waster of an ex-husband of course. He didn't spot the depression but he was quick to comment on the drinking. Then my GP did once. Fair play to my GP though she picked up on the depression as well. Wanted me to go and see the local mental health team.

GAVIN: Did you go?

SARAH: Of course not. After years of hearing my husband talk about his patients there was no way I was going anywhere near mental health services.

GAVIN: Why?

SARAH: Well, they all seemed to get worse rather than better. I mean, he spent most of his time trying to prevent people from killing themselves or killing other people.

GAVIN: I'm sure that's just the extremes of what they see. Lots of people get depressed. They don't all become suicidal or homicidal.

SARAH: What if I am one of the homicidal ones though? Does that mean you wouldn't be able to come back? I could have a shotgun in the pantry.

GAVIN: No, it means I'd have to come back with someone else. You'd be classed as a two person visit.

SARAH: Shit. Two of you. Horrendous thought. Just as well I'm not homicidal.

GAVIN: But seriously, Sarah. If you'd be prepared to engage with mental health services and, maybe, the local alcohol team, they could put together a package of care for you that could address some of the issues you have.

SARAH: A 'package of care'? What the hell is one of those when they're at home? And what the hell are my 'issues' then? I mean, it seems you see yourself as something of an amateur counsellor. You've already got me analysed by the sound of it.

GAVIN: For God's sake, Sarah, why do you have to be so argumentative. I'm trying to help.

SARAH: I don't need help.

GAVIN: Says the woman downing gin before midday. Look, the house got in a state because, yes, it's big and, yes, you've got a bad ankle, but being sozzled from dawn till dusk probably hasn't helped either. No one's doubting that you haven't got a bloody good reason for wanting to be pissed most of the time but, if you carry on like this, you're going to keep getting yourself in trouble and having annoying little jerks like me pop up on your doorstep. Let me refer you to the local teams and see if there is a package of care they can come up with that you think might help you. All I want to do is refer you. Once you've had a chat with them, you have the right to turn down what they offer you if you don't think it will help.

SARAH: Well, you're a persistent little bastard, I'll give you that. (PAUSE) Will they come to my house?

GAVIN: Yes, they do home visits.

SARAH: And will I have to pay for any of it?

GAVIN: No, it's all free on the glorious NHS.

SARAH: And will you shut up about it then?

GAVIN: I promise.

SARAH: Okay. Get me this parcel of care then.

GAVIN: Package.

SARAH: I know. I was trying to be amusing.

GAVIN: (PAUSE) Never sure with you. Right. I'll also arrange for the clean up guys to pay you a visit within the week. They'll only be tidying up the back garden, for now, but remember that offer still stands about having the inside of the house done as well. And please let them do their jobs and please don't swear too much at them.

SARAH: You need to be more specific. How much swearing is 'too much'?

GAVIN: Oh, and, one of them is a bit overweight. Please do not refer to him as 'the fat one'. His name is Clive and he's sensitive about his weight.

SARAH: Ok. Clive is the fat one but I'm not allowed to mention it.

GAVIN: Sarah, please.

SARAH: (PAUSE) Seriously, Gavin, you need to learn to realise when people are messing around with you and when they're being serious.

GAVIN: I'm just tired.

SARAH: I promise I'll speak to the shrink; I promise I'll speak to some killjoy alcohol worker; I promise I'll let the council people clear up by backyard and, most of all, I promise not to call Colin a fat git.

GAVIN: That would be lovely.

SARAH: And are you going to be back here bothering me again some time?

GAVIN: I'll probably come back for a follow up visit once the clearance has finished, if that's alright?

SARAH: That'll be fine. I'll make sure the kettle's on and I'll bake a fruit cake.

GAVIN: Really?

SARAH: Of course not. Do I look the sort of person who bangs out fruit cakes every spare minute?

GAVIN: True. (GETS UP) Right, I'll be on my way. Someone from the council will telephone you to let you know exactly when the team will be around so that you can make sure you're in on the day. Please try and answer the phone when they ring.

SARAH: I don't like answering the phone. And it doesn't matter anyway. I never go anywhere. I'll be here when they turn up regardless.

GAVIN: Ok. Well, all the best Sarah and I'll see you soon for the follow up visit.

SARAH: So you keep threatening. Better be on your way - just in case that heavily pregnant wife of yours has dropped the second one. You don't want to miss it. You've probably got to cut the cord and fry up the placenta so she can have it in a curry.

GAVIN: You are gross. I'll let myself out.

GAVIN LEAVES THROUGH THE PATIO  
DOORS. SARAH CHUCKLES TO HERSELF  
THEN EXITS STAGE LEFT.

