

# Skeletons

*A play in two Acts*

*by*

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*based on an idea by*

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## SKELETONS



## ACT 1

*Lights down.*

*Over the loudspeakers we hear the Beatles' song, 'When I'm sixty-four'.*

*Lights up on stage.*

*The setting is the inner hall of the Westwoods' large Edwardian house.*

*Leading off this inner hall are four doors, they lead (from stage right to stage left) to: the entrance hall and thence the front door; the sitting room; the dining room; the kitchen. There is also the beginnings of a staircase to the upper floors and bedrooms.*

*Between two of these doorways are fitted cupboards, opening at the centre. Open the downstage door and you will find a normal recess, with fitted shelves in the upper part. However, open the other and out flops a skeleton, hanging behind the door.*

*There is a hall table beside the staircase with a vase of flowers on it, and an antique hall chair beside it. A second hall chair is downstage right, below the door to the entrance hall. Downstage, just left of centre, is a hall chest, with a telephone on it.*

*It is six o'clock on a sunny Saturday evening in summer.*

*Enter Cynthia Westwood from the entrance hall.*

*She is just on the right side of forty and is dressed not 'smartly' in the conventional sense, but with great taste and flair which can only be produced by the combination of an artistic temperament and a large bank balance. She is loaded with plastic shopping bags from the smarter stores and shops. She dumps them where she can: on the hall chair, on the table, on the floor. She takes off her shoes and parks these under a hall chair. She goes out to the entrance hall and returns with another load of dress shop bags in each hand, some glossy fashion magazines under her arm and a letter between her teeth. She starts to take these upstairs.*

*The telephone rings.*

*Cynthia hesitates whether to answer it upstairs or downstairs and decides eventually to come back down to the hall. She drops one lot of bags onto the floor, to give her a free hand, and manages to drop the magazines onto the hall table, as she picks up the phone.*

CYNTHIA *(Into the phone, forgetting she still has the letter between her teeth)*

Four four five. Six five three four.

*(A pause. She removes the letter from her mouth)*

Sorry, Cynthia Westwood speaking. *(Pause, annoyed)*  
No I didn't have to put my bottom teeth back in!  
Look, who is this? *(Pause)* I'm no good at guessing.  
*(Pause)* Yes, I give up. *(Pause)* Philip! But I don't believe it!  
I thought you were in Canada. *(Pause)* Australia, then. Wasn't far out, was I? But when did you get back? *(Pause)* This morning? *(Pause)* Well, it's such a surprise. *(Pause)* Of course a nice surprise. But let's think . . . its been about five years, hasn't it? Didn't you re-marry or something? *(Pause)* And divorced again? Sorry. *(Pause)* All right so I needn't be sorry. Look Philip . . . *(She is trying to look down at her watch)*  
I think Geoffrey is due back any minute. *(Pause)* Yes, I know this used to be a good time to phone . . . but only on weekdays *(Pause)* No, it's Saturday. You seem to have lost a day somewhere, between Canada and Australia. They'll probably find it, floating in mid-Atlantic. *(Pause)* Mid-Pacific, then. *(Pause)* Look, I think I can hear him coming, *(Pause)* No, don't phone, not this weekend. *(Pause)* All right, Monday then. *(Pause)* Philip, it has been five years. A lot's happened. I'm . . . I'm just not sure. I need time to think . . . *(Pause)* . . . Good-bye.

*Flushed and flustered, she puts down the phone, she takes the letter and a magazine and goes hurriedly upstairs, leaving the hall still littered with plastic bags, magazines and her shoes.*

*After a moment or two, enter Geoffrey Westwood from the entrance hall.*

*He is in his early forties. Even after a game of golf Geoffrey is neatness*

*personified. He is dressed in well cut trousers, a cashmere V-necked sweater over a crisp open necked shirt. His shoes are highly polished. Not a hair on his slightly greying head is out of place. He is carrying a golf bag of the best make, in which each club is neatly covered. In his other hand are his golfing shoes. He puts these away immediately in the downstage half of the cupboard. Looking about him, he views with evident distaste the traces of his wife's recent passage through the hall. With the resigned air of someone for whom this has become a regular chore, he takes the shopping bags into the kitchen.*

*The telephone rings.*

*Geoffrey re-enters from the kitchen and picks up the phone.*

*Cynthia comes half-way down the stairs thinking, fearing, it might be for her again, Geoffrey has his back to her, so she hesitates, trying to gather from his reply who is calling. She is very nervous.*

GEOFFREY *(Into phone)* Westwood speaking. *(Pause)* I beg your pardon? *(Pause)* Who? *(Pause)* I'm afraid you must have the wrong number, *(Pause)* That is my number, yes. *(Pause)* Look, who's speaking, please? *(Pause, he becomes very agitated)* The what? *(He starts to fumble for something in his pocket)* You're from which hospital? *(More and more excited.)* No, I don't know anybody at your hospital. You've got the wrong person. The wrong number.

*Pause. He manages to take a small box of pills from one of his pockets and puts it on the hall table so that he can extract one with one hand. Cynthia meanwhile creeps silently up the stairs again, somewhat relieved that it is obviously not who she thought it might be on the phone.*

*Bike? As in bicycle, you mean? (Pause) Oh, Mike, as in Michael. You must have a cold. (Pause) I thought so. But Michael who? (Pause) No, I don't know anybody by that name. (Pause) Staying here? Nonsense. (Pause) No, that's impossible. (Pause, Flaring up) Because this is my house, damn you. I would know if anyone was staying here, wouldn't I? (Pause) What a cheek. No of course I can't give him a message. Never heard of him. (Pause. Testily) And good day to you.*

*Geoffrey slams down the phone angrily and rushes into the kitchen,*

*returning with a glass of water. He takes the pill and swallows it with the water. Then he notices Cynthia's shoes under the hall chair. He sweeps them up, almost frantically, and throws them into the downstage cupboard. This done, he picks up his box of pills, his glass and the remaining fashion magazines and takes them into the sitting room, collecting on the way the fallen petals from the flowers on the hall table. The hall, when he finally leaves it, is now as neat and tidy as he is.*

*Enter Cynthia down the staircase. She is carrying another glossy fashion magazine and is reading the letter. She calls.*

CYNTHIA    Geoffrey? You back?

*Receiving no reply to this unnecessary question, she drops the magazine onto the hall table and goes into the kitchen, still reading the letter.*

*Enter Geoffrey from the sitting room.*

GEOFFREY    What was that?

*He also receives no reply. He spots the offending magazine, picks it up and takes it with him upstairs, calling as he goes:*

GEOFFREY    Cynthia?

*Enter Cynthia from the kitchen wearing a pretty apron. Over her arm is a tea towel and in her hand a pair of oven-gloves. She is still reading the letter. She crosses to the foot of the stairs, dumping the tea towel and oven gloves onto the hall table as she does so. She calls up the stairs:*

CYNTHIA    Geoffrey? You up there? There's a letter. From Sally. She's coming for the weekend. *(Reads further)* Heavens! That means today! *(She looks for the post mark on the envelope)* Honestly, the Post Office couldn't deliver a baby on time. Why didn't she phone? *(Reads further)* And . . . oh, no! She's bringing Mike with her. Well, I must do something about supper. *(Calls)* I'll leave the rest of it for you to read.

*She goes into the kitchen, leaving the letter on top of the other things on the hall table.*

*Enter Geoffrey down the stairs. He catches sight of the oven gloves and the tea towel and instinctively opens the downstage cupboard and throws them in. He is about to throw the letter into the cupboard too, when*



*something in it catches his eye. He starts to read it. He goes into the sitting room, still reading.*

*Enter Cynthia from the kitchen. She looks around the neat and tidy hall somewhat mystified. She goes to the foot of the stairs and calls:*

CYNTHIA Geoffrey! Have you seen my oven-gloves? Geoffrey?

*Enter Geoffrey from the sitting room, that is from behind her, and flourishes the letter.*

GEOFFREY (*Agitated*) Have you seen this?

*This startles Cynthia, who turns.*

CYNTHIA I left it for you.

GEOFFREY I found it lying around.

CYNTHIA It was not lying around. I left it out for you to read.  
(*Pause*) It's from Sally, and she says. . . .

GEOFFREY (*Testily*) I can read. (*He reads as they talk*)

CYNTHIA Oh dear. (*Pause*) Had a good game?

GEOFFREY Thank you. Most enjoyable.

CYNTHIA Did you win?

GEOFFREY (*Irritated*) You know perfectly well that's not the point.  
It's the fresh air, the exercise, the. . . .

CYNTHIA I see, you lost.

GEOFFREY A close thing, I can tell you. A very close thing.

CYNTHIA Hmm. You lost badly. Look, have you seen my oven. .

GEOFFREY Try the kitchen.

CYNTHIA Very funny. If only you would let me finish. I'll try again. My oven gloves. Have you, by any chance, seen my. . . .

GEOFFREY Why didn't you say so?

CYNTHIA You never let me finish a. . . .

GEOFFREY She's bringing down some chap with her.

CYNTHIA Yes. Mike. You know.

GEOFFREY No. I don't know.

CYNTHIA She's told us about him. You know, Mike. . . .

GEOFFREY Oh, him. Michael you mean, surely?

CYNTHIA Do I?

GEOFFREY Yes, Michael. Let's call him by his proper name, for heaven's sake. You know how I hate these vulgar abbreviations. Some jumped-up whimp tried to call me 'Geoff' the other day. I soon put him in his place, I can tell you. 'Geoff' indeed!

*Cynthia opens the upstage cupboard door. The skeleton swings out. Neither of them seem to regard this as at all unusual.*

CYNTHIA Where are they? I'm sure I left them in the hall.

*She pushes the skeleton back into the cupboard and closes the door.*

GEOFFREY You know how many times I've asked you not to leave things in the hall?

CYNTHIA Yes, I do know. Oh, never mind. I'll find another pair.

GEOFFREY Now this feller she's bringing. . . .

CYNTHIA I've told you. He's the one she lives with. The American. Mike.

*Geoffrey throws an involuntary glance at the telephone.*

GEOFFREY *(To himself)* Bike.

CYNTHIA *(Mystified)* Bike? What bike? *(Tries again)* Who's bike? *(Silence)*

GEOFFREY *(Eventually)* Damn them.

CYNTHIA Damn who?

GEOFFREY *(Back to the letter)* She says here he's an occupational therapist.

CYNTHIA That's nice.

GEOFFREY In a mental hospital.

CYNTHIA So?

GEOFFREY With long-term patients.

*Cynthia is finally brought to a halt by this. They stare at each other as they consider the implications. Eventually Cynthia shrugs her shoulders.*

CYNTHIA There are hundreds of mental hospitals.

GEOFFREY And how many, in this area, deal with long-term patients?

CYNTHIA Let's not jump to conclusions.

GEOFFREY I'm not jumping to anything. There was a phone-call, just now, from the hospital.

CYNTHIA Which hospital?

GEOFFREY The hospital. This Michael of Sally's must have given them this number in case they needed to reach him over the weekend. Damned cheek. Something about a patient he promised to take out on Sunday. (*Becoming more excited*) It's beginning to happen. I knew it would.

CYNTHIA You're becoming paranoid.

*(The door bell sounds)*

GEOFFREY (*Terrified*) That must be them. Remember, we never had this conversation.

CYNTHIA Which conversation?

GEOFFREY The one we've just had, you idiot.

CYNTHIA My God, you are in a state. Look at you. This is just Sally and her boyfriend, remember. Anyway, such coincidences are just not possible.

GEOFFREY That's just where you're wrong. They are.

*(Door bells sounds again)*

You answer it.

*Cynthia tears off her apron and dumps it into Geoffrey's hands. She*

rushes off to the entrance hall. Geoffrey is annoyed at being left holding the apron, so he tries to hide it in the upstage cupboard. The Skeleton swings out again. He closes the door quickly but an ankle or a wrist of the skeleton is caught in it and is still showing. He pushes them back in and finally closes the door just as Cynthia brings Sally and Mike into the inner hall.

Sally is nineteen and has obviously inherited her mother's good looks. She wears a long loose cotton and lace dress with a 'Granny' shawl over her shoulders. Her bare feet are in open flat sandals.

Mike is twenty-two. He wears blue jeans and a T-shirt with some environmental slogan on it. He is carrying a back-pack and a rolled sleeping bag. He talks with an Anglicised American accent.

CYNTHIA Come along in, both of you. Geoffrey, this is Mike.

GEOFFREY Good evening, Michael.

MIKE Er, Mike. . .

SALLY Mike . . . actually, daddy.

GEOFFREY Hello, Sally.

SALLY (*Loudly, through her teeth to her father*) Mike!

CYNTHIA Oh, and we're Sally's parents.

MIKE (*Looks them up and down*) Yeah, I guess you fit the description.

GEOFFREY (*Fearful*) What description?

CYNTHIA (*Quickly*) Geoffrey! (*An awkward pause*) Sally's shawl?

*At a signal from Cynthia Geoffrey helps Sally off with her shawl. Despite her loose cotton dress it is now obvious that she is about six months pregnant. Cynthia notices and tries to draw Geoffrey's attention to it. But he is distracted because Sally is about to leave her shawl on the hall chest. Geoffrey hastily gathers it up and opens the upstage cupboard to put it away. The skeleton swings out. None of the Westwood family react. But Mike is both startled and amused and emits a choked chortle. They all turn to look at him. He covers his mouth with his hand and points to the skeleton but it is as if the family don't notice it, or at least don't think there is anything odd about it at all. Geoffrey pushes the shawl and the skeleton into the cupboard and shuts the door.*

GEOFFREY Now Sally, would you like to take Michael up and show him the guest room?

MIKE Oh that's all right. I've brought my sleeping bag.

GEOFFREY What ever for?

SALLY Mike can doss down on the floor in my room.

CYNTHIA (*Flustered. She is totally preoccupied with Sally's evident pregnancy*) Well, er, let's. . . .

MIKE Look, it's no sweat. Honest.

CYNTHIA (*To Sally*) Darling. . . .

SALLY I don't mind, either.

GEOFFREY Well I do. (*Smoothly, to Cynthia*) Besides, we prepared the guest room specially for Michael, didn't you darling?

CYNTHIA Did we? Did I? But we only just got Sally's . . . (*Receives frantic signal from Geoffrey*) Yes . . . yes, of course I did.

GEOFFREY (*With an even smoother smile*) After all, we want to give Michael a good impression of the Westwood household, now don't we. First impressions are so important, I always think.

MIKE (*Looking around*) They sure are.

GEOFFREY Quite so. (*Brightly*) Well, off you go then. (*Going to sitting room door*) We'll be in here. Come down and have a drink when you're ready.

MIKE Thanks a lot, Geoff!

*Geoffrey looks as if he is about to explode, Cynthia guides him swiftly through the door of the sitting room. They exit.*

SALLY Come on up, Ill show you where everything is.

*They go to the stairs.*

MIKE Hey, Sal, did you see that. . . . Well, you know . . . that. . . .

SALLY       What?

MIKE         Like . . . skeleton?

SALLY       Oh, that.

MIKE         Well?

SALLY       Didn't I tell you? Daddy uses them in his work. We've got dozens of them around the house. Come on.

*Mike leaves his sleeping bag on the hall chair near the foot of the stairs. They exit up the stairs.*

*Enter Geoffrey from the sitting room with an empty bottle of sherry. He calls back into the sitting room.*

GEOFFREY   Don't be silly. She's just putting on weight, that's all.

*He notices that Mike's sleeping bag has been left in the hall. Instinctively he puts it away in the upstage cupboard. He goes into the kitchen.*

*Enter Cynthia from the sitting room. She goes into the dining room. Enter Geoffrey from the kitchen with a new bottle of sherry. Enter Cynthia from the dining room with four dinner plates.*

CYNTHIA    Honestly! How blind can you be!

GEOFFREY   But surely they know how to take precautions?

CYNTHIA    Precautions or no precautions, Sally's pregnant.

GEOFFREY   Our little Sally? I refuse to believe it.

CYNTHIA    Not-so-little Sally, now. Besides, I was about the same age, remember? Have you forgotten how I looked?

GEOFFREY   *(Cutting)* Am I ever likely to forget? The spectre of your obscenely rounded shape has haunted me for twenty years. Damned inconvenient that was, too. And we're still paying for it.

CYNTHIA    Is that all your daughter is to you – an inconvenience?

GEOFFREY   *(Coldy)* I didn't mean Sally. I meant. . . .

CYNTHIA    *(Hurt and angry)* I know damn well what you mean. You still blame me for all that, don't you? You've always

blamed me.

GEOFFREY You brought it up.

CYNTHIA Always my fault. (*Half under her breath as she goes*) You bastard.

*She goes into the kitchen, slamming the door. Geoffrey notices that a lamp shade on one of the wall lights is askew. He goes to adjust it. Enter Mike, down the stairs, behind Geoffrey's back.*

MIKE Er . . . sir . . . excuse me. . . .

*Geoffrey is startled and turns, but quickly puts on the charm.*

GEOFFREY Ah . . . yes . . . er . . . Michael. Good. Everything all right? Come and have a drink before dinner.

MIKE Thanks. I was wondering . . . (*Looking around*)

GEOFFREY Yes?

MIKE Have you seen my sleeping bag?

GEOFFREY Now let me see . . . your. . . .

MIKE Sleeping bag? I guess I left it here, in the hall.

GEOFFREY Ah, well Michael, that's just it you see.

MIKE Just what?

GEOFFREY We don't leave things in the hall. Many visitors, you understand. Patients. Unexpected callers. After all, first impressions. . . .

MIKE 'Are important', I know.

GEOFFREY Quite so. You see, in my profession. . . .

MIKE O.K. But where is it? (*Geoffrey is annoyed at being interrupted*) My sleeping bag?

GEOFFREY Oh, that. I probably tidied it away. Between you and me, Michael, I'm forever having to tidy things away. You see Sally's mother . . . well . . . doesn't. . . .

MIKE Tidy things away?

GEOFFREY Let's put it this way. She's . . . well . . . basically an

artist. And, on the whole, artists . . . aren't very . . .  
er. . . .

MIKE Tidy?

GEOFFREY Not in my experience. Now, where were we?

MIKE My sleeping bag.

GEOFFREY Exactly. Now, let's see. . . .

*He opens the upstage cupboard door and the skeleton swings out. As he reaches deep inside for the sleeping bag he loses balance. Trying to support himself he becomes entangled with the skeleton. During the following dialogue he becomes more and more desperate as he tries to disentangle himself from the skeleton with one hand and hang on to the sleeping bag with the other.*

GEOFFREY But you won't need it.

MIKE It'll save the laundry. (*Geoffrey doesn't follow*) Like Mrs Westwood won't need to launder my sheets, you know?

GEOFFREY Mrs Westwood doesn't 'launder' sheets, as you put it, Michael.

MIKE What I mean is, if I use my sleeping. . . .

GEOFFREY Mrs Pike, the daily, washes the sheets.

MIKE But. . . .

GEOFFREY Failing that. . . .

MIKE I only meant. . . .

GEOFFREY The laundryman collects them. On a Monday, I think it is. And returns them on Friday. All very efficient and convenient. So you see Michael, not to put too fine a point on it, and facing facts. . . .

MIKE Look, can I help?

GEOFFREY (*In extremis*) Mrs Westwood hasn't washed a single sheet in twenty years!

*On this final desperate note he manages to free himself from the skeleton*



*which dangles loosely. He stands back, exhausted, and hands Mike the sleeping bag.*

MIKE Thanks. That's a fine skeleton.

GEOFFREY One of the best. I use it to demonstrate to my patients.

MIKE Are you a bone specialist?

GEOFFREY Only in a manner of speaking. You see, what was wrong with this poor fellow was. . . .

MIKE An extra cervical rib. Does happen, I'm told. Must have had terrible neck problems. . . .

GEOFFREY (*Impressed despite himself*) Good heavens. How did you know?

MIKE Simple. I majored in medicine for some time.

GEOFFREY But I thought Sally said you were an. . . .

MIKE An occupational therapist, right. Half way through medical school I came to the conclusion that most medical practice was a middle-class rip-off and that the majority of doctors were just out to make a fast buck.

GEOFFREY Nothing wrong with making money, surely?

MIKE Well I guess I didn't want to get into that kind of a groove. So I freaked out of medical school and began to look around for a service that – O.K. – might carry less financial reward but would be right up front when it came to real human need. You see, not many people have the patience to work with mental cases. Or the guts.

*Geoffrey closes the door on the skeleton.*

GEOFFREY Mental cases?

MIKE That's right. Long-term patients, mainly. Very demanding. But equally satisfying.

GEOFFREY Must be.

*Silence. Geoffrey is deep in thought.*

MIKE So you're a surgeon?

GEOFFREY No, not exactly.

MIKE A what then?

GEOFFREY An osteopath, actually.

MIKE Ah . . . ah, so that explains it.

GEOFFREY (*Annoyed*) Explains what?

MIKE The skeleton, of course.

GEOFFREY (*Relieved. Charming again*) Oh yes, of course. The skeleton.

MIKE Not to mention all that cash you squander on Sal.

GEOFFREY Squander?

MIKE You know, like 'waste'? 'Spend needlessly'?

GEOFFREY What exactly do you mean by 'spend needlessly'?

MIKE Oh, come on, do I have to spell it out for you? That sports coupé. All those clothes. Like she ends up giving most of them away – to the Oxfam shop.

GEOFFREY The little. . . .

MIKE Can't persuade her to give up the M.G., though.

GEOFFREY And why should she?

MIKE Wasting irreplaceable fossil fuel. Polluting the atmosphere. A bike's much healthier.

GEOFFREY Not to mention slower.

MIKE What's the hurry?

GEOFFREY And far more dangerous if my wife's diagnosis of Sally's present condition is at all correct.

MIKE Oh, that. Yeah, well, what about that? Terrific news isn't it? (*Geoffrey looks at him in amazement*) That's why I let her drag me along here by car this weekend. Reluctantly, mind you. Under protest.

GEOFFREY Oh, I dare say. Under protest.

MIKE Say, did you start out as a medicine major too?

GEOFFREY Yes I did, as a matter of fact.

MIKE Bet you didn't flunk out for the same reasons I did.

GEOFFREY Not quite. But then you see I actually experienced something you and your generation only talk about.

MIKE Oh? And what's that?

GEOFFREY Poverty.

MIKE (*Laughs in disbelief*) Poverty?

GEOFFREY Real financial hardship. And terrifying insecurity. You see, I lost my father, Sally's grandfather, in the war. My mother couldn't afford to let me continue with lengthy medical studies. I needed to earn a lot of money – and quickly.

MIKE (*Laughs*) No-one needs to earn a lot of money, surely?

GEOFFREY (*Is not amused*) You never will, obviously. Poor Sally.

*They stare at each other for a moment from their slit trenches, but neither is willing to advance further into battle at present.*

Well, how about that drink, eh? I'm ready for one, I must say. (*He leads Mike towards the sitting room door*) What'll you have? Sherry? Or something stronger?

MIKE Have you got any carrot juice?

*He follows Geoffrey into the sitting room.*

*Enter Cynthia from the kitchen with a hostess trolley which she wheels into the dining room.*

*Cynthia re-enters, pausing for a moment by the sitting room door.*

*She hears a burst of laughter and talk from the two men.*

*She goes to the foot of the stairs and calls.*

CYNTHIA Sally!

*Sally comes quickly down the stairs.*

SALLY Mum!

CYNTHIA Why didn't you tell me? After all, I am your mother.

SALLY I wanted to show you. I didn't want to write. And I'm hopeless on the telephone. Words can't explain things very well, at least not my words, and not something like this. Wonderful, isn't it!

CYNTHIA Is it?

SALLY Of course it's wonderful, mum.

CYNTHIA And Mike?

SALLY He thinks so too.

CYNTHIA Sure?

SALLY Look, mum. We're both delighted and we both want it.

CYNTHIA I believe you. I'm so relieved. (*She hugs Sally*) So, you'll get married now? (*Sally is silent*) Look, he does want to marry you? (*No response. Tries a different tack*) Surely it's different now, with a child on the way. You've got to think about a home and. . . .

SALLY A home, yes. We want to give it a wonderful home. In fact we've seen a place, not far from our bedsit. A bit run down. But we can do it up. Mike's very clever like that. Even plumbing. Leaky taps. Blocked drains. He can fix anything.

CYNTHIA Except a wedding.

SALLY Mum, I know you find it hard to accept this, but it really isn't necessary. Not these days.

CYNTHIA But after all we've done to bring you up properly. We've given you a respectable home. Our own example, as parents. . . .

SALLY (*Chortles incredulously*) What?

CYNTHIA Well we've stayed together, which is more than can be said for the parents of most of your friends. I used to

take you to church almost every week – and to Sunday School when you were little.

SALLY What's that got to do with it?

CYNTHIA Well I would have thought they taught you something. I mean about morals, behaviour, that sort of thing.

SALLY Don't make me laugh.

CYNTHIA And what about that expensive school we sent you to?

SALLY What about it?

CYNTHIA They set certain standards, I know for sure. Even daddy came to the school chapel for your confirmation. The Bishop was a patient of daddy's. Had a bad back. All that kneeling and bending, daddy used to say. We were very proud of you that day. All dressed in white, fresh-faced and innocent, clutching that new prayer book the headmistress had given you. And now this! Where's it all gone? I mean, what more could we have done?

SALLY You must try to understand, mum. We're happy as we are.

CYNTHIA Well daddy and I would be far happier if you were married. So would you really, what ever you may say.

SALLY Would I? I wonder. You're married. Are you happy, mum?

CYNTHIA That's got nothing to do with it. Besides you're young. You've got your whole life before you. You see, it's your future happiness I'm concerned about.

SALLY Is it? Come on, mum, be honest.

CYNTHIA What do you mean by that?

SALLY Is it our happiness, or your respectability? (*Reaction from Cynthia*) You're mainly worried about what your friends will say – at daddy's golf club, at your church. But they're all two-faced hypocrites anyway. Because all their kids are shacking up, just the same as us, only none of them would ever admit it.

CYNTHIA That does not excuse your behaviour. Besides it's unfair to generalise. There are weddings at our church every week, in the spring and the summer.

SALLY And divorces in the law courts every autumn and winter.

CYNTHIA Really, Sally!

SALLY Look, mum. I'm happier with Mike than with any person I've ever known. I'm at home with him, at ease. We can talk about . . . about anything . . . about everything.

CYNTHIA As I said, you're very young. What happens when it's not all so fresh and wonderful?

SALLY That's just our point. What does happen? In the case of you and your generation you're stuck with the man you married. Or you take a lover.

CYNTHIA Sally!

SALLY Or you get a messy divorce. Or both. In our case it won't ever have to be like that. If things don't work out we can just split up while we're still good friends.

CYNTHIA How very convenient. And the child?

SALLY How does a child manage when there's a divorce – or a loveless marriage, full of lies? Our way it will stand to experience a lot less bitterness. Anyway, Mike and I aren't thinking of splitting up.

CYNTHIA I should hope not, with you in this condition.

SALLY What about you and daddy?

CYNTHIA (*Irritated*) Ooh!

SALLY I only asked.

CYNTHIA You know very well that daddy and I are . . . well . . . devoted to one another.

SALLY I know you have a lot of rows.

CYNTHIA We're very different, of course. It doesn't take a genius to notice that. But a marriage of opposites can often

work very well.

SALLY But not always. Some couples I know are damned miserable.

CYNTHIA Daddy and I may have our disagreements. But there are other factors which you seem to ignore . . . like stability, security . . . all the things that marriage brings you.

SALLY Sounds dreadfully boring.

CYNTHIA As I said, you're still very young. You'll appreciate such things more when you're a little older. (*Sally is about to protest*) Look darling, can we talk about this later? I must get on with the supper.

SALLY O.K., mum. Can I give you a hand?

CYNTHIA Just go in and tell the men it's ready, will you. I'll get it onto the table.

*Exit Cynthia to the dining room.*

*Sally goes to the sitting room door, leans in, and calls.*

SALLY O.K. you lot. Stop boozing. Nosh is up. Time to dig in and pig out!

*Geoffrey comes to the sitting room door, holding a full glass of sherry, followed by Mike.*

GEOFFREY Really, Sally, where on earth did you learn to talk like that?

*Mike slaps him heartily on the back, so that his sherry nearly spills.*

MIKE Cool it, Geoff. From me of course!

*Reaction from Geoffrey as lights quickly fade to blackout.*

*Fade up sound of the Beatles' song, 'When I'm sixty-four'. It fades down and continues as lights up dimly in the hall. Cynthia enters from the dining room with an empty vegetable dish, making for the kitchen. She stops beside the telephone in a pool of light.*

CYNTHIA I could call Philip now and say 'I'm leaving'. And he'd say, 'Come over to my hotel.' Why should I stay here?

*(Pause)* If it wasn't for Sally. . . . But there is still Sally to consider. . . . Especially now . . . Oh, it's so unfair. God knows how many more months of sacrifice for Sally and her child. And yet it could be ended now, tonight, with one phone call . . . seven digits . . . a few whispered words. . . . And I could forget it all. Blot it out, in bed, with Philip. Then why don't I? Why do I even hesitate? What's stopping me?

*Fade spotlight on Cynthia. Exit to kitchen.*

*The song rises again, then fades out.*

*Lights up.*

*The hall is empty. We hear sounds of voices, shouting, angrily from the dining room they overlap.*

MIKE           *(Off, shouting)* That's a damned lie!

CYNTHIA       *(Off, shouting)* Don't you swear in my house!

SALLY           *(Off)* Why don't you listen to him, daddy?

CYNTHIA       *(Off)* Please! Everybody!

MIKE           *(Off, shouting louder)* It's not like that at all!

*The door of the dining room bursts open and Mike storms out in a furious temper. Sally rushes out after him.*

MIKE           Good God! I don't believe it. I simply don't believe it!

SALLY           Mike! Calm down.

MIKE           Middle class snob. I mean, like what century does that guy think he's living in?

SALLY           Look, Mike He didn't mean it, O.K.?

MIKE           He did mean it, too. Of course he meant it. He's been trying to put me down all evening, only you're too dumb to notice it. He doesn't think I'm good enough for you. That's what it is. Come on, Sal, admit it. In his eyes I'm not worthy of his precious daughter.

SALLY           They only want us to be happy.



MIKE Like hell they do. They just want us to be miserable, like them.

SALLY They're my parents, Mike.

MIKE I see, so you're taking their side now, against me.

SALLY Don't be silly.

MIKE Prefer them to me, do you? So that's the score.

SALLY Mike, for heaven's sake, you're being pathetic.

MIKE Oh, right. I see. Pathetic.

SALLY No, I don't think you do see. You're too paranoid.

MIKE Paranoid, too, eh? (*Makes for entrance hall door*) O.K., if that's what you think. . . .

SALLY (*Bursting into tears*) Oh, I don't know what to think any more!

MIKE You've been brainwashed, stupid.

SALLY Please, Mike, don't go on. Not like this. Let's talk about it, can we? (*She flops onto the hall chest*) Please?

*Mike paces around the room.*

MIKE Oh, hell.

SALLY Mike, we mustn't let them. . . .

MIKE Fascists.

SALLY I mean, we mustn't allow them . . . to do this to us.

MIKE I just guess I shouldn't have come. You're trying to trap me. All of you. You know that? Yeah, trap me.

SALLY No, Mike.

MIKE Yeah. Tie me down. I know it.

SALLY I'm not.

MIKE Sports car. Babies. White weddings. Crystal goblets. Silver salvers. Clinical guest room. I can't cope with all that, Sal. It's just not my scene.

SALLY But it's not my scene, either, Mike.

MIKE Isn't it? Are you sure? I figure it is your scene, after all. The real you, however much you pretend.

SALLY But that's unfair. I've turned my back on all this, Mike – for you.

MIKE Oh, no. Don't lay that on me. It's your choice.

SALLY I mean – because I love you. Look Mike, you must believe me. I feel far more at home sitting on the bare wooden floor of our little pad, with a plate full of your home-grown organic vegetables – or even those ghastly soya beans.

MIKE There you go, you see – ghastly. Soya beans are not ghastly. Except to spoilt brats.

SALLY (*Hurt*) I was going to say . . . because I'm with you.

MIKE And yet I've watched you. You're on home ground here. I can tell. And I'm not.

SALLY Sometimes I don't know any more who I am or where I belong.

MIKE Like I said, baby. You've got to sort yourself out.

SALLY Will you help me, Mike?

MIKE I'd like to Sal. But you've got to get your own act together, yourself. I can't do it for you.

SALLY But I need you.

MIKE (*Starts pacing the hall again*) One thing I've had to learn in my work at the hospital is . . . like . . . detachment. You know? Not to let myself get too involved with my patients. . . .

SALLY I'm not one of your patients. I'm. . . .

MIKE Even with Sam. . . .

SALLY I am not Sam!

MIKE . . . Not to get too emotionally involved . . . with

anyone.

SALLY But we're living together, aren't we? We're having a baby!

MIKE You see, if I was to try to carry around on my shoulders all the problems of my patients, I'd soon. . . .

SALLY But I thought we were talking about my problem, Mike. Your Sal's problem. Not everyone else's.

MIKE Like I said . . . if I did, I'd soon be as sick as they are, you know? So I've got to keep detached. Do my job. Do it well. But after hours – that's it, wham, finished, door closed – and no problem goes out of that door with me.

SALLY You mean I'm really no different, in your eyes, from one of your patients?

MIKE Of course you are, Sal. But you see what I mean, don't you? The fact is, I just can't afford to let myself get caught up in all this emotion between you and your folks. Well, you saw how uptight I got just now. That anger. That's bad, Sal. Very bad. Like I should never allow that to happen to me. I really lost my cool. And that's not detachment, is it? (*A pause while he paces*) The fact is, I can't handle all this feeling, all this tension. It gets to me. That's why my analyst, you know, back in Berkeley, he told me not to see my own folks any more. Like their aggression sparked off aggression in me. So you mustn't lay it on me Sal. I love you. But I don't have to get involved with your folks as well, and all the emotional hangups you have about them.

SALLY But, Mike, I thought if we. . . .

MIKE Now I'm just going to go upstairs – to that chaste and sterilised guest room of yours – and cool off some. Meditate, maybe. Like do some yoga. Just think things over for a while.

*He starts to go upstairs.*

SALLY        And what about me?

*Mike stops and turns.*

MIKE         Like I said, that's not my problem. You'd better try to talk to your folks, I guess. Get your act together. Only don't involve me – O.K.?

*Exit Mike up the stairs. Sally sits on the hall chest and starts to sob.*

*Enter Geoffrey from the dining room, followed by Cynthia.*

GEOFFREY    Honestly, Sally, I've never seen such atrocious behaviour. Your mother and I are quite shocked.

SALLY        (*Dabbing her eyes*) Please daddy, don't you start on me. Not now.

GEOFFREY    After all we've done for you. To be treated like this. That boy's got the manners of a gutter-snipe. And I must say, you were not much better.

CYNTHIA     Geoffrey, I'll talk to her.

GEOFFREY    Well I hope you will. And don't be soft with her. (*Going*) We deserve better, that's all I can say. A lot better.

*Exit Geoffrey to the sitting room.*

CYNTHIA     You're father's very upset.

SALLY        *He's* upset!

CYNTHIA     You offended us both, terribly. That boy-friend of yours! Shouting at us like that. In our own home.

SALLY        He was upset. He didn't mean it.

CYNTHIA     And the things he said to me! You don't agree with him, do you?

SALLY        I don't know what to think.

CYNTHIA     And how is that baby going to be brought up? That's what I'd like to know. I just hope it won't take after it's father, that's all.

SALLY        Please, mother.

CYNTHIA Oh well, that's your problem, I suppose. You've made your bed and now you've got to lie on it. That's not very original, I know. But right now it sums up your position exactly.

*Cynthia is about to go into the sitting room. Sally goes to her.*

SALLY Mum, I need help.

*Cynthia stops and turns to her, suddenly beaming with motherly relief.*

CYNTHIA Of course you do, my darling. I'm glad you've admitted it at last. That's what mothers are for, especially with a daughter in your condition. Now first of all, we must do something about your awful clothes. On Monday morning we'll go out and get you something decent. I'll ask daddy to write out a cheque now.

*She is about to go into the sitting room.*

SALLY Money! Clothes!

CYNTHIA Money and clothes would seem to be a rather obvious necessity in your case my girl.

SALLY But can't you see – that 's not what I mean by 'help'.

*Sally dries her eyes. Cynthia heaves a sigh of impatient resignation.*

CYNTHIA Very well then, what is it?

*Sally finishes dabbing her eyes and, still snuffing, sits on the chest, saying nothing. Cynthia rather obviously looks at her watch and coughs. Finally Sally speaks in a thin squeaky voice.*

SALLY What is love?

CYNTHIA Oh Lord. Not at this time of night, Sally. I haven't even stacked the dishwasher.

*But she sits down beside her on the chest.*

SALLY What is love? What does it really mean?

CYNTHIA But you were only telling me, just before dinner, how much 'in love' you were. Don't tell me you've changed your mind already?

SALLY But it's what you were saying . . . you know, about whether it would really last.

CYNTHIA Oh, don't take any notice of what I say.

SALLY You and daddy – you don't strike me as being very much 'in love'.

CYNTHIA Daddy and I are . . . well . . . very . . . settled. Anyway, I thought it was you we were talking about.

SALLY You see I really need to know. Does it last? Will it last? Can it last?

CYNTHIA So, you're not so sure of your Mike after all.

SALLY I know what I feel for him now. I know the joy we share when we are together. I know the pain I feel when we quarrel, like we did just now. I know that in all the world I don't want to be with anyone else.

CYNTHIA Yes, you have got it bad.

SALLY Is that 'love'?

CYNTHIA I don't know. But whatever it is I know the feeling.

SALLY Do you really, mum?

CYNTHIA Of course I do, you idiot. You children seem to think that no-one over thirty has ever been in love.

SALLY Yes, I suppose you must have been once, come to think of it.

CYNTHIA (*Pensively*) Not only once.

SALLY (*Surprised*) Really? (*She pauses to allow Cynthia to continue*) Well? Tell me.

CYNTHIA When you're old enough.

SALLY I like that! (*Suddenly serious*) But all the same, there's something missing. Something I feel, yet can't quite put into words. An uncertainty about the future, I suppose. A question-mark. A shadow that appears and disappears.

*Cynthia hums a few lines of a Beatles song she knew in her youth.*

- CYNTHIA *(Sings, softly)*  
Will you still need me,  
Will you still feed me,  
When I'm sixty-four?
- SALLY Something like that. Over half the girls in my class came from broken homes. You know, one-parent families – or so many parents, step-parents, ‘uncles’ or ‘best friends’ that they didn’t know how to cope with them all. You and dad – well you’ve stuck together, sort of. But you’re not very nice to each other. You argue all the time. And I can tell that neither of you are happy.
- CYNTHIA Sally, you must stop analysing us all the time.
- SALLY But mummy, don’t you see? I have to relate to something – to someone’s experience. And yours is all I know.
- CYNTHIA Well in that case I suppose we haven’t exactly been a shining example to you, have we?
- SALLY So what does last? Marriage is no guarantee. Just because you mumble a few words at the altar or in a registry office doesn’t seem to make a heap of difference. But then just shacking up together – that doesn’t exactly guarantee anything either. So what is it that’s missing? That’s what I want to know.
- CYNTHIA *(Quietly, almost desperately, but real for the first time)*  
When you find out, perhaps you’ll let me know.
- SALLY *(Going to her)* Mum!
- CYNTHIA Have I shocked you?
- SALLY No. Yes. I don’t know. But all of a sudden . . . well, you sounded real. Honest, I suppose.
- CYNTHIA Very dangerous, honesty. Very reckless. We risk revealing our real selves. And our real selves, for the most part, are not very nice are they? But it’s true. I don’t know. None of us knows. So why not admit it?
- SALLY Trouble is, I hoped you would know. I hoped somebody

would know.

*A silence between them. Cynthia is struggling with herself.*

CYNTHIA *(Finally)* Oh to hell with it, why not be reckless?

SALLY What is it, mum?

CYNTHIA I don't know how to tell you.

SALLY Do you think you could try?

CYNTHIA Trouble is, I'm not sure I should try.

SALLY It might be important, mightn't it, now we've got this far.

CYNTHIA Important? I don't know about that. Sally . . . did you ever guess I was pregnant – before daddy and I got married?

SALLY Mum! *(Pause)* With me, you mean?

CYNTHIA Of course with you.

SALLY How could I guess? You never so much as hinted.

CYNTHIA Simple arithmetic.

SALLY It never occurred to me to do the sums.

CYNTHIA We were both still students. Daddy married me, of course, immediately. He had to do 'the honourable thing'. You know your father. But then, knowing your father, you will appreciate that he had to cover it up as well. So we moved, away out of Manchester, to Hale, where no-one would know us and would naturally assume, when the baby arrived, that we had been married for some time. I had to give up Art College, of course, and daddy had to commute into the Medical School, miles every day, often having been up half the night with nappies, bottles, teething. You were quite a difficult baby. Not surprisingly he failed his exams and was told he would have to repeat the year's work. That nearly finished him. His mother couldn't help him. In fact, he was trying to support her. And now, with a wife and baby as well. So he cut short his medical



studies and switched to osteopathy.

SALLY That must have been very hard on him.

CYNTHIA And he has never stopped blaming me.

SALLY But why blame you? It was he who made you pregnant.

CYNTHIA Men are not logical, Sally. They think they are. They say they are. But when their careers are threatened, or their money, they are the most irrational creatures on God's earth. You know how neat your father is, how tidy he expects everything to be. Well, this was a right old mess. A disaster, as far as he was concerned. And all his own doing! Well it was too much to expect him to face up to that. So he had to cover it up – and to blame someone else for landing him in it – simply to keep his own mind tidy, I suppose.

SALLY Mum, – why are you telling me all this?

CYNTHIA I don't really know. That reckless feeling, I suppose. Maybe because, with you in this state, for the first time in my life I don't have to pretend any more. It's different for your father though. He still feels the need to keep up appearances. You see, your arrival in this world, nineteen years ago, was the messiest thing that had ever happened to him – until tonight, that is.

SALLY And now I've presented him with another untidy mess.

CYNTHIA Exactly. So he has to cover it up. And he has to blame somebody for it.

SALLY Me, this time, right?

CYNTHIA Wrong. Mike. Daddy dotes on you.

SALLY He doesn't show it.

CYNTHIA He shows it in the only way he knows how – by giving you things.

SALLY Money, you mean. The M.G. All those clothes.

CYNTHIA He's never refused you anything.

SALLY            Except love, . . . attention.

CYNTHIA        But don't you see? For him, that is love and attention.

SALLY            I don't want him to give me things.

CYNTHIA        Right now he wants to give you a slap-up wedding.

SALLY            Worse luck.

CYNTHIA        He's always wanted that.

SALLY            And it's the one thing in the whole world I don't want.

CYNTHIA        That's why he's so angry.

SALLY            And I find that really unfair.

CYNTHIA        Why is that?

SALLY            Because it would really be for him, wouldn't it? And for you, I suppose. For his status. For your respectability. Not for me at all.

CYNTHIA        Couldn't you bring yourself to allow us that – after all we've done for you?

SALLY            That's what I mean by 'unfair'. We shouldn't be asked to go through with something we don't believe in, just to please somebody else.

CYNTHIA        (*Bitterly*) Why should you be so lucky?

SALLY            (*Softly, somewhat shaken*) What do you mean, mum?

CYNTHIA        I've gone along with things I don't believe in for years. And where has it got me?

*Cynthia reaches for her handkerchief, Sally is aware that the dam of self-control is cracking. She is not sure she likes it.*

SALLY            It's all right, mum. You don't have to. . . .

CYNTHIA        No, it's too late. Now I do have to. (*She wipes her eyes*) Sally, I've lied to you. Just as I lie to everyone . . . the vicar, the neighbours . . . I even lie to myself most of the time. The truth is I *am* miserable, and bored, and . . . yes, bitter too, I suppose. I resent the blame, the coldness, the indifference I've had to put up with all

these years. I resent being used and I resent being taken for granted. Above all . . . and this is my own fault I know . . . I resent being bought. Our marriage is hollow. It's a sham. You might call it a farce, if it wasn't also a tragedy.

*She starts to weep. Sally goes to her.*

SALLY Its O.K., mum. I knew already. I've known for years.

CYNTHIA The truth is, I envy you, Sally, and your freedom. You're right about marriage. Why should you be expected to go through the same charade? If you love Mike, then live with him. Enjoy it while it lasts. Leave him when it grows cold and before it turns sour. I haven't any better advice to give you, after all my years in this prison.

*Geoffrey appears in the doorway of the sitting room, unseen by them.*

I hate it. Hate it. And if I had any guts at all and wasn't so greedy, I'd walk out. But I've grown used to it – that's the real truth – used to the sham and the pretence. When I've got so much security, why give it up? Especially for such a fragile thing as 'happiness'.

GEOFFREY Cynthia, that's quite enough.

SALLY Daddy!

CYNTHIA No, it's not enough.

GEOFFREY Sally you don't need to put up with any more of this pathetic performance. You'd better go to your room.

CYNTHIA No, wait a minute, Sally. (*To Geoffrey*) I've done nothing but tell her the truth. But it's not the whole truth. There's plenty more, as you and I both know. But I'm going to leave the rest for you to tell – if you dare, if you have the guts and if you care for Sally half as much as you pretend to – then you'll tell her the whole truth, won't you.

*Exit Cynthia to the kitchen.*

GEOFFREY (*As she goes, coldly*) What are you raving about, woman?

*(To Sally, complete change of tone and a forced smile.)*  
There's nothing to tell.

*Exit Geoffrey to the sitting room.*

*Sally looks from one door to the other as the lights fade slowly to blackout.*

*End of Act I*

## ACT II

*Fade up part of 'When I'm sixty-four'.*

*Fade house-lights.*

*It is night.*

*Geoffrey, in his dressing gown, enters from the kitchen. He moves restlessly about the hall, opening a door, looking inside a darkened room, then finally sits on the hall chest.*

*Fade song.*

GEOFFREY For twenty years it has been like this. Sleepless, restless, I walk about the sleeping house at night. And why? Because *they* won't let me sleep. The demons, they won't allow me any rest. And they know all too well when to attack. As soon as I lay back my head and close my eyes they close in on me, whispering, accusing. (*He fights them off*) Why can't you leave me alone? Allow me to rest? Permit me to die to conscious guilt for just a few hours each night? Just leave me! (*Shouting*) Leave me!

*Geoffrey exits upstairs as the lights fade.*

*Lights up dimly. The hall is now empty.*

*Sounds of an angry quarrel upstairs.*

CYNTHIA (*Shouting, off*) I can't stand this any longer!

GEOFFREY (*Shouting back*) And I can't stand you any longer.

CYNTHIA (*Screaming at him furiously*) Then you can clear out of this bed. And out of this room.

*Door opens above. Shaft of light down the stairs.*

GEOFFREY (*Off*) Don't worry, I'm going.

CYNTHIA (*Shouting off*) And stay out!

*A loud clatter off and then a yell of pain as Geoffrey stubs his toe.*

*Enter Geoffrey down the stairs, still in his dressing gown, and hobbling in pain from his damaged toe.*

CYNTHIA (*Off*) Serves you right!

GEOFFREY (*Nursing his foot*) I need my slippers, damn you!

*He sits on the hall chest, rubbing his toe.*

CYNTHIA Slippers, eh? Right. You shall have them!

*Cynthia appears in her dressing gown at the top of the stairs and throws a pair of slippers straight at him.*

GEOFFREY (*Gathering them*) Thank you!

CYNTHIA Don't mention it!

*Geoffrey steps into his slippers. He crosses to the cupboards. He opens the downstage cupboard and pulls out a duvet and a pillow. These circumstances have obviously arisen before and he is prepared.*

CYNTHIA I never want to talk to you again.

GEOFFREY That'll be a relief.

CYNTHIA You revolt me.

GEOFFREY Mutual.

CYNTHIA You've revolted me for twenty years.

GEOFFREY Then why did you stay that long?

CYNTHIA Only because of Sally, as you well know.

GEOFFREY And the money – don't forget the money.

CYNTHIA I shall see our Solicitor in the morning.

GEOFFREY Seeing him at church, are you?

CYNTHIA Don't be stupid. Of course I'm not seeing him at church.

GEOFFREY I just wondered. Tomorrow's Sunday. Ha!

CYNTHIA On Monday, then. And it won't be a day too soon.

GEOFFREY He'll advise against it.

CYNTHIA He'll do what I tell him.

*Geoffrey takes his pillow and duvet to the sitting room door.*

GEOFFREY He'll do what I tell him. He's my Solicitor and I pay him.

CYNTHIA (*Screaming at him*) In that case I'll find another blasted Solicitor!

*Geoffrey goes into the sitting room and slams the door. Cynthia turns angrily and makes her way upstairs.*

*Lights fade to blackout.*

SALLY (*Off*) Mum? (*Pause*) Mum? Are you all right?

*A pause, then sound of knocking on a bedroom door.*

SALLY (*Off*) Mike? Mike? Can I come in?

MIKE (*Off, through door*) Go away. I'm meditating.

*A spotlight picks out Sally, sitting on one of the lower steps of the stairs.*

SALLY Meditating!

*She is silent and still for a time. Then she starts to feel her swollen abdomen with her hands, as if measuring the size of the baby she is carrying.*

SALLY What are you thinking about. I wonder? Or perhaps you don't think yet. Only dream. A warm, comfortable dream of tenderness – from which you will all too soon awake into a harsh and screaming world. A world which murders babies, tortures babies, starves babies. What am I doing, bringing you to that kind of a waking? 'The real world' they call it, where people have forgotten to be kind. A world of inflated egos and shrivelled aims. A world that ridicules idealism and applauds graft, that rewards violence and penalises gentleness. Just you be sure to stay for as long as you can in the unreal, tender, world of the womb. Swim on in its watery darkness, because the light, when you meet it, will only blind you, the air out here will choke

you. In there you are one, unique, while you sleep. But as soon as you wake the world will squeeze you into its mould, standardise you and package you on its relentless assembly line; will process your perfection and turn you out as shoddy goods. *(Pause, bitterly)* And God, who could do something about it, watches it all, allows it to happen. Strange that, because He was a baby, too, once. You would think He would know. *(Pause)* Knows? Of course He knows. The question is, does He care?

*The spotlight fades on Sally and comes up on Mike, sitting further up the stairs, in a Yoga posture.*

MIKE            Stillness. Silence. But no serenity. Even the patience of the practice of yoga doesn't seem able, this time, this night, to uncoil my tensions. One foot is in the trap. One finger in the vice. The net is closing above my head once more. I've got to escape – even if it means losing a foot or a finger, I must extricate my body from this nightmare net. They won't have me. If I can't resist, then I'll run. Safety is only with myself, within myself. I have to learn again that I cannot entrust my integrity to a single soul, even a loving soul, even to Sally. That shrink told me I'd got to stay free of all pressures, all demands. And he was right.

*The light fades on Mike. Exit. Light up on Sally, sitting at the foot of the stairs.*

SALLY            Meditate! Meditate! How can he meditate when our world is cracking apart?

*Spotlight fades on Sally. We hear her pounding on Mike's door, Off.*

*(Sally's voice, off)* Mike! Let me in. We must talk. Mike!

*Night time. The only light comes from the kitchen, Geoffrey, still in his dressing gown, enters from the sitting room and crosses to the kitchen. He exits leaving the kitchen door slightly ajar.*

*A light goes on over the stairs. Then in the hall.*

*Mike comes down the stairs, followed by Sally. He carries his back pack and sleeping bag.*



SALLY But you can't leave now. Not at this time of night.

MIKE I should never have come. The whole thing's been a total disaster, right from the start.

SALLY But you don't know the whole story.

*Mike is strapping his sleeping bag onto his back pack.*

MIKE I know I've listened to you going on and on about it, and I don't want to hear any more.

SALLY But it's serious.

MIKE So you keep saying.

SALLY After twenty years of marriage they look like breaking up.

MIKE Not before time, then.

SALLY Mike, you're so unfeeling.

MIKE They're your folks, not mine.

SALLY But they are, sort of, aren't they? Like in-laws, almost.

MIKE No. That's just it, you see. They're not. No way. No marriage, no in-laws, that's the beauty of it.

SALLY Well, I can't speak for daddy, but mum was certainly ready to accept you.

MIKE How very condescending of her.

SALLY As her . . . her. . . .

MIKE Sin-in-law? Don't be stupid. They'll never accept me. I'm far too upsetting for them. I challenge every prejudice, every bourgeois platitude they've ever swallowed. No, you can't get out of it as easily as that, Sal. It's their life-style or mine. You've got to choose.

SALLY I have chosen, haven't I?

MIKE Well what are you waiting for, then? Come with me.

SALLY What, now? In the middle of the night?

MIKE Why not?

SALLY But I mean . . . after this evening . . . all that's happened. . . .

MIKE You'd be well out of it, if you ask me.

SALLY But I can't.

MIKE There you are, you see.

SALLY But it would be running away.

MIKE There are times when you need to run away.

SALLY Like you ran from your own family, from Berkeley?

MIKE That was my analyst, he advised me . . . to back off, you know distance myself a little?

SALLY Six thousand miles distance?

MIKE Not a mile too far, to get away from them.

SALLY Well, I don't believe in running away. Not from my own family anyway.

MIKE You're just too involved with them.

SALLY Oh, it's easy for you to say that, isn't it? Dead easy. But I am involved. Always have been. It was over me the whole trouble started, years ago.

MIKE That's just blackmail.

SALLY It also happens to be a fact.

MIKE Have it your own way, but I'm certainly not getting involved.

SALLY Aren't you involved in anything?

MIKE (*Angry now*) I'm involved all right – in what I choose to be involved in. And when I choose to be involved in it. O.K.? I'm involved in preventing pollution and the obscene spread of nuclear power. I work against fascism, and apartheid and, of course, against the Bomb. I'm involved in those things. I march for those things because I care about them, because I believe in them. And if I don't choose to become involved in your

family's marital problems, it's because I don't believe in marriage and I don't care about your family any more than I care about my own. Got me?

SALLY And me? Do you care about me? Are you involved with me?

MIKE Sure I am. Come on. You know that.

SALLY Do I? I'm beginning to wonder about your involvement with me if it doesn't extend to the people I care about.

MIKE Care about them? You haven't spoken to them for months, until this weekend. Don't tell me you've decided you care about them, all of a sudden.

SALLY Strangely enough I do. I suppose I always have, in a way. And after this evening I'm beginning to care about them even more. And because I care about them I'm more than involved, I'm . . . I'm . . . well I'm committed to them, I suppose, even when they're hurtful and . . . and . . . *(She stops suddenly)* Wait a minute . . . that's it!

MIKE What's what? I don't follow.

SALLY I think I've got it. The thing that was missing, when I talked to mummy.

MIKE Talked to mummy? You're talking nonsense.

SALLY Sorry, no you weren't there, were you. But that's it. That's definitely it. Commitment. In marriage. Out of marriage. In love. In life. Commitment.

MIKE What are you on about?

SALLY Mike – are you committed to me?

MIKE Am I what?

SALLY Committed. To me.

MIKE I've already told you. I'm involved with you. Deeply involved as a matter of fact.

SALLY Quick, a dictionary.

MIKE           A what?

SALLY          I need a dictionary. I think there's one in here.

*Sally opens the downstage cupboard. She searches the shelves for a dictionary. Finds one. Looks up a word. Reads:*

SALLY          'Involve. Involved. Wrapped up in. Entangled, with a person or thing'.

MIKE           Like I said – with you, yes. With your parents – no.

*Sally looks up another word. Reads:*

SALLY          'Commit. Commitment. To bind oneself to a person or thing. An engagement that limits one's freedom of action'. (*Looks up*) Mike, are you committed to me? (*A silence, Mike avoids her questioning gaze*) Are you committed to anything?

*A silence. Mike turns slowly to face her, holds her gaze for a short while, then averts his eyes and breaks away.*

MIKE           I'm out of here. (*Goes to the door, turns*) Like no-one, nowhere, limits my freedom of action.

SALLY          No Mike. That's something you have to do yourself, voluntarily. (*After a pause, she swallows hard*) Good-bye, Mike.

MIKE           Good luck with your folks, Sal.

SALLY          Thanks.

MIKE           Hey, will I see you again?

SALLY          (*With great difficulty. It costs her everything*) Of course, Mike. When you are ready to limit your freedom of action.

*Mike slowly picks up his sleeping bag. Exit to the entrance hall. We hear the front door open and slam shut. Sally has been holding herself in until he has gone trying desperately to keep a stiff upper lip. She goes slowly to the entrance hall door, presses herself against it, then she collapses in tears onto the downstage right hall chair. After a while Geoffrey enters from the kitchen. He is still in his dressing gown and has a steaming mug in his hand. At first he tries to tip-toe across to the sitting room, so as*

*not to disturb Sally. But then thinks better of it. He stops and turns to her.*

GEOFFREY Would you like a sip of cocoa? It's nice and hot. I've just made it.

SALLY *(Through her tears)* No thank you, daddy.

GEOFFREY *(Takes a sip himself. He is not sure what to say or how to say it)* Sally, I . . . er, couldn't sleep. I . . . that is . . . I usually can't, you know. . . . Well . . . you see I was in the kitchen just now and . . . it seems that the door hadn't shut properly . . . *(Pause)* That was one of the bravest things I ever heard.

SALLY Or one of the stupidest

GEOFFREY No . . . no, you mustn't think that.

SALLY He may not come back.

GEOFFREY Then what have you lost?

SALLY But I love him.

GEOFFREY There's no accounting for taste.

SALLY No, I really do. I love him. And he loves me.

GEOFFREY Unusual way of showing it.

SALLY It's all my fault really. I should never have invited him here. It was all a big mistake. Brought out the worst in him. He's a very caring person, really.

GEOFFREY He didn't seem to care for us very much.

SALLY That's because you're prosperous and confident and . . . and successful. I know Mike. That's like a red rag to a bull, as far as he's concerned. He cares for those who are down and helpless.

GEOFFREY What about those who are up . . . and helpless?

*Sally looks steadily at her father. Is this a cry for help? She is not sure. Geoffrey, embarrassed. Looks away.*

SALLY In Mike's book anyone who is up can't really be helpless.

He cares for the broken, the incapable, the people who don't know how to care for themselves.

GEOFFREY At the mental hospital, you mean?

SALLY Yes, at the mental hospital. I've seen him at work there. He's fabulous. Patient, understanding, tender. They adore him. Particularly Sam.

GEOFFREY Sam?

SALLY Sam's only a bit younger than you are, dad. He's been there twenty years, nearly. Think of it – my whole lifetime.

GEOFFREY Tragic.

SALLY And he'll never be able to leave.

GEOFFREY Where is it, this mental hospital?

SALLY You probably know it.

GEOFFREY Really?

SALLY Yes, it's quite near Hale.

GEOFFREY Hale?

SALLY Yes, that's where I was born, wasn't it? Mummy was telling me. I always wondered. I don't even remember living in Hale.

GEOFFREY We moved to Chester a year or two after you were born.

SALLY Why was that?

GEOFFREY My work.

SALLY That's when you became an osteopath.

GEOFFREY Yes.

*A silence between them, each deep in their own inner conflicts and thoughts.*

SALLY You care for people too, don't you daddy.

GEOFFREY I try to.

SALLY        And you can cure them?

GEOFFREY    Quite often.

SALLY        It's just the opposite with Mike. His patients are hardly ever cured. Helped, mind you, oh yes, helped a lot. But never really healed. It's a very long and slow process with most of them.

GEOFFREY    Yes, poor devils, it must be.

SALLY        Take Sam.

GEOFFREY    Sam?

SALLY        The man I was telling you about.

GEOFFREY    Yes. Sam. Sorry. What about him?

SALLY        He's got severe brain damage. Mike says there was a hit and run driver or something. Anyway Sam was found lying in the road one night, near Hale, heavily concussed. He didn't speak for over a year, evidently. And he'll never be normal again for as long as he lives. Mike sees Sam almost every day. Plays games with him, like Ludo. Mike says Sam's vicious at Ludo. And he reads to him. Stories. Only they're stories you would normally read to a six-year-old. I suppose Mike's become his best friend. His only friend. Strange that really, because Mike's got this obsession about not becoming involved with his patients. But . . . well, despite himself almost, he really loves them.

*During this Geoffrey has been staring blankly at her. Sally looks up and notices.*

Dad, are you all right?

GEOFFREY    I'm very tired my dear. I told you, I've hardly slept a wink all night. And to be honest I don't find this a very convivial topic for the middle of the night.

SALLY        You had a row. With mum.

GEOFFREY    You heard that, did you? Yes, I suppose you must have.

SALLY        And you don't like me going on about Mike, do you.

GEOFFREY Not very much, no.

SALLY In fact you don't like Mike, period.

GEOFFREY I would have thought that was fairly obvious.

SALLY You didn't listen to him.

GEOFFREY He didn't listen to me. (*Pause*) I wonder what he's after?

SALLY (*Annoyed*) What do you mean – 'after'?

GEOFFREY Coming here.

SALLY He's not 'after' anything. He's not even 'after' me at the moment.

GEOFFREY Exactly. So why did he come?

SALLY Because I invited him, of course.

GEOFFREY Strikes me as the sort of person who's after something.

SALLY Look, dad, you're being unreasonable . . . (*She falls silent. Then continues*) . . . I'll admit, though, there is this other side to Mike. . . .

GEOFFREY Oh?

SALLY The crusader. But it's nothing personal. Nothing to do with us.

GEOFFREY Are you sure?

SALLY Of course I'm sure. How can it be? It's just that Mike gets almost obsessive about what he regards as injustice. You see, shortly after Sam was admitted, the hospital started to receive anonymous donations, quite modest at first, but gradually becoming more generous. Each year another substantial gift arrives, always anonymously, through the same firm of solicitors. Well, Mike heard about these donations, so he did some research, looked up the records.

GEOFFREY And?

SALLY He smells a rat.

GEOFFREY What kind of a rat?



SALLY           A hit and run rat. Mike reckons that whoever it was knocked Sam down that dark and stormy night has one hell of a problem with his conscience and is paying to keep his own sanity.

GEOFFREY       So your Michael is a bit of a detective.

SALLY           Sort of.

GEOFFREY       Not to mention an amateur psychologist.

SALLY           I suppose he has to be, in his job.

GEOFFREY       But above all a moralist. Concerning other people's morals rather than his own, I'll wager. Not a very nice combination, would you say?

SALLY           I don't accept that. Mike's a very nice person.

GEOFFREY       Love is blind, my dear, but the neighbours ain't. Nor, in this case are your parents. But tell me, there's one thing that puzzles me in all this. If your Michael's guesswork is true – and that, after all, is what it amounts to, guesswork – how on earth would your hit-and-run driver have known what happened to the unfortunate young man, and where he was being cared for? In other words, how would he know where to send his subs?

SALLY           The press. Mike has looked up the cuttings. The story was all over the front page of the local paper. If the driver was a local man he must have seen it, was probably horrified at the consequences of what he had done, and started to send in the money to ease his conscience.

GEOFFREY       Or hers.

SALLY           Or hers, I suppose. Though where would a woman get that kind of money? And besides, would a woman have the nerve?

GEOFFREY       You're very hard on your own sex my dear. Would a man?

SALLY           Somebody obviously has had the nerve – but the strain

must be telling and one of these days that control is going to snap. Mike wants to be there when that happens, and expose him.

GEOFFREY But what's the point – after all these years?

SALLY It's this obsession with justice. Mike just feels the driver shouldn't be allowed to get away with it.

GEOFFREY Sounds plain vindictive to me. Do you agree with him? Do you want this man exposed?

SALLY Look, Sam has been suffering for twenty years, is still suffering, will go on suffering. You can see Mike's point. Why should the driver escape his share?

GEOFFREY But do you imagine for one moment that he has? Put yourself in his shoes. Come on, use your imagination. Let's play at being that driver, shall we? (*He becomes more and more excited*) Think what it must have cost him already – not only in money, though that's bad enough – but in mental anguish, sleepless nights, for years and years, as the 'if onlys' whirl around his tired but restless brain. Only in his working hours can he make himself forget, by keeping busy, until the next long evening and again the sleep-starved night.

SALLY Yes, but daddy. . . .

GEOFFREY But not only that. Every relationship, even with those he has tried to love, twisted and soured and frozen. . . .

SALLY But how can we possibly *know*?

GEOFFREY Use your imagination, child. Let it work. Picture the scenario. Play the game. See him now, in middle age, at the height of his career. A well known man in the locality, perhaps. What if he should be exposed now, as a criminal, a coward who didn't stop? Investigations by the police and, worse still, by the press, charges, publicity, prison. Reputation shattered, career grounded. And his family? (*He advances on Sally, she backs away*) Have you thought about his family? (*He holds her face close to his own*) I mean, would you wish

that on your own father?

SALLY       Daddy, no!

*(She breaks away from him. But he follows relentless now)*

SALLY       Well where is your imagination? Aren't you enjoying the game any more? *(He lets her go. She hugs herself, shivering with fright, hardly able to look at him any more)* Your mother wanted you to hear the truth, didn't she, the whole truth? All right. The truth. You want it. I've got it. Let's see now. Yes, she was about your age. Pregnant, too. I suppose she told you that much?

*Sally, frozen with horror manages a feeble nod. Geoffrey drags both the hall chairs downstage, right of centre and facing the audience.*

Premature labour. Near midnight. Frantic medical student who knows just enough to understand the dangers. Must get to the hospital.

*He seizes Sally roughly by the arm and drags her to one chair and pushes her onto it. He then sits beside her on the other chair as if in a small car.*

*Dazzling lights against general blackness. Sound of heavy rain and traffic on wet roads. Accompanied by appropriate sound effects, Geoffrey mimes driving the car at break-neck speed.*

Old Morris Minor, going full throttle. Suddenly, in the black downpour. *(He yells)* What's that? *(Squeal of brakes)* A young man, reeling into the road. Caught in the splattered headlights for one sickening second.

*Sally screams as he pulls her across him.*

GEOFFREY   Your mother, gasping with pain from a sudden contraction, was thrown onto the steering wheel. *(He pulls her up and holds her)* It was a wonder you were not born with brain damage. *(Car starting up again. He mimes changing gears, driving fast)* How could I stop? Any delay and you might have been lost. I had to keep going.

*He brings the 'car' to a stop and half drags, half carries Sally across the hall, eventually laying her back over the hall chest.*

At the hospital the doctors saw her condition. An emergency delivery. They insisted that I stay. It was touch and go for several hours. And all that time I was being wrenched in two. Physically I was at your mother's side. But the other half of me was at the roadside with that young man.

*Sound of a baby's first cry.*

Then, at last, thank God, you arrived, safe, healthy and normal. I was free to go.

*He rushes round the hall and sits on the hall chair. In mime he 'drives off' at great speed.*

I drove like a madman, back to the spot, expecting to find a battered and bleeding body by the roadside.

*He 'stops' the car and 'gets out'.*

But when I got there – nothing, nothing at all.

*Sound effects suddenly stop. The hall lighting snaps on. Sally sits bolt upright on the chest, watching him in horror.*

Had the police been there? The ambulance? I had no way of knowing. Had I, please God, missed him after all, and had he staggered his way home through the wet and the dark? For five hours I had been at your mother's side. Anything could have happened in that time.

*He sinks onto a hall chair.*

I went home and slept, exhausted.

*He springs to his feet again.*

The last good sleep I was ever to enjoy. Because next afternoon, as I drove back along the same road to visit your mother and you at the hospital, yellow police accident signs were out, asking witnesses to come forward. I was terrified. I had hit someone. I hadn't stopped.

*Turns to Sally, appealing to her.*

But I had to complete my medical studies. My mother, your mother, you all depended on me.

*Mimes holding a newspaper and 'reads' it.*

Then, a few days later, in the local rag, splashed across the front page, 'Hit and Run Accident'. Young man with severe concussion. A year later, another story. Out of his coma. But severely brain damaged. A life sentence. I did what I could. I worked. God knows how I've worked. And I've paid, for his treatment, for his care. But there's no peace. After twenty years there's still no rest!

*Sally is still staring at him open-mouthed in horror. He shouts at her.*

Well, she wanted you to hear the truth. She challenged me – you heard her – to tell you the whole truth. But if I didn't stop, it was for her. And for you. For her life. For your birth. And she hasn't loved me since. And you won't be able to love me now.

*Sally gets on to her feet and turns away from him, her head in her hands. Old habits die hard and Geoffrey half carries and half drags the hall chairs back to their rightful positions.*

That's right. Go on. Run off to your Michael. Tell him the whole story. Let him expose me if he wants. I don't care. I've carried this burden for twenty years, for her and for you. Because I loved you and didn't want to hurt you. And now I just don't want to carry it any more.

*He collapses onto the downstage right hall chair. Sally turns, but can hardly bear the sight of her father broken. She struggles with herself and, almost despite herself, slowly goes to him. She stretches out a hand towards him. For a moment it looks as if she is about to touch him, but she cannot bring herself to do it. She backs away, then turns sadly and goes slowly up the stairs as the lights fade.*

*Blackout.*

*We hear her knocking on a door, above, and her trembling voice over.*

SALLY (Off) Mum? Mum! Can I come in? I've got to see you.

We've got to talk.

*In the darkness we hear the 'Agnus Dei' from Lloyd Webber's 'Requiem'. It swells then fades away.*

*When the lights come up it is early morning.*

*Enter Cynthia from the entrance hall. She is smartly dressed and carrying a prayer book, which she puts down on the hall table. She is just about to go upstairs when Geoffrey comes in from the sitting room. He is still in his dressing gown and looks worn, red eyed and haggard after another sleepless night.*

CYNTHIA God, you look awful.

GEOFFREY What a touching compliment. Going out?

CYNTHIA Been out.

GEOFFREY Already? At this time on a Sunday morning?

CYNTHIA You won't guess where I've been.

GEOFFREY Not playing golf, obviously. Which is what any civilised person would do on a Sunday morning.

CYNTHIA No, you'll never guess.

GEOFFREY No, in my mental state I probably never will. So perhaps you would put me out of my misery.

CYNTHIA Communion.

GEOFFREY *(Manages a hollow laugh)* Where?

CYNTHIA Early morning communion. For the first time in months.

GEOFFREY But what on earth for? *(Looks at his watch)* Anyway, you can't have been. It's too early. It can't be over yet, surely?

CYNTHIA It isn't over. I left.

GEOFFREY Aha. Couldn't take it, eh?

CYNTHIA No. Quite literally. I couldn't take it.

*She goes to the hall table and picks up the prayer book.*

Remember this? Sally was given this for her confirmation. Dear sweet innocent little Sally.

*She opens it and reads aloud.*

‘Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins. . .’ Well. I haven’t. ‘And are in love and charity with your neighbours’. . . . Well I’m not, still less with my husband. ‘And intend to lead a new life. . . .’ How can I? ‘Draw near with faith and take this Holy Sacrament’. Well, I couldn’t, could I? So I didn’t. And I left. That’s why I’m back early, if you must know.

GEOFFREY *(Bitterly)* Sin! What do they know about sin?

CYNTHIA *(Reads)* ‘The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is . . . intolerable.’

GEOFFREY *(Wearily)* You can say that again. *(Pause)* I haven’t slept all night.

CYNTHIA You seldom do.

GEOFFREY I told Sally.

CYNTHIA You mean about. . . .

GEOFFREY Yes, about Sam.

CYNTHIA You did?

GEOFFREY It turns out that her Michael has been looking after him for the last couple of years.

CYNTHIA Do you realise you’ve probably been paying his salary?

GEOFFREY Good God! I hadn’t thought of that.

CYNTHIA So Mike knows Sam.

GEOFFREY Knows him – and is out to expose the hit-and-run driver who started it all. Isn’t it jolly?

CYNTHIA And what does Sally think about all this?

GEOFFREY She didn’t say anything last night. And needless to say I haven’t seen her this morning. I can’t imagine that she’ll ever want to see me again. In fact I’d be rather

surprised if she hasn't already left.

CYNTHIA She'll be back for breakfast.

GEOFFREY How do you know?

CYNTHIA She told me.

GEOFFREY You mean you've seen her this morning?

CYNTHIA Of course.

GEOFFREY Where is she now, then? With that Michael, I suppose. Hanging out our . . . my . . . dirty washing.

CYNTHIA She's at communion. At least that's where I left her. You see, it was her idea. She came to my room very early this morning . . . I don't think any of us slept much last night . . . and asked me if I would go with her.

GEOFFREY I didn't know she was in the habit of going to communion.

CYNTHIA She's not – not since she left school. But over the last few weeks she's felt the need of it. Because of the baby, I suppose. There's a lot more going on in Sally than I ever realised.

GEOFFREY I'm surprised they let her take it. You know 'living in sin' and all that.

CYNTHIA I asked her about that. It seems that these days they just don't bother to ask.

GEOFFREY Well she's got her own – what do they call it – 'manifold sin and wickedness' to confess, I suppose.

CYNTHIA That's what she was doing when I left. The trouble was I couldn't. (*Hesitates*) Not until I had spoken to you, that is.

GEOFFREY Me? What about?

CYNTHIA Us.

GEOFFREY Us! I didn't think 'us' existed any more. There's you and there's me. We haven't talked about anything real



for years.

CYNTHIA Well, this is 'real' all right. And it's the last thing I want to talk about. But I know I won't get any peace until I do.

GEOFFREY (*With almost desperate longing*) Peace!

CYNTHIA I told myself that it didn't matter, that it wouldn't make any difference – to you, to me . . . to . . . (*she swallows hard*) . . . to Sally.

GEOFFREY (*Laughs, coldly*) What are you leading up to? Surely you don't mean that dreary little affair with Philip?

CYNTHIA (*Momentarily stung*) It wasn't dreary! Far from it. It was fun. The one little bit of happiness I've had these last twenty years.

*Now it is Geoffrey who is stung. He turns away.*

CYNTHIA I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say that. (*Bites her lip, annoyed with herself*) Let me try again . . . I . . . Oh, it's no good.

*A Pause while neither says anything, and each nurses their own wounds. Eventually Cynthia gives a little laugh. It is a genuine, honest, silvery laugh which Geoffrey has not heard for years, he turns.*

CYNTHIA I wasn't very clever, was I? How did you find out?

GEOFFREY I didn't. I only guessed. Men are endowed with some intuition, you know. When your wife has been particularly cold and distant for six months or more, then suddenly all distraught and upset, then passionately wants you to give her another child, – you know that something's been going on.

CYNTHIA You never said anything.

GEOFFREY We'd already said everything . . . years before.

CYNTHIA Philip's own marriage had just broken up. And I . . . well I was bored with playing the perfect wife to the successful man, who didn't give a damn about me any more. Oh, I didn't want to leave you. I was too

comfortable for that. I just wanted adventure, a change. So I thought, 'Why not? Geoff needn't know. It can't harm anyone.' After it was all over I felt terrible: more distant from you, more lonely, more unloved. And then that series of miscarriages . . . I couldn't even hope to find consolation in another child. But it was only much later that I began to realise the full cost of it. Sally was adolescent and I suddenly found myself cut off from her too. How could I expect her to confide in me, when I was totally unable to be open and frank with her? So Sally drifted away from me too. And there was nothing left for me, only more boredom and more loneliness and mindless, ceaseless extravagance. *(Pause)* As I knelt beside Sally this morning – the first time since she was a little girl – I was overcome with a sense of my utter . . . uselessness.

GEOFFREY *(After a long pause)* Well at least we have found something in common after all these years.

CYNTHIA You mean – that's how you feel too?

GEOFFREY Everything's over for me – you, Sally, my home, my career – all that I've built up, yes and covered up, over twenty years. Sally's bound to tell Michael. Then the whole town will know. Probably the whole country. Then what? I don't know. And I really don't care. I have no defence. Whatever it is it will be no less than I deserve. *(Pause. He turns to Cynthia)* And what about you?

CYNTHIA Me?

GEOFFREY You've already said you want to shove off. And I can't blame you. From now on there'll be no more respectability. No more money. What is there to keep you? *(Cynically)* Pity Philip's not around.

CYNTHIA He is.

GEOFFREY What?

CYNTHIA Philip's back.

GEOFFREY Well that makes it all very simple for you, doesn't it?  
CYNTHIA Does it?  
GEOFFREY Exit Geoffrey in disgrace. Enter Philip, who's such fun  
– and right on cue.  
CYNTHIA Geoffrey . . . that's how it might have been but. . . .  
GEOFFREY But what?  
CYNTHIA So much has happened. I mean Sally and . . . (*Pause,  
she decides to tell him*) Philip has asked me to meet him  
. . . tomorrow. He only got back yesterday.  
GEOFFREY As I said – perfect timing.  
CYNTHIA I said I'd let him know.  
GEOFFREY I see. Well, you'd better then, hadn't you. I'm no good  
to you any more. I never was any good.

*Cynthia is about to go to him. Enter Sally from the entrance hall. She goes to Cynthia and hugs her. Then she goes to her father and, much to his surprise, she hugs him too.*

SALLY Morning, daddy. Isn't it a beautiful morning?  
GEOFFREY Is it? I haven't looked out yet.  
SALLY Mum, why did you leave?  
CYNTHIA I had to talk to your father.  
GEOFFREY Look, Sally. About last night. . . .  
SALLY It seems long, long ago, last night. It was so peaceful  
in church. The sunlight was pouring in through one  
of the stained glass windows onto the altar in a splash  
of dappled colour. In the window was a picture. It told  
a story – a story I vaguely remembered. Daddy, would  
you sit down a moment?  
GEOFFREY What, here?  
SALLY Here will do very nicely. I don't want to mess up the  
sitting room carpet.  
GEOFFREY Look, Sally, about last night, let me explain. . . .

SALLY No, please, let me explain.

*She sits her father down firmly on the hall chest.*

But I'm not very good with words, so I want to show you what I mean. Shan't be a moment. (*Mock threatening*) And don't you dare move!

*Exit Sally to the kitchen.*

GEOFFREY Now what is she up to?

CYNTHIA Proper little mystery girl this morning, isn't she. Well, she didn't tell me not to move, so I'll go and lay the breakfast.

GEOFFREY Lucky you.

*Exit Cynthia to the dining room. Enter Sally from the kitchen. She is carrying a large bowl of water and a towel.*

*Fade up sound of the 'Pie Jesu' from Lloyd Webber's 'Requiem'.*

*Without a word Sally kneels at her father's feet and removes his slippers. She bathes his feet and wipes them with the towel.*

*Cynthia enters from the dining room and is brought to a halt in the doorway at the scene before her.*

*When Sally has finished she puts his feet back into his slippers. Geoffrey leans forward and enfolds Sally in his arms. He gets up and gently makes her sit on the chest. He is greatly embarrassed at what he is about to do. He hitches up his dressing gown and pyjama trousers and looks nervously at Cynthia. But he knows he has to do it. He kneels before Sally. Now it is his turn to begin to wash her feet as*

*The lights fade to blackout.*

*The song rises to a crescendo and then fades out.*

*Lights up. It is mid-day.*

*Both cupboard doors are wide open, the skeleton is hanging in full view.*

*Geoffrey, still in his dressing gown, is at work emptying them of all the things that he has hidden away in them over the last twenty years – coats, hats, scarves, gloves, tea towels, dish cloths, oven gloves, aprons,*

*magazines, plastic bags. There is already quite a heap of such items piled on the floor and on the chest.*

*Enter Cynthia and Sally from the kitchen, wheeling the hostess trolley towards the dining room.*

SALLY Mike phoned, daddy. He's been thinking about what I said and wants to come over and talk.

GEOFFREY Oh, he does, does he?

SALLY He was planning to take one of his patients out for the day. But when I told him I wanted to talk to him too, he said he would re-arrange things and come. Oh, and mum, as a peace offering, he's bringing you some of his home-grown organic vegetables.

CYNTHIA That's nice of him. But what on earth shall I do with them? I only use tinned or frozen. I'm sure he won't approve of them.

GEOFFREY Do we have to worry what he approves or disapproves of?

SALLY Now daddy, don't start.

CYNTHIA Don't you think it's time you put this lot away?

GEOFFREY I thought you'd want to sort through it first and decide what you want to keep. The rest can go to Sally's favourite Oxfam shop.

CYNTHIA There isn't time to sort through anything now, not before lunch. *(Examines the pile and finds the oven gloves she had lost the previous day)* I must say I had wondered where some of this stuff had got to. There's the clutter of twenty years down there.

GEOFFREY Twenty years of chronic untidyness.

CYNTHIA Twenty years of pathological tidyness.

GEOFFREY Depends which way you look at it.

CYNTHIA Precisely.

SALLY *(Laughing)* O.K. Watch it, you two.

CYNTHIA But seriously Geoffrey, hadn't you better stop now and go up and get dressed? You don't want Mike to arrive and find you in this mess, do you?

GEOFFREY Why not? He looks a mess.

CYNTHIA But you know what you're always saying. First impressions. . . .

GEOFFREY Don't mean a thing. Do they Sally?

SALLY No, daddy. They don't.

GEOFFREY So what does it matter if Mike sees us as we really are?

SALLY Daddy, you said it!

GEOFFREY I did? Said what?

SALLY Mike. You called him by his proper name.

GEOFFREY Did I? How vulgar of me. Must have been a slip of the tongue.

CYNTHIA Well, he'll never want to marry Sally if he does see us as we really are.

*Exit Cynthia wheeling the trolley into the dining room.*

GEOFFREY (*Calling after her*) In that case he isn't worthy of her – and I don't mind telling him.

SALLY You just tell him the truth, daddy.

GEOFFREY But that is the truth.

SALLY Besides, I haven't asked him yet.

GEOFFREY Wait a minute. Isn't that the wrong way round? Shouldn't he ask you?

SALLY Why should that be the right way round?

GEOFFREY Well . . . because. . . .

SALLY Honestly, daddy, you are old fashioned. Does it really matter who asks who? – as long as we get down to discussing it sensibly. But I'll give him the chance if you like. Just to please you.

GEOFFREY Thank you.

SALLY And if he doesn't get round to it, then I'll ask him.  
(*Looks at the cupboards*) I see you've still got that old skeleton.

GEOFFREY I've had it ever since I was a student.

SALLY Would you give it to me – to us – as a wedding present?

GEOFFREY What ever for?

SALLY To remind us – no lies, no pretence, no shadowy corners in dark cupboards.

*Cynthia enters from the dining room.*

And there's something else I should like as well.

GEOFFREY What's that?

SALLY A massive bowl and dozens of towels, I reckon with those things a marriage might just work – and last.

CYNTHIA (*With real feeling and longing*) Do you think so? Do you really think so?

*She turns slowly to look at Geoffrey*

*The doorbell sounds. They all look at each other.*

*Sally runs off eagerly to the entrance hall. The front door is heard to open. We hear voices too muffled to be recognised. The door shuts.*

*Sally enters alone.*

SALLY (*Excited*) Mum . . . dad. . . .

GEOFFREY What's up?

CYNTHIA Where's Mike?

SALLY He's here.

GEOFFREY Well bring him in.

SALLY In a moment.

GEOFFREY What's he hanging back for? Don't tell me he's scared too?

SALLY No, it's not that.

GEOFFREY Well what is it, then?

SALLY He's brought you a surprise.

CYNTHIA Oh good, I love surprises.

GEOFFREY Actually I would have thought we'd had enough surprises for one weekend.

SALLY Well this one knocks all the others into the shade.

GEOFFREY I know. Don't tell me. He's . . . he's wearing a jacket and tie?

CYNTHIA He's bought you a ring?

SALLY As a matter of fact, he's brought a friend, a patient.

CYNTHIA For lunch? But how inconsiderate of him.

SALLY Mike tried to make other arrangements, but wasn't able to at such short notice. So he brought him along instead.

CYNTHIA But still, he might have phoned ahead and warned us. Oh well, I suppose I'd better lay another place and hope the joint will stretch. Perhaps I can add in some of Mike's organic vegetables. (*She moves towards the dining room door*) And family hold back on the gravy, O.K.?

SALLY Hey, wait a minute, mum. Hadn't you better stay and meet him first?

GEOFFREY (*Suspicious now*) Just exactly who is this patient, Sally?

SALLY They won't be a minute. Mike's taken him to the cloakroom. It's one of the things he has to do for him. You see, there are quite a few things he can't do for himself. Oh, by the way, his name is. . . .

GEOFFREY (*Thick throated and drained. He knows he is about to face the biggest test and challenge of his life*) You don't have to tell me his name. . . .

*Geoffrey turns to Cynthia. Her face registers with alarm her recognition*



*of what this means, hesitantly she puts her hand on Geoffrey's arm – the first time she has touched him tenderly for years. He draws her to him and puts an arm around her.*

*They all stand facing the door to the entrance hall, bracing themselves for what for them is the ultimate, painful reality.*

*As the lights slowly fade, two shadows appear on the surface of the open door.*

*The lighting continues to slowly fade to.*

**BLACKOUT**

**THE END**