

# RAINBOW BABY

(A 45 minute stage play)

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## CHARACTERS

Dr Louise Adamson. . . An academic in her late 40s.  
Sylvia Glenn. . . . .A middle aged housewife.  
Polly. . . . . A young woman with Down's Syndrome.  
Daniel. . . . . A volunteer helper in his 20s or 30s.

Music for the 'Rainbow Song' has been specially composed for this play.

## SET

The action takes place in a Church hall room which is packed with costumes, props, fold away chairs and boxes of toys. On one side of the room there is a large window. On the other side a door. Centre stage there is a chair and small table on which stands an electric sewing machine.

There is an area down stage right which is used for two short scenes. In this area there is a step ladder and a keyboard instrument such as a synthesiser. The action takes place over a period of two hours.

The lights rise on Dr Louise Adamson, who stands with her back to the audience, smoking a cigarette. She is wearing a fur coat and hat. Out of the half light comes a voice-over from her past. She hunches her shoulders in a gesture of hidden pain.

Irish Nurse            (the sound of foetal monitoring equipment fades up and we hear a woman panting during the final stages of child birth) Baby's crowning, Miss Adamson. A good big push now.

Louise                (groaning) Ahh.

Irish N.              Keep pushing now. Keep pushing. (climax of panting)

Louise                Ahhhhhhhh! (on stage Louise clutches herself. A newborn baby cries out)

Irish N.              (triumphant) Listen to those lungs, will you?

Louise            (exhausted but joyful) Show me. Let me see.

Nurse            (the baby continues to cry) A baby girl. A little baby girl.

                    (The voice-over fades down and the lights rise to fully illuminate the room.  
Louise Adamson lifts her head slowly)

Louise            A little baby girl.

                    (She turns to face the audience. Her face is full of regret)

Sylvia Glenn enters holding the top half of a pantomime cow under her arm.  
She is dressed in a sensible winter skirt and cardigan)

Sylvia            Ah, so that's where you're hiding. (Louise hastily tries to hide her cigarette.  
Sylvia sniffs the cigarette smoke) Oh, no, with all these costumes lying  
around?

Louise            Sorry. I'm trying to give up.

Sylvia            Mr Jeffreys'll have a fit. He's got a nose like a blood hound. Here, give it to  
me.

Louise            Are you sure?

Sylvia            (spots an old tea cup) Ah, just the ticket. (stubs out the cigarette) There. I'll  
smuggle it out later.

Louise            I tried to hold out, but . . . (peters out)

Sylvia            You shouldn't have rushed off like that. I was going to introduce you to Polly.

Louise            I needed a smoke.

Sylvia            Don't worry. She'll be in and out like a yoyo. (notices Louise looking at the  
cow head) Ermintrude. No eyes. One horn. A bit of a salvage operation.  
You don't mind if I get on with it, do you? We can still have our chat. (pause)  
We've got a lot to talk about, you and I. (pause) You did see Polly, didn't you?

Louise            Yes.

Sylvia            (laughs) She's not easy to miss. (pause) Aren't you going to take off your  
coat?

Louise            Of course. (starts to do so)

Sylvia            I can hang it up here with ours. Don't worry. It's quite safe.

Louise Thanks.

Sylvia (takes coat) Ooh, lovely quality. Is it real fur?

Louise No. Fake.

Sylvia Oh, very sensible. (pause) You must excuse the mess, by the way. We're right in the thick of it. 'The Live Wires' hit Luton next week. Wonderful name, isn't it? My husband thought it up. He's very good at scrabble. (starts to sort out piles of costumes) Polly's the star, of course. She's written most of the songs herself. Well, with a bit of help from Daniel. He's an estate agent, you know, but very pleasant with it, and puts a lot of effort into the Wednesday Club.

Louise (pause) They're amazingly full of life, aren't they?

Sylvia You can say that again. Especially when they're all together. (starts to set up the sewing machine) Switch me on at the mains, will you? (Louise looks for the plug) Down there. (Louise does so) I don't know. Every year I swear it'll be my last effort . . . but I do love to see them well turned out, and let's be honest, not everyone's that skilled with a needle. (sits down at the sewing machine and gets to work) Sit down. Go on. Make yourself at home.

Louise Thank you. (looks around for somewhere to sit)

Sylvia I'd have invited you for tea, but Jim's a bit touchy at the moment. You know, one of his moods about Polly and the future and everything. (pause) Well? What did you think . . . when you saw her?

Louise (pause) She's very . . . lively.

Sylvia Oh yes, she's a powerhouse, is Polly. I mean, the others have got talent, of course, but Polly . . . well, Polly projects.

(the lights fade to half light on the main set, and rise on Daniel at the synthesiser and Polly standing beside him. A large cardboard cut out of a rainbow rests against Polly's legs)

Polly (the sound of blaring pop music fades up. Polly is singing along to her ipod) "I should be so lucky, lucky, lucky, lucky. I should be so lucky, yes."

Dan Polly, take that bloody thing off, and get on stage!

Polly It's Kylie.

Dan I don't care if it's the Queen of Sheba. Everyone's ready. Get up on stage.

Polly (dancing to the music and still singing) I should be so lucky, lucky, lucky, lucky . . . etc.

Dan Right. If that's the way you want to play it. (claps his hands towards audience) Take up your positions everyone. Polly isn't practicing, so Polly isn't coming with us to Luton next week.

Polly (immediately pulls off ipod) What!

Dan (sarcastic) Ah, so you do have ears.

Polly I'm going to Luton. I'm going to Luton.

Dan Not if you don't get up here and join us right this minute. (Polly puts away her ipod) And don't forget your rainbow.

Polly You're angry with me.

Dan No I'm not.

Polly You are angry.

Dan (increasingly annoyed) I'm not.

Polly You're wearing your angry eyebrows.

Dan (laughs despite himself) Miss prima donna.

Polly (enjoying the word) Miss prima donna.

Dan Let's see how well you remember your lines. (reminding her) Rainbow. (he plays a few chords. Polly picks up the rainbow and jumps up onto the stage) Does everyone understand what they're supposed to be doing? Good. Let's do it then. And if you do forget - improvise. Don't just stand around like lemons.

Polly (enjoying the word) Lemons.

Dan (sarcastic) Thank you Polly. Ready everyone? (plays an introductory phrase) Cue Polly.

Polly Cue Polly! (she starts to sing to Daniel's accompaniment) "I am a rainbow, sunny and bright. I am a rainbow, happy, happy, happy. (belatedly she remembers to pick up a cardboard rainbow and holds it above her head) My head is blue, my nose is red. My arms and legs are purple and green. My toes are yellow. . ." (spotting someone off stage) Oh. Look! (fascinated) A lady. A lady with a big furry hat. (she laughs) Hello lady!

(The lights fade over Polly and Daniel and rise fully on the main set)

Sylvia (continuing the conversation) That's her favourite one, the Rainbow Song. She's been practicing hard all week. Jim and I know it backwards . . . (sings an

extract) "I am a rainbow, sunny and bright, I am a rainbow, happy, happy, happy." We had a real sing song at breakfast this morning.

Louise (thoughtful pause) Her hair.

Sylvia (in mock despair) Oh, don't mention her hair.

Louise It was the first thing I noticed.

Sylvia Goodness knows we've had enough trouble with it over the years. But it's very 'Polly' if you know what I mean. Masses of it, even as a baby. (starts sewing up a seam on the sewing machine, and something sticks) Oh. What's happening here? (she investigates)

Louise (softly to herself) Soft hair wet in the bath, soft and brown, on a tiny head I could hold in one hand, holding a whole mind in the palm of my hand, pouring water gently, gently over the crown, eyes open wide and gazing up, up into my face.

Sylvia (has fixed the sewing machine) Ah, that's better.

Louise (thoughts interrupted) Sorry?

Sylvia The machine. It's working again.

Louise (awkward pause) I must say, it's extremely decent of you to accept me in the way you have.

Sylvia Well, I can't pretend your letter wasn't a bolt out of the blue. I mean to say, after all these years. But we didn't hesitate. No. Jim's a big-hearted man. "Why don't you invite her along to Wednesday Club?" he said. "Much more informal. A lot easier for all concerned."

Louise It must have been awkward.

Sylvia Not a bit of it.

Louise You seemed so calm on the phone. I was quaking like a leaf.

Sylvia I always had this feeling, in the back of my mind, you'd turn up one day. Just a hunch, you know. Natural I suppose. Flesh and blood and all that. (pause) You haven't changed a bit, you know.

Louise You remember?

Sylvia Oh yes. I remember everything that day. Everything.

Louise All I remember is signing papers. Endless papers . . .

Sylvia You were wearing red. A sort of velour dress. The label was sticking out. Funny how you remember things like that. I had this terrible urge to walk across and tuck it in. I wanted everything to be right that day. (starts sewing again to cover her emotions) You've done well for yourself, though, haven't you?

Louise In terms of career? Not really.

Sylvia I thought you said you were a university professor.

Louise Yes. But Kalgornie Uni is hardly Oxford.

Sylvia Ambition's a good thing. I try and drum that into her. I want her to do well.

Louise (bitter) Ambition. Yes I was full of it. I was going to shake the academic world to its foundations. PHD at 25. First lectureship at 26. Book reviewed in the Times at 29. I had it all mapped out.

Sylvia Any good at unpicking? (Louise shakes her head) Go on. Surprise yourself. You can use this little gadget here. (hands her an unpicker) It'll whip along the seams in no time. (hands Louise the dress) I never throw anything away, you know. It's against my religion. Every bit of material's got potential.

Louise (pause) Look, I . . .

Sylvia Do all the seams if you can. Darts as well.

Louise I must say. . . (Sylvia gets back to the sewing machine) . . . I find this whole situation rather . . . unnerving. One has everything and nothing to say all at the same time.

Sylvia Well, let's start with the something and leave the nothing for later.

Louise If I were in your place I'd feel . . . resentful . . . or threatened or . . . I don't know. I certainly wouldn't be so damned friendly.

Sylvia But Polly's given us so much pleasure. If it wasn't for you, we'd never have had that. The least I can do is be friendly.

Louise All those things I said about her. It makes me cringe just thinking about them.

Sylvia I suppose it was natural in the circumstances.

Louise Natural? For a mother to call her own child . . . a . . . monster. (shattered by the memory) I did. It's still buzzing in my ears after 18 years. A little monster.

Sylvia (hurt but covering it up) Well I'm sure you didn't mean it. (gets up) Let's go and sneak a peak at her rehearsing. She's written some wonderful poems for 'The Live Wires'. Of course it's not Shakespeare or anything, but they do all rhyme.

Louise Poetry?

Sylvia Yes. And she paints.

Louise Actual poetry?

Sylvia Given half a chance she'll give you a recitation. She doesn't have to be asked twice.

Louise I'd like to read some of it, if I may.

Sylvia No sooner said than done. (searches in her handbag) I always keep it close by. I have a little read now and again just to give myself a thrill. (pulls out a card) Ah. (hands it to Louise) She wrote this one for my birthday. I think it's her best so far.

Louise Thanks.

Sylvia Only three spelling mistakes, and one's an apostrophe. Apostrophes don't count, do they?

Louise (gentle reply) No. (she appears to read)

Polly (spotlighted down stage far left) "My Mum loves tea, and she loves me. My Mum has a handbag, and loves my Dad. When we go out, I laugh and shout. But my Mum is the best. She's got a blue dress." (spotlight fades)

Sylvia (a long silence) Well? What do you think?

Louise (pause) It certainly rhymes. (hands it back)

Sylvia Sometimes I just want to grab her and say, ooh you are so lovely. Not that we always see eye to eye. That would be asking too much. Clothes! Don't talk to me about clothes. If there's one thing I won't tolerate and that's indecent clothing - specially for a girl like Polly. Well, I mean it's asking for trouble. I like her to look decent. You know. Nothing popping out that shouldn't. Everything in its place. (pause) You're not bored, are you?

Louise No, no.

Sylvia It's just that you look . . . distant.

Louise (pause) I suppose I'm thinking.

Sylvia About Polly?

Louise No. About you.

Sylvia Me?

Louise That's what I can't understand. No blood ties, no obligations, no reason at all . . . yet you chose of your own free will to adopt my child. The child I gave away because it was imperfect. (pause) You've no idea how guilty that makes me feel. (pause) I should be grateful. I am grateful. You've made a jolly good job of her.

Sylvia (laughs) She's made a jolly good job of us.

Louise I'm just amazed you can laugh, that you still know how to smile. (pause) Three days of delirious happiness. And then bang! A junior doctor shot me down with a single sentence. Right there in the middle of the ward. "I expect you've gathered by now Miss Adamson; your baby's a Down's." A what? "A Down's. Didn't Sister tell you?" (sinking into the memory) No. Not my little girl! Look at her! She's beautiful. I won't let you do this to her. She's beautiful. Beautiful! (distressed she realises where she is and pulls herself together) There I was in a ward full of happy mothers, drowning in a sea of procreative fulfillment. (pause) My milk dried up. I didn't produce another drop after that. (pause) All the love I had for her, all the dreams. Everything just dried.

Sylvia I hope you're not going to tell Polly any of this. I don't want her getting upset.

Louise Of course I won't tell her.

Sylvia She's a very sensitive girl.

Louise All I want is to make my peace with her. (pause) It's strange how you think you can sign away a child like I did in Court that day. But you can't. You can never sign away motherhood. Something stays. A kick in the belly, if you like. It gets you deep down inside where you're most defenceless.

Polly (sticks her head round the door) Mum?

Sylvia Ah, I thought we'd be getting a visit from Madam sooner or later.

Polly (enters) I banged my arm.

Sylvia Oh, poor honeybunny. Does it hurt?

Polly Yes. (holds out her arm to be rubbed)

Sylvia Let's have a look then. Nothing much wrong with that. I'll give it a rub. (does so. Polly smiles blissfully) How's that?

Polly Nice. (notices Louise is watching her) It's rude to stare.

Sylvia Polly! Say hello to the lady.

Polly           It's rude to stare.

Sylvia           Say 'hello Dr Adamson'.

Polly           I'm not sick.

Louise           I'm not that sort of doctor, Polly. I'm a doctor of philosophy.

Polly           Philosophy?

Louise           I specialise in Ancient Greek Theatre. A little bit like . . . what you're doing here.

Sylvia           (starts fussing over Polly's appearance) Look at you. You can't stay in one piece for one minute, can you? Put your grip back in. (to Louise) She doesn't usually wear make-up, but we've come to an agreement for Wednesday Club. (to Polly) Haven't we?

Polly           (notices sewing machine) Oh look!

Sylvia           No, honeybun. Run along and join the others. We don't want Daniel to have to come looking again.

Polly           (sitting down at the sewing machine) I'm going to make a dress. (starts running the machine at full tilt, laughing with pleasure)

Sylvia           No Polly. (pulls her hands away) Leave alone. It's not ours to break.

Polly           Oh, thingey! I'm bored.

Sylvia           (embarrassed in front of Louise) Polly.

Polly           (in Louise's direction) Silly old cow. (Sylvia looks horrified) Silly old cow.

Sylvia           Polly, that's very rude. Apologise to the lady this instant.

Polly           Old cow. Old cow. Old cow.

Sylvia           Polly! If you don't stop, we go straight home, and there'll be no Luton.

Polly  
Old cow.       (laughs mischievously and points to the panto cow that lies just behind Louise)

Sylvia           I said . . .

Polly           (picks up cow head) Old cow.

Sylvia (realising the deception) Oh. That old cow. (wags her finger at Polly) You little toe rag, you. (to Louise) She's been having us on. (to Polly) Sometimes I think you're cleverer than the lot of us. (Polly starts to put the cow head over her own) No, honeybun, you'll ruin your hair.

Polly (sporting the cow head) It's dark in here. (starts moving around the room, mooing and laughing)

Sylvia She's not usually this bad.

Polly Moo. (Polly nudges Sylvia affectionately. Sylvia strokes the cow's head) Oh, alright then. Just for a bit.

Polly (louder) Moo. Moo. (Polly heads towards Louise)

Sylvia (laughs) You've got a wicked sense of humour, haven't you?

Polly Moo. Moo. Moo.

Louise (aside, as if remembering) Baby crying. (her monologue is punctuated by Polly's mooing) Baby crying. Crying. Can't pick her up. Disgusted. Hate myself. Can't pick her up. Nothing left to give. Nothing. Dry. Bone dry.

Polly Moooooooooooo. (Polly starts to ram against Louise playfully)

Sylvia Polly, no!

Polly (butting more forcefully) Moo.

Sylvia No!

Louise (Polly butts her furiously) For Christ's sake, stop! (pushes Polly away with force)

Sylvia (breaking Polly's fall) Polly. That was naughty. Very, very naughty. (Louise hugs her stomach as if in pain. Polly stands stock still. Sylvia removes the cow's head and smooths down Polly's hair) What sort of impression do you think you've made?

Louise I'm sorry. I shouldn't have shouted.

Polly I upset the lady.

Sylvia Yes, you did.

Polly I'm sorry.

Sylvia You'd better tell her that, Polly.

Polly I'm sorry, Dr lady. I'm sorry.

Sylvia Good girl.

Polly (to Sylvia) Shall I give her a big 'sorry hug'?

Sylvia (checks Louise) No. I don't think she'd like that.

Polly Okey dokey, off I go.

Sylvia We'll see you at tea break.

Polly (heads towards door) I can remember all my lines. Do you want to hear them?

Sylvia Later, bunny.

Polly Daniel says I've got stage presence. (disappointed) But he hasn't wrapped them up, or anything. (as she exits) Bye.

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