

# The Middle of Nowhere

## Characters

- Helena: age 40, lives in a village in the west of England
- Daniel, age 20, Helena's son, student of French and Drama at Manchester University
- Jean, age 35, French lecturer at Manchester University, in a relationship with Daniel, who is one of her students

*The action takes place in the kitchen of Helena's house. There's a table centre stage where most of the conversation will take place. There are some cupboards and a fridge upstage.*

*The lights go up. A cell phone on the table rings. Helena enters stage right and picks up the phone. She sees who's calling, smiles excitedly and connects.*

Helena: Daniel! Darling, where are you? Are you at the station?

Do you want me to come and pick you up?

*(Pause)* What?

*(Pause)* Whose car?

*(Pause)* Who's Jean?

*(Pause)* But who *is* she?

*(Pause)* A lecturer? And she gave you a lift all the way from Manchester?

*(Pause) (Less enthusiastic)* Well, all right. I mean, yes. But I haven't got anything ready. I was going to take you to the pub for dinner.

*(Pause)* How long will you be?

*(Pause)* What? Oh! Do you want — Daniel? *(Looks at phone)* I love you too.

*The sound of a car approaching the house, maybe lights through a window stage left. Sound of car door opening and closing, talking and laughter offstage. Eventually, Daniel appears stage left, rucksack on his back.*

Daniel: *(Even though he can see his mother)* Is anybody home? The prodigal Dan has returned!

*Helena runs towards him and hugs him so that he can hardly move. She jumps up and down and squeaks excitedly. Daniel extricates himself.*

Mother! Desist! I want you to meet someone....

*He moves aside and with a sweeping gesture reveals a woman who is standing behind him. This is Jean.*

This is the wonderful Jean Padmore. Jean, this is my mother Helena.

Jean: Helena! Hi!

Helena: Hello.

*Helena holds out her hand, but Jean moves forward and hugs her. Helena is taken aback by this and reluctantly lifts her arms to give Jean a tentative hug.*

Helena: Come in.

Daniel: Jesus, that was a pig of a journey! Sit down, love of my life.

*Jean laughs, then looks at Helena, who is staring at her. Jean stops laughing and sits down.*

Jean: (To Helena) He says that to everyone. Really.

Daniel: Jean, welcome to the middle of nowhere! What do you think?

Jean: It's beautiful. I love it.

Daniel: Bollocks. You wouldn't live here, would you?

Jean: I might do!

Daniel: No, you wouldn't. The people are all white,  
they only speak English and they all read the Daily  
Telegraph. The throbbing metropolis that is  
Sawbridge-on-Avon. Otherwise known as Hell in the Forest.

Helena: Daniel? What's the matter? Why are you talking like that?

Daniel: It's what a year in Manchester does for you, mother.  
They're all barbarians up there. And do you know  
what? Some of them don't even have a German car.  
*(To Jean)* What do you want to drink?

Helena: Shall I make some tea?

Daniel: Jean's partial to something a little stronger than tea,  
aren't you, sweetness?

Jean: Generally speaking, yes. Depends where I am.

*They both laugh, clearly some private joke.*

Daniel: Sorry, mother, just our little joke. Too complicated to  
explain.

*He opens the fridge door.*

What? No beer? And just this bottle of white cat's piss?

Helena: Daniel! Really!!

Jean: Sorry, he's a bit stir crazy. We've been in the car for hours. He'll be fine when he's had a drink.

*Daniel is opening cupboards looking for alcohol — in one of the cupboards, he sees several bottles of spirits.*

Daniel: Jesus - gin, whisky, vodka, rum — who's been drinking all this stuff?

Helena: It's — I had a dinner party.

Daniel: A dinner party? Must have been a riot. Especially if the vicar and his wife were here. I'll go and have a look in the cellar, see if there's any red wine.

*Daniel exits stage right. Helena turns to look at Jean, who is sitting at the table.*

Helena: Did you ...um ... have a nice journey?

Jean: Actually, it was a bit snarled up around Spaghetti Junction.

Helena: Oh. Sorry about that.

Jean: Hardly your fault, is it? Actually, I'm the one who should apologise.

Helena: What for?

Jean: Descending on you like this. I was going to drop Daniel off and just carry on to my sister's place.

Helena: Where does your sister live?

Jean: Oxford.

Helena: Oxford? That's nearly an hour away. And it's late.

Jean: I know. But not to worry. I'll get back on the road in a minute.

Helena: You're ... you're welcome to stay...

*Daniel re-enters stage right.*

Daniel: There isn't a single bottle of red wine in the cellar. What happened to the stash that was down there at Christmas?

Helena: I do have people round occasionally.

Daniel: It's clearly been a non-stop party in Borebridge-on-Avon since I was last home. Is there nothing to drink apart from that anaemic stuff in the fridge?

Jean: White wine is fine.

Daniel: Only when there isn't anything else. I'll go down to the pub and get some provisions. Can I borrow some money?

Helena/Jean Yes.

*Helena is about to stand up and find some money and Jean starts to root in her purse. They both stop and look at each other.*

Daniel: Doesn't matter. I'll use a card. Can I take the car?

Helena/Jean: Yes.

*Helena and Jean look at each other again. Jean holds out her car keys. Daniel takes them.*

Daniel: *(Adopting a John Wayne accent)* If I'm not back before sunset, send out a search party.

*He exits stage left.*

Helena: Can he drive your car?

Jean: Oh yes.

Helena: I mean, is he insured?

Jean: I hope so. He's been driving it for the last three months. While we're waiting, why don't we do something with that bottle of white wine in the fridge?

Helena: Do something?

Jean: Like — drink it?

Helena: Oh. Yes.

*Helena goes to the fridge and takes out a bottle of already opened white wine, finds three glasses and brings them to the table.*

It hasn't been open long. I just had a glass with my lunch.

*She looks at the bottle. It's more than half empty, which makes her feel embarrassed. She pours out two glasses and gives one to Jean.*

Jean: Cheers.

Helena: Cheers. *(Pause)* So ... you're Daniel's .... lecturer?

Jean: Yes.

Helena: Drama?

Jean: No, French.

Helena: Um... how long —

Jean: ... have I been working with him? Since the course started. About eight months.

Helena: And ... are you —

Jean: ... happy with his progress? Absolutely. We all are. That son of yours is a very talented boy.

Helena: Thank you. (*Pause*) What exactly do you mean by talented?

Jean: He's our star student. The drama department absolutely love him and I ... well I mean, his French is practically native speaker standard.

Helena: He's spent a lot of time in France. We have a place there.

Jean: Yes, he told me. Bretagne, right?

Helena: Sorry?

Jean: Brittany?

Helena: Oh, sorry. Yes.

Jean: Nice.

Helena: Actually, I hate it. It's cold and wet most of the time.

Jean: So why do you go there?

Helena: Martin insisted on being as far away from Provence as possible.

Jean: Very sensible. The British in Provence are a bunch of tossers.

Helena: My sister lives in Provence.

Jean: Well, some of them are.

*Pause*

Helena: You and Daniel....

Jean: Yes?

Helena: How ... what exactly ...

Jean: He hasn't told you about me, has he? Your son and I are ... seeing each other? Is that the right expression?

*Helena is clearly affected by this information.*

Helena: I see.

Jean: In fact, he wants to marry me.

Helena: What???

Jean: Yes.

Helena: He CAN'T marry you!!! He's only twenty, for God's sake! He's too young to get married!

Jean: I know. I agree. Don't worry, I told him to hold fire on that one.

Helena: Hold fire??? What do you mean 'hold fire'??? I hope to God you said no!

Jean: I told him it isn't something we need to talk about right now.

Helena: Of course you need to talk about it! You need to say no! So he gets the idea out of his mind! Daniel can't even THINK about getting married until ...

Jean: Until what?

Helena: I don't know, until he works out what he wants to do, gets established DOING something! (*Pause*) I'm sorry, but he's a child. He is simply not ready —

Jean: OK, OK! I completely agree. I just thought I should tell you while I had the chance. Before HE says something. You know how dramatic he can get.

Helena: No, I don't know. To be honest, I've never heard him talk like this before. He suddenly sounds so ... theatrical.

Jean: (*Laughs*) It happens on the drama course.

Helena: I always thought Daniel was going to be different from his father but he's starting to sound just like him.

Jean: His father was in that comedy show in the nineties, wasn't he?

Helena: That's right.

Jean: I used to love it. Why did they stop doing it?

Helena: Martin realised he could make a lot more money making TV programmes rather than being in them, so he started his own production company.

Jean: I see. (*Pause*) He's older than you, isn't he?

Helena: Yes.

Jean: How much older?

Helena: That's a very personal question.

Jean: You don't have to answer it.

Helena: *(Sighs)* He's eighteen years older than me.

Jean: And I'm fifteen years older than Daniel. So, about the same, eh?

Helena: It's different.

Jean: Is it? Because I'm a woman?

Helena: Yes — no! I mean, I wasn't Martin's first wife.

Jean: And Daniel isn't my first boyfriend.

Helena: I'm sure he isn't! *(Pause)* Sorry, that didn't sound very nice. I didn't mean any offence.

Jean: None taken.

*Pause*

Helena: I just worry about him so much.

Jean: Martin?

Helena: No, Daniel. I mean, apart from a couple of days at Christmas, I haven't seen him since I drove him to Manchester last September.

]Jean: Well, he's been working hard, don't worry.

Helena: I'm sure he has — he's always worked hard. It's the rest of it I get worried about.

Jean: The rest of it?

Helena: He's always ... he's always been so ... impulsive in his relationships.

Jean: Oh, I think I picked that up. He's impulsive about everything. It's quite an attractive trait, actually. When he gets an idea, he's so full of it — one day he wants to work with homeless people, the next he's planning to tour schools doing a play about bullying, and of course he's determined to build that hospital in Africa.

Helena: Is he?

Jean: It's all very admirable, really.

Helena: Whatever — he's not ready to get married.

Jean: It's OK, Helena, we agree about that.

*They sit and drink their wine in silence.*

Jean: You've got a lovely place here.

Helena: Thank you.

Jean: This place, plus a place in France, famous husband, talented son. It all seems perfect.

Helena: Does it?

Jean: From where I'm standing, yes. I mean, how much is this place worth?

Helena: The house? I have no idea. And just in case you think Daniel will inherit it, it isn't mine, it's Martin's. And he has three other children.

*Jean stares at her in disbelief.*

Jean: Helena, I'm not after Daniel's money, if that's what you're thinking.

Helena: I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me. I'm being very rude to you.

Jean: Yes, you are. I can understand you worrying about Daniel being with (*She uses fingers to make quote marks*) 'an older woman', but I can assure you I'm not a gold digger. Please don't say anything like that again. If I thought for a minute that Daniel —

Helena: I said I'm sorry!

Jean: Mind you, if I was a gold digger ... I do like all of this.

Helena: All of what?

Jean: The house, for a start. My flat in Salford is barely bigger than this kitchen. And I rent it. And is that a Mercedes outside?

Helena: Yes.

Jean: Nice. I could never afford to buy a new car.

Helena: Look — none of this stuff belongs to me. It all belongs to Martin.

Jean: Well, he isn't going to throw you out any time soon, is he?

Helena: I don't know. I hope not.

*Jean chuckles, but then sees that Helena isn't joking.*

Actually, to be perfectly honest, life is ....

Jean: Yes ....? *(Pause)* Do you want to talk about it?

*(Pause)* I know what you're thinking — can I trust my son's girlfriend to keep a secret?

Helena: Well, can I?

Jean: You have no reason to trust me, but yes, you can if you like.

Helena: My life is a nightmare.

Jean: Oh. *(Pause)* Why exactly?

Helena: I suppose Daniel told you that his father lives in America.

Jean: Well, he told me that he spends half his time in Hollywood.

Helena: That's what we tell people. In fact, he hardly ever comes home.

Jean: Why don't you go and live there?

Helena: I tried it for a while. I hated it. And he travels around so much, I hardly saw him even when I was there, so it didn't really make any difference. And to be honest, I'd rather be near Daniel than with my husband. *(Pause)* God, I've never actually admitted that before.

Jean: Where did you meet him?

Helena: I was at drama school.

Jean: Oh! You're an actor.

Helena: Not really. I was in my first year at Arts Ed and some of us were invited to be extras in his show. Then he cast me in a sketch. I didn't have any lines. He tied me to a tree and walked round in a mad way until a branch fell off the tree and knocked him out.

Jean: Oh, I remember that sketch! The tying up thing, it was very, I don't know, it was quite erotic!

Helena: Was it? He kept getting it wrong and having to tie me up again. He told me later that he did it on purpose because he was enjoying it so much.

Jean: I bet he was.

Helena: So ... that's when it all started. And then I got pregnant. He was in the middle of a divorce. When it came through, we got married.

Jean: I see.

Helena: It was all pretty good for a few years, until they started the production company. It was incredibly successful but I think deep down he was frustrated that he wasn't performing any more. After a while, we just started living separate lives.

Jean: Do you ever think about getting a divorce?

Helena: All the time.

Jean: So why don't you?

Helena: *(Dry laugh)* What would I do if I left him? Go back and finish drama school? I can't even — no, stop, I don't want to talk about any of this. *(Pause)* Tell me more about you.

Jean: What do you want to know?

Helena: Have you ever been married?

Jean: Oh yes.

Helena: When?

Jean: A long time ago, when I was 22.

Helena: Who did you marry?

Jean: He was a student of mine.

Helena: Really? You seem to make a habit of that.

Jean: I do, don't I? No, this was completely different. I was studying in Paris and teaching English in a language school. Literally the day after I started working there, a bunch of totally gorgeous African boys came to the school. They were sent by PSG — you know what PSG is?

Helena: PSG? No. Is it a perfume company?

Jean (*Chuckles*) No. PSG is Paris St Germain — the biggest football club in France. The boys were footballers, from Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Mali. They were all in the youth team. PSG made them take English classes. Do you know why? To increase their transfer value when they sold them! Terrible really, but otherwise, they were looked after pretty well.

Helena: So ... you were teaching some boys from Africa?  
And?

Jean: Ah, right, sorry. One of the Malian boys was called Didier. He was 18 ... such a lovely boy — tall, gorgeous, sweet ... and very, very funny. Naughty funny, you know what I mean?

Helena: No, not really.

Jean: He was cheeky ... always saying things to try to embarrass me. And he was the best student in the class by a mile. One day, he stayed after the others had gone. Said he wanted to talk. Well, we did more than talk. (*She pauses as she remembers*) We kept our relationship quiet but the school found out and threatened to sack me, so I said, it's OK! We're getting married! And that's what we did. On his nineteenth birthday.

Helena: I got married when I was nineteen.

Jean: Really? In other words, you were younger than Daniel is now.

Helena: I know, I know.... so, you aren't married to him any more?

Jean: No.

Helena: What happened?

Jean: Well, PSG sold him to some Turkish club. Not one in Istanbul, it was in the middle of nowhere. The money was fantastic and he clearly wanted to go. I told him I didn't want to go, and he said, fine, stay in Paris. He went, I stayed. Eventually, I heard that he had a Turkish girlfriend so I just had to forget about him.

Helena: So ... are you divorced?

Jean: Yes, I sorted that out eventually. And I vowed I would never do anything so utterly, utterly stupid ever again.

Helena: But my son is only a year older than that.

Jean: Helena! This really is completely different. Daniel is so sweet, he's a lovely, lovely boy.

Helena: You said the same thing about the one you married!

Jean: Well, yes, but —

Helena: For God's sake, tell me — are you serious about Daniel?

Jean: Let's just say I'm taking it one day at a time. As I've always done.

*They stare at each other for a moment; Helena takes a breath as if about to speak. They hear the car returning. Car door opens and closes.*

Daniel: *(Offstage)* I'm back!

*He enters stage left, carrying a bag. He takes two bottles of red wine and a six-pack of beer out of the bag and puts them on the table.*

So ... what did you two get up to while I was gone.

Jean: We had a very interesting chat. Didn't we, Helena?

Helena: Yes. *(She stands up, and looks as if she's going to say something, but changes her mind)* I'm going to ... get the spare room ready.

Jean: You don't need to do that. I can sleep on the sofa.

Helena: You most certainly CANNOT sleep on the sofa. What kind of host makes a guest sleep on a sofa?

Jean: Well, I do, for one. There's nowhere else in my flat for a guest to sleep.

Daniel: I can vouch for that!

*Helena looks distraught and leaves. Daniel sits down at the table, opposite Jean.*

Daniel: I supposed she's in one of her moods again.

Jean: Daniel, we need to talk.

Daniel: What about?

Jean: Well, first of all, about her.

Daniel: What about her?

Jean: Can't you see how upset she is?

Daniel: She's always upset about something. Being upset is a default thing with her.

Jean: I think you should try to see things from her point of view. It can't be easy being married to your father.

Daniel: She could do something about that if she wanted.

Jean: Like what?

Daniel: Leave him.

Jean: Leave him? And leave all this?

Daniel: It's just a house.

Jean: Just a house? (*Laughs*) Like that Mercedes outside is just a car, right?

Daniel: Right. House, car, they're just things. That's all she's interested in. Things.

Jean: Give her a break, Daniel. She cares about you. Believe it or not, she wants you to be happy.

Daniel: You think so? The fact is, she wants to control me. She doesn't want me to do anything which is the least bit different. And now she's terrified of what her brainless village friends will think. Her son is having an affair with an older woman who doesn't even have a Mercedes!

Jean: Don't be so cruel. You do realise your mother and I are almost the same age.

Daniel: That is so not true.

Jean: It so *is* true.

**Ken Wilson**

**The Middle of Nowhere**

Daniel: It doesn't make any difference. You could be an eighteen-year-old virgin and she would still find something to get upset about.

Jean: You really are so unfair to her. Believe me, she cares about you. Passionately.

Daniel: Right.

Jean: All mothers care about their sons. We can't help it.

Daniel: *(Pause)* What did you say?

Jean: Mothers care about their sons.

Daniel: You said, 'We can't help it'. WE can't help it.

Jean: Yes....

Daniel: What do you mean - We can't help it?

Jean: *(Takes a deep breath)* There's something I've been meaning to tell you.

Daniel. What?

Jean: You may not like what you hear.

Daniel: Try me.

Jean: I .... have a son.

Daniel: What?

Jean: I have a son.

Daniel: Are you serious?

Jean: Yes. I had a baby when I was very young and I gave him away for adoption.

*Daniel stares at her for a moment.*

Daniel: For real?

Jean: For real.

*Pause*

Daniel: Where is he?

Jean: He lives in Oxford. With his adoptive parents.

Daniel: Who's the father? The Malian guy?

Jean: No.

Daniel: Then who?

Jean: It doesn't matter who.

Daniel: Yes it does matter! Was it someone at uni?

Jean: Noooo! It was a long time ago. I was sixteen.

Daniel: Sixteen! Jesus! Whose is it?

Jean: Mine, Daniel, he's mine. That's all that matters.

Daniel: You know what I mean! The father — who is he???

Jean: *(Sighs)* He's someone I only met once.

Daniel: What??? Where???

Jean: At a music festival. He was in a band.

Daniel: I don't believe it!

Jean: I'm afraid it's true. I had sex with someone in a band at a  
festival! In a tent! Enough information?

Daniel: Which band?

Jean: Oh for crying out loud! I don't remember! I don't even remember his name! He was the drummer!

Daniel: Oh Jesus, this just gets worse! You had sex with a drummer!!!

Jean: Yes!

Daniel: Why??

Jean: Why did I have sex? Or why did I have sex with a drummer? To tell you the truth, I wanted to go with the singer but the singer wanted to go with my best friend! And he did! In the same tent at the same time, if you must know!

Daniel: That's gross!

Jean: Yes, it was a bit. Especially as my friend sounded like she was having MUCH more fun than I was.

Daniel: What did he do when he found out you were pregnant?

Jean: He didn't find out. I didn't tell him.

Daniel: Why not?

Jean: If you must know, because I didn't want my parents to know who he was. My dad would have chased after him and forced him to marry me. And you know what? Even when I was sixteen, I knew I didn't want to spend the rest of my life with a balding drummer.

Daniel: Jesus Christ! He was a drummer! AND he was BALD??

Jean: BaldING!

*Pause*

Daniel: You were sixteen when he was born.

Jean: Yes.

Daniel: So, he's ...

Jean: Yes... he's a little bit younger than you....

Daniel: Jesus. *(Pause)* Do you know who adopted him?

Jean: Yes.

Daniel: Does he know he's adopted?

Jean: Yes.

Daniel: Do you ... do you ever see him?

Jean: No.

Daniel: Why not?

Jean: Because he doesn't want to meet me. Well, he DIDN'T want to see me, but I got a letter from the adoption people about a week ago and now he does. He finally wants to know who I am. *(Pause)* I was going to tell you when the time was right. Daniel, I completely understand if this changes things for you.

*Daniel stands up, picks up one of the bottles of wine, unscrews the cap and pours some wine into one of the glasses. He drains the glass, then fills it again and drains that.*

Daniel: I knew it was too good to be true. For the first time in my life, I meet someone who's totally perfect — intelligent AND funny AND who seems to like me a bit —

Jean: I like you a lot, Daniel, you know that!

Daniel: And then, bang, she tells me she has a son.

Jean: Well, it didn't happen quite the way I expected, but I WAS planning to tell you at some point.

Daniel: I can't believe you would do something like that.

Jean: Like what?

Daniel: Get pregnant! You're always so careful!

Jean: Well, think about it — there might be a connection there.

*Pause*

Daniel: Who knows about this?

Jean: I'm sorry?

Daniel: Who knows that you have a son?

Jean: Is that important?

Daniel: Yes it IS important! Simpson, the git you were sleeping with when we first met. Does he know?

Jean: No, of course not. Why would I tell him?

Daniel: I don't know. He was besotted with you. Maybe you wait until men are completely crazy about you and then you tell them.

Jean: What?

Daniel: Is it some kind of game you play?

Jean: I'm not going to talk about this until you calm down.

Daniel: There's nothing to talk about.

*He picks up her car keys and his rucksack and starts to exit stage left.*

Jean: Where are you going?

Daniel: To see a friend.

Jean: *(Standing up)* Daniel!

*He ignores her and exits stage left. We hear a car door open and close, the engine starts and the car drives away. Jean pours herself a glass of wine. Helena enters stage right.*

Helena: Has she gone? *(She sees Jean)* Oh. I saw the car drive away. I thought you must have left.

Jean: No, it was Daniel.

Helena: Where's he gone?

Jean: He said he was going to see a friend.

Helena: Did he say who?

Jean: No.

Helena: You sounded as if you were arguing about something.

Jean: Did you hear what we were talking about?

Helena: No. But I know what it's like when he loses his temper. He can  
be very difficult.

Jean: Yes.

Helena: If you don't mind me asking, what were you arguing about?

*Before Jean can answer, her mobile rings. She takes it out of her bag,  
connects and starts to talk.*

Jean: Hello. *(Pause)* That's all right. *(Pause)* Well, if you're going to  
drink, just don't drive my car anywhere. *(Pause)* I know you do. Bye.

*She disconnects and puts her phone on the table.*

Helena: Was that Daniel?

Jean: Yes.

Helena: Where is he?

Jean: He's going to see someone called Patrick.

Helena: Oh no...

*Helena sits down at the table and puts her head in her hands.*

Jean: Who's Patrick? The village psychopath?

Helena: He's my gardener.

Jean: OK, not too dangerous then, I suppose.

Helena: I know what's going to happen now.

Jean: What?

Helena: They're going to get drunk. And Patrick will start talking, and  
sooner or later, Daniel will find out.

Jean: Find out? What?

Helena: That I've been sleeping with Patrick for the last six months.

Jean: OK! I see. (*Pause*) How old is Patrick? Young guy?

Helena: In his twenties.

Jean: I see. So you're having an affair with someone who's about ...  
fifteen years younger than you?

Helena: It isn't an affair, it's just sex. I get so BORED out here all by  
myself. And I've been so lonely since....

Jean: Since...?

Helena: .... since I stopped seeing the vicar.

Jean: The vicar?

Helena: I think I want to get very drunk.

Jean: Well, there's plenty here to drink.

Helena: Let's finish the lot and forget about everything.

Jean: Good idea.

*They fill up their glasses.*

Helena: Cheers.

Jean: Cheers.

Helena: Men. What a bloody awful waste of time they are.

Jean: They have their advantages.

Helena: I suppose you're right. Can't live with them, can't live without them.

Jean: Right. Especially the young ones.

*They look at each other and burst out laughing.*

*Black out or curtain.*