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SF PERUSALS

# LOOK BACK IN ANGER

A Drama

by John Osborne

SAMUEL FRENCH

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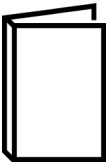
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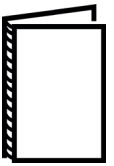
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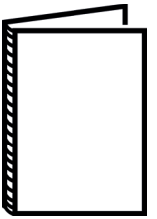
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John James Osborne was born in London on 12 December 1929 and died in Shropshire on 24th December 1994. He was married five times. His first wife was actress Pamela Lane. Pamela was the basis for the character of Alison in *Look Back in Anger*, outlived John and all his subsequent wives and died in October 2010. Osborne started writing plays whilst working as an actor in repertory in the 1950s. He first gained international fame in 1956 when *Look Back in Anger* was presented at the Royal Court Theatre, London, where many of his plays were produced, including *The Entertainer* (1957); *Epitaph for George Dillon* (1958); *Luther* (1961); Plays for England: the Bamburgs and Under Plain Cover (1962); *Inadmissible Evidence* (1964); *A Patroit For Me* (1965); *Time Present* (1968); *The Hotel in Amsterdam* (1968); *West of Suez* (1971) and *A sense of Detachment* (1972). His other plays include *The Devil Inside Him/Cry For Love* (Huddersfield 1950 & Cardiff 2010); *Personal Enemy* (Harrogate 1955 & London & New York 2010); the musical *The World of Paul Slickey* (Palace Theatre, 1959); *The End Of Me Old Cigar* (Greenwich, 1975); *Watch it Come Down* (National, 1975) and *Deja Vu* (Comedy Theatre, 1992) and he adapted Lope de Vega's *A Bond Honoured* (National, 1966); *Hedda Gabler* (Royal Court, 1972); *A Place Calling Itself Rome* (a reworking of *Coriolanus*); Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray (Greenwich, 1975) and Strindberg's *The Father* (National, 1988) His work for television includes *A Subject of Scandal and Concern; The Right Prospectus; Jack and Jill; The Gift of Friendship; Almost a Vision; Try a Little Tenderness; You're not Watching Me Mummy; Very Like a Whale; God Rot Tunbridge Wells* and his autobiographical play *A Better Class of Person*. *Better Class of Person* He also received the Tony Award in New York for Best Play for *Luther*. The Writer's Guild of Great Britain presented him with a Life Time Achievement Award in 1992.

## FOREWORD

*Look back in Anger* shocked and irritated a great many people. Others were enthusiastic and threw their hats in the air. Some said it was boring living in a world without morality, others that its sense of morality was overwhelming. Naturally, I was delighted. No playwright could ask for more. To become angry is to *care,* and, surrounded as we often are by pedantic indifference, apathy and a general state of casual funk, it does no harm if one can move a few people to tip up their seats noisily and walk out of the theatre. Every artist expects to be misunderstood. It is difficult enough, heaven knows, for him to understand what his own work is all about. It is not surprising, therefore, that some people's response should seem unexpected or even fantastic.

Unfortunately, we are still suffering from an Ibsenite hangover that leads everyone to search frantically for a message. Too many people, when they enter the theatre, put their emotional responsiveness in their pockets with their bags of sweets so that they won't rustle or distract. If a play is serious, they watch abstractedly, and wait impatiently for the *commercial.* "Yes, all right, but what are you selling?" This play has its *commercials,* several of them; some may not have occurred to me. Your response to it will depend on the kind of person you are; but, above all, it is a play about people. If a play doesn't deal with recognisable human beings it is nothing and has no place on any stage. You must work out the social, moral and political implications for yourself.

I would just like to say a few things about the people in this play: first, Jimmy Porter. Don't be misled by all the jeers about self-pity. To be articulate about one's suffering — or one's joy, for that matter — has become rare, but I do assure you that characters in the theatre have been doing it for centuries. This strikes at the root of the resentment some people feel towards Jimmy Porter. He is articulate. This would be acceptable to English audiences and critics from characters in Shakespeare and Chekhov but not, apparently, from one who speaks out of the real despairs, frustrations and sufferings of the age we are living in, now, at this moment. It is a playwright's job to make people more conscious. It isn't very surprising that a great many of them resent it, especially when so much time and money is being spent trying to make them less conscious than they already are. Jimmy Porter is not simply a young man who is upset because the world

is not giving him the things he wants most. He is a young man who is anxious to give a great deal, and is hurt because no one seems interested enough to take it — including his wife.

Alison was played in London with such appeal by Mary Ure that some people may not have recognised the character's deficiencies. She really is incapable of loyalty, even to herself. She is not even a rebel without a cause. She is caught between two uncertain worlds and cannot bring herself to declare her allegiances. Even her father is aware of this. He knows that for Alison to write letters to her mother without even mentioning Jimmy is a betrayal. This is not to say that I do not care for her myself. I care for her deeply. This play is not about Jimmy Porter. It is about two people who are in love, and are surrounded by a set of circumstances which, I believe, cannot be ignored.

I was extremely sorry that a great many took Cliff to be an ignorant oaf who merely looks on at the degradation that goes on around him. I believe that the relationship between these two young men is real and valid. It is simply unfamiliar on the English stage. These are two men who care for each other deeply. They may not be able to express it, but that is not the point. When Cliff says, "My feet hurt", there is a world of affection in Jimmy's reply: "Why not try washing your socks?" It is the only thing he can say.

As for Helena, she is rather like those people who ask what you are angry about. Life has held no problems for her that could not be solved by a little application and common sense — until she meets Jimmy. She is living in a different world and, although she tries desperately to comprehend something she cannot understand — but which she finds herself loving, in spite of everything — she is beaten in the end.

It is essential that the mood of the play and the mental climate of its characters are established in the opening moments. When I say mood, this is not something that is defined by drawing on adjectives like squalid, bitter, etc. People who believe that the setting of *Look Back in Anger* is unutterably squalid are simply unaware of the facts of life; that there is a housing shortage, that a great many houses are not only old, dirty and hideous but are unaware of the ugliness of their own surroundings, ugliness they have helped create themselves. And when you are young and neither the house nor the furniture is your own, there is not a great deal of incentive to improve things. One simply waits to

get out. The Porters are waiting to get out even if they don't know where they are going.

With the enclosed atmosphere of the setting, and with so few characters, it is most important that the pace and rhythm of the play be varied as much as possible. For example, it has long been considered a heresy for people in plays to embark on long speeches. Jimmy's long speeches have been scornfully referred to as monologues. The fact is that, carefully orchestrated, they work, and work theatrically and dramatically. I cannot over-stress how important it is to get the full value out of the text and really *listen* to it. Above all, an actor needs an ear and he will certainly need one when studying this play. Timing is fundamental to its success. It needs speed, tenderness, savagery, a dramatic, lyric sense.

The bears and squirrels motif is one which has caused a great deal of misunderstanding. The ending of the play is not sentimental. It should be ironic. This is about two people who couldn't bear the pain of being human beings any longer and so retreat into an unholy priest-hole and become little furry creatures with little furry brains, full of dumb, uncomplicated affection for each other. This is not whimsy; it is a common pattern of behaviour among sensitive, intelligent people. Only a sensitive, imaginative spirit is capable of really playing. Baudelaire even suggested that it was proof of the existence of a satanic side to human nature.

The trumpet playing in Acts Two and Three is an organic part of the action. This can be recorded and needs very careful plotting with the text. In the Royal Court production, each curtain went up with dead-beat traditional jazz with plenty of trumpet. This helps the play a great deal. At the end of the first scene in Act Two, Bunk Johnson's "Just a closer walk with thee" was brought in, harsh and loud, which deliberately kicked against the emotional feeling of the scene it brought down.

John Osborne

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## LOOK BACK IN ANGER

This play was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on the 8th May, 1956, with the following cast:

| | |
|---|---|
| **JIMMY PORTER** | Kenneth Haigh |
| **CLIFF LEWIS** | Alan Bates |
| **ALISON PORTER** | Mary Ure |
| **HELENA CHARLES** | Helena Hughes |
| **COLONEL REDFERN** | John Welsh |

*Directed by* **TONY RICHARDSON** *with setting by* **ALAN TAGG**
*Music for songs by* **TOM EASTWOOD**

*The action throughout takes place in the* **PORTERS**' *one-room flat in a large town in the Midlands.*
*Time: The present.*

ACT ONE

Early evening. April.

ACT TWO

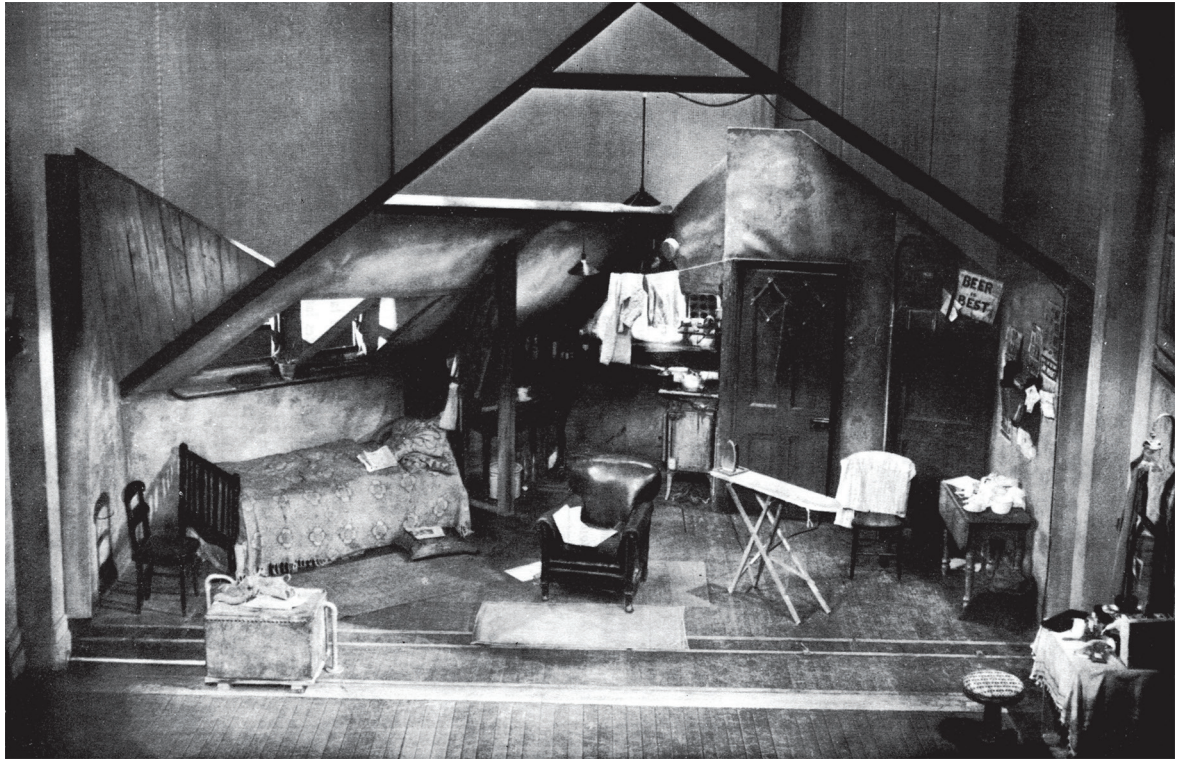
Scene One. Two weeks later.
Scene Two. The following evening.

ACT THREE

Scene One. Several months later.
Scene Two. A few minutes later.

*No reference is intended, in this play, to any person alive or dead.*

Note: *The running time of this play, excluding intervals, is two hours and five minutes.*


BEER
IS
BEST

# ACT ONE

*The* **PORTERS'** *one-room flat in a large Midland town. Early evening. April.*

*The scene is a fairly large attic room, at the top of a large, Victorian house. The ceiling slopes down quite sharply from left to right and ends in two small windows, beneath which is a double bed running along the back wall. Most of the u.s. wall is occupied by an alcove with a high, oblong window at the back which gives light into* **CLIFF***'s room across the landing. Beneath the window and to the right of it is a collapsible table and to the left of it a cooker. There is a door to the landing upper left centre and a food cupboard left of it. Another table is against the left wall and down left is* **ALISON***'s dressing table and stool. Down right, below the bed, is a chest of drawers, littered with books, neckties, etc. down stage of it is a wardrobe and down right centre a covered-in water cistern on which lie a large, tattered teddy bear and a soft woolly squirrel. An assortment of wooden kitchen chairs and one or two shabby leather ones completes the simple, and rather old, furniture.*

*At rise of curtain,* **JIMMY** *and* **CLIFF** *are seated in the two armchairs right and left, respectively. All that we can see of either of them is two pairs of legs, sprawled way out beyond the newspapers which hide the rest of them from sight. They are both reading. Beside them, and between them, is a jungle of newspapers and weeklies. When we do eventually see them, we find that* **JIMMY** *is a tall, thin young man about twenty-five, wearing a very worn tweed jacket and flannels. Clouds of smoke fill the room from the pipe he is smoking. He is a disconcerting*

*mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice, of tenderness and freebooting cruelty; restless, importunate, full of pride, a combination which alienates the sensitive and insensitive alike. Blistering honesty, or apparent honesty, like his, makes few friends. To many he may seem insensitive to the point of vulgarity. To others, he is simply a loudmouth. To be as vehement as he is is to be almost non-committal.* **CLIFF** *is the same age, short, dark, big boned, wearing a pullover and grey, new, but very creased, trousers. He is easy and relaxed, almost to lethargy, with the rather sad, natural intelligence of the self-taught. If* **JIMMY** *alienates love,* **CLIFF** *seems to exact it — demonstrations of it, at least, even from the cautious. He is a soothing, natural counterpoint to* **JIMMY.**

*Standing left, below the food cupboard, is* **ALISON.** *She is leaning over an ironing board. Beside her is a pile of clothes. Hers is the most elusive personality to catch in the uneasy polyphony of these three people. She is tuned in a different key, a key of well-bred malaise that is often drowned in the robust orchestration of the other two. Hanging over the grubby, but expensive, skirt she is wearing is a cherry-red shirt of* **JIMMY***'s, but she manages somehow to look quite elegant in it. She is roughly the same age as the men. Somehow, their combined physical oddity makes her beauty more striking than it really is. She is tall, slim, dark. The bones of her face are long and delicate. There is a surprising reservation about her eyes, which are so large and deep they should make equivocation impossible. The room is still, smoke filled. The only sound is the occasional thud of* **ALISON***'s iron on the board. It is one of those chilly spring evenings, all cloud and shadows. Presently,* **JIMMY** *throws his paper down.*

**JIMMY** Why do I do this every Sunday? Even the book reviews seem to be the same as last week's. Different books — same reviews. Have you finished that one yet?

**CLIFF** Not yet.

**JIMMY** I've just read three whole columns on the English Novel. Half of it's in French. Do the Sunday papers make *you* feel ignorant?

**CLIFF** Not 'arf.

**JIMMY** Well, you *are* ignorant. You're just a peasant. *(To* **ALISON***)* What about you? You're not a peasant are you?

**ALISON** *(absently)* What's that?

**JIMMY** I said do the papers make you feel you're not so brilliant after all?

**ALISON** Oh — I haven't read them yet.

**JIMMY** I didn't ask you that. I said—

**CLIFF** Leave the poor girlie alone. She's busy.

**JIMMY** Well, she can talk, can't she? You can talk, can't you? You can express an opinion. Or does the White Woman's Burden make it impossible to think?

**ALISON** I'm sorry. I wasn't listening properly.

**JIMMY** You bet you weren't listening. Old Porter talks, and everyone turns over and goes to sleep. And Mrs. Porter gets 'em all going with the first yawn.

**CLIFF** Leave her alone, I said.

**JIMMY** *(shouting)* All right, dear. Go back to sleep. It was only me talking. You know? Talking? Remember? I'm sorry.

**CLIFF** Stop yelling. I'm trying to read.

**JIMMY** Why do you bother? You can't understand a word of it.

**CLIFF** Uh huh.

**JIMMY** You're too ignorant.

**CLIFF** Yes, and uneducated. Now shut up, will you?

**JIMMY** Why don't you get my wife to explain it to you? She's educated. *(To her)* That's right, isn't it?

**CLIFF** *(kicking out at him from behind his paper)* Leave her alone, I said.

**JIMMY** Do that again, you Welsh ruffian, and I'll pull your ears off. *(He bangs* **CLIFF***'s paper out of his hands)*

**CLIFF** *(leaning forward)* Listen — I'm trying to better myself. Let me get on with it, you big, horrible man. Give it me. *(Puts his hand out for paper)*

**ALISON** Oh, give it to him, Jimmy, for heaven's sake! I can't think!

**CLIFF** Yes, come on, give me the paper. She can't think.

**JIMMY** Can't think! *(Throws the paper back at him)* She hasn't had a thought for years! Have you?

**ALISON** No.

**JIMMY** *(picks up a weekly)* I'm getting hungry.

**ALISON** Oh, no, not already!

**CLIFF** He's a bloody pig.

**JIMMY** I'm not a pig. I just like food — that's all.

**CLIFF** Like it! You're like a sexual maniac — only with you it's food. You'll end up in the *News of the World,* boyo, you wait. James Porter, aged twenty-five was bound over last week after pleading guilty to interfering with a small cabbage and two tins of beans on his way home from the Builders' Arms. The accused said he hadn't been feeling well for some time, and had been having black-outs. He asked for his good record as an air-raid warden, second class, to be taken into account.

**JIMMY** *(grins)* Oh, yes, yes, yes. I like to eat. I'd like to live too. Do you mind?

**CLIFF** Don't see any use in your eating at all. You never get any fatter.

**JIMMY** People like me don't get fat. I've tried to tell you before. We just burn everything up. Now shut up while I read. You can make me some more tea.

**CLIFF** Good God, you've just had a great pot-ful! I only had one cup.

**JIMMY** Like hell! Make some more.

**CLIFF** *(to* **ALISON***)* Isn't that right? Didn't I only have one cup?

**ALISON** *(without looking up)* That's right.

**CLIFF** There you are. And she only had one cup, too. I saw her. You guzzled the lot.

**JIMMY** *(reading his weekly)* Put the kettle on.

**CLIFF** Put it on yourself. You've creased up my paper.

**JIMMY** I'm the only one who knows how to treat a paper, or anything else, in this house. *(Picks up another paper)* Girl here wants to know whether her boy friend will lose all respect for her if she gives him what he asks for. Stupid bitch.

**CLIFF** Just let me get at her, that's all.

**JIMMY** Who buys this damned thing? *(Throws it down)* Haven't you read the other posh paper yet?

**CLIFF** Which?

**JIMMY** Well, there are only two posh papers on a Sunday — the one you're reading, and this one. Come on, let me have that one, and you take this.

**CLIFF** Oh, all right.

*They exchange.*

I was only reading the Bishop of Bromley. *(Puts out his hand to* **ALISON***)* How are you, dullin'?

**ALISON** All right thank you, dear.

**CLIFF** *(grasping her hand)* Why don't you leave all that, and sit down for a bit? You look tired.

**ALISON** *(smiling)* I haven't much more to do.

**CLIFF** *(kisses her hand, and puts her fingers in his mouth)* She's a beautiful girl, isn't she?

**JIMMY** That's what they all tell me. *(His eyes meet* **ALISON***'s)*

**CLIFF** It's a lovely, delicious paw you've got. Ummmmm. I'm going to bite it off.

**ALISON** Don't! I'll burn his shirt.

**JIMMY** Give her her finger back, and don't be so sickening. What's the Bishop of Bromley say?

**CLIFF** *(letting go of* **ALISON***)* Oh, it says here that he makes a very moving appeal to all Christians to do all they can to assist in the manufacture of the H-bomb.

**JIMMY** Yes, well, that's quite moving, I suppose. *(To* **ALISON***)* Are you moved, my darling?

**ALISON** Well, naturally.

**JIMMY** There you are: even my wife is moved. I ought to send the Bishop a subscription. Let's see. What else does he say? Dumdidum-didumdidum. Ah yes. He's upset because someone has suggested that he supports the rich against the poor. He says he denies the difference of class distinctions. "This idea has been persistently and wickedly fostered by — the working-classes!" Well!

*He looks up at both of them for reaction, but* **CLIFF** *is reading, and* **ALISON** *is intent on her ironing.*

*(to* **CLIFF***)* Did you read that bit?

**CLIFF** Um?

*He has lost them, and he knows it, but he won't leave it.*

**JIMMY** *(to* **ALISON***)* You don't suppose your father could have written it, do you?

**ALISON** Written what?

**JIMMY** What I just read out, of course.

**ALISON** Why should my father have written it?

**JIMMY** Sounds rather like Daddy, don't you think?

**ALISON** Does it?

**JIMMY** Is the Bishop of Bromley his *nom de plume,* do you think?

**CLIFF** Don't take any notice of him. He's being offensive. And it's so easy for him.

**JIMMY** *(quickly)* Did you read about the woman who went to the mass meeting of a certain American evangelist at Earls Court ? She went forward, to declare herself for love or whatever it is, and, in the rush of converts to get to the front, she broke four ribs and got kicked in the head. She was yelling her head off in agony but, with fifty-thousand people putting all they'd got into "Onward Christian Soldiers", nobody even knew she was there.

*He looks up sharply for a response, but there isn't any.*

Sometimes, I wonder if there isn't something wrong with me. What about that tea?

**CLIFF** *(still behind paper)* What tea?

**JIMMY** Put the kettle on.

**ALISON** *looks at him.*

**ALISON** Do you want some more tea?

**JIMMY** I don't know. No, I don't think so.

**ALISON** Do you want some, Cliff?

**JIMMY** No, he doesn't. How much longer will you be doing that?

**ALISON** Won't be long.

**JIMMY** God, how I hate Sundays! It's always so depressing, always the same. We never seem to get any farther, do we?

Always the same ritual. Reading the papers, drinking tea, ironing. A few more hours, and another week gone. Our youth is slipping away. Do you know that?

**CLIFF** *(throws down paper)* What's that?

**JIMMY** *(casually)* Oh, nothing, nothing. Damn you, damn both of you, damn them all.

**CLIFF** Let's go to the pictures. *(To* **ALISON***)* What do you say, lovely?

**ALISON** I don't think I'll be able to. Perhaps Jimmy would like to go. *(To* **JIMMY***)* Would you like to?

**JIMMY** And have my enjoyment ruined by the Sunday night yobs in the front row? No, thank you. *(Pause)* Did you read Priestley's piece this week? Why on earth I ask, I don't know. I know damned well you haven't. Why do I spend ninepence on that damned paper every week? Nobody reads it except me. Nobody can be bothered. No one can raise themselves out of their delicious sloth. You two will drive me round the bend soon — I know it, as sure as I'm sitting here. I know you're going to drive me mad. Oh heavens, how I long for a little ordinary human enthusiasm. Just enthusiasm — that's all. I want to hear a warm, thrilling voice cry out Hallelujah! *(He bangs his breast theatrically)* Hallelujah! I'm alive! I've an idea. Why don't we have a little game? Let's pretend that we're human beings, and that we're actually alive. Just for a while. What do you say? Let's pretend we're human. *(He looks from one to the other)* Oh, brother, it's such a long time since I was with anyone who got enthusiastic about anything.

**CLIFF** What did he say?

**JIMMY** *(resentful of being dragged away from his pursuit of* **ALISON***)* What did who say?

**CLIFF** Mr. Priestley.

**JIMMY** What he always says, I suppose. He's like Daddy — still casting well-fed glances back to the Edwardian twilight

from his comfortable, disenfranchised wilderness. What the devil have you done to those trousers?

**CLIFF** Done?

**JIMMY** Are they the ones you bought last weekend? Look at them. Do you see what he's done to those new trousers?

**ALISON** You are naughty, Cliff. They look dreadful.

**JIMMY** You spend good money on a new pair of trousers, and then sprawl about in them like a savage. What do you think you're going to do when I'm not around to look after you? Well, what are you going to do? Tell me.

**CLIFF** *(grinning)* I don't know. *(To* **ALISON***)* What am I going to do, lovely?

**ALISON** You'd better take them off.

**JIMMY** Yes, go on. Take 'em off. And I'll kick your behind for you.

**ALISON** I'll give them a press while I've got the iron on.

**CLIFF** OK. *(Starts taking them off)* I'll just empty the pockets. *(Takes out keys, matches, handkerchief)*

**JIMMY** Give me those matches, will you?

**CLIFF** Oh, you're not going to start up that old pipe again, are you? It stinks the place out. *(To* **ALISON***)* Doesn't it smell awful?

**JIMMY** *grabs the matches and lights up.*

**ALISON** I don't mind it. I've got used to it.

**JIMMY** She's a great one for getting used to things. If she were to die, and wake up in paradise — after the first five minutes, she'd have got used to it.

**CLIFF** *(hands her the trousers)* Thank you, lovely. Give me a cigarette, will you?

**JIMMY** Don't give him one.

**CLIFF** I can't stand the stink of that old pipe any longer. I must have a cigarette.

**JIMMY** I thought the doctor said no cigarettes?

**CLIFF** Oh, why doesn't he shut up?

**JIMMY** All right. They're your ulcers. Go ahead, and have a bellyache, if that's what you want. I give up. I give up. I'm sick of doing things for people. And all for what?

**ALISON** *gives* **CLIFF** *a cigarette. They both light up, and she goes on with her ironing.*

Nobody thinks, nobody cares. No beliefs, no convictions, and no enthusiasm. Just another Sunday evening.

**CLIFF** *sits down again, in his pullover and shorts.*

Perhaps there's a concert on. *(Picks up Radio Times)* Ah. *(Nudges* **CLIFF** *with his foot)* Make some more tea.

**CLIFF** *grunts. He is reading again.*

Oh, yes. There's a Vaughan Williams. Well, that's something, anyway. Something strong, something simple, something English. I suppose people like me aren't supposed to be very patriotic. Somebody said — what was it? — We get our cooking from Paris. *(That's a laugh)* Our politics from Moscow, and our morals from Port Said. Something like that, anyway. Who was it? *(Pause)* Well, you wouldn't know anyway. I hate to admit it, but I think I can understand how her daddy must have felt when he came back from India, after all those years away. The old Edwardian brigade do make their brief little world look pretty tempting. All home-made cakes and croquet, bright ideas, bright uniforms. Always the same picture: high summer, the long days in the sun, slim volumes of verse, crisp linen, the smell of starch. What a romantic picture. Phoney, too, of course. It must have rained sometimes. Still, even I regret it somehow, phoney or not. If you've no world of your own, it's rather pleasant to regret the passing of someone else's. I must be getting sentimental. But I must say it's pretty dreary living in the American Age — unless you're an American of course. Perhaps all our children will be Americans. That's a thought, isn't it?

*He gives* **CLIFF** *a kick, and shouts at him.*

I said, that's a thought!

**CLIFF** You did?

**JIMMY** You sit there like a lump of dough. I thought you were going to make me some tea.

**CLIFF** *groans.* **JIMMY** *turns to* **ALISON.**

Is your friend Webster coming tonight?

**ALISON** He might drop in. You know what he is.

**JIMMY** Well, I hope he doesn't. I don't think I could take Webster tonight.

**ALISON** I thought you said he was the only person who spoke your language.

**JIMMY** So he is. Different dialect but same language. I like him. He's got bite, edge, drive—

**ALISON** Enthusiasm.

**JIMMY** You've got it. When he comes here, I begin to feel exhilarated. He doesn't like me, but he gives me something, which is more than I get from most people. Not since—

**ALISON** Yes, we know. Not since you were living with Madeline.

*She folds some of the clothes she has already ironed, and crosses to the bed with them.*

**CLIFF** *(behind paper again)* Who's Madeline?

**ALISON** Oh, wake up, dear. You've heard about Madeline enough times. She was his mistress. Remember? When he was fourteen. Or was it thirteen?

**JIMMY** Eighteen.

**ALISON** He owes just about everything to Madeline.

**CLIFF** I get mixed up with all your women. Was she the one all those years older than you?

**JIMMY** Ten years.

**CLIFF** Proper little Marchbanks, you are!

**JIMMY** What time's that concert on? *(Checks paper)*

**CLIFF** *(yawns)* Oh, I feel so sleepy. Don't feel like standing behind that blinking sweet stall again tomorrow. Why don't you do it on your own, and let me sleep in?

**JIMMY** I've got to be at the factory first thing, to get some more stock, so you'll have to put it up on your own. Another five minutes.

**ALISON** *has returned to her ironing board. She stands with her arms folded, smoking, staring thoughtfully.*

She had more animation in her little finger than you two put together.

**CLIFF** Who did?

**ALISON** Madeline.

**JIMMY** Her curiosity about things, and about people was staggering. It wasn't just a naïve nosiness. With her, it was simply the delight of being awake, and watching.

**ALISON** *starts to press* **CLIFF***'s trousers.*

**CLIFF** *(behind paper)* Perhaps I will make some tea, after all.

**JIMMY** *(quietly)* Just to be with her was an adventure. Even to sit on the top of a bus with her was like setting out with Ulysses.

**CLIFF** Wouldn't have said Webster was much like Ulysses. He's an ugly little devil.

**JIMMY** I'm not talking about Webster, stupid. He's all right though, in his way. A sort of female Emily Brontë. He's the only one of your friends *(to* **ALISON***)* who's worth tuppence, anyway. I'm surprised you get on with him.

**ALISON** So is he, I think.

**JIMMY** *(rising to window right, and looking out)* He's not only got guts, but sensitivity as well. That's about the rarest

combination I can think of. None of your other friends have got either.

**ALISON** *(very quietly and earnestly)* Jimmy, please — don't go on.

**JIMMY** *turns and looks at* **ALISON.** *The tired appeal in her voice has pulled him up suddenly. But he soon gathers himself for a new assault. He walks centre, behind* **CLIFF,** *and stands, looking down at his head.*

**JIMMY** Your friends — there's a shower for you.

**CLIFF** *(mumbling)* Dry up. Let her get on with my trousers.

**JIMMY** *(musingly)* Don't think I could provoke her. Nothing I could do would provoke her. Not even if I were to drop dead.

**CLIFF** Then drop dead.

**JIMMY** They're either militant —like her mummy and daddy — militant, arrogant and full of malice, or vague. She's somewhere between the two.

**CLIFF** Why don't you listen to that concert of yours? And don't stand behind me. That blooming droning on behind me gives me a funny feeling down the spine.

**JIMMY** *gives his ears a twist and* **CLIFF** *roars with pain.* **JIMMY** *grins back at him.*

That hurt, you rotten sadist! *(To* **ALISON***)* I wish you'd kick his head in for him.

**JIMMY** *(moving in between them)* Have you ever seen her brother? Brother Nigel? The straight-backed, chinless wonder from Sandhurst? I only met him once myself. He asked me to step outside when I told his mother she was evil-minded.

**CLIFF** And did you?

**JIMMY** Certainly not. He's a big chap. Well, you've never heard so many well-bred commonplaces come from beneath the same bowler hat. The Platitude from Outer Space — that's

brother Nigel. He'll end up in the Cabinet one day, make no mistake. But somewhere at the back of that mind is the vague knowledge that he and his pals have been plundering and fooling everybody for generations. *(Going upstage, and turning)* Now Nigel is just about as vague as you can get without being actually invisible. And invisible politicians aren't much use to anyone — not even to *his* supporters! And nothing is more vague about Nigel than his knowledge. His knowledge of life and ordinary human beings is so hazy, he really deserves some sort of decoration for it — a medal inscribed "For Vaguery in the Field". But it wouldn't do for him to be troubled by any stabs of conscience, however vague. *(Moving downstage again)* Besides, he's a patriot and an Englishman, and he doesn't like the idea that he may have been selling out his countryman all these years, so what does he do? The only thing he *can* do — seek sanctuary in his own stupidity. The only way to keep things as much like they always have been possible, is to make any alternative too much for your poor, tiny brain to grasp. It takes some doing nowadays. It really does. But they knew all about character building at Nigel's school, and he'll make it all right. Don't you worry, he'll make it. And, what's more, he'll do it better than anybody else!

*There is no sound, only the plod of* **ALISON***'s iron. Her eyes are fixed on what she is doing.* **CLIFF** *stares at the floor. His cheerfulness has deserted him for the moment.* **JIMMY** *is rather shakily triumphant. He cannot allow himself to look at either of them to catch their response to his rhetoric, so he moves across to the window, to recover himself, and look out.*

It's started to rain. That's all it needs. This room and the rain.

*He's been cheated out of his response, but he's got to draw blood somehow.*

*(conversationally)* Yes, that's the little woman's family. You know Mummy and Daddy, of course. And don't let the Marquess of Queensberry manner fool you. They'll kick you

in the groin while you're handing your hat to the maid. As for Nigel and Alison— *(In a reverent, Stuart Hibberd voice)* Nigel and Alison. They're what they sound like: sycophantic, phlegmatic and pusillanimous.

**CLIFF** I'll bet that concert's started by now. Shall I put it on?

**JIMMY** I looked up that word the other day. It's one of those words I've never been quite sure of, but always thought I knew.

**CLIFF** What was that?

**JIMMY** I told you — pusillanimous. Do you know what it means?

**CLIFF** *shakes his head.*

Neither did I really. All this time, I have been married to this woman, this monument to non-attachment, and suddenly I discover that there is actually a word that sums her up. Not just an adjective in the English language to describe her with — it's her name! Pusillanimous! It sounds like some fleshy Roman matron, doesn't it? The Lady Pusillanimous seen here with her husband Sextus, on their way to the Games.

**CLIFF** *looks troubled, and glances uneasily at* **ALISON**.

Poor old Sextus! If he were put into a Hollywood film, he's so unimpressive, they'd make some poor British actor play the part. He doesn't know it, but those beefcake Christians will make off with his wife in the wonder of stereophonic sound before the picture's over.

**ALISON** *leans against the board, and closes her eyes.*

The Lady Pusillanimous has been promised a brighter easier world than old Sextus can ever offer her. Hi, Pusey! What say we get the hell down to the arena, and maybe feed ourselves to a couple of lions, huh?

**ALISON** God help me, if he doesn't stop, I'll go out of my mind in a minute.

**JIMMY** Why don't you? That would be something, anyway. *(Crosses to chest of drawers right)* But I haven't told you what

it means yet, have I? *(Picks up dictionary)* I don't have to tell her — she knows. In fact, L.B.A. — B if my pronunciation is at fault, she'll probably wait for a suitably public moment to correct it. Here it is. I quote: "Pusillanimous. Adjective. Wanting of firmness of mind, of small courage, having a little mind, mean spirited, cowardly, timidity of mind. From the Latin pusillus, very little, and animus, the mind." *(Slams the book shut)* That's my wife! That's *her* isn't it? Behold the Lady Pusillanimous. *(Shouting hoarsely)* Hi, Pusey! When's your next picture?

**JIMMY** *watches her, waiting for her to break. For no more than a flash,* **ALISON***'s face seems to contort, and it looks as though she might throw her head back, and scream. But it passes in a moment. She is used to these carefully rehearsed attacks, and it doesn't look as though he will get his triumph tonight. She carries on with her ironing.* **JIMMY** *crosses, and switches on the radio. The Vaughan Williams concert has started. He goes back to his chair, leans back in it, and closes his eyes.*

**ALISON** *(handing* **CLIFF** *his trousers)* There you are, dear. They're not very good, but they'll do for now.

**CLIFF** *gets up and puts them on.*

**CLIFF** Oh, that's lovely.

**ALISON** Now try and look after them. I'll give them a real press later on.

**CLIFF** Thank you, you beautiful, darling girl.

*He puts his arms round her waist, and kisses her. She smiles, and gives his nose a tug.* **JIMMY** *watches from his chair.*

**ALISON** *(to* **CLIFF***)* Let's have a cigarette, shall we?

**CLIFF** That's a good idea. Where are they?

**ALISON** On the stove. Do you want one, Jimmy?

**JIMMY** No thank you, I'm trying to listen. Do you mind?

**CLIFF** Sorry, your lordship.

*He puts a cigarette in* **ALISON***'s mouth, and one in his own, and lights up.* **CLIFF** *sits down, and picks up his paper.* **ALISON** *goes back to her board.* **CLIFF** *throws down the paper, picks up another, and thumbs through that.*

**JIMMY** Do you have to make all that racket?

**CLIFF** Oh, sorry.

**JIMMY** It's quite a simple thing, you know — turning over a page. Anyway, that's my paper. *(Snatches it away)*

**CLIFF** Oh, don't be so mean!

**JIMMY** Price ninepence, obtainable from any newsagent's. Now let me hear the music, for God's sake.

*Pause.*

*(to* **ALISON***)* Are you going to be much longer doing that?

**ALISON** Why?

**JIMMY** Perhaps you haven't noticed it, but it's interfering with the radio.

**ALISON** I'm sorry. I shan't be much longer.

*A pause. The iron mingles with the music.* **CLIFF** *shifts restlessly in his chair,* **JIMMY** *watches* **ALISON,** *his foot beginning to twitch dangerously. Presently, he gets up quickly, crossing below* **ALISON** *to the radio, and turns it off.*

What did you do that for?

**JIMMY** I wanted to listen to the concert, that's all.

**ALISON** Well, what's stopping you?

**JIMMY** Everyone's making such a din — that's what's stopping me.

**ALISON** Well, I'm very sorry, but I can't just stop everything because you want to listen to music.

**JIMMY** Why not?

**ALISON** Really, Jimmy, you're like a child.

**JIMMY** Don't try and patronise me. *(Turning to* **CLIFF***)* She's so clumsy. I watch for her to do the same things every night. The way she jumps on the bed, as if she were stamping on someone's face, and draws the curtains back with a great clatter, in that casually destructive way of hers. It's like someone launching a battleship. Have you ever noticed how noisy women are? *(Crosses below chairs to left centre)* Have you? The way they kick the floor about, simply walking over it? Or have you watched them sitting at their dressing-tables, dropping their weapons and banging down their bits of boxes and brushes and lipsticks?

*He faces her dressing table.*

I've watched her doing it night after night. When you see a woman in front of her bedroom mirror, you realise what a refined sort of a butcher she is. *(Turns in)* Did you ever see some dirty old Arab, sticking his fingers into some mess of lamb fat and gristle? Well, she's just like that. Thank God they don't have many women surgeons! Those primitive hands would have your guts out in no time. Flip! Out it comes, like the powder out of its box. Flop! Back it goes, like the powder puff on the table.

**CLIFF** *(grimacing cheerfully)* Ugh! Stop it!

**JIMMY** *(moving upstage)* She'd drop your guts like hair clips and fluff all over the floor. You've got to be fundamentally insensitive to be as noisy and as clumsy as that.

*He moves centre and leans against the table.*

I had a flat underneath a couple of girls once. You heard every damned thing those bastards did, all day and night. The most simple, everyday actions were a sort of assault

course on your sensibilities. I used to plead with them. I even got to screaming the most ingenious obscenities I could think of, up the stairs at them. But nothing, nothing, would move them. With those two, even a simple visit to the lavatory sounded like a mediaeval siege. Oh, they beat me in the end — I had to go. I expect they're still at it. Or they're probably married by now, and driving some other poor devils out of their minds. Slamming their doors, stamping their high heels, banging their irons and saucepans — the eternal flaming racket of the female.

*Church bells start ringing outside.*

Oh, hell! Now the bloody bells have started!

*He rushes to the window.*

Wrap it up, will you? Stop ringing those bells! There's somebody going crazy in here! I don't want to hear them!

**ALISON** Stop shouting! *(Recovering immediately)* You'll have Miss Drury up here.

**JIMMY** I don't give a damn about Miss Drury — that mild old gentlewoman doesn't fool me, even if she takes in you two. She's an old robber. She gets more than enough out of us for this place every week. Anyway, she's probably in church... *(Points to the window)* Swinging on those bloody bells!

**CLIFF** *goes to the window, and closes it.*

**CLIFF** Come on now, be a good boy. I'll take us all out, and we'll have a drink.

**JIMMY** They're not open yet. It's Sunday. Remember? Anyway, it's raining.

**CLIFF** Well, shall we dance?

*He pushes* **JIMMY** *round the floor, who is past the mood for this kind of fooling.*

Do you come here often?

**JIMMY** Only in the mating season. All right, all right, very funny.

*He tries to escape, but* **CLIFF** *holds him like a vice.*

Let me go.

**CLIFF** Not until you've apologised for being nasty to everyone. Do you think bosoms will be in or out, this year?

**JIMMY** Your teeth will be out in a minute, if you don't let go!

*He makes a great effort to wrench himself free, but* **CLIFF** *hangs on. They collapse to the floor centre, below the table, struggling.* **ALISON** *came on with her ironing. This is routine, but she is getting close to breaking point, all the same.* **CLIFF** *manages to break away, and finds himself in front of the ironing board,* **JIMMY** *springs up. They grapple.*

**ALISON** Look out, for heaven's sake! Oh, it's more like a zoo every day!

**JIMMY** *makes a frantic, deliberate effort, and manages to push* **CLIFF** *on to the ironing-board, and into* **ALISON.** *The board collapses.* **CLIFF** *falls against her, and they end up in a heap on the floor.* **ALISON** *cries out in pain.* **JIMMY** *looks down at them, dazed and breathless.*

**CLIFF** *(picking himself up)* She's hurt. Are you all right?

**ALISON** Well, does it look like it!

**CLIFF** She's burnt her arm on the iron.

**JIMMY** Darling, I'm sorry.

**ALISON** Get out!

**JIMMY** I'm sorry, believe me. You think I did it on pur—

**ALISON** *(her head shaking helplessly)* Clear out of my *sight!*

**JIMMY** *stares at her uncertainly.* **CLIFF** *nods to him, and he turns and goes out of the door.*

**CLIFF** Come and sit down.

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