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SF PERUSALS

RUN FOR YOUR WIFE

A Comedy

by Ray Cooney

SAMUEL FRENCH

samuelfrench.co.uk

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ISBN 978-0-573-11383-3

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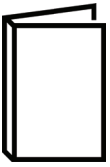
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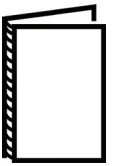
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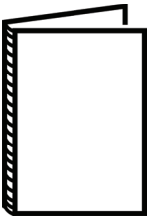
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ray Cooney is today recognised theatrically and publicly as "The Master of Farce" and a most worthy successor as an author to the great Ben Travers, and as a director/actor to Brian Rix. A most prolific writer of stage farces/comedies of high standards, which have not only graced the stages of English-speaking countries for more than forty years, but have been staged worldwide and translated into more than forty foreign languages, including Chinese, Japanese and Russian. Television broadcasts in English and foreign languages have also been widespread. Thus has Ray Cooney earned an international reputation as the finest living writer of this form of theatre, and professional and amateur artists have benefited from his writing genius and influence as well as an actor/director. Charles Spencer – the doyen of theatre critics – wrote of *Funny Money*, "Ray Cooney is a National Treasure".

The following resumé of Ray Cooney's activities for over seventy years bears testament to his enormous theatrical input and influence on our theatrical world.

Ray began his theatrical career as a boy actor at the age of 14 in *Song of Norway* at the Palace Theatre in 1946. He had a busy career between 1946 and 1950, appearing in *Calcutta in the Morning* at the Players Theatre and *The Hidden Years* at the Fortune Theatre plus *Treasure Island*, *Peace comes to Peckham*, *The Winslow Boy* and *The Guinea Pig* in tours and repertory companies around the UK. Between 1950 and 1952 Ray did his compulsory National Service in the Army. Following this he had many acting roles in weekly rep and tours until joining the Brian Rix Company at the Whitehall Theatre in 1956.

During this period he began his writing career by writing *One for the Pot* with Tony Hilton. This was premiered at the Whitehall Theatre on 2nd August 1961. Whilst this had a successful run for over four years, Ray wrote *Chase Me Comrade*, which had its West End premier at the Whitehall Theatre on 30th March 1964 and ran for three years. Following this he co-wrote *Charlie Girl* (1964); *My Giddy Aunt* (1968); *Not now Darling* (1968) and *Move Over Mrs Markham* (1971), *Why not Stay for Breakfast* (1973) and *There Goes The Bride* (1974), with John Chapman. He then devised the musical *Elvis* in 1977, which won the *Evening Standard* best musical award, followed by the play *Her Royal Highness* (1981). Then came Ray's biggest hit, *Run For Your Wife* in 1982, which ran for nine years in the West End and which Ray directed and played in the New York production. This was then followed by *Two into One* (1984); *Wife Begins at Forty* (1985); *Out of Order* (1990) which won the Laurence Oliver award for best comedy, *It Runs In The Family* (1992); *Funny Money* (1995); *Caught In The Net* (2001), sequel to *Run For Your Wife*, which was nominated for both the Laurence Olivier award and the *Evening Standard* Theatre award, *Tom, Dick and Harry* (2005) with son Michael Cooney, and the musical *Twice In A Lifetime* (2011), with Keith Strachan and Chris Walker writing the music. It's estimated that over 100 million tickets have been sold throughout the world for Ray Cooney comedies!

Apart from starring in his own plays in London, America and Australia, Ray has appeared in many other productions including a year in the famous *The Mousetrap*.

Between the years of 1970 and 1983, Ray produced many plays for the West End, including *Lloyd George Knew My Father; Say Goodnight to Grandma, Passion Play; Whose Life it is Anyway?; Chicago; Over The Moon; Happy As A Sandbag; Duet For One; Bodies; Andy Cap; Elvis; Dame of Sark; Ghost on Tiptoe, Jack The Ripper; The Mating Game; Birds of Paradise; In At The Death* and *Ipi Tombi.*

In 1983, Ray formed the Theatre of Comedy Company (bringing together the founder members consisting of thirty West End stars) and became its first Artistic Director. During Ray's eight-year tenure the company produced over twenty plays, including *Out of Order; Run For Your Wife; Two Into One; Rookery Nook; When We Are* Married; *Pygmalion; See How They Run* and *An Italian Straw Hat* at the Shaftesbury Theatre;

and *Loot; Intimate Exchanges;* and *Sister Mary Ignatius* at the Ambassadors Theatre.

In 1992, Ray bought the Playhouse Theatre in London. That year he staged the West End premiere of his latest farce *It Runs In The Family* at the Playhouse. This was followed by *Jane Eyre* (1993), adapted by Fay Weldon and starring Tim Pigott-Smith, Frederick Lonsdale's *On Approval* (1994), starring Simon Ward, Martin Jarvis and Anna Carteret, and Ray's *Funny Money* in 1995.

Ray says he keeps fit, partly by swimming, playing tennis and gardening but mainly, by appearing in his own hectic plays!

He was awarded the OBE (Order of the British Empire) in the 2005 Queen's New Years Honours List for his services to drama.

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RUN FOR YOUR WIFE

First produced at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford, on 26th October, I982, with the following cast:

MARY SMITH	Carol Hawkins
BARBARA SMITH	Helen Gill
JOHN SMITH	Ray Cooney
DETECTIVE SERGEANT TROUGHTON	Peter Blake
STANLEY GARDNER	Royce Mills
NEWSPAPER REPORTER	Arthur Bostrum
DETECTIVE SERGEANT PORTERHOUSE	Bill Pertwee
BOBBY FRANKLYN	Jimmy Thompson

Directed by Ray Cooney
Designed by Douglas Heap

Subsequently produced by The Theatre of Comedy Company at the Shaftesbury Theatre, London, on 29th March, I983, with the following cast:

MARY SMITH	Carol Hawkins
BARBARA SMITH	Helen Gill
JOHN SMITH	Richard Briers
DETECTIVE SERGEANT TROUGHTON	Peter Blake
STANLEY GARDNER	Bernard Cribbins
NEWSPAPER REPORTER	Sam Cox
DETECTIVE SERGEANT PORTERHOUSE	Bill Pertwee
BOBBY FRANKLYN	Royce Mills

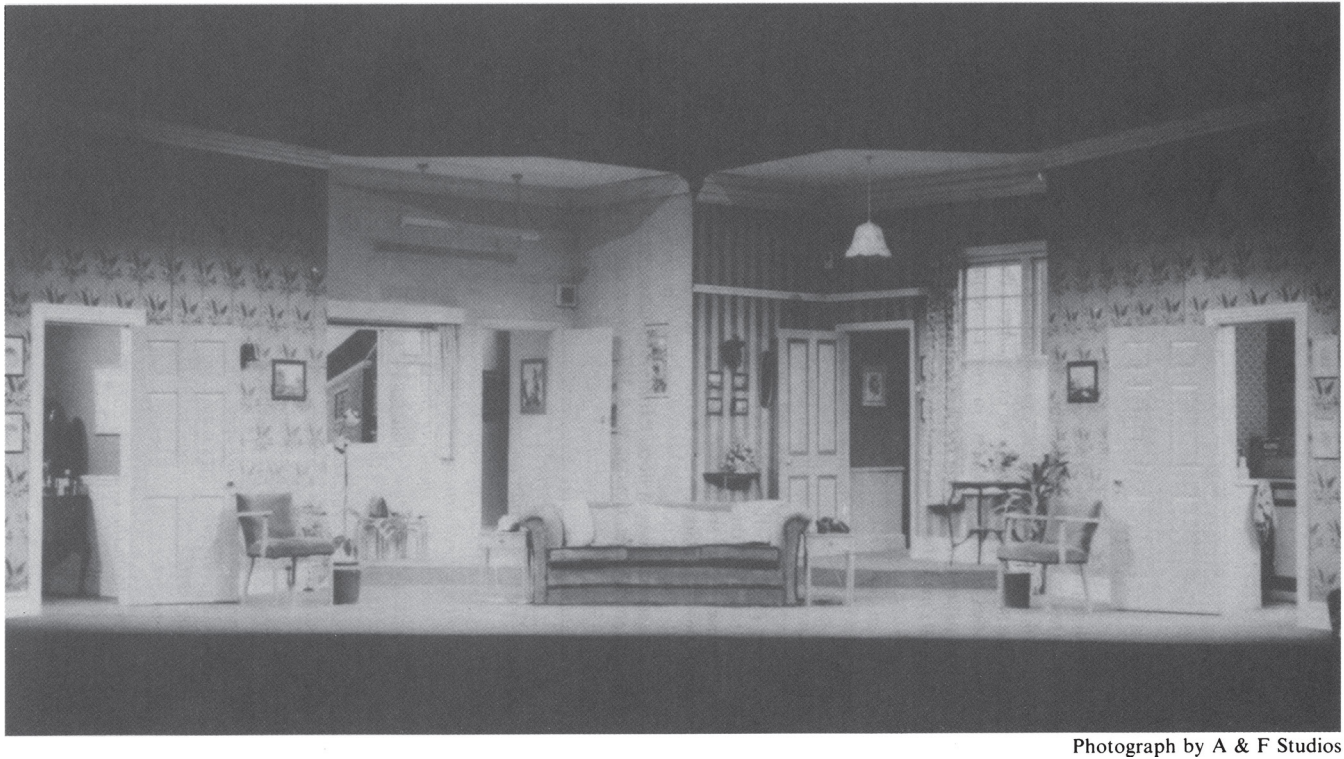
Directed by Ray Cooney
Designed by Douglas Heap

The action takes place in the Wimbledon flat of John and Mary Smith and, simultaneously, in the Streatham flat of John and Barbara Smith

ACT I One sunny summer morning

ACT II Immediately following

Time—the present



Photograph by A & F Studios

ACT I

The Wimbledon flat of **JOHN** *and* **MARY SMITH** *and the Streatham flat of* **JOHN** *and* **BARBARA SMITH**. *One sunny morning in summer.*

In the main, the set, which is the lounge of a modern flat, doubles for both homes. Frequently throughout the play, action will be taking place simultaneously in each of the flats but the inhabitants of each flat are, naturally, oblivious to the others. There is a door upstage left centre in the rear wall which leads into **MARY***'s hall and a door upstage right centre in the rear wall which leads to* **BARBARA***'s hall. The décor of the area upstage left centre represents* **MARY***'s home and the décor of the area upstage right centre, which is totally different, represents* **BARBARA***'s home. There is a window upstage left which has* **MARY***'s curtains and a window upstage right which has* **BARBARA***'s curtains (or Venetian blinds) The remainder of the lounge (about two-thirds of the total area) doubles for both homes. There is a door downstage left leading to the kitchen(s) – offstage can be seen a modern kitchen; and a door downstage right leading to the bedroom(s) – offstage can be seen a stool and a dressing-table. Down centre is a long settee with arms and at either end is a table on each of which there is a phone with a long extension to its socket to enable the actors to move around whilst holding the phone. The one on the table left is* **MARY***'s phone and one on the table right is* **BARBARA***'s phone. Behind the settee is a table which is almost as high as the settee. There are two armchairs – one downstage left centre and one downstage right centre – with a wastebin upstage of each. In the*

communal area there can be paintings, plants and any other dressings on the walls but nowhere in any area of the set are there any family photographs. The two front doorbells should sound different as should the phone bells. *(See the ground plan on page 135)*

As the curtain rises on an empty stage an orchestral version of ***"LOVE AND MARRIAGE"*** *plays. The curtains of both windows are drawn but there are shafts of the early morning sun sneaking through into the semi-darkness. The entire following sequence is taken at quite a pace as both girls are in a state of nervous tension and the music plays throughout this.*

After a moment **MARY** *enters from the kitchen dressed in her nightgown and carrying a mug of tea. She is a short, attractive blonde in her late twenties. She looks at her watch, then puts her mug on the table behind the settee and goes to the window upstage left. She opens the curtains and the sun streams in lighting the upstage left area and some of the communal area. She looks out of her window (her husband is late home). She then hesitates a moment and hurries down to her phone on the table left of the settee. She starts to dial one hundred but then hesitates and replaces the receiver.*

BARBARA *enters from the bedroom carrying a breakfast tray as* **MARY** *looks at her watch again.* **BARBARA** *is a tall attractive red-head in her mid twenties and she is wearing a long, flowing negligée.* **MARY** *hurries to her window again and looks out as* **BARBARA** *closes the bedroom door. As* **BARBARA** *starts towards the table behind the settee* **MARY** *returns from the window and picks up her mug from the table.* **BARBARA** *puts her tray down on the table behind the settee.* **BARBARA** *and* **MARY**, *standing side by side, each look at their watches simultaneously—it is clear they are not aware*

of each other (which is as it should be because **MARY** *is in Wimbledon and* **BARBARA** *is in Streatham).*

BARBARA *hurries up to her window upstage right as* **MARY** *moves to her phone on the left table.* **MARY** *starts to dial one hundred yet again but changes her mind once more and moves in front of the settee towards the bedroom. Whilst* **MARY** *has been doing this* **BARBARA** *has opened her curtains (or blinds) and the sunlight has flooded the upstage right area and the remainder of the communal area so that the whole stage is now bathed in bright warm light.* **BARBARA** *has opened her window, looked out, closed her window and moved down to her phone on the table right of the settee. Both* **MARY** *and* **BARBARA** *hesitate and once more, in unison, (but oblivious of each other!) look at their watches.*

MARY *exits into the bedroom still carrying her mug of tea as* **BARBARA** *starts to dial one hundred (her husband is late home).* **BARBARA** *decides against calling the police, replaces the phone, picks up her tray from the table behind the settee and exits into the kitchen as* **MARY** *returns from the bedroom. She is now wearing a dressing-gown.* **MARY** *closes the bedroom door and goes to her window upstage left as* **BARBARA** *returns from the kitchen carrying a Squezy washing-up liquid.* **BARBARA** *puts the Squezy on the table behind the settee, goes to her window upstage right and looks out.* **MARY** *and* **BARBARA** *both move away from their windows wondering what to do. In unison they each go to their hall door (***MARY** *upstage left centre and* **BARBARA** *upstage right centre) and look out. They both close their door and stand for a moment wondering what to do. They decide – in unison – to hurry to their phones (***MARY** *left and* **BARBARA** *right) and dial one hundred. Having dialled they sit at either end of the settee (***MARY** *left and* **BARBARA** *right) waiting for the operator to answer. As they sit the music fades.*

MARY *(on the phone)* Operator, do you think you could get me Wimbledon Police Station, please.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Operator?

MARY *(on the phone)* Thank you.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Could you put me through to Streatham Police Station, please.

MARY *(on the phone)* Hello? ...

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Thank you.

MARY *(on the phone)* Is that Wimbledon Police Station ? ...I'm sorry to trouble you, Sergeant, but I'm a bit worried about my husband.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Streatham Police? I'm rather concerned about my husband.

MARY
BARBARA } *(together, on the phone)* { Mr. John Smith.

MARY *(on the phone)* I'm Mrs. Mary Smith.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Barbara Smith.

MARY *(on the phone)* Number Twenty-five.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Number Forty-seven.

MARY *(on the phone)* Kenilworth Avenue.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Lewin Road.

MARY *(on the phone)* Wimbledon.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Streatham.

MARY *(on the phone)* S.W. Nineteen.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* S.W. Sixteen.

MARY *(on the phone)* John Smith, that's right. He's a taxi driver.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* He's a taxi driver.

MARY *(on the phone)* I woke up this morning and he hadn't come home. He was due back at twelve o'clock last night.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* He was due back this morning at seven-thirty.

MARY *(on the phone)* From the late shift.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* From the early shift. It's gone eight-thirty and he's always so punctual.

MARY *(on the phone)* I wouldn't normally worry except that he keeps to a very exact schedule.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* He has this very precise schedule you see.

MARY *(on the phone)* But he does put in a lot of overtime. I'm worried—

BARBARA / **MARY** } *(together, on the phone)* { He might have fallen asleep at the wheel of his taxi.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Hospitals?

MARY *(on the phone)* No, I haven't.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Would you?

MARY *(on the phone)* Thank you very much.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* I'm very grateful.

MARY *(on the phone)* Well, he's sort of commonplace really.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Average, I suppose.

MARY / **BARBARA** } *(together, on the phone)* { Medium height, brown hair, blue eyes – sort of cuddly.

MARY *(on the phone)* Distinguishing marks?

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Not really.

MARY *(on the phone)* No.

BARBARA / **MARY** } *(together' on the phone)* { He's very ordinary... Thank you.

BARBARA *and* **MARY** *each put down their phone and think for a moment.* **MARY***'s doorbell is heard off.*

MARY *reacts, replaces her phone on the left table and hurries out into her hall. During the ensuing dialogue* **BARBARA** *goes up to her window and looks out. She then picks up her Squezy from the table behind the settee and exits into the kitchen.*

MARY *(offstage)* Oh, my goodness!

JOHN *(offstage)* Hello!

TROUGHTON *(offstage)* He'll be all right, madam.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT TROUGHTON, *a slightly severe young officer in plain clothes, and* **MARY** *enter supporting a bedraggled* **JOHN** *who is casually dressed in slacks and a loose-fitting zip-jacket. He is an ordinary-looking man whose appearance belies his eccentricity. His head is swathed in a bandage and although he is a bit groggy, he is trying to be bright.* **TROUGHTON** *closes the door.*

MARY *(as they enter)* I knew he'd had an accident.

TROUGHTON Steady as we go.

During the following dialogue, **MARY** *leads* **JOHN** *to the settee and generally fusses over him, although in her relief she treats him like an errant schoolboy. She and* **JOHN** *sit on the settee.*

MARY Poor darling!

JOHN I'm fine.

TROUGHTON On the settee.

JOHN I'm OK. Honest.

MARY Look at the state of him. Sweetheart!

TROUGHTON *(to* **MARY***)* Detective Sergeant Troughton – Wimbledon Police.

MARY I've just been on the phone to your police station.

TROUGHTON I wouldn't know about that, Mrs. Smith. I've been with your husband at Wimbledon Hospital for the last three hours.

MARY *(tersely)* Oh, John! I got the shock of my life when I woke up this morning and you weren't there. *(To* **TROUGHTON***)* He's never not been here. What on earth happened, Sergeant? *(She surveys* **JOHN***'s bandaged head)*

TROUGHTON Well, it seems your husband got involved with a couple of young villains, *(to* **JOHN***)* didn't you?

JOHN *(nodding brightly)* Yes.

MARY *(tersely)* Oh, John! You'd better have a cup of coffee, sweetheart.

JOHN *(nodding)* Coffee.

BARBARA *returns from the kitchen and closes the door.*

MARY All right to give him a cup of coffee, Sergeant?

TROUGHTON Yes, he's a bit groggy, that's all.

MARY *(tersely)* Oh. John!

BARBARA *says the following line whilst passing* **TROUGHTON** *(who, of course does not react).*

BARBARA *(looking at her watch; tersely)* Oh, John!

BARBARA *hurries into the bedroom, closing the door.*

MARY Coffee for you, Sergeant?

TROUGHTON No thanks, Mrs Smith. Oh, the hospital said your husband had to take these tablets.

TROUGHTON *takes a bottle of tablets from his pocket and hands them across* **JOHN** *to* **MARY**. **JOHN** *tries to focus on the tablets and continues to smile rather blankly.*

Just to ease the headache, I think. One tablet, twice a day.

MARY *(to* **JOHN***)* Poor darling.

JOHN *(nodding)* Yes.

MARY Have you had any breakfast?

JOHN (*shaking his head)* No.

MARY Do you want a nice little egg?

JOHN *(shaking his head)* No thank you.

MARY *goes towards the kitchen.*

MARY *(to* **TROUGHTON***)* I'll get his coffee then. It was really very good of you to drive him back home.

TROUGHTON *(grinning)* He's in no fit state, is he? I must admit I quite enjoyed sitting behind the wheel of his taxi. Lovely feeling of power, driving along with the light on, ignoring people trying to wave me down.

MARY I'm most grateful.

TROUGHTON Least we could do. Your husband's a hero, aren't you, Mr Smith?

JOHN *(brightly nodding)* Yes!

MARY It's so unlike him to do anything spectacular.

TROUGHTON He "had a go", Mrs Smith. Didn't you?

JOHN *(smiling blankly)* Yes!

MARY He's a silly fool.

MARY *exits into the kitchen, closing the door.*

TROUGHTON *(taking out his notebook)* I won't stay long, sir. I'd just like to clarify a couple of points.

JOHN Right!

During the ensuing speech **JOHN** *looks round the room trying to take it all in, whilst* **TROUGHTON** *walks around.*

TROUGHTON Now then. *(He refers to his notebook)* Last night approximately twenty-three hundred hours— *(He smiles at*

JOHN*)* that's eleven p.m.(Bill Milneryou were driving your taxi. It *is* your taxi, sir? You're the proprietor as it were? The owner-driver?

JOHN Excuse me, what time is it?

TROUGHTON *(surprised)* Quarter to nine, sir.

JOHN *(trying to work it out)* Quarter to nine.

TROUGHTON So back to eleven p.m. last night, sir. When you got involved with this mugging incident.

JOHN Mugging. Yes.

TROUGHTON *(referring to his notes)* You were driving home to Wimbledon with an empty cab.

JOHN *(worried but still hazy)* Quarter to nine in the *morning*?

TROUGHTON That's right. *(He refers to his notes)* And as you were passing Wimbledon Underground Station, you saw an old lady struggling with two youths.

JOHN Wednesday morning?

TROUGHTON Yes.

JOHN What happened to Tuesday night?

TROUGHTON Well, half of it you spent at Wimbledon Police Station and half at Wimbledon Hospital.

JOHN *(thinking)* Schedule.

TROUGHTON Beg pardon?

JOHN *(trying to pull himself together)* I think I'm out on my schedule.

TROUGHTON I'm not surprised.

JOHN *(looking around)* This is Wimbledon.

TROUGHTON *(bemused)* That's right.

JOHN *(looking towards the kitchen)* That was Mary.

TROUGHTON Yes, she's just making some coffee.

JOHN *quickly takes his diary from the inside pocket of his jacket, and flicks through the pages to check on his schedule.*

(referring to his notes) Wimbledon Underground Station. Two youths attempting to relieve an old lady of her handbag.

JOHN *(reading from his diary)* Barbara. Seven-thirty a.m.

TROUGHTON No. Doreen Spinks, twenty-three hundred hours.

MARY *comes in from kitchen with a mug of coffee, closing the door.*

JOHN *puts diary away and immediately gives* **MARY** *a huge smile and opens his arms to her.* **MARY** *has left* **JOHN***'s bottle of tablets in the kitchen.*

Mrs Spinks is struggling with two youths. You stop your taxi and rush to her assistance.

MARY Oh, John, you might have got yourself killed.

JOHN Hang on a second. I'm trying to work something out.

MARY *puts* **JOHN***'s coffee on the left table and removes his jacket.*

MARY You're going to bed, that's what you're doing. *(To* **TROUGHTON***)* He's really in no fit state to be answering questions. How come you didn't sort all this out last night? *(She puts* **JOHN***'s jacket on the back of the settee and gives him his coffee)*

TROUGHTON Because Mr Smith wasn't very co-operative last night. To start with he wouldn't tell us who he was. And then he wouldn't tell us where he lived. And what with this hysterical old girl and Mr Smith fainting every five minutes.

MARY Oh, John!

TROUGHTON It was quite a to-do. *(To* **JOHN***)* Just a couple of questions, sir, then I'll be off.

JOHN Right! My taxi's outside, isn't it?

TROUGHTON Yes, sir.

JOHN Good.

TROUGHTON Now, you intervened in the struggle.

JOHN Yes.

MARY Silly fool!

TROUGHTON Mrs Smith.

MARY Well, he went and got himself attacked by these two brutes.

JOHN No, I didn't. The old lady hit me with her handbag.

MARY What? Silly cow!

TROUGHTON Mrs Smith!

JOHN She thought I was with the two blokes, you see.

TROUGHTON We *know* that, Mr Smith. Now, the two youths ran off.

JOHN Yes. Down Wimbledon High Street.

TROUGHTON OK. Now can you give us a description?

JOHN *(thinking hard)* It's a main road with shops on both sides—

TROUGHTON Of the two youths!

JOHN It was so quick. What with the old woman belting me about the head and me trying to explain I was just a passing taxi driver—

MARY You should mind your own business!

There is the sound of **MARY***'s front doorbell.*

Excuse me, Sergeant.

MARY *exits to her hall.*

JOHN *(looking at his watch)* Is that all now? I'd really like to be off.

TROUGHTON There is one tiny point, sir.

JOHN Oh yes?

TROUGHTON Slight confusion. At Wimbledon Police Station you gave your address – when you finally agreed to volunteer that information and in between fainting – you gave your address as here – *(He refers to his notes)* – Twenty-five Kenilworth Avenue, Wimbledon, S.W. Nineteen.

JOHN Yes.

TROUGHTON But – er – the hospital somehow seem to have got your address as – er – *(He refers to his notes)* – Forty-seven Lewin Road, Streatham, S.W. Sixteen.

JOHN *thinks very hard.*

JOHN *(finally)* Have they?

TROUGHTON Yes, sir. You don't have two homes, do you?

JOHN *(chuckling)* No.

TROUGHTON No. *(Chuckling)* I mean it's not as though Streatham's in the south of France, is it?

JOHN *(chuckling)* No.

TROUGHTON *(pleasantly)* So I was wondering if you could explain the confusion?

JOHN *(trying to chuckle)* No.

TROUGHTON Oh. So the hospital must have made a mistake then?

JOHN Yes. Late at night. Very rushed. Understaffed. And the young doctor in casualty – nice fellow – but English not too hot – maybe got it a bit confused. I probably sounded rather slurred, too, because of the bang on the head. Yes. *(Slurred)* Twenty-five Kenilworth Avenue, Wimbledon, S.W.

Nineteen. He mistakes it for *(in an Indian voice)* Forty-seven Lewin Road, Streatham, S.W. Sixteen.

TROUGHTON *(bemused)* Yes.

MARY *returns from her hall with* **STANLEY** *who is wearing a dressing-gown over his trousers and slippers. He is a bright fellow whose "brightness" is only skin deep. He walks breezily into the lounge.*

MARY *(as though announcing an unwelcome guest)* It's Stanley! *(She closes the hall door)*

STANLEY *(to* **JOHN***)* You all right, old son?

JOHN *(firmly)* Yes, I'm fine.

STANLEY *(surveying him)* You look bloody awful. *(To* **TROUGHTON***)* Stanley Gardner. Got the flat upstairs. You're the fuzz, are you?

TROUGHTON *(coldly)* Detective Sergeant Troughton, Wimbledon Police.

STANLEY *(smiling at* **TROUGHTON***)* Jolly good. *(He sits next to* **JOHN** *on the settee)* Now the milkman told me all about it. Said you'd had a punch-up with half a dozen skinheads wielding bicycle chains.

JOHN I was hit with a handbag if you must know.

STANLEY Oh, gay skinheads, that's new, Sergeant.

TROUGHTON *(to* **STANLEY***)* Are you a friend of the family, sir?

STANLEY *(putting his arm around* **JOHN***'s shoulder)* I most certainly am. I've been borrowing the odd tenner from John for a couple of years now, haven't I?

MARY Yes, you have!

STANLEY *(to* **TROUGHTON***)* Yes, another couple of years I'll start paying it back!

STANLEY *chuckles at his joke.* **TROUGHTON** *is not amused.*

(to **JOHN***)* So the milkman's got it wrong has he?

MARY He was very brave. He got himself a bang on the head saving some poor old lady from two muggers.

STANLEY You didn't!

JOHN *(touching his head)* There's hardly anything there now.

STANLEY Never was much. *(To* **TROUGHTON***)* He's such a harmless old prune normally.

TROUGHTON *(to* **STANLEY***)* Aren't you going to be late for work, sir?

STANLEY *rises indignantly and moves to* **TROUGHTON**.

STANLEY Work? I'm one of the Government's vital statistics.

TROUGHTON Beg pardon?

STANLEY I'm temporarily unemployed.

TROUGHTON I see.

STANLEY Only I'm considering making it permanent.

TROUGHTON *(coldly)* Really.

STANLEY Yes, the hours are good.

TROUGHTON *(ignoring* **STANLEY***)* Well, I don't have any more questions, sir. You take your wife's advice and rest up for a bit.

STANLEY Yes, you rest up, John, and let the sergeant get back to his duties. Do you know, Sergeant, there's a man knocked down in Wimbledon every five minutes.

TROUGHTON *(unimpressed)* Really.

STANLEY Yes, and he's getting bloody fed up with it!

STANLEY *laughs at his own joke but* **TROUGHTON** *"backs" him to downstage right where* **STANLEY** *sits in the armchair.*

TROUGHTON *(to* **STANLEY**, *sternly)* If there were more people around like your friend here, we'd have a lower crime rate.

STANLEY Of course.

TROUGHTON He may have caused you some concern, Mrs Smith, but like I said, your husband's a hero. I expect you'll have the press boys on to you.

JOHN *(rising)* Press?

MARY *sits* **JOHN** *again.*

TROUGHTON And I'll just give you the telephone number of the station in case you remember anything more about those two villains. *(As he writes in his notebook)* You can call me any time. Or speak to one of my men.

MARY Thank you, Sergeant.

During the following dialogue **MARY** *takes the page from* **TROUGHTON**, *which he has torn from his notebook, and puts it by the phone on the left table.*

TROUGHTON 'Morning then, Mr Smith. Mrs Smith.

MARY I'll see you out.

TROUGHTON *(to* **STANLEY**, *coldly)* 'Morning sir. *(He moves to* **MARY***'s hall door)*

STANLEY *(genially)* And don't worry, Sergeant, I don't believe half the stuff I read about you boys in the newspapers.

TROUGHTON *stops at the door and turns.*

TROUGHTON Gardner, was it, sir?

STANLEY Yes, but you can call me Stanley.

TROUGHTON *(deadpan)* I know what I'd call you, sir.

TROUGHTON *exits followed by* **MARY** *who closes the door.*

STANLEY *(rising happily and moving to* **JOHN***)* Well, quite a morning and we haven't even had breakfast yet. *(He takes* **JOHN***'s mug of coffee)* Thanks. *(He drinks the coffee)*

MARY*'s phone rings.* **JOHN** *goes to lift the receiver but* **STANLEY***, who is beside it, gets there first. During the early part of the ensuing speech* **JOHN** *looks at his watch and decides to go. He gets his jacket from the back of the settee and puts it on.*

(on the phone) Smith residence... No I'm not... Yes he is but he's incapacitated at the moment... U.P.I. What's that? ...Oh!

JOHN *is now wondering who* **STANLEY** *could be talking to.*

JOHN Who is it?

STANLEY U.P.I. Sssh! *(On the phone)* Fine... Yes. Flat A, Twenty-five Kenilworth Avenue, Wimbledon, S.W. Nineteen... OK, bye. *(He replaces the receiver)* That was U.P.I.

JOHN What's that mean?

STANLEY United Press International.

JOHN Press?

STANLEY Sort of agency that doles out stuff to all the newspapers.

JOHN *(moving to* **STANLEY***; aghast)* You gave them my address.

STANLEY Yes, that policeman was right. You're going to be a hero.

JOHN I won't see them.

STANLEY Why on earth not? Just an interview. Probably a photograph.

MARY *returns from the hall, closing the door behind her, and makes her way to the kitchen.*

JOHN *(grabbing* **STANLEY***; hoarsely)* Photograph? I'm not seeing anybody, Mary. *(He hurries over to* **MARY** *at the kitchen door)*

MARY What?

STANLEY The press have just been on the phone. They're sending somebody over.

JOHN They've got a damn cheek.

MARY The hospital gave him some tablets. I'll get them.

She exits into the kitchen.

JOHN *(shouting after her)* I'm still not meeting anybody! *(He closes the kitchen door)*

STANLEY Take it easy, old son.

STANLEY *sits* **JOHN** *in the armchair downstage left.*

JOHN *(rising)* Stanley, you don't understand.

STANLEY You're right there. Blimey, when you think of half the rubbish the papers print, you deserve to be on the front page.

JOHN *pulls* **STANLEY** *away from the kitchen.*

JOHN Stanley! Nothing must be said about me in the newspapers. You'll have to deal with them when they get here. Say it wasn't me, say it was you. Say anything.

STANLEY What the hell are you talking about?

JOHN It would ruin me.

STANLEY If this story appears in the papers?

JOHN Yes! I'll be ruined with Barbara.

STANLEY Why should you be ruined— *(He stops)* Who's Barbara?

JOHN She's – a lady.

STANLEY A lady? *(He suddenly realizes)* Ooo! You naughty naughty Johnny. So Barbara's a little bit on the side, is she?

JOHN There's more to Barbara than that.

STANLEY She's got a big bit, eh? Lovely! *(He indicates a large bosom)*

JOHN *pulls* **STANLEY** *down on to the settee. While* **JOHN** *tells his story both* **JOHN** *and* **STANLEY** *must be aware that* **MARY** *is only in the kitchen and could come in at any moment.*

JOHN Stanley! All hell would be let loose if Barbara were to see anything in the newspapers about me and Mary and living in Wimbledon.

STANLEY Why?

JOHN Because I live with Barbara in Streatham.

STANLEY No, old son, you live with Mary in Wimbledon.

JOHN That, too.

STANLEY *(blankly)* You've got two homes?

JOHN Yes.

STANLEY One *here* with Mary...?

JOHN Yes.

STANLEY And one with your girl friend in Streatham?

JOHN Yes. Only Barbara's not my girl friend.

STANLEY What is she, a Shetland pony?

JOHN She's my wife.

STANLEY I beg your pardon?

JOHN Barbara and I are married.

STANLEY *(nonplussed)* Mary and you are married.

JOHN That too.

STANLEY *is staggered.*

STANLEY You've got two wives?

JOHN Yes.

STANLEY And two homes?

JOHN Yes.

STANLEY God Almighty, I thought you were *ordinary*!

JOHN Yes.

STANLEY *(shaking his head in disbelief)* I can't believe it.

JOHN I think I've always been a bit surprised myself.

STANLEY And you just flit between Wimbledon and Streatham like some oversexed bumble bee, do you?

JOHN Sort of.

STANLEY But, blimey, *Streatham*. That's practically next door.

JOHN Four and a half minutes in the taxi.

STANLEY Jeez!

JOHN It's quite handy actually.

STANLEY Yes!

JOHN I mean, driving a taxi's not like an ordinary job, is it? Unusual hours. Morning shift. Afternoon shift. Evening shift. Night shift.

STANLEY I suppose we should be grateful you're not a Concorde pilot. What about the *expense*? It must cost a fortune.

JOHN Not really. Both Mary and Barbara work. And then I don't need much pocket money.

STANLEY No time to spend it.

JOHN Well, I'm either driving the taxi and rushing back to get to bed with Mary or driving the taxi and rushing—

JOHN
STANLEY } *(together)* —back to get to bed with Barbara.

STANLEY What do you do on your day off?

JOHN Sleep a lot.

STANLEY Yes. *(Gaping at* **JOHN***)* You did actually *marry* both of them, did you?

JOHN Oh, yes. Mary was the first. That was a lovely wedding – in a church. I met Barbara four months later.

STANLEY *Four months?*

JOHN Ssh! She just got into my taxi at Victoria Station. She'd been to Worthing on holiday and we started chatting between Victoria and Streatham where she had this flat. I helped her take her cases up and we chatted some more and she asked me if I'd like a cup of tea. And I said yes. And we chatted. And then she asked me if I'd like to come to tea the next day and I said yes and so I did. And the next day we chatted again—

STANLEY It's a pity you forgot to mention Mary while you were doing all this bloody chatting.

JOHN Yes, well one cup of tea led to another and another and I sort of got carried away, I suppose. And having not mentioned Mary in the first place, I didn't know how to bring it up afterwards.

STANLEY So you asked Barbara to marry you.

JOHN No. *She* asked *me.*

STANLEY *(rising)* Gawd Almighty!

JOHN Well – I didn't have the heart to say no.

STANLEY *Eh?*

JOHN So we got married at Streatham Registry Office.

STANLEY And you moved in with Barbara.

JOHN Yes.

STANLEY While still living here with Mary.

JOHN Yes.

STANLEY You've committed bigamy, that's what you've done.

JOHN Well, sort of.

STANLEY No, not "sort of", 100% bigamy!

JOHN Yes.

STANLEY It's a criminal offence!

JOHN Yes.

STANLEY You could go to jail!

JOHN Yes.

STANLEY Doesn't that worry you?!

JOHN I've been too busy to think about it!

STANLEY I don't know how you cope.

JOHN It needs a very tight schedule.

STANLEY And hell of a stamina. I don't know how you manage it. I can only just about find the energy to satisfy the girl friend and sign on at the Labour Exchange

JOHN *(rising and moving to* **STANLEY***)* Look, I've got to get over to Barbara right away or she'll be worried sick. I'm always bang on time.

STANLEY I can see why you need that schedule now.

JOHN I was due back at seven-thirty this morning from the early shift. *(He takes out his diary)*

STANLEY With Barbara in Streatham.

JOHN Yes.

STANLEY *takes the diary.*

STANLEY What are all these letters?

JOHN Well, I have a sort of code to back up my schedule.

STANLEY "S.W.M."?

JOHN Saturday with Mary.

STANLEY "H.D.B."

JOHN Half day Barbara.

STANLEY "L.N.B.E.M.M."

JOHN Late night Barbara, early morning Mary.

STANLEY "C.A.T."

JOHN That's to remind me to take the cat to the vet.

MARY *returns with the bottle of tablets and tumbler of water, closing the door.*

JOHN *hastily puts the diary away and smiles innocently at* **MARY**.

MARY Here we are, precious. One little tablet to calm you down.

STANLEY *(to* **JOHN***)* In that case you'd better take the whole lot!

STANLEY *sits in the armchair downstage right as* **JOHN** *glares at him. During the ensuing dialogue* **JOHN** *takes one tablet and then puts the bottle in his pocket.*

MARY Just one *(to* **JOHN***),* then it's bed for you, my boy.

JOHN I can't.

MARY Yes you can. He's had a shock, hasn't he, Stanley?

STANLEY I think we all have.

JOHN *glares at* **STANLEY**.

JOHN I can't afford to miss a day's business.

MARY You're in no fit state to be driving.

JOHN I'll just put in half a day.

MARY Do you know, Stanley, he's got enough energy for two people.

STANLEY *(laughing)* Yes!

Once more **JOHN** *gives* **STANLEY** *a furious look.*

MARY *(to* **JOHN***)* All right. I'll fix up your lunch box.

MARY *goes to kitchen door and* **JOHN** *follows her.*

JOHN Don't bother. I want to get back on the road.

MARY I'm not letting you go without your lunch box.

JOHN *puts his arms around* **MARY** *and embraces her.*

JOHN You'll make *yourself* late for work.

MARY I've decided. I won't go into the office today.

JOHN Won't you?

MARY *(to* **STANLEY***)* And it's about time you did something about a job, Stanley.

STANLEY I'm thinking of taking up taxi driving actually.

MARY Are you?

STANLEY I'm just beginning to appreciate its attractions.

MARY *exits into the kitchen.*

JOHN *quickly picks up* **MARY***'s phone.*

JOHN *(dialling)* Don't be so damn clever. You'll put your foot in it.

STANLEY Sorry but I'm seeing you through new eyes now. *(Chuckling)* You randy little devil!

JOHN Go and keep Mary chatting while I speak to Barbara.

STANLEY *(rising)* Barbara?

JOHN I can't let her go off to work without knowing I'm OK.

STANLEY *(going to the kitchen door)* Bloody hell!

JOHN This business has thrown me right out of gear. Go and make sure Mary doesn't come in.

STANLEY This is living!

STANLEY *exits into the kitchen.*

BARBARA*'s phone rings.* **JOHN** *sits at the left end of the settee.*

BARBARA *hurries in from the bedroom, closing the bedroom door, and lifts the receiver.*

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Hullo?

JOHN *(on the phone)* Hello, darling!

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Lovebug, where are you? You're an hour and a half late. *(She sits at the right end of the settee)*

JOHN *(on phone, quietly)* Sorry my sweet. Taxi broke down.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Why didn't you ring earlier?

JOHN *(on the phone, quietly)* Couldn't get to a phone. I – er – I took a fare to Gatwick Airport and conked out half way back.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Where are you phoning from now?

JOHN *looks nervously towards the kitchen.*

JOHN *(on the phone, quietly)* I'm – er – in a farmer's cottage. Miles from anywhere. Somewhere off the A23.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* What's the matter with your voice?

JOHN *(on the phone, quietly)* I don't want to wake the farmer's wife.

STANLEY *returns from the kitchen, closes the door, and joins* **JOHN** *by the left end of the settee.*

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Are you all right? You haven't had an accident, have you?

JOHN *(on the phone)* No, I'm fine, darling, I'm just a bit sort of flustered.

STANLEY I say—

JOHN *(jumping)* Ah!

BARBARA *reacts to the noise in her ear.*

BARBARA *(on the phone)* What is it?

JOHN *(on the phone)* Hang on a second, the *farmer's* just come in.

STANLEY Farmer?

STANLEY *looks around for the "farmer".* **JOHN**, *still holding the phone, moves to* **STANLEY**.

JOHN *(on the phone)* Hang on a second, pumpkin.

STANLEY *(laughing)* Pumpkin!

JOHN *(to* **STANLEY***)* What do you want?!

STANLEY I've got a message from your number one.

JOHN What is it?

BARBARA *(on the phone)* You still there, Johnny?

JOHN *(on the phone)* Yes, the farmer's just asking me something. *(To* **STANLEY***)* What do you *want*?

STANLEY Mary says would you like cheese and pickle or eggs and tomato or both.

JOHN I don't care!

STANLEY Do you want to check what number two's giving you for dinner first?

JOHN *glares furiously at* **STANLEY** *who grins mischievously.*

JOHN One of each! *(He goes to speak on the phone again)*

STANLEY And a flask of tea or coffee?

JOHN *(accidentally into the phone)* Coffee!

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Coffee?

JOHN *(on the phone)* Sorry, darling. I was speaking to the farmer. He's a bit—er—well, you know what country folk are like.

STANLEY *(in a West-country burr)* Coffee and sandwiches coming up, surr.

STANLEY *goes into the kitchen and closes the door.*

JOHN *moves back to the left end of the settee.*

JOHN *(on the phone)* The farmer was just telling me that the AA have fixed the taxi. I'd better go, my sweet. I wanted to catch you before you left for the office.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* I'm not going in today.

JOHN *(on the phone, surprised)* Aren't you?

BARBARA *(on the phone)* You know I'm not, you're taking the day off, too.

JOHN *(on the phone)* Am I? *(He sits and hastily looks through his diary)*

BARBARA *(on the phone)* It's been planned for ages. Just the two of us. *(Sexily)* Lazing around.

JOHN *(on the phone, referring to the diary)* Oh, yes, C.D.W.B.

BARBARA C.D.W.B?

JOHN *(on the phone)* Cuddly day with Barbara.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Silly boy. You hadn't forgotten about it, had you?

JOHN *(on the phone)* No. Damn taxi breaking down has thrown me that's all.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Well, you hurry up back home.

JOHN *(on the phone)* I'm on my way. I'll be ten minutes.

BARBARA *(on the phone, surprised)* Ten minutes?

JOHN *(on the phone, realizing)* Yes. I can cut off the A23 on to the M23 and be in Streatham in a flash.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* You drive carefully. I want you all in one big piece.

JOHN *(on the phone, foolishly)* Yes.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Are you feeling a little bit sexy?

JOHN *looks anxiously towards the kitchen.*

JOHN *(on the phone, worried)* Just a little bit.

MARY'*s doorbell goes.* **JOHN** *rises and takes a pace upstage.*

(on the phone) Hang on, the doorbell's going.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* So what?

JOHN *immediately stops.*

JOHN *(on the phone nonchalantly)* Mm? Oh, nothing. It's nothing to do with me. *(Calling off to the kitchen)* Stay where you are, I'll get it! *(On the phone)* OK, sweetheart, I'm on my way right now. Keep everything warm. 'Bye.

BARBARA *(on the phone, rising)* Oh, John.

JOHN *(on the phone)* Yes?

BARBARA *(on the phone)* You'd better ring the police at Streatham.

JOHN *(on the phone)* Police?

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Or shall I?

JOHN *(on the phone)* Why should either of us ring the police?

BARBARA *(on the phone)* I reported you missing this morning.

JOHN *(on the phone) Missing?*

MARY'*s front doorbell goes again.*

(on the phone) Don't do anything. I'll ring you straight back. *(In his confusion he lays the phone down on the left arm of the settee instead of replacing it. Calling into the kitchen)* I'll get it!

JOHN *dashes out into* **MARY**'*s hall, closing the door behind him.* **MARY** *comes in from the kitchen wiping her hands on a tea towel.*

BARBARA *(on the phone)* John? *(She sits on the right end of the settee)*

MARY What's that, darling?

STANLEY *appears in the kitchen doorway.*

STANLEY *(jokingly)* Get back into the kitchen, woman!

MARY Thought I heard John call out. *(She sees the phone off the hook)* Oh.

To **STANLEY***'s dismay she lifts the receiver.*

(on the phone) Hello?

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Hello?

MARY *(on the phone)* Were you talking?

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Yes, it's all right. I'm hanging on for him.

MARY *(on the phone)* Hanging on for *who*?

STANLEY *takes the phone from* **MARY**.

STANLEY Me!

BARBARA *(on the phone; rather annoyed)* My husband!

STANLEY *(to* **MARY***)* Damn nuisance not having my own phone upstairs. John said it would be OK. It's about a job.

STANLEY *moves away from* **MARY** *but she follows him interestedly.*

MARY *(bemused)* Oh. Good.

STANLEY *(on the phone)* Hello!

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Hello?

STANLEY *(on the phone)* Thanks for holding on. Stanley Gardner here.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Are you the farmer?

STANLEY *(on the phone, cheerfully)* Yes, yes, that's right – *(In a West-country accent)* – me dear!

STANLEY *smiles at* **MARY** *who is now standing beside him.*

(on the phone) You wanted to talk to me, I believe.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* No, I don't think so.

STANLEY *(on the phone)* Yes, well, fire away. I'm open to offers.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* I beg your pardon?

STANLEY *(to* **MARY***)* Don't let the coffee boil over.

MARY *(not moving)* No.

STANLEY *edges* **MARY***, who is rather bemused, towards the kitchen.*

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Mr Gardner? Hello?

STANLEY *is pushing* **MARY** *and smiling at her.*

STANLEY *(on the phone)* Yes – I'm interested – yes – very interested.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Interested in what?

MARY *goes into the kitchen.*

STANLEY In – er – it. *(He quickly closes the kitchen door. On the phone)* Sorry about that. Can Mr Smith ring you back?

BARBARA *(on the phone)* I'd rather hang on, if you don't mind. Mr Smith *is* all right, isn't he?

STANLEY *(on the phone)* Yes. He was a bit concussed, that's all.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Concussed?

STANLEY *(on the phone)* He's fine now. The country air's doing him good.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* What happened? John didn't say he was hurt.

STANLEY *(on the phone)* Oh, didn't he?

BARBARA *(on the phone)* He said the taxi broke down.

STANLEY *(on the phone)* Yes, it did.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Well, how did he get concussed?

STANLEY *(on the phone)* He bumped his head.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* His head?

STANLEY *(on the phone)* On one of our low beams.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* No!

STANLEY *(on the phone)* Yes. I'm afraid they're solid sixteenth-century oak.

JOHN *hurries in from* **MARY***'s hall.*

JOHN It's that bloody newspaper man! *(He goes to* **STANLEY***)*

STANLEY *(holding out the phone)* Will you deal with this?

JOHN *takes the phone from* **STANLEY** *and pushes him towards* **MARY***'s hall.*

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Hello? *(She gets up and moves away angrily)*

JOHN *(to* **STANLEY***)* United Press International. Get rid of him for me, will you?

STANLEY *hurries into* **MARY***'s hall.*

JOHN *closes the hall door and moves downstage.*

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Hello!

JOHN *(on the phone, quietly)* Hello, darling, I thought I'd put you down.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* John, are you hurt?

JOHN *(on the phone)* Hurt?

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Your head.

JOHN *(on the phone)* Oh, yes.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* The farmer said you'd banged it on one of his beams.

JOHN *(on the phone, through gritted teeth)* The farmer should keep his bloody trap shut!

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Shall I come over to Mr Gardner's farm and collect you?

JOHN *(on the phone)* No! No, I'm fine. What were you saying just now about the police?

MARY *comes in from the kitchen with a coffee flask and sandwich box. She closes the door and goes to* **JOHN**.

MARY There we are!

BARBARA *(on the phone)* I spoke to Streatham Police.

JOHN *looks at* **MARY** *for a second.*

JOHN *(on the phone, pleasantly)* If you'll hang on I'll get the farmer for you.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* I don't *want* the farmer!

JOHN *(on the phone)* Fine, fine, Mr Gardner will be with you in a second.

JOHN *smiles at* **MARY**. **BARBARA** *moves angrily towards the settee and sits at the right end.*

BARBARA *(on the phone)* John!

MARY Is that Stanley's call?

JOHN *(backing towards the settee)* Er—yes.

MARY About a job?

JOHN Er—yes.

MARY You said something about a farmer.

JOHN Er—yes. It's a lady who owns a farm. She thinks Stanley's looking for a job as a farmer.

MARY *(laughing)* A farmer?

JOHN *(laughing)* Yes.

MARY Why?

JOHN *stops laughing.*

JOHN Well, his name's Gardner and she thinks he's a market gardener... *(He tails off weakly)* She's got it a bit confused.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* Are you there?!

JOHN *(on the phone)* He won't be a moment. I think he could be interested if he doesn't have to start too early in the mornings.

BARBARA *What?*

STANLEY *and a large* **NEWSPAPER REPORTER** *(carrying his camera) come in from* **MARY***'s hall.* **STANLEY** *is struggling to keep him out.*

STANLEY An Englishman's home is his castle!

REPORTER I'm just doing my job, mate! I want a picture.

BARBARA *(on the phone)* John!

JOHN *(to the* **REPORTER***)* Clear off!

BARBARA *(on the phone) Clear off?*

JOHN *(on the phone, sweetly)* Clear the line a minute.

STANLEY *(to the* **REPORTER***)* He doesn't want any publicity! I've told you!

REPORTER And I'm telling you, news is news. *(To* **MARY***)* Are you Mrs Smith?

MARY
BARBARA } *(together)* { Yes
(on the phone) John!

JOHN *(on the phone)* The farmer's on his way.

REPORTER Get in close to your husband, please.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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