

The Vertical Hour

by

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A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



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Originally produced on Broadway in New York City
by Scott Rudin, Robert Fox, Neal Street Productions
Roger Berlind, Debra Black and The Shubert Organization

THE VERTICAL HOUR had it's world premiere at the Music Box Theatre in New York City on November 30th, 2006. It was directed by Sam Mendes, the décor was by Scott Pask. Ann Roth designed the costumes and Brian MacDevitt designed the lighting. The cast was as follows

OLIVER LUCAS		Bill Nighy
NADIA BLYE		Julianne Moore
DENNIS DUTTON		Dan Bittner
PHILIP LUCAS		Andrew Scott
TERRI SCHOLES		Rutina Wesley

CHARACTERS

Oliver Lucas

Nadia Blye

Dennis Dutton

Philip Lucas

Terri Scholes

"We need, in love, to practice only this : letting each other go. For holding on comes easily; we do not need to learn it."

Rainer Maria Rilke

ACT I

Scene 1

(OLIVER LUCAS, alone. He is English, undemonstrative, casually dressed, in his late 50s.)

OLIVER. I'd known for a long time I was going to have an accident. That's how it felt. The effort of concentration becomes impossible. For so many years you haven't made a mistake. Then you make one. It feels inevitable. You signal right, intending to go left. And you pay the price.

Scene 2

(NADIA BLYE is sitting at the desk in her office. She is American, pale, poised in her mid-30s, her style casual. Opposite her is DENNIS DUTTON, in his early 20s, also American. He is unusually dressed for someone of his age, in suit and tie, with floppy hair and trainers.)

NADIA. This is not a bad essay.

DUTTON. Thank you.

NADIA. It's not bad.

(DUTTON waits.)

NADIA. Clearly, I haven't persuaded you to my view of politics.

DUTTON. I know your view.

NADIA. It's competing claims, isn't it? If I had to sum it up.

DUTTON. That's your view.

NADIA. That's right. People want different things. The things they want can't be reconciled. Not everyone can have what they want. So the mediation between the groups, between the interest groups, the groups who want different things, to that process we give the name 'politics'.

(NADIA waits, but there's no reply.)

NADIA. Ultimately, you could say, politics is about the reconciliation of the irreconcilable.

DUTTON. I don't see it that way.

NADIA. No.

DUTTON. For me, politics is about the protection of property and of liberty.

NADIA. Yes, that's what you seem to be saying in this essay.

DUTTON. It is what I'm saying. It's about peoples' rights to live their own lives. It's about absolutes.

(NADIA thinks, considering how to go about this.)

NADIA. Yes. Yes, but there's a problem, isn't there?

DUTTON. Is there?

NADIA. We know for a fact that human life by its nature tends towards unfairness.

DUTTON. Do we know that?

NADIA. So: checks and balances have to be introduced. By human agency. The state, in any system yet proposed by man — be it communism, be it capitalism — has to intervene to balance things out.

DUTTON. I don't accept the term.

NADIA. What term?

DUTTON. 'Capitalism'.

(NADIA frowns.)

NADIA. You don't accept the term?

DUTTON. No.

NADIA. You don't accept it?

DUTTON. No.

NADIA. Meaning? Meaning what?

DUTTON. I don't think there's any such thing.

NADIA. No such thing as capitalism?

DUTTON. Correct.

NADIA. So what name do you give it then? The system we live under today? The system we call 'consumer capitalism', 'liberal democracy' — characterised by political parties and — I don't know — huge corporations, massively powerful industrial and military interests? The system as evolved by the West, by Western democracies? What do you call it?

DUTTON. Life. I call it 'life'.

(NADIA nods slightly.)

NADIA. No offence, but do you think Political Studies was a good choice of subject for you?

DUTTON. My father wanted me to do it.

NADIA. He's important to you?

DUTTON. Very much so. I admire him more than anyone in the world.

(NADIA looks a moment, thoughtful.)

NADIA. It's just...how do I put this?...basic to Political Studies is the notion of comparison.

DUTTON. Sure.

NADIA. We compare.

DUTTON. Sure.

NADIA. That's what we do. We say 'Here's one way at looking at things, now here's another.'

DUTTON. So?

NADIA. Well, such comparison becomes difficult if we start out with the idea that there's only one system - there's only one way.

DUTTON. But there is.

NADIA. Is there?

DUTTON. I know it's inconvenient to ask, but why do you think America has triumphed?

(NADIA is slightly thrown.)

NADIA. Inconvenient? Is 'inconvenient' the word for America's triumph? And I'm not sure I'm going to go with 'triumph' either.

DENNIS. Why not? Why not 'triumph'?

NADIA. Listen. Listen. This is a school. It's not a madrasa. We're not teaching one path. We're teaching many paths. You say you admire liberal democracy. Well, basic to liberal democracy is the idea of free discussion. The free exchange of ideas. Comparison.

DUTTON. You telling me I'm wrong to love America?

NADIA. I'm not.

DUTTON. I'm wrong to love my country?

NADIA. No. I'm not telling you any such thing. I'm telling you not to be blinded by love, that's all. Not to be made stupid by love.

DUTTON. Stupid?

(NADIA, embarrassed, picks up his essay and walks to the other side of the room. DUTTON is seen to pluck up courage.)

DUTTON. The fact is — I haven't wanted to say — I've come here to say this today — it's you I'm in love with.

NADIA. It's me?

DUTTON. I don't eat. I don't sleep. Ever since we met. Ever since — you must have noticed.

NADIA. What, that —

DUTTON. I've lost weight alarmingly. Have you noticed?

NADIA. I haven't.

DUTTON. I'm sick. I went to a barbecue on the weekend. The smell repelled me.

(NADIA is lost for a response.)

DUTTON. I think of you all the time. I find the idea of you incredibly exciting. Of who you are.

NADIA. Who I am? Say. If you imagine...For goodness' sake. Let's be serious! Tell me. Who am I?

DUTTON. This woman out there in the world.

NADIA. What woman?

DUTTON. On television.

(DUTTON immediately holds up a hand.)

DUTTON. All right, that was a foolish thing to say.

NADIA. A tad.

DUTTON. It's not what I meant...

NADIA. You have feelings for me because I've been on television?

DUTTON. A woman in the world. That's what I mean. A woman in the world.

(After the shock, NADIA is now angry.)

NADIA. Dennis, Dennis, I have to tell you there are now quite a lot of women in the world. As you put it. Quite a lot. In fact, the whole assumption makes me angry. How old are you?

DUTTON. 22.

NADIA. I'm a feminist and what you're saying makes me angry.

DUTTON. Why?

NADIA. Because the purpose of women taking part, the purpose of women being intelligent or public or in any way represented even, the purpose of women talking on television about international politics is not to turn men on!

(There is a silence. DUTTON is very quiet.)

DUTTON. You didn't know? You had no idea?

(NADIA looks, deciding how to deal with him.)

NADIA. Anyway, mercifully there's a code. There's a code to cover this sort of ridiculous situation.

DUTTON. I know that code. I've actually got a copy here. I think you'll find...

NADIA. It's not necessary. Really. Jesus!

(DUTTON has taken the code out, but NADIA stops him opening it.)

NADIA. So. So, one way or another, this is our last class together...

DUTTON. Why do you think I spoke?

NADIA. I'm going to ignore what you said. I'm going to forget it.

(There is a brief silence.)

DUTTON. Can I say something?

NADIA. If it's about politics, yes.

DUTTON. It's all nonsense, isn't it?

NADIA. I don't know what's nonsense. You tell me.

DUTTON. The study of international relations.

NADIA. In what way is it nonsense, Dennis?

DUTTON. I took this course — as you know I'm a business major, my interest is start-up — but my father wanted me to broaden my mind. I don't know why. Dad's own mind is about as narrow as it's possible to be.

NADIA. Narrow, how?

DUTTON. He wants money. That's the only thing he wants.

NADIA. Well?

(DUTTON sits forward.)

DUTTON. This is my point : America wins. It always wins. You can do all that historical perspective stuff, you can say it's an empire and like any empire it's going to fall. But not yet it isn't. Not in my lifetime. So. Say there's a runner - the runner wins the race — then the other runners, if they're at all intelligent, they ask 'How did he do that?' They look at the winner, they look at his methods, they analyze, they say 'OK'. And that's the way other countries are going to prosper. They'll prosper by imitating America. And to me that's Political Studies. 'What does America do? And how can anyone else get close?'

NADIA. Well I'm glad my year of teaching hasn't been entirely wasted.

DUTTON. It hasn't been wasted.

NADIA. Good.

DUTTON. In fact...

NADIA. Dennis...

DUTTON. That's what I wanted to say. I didn't want you to think I took this course — well, for any other reason but in order to learn. The last thing I want is to upset you.

NADIA. Thank you.

DUTTON. You're a brilliant teacher.

(NADIA looks wary, fearing what comes next.)

DUTTON. However, we can't — face it — the other thing happened to me.

NADIA. Dennis...

DUTTON. It happened. I can't pretend it didn't.

NADIA. I am not allowing this subject.

DUTTON. I fell in love. In fact, the other day, I might as well tell you, I was talking things over with my fiancée...

NADIA. I'm sorry? Your fiancée? I'm sorry?

(NADIA throws up her hands, exasperated.)

DUTTON. Look, just so you understand...

NADIA. I don't have to understand. In fact, I don't want to understand.

(Now it is DUTTON'S turn to get up, agitated.)

DUTTON. It's not — it's hard — listen! listen! — I don't know if you don't — if you know Maine — anyway, two big families. In our part of the state. Big families. Both — whatever. And for many years, it's been assumed, if you like. Everyone takes it for granted. I will end up with Val. Understand.

NADIA. I just said: I don't want to understand.

DUTTON. But just so you know. So you know the context. Let me say: Val is not just my fiancée, she's also a friend. Val is my best friend.

NADIA. And Val has no problem juggling these two roles?

DUTTON. Val — talking to Val is like talking to someone — someone objective. And it was Val who said, she said 'Look, Dennis, you're suffering. You have been suffering. For a long time. For your own sake, you must speak to her.' It was she who suggested it. Not me.

(NADIA looks at DUTTON, trying to work him out. Then she goes and sits on the far side of the room, as if defeated.)

DUTTON. I wouldn't be saying this. I wouldn't be saying it if it were up to me.

(There is a silence. When NADIA answers she is hesitant.)

DUTTON. What are you thinking?

NADIA. I suppose one imagines – I imagine – the world moves forward. Slowly, the world moves forward. My assumption has always been that society would progress. I work on that assumption. Old attitudes die out. But what can you say? They don't. They don't.

DUTTON. I'm not sure I understand you.

NADIA. As you know, I spend a lot of time in war zones – in Bosnia, in Serbia. In many ways I can only say I prefer it there. I prefer being there because here people –

(NADIA changes tack, not finishing her thought.)

NADIA. Put it another way: I am so far from regarding myself as somebody available to a 22 year-old as not to recognize myself in the description.

DUTTON. But that's good, isn't it? Isn't that a good thing?

NADIA. Let's say, let's just say the self-confidence, the peculiar self-confidence based only on accumulation, on years of accumulation, does not do it for me. I don't confuse being rich with being right.

(There is a silence.)

NADIA. This has been a profoundly depressing few minutes.

(DUTTON looks at her a moment.)

DUTTON. I hear you.

NADIA. Good.

DUTTON. But nothing you say convinces me. As it happens, before I took politics, I took psychology...

NADIA. Oh Christ!

DUTTON. Briefly. Freud.

NADIA. How many weeks? How many weeks did you study Freud?

DUTTON. Three. Intensely.

NADIA. Sure.

DUTTON. Actually you can understand quite a lot in three weeks.

NADIA. You can also misunderstand quite a lot in three weeks.

DUTTON. Do you know this?

NADIA. Try me.

DUTTON. Freud has a theory that we aren't who we claim to be.

NADIA. Really?

DUTTON. Freud says we're all somebody else. Underneath. Underneath.

NADIA. I would have thought that was self-evident. I would have thought that was obvious.

DUTTON. Maybe it is obvious, but have you considered what it means?

NADIA. Clearly, you're going to tell me I haven't.

(DUTTON leans forward, intent.)

DUTTON. Think: The real person — the person concealed — is quite different, has quite different feelings from the person on the surface.

NADIA. Well, it's a highly convenient theory. But that's all it is. A theory.

DUTTON. So what I'm getting at is this : you don't convince me. And something tells me — my own instincts tell me — that underneath you don't even convince yourself.

(NADIA tries not to be angry.)

DUTTON. I think this has happened before. I'm not the first student, am I? I know. I know you won't tell me. But I'm guessing it happens all the time. I don't see how it can't. It must. And yet for some reason you pretend it doesn't.

(NADIA just looks at him.)

DUTTON. I've got a feeling that's part of your attraction.
(This is the last straw for NADIA. She goes to open the door for him to leave.)

NADIA. That's it. That's the end of the course. Here. Here is your essay. And the lesson's over.

DUTTON. Is that it? Are we finished?

NADIA. We're finished.

DUTTON. Thank you very much.

NADIA. No. Thank you.

(NADIA has given him the essay at the door, and now they have shaken hands.)

NADIA. I believe I began by saying politics is about irreconcilable differences. So, by that standard, we've just had a terrific political discussion.

DUTTON. Yes.

(DUTTON waits a moment.)

DUTTON. What are my chances of seeing you again?

NADIA. They're zero.

(DUTTON nods, accepting.)

NADIA. Up until now I would have dismissed you as a sort of throwback, Dennis.

DUTTON. Would you?

NADIA. In all sorts of ways.

DUTTON. I don't see why.

NADIA. You're going into the world of money, is that right? The world of finance.

DUTTON. I'm going into my father's business.

NADIA. Maybe it's my ignorance but I don't believe that world will be different from any other. The most important thing you can take into it is an open mind.

(DUTTON looks at her a moment.)

DUTTON. Why? Why would I want an open mind?

NADIA. Why would you not?

DUTTON. Our enemies don't have open minds.

Scene 3

(NADIA, alone.)

NADIA. It's a choice, isn't it? How you live. How you behave. You make a choice. At some point in your life you think : there must be an intelligent way to live. And you make your choice. Maybe you don't even remember. Everything conspires to make you forget. But the choice is there. You made it.

Scene 4

(A lawn looking over the Welsh and English countryside. A tree. A blissful, sunny day. There are canvas chairs. The remains of breakfast. Both OLIVER and PHILIP are in shirtsleeves. PHILIP LUCAS is English, in his early 30s, notably handsome.)

OLIVER. So tell me, tell me a little, so I know something about her before we meet.

PHILIP. Aside from beautiful and brilliant?

OLIVER. Aside from that, yes.

(PHILIP smiles, thinking of her.)

PHILIP. Formidable, certainly. Committed. Articulate. Passionate. Full of strong feeling.

OLIVER. OK. Enough of her faults, now tell me her virtues.

PHILIP. Well, the first time I met her she was carrying a book. 'Pas de psychologie, pas de psychose.'

OLIVER. What did that mean?

PHILIP. No psychology, no psychosis.

OLIVER. No, I know what it means. I know what it means.
I'm not an idiot. Choosing that book.

PHILIP. All right, Dad.

OLIVER. That's what I'm asking. What did that mean?

(PHILIP thinks a moment.)

PHILIP. Well. As you know, Nadia teaches at Yale...

OLIVER. I know that...

PHILIP. Obviously what she was trying to say is that she
isn't keen on the psychological.

OLIVER. I see.

PHILIP. She has a horror of it. I thought : that's refreshing.
That's such a refreshing approach.

OLIVER. Why? Why did you think that?

PHILIP. Oh. Because the first thing you notice, it becomes
a way of life. People are taught to say 'I think, I feel'. They talk
all the time as if there were no such thing as reality.

OLIVER. Really?

PHILIP. Or rather: They know reality exists, they know it's
there, but they can't help believing that what they feel about it
is somehow more important than reality itself.

OLIVER. You're talking about Americans?

PHILIP. Not only. But obviously. Having spent time there.

OLIVER. It's something you've noticed?

PHILIP. Say you have an experience. Any experience.
You're walking along the street and a man drops dead in front
of you. And peoples' first response is 'Really? A man dropped
dead in the street? How did that make you feel?'

OLIVER. That's funny.

PHILIP. Yeah, but it's decadent isn't it? As if it's not the world, it's not the world you're interested in, it's just your own reaction to it.

(OLIVER looks at him.)

OLIVER. Huh.

PHILIP. I'll give you another example. This is an interesting example. Take the former Yugoslavia, if you remember just a few years ago...

OLIVER. I do remember...

PHILIP. Yugoslavia falling apart, on the verge of collapse. But Nadia told me that before she first went out there, she mentioned to someone 'You know, I think this is really important.' Whereupon the person looked at her and said 'Have you noticed, you seem quite emotional, Nadia? Have you ever stopped and asked yourself why? Why you're so worked up? All this fascination with foreign trouble-spots, have you ever considered there might be a reason? Has it occurred to you, you may just be running away from problems in your own life?'

(PHILIP smiles at the absurdity of the question.)

OLIVER. Well?

PHILIP. Well, what?

OLIVER. How did Nadia reply? Did Nadia have problems?

PHILIP. No, I don't think so. Not that she's told me about.

(They both smile.)

PHILIP. No, on the contrary. Nadia replied : 'I'm not going to Yugoslavia because there's anything wrong with me. I'm going because there's something wrong in Yugoslavia. It's called ethnic cleansing. And it exists.'

(PHILIP laughs.)

PHILIP. It's crazy. It's ridiculous, isn't it?

OLIVER. To be honest, I can't imagine.

PHILIP. Why not?

OLIVER. Because the people who need me so obviously need me.

(NADIA comes out onto the lawn.)

PHILIP. Ah there you are.

OLIVER. Good morning.

(NADIA reaches out a hand.)

NADIA. Hello.

OLIVER. Oliver.

NADIA. I'm sorry, Philip. I overslept. I didn't realize you'd got up.

PHILIP. I got up.

OLIVER. Good. Well this is charming, charming.

NADIA. Good morning.

(NADIA kisses PHILIP. They all stand a moment, embarrassed.)

OLIVER. So. Let me — right — to give you the idea, has anyone explained?

NADIA. No.

OLIVER. This is border country. That way, the sea. That way, the south.

NADIA. Toward the sun.

OLIVER. Precisely.

NADIA. Goodness, I really did oversleep.

PHILIP. It's not like you.

NADIA. It isn't.

PHILIP. You always wake so early.

OLIVER. You drove through the night, so I don't know how much you saw. Philip said you'd only been to England once before.

PHILIP. For a conference.

NADIA. At Chatham House. International relations. It was brief.

(OLIVER smiles formally.)

OLIVER. It's rare as you know for Philip to visit me at all, let alone in company.

NADIA. Actually it was an impulse. It was an impulsive thing.

OLIVER. Whose impulse?

PHILIP. Both of us.

OLIVER. Hence the short notice.

PHILIP. We got cheap tickets.

NADIA. Some of the happiest times we've had together, doing things on the spur of the moment.

PHILIP. Very much so.

(They both smile.)

NADIA. We simply got up one morning and decided we needed a vacation. Please don't read anything into it.

OLIVER. I haven't.

PHILIP. God forbid.

NADIA. Philip and I had both been working very hard.

PHILIP. It's something that happens over there. It's in the culture. You find yourself working every day of the year.

OLIVER. Really?

NADIA. And Philip said it was silly that I'd barely visited the country where he was born.

OLIVER. Or the people he was born to?

NADIA. Those too.

OLIVER. You're meeting both of us?

PHILIP. Yes.

OLIVER. Better and better. The grand tour.

(Again, OLIVER smiles icily.)

OLIVER. I'm being very rude. Let me get you some breakfast.

NADIA. In a moment. Yes. Thank you.

PHILIP. Or shall I do it?

OLIVER. Philip has actually tried to tell me what you do. I can't say I understand it entirely.

PHILIP. Oh, Dad...

OLIVER. What?

PHILIP. For God's sake!

NADIA. I'm not sure I do either.

PHILIP. Putting Nadia on the spot.

OLIVER. I'm not putting her on the spot. I'm making conversation.

PHILIP. That's even worse!

OLIVER. Even: I'm interested.

PHILIP. She's only just got up.

NADIA. I can't believe you want a lecture from me.

OLIVER. I'm not asking for a lecture. I'm asking for enlightenment.

NADIA. OK.

OLIVER. Thank you.

(They all smile. It's easier.)

NADIA. I teach politics. That's what I do. It's what I always wanted to do.

OLIVER. From when you were young?

NADIA. Exactly. In fact, I remember -

OLIVER. Yes?

NADIA. Even at school, I remember being bewildered. So much time spent reading - I don't know - medieval literature, doing trigonometry when meanwhile, all the important things were being ignored.

OLIVER. What were they? What were the important things?

NADIA. All right: the obvious things.

OLIVER. Which are?

NADIA. I don't know. I suppose: Why so many people live in such poverty. And so few live well. And what can we do about it? These huge facts, these enormous facts not up for study. Ignored. You'd think that to be alive would mean to want to find out.

(OLIVER looks at her a moment.)

OLIVER. But specifically...

NADIA. Yes?

OLIVER. Philip had suggested...

NADIA. Yes?

OLIVER. Your area is now international relations?

NADIA. That's right.

OLIVER. Your specific concern.

NADIA. My field.

OLIVER. With a particular interest in terror.

NADIA. Oh, no, not 'particular'.

OLIVER. I read on the internet: you're known as the professor of terror.

PHILIP. That's what she has to put up with.

NADIA. Only in the media. And among a few of my students. The dumber ones.

OLIVER. Do you have stupid students?

NADIA. I'm afraid I do. Or at least I was thinking before I left.

OLIVER. Why? Why before you left?

NADIA. Oh. Something that happened. A student. My God. Made me think.

(NADIA smiles.)

PHILIP. Excuse me. I'm going to get coffee.

(PHILIP goes out.)

OLIVER. But you have written about terror?

NADIA. Of course. Everyone does. You can't do what I do and not be fascinated by it.

(OLIVER waits for her to go on.)

NADIA. All right, crudely, if you're asking, you can say, if you want to put it this way, that terrorism may be the wrong answer to the right question.

OLIVER. What question is that?

NADIA. Well, I'd have thought terror's an attack on modernity, isn't it?

OLIVER. I'm never sure. Tell me what 'modernity' means.

NADIA. Usually it means that human beings feel themselves discontent, they feel lost in the world – if there's nothing but the world - and they imagine that materialism must therefore be at fault.

(NADIA shifts.)

NADIA. Of course – look, not to insult you – it's much more complicated than that...

OLIVER. Of course...

NADIA. And the actual motivation...

OLIVER. Yes...

NADIA. ...the moment at which an individual picks up a gun, or straps on explosives – that moment is still deeply obscure. People claim to understand it, but do they? I certainly don't. But underlying that desire you'll often find the same discontent: namely, the conviction that materialism isn't enough.

OLIVER. And is that what you think?

NADIA. People blame materialism because they feel it doesn't nourish them. And you could say, it's true: materialism, by definition, isn't heroic. People no longer want to do dangerous, outstanding things. In the West, you no longer become famous for what you do, simply for what happens to you. We celebrate victims, not heroes. We're infantilized by fear to a point where all we want is to live as long and comfortably as possible. And so this new Western ethic of survival, simply surviving as a human being – merely surviving – as though the world were everything, and the manner in which you live in it unimportant — seems to other people, other cultures, well... ignoble.

OLIVER. Do you agree?

NADIA. Me?

OLIVER. Is that your own view? Do you feel that?

(NADIA looks at him a moment.)

NADIA. I don't know. But, whether it is or not, the answer isn't violence.

(PHILIP appears on the lawn.)

PHILIP. I'm assuming you want toast.

NADIA. Yes, please.

PHILIP. Honey or jam?

NADIA. Honey. No, jam. Honey.

PHILIP. I'll bring both.

(PHILIP goes. NADIA remembers after he's gone.)

NADIA. Thanks, babe!

OLIVER. In fact, I must admit when I went to your website...

NADIA. Oh, that...

OLIVER. It lists subjects about which you're available to speak.

NADIA. It's a fancy piece of publicity. Shaming, but you have to do it.

OLIVER. Do you?

NADIA. Sure.

OLIVER. Why's that?

NADIA. Being an academic isn't quite what it was. We find ourselves doing all sorts of things.

OLIVER. I see.

NADIA. Inevitably, yes, I talk to the media.

OLIVER. You make a point of it?

(NADIA looks a moment, detecting criticism.)

NADIA. I was mentioning earlier about privilege? And my special privilege has been to define my job as I go along. The university's been very generous.

OLIVER. You're free?

NADIA. That's it.

OLIVER. Free to do what you choose?

NADIA. More or less.

OLIVER. Because of your status?

NADIA. If you choose to put it like that. I barely teach. A couple of seminars. Mostly, I write.

OLIVER. Philip said there was a book.

NADIA. There is. And I'm writing another. This is a relatively new study. Or rather it's an old study which has been transformed. Am I boring you?

OLIVER. No.

NADIA. You'll let me know if I'm boring you.

OLIVER. You're not.

NADIA. As long as we had two great powers, two super-powers in some sort of balance, then there seemed to be a procedure for determining the world's affairs.

OLIVER. Now there's only one.

NADIA. Exactly. So my area of study becomes more vital.

OLIVER. Especially after Iraq.

NADIA. As you say. Yes. Especially after Iraq.

(NADIA looks again, trying to gauge his agenda. Then she gets up and moves to look out over the hills.)

NADIA. I didn't get much of a look last night but this wasn't what I was expecting.

OLIVER. This spot?

NADIA. Yes.

OLIVER. In what way?

NADIA. I knew you were alone. But still.

OLIVER. I am alone.

NADIA. Is that a choice?

OLIVER. Well, this place would hardly be chance, would it?

NADIA. How do you pronounce it?

OLIVER. Shrewsbury.

(They smile together.)

OLIVER. I came here over ten years ago.

NADIA. As long as that? And you don't mind? You don't mind the isolation?

OLIVER. Philip was already practicing. He'd gone, he'd left home.

NADIA. His mother brought him up?

OLIVER. Officially, yes. But I did my share. You haven't met her yet?

NADIA. No. No, I haven't. He wants me to.

(OLIVER gestures round.)

OLIVER. There aren't many spots left where you can turn three sixty degrees and see barely a single building.

NADIA. You went out of your way?

OLIVER. In France they have this expression. 'France profonde'.

NADIA. I'm embarrassed. I don't speak French.

OLIVER. No? I'm surprised.

NADIA. Why? Why does that surprise you?

OLIVER. Oh. Something Philip said.

NADIA. What was that?

(OLIVER is reluctant.)

NADIA. No, say.

OLIVER. 'Pas de psychologie. Pas de psychose.'

(There is a moment. NADIA seems displeased.)

NADIA. He told you that? Why did he tell you that?

OLIVER. I'm sorry, have I crossed some sort of line?

NADIA. No, no, no.

OLIVER. Please, I didn't mean to upset you.

NADIA. You haven't upset me.

OLIVER. I happened to ask him how you met, that's all.

(NADIA turns away.)

NADIA. It's silly. Why do I want private things to be private?

(PHILIP returns with coffee and toast for NADIA.)

PHILIP. You two all right?

NADIA. We are. Thank you.

OLIVER. Fine.

(NADIA takes her breakfast from him.)

NADIA. Obviously you and your Dad were talking while I was asleep.

PHILIP. Oh, not much.

OLIVER. No, no, no.

PHILIP. Very little, in fact.

OLIVER. Philip's one of those people who's always been at peace with silence.

PHILIP. Silence never bothered me.

OLIVER. If the world can be divided into those who need to speak and those who don't.

PHILIP. People only talk because they're nervous.

OLIVER. It's funny. There's a doctor at the hospital who's notorious for his pauses. Ear, Nose and Throat. 'What are my chances, doctor?' 'Well...'

(OLIVER pauses elaborately.)

OLIVER. If the patient doesn't die of the disease, they die of suspense.

NADIA. And you?

OLIVER. Me?

NADIA. How's your manner?

OLIVER. Oh, reasonably sympathetic, I hope. Early on, they taught me something I try not to forget.

NADIA. What's that?

OLIVER. The definition of a doctor.

NADIA. I've never heard it. Tell me.

OLIVER. A doctor is someone who tells you the truth and stays with you to the end.

(NADIA stops eating and looks directly at him)

OLIVER. Not bad, eh?

NADIA. No. Not bad.

OLIVER. It's pretty good, isn't it?

(PHILIP shifts, not sure what's going on)

PHILIP. Are we going into town? I'd like to show Nadia the town.

(OLIVER takes no notice.)

OLIVER. Nadia's been explaining how things have changed for the academic. The public role.

NADIA. Your father sounds as if he disapproves.

OLIVER. Not at all.

NADIA. As if it were vulgar.

OLIVER. Not vulgar, no. But I have my own idea of what it is to be a professional. The two requirements : to be objective and to be discreet.

NADIA. I'd hope I was both of those.

(OLIVER looks at her a moment.)

OLIVER. Philip mentioned...Philip did mention that the president asked for you.

NADIA. He did. Believe it or not, he did.

OLIVER. You went to the White House?

NADIA. I did.

OLIVER. Goodness.

NADIA. I know.

OLIVER. What did he want?

NADIA. Oh, you can imagine.

OLIVER. Actually, no. I have no idea.

NADIA. He wanted briefing. He wanted advice.

OLIVER. Which you were able to give?

(NADIA doesn't answer.)

OLIVER. About Iraq?

NADIA. Yes. He knew I'd written about Iraq.

OLIVER. Clearly you were in favour? You were in favour of the invasion?

NADIA. The liberation, yes. Yes, I was in favour. I don't think the president would have asked me if I wasn't.

OLIVER. No.

(They both smile.)

NADIA. Whatever you think, whatever your view, I'd have to say, it is undeniably something.

OLIVER. For you?

NADIA. No, I'm not talking personally. I'm talking about entering. Walking in. It's impressive. You're picked up at your hotel in a black car, with blacked-out windows. Five minutes later you're standing on the carpet in the Oval Office.

OLIVER. It's theatre?

NADIA. That's right. Theatre.

(NADIA looks down, slightly embarrassed.)

NADIA. Also in our country, it isn't just the person, it's the office.

OLIVER. He's the president.

NADIA. In America...in America that still means something.

OLIVER. Quite.

NADIA. It really does. Do I sound naïve?

OLIVER. I don't think so.

NADIA. Because from what people tell me, it's not the same here.

OLIVER. Not in the smallest degree.

NADIA. Why is that?

OLIVER. It's hard to explain. But I'm probably typical.

PHILIP. Dad is absolutely typical.

NADIA. How?

(PHILIP smiles, dodging the question.)

PHILIP. I left this country, remember?

OLIVER. No doubt you feel that if your president calls, you have to answer that call. If my prime minister called, I'd let it ring. That's the difference.

PHILIP. It's true.

OLIVER. And what's more, what's more, politics being what it is in this country — i.e. everything, everything — my Prime Minister wouldn't call me in the first place.

PHILIP. That's definitely true.

NADIA. Do you — I don't know how to ask this — am I ridiculous for asking this?

OLIVER. Ask.

NADIA. Does no-one here have any concept of national loyalty? Of being part of a nation?

OLIVER. Oh.

NADIA. Well?

OLIVER. I don't know how to answer. Like most people, I do have a button marked 'patriotism'. But — let's say — I'm choosy about who I allow to press it. Certainly not politicians. And certainly not the Queen.

NADIA. Who then?

OLIVER. Oh you know. Blake. Wilfred Owen.

PHILIP. They're poets.

OLIVER. I know.

(There's a silence. Nobody moves.)

OLIVER. An appeal to patriotism is a contradiction in terms. Especially when made by politicians. You can no more appeal to patriotism than you can appeal to love. You may feel it, but you can't demand it. Wilfred Owen, yes. Fifty seven

thousand British casualties on the first morning on the battle of the Somme, sent into a murderous war by the ruthless, out-of-touch political class of the day. People with no direct experience of war, and no knowledge of its reality, send ordinary working men to die on their behalf. They stay at home. The men die. Hello? Hard to explain, impossible to justify. And one man – one great man – adequate to describe the event.

(PHILIP smiles to himself.)

PHILIP. Dad liked the Sex Pistols as well.

OLIVER. I admit it.

PHILIP. Same reason.

OLIVER. Similar.

PHILIP. All right...

OLIVER. Not the same.

PHILIP. OK.

OLIVER. Don't make me sound stupid. But I did like the Sex Pistols.

(OLIVER sits back, expansive.)

OLIVER. The only patriotic outfit still operating in this country is the awkward squad. In the United States, you're building an empire. Remember, we've dismantled one. When Philip was young I remember him saying he'd like to be gay or an immigrant because then he'd belong. He wanted a tribe.

NADIA. Isn't medicine a tribe?

OLIVER. Used to be. Now it's freelance. We've been – what's the word? – outsourced. The politicians dismantle communities, then complain that community no longer exists. They

incubate the disease, then profess to be shocked when people catch it. 'Oh, why can't people behave?' Well, why can't they? It's a good question. When the people who make the law become lawless themselves, what can you do? How can politicians lead except by example?

(NADIA smiles, giving up.)

NADIA. You have a high standard.

OLIVER. Not that high.

NADIA. If you're talking about what I think you're talking about.

PHILIP. I don't think there's much doubt, is there?

OLIVER. I don't think there is.

PHILIP. It's a fair chance, one way or another, Dad's returned to the subject of Iraq.

OLIVER. Gosh. How did you know?

PHILIP. He usually does.

OLIVER. 'Usually'?

PHILIP. All right...

OLIVER. I don't think, Philip, you're in a position to say 'usually'.

PHILIP. I agree. I'm not.

OLIVER. 'Usually' when you never see me?

PHILIP. OK...

OLIVER. Not just don't see me, barely ever talk, don't even talk to me.

PHILIP. Whose fault is that?

OLIVER. I know. I'm just saying. For all that.

(An edgy silence. NADIA puts her plate aside.)

NADIA. Good, well, maybe this is the moment to set off for Shrewsbury.

OLIVER. Maybe it is.

(They smile at one another.)

NADIA. Believe me, if it's what you want, I'm happy to have the Iraq discussion.

OLIVER. I'm not asking for it.

NADIA. I'll have it tonight if you want.

OLIVER. I'm not insisting.

NADIA. I've had it every day for the last three years. I never supposed a vacation in England would be a vacation from the argument.

OLIVER. Quite.

NADIA. Why should today be different?

(NADIA gets up and turns, formal.)

NADIA. No doubt, you can imagine, I've taken a huge amount of flak.

OLIVER. I'm sure.

NADIA. In liberal Connecticut defending the war has not been a popular position.

OLIVER. It's not been big in Shropshire either.

NADIA. If you're interested: I was quite clear about why I supported it. I'm also clear about what's gone wrong. And I don't think the mess that's followed invalidates the original decision. I've always supported humane intervention in countries where terrible things are happening. I believe in it. With all my heart. If the choice is between stepping in or staying put and

watching dictators let rip, not least against their own people, then I'm for stepping in. I was a reporter before I was as an academic. I've been in these places. I've seen suffering – at ground level. And I've been present in situations in which the West did nothing. I've seen the results of our indifference. So. If you want me to pass my evening defending the right of Western countries to use their muscle to free Arabs from systematic murder, believe me, I'm up for it.

OLIVER. I'm sure you are.

NADIA. I take it you were against?

OLIVER. Passionately.

NADIA. From the beginning?

OLIVER. Let's just say, I knew who the surgeon was going to be, so I had fair idea what the operation would look like.

(OLIVER gets up.)

OLIVER. Please. Don't take it amiss. I'm not being rude.

NADIA. I know that.

OLIVER. Least of all to you, to you of all people, Nadia. I'm thrilled my son has brought somebody home. Even if it isn't home. In the proper sense.

(There's a moment. OLIVER speaks quietly.)

OLIVER. All I want is Philip's happiness.

NADIA. We want the same thing.

OLIVER. And if you can contribute to that happiness, then believe me nobody could be more welcome.

(There's a brief silence.)

NADIA. However.

OLIVER. I'm sorry?

NADIA. I sense a 'however'.

OLIVER. No. There is no 'however'.

(They look at each other a moment.)

NADIA. Excuse me. I'll get my things.

(She goes off into the house. PHILIP moves away, OLIVER doesn't move. A few moments go by.)

PHILIP. Can I just say: this is an act of trust. I trusted you!

OLIVER. Well?

PHILIP. Dad, I didn't have to do this. I did it because I wanted to.

OLIVER. So?

(There is a silence. OLIVER says nothing.)

PHILIP. It's my own fault. I have this ridiculous need for family.

OLIVER. Why ridiculous?

PHILIP. Apart from anything, because I'm the only person in my family who has it.

OLIVER. Your mother has it.

(PHILIP throws him a mistrustful look.)

PHILIP. Just look at Nadia. You see what she is! You can tell what she is! This is the best piece of luck in my life! Meet-

ing her! What, I'm not to marry her because you don't approve of her position on Iraq?

OLIVER. Come on, nobody said that.

PHILIP. Didn't they?

OLIVER. Nobody put it like that.

PHILIP. They didn't need to, did they?

OLIVER. And maybe I wasn't listening but I didn't hear anyone say 'marriage' either.

(PHILIP is silent. OLIVER is amused.)

OLIVER. What am I meant to say? What have I done wrong?

PHILIP. You know full well.

OLIVER. Do I?

PHILIP. You could be a little more welcoming.

OLIVER. Welcoming?

PHILIP. Yes.

OLIVER. Come on, it's been a good old Welsh borders welcome. What was missing? Conjuring tricks?

(But PHILIP has already moved away.)

PHILIP. She said 'I'd be fascinated to see a little family background.' It's not very easy is it? to explain 'Oh you can meet my father, but bear in mind, this is a man who destroyed my mother's life.'

OLIVER. Did I?

PHILIP. And now – for reasons I'm not going into – he lives alone on a hillside, repelling boarders. Or rather, repelling male boarders.

(OLIVER smiles, unperturbed, enjoying himself.)

OLIVER. Philip, this is a tense and unnatural situation.

PHILIP. You could say.

OLIVER. Of course it is. It will test both of our characters to the limit.

PHILIP. Very funny.

OLIVER. Neither of us – all right? – has too much experience of conventional family life.

PHILIP. To put it no higher.

OLIVER. But, in my opinion, I think you're letting it get to you.

(OLIVER sits back, content.)

OLIVER. You say she's the greatest piece of luck in your life.

PHILIP. She is.

OLIVER. In that case, you might ask, why risk your luck by bringing her here to meet me?

PHILIP. I'm beginning to ask that myself.

OLIVER. Well, then, why did you?

(PHILIP just looks at him.)

OLIVER. All right. In fact, take one step back and I think you'll find the whole thing is going remarkably well.

PHILIP. You think so?

OLIVER. She's enjoying my company and relishing the chance to talk to someone who's almost as clever as she is.

PHILIP. You mean as opposed to me?

(OLIVER looks at him reproachfully.)

OLIVER. Look, Philip, if you'd like a piece of advice...

PHILIP. Advice from you?

OLIVER. ...then I'd say – just from my experience – I have some experience of this — strategically it wouldn't be very clever when in Nadia's company to show self-doubt. Trust me. It would not be advantageous. Because – I admit, you know her better than I do – but my guess is that Nadia Blye is not someone who easily tolerates weakness. She doesn't like it. Am I right?

(PHILIP doesn't answer.)

OLIVER. Anyone who announces that psychology's a load of rubbish – well, you choose to call that attitude 'refreshing'. I think a better word for it might be 'dangerous'. That's all I'm saying.

PHILIP. You've said enough.

OLIVER. Take one look at her : she's someone who'd have very little trouble attracting any man on campus.

PHILIP. So?

OLIVER. So my guess is, she's picked you out because you appear to be strong. Well then. Be strong. Why disappoint her? As our government instructs us, be alert but not alarmed. Face it: nothing serious is going to go wrong unless you let it go wrong.

(There is a mistrustful silence.)

PHILIP. We're here till tomorrow. We're here till tomorrow night.

OLIVER. Good. Then we'll all take it step by step and see how it goes.

(OLIVER examines his nails, smiling. PHILIP is annoyed with himself.)

PHILIP. And I don't feel self-doubt when I'm in America.

OLIVER. Good.

PHILIP. I like American life.

OLIVER. I'm sure you do.

PHILIP. I like the feel of it. The look. It suits me. In America, I stand with a gin and tonic, I look out of the window, people are going out to the mall and I feel hopeful. Explain that.

OLIVER. I can't.

PHILIP. The landscape moves me. Crazy, isn't it? When there's a road across the desert and nothing in sight. When it snows in New England. Sobbing like a child about a place which isn't even home.

(OLIVER looks down, mischievous.)

OLIVER. Well it's always nice, isn't it? to get away from one's parents.

PHILIP. In my case very much so.

OLIVER. And what's more with an American girl-friend. Though from what I read in the magazines American women can be quite exacting.

(PHILIP turns, half-amused, half-exasperated.)

PHILIP. Oh God, are you off again?

OLIVER. Am I?

PHILIP. Why do you do this? My whole life, you did this stuff. Did nobody tell you? Kids aren't meant to be objects of satire, you know. That's not why most people opt for parenthood.

OLIVER. No you're right.

PHILIP. Most people don't use their children to refine their jokes on.

OLIVER. I know. Absolutely.

PHILIP. Well?

OLIVER. You're right. Of course you're right.

PHILIP. You're 58. It's unbecoming.

OLIVER. I'll stop.

(NADIA returns.)

PHILIP. Good, you're ready. I'll get the car keys.

NADIA. I've got them here.

(NADIA holds them out.)

NADIA. Are you coming with us?

OLIVER. I'm not. You enjoy yourselves.

(NADIA hesitates, about to go.)

NADIA. I was thinking, something about this situation reminds me of J. Paul Getty. Do you know who I mean?

OLIVER. Of course.

NADIA. Richest man in the world. I've always liked him for one thing.

OLIVER. What was that?

NADIA. I read, before he took a girl on their first date, he insisted she submit to a full medical examination by a doctor of his choosing.

(OLIVER and NADIA smile.)

NADIA. Now that's what I call romantic.

OLIVER. Me too.

NADIA. Great start to an evening, isn't it?

OLIVER. And good business for my profession too.

NADIA. Yeah. Yeah, that's what I was thinking.

(The two of them stand, amused by each other.)

NADIA. See you later.

OLIVER. And you.

Scene 5

(OLIVER, alone.)

OLIVER. I used to go to the football when I lived in London. I thought, why's everyone shouting at the referee? He's doing his best. In fact I'm the only fan I know who ever took the referee for a meal. I ran into him as he was leaving the ground – and we fell to talking. I told him I'd liked the way he'd handled things. We went on to a restaurant and I bought him dinner. There's a part of me that likes a well-ordered game.

Scene 6

(The lawn again. The remains of meal. A CD player is on in the house. NADIA, PHILIP and OLIVER have been eating at a table under the stars. It looks enchanted.)

NADIA. It seems so long ago, it seems like such a long time ago. I suppose I wasn't there more than eight months...

OLIVER. That's all?

NADIA. Probably. But it seems like half a life-time. When we were in Sarajevo.

(There's a moment's silence.)

NADIA. Maybe there was something about my being so young. Most of us were. By the time you've got a family, it's tough, unless your partner's willing to accept you might get a bullet in the throat.

(OLIVER refers to the scene around them.)

OLIVER. You couldn't sit under the stars. You couldn't eat out?

NADIA. You couldn't eat. Most nights I was looped, all of us were.

OLIVER. Looped? What does looped mean?

(There is a sudden silence. She looks at him.)

NADIA. Looped? Looped means drunk.

(Everyone is still, PHILIP watching intently.)

NADIA. You'd go out all day in what we call 'soft skins'...

OLIVER. Say again.

NADIA. I thought it would amuse you, that's why I said it.

OLIVER. All your correspondents' slang.

NADIA. Yeah...

OLIVER. You're a tribe.

NADIA. Hmm.

OLIVER. So, 'soft skin'?

NADIA. 'Soft skin' meaning a car with no armour. An un-armoured car. A regular car.

OLIVER. So you went into Shrewsbury today...

NADIA. Yeah...

OLIVER. In a soft skin.

NADIA. That's right. Only in Sarajevo you felt it, you really felt it, because you knew there was just a thin layer of tin between you and everything outside. Back at the hotel you were sharing rooms, maybe even sleeping on the floor, you had relationships – these were people you're never going to forget.

(PHILIP looks thoughtful, OLIVER notices.)

OLIVER. But you stopped?

NADIA. Oh, yes.

OLIVER. You no longer do it. Why?

NADIA. The whole thing. The anger. I found myself addicted.

OLIVER. Which? To the anger or the way of life?

NADIA. Both.

OLIVER. Anger against what?

NADIA. Anger against the world. The world, for standing by, for knowing and not intervening.

(NADIA shakes her head, remembering.)

NADIA. Endless days, days lying on a floor in a blackout, watching people die for no purpose, for no reason, except the