

# When Did You Last See My Mother?

A Play in Six Acts

by Christopher Hampton

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



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## CHARACTERS

IAN

JIMMY

MRS. EVANS, *Jimmy's mother.*

DENNIS

LINDA

The first West End performance of WHEN DID YOU LAST SEE MY MOTHER? was given at the Comedy Theatre, Haymarket, London on July 4th, 1966. It was directed by Robert Kidd and the cast was as follows:

IAN ..... *Victor Henry*  
JIMMY ..... *Julian Holloway*  
MRS. EVANS ..... *Gwen Watford*  
DENNIS ..... *Christopher Matthews*  
LINDA ..... *Lucy Fleming*



# When Did You Last See My Mother?

## SCENE 1

### HOSTILITIES COMMENCE

*A faded but spacious bed-sit containing: two divans, one against the back wall, one against the side wall, a large, unwieldy table with ornamental legs, at the back with two or three chairs, a sofa with a holed red cover and one arm stove in, an armchair to match, a TV set set on a small round table, bookshelves, a telephone, a transistor radio, one chest of drawers decorated with an extremely scruffy, thin piece of green cloth, horrible pattern wallpaper, a gas fire, and various other odds and ends like raincoats hanging behind the door—all plonked down, it seems, on one huge all-purpose filthy red carpet. To add to the general air of constriction, the room is in an extremely untidy state, with books left about, dirty shirts on the chest of drawers. Occasional bottles, shoes and other bits and pieces litter the floor. The thick blue velvet curtains, souvenirs of another era, are pulled, and the two bottle lamps on the mantelpiece above the fire shed a dim light.*

*The two occupants of this room, IAN and JIMMY, are in the middle of a violent argument. JIMMY, fair-haired, handsome in a petulant sort of way, careful in his dress and hairstyle, stands, hands in pockets,*

*facing one of the side walls, an expression of great annoyance on his face. IAN is sitting glumly in the big armchair. He is not good-looking—he wears glasses, has a slight stoop, greasy, unmanageable hair. He does not look angry, but cool, sardonic, rather vicious. Both are in their very late teens. They are, in fact, both rather drunk—IAN rather more so than JIMMY, though they do not show any conventional signs of this, such as slurring their syllables or hiccuping or any of the usual unnecessary business of stage drunkenness. If it shows at all it is in the thrusting belligerence of their talk. After the curtain rises there is a short, poisonous silence.*

IAN. (*Evenly.*) Crap. She was a right bag.

JIMMY. (*Bursts out.*) You are a . . .

IAN. She was a right soggy Weetabix. Don't tell me you fancied her. You couldn't have. I know you're pretty short on intelligence but I thought you had a modicum of taste.

JIMMY. (*Explodes.*) Taste!?

IAN. The fifth and sixth sense.

JIMMY. Don't you talk to me about taste. Taste? That's one thing you haven't got. I know for a fact my taste is better than yours.

IAN. How?

JIMMY. Well . . . well, what about that god-awful moo you knocked around with last year—Hilary or Amelia or whatever her name was?

IAN. Carol.

JIMMY. Yes—well, she looked like a tin can in labor.

IAN. You never even met her.

JIMMY. She must have done if she went to bed with you. Anyone who did, would.

IAN. (*Stung by this, gets up.*) —Aren't you being rather childish? Anyhow she didn't. Look like that or go to bed with me.

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JIMMY. So are you.

IAN. So am I what?

JIMMY. Oh, belt up!

(*Silence. For a moment it seems as if the argument has come to an end. Then JIMMY kicks a shoe across the room.*)

IAN. Oh, you are a scruff. (*He turns to JIMMY, annoyed.*) She was, though.

JIMMY. What?

IAN. A bag. Horrible. I could tell her a mile off. The way she came up. (*He imitates her, a simpering falsetto.*) "What's your name? Jimmy what? Oo, I've heard about you." And then you went all pathetic and asked her what she'd heard, and when she said, "Aha," I nearly retched it was so inevitable. It was quite obvious she'd never heard of you before either.

JIMMY. (*Rather miserably.*) She had.

IAN. Like hell. (*Pause.*) Mind you, it wasn't so much your degrading yourself with a third-class tart that annoyed me, it was making we wait an hour after everyone else had gone home while you filled her in in her car. That was not only boring but embarrassing. By the time you turned up the host was getting quite nasty.

JIMMY. Oh, don't keep on, for Christ's sake.

IAN. Well, it was a terrible party.

JIMMY. Well, you don't seem to go out of your way to enjoy yourself.

IAN. That's because the only decent birds are already booked and only the ugly, sex-starved crows like you got are left.

JIMMY. She wasn't ugly.

IAN. She had a reasonable pair of Bristols, I remember noticing. But her face was dull, Christ, and listening to her yattering must have been like walking on red-hot coals.

JIMMY. So you just resign and drink.

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IAN. Yeah, that's right. And ogle the few respectable birds like that one in trousers and boots.

JIMMY. That was the host.

IAN. (*With a sudden outbreak of viciousness.*) Look, why don't you shut up and before you start making snide remarks, just remember yourself at school, last year.

JIMMY. (*Mumbles tiredly.*) Oh, bugger off.

IAN. (*Regaining his composure.*) I beg your pardon?

JIMMY. (*In a sudden blaze of fury.*) Bugger off!

IAN. For Christ's sake, keep your voice down or that Wop get will call the police again. If we have the police round more than once a week, dear, the neighbors will start talking. (*Suddenly JIMMY steps across and lashes out at IAN, who is genuinely surprised at this. He ducks out of the way.*) That was a joke. What I just said. A joke. Ha, ha? You thick turnip. You have a positive genius for missing the point. (*Pause—then, aggrieved.*) You want to watch what you're doing, you might have done me an injury.

JIMMY. (*Miserably.*) You are a bastard.

(*Silence. Their eyes meet for a second; then they both look away.*)

IAN. That's as may be. (*Pause. He looks at his watch.*) Christ, it's twenty to four. Bedtime, my lad. We got that job starting tomorrow morning, remember? (*Flops down on one of the beds and then, noticing that JIMMY has not answered and is in fact looking rather guilty:*) You do remember?

JIMMY. Well, yes, as a matter of fact, Ian, I wanted to tell you something about that.

IAN. (*Sits up, immediately suspicious.*) What?

JIMMY. Well, I . . . I've decided I don't want to do it. I don't fancy it.

IAN. You what?

JIMMY. Oh, God, I knew you were going to make a fuss about it. I wasn't going to tell you till the morning.

IAN. What do you mean you weren't going to tell me

till the morning? What do you mean (*His indignation is mounting.*) you knew I was going to make a fuss about it?

JIMMY. What I say.

IAN. What you say?

JIMMY. (*Becoming annoyed himself.*) Look, don't just stand there or . . . or sit there bloody well repeating everything I say. You heard.

IAN. Well, I don't think I get what you're on about.

JIMMY. Don't be so damn silly, of course you do. I am simply not going to come with you on the job tomorrow.

IAN. (*Flabbergasted.*) But I . . . you . . . we already signed on and everything.

JIMMY. Well, I've changed my mind. Look, let's face it, it's not really me lumping great loads of bricks around the place, now is it?

IAN. (*Has got to his feet. He is almost beside himself.*) But it was your lousy idea!

JIMMY. Yeah, and I still reckon it was a good one. Building sites is a good way to make money when you're down. But I've decided I don't want to do it and that's it.

IAN. But it was going to be all happy comrades. You said, you said all along that it wouldn't be too bad doing a laborer's job if we did it together. You said it would be—fun.

JIMMY. Well . . . I . . .

IAN. Of course, I never really expected you to soil your lilybloodywhite hands with honest toil. (*The quiet venom is back in his voice now.*) It's as much as you can do to write all those bloody letters home asking for more money. You nearly rupture yourself carrying all those pound notes around in your wallet.

JIMMY. Oh, don't start that again, for Christ's sake.

IAN. I'm surprised you deign to rub shoulders with an underprivileged pauper like me. Why don't you go and live with someone rich so that you can co-exist in the style to which you are accustomed? Like that collapsible

haggis you were with this evening. You could sleep with her as well. (*An afterthought.*) Of course, you could always sleep with me, but Mummy wouldn't like that, would she?

JIMMY. (*Reasonably.*) I think you're bloody tactless, Ian. If I moved out you know very well you wouldn't be able to afford the rent.

IAN. Tactless? Yes, I am tactless. I come from a tactless family. Take my father. He was a very tactless man: (a) because instead of having me educated on the house he nearly broke himself giving me the inestimable benefits of a public school education, and (b) because he went and caught nasty, rotten, lumpy cancer and, tactlessly, as ever, timed his death for my sixteenth birthday. My mother was also tactless enough to die, when I was twelve.

JIMMY. Oh, spare us the poor orphaned me spiel for Christ's sake.

IAN. (*Is furious that his bubble of indulgent self-pity has been burst; he shrivels back into cold, probing anger.*) You were threatening me just now, weren't you?

JIMMY. (*Taken off guard.*) When? How?

IAN. You said it was tactless to annoy you because if you moved out I couldn't manage the rent.

JIMMY. Yes, well . . . I . . .

IAN. (*Erupts again.*) Well, I can do without you, see? You and your bloody money, flashing it round like you were the Sheik of Kuwait. There's other people in London who want to share a flat and who could do it without making out they were Aristotle Onassis.

JIMMY. Who?

IAN. (*With insulting relish.*) Aristotle Onassis.

JIMMY. Well, if that's the way you feel . . .

IAN. Yes, it is. You're damn tooting right, it is.

JIMMY. Look, I'm bugged if I'm going to stand here and listen to you griping all day and every day. You seem to forget I live here from choice, not because I have to. *I've* got a home to go back to, and . . . and (*He*

*blusters, realizing suddenly the cruelty of his words.)* I'm bloody well going back to it.

IAN. Oh, why don't you. I can't imagine why you ever came in the first place. *(Now he is hurt, shouting.)* Go on, get packed and get out.

JIMMY. I will. *(Pause.)* I will. *(Crosses to the chest of drawers and pulls out an immense old holdall from behind it. He opens one of the drawers and begins bundling the contents into the holdall. IAN watches him silently and malevolently. After a short time JIMMY pauses and then strides over to the door.)*

IAN. Where are you off to now?

JIMMY. *(Coldly.)* I'm going to have a slash. Do you mind?

IAN. Not in the least, my dear. Make yourself at home. *(JIMMY stalks out, slamming the door. A pause, then IAN begins to laugh quietly. Then he gets up, goes over to the chest of drawers, reopens the drawer, takes JIMMY'S clothes out of the holdall and puts them back in the drawer. He closes the drawer, picks up the holdall and drops it back down behind the chest of drawers. As he has been doing this, he has been singing rather tunelessly in a heavy American accent:)*

There is a house in Noo Orleans  
They call the Risin' Sun,  
An' it's been the ruin of many a po' boy,  
An', God, Ah know, Ah'm one.

*(Re-enter JIMMY. He goes across and looks for his holdall, then turns wrathfully on IAN who is by now sitting in the armchair again.)*

JIMMY. You. . . what? . . . *(He breaks off as he sees IAN smiling at him.)*

IAN. My dear Jimmy, four o'clock in the morning is hardly the moment to stage a dramatic walkout. I imagine one would feel a proper nig-nog storming out and then having to wait two or three hours in a station waiting room full of snoring tramps.

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JIMMY. (*Again uncertain.*) Yeah . . . well, let's have a bit less of this patronizing "my dear Jimmy" bit.

IAN. A thousand pardons, James, my heart's desire. That scans.

JIMMY. (*Suddenly smiling, almost affectionate.*) You are a sod.

IAN. You tell me that so often I'm beginning to believe you. No, but seriously, Jim, in all . . . seriousness, you must stop starting all these arguments.

JIMMY. (*Again enraged.*) Me? You . . . I . . . (*He breaks off as he hears IAN laughing low in his throat. Then he smiles and shakes his head.*) No . . . but listen, Ian, let me tell you something seriously—and this is serious—well, seriously, Ian, you shouldn't drink so much.

IAN. (*Mock concern.*) Are you serious?

JIMMY. (*Missing the sarcasm.*) Yes. Yes, I am. Because I tell you, you're a real bastard when you're drunk. Because . . . you lose control of your tongue . . . and you're bloody vindictive.

IAN. Thank you, Mrs. Dale.

JIMMY. Yeah . . . well, just you try and remember that.

IAN. Oh, I will. Yes. (*Pause. Then IAN gets up.*) Well now, much as I love you, I can't sit around chatting you up all night. Some people have to work to earn a living.

(*Silence. IAN walks across to his bed and begins to take off his sweater.*)

JIMMY. Listen, I've been thinking. . . .

IAN. (*Engulfed in sweater.*) Never.

JIMMY. Perhaps I will come with you on that job tomorrow.

IAN. You what?

JIMMY. I changed my mind.

IAN. Again?

JIMMY. Yes. (*He is beginning to get annoyed.*) Yes. I think I do need the money.

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IAN. Oh, no.

JIMMY. No, what? What do you mean?

IAN. I'm not having you trailing along looking martyred. I'm not going to listen to you griping all day and blaming it on me. Oh, no.

JIMMY. Listen, you can't stop me if I want to work. We signed on for that job together . . . remember?

IAN. And then you decided you didn't want to go.

JIMMY. (*Bellows.*) Well, I've changed my mind!

IAN. Well, I'm perfectly capable of doing a job like that without you breathing down my bloody neck all day.

JIMMY. (*Still shouting.*) All right then, I won't go!

*(Long silence. IAN starts unbuttoning his shirt. Then he stops and fishes his wallet out of his back pocket. He inspects the contents and then puts it back.)*

IAN. Two pound ten. . . . I don't think I will either.

**BLACKOUT**

SCENE 2

TEA FOR THREE

*A few days later. The room looks a little tidier and IAN and JIMMY are in the process of clearing up. IAN is armed with a duster which he flicks carelessly over the furniture. JIMMY is picking up various bits and pieces and stuffing them into drawers. Their conversation is sporadic, interrupted by the actions of last-minute tidying-up. IAN stops dusting for a minute and looks nostalgic. He shakes his head and sighs quietly.*

IAN. He was beautiful. (*Silence.*)

JIMMY. (*Indifferently.*) He was all right.

IAN. It annoys me when you say things like that. Just offhand: "He was all right," just like that. After all, you did go to bed with him.

JIMMY. (*Does not answer for a moment. It seems he does not like being reminded. Finally he speaks.*) So what? Only because there was no one else going.

IAN. (*Stops dusting.*) Now that really does annoy me.

JIMMY. Why?

IAN. Because I was in love with him. I was in love with him and hardly ever spoke to him. You went to bed with him because there was no one else going.

JIMMY. As far as I can see you've only got yourself to blame. You should have told him. He'd have had them off like a shot. I've told you before, he was a pretty easy lay.

IAN. I . . . I was scared of him.

JIMMY. (*Amused.*) Why?

IAN. (*Fiercely.*) Because I was in love with him. (*Silence. IAN stands holding the duster, looking miserable.*)

JIMMY. Listen, are you going to dust or shall I? She'll be here in a minute.

IAN. What? Oh . . . oh, yes. (*Continues dusting for*

*a minute then stops, suddenly struck by a thought.*) You remember that last night?

JIMMY. No, what last night? When?

IAN. The last night of our last term.

JIMMY. No, not particularly.

IAN. I'm not surprised, you were stoned. (*Silence; IAN flicks aimlessly at the T.V. set.*)

JIMMY. Well, what about it?

IAN. What about what?

JIMMY. The last night.

IAN. Oh, nothing.

JIMMY. No, go on. You were going to say something about it.

IAN. No, I was just thinking about you on that last night.

JIMMY. Well?

IAN. Well, you were so drunk—you'd been mixing drinks all evening and you were really merry. You kept saying that you had a farewell appointment with Dennis at eleven o'clock and it was going to be the greatest.

JIMMY. And?

IAN. And then about eleven you got up and staggered off full of the sly winks and heavy nudges. And you were gone about an hour, maybe more, and I waited in my study till you came back to tell me how marvelous it had been, how fabulous he was, and I just sat there and listened to you babbling on and I thought what a way to end a school career and I thought you bastard because you knew.

JIMMY. (*A little worried.*) I don't remember all this.

IAN. I told you, you were pissed. As a cist. But I wasn't. (*Silence. He stands, remembering.*)

JIMMY. (*Deprecatingly.*) Well, anyhow, he wasn't all that marvelous.

IAN. (*Implacably.*) I thought so.

JIMMY. No, I tell you, he . . . er . . .

IAN. He what?

JIMMY. He had a . . . er . . . an anatomical deficiency.

IAN. A what?

JIMMY. An anatomical deficiency.

IAN. I'm not with you.

JIMMY. Well, work it out. (IAN remains puzzled.) Look, it's past four o'clock. For Christ's sake get a move on with that bloody dusting. (IAN does not move.) Look, are you or are you not going to dust?

IAN. (Sepulchrally.) We all are. (He looks up at JIMMY smiling and JIMMY laughs, as the bell rings. IAN goes berserk.) Oh shit, here she is. (He rushes round the stage dusting everything in sight, including JIMMY. JIMMY laughs and takes the duster from him. While JIMMY is offstage, IAN straightens a few cushions and flops into the armchair. Just as he does so the door opens and JIMMY shows his mother in. IAN stands up. MRS. EVANS is a still attractive woman of about 40. She shares JIMMY'S fair hair and good looks and has not lost her figure. She is dressed smartly but tastefully. It is fairly obvious from her clothes, accent and bearing that she comes from a prosperous family, although prosperity does not seem to have spoilt her in any way.) Hello, Mrs. Evans.

MRS. EVANS. Hello, Ian, nice to see you again. How are you?

IAN. Oh, you know, surviving.

JIMMY. Sit down, Mum. I'll go and get a cup of tea ready and you can have a chat with Ian.

MRS. EVANS. Thank you, dear. (Sits down at one end of the sofa. JIMMY starts to leave the room.)

IAN. I'll get it.

JIMMY. No, you sit down. I won't be long.

IAN. O.K. (Sits down again in the armchair. There is a short silence. Then they both begin talking at once.) Don't lean on the . . .

MRS. EVANS. You seem to have got . . .

IAN. Sorry.

MRS. EVANS. No, do go on.

IAN. I was just going to say don't lean on that arm of

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the sofa. It's extremely collapsible. Now what were you going to say?

MRS. EVANS. I was going to say that you seem to have got Jimmy nicely house-trained. He'd never have dreamed of getting the tea before he left home.

IAN. Actually, he's much better at that sort of thing than I am.

MRS. EVANS. Really?

IAN. Yeah, I'm hopeless.

MRS. EVANS. And yet you've led a much more sort of . . . independent life than he has, haven't you?

IAN. I suppose so, yes.

MRS. EVANS. I mean, I suppose I shouldn't say a thing like this, but you always seem to be so much more mature than Jimmy.

IAN. (*After a short pause, smiling.*) Maybe that's why I'm so lousy at housework. (*Silence.*)

MRS. EVANS. (*Thoughtlessly.*) How are the family?

IAN. (*Smiling, offhand.*) Dead, mostly.

MRS. EVANS. (*Is covered with confusion at this. She blushes deeply and stammers when she speaks next.*) Oh, I'm terribly sorry . . . I . . . didn't mean . . . I meant your grandparents. I'm awfully . . . I mean . . . how . . .

IAN. Don't worry. I don't mind a bit. Really.

MRS. EVANS. No, honestly, it was frightfully thoughtless of me.

IAN. (*Kindly.*) Nonsense. (*Pause. He smiles at her.*) My grandparents are fine. They're still strongly opposed to my living here and want me to go back to Sheffield. But, God, it's such a dreary place—I'd far rather live here with Jimmy.

MRS. EVANS. It's expensive here, though, isn't it?

IAN. Ah, now, there you've touched upon a very delicate point. As a matter of fact my money from all those different jobs I did at the beginning of the year when I was staying with you has almost gone. The Paris holiday took up quite a bit of it and this place has eaten up the

rest. Jimmy and I did have a job scheduled to start last week but there was a party on the Sunday night and on Monday we both had hangovers. I was sick all morning.

MRS. EVANS. But you've only got a couple of months before you go up to Oxford, haven't you?

IAN. Yes, but I would be hard pushed to exist for two months on my present capital, which amounts to 17/4d.

MRS. EVANS. (*Appalled.*) Is that all? Is that really all? (IAN *nods, smiling. Silence.*) Ian?

IAN. Mm?

MRS. EVANS. Look, if we could lend you some . . . you know, just twenty pounds or something . . . don't hesitate.

IAN. (*Smiling, shaking his head.*) No, I couldn't.

MRS. EVANS. Yes, I mean, just a loan. . . .

IAN. No, I wouldn't want to. Thanks a lot, it's very kind of you and all, but . . .

MRS. EVANS. Well, how are you going to manage?

IAN. I'll be O.K. As a matter of fact I'm signed on with an agency and they're going to ring me whenever they have a job going, which should be any day now, and I'll be able to start on Monday with any luck. We've got the weekend shopping in and the rent's up to date, so I shouldn't have to spend any more dough until Monday and I'll ask them to pay me in advance.

MRS. EVANS. What if they won't?

IAN. I'll manage.

MRS. EVANS. What if they can't give you a job?

IAN. I'll make out. (*Hastily changing the subject.*) Where's Jimmy gone with the tea then? (*Forced laughter.*) He's probably gassed himself or something. I'll go and see. (*Gets up and goes across to the door.*)

MRS. EVANS. Ian . . .

IAN. (*Smiling.*) You didn't hear an explosion, did you?

MRS. EVANS. No, I . . . (IAN *has left the room.*)

IAN. (*Offstage.*) Is it nearly ready? Can I fetch or carry?

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JIMMY. (*Offstage.*) Get the table out, will you? (*Re-enter IAN.*)

IAN. Won't be a minute.

MRS. EVANS. (*Laughs.* IAN comes across and sits.) You've done something different to your hair.

IAN. Combed it.

(*They both laugh. Then JIMMY enters backwards with a tray of tea, cake, toast, etc. He sets it on the ornamental-belegged table.*)

JIMMY. (*A little self-consciously.*) Voilà. Shall I dispense?

IAN. Not in here, please.

JIMMY. (*Matily.*) Shut your face.

IAN. (*Walks over to the table and looks at the tea.*) Your usual valiant, if mediocre, effort. Dispense by all means and let's get it over with.

JIMMY. Look, let's have a bit less of the sparkling repartee. Entertain Mum while I hand round. Give her one of your stories.

MRS. EVANS. One of his whats?

JIMMY. Stories.

IAN. No.

MRS. EVANS. Oh, do. Go on.

IAN. No, not in the mood. (*Pause.*) Oh, all right then. (*Pause.*) Well now, this is a true and very tragic story, so no giggling, James.

JIMMY. I've heard it.

IAN. How do you know? Anyhow, as you so elegantly put it, shut your face. (*JIMMY discreetly dispenses as IAN speaks, and they eat and drink as they speak and listen.*) It was when I was in Paris earlier this year.

JIMMY. I have heard it.

IAN. Look, for . . . Please. (*Pause; they laugh.* IAN continues.) In Paris, anyway. I went to this Sorbonne lecture and it was this old girl lecturing on modern art

and sculpture. Middle-aged she was, actually, and a bit or a droner. She gave a short address and then switched all the lights off and started showing slides of all these crummy modern sculptures, you know, with holes and all. Anyhow, she hadn't been going long before people started slipping out. Every now and then, you'd hear the swing-doors going as someone else left. Anyhow, she droned on and people kept going and going and she put more slides in and the swing-doors swung more and more often and finally—because I was accustomed to the dark by then—I looked around the hall and I was the only person left in the entire room. So I thought, Christ, this is going to be so embarrassing when the lights go on, we'll be alone, and she may even speak to me or something and my French is terrible, especially in times of stress, so I—quietly and guiltily—I crept out through the swing-doors. (*Pause.*) You can just imagine her at the end saying; "Thank you all for coming and listening and I hope you've all learnt something, all of you," and then switching the lights on and no one there.

MRS. EVANS. You should have stayed. You ought to have stayed.

JIMMY. (*Pensively.*) Poor old moo.

(*Slight silence. IAN turns to JIMMY.*)

IAN. I sit here; I tell a story so moving in its details and so deep in its implications, that the most hardened listener should melt into helpless tears. So Evans here, a . . . quagmire of hypersensitivity, is moved to comment in his own . . . inimitably colloquial way— Poor old moo. Poor old moo—the remark of a true aesthete.

JIMMY. (*Rolling his eyes.*) God alive.

MRS. EVANS. Well, really, Jimmy, he's right.

JIMMY. (*Harshly to his mother.*) Ian is being funny. You're supposed to laugh, not agree.

MRS. EVANS. (*Unhappily.*) Well . . .

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IAN. There is, nevertheless, a groatsworth of truth behind my wit.

JIMMY. (*Suddenly blurting.*) You're a bit bloody pompous this afternoon, aren't you?

(*There is an awkward silence. IAN is silent because he knows JIMMY is right; MRS. EVANS because she is a little uncertain how to react; JIMMY because he wishes he had not spoken.*)

MRS. EVANS. Er . . . more tea? (*IAN disregards her question; he is brooding.*)

JIMMY. Yes, please.

MRS. EVANS. (*Sharply.*) I was asking Ian. (*Then immediately:*) Oh, I'm sorry, dear. Sorry I was a bit. . . . We're all . . .

IAN. (*Smiling suddenly.*) Yes. (*Pause.*) My fault. (*Silence. MRS. EVANS pours tea for JIMMY.*)

JIMMY. Thanks.

MRS. EVANS. (*At the same time.*) Ian?

IAN. Yes, thank you.

MRS. EVANS. (*Silence again. MRS. EVANS goes to pour IAN another cup but the tea runs out.*) None left. I'll have to go and fill it from the kettle.

JIMMY. (*Slightly embarrassed.*) I'll go.

MRS. EVANS. (*Already on her feet.*) You sit down. I'll deal with it.

IAN. Don't bother. I'm not all that keen for another cup.

MRS. EVANS. (*With finality.*) Won't take a minute. (*Exits with teapot. Short silence, then IAN catches JIMMY's eye and smiles at him.*)

IAN. Not going too badly, is it?

JIMMY. No, except . . . sorry I snapped.

IAN. Like I said, my fault. (*Silence.*)

JIMMY. She likes you a lot, you know.

IAN. Does she?

JIMMY. Yes, she's always saying.

IAN. Well, I like her. (*Silence.*) Jimmy.

JIMMY. Yeah.

IAN. Can you lend me a couple of notes?

JIMMY. (*The slightest hesitation.*) Sure, sure. (*Reaches for his wallet.*)

IAN. Not right now. After will do. That'll make it I owe you three quid. I should be able to pay you back fairly shortly.

JIMMY. (*A little hurt.*) Look, I told you I didn't need that other pound back.

IAN. Oh, God, don't let's go through all this again. You lend me a pound, I owe you a pound. I don't want bloody charity.

JIMMY. (*A little huffily.*) All right then, I won't lend you any more.

IAN. (*Stares at him poisonously for a moment; then, hissing.*) All right then, don't.

(*Re-enter MRS. EVANS with the teapot. She goes across to pour out some tea for IAN.*)

MRS. EVANS. Oh dear, it's very weak, I should have left it . . . (*She realizes suddenly that there is tension in the air.*) to stand.

IAN. (*An obvious effort.*) No, no, that's fine. I . . . er, don't mind it weak.

JIMMY. (*Also forced.*) Did I tell you, Mum, to change the . . . er . . . subject, that we're having a party here next Friday?

MRS. EVANS. Really. No, you didn't. A big one?

JIMMY. Just a few friends.

MRS. EVANS. From school?

IAN. Some.

MRS. EVANS. Oh, who's from school?

JIMMY. There's . . .

IAN. (*Slightly maliciously.*) Dennis. (*Short silence.*)

MRS. EVANS. Who's he?

JIMMY. (*A little strained.*) You don't know him. You don't know any of them.

MRS. EVANS. Oh. (*Pause.*) Sounds rather exciting. Can I come? (*She laughs.*)

IAN. (*Quickly.*) Would you like to?

MRS. EVANS. Mm. (*Smiling.*) I would, rather.

JIMMY. (*Sharply.*) Out of the question.

MRS. EVANS. Why? I mean I wouldn't dream of coming really, but why do you sound so horrified? (*She smiles.*) Do you have orgies or something?

JIMMY. Oh, Mother, don't be ridiculous.

IAN. Jimmy, you're a misery. Your mother would be the life and soul. She'd lend an air of tone to any . . . debauch that might occur. (*Smiles broadly at Mrs. EVANS.*)

MRS. EVANS. (*Uncertain giggle.*) No, really, I've always wanted to be present at one of Jim's parties just to see what really happened.

IAN. You'd be bored stiff. It's just pop music and a lot of youths snogging. (*Hastily.*) And girls. Youths and girls.

MRS. EVANS. Sounds deadly.

JIMMY. It makes a change.

IAN. Rather a costly change, I may add. Still, with any luck next Friday will be my first payday. (*He sighs pleasantly.*) O.K., it's me for the washing up.

MRS. EVANS and JIMMY. (*Together.*) No, I'll do it. I'll go. (*Short silence.*)

MRS. EVANS. Let's all go and do it together.

IAN. Good idea. (*Mrs. EVANS picks up the tray and heads for the door, which JIMMY opens for her. IAN goes to follow her but JIMMY stops him. JIMMY fetches out his wallet, takes out two pounds, crinkles them at IAN and hands them to him. IAN stuffs them into a pocket and smiles at JIMMY. He nods at him. He stretches out his hand and pats JIMMY's cheek. JIMMY looks faintly*

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*embarrassed but returns IAN'S smile. They hold each  
other's eyes for a moment.) Thank you, darling.*

*(They exit: as they do so . . .)*

**BLACKOUT**

SCENE 3

AFTER THE PARTY'S OVER . . .

*About a week later. It is the small hours and the party has almost broken up. There are empty bottles, glasses and cigarette ends everywhere, and the room is a shambles. All but two of the guests have left and JIMMY can be heard offstage saying good-bye to some of them. The two remaining guests are LINDA, JIMMY'S latest flame, a good-looking enough girl, blond with trim figure, daddy-sent-me-to-art-school-isn't-it-fun type, and DENNIS, a very good-looking boy of about 16 or 17 who is slow of speech, superficially, one would say, because he is slow of wit. IAN is fairly drunk and is swigging red wine from a one-half pint mug. He is sitting on the floor against the armchair, LINDA is sitting on the sofa and DENNIS is half-sitting, half-lying on one of the beds, his feet not quite touching the floor.*

IAN. And so she said: (*Grotesque mincing imitation.*) "I don't think you've put enough milk in it," or something, anyhow she griped and I . . . (*Takes a swig of the wine, grimaces.*) Christ, this is foul.

DENNIS. Why drink it?

IAN. (*Disregarding the question.*) And so anyhow I said, "Well, if you don't like it you can bloody well make it yourself. . . ." (*During his speech JIMMY has entered.*)

JIMMY. Oh God, you're not telling this one again, are you?

IAN. (*Doggedly.*) . . . or words to that effect and so anyhow I was fired.

JIMMY. (*To LINDA, smiling.*) In a minute he's going to tell you that he isn't cut out to be a bloody office boy.

IAN. (*Playing up.*) Anyhow I don't think I was cut out to be a bloody office boy.

JIMMY. We've all heard about it already.

IAN. Balls. They haven't. Have you?

LINDA. As a matter of fact I think I have. (*She giggles.*)

IAN. Tell us about Art School then.

LINDA. (*Uncertain.*) Well . . . I . . .

IAN. Never mind, I've got a better idea. I think I'll sing you a little song. Like that, Dennis?

DENNIS. Well . . . I . . .

IAN. Right, then. Here we go. A little song entitled, (*Sings.*) "Don't be afraid to sleep with your mother, just because she's older than you." No, actually, the song is really called "Oedipus' Lament at Colonnos." (*IAN sings viciously, filled with the acrid knowledge that he is embarrassing the others more than amusing them.*)

When I was sixteen, I fell in love  
 With a slightly older bird,  
 But I remembered what the prophet said  
 And those wise words I had heard.  
 'Cos he said,  
 Son, you are a bachelor boy  
 And that's the way to stay, hey hey,  
 Happy to be a bachelor boy  
 Until your dying day.  
 (*Pause.*) Verse Two, you unlucky people.

Then a bit later I fell once more  
 For another older dame, pom, pom,  
 I still remembered what the prophet said  
 But I married her just the same,  
 But I wish that  
 I'd stayed a bachelor boy  
 'Cos, though this is a welf-  
 Are state, it is bleedin' impossible to get  
 New eyes on the nashnal helf. Olé.

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(*He grins tiredly and empties his mug of wine. Then he sinks down on to the floor again.*)

JIMMY. (*Drily.*) Bravo.

LINDA. (*Puzzled.*) I didn't get it.

DENNIS. Did it take long to compose?

IAN. No, matter of fact I thought of it on the shitter yesterday. (*LINDA looks slightly shocked. IAN looks at his empty mug.*) Listen, spicy-chops, if you'd care to shift your well-known arse and pull the sofa out you will discover a bottle of superior red. Some rich sucker brought it and I thought pity to waste it down the throats of this guzzling mob so I kicked it discreetly behind the sofa.

LINDA. (*In a tone of arch-disapproval.*) I brought that.

IAN. Oh . . . oh well . . . cheers. (*Takes the bottle from LINDA and stumbles round the room kicking things vaguely.*) Where's the corkscrew? (*Turns to JIMMY, impatient.*) Where's the bloody corkscrew?

JIMMY. In the kitchen.

IAN. (*Heads for the door, then changes his mind.*) You open it, will you? I'll only shred the cork into the bottle and bugger it up. And if you can't find the corkscrew, shove it in the bread bin and we'll have it for Sunday nosh.

JIMMY. (*Evenly.*) Hadn't you better ask the owner what she wants done with it?

IAN. What?

LINDA. That's all right, you go ahead and open it if you want it.

IAN. (*Hands JIMMY the bottle.*) Yeh, you open it. (*JIMMY takes it and heads for the door.*) And be a love and hurry up, will you? I've got to have something to get rid of the taste of that cheap, nasty vinegar I brought.

(*Exit JIMMY.*)

LINDA. I don't think I tasted that.

IAN. No, you wouldn't have; I drank it all myself.

(As he moves across the room to flop down on the bed next to DENNIS.) Are you enjoying yourself, Dennis? Have you had a good time?

DENNIS. I . . . yes, I think so, thanks.

IAN. I feel, Dennis, that you are not a great talker.

DENNIS. (*Uncertain.*) Well . . . it depends.

IAN. (*Pause.*) What's it like at school now?

DENNIS. Same as ever.

IAN. (*Mellow.*) I don't think I've been so drunk as I am now since the last night of my last term.

DENNIS. I remember that night.

IAN. You do? . . . Yes, I suppose you do. (*Silence.*)

LINDA. I cried when I left school.

IAN. (*Coldly.*) Really? . . . (*He looks at DENNIS.*) So did I. (*Re-enter JIMMY with the open wine bottle.*) But Jimmy didn't, did you?

JIMMY. Did I what?

IAN. Cry.

JIMMY. Eh?

(IAN puts on a moron face and they go into an obviously familiar routine.)

IAN. Eh?

JIMMY. Eh?

IAN and JIMMY. (*Together.*) Wotcherronabaht?

(*Silence. JIMMY pours wine. Business as IAN insists on his one-half pint mug being filled. IAN sniffs elaborately.*)

IAN. Ah, '47! (*Twirls imaginary moustache.*) A sterling year. (*Silence.*) How about a nice orgy, then? (*He beams at the others who smile a little uncomfortably.*) No, seriously, you know. Nothing spectacular or . . . or anything, just a nice quiet modest little orgy.

LINDA. I don't really think I'd like that.

IAN. No. No, I don't suppose you would. You'd be a bit of an outsider really, wouldn't you? Besides, (*He gulps mightily at the wine.*) you haven't really got the

constitution for an orgy—if you don't mind my saying so.

LINDA. Is he always like this?

JIMMY. No, he's usually quite well-behaved and . . . docile. (*To IAN.*) What's the matter with you tonight? Are you sozzled or something?

IAN. No . . . yeah. I'm drunk. And I'm tired. And I'm broke. (*He looks at DENNIS.*) And I'm shy.

LINDA. Shy?

IAN. Yes. (*Recklessly.*) Dennis is one of the people who always brings out the worst in me that way.

LINDA. Why?

IAN. (*Abruptly.*) Look, I don't want to harp or anything but since it is the early hours of the morning and since the last trains have already left and you two will presumably be staying the night and since there are only two beds I don't see how we can decently avoid having an orgy.

LINDA. (*Decisively.*) Well, *I'm* not staying the night. I've got the car.

IAN. Oh, yes. I forgot the car.

JIMMY. You can stay if you like.

IAN. Oh, no, she can't. Not if she's got the car. Because if she goes home, Dennis can sleep on the sofa and orgies will once again become optional.

LINDA. Well. There's hospitality for you.

IAN. Any time. Well, Dennis, are you . . . (*He breaks off as he notices that DENNIS is asleep. He pauses, smiles, grasps DENNIS' thigh and shakes. DENNIS comes awake with a great jerk.*)

DENNIS. What . . . ?

IAN. I was just going to ask you if you were going to stop the night. Please do. We've got the sofa and you can borrow a pair of my . . . (*He notices suddenly that he hand is still on DENNIS' thigh and whips it away hastily.*) . . . pajamas.

DENNIS. (*A little wildly.*) No . . . no. What's the time?

IAN. One-thirtyish.

DENNIS. Christ, I didn't realize. I'd better go. My mother'll be sitting up waiting. (*JIMMY has sat down on the sofa next to LINDA and is holding her hand.*) I didn't realize.

IAN. (*Paternally.*) I think you've been in an alcoholical stupor for the past couple of hours, my lad. You'll have a job getting back, though, you've missed your train.

DENNIS. (*More worked up.*) But, God, my mother'll be waiting.

IAN. Ring her up, then.

DENNIS. (*Miserably.*) I can't ring her up. Not at this time of the morning.

IAN. Why not? Ring her up. Say you just missed the last train, tell her you've got a bed here, she won't mind.

LINDA. (*Suddenly.*) Where do you live, Dennis?

DENNIS. Hampton Wick.

LINDA. (*Offhand.*) Oh, that's O.K. I'll drive you back. (*She beams at IAN.*) All settled?

IAN. (*Morosely, almost stunned.*) Fine . . . fine.

DENNIS. (*Delighted.*) Will you really? That's very kind of you indeed.

LINDA. Mm. (*Silence.*)

JIMMY. Are you going to take me for a drive round the . . . er . . . square, Linda?

LINDA. Yes, all right, just briefly, then I'll be off home.

IAN. Oo, goody, I'll come too.

JIMMY. Two's company. You stay behind and . . . entertain Dennis. (*JIMMY and LINDA have got to their feet and are heading for the door. Challenging:*) Won't be long.

IAN. (*Riposte.*) Don't forget the . . . fruit gums. (*Exit JIMMY and LINDA. There is a long silence. IAN appears nervous. Then he speaks in a more sober, rather strained voice.*) Dennis. (*DENNIS is asleep. IAN slaps his face gently.*) Wakey wakey.

DENNIS. Mm. What? (*He sits up.*) Where's everybody? Where's . . . what's her name?