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Man of the Moment

A Play

Alan Ayckbourn

Samuel French - London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood

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MAN OF THE MOMENT

First performed at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round, Scarborough, on 10th August, 1988 with the following cast of characters:

Jill Rillington	Lynette Edwards
Trudy	Lesley Meade
Kenny Collins	Simon Chandler
Ruy	Daniel Collings
Douglas Beechey	Jon Strickland
Vic Parks	Peter Laird
Cindy	Lisa Bailey *or* Charlotte Kershaw
Sharon Giffin	Shirley-Anne Selby
Marta	Doreen Andrew
Ashley Barnes	Peter Forbes
David	Adam Godley

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn
Designed by Michael Holt

It was subsequently presented by Michael Codron at the Globe Theatre, London, on 14th February, 1990 with the following cast of characters:

Jill Rillington	Samantha Bond
Trudy	Diane Bull
Kenny Collins	Simon Chandler
Ruy	Daniel Collings
Douglas Beechey	Michael Gambon
Vic Parks	Peter Bowles
Cindy	Joanna Relf *or* Diana Endsor
Sharon Giffin	Shirley-Anne Selby
Marta	Doreen Andrew
Ashley Barnes	Terence Booth
David	Paul Stewart

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn
Designed by Roger Glossop

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(See also page ii)

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CHARACTERS

Vic Parks
Trudy, his wife
Cindy, aged seven, their daughter
Sharon Giffin, their children's nanny
Ruy, their Spanish gardener
Marta, Ruy's wife, their Spanish maid
Kenny Collins, Vic's manager
Jill Rillington
Douglas Beechey
Ashley Barnes, a TV floor manager
plus seven **actors** (six non-speaking)

The action takes place in the patio/pool area of Vic and Trudy's Mediterranean villa

ACT I One day recently
ACT II Later that same afternoon

Other plays by Alan Ayckbourn
published by Samuel French Ltd

One Act
A Cut in the Rates
Ernie's Incredible Illucinations

Full Length
Absent Friends
Absurd Person Singular
Bedroom Farce
A Chorus of Disapproval
Confusions
Henceforward . . .
How the Other Half Loves
Intimate Exchanges (volumes 1 and 2)
Joking Apart
Just Between Ourselves
Living Together
Mixed Doubles (with other authors)
The Norman Conquests
Relatively Speaking
Season's Greetings
Sisterly Feelings
A Small Family Business
Table Manners
Taking Steps
Ten Times Table
Time and Time Again
Tons of Money (revised)
Way Upstream
Woman in Mind

ACT I

The paved patio/pool area of a modern, moderate-sized (three-bedroomed) villa in a Spanish-speaking area of the Mediterranean

At one side, a glimpse of the villa itself. White stucco walls and wooden shutters. The edge of the living area – tiled floor with rugs – perhaps the end of what promises to be a very long drinks bar. Large, open sliding doors leading out from the living area on to a shaded area. Here, a table and chairs to seat about four. Moving away from the house further, a step down to a slightly sunken sunbathing area. Here, two or three sun loungers and a low table. At the other side, steps up again to the back gate of the villa, which in turn leads to a carport and the rough road. Also visible, the raised, angled corner of the swimming pool (deep end). It is possible to walk around the pool, either along the deep end to reach the diving board (unseen) or along the poolside to reach the shallow end. One or two shrubs in tubs. Perhaps a toy left lying about, betraying the presence of young children

At the start, though, none of this is visible. Just a light on Jill Rillington who sits on the patio in a chair beside the table, angled out facing away from the house. Jill is in her early thirties and looking good – certainly at first glance. Every inch the assured, charming TV reporter/presenter. She is at present doing a piece to camera, though we won't guess this immediately. The film crew are out of sight and remain so throughout. Sometimes we will hear their distant voices calling to Jill but their words are impossible to decipher

Jill (*to the camera*) Hallo. I'm Jill Rillington. In this edition of *Their Paths Crossed*, we tell a story that started seventeen years ago in the slow and sneet of a Surrey Novem . . . Oh, piss! Keep rolling. We'll go again. Snow and sleet. Snow and sleet . . . (*Slowly*) Snow—and – sleet . . . Here we go. Snow and sleet. Hallo. I'm Rill Jillington . . . My God, I don't believe this. Right, straight in – keep turning. Hallo. I'm Jill Rillington. In this edition of *Their Paths Crossed*, we tell a story that started seventeen years ago in the snow and sleet of a Surrey November morning and finishes——

She gestures. As she does so, the Lights spread out to include the whole area, rather as if the camera had pulled back to include her surroundings. We see she is wearing a discreet radio mike attached to her blouse. On the table beside her is a cardboard folder containing research material, press clippings and interview notes

– here. In the brilliant sunshine of a glorious Mediterranean summer. It's a story which has – fittingly perhaps – almost a fairy-tale ring to it. A tale with a hero and a villain – even a damsel in distress. But this is no child's fable, it is a true story. This is the real world where nothing is as it seems.

This is the real world where heroes are easily forgotten; this is the real world where the villains may, themselves, become heroes. And as for distressed damsels– well, are they in reality ever truly rescued? I'll leave you, the viewer, to judge for yourself . . . (*She pauses for a moment, looking towards the camera*) And cut! OK?

A shout of assent from the crew

Did you get the wide? (*Gesturing*) The wide?

The crew replies

Good. Did you get this whole area? (*Gesturing and yelling*) This whole area?

A yell from one of the crew

What? (*She notices her radio mike*) Oh, yes. Sorry, Dan. Didn't mean to burst your eardrums. Sorry, my love. (*She consults her watch. She makes to yell again then thinks better of it*) George – (*Quietly*) Sorry, love. Dan, can you tell George to set up the arrival shot. For the arrival. Can he do that? Where we talked about? On the bend? So we see this man's taxi coming up the hill and their first meeting at the front door? OK? George knows where. I'll be with you in a sec. Thank you, love. I'll unplug. Save your batteries. (*She unplugs her mike from its transmitter in her pocket and tucks away the lead*)

As she is doing this, Trudy comes out from the house rather tentatively. She is only a few years older than Jill but looks rather more. Possibly due to an over-eagerness to please her husband Vic, Trudy has attempted to retain the look of someone ten years younger; an image presumably with which he originally fell in love. She has taken rather more care than usual this morning as the TV cameras are about

Trudy Sorry. Is it all right for me . . . ?

Jill Yes, we've finished. It's quite all right.

Trudy Would you all care for coffee? A cup of coffee?

Jill Well, I'd love one. I think the crew are probably OK. They seem to have brought their own refreshments.

Trudy Sure?

Jill No, it's probably best to let them get on. We need to set up for this new shot. I want to catch Mr Beechey actually arriving here straight from his hotel . . .

Trudy Yes, yes, yes . . .

Jill And hopefully his first meeting with your husband . . .

Trudy Yes, yes. I don't know if Vic's . . .

Jill Is he still not back?

Trudy Well, he should be. He said he would be. (*Moving to the gate*) Kenny was going to see if he could . . . Just a minute, I'll . . . (*Calling to someone*) Kenny, is he coming? Can you see them? No?

Jill No?

Trudy No, I'm sorry. He only took the children down to the beach. With Sharon. She's their nanny. You can usually see them on the beach down there . . . He did promise he'd be here . . .

Jill (*rather coolly*) Yes, he did.

Trudy It's not like him to do this. I'll make the coffee. It may have just slipped his mind. (*Smiling*) Once he gets with the kids . . .

Trudy hurries back into the house

Jill (*smiling*) Yes. (*Sourly, looking at her watch again*) Bugger him. (*She starts to gather up her folder from the table*)

Kenny comes through the back gate. Late twenties or early thirties. He is one of the new breed of young manager/agents with a cool, laid-back, slightly public school, unflappable exterior which just serves to conceal any insecurity beneath

Kenny No. No sign.

Jill Well, where is he?

Kenny Digging on the beach. Burying the kids. Bonking the nanny. I don't know.

Jill But he knew about this. He knew . . .

Kenny Oh, yes, he knew all right.

Jill I mean you knew it, Kenny, we talked about it last night . . .

Kenny I know, he definitely knew . . .

Jill He knew I wanted to catch their first meeting . . .

Kenny I know, I know . . .

Jill I needed that on camera. He knew that.

Kenny I know, he knew. He said you'd said it to him. I know . . .

Jill I said to him. You know I did.

Kenny I know. He knew, all right, he knew . . .

Jill Then why the hell isn't he here if he knew?

Kenny I don't know. (*Pause*) You know Vic.

Jill Yes.

Kenny You can't tell him.

Jill I don't see what makes him so special.

Kenny He's a star, darling. A star. Isn't he? (*Pause*) He won't let you down. Don't worry.

Jill There's no point in saying that. He just has.

Kenny You can film it later. You can mock it up later.

Jill I doubt it.

Kenny Why not? Vic can do that. He's a pro. He's used to that. He did a programme once. Visiting sick kids in hospital. He was a hundred and forty miles away in a London studio. No-one ever knew. Except the kids he was meant to be visiting. He can do that sort of thing. Piece of cake.

Jill I'm sure Vic could. I'm not so sure about Mr Beechey.

Kenny No?

Jill No.

Kenny Not your television natural, I take it?

Jill He's about as lively as a sheet of laminated chipboard. I've just spent four days interviewing Mr Beechey. In his home town of Purley. I think I've got about twenty seconds of usable material. And those are shots of Purley.

Kenny Not a talker?

Jill Oh, he talks. It's just he never says anything. You know, when I first started out with the BBC as a radio interviewer, I went on this course and they warned us that one day we'd all of us find ourselves interviewing the uninterviewable. I thought, after ten years, I'd managed to escape. And then along comes Mr Beechey. (*Musing*) It's not that he won't talk. You can usually cope with that. We all get that. Then you can generally coax them round. Eventually. Or you say something so blatantly incorrect about them, they're forced to contradict you in self-defence. But this man, he's deadly. The point is, there's absolutely nothing you can say to him that he doesn't agree with. He smothers you with approval. It's like interviewing a fire blanket.

Kenny You normally only meet people like that during general elections, don't you? What about Mrs Beechey? Any joy with her?

Jill She spent the four days we were there hiding in the boxroom. I never got to speak to her at all. All I'm hoping is, once he's here – far away from the bright lights of Purley – he might open up.

Kenny (*wandering to the gate to look*) A little sunshine. Does wonders.

Jill Is Vic coming?

Kenny Can't see him.

Jill Listen, Kenny, I hope he's taking this seriously . . .

Kenny Of course. You know Vic. He's a pro . . .

Jill I mean, this may just be another tacky little interview as far as he's concerned——

Kenny He's never said that.

Jill – a jokey programme which only merits an eighth of his attention——

Kenny Whoever said that?

Jill – but for me this is important. It may not seem much to you, but if this works out – then I have their firm provisional promise of the other seven slots. That is eight in all . . .

Kenny (*duly impressed*) Eight, heavens!

Jill Plus—plus – wait for it! Plus another pencilled second series of eight in the New Year.

Kenny Sixteen, goodness . . .

Jill Right. Sixteen. Of my own series. Seventy per cent film – thirty per cent studio – me – nobody else – me alone . . .

Kenny (*humouring her along*) That's some doing. These days.

Jill Oh, I know a lot of people are sitting back there waiting for me to fall flat on my arse. Colin and Martin thing. Clare. She certainly is. And that Richard – whatsit. They are all dying for that to happen . . . Well, I've got this far and no-one is going to trip me up now. I've fought for this chance—just watch me go . . .

Kenny I will. I will . . .

Jill Not Mr Beechey, not you, not Vic, not that damp, septic tank of a film crew I've been landed with – and I know who saddled me with them, thank you very much, Mrs McIver, I'll settle you when I get back home, madam, see if I don't – God, is this mike still on? No . . . Oh, relief . . . Kenny, if the choice is this or making ten-minute promo videos of eager fringe companies from Stockport for the British Council, I know which I want to do. Just remember Vic owes me, Kenny. He owes me one. I helped him. Remember that. (*Pointing to herself*) This kid from BBC Radio Bristol got that whole splendid career of his started. Remember that.

Kenny All right, all right.

Jill Just remember.

Kenny All right. Easy.

Pause. Jill simmers

We love you. Promise. We're all mad about you.

Jill (*muttering*) I don't want love, I just want basic co-operation, all right?

Kenny (*moving back to the gate*) Relax.

Jill (*looking at her watch again*) He should be here. Why isn't he here? Neither of them are here. This is all I need.

Kenny It's only one minute past.

Jill By the time they get here, that film crew will want a break. I've never met anything like them. Every time they change film they have a union meeting. And it's no use trying to do anything after lunch, because they're all totally legless. There's that much camera shake, you'd think we were filming on the top of Mount Etna . . .

Kenny (*still at the gate*) There's a car in the distance just starting up the hill.

Jill Is it Vic?

Kenny No, it's not the jeep. It looks like a taxi from here. Probably your Mr Beechey.

Jill Right. Well, we can film him arriving, anyway. Get his reactions. If he has any. Keep a look out for Vic. (*As she goes*) You're his agent, get him here.

Kenny His manager . . .

Jill hurries through the garden gate

Jill (*calling*) George! Come on, get a move on. He's coming! Come on, come on!

As Jill goes, Trudy comes out from the house with a tray of coffee things

Trudy Is something happening?

Kenny I think Mr Beechey's arrived.

Trudy (*without enthusiasm*) Oh. Good.

Kenny What's the matter? Nervous?

Trudy Not at all.

Kenny It was years ago. You weren't even around.

Trudy You know perfectly well how I feel about all this.

Kenny All right.

Trudy I blame you. You talked him into it. This programme.

Kenny When have I ever talked Vic into anything? When has anyone? Come on. Don't blame me. Be honest. Have *you*? Have you ever talked him into anything?

Trudy doesn't reply

(*His point proved*) Well, then.

Trudy He said he'd be back by now. He's forgotten. I bet that's what's happened. He always forgets what he doesn't choose to remember.

Kenny Sharon might have reminded him.

Trudy (*with ill-concealed dislike*) Well, I think telling the time's a bit beyond Sharon. I'd better fetch another cup. (*She makes to leave*)

Kenny Haven't you got anyone to help you today?

Trudy How do you mean?

Kenny You know. To make the coffee? Fetch things out?

Trudy Oh, yes. Marta's here. Only by the time I've explained it to her, it's quicker to do it myself. I mean, she can speak quite good English. I know she can. She always understands Vic. It's just me. She doesn't seem to understand me at all. It's probably the way I talk, I don't know . . .

Trudy goes back into the house

Kenny wanders to the pool. He stoops and tests the water temperature with his hand

Ruy, a man in his fifties, comes through the back gate with a pool rake. He ignores Kenny, as he ignores everyone, except on those rare occasions when Vic speaks to him

Kenny Good-morning to you.

Ruy totally ignores him. He starts to rake the surface of the pool. This activity soon takes him out of view

(*Sarcastically, in response to Ruy's lack of response*) Thank you. And the same to you. Lovely chatting to you. Now, you must excuse me interrupting but I have to get on. Not at all. And the same to you.

Trudy enters from the house

Trudy (*talking to someone following behind her*) We're just about to have coffee out here. If you'd care to join us . . .

Trudy is followed by Douglas Beechey, a man in his early forties. He is, as Jill has hinted, quite staggeringly unimpressive on first acquaintance. He is, though, as with many of nature's creatures, compensated for his apparent total lack of aggression by an almost complete invulnerability to attack by others. His clothes are quite unsuited to the climate

Douglas (*as he approaches*) Isn't this glorious? Isn't this simply glorious . . . (*Stopping in the doorway to survey the patio and pool*) Oh, now. This is glorious.

Trudy (*unsure how to react*) Thank you. May I introduce (*indicating Kenny*)—have you met my husband's manager?

Kenny (*stepping towards them*) How do you do.
Trudy This is Kenneth Collins. Mr Beechey.
Douglas Douglas Beechey. How do you do.
Kenny Kenny Collins. Good to meet you.

They shake hands

Douglas Isn't this glorious? Isn't this just glorious? May I . . . ? (*He indicates the terrace*)
Trudy (*waving him in*) Of course.
Douglas (*exploring the area*) Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh. (*Admiring the view from the garden gate*) Oh. (*Investigating the pool*) Oh. Look at this pool. Doesn't that look inviting?
Trudy You're welcome to have a swim, any time.
Douglas No, I don't swim.
Trudy No?
Douglas No, no. Me and water, I'm afraid, we've never seen eye to eye. (*Calling to the unseen Ruy*) Hallo. Good-morning to you.
Trudy I was just fetching another cup. Excuse me.
Douglas Of course. May I help at all . . . ?
Trudy No, no. Wait there.

Trudy goes back in to the house

Douglas Well, I must say. Who could ask for anything more, eh?
Kenny Yes.
Douglas Glorious. Quite glorious. (*Indicating in Ruy's direction*) Who's that? Is he one of the family?
Kenny No, that's the gardener.
Douglas (*impressed*) Oh. The gardener. I see.
Kenny Right.
Douglas Very impressive. (*Looking around*) All you need now is a garden, eh? (*He laughs*)
Kenny Well, I think he cleans the pool and – odd jobs, you know.
Douglas Oh, yes, I'm sure. I was only joking. I expect this paving would need weeding to start with. I should imagine. I suppose they get weeds here, don't they? Same as we do?
Kenny I would imagine so.
Douglas (*calling to Ruy*) Excuse me, I say . . . Do you get weeds? I say! Do you have weeds here?
Kenny I don't think he speaks much English.
Douglas Oh. (*Calling*) *Gracias!* (*To Kenny*) That's the only bit of Spanish I know.
Kenny Pretty impressive.
Douglas I definitely don't know the Spanish for weed killer, that's for certain. (*Breathing in the air*) Glorious!

Slight pause

Kenny Good flight?
Douglas Pardon?

Kenny Good flight? Out here? On the aeroplane? Did you have a good one?

Douglas Oh, glorious. I was with a very jolly crowd from Dagenham. Singing their heads off, all the way over.

Kenny Oh, yes?

Douglas When they weren't playing practical jokes on the crew that was. You had to laugh.

Kenny Sounds fun.

Douglas Couple of them dressed up as air hostesses. Couple of the men. Then it turned out we were all staying in the same hotel. So . . .

Kenny That OK? The hotel?

Douglas Very clean. And the windows open. That's all I ever ask for in a hotel.

Kenny (*slightly baffled*) Really?

Douglas I need air to sleep, you see. Not that I stay in them very often. Oh, I'm savouring every minute of this, I can tell you. Free trip. Free meals. Free hotel. VIP treatment. And appearing on the television. You don't get that every day, do you?

Kenny You certainly don't.

Douglas Make the most of it, I say.

Kenny I should.

Douglas I see they were all out there to greet my arrival. The film crew. I got to know them all quite well. While they were sitting in our front room for four days. Good to see them again. All out there. Filming away. And dear old Jill, waving her arms about as usual. She doesn't half go at them sometimes. Mind you, they take it all in very good part. They're a very pleasant bunch. Very easy-going, I've found. Well, let's put it this way, we certainly had a few good laughs while they were in Purley. (*He has moved back to stand by the garden gate*) That'll be the Mediterranean Sea? Down there? Right?

Kenny The bit covered in water. Where the land stops.

Douglas (*surveying the view thoughtfully*) The Med, eh? Well, well. That's something else I can tell people I've seen.

Trudy enters with the extra cup

Trudy Here we are.

Douglas Well, I can't say I'm not a tinge green, Mrs Parks. I must say, this is just perfection.

Trudy Yes, we're very—lucky!

Kenny (*anxious to correct any wrong impression*) Mind you, you didn't get it for nothing, did you? You've earned it.

Douglas (*anxious to do the same*) Oh, yes.

Trudy Well, Vic earned it.

Kenny You both have.

Trudy (*smiling, unconvinced*) It's nice of you to say so.

Douglas Behind every successful man, don't they say?

Trudy I'm afraid my husband's still on the beach with the children. He should be back shortly.

Douglas Oh, how many children have you?

Trudy Two. Coffee, Mr Beechey?
Douglas Thank you. Do call me Douglas, won't you? Milk and three sugars, thank you.
Trudy Kenny?
Kenny Please. Usual. Black, no sugar.
Douglas And how old are the children, Trudy—may I call you Trudy?
Trudy Cindy is seven and Timmy is just five.
Douglas Lovely. One of each, then?
Trudy Yes.
Douglas They must love it out here.
Trudy Oh, yes, they do. (*Offering him coffee*) Mr Beechey.
Douglas Thank you. Douglas. Please. Call me Douglas.

Slight pause. Kenny is served coffee

Kenny Thanks. Do you have children, Mr – Douglas?
Douglas No. No. (*A slight pause as if he might be going to say something else*) No.
Kenny Ah.
Douglas My wife was . . . Well, we made a joint decision not to have any. We decided we weren't ideal parent material. Either of us.
Kenny It's a pity your wife couldn't come with you.
Douglas Oh, no. Nerys is not a traveller.
Kenny No?
Douglas I'm afraid this sort of trip would be quite beyond her.
Kenny Oh. What a shame.

Pause

Trudy She's – she's all right, is she? I mean, she's not ill, your wife?
Douglas Oh, no. She's very chirpy.
Kenny Oh, grand.
Douglas At present. She has her ups and down, of course.
Trudy Don't we all?
Kenny Absolutely.

Pause

Trudy You'll appreciate that I'm Vic's second wife. I wasn't around when when all that happened – I mean, Vic and I, we've only been married eight years.
Douglas Yes, I did read he'd remarried. I read all about your romance. In his book.
Trudy (*not pleased*) Did you?
Douglas Sounded very romantic. Is that how it actually was? Did he really abduct you from the middle of a public car park in the back of a Transit van?
Trudy (*reluctantly*) Well, sort of, yes . . .
Kenny Mind you, Trudy was standing around for some time waiting to be abducted, weren't you?

Douglas laughs. Another pause

Trudy No, what I'm saying is that – all that happened – all that – between you – happened while Vic was married to Donna, you see. I was not around then. I didn't even know him. I was married to somebody else as well, as it happens. Only that didn't work out.

Douglas That would be your previous marriage to the dental mechanic?

Trudy Yes . . .

Douglas Oh, dear . . .

Trudy (*faintly irritated*) No, what I'm saying is, I had nothing to do with that part of Vic's life. If they want to know about that – for this programme – then they'll have to ask Donna. Providing they can sober her up. By the time I met Vic that was all in the past. I wasn't part of it and I don't really want to know about it. We're all different people now. At least I hope we are. And I have to say that I don't agree with this programme anyway. I don't honestly think they should be doing it. I'm sorry. I've said it to Vic and I've said it to her. That Jill Rillington. And now I'm saying it to you. I'm sorry. I think it's unnecessary. And hurtful. I think it's raking over old ground and opening old wounds. I'm not at all surprised your wife isn't here. If I were her, I certainly wouldn't be here. Not after what she . . . Still. As I say, I'm an outsider. I wasn't even around when it happened. And what Vic does is his own affair. But I am his wife and I think I might have been consulted. I'm also the mother of his children – though you wouldn't think so sometimes, would you? (*She is suddenly on the verge of crying*) Excuse me. I just have to fetch some – things . . .

Trudy hurries into the house

Douglas rises, amazed. Kenny remains seated

Kenny (*calling calmly after her*) Trudy . . . love . . . (*Silence*) She'll be all right.

Douglas Oh, dear. I had no idea she felt . . . I mean, I wouldn't . . .

Kenny She'll be fine. Don't worry. Things are just a bit (*he gestures*) – you know . . .

Douglas How do you mean?

Kenny Between them. Her and Vic.

Douglas Oh . . .

Kenny Just at the moment. Temporarily. Nothing at all, really. Vic's a bit of a lad sometimes. I mean, I've known them both for ages. They're terrific people. Both of them. I should know. It was me who introduced them.

Douglas Did you really? That wasn't in the book.

Kenny Vic was just – getting going, you know, after – after his leave of absence – and he took me on – initially as his agent – and later on, as he got in greater demand, I became his personal manager. I got him his first weekly TV slot – regional, mind you – sort of local *Crimewatch/Police Five* sort of thing, you know – scare the old ladies off to bed type of show – and Trudy was a friend of the producer's secretary or somesuch. And. Romance, romance.

Douglas I hope this programme hasn't created a tension between them.

Kenny No, no, no ... Why on earth should it? Nice plug for Vic. Nice holiday for you – as you say—all expenses paid. Who's it hurting? I mean, your wife didn't object, did she? And she has far more reason to than Trudy, hasn't she? But your wife's presumably perfectly happy for you to be here?

Douglas Well, Nerys had initial objections, I have to say. And she certainly didn't want to be any part of it herself. Although Jill Rillington did try very hard to persuade her to be interviewed. But Nerys said if I wanted to do it and Vic Parks wanted to do it, then who was she ... I mean, the way Jill described the programme to me, I think it's a very interesting idea, don't you? What's happened to us all since. Since ...

Kenny Oh, you bet ...

Douglas Take Vic, for instance. He has had the most amazing career, hasn't he? Considering.

Kenny Oh, incredible ...

Douglas I mean, from what he was then—to what he is now. He's an example to us all, isn't he?

Kenny He is.

Douglas A remarkable man. You have to admire him. What he's done. Particularly for the young people. And all that from nothing.

Kenny Less than that really.

Douglas Absolutely.

Slight pause

Kenny I suppose quite a lot must have happened to you, as well? In, what is it, seventeen years? You must have seen some changes in your own life.

Douglas One or two. (*He reflects*) Not many really. I married Nerys, of course. And I changed my job. Well, I could hardly have continued at the bank.

Kenny Memories too painful, were they?

Douglas No, no. But people used to come in just to stare at me, you know. While we were trying to conduct bank business. And Mr Marsh—that was my manager at the time – he's retired now to Bournemouth – he felt my presence was not conducive to normal, satisfactory banking practices and he offered to request a transfer for me to another district. But I couldn't in all conscience leave Purley – I was born and bred there, you see—so I left the bank altogether. And then, hey presto, I was lucky enough to land a job straightaway with a local firm of double-glazing consultants, and I've been book-keeping for them ever since. Not an earth-shattering tale, perhaps, but one with a happy ending none the less.

Kenny And a success story, too. In its own way.

Douglas True. True. Nerys and I are both happy, anyway. That's the main thing.

Kenny And you've both got your health and strength.

Douglas And we've both got our health and strength, precisely. Well, Nerys is sometimes ... But it's mostly in her mind. I've told her she looks fine. She really does. Her face is fine.

Kenny Why, she's not – is she – still disfigured, is she?

Douglas Oh, no, no, no. All there is if you look very carefully, she's got the faintest traces of scar tissue, just around here (*he indicates the side of his face*)—but you really couldn't tell, I promise. He did a marvellous job, that surgeon. One of the best of his day, he was– he's dead now, alas. Died last year . . .

Kenny Oh, sad . . .

Douglas But if she wears the make-up, it's undetectable. No-one could tell.

Kenny Fine, then . . .

Douglas The trouble is, Nerys won't always trouble with the make-up. She can't always be bothered. So then she goes out to the shops and people start staring at her or she imagines they're staring at her anyway—I don't honestly think, myself, they bother to give her a second look, if you want the truth, still . . . Then she comes home upset and she won't go out of the house for months on end. I've said to her, Nerys, if you'd only wear the make-up, you wouldn't have all this upset, would you?

Kenny A lot of women wear make-up.

Douglas They do. I've told her that.

Kenny Most women wear make-up.

Douglas Yes. I mean, this is a special make-up, it has to be said. It's slightly thicker than normal. But it's the same principle. It's like I imagine they must wear on the television. Like dancers must wear. I expect.

Kenny Right.

Douglas I mean, if she was a man, I'd have understood her reluctance.

Kenny Oh, yes. If you were a man you wouldn't necessarily want to go strolling about in make-up, would you?

Douglas Not in Purley you wouldn't, certainly. But a woman.

Jill comes on through the garden gate. She is evidently angry

Jill Sod them. They are useless. They are worse than useless.

Douglas (*rising*) Hallo, Jill . . .

Jill (*grimly*) Hallo, Mr Beechey. We may have to ask you to arrive all over again. We were just a little slow catching you first time around . . .

Douglas Right-oh, Jill. Just say the word. (*To Kenny*) I'm getting rather expert at this filming. She had me walking in and out of our kitchen, must have been thirty-five times one day. (*Laughingly to Jill*) It was about that, wasn't it?

Jill (*unamused*) At least thirty-five. Is this coffee?

Kenny Help yourself. Trudy's just– just . . . doing something or other.

Jill helps herself to coffee

Douglas I did a very good sprint round the local park for you, though, didn't I? We got that in one take, didn't we? I'm looking forward to seeing that. I ran for miles, Kenneth, you've no idea. Nearly killed me. Go on, the crew kept shouting, keep going. (*He laughs*) I'm looking forward to that.

Jill Well, we may have to leave that bit out, Mr Beechey . . .

Douglas Oh, dear.

Jill We've got so much wonderful stuff already.

Douglas The crew will be disappointed. It was their idea, wasn't it?

Jill Yes. (*Beaming at him with her best professional smile*) Anyway. You're here. That's the main thing. What are your first impressions then, Mr Beechey? Of this place?

Kenny Glorious.

Jill (*irritably*) What?

Douglas Quite right. Glorious. I couldn't have put it better myself. I must say, I've always heard tell of the dazzling world of show business, but this is the first time I've ever experienced it.

Jill You wouldn't mind it yourself?

Douglas I certainly wouldn't.

Jill How do you feel about someone like, say, Vic having it?

Douglas Lucky him, that's what I say.

Jill You don't feel it's wrong that he should have something like this and you don't?

Douglas I'm sorry, I don't quite follow, how do you mean? Is that a socialist question . . . ?

Kenny What are you trying to get him to say, Jilly?

Douglas Because I'm not a socialist. Actually, I'm not quite sure what I am just at present. The past few years I have been consciously witholding my vote . . .

Jill So you don't feel just a little bit jealous?

Douglas Certainly not.

Jill Not the teeniest bit?

Douglas No.

Jill Honestly?

Kenny Jill, the man's just said, he's not jealous . . .

Douglas (*cheerfully*) Oh, don't worry. She's always going on at me like this . . .

Jill I'm sorry, I simply cannot believe that after what happened Mr Beechey can sit here among all this wealth these spoils of the good life . . .

Kenny Come on, Jilly, it's one poky, run-of-the-mill villa in the middle of hundreds it's no big deal——

Jill Maybe not to you or Vic or me it isn't. But to someone like Mr Beechey, it's beyond his wildest dreams . . .

Kenny What are you talking about? This place is littered with people like Mr Beechey——

Douglas Do call me Douglas, please . . .

Kenny The place is populated by Mr Beecheys. You can barely move for Beecheys, don't talk nonsense.

Jill (*angrily indicating Douglas*) If you had seen if you had seen, by contrast, the dingy little house this man is forced to live in. On the edge of a roaring main trunk road rooms the size of this table fading wallpaper . . . worn carpets . . . God! (*She shudders*) Sorry, Mr Beechey, but . . .

Douglas (*without offence*) We're really both quite fond of it, actually.

Jill (*calming down*) Just don't try and kid me he wouldn't prefer this if he were given a choice . . .

Kenny And all I'm saying is, don't hold this place up as some fantastic dream palace. It's a perfectly ordinary holiday shack. A lot of people have one. Most people have one. If they've bothered to save up . . .

Slight pause

Douglas Mind you, I think we've got used to that house over the years. You don't notice the little drawbacks quite so much after a while. I must be honest, we have meant to do something about that hall carpet for some years. But it's getting a good match with the stairs, you see. That's the problem. They don't really make that mauve any more. It means I have to keep bringing the samples home with me—because, of course, Nerys can't face walking into Debenhams, certainly not on a Saturday morning.

A silence

Kenny The man is just not the jealous type, Jill, forget it.

Jill (*with ill-concealed annoyance*) So you have no feelings at all about this place, Mr Beechey? Like you appear not to have feelings about anything very much?

Douglas Oh, I have feelings, Jill, I most certainly do. Very deep feelings. But I sincerely hope that envy is not one of them. Because envy in my book is a deadly sin and as a practising Christian, that is something I try to avoid.

Jill Super. I'm glad to hear it. Well, perhaps you ought to tell me something you do feel strongly about and we'll try and include that in the programme.

Kenny Jill, come on . . .

Jill Illegal parking on double yellow lines? Any good? Dogs fouling footpaths? Free double glazing for senior citizens?

Douglas (*thoughtfully*) I suppose evil, really.

Jill Evil?

Douglas Yes. I feel strongly about that.

Jill That's it? Just evil?

Douglas Yes. Only, it's often hard to recognize. But there's a lot of it about, you know.

A silence

Suddenly, there in the garden gateway stands Vic Parks. A powerful man in his late forties. He has just come from the beach and is wearing shorts, sports shirt and canvas beach shoes. Holding shyly on to his hand is his elder child Cindy, a pretty little girl of seven

The others don't immediately see him

Vic Good-morning. Don't we say good-morning, then?

Jill and Douglas rise. Kenny follows suit, rather more slowly

Jill (*delightedly*) Vic . . .

Douglas (*obediently*) Good-morning . . .

Kenny (*with them*) About time . . .

Vic (*gently*) Cindy, you get changed and then you take Timmy up the other end of the pool, all right? And look after him, OK?

Cindy runs off again

(*Shouting after her*) And do what Sharon says. You listen to Sharon, all right?

Jill (*embracing him*) Hallo, Vic.

Vic Hallo, how's my girl?

Jill Grateful you've decided to turn up.

Vic Well, where are the cameras, then? Where're the cameras? I thought this place would be a mass of people. Cameras, sound men, extra lighting rigs . . . Look at it, I ask you. Bugger all. I make my special entrance. Get dressed up specially . . .

Jill I sent them off to do the mute shots. They'll be back in an hour.

Vic They'd better be. I came all the way up from the beach for this. (*To Douglas*) How do you do, Vic Parks. You'll be——?

Jill This is Douglas Beechey.

Douglas Hallo. Great to meet you. I'm a real fan . . .

Vic Well, that's very nice to hear. (*To Jill*) Listen, you'll get the kids in somewhere, won't you? Just one shot, eh?

Jill Oh, sure . . .

Vic Only I promised Timmy and Cindy they'd be on the telly, you see . . .

Jill I was hoping you would let us use them . . .

Vic Just one shot. (*To Douglas*) Have you got kids?

Douglas No, no. But I watch your programme. I watch *Ask Vic* every Tuesday . . .

Vic (*to Kenny*) Now, isn't that interesting? Here's another example . . .

Ruy, who has finished raking the swimming pool, has entered and is crossing to the back gate

Morning, Ruy, lad.

Ruy (*cheerily animated*) Hallo, good-morning, Mr Vic!

Vic (*to Jill and Douglas*) You know, they did a survey as to what categories of kids make up the viewing sample for *Ask Vic* and they actually found that—fifteen per cent, wasn't it ?

Kenny Thirteen and a half

Vic Nearly fifteen per cent of our viewers were adults over the age of twenty-one——

Kenny —age of eighteen

Vic Isn't that incredible?

Douglas Incredible.

Vic No, you think about it for a minute. That's a big percentage, that is, fifteen per cent.

Douglas Amazing.

Vic Whereas my evening show *The Vic Parks Show*– that is exclusively adult. Well, point o-one per cent kids, or something. So there's no cross spill the other way. Which I find very interesting.

Kenny It is on at eleven o'clock at night, of course . . .

Vic No. Even so.
Douglas Yes, it's a bit late for me, that one . . .
Vic What, early riser, are you? (*He claps him on the back*) Nothing like it. We were down there at what, six-thirty this morning. Magic. Best time to be on a beach. First thing in the morning. Virgin sand, sun coming up, not too hot, clear blue sea . . . Now, have you all got what you want? Drink? Food? Anything? Where's Trudy? Isn't she looking after you? I told her to look after you. (*Calling into the house*) Trudy! Where is she?
Kenny Trudy's just . . .

Sharon Giffin enters from the garden gate. A girl of about nineteen. Overweight and sadly graceless. She is at present in a sulk. She carries a couple of baskets with towels, toys, etc., which presumably they've brought back from the beach. She is wearing a wetsuit top under her beach robe

Vic Sharon, find Trudy. Tell her to come out here.
Sharon (*flatly*) Yes, Mr Parks.
Douglas (*to Sharon*) Hallo, I'm Douglas.
Sharon (*all but ignoring him*) Hallo.

Sharon goes into the house

Jill We're being looked after fine, Vic. You don't have to worry about us.
Vic No, I can't stand guests being left on their own. That's terrible. I can't stand that. (*Feeling the coffee pot*) This is cold and all. (*Yelling*) Marta! Marta! Sitting here drinking cold coffee. What the hell's going on here? Marta! Come out here. Sit down. Go on. Sit down.

They sit

Marta, a Spanish woman in her fifties, enters in a hurry from the house. Normally dark and brooding but, as with her husband Ruy, in the presence of Vic she is effusive and charming

Marta Yes, Mr Vic?
Vic Marta, coffee. More coffee. Hot. More cups. Clean. Quickly. All right?
Marta (*taking the tray from the table*) More coffee, more cups.
Vic Hot coffee. Understand?
Marta Hot coffee.
Vic Hot not cold.
Marta (*hurrying away*) Hot not cold. Yes, Mr Vic.

Marta goes

Vic sits at last, like someone about to hold court. Douglas is holding his old coffee cup. The occasional child's shout is heard from the direction of the swimming pool

Vic Now then – that's sorted that out . . . (*Seeing the children*) Look at those two. Look at those kids.
Douglas (*smiling appreciatively*) Ah . . .
Vic You got kids, have you?
Douglas Er – no . . .

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