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Valued Friends

A play

Stephen Jeffreys

Samuel French - London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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VALUED FRIENDS

First produced at the Hampstead Theatre, London, on
9th February, 1989, with the following cast of characters:

Sherry
Howard
Paul
Marion
Scott
Stewart

Jane Horrocks
Peter Capaldi
Tim McInnerny
Serena Gordon
Martin Clunes
Peter Caffrey

Directed by Robin Lefèvre

Designed by Sue Plummer

Lighting by Gerry Jenkinson

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(See also page ii)

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CHARACTERS

Sherry, late twenties
Howard, early thirties
Paul, early thirties
Marion, early thirties
Anthony Scott, thirty
Stewart, early forties

The action takes place in a sitting-room in the basement flat of a large, late-Victorian house in Earl's Court

ACT I

SCENE 1 Early June, 1984. Just before midnight
SCENE 2 December, 1984. Evening
SCENE 3 July, 1985
SCENE 4 October, 1985. Saturday morning, around eleven o'clock

ACT II

SCENE 1 May, 1986. Early afternoon
SCENE 2 November, 1986. Early evening
SCENE 3 May, 1987. Evening

Time—1984–1987

“An acre in Middlesex is better than a principality in Utopia.”

Thomas Babington Macaulay

ACT I

SCENE 1

The sitting-room in the basement flat of a large, late-Victorian house in Earl's Court. Early June, 1984. Just before midnight

The room is cosy, carpeted and cluttered, with pictures on the walls. There are two doors, one to Paul and Marion's bedroom and one to the rest of the flat. There is also a pair of French windows with curtains, which look on to a small concrete garden

On one side of the room there is a fireplace with ornaments on the mantelpiece. Against the opposite wall there is a drinks cabinet and a radiator. There are several easy chairs, with an upright chair at the table. There is also a cassette machine. By the door to the hall there is a dimmer light switch

Music: "Needles and Pins" by the Searchers

The Lights come up on Howard sitting at his typewriter. He has commandeered the table and is surrounded by papers, books and card index systems

Sherry has just come in and is standing next to him. She wears a short dress, an absurd floppy hat and a huge shoulder bag

Sherry (with great excitement and volume) The train is packed Howard, I mean I've trodden on faces to get a seat. We're somewhere between Knightsbridge and South Kensington, there's this just incredible smell of sweat, you know, not stale sweat, excited summer sweat. Suddenly there's this guy, lurching towards me through the pack and he is *crazy*, there are no questions about this, the man is *gone* and he has singled out *me*, no-one else will do. He shoves aside the last remaining body and looms over me, hanging from the strap, swaying like a side of beef, I mean he's *enormous* and he starts stabbing his finger at me, "How much do you *care*? How much do you *care*?" That's all he's saying over and over. "How much do you *care*?" Everyone's looking at me. *He's* crazy but they're staring at *me*. They want to know how much I care too. About what, nobody's saying, so I take a chance, put my hand on my heart and say, "Very deeply, very deeply indeed," thinking this might get the crowd on my side, but no, nobody applauds, nobody cries, nobody even *laughs*. They're just waiting for the crazy to come back at me, and, Howard, he does. "What about? What do you care so much about?" And they all *stare* at me again. I can feel the mood of the train switching against me. We get to South Ken but nobody gets off. They all live there, I know they do, but they're saying to themselves, "We'll walk back from Gloucester

Road.” The doors shut, the train starts. “What about? What do you care about?” Howard, I can’t think of anything. In a calmer moment I might have said, “The early films of Ingmar Bergman, my mum and being the greatest stand-up comedian the world has ever seen.” But I can think of *nothing*. The silence is just incredible. I mean I’m not ignoring the guy, I’m racking my brains. The whole carriage is racking my brains. Eventually I look the guy in the face, admission of defeat, and he just says, “You see, you see.” And the doors open and he gets off at Gloucester Road. All those people who really live in South Ken are now saying to themselves “What a glorious evening—we’ll walk back from Earl’s Court.” Howard, they’re prepared to stay on till Hounslow Central, gawping at my embarrassment. We get to Earl’s Court, I’m so paranoid I can’t face them all in the lift, I have to climb the emergency stairs to escape. Have you *any* idea how many emergency stairs there are at Earl’s Court?

Howard Eighty-four.

Sherry Are there really?

Howard I counted them.

Sherry What a nightmare. Are you going to make some tea?

Howard No.

Sherry I put the kettle on when I came in.

Howard I don’t want any tea.

Sherry Oh. Did you go out collecting tonight?

Howard They phoned me up. I told them I was ill.

Sherry Howard!

Howard I’ve been out twice. What’s the point? Collecting for the miners in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea? I was stood two hours outside the tube on Monday with me plastic bucket, copped one pound forty and I put the quid in meself. If I’d been up in Glasgow I’d not have been able to hold the thing up after five minutes.

Sherry So you’re writing the book instead?

Howard That’s it.

Sherry Going well?

Howard No.

Sherry Oh.

There is a pause

Are the others in?

Howard I’m sorry.

Sherry No. I didn’t mean you were being—

Howard I’m just tired, I’d like to go to bed.

Sherry —boring or anything. Well go to bed.

Howard I can’t, I need to speak to Paul and Marion.

Sherry Where’ve they gone?

Howard Concert. The Searchers.

Sherry Oh yeah. More sixties nostalgia. Is it healthy I ask? I mean, you can’t imagine these destruction metal bands getting together for twenty-first anniversary gigs.

Howard Destruction metal?

Sherry Very big in Germany. These guys, they hire a warehouse and smash the stage up with drills and amplified sledgehammers. It's pretty loud. Paul did a piece about it in the *NME*.

Howard You mean, they use, like, manufacturing tools for——

Sherry Yeah, cement mixers and stuff——

Howard —signalling the decline of manufacturing culture, that's ... (*He makes a note*)

Sherry Apparently it gets pretty dangerous. I mean you're standing there listening and the walls fall in on you, it's meant to be great.

Howard Well it would be.

Sherry You gonna put that in your book?

Howard Might make a nice little footnote. The section on de-industrialization.

Sherry Howard. You couldn't lend me some money, could you?

There is a pause

Howard How much d'you want?

Sherry Just—a tenner. Is that all right? Brian at the *Queen's Head* owes me for my last three gigs—and he wasn't around tonight, bastard, and there's a few——

Howard I'll lend you ten quid, Sherry. (*He reaches in his pocket*)

There is the sound of people arriving through the front door

Did it go all right, the *Queen's Head*?

Sherry Pretty dead audience. Got a couple of laughs towards the end. I don't think they understood what I was doing at all.

Howard hands her a ten pound note

Oh ... that's great, ta.

Howard Well as long as you're getting the bookings, getting the experience.

Sherry Yeah, well. I'm getting the experience. But the audiences don't seem to be learning much from it.

Sherry crunches the money up and hides it in her hand as she hears Paul and Marion approach the sitting-room

Paul enters, carrying his car keys in his hand

Marion closely follows him

Paul You're still up.

Marion They're still up.

Howard Good were they?

Paul Merely stunning.

Sherry Didn't get their pacemakers wired up in their wah-wah pedals, then——

Paul It's easy to be cynical. They did not look one day older. Twenty-two years on the road and they looked like a set of fresh-faced youths.

Marion And they hadn't learned any new songs either.

Paul You know what I admire? I admire the sheer stamina, the slog, the

perseverance. All this bullshit you hear about the rock 'n' roll heroes, the ones who destroy themselves with drugs, or chuck lawsuits at each other or get killed in plane crashes. That's not heroic, that's the soft option. You know what true heroism is? It's twenty-two years in a Ford Transit staring at the cat's eye lights on the way back from the Club-a-Go-Go, Lowestoft.

Marion Does anyone want tea?

Howard Love some.

Sherry It's just boiled, I put it on.

Marion My ears are ringing. (*She turns to go*)

Sherry (*following her*) Marion. I had this really weird thing happened to me on the tube. There we were between Knightsbridge and South Ken ...

Marion and Sherry exit

Paul (*holding up a cassette*) Look at that, eh, magnetic gold.

Howard You got an interview?

Paul Fifteen minutes' worth. Frank and John. Classic. Cut some old favourites into it and I've got a nifty programme. Syndicate it globally. (*He slumps into a chair*)

Howard tidies some papers

(*Suddenly remembering*) And! And—you'll never guess.

Howard What?

Paul The support band.

Howard The Swinging Blue Jeans.

Paul More obscure.

Howard The Downliners Sect?

Paul More talentless.

Howard More talentless than the Downliners Sect? I give in.

Paul The Blue Scarecrows.

Howard Never heard of them.

Paul You won't have heard of them. They've only been together for six months. But you will have heard of the bass guitarist.

Howard Jack Bruce down on his luck, is he?

Paul Dennis Combes.

Howard Never.

Paul The man himself.

Howard Dennis Combes.

Paul Bass guitar, vocals and insulting the audience.

Howard Making a go of it then, is he?

Paul No. Had a few words with him. Christine—remember Christine—they're married now, just about—she's got a good job, likes to get him out of the house of an evening.

Howard Can see her point. Was he good?

Paul Same as ever. Played a fretless. Still trying to sound like Charlie Mingus.

Howard He was all right, Dennis. The two of you were good together.

Paul Well ...

Howard You were, should have stuck at it.

Paul Like The Searchers.

Howard Could have been where they are today.

Paul The thing with Dennis, the real problem, was that he never accepted the idea that the bass guitar is a background instrument. There you are, up on the stage singing the crucial line of the lyric, and Dennis turns up his amp and starts playing semi-tone runs, crawling up and down the fingerboard like a demented spider.

Howard Great days. Remember the big gig. The Old Refectory.

Paul I've still got the ticket. It was pink. October the twenty-seventh, nineteen seventy-three Southampton University's own band, Centrifugal Force, supporting Leonard Cohen.

Howard Shrewd piece of booking. Everyone cheered up when Leonard came on, he seemed quite chirpy in comparison.

Paul Lennie Cohen. Remember how old we thought he looked.

Howard Great days.

Paul Great days. Old Dennis.

Howard You were mad to jack it in.

Paul I still play——

Howard You know, in a *band*. I reckon if you'd have stuck at it you could really have——

Paul Yeah, shut up, will you Howard. (*Pause*) Interviewing Bronski Beat for the *NME* tomorrow.

Howard Oh yeah?

Paul Oh *yeah*.

Marion and Sherry enter

Marion is carrying a tray with a traditional earthenware teapot, four distinctive mugs, a bottle of milk, a sugar bowl and a packet of biscuits on it

Sherry (*continuing her previous conversation*) ... all those people who actually live in South Ken have decided, "What a stupendous evening, we'll walk back from Earl's Court," I mean, they're prepared to walk back from——

Howard Hounslow Central.

Sherry Howard——

Paul What's this?

Sherry I was telling Marion——

Howard She had to climb the emergency stairs by all accounts——

Sherry Shut up, Howard——

Paul Will somebody tell me——

Sherry This guy I met, on the train between——

Howard (*suddenly standing up*) Look, I want to go to bed.

Paul, Sherry and Marion are puzzled by his vehemence

There is a pause

Paul Well go to bed then.

Howard sits down again

Howard I waited up to tell you something. Some news. It affects all of us. I thought I should wait until we were all together.

Marion pours the tea and hands it round

Marion If we've got mice again, I'm leaving.

Howard We've got a new landlord.

There is a pause

Paul Is that it?

Sherry We're always having new landlords.

Paul Seven in ten years.

Sherry Eight now.

Paul Yeah, eight now.

Howard The rumour is, this one's different.

Paul Says who?

Howard Tracey from the top flat. She came down earlier on, asked if I'd heard anything.

Paul And?

Howard Well I said no, and Tracey said the guy on the second floor, the bald geezer——

Paul —the one with the Renault Five——

Howard Yeah, he'd gone, cleared off 'cos the landlord had found something dodgy in his lease, and he'd said that the people on the ground floor had been offered three grand each to leave.

Sherry Three thousand pounds, just to clear off?

Howard That's the story.

Paul And is that the lot?

Howard So far.

There is a pause

Paul Tracey says that the bald Renault driver, now departed, says that the ground floor have been offered three grand each to go. It's not exactly Reuters we've got here, Howie.

Howard All right, next time I'll keep it to myself.

Sherry Three thousand pounds. Be handy, wouldn't it?

Howard, Paul and Marion look at her doubtfully

Paul We had the same story, exactly the same, two years ago when that Swedish woman sold out.

Howard stands

Howard OK. OK. Sorry I mentioned it. I can go to bed now. Sorry it wasn't more interesting. Put my tea on the side and I'll heat it up for breakfast. Good-night.

Howard exits

Sherry Good-night.

Paul goes to the door, looks, then follows Howard

Paul (*off*) Howie!!

Sherry Marion?

Marion Yes?

Sherry You couldn't lend me ten quid, could you?

Marion Ummm . . . ohhh . . . I expect so.

Sherry It's just that Brian, the bastard owes me——

Marion You know we've got to pay the phone bill this week.

Sherry Is it a lot?

Marion Well. Your share is.

Sherry Oh shit.

Marion Paul's worked it out. It's on the hall table.

Sherry Oh. (*Pause*) I'd still like ten quid.

Marion Tomorrow?

Sherry That would be—lovely, yes.

Marion I suppose it must end somehow. Why not like this?

Sherry What?

Marion Living together. It's been ten years. Life's not meant to happen that way. After a while you go your separate ways, buy squeaky clean places with freezers and get surrounded by cats and children. I've met people who've done it.

Sherry Well, this might be your chance. You could go and do all that with Paul.

Marion Would he want that?

Sherry Probably. I know he likes freezers.

Marion Would I want that?

Sherry Yes, I should think so.

Marion And what would you do?

Sherry Kip on floors, I don't know.

Marion You're getting a bit big for that, Sherry. Floors, that was a long time ago.

Paul enters

Paul He's all right. He was just pissed off cos he's got to get up early to pick up some leaflets at the printers for his NATFHE branch.

Sherry It was silly staying up. I don't see why he didn't get me to tell you.

Paul Did you see the breakdown of the phone bill?

Sherry No I haven't. Stop hounding me.

Paul It's the first time I've mentioned it.

Sherry It's always money now. You used to be able to get some really good conversation in this flat. Burning issues and moral dilemmas and things. Now all everyone talks about is money.

Marion I should get time to go to the bank at lunchtime.

Sherry Sorry? Oh right. The money. (*She gets up and heads for the door*) See you in the morning.

Sherry exits

Paul What money?

Marion She's broke.

Paul You shouldn't lend to her, it makes her worse.

Marion I said I was going to read those reports for Jeremy tonight, oh well.

Paul Picks up forty quid a week if she's lucky, then splurges out eighty in the Portobello Road on an antique wedding dress that doesn't fit her.

Marion She'd be happy. If we got money to go.

Paul Don't talk about it or she'll spend all the cash on the offchance.

Marion I was talking to Jackie today. Marketing Jackie. She hadn't realized how old I was. She thought I was about twenty-five. She went all quiet.

Paul Even if it did happen and the landlord came up with a heap of money I still wouldn't go. It's ideal, living here.

Marion Marketing's funny. They all sit round and say things like "In five years time, every home will have a computer like every home has a toaster."

Paul What happened to our toaster?

Marion It broke.

Paul You don't look thirty-one. Twenty-six, twenty-seven at the outside.

Marion bends over and kisses him

Marion I'm going to bed. Jennifer's having a baby.

Paul Jennifer.

Marion Roger and Jennifer.

Paul Oh.

Marion We could buy a place. If he came up with enough.

Paul The four of us?

Marion No, silly, you and me. Renting doesn't make sense.

Paul We've been renting for years. When did it stop making sense?

Marion Sometimes it feels a bit cramped. Anyway, everything changes eventually.

Paul I don't like change. I like things that go on and on.

Marion breaks away from him and goes towards the bedroom door

Marion?

Marion Bring me a glass of water when you come, will you?

Marion exits into the bedroom

Paul sits for a moment. Then he remembers the interview tape. He gets up and puts it in the cassette machine. He goes to the drinks cupboard and pours a brandy

Paul's voice is heard on the tape

Paul I'm backstage at the Albany Empire, Deptford after a tremendous gig by that great band of the sixties and indeed the eighties, the Searchers, and I've got bass guitarist Frank Allen with me. Frank, you've got that distinctive Searchers sound, I mean the high harmonies and twelve string guitars, that's had quite an impact on rock and roll history.

Frank It has, I mean the Byrds got a lot of credit for that, but in fact the Byrds used the twelve string sometime after us and I believe they were influenced, certainly Tom Petty has admitted being influenced by our

twelve string sound and Bruce Springsteen. He was using "When You Walk in the Room" on his stage show for quite some time. And Marshall Crenshaw came to see us in New York . . .

Quick fade to Black-out

Music: "When You Walk in the Room" by the Searchers

SCENE 2

The same. Evening. December, 1984

The room is much tidier. Christmas cards adorn every available surface. There is a small, genuine Christmas tree with working lights

Marion is hoovering. She is wearing a suit and gives the impression of being older and richer than she really is

She switches the hoover off, and looks around, houseproud

Paul enters. He is clearly anxious

Paul Are we going to offer him a drink?

Marion No.

Paul Are you sure?

Marion We want him in and out quickly. We want to make him feel like an intruder. We want tension and hostility.

Paul So no drinks, not even coffee.

Marion Not even coffee.

Paul It's cold out there, he'll be cold.

Marion The psychology is: no coffee.

Paul Right.

There is a pause

They're not going to get here in time. I knew we should have made it later.

Marion It doesn't matter.

Paul It does matter. We don't want Howard lecturing him on economics and we don't want Sherry saying anything.

There is the sound of the front door opening and closing

Marion I talked to them last night. They know what to do.

Sherry enters, running. She is wearing a heavy coat

Sherry Oh God. He's not here yet.

Marion No.

Sherry Christ it's so cold. *(She goes to the drinks cupboard and pours herself a large brandy)*

Paul is stupefied by Sherry's actions

I had this really amazing thing happen to me on the bus—

Marion Not now. You know what to do?

Sherry Yes, I say nothing. Absolutely nothing. I leave it to the smooth-tongued among us. When he speaks to me I say, "Signor Landlord, I know nothing, nada, absoluto zilcho——"

Paul Do you often drink my brandy?

Sherry What?

Paul Elton John's manager gave me that.

Sherry Paul, it's really cold outside, you have no idea——

Paul If it's my birthday. Or I have something to celebrate. Or I'm in the depths of terminal depression. Then I have some of my cognac——

Marion Please.

Paul Then and only then——

Sherry It's only a drink——

Paul If you just wanna get warm, there's a bottle of sherry I got off Bananarama——

Marion Please!

There is a pause

He'll be here any second. Howard will probably be late. The important thing is this: we will give away nothing, no information at all. Our financial standing, our mutual relationships, our careers, these will remain a closed book to him, all right? He's the landlord, make him feel like one. If there's any official statement required from our side, Paul will make it and there will be no dissenters, right?

Sherry Right.

Marion And above all: if he mentions a sum of money, whatever it is, as compensation for our giving him vacant possession, we look incredibly depressed.

Sherry Depressed, right.

There is a ring at the doorbell

Sherry Oh shitbags.

Marion I'll go. (*She makes for the door, then turns for a moment*) Sit down. Looks as if you live here.

Marion exits

Paul and Sherry sit

Sherry Suppose he offers us the four grand Tracey and the others got——

Paul You look depressed——

Sherry I'll try——

There is a pause

Paul Think of something to say——

Sherry I can't——

Paul Quick before he comes in——

Sherry Oh Christ, oh internal megadeath——

Marion enters

Anthony Scott follows her. He is a go-getter, only just thirty, younger than the inhabitants of the flat though he doesn't realize this. He has a public school manner, and he is clean, clear-cut, confident. Despite themselves, Paul and Sherry stand when Scott comes in. Scott holds some papers, recently extracted from his briefcase. He is talking into a micro tape recorder as he comes in

Scott . . . substantial areas of wasted space, corridors and so on, then large reception room, French windows, opening to garden, rear, good-evening, so you two are . . .

Scott looks at Sherry and checks his papers

Sherry does not know if she should speak

Paul Paul Cameron.

Scott Excellent. Anthony Scott.

Scott and Paul shake hands

So therefore, the other one's called Howard, you must be Sherry Martin.

Sherry is immensely relieved

Sherry Yes, pleased to meet you.

Sherry and Scott shake hands

Although my equity name is Sherry St George.

Paul and Marion look appalled

Scott (*puzzled*) Equity? Do you deal?

Sherry It's just you can't have the same name as somebody else, and somebody else already had my name, although—obviously it was her name, so I had to find another and my aunt's maiden name was St George so I thought—rather stylish and . . .

Scott looks at her as if she were mad

As a stage name . . .

Scott *That* Equity. Sorry didn't cotton. Different worlds. (*He sits down*) Are you all in that line of business?

Sherry No, Paul's a freelance broadcaster and Marion's in computers. Howard's not here yet, he's a lecturer at . . . (*She realizes she has said too much*) . . . the moment. That's why he's not here yet. (*She pauses*)

Paul and Marion look daggers at Sherry

But he'll be here soon. When he finishes his lecture. (*She pauses*) It's about the re-birth of German industry in the nineteen fifties. (*She pauses*) So he won't be long. Can I make you a cup of coffee?

Scott I—no I really mustn't stay long. Should we wait for this—

Paul Howard. Howard Unwin.

Scott Perhaps we'll give him a moment or so. You're an actress then?

Sherry Well I'm more of a performer, really. I'm breaking into the alternative comedy scene.

There is the sound of the front door opening and closing

Scott Television? Lots of money in that.

Sherry Yes. On a good night, you can take home twenty quid.

Scott Ah.

Howard enters

Howard Sorry I'm late. Howard Unwin.

Scott Anthony Scott.

Scott and Howard shake hands

For a man who's had to explain an economic miracle, I'd say you were a shade early.

Howard can't work out how Scott knows

The Krauts, your lecture. Lot to learn from them.

Howard Well, yes.

Howard searches the faces around him for clues

(Giving up) I'll sit down.

Scott immediately leans forward. He is well prepared

Scott *(in a cards-on-the-table-manner)* Now you've been living here as tenants for quite some time, five years, isn't that right?

Paul Ten.

Scott Ten. *(He seems momentarily depressed)* Long time. Well. You will not be unaware of the situation. My line of business is property. My interest is primarily, I would say, a creative one. I like to seize opportunities and make the most of them. Six months ago I bought this property as part of a portfolio of similar—units. You'll be aware I bought it sight unseen, tenants and all because I have a particular interest in the area and . . . Well a good price is a good price.

There is a pause

I should, perhaps, apologize for having taken so long to contact you, but I was aware you were tenants of long standing and I decided to—approach the other occupants first. Now, you're here in the basement. The second floor and the ground floor are both vacant. The top floor will be vacant by the end of January, the first floor by the sixteenth of February. You will be the sole remaining tenants. I want to be quite clear about this, I have no intention of being a landlord. That's not my—thing at all. I—that is my company Anthony Scott Developments—refurbish properties—substantial buildings in promising locations renovated with a degree of wit and imagination—and then sold. To an increasingly clamorous market. Earls Court—becoming an interesting part of the world. Conservation area, nice London square, convenient for the city, handy for the airport, lots of brownie points . . . *(He looks around)* Needs a bit of work. As with much rented accommodation, the landlord tends to let things slip. Actually, needs an awful lot of work.

There is a pause

What I'd like to do is gut the whole house, shove in a central wall, rearrange the accommodation on to different levels, so you have seven or eight different units, one bedroom, two bedroom flats, making the whole property more space efficient.

Paul They did that to the one on the corner.

Howard Yes they did, they put in a——

Paul Central wall, yes.

Scott Yes.

There is a pause

This work will be much easier to accomplish if you are no longer living here.

There is a pause

So. There are a number of routes available. A number of routes. All of which we are at liberty to explore. One of which we will choose to travel on.

There is a pause

Route one, and this is the route I absolutely prefer and which I cannot recommend to you too highly . . . I will pay you a sum of money for vacant possession. Which you would dispose amongst yourselves as you thought fit. And we would name a date for your vacation of the premises.
(*He looks around*)

Sherry, Paul, Howard and Marion look back at him

Should we—for any reason—not be able to avail ourselves of this route, then we may have to get into re-housing. This could be rather a messy route. Under the terms of your tenancy, I would need to find accommodation of an equivalent nature to that which you are now enjoying. Now obviously it can't be *exactly* the same and we might find ourselves quibbling over a French window here and a lavatory pedestal there—if you catch my . . . it's a bit wrangly, a bit nit-picky as processes go, which is why I'm not madly keen to set foot down this particular . . . boulevard. But of course if we can't agree on option one, then re-housing it may have to be. I may not be into being landlord, but I have a colleague who is and he has a whole *sea* of flats not a biscuit's toss from this very spot and, should it come to the push, I have little doubt that the courts will rule one of these to be as damn near equivalent as equivalent can be . . .

Scott waits for some comment, but there are still no takers

Failing that, I could in the very near future turn this place into a building site. A lot of work could be done around you, scaffolding, brickdust, rough labouring chaps working funny hours with their jovial badinage floating in through the windows—and in the meantime I can hardly fail to note that the rent you're paying is way below the going whack for this area. If I were to make a concerted push at the Rent Tribunal to bring you

into line, you could well find yourself paying twice or thrice the current sum. But this is not a pleasant option, not by any means a scenic route. It's possible that we'll have no problems whatever reaching an agreement, in which event, it may be possible for me to offer you one of the newly created units on this very spot in the not too distant future, possibly at a highly competitive price. So. That's it.

There is a pause

That's where we stand.

There is a pause

Paul You mentioned a sum of money.

Scott Yes.

Paul For vacant possession.

Scott Yes.

Paul What sort of sum are we talking about?

Scott Well, this would be a figure on which we would have to agree.

Paul, Howard, Sherry and Marion wait

But I would have to say, at this juncture, that the absolute ceiling on such a sum, working as I am within tight budgets, the absolute ceiling would be around twenty thousand, twenty-five thousand, say around six thousand each.

Marion, Paul and Howard instantly look incredibly depressed

Sherry (a yelp of joy) Yahhh!! (Suddenly she realizes she has to suppress her feelings) Well, that's not very . . . I mean that's . . . well . . . as a sum . . . that's . . .

There is a pause

Scott And I think I ought to say, right from the start, that we are not in a negotiating situation here. You are not about to make a killing out of me. We are not talking telephone numbers. We will be looking to settle amicably, speedily and sensibly.

There is a pause

Paul Well we obviously can't make any decision here and now. We'll need to consult among ourselves——

Scott Surely, surely.

Paul There is one point I would very much like to make. This is our home. It has been our home for some considerable time. We would none of us be at all happy to have to leave it.

Scott Well, this is a point of view, yes. But the world moves on, times change and so forth——

Paul It's a pleasant area, convenient for all our working arrangements, we get on extraordinarily well together, almost like a family——

Scott (becoming embarrassed and making up his mind to get out) Well. (Looks at his watch) I have to be going. I have another . . . (He leans

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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