Ten Times Table

A Play

Alan Ayckbourn

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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Ten Times Table

First presented by Michael Codron at the Globe Theatre, London, on the 5th April 1978, with the following cast of characters:

Ray	Paul Eddington
Donald	Benjamin Whitrow
Helen	Julia McKenzie
Sophie	Stephanie Fayerman
Eric	John Salthouse
Audrey	Matyelok Gibbs
Lawrence	Tenniel Evans
Tim	Christopher Godwin
Philippa	Diane Bull
Max Kirkov	Rob Stuart

The action takes place in the Swan Hotel Ballroom

Act I	Scene 1	At the meeting held on Wednesday 3rd November
	Scene 2	At the meeting held on Friday 17th December
	Scene 3	At the meeting held on Thursday 19th May
Act II	Scene 1	At the Emergency meeting held on Sunday 5th June
	Scene 2	On Festival Day Saturday 11th June

Time—the present

ACT I

SCENE 1

A committee room. In fact, the ballroom of the Swan Hotel. At one end a stage where the band, when the room is in use, presumably play. One or two "glitter" music stands. A mini—or possibly an upright piano. To one side, crash doors to the street. To the other, the main entrance from the hotel. The room is in bad repair. Dirty drapes. Dirty dim chandeliers. In the centre of the room, isolated, the committee table with ten chairs round it, one at each end, and a small separate table to one side

At the start it is very gloomy indeed with only the emergency lights on. In the semi-darkness, Ray, an enthusiastic man in his forties, enters. He carries a briefcase and a half finished pint of beer

Ray (*to someone off behind him*) Right, thank you. (*He turns*) Hoy! Hoy—I say. There's no light in here. Could we have some lights on in here, please? Lights. Yes, lights . . . (*There is a clicking of switches*) No . . . No . . . No . . .

The Lights go on

That's it.

The Lights go off

No. The last one you did. No. The one before that.

The Lights go on

That's it. Thank you. Fine. (*He approaches the committee table, selects the end chair and stands emptying his briefcase*)

After a moment Donald, a grey man in his fifties, appears in the doorway

Donald Ah. Good evening, Mr Dixon. Is this where we're met?
Ray Yes. Yes. Come on, Councillor Evans, come in.
Donald Just one moment. I'll just fetch Mother. (*He starts to go*)
Ray Right. Do you need any . . . ?
Donald No, no, no. I left her in the foyer while I found out where we were. Save her a few steps. I thought we'd be in here. We usually are. We meet in here with the Civic Society, you know.
Ray Yes, well it's a bit of a barn, I'm afraid. But it's cheap. They don't have so many dances these days.
Donald No, that's true enough. Won't be a minute. (*He starts to go*)

Helen enters, passing Donald

Oh, good evening, Mrs Dixon.

Helen Hallo there. Lovely to see you.

They shake hands

Donald I'm just fetching Mother.

Helen Yes, I've been talking to her in the lobby. Doesn't she look fit?

Donald Yes, yes. Excuse me . . .

Donald goes out

Helen approaches the table

Helen He's left that poor old lady sitting slap in front of the Gents. She keeps getting knocked sideways in the rush. Do you think she's going to be up to this?

Ray How do you mean?

Helen Well, she looks a bit feeble. She didn't seem to understand a word I was saying.

Ray Oh, it won't be very strenuous. Just a matter of taking a few Minutes. A little bit of typing now and again.

Helen She looks past it to me.

Ray Well, with her being retired, I thought she might be glad of a few bob. I'll see her all right. She sounded very willing in her letter.

Helen God, it's freezing in here. I'm going to get my coat.

Ray Mind you, she must be over eighty now, I suppose.

Helen Well, we'll have to speak very slowly for her, won't we?

Sophie enters. She is in her early thirties, still fresh-faced from much open air. She carries two large shopping bags. She is followed immediately by Eric, bearded and suspicious

Sophie, hallo.

Sophie Hallo, Helen. Hallo, Ray.

Ray Hallo there.

Sophie (*indicating her bag*) Week-end shopping.

Helen I warn you, you're going to need a coat. It's freezing in here. Be warned . . . (*Seeing Eric*) Hallo. I don't think we've met, have we? Helen Dixon. How do you do.

Eric Hallo.

Eric and Helen shake hands

Sophie Eric—Collins.

Helen Have you come along with Sophie?

Sophie Oh no.

Ray Hang on, hang on. Don't start that, my love, he's a married man. Haven't you met Eric, Helen? Eric, this is my wife Helen. Eric Collins who's teaching up at the school. The Catherine Stoker comprehensive.

Helen Really? The Catherine Stoker. How are you managing in that building?

Eric Well, its . . .

Helen Isn't it awful? Ghastly. Typical socialist monstrosity. Does your wife teach as well?
Eric Who? Oh yes . . .
Helen Isn't that extraordinary? You know, they always come in pairs. Don't you find that? Teachers. Like Noah's Ark.
Eric She's not my wife.
Helen I beg your pardon?
Eric She's not my wife.
Helen Oh I'm sorry, I thought . . .
Eric We just live together.
Helen Ah well. That's convenient anyway. Excuse me, I must get my coat before I freeze.
Sophie Yes, I think I will. It does seem rather . . .
Helen I said it was. Freezing. Absolutely freezing.

Helen and Sophie go out

Ray Come and sit down, Eric. Very glad you could make it. You know, it just occurred to me we should have asked your—er—your Philippa to come on the committee as well. Then you could both . . .
Eric (*sitting*) No, she's—very busy.
Ray Ah. Working?
Eric Babysitting. She loves babysitting. She's got a fixation about it.
Ray Oh, I see. Now then, who have we got to come? You, myself, Mrs Evans, Councillor Evans, Helen, Sophie, Lawrence and Charlotte Adamson—er—is that all? Yes.

Donald brings in Audrey, his mother, an old lady with an almost permanent smile

Donald This way, Mother.
Ray Here we are. Can you manage?
Audrey Lot of steps. Awful lot of steps.
Ray Yes, there are one or two.
Audrey I'm all right except for steps.
Ray (*moving to a chair*) Would she like to sit here?
Donald (*moving below the separate table*) No, I'll sit her up this end, Mr Dixon, I think. She's just a little bit hard of hearing and she'll be able to see most people from here. She's all right if she can see mouths.
Ray Ah, I see.
Donald (*sitting Audrey down*) There we are, Mother.
Audrey Found I was sitting by the Gents.
Ray (*laughing*) Oh dear, that won't do.
Audrey (*to Eric*) By the Gents.

Eric gives a wan smile

Ray (*beckoning*) Er—Councillor Evans—er—(*He is about to speak, then turns away from Audrey*)—er—I'm just wondering whether you think your mother's going to be up to this?
Donald (*also turned away*) Well, if you recall, Mr Dixon, when you first

approached me, I did I think warn you that—well, she's into her eighties, you know?

Ray Yes, quite.

Audrey ferrets in her bag

Donald I mean, she's still very active. She still gives the occasional piano lesson.

Ray Does she really?

Audrey (*to Eric*) Getting out my pencil.

Eric Ah.

Audrey Ready for action.

Donald Well you see her hands, although naturally they're not as supple as they were—they're still agile. I mean, she's given up the higher grades of course.

Ray Well, we'll see how she gets on, shall we?

Donald Fair enough. Fair enough.

Ray I can remember her doing the odd typing job for me very well indeed. But that was some time ago.

Donald Oh that was some time ago. She's not worked for ten years.

Ray As much as that?

Audrey Are we starting yet?

Ray Er—(*looking towards the door*)—we're just hanging on for the others, Mrs Evans.

Audrey Are we ready to start?

Ray (*turning to her with emphasized mouth movements*) No, we're just hanging on for the others.

Audrey We're hanging on for the others.

Ray That's it.

Audrey Good, good. Perhaps they're in the Gents.

Ray (*laughing*) Yes, that's right.

Audrey Everyone else seemed to be.

Ray (*laughing*) Yes. Now, who are we missing? Has anyone seen Mr and Mrs Adamson?

Donald No, not this evening, Mr Dixon.

Ray I hope they haven't forgotten. Haven't seen them for a few days. I meant to phone to remind them.

Donald I understood that Mr Lorne-Messiter would be attending this evening?

Ray (*placing circulars and other papers on the table*) Yes. He was unfortunately unable to come at the last minute. I have apologies from him. I'll be reading it out.

Eric Is this Bernard Lorne-Messiter?

Donald Yes, a very useful man to have on your side. Owns a lot of property round here.

Eric (*grimly*) Yes, I know he does.

Helen and Sophie enter

Donald slides along to Eric and starts talking confidentially to him under their conversation

Helen I love them. Where did you get them?
Sophie Oh, they're very old.
Donald (*to Eric, under this and the ensuing dialogue*) He has been known to attend our Civic Society meetings in here, you know.
Eric Oh yes.
Donald We meet, I'd say on average, about a dozen times a year. We're mainly concerned with improving the life in the town—although we also keep a weather eye open for listed buildings and so on. And then once a year we generally have a function. That varies. We had a Whist Drive last year that was extremely successful. We raised over eighty pounds for the old folk, and this year, I understand, there is talk of a dance which we'll probably be holding here as well. I've been on the committee actually for twelve years.
Eric Ah-ha.
Donald And our present Chairman, Councillor Highsmith, he's served on it for fourteen years and two of our members, Mrs Whittaker and Mrs Paxton, they've been on it for twenty-four years since it was initially founded. So you can see there's quite a continuity there. My mother was actually Treasurer for over eighteen years until she unfortunately broke her hip and that I'm afraid forced her to give up.
Helen (*meanwhile*) I love them. I want them. Where did you get them?
Sophie Oh, I've forgotten now.
Helen Not round here, I can tell you that. How's Tim?
Sophie Pretty well.
Helen Still breeding furiously is he? (*To Eric, across Donald's conversation to him*) Sophie and her brother breed lovely huge dogs—what are they? Old English aren't they?
Sophie That's right.
Helen Glorious. Ray won't let us have one.
Ray What lies. You said they come off on the carpet.
Sophie They do a bit.

Donald fades away through lack of an audience

Helen Now where am I going to sit. I think I'll sit opposite Edward.
Eric Eric.

They all sit at the table, Ray at one end

Helen Eric. Sorry. You look like an Edward. Well, are we off?
Ray We're just waiting for Lawrence and Charlotte.
Helen Well, where are they?
Ray I don't know. They may have been delayed.
Audrey Could you ask them to speak down in this direction?
Donald We haven't started yet, Mother.
Helen It's all right, my love, we haven't started.
Audrey You haven't started?

Helen No, we'll let you know when we start. We won't leave you out, don't worry. (*To the others*) Isn't she sweet?
Ray We'll give them five minutes.
Helen It's very odd. Perhaps Lawrence has fallen over again.
Ray (*quietly*) Helen . . .
Helen Well, he could have done. He's continually falling over.
Ray Yes, all right, love.
Helen Well, he does hit the bottle. It's no secret.
Ray No, well, that'll do . . .
Helen (*sotto*) Like a fish . . .

Audrey starts struggling

Donald What is it, Mother?
Audrey Very hot. It's getting very hot.
Helen Hot?
Donald (*rising and helping her with her coat*) Just a minute, Mother, I'll . . .
Helen My God, the woman's an eskimo.
Donald Here we are. Now, Mother.
Audrey Thank you. Can't bear being too hot.
Helen It's about minus ten in here.
Sophie Will she be all right?
Donald Yes, Mother has exceptionally good circulation. I'll just hang this up. Would you like me to telephone the Adamsons while I'm out, Mr Dixon?
Ray Oh would you mind, Councillor, that's extremely kind . . .
Donald Not at all. We don't want to be sitting around much longer, do we? Have we the number?
Ray It'll be in the book, Councillor, under L. Adamson. Fourteen—is it? —Holly Drive.
Sophie Fourteen, I think . . .

Donald goes out

Audrey fumbles in her bag, brings out a bag of boiled sweets and eats one

Helen Look, would someone mind telling me why—(*with a glance at Audrey*)—why we've—can she hear me?
Ray Not if you keep your mouth this way.
Helen (*turning off*) Why we've got that awful little man in on this? He's most dreadfully boring.
Ray Well, he happens—(*he turns away*)—he happens to be on the Leisure and Amenities Committee and God knows what other committees and it's very possible he'll get us a grant.
Helen Well, as long as he's good for something.
Audrey (*proffering the bag*) Boiled sweet?
Sophie No, thank you.
Audrey (*to Eric*) How about you?
Eric Oh, ta. (*He takes one*)
Helen Oh look, she's got her sweets. Isn't that charming? (*To Audrey, loudly*) No, thank you. No, thank you. You keep them.

Ray waves, declining the offer

(*Aside*) She's not going to crunch all the way through the meeting, is she?

The lights go out

Sophie } Hey! { *Speaking*
Helen } { *together*

Ray Oy—oy—oy. Lights! Lights, please.

The lights go on

Thank you so much.

Helen What was that in aid of?

Audrey The lights went off.

Helen Yes, on again now.

Ray It's that waiter, I think. Italian or something. He's got a thing about the lights. He keeps switching them all off.

Sophie The Swan Hotel Economy Drive.

Ray Something like that.

Helen They're certainly economizing on their dry cleaning. Have you seen their curtains out there? Filthy. And as for the heating. We'll all be frozen to death soon. Except for Eskimo Nell over there.

Donald enters

Donald Mr Adamson's here. He's arrived. (*He sits*)

Ray Oh good.

Helen Hooray.

Lawrence, in his forties, enters briskly. A big man. Florid. Tight-lipped. Tense. He carries a large whisky

Lawrence Sorry, everyone, sorry.

Ray Come in, Lawrence.

Lawrence Sorry.

Ray Take a seat.

Lawrence (*sitting*) Sorry, Mr Chairman. Unfortunately I have to announce that my wife, Charlotte, won't be able to make the meeting this evening. She's regrettably—indisposed.

Ray Oh, we're sorry to hear that, Mr Adamson. Nothing serious I hope?

Lawrence No, no, nothing. Well—nothing too serious anyway.

Ray Right. Well. Good. All met. Well. Welcome everyone. Before we start, besides Mrs Adamson, I've had one apology for absence from Mr Lorne-Messiter who can't be with us. He has business in Sheffield.

Helen Shame.

Ray I did however receive this telegram from him. I'll read it to you. "Good luck to you and your endeavours. Look forward eagerly to your second meeting. Regards Bernard Lorne-Messiter."

Donald Very nice.

Lawrence Very nice indeed.

Ray I know we'll look forward to welcoming him in due course. This is by way of an exploratory meeting. You'll all have had my circular, I hope,

so you'll have a rough idea of what it's all about. There's some spare copies in the middle there if you wish to refresh your memories.

All except Lawrence and Eric take a copy. Sophie offers one to Audrey, who accepts smiling

Donald (*confidentially to Ray*) May I just—er . . .
Ray Yes. Certainly, Councillor.
Donald (*very quietly, to Ray*) It's just, that—er—to be strictly in order before we start the meeting—we ought to elect a Chairman . . .
Ray Ah. Yes, good point, Councillor. Councillor Evans has quite correctly just pointed out that before we start we ought—to be strictly in order—to appoint a Chairman.
Lawrence Hear! Hear!
Donald To be strictly in order.
Helen I thought you were Chairman.
Ray Ah, but I have to be elected.
Helen Well then, I elect you.
Donald He has to be proposed.
Helen Then I propose you.
Donald I second that.
Ray Right, well. Fine. If we're all agreed? All those in favour, then?
Helen (*to Audrey*) We're electing him as Chairman, my love.
Audrey Oh yes, I second that.
Ray All those in favour? Could we have a show of hands, please.

They are about to raise their hands when the Lights go out and a spot shines on the mirror ball, which revolves. There is a chorus of protest

Helen *El illuminatos, s'il vous plaît.*

The lights return to normal

Merci. Gracias so much
Ray (*going to the door and bellowing*) Would you kindly leave those light switches alone, please. There is a meeting in progress. Thank you. (*Returning*) Right. Sorry about that. Did we get a vote?
Helen Yes, you're elected.
Ray (*sitting*) Fine. Well. To proceed then . . .
Donald (*to Ray, very quietly*) Mr Chairman, I would just point out one minor discrepancy here. There is, in fact, a misspelling. (*Holding out a roneo'd sheet*) There should be a second L, you see.
Ray Ah yes. My secretary did do them in a bit of a hurry. Councillor Evans has pointed out an L missing from the word "dwelling"—one, two, three, four, five, six lines down. If you feel like altering that.
Helen Good heavens, so there is. Well done.
Donald (*to Ray, very quietly*) And—er—I think this was meant to be a full stop, not a comma.
Lawrence Oh my God . . .
Ray Yes. And there's a comma, one, two, three—several lines up from the bottom after the word "it" which should be of course a full stop.

Donald Er . . .

Ray (*swiftly*) So the next letter A, of course, will become a capital letter. Right now . . .

Helen God, it's freezing in here. Absolutely freezing.

Ray Now then. We're here to discuss the possibility of holding a First Pendon Folk Festival.

Helen I mean, it's an absolute disgrace. This is a three star hotel.

Ray Helen, please. Would you mind? Thank you. Now, it seemed to me when I first had the idea . . .

Helen (*mouthing under her breath*) Three star.

Ray It seemed an exciting one to me in a number of ways.

Donald Mr Chairman, I wonder if you could direct your remarks a little bit more towards Mother.

Ray I'm sorry, yes.

Donald It was just I noticed she was having slight difficulty . . .

Ray Yes, sorry. In a number of ways. First, it is something new. Something I think that, if we handle rightly, could catch the imagination of everyone within the town. Second—

Lawrence grunts in agreement

—by making it a Folk Festival, that is to say by concentrating upon our own past with its crafts, its history, its bygone customs, we will in a real way be helping Pendon to regain its identity—an identity which I think and I'm sure you'll agree, under the pressure of modern life, is fast disappearing.

Lawrence Hear! Hear!

Ray So the proposition is that we hold such a Festival next June. At that time of the year, obviously, we'd hope to attract a good number of visitors into the town for the occasion. Now, may I say immediately that since this is our first effort we shouldn't attempt to crawl before we can walk. Or rather *vice versa*. We start modestly. As indeed we shall probably have to, funds being limited. Although may I add that we already have made application to the Council for a small grant to help us . . .

Donald Mr Chairman, I do note that the application is on the agenda for the next meeting of the Leisure and Amenities Committee of which I am a member.

Ray Grand. So, as I was saying, we start modestly. But the question is how? And with what sort of thing?

Eric Well, I suggest that we . . .

Ray Sorry, Eric. Would you mind? Sorry. Just let me finish. Well, we have in Pendon in fact the ideal starting point.

Lawrence grunts in agreement

A piece of colourful history directly related to our own town that would indeed make an excellent basis for a modest pageant. I refer to an occurrence known by history apparently as the Massacre of the Pendon Twelve.

Lawrence Of the what?
Eric Never heard of it.
Donald No, I can't say I have.
Ray Well, it was a couple of hundred years ago. I came across it quite by accident myself.
Donald No, it's a new one on me. Mother might know.
Helen She was probably there.
Donald The Massacre of the Pendon Twelve, Mother. Have you heard of it?
Audrey The Pendon Twelve? Was it recent?
Donald No, no. Some time ago.
Audrey No. Before my time.
Ray No, anyway, I do happen to have located a brief description of these events which I came across in this book. I understand it's out of print now. It's called *Through Haunts of Coot and Hern*, by a bloke called E. Arnott Hutchings. I thought if I may, I'd read it to you. It's quite interesting. I've had a few copies made so you can take them away with you, if you like. Anyway, so . . . (*He opens the book*)
Helen I think Mrs Evans ought to have a copy to read, darling. She'll never be able to follow this.
Donald Yes, I think it would be better.

Ray passes a copy to Audrey

Ray Right then. There's a copy, Mrs Evans. A copy of what I'm reading.
Audrey Thank you. (*She starts to read*)
Ray Here we go then. (*Reading*) "The story of the Pendon Twelve is worth here, I feel, relating in some detail, if the reader will forgive me. Following the increasing tide of discontent amongst agricultural folk brought about by these new taxation laws, two local men, Jonathan Cockle and William Brunt began actively to ferment this feeling through a series of meetings when, according to one contemporary eye witness, Cockle 'spoke with much fire and feeling' whilst Brunt 'would further inflame the crowd with his fierce appearance and wild gestures.' This pair, from all reports, through chance and circumstance brought together must have presented an incongruous couple. Cockle is described as 'a thin man with choleric appearance—an almost womanly complexion, resembling more a cleric or a scholar than one used to earn his living from the land.' Brunt, on the other hand, is said to have stood 'head above all others, a veritable giant with wild beard and besides much hair about his person as was visible to the eye . . .' He—Brunt—'would often for wagers toss his fellows high in the air to the amusement and recreation of all.'"
Helen They sound the most unprepossessing people.
Lawrence Hear! Hear!
Ray Yes, Helen, let me . . .
Helen Uggh! Horrid.
Ray (*continuing to read*) "The authorities . . ."
Audrey (*finishing reading*) What an interesting story. Is it true?
Ray Yes, I haven't quite finished, Mrs Evans.

Audrey Haven't finished? Sorry.
Helen Does it go on much longer about these awful-looking men?
Eric I shouldn't imagine they had a great deal of option as to how they looked.
Helen Oh, come now.
Eric These were men, may I remind you, who spent their working lives sweating their guts out for a living.
Helen My dear boy, there are people around this table who, as you charmingly put it, sweat their guts out for a living. I do for one, but I don't go around covered in black hair throwing people in the air for fun.
Eric They were probably living at starvation level to start with.
Helen Oh, nonsense.
Eric What do you mean nonsense?
Helen Oh, don't be so dim. You heard what he said. They were farmers. Perfectly capable of growing food if they wanted to.
Ray Helen, would you mind . . . ?
Helen No, the trouble with them was they spent all their time making speeches. Getting drunk. Throwing people in the air. Serve them jolly well right.
Lawrence Hear! Hear!
Eric How the hell you can sit there . . . ?
Helen They're all the same. Since time immemorial. Spend their lives belly-aching and complaining. It's the same these days with those whatever-they're-called, those Trotskys.
Eric What do you know, sitting there in your bloody fur coat, you stupid bourgeois bitch . . .
Ray Now, now.
Helen How dare you use that sort of language to me.
Donald Mr Chairman, might I suggest . . .
Helen How dare you, you seedy little man. How dare you.
Eric (*rising violently*) Oh, damn it.
Sophie Where are you going?
Eric I'm sorry—I can't—her sort of person—I can't—gets right up my—I'm sorry. I'm going.
Ray (*rising*) Now, now, Eric. Come on, lad. Calm down. We're all getting heated. Calm down.
Lawrence Hear! Hear!
Donald Mr Chairman, might I suggest . . .
Helen I'm sorry. I am not prepared to sit here calmly and have that sort of language used to my face. I demand an apology.
Eric If you think I'm apologizing to you, mate . . .
Ray (*shouting*) Now sit down, both of you. This is not a political meeting. And I won't have any politics. (*Quieter*) Right, that's it. Now sit down.

Ray, Eric and Helen sit

Eric, I respect your views. I don't agree with them but I respect them. We must respect Helen hers. Beg to differ. And all that.
Audrey (*to Ray*) Boiled sweet?

Ray takes a sweet

Helen Well, I'll tell you one thing. We're never going to get anywhere if we've got Trotskys on the committee.
Eric I am not a Trotskyite. If you must know I'm a Marxist.
Sophie Oh golly.
Helen God, that's even worse isn't it? A Marxist. That's even worse. They're completely round the bend.
Ray (*roaring*) Helen, will you bloody shut up.
Helen Oh right, that's it. (*Rising*) Good night, everyone.
Ray Now what are you doing?
Helen I am now being sworn at by everyone. Good night.
Sophie Helen . . .
Helen Good night. (*As she goes*) It's freezing in here anyway. Not that the Russians would notice.

Helen goes

A silence. Eric boils. Ray sinks his head in his hands with a groan

Donald Mr Chairman . . .
Ray (*sharply*) What? (*Recovering*) Sorry, Councillor. Sorry, Donald, yes.
Donald I was merely going to observe that it's generally helpful, we have found in our experience of committees, if all remarks are addressed through the chair. It avoids these personal confrontations.
Ray Yes that's a very useful point that, Donald, thank you. Well, I'd better finish this, I suppose, if everyone . . .
Sophie Yes, go on, please.
Ray Well, there's more description of the men—I'll skip that and—er—anyway . . . (*reading*) "The activities of the pair"—that's Cockle and Brunt of course—did not pass unnoticed.

A young man enters, goes on to the stage, picks up the drum and takes it off

Indeed, the authorities were becoming disturbed by the popularity this cause espoused. On several occasions the militia had intervened in an attempt to break up their meetings but invariably they arrived too late. Yet as the movement gathered momentum so Cockle and Brunt grew bolder. Thus it was that in June of that year, a meeting was arranged in Pendon itself intended as the climax of the campaign. On the day, the protesters had chosen for their meeting the old Market Place at the lower end of the town"—That of course is the square just outside here—"As was the custom, Cockle spoke for upwards of an hour until a sufficient crowd had gathered, whereupon he beseeched them to pledge support for his cause. From the other end of the High Street the militia, until then well concealed, finally showed themselves. A company of foot soldiers, muskets primed and ready, advanced in formation towards the crowd. At the head—(*He rises*)—their commander—none other than the Earl of Dorset himself, mounted and with sword in hand. At the sight of such a show of force, the crowd swiftly dispersed and fled till the square was empty save for twelve men—among them Cockle and Brunt. This Twelve

now armed themselves with rudimentary weapons and stood ready to resist. Three times the Earl called upon them to surrender and three times the men refused . . ." That's very good that bit. You can see that working very well in terms of a pageant. "At length, the Earl without further ado, commanded his soldiers to fire. Many fell mortally wounded including Cockle himself. Brunt, though himself injured, charged forward before the soldiers could reload and together with several of his fellows set upon the militia with fists and cudgels until, exhausted, they were overcome by sheer numbers. Some weeks later, Brunt with seven others stood trial and were executed. The bodies of the twelve were buried outside the prison in unmarked graves. It was natural that, in time, they should come to be remembered simply as the Pendon Twelve." (*He sits*)

Sophie Hey, that's terribly sad.

Lawrence Hear! Hear!

Eric Terrible.

Donald May I ask, Mr Chairman, before we go any further whether we intend forming ourselves into a Trust?

Ray Yes, I have made enquiries about that. It is in hand. Well, that's it. That's the basis. I think we should have the makings of something quite spectacular with that. You could imagine the crowd in the Market Place with these two fellows and then the militia charging down the High Street . . .

Eric I hope we intend this as a tribute to these men? That we're going to take it seriously enough, that's all.

Ray Oh yes. I mean, we wouldn't—yes.

Eric I mean, they were real people, after all. I mean, it's all very well a lot of middle-class businessmen and their wives dressing up for fun and prancing about the streets.

Ray No, no, Eric. No. No. Not at all. I mean. Point taken.

Donald It is to be hoped, Mr Chairman, that we will get the full support of the ordinary working people as well.

Ray Essential, yes.

Eric Well, let's just get the facts right, that's all.

Lawrence (*clearing his throat for a momentous announcement*) Mr Chairman.

Ray Lawrence.

Lawrence Might be a good idea to get someone on further research, mightn't it? I mean, it's got to be accurate. There's no point otherwise, it seems to me. (*He tails away, clearing his throat and muttering*)

Ray Yes, well, perhaps we ought to appoint someone to be in charge of that. Any offers?

Sophie What about Mrs Evans?

Ray (*dubiously*) Well, I don't know if . . .

Donald I think that might be a very good idea, Mr Chairman. She is an avid reader and may well disinter one or two useful details which could be of use.

Ray All right then. Splendid. Would you like to take care of that, Mrs Evans?

Audrey Yes?
Ray We were wondering if you would care to do some additional research?
Audrey Additional research? Yes, I'm going to. Very odd.
Ray Well, thank you. That's it then. Meeting closed. (*Rising*) Who's for a drink?
Donald Might I suggest, Mr Chairman, that we arrange our next meeting date now. Some of us may have . . .
Ray Yes, we can do that by all means. Let's see. Everybody got his diary? About a fortnight shall we say? How about the sixteenth? Any good for anyone? Tuesday the sixteenth evening?
Donald Er—no. Not the sixteenth, Mr Chairman. We have our Church meeting on that date. It's usually the third Tuesday of every month.
Ray Monday the twenty-second, then?
Eric Not Mondays. Youth Club.
Ray Twenty-fourth. Wednesday the twenty-fourth?
Sophie Fine.
Lawrence We're free. I am.
Ray Twenty-fourth it is. No hang on, I can't do that. I've got a dinner.
Lawrence What about the twenty-fifth?
Ray Fine.
Eric That's O.K.
Sophie Yes. I can change that.
Ray Seven-thirty, all right?
Donald Providing it's no earlier, Mr Chairman. We do have a rather critical meeting of the Highways and By-ways Committee. That may run on a little. We're discussing the shelving of the new ring road scheme, you see, and I could see that could run on.

They all rise except Audrey

Ray Well, do your best. Right. Twenty-fifth—seven-thirty p.m. I'd better dig my wife out of the bar. Lawrence, are you having one?
Sophie I'm dying for the loo . . .

Sophie hurries out immediately

Donald buttonholes Eric and under the ensuing talks to him

Donald You see, the trouble with these meetings is they can get out of hand. We've found this particularly lately with the Highways and By-ways Committee.
Eric Oh yes.
Donald In fact you won't believe this, in the past five weeks we've had three emergency meetings just to cope with the normal agenda. Our recent emergency meetings went on for a total of seven hours and we finished up with only a half an hour for lunch.
Lawrence (*meanwhile*) I'll have a quick one. You seem to be perfectly frank—Charlotte and I had just the smallest tiff this evening . . .
Ray Oh dear. (*He starts gathering up his papers*)
Lawrence Over those kids of ours actually. Nothing serious, I don't think . . .

Ray Ah well.
Lawrence I mean, I don't necessarily think one needs to take a strong line. Not with kids these days. (*Moving off*) See you in the bar.
Audrey Have we finished?
Ray Yes, all finished. Now, Mrs Evans . . . (*He turns to Lawrence*) Hey, Lawrence, old son. Where's my track lighting, then?
Lawrence Your what?
Ray I ordered it from your lot a month ago. They told me a week to ten days.
Lawrence I'll sort it out for you tomorrow.
Ray I wish you would. It's pitch dark in my shop. Customers falling over themselves. (*He laughs*)
Lawrence I'll see to it, old boy.

Lawrence goes out

Ray (*seeing Eric's plight, interrupting Donald's flow*) Excuse me a moment, Donald. Eric, you're not dashing off straightaway are you? You'll stay for a drink?
Eric (*moving rapidly away from Donald*) No, thanks.
Donald (*determined to finish his story*)—so you can imagine . . . (*He goes to Audrey*)
Eric Yes.
Donald (*helping Audrey to struggle up*) All right, Mother. Just a minute.
Ray (*putting down his papers to help*) Hang on. I'll—er—Would you both like to stay for a drink?

Eric wanders up on to the bandstand

Donald No, I'm afraid not. Mother wouldn't . . .
Ray No.
Audrey Get a bit stiff.
Ray Yes. There we are. (*He tries to help Audrey*)
Audrey Thank you. Soon as I get moving. Are we staying for a drink?
Donald No, Mother, not tonight. Mind yourself. That's it. I'll manage us from here thank you, Mr Dixon.
Ray Don't forget her coat.
Donald No, we won't.
Audrey We never stay for drinks.

Donald and Audrey go out. Ray, following them, passes Sophie entering

Ray You staying for a drink, Sophie?
Sophie No thanks, Ray. (*She starts to collect up her handbag*) Got to get back and get the meat cut up for the morning. Helen's in the bar, by the way.
Ray Thought so. 'Night.
Sophie 'Night.

Ray goes out

Eric Want a lift then?
Sophie Oh heavens, I didn't see you.

Eric Can I give you a lift home?
Sophie Well I—well, yes please.
Eric (*moving towards the door*) O.K. Probably not up to the standard you're used to.
Sophie I'm used to an eight year old Land-Rover with a broken front seat which smells of dogs. What have you got?
Eric Nothing as luxurious as a Land-Rover.
Sophie (*going to collect her shopping bags*) Going to be fun, isn't it? The Festival.
Eric Possibly. On the other hand, it could be something more than that. It could really mean something. For everyone. Fantastic story, isn't it? I thought it was. Puts what it's all about into a nutshell.
Sophie Are you really a Marxist?
Eric Yes. So?
Sophie So jolly good. Hope you enjoy it.
Eric Well, what are you then?
Sophie I'm—an agnostic.
Eric (*moving to her*) Oh yes.
Sophie Waiting to be converted—to some worthy cause.
Eric Try mine.
Sophie Not just now. Too intense for me.
Eric (*smiling*) Not all the time. (*Moving close to her*) You'd be surprised. Try it sometime.
Sophie Not—just this actual minute, thank you. Anyway, I expect you'll be wanting to get home to your—lady.
Eric Yes. Right. (*He moves off*)
Sophie (*indicating her shopping bags*) Could you carry these please?
Eric Ah. (*He returns and takes them*) God! Were you going to walk home with this?
Sophie They're not heavy. You don't teach sports, I take it?
Eric Modern history.
Sophie Super.

Tim appears in the doorway. A man in his late forties. He wears gum boots, a sheepskin coat and a cap

Tim Ah, there you are.
Sophie Hallo, Tim.
Tim Popped down to fill her up. Save me doing it tomorrow morning.
Sophie Tim, this is Eric. Collins, isn't it?
Eric Collins, yes.
Sophie This is Tim, my brother.
Tim How do you do.
Eric Hallo.
Sophie Eric teaches.
Tim Does he?
Eric Yes.
Tim I see.

Tim sizes Eric up. He does not like what he sees. Eric does not either. A silence

Sophie (*to Eric*) Well. Thank you. Won't need the lift after all.
Eric No . . . Here. (*He hands over her bags*)
Tim (*turning*) I think Queenie's on heat, you'll be glad to hear.
Sophie About time.
Tim Good night to you.
Eric 'Night.
Sophie See you again. My regards to your good lady.
Tim (*as they go*) Whose good lady?
Sophie His good lady.
Tim What are you prattling about . . . ?

Sophie and Tim go

Eric stands staring after her for a moment. Then he moves thoughtfully round the room till he arrives at the top of the table at Ray's chair. He sits in it. He eyes the other chairs meaningfully. He stands

Eric (*in a low vibrant voice*) Brothers—I—

The Lights go out

Oh, damn it. (*As he crashes his way off*) Lights. Blast you. Oh, damn it—damn it . . .

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

The same. At the meeting held on Friday the 17th December

Ray enters. He is followed by Lawrence, who carries a festive carrier bag and a half-finished whisky

Ray In here, Lawrence. We're a bit early, nobody's due to arrive for a bit.
Lawrence Thanks.

Lawrence puts down his carrier bag and paces about nervously. Ray watches him

Ray What seems to be the trouble, Lawrence? Something worrying you about the way things are going?
Lawrence No, no—er—it's nothing to do with the committee, nothing at all. It's—er—about—er—Charlotte—and I. You see, the fact is—we're breaking up . . .
Ray Oh, I see.
Lawrence Yes.
Ray Oh. I am sorry, Lawrence, I really am . . .
Lawrence Yes, it's a—very sad business. I think things haven't been going

frightfully well in any direction lately. I had a few business worries. Of course the present state of the country tends to hit we smaller firms.

Ray Yes, I quite see.

Lawrence So we're splitting. Charlotte's got a bit of a health thing as well. That doesn't help. The point is—if you'd like us to stay on the committee we will.

Ray Wouldn't that be a bit awkward for you?

Lawrence No, you see what we thought was—we could do sort of alternate stints. I'd come to this meeting and she'd come to the next one. And so forth.

Ray (*dubiously*) Well, I suppose so—yes—I suppose it . . .

Lawrence The point is, frankly—a thing like this fête thing—it's a bit different. It's probably the only thing that's going to keep us both sane at the moment, if you want the truth. Take us out of ourselves a bit. If you follow . . .

Ray Ah yes.

Lawrence Of course, Charlotte used to have the amateur dramatics to fall back on. But she hasn't done a lot of that lately. There don't seem to be any good parts for her these days. They're not writing them for some reason. Sad about Noel Coward, wasn't it?

Ray Yes.

Lawrence Anyway keep this under your hat. It's not common knowledge yet.

Ray Yes, of course. As long as you're both sure you're up to it. I mean, committee work can be . . .

Helen enters

Helen Oh sorry. Were you . . . ?

Ray starts correcting some roneo'd sheets

Lawrence No, no, Helen, no. Finished now. Expect Ray'll tell you, so I won't keep you. I'll just get a refill. Be straight back. (*Seeing his carrier bag*) Oh, dump this in the Cloaks. Presents. For the girls. They're with the in-laws. By the way, I'm chasing up those lights you ordered, Ray. Any day now. Gave them a terrific balling out this morning. Excuse me. (*As he moves away, his carrier clinks with the sound of bottles*)

Lawrence goes out

Helen What are you doing?

Ray I'm just correcting the typing errors in the Chairman's report. Otherwise we'll have to wait while Donald Evans points them out.

Helen Well, I still think making him Hon. Secretary was a terrible mistake. None of us will get a word in now.

Ray Oh well . . .

Helen What was that all about just now with Lawrence?

Ray He and Charlotte are splitting up,

Helen Oh well, we all knew that. Is he resigning?

Ray No, he wants to stay on.

Helen What about her?
Ray She wants to stay on too apparently. They're going to attend alternate meetings.
Helen Oh, that's ridiculous.
Ray Going to be a bit tricky.
Helen Oh, they'll both have to go. That's ridiculous. They're a dead loss anyway. He's incoherent and she keeps falling asleep. Have you seen those things she's on? About fifteen a day. She sucks them like cough sweets. And she's going potty.
Ray Well, we'll see how it works out.
Helen I can tell you that now.
Ray I'll get rid of them if we have to. I just think it would be rather heartless to do it at this moment.
Helen Oh well. I hear he's going bankrupt anyway. (*She wanders*) I do wish they'd cheer this place up a bit. I had to leave the bar. The local branch of the Red Army marched in with guess-who of course.
Ray Sophie?
Helen Tim's getting very worried about her, you know.
Ray Yes, you said.
Helen You know he phoned me.
Ray That's right.
Helen I mean, they're sitting in the bar holding hands.
Ray Oh well . . .
Helen I mean, you can see Tim's point. She's made one mess of her life. He doesn't want to see it happen again.
Ray It may not. Wait and see.
Helen But don't you see, she's doing precisely the same thing as she did the last time she . . . Mind you, Tim's very odd really. I admire him but he's certainly peculiar.
Ray Well, he's a—he's all right is Captain Barton.
Helen I heard a rumour. I don't know if it's true. He sleeps with a loaded revolver under his pillow, you know. He shot a cat one night.
Ray Well . . .
Helen Mrs Mason's. In error.

Donald and Audrey enter

Donald Good evening.
Helen Hallo there.
Ray Good evening, Donald.
Donald And, I suppose, festive greetings are in order. We're in here as usual, I take it?
Audrey Good evening.
Helen Hallo, Mrs Evans. How are you?
Donald (*sitting Audrey down in her previous place*) There we are, Mother. She was giving a piano lesson. So we're a little bit late, I'm afraid.
Helen No, dead on time. As usual.
Donald (*seeing Ray's report*) Ah, you've been correcting those, have you, Mr Chairman? I was going to point those out to you at the meeting.

Ray (*laughing*) Well I thought I'd get in first, Donald.
Donald Yes, I see.
Helen How's your research going, Mrs Evans?
Audrey My research? Oh, nothing much so far. We'll keep looking.
Helen Nothing to report yet?
Audrey No, not yet.
Helen Oh dear. As long as we get it before the Festival.
Audrey Oh yes, you'll get it before the Festival.
Donald She's been reading avidly. Burning the midnight oil. I only wish I had her eyesight. I'm afraid I get my eyesight from my father's side, unfortunately . . .

Eric and Sophie enter. They are no longer holding hands but they are very much together. Eric has a file of papers. Lawrence wanders in behind them. He carries a large drink

Donald Good evening.
Sophie Hallo.
Eric Evening.
Lawrence Back again.
Audrey Good evening. Happy Christmas.

Helen eyes Sophie and Eric. Everyone sits, Ray at one end of the table

Ray (*over the above*) They still haven't managed to do very much to the heating, I'm afraid. The manager tells me it's something to do with an air-lock in the system. Anyway, welcome again. I think we can make this, our third meeting, a fairly brief one. More in the nature of a progress report. Right. Apologies for absence, Councillor Evans?
Donald Yes, Mr Chairman. We have firstly very sincere regrets from Mr Lorne-Messiter who had hoped very much to be here tonight but was unexpectedly called away but wishes us to be assured of his continuing interest, so his wife informed me when I telephoned her this evening. Apologies also from Mrs Adamson.
Lawrence Indisposed, Mr Chairman.
Ray Right. Yes. We must take the Minutes as read, I think, as Mrs Evans is probably still working on those, so Item Three Chairman's Report. Well, there is a copy of that you should all have. You'll see the main point is that the Leisure and Amenities Committee couldn't see their way to offering us any financial support this year.
Donald Yes, if I could interrupt one moment, Mr Chairman . . .

Sophie and Eric whisper together during the following. Helen glares at them

I was at that particular meeting and fought our case vociferously. Regrettably the committee did feel that whilst they viewed what we were doing with extreme interest and favour, they were unable to recommend a grant for this year owing to the slightly unusual financial situation in which we find ourselves as a Council at this particular moment in time.
Ray Thank you, Mr Evans.

Helen Did you catch that, Sophie?
Sophie What? Oh yes.
Helen Oh, I thought you might have missed it.
Sophie No.
Ray Yes. So it's up to us to do a little bit of digging in our own pockets, I suppose—

Lawrence clears his throat

—when we can and continue to think of other ways such as jumble sales and coffee mornings to come up with what we need.
Audrey (*to Lawrence*) Where's your wife?
Lawrence I beg your pardon?
Audrey Where's your nice wife? Isn't she here tonight?
Lawrence (*muttering*) No, she's—er—indisposed.
Audrey She's what?
Ray She's indisposed, Mrs Evans.
Audrey Indisposed? Oh dear. Something the matter with her?

Lawrence smiles weakly. Helen gives a dry laugh

Eric (*with urgency*) Mr Chairman, I assume we're now on Item Four?
Ray Yes, I think we will be. Yes.
Eric Which is the preliminary report of the action group which was set up at the last meeting . . .
Helen Which you set up at the last meeting . . .
Eric Headed by Miss Barton and myself. Well, we've already made some feasibility studies on this and, in accordance with the brief we were given we've co-opted one or two outside members on to the group whom we feel could be useful. Now then . . .
Helen Excuse me, Mr Chairman, could we ask Mr Collins who these members are? Whom he's co-opted on without our knowledge.
Eric Certainly. We have Mr Raymond Snaithe, who is a lecturer in Sociology at the Polytechnic. He has also agreed to help us find volunteers to take part in the Pageant. We have Mr Platt who's an Art Teacher from the Catherine Stoker school. Mr Ron Sowerby who works at Foxton's Engineering . . .
Donald Mr Sowerby? I don't think I know him at all. I know most of the staff at Foxton's.
Eric I can assure you he's been employed there several years and also serves as a shop steward.
Donald Oh I see.
Helen My God.
Eric And finally Miss Sally Prince and Mr Max Kirkov both, at the moment, full-time students.
Helen Mr who?
Eric Mr Kirkov.
Helen You see, now we have got the Russians.
Eric Mr Kirkov is actually Jewish and was born, I believe, in Slough, Berkshire. He is in fact a keen athlete and I feel will be very

suitable to take the part of William Brunt in the Pageant. He incidentally has a beard.

Ray Oh well, that's splendid, isn't it?

Eric The Technical College, whom I've approached, have also expressed willingness to loan us their printing machinery free of charge to help our publicity.

Ray Well, that's first rate. Thank you very much, Mr Collins. You've obviously been very busy.

Helen Yes.

Eric Mr Chairman, I wonder if at this point I can make a suggestion to the committee. It seems to me that the organization of this rally could best be tackled if we divide the organizational responsibility.

Ray No, I don't quite follow you there, Mr Collins.

Eric Well, it appears to me we have within the rally itself two distinct factions . . .

Helen I do wish he'd stop calling it a rally.

Eric I'm sorry.

Helen It's not a rally. It's a pageant.

Eric All right. A pageant, if you prefer. What's the difference?

Helen My dear boy, there's a great deal of difference between a pageant and a rally and if you don't . . .

Eric Listen, madam, if you want to discuss semantic niceties perhaps you'd care to do that afterwards . . .

Helen I'm sure you're far too busy to do anything afterwards.

Ray Now just a minute, please. You're out of order, Helen, that'll do.

Helen What do you mean, I'm out of order? Don't you speak to me like that.

Ray No. I'm sorry—when the Chairman—when the Chairman asks you to stop talking, I'm afraid you *have* to stop. I've told you before—no, I'm sorry . . .

Helen Look here, I will *not* be browbeaten or shouted down—by you or anyone. Ever since I made you Chairman you've been nothing but a petty little dictator . . .

Ray (*placatingly*) Would you let Mr Collins continue, Helen. Please.

Helen (*muttering*) Oh well, if you're going to side with him . . .

Ray Mr Collins? Divide the functions you were saying.

Eric Thank you, Mr Chairman. Divide the factions. The pageant naturally divides into two factions. On the one hand, the military faction and on the other, the proletarian faction represented by the Twelve.

Ray Yes.

Eric Owing to the amount of organization involved, I would be happy to take responsibility for recruiting and rehearsing the Twelve and the entire Market Square faction if someone else could deal primarily with the military side.

Ray Oh, I see. You mean like two team leaders.

Eric That's it, Mr Chairman. Obviously both working in close co-operation . . .

Ray I think that sounds a very sensible idea.

Donald Yes. Yes . . .
Lawrence Hear! Hear!
Helen Well, I think it sounds a terrible idea.
Ray What's wrong now?
Helen Dividing it up? This whole thing is a group effort. We're all mucking in together. We don't want them going off here and us going off there into little huddles . . .
Ray It's only for organizational purposes.
Helen It's not for organizational purposes. It's for his purposes. And it will absolutely suit him down to the ground. That's how they work. That's the way they gain their power. By dividing people up.
Sophie Oh Helen, really, you do talk rubbish . . .
Helen Well, look at him. He's already formed his own committee with half the card-carrying rabble from the district . . .
Eric Now, wait a minute. Wait a minute. What basis do you have for that allegation?
Helen It's patently obvious. We, as a committee, are being used by this man for extremely sinister purposes.
Eric (*thrusting out a sheet of paper*) All right, all right. Here's the list of my working group. You tell me which of these names you object to and why.
Helen Though God knows what he's hoping to gain by it.
Eric (*rising, stabbing his finger at his sheet of paper*) Which of these names do you object to and why?
Donald (*rising*) Mr Chairman . . .
Helen (*rising*) Somebody tell me what this man's hoping to achieve by taking over a committee who's sole function is to bring gaiety and light into the town.
Eric (*thrusting his piece of paper right under her nose*) Which of these names do you object to and why?
Helen (*swotting the paper away*) And will you kindly stop prodding me with that piece of paper.
Donald Mr Chairman . . .
Ray (*rising*) Order! *Order!* ORDER!

Silence

Thank you. Now then. Mr Collins.

They all sit

Eric (*quietly*) Could I ask, Mr Chairman, which of these names Mrs Dixon objects to and why?
Ray Helen?
Helen What?
Ray Which of those names do you object to and why?
Helen Well. I don't know. I mean. Well, what about that shop steward from Foxton's. He sounds a very fishy character. What's he doing here?
Eric He's interested. Any reason why an engineer shouldn't be interested?
Helen Well. He should be busy making engines. Or whatever he does.

Well, he's an engineer. Nothing to do with the Arts. Nonsense. Totally unsuitable.

Eric Might I suggest, Mr Chairman, to avoid further conflict we put it to the vote? Does the committee feel that the division of the pageant into two separately organized but mutually linked groups is a good idea?

Donald I was about to suggest that myself, Mr Chairman.

Ray Yes, that seems a good idea. So we'll vote on that, shall we? Does the committee feel—and so on. All those in favour of dividing responsibilities?

Donald, Lawrence, Eric and Sophie raise their hands

Those against?

Helen raises her hand

Motion carried, then.

Helen Just a minute, Mrs Evans hasn't voted.

Donald I think she may have missed some of the arguments.

Ray It wouldn't have altered things.

Helen Well, I've done what I can. On your own heads be it.

Lawrence (*clearing his throat*) Er . . .

Ray Mr Adamson.

Lawrence (*rising*) Mr Chairman, I don't often have occasion to speak at these things—because I feel people should be allowed to get on with it. However, I do feel that someone ought to say a few words in defence of Mrs—er—Dixon's arguments which I felt were heartfelt and extremely moving and—from the heart.

Eric slides down in his chair. Lawrence sees him

Now you can slide down in your chair if you like, young man. Just let me have my say. You've had plenty of say already. You see, it's very rare in these days of cynicism and a generally diminishing of personal idealism and—so on, for someone to come out and say what they feel. It does seem to me that a lot of what's wrong with the country today comes about because we've lost what we used to hold most dear. You can include in that our concepts of family and home life which has been eroded by all these pressures. I'm a business man who's felt the effects of those as much as anyone. It's also inevitable that it does creep regrettably into one's own personal life which I won't bore you with here, except to say I admire Mrs Dixon. I admire her for what she stands for. I admire her as a woman. I admire her as person . . .

Helen (*out of the side of her mouth*) What's he talking about?

Lawrence Well, that's all. My life's a mess but that's my fault. Nobody else's. You can't blame Governments if your own home comes crashing round your ears. I wish to God one could. I do. Thank you.

Lawrence sits down. A stunned silence

Ray (*eventually*) Yes. Thank you, Mr Adamson. I think we can all learn something from that.

Donald Hear. Hear.
Audrey It's a lot warmer in here tonight, don't you think?
Ray Right. So we've decided to divide responsibility. Now, Mr Collins has agreed to run the Market Square group. Do we have anyone who'd care to organize the military? (*Silence*) Anyone?
Helen Yes. I volunteer.
Ray Oh. Are you sure now, Helen? I mean, it's quite a task.
Helen I'll manage. I can get help. Like Mr Collins.
Ray Well, if you're sure.
Helen My main problem, I think, will be on the costume side. The military uniforms and so on. We are going to have to borrow or steal those from somewhere. I wonder, Mr Chairman, would it be in order to have someone co-opted on to this committee to assist me?
Ray No, I don't think anyone would have any objection to that. Would anyone?

General headshaking. Eric looks suspicious

Perhaps Mrs Pakenham would . . .
Helen No, it's all right. I'll find somebody suitable.
Ray Right. Splendid. Well, we seem to be making progress.
Helen May I just add, Mr Chairman, that from the military side—we'll do everything in our power to make sure the Pageant is a resounding success.
Eric May I add, so will we, Mr Chairman.
Donald Bravo.
Ray Yes. That's really very reassuring. Thank you, both. Any other business. No? (*Rising*) Good. A happy Christmas everyone. Shall we adjourn? (*He goes to the door, then turns*) Er . . . ?

CURTAIN

SCENE 3

The same. At the meeting held on Thursday the 19th May
Sophie enters. She carries a box file marked Personnel. She puts it on the table and sits. After a moment Tim enters and stands in the doorway. He is dressed as before. He studies her

Tim Look, Sophie . . .
Sophie (*looking up*) Oh, now what?
Tim I'm not leaving it at that, Sophie. Now what the devil's going on? What are you playing at?
Sophie (*busying herself with papers*) How do you mean?
Tim You know perfectly well. Apart from anything else, you're never home. The kennels are all to cock. You've abandoned me and a damned sight more important you're neglecting the dogs.
Sophie I said I'm busy. I have a lot of work to do on this committee.
Tim But surely you . . .

From the floor above, sounds of hammering are heard

What on earth's that?

Sophie (*removing her coat*) I don't know. Workmen, I suppose. (*She is wearing a JONATHAN COCKLE tee-shirt. On the front is a picture presumably of Cockle looking remarkably like Eric, with letters JOHN COCKLE. On the back of the shirt are the words: BACK TO BRUNT*)

Tim What the hell are you wearing?

Sophie It's our Pendon Twelve tee-shirt. Do you like it? We're selling them. The tech. did them for us.

Tim Isn't that—that fellow on the front?

Sophie Jonathan Cockle.

Tim No, the one you're—working with . . .

Sophie Eric Collins? Yes, a bit. We based it on him. There aren't any existing pictures of Cockle. So we decided since Eric was playing him . . .

Tim And I don't like that either. I've said it before . . .

Another burst of hammering. He pauses till it stops

And I'll say it again. I don't like him from what I've heard. And I don't like your associating with him.

Sophie Too bad.

Tim He' s got a wife or some such, hasn't he? For one thing?

Sophie Yes.

Tim Well, then.

Sophie Philippa and I happen to be very good friends. I like her. Now.

Tim Yes, that may be—but don't you see, Sophie, sooner or later . . .

A burst of hammering. He pauses till it stops

Sooner or later, you're going to get hurt again. As soon as he's had what he wants from you, he'll leave you high and dry. Like that other fellow. Like Patrick.

Sophie Patrick was totally selfish and self-centred. He never intended leaving his wife for me for one minute. He was far too middle-class and cosy.

Tim Well, does this fellow Eric intend to?

Sophie No. But then he's never said he would. He loves Philippa anyway.

Tim But . . .

Sophie There's room for both of us.

Tim But I—I—I . . .

More hammering. He paces about till it stops

Well, what about her? What's she got to say about it?

Sophie Philippa? She seems happy enough. Now look, Tim, I do have things to do before the meeting. I'm sorry.

Tim Well, I don't know. I don't know at all. I only hope to God you know what you're doing, Sophie. I'll come and pick you up afterwards.

Sophie No, there's no need.

Tim Save you walking.