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SF PERUSALS

On The Verge

A Farcical Comedy

Peter Horsler

Samuel French—London
New York-Sydney-Toronto-Hollywood



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On the Verge

The premiere of this play was given by the Clacton Amateur Dramatic Society at the Westcliff Theatre, under the direction of John Gordon Ash.

Characters -

Bill Flack
Dora Day
Teresa Day, her daughter
Lily Flack, Bill's wife
Gerald Turner
Lionel Flack, Bill's son
Ruth Hill
Debbie Martin
Tom Day
Alison Turner

The action takes place in Bill Flack's cottage, somewhere in the country

ACT I	Scene 1	8 p.m. on a Friday evening in late August
	Scene 2	10 p.m. the same evening
ACT II	Scene 1	11 a.m. Saturday morning
	Scene 2	8 p.m. the same day
	Scene 3	Three hours later

Time—the present

Note On The Set

The play is set on the ground floor of a cottage with a visible bedroom on the first floor (see photograph of set). Although this visible bedroom adds greatly to the play it is not essential to the action and can be dispensed with if staging facilities will not permit its inclusion. Minor amendments have been included in the script to accommodate this change.

The script has been treated throughout (as regards lighting plots, etc.) as though the inset bedroom has been included in the set.

ACT I

SCENE 1

Bill Flack's cottage somewhere in the country. 8 p.m. on a Friday in late August

The cottage is rather dilapidated, and looks as if it has been well lived in. The ground floor is all in one room. To one side is the front door, which opens directly on to an overgrown garden: this can also be seen through a window set above the door. A boarded door at the back of the room opens on to the stairs, which lead up to a visible practical bedroom containing one small single bed. Below the visible bedroom is a recess where a dresser stands. On the other side of the stairs door is a recessed kitchen with a raised floor where there is a stone sink, together with a few shelves and a kitchen range. There is a small window to the side of this kitchen area, and a back door just below the raised area that leads directly to the outside. Below this door is a small Victorian fireplace with a mirror above it. Furniture consists of an old armchair, a large dilapidated sofa and a kitchen table with three chairs set around it

When the Curtain rises, all the cottage doors are open and Bill Flack is peering out of the front door, obviously expecting someone. He turns impatiently and stomps up to shout up the stairs

Flack Dora, what you at, gal? Bin up there hours, you have!

Dora (*off*) Ain't bin more than five minutes, Bill Flack! Lived in this cottage twenty years I has, so what's yer hurry?

Flack You want Lionel ter run yer down the village in the Land Rover don't yer? Well, he ain't got all day. I got work for him ter do.

Dora emerges from the stairs door, carrying two cases and a small parcel

Dora All right, all right, keep yer hair on. (*Shouting back up the stairs*) Teresa, look under the bed, gal, ain't left no shoes have I?

Teresa (*off*) Already done it, Mum, ain't nothing.

Dora If you was half a man, Bill Flack, you'd carry summat, 'stead a letting me lug me arm off.

Flack (*taking the small parcel*) Give it here then, *gal, never asked yer ter* move ter no council house, did I? (*Shoving her towards the back door*) Beats me why yer done it.

Dora Do it now? Well, you try living with no electricity, no water, bloomin' miles from nowhere when you ain't got a car and see how you like it. (*Moving back to shout up the stairs again*) Teresa! (*Turning to Flack again*) 'Nother thing, Bill Flack, you reckon as how you don't have ter pay my Tom more than a boy's wage 'cause he's living in your cottage. (*Shouting and moving above and round the table checking on what is left*) Teresa,

come on, gal! What's keeping yer? (*To Flack*) Think he's frit ter move, don't yer?

Flack Give over gabbin', woman, you're worse than my old Lil, you are.

Teresa emerges from the stairs with another case

Teresa (*crossing towards the back door*) Couldn't get it shut no how, rusted up it were.

Dora Now are there anything else I oughter take?

Flack Strike me, woman, had enough time ter think on it ain't yer?

Teresa Got enough ter carry, Mum, ain't we? Uncle Bill said as how dad can borrer the tractor and trailer.

Flack (*going to Dora and moving her towards the back door*) Going are yer, 'cause I ain't waiting no longer?

Dora Don't you shove me, Bill Flack! (*To Teresa*) Reckons as how we're a couple of his old sheep, gal.

Flack ushers Teresa and Dora out

Flack (*shouting after them*) And tell Lionel not ter mess about! Teresa, don't you hang round him, gal, I want him straight back here! (*He slams the door and dashes across to the front door where he stands beckoning to someone off*) Come on, gal! It's past eight already!

Lily Flack enters, red in the face, panting and carrying a pile of sheets and blankets

Lily (*moving to the stairs door*) Doing me best, Bill, ain't I? Near run all the way up from the farm I has; blowed as an old sheep in clover, I are.

The Land Rover starts up and fades away

Got them off then. I don't reckon as how Dora wanted ter go when it come to it.

Flack (*peering out of the front window*) Don't start gabbin' now, woman, you gotter get them beds done!

Lily Doing me best, ain't I? Your fault, you shouldn't have let the cottage by rights when Dora'd paid ter the end of the month.

Flack Thought she was going this morning, didn't I, silly old boot. Fancy moving house at this time.

Lily Wan't ter know you was going ter let it was she?

A car draws up outside

Flack (*pushing Lily up the stairs*) That'll be them. Now see what you've done with yer old yacking. Go on, fix up them beds!

Lily disappears upstairs

Flack closes the stairs door and rushes around, making sure the Days have not left anything

Lily enters the bedroom and starts making the bed

There is a knock on the front door. With a last glance round, Flack goes and opens it

Gerald Turner and Ruth Hill are standing there. She is carrying two suitcases and Gerald clutches two cardboard boxes to his chest, one holding wine and the other food

Gerald Hello, Mr Flack, you did say about eight, didn't you? May we come in?

Flack Oh-ar, help yerself, Mr Turner.

Gerald enters and moves above the table, where he dumps his boxes. Ruth drops the suitcases just inside the door and follows Gerald across. Flack closes the door

Gerald Oh, Ruth, this is Mr Flack who's rented us the cottage (*To Flack*) I've been telling Miss Hill how much I enjoyed my stay on your farm last summer.

Flack Ooh-ar.

Ruth How do you do.

Gerald Miss Hill is a librarian at the college where I work but this weekend she's acting as my secretary.

Flack (*looking her up and down*) Ooh-ah, secretary is she?

Gerald (*to Ruth*) Well, what do you think?

Ruth (*looking round*) It's not quite ...

Flack Ain't a lot; never said it were much.

Gerald Anyway, it's the genuine thing, eh Ruth? Earthy, lived in.

Flack Lived in all right, still blinking warm.

Gerald Genuine, Ruth, everything's genuine.

Ruth Genuine what?

Gerald Life, rustic life, reeks of it.

Flack (*sniffing*) Don't stink do it? Old Tom's me stockman but he washes regular and Dora wouldn't let him in till he took his boots off.

Ruth Tom? Dora? Is this their cottage then?

Flack Not now, it ain't. Gone and moved to a council house, they has.

Gerald Imagine anyone preferring a council house to this, Ruth.

Ruth Yes, imagine. They've only recently moved then, Mr Flack?

Flack Oh, fair time back now.

Lily disappears into the other bedroom

Gerald Did I meet them when I was here?

Flack Don't suppose yer did, Mr Turner. Dora don't come down the farm all that much and old Tom would've been helping with the harvest when you was here.

Gerald I remember Debbie.

Flack Ooh-ar, you would an' all.

Ruth Who's Debbie?

Flack She helps Tom with the milking and does a bit on the side—for my old woman.

Gerald Delightful child, I expect she's grown a bit since last year.

Flack Ooh-ar, she has an' all. (*Moving to the stairs door, opening it, and showing stairs*) Well, better show yer what's what, ain't I?

Gerald Good idea.
Flack This here's the stairs. They're a bit narrer, all right though if yer don't rush it.
Ruth There are two bedrooms?
Flack (*looking from one to the other.*) Ooh-ar, 'cause you'll want two, won't yer?
Ruth We will, most certainly, Mr Flack.
Gerald Yes, of course, I certainly don't fancy sleeping on that sofa.
Ruth You're sure the beds are aired, Mr Flack?
Flack Aired? I should say they are, just as if they'd bin slept in last night.
Ruth Oh!
Flack All clean clothes though, Mrs is up there putting them on now. (*Opening the stairs door and shouting up the stairs*) You finished them beds yet, Lil?
Lily (*off*) Shan't be two ticks.
Flack (*waving his arm towards the kitchen area*) That there's the kitchen. Still, 'spect you can work it out fer yerselves. No need fer me ter show yer everything, is there?
Gerald No, I'm sure we can manage.
Flack Right, I'll be off then, got plenty ter do. (*Shouting up the stairs*) Lil! (*To Gerald*) You going Sunday night?
Gerald I'm not sure yet.
Ruth I should be in by nine on Monday. It had better be Sunday night.
Flack Well, suit yerselves. Drop the key at the farm when yer ready.

Lily flings open the stairs door, catching Flack with it

What the hell! 'Ang it woman, can't yer look what yer doing! (*He closes the stair door*)
Lily Hello, Mr Turner, I din't know as how it was you he'd let the place to. Close as the grave, he are.
Gerald Ruth, this is Mrs Flack.
Ruth How do you do.
Lily Please ter met yer, I'm sure.
Flack (*opening the door to usher Lily out*) She's his secretary.
Lily That's nice. Staying long then this time, Mr Turner?
Gerald Only the week-end, I'm afraid.
Lily We could put you up at the farm, if you'd rather.
Ruth Oh, well perhaps...
Gerald (*quickly*) Very kind, Mrs Flack, but we shall get more work done on our own.
Flack We'll let yer get started then. Come on, Lil. (*He drags her towards the front door*)
Lily Anything you want?
Ruth Some fresh milk and eggs would be nice.
Lily Debbie'll bring yer some if she ain't gone, or I'll send Lionel.
Flack Come on, woman!

Flack pushes Lily ahead of him out of the door

Gerald (*moving to Ruth, spinning her round and embracing her*) Ruth darling, its come true at last.

Flack returns

Flack (*by the open door*) 'Ere, you ain't likely ter light a fire are yer?
Gerald (*breaking from Ruth*) What?
Flack (*pointing to the fireplace*) Only there's an old owl nesting in the stack.
Ruth Owl?
Flack Won't hurt yer, miss.
Gerald Of course not. Well, thank you, Mr Flack.
Flack Thought I'd better warn yer like, case yer smoked yerself out.
Gerald I think we'll be warm enough without fires, don't you, Miss Hill?
Flack Ooh-ar, happen yer will. I'll be off then.

Flack exits closing the door

Gerald Now let's dig ourselves in and forget the outside world.
Ruth (*sitting in the armchair*) Trust an archaeologist to talk of digging in.
Gerald (*unpacking the food box and taking out two plates, two wine glasses, two table napkins, two soup bowls and two sets of knives and forks*) Right, darling, now we'll make everything cosy and ...
Ruth (*heaving herself out of the chair*) You'll have a job to make this chair cosy.
Gerald We shan't need that. Try the sofa. Then, when we've got supper ...
Ruth (*sitting on the sofa and placing her shoulder bag beside her*) Supper? You promised a cooked dinner.
Gerald I was just being modest, modest little Gerald, that's me. While it's cooking, we'll go for a little stroll—good for the appetite.

There is a bellow of a bull from the garden

Ruth (*jumping to her feet and running to the fireplace*) Oh, what on earth!
Gerald Hell! Sounded like the minotaur. (*Dashing up to the kitchen window*) I'll have a look.
Ruth It's not loose, is it?
Gerald Can't see anything.
Flack (*off, as if from the garden outside the back door*) Woe, you old bugger you, I'll belt yer nose if I catch yer!

There is another bellow further off

(*Off*) Don't just stand there, Lil, grab his ring!
Gerald (*rushing to the front window*) They're round this side.
Ruth (*pressing herself to the fireplace*) It can't get in here, can it?
Gerald It's only a cow that's broken loose. Oh, hell, old Flack's coming back here. (*He moves to the front door and opens it.*)

Flack falls in

Flack Ah-oop!
Gerald Sorry, thought I'd save you the trouble of knocking.
Flack Knocking? Oh-ar. Thought I'd better come back and warn yer.
Ruth Warn us, oh!

Gerald About a loose cow.
Flack Bull.
Gerald / **Ruth** Bull! *Speaking together*
Flack Can't keep the old sod in no-how.
Gerald You never mentioned a bull when I paid you.
Flack I don't charge for him.
Ruth Does he charge us, that's more to the point.
Flack (*breaking into a slow laugh*) Do he charge yer? That's a good un that is—Hamish charge?
Gerald Hamish?
Flack That's his name. Scottish, Aberdeen Angus, see?
Gerald No.
Flack Gentle as a lamb he are, only I thought I'd better warn yer, he don't like being trod on.
Ruth Trod on! What is he, a midget?
Flack In the dark I mean, if yer goes out.
Ruth (*going to stairs door and disappearing up the stairs*) Don't worry, Mr Flack, nothing will induce me to go outside after sunset.

Ruth goes

Flack (*to Gerald*) Thought as how I'd better let yer know like. Can't have no accidents to me guests can I?
Gerald (*aware that Ruth has gone upstairs, moving pointedly to the front door and inviting Flack to go*) Very thoughtful of you, Mr Flack.
Flack 'Sides, I ain't insured.
Gerald No need to worry about us, I can assure you. We've better things to do than go wandering about in the dark.
Flack Ooh-ar, 'spect you have an' all. Be off then. Pop across ter the farm if there's anything else yer want.
Gerald Nothing but a little peace and quiet, Mr Flack, that's all.

Flack goes out. Gerald closes the door and then rushes up the stairs only to be met by Ruth coming down

Ruth (*pushing past him at the foot of the stairs*) You promised a restful week-end
Gerald (*taking her in his arms and trying to propel her back up the stairs*) But it will be darling, and I hope you haven't forgotten your promise.
Ruth (*pushing him back again*) When the setting's right, I said. (*Moving to the fireplace*) It's a long way off yet.
Gerald (*moving above the table*) It won't be. (*He picks up the food box and goes to the kitchen area, calling to her as he goes*) If you're not too tired, you can lay the table.

Ruth goes to the table, removes the wine box into a chair, and starts to lay the table

(*Emptying the container on the draining-board by the sink*) Do you fancy chops, steak or fish?

Ruth I fancy eating before midnight.

Gerald They're all pre-cooked, darling. We can heat them over a saucepan or in the oven.

Ruth (*pulling out bottle after bottle of wine from the box and placing them on the table*) Were you planning a drunken orgy?

Gerald Not a drunken one, darling, but I thought you'd like some choice. What are we having, meat or fish?

Ruth What's the fish?

Gerald Smoked mackerel, cold salmon or trout cooked.

Ruth The trout would be nice.

Gerald (*picking up a bottle of wine and adopting a foreign accent*) In that case, madam, I recommend this one. (*Reading the label*) *Chateauneuf du pape.*

Ruth Gorgeous.

Gerald (*putting the bottle on the table*) That's settled then. (*Trying to propel her to the stairs door*) Now come and help me choose a bedroom.

Ruth (*crossing below him back to the table*) I'm laying the table and just remember you're here to study an earthwork.

Gerald I am?

Ruth Part of your thesis, I think you said.

Gerald Yes, well I can do that as well.

Ruth As well as what?

Gerald Having a lovely time with you.

Ruth Upstairs, I suppose, choosing a bedroom.

Gerald Or down here on the sofa.

Ruth No, Gerald, I have not come away on a dirty week-end.

Gerald (*feigning shock, and moving to her*) Darling, now be fair. (*Taking her in his arms*) You know I could never think of you like that. I love you for yourself, only yourself, that lovely little self that sometimes overwhelms me.

Ruth (*coolly disengaging*) You really do love me, do you, Gerald?

Gerald (*wrapping his arms round her*) Overwhelmingly.

Ruth (*pushing him away*) And Alison, do you love her?

Gerald Of course I do, only not in the same way.

Ruth In what way then? (*Pushing him towards the sofa*) Go and sit over there and tell me. (*She moves above the table again and continues laying it*)

Gerald (*sitting on the arm of the sofa*) Well, she's important to me of course. I like her company—I'm used to having her around. She's a marvellous cook and—well, we married so young.

Ruth She spoils you, mothers you, does everything for you.

Gerald No—well in a way, I suppose, but she stifles me, won't respond to my romantic spirit. It's being a nurse—she's too damned efficient.

Ruth So you betray her.

Gerald (*rising and moving to the fireplace*) Betray! That's an ugly word to use.

Ruth It's an ugly act.

Gerald (*turning back to her*) I couldn't betray anyone, least of all Alison.

Ruth (*engaging him*) You don't see bringing me to an out-of-the-way cottage in the country with the intention of having your evil way, a betrayal?

Gerald Evil way! (*Laughing and moving to her*) Aren't we a wee bit out of date? (*Taking her arm, pushing her to the sofa and sitting beside her*) Look, come and sit down. Let's talk this thing out. Now, you'd agree that we're not one person but many; that we have different facets to our personalities?

Ruth Yes.

Gerald That we're different people, depending on whom we're with?

Ruth Mmm.

Gerald Well, to be fully alive we need different company so that every facet is stimulated.

Ruth Yes?

Gerald So, there's a side of me that Alison can't touch, can't respond to.

Ruth And that's where I come in?

Gerald Exactly, so you see I need both of you. Love you in different ways.

Ruth Which particular bit loves me?

Gerald (*putting his arm around her*) Darling, need you ask? The deeply passionate side, the emotional, the romantic ...

Ruth (*removing his arm*) In other words, the dirty old man bit.

Gerald (*jumping up and pretending to be deeply hurt*) Hell! Do you have to be so crude? I thought you cared! (*Marching to the table and starting to pack the things back into the box*) I'll take you home.

Ruth follows him up

I hope you've enjoyed your little game. If you must get pleasure from hurting people, I'm delighted to have made you happy. I'm glad! After all, your happiness is everything to me, everything! Everything!

Ruth (*putting back the articles as he continues to remove them*) I'm sorry, Gerald, I didn't mean it. I don't really think of you like that; it's just the mood I'm in after a hard week and that long drive down. Blame this cottage, old Flack, the owl up the chimney and that bull, Hamish. (*Drawing him away*) Come on, let's stay.

Gerald (*taking her hand*) All right, darling, all right, I understand. I know it isn't quite the romantic setting I promised.

Ruth It doesn't matter, really it doesn't.

Gerald (*breaking away and moving back to the table*) We shall never get supper at this rate and we can't go to bed until we have.

Ruth (*yawning*) I could, this minute.

Gerald (*rushing to her and manœuvering her towards the stairs*) Oh, darling, you make me so happy. We'll eat later.

Ruth (*breaking away from him and moving to the table*) No, we won't; I'm also starving. (*Picking up the chosen bottle of wine and thrusting it at him*) You open that, I'll try laying the table again. (*She carries on laying the table*)

Gerald Right, darling. (*He skips up to the sink in the kitchen area with the bottle*) That's funny!

Ruth (*not looking round*) What is?

Gerald There's no tap.

Ruth Don't be silly, there must be.

Gerald (*looking through the window over the sink*) Yes, there is: it's outside.
Ruth Don't be ridiculous, whoever heard ... (*She stops as a terrible thought strikes her*) If the tap's outside, what about ... (*She looks round the room, then dashes to the stairs door and disappears up the stairs*)
Gerald (*returning from the kitchen area*) Well, it is outside. It's what they call a stand-pipe. (*Realizing that she has gone*) Ruth? Ruth, where ... (*Seeing the stairs door open, he moves rapidly to the foot of the stairs*) Don't come down, I ...
Ruth (*pushing past him at the foot of the stairs*) That's it! (*Moving rapidly to the front door*) That is definitely it!
Gerald (*following her down*) I was only joking.
Ruth There's no loo. Do you realize that?
Gerald Yes there is, silly.
Ruth Where then?
Gerald (*drawing her after him into the kitchen area*) Come here! (*Pointing out of the window above the sink*) There you are.
Ruth You don't mean that little barn?
Gerald That's right—with the nettles round the door.
Ruth (*freeing herself and marching down to the front door*) Nettles! Splendid!
Gerald (*dashing after her*) Hold on, no need to panic.
Ruth (*turning on him*) If you think I'm going out there, every time I want to—with nettles up to my ...
Gerald No, of course not.
Ruth Stumbling over a slobbering bull ...
Gerald There won't be any need, darling, there's bound to be a guzzunder.
Ruth A what?
Gerald A potty that goes under the bed.
Ruth (*turning and picking up the cases*) Thank you very much! Good-bye!
Gerald (*going to her and taking the cases*) No, darling, sorry. We'll manage without.
Ruth (*turning and staring at him*) What?
Gerald I mean, we'll be out all day and there are plenty of pubs.
Ruth I shan't dare drink a thing. (*Looking at the wine on the table*) You can pack that lot away for a start.
Gerald (*putting down the cases*) I know it's all been a bit of a shock. I didn't realize—I only saw the place from the outside. (*Indicating the sofa*) Look, sit down for a moment.

Ruth, rather reluctantly, sits

That's better. (*Moving up to the kitchen area*) I'll get us both a drink.
Ruth (*jumping up*) Drink!
Gerald It's all right.

Ruth sits

Then we'll drive down the village after supper and find a pub. (*He takes out a pocket corkscrew and opens the bottle that he had left in the sink*)
Ruth I'm sorry, Gerald, I'm not staying here, spending pennies in a pub miles away.

Gerald (*returning to the table with the bottle*) My fault, darling, I should have checked the place.

Ruth Let's go back. You can always tell Alison the earthwork wasn't any good.

Gerald (*pouring two glasses of wine*) I'm afraid that would be difficult. You see, I rather built up the jolly old earthworks. Had to or she might have smelt a rat. (*Carrying the two glasses over to her and sitting beside her*) Anyway, you wouldn't send me back to the misery of a weekend on my own, would you? Alison's on duty and there are at least three babies about to be born any minute now. (*He hands her a drink*)

Ruth What on earth made your wife want to be a district nurse? Beats me.

Gerald Me, too, but that's Alison, loves every minute of it. Says she does it to counterbalance my preoccupation with the past and the dead.

Ruth Are you in the habit of going off for lonely week-ends to work on earthworks?

Gerald No, I've only been working on it seriously for about a year. (*Putting his arm round her*) But I've been thinking about having a go for some time now; preparing the ground you might say.

Ruth (*removing his hand*) Very appropriate for an archaeologist.

Gerald Yes, it is, isn't it.

Ruth My flatmate thinks I'm at a librarian's conference.

Gerald Well, won't she expect to hear details?

Ruth I hope not. Lucky for us she's too occupied with her new boy-friend at present.

Gerald (*placing his hand on her knee*) You know, I can't think why I only noticed you at the beginning of term. It's a big library but all the same.

Ruth (*removing his hand*) I only came in April.

Gerald (*returning his hand to her knee*) Ah.

Ruth (*looking at his hand*) I suppose you've tried it on with all the others, those under fifty, that is.

Gerald Is that what you really think of me?

Ruth I'm not sure what I think. (*Removing his hand*) I don't know you very well yet, do I? I'm only going by what the juniors told me.

Gerald And what was that?

Ruth "If old Turner's about, watch it," they said, "don't put anything on the bottom shelf; don't be caught bending."

Gerald (*putting his arm round her*) You're an incorrigible liar: they'd never refer to me as old.

Ruth Mind my drink!

Gerald (*taking her glass and placing both glasses on the table*) All right, I confess. Only they didn't tell you everything; they forgot to mention one important fact. (*Diving over the end of the sofa and pinning her beneath him*) I'm an incurable sex maniac!

Ruth Ouch! Stop it, Gerald, you're hurting!

Gerald I've not started yet. Gr-rr-rr.

The front door opens and Debbie, who is nine months pregnant, enters carrying a basket containing milk and eggs

Debbie (*calling as she closes the door*) Anyone about, brought yer milk and eggs. (*Moving in*) Oh, sorry, Dora never answered no doors and I . . . (*She recognizes Gerald*) Uncle "G"! Well I never! Didn't know as it was you what'd got the cottage.

Gerald Debbie!

Ruth (*pushing Gerald off her and sitting bolt upright*) Uncle "G"?

Gerald Well, well, Debbie, how nice to see you. (*Forcing a laugh*) You've caught me at an awkward moment: I was just giving Miss Hill some dictation when I fell over the end of the sofa.

Debbie (*giggling*) Ooh—and she lost her notebook?

Gerald What?

Debbie And her pencil?

Gerald (*kneeling and pretending to search*) Ah, thank you Debbie—must be here somewhere.

Ruth Uncle "G", why don't you stop this charade and introduce me.

Gerald (*getting up sheepishly from his knees*) Ah, yes, well, this is Debbie Martin. She works for Mr Flack; and Debbie, this is Miss Hill who's acting as my secretary for the week-end.

Ruth And perhaps Debbie would like to introduce me to Uncle "G".

Debbie Don't yer know him, then?

Ruth I've not met Uncle "G" yet, no.

Debbie He ain't me uncle really, only called him that 'cause he were so cuddly.

Gerald Looked cuddly, you mean, Debbie, looked cuddly.

Debbie giggles

Ruth It appears that Uncle "G"'s soon to have a nephew or niece or a something?

Gerald I didn't know you were married, Debbie.

Debbie Oh, I ain't married yet.

Ruth Well you don't want to rush these things.

Gerald (*sternly*) I hope you're not mixed up with a married man, Debbie.

Debbie I ain't saying nothing. (*Turning and putting the basket on the table*) If he wants me he'll ask, won't he.

Ruth (*looking at Gerald*) He may not be in a position to ask.

Debbie (*looking at Gerald*) Anyhow, I don't want him, if he don't want me. Well, yer'll be all right for milk and eggs now, won't yer. (*Moving to the front door*) Mrs Flack says I gotta start having early nights, 'case I gets meself inter trouble. (*Putting her head back round the door*) Oh, and she says, if yer hear scratchings in the roof, it'll be the sparrers 'cause old Bill's done in all the rats.

Ruth (*jumping up*) Rats!

Gerald Rats! In the house?

Debbie No, not in the house. Might be a few in the privy though. Never seen nothing but a few old bats in here since he done it. See yer then, Uncle "G". (*As she goes*) Ooh, what a surprise!

Debbie goes out

Ruth (*collecting her bag and crossing to the front door*) Owls, rats, bull, bats! I'm not staying!

Gerald Now, Ruth, don't get into a state over nothing.

Ruth Nothing! You call being incarcerated with a dirty old man in a cottage full of rodents, nothing!

Gerald Dirty old man, I resent that.

Ruth So must Debbie.

Gerald (*moving swiftly to her*) Debbie! Good God, you don't think?

Ruth You stayed at the farm, said so yourself. Keep away from me!

Gerald Not till I've knocked some sense into you. (*Swinging her past him*) Now, just you listen! Yes, I stayed at the farm but over a year ago and as for Debbie, I'm old enough to be ...

Ruth Daddy, yes quite.

Gerald (*picking up the cases*) I'd better put these back in the car then if you really think ... How could you, Ruth? It's as well you'll never know how much you've hurt me.

Ruth All right, Gerald, I'm sorry, it was her calling you Uncle "G". Of course I don't really think ... It's this wretched place—peace and quiet you said, a little rural haven.

Gerald Look, tell you what, let's eat out at the - what was it - the *Red Lion.*

Ruth (*dropping her bag on the sofa*) I shall never be able to sleep here, I know.

Gerald Come now, I'm not that much of a beast.

Ruth (*laughing*) Not that young either.

Gerald Enough of that. (*Indicating the food on the table*) You put this stuff in the kitchen, while I take these cases upstairs. (*He mounts the stairs to the exposed bedroom*) I'll just make sure the bed's all right while I'm up there.

Ruth (*going to the table and packing up the picnic things*) You make sure both beds are all right. I'm not sure of your part of the bargain yet—rural paradise!

Gerald (*off, or from the exposed bedroom*) You'll see: the tranquillity, the country smells, the chatter of little birds ... (*He places Ruth's case under the bed*)

Gerald exits

Ruth (*alone*) The scrabbling of rats, the whirring of bats, the roar of a dirty, great bull. (*She takes the basket that Debbie brought and the picnic box up to the kitchen area*) Not to mention Uncle "G". (*She packs the box and basket out of sight into a cupboard*)

Gerald enters down the stairs

Gerald There, all neatly stowed away under the bed.

Ruth Where have you put my case? Not under the same bed as yours, I hope.

Gerald (*with mock shock*) Don't be disgusting, as if I would leave your case alone with mine without a chaperone.

Ruth (*moving down to mirror to tidy her hair*) Where is it then?

Gerald Under the other bed.

Ruth (*picking up her bag from the sofa*) Good, I don't want to be taken for granted.

Gerald (*moving swiftly to her and embracing her*) Of course not, darling, just taken. Hmm?

Ruth (*disengaging firmly, then taking his arm*) Come along. Is the *Red Lion* another paradise?

Gerald (*walking with her to the front door and opening it*) It's a three-star inn.

Ruth You sure they were stars and not sparrow droppings? (*Breaking away from him as they reach the door*) Oh, what about that damned bull?

Gerald We're not taking him.

Ruth Check he's not outside, idiot! (*She pushes him out*)

Gerald (*returning quickly*) No, there's an anaconda, a few rattlesnakes, a giant rat or two but no bull.

Ruth (*trying to push him out*) Well, go on, Lord of the jungle.

Gerald Jane stay close Tarzan, beasts no come near.

Ruth (*as they go*) Jane more frightened of Tarzan coming too near.

Ruth and Gerald go out. As their laughter dies away, the back door opens and Dora and Teresa enter, followed by Lionel carrying their two cases

Dora (*moving above the table*) Council workmen! Like ter put me boot behind them, I would. Been sick, gal, if I'd stayed there with all that old wet paint. (*She becomes aware of the bottles of wine on the table*) Hello, what's all this here then?

Teresa (*following her, picking up the box of wine from the chair and sitting*) Ooh-er.

Lionel (*not looking in the direction of the table*) Where do yer want these then? Like ter know what cheeky devil parked his old car in the gateway. No flippin' joke carrying these up from the road. (*To Teresa*) What yer gawkin' at, gal?

Teresa This here drink. What's it doin' here?

Dora If old Bill Flack's done it ter keep my Tom from goin' arter another job, he's bin wasting his time, I can tell yer.

Lionel Ain't like dad, he wouldn't give yer nothing.

Dora Must have bin him though; nobody else ain't got a key. (*Packing the bottles back into the box*) Well, he needn't think I'm a going ter drink it.

Lionel Bet he got it as a job lot down the market.

Gerald's car starts up and drives away

(*Racing across to peer out of the front window, still carrying the cases*) There he goes. Wanted ter tell him off, I did. Bloomin' cheek!

Teresa Might have been bigger than you, Lionel.

Lionel (*lifting the cases above his head*) Had to a bin a ruddy giant, gal, afore he'd a frit me.

Dora You can carry those cases up afore you goes then, Lionel, being as you're so strong like.

Lionel moves up to the stairs door

We ain't sleeping with no wet paint. We'll have another night here, gal.

Lionel Where do yer want them then?

Teresa Mine's the rusted one, stick it on me bed.

Lionel goes up the stairs

Dora (*as he goes*) Put them both on the floor, Lionel. We gotta make the beds first. Good job, gal, we left them sheets and blankets in the old cupboard else we'd have had ter carted some back with us.

Lionel appears in the exposed bedroom. He puts down one of the cases and disappears from sight

Teresa (*moving to the fireplace and quizzing herself in the mirror*) Ain't we going ter have summat ter eat afore we goes?

Dora You can if yer like, I ain't getting nothing. I'm off ter roost, I are.

Teresa (*fluffing her hair, etc.*) Good job we met Dad on the way back, else he'd a gone to our new house arter the cricket match.

Dora State he gets in, gal, when he's cricketing, he wouldn't have noticed we wasn't there. Ah, now I sees how old Flack knew we was a coming back: course, yer dad must have told him. Crafty old fox he are. Well, he can have it all back termorrer, I ain't a touching it.

Lionel returns from the bedroom

You get off home now, Lionel. Thank yer for running us down.

Teresa Oh, Mum, can't he stay while I'm having summat ter eat?

Dora (*moving to the stairs door*) Two minutes then, no more, else yer get up ter something you didn't oughter.

Teresa Mum, you ain't got no trust in me, have yer?

Dora (*looking pointedly at Lionel*) Ain't just you gal. Two minutes, mind.

Dora goes up the stairs

Lionel creeps across and closes the stairs door and then vaults over the sofa to grab Teresa. She dodges his embrace and sits on the sofa

Teresa Give over, Lionel, she'll hear us. Anyhow, I'm hungry.

Lionel (*circling round the sofa*) Know what yer hungry for, gal, I do.

Teresa (*giggling*) All you think of, Lionel Flack. Worse than old Hamish you are.

Lionel (*jerking her to her feet*) Can't hang about, gal, only got two minutes! (*He bends her across his knee and kisses her*)

Teresa (*coming up for air*) Oh, Lionel, yer do kiss lovely.

Lionel throws her on the sofa, where she lands with a crash

Dora (*off*) Teresa!

Teresa (*shouting up to Dora*) Shan't be a minute, Mum!

Dora (*off*) Has Lionel gone?

Teresa Just going, Mum.

Lionel charges across and dives on top of her

Dora (*off*) Lily's made the beds up for us so you can come straight up. Teresa!

Teresa (*pushing Lionel off and scrabbling to her feet, straightening her dress, etc*) Just finished me supper, Mum. Ooh, you got me all of a doo-dah, you have, Lionel. You can't go home now.

Lionel (*leaning forward and pinching her seat*) Two minutes ain't no good to a man like me.

Teresa shrieks as he pinches her

Dora (*off*) That Lionel still there! What's he up to?

Lionel jumps to his feet and whispers in Teresa's ear

(*off*) Teresa!

Teresa All right, then, cheeky devil. (*shouting*) Lionel's had a bite, Mum, going now. (*Pushing him across to the front door*) Go on, then!

Lionel (*stomping heavily to the front door and opening it*) Night, then, Teresa. (*He slams the door, but stays*)

Teresa (*in a loud voice as she moves to the stairs door*) Night, Lionel.

Teresa goes up the stairs into the visible bedroom singing a pop song, and we see her strip down to bra and panties. Lionel tiptoes to the sofa and pulls off his wellingtons

Dora (*off, as Teresa strips and sings*) Enough of that, gel. You get ter bed!

Teresa Right Mum.

Lionel tiptoes to the stairs door and pulls it open

A grim-faced Dora is revealed, with arms folded

Lionel (*backing towards the back door, holding up his wellingtons for her to see*) Little stone, in me wellies.

Lionel turns and dashes out

Dora marches back upstairs into Teresa's room, grabs her by the hair and drags her off. Teresa's song trails off as she does so, and—

the CURTAIN falls

Additional script if the inset bedroom is not used

Teresa (*in a loud voice, as she moves to the stairs door*) 'Night, Lionel. (*To him in a stage whisper.*) Be ready in a minute.

Dora (*as she goes up the stairs after Lionel's exit.*) Right, my gal, you're coming in with me. That'll stop yer hanky panky.

Scene 2

The same. 10 p.m. the same evening

The curtain rises on an empty set lit by the remaining daylight. Immediately, a car draws up outside and headlights flash across the window. The car doors bang

Ruth (*off*) I swear that's Hamish under those laurels.
Gerald (*off*) He gets about then, you've seen him a dozen times tonight at least.

Ruth and Gerald enter by the front door, both a little giggly from their visit to the pub

Ruth (*as she enters*) Can't get it out of my mind that he's out there somewhere.
Gerald (*moving to her and putting his arms round her*) He's made you cling close to me. Got him to thank for that. (*He goes to the door and puts his head out*) Hamish, Hamish, Hamish! Come along, boy, "G" wants to give you a big thank-you kiss.

A distant bull roar: Gerald jumps back into the room

Ruth Please close that door, Gerald, you're making yourself nervous.

Gerald slams the door

Gerald (*moving to her and putting his arm round her*) Stay close to me, darling, and you haven't a thing to worry about.
Ruth (*disengaging*) I'm not so sure about that either.
Gerald (*nipping up to the stairs door and opening it*) Well, we might as well get an early start.
Ruth What!
Gerald In the morning, make an early start on the earthwork.
Ruth (*moving swiftly up to mount the stairs*) Oh, right, good idea. (*Turning and pushing Gerald back into the room*) No, not yet, not just yet, Gerald, I want to talk to you first.
Gerald (*trying to steer her back to the stairs*) What about? We've done all the talking; it's action time now.
Ruth (*closing the stairs door firmly*) No, we haven't. Besides I'm not going to bed until I'm sure that I won't need to ...
Gerald You can always wake me. I'll escort you madam, through the perils of the nettles, fending off the rampaging Hamish.
Ruth Look, put the light on and come and sit down for a moment. (*She sits on the sofa, putting her handbag down beside the arm*)
Gerald (*going up to the kitchen area*) I suppose there's one somewhere. I didn't think to ask, it being summer.
Ruth A one what?
Gerald (*looking in the cupboards*) Light.
Ruth (*standing*) You don't mean there's no electricity either? (*Falling back in her seat*) Some paradise!

Gerald I don't remember reading that they had all mod. cons. in paradise. (*Finding a lamp*) Ah, here we are. (*He carries a small gas lamp triumphantly to the table*) Complete with new canister, too.

Ruth I hope you know what you're doing with that thing?

Gerald Used to use them on field study. (*He examines the lamp*) There should be a lever to lift the glass somewhere. (*He does so*) Ah, that's it. All I want is a match. (*He takes a box from his pocket, which he leaves on the table*) Ten, nine, eight, seven, six five. (*He strikes the match*) We have ignition, four, three, two, one—lift off. (*He picks up the lamp and swings it round at arm's length*) It's looking good, right on course.

Ruth Gerald, when you've finished playing, I want to talk.

Gerald (*putting the lamp down on the table and looking puzzled*) That's funny.

Ruth What is?

Gerald I could have sworn that we unpacked that box of wine before we went out.

Ruth Don't tell me the place is haunted as well.

Gerald (*going to sit beside her, putting his arms round her*) I must have been wrong, that's all. You're befuddling my senses, clouding my reason, warping my judgement.

Ruth (*removing his arm*) That's precisely what I am doing. I'm sure you'll regret this when you stop to think.

Gerald Yes, I do. I should have insisted that we went straight to bed. Not given way to your whim for a little talk. You're coming over all moral again. (*Putting his arm round her*) Anyway, thinking is counter-productive in matters of the heart.

Ruth (*removing his arm, rising and moving to the table*) I'm talking about you and Alison. Things will never be the same again if you betray her. Don't imagine you can be unfaithful and not suffer regrets. (*Relaxing against the table*) These taboos are generations deep, they can't be disregarded by rationality. You may think you can have a bit on the side ...

Gerald Ruth!

Ruth Well, that's what I am.

Gerald I'd never think of you as that—you know how I feel.

Ruth At the moment, yes. But afterwards ...

Gerald Still the same. I told you, you complement Alison.

Ruth (*moving to sofa and flicking his head*) The theory's fine but you must admit some guilt. Go on, admit it.

Gerald Why should I, she doesn't feel guilty about me.

Ruth (*moving to the fireplace*) She would never be unfaithful to you. She couldn't.

Gerald How would you know? You've never met her.

Ruth (*turning to him*) Well, no, but from what you've said.

Gerald She wouldn't hop into bed with another man, if that's what you mean.

Ruth Well, what other way?

Gerald (*rising and going up to the kitchen area to collect two wine glasses*) All right, if we're going to be serious, I'm having another drink. You going to

join me or are you scared of the consequences? (*He goes to the table and pours two drinks*)

Ruth (*sitting on the sofa*) If you think it will help, but don't try to put me off. We've got to have this thing out.

Gerald I wasn't trying to. (*He picks up the two drinks, gives one to Ruth and then sits on a chair at the table*) Here's to the bloody inquisition.

Ruth Well what other way can Alison be unfaithful?

Gerald How could you understand?

Ruth I'll try.

Gerald (*tossing back his drink*) No, I can't tell you; it's too humiliating. (*He pours another drink*)

Ruth Please.

Gerald (*indicating her drink*) Drink that then.

Ruth Are you about to shock me?

Gerald She makes me feel—well—less than a man.

Ruth Oh, I am sorry, I didn't know.

Gerald What?

Ruth About your peculiarity.

Gerald What peculiarity?

Ruth Well, whatever it is that makes you feel less than a man.

Gerald No, it's not like that. It's just that she won't let me dominate her.

Ruth You mean bully her.

Gerald No, I mean in bed. She has to make all the running. If I become manly, aggressive, she—well, she—giggles.

Ruth (*smiling*) How terrible for you. Poor old "G".

Gerald I'm not poor and I'm not old. I told you ...

Ruth (*holding up her glass*) I think I need another drink.

Gerald (*rising, taking the bottle from the table and sitting beside her*) I should never have told you. I knew all this soul searching would ruin the week-end. Now you'll think I'm inadequate in some way: have something missing that makes women giggle in bed.

Ruth No, of course I won't.

They sit looking at each other, sipping their wine

Gerald There you see: you do, don't you?

Ruth No, don't be silly.

Gerald What are you thinking then?

Ruth (*rising, placing her glass on the table and opening the stairs door*) That you don't understand women. Come on, let's go to bed before the dawn chorus starts.

Gerald (*lost in gloom*) You'll despise me now.

If the inset bedroom is not used, the following lines will be said at the foot of the stairs

---

Ruth (*going up the stairs to the inset bedroom*) Don't talk nonsense. I'll try to explain to you in the morning. (*Calling down*) Are you taking that bottle to bed with you?

Gerald (*coming to*) What? Oh—(*Jumping up and moving to the table*) Right, I'll douse the light then. (*In his haste, he turns the light down but not off and dashes up the stairs. Arriving in inset bedroom*) Oh, Ruth, I need you desperately.

Ruth I thought you might.

Gerald (*embracing her and manœuvring her on to the bed*) You can't let me down after all I've confided.

Ruth (*extricating herself and pulling him to his feet*) Anyway, let's start respectably in two beds, shall we?

Gerald I can't sleep alone tonight. I need the warmth and comfort of a woman.

Ruth Any woman?

Gerald None but you, Ruth. You know that.

Ruth (*pushing him out*) I'll change in here. You go and warm the big bed.

Gerald (*re-appearing*) For us?

Ruth (*pushing him out again*) We'll see.

Gerald goes. There is a short pause in which Ruth fusses with her hair, etc., then a hullabaloo as if from the other bedroom: crashes and bangs, screams from Teresa, shouts from Dora and Gerald. Gerald bursts from the stairs door, hotly pursued by Dora and Teresa in their nighties. Gerald retreats before them to fall on his back. Ruth reacts to the noise but does not leave the bedroom until Gerald has appeared on the stage

Dora (*straddling him*) You dirty peeping Tom you. I'll larn yer! (*To Teresa*) Come on, gal, turn that light up, I want ter see what the dirty old bugger looks like!

Teresa turns up the light and then comes down to Gerald

Teresa What if he's a sex maniac, Mum?

Gerald Get off! Let me explain! You don't ...

Dora Grab his legs, gal!

Teresa darts down and lifts his legs

Gerald Listen, it's all some ghastly mistake!

Dora Made a mistake all right, trying it on with me. We know how ter deal with the likes of you.

Ruth emerges from the stair door and moves to the fireplace, doing her best not to laugh

Teresa (*seeing Ruth and dropping Gerald's legs*) Ooh-er!

Dora (*turning and seeing Ruth*) Who the Hell?

Ruth I think there's been some mistake.

Dora I should bloody well say there has!

Gerald Get off, woman and let me ...

Ruth Are you Mrs Day?

Dora (*letting go of Gerald*) I are. And who might you be?

Teresa What you doing in our house?

Gerald (*levering himself to a sitting position*) I've been assaulted.

Dora (*pushing him down with her foot*) Serves you right!
Teresa (*turning him over with her foot*) What you expect!
Ruth Mr Flack let us the cottage. He said you'd moved to the village.
Dora The old sod, and he made us pay ter the end of the month.
Teresa Bloody old skinflint!
Dora (*turning on her*) I told yer not ter swear, gal!
Ruth (*indicating the sofa*) Come and sit down, Mrs Day. It must have been quite a shock.

Dora sits on the sofa

Gerald (*crawling to the table*) What about me, then? I suppose it's nothing to be set upon by two Amazons. (*He lifts the wine box and sits on the chair by the table*)
Ruth That's better. (*Indicating the sofa*) Your daughter had better sit here.
Dora Teresa.
Ruth Come along, Teresa. I expect you feel a bit shaky, too?
Teresa (*sitting on the sofa*) Not half, I'm all of a dooda. (*To Dora*) What's an Amazon, Mum?
Dora Shut up, gal, don't make things no worse.
Teresa (*looking at Gerald and then back to her mother*) He means you're butch!
Ruth We'll all laugh about this in the morning.
Gerald (*standing, still clutching the box of wine*) I need a drink!
Ruth (*going to the table*) Good idea, let's all have one. (*She pours two drinks*)
Gerald Hurrah, somebody's noticed me. (*Moving above the sofa and speaking to Dora and Teresa*) Well, it may surprise you to know that I only brought two glasses. Silly of me not to have thought of the late-night guests, commonly found lurking in bedrooms in out-of-the-way cottages.
Dora Plenty of glasses in the kitchen, mate.

With a poisonous look at Dora, Gerald stomps up to the kitchen, dumps the wine box and searches for glasses

Ruth Well, it's obvious Mr Flack thought he'd cash in on the empty cottage.
Dora Ain't no right.
Teresa Trust him, crafty old sod.
Dora Watch it, gal!
Ruth It's a bit late for introductions, but I'm Ruth Hill—(*she nods towards the kitchen*)—Mr Turner's secretary. We're down here to do a bit of work on the earthwork.

Gerald returns with two half-pint glasses and pours two large drinks

Dora (*not understanding*) Work on the earthwork, ooh-ar.
Teresa Ploughing?
Ruth No, not exactly, just measuring, perhaps a little digging if we're allowed. You know the big mound up by the spinney, Blue Bell Wood.
Dora "Devil's Hump."
Teresa "Devil's Bum."

Dora Teresa!

Teresa Well, that's what the kids call it. Ain't no good digging there: you won't grow nothing.

Gerald Who wants to grow what?

Dora I know why you're here right enough.

Gerald You do?

Ruth (*picking up two drinks and crossing behind the sofa*) Well, we'll have to make the best of it tonight. (*With a glance at Gerald*) It's too late to do anything now. (*She hands a drink to Dora and Teresa*)

Dora sniffs it

Dora (*handing it back to Ruth*) Not for me, thanks, miss. Can't abide the smell of booze in bed. Reminds me of me old man.

Ruth sits at table and places Dora's glass on it

Teresa I don't mind if I do. (*She drains glass and smacks her lips*) Ooh, not a bad drop of old cider, that.

Gerald winces

Ruth (*picking up one of the glasses of wine she had poured earlier*) Now, I suggest that you, Mrs Day, and your daughter share the double bedroom. I'll have the single and Mr Turner can sleep down here.

Gerald Thank you, that sounds very cosy.

Ruth It's only for tonight, Gerald.

Teresa What about Dad then, Mum?

Ruth Mr Day?

Dora Forgot all about him, gal.

Gerald We're not expecting him are we?

Dora Tom's playing cricket.

Gerald At this time of night?

Teresa He ain't playing now; he's at the boozer.

Gerald (*moving to the fireplace*) Where's he going to sleep then? I'm not having him down here with me.

Dora Don't you worry none, he'll have forgot we've come back here. He'll either go down to our new place or straight ter the farm in time for milking. Depends on whether they wins or loses.

Teresa Slept with Hamish once he did when they won.

Dora Two old bulls together. (*Getting up*) Anyhow, I'm too wore out ter bother. (*To Teresa*) You coming, gal?

Teresa Don't feel tired no more, Mum.

Dora You gotter come, gal, else—(*indicating Gerald*)—he can't get no sleep. Come on! (*She goes to the stairs door*)

Teresa (*rising, going to the table and picking up the bottle of wine*) Reckon I'll have another drop of old Flacky's cider, I will. (*She takes a swig from the bottle*)

Dora (*taking the bottle away from her, putting it on the table and dragging her upstairs*) No, you won't, my girl. Don't want you getting a taste for booze. One in the family's bad enough.

Dora and Teresa disappear up the stairs, leaving the stairs door open

Gerald (*moving to close the stair door, then above the table to put down his glass*) You're not going to do it, are you?
Ruth What?
Gerald Leave me down here, alone.
Ruth What will the Days think if they find us curled up together on the sofa?
Gerald No more than the old biddy thinks now. Stay for a while anyway. You can always creep up later when they're asleep. Come on, it'll probably be our last chance to be alone this week-end. (*Proffering the bottle*) Have some more.
Ruth No thanks. I think I've had more than enough already.
Gerald Just a nightcap.
Ruth (*holding out her glass*) A small one then.
Gerald (*putting the bottle down and switching Ruth's glass for the one discarded by Dora*) This old cider ain't half bad, are it. (*Going up to the kitchen area*) Think I'll open another.
Ruth (*sipping her drink*) Don't open one for me, I'd rather not drink any.
Gerald (*looking in the wine box*) Come to think of it though, I need something stronger. Should be a bottle of whisky—yes. (*He lifts out the whisky bottle*) Would you rather?
Ruth (*rising, turning down the light a little, and drifting over to sit on the sofa*) No thanks. I'll stick to the wine unless you want me to pass out completely.
Gerald (*coming from kitchen area to the table carrying a glass and the bottle of whisky*) Well, I need it, so would you if you'd been savaged. (*Pouring himself a glass of whisky*) Hell, these country women are built like tanks. I shall be sore for a month.
Ruth You'd better not get any ideas about young Teresa then.
Gerald I told you—and I'll tell you something else: that young devil would get sent off in a rugby match, grabbing me where she did. (*Raising his glass*) Well, cheers.
Ruth (*raising her glass*) Cheers.

Gerald switches his glass for hers

Gerald (*coming to the sofa to sit by Ruth*) Here's to peace and quiet.
Ruth (*after a pause*) Gerald, why don't we go home? No harm's been done.
Gerald You weren't grabbed by young Teresa.
Ruth Be serious, to your marriage, I mean. You can always tell Alison it wasn't worth staying.
Gerald You've gone off me, I suppose, since I told you ...
Ruth 'Course not, it's the reverse. (*Draining her glass*) I find you more attractive and with all this damned drink, I'm finding it harder to think of Alison every damned minute.
Gerald (*taking her glass and placing it on the table and then returning above the sofa*) Good. Believe me, if I thought this would harm Alison, I'd go

home at once. (*Leaning over the back of the sofa*) But it won't—she may even benefit. I'd be so much nicer to live with.

Ruth I want to believe you.

Gerald I'd be less tetchy.

Ruth And you're sure Alison would benefit, are you?

Gerald Unquestionably.

Ruth Right, kiss me!

Gerald (*straightening up*) What?

Ruth Kiss me, take me!

Gerald (*coming round the sofa*) What now?

Ruth Yes, now. Let's go!

Gerald (*closing to her hesitatingly*) But Alison.

Ruth (*drawing him down to her*) To hell with Alison. There's nobody but us in the whole wide world. Come on, damn you, kiss me!

A little reluctantly, Gerald enters into a passionate kiss. There is the roar of a tractor, and headlights flash across the front window

(*Pushing him away, jumping up and crossing to the window*) Now what!

Gerald (*struggling to his feet*) What the hell's that!

Ruth There are two men. They're coming to the door. (*Moving to the table and pouring herself another drink*) One of them's old Flack, I can recognize his walk.

Gerald (*marching to the front door*) Right, I'll just about tell him what I think. I'm a patient man but this is the last straw! (*He wrenches open the door*)

Flack and Lionel are standing outside

Why, Mr Flack, how nice to see you.

Ruth goes and lies down full length on the sofa

Flack I was frit yer might have gone and hit the hay.

Ruth Were you? Well it might surprise you to know that that has already been done by two of your late tenants, the Day women!

Flack (*moving in*) What they back for?

Lionel follows Flack, both taking in Ruth

Gerald (*laughing falsely*) Apparently, the comforts of a modern council house didn't compare with what they'd been used to, Mr Flack.

Flack Better sort it out like, ain't I? (*Indicating Lionel*) This here's me son.

Gerald Yes do.

Lionel 'Ow do. (*Moving to the sofa, staring at Ruth*) 'Ow do!

Flack (*still staring at Ruth who is draped provocatively on the sofa*) Reckon as how we come at the wrong time, then.

Lionel (*leering at Ruth*) Or the right time, Dad.

Flack (*turning to Gerald*) Had ter knock yer up 'cause yer parked yer car in the lane and we can't get the old harvester back ter the farm. Coming at six they are ter take it ter Bailey's. There'll be hell ter pay if it ain't loaded.

Gerald Right, Mr Flack, I'll go and move it at once. Must keep the wheels turning. (*Calling back as he goes*) Won't be a moment, Ruth.

Gerald exits

Ruth (*still staring at Lionel, fascinated*) No hurry, take your time.
Flack Won't take us long. (*Turning to Lionel*) You can go ahead, boy, and get the gate open.

Lionel continues to leer at Ruth

Hear what I say, Lionel. Wake up, boy, keep yer mind on the job!
Lionel (*still staring at Ruth*) I are, Dad, I are.

Flack exits, thinking Lionel is following

(*Following Flack to the door and closing it after him*) I are. (*Moving back to the end of the sofa*) What's your name, then?
Ruth Ruth.
Lionel (*pointing at his chest*) Lionel.
Ruth How do you do, Lionel.
Lionel Better, gal, for having met you, bit of all right you are. (*Flexing his arm muscle*) 'Ere, feel that.
Ruth What?
Lionel This here, man's muscle that are.
Ruth Very nice.
Lionel Go on, feel it. It won't bite yer.
Ruth (*rising*) Very nice, Lionel.
Lionel Like that all over I are, Ruth.
Ruth (*moving to the table and putting her glass down*) Yes, I'm sure you are, Lionel.
Lionel (*moving to her*) What about it, then?
Ruth What about what?
Lionel (*pulling her violently to him*) This here! (*He kisses her*)
Ruth (*breaking away*) Well, really!
Lionel Never mind, "well really", give us another! (*Pulling her slowly into his arms*) Don't want ter waste time, gal. (*He kisses the struggling Ruth again*)

She stops struggling and enjoys it

The stairs door opens and Dora appears

At the sound of Dora's voice, Lionel releases Ruth

Dora Here, what's all the rumpus, enough ter wake the dead! (*Seeing Lionel*) Lionel, what you at?
Lionel (*backing to the front door*) Bit a chaff in her eye, just got it out fer her. (*Pinching her bottom*) See yer, Ruth.

Lionel exits, closing the door after him

Dora How'd he come ter be here, then?

Ruth (*moving to the fireplace, rubbing her bottom*) Helping his dad to move the harvester. That's what all the noise ...

Dora (*turning the lamp up to full*) Yer want ter watch that one, gal, oughter have a ring through his nose, he did.

Gerald's car starts up, followed by the roar of the harvester

(*Moving to the front window and peering out*) Never thinks of no-one. Knock yer up any time he would if it suited.

Headlights flash across the window

(*Shouting*) Hope yer run it in the ditch, mean old bugger!

Teresa enters from the stairs, rubbing her eyes

(*Turning back to Ruth*) Beats me how Lil stands him. (*Seeing Teresa*) Woke you an' all, gal, has he?

Teresa What's going on, Mum? Who was you a-shouting at?

Dora Only old Flack, who else would wake yer at this time? (*Moving to the stairs door*) Shan't sleep a wink now, gal. All churned up I are. Might as well get dressed.

Teresa (*sitting at the table*) Coo, old what'sit's opened another bottle of that there cider. (*She picks up the bottle and takes a swig*)

Dora (*sitting at the table*) Pass us a drop, gal, might settle me stomach.

Teresa pours a glass for Dora and then continues to drink from the bottle herself

Ruth (*moving to the table*) Yes, help yourselves. I'm sure Mr Turner won't mind if it will help you sleep. (*Taking the bottle from Teresa*) Excuse me. Let me pour you some. (*She pours two drinks: hands one to Dora and the other to Teresa*) I'd like to offer you a hot drink but we haven't unpacked the gas stove yet.

Dora Cup of Horlicks might help. (*To Teresa*) Put the kettle on, gal.

Lionel opens the back door and peeps in. He then tiptoes up into the kitchen area unseen by the three women

Teresa Range is out, Mum.

Dora Soon boil a kettle with some of that small wood. Go on, gal! (*To Ruth*) Any excuse with them these days.

Teresa goes up to the kitchen area, where she is immediately grabbed by Lionel who kisses her before she can say anything

Ruth (*topping up her glass*) I don't know how you've managed all these years without electricity and mains water.

Dora It's what yer brung up to, ain't it. Be better in the village though, except for the boys chasing our Teresa. All arter her they'll be. Only Lionel out here and I can soon see him off.

Ruth (*moving to the sofa, taking in Teresa and Lionel in a clinch and then dropping down to the fireplace, speaking out front*) You must find Lionel a bit of a handful?

Dora Can't turn me back on 'em, gal, else they'd be at it.

Lionel disengages a hand to wave at Ruth

Ruth I don't think you should blame Teresa, though; Lionel definitely has a sort of animal magic.
Dora Oh, that's what it is, is it? He and our old bull make a good pair.

Gerald enters from the front door

Gerald (*closing the door, so that he does not see Dora*) He could have told me where to park earlier. He must have known he would have to bring that thing up the lane. (*Seeing Dora*) Good God, you're back!
Ruth The noise woke them.
Gerald Them?
Teresa (*breaking away from Lionel and popping her head round the kitchen partition*) Hello, Mr Turner, would you like a cup of Horlicks?

Lionel immediately whips her back out of sight of Gerald

Gerald (*flopping into a chair at the table*) Horlicks, coffee, hemlock, strychnine! Who cares?
Dora (*to Ruth*) Told yer, gal, they're all the same. If things don't go their way, they turn nasty. You're his secretary, ain't yer?
Ruth Well - yes.
Dora Don't need ter stand any of his old buck, then. Tell him ter stick his job. Anyway, what yer here for, working overtime?

There is a little flurry of activity from Lionel and Teresa in the kitchen

Ruth (*directing her attention on Dora with some effort*) We're examining an earthwork.
Dora What fer?
Ruth Mr Turner's trying to prove something to himself. He has a theory.
Dora Thought there was summat up with him.
Gerald (*heaving himself out of the chair and moving above the table*) There's absolutely nothing wrong with me, Mrs Day, that a good night's sleep won't cure. Now do you think we could all go to bed?
Dora (*calling to Teresa*) How's the fire, gal?
Teresa (*breaking out of a clinch with Lionel*) Getting it lit up, Mum.
Dora You ain't forgot ter warm the milk, gal?
Teresa Ain't no milk, Mum.
Gerald (*going rapidly up to the kitchen*) There's milk under the sink. I'll come or it will take all night.

Lionel breaks away from Teresa towards the back door but is not quick enough to avoid being seen by Gerald

Hello, Lionel!
Dora (*staring*) Lionel!

Teresa scoots across to the far side of the table

(*Struggling to get up*) What the 'ell you doing 'ere. Where's my broom!

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