

# SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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# The Revengers' Comedies

A Play

Alan Ayckbourn

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL  
FRENCH**  
FOUNDED 1830

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ISBN 978-0-573-01881-7

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## THE REVENGERS' COMEDIES

First performed in Scarborough at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round on 13th June 1989 with the following cast:

<b>Henry Bell</b>	Jon Strickland
<b>Karen Knightly</b>	Christine Kavanagh
<b>Lorry Driver</b>	Jeff Shankley
<b>Winnie</b>	Doreen Andrew
<b>Norma</b>	Claire Skinner
<b>Oliver Knightly</b>	Adam Godley
<b>Lady Ganton</b>	Ursula Jones
<b>Colonel Marcus Lipscomb</b>	Donald Douglas
<b>Percy Cutting</b>	Martin Sadler
<b>Councillor Daphne Teale</b>	Alwyne Taylor
<b>Anthony Staxton-Billing</b>	Rupert Vansittart
<b>Imogen Staxton-Billing</b>	Elizabeth Bell
<b>Lydia Lucas</b>	Frances Jeater
<b>Tracey Willingforth</b>	Claire Skinner
<b>Mrs Bulley</b>	Doreen Andrew
<b>Bruce Tick</b>	Jeff Shankley
<b>Hilary Tick</b>	Alwyne Taylor
<b>Graham Seeds</b>	Frank Lazarus
<b>Veronica Webb</b>	Ursula Jones
<b>Jeremy Pride</b>	Frank Lazarus
<b>Fireman</b>	Jeff Shankley
<b>Eugene Chase</b>	Rupert Vansittart
<b>Motor-cyclist</b>	Jeff Shankley

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn  
Designed by Roger Glossop  
Lighting by Mick Hughes

It was subsequently performed at the Strand Theatre, London, on 16th October 1991 (Part I) and 17th October 1991 (Part II), with the following cast:

<b>Henry Bell</b>	Griff Rhys-Jones
<b>Karen Knightly</b>	Lia Williams
<b>Lorry Driver</b>	Raymond Sawyer
<b>Winnie</b>	Doreen Andrew
<b>Norma</b>	Rose Keegan
<b>Oliver Knightly</b>	Adam Godley
<b>Lady Ganton</b>	Lavinia Bertram
<b>Colonel Marcus Lipscomb</b>	Jeffrey Wickham
<b>Percy Cutting</b>	Raymond Sawyer
<b>Councillor Daphne Teale</b>	Hazel Ellerby
<b>Anthony Staxton-Billing</b>	Rupert Vansittart
<b>Imogen Staxton-Billing</b>	Joanna Lumley
<b>Lydia Lucas</b>	Lavinia Bertram
<b>Tracey Willingforth</b>	Nina Young
<b>Mrs Bulley</b>	Doreen Andrew
<b>Bruce Tick</b>	Jeff Shankley
<b>Hilary Tick</b>	Hazel Ellerby
<b>Graham Seeds</b>	Geoffrey Whitehead
<b>Veronica Webb</b>	Jennifer Piercey
<b>Jeremy Pride</b>	Geoffrey Whitehead
<b>Fireman</b>	Christopher Birch
<b>Eugene Chase</b>	Nicholas Palliser
<b>Motor-cyclist</b>	Christopher Birch

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn

Designed by Roger Glossop

Lighting by Mick Hughes

## CHARACTERS

**Henry Bell** (forty-two)  
**Karen Knightly** (twenty-five)  
**Lorry Driver** (forties)  
**Winnie, a servant** (sixty)  
**Norma, a servant** (sixteen)  
**Oliver Knightly, Karen's brother** (early twenties)  
**Lady Ganton** (sixty)  
**Colonel Marcus Lipscomb** (sixty)  
**Percy Cutting** (forty-five)  
**Councillor Daphne Teale** (forty-four)  
**Anthony Staxton-Billing** (thirty-eight)  
**Imogen Staxton-Billing** (thirty-seven)  
**Lydia Lucas, Mrs Bulley's assistant** (late thirties)  
**Tracey Willingforth, a secretary** (early twenties)  
**Mrs Bulley** (fifties, voice only)  
**Bruce Tick, an executive** (thirty-five)  
**Hilary Tick, his wife** (thirty-five)  
**Graham Seeds** (fifty, voice only)  
**Veronica Webb, Mr Pride's assistant** (forty-eight)  
**Jeremy Pride, an executive** (fifty-five)  
**Fireman**  
**Eugene Chase, an executive** (thirty-five)  
**Motor-cyclist**

# SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

## PART ONE

### ACT I

PROLOGUE	Midnight. Albert Bridge, London SW3
SCENE 1	2.30 a.m. A transport café in Wiltshire
SCENE 2	5.00 a.m. The hall at Furtherfield House, Dorset
SCENE 3	3.00 p.m. The dining-room at Furtherfield House

### ACT II

SCENE 1	9.30 a.m. Mrs Bulley's offices at Lembridge Tennit
SCENE 2	10.00 a.m. A wood near Furtherfield House
SCENE 3	10.30 a.m. Bruce Tick's offices at Lembridge Tennit
SCENE 4	11.30 a.m. A drawing-room at Furtherfield House
SCENE 5	4.15 p.m. Bruce Tick's offices at Lembridge Tennit
SCENE 6	11.00 a.m. The piggery at the Staxton-Billings' farm
SCENE 7	4.45 p.m. Bruce Tick's offices at Lembridge Tennit
SCENE 8	5.00 p.m. The hall at Furtherfield House
SCENE 9	10.00 a.m. Bruce Tick's offices at Lembridge Tennit
SCENE 10	4.00 p.m. A hen house at the Staxton-Billings' farm
SCENE 11	6.00 p.m. A wine bar
SCENE 12	3.00 p.m. The village green
SCENE 13	6.15 p.m. A wine bar
SCENE 14	11.00 a.m. A cowshed at the Staxton-Billings' farm
SCENE 15	6.30 p.m. A wine bar
SCENE 16	7.00 p.m. The hall at Furtherfield House

## PART TWO

### ACT III

SCENE 1	9.00 a.m. Lembridge Tennit/Furtherfield House
SCENE 2	9.15 a.m. The dining-room at Furtherfield House
SCENE 3	Noon. Mrs Bulley's offices at Lembridge Tennit
SCENE 4	3.00 p.m. A junior gymkhana
SCENE 5	9.00 a.m. Jeremy Pride's offices at Lembridge Tennit
SCENE 6	7.30 p.m. The lounge of Daphne Teale's bungalow
SCENE 7	9.10 a.m. Jeremy Pride's offices at Lembridge Tennit
SCENE 8	9.30 a.m. The dining-room at Furtherfield House
SCENE 9	9.45 a.m. Jeremy Pride's offices at Lembridge Tennit
SCENE 10	Noon. A drawing-room at Furtherfield House
SCENE 11	9.45 a.m. Jeremy Pride's offices at Lembridge Tennit
SCENE 12	Dawn. A wood near Furtherfield House

### ACT IV

SCENE 1	Dawn. A wood near Furtherfield House
SCENE 2	11.00 a.m. A churchyard
SCENE 3	8.50 a.m. Jeremy Pride's offices at Lembridge Tennit
SCENE 4	3.45 p.m. The kitchen of Imogen's farmhouse
SCENE 5	11.30 p.m. The hall at Furtherfield House
SCENE 6	12.30 a.m. The front drive of Furtherfield House
SCENE 7	11.00 a.m. The sitting-room of Imogen's farmhouse
SCENE 8	11.00 a.m. Outside the boardroom at Lembridge Tennit
SCENE 9	Dusk. The ruins of Furtherfield House
SCENE 10	7.00 p.m. The kitchen of Imogen's farmhouse
SCENE 11	Midnight. Albert Bridge, London SW3

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A Small Family Business  
Suburban Strains  
Table Manners  
Taking Steps  
Ten Times Table  
Time and Time Again  
Tons of Money (revised)  
Way Upstream  
Wolf at the Door (adapted)  
Woman in Mind

## PART ONE



## ACT I

PROLOGUE

MIDNIGHT

*Albert Bridge, London SW3*

*Perhaps a little river mist. Distant traffic, a ship's siren*

*Henry, a man in his early forties, appears in a pool of street light on the bridge. He is wrapped in an overcoat and scarf, hunched and miserable. He stares over the edge, deciding whether to jump. From his expression, it's evidently a long way down. He says a little silent prayer, as though asking forgiveness, and makes to climb over the railing. He is uncomfortably straddled across the railing when he hears a woman's voice from the darkness*

**Karen** (*calling*) Help ... help ... Please help me ...

*Henry stops and listens, rather startled*

Please help ... somebody ...

**Henry** (*calling, tentatively*) Hallo?

**Karen** (*calling back*) Hallo ...

**Henry** (*calling again*) Hallo?

**Karen** Would you stop saying hallo and come and help me, please? I've got myself caught up here ...

**Henry** Oh, right. Hang on, there ... Just hang on ... (*He clammers back on to the bridge*)

**Karen** I don't have any option. I've been hanging here for hours.

**Henry** Just one very small second ...

*He moves to the source of her voice. As he does so, we make out Karen for the first time. She is in her mid-twenties. She wears a woolly hat and a lightweight coat over an evening dress. She is hanging outside the bridge*

*railing. All that seems to be keeping her from falling is the belt of her coat, which has become entangled with the ironwork. Henry reaches her*

Oh, Lord. How can I ...?

**Karen** (*trying to indicate*) Do you see? Something's caught — I think it's the belt of my coat ...

**Henry** Oh yes, yes. Look, I think I'd better ... (*Flustered*) Look — er ...  
Yes, yes. I think I'd better try and — er ... Would you mind if I — tried to lift you ...

**Karen** You can do what you like — just get me off this bloody bridge ...

**Henry** Yes, yes, right ... (*He studies the problem*)

**Karen** Can you see? I think it's my belt ...

**Henry** Yes, yes, so it is. I think I'd better get that free before I ... (*He starts to untangle the belt*)

**Karen** Careful ...

**Henry** Yes. Only I don't want to tear your coat, you see. If I tried to lift you over as you are, I might damage it ... It's a very nice coat ...

**Karen** (*sarcastically*) Well, that's very considerate of you ... Thank you.

**Henry** (*finally freeing the belt*) Right. There you go, all free.

**Karen** Aaaarh!

*The sudden release of the belt all but causes her to lose her balance and topple over the edge. She grabs at the first available handhold, which happens to be Henry's scarf*

**Henry** (*choking*) Hurrgh!

**Karen** (*screaming*) Hold on to me, for God's sake!

**Henry** (*with difficulty*) Hould hoo hossibly het ho hof hy harf? Hi han't —

**Karen** Don't let go ...

**Henry** Hi han't ...

**Karen** What?

**Henry** Hi han't heathe ...

**Karen** Well, give me something else to hold. (*Angrily*) Quickly, you're so useless ... You're so totally, totally useless ... What are you doing on this bridge, anyway?

*Henry manages to put his arms under hers and around her middle. Karen releases his scarf*

Henry (*much relieved*) Ah! Thank you. OK, I'm going to try and pull you over. Ready?

Karen Right.

Henry And — heave ...

*Henry hauls her. Karen reacts*

Karen Aaargh! Careful!

Henry Sorry. It's a question of leverage ...

Karen Well, could you use another bit of me to lever with?

Henry Yes, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to ... (*He finds another grip*) That better?

Karen Fractionally. Those are only my ribs.

Henry And two-six! Hup! (*He starts to heave her over*)

Karen (*reacting*) Hah!

Henry (*with another heave*) Hip!

Karen Hoo!

Henry Sorry, is this hurting?

Karen No, it's quite nice, actually. Keep going.

Henry (*with a final heave*) Hoy!

Karen Huf!

*He finally half lifts, half drags her over the railing. Karen finishes up sitting on the bridge. Henry regains his breath*

God! That was terrifying.

Henry Close thing.

Karen It certainly was. (*She shudders. She looks around her as if searching for someone*)

Henry You all right?

Karen Thank you very much.

Henry Not at all.

Karen You saved my life.

Henry Well ...

Karen I must owe you something ...?

Henry No.

Karen Something. A drink, at least?

Henry (*looking at his watch*) It's half-past twelve.

Karen Half-past twelve?

**Henry** Yes.

**Karen** (*angrily*) My God! Half-past twelve?

**Henry** Yes.

**Karen** I don't believe it.

**Henry** How long had you been there?

**Karen** Since twenty past eight.

**Henry** Lord.

**Karen** Half-past twelve! It's unbelievable.

*Pause*

**Henry** Well ...

**Karen** This is Chelsea Bridge, isn't it?

**Henry** No, this is Albert Bridge.

**Karen** Albert Bridge?

**Henry** Yes.

**Karen** You sure?

**Henry** Positive.

**Karen** Sod it!

**Henry** What?

**Karen** Nothing.

*Pause*

**Henry** Er ... How did you come to get there?

**Karen** Where?

**Henry** Where you were. Hanging like that? How did you get there? Do you mind my asking?

**Karen** Well, obviously, I was trying to throw myself off.

**Henry** You were?

**Karen** Only I managed to make a complete mess of that, too. Like everything else in my life ... (*Suddenly despairing*) Oh, God ... (*She hunches up, tearfully, a pathetic huddle on the pavement*)

**Henry** (*ineffectually*) Oh, come on, now ...

**Karen** You can leave me, it's all right. Leave me here. I'm just so pathetic ...

**Henry** Look, perhaps I could see you home ...?

**Karen** Go away. Just leave me here ...

**Henry** I can't do that.

**Karen** I'll be all right. I expect.

**Henry** I can't leave you here like this.

**Karen** (*with a little cry of self-pity*) Oh ...

**Henry** (*soothingly*) Sssh!

**Karen** Oh!

**Henry** Please let me ... at least get you on your feet. You'll catch your —  
you'll catch your cold sitting there.

*Karen lets him help her to her feet*

There.

**Karen** (*holding on to him*) Thank you. You're very kind.

**Henry** (*slightly embarrassed*) No, not really. I just —

**Karen** I'm sorry I called you useless. I didn't mean that.

**Henry** No, as it happens you were right. I am a bit useless, really.

**Karen** Yes? Is that how you see yourself? Useless?

**Henry** Most of the time.

**Karen** Well. That makes two of us, then, doesn't it? (*She smiles a little*)

**Henry** (*smiling too, despite himself*) I suppose it does.

*Karen evidently decides to pull herself together. She scrabbles in her mac pocket and eventually finds a tissue*

**Karen** Come on ...

**Henry** (*startled*) Where to?

**Karen** I'll take you somewhere for a drink. Come on.

**Henry** But nothing will be open.

**Karen** I know somewhere that's open. It's all right, it's not far ... Do you  
have your car with you?

**Henry** I don't have one.

**Karen** Mine's parked along there ... Come on, we both need something.  
Unless you've other things you'd sooner be doing?

**Henry** (*looking back at the river*) Er, no. No.

**Karen** Great. (*She turns and extends her hand*) By the way. Karen. Karen  
Knightly.

**Henry** (*Shaking her hand*) Henry. Henry Bell.

**Karen** Splendid. Then follow me, Henrybell.

**Henry** Where are we going?

**Karen** (*disappearing into the darkness*) Just as far as the bypass, that's  
all ...

**Henry** Ah. (*As he follows her off, puzzled*) What bypass?

*The Lights dim and almost immediately return to reveal:*

SCENE 1  
2.30 A.M.

*A table in the corner of a transport café*

*Faint jukebox music and the sound of an electronic game machine.  
Chatter from unseen lorry drivers*

*Henry appears carrying two very large mugs of tea. He sets these on the table. He yawns, something he is wont to do throughout the scene. He removes his coat and scarf and, after a careful examination of two chairs, places the items on one and sits on the other. We see he is wearing a neat, conventional suit. He looks around him. He smiles at someone nervously and looks away self-consciously. He tries his tea and nearly scalds his mouth*

*The chatter in the room suddenly ceases. So does the game machine. Just the thud of the jukebox. The cause of this lull enters: Karen has evidently been freshening up. She has removed her hat and let her hair loose. She is now carrying her coat, revealing a chic, if somewhat incongruous, strapless evening dress. She seems quite unaware of the effect she has caused. Henry, gaping, rises as she approaches. She really does look quite something*

**Karen** (*dropping into the chair opposite him*) Sorry I've been so long, Henrybell. Just taken a proper look at myself. I looked frightful. Is this tea? Terrific. Just what I needed.

**Henry** It's very, very hot. Be careful.

**Karen** Great. (*She takes a great gulp, apparently immune to heat*) Mmm! They don't make tea like this anywhere else but here.

**Henry** Where exactly are we?

**Karen** About ... twenty miles from Salisbury. Why?

**Henry** No. No reason. It just seems quite a way to come just for a cup of tea, that's all.

**Karen** (*sipping her tea*) Worth it, though.

**Henry** Oh, yes. (*Pause*) Glad we didn't decide to have alcohol. We'd probably have finished up at Land's End. (*He laughs a little at his joke*)

**Karen** (*innocently*) Why, is there a good pub there?

**Henry** I've no idea.

**Karen** I'm game if you are.

**Henry** No. No ...

*He sips at his tea tentatively. A silence. The music plays for a second. Karen listens*

**Karen** Oh God, this is wonderful, this one. I love it. What is it? The Hollies?

**Henry** (*blankly*) Pardon?

**Karen** Or is it Brian Thing and the Thingies?

**Henry** I don't know, I ...

**Karen** (*turning and yelling to someone*) Who's this, do you know? Is it the Hollies?

**First Voice** (*off*) What's that, darling?

**Karen** This music. Is it the Hollies?

**Second Voice** (*off*) It's the Everlys, sweetheart.

**Karen** The Everly Brothers. Of course it is. Thank you.

**Second Voice** (*off*) Any time, sweetheart, it's my pleasure.

**First Voice** (*off*) Make sure that's the only pleasure you give him and all, darling ...

*A lot of laughter. Karen seems amused. She obviously enjoys such attention, unlike Henry, who looks even more embarrassed. He looks at his watch*

**Karen** Have you got to be somewhere, Henrybell?

**Henry** What?

**Karen** You keep looking at your watch, I wondered if you had to be somewhere?

**Henry** No, I was — I was just wondering — how I was going to get back, that's all.

**Karen** What's the time?

**Henry** Half-past two.

**Karen** It's OK. I'll take you back. Don't worry. Where are you? Chelsea?

**Henry** Er ... more Fulham, really.

**Karen** Fulham. Fine. Easy.

**Henry** (*yawning*) Is that convenient for you? Excuse me.

**Karen** Anywhere's fine for me.

**Henry** Where do you have to go?

**Karen** Me? (*Vaguely*) Oh, the other side of Dorchester.

**Henry** Dorchester? The one in Dorset?

**Karen** Have you been there?

**Henry** Do you mean — do you mean you'd drive me all the way back to London and then drive all the way to Dorset? Tonight? You'll kill yourself ...

**Karen** Why not? What else was I going to be doing?

**Henry** Ah, yes. Point taken.

**Karen** (*tearfully*) God, I'm so unhappy, you know ...

**Henry** Yes? (*Pause*) Do you want to talk about it?

**Karen** (*suddenly angry*) No!

*They sit in silence. Henry is becoming wary of her ever-changing moods. Karen sings along with the music: occasional, wordless, discordant notes with no attempt at the melody*

**Henry** I — I don't know if this would help at all but ...

**Karen** Yes, I'm sure there is a God, Vicar, thank you very much.

**Henry** No, I wasn't going to say that — what I was going to say is, Karen — you're not alone. That's all.

**Karen** I know I'm not alone. There's millions of the buggers everywhere. That's half the trouble.

**Henry** (*patiently*) No, I meant — tonight. When you were trying to — end it all ... You weren't the only one.

*Karen stares at him*

I was just about to do the same thing, you see. Jump off that bridge.

**Karen** You were?

**Henry** I don't know if that helps at all ...

**Karen** I saved your life, then?

**Henry** I think you did.

**Karen** Well ... (*She raises her mug*)

**Henry** (*joining in the toast*) Yes.

**Karen** Would you have really jumped, Henrybell? Really?

**Henry** (*considering*) Yes. Then I would have done. At that moment, probably. Not now.

**Karen** The moment's passed?

**Henry** It has.

**Karen** Are you glad you didn't?

**Henry** (*smiling at her*) Yes. Yes, I am.

**Karen** (*smiling back at him*) So am I.

**Henry** You're glad you didn't jump?

**Karen** Oh, yes, that too. But I'm glad you didn't.

**Henry** Thank you. (*Pause*) It's just everything suddenly conspires against you at once, doesn't it? It all becomes insoluble.

**Karen** Insuperable.

**Henry** Right. I don't know how you feel. Every now and then, I just get this overwhelming sense of the futility of it all. Of the sheer uselessness. Do you get that feeling?

**Karen** No.

**Henry** Ah.

**Karen** I don't think I'd kill myself simply because I couldn't think of a reason for living.

**Henry** You wouldn't?

**Karen** No. I can always find a good reason for living.

**Henry** In that case, why would you ever want to kill yourself?

**Karen** I'd kill myself when I had a very good reason for doing so. A stronger reason than the reason I had for living. There is a difference, I promise you there is.

**Henry** (*uncertainly*) Yes. Yes, I can see there probably is.

**Karen** Why did you? Want to do it?

**Henry** As I say. Things. I don't want to bore you with details. My wife — she'd recently left me and — I was just about getting over that ...

**Karen** Did she go off with another man?

**Henry** No. She just went. She found it — me — too much. All of a sudden.

**Karen** Have you any children?

**Henry** Yes. One. Well, hardly a child. He's left home, now. Working in Holland.

**Karen** When did your wife leave?

**Henry** Oh, a year ago.

**Karen** You waited that long to jump off a bridge?

**Henry** No, as I was saying. I'd just about got over her going. I'd come to

terms with that. I'd sold the house. Got a little flat. Mastered the microwave. I mean, Marianne and I — we were fond of each other, don't get me wrong — but it was familiar-fond rather than loving-fond — if you know what I mean. A bit routine. Appallingly routine, if you want the truth. We never rowed — we never disagreed — we never — did anything very much except — sit. I wasn't really surprised when she went. Not deep down. It was the ... I don't know ...

**Karen** Loneliness?

**Henry** Pointlessness. So I hurled myself into my work. I enjoyed my work. I was good at it.

**Karen** Was?

**Henry** That's it, you see. I've just been fired. Sorry. Made redundant. Sounds nicer. I cleared my desk this evening — yesterday evening — I had a glass of sherry with the department. And I left quietly by the side door. After fourteen years, and without much home life to speak of, that really did leave a bit of a hole. I had suddenly moved on from a state in which things seemed faintly pointless, to one where I could no longer see any point to them at all.

**Karen** Where did you work?

**Henry** Lembridge Tenny. If that means anything.

**Karen** Can't say it does. What line are they in?

**Henry** Everything, really. From biscuits to bicycles. You'd know the brand names.

**Karen** Oh, I see. One of those. Multinationals.

**Henry** Multi. Multi. Multi.

**Karen** Polluting the rivers, poisoning the atmosphere and secretly funding right-wing revolutionaries.

**Henry** Those are the chaps.

**Karen** Why did they fire you?

**Henry** Oh, all the jargon. Redefining the job profile. Rationalizing the department. Restructuring the management team. Which essentially meant either get promoted or — get out. And, innocent that I was, so certain that I'd been doing a good job, I sat there fully expecting to be promoted.

**Karen** Being good is never enough in itself ...

**Henry** How right you are. (*Pause*) How right. It's not just a matter of doing a good job. Or even doing the best you can. No. It's no good taking work home with you and sitting seven nights a week ruining your eyesight for no extra money. No point at all in covering for colleagues

who aren't doing the job they're paid to do because they're taking three-hour lunchbreaks five days a week and rolling in absolutely legless after fifteen double scotches at four-thirty in the afternoon. That's never enough. You've also got to be working the system. Chatting up the right people. Buying the drinks that matter. Arranging the cosy little dinner with the boss's P.A. Taking the right lift at the right moment with the right people. Going down — hallo, Mr Pride, sir — fancy bumping into you, remember me? Losing the right game of squash. Missing the right putt. Winning the right rubber. Licking the right shoes. Sending the right Christmas cards. Driving the right car. Choosing the right suit. Wearing the right bloody underwear. Screwing the right secretary ... (*He stops*) Sorry.

**Karen** (*simply*) It's just a game, that's all.

**Henry** And you either play by the rules and win, like he did. Or you ignore them and lose, like me.

**Karen** He?

**Henry** What?

**Karen** You said he. Who's he?

**Henry** (*through grated teeth*) Tick.

**Karen** Sorry?

**Henry** (*barely able to say the name*) His name is Bruce Tick. I've never hated anyone in my life, you know. Well, not since I was a child — but then you hate people all the time at that age — but Bruce Tick I actually hate now. He smiled at me and stole my job. Even as he was smiling he was stealing my job. But do you know the worst thing of all? The worst thing was — *everybody knew he was doing it* — and no-one — *no-one* thought to ... People I'd worked with for fourteen years. *Friends!*

**Karen** Yes.

**Henry** That's what hurt. That hurt more than anything. (*Calming down*) Yes, I came very near to murdering Mr Bruce Tick, I can tell you.

**Karen** (*seriously*) You should have done. Why didn't you?

**Henry** (*assuming she is joking*) What? And give him the satisfaction of sitting up there on his cloud afterwards, sipping Glen Whatsit, while I'm down here breaking rocks in a quarry? No, thanks.

**Karen** Good point.

**Henry** No, to hell with them all, I say. Except Elaine, of course. (*He yawns*) Excuse me.

**Karen** Elaine?

**Henry** My secretary. That was. You know what she did? The minute she

heard they were firing me, Elaine marched right in there and handed in her notice.

**Karen** Was she in love with you?

**Henry** Elaine? Good Lord, no. Respectable, happily married lady. Six years to go till retirement. Everything to lose and she just didn't care. She marched in there and she told them.

**Karen** Good for her.

**Henry** She said to them: "I can no longer continue to work for a firm who could reward fourteen years of unswerving loyalty with such contemptuous disdain."

**Karen** She sounds quite a woman.

**Henry** She is. Well, at least she's been spared from working for Bruce Tick.

**Karen** I don't like the sound of him at all.

**Henry** He's — repellent. (*He simmers. Pause*) But then, I am slightly prejudiced.

**Karen** I knew someone like that once.

**Henry** Really? Bad luck.

**Karen** Yes.

*Pause*

**Henry** Who was he?

**Karen** Her name was Imogen Staxton-Billing.

**Henry** She sounds absolutely appalling.

**Karen** She is. What sort of woman — what sort of wife — would be frigid and inept enough to drive her own husband out of his house into the arms of another woman — a woman who really did appreciate him and gave him love and warmth and comfort and sex — and then, at the very last minute, this wife refuses to let him go. Instead uses all her wiles and cunning and cheap little wifely blackmailings — flaunting their two grotesquely repulsive kids — in order to lure him back into her barren, lumpy iceberg of a bed. What sort of woman do you think would do that?

**Henry** Sounds like an Imogen Staxton-Billing sort of woman to me.

**Karen** Right.

*Pause*

**Henry** You don't think that he might have ... The husband might have ... been a bit to blame, as well?

**Karen** Who?

**Henry** The husband?

**Karen** Anthony Staxton-Billing?

**Henry** Yes. You don't think he might have decided, after all, to give the marriage another go? Decided to go back to his wife? Is that a possibility? I mean, I was just hoping to perhaps help you to see her in a better light ... *(He trails away)*

**Karen** *(dangerously)* If you don't mind my saying so, that is a very, very ignorant thing to say. *(Pause)* Sorry, Henrybell.

**Henry** That's quite all right.

*Pause — mainly because Henry can't think of anything to say*

**Karen** No, you couldn't possibly say that if you'd met the ageing, comatose, bovine Imogen Staxton-Billing. Bouncing, bonny, horsey, dung-smelling niece of one Colonel Marcus Lipscomb, DSO, VSOP and twiddly bits. She worked it. Somehow she worked it. She had little Tony running home to Mummy. She cheated. *(She reflects. Then, calmly)* I was standing at that station with three suitcases. For hours and hours and hours. And he never came. *Three* suitcases. Can you imagine that?

**Henry** *(yawning, despite himself)* That's terrible. Excuse me.

**Karen** It was. It was terrible. Wait for me, darling. The trains were coming in. And then the trains were going out. And then they were coming in again. And I was just standing there. Like an old, unwanted — chocolate machine. With three suitcases. Can you imagine how I felt?

**Henry** Yes. How awful. *(Pause)* Which station was this?

**Karen** *(furiously)* I don't know which station. I can't remember which bloody station. How do you expect me to remember the station, for God's sake? *(Weeping openly now, as her voice gets increasingly loud)* How could he do that to me? How could he do that to *me*? I'll kill her!

*Henry looks around nervously. They are beginning to attract attention*

*(Screaming)* AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!

*A large figure looms into view. It is a lorry driver. He stares at Henry suspiciously*

**Lorry Driver** Spot of bother, is there, mate?

**Henry** No, no, no. We're fine. Don't worry.

**Lorry Driver** (*to Karen*) Is he giving you any trouble, love?

**Karen** No, it's all right.

**Lorry Driver** Sure?

**Karen** Yes.

**Lorry Driver** (*a bit disappointed*) All right. (*To Henry*) Don't give her any trouble, mate, all right?

**Henry** I'm not going to.

**Lorry Driver** If there's one thing I can't stand in this world it's a man maltreating a pretty young girl, all right?

**Henry** Absolutely. (*He yawns*) Sorry.

**Lorry Driver** (*leaning close to Karen*) All right then, love? You all right? You let me know if he causes you any more trouble, all right? I'll come and sort him out for you, all right? You just give me a shout. I'll be just over there if you need me, all right? All right, then?

**Karen** (*irritated by all this*) Oh, just bugger off, will you? Go away!

**Lorry Driver** (*outraged*) Oy, oy, oy, oy, oy ...

**Karen** Look, go away. We're having a private conversation, all right?

**Lorry Driver** (*departing truculently*) No need for that. No need for language like that. (*To Henry, threateningly*) You'd better watch her language, mate. If you don't want to get sorted out. All right?

*The lorry driver exits — a Knight of the Road rebuffed*

**Karen** I can't stand men like that. Right. (*Shouting in the direction of the lorry driver*) Who do they think they are, anyway? (*Pushing aside her mug*) I can't drink any more of this, it's foul. If I don't have a vodka soon, I'll die. (*She rises and starts to put on her coat*)

**Henry** (*rising, looking at his watch*) We still won't find anywhere open. It's only just after three a.m.

**Karen** It's all right, I know somewhere.

**Henry** Would I be right in thinking it's just the far side of Dorchester?

**Karen** You got it in one, kid.

*She exits swiftly*

*Henry, still struggling into his coat and yawning, follows her. He turns in the doorway and nods to the unseen drivers*

**Henry** Good-night.

*There is a barrage of abuse and shouting*

*He exits hurriedly*

*With scarcely a break, the Lights rapidly cross-fade to:*

SCENE 2  
5.00 A.M.

*Furtherfield House. The hall*

*Seemingly this is a very large place indeed. The hall is the size of a football pitch. We see some area of it: a couple of chairs or a sofa, to give an idea of the scale. Somewhere, a huge front door is heard to slam*

*Immediately Karen enters, pulling off her hat and coat as she does so. Henry follows, totally awed by the unexpected*

**Karen** (yelling) Winnie! Winnie! (To Henry) Sling your coat anywhere.

I think we'd be better off here in the hall, it'll be freezing in the drawing-rooms. (Yelling again) Winnie! Wakey, wakey!

**Henry** It's only five o'clock, maybe people aren't ...

**Karen** Winnie!

*Winnie appears in her dressing-gown. She is the old family retainer, gentle, uncomplaining, with a soft-spoken Dorset accent*

**Winnie** Just a minute, Miss Karen ... Here I am. (She gathers up their coats during the following)

**Karen** Winnie, dearest, could you find us a bottle of nice champagne?

**Winnie** Champagne. Right, Miss Karen.

**Karen** (to Henry) Anything to eat?

**Henry** No, not at this time of the morning. (Yawning) Excuse me.

**Karen** No, I'm not hungry either. Just the champagne.

**Winnie** Right. Just the champagne. Morning, sir.

**Henry** Good-morning. This is very kind of you.

**Karen** Winnie, this is Mr Henry Bell. Known as Henrybell.

**Henry** How do you do.

**Karen** We'll have two glasses, Winnie.

**Winnie** Right you are, Miss Karen.

*Winnie exits*

**Henry** What an amazing house. Wonderful. It's yours?

**Karen** Well, my family's. Yes.

**Henry** Who lives here? Besides you?

**Karen** Well, mostly my brother. That's my brother Oliver — he's generally around somewhere — then other people trail in and out from time to time. And then there's people like Winnie and things.

**Henry** Do you have a lot of servants?

**Karen** (*vaguely*) No ... Well. A few. I don't have much to do with any of that side, really.

**Henry** Your parents don't live here, then?

**Karen** (*casually*) No, they're both dead. There was an accident. And they died.

**Henry** Oh dear. What sort of accident?

**Karen** (*slight pause*) I'm not allowed to talk about that.

**Henry** Ah.

*Winnie enters with a tray, two glasses and a bottle of Dom Perignon*

**Karen** This isn't an ancestral home or anything, if that's what you're thinking.

**Henry** Oh, I see. (*He yawns*) Excuse me.

**Winnie** Want me to open it, Miss Karen?

**Karen** Well, we don't want to sit here staring at the bottle, do we, Winnie?

(*To Henry*) Some revolting old landowner built it in about eighteen-fifty. My grandfather bought it in about nineteen-ten, spent a fortune doing it up and then promptly died and left it to my father.

**Henry** I couldn't see it all in the dark. How many rooms?

**Karen** No idea.

**Winnie** There's fifty-eight rooms, sir, including the servants' quarters and the old nurseries.

**Henry** Fifty-eight. Goodness.

**Winnie** There's twenty-five bedrooms, not counting the master bedroom. Twelve bathrooms. A billiard-room, two drawing-rooms, dining-room, a west study, an east study —

**Karen** Yes, thank you, Winnie. *(To Henry)* You get the idea, anyway.

**Winnie** *(giving Karen a glass)* Miss Karen.

**Karen** We don't use half the place. I mean, the billiard-room is where Oliver keeps his motor bike.

**Winnie** He's got a whole race track now and all.

**Karen** Has he? Oh well, I can't keep up with him these days.

**Winnie** *(giving Henry a glass)* Sir.

**Henry** Thank you very much indeed. Delicious.

**Winnie** Anything else, miss?

**Karen** No, Winnie, you can go back to bed now. Thank you.

**Winnie** Nearly time to get up, I think. Sleep well then.

**Henry** Thank you.

*Winnie exits*

Good health.

**Karen** Good health, Henrybell.

**Henry** Mmm. Lovely.

*Karen studies him for a second*

**Karen** Henrybell ... While we were in the car I had a rather exciting idea.

**Henry** *(yawning)* Sorry, did I doze off during the drive? I think I did.

**Karen** You did. You've had your night's sleep. So you can keep awake now.

**Henry** I'm afraid I'm going to have to go to bed, properly. Very soon. Somewhere or other.

**Karen** *(ignoring him)* Answer me this ——

**Henry** I presume one of your twenty-five bedrooms is free ——

**Karen** If I hadn't met you — if you hadn't met me — where would you be?

**Henry** Home in bed, probably.

**Karen** *(angrily)* Oh, do be serious.

**Henry** I'm sorry.

**Karen** I hate silly men. I can't stand them.

**Henry** What about silly women?

**Karen** *(ignoring him)* Answer me. Where would you be? Where would we both be? I will tell you. Floating in the Thames. That's where we'd be. Only we're not. Thanks to you, I'm here. And thanks to me, you're

# WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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