

GEORGE. It's beautiful, isn't it? I mean, it needs some work –

JULIA. Well, yes, I was going to –

GEORGE. Obviously it needs work –

JULIA. And money –

GEORGE. But architecturally, it's outstanding.

JULIA. Oh, outstanding. Underneath.

GEORGE. Original features.

JULIA. Although that bathroom –

GEORGE. I know, avocado nightmare.

JULIA. And it's quite draughty in here, isn't it?

GEORGE. The heating's a bit... antiquated, yes, but –

JULIA. It's definitely draughty. And it's only October.

GEORGE. Come on, Ju. It's beautiful! Look at the light in this place!

JULIA. Well, yes. The light. And it's nice and big, I suppose.

GEORGE. Well, there you go. Hedda needs space. It affects you so much. Where you live. Only a bike ride from you, too. And you know Toby's finally defected to the other end of the Central Line? You can see his flat from the window, see? Hello, Tobes!

GEORGE *waves to an imaginary Toby through the window.*

JULIA. And it's a, a nice area, isn't it? Characterful.

GEORGE. Oh yes. Portobello Road at the weekends, carnival in the summer, rice and peas whenever you want it!

JULIA. Yes. Very urban.

GEORGE. I just can't believe we're actually here. We actually own it. Love at first sight, you know. Stumbled on it one night, ended up sitting on that bench over the road for hours, just wishing it was ours. Hedda and I, we thought it was just beautiful. The ivy on the brick, wisteria climbing up. She said, I remember it so clearly, she said she felt she could never live anywhere except this house.

JULIA. And then it just happens to come up for sale!

GEORGE. No, well, turns out it'd been on the market for ages actually.

JULIA. I can't think why.

GEORGE. Well, the market's dropped off, hasn't it?

JULIA. Still, wasn't cheap though, was it? And the mortgage must be –

GEORGE. It's *fine*. Really. The money will be there. And it's an investment, isn't it? / In our future. In Hedda. I want her to feel –

JULIA. I know –

GEORGE. – happy. You know. I love her so much. Really. Sometimes
Sometimes I just

Beat.

sort of

ache

with

it.

Sorry.

GEORGE *smiles, bashful*. JULIA *puts an English hand on him*.

JULIA (*quiet*). I'm so happy for you. It's going to be beautiful.

Beat.

GEORGE. How much, do you think?

JULIA. George?

GEORGE. To do it up. Properly.

Pause. JULIA *doesn't want to lie*. GEORGE *whistles*.

That much?

JULIA. George. Listen. Mum and Dad's house.

GEORGE. No. No. No, we've already talked / about this –

JULIA. Well, I want to talk about it again, it's far too big for just me. I only need a bit of extra space, to run the business from. I've talked to a few estate agents, you wouldn't believe how it's appreciated over the –

GEORGE. I don't want you to sell it. It's your home. Our home.

JULIA. No but *this* is your home now. And I want you to be able to enjoy it. Do it up properly. Come on, it's only money, isn't it? I mean, if money's the only thing we have to worry about, then –

GEORGE. I'll think about it.

JULIA. I mean, look at you. Your own flat. Married. And about to become a *senior lecturer*!

GEORGE. I just feel so (it sounds silly), but I feel so *blessed*.

JULIA. Don't be silly. You *deserve* it. After all you've had to worry

about. I wish Mum and Dad could have known. What you've achieved. They'd be so proud. Working so hard – and then all that with Eli Langford –

GEORGE. Longford –

JULIA. It still makes me angry. The trouble he caused you. No, it does. Acting like your best friend and then accusing you like that. I have to say, I wasn't surprised when I heard all that talk about him, interfering with that poor girl, not surprised at all, / one of his own students!

GEORGE. It was a little more complicated than that, she retracted / her –

JULIA. No smoke without fire. And I know you shouldn't say it but I'm glad. I am.

GEORGE. Have you heard anything about how he's doing? Since I left?

JULIA. Nothing at all. Except he's published a new book.

GEORGE. What?

JULIA. I saw them talking about it on the TV. The affable chappy with the glasses and the well-preserved Australian woman. Didn't sound like much to me. You wait and see what they make of *your* new book. I'm dying to know what it's going to be about.

GEORGE. Robotic ants.

JULIA. Oh my. Well, isn't that just –

GEORGE. Wait: *Robotic Ants and the Mapping of Consciousness*.

JULIA. I mean, it's so... isn't it? To think you can write a whole book on... something like that!

GEORGE. Lot of work to do first. Six month's worth of research to collate. The sheer volume of material, it all needs ordering, and consolidating, / and –

JULIA. Consolidating! You're so *methodical*, you remind me of Dad so much sometimes!

GEORGE. Can't wait to get started. Now I've got something to get my teeth into.

JULIA. And someone to *love* you, that's the most important thing.

GEORGE. Yes. I know. She's wonderful. Isn't she?

A sound from off. GEORGE nods towards the noise.

Hello. Speak of the devil. Hedda?

HEDDA *enters, yawning.*

HEDDA. Is there any coffee?

JULIA. Hedda! Hello, darling, welcome home!

HEDDA. Morning, Julia. Lovely to see you. You're here early.

JULIA. Oh. Well, I was just –

GEORGE. Couldn't wait to see her family, could you, Ju?

JULIA. And how was your first night in your new home then, Hedda Gabler?

GEORGE. Tesman.

JULIA. Tesman. Did you sleep at all?

HEDDA. Not really.

GEORGE. 'Not really'!

HEDDA. Tolerably.

GEORGE. 'Tolerably'!

HEDDA. Is there an echo in here?

GEORGE. It wasn't too bad, was it, darling? I mean, I know you had a rough night but you were fast asleep when I got up.

HEDDA. Won't you sit down, Julia?

JULIA. Oh no. I won't. Thank you but I should get back to Rita.

GEORGE. Give her my love, eh? And tell her I'll come over later, soon as I can.

JULIA. Yes, I will – oh! I nearly forgot! Wake up, Julia!

GEORGE. What is it?

JULIA *hands* GEORGE *a plastic bag*.

JULIA. Don't get too excited.

GEORGE *pulls out a pair of knitted bedsock/slipper-type things*.

GEORGE. My slip-slops! Oh, Ju, that's – Hedda, Julia's brought my slip-slops!

JULIA. I gave them a good wash, they were filthy.

GEORGE. Remember how annoyed I was I'd forgotten them?

Honestly, Ju, I said to Hedda – what, five or six times?

HEDDA. At least.

GEORGE. At least five or six times, I said to Hedda, I'm really annoyed I forgot my slip-slops. Didn't I, sweetheart?

HEDDA. Yes. They were one of the hot topics of conversation of our honeymoon. Your slip-slops.

GEORGE. Slip-slops!

HEDDA. Have you had a stroke or something?

GEORGE *pulls the slippers on*.

GEORGE. Hello, old chums! Rita made these for me before I went up to Oxford. Knitted them herself. Try them on, they're so comfy! Go on!

HEDDA. I'm all right, thanks – George? I think some Gypsies must've broken in. While we were away.

GEORGE. Nobody's going to break in, sweetheart. Stop worrying, I'll get the door fixed today.

HEDDA. No. I'm serious. Look. We better sterilise the sofa.

She holds up JULIA's scarf between a finger and thumb.

GEORGE. Hedda...

HEDDA *sniffs the article*.

HEDDA. God, it smells! It really smells, George! It smells of old ladies!

She thrusts it in his face and giggles.

GEORGE. Hedda, stop it, darling.

HEDDA *wraps the scarf round her head.*

HEDDA. 'El-lo. You vant to buy some pegs?

GEORGE. Hedda. That's Julia's.

Beat. HEDDA stops laughing and takes the scarf off.

HEDDA. Oh. Is it?

JULIA. Yes. It's new.

HEDDA. Sorry. I didn't really look at it properly.

JULIA. It's all right.

GEORGE. It's lovely, Ju. Really lovely. Hedda was / just –

HEDDA. I was / just –

JULIA. It doesn't matter. It wasn't very expensive.

Beat. JULIA laughs.

Don't look so mortified, you two, I said it's all right, didn't I? My own fault for trying to look nice next to Hedda here. Look at you! Just got out of bed and you still look like a million dollars. Doesn't she? Makes me feel like an old frump.

HEDDA. Oh, don't be / silly...

JULIA. An ugly old frump!

JULIA laughs again.

I don't know how you do it, you always look so nice. Clothes just seem to hang properly on you.

GEORGE. She looks even better now, don't you think? I mean, now she's

filled out a bit? Got a few / more curves –

JULIA. 'Filled out a bit'?

GEORGE. No, well, you can't really tell in this dress. But I can tell you, when –

HEDDA. *You can't tell her anything.*

Beat. Calm.

I'm exactly the same now as I was when I left.

Beat. GEORGE falters.

GEORGE. I was just. I mean. Don't you think she looks different, Julia?

HEDDA stands facing away from them. JULIA watches her.

JULIA. I think she looks lovely. Just lovely. You've made my little brother a very happy man.

She embraces HEDDA tightly. HEDDA tries to bear it. She can't.

HEDDA. Sorry, can you let go, please? You're hurting me.

JULIA breaks away.

JULIA. Oh. Sorry. I should be going.

GEORGE. Oh no, you don't have to –

JULIA. Don't be silly, George. I'll pop round again tomorrow, if that's all right.

GEORGE. Of course! We're so close, we want you round here as often as possible.

JULIA. Goodbye, Hedda.

GEORGE. Every day, if you like. I'll see you out. Hedda? Julia said –

HEDDA. Goodbye.

GEORGE and JULIA exit. HEDDA relaxes. She fishes in her bag for her cigarettes. She puts one in her mouth. Lights it. As she does:

Yes, come round every day. That'll be nice. Better still, why don't you just move in? Yes, move in. Have my bed. I insist. Jesus, George.

HEDDA goes to the window. She stubs the cigarette out and throws it into the garden. Stays there, looking out. GEORGE watches her.

GEORGE. What are you looking at, darling?

HEDDA. I'm just looking at the leaves. They're so yellow. And so withered.

GEORGE. Well, it's almost autumn already, after all.

HEDDA. Yes. It is almost autumn already. After all.

GEORGE. I'm worried about Ju. Did you think she was acting a bit strange?

HEDDA. I suppose she was upset about the scarf thing. Does she usually behave like that?

GEORGE. Like what?

HEDDA. Throwing off her clothes in the middle of other / people's flats?

GEORGE. 'Throwing off her' – it was only a / scarf, Hedda –

HEDDA. I mean, I know she's your sister but –

GEORGE. Come on, darling. Give her a break!

Beat.

HEDDA. Sorry. I've got one of my migraines. Don't worry. I'll smooth it out with her. When you go over there later you can... you can invite her over for dinner tonight. If you like.

GEORGE. I will. That's very thoughtful of you. She'll like that.

Beat. HEDDA smiles weakly at him. He puts a hand on her stomach. HEDDA freezes, then spots the bunch of flowers.

HEDDA. Where did those come from?

GEORGE. Julia must have brought them for you.

HEDDA. Chrysanthemums. Jesus. There's a note.

She reads.

'I'll come back tomorrow.' How ominous. Guess who.

GEORGE. Who?

HEDDA. Thea Eldridge.

Silence. A long pause as HEDDA watches THEA. THEA turns to look at her. HEDDA smiles broadly. THEA smiles nervously back.

HEDDA. There.

THEA. Sorry?

HEDDA. Now we've killed two birds with one stone.

THEA. Have we?

HEDDA. I got him out of the way, didn't I? Now we can talk properly.

THEA. But I've told you everything already.

HEDDA. I want you to get *everything* off your chest. How are things at home?

THEA. That's the last thing I want to talk about –

HEDDA. Not even to me, Thea? I mean, we did go to school together!

THEA. Yes, but... You were a year below me. And to be honest... well, I was a bit frightened of you.

HEDDA stares at her for a moment, then bursts out laughing.

Don't – it's not funny. I know it sounds silly but you terrified me.

HEDDA. But we were friends!

THEA. Don't you remember? You used to pull my hair.

HEDDA. I was a year younger than you!

THEA. I know it was only a joke but you did it so hard. One time you – look.

She pulls back a little of her hair and shows HEDDA her scalp.

You see that soft spot there? Where it's all smooth. It never grew back –

HEDDA feels the bald spot with a finger.

And once –

HEDDA. Yes?

THEA. Once you said that you wanted to burn it all off.

HEDDA *stops feeling the spot.*

HEDDA. I probably didn't mean it.

THEA. Anyway. Our lives have drifted apart since then, haven't they?

HEDDA. Then we have to make up for lost time, don't we, T?

A sudden energy. She claps her hands together.

That's it. I've decided! From now on we shall be the best of friends.
Like in the old days.

She kisses THEA on the cheek.

There we are.

HEDDA *kisses THEA's bald spot and smiles kindly at her. An expectant pause.*

Thea?

THEA. Yes?

HEDDA. Aren't you going to kiss me back?

THEA. Oh. Sorry. I –

She leans in and kisses HEDDA on the cheek. HEDDA beams.

HEDDA. There. *The best of friends.*

THEA *suddenly starts to sob. HEDDA strokes her hair.*

Poor little crying girl. What's the matter? Things not good at home?

THEA (*fierce*). It's not my home. It's *his* home. It belongs to him, not to me. I'm just a, a – tenant in his bed.

THEA *sobs again, leaning into HEDDA's chest. HEDDA winds a strand of THEA's hair round her fingers and examines it as she talks.*

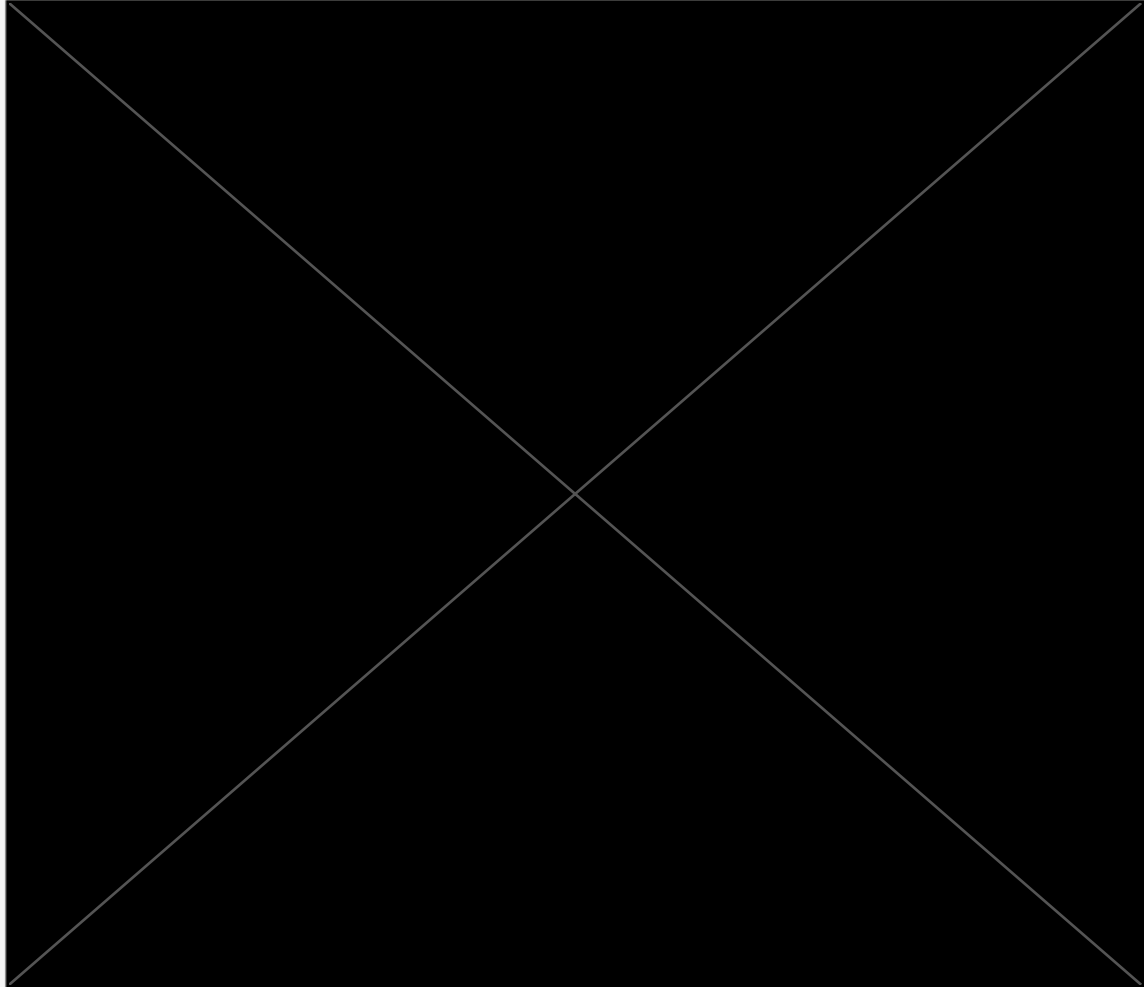
HEDDA. And Scotland. It's so far away, isn't it? I can't think why you'd –

THEA. I just had to get out of the city. I went up there to work.

HEDDA. For Robert?

THEA. I was his P.A. It was a good job. Well paid. I enjoyed it.

HEDDA. Of course you did. You're a hard worker. You stick at things, don't you?



THEA. Three years.

HEDDA. Three years. You poor thing. Alone up there. Is it a big house?

THEA. Yes. Isolated. Beautiful but –

HEDDA. Robert away all the time?

THEA. Well, he has to travel such a lot.

HEDDA. And of course he's so much *older* than you, isn't he?

THEA. Nearly twenty years, yes, but that's not it, I don't care about... I

did love him, Hedda. In the beginning. I wouldn't have married him if I didn't –

HEDDA. But now?

THEA. No. Not now. I mean, it's never how you imagine it, is it? Things are bound to... deaden a bit. I'm still – fond of him.

HEDDA. But he still –

THEA. Yes. I think he does. In his own quiet way.

Beat. THEA bites her lip.

HEDDA. Thea?

THEA. I didn't tell him I was coming.

HEDDA. No, really?

THEA. He wasn't home when Eli left. I couldn't stand it any more. The thought of it just. Hit me. The time just stretching out ahead. Stuck up there. I don't have any friends, nothing to do except run that house, the children away at school, there's nothing, nothing except days and weeks and months just stretching out...

HEDDA. So that's it. You've left it. Just like that. Your whole life. But what will Robert say when he gets home and you're not there?

THEA. He probably won't even notice until his dirty socks start rotting. Sorry. I shouldn't be cruel. I'm not going back.

HEDDA. You've been so brave. What will you do now?

THEA. I don't know. I just – I have to be near Eli. And he needs me too, you know. He does. That day he arrived at the house he just looked so. Lost. You know? He needed a sort of... force in his life. A –

HEDDA. A power.

THEA. Yes. I suppose.

HEDDA. I mean, you had power over him is what you're saying.

THEA. No, but it wasn't like that. I mean, he gave it all up. All his bad habits. But I never asked him to. I wouldn't have *asked* him to. He just seemed to know that I didn't like it. And so he abandoned it.

HEDDA. You rehabilitated him. A one-woman clinic, you should be charging.

THEA. He made me *real*. Do you understand? He made me feel like I was *being*, properly, for the first time since I left university. Understanding things. Thinking and talking and learning and and and *sharing*. Sharing. In his work and. In him, so good to be using my *brain* again.

HEDDA. He let you share in his work?

THEA. Oh yes. When he wrote I was always there. He wanted me there.

HEDDA. As two comrades.

THEA. That's so funny.

HEDDA. Is it?

THEA. Well, that's what he called it – 'comrades'. I was so happy. In my soul. I was happy. But now. I don't know.

HEDDA. Aren't you more sure of your comrade's extraordinary willpower than that?

Beat.

THEA. There's someone else. Ex-girlfriend or... he never said anything, not outright anyway, but I don't think he's ever got her out of his system.

HEDDA. But what's he said?

THEA. He said that when they broke up she threatened to shoot him.

HEDDA. Shoot him? Oh, T! People don't just go around *shooting* each

THEA. She's supposed to have quite a temper on her. Quite a violent streak.

HEDDA. This isn't *America*. Who are you talking about?

THEA. That singer. The one with the red hair, what's her name? Kate Streets.

HEDDA. Oh. Her. High heels and track marks.

THEA. She's quite good, I think.

HEDDA. She's a train wreck.

THEA. He, Eli – he had a thing with her, didn't he? When she was starting out.

HEDDA. Well, it must be her then. Mustn't it?

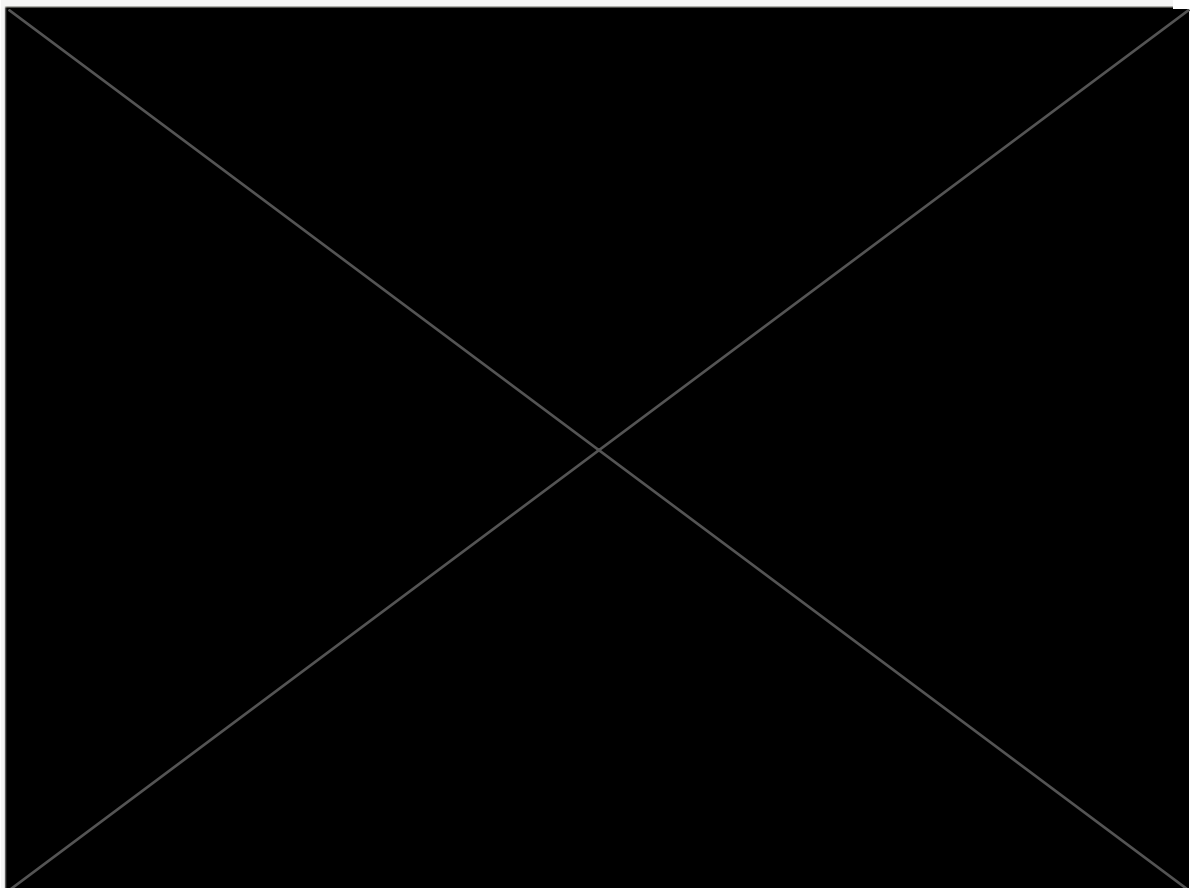
THEA. She's in London, Hedda.

She's bought a house. Near the canal.

It's in the papers. I can't. I feel so –

desperate what if he –

HEDDA. Shh now. George is coming. Wipe your face.



ACT TWO

Half past six. The same day. THEA's flowers are in a jug on the desk. HEDDA is alone by the open window. It's turned into a beautiful evening, the last one of the summer. HEDDA is examining one of Doctor Gabler's guns. Polishing it. Appreciating its beauty. HEDDA loads the pistol and looks down into the garden. She smiles and calls.

HEDDA. Back again, Toby?

TOBY (*off*). Just can't stay away, Mrs Tesman!

HEDDA raises the pistol and takes aim.

HEDDA. Do you think I could hit a target from here?

TOBY (*off*). Oi, don't mess about!

HEDDA (*soft*). This is what you get if you sneak in the back way

you

sly

old

She shoots.

TOBY (*off*). Are you insane!

HEDDA. Toby! I'm so sorry! I didn't hit you. Did I?

TOBY enters, angry. Catches HEDDA smiling.

TOBY. It's really not funny. Bloody hell, have you got a licence for these?

HEDDA. Don't be ridiculous. They're purely ornamental.

TOBY looks at her. She smiles.

Well. Maybe not purely. Aren't they *beautiful*? They belonged to the two Germans my *bestefar* killed at Trondheim. He brought them home and gave them to my father. I remember him, cleaning them on Sunday afternoons. And sometimes, at night, he'd wake me up and we'd drive to the Cotswolds and put up our tent and lie in the grass and shoot at the rabbits and pretend we were outlaws, scavenging for something to put in our *pot*.

TOBY. What for?

HEDDA. For fun. You had to be very, very quiet though.

TOBY. Yes, well, it's one thing to massacre rabbits in the Cotswolds, it's quite another to go waving guns around in West London. I'm serious.

HEDDA. I understood that lots of people in West London are armed to the teeth.

TOBY. Not people like us. What the hell were you aiming at?

HEDDA. Oh, I just like to stand here and shoot up into the blue sky.

Beat.

There's a fox prowling round out there.

I can't stand the yowling.

TOBY. 'Yowling'?

HEDDA. They scream, you know. When they're having sex. Because it hurts so much.

TOBY. Doesn't sound like much fun, Jesus, can we *please* put these away? (*He takes the gun.*) Can't you just get rid of these, Hedda? I mean, I know they belonged to old Magnus but –

HEDDA *plays dumb.*

HEDDA. Magnus. Old Magnus. Sorry, I don't know who you – (*Beat. Realisation.*) Oh! My father! Did you mean my *father*? Doctor Gabler? MA, PhD, Dean of New College, is that who you meant?

TOBY. Sorry. But – I can't believe you've got these things just hanging round the house. I mean, it's weird. Doesn't George mind?

He gingerly shuts the guns in a drawer.

HEDDA. How else am I supposed to entertain myself?

TOBY. I don't know. Go out? See your... friends? / Or –

HEDDA. No.

TOBY. No. Sorry.

HEDDA. I think they must all still be away. On holiday. Or something.

TOBY. Probably. George not home?

HEDDA. He went to see Rita straight after lunch. He didn't expect you so early.

TOBY. No. Should have thought of that. Silly of me.

HEDDA. 'Silly', Toby?

TOBY. I should have come a bit, uh, earlier.

HEDDA. Well, that wouldn't make any sense at all, would it? Because then you wouldn't've had *anyone* to talk to. I've been in the bath all afternoon.

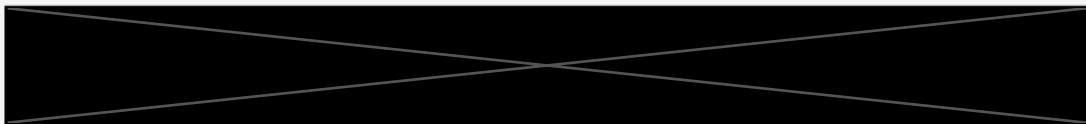
TOBY. And isn't there a tiny little crack in the door that I could have spoken to you through?

HEDDA. No. Our solicitor forgot to arrange for one.

TOBY. That was very stupid of him.

Pause. They look at each other.

HEDDA. Never mind. You'll just have to sit and wait, won't you? I just need to change. So warm for October, isn't it?



Well?

TOBY. Well?

HEDDA. I asked first.

Beat.  *TOBY smiles.*

TOBY. I've looked across into this flat from my window every single day for six months, wishing you were home again.

HEDDA. Have you? How funny. I've wished exactly the same thing.

TOBY. But I thought you had a great time? George said –

HEDDA. Yes, well, I imagine that if you happen to share George's passion for androids, then it would have been absolutely thrilling. Personally, I've never understood the appeal.

TOBY. It's his job, Hedda. His vocation.

HEDDA. I've been bored out of my head.

TOBY. Come on. You were on honeymoon! He's your husband, isn't he?

HEDDA. George is an academic –

TOBY. Undeniably.

HEDDA. – and it turns out that academics are no fun to travel with.

TOBY. Not even an academic that you love?

HEDDA. Oh, for Christ's sakes, don't be so soppy.

TOBY. But still, most people would kill to see the places you've –

HEDDA *comes out of her room putting her earrings in.*

HEDDA. Well, I'm not 'most people'.

Can't you imagine it? Away from everything for six whole months?

No one to talk to, no one who knows the same things as you –

TOBY. Wouldn't be my cup of tea either.

HEDDA. – and the most, most *unendurable* thing about it, the thing nobody tells you. What you don't get 'til it's happened. 'Til you're stuck. Marooned with this person, *everlastingly* stuck looking at the same face and listening to it talk and chew and snore and breathe. And knowing it'll never stop. That this is it. Always and eternally.

TOBY. Well. That's marriage, isn't it? 'Til death do us part.

HEDDA. I said: always and eternally.

TOBY. What are you saying? That you don't love him?

HEDDA. Try it for yourself! Go on! Spend six months listening to someone bang on about *ant robots* –

TOBY. You didn't have to marry him –

HEDDA. No, you're right. I could have married you. Only you never asked and I'm not that stupid.

Beat.

(*Quiet.*) I danced myself out. My time was up.

And it was the easiest thing. He was so eager to take care of me and... and I wanted to be taken care of.

I was so tired. It was either that or – but you know what a coward I am.

TOBY. Hedda, don't –

HEDDA. Anyway. On paper, George Tesman is quite a catch, don't you think?

TOBY. Heds –

HEDDA. On paper. And I can't find anything that's *really* ridiculous about him. Can you? And perhaps he could go far. In time. Perhaps.

TOBY. But if you don't love him. It's not like you didn't have other options –

HEDDA. No, but you see, I didn't. Not really. Especially after.

She laughs.

It's funny how quickly people stop calling. After.

TOBY. After your dad?

HEDDA. Yes. All the nice young postgrads with their carefully frayed jumpers and eagerness, suddenly and inexplicably became very busy. And that's when you start to understand the real reason they wanted to come to the house.

That it wasn't really you. Well. Of course it was. In some ways.

But not really.

Beat.

Still. You can't really blame them. Can you?

TOBY. I don't know about them. But that wasn't it for me. I'd be the first one to tell you that marriage is the most wonderful, life-enriching institution...

HEDDA. ...but who wants to be put in an institution, right? (*Laughs.*) Don't worry, I wasn't talking about you. I wouldn't want to be the woman to tie you down, Toby Brack.

TOBY *laughs*.

TOBY. All I want is a circle of friends. Close friends, I mean. Who let me come and go as I like. And be of service where I can.

HEDDA. To my husband, you mean?

TOBY. Well, to be honest I was talking more about his wife. But the husband too, of course. I think that that kind of (how do I put it?) that kind of triangular relationship can be a good thing for all concerned. Don't you?

HEDDA. Well, I could certainly have done with some company on that trip. Not just the two of us, trapped in a stifling train compartment.

TOBY. At least the honeymoon is over and done with now.

HEDDA. But unfortunately the journey has only just begun. I've simply reached a station on the way.

TOBY. Jesus, Hedda. If you're that unhappy then leave. Jump off the train.

HEDDA. Ah, yes. But the thing about jumping from trains, Toby, is that one tends to break one's neck upon landing.

TOBY. But if you don't love him, then you have to –

HEDDA. No. I couldn't do that.

I'm fine. Really. I'm fine. Just here, sitting quietly. Watching the world speed by through a window. Just the two of us.

TOBY. No room for a third passenger?

HEDDA *laughs*.

HEDDA. Well now, that's a different matter.

TOBY. A trusted friend. A close and interesting companion.

HEDDA. Who can entertain me with all kinds of fascinating subjects?

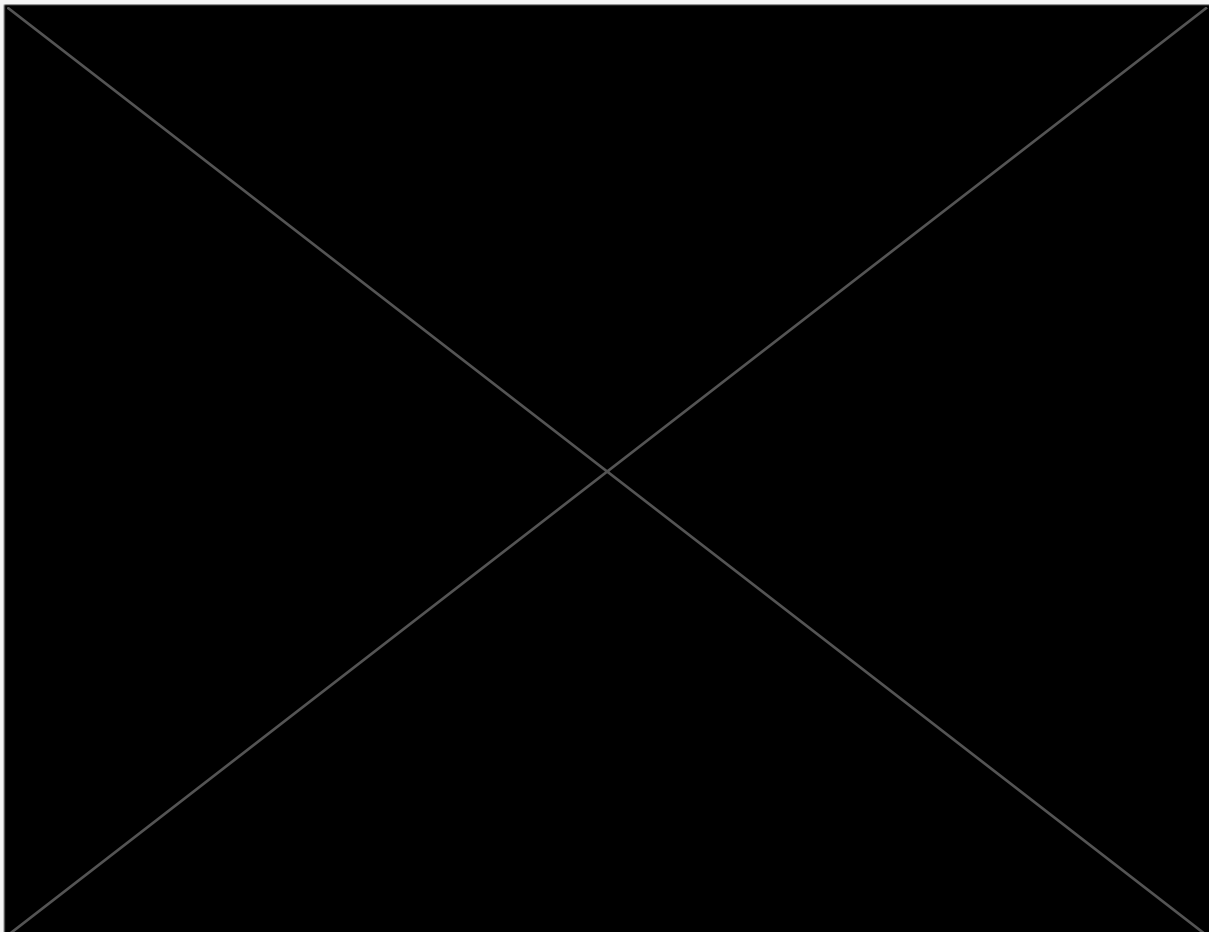
TOBY. And not an academic bone in his body!

HEDDA *laughs*.

HEDDA. Yes. That would be a relief.

TOBY. Triangle complete.

HEDDA. And the train drives on.



TOBY. What was all that about a scarf?

HEDDA. Oh. There was a *thing*. This morning. With *JuJu*. She left her scarf on the back of the sofa.

She looks at TOBY and smiles.

And I pretended to think it had been left by a Gypsy.

HEDDA *can't stop herself laughing.*

TOBY. That was very naughty of you.

HEDDA. Well, you see, it's an *affliction*. I'm a very sick girl.

Apparently. These impulses come over me and *I just can't help it.*

Beat. HEDDA is suddenly serious.

I can't stop myself. I can't think why.

TOBY. I think. I think it's because you're not very happy. Are you?

HEDDA stares at him for a beat, then breaks away.

HEDDA. I don't see any reason why I should be. Perhaps you can suggest one?

TOBY. I could suggest lots of things. For one, you've got the beautiful flat you always wanted, the flat you sat on that bench and wished for –

HEDDA. Oh God, you don't believe that story too, do you?

TOBY. It's not true?

HEDDA. Look. All it is, is last summer, when I was down in London with Magnus, George took it upon himself to make sure I got back to the hotel safe at night from the hospital.

TOBY. Well, I was living east last summer. I went in another direction –

HEDDA. Yes, last summer you went in many different directions.

TOBY. Touché.

HEDDA. So, one night we came past this house. I was... I wasn't

feeling very well. So we sit down on the *bench*. And I have a cigarette. And George doesn't know what to say to me! The poor thing is writhing and wriggling and gabbling on, so I take pity on the erudite creature, and make up a little story about how this was *simply* the most *lovely* place I'd ever seen and wouldn't it be *divine* to live here. I just talked and talked and talked so that he wouldn't have to.

TOBY. Nothing more than that? This is priceless. I mean, it's not funny but – you never really wanted to live here?

HEDDA. No. Not particularly.

TOBY. Ha!

HEDDA. Yes, well. My frivolity had consequences.

TOBY. What do you mean?

HEDDA. I mean, I didn't know what a dump it was inside, did I? Anyway, as Magnus used to say, '*Som man reder ligger man.*'

TOBY. What?

HEDDA. 'As you make your bed, so shall you lie in it.'

TOBY. But now? Now it's been cleaned up a bit? There's still work to do but –

HEDDA. There's something dead about it. A smell. Like when you go back to a grave the week after a funeral. The flowers people left, all rain dashed and rotting...

God, Toby. You don't know how bored I'm going to be here. Shipwrecked in nappy valley with nothing to do.

TOBY. Well, that's up to you, isn't it?

HEDDA. I don't know what you mean.

TOBY. You could find a vocation too, Mrs Tesman.

HEDDA. 'A vocation', Mr Brack?

TOBY. Get a bloody job, Hedda.

HEDDA *laughs*.

Something that excites you.

HEDDA. I don't know what that would be. It's not like I haven't tried, Toby.

TOBY. You haven't tried.

HEDDA. No? George isn't the only one who gets post, you know.

She goes to the desk and throws down a stack of opened letters.

TOBY. What's this?

HEDDA. What do you think. Rejection. Rejection. Rejection. And, oh! Rejection –

TOBY. You've been busy.

HEDDA. George was at conferences all day. I spent a lot of time buying coffee tables and writing applications on hotel stationery. Fat lot of good it did.

TOBY. Hedda. This one's from the Ministry of Defence.

HEDDA. I like to aim high.

TOBY. Maybe you should set your sights a little lower. You could temp maybe. / Or –

HEDDA. I've done that. I got fired and it was boring.

TOBY. Work is boring. Most people –

HEDDA. I *told* you, Toby. I'm not 'most people'. Anyway, I'm unemployable. Apparently. Maybe I could become a lawyer. Is it hard?

TOBY. Come on, Hedda, there must be something you could do –

HEDDA. Oh yes. (*She holds up the letters.*) There are so *many* things I could do that I couldn't possibly ask myself to choose just one of them.

TOBY. So write some more applications. Join an agency, something –

HEDDA. I can't. I'm too busy.

TOBY. Doing what!

Beat.

HEDDA. I'm writing a novel.

TOBY. Really? How much have you written?

HEDDA. It's more at a brainstorming stage at present.

TOBY. Hedda!

HEDDA. What?

TOBY. You can't sit on your beautiful behind all day doing nothing.

HEDDA. George doesn't seem to mind half as much as you do.

TOBY. George has more patience than I do.

HEDDA. No. He just loves me more than you do.

Beat.

TOBY. That's not true.

HEDDA. It's lucky I didn't marry you. I'd probably be stuck down a coal mine right now.

TOBY. I'm not suggesting you become a coal miner, I'm just asking you to use / your life to *do* something –

HEDDA. Sweeping chimneys or something – I'm not qualified to *do* anything.

TOBY. So be a barmaid be a waitress be a bloody typist make the bloody coffee instead of drinking it –

HEDDA *starts to laugh.*

– but don't sit there and tell me you're *bored* when you've got bugger-all else to do except watch your bank statements go red, / Hedda –

HEDDA (*bad cock-en-ay accent*). 'All right, guv? What can I get you? The usual? Pint a shandy an' a pork scratchin', is it?' I mean, for God's sake, Toby! A barmaid?

TOBY. You're a snob.

HEDDA. I'm discerning.

TOBY. You can't afford to be discerning.

Beat. HEDDA stares at him coolly then wanders to the window.

HEDDA. I was thinking I might get George to go into politics. I'd make a good prime minister's wife. Don't you think?

TOBY sighs and laughs, beaten. He goes to her.

TOBY. You'd be sensational. But do you think George is cut out for politics?

HEDDA. He's inarticulate and he rides a bicycle. I think the public would clasp him to their bosoms.

TOBY. Yeah, but if he doesn't have any interest in it, why would you want –

HEDDA. Because it would give me something *important* to do! Something a damn sight more exciting than listening to him tap-tap-tapping away at footnotes and wiping egg off his beard for the rest of my life.

Do you think it's a completely mad idea? That George Tesman might one day be prime minister?

TOBY. No. But unfortunately he would have to be much richer than he is now.

HEDDA. We live in a democracy, my dear friend.

TOBY. Yes. A democracy in which if you are poor then you are unlikely to become prime minister. My dear friend.

HEDDA. Oh, bloody *money*.

That's it, isn't it? It's our circumstances. Our *situation*. That's what makes me depressed. That's what makes life so unbearable because

that's it, isn't it? That is *it*. The truth is, however much happy-clappy, 'love makes the world go round' rubbish you spout, if you don't have money then everything's miserable and mundane and –

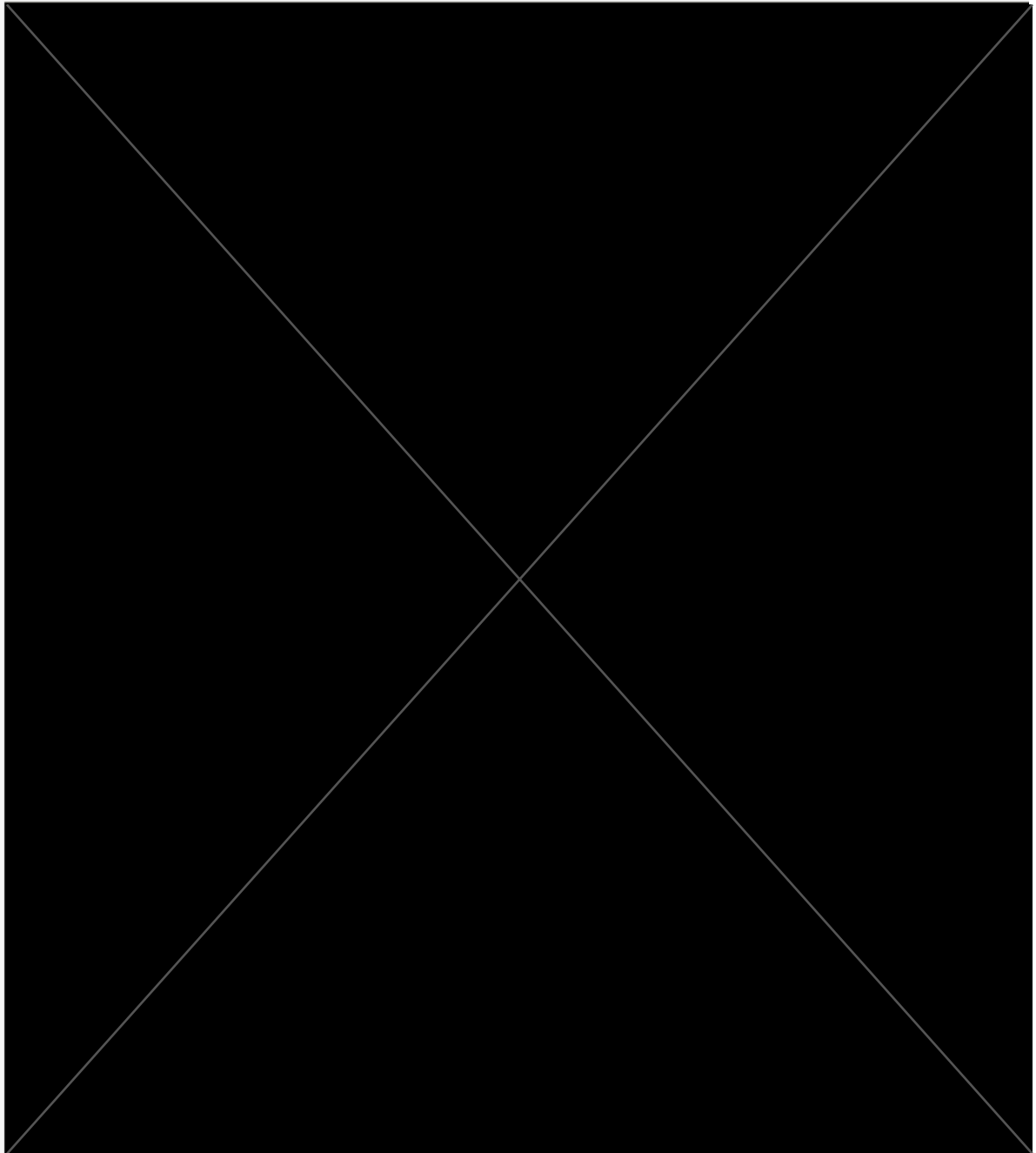
TOBY. I don't think that's it, actually. Not really.

HEDDA. Well, what then? What is it?

TOBY. I think your problem, Mrs Tesman, is that you have never been really excited by anything.

HEDDA *regards him and the idea for a moment.*

HEDDA. That's not true. Actually. That's not true.





HEDDA. Boring the life out of myself. Hello, Doctor Tesman!

*GEORGE enters. He is the kind of man who owns a 'party shirt'.
He is wearing it.*

GEORGE. Eli hasn't called, has he?

HEDDA. No.

GEORGE. We said seven. He should be here. I'm sorry, Toby, but can we wait just a bit longer?

TOBY. If you like.

GEORGE. Good. We can keep you company in the meantime, can't we, gorgeous?

He kisses HEDDA and sits on the sofa.

HEDDA. I can always look after Eli. If he doesn't want to go with you, I mean.

ELI. I know what she's told you –

HEDDA. Ah, but see, I don't know what you've told *her*.

ELI. Nothing –

HEDDA. Nothing? I find that hard to believe. Surely during one of your cosy chats / you must've –

ELI. I haven't told her anything about us. She's stupid. / Hedda...

HEDDA. Yes yes, she is stupid but I am a coward, remember?

ELI. Hedda, that day. I wish you'd done it. I wish you'd just shot me then.

HEDDA. Which day? There were lots of *days*.

ELI. You know which one I mean.

That night. At Doctor Gabler's?

When you couldn't bring yourself to...

Do you remember?

Beat. HEDDA looks at ELI.

HEDDA. Oh yes. *That* day.

ELI. We'd been drinking since noon.

HEDDA. Yes. Burnt our skins on Christ Church Meadow.

ELI. We dived into the river to cool down.

HEDDA. Told you we'd get Weil's disease but you pulled me in after you.

ELI. I tried not to look at you through the wet cotton

HEDDA. You gave me your **dry shirt** to wear

ELI. Hung your dress on a tree

HEDDA. Watched it steam while I checked whether you liked butter

ELI. Then I carried you up the towpath on my back

HEDDA. Ivy leaves caught in your hair

ELI. Pondweed really, but you said it was

HEDDA. Ivy leaves. Wound through your hair

ELI. The sun still high

HEDDA. It was low

ELI. It was high

HEDDA. The sky was turning pink

ELI. Was it?

HEDDA. Like fish blood.

ELI. You're right. It was sunset.



HEDDA. The end of an exquisite day.

ELI. But then

HEDDA. But then

ELI. But then

HEDDA. No, not yet, don't you remember

ELI. No, not yet, you're right, first we went / out

HEDDA. Dancing

ELI. You moving like fucking water

HEDDA. Sticky floors and / condensed sweat dripping from the

ELI. Like water, the / only time I saw you not looking bored

HEDDA. Ceiling, UV lights and cheap shots

ELI. That kid tried to come on to you

HEDDA. Got in my way, I just wanted to dance

ELI. You stubbed your cigarette out on his neck

HEDDA. He screamed like a girl

ELI. And then

HEDDA. And then

ELI. And that's when

HEDDA. Yes.

Beat.

ELI. Didn't start 'til we got home, though

HEDDA. No. Ate toast and

ELI. And drank your Dad's whisky in the kitchen

HEDDA. Turned off the lights

ELI. Why did we do that again?

HEDDA. To trick the mosquitoes.

ELI. Oh yes. Mosquitoes.

HEDDA. You stubbed your toe and told me I was spoilt

ELI. You are spoilt

HEDDA. I told you you were simple

ELI. I am simple

HEDDA. You started crying and I hated you.

ELI. You put that gun to my / head.

HEDDA. To your temple, I meant to do it

ELI. I wanted you to do it.

HEDDA. It would have been beautiful, don't you think

ELI. I can still feel the pressure of it / now.

HEDDA. But I was a / coward.

ELI. Pressing into my skin left a mark, *Hedda*

HEDDA. I was a coward and I could / not

ELI. You looked / beautiful.

HEDDA. Could not

ELI. Burnt and beautiful

HEDDA. Could not get my finger to listen to my brain.

ELI. And why do you think that was?

HEDDA. I never see anything through, you see.

ELI. You couldn't do it, why was that?

HEDDA. I'm flighty and capricious

ELI. No other reason?

HEDDA. I don't know.

ELI. Maybe

because I was your comrade?

HEDDA. Maybe

ELI. Maybe

because you and I –

HEDDA. No. No.

ELI. Because you and I –

HEDDA. Don't believe that

ELI. You and I

HEDDA. Me and you –

The doorbell rings. HEDDA stands brusquely. She gets the door.

THEA stands there. HEDDA throws her arms around her.

Darling T! Thank God you're here, I've been so bored without you!

THEA sees ELI and runs to him.

THEA. Eli! You're here you're –

ELI. Hello, Thea.

THEA. You're okay!

ELI. Yes. I'm okay.

Beat. HEDDA beams at them and breaks the pause.

HEDDA. Sit, sit! George and Toby will be going soon and then we can eat.

THEA. Where are they going?

HEDDA. Oh, out.

THEA (*to ELI*). Are you going too?

HEDDA. Eli's staying here with us, aren't you?

THEA. Oh. Good.

She goes to sit on the sofa next to ELI. HEDDA rushes forward.

HEDDA. No no no no! Not there, naughty! You sit –

She pulls THEA up, guides her to the end of the sofa and seats her.

– there and I'll be selfish and sit in the middle so I can have both of you. There.

HEDDA sits in the middle and beams at them both. Pause. Then:

ELI. Don't you think Thea is lovely to look at? Mrs Tesman?

HEDDA. Just to look at, Eli?

ELI. You wouldn't believe our conversations. Used to have these long walks together, talking for miles, didn't we?

THEA. Oh, Hedda. I've been so

happy. I can't tell you. What he's done for me. How I feel. To be stretched again, and made to think, and argue and and to be called an *inspiration*...

Beat. HEDDA looks at ELI.

HEDDA. He called you his inspiration, did he?

ELI. She's got such courage, Mrs Tesman. Don't look like that, you do.

Real courage.

Beat.

HEDDA. And such *gorgeous* hair too. Don't you think, Eli? That Thea has gorgeous hair?

ELI. Yes. It's lovely.

HEDDA. Gorgeous. Give her a kiss then.

ELI. What?

HEDDA. Give your brave-clever-courageous-comrade-with-the-lovely-hair a *kiss*.

THEA. It's all right, Hedda, don't –

HEDDA. Now Thea thinks you don't want to kiss her! You've hurt her feelings.

Kiss her.

ELI leans across HEDDA and kisses THEA. HEDDA watches, claps her hands in delight.

Lovely. Now, won't you have a drink, T? Have a nice gin and tonic.

THEA. I'm all right, thank you.

HEDDA. No? Well then, in that case. Have one of these instead.

She holds out the packet of cigarettes.

Go on. For me. I'm not allowed to any more.

THEA. I don't smoke. Sorry.

HEDDA. It's very rude to refuse one's hostess. Smoke it.

ELI. She doesn't want to.

HEDDA. Then you'll have to smoke it for us both, Eli.

THEA. He doesn't smoke either.

HEDDA. He used to. He used to smoke when I knew him. He used to drink and smoke and –

ELI. I gave up.

HEDDA. You gave up! That's incredible, isn't it, T? What a man. See? Firm as a rock. But seeing as you've conquered all your bad habits, you could just have the one cigarette. Just for me.

THEA. He doesn't want to.

HEDDA. But if I told him he had to...

ELI. It wouldn't make any difference.

HEDDA laughs.

HEDDA. Are you saying I don't have any power over either of you?

ELI. Not like that.

Beat. HEDDA carefully puts the cigarette back in its packet.

HEDDA. Toby was right about you, Eli.

ELI. What do you mean?

HEDDA ignores him and turns to THEA confidentially.

HEDDA. We're so scared of everything these days, aren't we? We're all such *cowards*. I mean, I'm a coward, I'm the worst of all, but really we all are. Petrified like rabbits. Or foxes. Yowling in the dark.

BILAL. Things are gonna have to change when we go clear bruv, I'm telling you. I saw some post on Insta saying that ballers even switch up the food they eat as well.

OMZ. Not me boy. I'll be having my curry goat and rice for breakfast, rice 'n' peas with stew chicken for lunch and tuwo shinkafa and miyan taushe for dinner and still be badding it up on the pitch. (*Referencing the ball.*) Yeah.

BILAL. What do you know about tuwo shinkafa and miyan taushe?

BILAL passes the ball to OMZ.

OMZ. That time your mum made some for me, Rara and my grandad init.

BILAL. Oh yeahhh. You can come back whenever you know – my mum was gassed having you lot around.

OMZ is grateful but struggles to show it. He passes the ball back to BILAL.

OMZ. Coach needs to hurry up and send us them deets for trials.

BILAL. He said he'll text us tonight.

OMZ. He better or I'll slap his head bruv.

BILAL. Do it.

OMZ. Coach thinks he's hard but he ain't about it.

BILAL. He grew up in endz you know.

OMZ. So? He dipped time ago.

BILAL. Only 'cause his flat had mice.

OMZ. Didn't you hear coach talking crud today? Talking 'bout, how he don't wanna ever see me holding the ball for too long. My guy, if I feel like dribbling pass the whole team and scoring, I'll do it.

BILAL. Na, you don't have it in your locker.

OMZ. Look at how you're hating.

BILAL (*extends his arms and hands*). Why would I hate?

OMZ (*mockingly, whilst extending arms and hands*). 'Why would I hate?' That's how I know you're capping.

BILAL. There's nothing to hate on. Coach always says I remind him of a young Sancho.

OMZ. Sancho's not that sick.

BILAL. Now you're capping. On form, he's one of the hardest in the

JOEY enters, ritualistically double-tapping the cage. He has a chicken-and-chip-shop box in his hands.

You took your time.

OMZ. For real, it was getting a little late – thought you got that ‘home-time’ call.

JOEY (*dismissing* OMZ). Bruv, you know the Morley’s on Wooly Road has closed? Guess what’s there now... A Costa. I go in, I’m like, ‘Rah there ain’t no wings here, what happened to Morley’s?’ They’re all like ‘What?’ I said ‘Morley’s, where’s the chicken-and-chip shop?’ He goes... ‘It’s not here any more,’ I’m like ‘I can see that, where am I meant to get my barbecue wings and chips from?’ He tells me they sell soup... Soup bruv. I know I don’t go Wooly Road a lot but when did that Morley’s change?!

BILAL. You went HFC then?

JOEY. You’re smoking. Only Morley’s give you that good chicken – I walked down to Camberwell. That’s why I took long.

BILAL shakes his head and goes to practise shooting. JOEY starts eating. As he eats, he notices OMZ ogling his food. OMZ walks over to JOEY. JOEY rolls his eyes.

OMZ. What you saying though? What you saying?

JOEY. Yeah, I’m good... you?

OMZ. What you saying? What did you get?

JOEY (*apathetically*). Four wings and chips.

OMZ. Four wings and chips, yeah?! Did you get burger sauce?

JOEY. No.

OMZ. You didn’t get burger sauce?

JOEY. No.

OMZ. Fair enough, fair enough – (*Beat.*) You put salt on it though?

JOEY rolls his eyes.

BILAL. Bro, just leave him to enjoy his food.

OMZ. Why you getting involved for Bilal? (*Beat.*) So what, you put salt on it?

JOEY. Do you want some chips?

OMZ. Fine then.

OMZ takes a wing from JOEY’s chicken-and-chips box.

JOEY. Oi, what you doing? Yo, put it back.

OMZ licks the wing.

OMZ. You sure?

OMZ walks off eating the chicken wing. When it's done, he puts the bone in the chicken-and-chip-shop bag which JOEY has left on the side.

JOEY. You owe me a wing.

OMZ. Yeah, I'll pattern that.

JOEY kisses his teeth and shakes his head.

JOEY. The way they're changing endz is nuts.

OMZ. They're not changing it. They're renewing it.

JOEY. They're taking everything good.

OMZ. 'They're taking everything good'? Listen to this conspiracy theorist, again.

JOEY. It's not a conspiracy bro. Am I lying Bilz?

BILAL. Boy... I ain't deeped it too much to be honest.

JOEY. You need to watch what's happening. Everything on endz is changing. It's a madness.

OMZ. Can you imagine? They're patterning endz and you're moving like you don't want them to do it. Look at it. It's a shambles – rotting everywhere, it stinks, lifts don't work.

JOEY. Obviously, I want them to fix it up but not if they're gonna take all the sick spots away. All the people as well. Femz has gone. I'm going Monday – my mum has the keys. Bilz is gonna go. Even you're gonna have to go.

OMZ. No I'm not. I'm staying on endz. My block of flats are the last to go down on Reedbury. The new flats would've been put up by then so we're just gonna move into the new ones.

BILAL. You're gonna be the only one on endz? That's dead.

OMZ. Na, it's gonna be lit, deep it. I'll just be banging out Red Pitch and going back to my brand-new crib literally thirty seconds away. It's gonna be a ground-floor ting as well so my grandad won't have to walk up to the fifth floor. And anyways the lifts are gonna be working so it don't matter. It's gonna be sick!

BILAL and JOEY don't truly agree with what OMZ has said. They avoid eye contact with him, exchanging glances with each other.

Just 'cause you have to go Camberwell to get chicken and chips
don't mean them renewing endz is a bad thing.

OMZ *forces a laugh but BILAL and JOEY don't laugh with him.*
They pass between one another.

BILAL (to JOEY). Who's a better baller, me or Omz?

JOEY *ponders.*

JOEY. It's me obviously.

BILAL. Forget it.

JOEY. 'Cause I'm a goalie, I can't be the best?

BILAL. No one said that – But yes – Aight, who's faster?

JOEY *thinks.*

JOEY. I don't know. Just race init.

BILAL. He's shook.

OMZ. Low all that 'bout 'shook'.

JOEY. Race then. (*Beat.*) To be fair, I'll probably take both you man in
a race.

OMZ. What?!

BILAL. My ears!

OMZ. Come! Joey can never be disrespecting like that.

OMZ *goes to one end of Red Pitch, assuming the starting position
taken up in 100m sprints.*

JOEY. Come then.

JOEY *joins in the starting position.*

BILAL. Come we go. There and back yeah?

Then BILAL. They are all on the line.

OMZ. Calm.

Beat – OMZ tries to creep forward.

Ay no cheating you man. No cheating, yeah? Ay? Bilz. No cheating.

JOEY. Can you get back on the line?

OMZ (*mischievously*). Oh my mistake. (*Beat.*) Are we gonna go on 'go'
or 'on your marks'?

BILAL *stands from his starting position, frustrated.*

BILAL. When do you ever go on, 'on your marks'?

Scene Three

BILAL, JOEY and OMZ are in Red Pitch doing warm-up exercises without the ball. It feels intense. Suddenly and seamlessly, BILAL, JOEY and OMZ have moved on to ball work. They are passing and moving; it's rapid, it's focused, it's choreographed between them. Another change as JOEY is now in goal. BILAL and OMZ are shooting at him. Finally, their practising comes to an end as the football has gone into the scaffoldings.

BILAL. Yeah, go on Joey.

JOEY. What?

BILAL. Get my ball init.

JOEY. Wait, why me? It's Omz that should be getting it.

OMZ. Is it my fault it's in the scaffoldings?

JOEY. You're the one that kicked it there.

OMZ. I shot and you fingertipped it over.

JOEY. Ahh! Bilal if I *fingertip* it over, alie it's already going out the pitch?

OMZ. Don't matter Joey.

JOEY. Yes, it does 'cause whether I touched it or not, it was already going out.

OMZ. The rule is: it's whoever touches it last, gets it.

JOEY. Na man, that's like saying: someone dashes an Audemars Piguet from the eighth floor and I fingertip it when it's coming down... am I the one that broke it?

BILAL (*considering it*). I hear you, I hear you.

OMZ. What are you talking about? It's like saying: I shoot, keeper fingertips it over and it's a corner for me... 'cause you touched it last.

JOEY. No – (*Realising.*) Wait?

OMZ (*assuming victory*). There you go.

BILAL (*flatteringly*). You got them watches secured to be dashing them, yeah Joey?

BILAL *spuds* JOEY.

JOEY. Soon come, soon come.

BILAL (*flatteringly*). Yeahhh? (*Suddenly serious.*) But get my ball.

OMZ. Joey, why do you always have to make things so difficult?

BILAL and JOEY are startled.

JOEY. Ahhh! Me?!

BILAL (*shocked*). You have the temerity to say someone else makes things difficult? Mr I'm-Not-Going-Anywhere. Mr-I-Want-to-Fight-Everybody. Wow.

JOEY. Thank you!

OMZ's phone vibrates. He continues speaking whilst taking it out of his pocket.

OMZ. Joey, I know what you're doing.

JOEY. What?

OMZ. You think you're sick.

OMZ answers his phone. BILAL and OMZ wait.

(On the phone.) Rara, you okay? I left some rice 'n' peas in the fridge for you...

BILAL (*to the phone*). Rahim, tell your brother someone needs to be getting my ball. (*Beat.*) We miss you bro, come Red Pitch.

OMZ (*on the phone*)....It's in the fridge... Just... huh?

OMZ walks away from BILAL and JOEY. They're watching him.

What?! I told him before I left – 'Don't turn it off from the main switch 'cause you'll break the boiler!' This donny doesn't listen. Did you put it back on for him? What's he doing now? Alright, keep an eye on him. Cool. You good? Calm. Cool, shout me if you need me. Love you. Love.

OMZ hangs up. He pockets his phone and, slightly irritated, rejoins BILAL and JOEY. JOEY quickly moves the conversation forward.

JOEY. I've actually been thinking you man, you know what we should do? Vlog when we're in Red Pitch, then just @ bare professional teams to scout us from that.

OMZ. That's not a bad idea you know... 'Hey everybody, welcome to our channel.'

OMZ *does a sudden sprint on the spot.*

‘Look at the strength... look at the strength!’

JOEY. Trust, it could bang you know. You gotta shoot your shot.

Remember ‘The Winner’?

BILAL. Ohhh yeahhh... I remember that guy...

OMZ. I ain’t seen ‘The Winner’ for tiiime.

JOEY. His flats went down first. Anyways, he’s got a gaming channel on YouTube and it actually bangs.

BILAL. Is he still the same?

JOEY. Yeahhh, still exactly the same, looks the same, talks the same. Still calls himself ‘The Winner’. I’ll send you lot a link of his stuff.

OMZ. That guy was a nutcase fam. He always came Red Pitch in Timberland boots, jeans and a jeans jacket, even on the hottest days and he’d do the maddest toe-punts.

JOEY. Every time he shot and I was in goal, I just stepped away bruv. I cared ’bout my life.

They all laugh.

BILAL. I swear, the wall of Red Pitch shook once when he toe-punted it.

OMZ. Na, he was the worst footballer.

They all laugh.

BILAL. What I don’t get is why he’d always announce his arrival to Red Pitch? ‘The Winner is here.’

OMZ. Yeah, yeah, ‘The Winner is here.’ Just shut your mouth, dead footballer. He was old you know, he’s like ten years older than us.

JOEY. Remember that time he was gonna fight you??

OMZ. I know!! What’s his problem?

BILAL. He thought we bumped him in FA.

OMZ. And he was stepping to me you know. Why me? We were all there, even Femz. ‘Na, na, na, you guys changed the rules.’

BILAL. ‘I’m not playing, you guys changed the rules. You’re taking the piss.’

A moment passes and their laughter naturally comes to an end.

We're gonna blow on Sunday so we don't need to do no vlog.

OMZ. Insha'Allah.

JOEY. Yeah God-willing but say we *don't*?

BILAL. We're gonna blow, Joey.

JOEY. Trust me, you always need a back-up plan. Like me, I'm gonna do Business Law on the side. Omz, you're doing Art and Design, you're sick at that stuff, you could be the next... painter guy init and Bilz, you're doing Maths, you could be a banker.

BILAL. Bro, you shouldn't think like that. If you think about not making it, then you won't. It's a mindset thing.

JOEY. I knowww but it's always good to have a plan B. I've been paying attention to this whole 'buying a house' set-up. It's biiiig money. You got all the different loans you could be taking out. Buying then renting out. The subsidi- subsidi- subsidiaries – something like that. Bare money, trust me.

OMZ. I ain't seeking the dunyā, my brudda. So long as my grandad and Rara are good.

BILAL. For real, the goal's not to make money, it's to be successful.

JOEY kisses his teeth.

JOEY. Can you be successful without money? You think you can just walk into the shop and ask for an Audemars without the P? Listen, when you're doing your thing in the bank, Omz – you're painting your art, I'm doing law – we can come back to endz, buy flats together, then sell them for like fifty thousand each. Minimum. Trust me – we'll be securing that Urus ASAP!

JOEY recites rap lyrics celebrating Lamborghinis. He looks at BILAL to finish the lyrics but, instead of picking up the cue, BILAL stares blankly at JOEY. JOEY finishes the rap himself, reciting the next line.

BILAL. The way you're moving, it's like you're not even on ball.

JOEY. Obviously I'm on ball. I'm just saying it's good to have options.

OMZ. Rah boy. Fifty bags for a flat on endz?

BILAL. Don't listen to this guy. That ain't true. Even I know it's four

hundred thousand minimum.

OMZ. What?!

JOEY. How do you know?

BILAL. My mum and dad went to one of them local meetings.

OMZ. Ay, when you moving Bilal?

BILAL. I don't know yet. I still need to pattern some things...

OMZ. But you're definitely moving?

JOEY. He has to.

OMZ. No, he doesn't.

JOEY. His flats are going down next.

OMZ. So?

JOEY shakes his head.

Pause.

JOEY. I'm just saying if anyone should be making Ps off endz, it's us.

OMZ. 'Making Ps off endz'? If anything, you're supposed to be giving Ps back to endz.

JOEY. Giving back? This is why I'm predicted a seven in business and you're predicted a six.

OMZ. Whatever man, if people gave back to Reedbury in the first place, then they wouldn't be renewing it. But nobody put P back in the endz, nobody took care of it, so it's getting patterned now.

JOEY. It's not the people that need to be putting P back in endz. Do you know how much money the government and all them organisations have? Trust me. I heard my mum talking about it.

BILAL. I heard your mum talking about that as well actually... in fact, if you listen closely...

JOEY. You're both not serious guys.

BILAL laughs.

OMZ. Come we play pounds.

JOEY (*excitedly*). Come!

JOEY and OMZ take out pound coins each and stand in front of a wall in Red Pitch. As they are setting up to play 'pounds' (penny up

Scene Four

OMZ is in Red Pitch alone. He is visibly agitated whilst he does exercises without the ball (explosive sprints, high-knees, sidesteps). He rests. After a moment, he returns to doing exercises. Finally, BILAL and JOEY arrive with their rucksacks on and with BILAL's ball. They ritualistically double-tap the cage upon entry.

BILAL. Wagwarn.

OMZ. You man got here quick. Pass.

BILAL. Bro, what happened?

OMZ kisses his teeth.

OMZ. What do you mean what happened?

BILAL. Are you gonna apologise to coach?

OMZ. Apologise? For what?

BILAL. Bro, you violated.

JOEY. You sent for him differently.

OMZ. He sent for me. How can he be making me run laps for that long? Is he mad?

JOEY. He does it all the time. If you're late to training, he makes you run laps.

OMZ. For that long?

JOEY. But you were an hour late though.

OMZ. Fifty minutes.

JOEY. Bro. Listen, if you want, you can just use my phone to dial –

OMZ. I ain't calling him, Joey. He should apologise to me.

JOEY. Coach said he's taking your name off the list for trials.

OMZ. Why?

BILAL. What do you mean why? You stormed out of training. And it looked like you were 'bout to scrap him.

OMZ. He came in my face init. (*Beat.*) I don't even care.

BILAL. Why you capping for, Omz? It's QPR trials. That's a sick team. You can bad that up, put in that transfer request to Arsenal, then be killing it there. (*Trying to force a laugh out of OMZ.*) Obviously, I'll be 'drop, drop' shouldering at Man United, so we'll be collecting all the trophies but you can still be a club legend.

JOEY (*also trying to force a laugh out of OMZ*). Na, na, it'll be Chelsea winning that silverware bro. Me with them golden gloves.

BILAL. Let's not talk about teams that buy leagues. See what I'm saying though, Omz? Imagine... All of us... for our teams... that's gonna be lit.

OMZ. Yo, Joey's farewell match. Come we play.

BILAL. Bro, you're gonna throw it away over something petty? We could be securing that bag as well.

JOEY. That's true. You don't even have a plan B. That's why I was saying we should buy houses –

OMZ. Don't start all that Joey.

JOEY. Bro, I don't want you to be broke.

BILAL. Yeah, he won't be 'cause he's gonna be a baller.

OMZ. You're telling me what I'm gonna do with my own life? Come out of here man. Are we doing your match or not?

BILAL. I'm not telling you what to do with your life. I'm just saying ball is what we're *meant* to do. Together. Do you get it? How long have we been waiting for a chance like this to come up? Now we have it, don't throw it away over something petty.

OMZ. Fam, you lot are getting on my nerves.

BILAL. Doesn't the Prophet speak about forgiveness?

JOEY. The Bible says, don't let the sun go down on your wrath.

Pause.

OMZ. How did you lot get back so quick?

BILAL. Omz –

JOEY (*interrupting*). Sandra.

OMZ. Reedbury Sandra?

JOEY. She saw us at the bus stop, pulled up on us, and was like – (*Cockney accent.*) 'Get in.'

BILAL. Sandra's calm man.

JOEY. 'Blimey!' That's all she kept saying, 'Blimey, look at how big you boys have gotten. Blimey.' (*Beat.*) Oh yeah, she said to round up the lads from the area too, they're trying to close down Esme's dry cleaner's, Sandy's coming back to protest and she's saying we should come through. She'll bring her cakes to the protest as well – Ay, Sandy's got her own cake shop, you know. She's killing it!

OMZ. Lit.

Beat.

BILAL. Listen man, I'll tell coach you said sorry.

OMZ. Don't get involved.

BILAL. My dad's even trying to become an agent. He could sort out contracts for us. Everything is patterned Omz.

OMZ. For him to pressure me? I'm good.

BILAL. Pressure?

Beat.

OMZ. Joey, go in goal.

BILAL. Omz, I'm thinking 'bout the long term. 'Success comes after tears', remember? You have to make it or else all this work you've been putting in... it counts for nothing. Absolutely nothing. And there's so many people counting on you as well. You've got Rahim, your grandad.

JOEY. It's true, and then if you don't come, you *have* to start thinking 'bout what you're doing after college, like what uni you're going to. Can't just expect things to be calm. You have to do the resear–

BILAL. He's going to trials and he's getting in, Joey – Just 'llow all that. (*To OMZ.*) Fix up bruv, what's wrong with you? Stop being petty.

OMZ. I'M NOT BEING PETTY! I was helping my climb the stairs after his GP appointment... it's not easy to get to the fifth floor when you're eighty-one. That's why I was late yeah!

A moment, BILAL and JOEY do not know what to say. OMZ storms out, but still ritualistically double-tapping the cage.

JOEY. I feel bad, still.

BILAL *sighs*.

I asked him, he said his grandad was cool, just getting older. Coach would 'llow him if he tells him.

BILAL *sighs and shrugs*.

He should've just shouted my mum for help. She could've taken his grandad GP.

BILAL. You know Omz is stubborn.

JOEY. There's that but also... he's probably getting used to doing things one man up.

Pause.

BILAL. He'll be fine. I don't think I've ever seen Omz cry.

The construction soundscape rises in volume momentarily and then returns to normal.

JOEY. Have your parents found a new spot, yet?

BILAL *shrugs*.

Bro, you need to pay attention to what's going on. All you know is football.

BILAL. Ah leave it Joey. We got trials on Sunday, obviously football is the focus.

JOEY. Yeah, but if you don't find a spot, they'll just move you out into the / sticks.

BILAL. I don't care about all that. When I get in at trials, my money will take care of everything.

JOEY. So you do wanna be rich then?

BILAL. I wanna be successful, like I said.

JOEY. I'm just saying you have to get on that bro, or at least get your parents to get on / that.

BILAL. I have! I am. There's this online thing you have to do. My parents don't know what they're doing so I'm looking into it.

JOEY. What do you mean 'looking into it'? Get professional support if your parents are struggling to use the internet. You have to go to the right people to help you from early or you're gonna get left / behind.

BILAL. Just leave it Joey!!... Leave it.

Silence. BILAL goes off to do some ball work whilst JOEY goes on his phone, browsing. After a moment BILAL takes in his surroundings. He gets out his phone and starts taking pictures of the pitch, the rusting goals, the hole in the AstroTurf, blood on the wall. JOEY notices.

being blocked by BERNARD. QUEENIE *is in the middle of the room.*

BERNARD. No!

QUEENIE. Bernard...

BERNARD. I have said no. (*To VOLUNTEER.*) Let go of it!

QUEENIE. But, Bernard, we'll get it back. We're just lending it. It's doing nothing upstairs, just sitting in those rooms covered in newspaper. It's a couple of beds, a table and four...

The VOLUNTEERS try to move towards the door again.

BERNARD. No! Stop! Let... go!

QUEENIE. Oh, for goodness' sake! It's just for a few months. They'll give it back...

BERNARD. Who will? Who?

QUEENIE. Dora and her family – Mrs Palmer. They came into the rest centre. They've been bombed out and...

BERNARD. Oh for... No!

QUEENIE. Her husband's in the hospital. They've been given a flat but they haven't got a stick of...

BERNARD. Are they our sort of people?

QUEENIE. What do you...?

BERNARD. Are they? Or are they like that last bunch you dragged in here trying to help with their... lice-ridden children and...

QUEENIE. Oh, we'd all be lice-ridden if we'd been bombed out in the East End...

BERNARD. We most certainly would not!

QUEENIE (*to audience*). To be honest, I'm actually enjoying this. This is the most lively Bernard's been since I married him – since I met him. If only I'd known it takes furniture to get him going.
(*Watching him.*) Look at him. He's so furious that the vein in his temple that annoys me when he eats is pumping away like it's got a heart of its own.

QUEENIE *suddenly grabs a chair, provocatively, and hands it to a* VOLUNTEER –

(*To VOLUNTEER.*) Take it to the van.

BERNARD. No! (*To VOLUNTEERS.*) Put that down! You will not take it. I have said no!

QUEENIE (*to audience*). How did I end up here? In this lanky house in Earl's Court, married to a fella I've as much in common with as a creature from another planet? It's not what I imagined for myself. But then again, I don't come from a place where you do much imagining. Growing up, I knew just one thing – that I didn't want to spend my whole life on that stinking farm, with my dad butchering the animals in the shed, helping my mother with the meat pies, swilling out the blood from my brothers' overalls. Maid of all drudgery, that was me.

I'll tell you the story of my deliverance. It came in an unlikely form.

Enter AUNTIE DOROTHY, a large, titivated woman, and MR AND MRS BUXTON – QUEENIE's parents. QUEENIE goes to join them in the farmhouse kitchen.

DOROTHY. The shop's getting too much for me now that my poor dear Montgomery's gone. It's very difficult when you've been treated like a princess for twenty-five years, to find yourself alone again and with everything to do. It's a nice little earner, mind. And I do newspapers now as well as the sweets and tobacco. But I can't cope with being on my feet all day. Not with my bunions as they are...

MRS BUXTON. You should try wearing proper shoes, Dot. I've always said so.

DOROTHY. So I've been thinking about taking on a shop assistant. I did start looking for someone locally, but then I thought – what about my niece, Queenie?

There is a shocked silence.

I wonder if she might like to come and live in London for a while and help her poor auntie out?

MR BUXTON. You what?

QUEENIE. Me?

DOROTHY. I'd pay you a small wage as well as your board and lodging. We'd have to sort you out with some pretty clothes to wear. Do you always dress like that?

MR BUXTON. She's been cleaning out the chicken sheds. What else is she supposed to wear?

QUEENIE. I have got one nice dress – my Sunday dress.

DOROTHY. Well, we could go on a little shopping expedition to Oxford Street. Ooh, I would enjoy that.

QUEENIE (*transported*). So would I.

MR BUXTON. Now just a minute. We need her here.

MRS BUXTON. It's the pies you see. She's up helping me at dawn and we've to work fast if we're to...

QUEENIE. But couldn't you get someone from the village? A miner's daughter like you did when I was little...

MRS BUXTON. Oh, you know what they're like. They never put the jelly in right. I've always to be watching them and...

QUEENIE. Mum, please. You know I don't like working on the farm. I wish I did but...

MR BUXTON. I should have seen this coming. Ever since you announced that you're a vegetarian.

QUEENIE. I am a vegetarian.

MR BUXTON. Have you ever heard the like? Queenie Bee – our meat's not good enough for the likes of her.

MRS BUXTON. Now then. She didn't say that.

MR BUXTON (*to* QUEENIE). You're a butcher's daughter, from a long line of butchers. It's supposed to be in your blood!

QUEENIE. Well, it's not in my blood!

Pause.

DOROTHY. Oh, dear. I can see I've put the cat amongst the pigeons.

QUEENIE. You haven't. You haven't, Auntie.

Mum. Dad. Please.

Two weeks later. A fitting room in a department store, Oxford Street. QUEENIE is behind a screen with a shop assistant, putting on new clothes. DOROTHY is sitting on a chair on the other side of the screen, eating coconut ice from a paper bag.

DOROTHY. Are you going to show me?

QUEENIE. Almost there.

QUEENIE steps out from behind the screen. She's wearing a yellow cardigan over a floral dress.

DOROTHY. Oh! Oh, you do scrub up well. I knew you would. Yellow's definitely your colour.

QUEENIE. Is it?

DOROTHY. Oh, yes. Turn round.

DOROTHY. Oh, yes. Turn round.

QUEENIE *does so*.

Yes. (*To the ASSISTANT.*) We'll take both. And we'll take a cardigan in pink as well.

QUEENIE. Are you sure, Auntie?

DOROTHY. Quite sure. You look a proper confection. Leave them on. We'll go and have cake to celebrate.

I can see I'm going to have to be careful with you. I shall lose you as soon as I've found you. You'll be snapped up by some lucky young admirer.

QUEENIE (*embarrassed*). Auntie.

DOROTHY. You will, you know. You'd like that, wouldn't you? A nice young gentleman to walk out with?

Later. QUEENIE's room above the shop. QUEENIE stands in front of a dressing table with three mirrors.

QUEENIE (*to audience*). It turned out I would. Once I'd made my escape I found myself thinking about all sorts of possibilities in that department. I knew what went on of course – you can't grow up on a farm and not know. I'd even been asked out once or twice by some snotty-nosed miners' lads who I'd laughed at. But I'd been to the pictures too. I'd seen those movie stars with beautiful powdered faces and glossy curls. I knew there was such a thing as romance. What if that could happen to me? What if I could be adored, pursued? I could get married, have a home of my own, have babies. Babies. When my brothers were very little it'd been my job to look after them. I can still remember how they felt in my arms, the warmth of them, the softness of their little necks and hands.

QUEENIE *looks at her reflection in the mirrors, repositioning them for a better view.*

I had a proper bedroom at Auntie's house – in the rooms above the shop. I had a dressing table. I could see hundreds of Queenies – pretty, grown-up. (*Amazed.*) This was me.

A week later. The shop. QUEENIE goes to stand behind the counter.

The first time Bernard came into the shop, I hardly noticed him.

QUEENIE *is serving a YOUNG MAN when BERNARD enters. He is wearing his gaberdine coat and hat.*

YOUNG MAN. Go on – I'll take two ounces of Cherry Lips as well.

QUEENIE *reaches for the jar of Cherry Lips from the shelf. The YOUNG MAN makes a show of watching her skirt ride up slightly at the back. He winks at BERNARD, who looks away quickly.*
QUEENIE *weighs out the sweets and puts them in a bag.*

(To QUEENIE.) I bet your lips taste like cherries.

QUEENIE. You're not likely to find out.

YOUNG MAN. You're new here, aren't you? What's your name? Let me guess – 'Sugarbaby'? 'Sweetheart'? Get it?

QUEENIE. It's Queenie.

YOUNG MAN. Queenie! Well, if you ever need a handsome prince to sweep you off your feet, I'm your man. See ya.

The YOUNG MAN leaves. BERNARD steps forward, shyly.

QUEENIE. How can I help you?

BERNARD. I was... I'm looking for *The...*

QUEENIE. *The Times?*

BERNARD (*blushing*). Yes. Yes, thank you. I will take *The Times*.

She hands it to him and he gives her the money.

QUEENIE. Thank you.

BERNARD. Good day.

QUEENIE. Good day.

BERNARD *leaves. DOROTHY appears from the room behind the shop.*

DOROTHY. Did I just hear someone ask for *The Times*?

QUEENIE. Yes.

DOROTHY. Ooh! That'll be a proper gentleman then. No spivs or cockneys ever read *The Times*. What did he look like?

QUEENIE. Er... Tall. Skinny. Not bad looking.

DOROTHY. Ooh! We shall have to watch out for him! Fetch me some more coconut ice, will you?

QUEENIE (*to audience*). The second time he came in...

The following morning. QUEENIE is behind the counter when BERNARD enters.

BERNARD (*tipping his hat*). Good morning.

QUEENIE. Good morning. *The Times*?

BERNARD. Yes. Thank you.

QUEENIE *gives him the paper*.

Rather inclement for the time of year.

QUEENIE. What's that?

BERNARD (*blushing*). The weather – rather cloudy.

QUEENIE. Oh. Yes. It is.

He gives her the money.

Thank you.

BERNARD. Good day.

QUEENIE. Good day.

BERNARD *leaves*.

(*To audience.*) The third time he came in, he just came straight out with it – like he'd been practising.

BERNARD *enters*.

BERNARD. I wonder if you would care to come for a walk with me tomorrow afternoon. In the park. I've been assured it's to be a lovely day.

QUEENIE *is shocked and speechless for a moment*.

DOROTHY (*from back room*). Yes!

BERNARD. Good. I'll call for you at one.

He turns to leave then stops, emboldened.

I'm sorry, but I don't believe we've ever been introduced. Bernard Bligh.

QUEENIE. My name's...

BERNARD. Queenie. Yes. I know. Good day.

QUEENIE. Good day.

The following afternoon. QUEENIE and BERNARD sit down on a park bench. They are silent for a moment. QUEENIE takes a paper bag from her pocket and holds it out to him –

Liquorice?

BERNARD. Oh. (*Taking a piece.*) Thank you.

QUEENIE *watches him eat from the corner of her eye.*

QUEENIE (*to audience*). There's that vein in his temple. Why does it have to move around like that? Like a worm under his skin.

(*To BERNARD.*) Do you live close by?

BERNARD. About fifteen minutes' walk – (*Pointing.*) in that direction. Nevern Street.

Pause.

QUEENIE. Where do you work?

BERNARD. Lloyd's Bank. Clerk.

QUEENIE. Do you like it?

BERNARD. It's a solid job. Some prospects, I like to think.

Pause.

QUEENIE. Do you live on your own?

BERNARD. With my father. He was in the Great War. He's... He has what they call 'shell shock'.

QUEENIE. Oh, dear. Shame. My dad tried to sign up but they wouldn't have him. Weak heart.

BERNARD *nods slightly. Pause.*

(*To audience.*) They say 'Silence is Golden', but this one was in danger of being burnt to a crisp.

(*To BERNARD.*) I grew up on a farm. In Lincolnshire...

BERNARD. Oh.

QUEENIE (*to audience*). I ended up telling him anything and everything I could think of, nattering away until it was time to go home.

They stand, and walk back to the shop.

BERNARD (*tipping his hat*). Thank you. May I call for you on Sunday? Around two?

QUEENIE. Yes. If you like.

Some weeks later, QUEENIE is in the shop with DOROTHY.

But he never says anything. Except about the weather. It's been over two months now and I hardly know anything about him.

DOROTHY. He's reserved. That's a sure sign of him being a gentleman. Does he open doors for you?

QUEENIE. Yes.

DOROTHY. Does he walk on the outside of you when you're going down the road?

QUEENIE. Yes.

DOROTHY. That's so you don't get splashed by a carriage.

QUEENIE. When did you last get splashed by a carriage? He's odd. You should see him when he's counting out his money to pay for tea – checking each coin, putting them down in little piles. It's like he's backward.

DOROTHY. Oh, don't be daft. You've found yourself a little gem, Queenie. You'll be safe as houses with him.

QUEENIE. You don't think we're courting, do you?

DOROTHY. Of course you're courting!

QUEENIE. But... I thought... Don't people get all dreamy when they're courting?

DOROTHY. Oh, you don't want to bother with any of that.

QUEENIE. I don't know. I don't know. It doesn't feel right.

The following day. QUEENIE and BERNARD are sitting in the cinema together. All around them, young couples are kissing and fondling each other. On the screen, a glamorous couple is kissing passionately in the last scene of the film. Sweeping music as the film finishes. The lights come up and QUEENIE and BERNARD sit awkwardly as the couples around them gradually extricate themselves from each other and straighten their clothes before starting to leave.

Bernard... I've enjoyed our little outings but I don't think we should see each other any more.

He looks at her, shocked. Then his face collapses and his lip starts to quiver.

BERNARD. No, Queenie, please don't say that. This... this means a lot to me.

QUEENIE. Oh. I didn't think you'd be upset...

BERNARD. I really am very fond of you. I know I'm older than you and perhaps not as lively as you'd like. But over these months...

He turns away, overcome.

QUEENIE. It's just...

BERNARD (*suddenly taking hold of her hand*). Please, please don't say any more. Just give me another chance. I was hoping to persuade you that... that we should get engaged.

Pause.

QUEENIE. Oh. Well... It's something to think about perhaps. Well. Never mind then. I'll see you again on Thursday.

She stands. He stands immediately.

BERNARD. Yes. Thursday. Thank you.

He suddenly kisses her on the cheek – a pecky sort of kiss.

QUEENIE (*to audience*). In the end it was a tragedy that brought things to a head.

In the shop, DOROTHY falls down dead.

A week later, it's DOROTHY's funeral. MR BUXTON and other family members carry the coffin containing DOROTHY to the graveyard. BERNARD joins them, putting his shoulder under the coffin to help bear the heavy weight.

QUEENIE and MRS BUXTON look on as the men put the coffin down.

MRS BUXTON. Eh, dear. Death by coconut ice.

QUEENIE. Yes.

MRS BUXTON. I suppose that's it now then. The shop'll be sold.

Never mind – you can come back home now. There's plenty for you to do around the farm.

QUEENIE. What? Not on your nelly, Mother.

MRS BUXTON. But...

QUEENIE. No.

She looks at where BERNARD is now shaking hands with MR BUXTON – like a regular man.

Actually, I've some good news for you. I'm getting married, Mother. To Bernard Bligh.

Six weeks later. QUEENIE and BERNARD enter the front room of his house in Nevern Street. BERNARD is carrying QUEENIE's large suitcase. ARTHUR, BERNARD's father, is sitting by the fireplace. He stands and walks towards QUEENIE.

BERNARD. Queenie, this is my father – Arthur.

ARTHUR holds his hand out shyly and they shake hands.

QUEENIE. Hello. It's very nice to meet you at last.

ARTHUR brings her a chair. She smiles and sits down.

Thank you.

Pause. QUEENIE takes in the room, which is dingy and unloved.

It's a big place you've got here.

BERNARD. Three stories. But we only use four rooms. Since Mother died.

QUEENIE. When was that?

BERNARD. Fifteen years ago.

QUEENIE. Well, perhaps we can open things up a bit...

BERNARD. I'm not sure about...

QUEENIE. I could give the whole place a clean from top to bottom. Get some more light in. I think we could make it proper grand.

BERNARD. Father, would you put the kettle on?

ARTHUR exits to the kitchen.

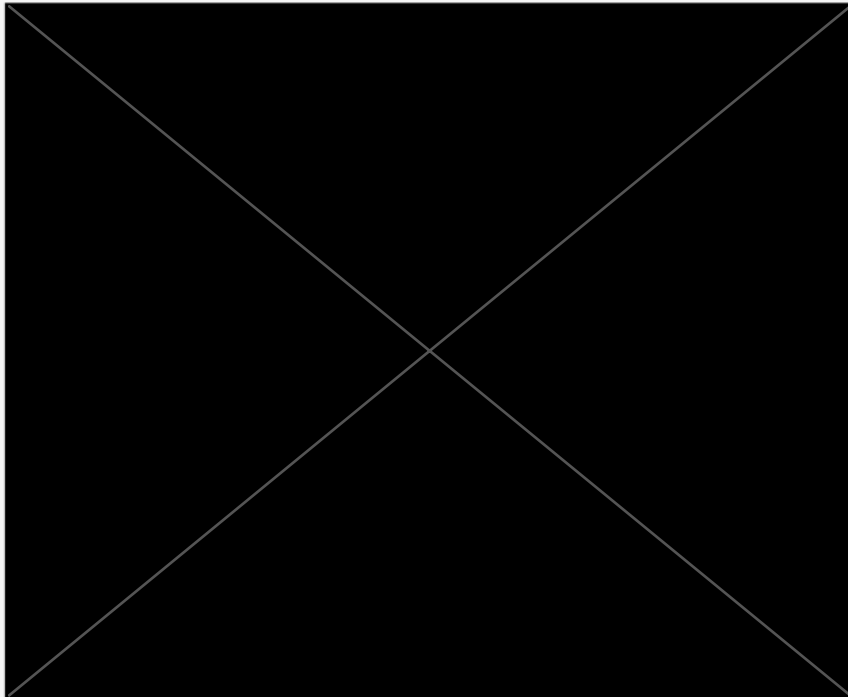
Queenie, before we go upstairs... I've rather made an assumption that we'll be sleeping in the same bed. I hope...

QUEENIE. Oh, yes. Yes. That's fine.

BERNARD. Queenie, I probably should have said this before we got married, but... I would like children.

QUEENIE. Yes. Good. So would I.

He smiles. He pats her on the shoulder.



The front room, Nevern Street. We are back where we began. The VOLUNTEERS still have hold of the bedstead.

BERNARD. Queenie! Are you listening to me?

QUEENIE. Yes.

BERNARD. It isn't even our furniture to give away. My mother and father bought that furniture. Some of it's even handed down from...

QUEENIE. Right. Right. Let's ask Arthur, shall we – see what *he* thinks. (*Calling.*) Arthur! Arthur, can you come here?

BERNARD. Oh, don't be... you know he can't say...

QUEENIE. Course he can. He's not daft.

ARTHUR enters from the kitchen. QUEENIE and BERNARD speak over one another –

Arthur, there's a family at the Rest Centre...

BERNARD. She has no idea what they'll do with it...

QUEENIE....who have absolutely nothing. Lost it all in a bomb. Can we lend them a bed or two...

BERNARD....And she knows nothing about these people.

QUEENIE. A chair to sit down on. They've got kids, Arthur. Can we?

ARTHUR nods decisively.

Good. Right. (*To VOLUNTEERS.*) Take it to the van please.

The VOLUNTEERS carry the bedstead out. BERNARD is quiet for a moment, profoundly disturbed.

BERNARD. I want something in writing. A contract.

QUEENIE. Oh, for goodness' sake.

BERNARD. You're too trusting. You can't help everyone. Isn't it enough that you're working at that Rest Centre day and night? You're worn out...

QUEENIE. There's a war on, Bernard.

BERNARD. I am aware of that.

QUEENIE. Are you? Because there's thousands of people out there having much more of a war than you are.

Silence. BERNARD looks like he's been slapped. He turns away.

QUEENIE regrets what she's said –

Look... Bernard...

The air-raid siren suddenly begins to wail loudly.

Oh, no! No! (*Shouting upwards.*) Could you not just give it a rest for one night?!

ARTHUR has begun to shake all over.

BERNARD (*looking around*). Where's his gas mask?

QUEENIE. It's all right, Arthur.

The planes are heard overhead.

BERNARD. We have to go to the shelter, Father.

QUEENIE. They're coming already. What sort of a warning's that?

ARTHUR has dived under the table. BERNARD goes to pull him out.

BERNARD. Father!

QUEENIE. It's too late. Forget the shelter.

BERNARD. No. He has to...

QUEENIE. Just get down, will you?

QUEENIE and BERNARD scramble under the table next to ARTHUR, as the noise of the planes grows louder.

BERNARD. We should go to the shelter.

QUEENIE. They're close by.

BERNARD. Oh, God. Oh, God.

Terrified, BERNARD begins to tremble. Suddenly there is a tremendous whistling sound.

QUEENIE. Oh, no!

There is a huge, deafening explosion. ARTHUR curls up into a tiny ball. BERNARD just manages to cling onto the leg of the table.

QUEENIE is thrown backwards by the blast, banging her head on the floor. Pieces of debris begin to rain down onto the roof of the house. Slowly, QUEENIE manages to sit up, dizzy and shocked.

BERNARD (*shaking*). That was the roof. Oh, God...

QUEENIE. I don't think it was us.

BERNARD. The whole thing's going to come down. It's going to come down...

QUEENIE. It's all right, Bernard. It's all right. I'll go and look...

She starts to move but BERNARD suddenly grabs her and pulls her back to him, holding her tightly.

BERNARD. No! No. No. No. Not you. Not you. Never. Never. Never you.

The sound of the falling debris gradually stops. BERNARD gradually loosens his grasp on QUEENIE.

QUEENIE. It was close but I'm sure it wasn't us. It wasn't us. It's all right. (*Stroking his head.*) There, there. There, there.

BERNARD manages to breathe. He fights back tears. QUEENIE crawls out from under the table. She stands, shakily, and makes her way to the window. She lifts a corner of the blackout curtain and peers out.

BERNARD. I want you to know, Queenie – I do love you.

QUEENIE *looks back at him, astonished. This is the first time he's said that. She watches him as he goes to ARTHUR and helps him up from the floor.*

Three days later. The Rest Centre. There are desperate people everywhere, waiting to be seen. One of QUEENIE's colleagues, FRANNY, approaches her –

FRANNY. Here – have some PC3s.

QUEENIE. I'm that tired I don't know if I'm coming or going. (*Of the people waiting.*) Look at them all.

FRANNY. Best not. Just look at the next one in front of you. Oh, I've got a favour to ask – didn't you say you've some spare rooms in your house?

QUEENIE. Yes, but...

FRANNY. Could you put a flight crew up for a couple of nights? End of next week? It's just three of them. My sister's sweet on one of them and if they stay locally...

QUEENIE. Franny, I can't. Bernard won't have it...

FRANNY. They're none of your rubbish. Proper flyers. 103 Squadron Lancasters. They've only got three days' leave...

QUEENIE. I'm sorry. You know I would if I could.

FRANNY. Ah, well. Worth a try.

BERNARD enters. QUEENIE sees him at once and looks surprised. She leaves FRANNY and goes to BERNARD.

QUEENIE. What are you doing here? Is something wrong? It's not Arthur, is it?

BERNARD. No. But I need to speak to you. And you didn't come home last night, or the night before so...

QUEENIE. Sorry. It just wasn't worth trying to get back. We've been that busy. And with the streets as they are...

BERNARD. I've signed up.

Pause. QUEENIE is shocked.

RAF. Boys in blue.

QUEENIE. Oh. Is this because of what I said the other day? I didn't...

BERNARD. You were right. Can't leave it any longer. Have to do my bit.

QUEENIE. But... are you not too old?

BERNARD. Apparently not. Keen to have me. Won't be flying of course – eyesight. But I go up to Skegness for basic training. Then I'll be shipped out.

QUEENIE. When?

BERNARD. Tomorrow morning.

So, you'll come home tonight?

QUEENIE. Yes.

BERNARD. Good.

BERNARD *leaves*.

The following morning. The sitting room, Nevern Street.

QUEENIE *watches as BERNARD fastens his coat.*

QUEENIE. I wonder where you'll be sent.

You will write?

BERNARD. Of course.

About Father... I know it's a lot to ask...

QUEENIE. It's fine. We'll be fine. You'll be back before we know it.

She suddenly takes his hand. For a moment, she feels she will cry.

They look down at their clasped hands, unable to say anything.

ARTHUR *enters*. BERNARD *picks up his bag*.

BERNARD. Right.

He goes to ARTHUR and shakes his hand.

Goodbye, Father.

ARTHUR *nods sadly*. BERNARD *goes to QUEENIE and pecks her on the cheek*.

Goodbye.

QUEENIE. Bye, then.

BERNARD *leaves*. QUEENIE *notices that ARTHUR is crying* –

Look on the bright side, Arthur – he's that thin the enemy'll have a job to hit him. Especially if he turns sideways.

ARTHUR *suddenly laughs, silently*.

That's tickled you, has it? Come on. Let's get the kettle on.