

NOTHING BUT MAMMALS

By Michael Ross

Characters

ZOE – Female.

SIMON – Male, married to Zoe.

Location

Their flat, London, present day.

Royalty Free Play.

ZOE and SIMON are inside their flat. A baby's pram is near them. They are addressing the audience. The front door of their flat is behind them.

ZOE: I've had it out with the flat downstairs. I've said to them, "keep that cat of yours locked up at *all times!*" Because it's forever mewing away outside our door.

SIMON: It terrifies Izzy.

ZOE: Poor baby! She's traumatised.

SIMON: We tell them our daughter is scared of their cat and they just laugh, don't they? Because of course to them it's just this sweet, adorable little tabby.

ZOE: Who keeps a cat in a block of flats? It's cruel on the cat, regardless of the whole Izzy situation.

SIMON: Yeah, a cat should have the run of a garden, right?

ZOE: Because they never let it *outdoors* as far as I can see. Have you ever seen it outdoors, Simon?

SIMON: Nope.

ZOE: So of course the poor creature gets cabin fever and as soon as they open the door to their flat, up sprints the cat to loiter outside our door.

SIMON: Sending Izzy into a tizzy, of course!

ZOE: So I stamp my feet on the floor and scream down at them, "come and get your fucking cat!" and we hear this laughter, don't we, Simon? But *eventually* someone trudges up here and scoops it away.

SIMON: You can't really blame them.

ZOE: Excuse me?

SIMON: I mean, it must seem like we're these rather neurotic, namby-pamby middle-class parents who want to wrap our daughter up in cotton wool.

ZOE: Oh, I'm neurotic, am I Simon?

SIMON: No, of course you're not! I said that's what *they* must think of *us*. (*to audience*) But what I'm always suggesting to Zoe is; lets invite them up, offer them a cup of tea, introduce them to Izzy.

ZOE: No way!

SIMON: But if they met Izzy maybe they'd understand.

ZOE: Out of the question! *(to audience)* I'm pretty sure we were expressly told when we moved in that we weren't allowed pets. Weren't we Simon?

SIMON: I seem to recall so, yes.

ZOE: So I've no idea why they've been allowed one, unless of course the landlord *doesn't know-*

SIMON: But we're not going to tell him, are we Zoe? It'd be a very bad idea. Because if they go sniffing around downstairs they're bound to come sniffing around up here too, aren't they?

ZOE: Oh come on! It's hardly the same.

SIMON: Well we haven't had the cat up here for a couple of days now, so hopefully they've got the message, darling.

ZOE: Awww. Izzy's sound asleep now.

SIMON: She'll be up and about in a bit, no doubt, causing all manner of mayhem!

ZOE: *(laughs)* Naughty little Izzy.

SIMON: We're not going to deny it's been tough.

ZOE: But intensely rewarding at the same time of course.

SIMON: And we're not going to lie; Izzy isn't exactly what we envisaged our child to be.

ZOE: But what child is what you envisage? Isn't that the point? They're their own special little person. And in a way Izzy is far *more* than either of us could ever have imagined.

SIMON: *(laughs grimly)* You can certainly say that!

ZOE: And what's that supposed to mean, Simon?

SIMON: I was simply agreeing with you, dear.

ZOE: I hadn't gone for any prenatal scans.

SIMON: She refused.

ZOE: Point blank. Didn't want to know. So it was a total surprise.

SIMON: 'Surprise.' (*laugh*) Understatement of the century!

ZOE: I thought, 'whatever this baby is, I'm going to have it!'

SIMON: It's almost like she knew.

ZOE: No Simon, I didn't *know*!

SIMON: But you had an intuition something was wrong, didn't you? Come on, Zoe, you *did* say that.

ZOE: I had an intuition something *might* not have been right, but I didn't know *what*.

SIMON: Right.

ZOE: I mean, I had *no idea* that-

SIMON: Sure.

ZOE: Do you seriously think I *knew*?

SIMON: Of course I don't.

ZOE: Let's not air our dirty linen in public, Simon.

SIMON: (*to audience*) So it was a total shock when out she popped.

ZOE: 'Out she popped'?

SIMON: You know what I mean.

ZOE: No, I'm sorry Simon but I *don't* know what you mean, and neither do the audience. Babies do not simply 'pop out.'

SIMON: Ok, my bad! Wrong choice of words.

ZOE: Reveal a lot though, don't they?

SIMON: (*to audience*) So there we were in the delivery room, and there on the bed, in between Zoe's legs, was this *thing*.

ZOE: I'm sorry, are you referring to our daughter as "a thing"?

SIMON: Dear, I'm merely trying to paint a picture, set the scene. Because there we were, expecting what we'd always been led to expect; but instead there was this small pink creature. (*quickly anticipating an objection from Zoe*) And when I say 'creature' I'm merely describing my honest first impressions, because that's how it looked, I mean really that's what it *was* because it wasn't human.

ZOE: (*sharp intake of breath*)

SIMON: Now, come on, Zoe, Izzy isn't human, is she?

ZOE: I think Izzy challenges our very notions of what it is to be 'human.' I think Izzy, in a way, disproves the whole concept of being 'human' and the arbitrary distinction we draw between ourselves and other animals.

SIMON: (*rolls his eyes*) Here it comes!

ZOE: Because really, we're just one mammal among many.

SIMON: (*sings*) "You and me, baby, we ain't nothing but mammals!"

ZOE: Yes, thank you Simon!

SIMON: (*to audience*) Nobody knew exactly what the hell Izzy was at first.

ZOE: Because when they're young they don't look like they do when, y'know, when they've grown up. They don't have any fur for a start and they don't have the long tails, just this little stump.

SIMON: One of the nurses screamed and bolted out of the room.

ZOE: Must've been new!

SIMON: But apart from that everyone else was weirdly calm, weren't they?

ZOE: Except me. I burst into tears!

SIMON: She did, yes.

ZOE: Not because of how Izzy looked, but because she wasn't moving.

SIMON: Now come on Zoe, be honest-

ZOE: I am being honest!

SIMON: You were disturbed by her appearance, I could see it in your face.

ZOE: Just because *you* were disturbed by her appearance, Simon-

SIMON: Disturbed? I was horrified!

ZOE: *(to audience)* Was I disturbed by her appearance? Maybe slightly.

SIMON: And that's nothing to be ashamed of Zoe. After all, you're only hu...
(breaks off, thinks better of it).

ZOE: But my overwhelming, overriding emotion was just this intense blazing and all-consuming maternal love, because she was my daughter and I *loved* her, whatever she was!

SIMON: The doctor carefully placed Izzy on a little silver tray and hurried away, closely followed by everyone else in the room.

ZOE: And we were just abandoned really, weren't we?

SIMON: I sat with Zoe and held her hand and told her it was all going to be ok. Of course in an earlier age Zoe would probably have been burnt for being a witch.

ZOE: Yes, Simon thinks it's very funny to keep reminding me of this!

SIMON: She's very lucky, that's all I'm saying.

ZOE: *Excuse me?* I'm *lucky* not to be burnt for being a witch?

SIMON: At some point later that night, whilst Zoe was asleep, a nurse came in and whispered for me to follow her. She took me up to the top floor to this little office where the doctor was sat along with this other bloke, this rather random, geeky looking guy in a New Order t-shirt. And the doctor gestured to him and said, "this is Professor such-and-such, he's a mammalogist from Imperial College." So I'm thinking "mammalogist"? Huh? Y'know- "what the fuck?" And the doctor turns to the mammalogist and says, "Professor such-and-such has something to tell you."

ZOE: That's not his real name, by the way.

SIMON: The mammalogist looks nervous, he obviously didn't think he'd have to be the one to break the news, but he says, "I don't know how to tell you this, Mr Farrow, but your wife has given birth to a rat."

ZOE: Simon just laughed. Didn't you, Simon?

SIMON: I did. It's true. I mean, what can you say to that?

ZOE: It was about a week before I was allowed out of the hospital. After much stamping of feet (mine) they relented and allowed me to take Izzy home.

SIMON: They didn't want to, but in the end they had to.

ZOE: And as I got in the car with Izzy asleep in her cage on my lap, do you know what the first thing Simon said to me was?

SIMON: Don't tell them this!

ZOE: He said, "Just tell me, Zoe- did you fuck a rat?"

SIMON: Jeez! I've apologised a *million times*, haven't I?

ZOE: They're all shocked at you, Simon. You've *disgusted* them.

SIMON: It was horrible of me, I know.

ZOE: I just burst into tears.

SIMON: Every man in this room would have said exactly the same thing in my shoes.

ZOE: No they wouldn't.

SIMON: Come on guys, you would, right? Be honest.

ZOE: Don't judge everyone by your own base standards, Simon.

SIMON: I mean, what else was I supposed to think? I'm not defending myself, I'm simply saying-

ZOE: Although you were right, as it happens.

SIMON: Sorry?

ZOE: (*acting tearful*) I didn't want to tell you, Simon, I was so ashamed. But you know what it's like, girls. You're standing at the very end of the platform at Tottenham Court Road on a Friday night, waiting for the last Northern Line train. You've had a bit too much to drink at the office party, then you see this rat scampering about on the track and you think, "phwoar, I'd like a bit of that" so you lift your skirt up, don't you girls, and slur, "come on gorgeous, up you come!"

Simon stares at Zoe, open mouthed in horror.

ZOE: I'm joking!

SIMON: I know. I knew you were.

ZOE: You believed me, didn't you?

SIMON: No I did not! I'm just appalled, frankly, that you can be quite so vulgar.

The sound of high pitched squeaking comes from the pram.

Zoe gets up and rushes over to it.

ZOE: Oh, Simon, you've woken her up!

A rat's tail rises up out of the pram and waves about.

ZOE: *(to pram)* Izzy darling, go back to sleep!

Zoe leans into the pram and we hear her kissing its occupant. Simon shares a grimace of disgust with the audience.

ZOE: The most striking thing about Izzy of course is her insatiable curiosity. She's less than a year old but already she's off gallivanting about, exploring things, delving into little nooks and crannies. She's ever so energetic! And her eyes are alive with this fierce intelligence. It's really quite extraordinary in a child her age, isn't it?

Simon snorts with derision.

ZOE: Simon?

SIMON: *(to audience)* Do you want to hear something really funny? This'll crack you up. Just outside our flats there are these big bins that everyone on the estate uses, and at night the whole place is just crawling with rats. Now guess who's been on the phone haranguing the council to get Izzy's cousins exterminated?

ZOE: *(sighs)* He means *me*, ladies and gentleman.

SIMON: Yes. Her! Isn't that ironic?

ZOE: And how exactly is that ironic, Simon? We'd all love to know. Those rats outside have *nothing to do* with Izzy. They are not her *cousins*, Millicent and Jacob are her cousins! Those rats are vermin. I don't *want* them dead, poor things, but they carry diseases and we've got our daughter's health to think of.

SIMON: No, what Zoe is actually worried about is that those rats might one day get into our flat and of course then they'll whisk Izzy away with them.

ZOE: Don't be ridiculous!

SIMON: Yes, Izzy will scuttle off after them down the toilet, down into the depths of the London sewage system, there to gambol around merrily in the dark eating shit and fucking other rats for the rest of her short and squalid little life.

ZOE: Clearly, this is what Simon *wishes* will happen.

SIMON: I haven't told Zoe this but a few nights ago I went into the kitchen to get a glass of water, and as I was at the sink I looked out the window, down at the ground, and there was this long line of rats directly below, and they were all staring up at our window, right at me, eyes glistening in the moonlight, and they were all squeaking in unison, beckoning Izzy to join them.

ZOE: (*laughs*) Bollocks they were!

SIMON: Izzy is a rat, Zoe. A fucking rat.

ZOE: You can't help judging her, can you?

SIMON: I'm not 'judging' I'm '*describing*.'

ZOE: But you can't love her unconditionally, can you? And here's the thing- if she hadn't been born a rat, there'd have been something else that would have *disappointed* you. She'd have been disabled perhaps, or a bit slow, or else she'd have been a perfectly healthy, bright, pretty young girl but one day she turns to you and says "daddy - I'm a lesbian."

SIMON: (*laughs*) I wish!

ZOE: Well yes, you say that *now*. Its easy enough to say that *now*, but I think actually in that case you wouldn't think, "well at least she's not a rat," would you?

SIMON: I think it's unbelievably crass for you to compare rats with lesbians, Zoe. (*to audience*) I'm deeply sorry if anyone here is offended by that.

ZOE: I wasn't! Don't twist my words, Simon. Look, it isn't good for Izzy to hear us bickering all the time. She'll grow up with issues. (*looks into the pram.*) Oh God!

SIMON: What?

ZOE: She's gone! (*calling out, panicky*) Izzy! Izzy darling, where are you?

Zoe starts hunting around the room, frantically searching.

ZOE: (*to audience*) Did anyone see where she went? Someone must have seen her!

Zoe runs off to look in another room. Simon is left alone on stage.

ZOE: (off) Izzy! (getting further away) Come to mummy, Izzy!

There is the sound of a cat purring outside the door behind Simon. Simon stiffens.

The cat purrs some more.

Simon hesitates, then, checking the coast is clear, he quietly opens the door.

SIMON: (whispers) Here kitty kitty! In you come.

Lights down.

Curtain.