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SF PERUSALS

BREEZEBLOCK PARK

A Play

WILLY RUSSELL

SAMUEL  FRENCH

LONDON
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BREEZEBLOCK PARK

First presented in 1975 at the Everyman Theatre, Liverpool; subsequently on the 12th September 1977 at the Mermaid Theatre, London; and on the 3rd November at the Whitehall Theatre, London by Colin Brough for the Lupton Theatre Company, with the following cast of characters:

Betty	Prunella Scales
Syd	Bernard Gallagher
Sandra, their daughter	Emma Jean Richards
Vera	Julie Walters
Tommy, Betty's brother	Peter Postlethwaite
Reeny, Betty's sister	Eileen Kennally
Ted	Norman Rossington
John, their son	David Neilson
Tim	Anthony O'Donnell

The play directed by Alan Dossor

Setting by Adrian Vaux

Act I Betty's House, Christmas Eve
Act II Reeny's House, Christmas Day

Time—the present

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(See also page ii)

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ACT I

Syd and Betty's house on a council housing estate. Christmas Eve

To one side is the front room, and adjoining it the kitchen. Through the door of the front room can be seen a small hall and the beginning of the stairs. A door leads from the front room into the kitchen, and another door from the kitchen to the back of the house. Although we are in a council house, we are not in the land of cloth caps and sawdust on the floor. The room is not too vulgar: it contains a fitted carpet, the famous "Japanese Lady" print, a "Coalglow" electric fire, a radiogram, a sideboard, a glass-fronted cabinet, a three-piece suite and a colour television. This television is on throughout the entire 'act'—though generally without sound. There is also a Christmas tree—a silver false one

When the CURTAIN *rises, Betty is making adjustments to the Christmas tree. The door to the hall and stairs is open. Sandra is sitting at the kitchen table reading a book. After a moment Betty goes to the hall and shouts up the stairs*

Betty Syd! Syd, are you ready yet?

We hear a grunt from upstairs

They'll all be here, y'know. They'll all be here if you don't get a move on.

Syd (*off*) All right, all right, what harm will it do if I'm not quite ready? Bloody hell, Betty, it's only the family we're expectin'—not the Queen Mother.

Betty (*moving to the first step on the stairs*) The Queen Mother I wouldn't mind. But our Reeny is a different matter. I am *not* having you only half ready when she arrives.

Syd (*off, wearily*) All right. All right.

Betty (*turning to go back to the front room but stopping and taking a couple of steps up the stairs*) Yes, yes it's all right for you because you don't mind giving her the chance to put one over on me. (*She turns to come down, but suddenly remembers something and turns back. Quietly, threatening*) And listen, don't you go blabbing about the price of my new suite. (*Pause*) Did you hear me Syd?

Syd (*off*) How can I tell her how much the suite cost when I don't know meself?

Betty (*impatiently*) Of course you know how much it was. You signed for it in the shop.

Syd (*off*) Yes, I signed for it. But when I signed it cost two hundred and twenty quid. When Mrs Devlin was here the other night it'd gone up eighty quid;

when y' showed it to Barbara Mac it was a three hundred and fifty quid job. No wonder the bloody country is sufferin' from inflation.

Betty You make me sick! How the hell could it only have cost two hundred and twenty?

Syd Well that's what it said on the form.

Betty (*getting more rattled*) Yes, yes, well go on, go on...

Syd Well, that's it—two hundred an' twenty quid...

Betty How did I come to marry someone so stupid? Two hundred and twenty pounds, Sydney, with H.P. on top of that. With V.A.T. on top of that. Delivery charges on top of that. The special shampoo for cleaning it. Two hundred and twenty pounds my foot. That suite has cost me every penny of three hundred pounds.

There is a grunt from upstairs

Did you hear me? Three hundred pounds—not a penny less, and don't you go forgetting it. You try and make me look cheap in front of our Reeny an' I'll swing for you. (*She comes back into the room and mumbles to herself as she makes adjustments to the Christmas tree. Referring to Sandra*) An' she won't lift a finger to help. She never does, that one. Not lately. Thinks she's a law unto herself she does. Well I'm gettin' a bit sick of it. (*She stands back and looks at tree, then shouts through to the kitchen*) Sandra. Sandra, come an' have a look.

Sandra (*not looking up from her book*) What?

Betty Just come an' have a look.

Sandra What? I'm reading.

Betty Sandra! It's Christmas Eve, you don't want to be reading at Christmas. Come on, come an' have a look.

Sandra reluctantly puts down her book and comes through to the front room

Sandra What?

Betty (*looking at the tree, smiling, fawning, proud*) Look, love. Look at it. (*Pause*) You've always loved the tree, haven't you? Eh? Isn't it really lovely this year?

Sandra I don't know why you waste your money, Mother.

Betty (*flaring slightly*) Now don't start. Just don't start that stuff again, Sandra, I've had enough lately. It's Christmas now let's have no more of that stuff.

Sandra What stuff?

Betty You know very well what stuff; all this—criticizing stuff. I'm just getting really fed up with it.

Sandra Just look at it. You could at least have got a real tree.

Betty Don't be stupid! Who buys real trees these days? Real trees are old fashioned. And anyway—they smell.

Sandra Yeh. Real trees are supposed to...

Betty I am not arguing with you, Sandra. I want the house to be nice. Not smellin' like the inside of some forest.

Sandra sighs and walks towards the kitchen

(*Reaching into the cabinet*) All right, clever, if you want a smell—here! (*She produces an aerosol and liberally sprays the tree*)

Sandra What's that?

Betty *That* is the smell of real trees. (*Holding up the can*) Pine essence, lovely. (*She sniffs*)

Sandra resumes her passage to the kitchen

Sandra I've told y', Mother—stuff like that is just a con trick.

Betty (*following her through to the kitchen*) An' I've told *you* I don't want to hear any more of that stuff. It's bad enough havin' to put up with your criticizin' the whole year round but I'm certainly not having' any of that at Christmas.

Sandra "tuts" and goes to pick up her book. Betty beats her to it, though

(*Reading out the title*) *The Long March of Capitalism*—now what sort of a book's that supposed to be?

Sandra (*taking the book*) A murder story, Mother!

Betty (*busying herself in the kitchen*) Well, I've warned you about all this readin'. The way you're goin' on you'll be damagin' your eyes.

Sandra goes through to the front room door

Where are you goin' now?

Sandra Upstairs.

Sandra exits

Betty Upstairs, upstairs. You live your life upstairs lately. (*She goes as if to follow Sandra, then decides against it and instead smiles at the tree. The smile fades into thought*)

Syd enters behind her, wearing only trousers and vest and drying himself with a towel. He starts to sniff

(*Looking at the tree*) She used to love Christmas. (*She arranges cards on the sideboard*)

Syd (*still sniffing, approaching the tree*) That tree stinks. Is me shirt ironed?

Betty Have I ever kept washing downstairs? Have you ever come home to find clothes airing in this room?

Syd What?

Betty Your shirt is where your shirts are always kept—in the airing cupboard. Now would you mind going and getting one on. I told you, you're not walkin' round half-dressed when there are people coming.

Syd (*lighting a cigarette*) It's the family that's comin'—no-one's gonna complain. How many times have we been round to Tommy's house an' seen him in his vest?

Betty People expect that in Tommy's house. They don't expect it here. The head of *this* household is not an alcoholic!

Syd Tommy's not an alcoholic. He just likes a few pints.

Betty Syd. Have you had a training in medicine?

Syd No—but anyone can see that...

Betty I'm not talking about anyone. Was I or was I not a nurse?
Syd Yes, but...
Betty But nothing. Tommy has a severe drink problem.
Syd Betty!
Betty Do you know what he's bought Vera for Christmas?
Syd No.
Betty Well, I do. Six bottles of whisky.
Syd Vera doesn't drink whisky.
Betty Exactly. And anyway, you know you had to give up the car because of your health, I don't know what you think you're doing walking round in just your vest when it's the middle of winter. 'Course, if you'd listened to me about the central heating, you'd be all right.
Syd Ah...
Betty Take no notice of me. Ignore me if you want to. But I've warned you—to a man in your condition, a chill could be the final stroke. But that doesn't matter to you does it? Self. Self. Self!
Syd Well—it's only meself I'm harming.
Betty You've no consideration, have you. It'll be all right for you if you slip away in your sleep one night. But who'll be the one who has to wake up in bed—with a corpse beside her?

Betty to the kitchen. From outside we hear carol singing

Syd (*laughing good naturedly*) 'Ey—Betty—listen!

Tommy / **Vera** (off) { *singing* / *together*

"Christmas is comin' the goose is gettin' fat,
Please put a fiver in the old man's hat.
If y' haven't got a fiver a quid will do.
If y' haven't got a quid, y' window's comin' through."

Syd Here—give us a couple of bob an' I'll go an' give it them.
Betty You'll do nothing of the sort.
Syd Why?
Betty Why? Because it'll be those little swines from down the street—that's why.
Syd Betty love ... it's Christmas.
Betty Syd love, those kids were carol singing on July the first.
Syd (*sighing*) Joy and peace to all mankind.
Betty And what's that supposed to mean?
Syd (*going to get his shirt*) Nothing—nothing.

Syd exits upstairs

Betty (*going after him to the bottom of the stairs*) Don't you start throwing Christmas up in my face. Don't you dare tell me about Christmas, I understand the meaning of Christmas. But those swines from down the road aren't getting one penny out of this house.
Syd (*off*) All right, Betty. But don't blame me if they put a brick through the front window.
Betty They wouldn't.

Syd (*off*) Wouldn't they? They were in court last week for stealing a police car.

Betty (*firmly*) They wouldn't touch this house. (*Hopefully*) They wouldn't.

From outside we hear the strains of "Why Are We Waiting"

Where's my bloody purse? (*Frantically rushing round and finding her purse under a cushion*) It's not right this isn't. It's nothing less than extortion. (*Getting to the front door*) They should be locked up! (*Opening door*) Oh—it's you two. (*Greetings. She shouts back upstairs*) It's all right, Syd, it's not real carol singers—only Tommy and Vera. You really fooled me for a minute. I thought it was the little children from down the street. I was just going to invite them in for a warm.

Tom and Vera come into the room with Betty

Tommy (*fairly well oiled, carrying Christmas parcels*) I'll bet y' thought y' were gonna have t' fork out a few bob, eh Betty? I'll bet that nearly ruined y' Christmas, eh? (*He laughs*) Eh?

Betty (*not amused*) And what's that supposed to mean?

Vera (*helping Tommy out of his coat. His condition and the parcels in his hand make this an awkward operation*) Take no notice of him Betty. They finished work at half-twelve today. He's been drinkin' ever since.

Tommy (*out of his coat, throwing his arms around Betty*) Happy Christmas Big Sister. (*He shouts, hugs her, stands back and smiles*)

Betty It's still Christmas Eve, Tommy...

Tommy It's not, is it?

Betty Christmas begins tomorrow. (*She takes Tommy's coat*)

Tommy Well—anyway, it's good to see y'.

Betty I'm surprised you can. (*She puts Tommy's coat in the hall*)

Tommy Where's Syd?

Betty He's just getting changed.

Tommy (*rubbing his hands*) Ah well—what about a little drink while we're waiting'.

Vera Tommy! Oh Betty, it looks lovely in here, doesn't it, Tommy? Something's changed, hasn't it? What is it?

Betty stands by the settee, smiling modestly. Vera suddenly shrieks with delight

Vera Ooooooooh—Betty! You've got your new suite. Oh it's really beautiful, Betty. (*She sits down to test, goes into raptures*) Ooooooooh the comfort—the luxury—I could just fall asleep.

Tommy We can but hope.

Vera It's just like sitting on—well, like sitting on—on—clouds. That's it. It's just like sinking into a cloud.

Betty (*showing Vera a brochure*) That's because of the special air pockets, Vee. I mean, we were going to get a cheaper one but as soon as we saw this one incorporated the special Winterbred Honeycombe Air Pockets—well, we couldn't resist it. If you want real comfort I think it's worth paying that bit extra.

Vera Oh it is just like a cloud, Betty. Sit down, Tommy, try it.

Tommy I'm frightened it might start rainin'. (*He prods the suite*) What did it cost y'?

Vera Tommy!

Tommy I'm only askin' Betty how much it cost.

Betty I'll give you a guess. Go on, Tommy, one guess. What do you think?

Tommy Beer usually, but whatever you've...

Vera *Think*, not drink. Betty's askin' y' about the suite.

Tommy Oh! (*Prodding and inspecting*) Well, erm—let's see... (*He makes an exaggerated fuss of this, tutting and shaking his head*) I don't know—I mean, with goods of this nature it depends or the supplier. I mean, if it was from a shop down town—well! (*Shaking his head*) But there again, if it was off the back of a lorry...

Vera (*quietly, threateningly*) I'm warnin' you, Tommy...

Tommy I reckon it must have knocked you back a few bob, Betty. I'm glad it didn't come out of my wallet. At a guess Betty, I mean, I'm probably wrong, but at a guess I'd say that suite, that suite, Betty, must have cost you every penny of fifty quid.

Vera (*getting in quick*) Take no notice of him, Betty, he's stupid. He doesn't know anythin' about furniture anyway.

Tommy goes to the door and shouts up the stairs

Tommy Syd—come on, Syd, we're all waitin' for y'—come on, I wanna give y' y' pressy.

Syd enters down the stairs, greets Tommy and comes into the room

Syd Christmas presents tonight?

Tommy Ah bugger it. There's no point waitin'. Here Syd, that's yours. (*He hands him a parcel*)

Syd Thanks a lot, Tommy. That's very good of y'. (*He starts to unwrap*)

Tommy Now for Betty—a special pressy. (*Handing her a parcel*) Very careful, Betty, it's come all the way from London that has. I got that specially for you when I was down there for the Motor Show. Never saw any motors like, but we all had a good laugh...

Vera God knows what he's bought for y', Betty. I let him buy the presents this year. I couldn't get off work at all. I hope they're all right. He wouldn't even let me see them. Even wrapped them up himself.

Syd has unwrapped his present. It is a Krooklock. Tommy beams with satisfaction

Syd (*dubiously*) Well—er, yeh. Thanks, Tom—it's er, very thoughtful.

Vera What is it?

Syd It's a, a Krooklock. For a car, Vera.

Vera (*to Tommy*) You gormless get! You're a stupid so-an'-so. Don't you ever listen to what I say?

Tommy Not if I can help it.

Vera I told you a fortnight ago that Syd had to get rid of the car. I told you about his health.

Tommy Packin' up the car?

Betty (*postponing the unwrapping to join in*) Tommy, Tommy, now you're not tellin' me that you'd expect your brother-in-law to drive a car in the state he's in.

Tommy He looks the picture of health.

Betty To an untrained eye he might do, Tommy. But when you're stricken, Tommy, looks can be very deceiving.

Tommy What is it that's wrong, Syd?

Syd (*sighing and sitting down*) I wish I knew, Tom.

Tommy Well, what's the doctor said?

Betty Doctor? The doctor? And what would the doctor know about it? The stupid doctor told him it was indigestion.

Syd That's what he said, Tom.

Betty But when that man came back from the surgery I took one look at him, one look, didn't I, Syd?

Syd (*going pale*) You did, Bett.

Betty And straightaway I said—there and then, indigestion my foot; that man is a walking heart condition. Look, go on Tommy, look at him. He's in agony, agony aren't you Syd?

Syd, now quite reduced, nods with difficulty. Tommy shakes his head

Tommy I never realized, Syd.

Betty A layman wouldn't, Tommy, but to someone trained in diagnosing illness it's as plain as the nose on your face.

Tommy Do you think it's wise though, Betty, making judgements over a doctor's head.

Vera But Betty was a nurse, Tommy.

Tommy I know but even so ...

Vera You were an S.R. ...

Betty An S.R.N.? No, much higher, Vera. I was an auxiliary.

Tommy An auxiliary?

Betty Now if you're going to start questioning my handling of this case, Tommy ...

Tommy But Betty, the doctor ...

Betty (*waving him aside*) Don't talk to me about doctors, because I've seen enough of them behind the scenes, Tommy.

Vera Ah, he does look ill doesn't he?

Betty That's all right Vera. I know what to give him. (*She goes into the kitchen and gets a glass of whisky*)

Tommy (*kneeling down and talking quietly to Syd*) Sorry about the old Krooklock, Syd. See, I didn't know you'd had to get rid of the car. Mind you, it'll still come in handy won't it. (*Holding the Krooklock*) If y' need a bit of peace y' can clamp it round Betty's mouth.

Betty returns with the glass of whisky. She gives it to Syd

Betty Come on, Syd. Sip this.

Tommy So that's the way to get a drink in this house.

Betty Syd will get you a drink in a minute, Tommy...

Vera Forget him an' his drink, Betty. Come on open your present. I'm dyin' to see it. If his last effort's anythin' to go by he's probably got you a bottle of after-shave.

Betty (*resuming the unwrapping of her present*) My God, you've wrapped it up enough, Tommy.

Tommy I told y' Betty, it's a special present that.

Betty finally pulls off the paper to reveal a battery-operated phallic vibrator. She looks at it, not in shock but bewilderment. She does not know what it is. Vera is silently telling Tommy off

(*Laughing*) Great eh, Betty—I knew you'd like it. Great eh? (*He laughs*)

Betty It's very nice, Tommy. Erm, what exactly is it?

Tommy "What is it?" You're a case, Betty. She's a case our Betty, isn't she? (*He laughs, nudges Vera*) It's an electric organ, Betty.

Betty No, seriously, what is it?

Tommy It's a thingy, isn't it?

Betty What?

Tommy (*spelling it out*) A vibrator?

Betty (*with a little laugh*) Oh—of course. And what is it you use it for?

Tommy (*realising that she really does not know*) What?

Betty What do you use it for?

Tommy What d' y' use it for?

Betty Yes.

Tommy (*uncomfortably*) Well, er, y' know, y' use it for—well, y' know like erm ... Well, here (*He grabs it off her, grabs Syd's glass of whisky, inserts the vibrator into the whisky and switches on*) Y' use it for mixin' drinks. It's a portable automatic drink mixer, a shake on a stick. Latest things these are, you know. Even our Reeny hasn't got one of these.

Betty (*visibly brightening*) I'll bet she hasn't. Let's have a look, Tommy. (*She tries it*) Ooooh. Now that's what I call a present, Tommy. You should do the Christmas shopping every year. Now where shall we put it? What about here? (*She puts it on the television set among the candles; stands back and admires it*) Now, Syd. Come on, are you feeling better?

Syd A bit—yeh.

Betty Good, because you know you've not taken those presents round to your people yet.

Syd It'll do tomorrow.

Betty Oh no. You can take them tonight. A walk will do you good after having an attack.

Syd I've told you. Tomorrow.

Betty And I've told you. Tomorrow will not do.

Syd "tuts"

Look, if you don't take those presents round to your relations they'll end up calling here and I'm afraid I don't want them, Syd. (*To Vera*) I'm not having his side parked here over Christmas. Short stuff all the time it is with them. One night of his relatives and there's no short stuff left in the house. But it won't happen this year, I'm telling you. I'm not playing the

mug's game this year. I don't want them here. And if they do turn up I just won't give it them. They can drink beer, beer or nothing at all.

Tommy picks up the Krooklock, smiles and winks at Syd

No, come on. You can take their things tonight. You'll only be ten minutes.

Tommy Tell y' what, Syd, if y' fancy walkin' over I'll come with y'. We could—er ... (*He mimes drinking a pint, trying to hide it from Betty.*)

Betty sees Tommy's action

Syd (*getting up*) Well if y' fancy a walk, Tom ...

Betty You stay where you are! You can take those presents tomorrow.

Syd But you just said...

Betty Yes. And now I'm saying you can take them tomorrow. Now come on Syd. I'm sure everyone must be thirsty. Get us a drink will you? Port and lemon for you, Vera.

Vera nods

What about Tommy?

Tommy Have you got any beer, Betty?

Betty Yes, Tommy, we've got plenty of beer.

Tommy Well save it for Syd's relatives, I'll have a large whisky. Come on, Syd, I'll help you carry them. (*He goes through to the kitchen*)

Syd (*following*) Come on, y' can give us a hand with this crate in the shed, Tom.

Tommy and Syd exit through the back door

Vera Where's Sandra, Bett?

Betty Going out. That's all I ever know these days, Vera. Where are you going? Out. That's all you get from her.

Vera She must have a feller then, eh, Betty?

Betty I've told her; Sandra, I said, if you've got a boyfriend why don't you bring him home. She didn't say a word. (*Pause*) There must be someone, though. There must be someone who she's getting all these new ideas from.

Vera (*fascinated*) What new ideas, Betty?

Betty I couldn't begin to tell y', Vera. Like the other night I said to her, "What do you think of the tree this year, Sandra?" Do you know what she said?

Vera What, Betty?

Betty "I don't know why you waste your money on trash."

Vera (*shocked*) Go on! That's not like Sandra at all, is it? She always loved Christmas.

Betty "Christmas", she says, "Christmas comes from Capitalism."

Vera Go on. I thought it came from Jerusalem.

Sandra enters, and on seeing Vera is slightly taken aback. She hesitates for a moment before moving down

Sandra Oh, er, hello Aunty Vee.

Vera Hia, Sand. It definitely started in Jerusalem, Sandra. It says so in the carols.

Betty I'm just tellin' your Aunty Vee some of the things you've been comin' out with lately. Well, I hope it's just a passin' phase—that's all I can say. (*Pause*) Go on—tell your Aunty Vera some of the things you've been sayin'.

Sandra (*with a sigh*) What about?

Betty A licence to rob people of their hard earned money—that's what she said Christmas was, Vera.

Vera But people have got to have their bit of pleasure, Sandra. You can't begrudge people a bit of pleasure once a year. Can y', Betty.

Betty I know Vera—that's what I tried to tell her. But she never listens these days. Do you. Said I didn't know what the word pleasure meant, Vera.

Vera Oh but you do, Betty. You're always laughin' and jokin', aren't y'?

Betty Not lately, Vera. I've been driven up the wall lately, haven't I, Sandra? She's even, you know, Vera, she's even been going on about packing in the office an' going back to school.

Vera But y' can't go back to school when y' nineteen, Sandra. They won't let y' in.

Sandra Not a school. A college. Like a student.

Vera Oh God, Betty, don't let her do that. I've seen students, Sandra. I have y' know. There's a pile of them live in one of them big houses by us. It's more like a mental home y' know, for lunatics. The language that comes out of that house. Ey, Betty, an' y' know that peepin' Tom—well they reckon he's a student, y' know. He's up an' down the back of Parkhill Road every night y' know, an' all's he wears is a pair of gold-rimmed glasses an' a big scarf round his neck.

Betty At this time of year.

Vera (*nodding*) Yeah—I know. Tommy said all we need is a bit more frost and his thingy might drop off with the cold. (*She shrieks with laughter*)

Betty (*disturbed, in the knowledge that Sandra is present*) His thingy—Vera?

Vera Yeah—y'know, his ding-a-ling ... (*she laughs again*)

Betty (*tortured*) Vera ... Vera! (*She draws attention to Sandra's presence*)

Vera (*her hand going to her mouth in apology*) Oh.

Sandra It's all right, Mother. I do know about the existence of the penis.

Betty / **Vera** (*in instant recoil; loudly*) Sandra! (*speaking together*)

Betty Don't be so filthy. I think this discussion's got quite out of hand.

Sandra Mother, the...

Betty *Sandra* ... I don't want to know. I've got make-up to put on. I hope that when I come back down I won't hear any more of that sort of talk.

Betty makes her escape, going upstairs

Sandra There's nothing wrong with that you know, Aunty Vera. The word penis.

Vera (*shuddering*) Ooh—Sandra—don't say it. I hate that word. It goes right through me. I'm surprised at you, Sandra—comin' out with words like that.

Sandra Well, it's only a normal word.

Vera Not very nice though.

Pause

Sandra Where's Uncle Tommy.
Vera He's in the kitchen with y' Dad. He's gettin' us some drinks.
Sandra Oh. (*Pause*) Are you stoppin' long, Aunty Vee?
Vera Oh, I don't know, love. Why?
Sandra Well. I've er—I didn't know anyone would be here tonight. I've, er—well I've got someone comin' round.
Vera Oh. (*Pause*) A feller.
Sandra We've got to talk to me Mum and Dad.

Pause

Vera (*thinking she has guessed it*) Oh—have you got an announcement to make?
Sandra (*realizing that Vera thinks it is an engagement*) Yeah—sort of. You won't say anything, will you?
Vera I won't say a word, Sand. Oh Sandra, you are a dark horse aren't you? Eh? What's he like, Sand?
Sandra He's ... (*Going to sit with her*) Well—he's different, Aunty Vee.
Vera (*kindly*) They all are at first, love.
Sandra No, but he is. I mean—really different. I mean he's not like, you know, the fellers round here.
Vera Where did y' meet him. Out dancin'? At the disco, was it?
Sandra It was at a dance, yeah. At his college. He's a student.
Vera Sandra! He doesn't wear gold-rimmed glasses does he?
Sandra Oh, stop messing about. Aunty Vee, I'm serious. It's a different world he comes from. I mean all—this (*The room*) He wouldn't live like this. (*Pointing to the picture on the wall*) He wouldn't have anything like that up, you know.
Vera Why, Sand?
Sandra Because, Aunty Vee—it's not unique.
Vera (*as though that explains it*) Oh.
Sandra I told me mother—when she was buyin' it at the market. I said don't get that picture—everyone's got one of those. There's thousands of those around.
Vera Yeh—well that shows it's a good paintin'. I mean look at that *Bubbles*. That's a good picture an' there's millions of them around. (*Pause*) Me an' our Tommy were thinkin' of gettin' a picture for our chimney breast. But we couldn't agree. I wanted a nice little picture—

Betty enters

—but our Tommy always wanted a big one.
Betty I thought I told you to change the subject, Vera.
Vera What! But I was ...
Betty Yes, I know, Vera—now let's have no more of it.

Sandra goes to the front door

Where are you going, Sandra?

Sandra I'm just going out.

Betty Sandra! We have got visitors.
Sandra I won't be long.
Betty I don't think that's the point.
Sandra I'll be back soon.

Sandra exits

Betty (*shouting through the door*) I don't know where you learnt your manners, young lady, but you certainly weren't taught that sort of behaviour from anyone in this house.

The front door slams

Honest to God, Vera, I don't know what's got into her over this past couple of months. She could learn a thing or two from our Reeny's lad, she could. I can't say much for Reeny, but she's brought their John up a treat. He's always helpin' out in the house you know, Vee. He'd do anything for his mother. Not like our Sandra. She wouldn't lift a finger—not lately anyway. Do you know, if there was a speck of dust on the arm of that settee and Sandra was sitting there, she wouldn't even lean across and brush it off. Now that's not right, is it, Vera?

Vera It's not, Betty.
Betty I mean that's no way to treat a three hundred and fifty pound suite. (*She "tuts"*) Oh Vera, it just slipped out. You'll think I'm an awful bragger, won't you.
Vera Is that what it cost you, Betty?
Betty Well you know I don't buy rubbish, Vera.
Vera Ooh, it's just like sitting on a cloud.
Betty Of course you won't mention that to our Reeny, will you?
Vera I wouldn't dream ...
Betty With her having got a suite not so long ago. I'd hate to embarrass her. You know, she'd be a bit upset if she thought mine was a lot dearer than hers.
Vera Would she really be upset, Betty?
Betty Upset? I mean I don't like to talk about people but do you know, when she saw that new shower I've had fitted in the bathroom, she was green.
Vera I was askin' our Tommy about gettin' a shower fitted, y' know. D' y' know what he said? (*She laughs*) He said he'd make a bargain with me. (*She laughs*)
Betty (*all ears*) What was that, Vera?
Vera (*laughing*) Oh Betty—I'm ashamed. I daren't tell y'.
Betty Go on love. You can tell me. You know I wouldn't breathe a word.
Vera Well—(*laughing*)—Tommy said that he'd get me a shower fitted if I agreed to give up wearin tights an' start wearin' a suspender belt an' stockin's.
Betty Why?
Vera Well he just thinks stockin's are sexy.
Betty (*poker-faced*) Well, that is one thing I would not have thought about our Tommy. I didn't know he was a pervert.

Vera Oh—he's not, Betty.
Betty It doesn't sound like it, either. What did you say to this request?
Vera I agreed.
Betty You didn't.
Vera Yeh. Why?
Betty Vera, Vera! Do you realize what you are saying? That swine has turned you into a prostitute, Vera.
Vera Oh Betty! All I've said is that I'll wear stockin's.
Betty Yes. But where will it end? Don't you see my point, Vera? All right, you wear kinky stockings so that he'll get you a shower; what happens when you want a fridge? A washing machine? Vera, you could end up on the streets for a colour television.
Vera (*worried*) Oh. 'Ey, I never thought of it like that.
Betty Well I'm telling you love, you wait till you can afford a shower y'self.
Vera I think I will now, Betty.
Betty Have you seen my shower? Come and have a look. I mean I don't suppose you'll be able to afford one like this but it'll give you an idea Vera. So, he's a bit that way is he, our Tommy?

They start to go to the stairs

Vera I think he's harmless really Bett!
Betty Well you just stamp it out now before it takes a grip of him. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that a couple shouldn't enjoy it. But there's moderation. I have to restrain my feller you know.
Vera Syd?
Betty Oooooh—he's like a ram. Unsatiable.
Vera Go 'way!

Betty and Vera exit upstairs

The lights dim slightly in the living-room and come up in the kitchen

Tommy and Syd enter with a crate of various drinks

Tommy I mean, no messin', Syd, I've seen strippers in the clubs up here but they're not worth a carrot compared to these London tarts.
Syd (*agog*) Go on!
Tommy Oooooh, what! The first club me an' the lads got into, there was this little one ...
Syd Stripper?
Tommy Well, I say little but you should have seen the equipment this one had.
Syd Go 'way!
Tommy What this little one couldn't do with her knockers wasn't worth knowin'.
Syd What er sort of things?
Tommy An artiste she was, Syd. Y' talk about jugglers—I'm tellin' y'—me an' the lads didn't *walk* out of that club—we pole vaulted!

Syd looks at him open-mouthed

I thought you were lookin' for lemonade.

Syd (*breaking the trance*) O yeh. (*He starts to look in cupboards*)

Tommy takes some mince pies from the oven

Tommy But y' know what the latest thing down there is, Syd? The massage parlours.

Syd Massage.

Tommy A wonderful experience y' know. Marvellous girls. An' very clean ...

Syd An' er what do they—er—do, Tom?

Tommy The works, the full works. I brought—(*he produces a book*)—a book back on it. Y' know, so Vera can learn how to do it. I'll pass this one on to y' when I've finished with it. Get Betty to do it for y'.

Syd Yes, there's a chance of that an' all. She's not very—you know, Betty—she's a bit ... (*Checking that no-one can hear him*) I mean, between you an' me, Tommy—I'm thinkin' of lookin' round elsewhere for—y' know.

Tommy (*laughing*) Now now ...

Tommy gets glasses from the draining board and pours out two whiskies

Syd No, serious. I've thought about it Tommy an' I reckon a bit of that could make a new man out of me. It could really do me good. Y' know, make me young again. It sounds daft doesn't it?

Tommy No.

Syd I remember when I was young, y'know. I was a different man, I was. The things I used to notice—y' know—like, simple things—just, well, y' know, flowers like—an' birds singin'—an' the grass. Sounds stupid doesn't it? But the grass—Christ, it used to be so bloody green. (*Shaking his head*) I don't know! (*Starting to look in cupboards again*) I wouldn't mind if there was something different to look forward to—but every year's the bloody same. It's like the television, like them serials that never change from week to week, apart from gettin' worse. An' Christmas. Christ, Christmas must be the worse time of all.

Tommy An'—er—so y' lookin' round for a bit of snatch, are y'?

Syd (*again checking that no-one can hear*) There's—er—there's a woman serves in the canteen at our place ...

Tommy An' have y' managed to ...?

Syd No, no—it's not reached that stage yet. It's more of the chattin' up stage at the moment.

Tommy How long's this been goin' on?

Syd Well, a good few months now, but I don't think it's wise to rush these things. It's coming along quite nice at the moment; y' know, we have a laugh an' that, an' I always give her a bit of a wink when I go past. I just hope no-one at our place starts to suspect what's goin' on.

Tommy Well, y' not bein' what y' could call madly indiscreet, are y', Syd?

Syd No—I know that but, see, about a month ago—she started givin' me extra chips. (*Pause*) I mean, all the other fellers have got half a dozen chips on their plates an' I come along the queue with me plate overflowin'. I've been gettin' some strange looks already.

Tommy I'll bet you have, Syd.

Syd D' y' think anyone will cotton on?

Tommy Well, what if they do? If you wanna go an' get a bit of spare that's your business. Everyone else can sod off.

Syd Yeh. Yeh. They can, can't they? (*He sighs*) I think that sometimes y' know. Why don't I just go an' do it. Enjoy meself. She'd have me an' all, y' know, Tom. This one in the canteen. I've thought about soddin' off with her, y' know. Jackin' this lot in an' just goin' off somewhere with her.

Tommy Now, now, Syd—come on, lad. There's no need for talk like that. Get a bit on the side, like, but don't start talkin' about, y' know, jeopardizin' the family.

Syd Well that's how I feel sometimes, Tommy, I'm tellin' y'.

Tommy Well, I'd watch out for thoughts like that, Syd. No use going' over the top, lad.

Syd Agh—I suppose y'right. It's just Christmas I suppose. It gets y' like that doesn't it? (*He resumes his search for lemonade*)

Tommy It's not Christmas Syd—it's this bloody country. It's no friggin' use to man nor beast. I'm gettin' out, Syd, whilst the goin's good. Australia for me this year.

Syd I thought it was New Zealand y' were goin' to.

Tommy New Zealand, Australia, Canada—it doesn't matter which one but this year we're goin'. I couldn't stay here much longer meself. There's no life left in this country. At least not for the likes of us. It's all right if y've got money—or, status like. But y've got to be realistic haven't y'? There's nothin' left here for us. We're just like loads of Indians herded together an' stuck in a reservation. I mean—we've got no land have we? There's nothin' y' can call y' own. Nothin' that y' can make a go of?

Syd I suppose y' right, Tommy.

Tommy I know I am. I'm gettin' out, settin' me course for a new country. Give me a couple of years in a young country an' I'll be a new man: cuttin' the cane, tendin' the sheep, bringin' in the wood for the fire. I'll be a new feller then; an' the ciggies y' know, an' the ale, I'll knock them right on the head.

Syd 'Ey, Tommy, will your Vera drink somethin' else with her port? I can't find this lemonade anywhere. Will she have somethin' else in it?

Tommy She'll have to if y' can't find it

Syd Will she ...

Tommy Or there again, we could—erm ...

Syd What?

Tommy Well we could nip out an' get a bottle couldn't we?

Syd There's nowhere open.

Tommy What about the pub? (*He winks*)

Syd Oh Christ, Tommy—I don't know.

Tommy Well you need the lemonade don't y'?

Syd I suppose ...

Tommy Come on—we'll be there an' back in ten minutes ... (*He goes to the back door and opens it*)

Syd We won't stay for a pint though, Tom.

Tommy 'Course we won't.

Syd (*going to the door*) Are y' sure now?
Tommy Scout's Honour, Syd, Scout's Honour.

Syd and Tommy go out through the back door

The Lights cross-fade slightly to the living-room

Betty and Vera come downstairs

Betty (*entering the room with Vera following*) Syd! Sydney! (*Shocked*) Sydney! (*It dawns on her*) I knew it—I knew I shouldn't have left Syd with that fella of yours.
Vera What's up, Betty?
Betty What's up? I'll Tell you what's up, Vera—They've gone off to the pub, haven't they? Well, just wait till they get through that door, they'll ...

The doorbell chimes

Oh, no! That's all we need. Our Reeny here an' he's out at the pub. It's your feller I blame for this, you know. This is just the thing to delight our Reeny, isn't it?

The doorbell chimes again, loud and long

Listen to her. Listen to that. She's always been jealous of my chimes and she won't be content till she breaks them.

Betty goes to the front door, and returns, all smiles, with Reeny, Ted and John

Hello, Reeny love, how are you? Come on in, Ted, John.
Ted (*taking off his coat*) I'm just wonderin' if my car's gonna be safe out there, Betty.
Betty Oh, it'll be all right. Come on, John, let's have your coat. Aren't you takin' yours off, Reen?
Reeny I'd rather leave it on for a bit, Betty. I'm a bit cold.
Betty Well we can put another bar on the electric fire you know, Reen.

Ted goes straight to the window, puts his head under the curtains and looks out

Reeny Oh don't think I'm complainin', Betty. I'm not, it's just, y' know, with getting used to the central heating now ...

Betty, hanging up coats, is visibly shaken. She recovers and finishes hanging the coats

Betty Oh—the central heating at work you mean ...
Reeny And at home. You did know we were having central heating put in didn't you?
Betty No ...
Reeny Maybe I forgot to mention it.

Betty is not pleased

Ted Are you sure that car of mine's gonna be safe out there, Betty? I mean, it's not so bad down at end of the estate, but I'm not so sure about up here.

Betty Well if you like, Ted, I'll go an' stand guard on it for the rest of the night. Would y' like a few blankets off the bed to stop it getting wet?

Ted (*with an unsure laugh, really more of a cracked face*) You do have to be careful these days, though. A car owner is a vulnerable man. I hope it's all right out there.

Betty Come on, Reen. Sit down.

John sits near the television and watches it

Reeny I'll just get warmed through first, Bett.

Betty Well, suit yourself. (*Aside to Vera*) *She*—has got central heatin'. (*To everyone*) Now—who's having a drink?

Vera Yeh—I'd love that port an' lemon, Betty.

Reeny Where's Syd, Betty?

Vera He's gone down the—

Betty —road to take those little children home. Carol singers, y'know. Syd was upset wasn't he, Vee? Seein' small children out on their own at this time of night. He said he wouldn't be able to rest unless he saw them safely home

Ted starts coming away from the window

I mean, you never know what's out there, lurking in the night.

Hearing this, Ted returns to the window

Our Tommy's gone with him. I wouldn't let Syd go out on his own. I don't think it's wise for a man in his condition.

Reeny Is he still bad, Betty?

Betty Dyin' on his feet, isn't he, Vee?

Vera Oh he did look ill, Reeny.

Betty (*looking at Reeny*) You don't look as though you've been keepin' too well yourself, Reen.

Reeny I've had a terrible chest the past few weeks, he'll tell y'.

John You haven't been well at all, have y', Mum?

Betty Why don't you take the weight off your legs, Reeny?

Reeny No. I'm all right here for the minute, Betty.

Betty Standing isn't good for you. And you're just at the age when they start to appear.

Ted I wonder if that vehicle would be safer round the back?

Reeny When what appear?

Betty Varicose veins.

Reeny (*huffily*) I've never suffered with varicose veins. Even when I was havin' him I didn't get them. Did I Ted?

Ted A car owner, these days—is a potential victim.

Betty (*passing cigarettes around from the sideboard*) Oh—that's right. I'm getting mixed up. It was me who had the varicose veins when I was carrying Sandra, wasn't it?

Reeny (*vindicated*) I told you. I've never had varicose veins.

Betty (*going over to give Ted a cigarette*) That's right—I had the varicose veins and you had the piles. Remember, Reen?

Ted Christmas is the worse time of all. Drunks—can't get a bus or a taxi—they don't think twice about robbin' a car to get home. An' the next thing y' know it's up against a wall somewhere. (*He lights the cigarette*)
Betty Are you comfortable enough there, John?
John Yes, thanks, Aunty Betty.
Betty Are you sure?
John Yes, thanks.
Reeny Oh—Betty! Trust me! I didn't notice.

Betty smiles at the suite

Betty That's quite all right, Reeny. Tasteful furniture should never be noticed straightaway. It blends in.
Reeny Oh I know, but I should have noticed you've had your suite recovered.
Vera No, Reeny—it's a new one.
Reeny Is it? Oh it's lovely, Betty.
Betty Just wait till you sit on it.
Vera It's just like a cloud y' know, Reen.
John (*testing his seat*) I think you've hit the nail on the head there Aunty Vee. It is just like a cloud.

Reeny, gingerly, sits on the settee

Betty Now isn't that comfortable, Reeny? Have you ever known comfort like that?
Reeny (*quietly*) It's certainly nice, Betty.
John It is just like sitting on a cloud isn't it, Mum?

Reeny slowly burns him into his seat

Reeny You'll be all right if it stays this way, Bett.
Betty What do you mean love?
Reeny Well, you know I got a new three-piece a couple of months back.
Betty Yes.
Reeny What's it like, Ted?
Ted (*coming from the window*) It's certainly a mystery.
Vera What is?
Reeny Every mornin' when we get up—there's another seam gone. Split right open.
Betty Go 'way.
Reeny I'm not telling a word of a lie. Seams just gaping open. We've had to tape it all up.
Betty Well, haven't you had them in to look at it? They should take it back.
Ted They won't though, Betty. They said the seams had been ripped apart. Split open on purpose.
Vera They didn't?
Reeny They did.

John gets up and goes to window, looks out at the car

I said to him, didn't I, Ted? I said, are you trying to tell me that I'd damage my own suite? I've never heard stupidity like it. I mean who's going to pay nearly five hundred pounds for a suite and then rip it all to pieces?

Vera Is that what you paid for your suite, Reeny?
Reeny I did, Vera.
Betty Well maybe that'll teach you, Reeny. It never does any good gettin' things on the cheap. Now—who'd like a drink?
Vera I'd love a port an' lemon, Betty.
Ted I could shift a nice drop of rum if y've got ...
Reeny I hope you've not forgotten that you're driving me home.
Ted (*sitting*) Oh—I'm all right if I have a couple of drinks early on, Reen. We've only just got here. We're not going' yet are we?
Reeny (*putting her hand to her chest*) No—but if my chest gets any worse ...
Betty Is it very bad, Reeny?
Reeny It's this tightness I get. Y' know, this tightness across here.
Betty (*interested*) And have you got a tickle in your throat as well?
Reeny (*surprised at Betty's knowledge*) I have, Betty.
Betty (*nodding*) And a dry cough?
Reeny Yes—that's right. God knows what's causin' it ...
Betty (*shaking her head*) You don't need God to tell you what's causing that. It's as plain as the nose on your face, what's causing that.
Reeny (*a little worried*) What?
Betty It's the bloody central heating! Did you know they've found it causes a multitude of illnesses. Haven't they, Vera? There's even a theory goin' round that it can cause—(*looking round to check that no intruder is listening*)—C.A.N.C.E.R. (*She spells it out instead of saying the word*)
Vera (*puzzled and fascinated*) What was that, Betty?

Betty mouths the word for her

Go 'way!
Betty Of the B.R.E.A.S.T. Believe me, Reeny, y' don't know what it can cause. (*Smiling*) What did you say you were havin' to drink love?
Reeny What have you got in?
Betty You name it and it's yours.
Reeny I'll have a Tia Maria then, Betty.
Betty Ah. We just finished the last bottle yesterday, Reen. I'll tell you what you'd like—why don't you have a drop of whisky and hot water and sugar. Good for that chest of yours. Right. And some beer for John, eh John?
John Please Aunty Bett!

Betty goes into the kitchen to get the drinks

Reeny And don't you go drinking it all at once.
John I won't, Mum.
Vera I thought you'd be off out, John, with it bein' Christmas. They like to get out at Christmas, the young ones, don't they?
Reeny He doesn't want to be goin' out. Do y' John?
John There's nowhere to go, Aunty Vee.
Vera Oooh—I was always off down town when I was your age. You couldn't keep me away; dancin' and larkin' about.
Ted You could do then, Vera. Not now though.

John It's not safe in town these days, Aunty Vee. You know, with the gangs an' that. There's no point goin' to town.

Reeny He's better off stayin' in with us, Vera.

Vera But when y' young, y' don't wanna be sittin' in with y' Mum an' Dad, do y' ?

Ted But what's the point of goin' out, Vera? I mean, what is there that's worth seekin' in the world? Our John's got a good family. We get on well together, don't we John? He doesn't need to go runnin' all over the place to get enjoyment.

Reeny (*quietly*) Not like some I could name.

Vera Who's that, Reen?

Reeny Well, I mean, I see Sandra's not in again.

Vera Oh. I know.

Reeny If it was a daughter of mine, I'd put my foot down. She could be off anywhere; with fellers, runnin' round in cars ...

Vera In cars, yeh ...

Ted Now you're talkin' about cars, Vera. I know there are more expensive models on the road. Fuel injection jobs an' automatic gearboxes an' all that stuff. There's more up-to-date models on the road. But I'd defy any of them to give a better overall performance than that car of mine.

Vera It's certainly a lovely model, Ted.

Ted It's looked after, Vera. Our John'll tell y', how often do we clean that car, John?

John Four times a week we clean the car.

Ted An' that's in summer.

John In winter we clean it five times a week.

Vera As much as that, Ted?

Reeny Sometimes more than that isn't it, Ted?

John You probably don't know this, Aunty Vera, but the car has been likened to the human body!

Vera Go 'way!

Ted See, Vera—man made the motor car in his own image! There isn't one part of a man's body, Vera, that isn't present in the motor car.

Vera I bet I could think of one couldn't you, Reeny? (*She shrieks with laughter but her attempt to lighten the topic of conversation is ill-timed and fruitless*)

Reeny looks at Ted

John Did you know that me Dad had worked it out, Aunty Vera? At home we've got this chart that he made showing all the links between man and the car. Haven't we, Dad?

Ted See—I'm a great believer in thinking, Vera.

Reeny Sometimes he just sits for hours, and thinks.

Vera Do y', Ted?

Ted Thinking, Vera, thinking is one of the last great pleasures left to man.

Vera Oh—I'd find it borin'. Just thinkin'.

Ted But you wouldn't, Vera. You wouldn't become bored, because the mind, the human mind is a vast warehouse of ideas!

Vera I suppose so. If y' a feller, like.

Betty enters with drinks. Ted stands

Betty Now, everybody. I don't want you to touch your drinks yet. Not till I say. (*She hands the drinks round "There we are, there's yours etc....")*

There is no drink for Vera

Vera Er—mine was a—er—port an' lemon, Betty.
Betty Ah—now I can't find the lemonade, Vera. Would you have somethin' else in your port?
Vera Anythin', Betty.
Betty Right. Just hold on a minute and I'll get it for you. Now. (*She grabs the vibrator from its place and holds it up*) Who's going to be first? Reeny? (*She takes Reeny's drink and plunges the vibrator in. Smiling*) I'll say one thing for that feller of yours, Vera—when he buys a present, he knows what to get to please a lady!
Reeny Oh—did Tommy get you that?
Ted I'm just wonderin' what it reminds me of.
Reeny Ted! (*With a slight laugh*) Don't be filthy.
Ted Who's being filthy? That's just your dirty mind.
Reeny (*offended*) Dirty mind! I beg your pardon. Don't you insult me in public or we'll go home now.
Betty (*finishing the mixing and putting the "mixer" back*) Now now, Reen. Ted's only havin' a laugh. Let's not have any arguments. Let's have your coat an' you can settle down with your drink.
Reeny (*still not shedding her coat*) I haven't come out to be insulted.
Betty Never mind, Reeny. Take no notice. Every marriage has its little difficulties.

They are all silent watching the television

The back door opens, and Sandra enters the kitchen. She ushers Tim in. He is anxious and ill-at-ease. Their dialogue is whispered

Tim (*nervously*) Sandra, I thought you said just your parents would be here.
Sandra Well I didn't know did I?
Tim All right—but come on—we'll have to leave it now.
Sandra (*emphatically*) No! They've got to be told tonight.
Tim But tomorrow ...
Sandra Tomorrow I want to be out.
Tim Look—I've told you—we can't live in my flat. It's hardly big enough for me. What will the other lads say if I move you in?
Sandra They'll just have to put up with it until we find somewhere else.
Tim Well, why can't you live at home until we find somewhere?
Sandra You've never lived here. You don't know what it's like. (*Pause*) Come on, Tim, you said you'd tell them tonight.
Tim I know but—but not with all your relations here.
Sandra Well—we'll wait till they've gone.
Tim Sandra—I'd rather leave it till ...
Sandra (*slightly rattled*) What are you frightened of? All you've got to do is tell them. (*Appealing*) You said, Tim. You said you would.

Her appeal works. Resigned, he sighs

It'll be all right. You can cope with them. Just be firm and strong. (*She enters the front room, leaving Tim just out of sight in the kitchen. With a half nervous smile*) Hia. Aunty Reen, Aunty Vee, Uncle Ted. (*She nods to John*)

Betty (*after a pause*) Well, are you coming in or not?

Sandra (*looking over her shoulder*) I've—well I've got someone with me.

Betty Pardon?

Sandra I've got someone with me.

Betty Where?

Sandra In the kitchen.

Everyone cranes to see who is in the kitchen

Betty Who is it?

Sandra We want a word with you and me Dad. I didn't know everyone was coming.

Betty Well what difference does that make. This is your family. Now come on. You don't leave people standing in the kitchen, Sandra. (*To the others*) I don't know what she's thinking of, come on, come on.

Sandra opens the door so that Tim can enter, smiling all round

Tim (*nodding*) Hello.

Sandra This is me Mum. This is Tim.

Tim stretches out his hand to Betty

Tim Pleased to meet you.

Betty Oh—well, come in Tim, and sit down. (*She sits him on the settee*) You won't know Sandra's relations, will you? (*She introduces him all round*) Now, what would you like to drink, Tim?

Tim Beer?

Betty Well, come on, Sandra. Get Tim a beer.

Sandra Where is it?

Betty It's in the ice box, where it's always kept, Sandra.

Sandra You mean the fridge? (*She goes out to the kitchen*)

Ted gets up to look out of the window. Tim watches him

Betty Ted's just checking that his car's still there.

Tim Oh.

Reeny You've got to be very careful these days, haven't you?

Tim Pardon?

Betty Are you comfortable there, Tim?

Tim Yes. Yes, thanks.

During the following, Sandra gets out a bottle of beer for Tim, pours it into a glass, prepares a drink for herself, then sits at the kitchen table

Betty I suppose Sandra's told you all about our new suite hasn't she?

Vera passes Tim the brochure

Tim Erm ...
Betty What's your second name, Tim?
Tim McBain. Tim McBain.
Betty McBain! (*Pause*) There's, er, there's no—Irish blood in your family though, Tim?
Tim Well—I don't ....
Betty No—I thought ...
Ted (*laughing*) Hey, John, John—come over here an' look at this....

John gets up and goes to the window

Vera I see you've got one of those college scarves ...
Tim (*putting a pair of glasses on*) Yes, well, I'm a student!
Betty (*thrilled*) Oh, he's a student.

Vera moves down the settee

Ted Look at that pile of junk across the road. Hey, Betty, how long's that feller opposite you been runnin' that heap?
Betty (*to Tim*) Ted knows all about cars, you know, everything. Do you have a car, Tim?
Tim Yes, it's just across the road.

Ted and John close the curtain return to their seats

Betty Whereabouts are you from, Tim?
Tim Well, I'm at college up here, but my home's in Stafford.
Betty (*almost overcome*) Oh—what a beautiful part of the world that is, Tim.
Tim Yes, it's all right.
Betty All those hops! I think the people from Stafford are very civilized, don't you, Tim?
Tim Well, erm—I just don't know really.
Reeny Oh they are, you know. Your people are much more civilized.
Tim Are they?
Ted Are they? Well, I'm surprised at you. You a college lad and you didn't know that. Do you know what Northerners are called, historically speaking?
Tim Erm ...
Ted Tell him, John.
John Barbarians!
Ted Bar——barians. Now! Do you know what the word barbarian means? (*Fully expecting him not to*)
Tim To be barbaric.
Ted (*after a pause*) You've got it. He's right. He's right!
Betty Our Ted could have gone to a college, you know, Tim.
Tim Oh. Yes.
Reeny He's always watching the documentaries, y'know. He loves them. Don't you, Ted?
Ted Oh—I watch them all. See, with the documentaries—the whole—of human life—is there! We can learn from things like that, y' see. Now last

night—she—(*indicating Reeny*)—wouldn't watch it—but I did, didn't I, John?

John You watched that documentary, didn't y', Dad?

Ted Last night I was transported, transported from my armchair to the heart, the heart of South America! Did you see it? Did you see it yourself?

Tim Er—no, I . . .

Ted Well I did, see. An' believe me—it was a bloody crime.

Betty Ted! Mind your language please!

Ted But it was, Betty—it was a crime. It told all this programme did. You saw them, the little black fellers, little, but hard as nails. Solid. Livin' for thousands of years, never changin' an' perfectly happy. They, didn't have much, agreed. But they could range—free—an' wide over all the rivers an' lands doin' the things they'd always done, the things they knew an' understood. See, see, they could cope! An' live! because, because—everythin' was in order! See—see what I mean?

Tim Mm.

Ted (*throwing up his hands*) But what happened?

Vera What happened, Ted?

Ted I'll tell y', Vera. Two of them sailed up the river, didn't they.

Vera (*as though that explains all*) Oh.

Ted Only a couple of them—but that was it. They were finished. Swapped a few skins for a tee shirt an' a bag of beads. Next thing y' know, the whole tribe's paddlin' hell for leather up the river for tee shirts. Never got back to their own lands. All pushed together in corrugated iron sheds now. Killin' each other for a packet of American ciggies. They just sit around all day now, in their tee shirts, not understandin' what's going on.

Pause

Vera Me an' Tommy always used to watch "Love Thy Neighbour". It's great!

Ted No—y' can't beat a good documentary. An' the one programme I never miss. (*To Tim*) Do y' know what that is?

Tim shakes his head

Tell him, John.

John "University Challenge."

Ted (*to Tim*) I admire him, you know. Have you met him?

Tim Who?

Ted Bamber! Bamber Gascoigne. He's a clever lad, y' know. The questions he dreams up!

Tim (*half laughing*) But—but, you don't think *he* makes up the questions? *He* doesn't think them up.

Pause

Betty Oh, I think you could be wrong there, Timothy. If y' don't mind me saying.

Tim No. The questions come from the . . .

Betty 'Ey. You haven't got a drink yet. Where's that girl got to with your drink? (*She starts to go into the kitchen*)

Vera (*getting up*) It's all right, Betty. I'll go through. Betty can I help meself to a port an' somethin' while I'm there?
Betty My God, Vera—you're shifting the drink tonight aren't you?
Vera But I haven't ...
Betty How many will that be? I don't begrudge it, Vee, but I don't want you gettin' like our Tommy.
Vera But—but—I haven't ...
Ted (*To Tim*) No, son, see, Bamber Gascoigne ...
Betty (*shouting*) Oh John. (*Pointing to the television*) Turn that up.

John turns up the sound. Ted goes to the window. Everyone watches television automatically

Oh—I never miss the Christmas Eve carol singing.

A choir is heard singing on the television. Vera gives up protesting and goes into the kitchen. The Lights cross-fade slightly to favour the kitchen. Sandra still sits, in her coat, the drinks on the table by her

Vera What's up, Sand?
Sandra Nothing. I just wanted to ...
Vera Hey. He talks funny doesn't he? He doesn't talk like us, does he? Oh I'm not saying there's anythin' wrong, with the way he talks. He talks nice, really. Hey—you've got a good catch there, haven't y', Sand?

Pause

Sandra Aunty Vera. Do you like Christmas?
Vera (*as though it is a stupid question*) Oh yeh. Everyone loves Christmas.
Sandra I don't. I hate it!
Vera Oh Sandra! Don't say that. That's flyin' in the face of God. You shouldn't say things like that. (*She puts the empty beer bottle away in the bin*)
Sandra Why?
Vera Well you shouldn't, Sand. It's temptin' fate. An' like those things you said to your Mum. You shouldn't say those sort of things.
Sandra What things?
Vera About Christmas comes from cannibalism.
Sandra I didn't say cannibalism. I said Christmas is the product of Capitalism.
Vera What's that mean?
Sandra Well it means ... Tim can explain it better. You don't like him, do you, Aunty Vee?
Vera I wouldn't say that, Sand. I mean he's—er—he is ...
Sandra He's different, Aunty Vera. That's all. Look, see—look, his type of life is—different like, like, when I started goin' up to the college with him. You should have seen it, Aunty Vee, honest it just ... You want to see how they live. It's ... I went up there one afternoon, and everyone was sittin' round on the lawns, talkin' in the sun. You know, readin' and discussin' things. Honest, everyone was full of life an' interesting. You couldn't believe how people live out there, Aunty Vee. It's just—I mean—all the people he

goes round with—they're just so, you know full of life. It made me feel really thick and stupid.

Vera Oh I wouldn't let yourself feel like that, Sandra. They wouldn't make me feel like that.

Sandra An' like Christmas. Like, well. *His* Mum and Dad—do you know how they'll spend Christmas?

Vera Oh I know they're very civilized. Aren't they? Where they come from?

Sandra They won't spend Christmas stuck in front of the telly. They'll get a big massive table out in the drawing-room.

Vera Are they old fashioned? No-one has drawin'-rooms now (*She looks for the port*)

Sandra They do. And a big fire in the grate. And they'll have lots of people round, interesting people, round to dinner. And it'll be a proper dinner, a special dinner, like an event and it'll take hours to get through ...

Vera (*looking for the port*) Ooh, I'd hate to do the washin'-up in their house.

Sandra And candles on the table, and wine, and all the people will sit round the table afterwards and talk and tell stories and laugh. All the people that Tim knows are like that, Aunty Vee.

Vera (*finding the port*) They sound like snobs to me. (*She pours her drink*)

Sandra Wouldn't you like to live like that, Aunty Vee?

Vera Oh no! Tommy wouldn't like it. He'd throw me out.

Sandra Well, I'm going to be like them.

Vera (*as if to say "Come off it"*) Oh, Sandra!

Sandra Tim's taking me away.

Vera (*her drink completed*) Taking you away?

Pause

Sandra (*quietly*) Don't you know why we wanted to see me Mum and Dad on their own? (*Pause*) Aunty Vee—I'm pregnant.

Vera's glass stops just before her mouth. She is stunned

I'm going to have a baby!

Vera's unsipped port is dropped. She does not know which to worry about more, Sandra or the spilt drink

Vera Oh God! Oh Christ, I shouldn't say "God" at Christmas. Oh God—I shouldn't say "Christ". Oh Jesus—oh frig it! (*She bends down and hurriedly tries to clear up the mess*)

Sandra helps her

(*In a whisper*) An' does y' Mum know?

Sandra Not yet. Tim's going to tell her.

Vera (*alarmed*) When? Tonight?

Sandra It's all right, Aunty Vee. Tim knows how to deal with situations.

Betty enters the kitchen

Betty What's goin' on?

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