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PACK OF LIES

A Play

by Hugh Whitemore

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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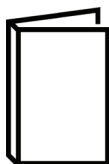
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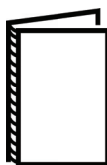


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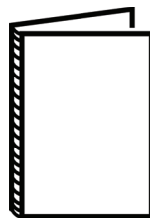
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PACK OF LIES

First presented by Michael Redington in association with Bernard Sandler and Eddie Kulukundis at the Theatre Royal, Brighton, on 11th October, 1983, and subsequently at the Lyric Theatre, London, on 26th October, 1983, with the following cast:

BOB JACKSON

Michael Williams

BARBARA JACKSON

Judi Dench

JULIE JACKSON

Eva Griffith

HELEN KROGER

Barbara Leigh-Hunt

PETER KROGER

Larry Hoodekoff

STEWART

Richard Vernon

THELMA

Elizabeth Bell

SALLY

Penny Ryder

Directed by Clifford Williams

Designed by Ralph Koltai

CHARACTERS

BOB

BARBARA

JULIE

HELEN

PETER

STEWART

THELMA

SALLY

The play takes place in a suburb of London during the autumn and winter of 1960–61

The main events of the story are true.

FOREWORD

In 1961 Helen and Peter Kroger were found guilty of spying for the Russians and were sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment. In 1969 they were exchanged for a Briton jailed in Moscow, and flew off to Poland amidst a great hullabaloo in the press.

Shortly after the Krogers' release, Gay Search, a young journalist, was having dinner with Cedric Messina, who was then producing BBC's *Play of the Month* series. Conversation touched on the Krogers, and Miss Search said, "I know them. In fact, they were our neighbours." She then told Messina the full story of her involvement with the Krogers and how her family had played a key part in their capture. Messina was amazed and excited by the story. The following day he telephoned me to say that he believed he had unearthed a good subject for a television play. Miss Search and I met, discussed the project with Messina, and I was subsequently commissioned to write a play, which was entitled *Act of Betrayal*. It was transmitted in January 1971 and was well received by both the press and the public.

Long after the play's production, the subject and its implications stayed in my mind. The television script had adhered very closely to known facts and, as is always the case with documentary drama, the scope for imaginative development of characters and situations was limited. In addition to the themes of loyalty and deception, I became increasingly preoccupied with the role of the ordinary citizen in our society. Is it ever possible for the average, relatively powerless, man or woman to make anything more than a token stand against officialdom? Is it not potentially risky to allow the state (albeit for well-argued reasons) greater moral licence than the individual? Or is it, perhaps, naive to expect more than an approximate degree of truthfulness from governments and their spokesmen?

With these thoughts in mind, I decided to rework the basic story of *Act of Betrayal* in a longer, less restricted, more fictionalised form. *Pack of Lies* is the result.

Before starting work on the play, I wrote to the man who was in charge of MI5's day-by-day handling of the case (the character called Stewart is not, I hasten to add, a portrait of this man, but an entirely fictional creation). In my letter, I made it clear that all I wanted was an informal conversation and that I was not hoping for any startling or indiscreet disclosures. The gentleman replied most courteously, but regretted that he was unable to meet me. He said that his "former masters" had imposed "a total embargo on interviews of any sort". Although I detected traces of ironic humour in the tone of his letter, I couldn't help asking myself a few more questions: Who are these "former masters"? Who gave them their authority? How can we, the general public, be sure that they are acting wisely? And if not, how can we control them?

Gay Search and her father helped me most generously in the writing of this play; my thanks to them, and to Clifford Williams, Sarah Moorehead and Michael Redington, who, in addition to his many managerial duties, thought of the excellent title. My thanks also to Arthur Cantor.

Hugh Whitmore

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For Judy

ACT I

BOB *enters and addresses the audience. He is in his forties. He wears a grey suit.*

BOB I was out in the garden when I heard the doorbell. It was a Saturday afternoon. I was just pottering about, sweeping up leaves and so on. Barbara and Julie had gone shopping. When I opened the front door I found a man and a woman smiling at me. They were holding a Bible and some religious pamphlets. "We've come to bring you the key to great happiness," the man said. "Thanks very much," I said, "but I'm happy enough as it is" – and shut the door quickly before they had a chance to say another word. They walked away slowly, still smiling – I could see them through the window. I suppose they were used to having doors slammed in their faces. Later, when I was back in the garden, I thought to myself, "Well, it's true – I am happy – it's true." And for a moment I stood there, grinning from ear to ear, just because I felt happy for no particular reason. (*He grins.*) It was marvellous.

BARBARA *enters the kitchen.*

The lights come up. Day.

A small semi-detached house near London, typical of the thousands of suburban homes that were built between the wars. Right is the sitting room: tiled fireplace, net curtains at the bay window, chintz-covered chairs and sofa, small tables, a sideboard, a radiogram, framed paintings of flowers on the walls. Left is the kitchen, with a back door leading to the garden. Upstage is the entrance hall and front door, which has a stained-glass

panel. A telephone stands on a table beside the stairs leading to the unseen bedrooms.

BOB goes to the kitchen where his wife, **BARBARA**, is preparing breakfast. He sits at the table, picks up the newspaper, and pours himself some tea.

BARBARA What's Julie doing?

BOB I don't know. Getting dressed.

BARBARA It's almost eight o'clock.

BOB Yes, I told her.

BARBARA (*calling*) Julie! (*to BOB*) I do wish we didn't have this awful rush every morning.

BOB It doesn't matter, I'll give her a lift.

BARBARA Why can't we have breakfast like civilised human beings for a change?

BOB Well, never mind.

BARBARA (*irritated*) Never mind...!

JULIE enters – a teenager wearing school uniform.

JULIE Sorry.

BARBARA About time.

JULIE Sorry.

BARBARA Every morning it's the same – why do you do it?
Rush, rush, rush.

JULIE I didn't hear the alarm.

BARBARA That's because you went to bed so late.

JULIE It wasn't that late.

BOB When I was your age I was in bed by half-past nine and no arguing.

JULIE That's just silly.

BOB No, it's not, you need your rest.

JULIE What's the point of going to bed if I can't sleep?

BARBARA If you went to bed earlier you'd go to sleep earlier.

JULIE No, I wouldn't.

BOB You might.

JULIE No, I wouldn't. I don't feel sleepy at night – only in the mornings.

BARBARA Oh, Julie.

JULIE It's not my fault—

BOB No, nothing ever is.

JULIE —it's biological.

BOB What is?

BARBARA Shall I make toast?

BOB What's biological?

JULIE Feeling tired. Has the postman been?

BARBARA Julie...

JULIE What?

BARBARA Do you want some toast?

JULIE No, thanks.

BARBARA You must have something before you go to school.

JULIE I'll have an apple.

BARBARA That's not enough.

BOB What's biological about feeling tired?

JULIE It all depends when you reach your peak. You're either a day person or a night person. (*biting into an apple*) You're day people and I'm not.

BOB Trust you to be different.

JULIE It's true. These apples aren't very nice.

BARBARA Have a glass of milk, then.

JULIE Isn't there anything else?

BOB Tea?

JULIE Not at breakfast time.

BOB What's wrong with tea?

JULIE Couldn't we have coffee or fruit juice or something?

BARBARA Fruit juice...?

JULIE People don't have tea with breakfast anymore. It's so old-fashioned—

BOB What are you talking about?

JULIE —and boring.

BOB What is?

BARBARA Have some cornflakes. You like cornflakes.

The front doorbell rings.

JULIE I'll go.

JULIE goes to the front door.

BOB What on earth is she talking about?

BARBARA Try and get her to eat something.

BOB She won't listen to me.

JULIE opens the front door.

HELEN and **PETER** enter; they are carrying a large object (in fact, an artist's easel) wrapped in a tablecloth. Helen is a tall, large-boned American in her forties; she invariably wears slacks and sweaters. **PETER**, her husband, is about fifty, also an American; he too prefers casual clothes.

HELEN Hi, sweetheart.

JULIE Hello, Auntie Helen – Uncle Peter.

BOB (*to BARBARA*) God, it's Helen, that's all we need.

BARBARA Ssshhh.

HELEN (*to PETER*) Don't push, for Chrissake!

PETER Sorry.

JULIE *is staring at the tablecloth-shrouded object.*

JULIE What's that?

HELEN Surprise, surprise! (*to PETER*) Back off! You're pushing it right into my goddam ribs.

PETER Sorry, honey.

HELEN (*to JULIE*) My husband is physically maladjusted, do you know that?

PETER (*grinning*) Maladjusted...?

HELEN I don't mean maladjusted. Will you open the door please, sweetheart? He malfunctions. What do you call it? No co-ordination—

BOB *pushes back his chair and stands up.*

BOB What's going on out there?

HELEN Tell him to lift something – he goes right ahead and pushes it.

PETER That's not true.

HELEN Mind that table – Jesus! (*entering the sitting room*) Over there – put it over there. Hi, Bob, where is she?

BOB She's in the kitchen getting the breakfast.

HELEN Barbara, where are you? Barbara!

BARBARA *enters from the kitchen.*

BARBARA I'm here.

With a flourish, HELEN gestures towards the easel and sings "HAPPY BIRTHDAY". BARBARA stares in amazement. PETER smiles.

PETER We couldn't find any paper big enough – hence the tablecloth.

JULIE and BOB are giggling.

HELEN Go on – open it up.

BARBARA *(trying not to laugh)* Oh, Helen...

HELEN What's the matter?

BARBARA It's not my birthday.

HELEN Whaat?!

PETER shouts with laughter.

BARBARA It's next week. The twenty-ninth.

PETER What did I say? What did I tell you?

HELEN Don't give me that, you said no such thing.

PETER "When's Barbara's birthday?" you said, and I said the twenty-ninth.

HELEN You didn't.

PETER I did.

HELEN You didn't.

PETER I did.

HELEN *(turning to BARBARA)* The twenty-ninth...?

BARBARA That's right.

HELEN *(to PETER)* You said the nineteenth.

PETER I didn't.

HELEN You did.

PETER I swear to you. I did not.

HELEN What are you trying to do to me? Jesus! It's like that goddam film – what's it called? – you know – Ingrid Bergman thinks she's going crazy, but it's her husband all the time – it's Cary Grant or James Mason or someone—

PETER Charles Boyer.

HELEN He keeps telling her the wrong things so she thinks she's going crazy – is that what you're trying to do? (*to BOB*) He said the nineteenth. I know he said the nineteenth.

PETER If I did, I'm sorry – my mistake, okay? (*to BARBARA*) Come on, you'd better open it up.

BARBARA Shall I?

HELEN I'm sure as hell not taking it back home again.

JULIE Yes, go on.

BARBARA What is this, some terrible joke?

PETER Let me give you a hand, it's a bit tricky. (*He unwraps the easel.*)

JULIE Wow!

HELEN Well – do you like it?

BARBARA *stands speechless for a moment, unable to find the words to express her delight.*

PETER It's an easel. For your paintings.

HELEN She knows it's an easel, you dum dum. (*to BARBARA*) Come on – don't keep us in suspense – do you like it or don't you?

BARBARA I love it. It's wonderful. I don't know what to say.

PETER Now that you're going to these art classes, we thought you ought to have all the regular... (*He completes the sentence with a gesture towards the easel.*)

BARBARA You shouldn't have done this, it's much too extravagant.

HELEN (*overlapping*) Now, don't give me any of that English phoney-baloney about "Oh, you shouldn't have", and all that horseshit. You're my very good and dear friend, Barbara, and if I want to buy you a fancy birthday present, no one's going to stop me, okay? Okay?

BARBARA (*smiling*) Okay.

HELEN And if it ain't your birthday, who cares – what the hell – we'll call it a thanksgiving present.

JULIE Thanksgiving for what?

HELEN Thanksgiving for what...? (*improvising rapidly*) Okay, I'll tell you what. How many people are there living in London? Six million? Eight? Let's say six, okay? So that means it was something like three-million-to-one that we'd find ourselves living across the street from wonderful folk like you – and if that ain't the cause for some kind of thanksgiving, I don't know what is!

BARBARA *laughs and embraces HELEN.*

BARBARA Oh, Helen, dear Helen – you're priceless!

The lights fade.

BARBARA, HELEN, BOB, JULIE and PETER *exit.*

STEWART *enters and addresses the audience. He is in his forties, wearing a raincoat and a dark-blue suit. He might be mistaken for an averagely successful provincial solicitor.*

STEWART Eventually our investigations led us to a street in Ruislip. It was autumn, nineteen-sixty. Ruislip, I should explain, is a suburb of London. It lies to the northwest of the metropolis and is one of the places one drives through on the way to Oxford. That is how I remember it, at any rate: as somewhere glimpsed briefly through car windows, generally at dusk, generally in the rain – neat rows of semi-detached houses; small front gardens, each with its square of

lawn and herbaceous border; bay windows; clipped hedges; and every so often, where the downstairs curtains have yet to be drawn, the blueish flickering light of a television set. And that, since all stories have to begin somewhere, is where this particular story began for me – or rather this particular chapter of this particular story, for the case as a whole had been occupying my attention for several months. It is, by the way, by and large – true.

The lights fade.

STEWART *exits.*

The lights come up. Dusk.

BARBARA and **HELEN** are coming downstairs. **BARBARA** is carrying a dress; **HELEN** is wearing an almost-completed dress (some of it is still only pinned together), and carrying the dress she arrived in.

HELEN Where do you want me to go?

BARBARA In the sitting room.

HELEN (*going into the sitting room*) Jesus, it's cold in here. You ought to get central heating.

BARBARA (*switching on the electric fire*) Well, one day.

HELEN *drapes her own dress over a chair and positions herself in the centre of the room.*

HELEN Okay, what do you want me to do?

BARBARA Just stand still. I want to make sure that it fits all right.

HELEN God, you're a fast worker.

BARBARA I've got to get a move on if it's going to be ready for Christmas. Hold your arm up. Let me look at the sleeve.

HELEN Like this? (*She extends her arm.*)

BARBARA Yes, that's fine.

Thus for a moment, BARBARA and HELEN stand face-to-face, with their arms extended, almost like ballroom dancers. HELEN, realising this similarity, suddenly grabs BARBARA by the waist and whirls her across the room.

HELEN Hey, come on – let's dance!

BARBARA (*protesting but laughing*) Stop it, Helen, stop it.

HELEN (*singing*) "Shall we dance, pom pom pom pom – Shall we dance deedle-ee-dle" – come on.

BARBARA (*laughing*) Oh, Helen, you are a fool.

HELEN Do you ever go dancing? I never go dancing. I used to love dancing when I was a girl.

BARBARA Where could you dance round here?

HELEN We could organise something. Why not? We could have dances in the afternoon. What are they called? Tea dances. We could have tea dances in Cranley Drive.

BARBARA Who'd come?

HELEN Lots of people, I bet.

BARBARA All the men are at work.

HELEN Okay, so we could ask some of the boys from school.

BARBARA They're a bit young.

HELEN Who cares? They're a good-looking bunch.

BARBARA Some of them.

HELEN That guy Julie likes – he's really good-looking.

BARBARA You mean Malcolm Granger?

HELEN Don't you think he's good-looking?

BARBARA He's completely irresponsible. Have you seen the way he races around on that motorbike of his? He'll get himself killed one of these days.

HELEN If you're worried, tell her.

BARBARA I can't.

HELEN Why not?

BARBARA She thinks I worry about everything.

HELEN She's right, you do.

BARBARA I try not to.

HELEN It's your nature, you can't help it – she knows that, I know that, we all know that. (*She squeezes BARBARA's hand comfortingly.*) Now, listen, here's what to do if you're worried: you tell her she's too young to go riding about on motorcycles.

BARBARA I've told her that already.

HELEN Then she won't. She's a good girl. She'll do what you say.

BARBARA, *unconvinced, says nothing.* HELEN *grins.*

You know something? Malcolm Granger has a beautiful body. I saw him at the pool last summer. Beautiful! Maybe I should lure him round to the house when Peter goes to one of his antiquarian book sales. What do you think? Shall I introduce him to the more sophisticated charms of an older woman?

BARBARA *does not respond; she is preoccupied with her anxieties about JULIE.*

BARBARA I wish you'd say something to her.

HELEN Say what?

BARBARA About going on the motorbike.

HELEN *looks at BARBARA.*

HELEN You really are worried.

BARBARA Yes, I am.

HELEN What can I say?

BARBARA She'd listen to you.

HELEN What about Bob? Why doesn't he talk to her?

BARBARA You know what Bob's like. She can't do a thing wrong as far as he's concerned. (*brief pause*) Please. There's no one else I can ask... Please.

HELEN *hesitates.*

HELEN Okay.

BARBARA (*relieved*) Would you?

HELEN Okay, if it'll make you any happier.

BARBARA Well, it would.

HELEN Okay.

BARBARA Thanks. I hate asking.

HELEN Don't be silly. (*deliberately changing the mood*) It's beautiful, this dress – really beautiful. You're such a clever girl, Barbara. You do so many things real good. You've got golden hands.

BARBARA What a funny thing to say.

HELEN Well, it's true.

JULIE *opens the front door; she's wearing a raincoat, scarf, and gloves over her school uniform; she carries a satchel.*

JULIE (*calling*) Mum!

BARBARA (*calling*) In here, Julie. (*whispering to HELEN*) Don't tell her I asked you to say anything.

HELEN Of course I won't. Don't worry.

JULIE *enters the sitting room and kisses BARBARA.*

JULIE Hello, Mum. Hello, Auntie Helen.

HELEN Hi, Julie, sweetheart.

BARBARA How was choir practice?

JULIE Boring. Every year it's *The Messiah*. If only we could do something different. It's so boring doing the same old thing year after year.

BARBARA Everything's boring as far as you're concerned.

JULIE The dress looks smashing.

HELEN Doesn't it? (*She starts to change dresses.*)

BARBARA It's quite an easy pattern.

HELEN Don't be so modest. Be proud. If I could make a dress like this, I'd be really proud of myself.

BARBARA You could if you tried.

HELEN Honey, I couldn't and you know it. I've got five thumbs and no finesse.

BARBARA (*smiling*) Oh, Helen.

HELEN It's true. I remember, when I was a kid, one of the farm hands saying to me – I'd just done something stupid or clumsy or both – and he said, "God help the man you marry, Miss Helen, you may be okay with cattle, but you'll be a disaster in the home."

BARBARA Oh, what nonsense.

HELEN He was right.

BARBARA (*to JULIE*) Don't start making yourself comfortable, Julie. Remember: homework first.

JULIE Can't I even have a cup of tea?

BARBARA Do you know what the time is? Your father will be home in a minute.

HELEN Come on, Barbara, give the poor girl a cup of tea.

BARBARA You spoil her. (*She gets up and goes to the kitchen.*)

HELEN Well, why not? (*to JULIE*) Hey – I see the folk down the street are having a bonfire party tomorrow. Are you going?

JULIE (*dismissively*) Oh no.

She gets up, picks up her satchel, coat, scarf and gloves, crosses into the hall and into the kitchen, putting her things down on the chair at the table. HELEN follows and sits at the table.

HELEN Too old for fireworks, huh?

JULIE I've got better things to do.

BARBARA Yes, she's got better things to do – like homework.
(to JULIE) Cake or biscuits?

JULIE (*irritated*) Oh, Mum...! Neither, I *told* you.

BARBARA (to HELEN) Have you heard about this stupid diet?

JULIE It's not stupid. Look at Sue Galleyford.

BARBARA She's always been a big girl.

JULIE Only because she eats so much.

BARBARA Well, I think it's ridiculous – someone of your age...

The telephone rings.

JULIE I'll go – it's probably Maureen.

BARBARA Hang your coat up! How many more times?

JULIE Sorry, sorry.

She picks up her raincoat and goes towards the hall.

BARBARA If it's that insurance man, tell him to ring back later.

JULIE Okay.

She closes the kitchen door. She hangs her raincoat on a peg and then answers the telephone.

BARBARA Would you like a cup of tea?

HELEN No thanks, I'd better not.

BARBARA *makes tea for JULIE.*

Say, whatever happened to the Pearsons?

BARBARA The Pearsons...?

HELEN Brian and Betty, down at number twenty-three.

BARBARA They're all right, as far as I know.

HELEN I've been round there half a dozen times and there's never anyone at home. I just wondered if they're okay.

***JULIE** returns.*

JULIE Who's that?

HELEN The Pearsons.

JULIE They've gone on holiday. (*to BARBARA*) It's for you, Mum.

HELEN (*to JULIE*) At this time of the year?

JULIE Only for a week. They're back tomorrow.

***BARBARA** goes to the door.*

BARBARA (*to JULIE*) Who is it?

JULIE A man.

BARBARA What man?

JULIE He didn't say.

BARBARA Oh, Julie...

She goes into the hall, closing the door. She goes to the telephone.

***JULIE** pours tea for herself.*

JULIE Do you want some?

HELEN No, thanks.

***JULIE** sips her tea; **HELEN** watches her.*

Well, now, young lady, and how are you today?

JULIE Fine.

HELEN Good.

JULIE (*mock American accent*) Fine and dandy.

HELEN Let's hope it stays that way.

JULIE (*glancing at HELEN*) Why shouldn't it?

HELEN You tell me.

JULIE *turns, frowning, to face HELEN.*

JULIE What's the matter, Auntie Helen?

HELEN I thought you weren't supposed to go riding about on motorcycles.

JULIE Oh.

HELEN Yes – oh.

JULIE When did you see me?

HELEN The other afternoon, with young Mr you-know-who.

JULIE Malcolm.

HELEN Yes, Malcolm. I thought all that was strictly *verboten*.

JULIE He was only bringing me home from school – and he's very careful.

HELEN Your momma doesn't think so.

JULIE You know what she's like: she worries about everything.

HELEN Only because she loves you.

JULIE She keeps treating me like a little girl. She doesn't realise that I'm grown up.

HELEN *looks at JULIE; she smiles affectionately.*

HELEN No. No, and I don't suppose she ever will. (*She goes to JULIE and kisses her.*) Okay, I won't say a word. It'll be our secret. Don't do anything silly, do you hear me?

JULIE (*smiling*) I won't. Thanks.

BARBARA *returns.*

BARBARA Come on, Julie, what about that homework?

JULIE (*to HELEN, smiling*) See what I mean?

BARBARA See what?

JULIE Nothing. (*She picks up her cup of tea and goes to the door.*) Who was that on the phone?

BARBARA Someone for your father.

JULIE *slings her satchel over her shoulder.*

JULIE Bye, Auntie Helen.

HELEN Bye, sweetheart – work hard.

JULIE I will.

JULIE *exits and goes upstairs.*

HELEN She's a good girl.

BARBARA *finds JULIE's gloves on a chair.*

BARBARA If only she wasn't so untidy.

HELEN *has now changed back into her clothes.*

HELEN There are worse things in life than being untidy.

BARBARA You ought to try living with her. It takes at least half an hour to clear up the mess after she's gone to school: books and clothes all over the place – not to mention all the washing and ironing and mending. She doesn't do a thing for herself, it's disgraceful, really.

HELEN Say what you like – she's a good girl and I'm very fond of her.

BARBARA *glances at HELEN, mildly surprised by her uncharacteristically serious tone of voice.*

BARBARA Yes – well, she's very fond of you.

HELEN I hope so.

BARBARA You know she is.

HELEN I guess I do. (*She sighs.*) I'd give a lot to have a daughter like Julie. You don't know how lucky you are.

BOB *opens the front door. He is wearing a raincoat and a dark-grey suit.*

BOB (*calling*) Hello.

HELEN Hey, there's your old man. I must go.

JULIE (*offstage*) Hello, Daddy!

HELEN The dress is truly beautiful.

BARBARA (*with a smile*) Thank you.

HELEN *goes to the hall. BOB is taking off his raincoat, which he hangs on a peg by the front door.*

BOB Ah – Helen.

HELEN Don't look so worried, I'm just going. Is it still raining?

BOB It's raining, it's cold, and it's windy.

HELEN Only one place to be on a night like tonight. Bed. Tucked up in bed, all cosy and warm, with the wind whistling outside. A little nooky, maybe. Poifeck, as my old Aunt Sophie used to say. (*grinning at BARBARA*) Hey. Maybe I'll call Malcolm Granger and see if he wants a few mind-broadening experiences. (*calling upstairs*) Bye, honey. Bye, Bob. (*blowing a kiss to BARBARA*) Bye, sweetheart.

JULIE (*offstage*) Bye.

HELEN *exits, closing the front door as she goes.*

BOB *turns, smiling, to BARBARA, who is standing by the kitchen door.*

BOB What's all that about Malcolm Granger?

BARBARA Just a silly joke.

BARBARA *closes the kitchen door; she turns to face BOB; she is clearly anxious about something.*

BOB You all right?

BARBARA Bob, listen – somebody's been ringing up for you – I think it's urgent.

BOB What is? Who?

BARBARA His name's Stewart.

BOB Stewart what?

BARBARA That's his surname – Mr Stewart.

BOB Who is he?

BARBARA I don't know.

BOB What does he want?

BARBARA I don't know.

BOB Didn't you ask him?

BARBARA Of course I asked him! He said he wanted to talk to you. I told him you weren't here and could he ring back later, and he said no, he'd like to come and see us.

BOB What about?

BARBARA I don't know – he got all cagey and said he couldn't explain on the phone.

BOB He's probably just a salesman.

BARBARA No, he's something to do with the police.

BOB The police...?

BARBARA He said if we were worried about him coming round here, we could ring Scotland Yard and speak to a Superintendent Smith.

BOB *stares at her, but says nothing.*

And he said it's confidential; we mustn't tell anyone.

Momentarily at a loss for words, BOB walks aimlessly across the room.

BOB When did he ring?

BARBARA About five or ten minutes ago.

BOB Right... *(He goes to the door.)* ...Right, I'll talk to this man Smith. Where's his number?

BARBARA It's on the pad.

BOB Right. *(He goes to the telephone and dials the number.)*

BARBARA *remains by the kitchen door, observing.*

BARBARA Ask him what it's all about.

BOB Yes, right. *(on the telephone)* Hello? ...Hello, yes – could I speak to Superintendent Smith, please? My name's Jackson. *(pause)* Hello? Is that Superintendent Smith? ...Yes, good-evening – um – I understand a man called Stewart rang my wife just now and, um... Oh, did he? ...Yes... Yes... Well, yes, of course, if it's important... Yes... Yes – um – can you tell me what it's all about? ...Oh, I see... Right... Yes, I will... Thank you, Superintendent. Goodbye.

BARBARA Well?

BOB *replaces the receiver. He turns to face BARBARA.*

BOB Well, it's obviously pretty important.

BARBARA What did he say?

BOB That's what he said. He said it's pretty important, and he'd be grateful if we could spare him the time to talk to this Mr Stewart.

A moment of silence. BARBARA looks at BOB as if she had expected him to make more of a stand.

He was very polite...very – you know, friendly and pleasant.

No response from BARBARA.

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