

**Positive
Stories
For
Negative
Times**

**Season 4
2024/25**

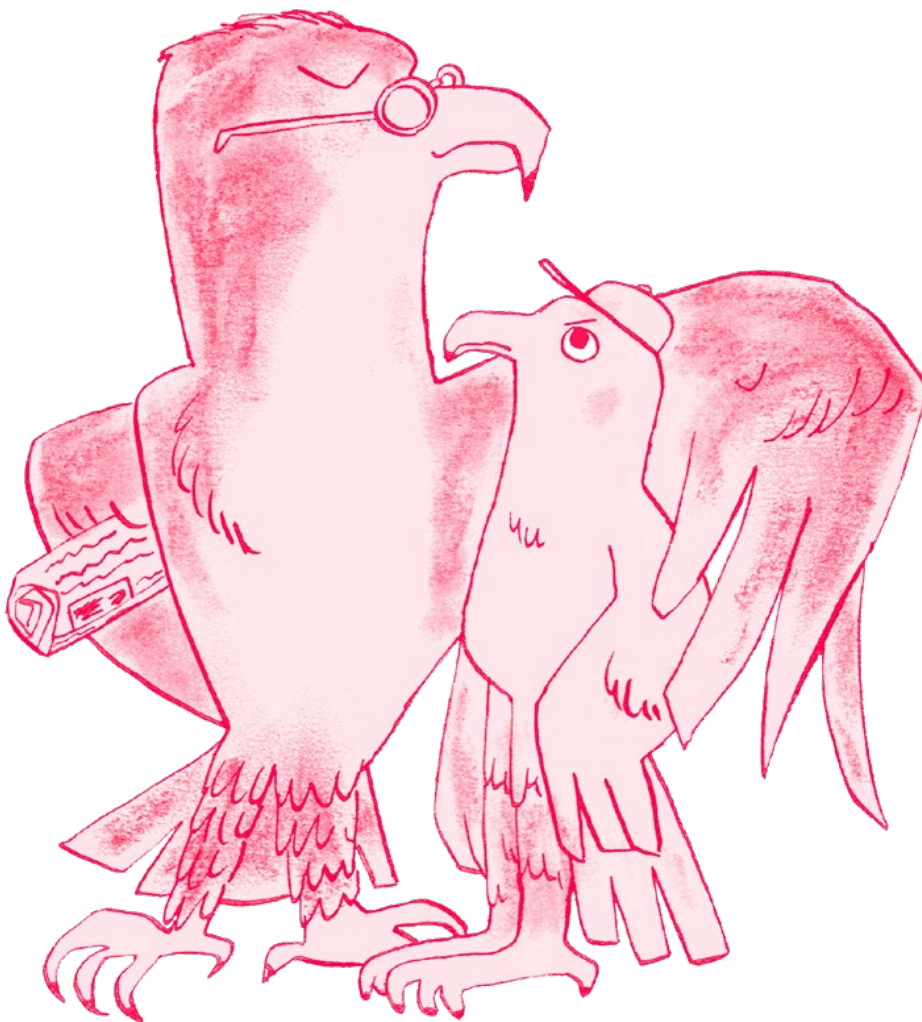
Presented by

**WONDER
FOOLS**

In association with



Roman Cardboard Swift by Ella Hickson



ROMAN CARDBOARD SWIFT

By ELLA HICKSON

CAST

ONE-YEAR-OLD JENNY / BABY
TWENTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD LORNA [BABY's MUM]

ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD RORY
THIRTY-YEAR-OLD SANDRA [RORY's MUM]

TEN-YEAR-OLD JENNY
TWENTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD RORY
THIRTY-THREE-YEAR-OLD RORY

SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD JENNY
THIRTY-NINE-YEAR-OLD RORY
THIRTY-SEVEN-YEAR-OLD LORNA

FAMILY TREE

Sandra
Rory (Sandra's son) – marries Lorna.
Lorna and Rory have a baby – Jenny.

A NOTE

Age:

This play sees the characters age: think about how best to clearly communicate the character's age to the audience.

[T-shirts? Signs? Does the character tell the audience their age before they start talking? Don't say a thing and let the audience guess? What do you think is most interesting?]

Think about the age of the actor vs. the age of the character:

Do you want one actor to play the same character at different ages?

Do you want different actors to play the same character at different ages?

What story does this decision tell?

Time:

Does time pass quickly or slowly when we're having fun? Does time pass faster when you're younger or when you're older? Spend a day seeing how your experience of time changes depending on what you're doing.

Is there a way to let the audience know how fast the characters feel that time is passing in each scene?

Formatting:

A slash at the end of a line / - indicates an interruption by the following line.

A dash – instead of speech, indicates that that character is speaking with a silence, a look, or a moment of meaning- but there are no words.

ONE

Everyone in the cast is one year old. They experiment with being one with their bodies and their voices. They explore the stage. How does time pass when you're one?

Everyone in the cast is ten years old. They experiment with being ten with their bodies and their voices. They explore the stage. How does time pass when you're ten?

Everyone in the cast is sixteen years old. They experiment with being sixteen with their bodies and their voices. They explore the stage. How does time pass when you're sixteen?

Everyone in the cast is twenty-two years old. They experiment with being twenty-two with their bodies and their voices. They explore the stage. How does time pass when you're twenty-two?

Everyone in the cast is thirty-seven years old. They experiment with being thirty-seven with their bodies and their voices. They explore the stage. How does time pass when you're thirty-seven?

TWO - 2008

BABY JENNY – ONE-YEAR-OLD / HER MUM – LORNA – TWENTY-TWO.
LORNA and RORY's HOUSE

[BABY *crawls towards a cardboard box*]

[BABY *crawls around the cardboard box*]

[BABY *looks back to MUM (who watches) BABY smiles*]

[MUM *smiles*]

[BABY *laughs*]

MUM: Go on. What is it? Is it a box? Do you want to play with your Panda?

[MUM *holds out a panda*]

[BABY *crawls to the panda – inspects it, looks it all over – opens its mouth and puts its mouth over the panda's nose*]

MUM: No, bubba, you don't eat the Panda. You cuddle him.

[BABY *laughs. Ignores MUM, eats the panda – drops the panda, goes back to the box*]

[BABY *inspects the box*]

[BABY *pushes the box with its nose whilst crawling*]

[BABY *tries to stand using the box to hold onto – but bops back down onto the floor*]

[BABY *gets into a deep squat – as if it's pooping, natural style – then slowly, pushing up – rises to standing*]

[BABY *lifts one leg tries to climb into the box*]

MUM: Bubba? Do you want help?

[BABY *tumbles pulling the box down with it*]

[BABY *falls on the floor laughing*]

[MUM *laughs*]

MUM: Are you ok?

[BABY *laughs*]

[BABY *gets back to crawling – and crawls inside the box*]

[BABY *keeps looking to MUM, smiling – looking to see if it's ok. MUM smiles back*]

MUM: Go on.

[BABY *crawls inside the box and laughs, loud*]

[BABY *lifts the box up onto its head*]

[BABY *is now inside the box*]

[MUM *laughs*]

[BABY *stands, staggers, the box moves – because BABY is inside it*]

[*They both laugh*]

[BABY *looks like they will topple*]

[MUM *runs over to catch BABY*]

[MUM *lifts the box off of BABY's head*]

[BABY *looks serious for a second – then laughs. They both laugh*]

[LORNA *rocks the baby – LORNA rocks the baby – this should take some time. BABY should scream and scream. LORNA eventually gets the baby to sleep*]

MUM/LORNA: You run this constant list... put washing on, but you know what she's currently wearing needs to be washed, and by that point, this evening, my socks will also be dirty – so you wait to get the greatest number of items into the wash at the same time and when you do, when every dirty item fits in exactly, and you use one of the value pack detergent blobs that you got on sale, and you make sure they're never on the floor, so that she doesn't eat them, and the wash cycle is working whilst you cook dinner you – feel – honestly, great – because loads of things are happening at the same time - and so you look at the fridge, and you see half a pack of blueberries, an inch of yoghurt – one chicken breast, half a pepper and some of yesterday's pasta and, you think, if I can use every last scrap, every last blueberry and the chicken, and I get a good meal into her and the fridge is clean and empty and tomorrow, I can re-stock it in a value-conscious way – you really would never have imagined, before you had a kid, the impossible satisfaction of using every last blueberry. And of saving yourself half an hour by doing the shop on the way to the post office, to send off the application which will get you the voucher which will make the next shop cheaper. You feel like a superhero, and you wonder why there isn't an Olympic category for domestic admin. It's not even about the money, it's about the optimisation. The perfect, excellent, exact use of time and the efficiency of – [BABY *cries*, LORNA *freezes*] To waste a single second of a nap is a crime [BABY *quiets* – LORNA *gets back to work, she's busy*] I felt it when I was sixteen and worked in an Italian restaurant. It's the same thing. Packing a nappy bag and getting a service out, making sure it's all in exactly the right place as quickly as possible, holding a hundred things in your head... say what you like, it's a buzz.

[LORNA *turns on the radio – Taylor Swift's 'Love Story' – plays very quietly in the background*]

And I'm really very good at it. And I know I'm really very good at it – because when my partner comes home from work and he

tries to take her out for a walk or to the park – the swear to god, car crash of ‘um, where’s her’ – ‘have you seen my shoes’ – your shoes? - ‘does she need a bottle’ – ‘is the – where’s the – does she need the – dummy?’ – and you’re like, pal – she stopped that four months ago and you’re talking to an Olympic level, black-belt, bag-packer and this display is, frankly, embarrassing. Pull yourself together. And you’ll get there in an argument, you know, like – neither of you has slept for a year – and so you get there soon enough, like - ‘all you do is stay at home all day, and I’m working – I’m *working*’ – is what he says. And I’m like, pal – you can’t pack a bag. You can’t find your own shoes. I know working, I’ve done working – at an office, writing emails, being in pointless meetings that could last half as long if people got their shit together, I’ve don’t that. And I’ve done this – and I can promise you, this is harder. This is, like, constant, unrelenting, physical, mental and emotional work. You sit on twitter on the loo. I’m calculating an endless list of tasks into exact fractions of naps, and running the house and cleaning and buying the food and – I’m with her. I’m like, *with her*, the second she needs me and boom –

[BABY JENNY *comes back over – staggers over*, LORNA *turns off the radio - smiles – offers her hands for BABY JENNY to take*]

LORNA: There you go, there you go bubba – one step, that’s it – clever girl. Well done. And – ooop, bomp. Never mind. Up you get, try again – come on. To mama. [*to the audience*] If you have them hold something in each hand, like an object – and then try walking, they find it easier – like their conscious mind is taken up with something – like the holding of the objects, and so they’re doing the walking without even noticing, which – I know that feeling, it’s golden. You don’t even notice, and it’s running away with you – and you’re happy as hell and it’s just happening, because you’re so focussed.

[LORNA *gives BABY JENNY two objects*]

[BABY JENNY *holds the objects and staggers towards her mum*]

[BABY JENNY *isn’t concentrating on her feet, but on the objects – and so manages to do it without noticing*]

[BABY JENNY *grins at her mum*]

[LORNA *smiles back at her kid – BABY JENNY walks – LORNA beams*]

Time - slows - right - down - and - you - wouldn’t - want - to - be - anywhere - else –

[BABY JENNY *bomps down on her bum*]

In the world.

And you know it’s going to go fast.

People stop you on the street and tell you to treasure it.

And part of you wants to hit them –

“Oh, make the most of it – it goes so fast?” –

And you're like, love – back up, who isn't already trying to drink it in – and stamp it and frame it and – you know, whilst also being so very very tired. One part of you is trying to freeze it – press pause – let it be forever... I know she's going to be big, and it kills me – good and proud and pleased – but also –

[BABY JENNY *comes in for a snuggle*]

And then there's this other little part of you that's like – screaming to go for a walk on your own, to sit in a wine bar by yourself. But you know that one day, when she's up and gone – that part of you will miss her like hell.

'Treasure it? Oh, should I treasure it? I'm so glad you mentioned it, because it hadn't occurred to me - what with this being someone I'd give my life up for a hundred times over and it being someone who is only going to be little for an unbearably short amount of time – but thanks for reminding me'.

[LORNA *rolls her eyes*]

Eejits. Really. Everyone's got something to say.

[BABY JENNY *says mama for the first time*]

LORNA: That's the first time she's said that.

[LORNA *looks at the audience, proud as punch*]

LORNA: [*smiling*] That's nuts.

And for that second, the to-do list Olympics? You don't give a shit. The blueberries can sit and rot. I'd put a half-full wash on. I just want to be with her every second of every day.

And I don't want to judge, certainly not other women, because - fuck me, whichever way you cut it, it's hard enough but – the fact he doesn't want to be at home all day, and I know he doesn't 'cos I've asked him, and even when he's back – when he's not seen her, he still does the like – you know – I'm all – 'hey love, why do you need your phone to do go to the toilet?' I mean he's in there upwards of twenty minutes sometimes, so maybe something mega is going on and he needs to phone and call for assistance... but whilst I'm feeding her what I've cooked and he's not seen her all day – he'll actually send me something on insta, from the toilet.

We're just different.

I don't think he feels the crushing weight of the preciousness of this moment.

[JENNY *says mama again*]

Or if he does, he's covering it. Maybe he feels it twice as hard and can't handle that much love, knowing it's always slipping.

Maybe older women, with a terrifying sadness in their eyes, don't stop him in the street and tell him to treasure it.

Or maybe we're just different.

Or maybe I'm so far away from who I was, I don't really know what I would be doing if it wasn't this –

Or maybe I love her too much or –

Maybe we're all just different.

Maybe the kicker will be that she'll want to be with him more in the end or.

Do I worry about how different me and her Dad seem these days?

I don't know.

There's not a whole lot of time to worry about anything other than her right now.

But I doubt she'll thank me when she's a teen having to do weekends in different places.

I'm joking.

[*Beat – is she joking?*]

I love her so much; I can't really think about much else right now and so – it is what it is.

[BABY JENNY *gets back in the box*]

[TWENTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD LORNA *crawls over to where JENNY is, in the box – and joins her inside*]

[*They laugh*]

When I'm with her, I'm always wanting to be on my phone or wanting for someone to arrive, so I've got some company. But the second we've got company I want them to go again so I can be with her on my own.

[*The sound of someone at the door*]

[LORNA, *from inside the box*]

LORNA: Jenny baby – who's that? Who can you hear at the door? Who do you think it is – it's your Papa. Bubba – it's your Papa!

THREE - 1996

RORY – ELEVEN YEARS OLD

RORY's BEDROOM – and HIS MUM [SANDRA] – THIRTY YEARS OLD

RORY: I like Romans a lot. Not people that, like, live in Rome now. Romans that lived like, *two thousand years ago*.

I like Egyptians too – Ancient Egyptians - they lived *five thousand years ago*.

I like that they wore sandals, the Romans, and they carried oil lamps. I like that it was sort of fancy - there were concerts and bath houses, but it was so so long ago that like, no-one took a picture, and there's no home videos and you can't google any of the people. So, like, if you do google – or you read a book – or you see a picture, it's like not *actually* from the time.

It's like, from someone's imagination about the time.

Egyptians built these like big, huge triangles in the middle of the desert called the Pyramids. And you can see them, now, in pictures or if you go. My Dad went once when he was on business and in the photo, you see people on camels and they look so teeny, teeny tiny - and then these huge triangles made all out of sand and you think... they made those without machines and with just humans, who were slaves, and they had to work so hard and lift really heavy stuff.

You can't watch them on the news, and see how tired they were, on that bit where they show them at work – you just have to imagine what that was like.

SANDRA: [*shouting from downstairs – we can only hear her – we can't see her*] Roooooory! Rory!

[RORY *doesn't move – he doesn't respond*]

RORY: [*whispered*] I can be looking at my Horrible Histories about the Rotten Romans or the Awful Egyptians -

SANDRA [*shouting from downstairs – we can only hear her – we can't see her*] Roooooory!

RORY: [*whispered*] And I don't think they were awful or rotten – I think it's amazing, I'm like, in my wooden hut – or I'm fighting a gladiator or drinking wine with the Pharaoh –

SANDRA: [*shouting from downstairs – we can only hear her – we can't see her*] Will you come down here! Your potatoes are getting cold!

-

[RORY *doesn't want to go*]

RORY: And I think it's only been five minutes but then I look at the clock and it's been hours and hours. And it doesn't seem fair – because sitting with mum and eating tea - that's like, only twenty minutes – but it takes ...forever.

FOUR - 1996

RORY – ELEVEN YEARS OLD – AND HIS MUM [SANDRA] – THIRTY YEARS OLD - HAVING TEA

SANDRA: I miss the old house.

RORY: Why?

SANDRA: It's ok to miss things.

RORY: I prefer this house.

SANDRA: Where are you going?

RORY: Football.

SANDRA: Why are you going to football?

RORY: The cricket boys are playing a game in the park.

SANDRA: It's raining. [*Pause*] Did I make you cross?

RORY: Have you seen my shin pads?

-

SANDRA: They're in your bag. [*Beat*] You didn't like the old house?

RORY: I don't remember it.

SANDRA: We had a big front door that was old and heavy. The garden was full of tall grass that hid tiny pink flowers. When we brought you home from the hospital, I would just lie in the grass and sleep with you on my chest, for hours. It felt like minutes, but it was hours.

RORY: I hope you used a shade. Babies aren't meant to be in the sun.

[SANDRA *laughs*]

SANDRA: Yes, I used a shade. When you were learning to walk, you would stagger about and go [*a baby learning to use its tongue, flicking it in and out of her mouth*] Leelalalalalelela.

RORY: Well, that's disgusting – it flies spit about.

SANDRA: It wasn't disgusting.

RORY: I'm not a baby anymore.

SANDRA: I know.

RORY: I like this house. The fridge is bigger. There are more people to play with on the street.

SANDRA: You don't mind that there's no garden?

RORY: People play matches on the green.

SANDRA: You don't mind that it's smaller?

RORY: We don't need as much space now Dad doesn't live here. Do you know that the Romans would eat lying down? They'd lie down on, like, a sofa – and they'd mostly just use their hands, sometimes a spoon, but mostly just lying down using their hands and I think that sounds like such a relaxing way to eat. I should go or I'll miss the game.

SANDRA: Ok. I might paint this room yellow.

RORY: Ok.

SANDRA: Would you mind?

RORY: The old kitchen was yellow.

SANDRA: I know. It was nice.

RORY: They were also the first people to build aqueducts. These pathways where you could bring water into the city, so that you would have baths and toilets which sound basic, maybe now, but was kind of amazing when you think how long ago it was. And also – when they were eating, they were eating storks and parrots and flamingos.

SANDRA: That's amazing.

RORY: You don't sound like you think it's amazing.

SANDRA: I do think it's amazing. I love that you love it.

RORY: You should just love it – not cos I love it. It's very cool.

SANDRA: Are you cross?

RORY: I'm going to miss the match.

SANDRA: Rory?

RORY: It's not my fault I'm not a baby anymore.

SANDRA: Oh course, not. What do you mean? I didn't –

RORY: I just don't know why you like old me more than now me and why you like the old house more than this house, it's very annoying. You should like now. I'm going to play football.

[RORY *leaves*]