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SF PERUSALS

Taking Steps

A Farce

Alan Ayckbourn

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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TAKING STEPS

First presented at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round, Scarborough, on 28th September 1979, with the following cast of characters—

Elizabeth	Alison Skilbeck
Mark	Robin Herford
Tristram	Robin Bowerman
Roland	John Arthur
Leslie	Jeffrey Robert
Kitty	Lavinia Bertram

Subsequently presented in London by Michael Codron at the Lyric Theatre on the 2nd September 1980, with the following cast of characters—

Elizabeth	Nicola Pagett
Mark, her brother	Paul Chapman
Tristram, a solicitor	Michael Maloney
Roland, Elizabeth's husband	Dinsdale Landen
Leslie, a builder	Richard Kane
Kitty, Mark's fiancée	Wendy Murray

The Play directed by Michael Rudman
Setting by Alan Tagg

The action takes place in *The Pines*: the attic, the bedroom, the lounge and the linking stairs and passageways

ACT I Friday night

ACT II Saturday morning

Time—the present

ACT I

The Pines. About 6 p.m. on a cold Friday evening in February

The Pines is a fairly large Victorian manor house of no great beauty or distinction. At ground floor level, our view of the house is dominated by the lounge. This is a fairly big room with two doors leading off it; one to an inner sanctum, the study; the other to the main hall and grand staircase. The hall itself also leads to the front door of the house, and, the other way, to the kitchen and presumably the dining-room. The lounge is furnished comfortably but without any great style. There is an impression of age. An armchair or so, a sofa and a small table. All in all, it suggests what it is, a rented partly furnished house. Up the main staircase, the visible first-floor area contains, principally, the master bedroom situated immediately above the lounge. This contains a double bed, bedside tables, a dressing-table with stool and at least one single upright chair. Again there are two doors; the main one leading off the landing, fairly near the top of the stairs; the other to the bedroom's own private bathroom. The landing itself leads away to the other bedrooms on the first floor unseen by us. In view, though, is a second much narrower staircase which leads to the attic floor. Our view at this level is primarily of a small low-ceilinged "servants' " bedroom containing a tiny single bed, a plain bedside table with a battered table lamp and an ancient wooden chair. There is a skylight window near the bed and an overhead light that doesn't work. The bed is unmade. In the corner of the room is a cupboard, housing at the top the cold water tank for the house. The attic bedroom has only one doorway leading on to its own second floor landing from the stairs. Again, the landing leads away out of view to other attic bedrooms and to an upstairs bathroom

Three floors, then, linked by two flights of stairs; but to simplify—or perhaps to complicate—matters, all floors are at the same level. The stairs though marked with sloping handrails and rodded stair carpets are flat and only give the impression of leading upwards. The furniture for each room therefore occupies the same area of stage or possibly an area diminishing in size the higher we go. Certainly the areas should and must overlap and each set of furniture kept separate and to a minimum. Individual levels when used separately can be defined by their own styles and, of course, by lighting. The lounge and master bedroom can have one or two practical fittings to help this

As the CURTAIN *rises, the lights are on only in the master bedroom where we find Elizabeth, an attractive woman in her early thirties, writing a difficult letter at her dressing-table. Standing by the bed is her brother, Mark, a little older. He is at present scowling with displeasure. Beside him is a*

suitcase open and half-packed with some of Elizabeth's clothes. He looks at Elizabeth. He looks at the suitcase. Then back at Elizabeth. She continues to write, frowning with concentration

Mark (*at length*) Well. (*Pause*) Well, frankly I don't mind saying, it's my considered opinion, weighing everything up, all in all, you're most definitely jumping the gun. (*Pause*) That's my opinion. (*Pause*) This is one hell of a step you're taking, Lizzie, and if you were to ask me, you're walking right into it. Out of the—into the—whatever it is. I mean, I hold no torch for Roland. Don't get me wrong. He's not perfect. No, he's certainly not that. Let's say, not bad. (*He reflects*) Well, maybe that's pushing it a bit. He's . . . well, he's a slob really but you could have done a lot worse. Well, you have done in your time. I think I'm entitled to say, as your brother, that your choice of men, to date, has been to say the least—idiosyncratic.

Elizabeth (*finishing her letter*) There. (*She rises and goes to Mark*) Read that then. Is that better?

Mark (*rather reluctantly taking the letter from her*) I don't know. (*He stares at the letter without reading it*) You're making one hell of a mistake, Lizzie.

Elizabeth (*flaring tetchily*) Well, I can't help that. It's the best I can do. It'll have to do.

Mark O.K., O.K.

Elizabeth I mean, what do you expect? I'm a dancer, not a writer.

Mark Yes, all right.

Elizabeth Well.

Mark All I'm saying is, your marriage has hardly been bench-tested yet, has it?

Elizabeth Quite enough for me.

Mark What, in three months?

Elizabeth Three and a half. Will you read that letter, please?

Mark (*sitting on the chair by the bed*) Well, I mean . . . (*He reads*)

Elizabeth If you'd lain awake like I have—

Mark (*reading*) Yes—yes—

Elizabeth —night after night—

Mark —yes—

Elizabeth —in that bed—

Mark —sure.

Elizabeth —you'd know how long three and a half months could be.

Mark (*still reading*) Aha—aha . . .

Elizabeth (*producing a bottle from her bedside drawer*) Look. Look at these. Sleeping-tablets. Do you ever remember me having to take sleeping-tablets? When I was dancing, my body was in peak condition. I had no trouble sleeping. I could sleep anywhere. Any time. At the drop of a hat.

Mark (*finishing the letter*) Yes, that's super.

Elizabeth Read it out.

Mark No, I can't . . .

Elizabeth Please. I want to hear it.
Mark It's a private thing between you and him.
Elizabeth You can share in these things. You're my brother. (*She sits on the bed*)
Mark Oh. Well, all right. (*Reading without enthusiasm*) "My darling, maybe this letter will not come as that much of a surprise to you after all. Quite simply, by the time you read this, I will be gone. As you once said of me, and it's a moment I will always treasure, my darling, I am a woman who needs an endless amount of—something—feeling. An endless amount of feeling." Farming. Fencing. Ferrets.
Elizabeth (*impatiently*) Freedom.
Mark Ah, yes. That'll do the trick. An endless amount of freedom. "I'm—(*having difficulty in reading*)—afraid more so than—either—of us realized. This is not the easiest of letters to write, my darling"—it's not the easiest of letters to read either—"so forgive my awkwardness. I only wish I could have had the cabbage . . ." That can't be right . . .
Elizabeth Courage. It's perfectly clear.
Mark It's not clear at all. It's quite clearly a B.

Elizabeth rises and goes to Mark

Elizabeth No, it is not. That is a B. That is an R.
Mark That's more like an F.

Elizabeth snatches the letter and goes to the dressing-table

Elizabeth All right, all right. (*Snatching up a pen*) R.A.G.E. Better? (*She goes to Mark and gives him the letter*)
Mark Looks more like carnage, now. "I only wish I could have had the carnage".

She snatches the letter

Elizabeth (*reading very rattily*) ". . . courage to face you and tell you personally that I love you, I always will, your memory will linger forever. Good-bye. Elizabeth. P.S. Mrs Porter has left as well. E." How did that sound?
Mark Has she?
Elizabeth What?
Mark Mrs Porter. Left.
Elizabeth Yes.
Mark Lord.

She goes to the dressing-table, puts the letter in an envelope, initials it, and props it against a perfume bottle

Elizabeth Before I was up. Not a word to me. Just packed her things and left; like that.
Mark Obviously a day for leaving.
Elizabeth Awful woman.
Mark Oh yes . . .
Elizabeth What about my letter, then?

Mark Well. Roland'll be absolutely poleaxed.
Elizabeth Yes?
Mark He'll be scythed legless, Lizzie.
Elizabeth (*going into the bathroom*) I was as gentle as I could be.
Mark No, he'll be absolutely steam-pressed. The moment he reads that, he'll most likely go and jump off the nearest—whatever.
Elizabeth (*returning from the bathroom with her spongebag*) Why do you think I've asked you round here?
Mark I beg your pardon?
Elizabeth So he won't be alone.
Mark You want me to be here when he reads that?
Elizabeth He's going to need someone.
Mark Probably. Not me, though.
Elizabeth Obviously you.
Mark No, thank you.
Elizabeth Who else is there?
Mark Sorry.
Elizabeth You won't?
Mark Certainly not.
Elizabeth (*coolly*) I see. Right. (*She throws the spongebag into the suitcase*)

Pause. Mark fidgets uneasily. He looks at his watch

Mark Look, Lizzie, I have some urgent things I have to be doing.
Elizabeth (*packing her clothes*) You abandon him, then.
Mark Me abandon him? He's your husband. You're the one who's doing the abandoning. Not me. I. Anyway, in my experience of these things and you are, may I remind you, looking at a man who has in his time been abandoned, and not just abandoned—abandoned, may I say, on the very day of his wedding . . .
Elizabeth Yes, all right, don't drag all that up again.
Mark I don't want to . . .
Elizabeth All right. So we've decided, have we? We're going to let him kill himself, are we?
Mark Who ever said that? (*He reflects*) He won't. Not Roland.
Elizabeth He might. You said so yourself. Jump off the nearest . . .
Mark What am I supposed to say to him, then?
Elizabeth (*picking various bottles from the dressing-table*) Tell him he's—better off without me—that there's plenty more fish in the sea—you know. Just try and explain to him why I'm leaving.
Mark That's just it, I don't know why you are leaving. It seems a perfectly good marriage to me. Look, the man worships the ground you walk on. Your slightest whim, Lizzie.
Elizabeth Precisely. (*She goes to the bed*)
Mark Eh?
Elizabeth (*packing the bottles*) It's a wonderful thing being made to feel like a goddess but after about ten minutes, it gets very, very boring. I mean, I daren't do anything normal in front of him now in case it shatters some illusion he's got. I have to leave the room to scratch.

Mark Oh, come on.
Elizabeth God help me if I get wind. I'd have to leave the country.
Mark I don't think he's like that at all.
Elizabeth I must get back to work. I shall go mad otherwise.
Mark What, back to dancing?
Elizabeth What else?
Mark Hah. (*Pause*) And another thing, what about all the other people involved in this?
Elizabeth All what other people?
Mark Well, all of them. People like . . . let's see. People like—me. Who've given up a perfectly good afternoon off which I had great difficulty in wangling.
Elizabeth (*looking under the dressing-table*) Have you seen another small suitcase anywhere?
Mark Great difficulty.
Elizabeth I thought you were a manager or something and took afternoons off when you liked.
Mark That's a biased view of industry. Anyway, it's different in Personnel. They expect you to put in an appearance occasionally to set an example.
Elizabeth (*still hunting for her suitcase*) Is it under there? (*She looks under the bed*)
Mark If you must know, Roland was on the very point of coming round to the idea of lending me some money. Then I can get those premises. For my shop . . .
Elizabeth It's not still this fishing-shop?
Mark Yes.
Elizabeth That's the most absurd idea. Are you going to sit there selling tins of bait?
Mark There's infinitely more to it than that. Fishing is a way of life. It's like Transcendental Meditation with an end product. A fishing-shop is my idea of sheer heaven. Damn it, a man's got to have some sort of dream, Elizabeth. Once I'd set the place up, got it all going—straightened things out with Kitty—away we'd go.
Elizabeth Kitty?
Mark Yes.
Elizabeth Is that still on?
Mark Yes.
Elizabeth Marriage?
Mark Possibly.
Elizabeth Does she want to?
Mark Naturally.
Elizabeth She ran away the last time you both tried it.
Mark Thank you for reminding me.
Elizabeth I'd forget her, Mark, I really would. Honestly.
Mark In the circumstances, I don't happen to rate your views on marriage extremely highly. It's intended as a thirty-year marathon. Not a three-month sprint.

Elizabeth (*closing and fastening the suitcase*) I think it's upstairs in the attic. Come and give me a hand, will you?

Elizabeth goes out of the master bedroom on to the landing, followed by Mark. During the next speeches, they climb the stairs to the attic bedroom

Mark Anyway, don't be too sure. Things have a way of turning out.
Elizabeth Oh, yes?
Mark *Vis-à-vis* me and Kitty, I mean.
Elizabeth Oh, good. (*Pausing on the stairs and shuddering*) Aarrgh! I shall be glad to leave this place. I hate it. Who else but Roland would ever dream of buying it.
Mark I thought you were the one who wanted to live here.
Elizabeth Me?
Mark Fancying yourself as lady of the manor, you know you did.
Elizabeth Rubbish. (*Trying the wall switch to the attic bedroom*) Damn, there's no light.
Mark Probably the bulb.
Elizabeth Is it?
Mark (*climbing on to a chair and inspecting the centre light socket*) Yes, yes, it's definitely the bulb.
Elizabeth How can you tell?
Mark There isn't one in here. (*Getting off the chair*) Surely this is the awful Mrs Porter's room?
Elizabeth The ex-Mrs Porter, yes. Knowing her, she probably took the bulb with her. Can you find the bed?
Mark Hang about. (*He gropes round*) I think so.
Elizabeth There should be a suitcase in that corner cupboard. Unless she's stolen that.
Mark Won't be a minute. (*He gropes about*) Is he definitely buying this place?
Elizabeth So he says. It's draughty, it leaks and it smells. It's a white elephant. Everyone says so. He's the laughing stock of the county.
Mark (*finding a suitcase*) Here we are. Got it.
Elizabeth Ugh, there's dust everywhere. She did nothing. He's well rid of her.

She starts back down the stairs to the master bedroom. Mark follows, carrying the empty suitcase

(*Stopping*) Oh, how I loathe this house. It has no music about it, has it?
Mark Hasn't it?
Elizabeth No, none.
Mark Seen the ghost yet, have you?
Elizabeth Don't be silly.

She returns to the bedroom. Mark comes in after her. Elizabeth takes the suitcase, puts it on the bed and starts to fill it with more belongings. Mark watches her, impatiently

Mark Look, how much longer are you going to be?

Elizabeth Just a minute.
Mark Because if I'm supposed to be running you to the station . . .
Elizabeth All right, all right.
Mark Well, will you get a move on.
Elizabeth I don't know why you're in such a hurry. What are you doing that's so important?
Mark I suppose I might as well tell you. (*He sits on the dressing-table stool*) I mean, I didn't mean to tell you. I didn't mean to tell anyone but the cat's half out of the bag already, so—the point is, Kitty is coming back.
Elizabeth Kitty?
Mark Yes.
Elizabeth Back here?
Mark Yes.
Elizabeth When?
Mark Today, actually. She's due to get off the train in about half an hour. I'm meeting her. Which is the reason why I can't hang around.
Elizabeth But why?
Mark Why what?
Elizabeth Why is she coming back here?
Mark It's her home for one thing. Her parents are here. I'm here.
Elizabeth But she'd just broken out. She'd found freedom.
Mark I don't call running off with a Cypriot waiter from *The Boar's Head* finding freedom.
Elizabeth I can't believe she'd want to come back here.
Mark Why not? I'm here.
Elizabeth Yes, I know that.
Mark Well. Automatic reaction.
Elizabeth Yes. Possibly. Still.
Mark Besides. I don't think she had any choice in the matter. She had to come back here. They bought her a ticket and put her on the train.
Elizabeth Who did?
Mark Three of them.
Elizabeth Who?
Mark Two policemen and a policewoman.
Elizabeth What happened?
Mark Oh, it's all—awful.
Elizabeth What did Kitty do?
Mark It's all—ghastly. Nothing. It's all—dreadful. Really foul. Terrible. Embarrassing. No. (*Pause*) She was—she was—there was some talk about a charge of soliciting.
Elizabeth Kitty?
Mark It was that little waiter from *The Boar's Head* who put her up to it, I'm sure of that.
Elizabeth Soliciting.
Mark Suspicion of. They arrested her in the middle of Haverstock Hill.
Elizabeth What an odd place to choose. I mean, up that end of London. Everybody there seems to have someone already.
Mark. Yes Well, that's the sorry story.

Elizabeth By the garage or further up?

Mark (*suddenly extremely angry and pacing about clenching his fists*) I honestly don't know, Lizzie, and I don't think it makes the slightest difference. The facts are, my fiancée was arrested on suspicion of soliciting. Isn't that enough? (*Looking at his watch*) Look, I have to go, her train's due. I can't wait. I'm sorry.

Elizabeth But I haven't even changed yet . . .

Mark Well, get yourself a taxi.

Elizabeth Out here? By the time I get one here, Roland'll be home from work and in bed. He's due back in an hour.

Mark Why didn't you get the whole thing organized a bit earlier, then? You've had all day to leave the man.

Elizabeth I didn't decide until lunchtime, did I?

Mark Well, I can't wait. Sorry.

Elizabeth But you're going to be here for Roland.

Mark How can I? I'll have Kitty with me . . .

Elizabeth You can drop her off at home. Then come back.

Mark I am not letting her out of my sight. I can't take her home with me to our place. Mother won't speak to her since our so-called wedding day. We can't go to her place because her parents won't speak to either of us.

Elizabeth Where are you both going?

Mark Well, actually I—booked us a couple of single rooms at *The Bull.*

Elizabeth *The Bull*? That pub off the ring road. That's an awful dump.

Mark I'm hardly going back to *The Boar's Head.* I don't fancy mixing with that waiter's relatives.

Elizabeth (*collecting the remaining bottles from the dressing-table*) Has she got some overnight things? If they picked her up in the middle of the road.

Mark No, I've got some for her. In a suitcase.

Elizabeth Where from?

Mark Well—it's her suitcase she packed for our honeymoon actually. After she took off and bolted, it somehow got left in the boot of my car. Never been unpacked since. Hadn't got the heart to.

Elizabeth How sad.

Mark Yes. (*He sits on the stool*)

Elizabeth (*sitting on the bed*) It'll all be dreadfully creased. (*During the following speech Elizabeth dozes off*)

Mark (*suddenly deflated and rather depressed*) What it all adds up to, Lizzie, the thing is with you and really in a way I suppose it's the same with me, it's in the blood. When we were kids, I always had this dilemma over personal relationships. I always drew back from them, fighting shy of getting too deeply involved with someone, possibly fear of getting hurt, I don't know. I think that's probably true in my case. When I first met Kitty, things were very much that way. Certainly to start with. Still are, I suppose. Funny. I never really talk like this to anyone. (*He pauses*)

She awakes with a snort

Elizabeth What?

Mark Eh?
Elizabeth God, I dozed off.
Mark Oh, did you?
Elizabeth Sitting here, I actually nodded off to sleep. (*She rises*) You can see the sort of state I'm in. I must be totally exhausted. Sorry, were you saying something?
Mark No. Look at the time, I must dash. (*He moves to the bedroom door, then turns, puzzled*) That's always happening to me these days, you know. I'm chatting away and people just seem to doze off. Happening more and more lately. Is it something to do with my tone of voice, do you think?
Elizabeth I shouldn't think so.

The front doorbell rings downstairs

Who on earth's that?
Mark No idea at all.
Elizabeth Have a look. Get rid of them.
Mark O.K.
Elizabeth Don't tell them I'm here, anyway.
Mark Righto.

Mark goes down the main staircase, across the hall, and to the front door. Elizabeth gets on with her packing. Mark opens the front door

Tristram enters. He is about twenty-five, young, eager and pleasant. He wears a dark, sober raincoat and a discreet suit. He carries a briefcase.

After a few moments Elizabeth goes out to the bathroom

Mark Yes?
Tristram Yes.
Mark Yes?
Tristram (*very flustered*) Yes. (*He steps further into the hall*)

Mark closes the front door

Sorry. My name's . . . No. I'm from Speake, Tacket and—er—Whatsname . . .
Mark What?
Tristram Sorry. Hot. I'm—my name's—er—well, I'm here on behalf—on behalf of Mr Winthrop who's been—er—taken ill, you see. Not seriously. So, I'm here instead.
Mark Who's Mr Winthrop?
Tristram Oh, he's—Mr Crabbe'll know him. He's from . . . You're not Mr Crabbe?
Mark No, I'm Mr Boxer.
Tristram Right. Sorry. Mr Boxer. Well, he—that is, Mr Winthrop—he's from Speake and Winthrop. No. Rather—sorry—Speake, Tacket and Winthrop. Where I am also am from.
Mark (*distinctly puzzled*) You're expected, are you?
Tristram Well, in a sense. Mr Crabbe was, in fact, expecting Mr Winthrop but I'm—er—I'm—er—here—er—um . . .

Mark Instead.
Tristram Sorry?
Mark Instead. You're here instead.
Tristram Yes. Sorry. Yes. I've got the things here, you see—for him. For Mr Crabbe. To be ready to be signed. (*He stops for breath*) Sorry, you were saying . . .
Mark No, I wasn't.
Tristram Oh, right, I thought you were.
Mark No.
Tristram Ah.

Elizabeth returns from the bathroom and sits at her dressing-table. During the following she writes the envelope for the note, folds the note and putting it inside, seals the envelope

Mark (*after a pause*) Who are you, by the way?
Tristram Oh. I'm Mr Watson. Mr T. Watson. Sorry, I meant to say. I've—running . . .
Mark You've been running?
Tristram Yes.
Mark Right. You'd better come in then, hadn't you? You can sit in here.

He ushers Tristram into the darkened sitting-room

Tristram Right, thanks. Thanks very much. I'm sorry to have . . .
Mark Mr Crabbe's not due for another half an hour. So you'd better make yourself at home. (*He starts up the stairs again*)

Tristram gropes across the darkened sitting-room, collides with the sofa and sits on it, clutching his briefcase. Mark goes into the bedroom. Elizabeth is sealing her note

Elizabeth Who was it?
Mark Someone from Speake, Tacket and Winthrop.
Elizabeth (*rising*) That's Roland's solicitors.
Mark Oh?
Elizabeth They're based in London. What are they doing here?
Mark There's only one of them.
Elizabeth Which one?
Mark I don't think he's absolutely sure himself. A Mr Watson.
Elizabeth I don't know a Mr Watson. What did he want? (*She places the note on the dressing-table*)
Mark Go and ask him. He's still down there.
Elizabeth You didn't let him in?
Mark I had to.
Elizabeth Oh really, Mark. Did you tell him I was here?
Mark Of course not.
Elizabeth Now, listen. I think I've got it all sorted out for us . . .
Mark I'm perfectly sorted out already, thank you.
Elizabeth You go and collect Kitty now, bring her back here and deliver

her and then run me straight to the station. Then you come straight back here to Kitty and wait for Roland. All right?

Mark No.

Elizabeth Kitty can sleep upstairs in Mrs Ex-Awful P's old room. I'll make the bed up for her. And I'll make you up a bed, if you insist on sleeping apart, in the Dark Brown Room along the passage there.

Mark The Dark Brown Room?

Elizabeth It's the driest. I've slept in it once or twice. I can vouch for it. Does that sound all right?

Mark It sounds dreadful.

Elizabeth It's a perfect solution. All you have to do is cancel that appalling *Bull Hotel* place . . .

Mark And snuggle down in the Dark Brown room . . .

Elizabeth Don't blame me. That's how they were decorated when we moved in. You can take your pick of rooms if you want. There's the Dark Brown, The Patchy Brown, The Mouldy Brown, The Nasty Brown, The Dirty Brown and The Yucky-Awful-Foul Brown.

Mark Thanks. I'll stay at *The Bull.*

Elizabeth (*angrily*) My God, here I am, with my marriage in ruins, breaking up around me even as I stand here and my own brother cannot even be bothered to help. Well, I will tell you this, Mark. Neither you nor anyone is going to stand between me and my freedom this time, do you hear me? I'm warning you . . .

Mark What the hell are you talking about?

Elizabeth I won't let you stand between me and my career. I won't.

Mark (*thoroughly exasperated*) What do you mean?

Elizabeth Do you realize that I trained for ten years? Ten years of my life so that I could dance. Why should I give that all up? For you or for him.

Mark I'm not asking you to.

Elizabeth Look at this. (*She jetées across the room to Mark's amazement*) Can you do that?

Mark It's very unlikely.

Tristram looks up at the ceiling at the thumping sounds above

Elizabeth (*swinging a leg high and on to the bed*) Or this?

Mark No.

Elizabeth (*slightly breathless from lack of practice*) Well then. (*She sits on the stool*) And I'll tell you something. If you're not here when Roland reads that note of mine, you can certainly say good-bye to any loan. If you're here and very nice to him and hold his hand, then maybe.

Mark (*struck by this*) Really?

Elizabeth Certainly.

Mark Ah.

Elizabeth (*taking a key from the dressing-table drawer*) You'd better have a spare front door key.

Mark takes it

Mark (*still unhappy at the arrangement*) O.K. Where are you staying when you get to London, anyway?
Elizabeth Maureen's.
Mark Which Maureen?
Elizabeth The Osterley Park Maureen.
Mark Oh, that Maureen. Enough said.
Elizabeth Go on.

Mark goes downstairs into the hall

Elizabeth goes into the bathroom

Mark looks into the lounge where Tristram is still sitting in the dark

Mark All right, then?
Tristram Oh. Sorry. Yes, thank you.
Mark I'll be off now.
Tristram Yes.
Mark So there's er—there's nobody else at all in the house now.
Tristram No?
Mark No. Just you. So look after things.
Tristram Right. Yes. Well, I'll er—I won't . . .
Mark He shouldn't be long. 'Bye.
Tristram Good-bye—er—(*He rises and sits again*)

Mark goes out the front door

Tristram sits in the dark. After a second, he plucks up courage and switches on the table lamp next to him. It does not appear to work. After a pause, Tristram tries another lamp further away. That does not work either.

Tristram sits again. He whistles to himself very quietly

Upstairs, Elizabeth comes back from the bathroom

Tristram hears her feet clomping across his ceiling. He stares up at it and freezes, listening

Elizabeth collects a fresh pair of tights from the dressing-table drawer and exits again to the bathroom

Tristram looks up again, startled. His whistling becomes a little more agitated. He picks up a magazine and thumbs through it. Unable to see it, he holds the magazine at arm's length and manages to read it with difficulty by the light coming from the hall doorway. The front door opens. Tristram replaces everything and sits expectantly

Roland, a bucolic man in his forties, appears in the doorway, removing his hat

Roland (*calling*) Darling. Lizzie girl. Darling . . . (*He hangs up his hat. Yelling in the direction of the kitchen*) Mrs P! I am back. Mrs P! (*He listens*)

Elizabeth, upstairs, having heard something comes out of her bathroom

and listens. When she hears nothing more, she shrugs and goes back in again

(*On getting no reply from the kitchen*) Oh well.

Roland goes into the lounge, switching on all the lights at the door as he does so. Tristram blinks in the light and stands up

Good Lord, who are you?

Tristram Hallo. I'm . . . Are you Mr Crabbe?

Roland I'm Crabbe, yes.

Tristram Sorry. I'm er—you see, Mr Winthrop . . .

Roland Mr Winthrop?

Tristram No, I'm not Mr Winthrop.

Roland Just a minute. I know who you are. Mr Curry phoned me from Mr Miller's. You're Mr Watson.

Tristram Yes.

Roland Splendid. I must apologize. I suddenly remembered twenty minutes too late that I'd agreed to meet here at six-fifteen. Have you brought everything?

Tristram Yes, yes. (*He waves his briefcase*)

Roland Good. First rate. Were you sitting in the dark for any reason or . . .

Tristram No, I was—er—just looking . . .

Roland Prefer to keep your coat, do you?

Tristram Er . . .

Roland Hang it up in the hall there.

Tristram (*getting up and removing his raincoat*) Right.

Roland What'll you drink?

Tristram (*going into the hall and hanging up his coat*) Er . . .

Roland Scotch, gin, vodka, Martini, you name it.

Roland goes into the study where the drinks are

Tristram Oh well, now then . . .

Roland (*off; not hearing him*) O.K. with Scotch, are you? Fine.

Roland comes back from the study and crosses the lounge to the hall

(*Yelling*) Mrs P! Where the hell is the woman? (*Bellowing*) Mrs P! Ice, please! Chop chop!

Upstairs, Elizabeth again appears at her bathroom door having thought she heard something. Hearing no more, she goes in again

Roland (*muttering, returning towards the study*) Place seems deserted.

Tristram Er—I think the house is no-one. But me in it . . .

Roland (*turning*) Pardon?

Tristram No-one but me. In it.

Roland Isn't there? How did you get in then?

Tristram Oh. Well, a man let me in.

Roland A man? What sort of man?

Tristram Oh, er—sort of that high . . . (*He indicates*)

Roland Well, where is he now?

Tristram He went out just before you came in.

Roland Curious. And you haven't seen my wife?
Tristram I don't think so.
Roland (*getting out some cigars*) If you'd seen my wife, you'd have remembered her, I can promise you that. And you didn't see a little, short, fat, dark woman—usually wearing glasses with her hair all over the shoot?
Tristram No. Is that Mrs Crabbe?
Roland The hell it's Mrs Crabbe. That's our Mrs Porter.
Tristram Ah.
Roland Who also seems to have disappeared. Do you mind it without ice?

Roland goes into the study

Tristram No, no.
Roland (*off*) Help yourself to a cigar.
Tristram Thank you. (*He does not*)
Roland (*off*) What ails Mr Winthrop, then?
Tristram I think he has a stomach.
Roland (*off*) A what?
Tristram Upset stomach. Upset.
Roland (*off*) Couldn't be bothered to make the journey himself, idle brute.
Tristram Well . . .
Roland (*off*) Or been on the booze again. Eh? If I know Basil Winthrop.
Tristram Ah.

Elizabeth returns from her bathroom, carrying a pair of freshly laundered pyjamas. She has changed into a dress. She clomps across to the bed, replaces her make-up bag in her handbag and puts her recently discarded skirt in the suitcase

Tristram, who has again heard her footsteps, stares up at the ceiling

Roland (*off*) How long have you been with Winthrop?
Tristram Well, only a matter of a few weeks, actually.
Roland (*off*) Office clerk, or something, are you?
Tristram No, I'm a junior partner.
Roland (*off*) Ah-ha.
Tristram Very junior.

Elizabeth leaves the master bedroom, carrying the pyjamas, and goes off along the first floor passage

Tristram glances up briefly

Roland returns bearing two very large Scotches and a soda siphon. He plonks the siphon on the table and hands Tristram a glass

Roland There y'are. Help yourself to that stuff if you want it. (*He nods at the siphon*) Personally I never touch it. (*He sits in the armchair*)
Tristram No, no, I won't either.
Roland Good man. Here's to you, sunbeam.
Tristram Yes. (*He raises his glass and drinks carefully*)

Elizabeth comes back along the first-floor passage, carrying clean sheets

and a pillow-case. During the following, she goes upstairs to the attic bedroom

It's odd, you know, because although the man who—the man who let me in said the house was empty, but I keep thinking I hear someone upstairs. Footsteps. A woman's, I think.

Roland Ah well. Could be our ghost.

Tristram Really?

Roland Apparently, just after the place was built, the old boy who built it went bankrupt and had to sell it off cheaply. And he sold it to some woman and she turned it into a brothel, would you believe.

Elizabeth switches on the attic bedside table lamp

Tristram Good heavens.

Roland Right out here. Miles from anywhere much. Very exclusive apparently. Catering for well-to-do Victorian gentry and all that.

Tristram Ah.

Elizabeth sniffs the sheets that are already on, decides they really are not too bad and, during the following, makes up the existing bed

Roland That bit's certainly true. That's on record. Then apparently, legend has it, one of her girls gets into a fight with a client and he runs her through with his swordstick. Which wasn't very pleasant. She dies, naturally, there's a terrific scandal and the place is closed. Now, when it is eventually resold after ten years or so, there's this wretched girl, the one who's been murdered, still prowling around.

Tristram Goodness.

Elizabeth sits on the bed

Roland And if you're her type and she takes a fancy to you, apparently she's even been known to climb into bed with you. Being the sort of woman she was, eh? (*He laughs*)

Tristram laughs

Only trouble is, if she does take a shine to you, you'll be dead in the morning.

Tristram Ah.

Roland Extracting her revenge, I suppose. Exacting her revenge. Some people say exacting, I say extracting. Load of old rubbish really but still makes for a good story. Care for another?

Tristram Oh no . . .

Roland (*rising*) Hang on, I'll top you up. Save me going backwards and forwards.

Roland takes both glasses into the study to refill them

Elizabeth rises simultaneously, having finished in the attic. She turns off the light and comes down the attic stairs with the sheets and pillow-case. Tristram starts to unpack his own briefcase, spreading the documents on the table

Elizabeth goes off along the first-floor passage

Roland (*off*) You drive down?
Tristram No, I came on the train.
Roland (*off*) Staying over?
Tristram Yes, at the—*Bull*, I think it's called.
Roland (*off*) Really. You should have stayed at *The Boar's Head*. Much better. Very good restaurant.

Elizabeth returns from putting away the sheets and goes back in the master bedroom

During the following, Tristram again hears her pass above him as she goes to the bed and closes her cases

Tristram Ah well, the firm's paying, of course.
Roland (*off*) Much cheaper at *The Bull*, mind you. Should be. All that traffic rumbling past.
Tristram Yes.
Roland (*off*) You won't sleep a wink.

Roland returns with the glasses even fuller

Tristram Ah well.
Roland There y'are. (*He puts Tristram's glass down*)
Tristram Thank you.
Roland Food's lousy at *The Bull* as well. (*Settling down*) Well, what do you think of this place? What you've seen of it in the dark?
Tristram Well . . .
Roland Probably think I'm a lunatic buying it, don't you?
Tristram No. No . . .
Roland Yes, you do. Yes, you do. Don't blame you. (*More confidentially*) Listen. Business for just a second, right?
Tristram (*alert immediately*) Yes, yes.
Roland This Bainbridge man'll be here in a minute. (*Consulting his watch*) I asked him to look in about—er . . .
Tristram This is the vendor?
Roland The man who's selling it. He'll be here in a second so let me fill you in. First of all, I think I've definitely decided I'm going through with the purchase of this place. We'll probably give him a bit of a dance first but I think I've made up my mind.
Tristram I see, I see.
Roland The point is, you're absolutely right, of course. The place is totally beyond the pale. But you see, Mr Watson, over and above a lot of things I'm a great believer in family. That make any sense to you?
Tristram Oh yes. Your family are here, are they? From here?
Roland No, they're not.
Tristram Ah.
Roland It's my wife's family. They're the local people.
Tristram Oh, I see. You didn't want to live where you were brought up?
Roland I was brought up in Singapore.

Tristram Oh, I see.
Roland Which is a hell of a long way to commute on a Monday morning.
Tristram (*laughing*) Yes, yes.
Roland No, the point is, not wishing to bash around in the bushes, Mr Watson, I've made a great deal of money. A great deal of money.
Tristram Yes, yes.
Roland If you want to put it in those terms, I'm a successful man.
Tristram Yes.
Roland No, to hell with it. Why not say it? I'm a very successful man.
Tristram Right.
Roland And very successful men, let's be truthful about this, very successful men should live in very big houses. Am I right?

Tristram looks blank

Or am I not right?
Tristram (*scarcely following this logic*) Oh yes.
Roland Otherwise, there seems to me to be no point in being very successful, does there?
Tristram No.
Roland There you are. Wife's family district. Big houses. I look around and I come up with this place. *The Pines*. Miles from anywhere. Of course, nobody else wants it. I'm getting it for a song, you know.
Tristram Yes, well, of course I saw the . . .
Roland Needs masses doing to it, of course.
Tristram Yes.
Roland Now this Bainbridge chap when he comes. He's a local builder. I don't know how he got to own this place. Didn't ask. But I did give him the impression when I wrote to him that he might be the lad to do the improvements. He seemed pretty keen. So we'll sound him out there, as well. Now. Everything's clear on the legal side, is it?
Tristram (*clearing his throat*) Yes. We have only to cheque the payment—of the—no—pay the chequement of the vendor—of the—sorry. Of the purchaser. Outstanding. (*He clears his throat*)
Roland Pardon, I didn't quite . . .
Tristram Sorry. I've got the contractual finalizations—er—the finalized contractuals—rather, contracts—ready. So there should be no obvious—er—er—er—oh—er—constructions—er—obstructions. Right. To the payments and completion. Of it all. (*Pause*) Yes.
Roland (*after some thought*) Yes, I see. (*He studies Tristram*) Excuse me asking but you're going into this legal business full time, are you?
Tristram Yes.
Roland Ah-ha.
Tristram I am. In it.
Roland Full time?
Tristram Yes. Sorry, was there . . .?
Roland No, no. It's just that—er—well, if you don't mind my saying so, yours doesn't immediately strike a layman like myself as what we generally think of as a legal brain. Just a first impression.

Tristram Well, yes. I'm more usually on the papers. Work. Paper.
Roland Oh, paper.
Tristram Yes.
Roland Ah well, there's masses of that, isn't there, in your business? You'll be all right there.
Tristram Yes.

A pause. They appear to have run out of conversation

Roland Fancy a peanut, do you?

Elizabeth returns from the master bathroom, now in her coat and ready to leave. She picks up her cases and moves to the bedroom door

Tristram Er . . .
Roland Or an olive, perhaps? Yes, an olive. That'd be nice. (*Crossing to the hall door and shouting*) Mrs P! Mrs P! (*He listens*)

Elizabeth again stops as she reaches the bedroom door, believing she heard something. Hearing no more, she moves on

Sorry about this. It's really most odd. Can't think where she's . . . (*Yelling*) Mrs P!

Elizabeth, half-way downstairs, freezes

Elizabeth (*to herself*) Oh, dear God.
Roland (*returning to the lounge*) Well, I'm sorry. I give up. Wait there. I may have the odd nut in the sideboard.

Roland goes into the study

The front doorbell rings. Elizabeth stands stock still, then slowly begins to back up the stairs again with her suitcases

(*Off*) That could be Bainbridge. Let him in, there's a good chap.
Tristram Right.

Tristram goes through the hall to the front door. Intent upon opening the door, he catches only a glimpse of Elizabeth out of the corner of his eye. He looks again but she has gone. He reassures himself with a little whistle. Elizabeth takes refuge off along the first-floor landing, still with her suitcases. Tristram opens the front door

Leslie is standing outside. He is a perky little man in his late thirties. He is difficult to recognize at all at present, as he is clad in full motor-cycle gear

Tristram steps back alarmed, with a cry

Leslie (*stepping smartly into the hall*) Good evening. Mr Crabbey, I presume?
Tristram No, I'm Mr Watson.
Leslie Mr Watson?
Tristram Yes, Mr Crabbe is . . . (*He indicates the lounge*)
Leslie Oh, I see. I do beg your pardon. Leslie Bainbridge. How do you do?

Tristram Oh. Tristram Watson.
Leslie Oh. Very melodic if I may say so. Excuse me. (*He starts to remove his gear*)
Tristram Can I help?
Leslie No, it's quite all right. Came on the Yamaha.
Tristram Oh yes?

Roland enters with a tin of peanuts

Roland Is that our Mr Bainbridge? Come in, Mr Bainbridge, let me get you a drink.
Leslie (*struggling out of his gear*) That's what I like to hear. How do you do, Mr Crabbey? Very glad that we meet in person, at last.
Roland Will you join us in a Scotch? I'm afraid we have an ice crisis at the moment.
Leslie A very small sweet Martini, if I may, Mr Crabbey, thank you very much.
Roland (*going to the study*) We were just talking about our ghost here, Mr Bainbridge.

Roland exits

Leslie Oh yes, Scarlet Lucy, you mean, yes.
Roland (*off*) Good Lord, is that what she's called?
Leslie Yes, locally. Locally.
Roland (*off*) Can't say we've ever seen her. Not yet.
Leslie (*entering the lounge*) Frankly, I doubt if anybody ever has, Mr Crabbey. A little touch of things of the mind that go bump in the night. If you know what I mean, Mr Watson.
Tristram Ah.

Roland returns with a very large Martini

Roland Does this look about right? I never touch the stuff myself so I've no idea.
Leslie Oh yes, very generous. Thank you.

Tristram rises

Roland You've met Mr Watson, have you?
Leslie Yes, indeed.
Roland Mr Watson is my ... (*He rephrases this*) Mr Watson is here representing my solicitors.
Leslie Here to see fair play, eh, Mr Watson?
Tristram I hope to. (*He laughs*)

Tristram and Leslie sit together on the sofa

Roland (*moving to the hall*) Well, shall we do the grand tour first?

Tristram and Leslie rise

We can take our drinks. Then we can sit down and have a chat.
Leslie Just as you like, Mr Crabbey. I'm in your hands.

Roland It's just plain Crabbe, Mr Bainbridge. We don't pronounce the E.
Leslie Oh, it's Crabbe, is it? As in the word crab.
Roland That's right.
Leslie I see. I do beg your pardon.
Roland You tagging along with us, Mr Watson? (*Moving back towards the study*)
Tristram Oh yes. If you like.
Leslie To see fair play. (*He laughs*)
Tristram (*also laughing rather less enthusiastically this time*) Yes.
Roland Hang on a second. I'll get my notes. I've got one or two queries . . .
Leslie Oh, dear.

Roland goes off to the study

Are you locally based, Mr Watson, or have you travelled down here especially?
Tristram Yes, I'm up mostly. There, most of the time. Up. I'm not down too much, really. No.
Leslie (*baffled by this*) Yes, I see.
Roland (*off*) Sorry, I'm just trying to find them.
Leslie (*confidentially to Tristram*) Buckets.
Tristram I beg your pardon?
Leslie Mr Crabbe. He made all his money in buckets, you know.
Tristram Really?
Leslie Cast iron, polythene, plastic, you name it. That's what his fortune's based on. Eight out of ten buckets sold today are made by Crabbes. It's a fact. Have a look at yours when you get home. He's rolling in it.
Tristram Yes.
Leslie His father started it, you know.
Tristram Did he?
Leslie Oh, yes. He was the brains. There's a lot of money in buckets. Mind you, he's expanded since then. He's into rubbish bins and all sorts.

Roland returns from the study with his notebook

Roland (*as he does so*) Here we are. Somebody put it under a pile of something else.
Leslie I was just remarking the other day, Mr Crabbe, that in my view this house, *The Pines*, has just been sitting here waiting for a man like yourself to realize it again to its former glories.
Roland Former glories? What's he talking about, Mr Watson? Hoping I'll re-open it as a brothel, are you?
Leslie (*laughing inordinately*) No, no. That would be too much to hope for, eh? No, to be serious, I merely meant that once you've purchased the property a man of your substance will be able . . .
Roland Now, now, hold your horses, Mr Bainbridge. No-one's purchased anything yet, have they? You haven't heard me purchase anything, have you, Mr Watson?
Tristram No, no.
Leslie (*laughing*) Well, perhaps not strictly according to the letter . . .

Roland (*laughing*) And perhaps not strictly according to the cash, either.
Leslie (*laughing*) No, true.
Roland Which is still in my pocket until it's in yours. And there's many a slip between pen and cheque, as they say.
Leslie Yes, quite, yes. Cup and lip.

The merriment fades

Roland Now, the first thing I want from you, Mr Bainbridge, is your advice as a builder.
Leslie Of course, yes.
Roland You're the best in the district or so they keep telling me. So if you can discard your vendor's prejudice and give me a little free advice . . .
Leslie Only too pleased.
Roland I've had surveyors, of course, but it's the man on the spot who interests me. Always has been. As my father always said to me: if you want to know the time, don't bother asking a policeman, go to a watchmaker. And buy yourself a watch while you're at it.
Leslie Sound advice.
Roland Follow on. We'll start at the top, shall we?
Leslie Just as you like.

Roland leads them up the main staircase. He leads, Leslie close behind him. Tristram, slightly apart from them, brings up the rear

(*As they go*) I'm glad that you've heard good reports about Bainbridge's.
Roland Here and there. Here and there. Matter of fact, the impression I got was that you were a much older man.
Leslie Ah well, now, it may be that you're confusing me with my father, W. Bainbridge.
Roland (*turning to him on the first-floor landing*) Aren't you W. Bainbridge, then?
Leslie No, I'm L. Bainbridge.
Roland You're L. Bainbridge.
Leslie Yes.
Roland Well, where's W. Bainbridge? He's the Johnny from all accounts. What am I doing with an L. Bainbridge?
Leslie Well, there's an L. Bainbridge, that's me. There's a B. Bainbridge, that's my brother Brian. An S. Bainbridge who's my cousin Stu who's principally electrical. Then there's V. Bainbridge, my mother . . .
Roland I see. Quite a family. (*Turning and leading on*) Let's get up the top then, shall we?

They climb the attic stairs

Now, my surveyor and I had considerable worries about the state of this roofing.
Leslie (*following him*) Well, these old houses, you must expect a little wear and tear.
Roland I don't mind the wear and tear, it's the wet rot that worries me. There's enough silver fish up here to start an aquarium.

Roland and Leslie go off along the attic corridor. Tristram follows on behind them, climbing the attic stairs

Elizabeth, thinking the coast is clear, leaps across the first-floor landing behind Tristram, downstairs, through the hall and out of the front door. She is carrying her suitcases

This time, Tristram just hears the sound. He retraces his steps a little way, shakes his head, and shivers slightly. He starts up the stairs again

Elizabeth slams the front door

Tristram runs up the remaining stairs, nearly colliding with Roland and Leslie returning from the far reaches of the attic. Leslie comes first, looking at the ceiling

Leslie There seems to be less trouble along here. These timbers seem in fair condition.

Roland (*following him, also looking up*) Oh, they're all right along here. It's just that the roof leaks.

Leslie Ah well, that's soon righted.

Roland It beats me why you didn't do it when you bought the place, Mr Bainbridge? I mean, it hasn't done it a lot of good, has it?

Leslie Well, to cut a long story short, Mr Crabbe . . .

Roland tries the wall light switch to the attic bedroom

Roland No light in here, is there?

Tristram I think I can see a, maybe, a table . . . **Yes.**

Tristram gropes his way across to the bedside lamp

Leslie (*during this*) To be honest, my father bought this place fifteen years ago at a reasonable cost when the property market seemed to be on an upsurge, particularly amongst foreign people.

Roland And you got your fingers burnt?

Leslie Well . . .

Tristram (*switching on the light*) There we are.

Leslie At that time, it was the site we were primarily interested in for redevelopment, of course. But then, certain local people managed to get the building listed and we had our hands tied. I mean, we are, as I say, selling it way below what we paid for it. In equivalent terms, that is.

Roland examines the ceiling of the attic bedroom

Roland (*unsympathetically*) That's awfully bad luck, yes.

Leslie We've been renting it out when we could but, of course, there aren't many people who want a place this size.

Roland Except for idiots like me.

Leslie Ah well, now, that's putting words into my mouth, (*Examining the roof again*) Now, this looks fairly sound to my view.

Roland Yes, now I've got a note here. What about this floor? You watch this . . .

Roland jumps up and down in the middle of the attic bedroom floor

(*As he does so*) See that? See what happens?

Leslie I think that's natural spring. It's all timber, you see. We're talking pre-steel R.S.J.s.

Roland You jump over there. I'll jump over here.

Leslie Right.

Leslie and Roland jump with a will. Tristram bounces up and down on his toes, as the floor vibrates

Roland You watch for the sag.

Leslie Yes, yes.

Roland (*continuing to bounce*) You see, there's definite bowing there. Just where Mr Watson's standing.

Tristram (*stepping rapidly back onto the landing*) Ah.

Leslie Could be. Could be you're right.

Roland (*ceasing to bounce, a little breathless*) Now, I don't like the look of that at all, Mr Bainbridge.

Leslie (*stopping, similarly breathless*) No, well, we'll have that up. We can have that up.

Roland We better had. Our room's under here. I don't want some housekeeper falling on top of me while I'm in bed. (*He turns off the bedside lamp*)

Leslie (*laughing*) No, that wouldn't do at all, would it?

Roland (*leading off again*) Right, down we go.

The three men go down the attic stairs

(*Consulting his notebook*) Now then, let's have a look at all these brown jobs along here.

Leslie Ah, you noted the linking colour schemes.

Roland You mean, all that brown there is your choice, is it?

Leslie Well my sister Pat must really take the credit. She wanted to achieve this autumnal feeling.

Roland (*going off along the landing*) She's certainly done that. It's like the Atacama desert along here.

Roland exits. Leslie follows him off

Tristram, alone, goes back into the master bedroom but sees no-one. Distantly is heard Leslie's laugh. Tristram starts to follow after them without much enthusiasm. The front door slams

Tristram scuttles off. Mark enters through the front door. He carries a small, new, blue suitcase

Mark (*to someone behind him*) Oh come on, Kitty, for heaven's sake. Do put your skates on.

Kitty, a rather cumbersome girl, in her late twenties, follows him in

(*Looking into the lounge*) Lizzie? Hallo? Anyone? No. (*To Kitty*) O.K. Look, I'll take you up. Follow on.

Mark marches up the main staircase. Kitty docilely follows

(*As they go*) There's going to be a hell of a storm in a minute, isn't there? Glad we missed that.

They reach the first landing

Just a tick, wait there.

Kitty waits obediently. Mark goes to the master-bedroom door

Liz? Lizzie? (*He opens the door*) No. The note's still here so he isn't home either. (*He closes the door*) Right. Up we go again. Follow on.

Mark leads Kitty to the upper level

(*As they go*) Bit of a turn up for the book, that, eh? Lizzie leaving Roland. I give up on her, I really do. Doesn't know what she does want half the time. (*Trying the attic bedroom light switch*) Damn. No bulb. Wait there. (*He gropes into the room*) Not the most elegant of rooms, this, but it's probably as good as you'd have got at *The Bull*. (*Discovering the table lamp*) Aha, what's this? (*He switches on the light*) There, O.K.?

Kitty nods

You're looking absolutely awful, you know. You look as if you want a lot of food, a lot of fresh air and a lot of sleep. (*Picking up her suitcase again*) Oh, this is your case. I hung on to it. I had to. Your mother wouldn't take it back. I hope it's got everything you want. I haven't opened it. It's the one you—the one you were meaning to . . .

Kitty (*softly*) Yes, I know.

Mark Ah. (*He puts the case on the bed*) Listen, Kit, I'm in a bit of a rush. I'll be back as soon as I've got rid of Lizzie. The point is, as far as I'm concerned, it's square one, Kitty. I'm forgetting all that's happened over the past couple of months. It's like so much dirty water down the drain. You see? You're back home, that's all that matters to me, O.K.?

Kitty (*sitting on the bed*) Yes. (*As Mark speaks, her head slumps on to her chest*)

Mark That sort of life isn't for you, Kitty. Dancing about in the middle of Haverstock Hill. Your life's here, you see. With real people. Like me. Leave all that sort of behaviour to the people on TV. They get paid for it. You don't. So. Anyway. I think I'm very near landing that loan from Roland, if Lizzie doesn't upset the cart. Then I'm going to jack in this job at Foxton's. It's my view there isn't a lot of future in Personnel anyway—and we'll get that shop started. Between us. To begin with, I'm going to concentrate on purely fishing. Now, if that all works out, we might well branch off into guns. The whole thing really rests on whether I can . . . (*He tails off*) Kitty?

Kitty snorts awake

Were you asleep?

Kitty I'm sorry. I'm very tired.

Mark (*suspiciously*) Yes. (*Brightening*) I'd get your head down, then. I'll just deal with Liz. I'll look in on you again when I get back. O.K.?

Kitty nods

Mark (*on the landing*) Bathroom's along there, I think. (*He goes along the attic passage and returns*) Yes, it's along there. The brown door. See you then.

Kitty 'Bye.

Mark leaves her and goes straight down the stairs to the hall

Mark Lizzie?

Mark goes along the passage towards the kitchen. The front door opens and Elizabeth steps into the hall. It has started raining and she is slightly wet. Mark returns

Ah.

Elizabeth Come on, you idiot, where have you been? It's raining.

Mark Looking for you.

Elizabeth Ssh! Ssh!

Mark What?

Elizabeth He's here.

Mark Who?

Elizabeth Roland.

Mark No, he's not. There's nobody here.

Elizabeth His car's in the garage. Besides I heard him.

Mark Well, there's nobody here now.

Elizabeth Then whose is that motor-bike?

Mark Where?

Elizabeth (*pointing through the front door*) There.

Mark Good lord. It's a Yamaha. Roland can't be chasing around on a Yamaha, can he? He'd be absolutely lethal. They have to have a curfew when he drives through the village in a car.

Elizabeth Will you come on? I am going to miss my train.

Mark All right.

Mark and Elizabeth go out, closing the front door. The three men return from their tour of the other bedrooms: Roland, followed by Leslie, Tristram some way behind them

Roland (*as they return*) You say, repointing. I say rebuilding. I don't want to quibble over terms, Mr Bainbridge . . . Why's she made up that bed, I wonder . . .

They enter the master bedroom

Now then. The master bedroom. Now, this has got to be right.

Leslie Oh, most important.

Roland I'm married to a woman who's highly susceptible to draughts and damp and she won't put up with any room that's anything short of completely airtight and totally waterproof.

Leslie (*laughing again*) And how is Mrs Crabbe? Whom I have yet to have the pleasure . . .
Roland She was fine when I last saw her. Don't know where the hell she is at the moment, I'm sure.
Leslie I understand she's a dancer.
Roland Was a dancer, yes. I put a stop to all that.
Leslie In the ballet, was she?
Roland The ballet? Good God, no. She was in these TV shows, you know. At the back mostly. Bobbing about, smiling and miming. She did some commercial for my firm. That's how I met her. Dustbin liners, I think.
Leslie Oh.
Roland She wasn't a very good dancer. Always seemed to me to be a bit behind the others.
Leslie Ah well. This floor seems firm enough, anyway. (*He jumps up and down*)

Above them, Kitty, still sitting in her reverie, reacts, startled

Roland (*stamping about*) Oh yes, this is fairly reasonable.
Leslie (*jumping*) Well settled, this one.
Roland (*stamping*) Yes.

Kitty kneels on the floor of her room, trying to locate the sound. She presses her ear to the floorboards

(*Again consulting his notebook*) No, the problem with this room, I've got written here, is the plumbing. Now, you listen to this. I'm going to run the bathroom tap for a second. (*Going off into the master bathroom.* (*Off*) Now, you listen to that. (*Returning*) Can you hear anything.
Leslie No.
Roland (*to Tristram*) Can you?
Tristram No.
Roland Well, put your ear to the floor, you'll hear it.

The three men kneel and listen to the floor at various parts of the room. As they do this, the cold water tank apparently situated in Kitty's attic starts to fill up noisily. She stands up alarmed. It is very loud

Do you hear anything?
Leslie Very, very faintly.
Roland Well, come over here. Over here, Mr Watson.

They gather by him

Now you can hear that, surely? Like a rumbling.
Leslie Oh yes.
Tristram Perhaps it's someone's stomach (*He laughs*)

They look at him

Roland Beg your pardon?
Tristram Nothing.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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