

# Dangerous Obsession

A play

N. J. Crisp

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## DANGEROUS OBSESSION

First presented at the Churchill Theatre, Bromley.

Subsequently presented in London by Mark Furness and John Newman, Dina and Alexander E. Racolin and Martin Birrane by arrangement with Louis Benjamin for Stoll Moss Theatres Ltd at the Apollo Theatre on 9th November, 1987, with the following cast of characters:

**Sally Driscoll**  
**John Barrett**  
**Mark Driscoll**

Carol Drinkwater  
Dinsdale Landen  
Jeremy Bulloch

The play was directed by **Roger Smith**  
Designed by **Shelagh Keegan**

The action is continuous, and takes place in the conservatory of the Driscolls' home—a large, luxurious Georgian house, in an enviable setting in the Home Counties.

Time: the present.

**ACT I** Late afternoon on a hot day in late summer

**ACT II** Immediately following

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## ACT I

*The conservatory of the Driscolls' house in the Home Counties. Late afternoon on a summer's day*

*As the House Lights dim music commences—Ravel's La Valse*

*The CURTAIN rises on the conservatory of a very expensive, secluded house in the Home Counties. There is a hint that the house is Georgian in period*

*The conservatory itself is Victorian, its iron framework solid and elaborate. With its high arched roof there is a Gothic feeling about it. Roller blinds slanting upwards across the roof area can be used to shield the interior from direct sunlight, and these roller blinds are drawn across the roof now*

*To the left, french windows lead into the drawing room of the house itself. The other sides of the conservatory are almost entirely of glass. There are two or three windows which can be opened to admit fresh air, all at present closed. There are floor length curtains which can be drawn at night; at present they are open. (Or venetian blinds which can be used for the same purpose. If so, these are "down", but the slats in the "open" position). To the right, a door, standing open, a key in the lock on the inside, leads out into the garden*

*Outside the conservatory, flowering shrubs mask any view of the grounds of this house. In the distance, a wooded hill can be seen*

*The conservatory itself is a pleasant relaxing area and furnished appropriately in a light, modern style; a couch, comfortable chairs, a low glass table, standard and table lamps, a refrigerated drinks cabinet, near which is a push button telephone extension on one of several wall fittings. Cacti and indoor plants here and there provide a luxuriant atmosphere*

*The conservatory is empty. The music is coming from a compact disc player which stands on one of the wall fittings*

*After a moment or two, Sally Driscoll enters from the garden, carrying a small watering can. She is a striking woman with a splendid figure, clad only in a swinsuit and sandals. She hesitates, thinks about pouring herself a drink, decides to postpone it, and begins to water the indoor plants. Intent upon her task, and with the music—to which she unconsciously jigs slightly in time with the rhythm—she neither hears nor sees the man who appears outside, and stands looking at her through the glass. This is John Barrett*

*John's business suit is neat but not expensive. He wears a collar and tie and carries a large briefcase. Not a conventionally good looking man, he gives the impression of being mild, rather ordinary, pedantic, self-deprecat-*

*ing, but his face is capable of assuming other expressions which can be inexplicably dangerous*

*Just now, John merely studies Sally's swimsuit clad figure in an expressionless way, as if committing her body to memory*

*As Sally moves from plant to plant, John drifts along the outside of the conservatory so that, whether by accident or design, she does not notice him. Finally, when Sally stands erect, and brushes a wisp of hair back, he seems to take a breath, and taps on the window with one fingernail*

*Sally does not hear this either. She looks round at the plants, decides that she has finished, puts the watering can down, and is about to move to the drinks cabinet. Meanwhile, John has moved again, and is standing in the doorway to the garden. He raps on the glass pane of the door more loudly. Sally hears this, swings round, startled, and stares at the figure in the doorway. John gives her a nice apologetic smile*

**John** I did ring . . .

*John's voice is gentle, and Sally does not catch what he says*

**Sally** What?

**John** I was explaining . . .

**Sally** (*higher*) Pardon?

**John** (*louder*) The bell was probably drowned by Ravel's *La Valse*.

**Sally** Who? Just a minute (*She switches the disc player off with a sharp movement. She feels off balance, and at a disadvantage*) Yes?

**John** I rang the front door bell, but I expect . . . (*He points at the now silent compact disc player*)

**Sally** Oh, yes.

**John** I could hear the music . . .

**Sally** I've only just come in.

**John** Lovely weather, isn't it. (*He loosens his tie, warm*) Overdue though, after so much rain of late.

**Sally** (*wary, curtly*) Yes, well, what can I do for you?

**John** John Barrett.

**Sally** Barrett?

**John** Yes.

**Sally** You must have the wrong house.

**John** I believe not.

**Sally** Do you mean Bartlett? There's a Bartlett near the golf course. Otherwise, ask at the post office.

**John** What for?

**Sally** The person you want. No one called Barrett lives near here.

**John** I am not seeking my namesake.

**Sally** Your what?

**John** I am John Barrett.

**Sally** Oh, you . . . I see . . .

**John** May I come in?

**Sally** I'm afraid you've chosen a bad time.

**John** I had hoped this might prove a convenient moment to call.

**Sally** No. (*Referring to his briefcase*) And if it's double glazing . . .

**John** No.

**Sally** We're not interested.

**John** It's not.

**Sally** Well, whatever it is, leave a leaflet or something, and I'll show it to my husband . . .

**John** I have no leaflets . . .

**Sally** (*pointedly*) . . . who will be home any moment.

**John** I'm not selling anything.

**Sally** No door-to-door salesman ever is. Whatever it is, we don't want it. OK?

**John** Materially, you appear to have everything anyway.

**Sally** Right, Then please go.

*Sally closes the door on John, leaving him outside, and turns away*

*John walks away the way he came, and out of sight. After a moment, he reappears, walks back, and opens the door*

**John** If you would allow me to step inside and explain . . .

**Sally** No. Is that clear?

**John** I wish you would.

**John** Our alarm system would not only raise the dead, it's connected directly to the police station. (*Her hand hovers over the panic button, which is on the wall near the french windows*) I only have to press this.

**John** I have realised, of course, that you don't remember me.

**Sally** We've never met.

**John** We danced together, you and I . . .

**Sally** I warn you, for the last time . . .

*Sally is about to press the button, when John's words percolate*

We what?

**John** A less than memorable experience, for you, I'm sure.

**Sally** Danced?

**John** I'm not very good, You were, though. Possibly it's the dinner jacket.

**Sally** What are you on about?

**John** I was wearing one at the time.

**Sally** With or without, you've made a mistake.

**John** Torquay.

**Sally** What about it?

**John** Torquay was the venue.

**Sally** Torquay?

**John** Yes.

**Sally** I assure you, I've never been to Torquay in my life. I wouldn't dream of going to . . . (*She breaks off as a dim recollection finally stirs*) . . . oh, you mean . . . Torquay . . .

**John** Yes.

**Sally** Some sort of . . .

**John** Conference.

**Sally** One weekend.

**John** Long weekend. Friday till Monday.

**Sally** Long weekend. At that hotel. And on the last night . . .

**John** There was a gala dinner, followed by dancing.

**Sally** And that was when . . .

**John** I had the pleasure. Between courses too, for those so inclined.

**Sally** Sorry?

**John** Dancing. Although we didn't. Only after dinner.

**Sally** No. Yes. So we were . . .

**John** On the same table. Quite.

**Sally** Of course! You're *that* . . . er . . .

**John** John.

**Sally** Yes. *That* John!

**John** And Jane.

**Sally** Sorry?

**John** My wife.

**Sally** Yes! John and Jane! Yes!

**John** Yes!

**Sally** Well, well.

**John** May I?

**Sally** Oh, yes. Please. Come on in, of course.

**John** Thank you. (*He comes into the conservatory*)

**Sally** Do forgive me, John.

**John** Please don't concern yourself.

**Sally** It's just that I meet so many people . . . you know how it is . . .

**John** It is a phenomenon I have observed frequently.

**Sally** Sorry . . . what is?

**John** The necessity to remind people who I am.

**Sally** John, the fault is mine, you took me by surprise, I was thinking of other things . . . oh dear . . . I hate lame excuses . . .

**John** Please. I do understand.

**Sally** Can I offer you a drink?

**John** Thank you.

**Sally** I think I feel like one myself.

*John puts his briefcase down beside the couch. Sally moves to the drinks cabinet*

What would you like? No, don't tell me. (*Guessing hopefully*) You're a gin and tonic. Are you?

**John** That's right.

*John joins Sally at the drinks cabinet*

**Sally** You see? It's all coming back.

*Sally, who has not started mixing the drinks, smiles at John, and he smiles back*

**John** I'm glad.

**Sally** We'll begin again from here, yes?

**John** That would be difficult.

**Sally** Why?

**John** Memories.

**Sally** Oh?

**John** That weekend—I remember every trifle.

*Due to their proximity and John's steady gaze, Sally becomes very aware that she is only wearing a swimsuit still, and moves away*

**Sally** Excuse me, I think I'll . . . *(She picks up an elegant housecoat, which is lying across the back of the couch, and slips it on, feigning being chilly)* Surprising, the chill in the air as the sun goes down, isn't it.

*John is about to mop his face with his handkerchief. He returns it to his breast pocket*

**John** Yes, isn't it. Shall I carry on?

*Sally, buttoning her housecoat, looks towards him*

**Sally** Carry on?

**John** The drinks.

**Sally** Oh . . . yes . . . thank you . . .

**John** Are you still a gin and tonic too?

**Sally** That's me.

**John** With ice and lemon.

**Sally** Yes.

**John** We remember each other's drinks. That's a promising start, don't you think?

*Sally sits on the couch, and glances over her shoulder at John in a speculative fashion*

**Sally** Of what?

**John** Renewing our acquaintance perhaps? *(He hands Sally her drink)*

**Sally** Thank you. You'll be able to . . .

**John** *(indicating her drink)* Would you like to try it?

**Sally** I'm sure it's fine. *(She takes a deep swallow)* Just right.

**John** Good. *(He returns to the cabinet to finish mixing his own drink)*  
You were saying?

**Sally** Was I?

**John** Be able to . . . ?

**Sally** Oh, yes. Meet my husband again too. He's probably on his way home.

**John** Such was my presumption.

**Sally** Oh, I see. So . . .

**John** Perhaps I should close the door.

**Sally** Why?

*John moves across towards the door to the garden*

**John** Since there's a chill in the air.

**Sally** It's all right. I'm fine now.

**John** I think I should. You're not wearing much, change of temperature and so on. (*He closes the door, but remains near it, looking admiringly towards the house itself*) I like your house.

**Sally** Yes, it's quite nice.

**John** Delightful. Secluded and yet convenient for everything. (*He points at the french windows*) That will be the drawing room . . .

**Sally** Yes.

**John** Or is it two rooms?

**Sally** No, it's L-shaped. Though it's on two levels.

**John** Oh, yes, I see. And beyond?

**Sally** (*turning to look towards the french windows*) The hall, dining room. Mark's study, breakfast room, kitchen, laundry room . . .

*While Sally is looking away from him, John deftly turns the key in the lock of the door to the garden, and pockets the key. By the time Sally looks back towards him, John has left the door and is on his way to the cabinet to collect his drink*

. . . shall I draw a plan?

*Sally finds that John is not at the door, and looks over her other shoulder to find him at the drinks cabinet*

**John** No, I can visualise it now.

*Sally rises and moves away from the couch*

**Sally** Do sit down.

**John** Thank you. Where would you . . . ?

*Sally indicates the couch*

Thank you. (*He sits on the couch. Indicating his glass*) And for your hospitality.

**Sally** My pleasure.

**John** A house this size, an acre of ground, the swimming pool, it must take a lot of keeping up.

**Sally** I do have help.

**John** Of course.

**Sally** I like room to breathe. I like space.

**John** Oh, yes. Space is nice.

**Sally** Besides, we're obliged to do a good deal of entertaining.

**John** Socially?

**Sally** Some. Mostly business.

**John** Your husband's hostess. Charming the men while not making the wives jealous.

**Sally** (*amused*) Something like that.

**John** Behind every successful man . . . and so forth.

**Sally** It's still true.

**John** He's fortunate to have such a partner. I've been looking forward to this meeting. Recalling that delightful evening.

**Sally** Torquay, you mean.

**John** Yes.

**Sally** John, I think it's time I admitted something. (*She sits on a chair to the left, near the french windows*)

**John** You don't really remember much about it.

**Sally** No. (*Eyeing him*) Did I babble on?

**John** Certainly not. You... entertained... me most charmingly. You were enchanting.

**Sally** I must have been on automatic.

**John** You exaggerate.

**Sally** And we talked about...?

**John** Many things.

**Sally** Personal matters?

**John** Fleeting references. In passing.

**Sally** How fleeting. Come on. For instance?

**John** Oh, singing your husband's praises, for example, how brilliant he was, full of ideas.

**Sally** Oh, no...

**John** How different it was in the early days when you first met, money problems, lack of capital...

**Sally** (*appalled*) In front of Mark?

**John** No, he was dancing with my wife at the time.

**Sally** Thank God for that. (*She shakes her head, picks up her glass, looks at John's glass*) You've hardly touched yours.

**John** One lasts me a long time,

**Sally** Wine with meals?

**John** A glass.

**Sally** No wonder you remember everything. I think I'll top mine up. (*She takes her glass to the drinks cabinet, gives herself more gin and tonic*)

What I don't understand... there was a reception on the first night when everyone was introduced... I remember that.

**John** We arrived late. Missed the reception.

**Sally** Oh, I see.

**John** The rest of the weekend was very intense. My wife remarked that we only seemed to meet in bed.

**Sally** (*returning to her chair*) I expect she was glad to get away.

**John** I think she rather enjoyed it.

**Sally** Really? It was my idea of hell. Nothing to do except try and be nice to some of the most appalling, dreary people I've ever... (*hurriedly*)... I don't mean you, of course.

**John** No, no, of course not, naturally.

**Sally** Anyway, when the last day arrived, I thought "Thank God" and had a drink or two to celebrate. That was at lunchtime.

**John** Lunchtime.

**Sally** Before dinner, I had another drink... or two... or... I don't know. And I expect the wine flowed at dinner.

**John** Your husband was most hospitable. He wouldn't allow me to contribute, even to the very costly old brandy he insisted we partook of afterwards.

**Sally** I didn't have brandy—did I?

**John** (*nodding*) With every appearance of enjoyment.

**Sally** No wonder. We don't get on, brandy and me. It's a miracle I could stand up, much less dance.

**John** I do assure you, no one would have known.

**Sally** It's not a complete blank. I remember . . . which dress I wore. (*She hesitates, thinking*)

**John** Most elegant, if I may say so.

**Sally** . . . going down to the ballroom . . . the table for four . . . it was just four . . . ?

**John** We'd been put together, perhaps by chance.

**Sally** But the rest . . . (*She shakes her head*) . . . not until the next day, the ghastly drive home, feeling awful . . . I hope you don't think I usually drink like that.

**John** I think—you possess great beauty.

*Sally stands, glances at her watch, moves to the french windows as if looking to see if her husband has arrived*

**Sally** Mark shouldn't be long now. It was him you came to see?

**John** Not exclusively. I was anxious to see you too. But my business is with him.

**Sally** Hence the briefcase. (*Playfully*) You are selling something.

**John** (*smiling*) A concept, let us say, to which he may care to give some attention.

**Sally** Well, I'm sure he'll be only too glad to help you if he possibly can.

**John** That's what I'm here to find out. He may not wish to discuss it.

**Sally** He most certainly will. I shall make sure of that.

**John** Than I shall rely on your good offices.

**Sally** (*making conversation*) Do you live far away?

**John** In linear terms, some nine miles. Millers Wood.

**Sally** It sounds familiar.

**John** The big estate.

**Sally** Oh, yes, of course.

**John** Convenient for the railway station.

**Sally** Yes. Very.

**John** Bungalows and town houses. We chose one of the former. It had the advantage of a large additional room in the roofspace with dormer windows and a pleasant outlook to the front.

**Sally** It sounds rather charming.

**John** The railway line does run fairly close to the bottom of the garden, but with double glazing one scarcely notices the passing trains.

**Sally** No.

*There is a silence during which nothing at all can be heard save birdsong in the garden. John seems unaware of the silence, perfectly content merely to sit. Sally feels obliged to say something*

You should have looked us up before.

**John** The possibility was mooted when we parted that evening.

**Sally** Then why didn't you get in touch?

**John** When I raised the subject with my wife later, she advised against it.

**Sally** Why?

**John** She made the point that, while we'd all got on terribly well that evening, in reality we were complete strangers moving in very different circles, and you might regard such a call as something of an imposition.

**Sally** What utter nonsense. I'm sorry, but she was quite mistaken.

**John** I did venture to disagree with her myself, but she reminded me that you would no doubt telephone us should you wish to see us again. I found that a telling point.

**Sally** Yes, but . . . did we have your phone number?

**John** You asked your husband to take it.

**Sally** Well, I'm sure I did if you say so . . . I can only apologise . . .

**John** There's really no need.

**Sally** I simply don't remember . . . and it must have slipped Mark's mind too.

**John** I quite understand, I assure you.

**Sally** We really only ever get the weekends to ourselves.

**John** And I'm intruding on one of them.

**Sally** Not at all.

**John** Once I've spoken to him I shall leave you in peace.

*There is another silence, during which, with deliberation, John takes a small sip of his drink, and puts the glass down again, while Sally covertly eyes his movements*

**Sally** Tell me about . . . your wife . . .

**John** Jane.

**Sally** Jane. Do you have children?

**John** Like yourselves, no.

**Sally** We're considering it.

**John** So you said—then.

**Sally** Oh, God, I did babble on. Is there anything I didn't tell you?

**John** It was a long evening. We shared a number of confidences.

**Sally** But I don't remember yours. It's not fair.

**John** Mine, I dare say, were scarcely worth committing to memory. Which are you considering? Whether? Or when?

**Sally** What? Oh, a baby. When. I really want one.

**John** Then why not now?

**Sally** Oh, Mark thinks we should wait. Until he could spend more time at home. He's away a lot. Business pressures. The usual. I'm working on it. Does your wife . . . does Jane work?

**John** As a beauty consultant.

**Sally** Perhaps I should consult her.

**John** That would be an act of supreme supererogation.

**Sally** Are you planning to have children?

**John** We waited for some long time. Too long in our case.

**Sally** Why?

**John** It's interesting how we speak of spending time, isn't it. As if the account were bottomless, to be drawn on indefinitely. Not so. As the poet reminds us, "The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ, moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit shall lure it back to cancel half a Line, nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it."

**Sally** I don't accept all that fatalist stuff.

**John** Fate overtakes us, whether we like it or not.

**Sally** No. We can change it, if we want to.

**John** Even the past?

**Sally** The past is how we perceive it.

**John** The past is a series of events which cannot be changed.

**Sally** But the results can be modified, given the will. You don't have to just sit back and accept it.

**John** Yes, I think I might agree with that.

**Sally** I believe . . . (*She breaks off, listening*) Was that a car?

*There is the faint sound of a car coming to a stop on a gravel drive*

*Yes. (She gets up, crosses to the drinks cabinet, deftly mixes a dry martini, in a jug)*

*There is the sound of the front door closing*

**Mark** (*off*) Sally? Sally?

**Sally** (*calling*) Out here, darling. Ready for your drink?

**Mark** (*off*) Gasping. Shan't be a minute.

**Sally** (*calling*) There's an old friend called to see us.

*John gets up and moves away from the couch*

**Mark** (*off*) Really? Who is it? Is that you, Clive, you old devil?

**Sally** (*calling*) No, it's not Clive. Come and say hullo.

**Mark** (*off*) Just coming.

*Sally pours the dry martini into its glass, leaves it on the cabinet, and crosses to the french windows*

*Mark enters*

*Sally meets him and embraces him warmly*

*Mark is immaculately and expensively suited (John's neat suit looks baggy in comparison), good looking, outgoing—just this side of hearty—possessing the energy and confidence of the successful man*

*John is in a position where he is not in Mark's immediate line of sight*

**Sally** Hullo, darling.

**Mark** I thought I'd never make it.

*They kiss briefly. Sally draws back a little*

**Sally** Traffic?

**Mark** Unbelievable.

*Sally goes to the drinks cabinet and hands Mark his drink*

**Sally** Say hullo to our visitor.

*John turns and faces Mark. There is a perceptible moment of awkwardness as Mark appears not to recognise John. Sally fills in the moment, or almost*

**Sally** You remember John Barrett, darling. Torquay, John and . . .

**John** Jane.

**Sally** Jane.

**Mark** (*breaking into a pleasant smile*) Yes, of course. How are you, John?

**John** Very well, thank you, Mr Driscoll.

**Mark** Mark, please. Well, this is a pleasant surprise. (*He smiles; sips his drink*)

**John** Thank you.

*Mark becomes aware of the drink in his own hand, and the fact that John hasn't got one in his*

**Mark** I'm sorry. What would you like to drink?

**John** Your wife very kindly did the honours earlier.

**Mark** Well, have another. Keep me company.

**Sally** He's a slow drinker, darling.

**Mark** Oh, yes, of course, I remember. Well, whenever you're ready John, just say the word.

**John** You're very kind.

**Mark** Do sit down, please. Well, how are things with you, John?

**John** Not on your upward curve, far from it.

**Mark** Let me see, weren't you thinking of setting up on your own, or something?

**John** The initial capital required proved too formidable a problem.

**Mark** You have to believe in yourself, take a chance.

**John** How do you . . . ? . . . if I may ask? . . . when it comes to raising capital?

**Mark** Self generated from cash flow.

**John** Self generated. I see.

**Mark** (*about his drink*) I think I feel like the other half. (*To John*) Are you quite sure?

**John** Not yet, thank you.

**Mark** (*to Sally*) Darling?

**Sally** No thanks.

*Mark crosses to the drinks cabinet and pours his second dry martini*

**Mark** Well, what have you two been talking about?

**John** Torquay, mostly.

**Mark** Reminiscing, eh?

**Sally** John had to remind me, I'm afraid. I owned up. You know what I was like.

**Mark** Yes, you were a bit under the weather afterwards, weren't you.

(*He returns to his previous position and sits*) It must have been something you ate.

**Sally** No, it wasn't.

**John** It could well have been, you know.

**Sally** John, don't be gallant. I got pissed.

**Mark** Just the same, it was a jolly nice evening.

**Sally** So I gather.

**John** One I shall long remember. A veritable landmark.

**Sally** You're overdoing it, John.

**John** By no means.

*Mark nurses his drink, takes a look at his watch. Sally breaks the silence, good hostess style*

**Sally** John's really come to see you, darling.

**Mark** Oh?

**Sally** He thinks you may be able to help him.

**Mark** Concerning?

**Sally** A business matter. (*To John*) Where did you put your . . . oh, here it is. (*She lifts the briefcase. It is heavier than she had anticipated*)

Good lord . . . sorry . . .

*Sally hands the briefcase to John, who rests it on his knees*

Heavy.

**John** I thought it wise to come fully prepared.

*Mark is eyeing the briefcase with some dismay, although John makes no move to open it*

**Mark** John . . .

**Sally** (*making to rise*) Well, it's time I changed, so I'll leave you two in peace.

**John** (*firmly*) Please don't go.

**Sally** John, if you want to talk business . . .

**John** You may have an opinion about the matter in hand. I'd very much welcome your views.

**Sally** (*uncertainly*) Well . . .

**Mark** (*politely but firmly*) John, forgive me, but I had no warning of this . . .

**John** To be candid, I feared you might not be prepared to see me.

**Mark** Of course I would, given some notice, but not when confronted by a fat briefcase without knowing what it's all about . . .

**Sally** Mark . . .

**John** I shall be only too happy to explain in full.

**Mark** Yes, I'm sure. (*Reasonably*) John, I've just got home. I've shut my office after a long hard week. We have people coming.

**Sally** Darling, I promised John you'd talk to him.

**Mark** I will. Gladly. At my office when I can set an hour aside. All right?

**John** When would you suggest?

**Mark** My secretary makes my appointments. Ring her.

**Sally** Mark, surely you can spare a few minutes . . .

**John** No, please. It will take much longer than a few minutes.

**Mark** (*amiably*) Well, that's settled then.

**John** Yes. (*He takes another of his delicate sips*)

*Mark watches him. John sets his glass down—still with some drink in it.*

*Sally, put out, feels obliged to make amends*

**Sally** Perhaps next week . . . no, the week after . . . you'd like to bring Jane over for dinner one evening.

**John** I fear that will not be possible.

**Sally** Well, we go on holiday then. When we come back. Yes?

**John** The date is immaterial.

**Sally** Please, John. You'd be more than welcome.

**John** My wife was the victim of an accident.

**Sally** (*in a hushed tone*) Victim? You mean . . . ?

**John** A car accident.

**Sally** Was she . . . I mean . . . ?

**John** (*shaking his head*) The outcome was a tragic one, I'm sorry to say.

**Mark** Oh, no . . .

**Sally** How terrible. John, I'm so sorry.

**John** Thank you.

**Sally** You should have said something before . . .

**John** It didn't arise, and—it still isn't easy.

**Sally** No, of course. I do understand. I am so desperately sorry, John. I know that's useless, but . . . I don't know what else to say.

**John** The results of past events can be modified, you said, given the will. How would you set about modifying the results of that accident, I wonder?

*There is a pause. Sally, at a loss, looks at John. John's eyes are fixed on his glass. After a moment, he takes yet another delicate, careful sip, which finally empties his glass*

**Sally** How long ago was . . .

*Sally breaks off, as John looks at her*

. . . I'm sorry . . . you did say . . .

**John** No, no, if you wish to know more, I have no objection.

**Sally** It's just that . . . it was so unexpected . . .

**John** The accident?

**Sally** Hearing about such a dreadful thing.

**John** It appears to be open to question if you even remember her.

**Sally** I wish I did, John . . . truly . . . I'm sure Mark does.

**Mark** Yes, of course. She was very interesting to talk to.

**John** Yes, she was a good conversationalist. She made up for me.

**Sally** Were you with her? I mean, when it . . .

**John** No. (*To Mark—looking towards him*) She may have mentioned the work she did . . .

**Mark** Yes, the beauty business. She seemed very enthusiastic about it. Promotion in the wind, wasn't there?

**John** She took it seriously, as she did everything she undertook. (*To Mark*) Do you ever use public transport?

**Mark** What?

**John** Trains. Buses.

**Mark** No. Can't stand it.

**John** I prefer it.

*There is another hole in the conversation, as John continues to gaze reflectively at Mark*

**Mark** Just as well someone does, I suppose.

**John** Quite so. Consider the traffic jams if all we commuters took to the roads.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** It was, therefore, perfectly convenient for Jane to use the car. We only had the one, of course.

**Mark** But then you only needed one.

**John** Exactly. In fact, even when we went out together, Jane nearly always drove. She was a very careful driver, and I am a good passenger.

**Sally** Mark's terrible. He hates it.

**Mark** But you're more dashing than careful, darling.

**Sally** Nonsense. I've never had an acci . . . (*She checks herself*) You're the same with everyone.

**John** However, I digress with extraneous detail.

**Sally** No, no . . . please . . . you were saying . . .

**John** Explaining.

**Sally** Explaining.

**John** That Jane always took the car.

**Sally** For her work.

**John** Also to attend the product meetings her company called from time to time. Once she became a supervisor, they became more frequent.

**Sally** I see.

**John** At various seaside locations. Although not Torquay.

**Sally** No.

**John** Presumably because it was too far.

**Sally** Yes.

*Mark is wearing the expression of a man who is finding this account tediously long winded*

**John** She enjoyed such excursions. She looked forward to them.

**Sally** But you didn't go with her.

**John** (*tapping his briefcase*) I used the opportunity to work late.

**Sally** I see. And it was when she was . . .

**John** On her way back. I was working in the large upstairs room which I believe I mentioned . . .

**Sally** Yes.

**John** . . . when a police car drew up outside. The day had been wet and

miserable and it had been dark for some long time, but I was not concerned. After such meetings, she frequently returned home very late. I remember idly wondering what a police car was doing in our close. Then the doorbell rang. And again as I hurried downstairs.

**Sally** How awful.

**John** Yes. It must be an unpleasant duty for the police. I couldn't help feeling sorry for them.

**Sally** No, I meant . . . for you . . .

**John** It was a shock. A great shock.

**Sally** It must have been.

**John** Yes. It was.

*John seems to have reverted to his occasional condition of apparent catalepsy. Sally feels that she has been left to carry too much of the burden, and gives Mark a meaning look. Mark's expressive gesture conveys "nothing to do with me", and also boredom. Sally gives him a nasty look, and turns back to John assuming a sympathetic expression*

**Sally** John, did you ever . . .

**John** (*interrupting*) Do you know, I think the other drink you offered would be most acceptable, if it's not too much trouble.

**Sally** (*standing up*) Of course not. The same again?

**John** Please. (*He stands up for no apparent reason, walks past Sally towards the french windows with his briefcase, then pauses*) Would I be right in supposing there is a cloakroom off the hall?

**Sally** Oh . . . yes . . . I'll show you . . .

**John** No, please. I'm sure I can find it.

**Sally** It's no trouble . . .

**Mark** Sally, he can't miss it. He doesn't need a chaperone to go to the loo.

*John moves to the french windows, but pauses to look at the push button telephone*

**John** Is this one of these ingenious telephones which stores the most used ten numbers?

**Sally** Yes.

**John** A friend has one. Your husband's office number, I expect . . .

**Mark** Fortnum and Mason's . . .

**Sally** My mother . . .

**Mark** Harrods . . . Asprey's . . . Gucci's . . . Tiffany's . . .

**Sally** Do you get the bills? No. All right?

**John** And nine for nine, nine nine. For swiftness in an emergency.

**Sally** Yes.

**John** The same thought occurred to my friend. I expect this is a high risk area.

**Sally** It is. So we take precautions.

**John** Very wise. Well, if you'll excuse me . . . it must be the gin . . .

*Sally manufactures a smile for him*

*John smiles back, turns, and goes through the french windows and out of sight*

*Sally picks up John's glass*

**Mark** For Christ's sake make it a small one.

**Sally** He'll be all right. He's only had the one.

**Mark** He drinks like a bloody old woman. If you give him more than a thimbleful, he'll sit here all night.

**Sally** You kept pressing him to have another.

**Mark** I didn't know he was going to drone on and on did I?

**Sally** Mark, that's horrible. His wife's been killed . . .

**Mark** All right, I'm sorry about that. But it's nothing to do with us. What the hell are we supposed to do about it?

*Sally crosses to the drinks cabinet and refills John's glass*

**Sally** The least we can do is listen to him.

**Mark** I'd have thought you'd had enough of that at Torquay. You were stuck with him all evening.

**Sally** I don't remember . . .

**Mark** Lucky you.

**Sally** He was saying how kind and hospitable you were . . .

**Mark** What else could I do? Some fool had put them on our table . . .

**Sally** You're not being very kind now.

**Mark** (*rationaly*) Look, possibly he needs to talk to someone, although he hasn't shown any emotion that I can see . . .

**Sally** That could be just his way. It's all bottled up inside.

**Mark** What? There's nothing inside John Barrett, except a little man with a unique capacity for boring the arse off everybody.

*Sally glances towards the half open french window*

**Sally** Mark, keep your voice down.

**Mark** (*complying*) A boring little man with an equally tiresome little wife.

**Sally** She's dead. For God's sake show some feeling.

**Mark** How can you feel for someone you didn't know?

**Sally** But we did . . . well, you did . . . I suppose I must have talked to her as well . . .

**Mark** Not much. You left that duty to me.

**Sally** Well, anyway . . .

**Mark** If you remembered her, you'd know. Sort of insipid pretty, clinging vine type, desperately trying to be intelligent, with nothing whatever to say.

**Sally** The job she had, she can't have been all that dim.

*Mark rises and moves to Sally at the drinks cabinet*

**Mark** Darling, how many brains do you need to flog make-up? Come on.

**Sally** Anyway, just be polite to John when he gets back. (*She glances automatically towards the french windows, before she returns to the*

*couch, where she sits*) I mean that, Mark.

**Mark** Have you taken to him?

**Sally** He was quite nice before you arrived.

**Mark** Oh, Sally, really . . .

**Sally** I didn't find him boring at all. A bit strange perhaps . . . more than a bit sometimes . . .

**Mark** Haven't you realised what this is all about? (*He returns to his former chair and sits*)

**Sally** He wanted to talk to you . . .

**Mark** Yet he deliberately contrived to see you first.

**Sally** Why should he do that?

**Mark** To try and get you on his side.

**Sally** Side? What side? For what?

**Mark** He wants to borrow money.

**Sally** You don't know that.

**Mark** The hint was dropped. Finance. Remember? He's on the make.

**Sally** No, surely . . .

**Mark** Think about it. We met once. Suddenly, out of the blue . . . why? What else?

*Sally does think about it and somewhat reluctantly finds it could be logical*

**Sally** I suppose it's possible.

**Mark** Money, and you know it.

**Sally** Even so, if he does need that kind of help . . .

**Mark** There's no "if".

**Sally** Perhaps he's in difficulties because he's let things go since the death of his wife.

**Mark** And you wonder why he should want to talk to you first. Sally, it's a con.

**Sally** (*uncertainly*) It depends how much he needs . . . we could afford to . . .

**Mark** If he's short of cash, there are banks. We're not bloody money-lenders. Just get rid of him nicely. You're good at that. OK?

**Sally** (*subdued*) Yes, all right.

**Mark** And make it quick. I'm hot, I want a shower . . . God, it's boiling in here. Let's have some air.

*John has appeared the other side of the french windows. He stands in a position where Sally and Mark cannot see him. We should feel that he might have been there for some time*

*Mark takes off his jacket, puts it down, moves to the door, tries to open it, tugs at the handle*

(*Tightly*) Sally, where is the key, please?

**Sally** In the door.

**Mark** It is not in the bloody door, or I wouldn't ask, for Christ's sake.

*Sally rises and crosses to join Mark at the door. While their attention is*

*on the door, John removes the key to the french windows from the inside, and places it in the keyhole on the outside*

*This done, John retreats out of sight*

**Sally** It was there.

**Mark** Sally, what have you done with it?

**Sally** I don't understand . . . I unlocked it when I went out to sunbathe . . .

**Mark** Oh, Jesus . . .

**Sally** I haven't touched it. Why should I?

**Mark** Now you're not only wiped out for entire evenings, you can't even remember where you put bloody keys.

**Sally** (*strained*) It was there. I know it was.

**John** (*off*) I used the guest towel. I hope that was all right.

**Sally** (*too brightly*) That's what it's there for.

*John comes in through the french windows*

**Mark** Everything all right, old chap?

**John** Fine, thank you. (*He sits down on the couch*)

**Sally** (*handing John his glass*) Your drink, John.

**John** Thank you.

*Sally sits on the chair to the left, with her drink, and takes a deep swallow. She needs it. Mark continues to search for the key*

**Sally** John . . .

**John** Yes?

**Sally** I suppose you didn't notice, when you closed the door . . .

**John** Yes?

**Sally** If the key was in the lock?

**John** Key?

**Mark** The key must have been in the lock, darling, or you couldn't have unlocked it. (*To John*) Sally's lost the key. Not to worry. (*He opens one of the windows*)

*The birdsong becomes louder*

You don't mind some fresh air?

**John** No.

**Mark** That's better. (*He loosens his tie*)

**John** (*to Sally*) You won't feel the chill again?

**Sally** No.

**Mark** Chill? In here? She's not that cold blooded.

**John** Earlier, she did.

**Sally** Only for a moment when I came in.

*Mark moves to the drinks cabinet to retrieve his drink. He looks at Sally speculatively*

**Mark** Not lying out there starkers again, I hope.

**Sally** No.

**Mark** (*to John—indicating*) We get jobs lurking in the woods over there

with binoculars. She was the local peep show. I think they were selling tickets.

**Sally** I was wearing a swimsuit. (*She goes to unbutton her housecoat*) Perhaps you'd care to check.

**Mark** Don't be silly, darling. I believe you. I'm glad you remembered, that's all.

**Sally** Do you want to make a big thing of this, Mark?

**Mark** No, dear. It was a mild attempt to amuse John, no more.

**Sally** (*to John*) Were you amused, John?

**John** I beg your pardon? By what?

**Mark** Sally, leave it.

*Sally subsides. Mark decides that he might as well replenish his drink. Sally holds her glass out towards Mark.*

**Sally** And for me, if you please.

**Mark** It's still half full.

**Sally** Because the ice has melted. I would like a fresh one, if it's not too much trouble.

**Mark** Yes, dear. Coming up. (*He takes her glass with none too good a grace and uses another one in which to pour a fresh gin and tonic for her*)

**John** Fascinating, to listen to the constant twittering.

**Sally** What?

**John** Of the birds. In your garden.

**Sally** Oh, yes.

**John** Such a happy sound. Quite idyllic.

**Sally** They're marking out their territory.

**Mark** Like dogs, peeing.

**John** May not both enjoy their task? They certainly appear to go to it with a will.

**Sally** You're a romantic, John.

*Mark hands Sally her drink then moves until he is standing beside John, looking down at him*

**Mark** (*significantly*) Well, John . . .

**John** Yes?

**Mark** Cheers.

**John** Oh, yes. Your continued good health.

*John takes another of his infuriatingly small sips. Sally takes a good swallow. Mark catches her eye, and indicates his watch significantly. Sally gives him a hard look, but turns to John putting on a nice smile, about to speak*

**John** Half past six.

**Mark** What?

**John** The time.

**Mark** Good lord, is it as late as that?

**John** According to my watch.

**Mark** I had no idea. (*To Sally*) Well, darling . . .

**John** Has yours stopped?

**Mark** Must need a new battery.

**Sally** You'll have to take it in, darling.

**John** Twenty six days ago, it was.

**Mark** What was?

**John** The accident. Late on the Sunday.

*Sally stands and moves towards John*

**Sally** John, it you feel the need to talk about it . . .

**John** I do rather.

**Sally** I wonder if we're the right people.

**Mark** We hardly knew her.

**Sally** It might be easier with close friends . . .

**Mark** (*pointedly*) Or your doctor.

*John reacts to this remark with a look*

**John** I went to him for some sleeping pills. I found myself lying awake . . . thinking . . . waiting for the dawn.

**Mark** Very sensible. You must have a good night's sleep.

**John** Do you ever find difficulty in sleeping?

**Mark** Me? No.

**John** My doctor diagnosed depression.

**Sally** Well, that's only natural . . .

**John** And offered me some anti-depressants.

**Sally** I'm sure you'll find that, after a while . . .

**John** Which I declined.

**Sally** Why? If your doctor thought you needed them . . .

**John** Would they 'cancel half a line' or 'wash out a word of it'?

**Sally** They'd have helped you to cope.

**John** By blurring, masking, an anodyne for the pain.

**Sally** There's nothing wrong with that, John.

**John** It seemed to me that, however disagreeable the emotions experienced, they were part of what we are, the life we lead, and should be faced, if reluctantly.

**Sally** You're very strong if you can do that.

**John** I found that concentrating on something else was of assistance.

**Sally** You mean your work?

**John** The matter I came to discuss with your husband.

**Mark** And so we shall, old chap. (*Pointedly*) When we have more time at our disposal.

**John** That weekend, she had been to Bournemouth. The police supposed she must have taken a wrong turning on her homeward journey.

**Sally** Why?

**John** The minor road where it occurred would have taken her out of her way. It was, of course, dark at the time, and raining hard.

**Sally** It's easy to miss road signs in those conditions. I've often done it.

**John** According to the police, the skid marks indicated that she had been driving at an excessive speed given the conditions prevailing.

**Sally** Perhaps she was in a hurry to get home. Realised she was on the wrong road . . .

**John** And put her foot down. Became careless.

**Sally** (*uneasily*) Not necessarily. We don't know how it happened.

**John** On a bend. Due to the weather perhaps, there was little traffic. Only the other vehicle involved. The skid marks showed that the car had crossed the crown of the road when it entered the bend.

**Sally** (*subdued*) People do make misjudgements, John. God knows, I have, now and then. Usually, we get away with it . . .

**John** But sometimes not.

**Sally** I do think you should try not to brood about it.

**John** Forget her?

**Sally** No. The circumstances. No one can really know.

**John** It is known that the car left the road, turned over, twice it seems, and finally hit a tree. It was, of course, a write-off.

**Sally** And even though she was strapped in . . . I mean, if she was careful . . .

**John** Always.

**Sally** Sometimes, if a crash is bad enough . . .

**John** It's chance if one survives or not.

**Sally** Yes.

**John** Just bad luck.

**Sally** John, it's happened. Going over and over it can't be good.

**John** And yet, I can't help feeling responsible.

**Sally** You musn't.

**John** But I do.

*Sally sits beside John*

**Sally** You couldn't be responsible. You weren't there.

**John** But had I behaved differently, it wouldn't have happened.

**Sally** How can you say that?

*Mark's successive drinks are beginning to have some effect*

**Mark** Raking over the past, no point.

**John** You never do that.

*Mark moves to the drinks cabinet and tops up his drink. (Note: this is when the actor exchanges his glass for the "exploding" prop glass)*

**Mark** Senseless. What use are regrets? You can't change anything. It's over and done with. Gone. Forget it. Face the future. Look forward. Get on with your own life.

**John** Yes.

**Mark** That's my advice.

**John** Thank you.

**Mark** Best thing, believe me.

**John** I'll consider it. (*He leans forward, sips his drink, replaces his glass*)

Well, I expect you're waiting for me to go.

**Mark** (*relieved*) No, no . . . still, if you must . . .

*Sally stands up expectantly*

**John** I haven't finished my drink, though.

**Mark** Don't worry . . . if you'd rather, leave it . . .

**John** I would prefer to, yes.

**Mark** Good. I mean, no problem.

*John hugs his briefcase which is on his knees*

Well, marvellous to see you again, old chap . . .

**Sally** It's been so nice . . .

**John** Yes.

**Sally** You must come again.

**John** (*unlocking his briefcase*) However, before I finally depart, there is one thing I would like you to see.

**Mark** John, there's nothing I want to look at. Not now. My office. By appointment. OK? Have you got that? (*He circles the couch until he is beside John*)

**Sally** Mark, please . . .

**Mark** Well, for Christ's sake . . .

**Sally** (*to John*) I'm sorry . . .

**John** Don't apologise. I understand entirely.

**Mark** About time. I've tried not to be rude, but you don't seem to listen.

**John** I listen, Mr Driscoll. I listen very intently.

**Sally** (*to John*) Perhaps it would be best if you did go.

**John** I shall be glad to.

**Sally** I'll show you out.

**John** There's no need. I'll leave the way I came. (*He stands up, his briefcase still unlocked*)

**Sally** You can't. The door . . .

**John** I think I can tell you where the key is.

**Sally** Where?

*John indicates the floor. Sally and Mark stare at the floor, while John crosses to the french windows, closes them and locks them. He holds up the key, and slips it into his pocket*

**John** With this one.

*Sally and Mark register that they are now locked in. Mark glares at John*

**Mark** What the hell do you think you're doing?

**John** (*he puts his hand into his briefcase*) It does not suit me to postpone our talk, Mr Driscoll.

**Mark** We'll damn soon see about that . . .

*Mark breaks off as John takes a gun from the briefcase, and levels it at him. Sally draws her breath in sharply, shocked*

**John** You will see this, Mr Driscoll, like it or not.

*Mark blinks, unable yet to take it in. John swivels the gun and points it at Sally*

Sit down.

*Sally sits down on the couch abruptly*

(To Mark) And you.

*Mark sits down in "his" chair*

Thank you.

*John puts his briefcase down, never taking his eyes or gun off Mark. Mark tries to clear his head*

**Mark** What do you want?

**John** A little of your time.

*John moves towards the windows, switching on table and standard lamps as he goes. His movements are unhurried as he keeps Mark covered.*

**Mark** I know. It's not real. It's one of those replicas, isn't it.

**John** I would advise you not to rely on that theory.

**Mark** (to Sally). It's some sort of stupid joke. He's trying to frighten us.

Where would he get a real gun?

**John** I purchased it.

*As he speaks, John is steadily closing the curtains (or closing venetian blinds). When he comes to the open window, he closes it, and the birdsong diminishes*

(About his actions) In case there are any jobs with binoculars, optimistically waiting. I would prefer we were not observed.

**Mark** (uncertainly) Bought it where?

**John** A gunsmith's.

**Mark** You're lying.

**John** I dislike lies, Mr Driscoll.

**Mark** You can't walk in off the street and buy a handgun, just like that.

**John** I have a licence for it. (He shows his licence) My hobby is shooting.

I belong to a gun club.

*John has finished closing the curtains or blinds, taking care to stay well clear of Mark. The outside light is blotted out. The light from the lamps is less good, the effect sinister*

This is a point two two calibre Smith and Wesson revolver. (He smiles at Mark benevolently) Lethal when aimed accurately. I flatter myself I have become fairly proficient. However, to ensure that any wound proves fatal, I have filed the noses of the bullets flat, and cut a cross in each one.

**Mark** (a bit high) Dum-dum bullets?

**John** Home made, but effective.

**Sally** (strained) May I get another drink . . . please?

**John** By all means.

*Shakily, Sally rises and moves towards the drinks cabinet*

(*To Mark*) Of course, I am now behaving unlawfully by using it in such a fashion. I accept that entirely.

*While John is speaking, Sally shoots a quick glance towards him. His attention seems not to be on her. Furtively, she presses the panic button. Nothing happens. Losing control, she dabs at it again and again*

**John** (*regarding her mildly*) I found the control panel, and switched your alarm system off.

*Sally, gasping, moves to the adjacent french windows, and tugs at the handle uselessly. John begins to move towards her*

**John** It won't open, you know. It's locked.

**Mark** (*starting to rise*) Sally . . .

**John** (*to Mark*) Stay where you are, please.

*Mark does not quite rise, but remains tense. As John approaches Sally she shrinks away*

It's all right. You're in no danger—not as yet. Come and sit down.

*John grips Sally's arm firmly and leads her back to the couch. When he releases her, she sits down in her former position*

There's no way out, you see. You may as well accept that, and let us get on.

**Sally** (*a fearful plea*) Mark . . .

**Mark** It's all right, darling.

**Sally** It's not all right . . .

**Mark** Just keep calm. There's nothing to worry about.

**John** (*an observation*) You shouldn't make such a promise, Mr Driscoll.

We shall have to see about that.

**Sally** (*to Mark*) You hear? Please, do something . . .

*Mark stands up, still holding his glass. His natural authority has returned*

**Mark** (*to John*) You're in trouble, you know that.

**John** I think not.

**Mark** You do know. Unless you're raving mad.

**John** To your observation, am I raving?

**Mark** All right. You've put on a good show. Why, God only knows.

**John** He certainly does. There I agree.

**Mark** But it's over. Finished.

**John** Is it?

**Mark** Unless you want to find yourself in the hands of the police.

**John** I wouldn't like that, no.

**Mark** Right. (*He is gaining confidence by the second*)

**John** But who would inform them? You?

**Mark** The second you leave.

**John** You have that option. Should you be in a position so to do.

**Mark** Oh, for Christ's sake, we've had enough of your long winded crap.

**John** Yes. My wife used to chide me about that. In jest, you understand.

**Mark** John, you should have taken the drugs your doctor prescribed, you're disturbed. For your own sake, you should go and see him again, as soon as possible.

**John** I do have another appointment with him on Monday.

**Mark** That's good.

**John** I may not be able to keep it.

**Mark** You must. He'll help you, he'll know what to do . . . isn't that right, Sally?

**Sally** Yes . . . yes . . . Mark's right, John.

**Mark** You needn't tell him about this.

**John** Oh, no. I wouldn't tell him.

**Mark** So, provided you hand over those keys, and go now, we're prepared to forget all about it.

**John** But we haven't concluded our business yet.

**Mark** We will, John. When you're feeling better, we'll meet again then.

**John** You might change your mind.

**Mark** I won't, I promise you.

**John** No. I would prefer not to rely on your word.

**Mark** Right. You've had your chance. If you don't put that toy away and get out at once . . . (*pointing to the telephone*) . . . I'm sending for the police.

**John** I have explained, it's not a toy. I would be obliged to prevent you.

**Mark** You can stop pretending, John. All right, you had me going at first, but you? An insignificant little nobody like you, trying to behave like some desperate gunman? All that stuff about dum-dum bullets!

**John** You found that a trifle too much?

**Mark** Come on! Please. You didn't really think you could keep it up, did you?

**John** I feared the first shock might not last long.

**Mark** Well, that's something, if you realise that. You're not completely unbalanced.

**John** I'm aware of that.

**Mark** Right. Give me the keys.

**John** I can't do that.

**Mark** If you don't, I shall phone for the police. They'll lock you up. Do you understand?

**John** Oh yes.

**Mark** Well?

**John** All I ask is that you give me an hour or so.

**Mark** Then it's the police. I've warned you, but if you won't listen . . .  
(*He starts to move*)

*The moment Mark begins to move, John fires. Mark ducks instinctively to a half crouching position at the deafening explosion. The glass in his hand shatters, its contents spray and splatter. There is the sound of splintering glass. There is a strangled shriek from Sally*

*Jesus Christ . . . (He lifts the glass in his hand and looks at it. He is holding the stem, the glass itself is in fragments. Appalled) You could*

have killed me.

**John** Remember that, Mr Driscoll.

*John fires again, just above Mark's head. With the explosion of the gun, the curtains (or blinds) behind Mark twitch, and there is the sound of glass shattering. Mark ducks again, and is on his knees, half sprawling, head bowed, thoroughly undignified. Sally, terrified, has flung herself face down deep into the couch. John surveys Mark*

Just remember that.

*Black-out*

## ACT II

*A few moments later*

*John is standing in his previous position. Sally is still face down on the couch. Mark, completely sober now, is crouched, head bowed*

**John** You believe me now, I trust.

**Mark** (*scarcely audible*) Yes.

**John** More clearly, please.

*Mark moistens his lips, manages to speak a little louder, if hoarsely*

**Mark** Yes.

**John** Yes what?

**Mark** I believe you.

**John** (*to Sally*) You?

**Sally** (*muffled*) Yes.

**John** Sit, Mr Driscoll. Make yourself comfortable.

*Mark levers himself to his feet, stumbles the pace or two to the chair and collapses into it. Sally slowly sits up*

Let us take a few moments to regain our composure. Try a few deep breaths, Mr Driscoll. You will find it helps, I think. (*He unhurriedly takes off his jacket, switching his gun from one hand to the other as he withdraws his arms from the sleeves. This done, he drapes his jacket neatly across the back of his chair with care*)

*Mark and Sally gaze at him fixedly, as if semi-hypnotised*

**Mark** What are you after?

**John** Your close and undivided attention.

**Sally** Why? What for?

**John** (*to Mark*) Which I trust you are no longer disposed to refuse.

**Mark** No.

**Sally** Then . . . (*She clears her throat*) . . . then what?

**John** Can you predict the future? For I can't. (*He places his briefcase on a table near the chair to the left. He half opens the briefcase, puts his free hand inside then appears to change his mind*) No, let us talk first. (*He sits in the chair*)

**Sally** You do realise . . .

**John** Yes? Realise what?

**Sally** The friends we invited . . . (*She gives Mark a look of appeal*)

**Mark** They'll be here soon . . . any minute . . .

**John** (*looking at his watch*) This early?

**Mark** We asked them to come early . . .

**Sally** For drinks.

**John** (*sceptically*) Really.

**Mark** If they ring and there's no answer . . .

*Mark breaks off as John levels the gun at him*

**John** There won't be. We shall sit quietly until they go.

**Sally** They'll think it strange . . . especially if they walk round here, and find the curtains drawn (blinds closed).

**John** Why should they do that?

**Sally** You did.

**John** (*mildly*) But I knew you were in. (*Pointing*) The jobs' binocular view from the woods.

**Sally** John, they're close friends. I phoned them this afternoon, and said we'd be in.

**John** Do you know, I think you're trying to get rid of me.

**Sally** I'm trying to explain . . . they won't just go away . . . they'll be worried . . . think something's wrong . . .

**John** How nice to have such concerned friends.

**Mark** No answer . . . the curtains drawn (blinds down) . . . on a bright sunny evening . . .

**John** Yes, I do agree that would look odd.

**Mark** They'll send for the police . . .

**Sally** That's what we're trying to explain . . .

**John** I did grasp that, thank you.

**Sally** Well, then . . .

**John** Allow me to explain in turn. One, I don't believe you.

**Mark** It's true, I swear it.

**John** Two, should you not be lying, it is a matter of sublime indifference to me whether the police are summoned or not.

*Mark and Sally exchange glances of defeat. John studies them gravely*

You think I'm mad, I expect.

**Sally** Oh, no, . . . no . . .

**John** Deranged.

**Mark** Good heavens, no . . .

**John** To be humoured.

**Sally** Not at all. You mustn't think that.

**John** Oh, I see. This occurs all the time in your lives. You find such behaviour perfectly rational.

**Sally** It's our fault. We didn't realise how much you wanted to talk to us, did we, Mark?

**Mark** No. Didn't quite understand.

**John** I did ask. Politely, I believe.

**Mark** Oh, yes.

**John** You refused.

**Mark** Sorry about that. Thoughtless of me.

**John** It was, rather.

**Mark** You know how it is, John . . . never enough time . . . mind on other

things... business... people coming... should have made time... quite wrong...

**John** Who was?

**Mark** (*hurriedly*) Me. I was. Not you, of course...

**John** So you find my behaviour perfectly normal.

**Mark** Oh, yes. Absolutely.

*John smiles. Sally, more in control of herself than Mark, gives her husband a none too friendly look and turns to John*

**Sally** John, the way any of us act, there's always a reason. In your mind, there must be a very good one.

**John** There is.

**Sally** We're quite ready to sit and talk about it quietly, for as long as you like. Try and help you.

**John** I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

**Sally** A quiet talk between friends.

**John** You pretend friendship?

**Sally** We are your friends, John, believe me.

**Mark** That's right, old chap.

**Sally** We only want to try and help you.

**John** You're most kind.

**Sally** Trust us, John, please.

**John** I'll try.

**Sally** We understand now why you brought that with you.

*John glances at his gun, which is casually aimed in Mark's direction, as if scarcely aware of it*

**John** I did hesitate. I have a Beretta automatic as well. But on the whole, I prefer this one. It just feels right. Comfortable. And I calculated that six shots would be ample for my purposes.

**Sally** You were afraid we might try and put you off.

**John** I was right.

**Sally** Yes. But we've both apologised. We'll listen, we'll do anything you say.

**John** Truly?

**Sally** I promise. So you see, the reason you felt you needed it doesn't apply any more. With friends you don't need it.

**John** There's a hole in your curtains (venetian blinds).

**Sally** It doesn't matter.

**John** Was the glass valuable?

**Sally** No.

**John** I was obliged to demonstrate, you understand.

**Sally** Yes, I know... but now...

**John** Four shots left. But then, two would suffice.

*John looks from Sally to Mark, and back again. Mark looks sickly*

Should it come to that. I look upon it as a lie detector. I suggest you do the same.

*Sally decides that she isn't going to get anywhere with that ploy*

**Sally** May I fetch myself another drink?

**John** By all means.

**Sally** Thank you. I need one. (*She stands up*) Mark?

**John** He does *not* need one.

*Sally takes her glass to the drinks cabinet. She is very conscious of the nearby telephone*

(*To Mark*) How would you describe your marriage?

**Mark** What?

**John** A lifestyle to be envied, a beautiful wife. Not bad, good, idyllic, what?

**Mark** Oh, yes, marvellous, idyllic.

**John** (*pointing the gun*) Idyllic, no. I've heard you, I've seen you.

**Mark** (*shrinking*) I don't know what you want.

**John** The truth.

*John looks towards Sally. Sally's hand has been near the telephone. She hastily withdraws it, and continues making her drink*

What do you say?

**Sally** Nothing's perfect.

**John** So he has faults.

**Sally** Who doesn't?

**John** (*to Mark*) Tell me her faults.

**Mark** Oh, come on, John . . .

**John** Tell me.

**Sally** Go ahead, Mark. I know what they are anyway.

*Sally indicates the telephone, silently urging Mark to keep John's attention away from her. Mark cottons on*

**Mark** Well, silly little things, you know . . . nothing much.

**John** None in bed?

**Mark** Oh, no, fine in that department . . .

**John** Entirely satisfactory.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** Terrific even?

**Mark** Yes, terrific.

**John** Mr Driscoll, I don't want you merely to echo me.

*Sally takes her opportunity to remove the telephone receiver, and press the memory button and then button nine*

**Mark** I don't know what you expect me to say . . . in bed, it's great . . .

**John** But you've had other women.

**Mark** Before I was married . . .

**John** Many?

**Mark** I don't know . . .

**John** Why? Did you lose count?

**Mark** It's a long time ago . . .

**John** (*nodding*) It must have been a lot. How did they compare?

**Mark** I don't remember.

**John** You are required to remember, Mr Driscoll.

**Sally** Tell him, darling. I'd be interested to hear.

*Sally returns to the couch and sits down with her drink*

**Mark** Sally's the best.

**John** In what way?

**Sally** Well, darling?

**Mark** I can't analyse it . . . just the best . . .

**John** Even after years of marriage.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** Exciting, fulfilling etcetera. Still.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** (*to Sally*) Would you provide him with a similar reference?

**Sally** He's a good lover.

**John** In what sense?

**Sally** Skill, Technique.

**John** That has a pejorative ring, somehow.

**Sally** I get a good orgasm. Is that what you want to hear?

**John** My curiosity is not prurient.

**Sally** In that case, why do you want to know?

**John** There is a good reason.

**Sally** I'm sure there is, John. Tell us about it.

**John** You may replace the receiver.

**Sally** What do you mean?

**John** Button nine for emergency. But no anxious operator is tracing the call, nor informing the police. Put it back.

*Sally rises slowly, moves to the telephone, lifts the receiver, listens to it, replaces it*

I removed the incoming wires from the master junction box in the hall long ago.

*Sally returns to the couch and sits down, defeated. With the death of the hope that help is on the way, both she and Mark feel that they are inexorably trapped with this dangerous lunatic*

I am a little mad, you know. Just a little. But then I think there is a touch of what we call madness in all of us. (*To Mark*) You immediately blamed your wife for losing the key.

**Mark** Which key? Oh . . . well . . .

**John** She hadn't, but you took it for granted. Why?

**Mark** She tends to mislay things.

**John** One of her faults.

**Mark** It's nothing. She's a bit forgetful, that's all.

**John** I thought your attitude rather unkind.

**Mark** I get a bit irritable sometimes . . . it's not important . . .

**John** This forgetfulness—would a contributory factor be that she drinks too much?

**Mark** She doesn't.

**John** No?

**Mark** She likes a glass now and then, that's all. Most of us do.

**John** (to Sally) Do you think you drink to excess?

**Sally** Sometimes. You know that.

**Mark** Special occasion, darling, that's all.

**Sally** How do you know what I do when you're not here?

*The sharpness of her manner amuses John*

**John** Quite so.

**Sally** (angrily) Yes, we pick at each other. Satisfied?

**John** For the moment.

**Sally** How long does this go on? Do you intend to sit here all night?

**John** It will be over, one way or another, long before darkness falls. A typical marriage, then.

**Sally** If you like. Was yours all honey and bliss?

**John** I was content. In truth, I was constantly surprised at my good fortune. I have certain attributes, I believe, trust, loyalty, perseverance, but perhaps they are on the dull side.

**Sally** I didn't find you dull.

**John** At Torquay? You don't remember.

**Sally** This afternoon. Before . . . (referring to the gun) . . . things changed.

**John** Not dull?

**Sally** No. Strangely interesting.

**John** Peculiar, more likely.

**Sally** I felt I'd like to know you better.

**John** How nice.

**Sally** I still would. As you were then.

**John** I am no different.

**Sally** You are. We can't talk normally, become real friends, not while you're sitting there . . . with that in your hand.

**John** (glancing at the gun, absently) But I need it.

**Sally** You think you do, I accept that. But it frightens me, John . . . just looking . . . it . . . frightens me . . .

**John** Regretfully, a degree of fear is a necessary component of our conversation.

**Sally** No, John, not any more. We've seen you . . . demonstrate . . . it.

You don't have to . . . point it . . . all the time. You could put it away now, so that at least we can't see it. Will you, John? For me? Please?

**Mark** (leaning forward) Yes, why don't you do that old chap.

*John points the gun sharply at Mark. Sally gives Mark a look. She feels that her plea was making an impression, and that Mark's intervention has spoiled it. She looks back at John*

**Sally** Then we'll all sit and talk for as long as you like. We can't be friends, John, unless we all behave as friends.

**Mark** That's right, old chap. Bound to make us nervous, looking down the barrel of a gun. Don't want any accidents to happen, do we?

**John** I have been trained to handle firearms with care, Mr Driscoll.

**Mark** Oh, yes, of course, I'm sure, no question . . .

**John** It will not go off by accident. Only, as previously, by design.

**Mark** Well, fine . . . fine . . . but you said you wanted to talk, and that's fine too . . . looking forward to it . . . but if we're all on edge . . .

**John** I'm not, Mr Driscoll.

**Mark** Not you, no . . . but we are . . . right, Sally?

**Sally** Definitely.

**Mark** Which makes it hard to keep one's mind on what's being said, do you see?

**John** I had assumed that the prospect of being shot, like that of being hanged, would concentrate the mind wonderfully. My filed down bullets would expand as they enter the body, tearing, ripping, destroying vital organs. But I expect you know that.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** (*to Sally*) It was four weeks ago today she departed for her weekend.

**Sally** Your wife . . . yes . . .

**John** I had a late meeting in town. When I returned home, she had gone. My supper was in the oven. She had left a brief note, instructing me what to do. It was a casserole. I recall enjoying it greatly, reading as I ate, a bad habit my wife discouraged when we were together. I was accustomed to her periodic absences, and while part of me missed her, another part quite relished being alone, briefly as I imagined, doing as I chose, as and when I chose. (*To Sally*) Is that a contradiction?

**Sally** Sometimes I feel like that.

**John** I knew a man once. When he was thirty, quite a serious eyesight condition was diagnosed. He wasn't aware of it. Eyesight being so subjective, he imagined everyone else saw as he did. I suppose marriage is rather like that.

**Sally** Yes, I expect it is.

**John** I find myself dwelling on that weekend, when my world changed so drastically, yet everyone else went about their business as though nothing had happened. I expect, for you, it was just another weekend.

**Sally** Yes.

**John** What were you doing?

**Sally** I'm not sure.

**John** I'd like to know. Try and remember.

**Sally** Four weeks . . . I think that was when we had a barbecue.

**John** Which day?

**Sally** Sunday.

**John** Outdoors?

**Sally** Yes.

**John** A few friends; a lazy afternoon; swimming in the pool; sunbathing; drinks on the terrace; that kind of occasion.

**Sally** Yes.

**John** You must be hardy people. It rained most of that Sunday. I told

you that.

**Sally** Oh . . . well . . . it couldn't have been then . . .

**John** I think not. Do try and hear what I say.

**Sally** Oh, yes, I remember now.

**John** The weekend in question.

**Sally** Yes. We were supposed to go to the wedding of a dear friend of mine.

**John** Supposed to?

**Sally** My mother rang, I think it was the Tuesday before. She'd heard she had to go into hospital for tests the following Monday. I was worried. She was afraid it was cancer.

**John** So you didn't go to the wedding.

**Sally** It was more important to be with my mother.

**John** Of course. Where does she live?

**Sally** Norfolk.

**John** Did your husband accompany you?

**Sally** No.

**John** He went to the wedding.

**Sally** She's my friend, not his. He's only met her once or twice. Why do you want to know all this?

**John** Constructing a picture of what others were doing helps. Bear with me. So he did what? Stayed at home?

**Sally** Some last minute business had come up. Since I wouldn't be here, he decided to fly to Jersey and deal with it.

**John** (*taken aback*) Jersey?

**Sally** Mark has some clients there.

**Mark** Do a lot of business with them.

**John** (*to Sally; trying another tack*) Did you drive to Norfolk?

**Sally** Yes.

**John** The Audi Turbo in the drive, that would be yours, perhaps.

**Sally** Yes.

**John** What was the result of the tests?

**Sally** It was a false alarm.

**John** I'm glad.

**Sally** So was I.

**John** It must have been very worrying.

**Sally** It was.

**John** Yet you found it hard to remember when this worrying period occurred.

**Sally** I'm not very good at dates—when things happened.

**John** No. (*To Mark*) You had a Mercedes Coupé at Torquay, I believe.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** I recall admiring it. Still the same one?

**Mark** Waiting for delivery of a new one.

**John** Ours was a hatchback. I don't suppose you noticed it.

**Mark** No, not really.

**John** Three days after the accident, I retrieved her suitcase. Unlike my wife, it was undamaged. I went into our bedroom to hang the contents

up in her wardrobe. When I opened the door, it was as if she were beside me. The smell of her, the faint trace of her perfume. I expect I became upset. Clumsily, in my haste, I knocked several garments off their hangers. When they fell, they dislodged a small writing case, tucked away out of sight. The contents spilled out. (*He reaches into his briefcase, and withdraws a single sheet of notepaper*) Envelopes, writing paper, and this, written in her hand. It begins . . . (*reading*) "Oh, my darling . . ."

**Sally** (*uneasily*) John, don't, please . . .

*John gestures her to be silent, and continues reading*

**John** "It seems so long since I have seen you. How long will it be, my love? This weekend, you will be in my thoughts every moment. I do realise how difficult it is for you. I could come home Saturday night, but I have told J. I have to stay till Sunday. Just in case you find that you can get away, even if only for a few hours. You know where I shall be." (*He lays the notepaper down on the table. To Sally*) It wasn't written to me. That will be obvious to you.

**Sally** Yes.

**John** It was a considerable shock.

**Sally** You didn't know?

**John** No.

**Sally** You had no idea?

**John** None. You seem dubious.

**Sally** I think . . . people . . . usually do. They may prefer not to . . . or choose to ignore it . . .

**John** Possibly women's instincts are keener for these things. I can only speak for myself.

**Sally** That letter doesn't sound as if . . . well . . . it was a casual thing.

**John** No. A love affair of some long standing.

**Sally** She must have changed . . .

**John** Towards me, you mean.

**Sally** Yes.

**John** Being wise, too late, yes.

**Sally** And you didn't notice?

**John** I was blind to the cause. You wear that sceptical look again.

**Sally** No, no, I'm just listening.

**John** You feel my suspicions should have been aroused.

**Sally** I can't answer for you. You don't even sound angry.

**John** I wish she had confided in me.

**Sally** Suppose she had?

**John** Were I certain her true happiness lay elsewhere, I would not have stood in her way.

**Sally** Perhaps she didn't know what she did want.

**John** On the evidence of that . . . (*He points to the letter*) . . . she did.

*There is a silence. Sally has about run out of things to say to try and keep John calm, and gives Mark a meaningful look, indicating that it is his*

turn. Mark shrugs almost imperceptibly. Sally turns back to John, and is about to say something, when the silence is broken by a long ring on the front door

It seems you were speaking the truth. (*He gets up, switches off the lights, and moves to the back of the couch*) A good omen. I'm glad.

John presses his gun into the back of Sally's neck. Sally tenses, very frightened

(*Softly*) I wish to continue our conversation. You will remain silent.

Sally nods her head fractionally. John looks towards Mark

Both of you.

Mark, rigid, nods. The gun remains glued to Sally

The doorbell rings again. Then a knock. Soon after, the sound of footsteps on gravel approaching the conservatory

(*Whispering*) Make no sound.

**Lady Visitor** (*off*) Hello... anyone at home?... Mark?... Sally?... Hello. Hello, anybody there?... Mark?... Sal?

There is a knock on the conservatory door. Then the visitor tries the door

Well, really, she might have telephoned! They must have gone out!

The footsteps recede. There is the faint sound of a car door slamming then the faint sound of a car starting up and driving away

**John** (*switching the lights back on*) All is well. (*Speaking normally*) If they telephone, they will get the number unobtainable tone and assume your line is out of order.

John's deadly manner, and the contact of the gun on Sally's neck, have aroused again a state of intense fear in Sally and Mark

(*To Sally; with some agitation*) Where were we?

Sally swallows and speaks with a little difficulty

**Sally** About your wife's feelings.

**John** Oh, yes. There is more I wish to tell you.

Sally looks at Mark despairingly

Are you listening?

**Sally** Yes. Yes, listening, John.

**John** It occurred to me eventually that her letter was unfinished. Therefore, she might have heard from the man in question, a telephone call perhaps, when it was known I would be at the office. Feasible, would you not agree?

**Sally** I don't know.

**John** An enquiry revealed that, although she had attended the product meetings, she had not taken advantage of the room provisionally booked

for her at the hotel, saying she preferred to stay with friends nearby. I found that significant. Would you?

**Sally** Unless you had friends, wherever it was.

**John** Bournemouth. We do not. What then?

**Sally** Some other hotel.

**John** But, a large seaside resort is brimming with hotels. Hopeless. Where to look?

*John's manner makes it plain that he is expecting—or demanding—an answer from Sally*

**Sally** Her suitcase. Something in there.

**John** Nothing.

**Sally** I don't know.

**John** I, too, was at a loss. Yet I felt impelled to continue. Can you understand that?

**Sally** Yes.

**John** *(to Mark)* You too?

**Mark** Quite understandable . . .

**John** Natural?

**Mark** Natural, yes . . .

**John** In the circumstances.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** Thus far, we all concur. I went again to look at the wrecked vehicle, which had of course been removed to a garage. The nearside had been extensively damaged, door-frame and roof buckled and crushed, the driver's side rather less so. I searched the interior, cutting my hand slightly in the process. The windscreen and instrument panel were shattered. The glove pocket was intact, but misshapen and jammed. With the aid of a tyre lever, I contrived to prise it open. Inside, was this. *(He takes a sheet of paper from his briefcase)* A hotel bill. *(He gazes at Sally expectantly)*

**Sally** Where she'd stayed.

**John** A hotel on the coast but well outside the town.

**Sally** And that told you . . .

**John** That she had taken a double room.

**Sally** In her name?

**John** Mrs Barrett, yes.

**Sally** Perhaps they didn't have any singles.

**John** I determined to investigate that possibility, and drove to the hotel. I have hired a car until the insurance formalities are complete.

**Sally** Yes.

**John** It was a pleasantly secluded place of a kind, I fancied, lovers might select in the hope of privacy.

**Sally** I see.

**John** Hotels, I am given to understand, are not notably forthcoming in response to the kind of enquiries I wished to make. Porters and waiters, however, given certain inducements, I suspected, might prove more obliging.

**Sally** And they were.

**John** A man had arrived Friday, and occupied a single room on the same floor. He was seen with my wife in the bar, they ate at the same table. When they vacated their rooms on the Sunday, they did not leave but sat talking in the lounge, where they took tea, and later adjourned to the bar before finally departing. (*To Sally*) You appear somewhat surprised.

**Sally** They could tell you all that?

**John** You doubt it?

**Sally** If I was buying information, I wouldn't trust hotel porters on the make. Why should they remember all that about two strangers?

**John** When they left, and in fact before, they attracted some attention. My wife appeared distressed. There seemed to be some disagreement between them. The man had registered as Roger Price, of London.

**Sally** Do you know him?

**John** The name means nothing to me. You, perhaps?

**Sally** Me? No.

**John** Have you come across him by chance, Mr Driscoll?

**Mark** Roger Price? No.

**John** The porter who carried the luggage, my wife's suitcase, and Mr Price's weekend bag, saw them leave in the car together. Yet later, after the accident, my wife was the only occupant. There was no man's weekend bag. (*To Sally*) What does that suggest?

**Sally** She dropped him somewhere.

**John** Where?

**Sally** How do I know?

**John** But he found his own way, while she drove on alone.

**Sally** Apparently.

**John** Why, do you suppose?

**Sally** I don't know.

**John** Preferring not to be seen together, perhaps.

**Sally** Possibly.

**John** Which might suggest they lived not too far apart, and wished to arrive back home separately.

**Sally** Not necessarily. Perhaps he lived nowhere near you, Bristol, anywhere. I really don't know.

**John** The hotel register records Mr Price of London, not Bristol. The porter had helpfully provided an approximate description of Mr Price, but it was really rather vague. It would fit a great many men. You, for one, Mr Driscoll.

**Mark** Really.

**John** Yes.

**Mark** What about it?

**John** What indeed.

**Mark** You said his name was Price.

**John** I said he registered as Roger Price.

**Mark** I don't see what you're getting at.

**John** Have you seen my wife at all since we met at Torquay?

**Mark** No, of course not.

**John** Never?

**Mark** I've just told you. Never.

**John** It struck me, you see, that the change in her could, in retrospect, be dated from Torquay.

**Mark** And you're trying to make out . . . this is ridiculous.

**Sally** John, excuse me . . .

**John** Yes?

**Sally** I think you said it was around then she'd been promoted.

**John** Which called for her to be away more often . . .

**Sally** In that case . . .

**John** . . . and provided her with the opportunity to conduct her relationship.

**Sally** Yes, but probably with someone she'd met in her new job. That often happens you know.

**John** Or, by fortuitous chance, with someone she already knew.

**Mark** You needn't look at me. Find this Roger Price.

**John** I believe I have.

**Mark** Oh, for Christ's sake, you must be bloody . . .

*Mark's aggression dies in the face of the gun barrel*

**John** Bloody what, Mr Driscoll?

**Mark** It wasn't me. It couldn't have been, and you know it.

**John** No, but I am open to persuasion.

**Mark** The man you want was the one with your wife that weekend, right?

**John** I doubt if there was more than one.

**Mark** I was in Jersey. If I was in Jersey, I couldn't have been with your wife.

**John** That would seem to follow.

**Mark** Well then. Satisfied?

**John** (to Sally) The note continues overleaf. (He offers her the notepaper) You might care to glance at it.

**Sally** It's hers . . . private . . . I don't want to . . .

**John** And I must insist.

*Sally reluctantly takes the note, turns it over, reads it silently*

Read it aloud.

*Sally, tight faced, turning to look at John, finds herself looking at the gun*

Read it.

**Sally** (reading, in a flat voice) "We can't go on like this. I must see you soon. Mark, my darling, if you love me as much as you say . . ." (She stops reading)

**John** Perhaps the telephone rang at that point. (He faces Mark) Is that correct?

**Mark** She wasn't writing to me. I don't know.

**John** (indicating the letter) Mark . . . not Roger . . . (indicating Mark) . . . Mark. Do you see my point?

**Mark** Mark's a common enough name. If you're going to pick on the first man you know called Mark . . . for God's sake, I was in Jersey! Sally, you saw the ticket, tell him.

**Sally** Yes, I did.

**John** Your memory for small details has abruptly improved.

**Sally** I saw the tickets on the hall table just before we left, and told Mark not to forget them.

**John** You left together?

**Sally** I dropped him at the airport.

**John** The possession of tickets does not mean they are to be used.

**Sally** John, listen . . .

**John** We could consult the airline, I suppose, and ask if they were or not . . .

**Sally** Will you listen! I drove Mark to the airport. I saw him go into the terminal.

**John** I don't doubt that. His white Mercedes Coupé is a highly conspicuous vehicle which he might well prefer not to use when keeping assignations.

**Mark** I wasn't keeping any assignation! I was in Jersey!

**John** I must take leave to doubt that, without some proof.

**Sally** John, I've just remembered something.

**John** You *are* improving.

**Sally** Mark rang me from Jersey to ask how my mother was.

**John** That was thoughtful of him. When?

**Sally** Oh . . . it was . . . Saturday afternoon . . . the day after I arrived at my mother's . . .

**John** What was said?

**Sally** Just about my mother, and I asked how things were going in Jersey.

**John** (*to Mark*) Where were you phoning from?

**Mark** My hotel.

**John** Where was this hotel?

**Mark** St Helier.

**John** Its name?

**Mark** The Grand.

**John** May I see the hotel bill?

**Mark** I don't have it.

**John** Come now. A business trip, you need the bill to claim your expenditure against tax.

**Mark** My client paid it, just as I pay for him when he's in London.

**John** I suppose we could contact the Grand Hotel, or I could oblige you to tell me the name of your client and telephone him . . .

**Sally** John, can't you see you've made a mistake?

**John** . . . but I'm sure you've briefed him as to what to say.

**Sally** Stop it, John. Please, for your own sake, stop it. You've brooded over this until it's become an obsession.

**John** I expect you're right. It has.

**Sally** We understand. Truly we do. You felt driven to try and find this man. But you don't know who he is. You really have no idea. You decided it must be Mark, with nothing to go on at all.

**John** (*mildly*) There was some evidence.

**Sally** What evidence? A christian name, shared by God knows how many men. Whatever you're told, you refuse to believe it.

**John** You think I should?

**Sally** Yes, John. For yourself, not us. Your own state of mind. Because you *want* to think it was Mark, you come up with one far-fetched explanation after another, to avoid the truth. That it wasn't. But it's all in your own head, John. It's not real. If you go on like that, you'll drive yourself in . . .

**John** Insane?

**Sally** . . . into an even deeper state of depression.

**John** Do *you* believe him? Do you genuinely believe him?

**Sally** Yes.

**John** I have given you every opportunity, Mr Driscoll. But I hardly expected a frank admission.

**Sally** Oh, my God, not again . . .

**John** (*to Mark*) For I believe you have very urgent reasons to lie indeed.

**Sally** (*standing up; facing John*) You're out of your mind! Do you hear me?

**Mark** (*aware of the constant gun*) Sally, please . . .

**Sally** He is. It's no use trying to reason with him. He is insane.

**John** (*gently*) Let us put that to the test. (*He takes another piece of paper from his briefcase*) This was not easy to come by. My avaricious porter claimed he risked losing his job. It required considerable compensation to soothe his fears. It is a photostat of Mr Price's bill. On that Saturday, Mr Roger Price made a telephone call. The account is admirably detailed. (*He hands the paper to Sally*) Is that your mother's telephone number?

*Sally looks at the bill. She does not answer. John's soft repetition is deadly. The gun lends emphasis*

Is it? Is it? Is it?

**Sally** Yes.

**John** (*taking the bill*) Thank you. You are not, I hope, about to assert that one Roger Price also happened to telephone you at your mother's home on the same afternoon.

**Sally** No. (*She sits on the couch*)

**John** Good. My credulity has its limits. (*He moves a little, and stares at Mark very hard*) You will no doubt wish to withdraw your plea of innocent. I must warn you that any further lies or deceit will be taken into account and will weigh heavily against you, when the time comes to bring these proceedings to a conclusion.

*Sally is gazing fixedly at Mark. There is a long pause*

**Sally** So it was her.

**John** You knew?

**Sally** That there was someone. Not who.

**John** How?

**Sally** I could tell.

**John** Experience. It's happened before.

**Sally** He has other women.

**John** You don't mind.

**Sally** (*tiredly*) That's how he is.

**John** You accept it.

**Sally** If you like.

**John** What is termed an "open marriage" I believe.

**Sally** It's the one I've got. (*She picks up her drink and drains the glass*)

**John** You do mind.

**Sally** The first time, a lot.

**John** Did you take it up with him?

**Sally** He swore it wasn't important, it would never happen again.

**John** (*a statement*) But it did.

*Sally nods tiredly*

And?

**Sally** He lied.

**John** Now?

**Sally** I don't ask.

**John** You prefer not to know.

**Sally** So long as he doesn't flaunt it, or get involved. He knows the rules.

**John** Suppose he does get involved.

**Sally** He knows better.

**John** What does that mean?

**Sally** Just that. There are limits.

**John** He seems to have transgressed those limits this time.

*Sally stands up, facing John*

**Sally** (*flaring up*) Who the hell do you think you are? Playing God almighty, with a gun in your hand . . .

**Mark** (*muttering*) Oh, Jesus . . .

**Sally** . . . prying and bribing . . . are you playing out some fantasy about being the smart private detective digging up the truth?

**Mark** Don't, Sally . . .

**Sally** Is that what it is? Perhaps you should have been one. You seem to be bloody good at it.

**Mark** (*a helpless half moan*) Sally . . .

*John ignores Mark completely at this stage*

**John** I would remind you that someone died.

**Sally** That was an accident.

**John** Accidents have causes. And the only fantasy in which I indulge is that I could go back in time, when I would decline my invitation to Torquay.

**Sally** (*subsiding*) All right, all right.

**John** Will you tell me something?

**Sally** What now?

**John** He has other women.

**Sally** Well?

**John** Do you indulge in the same freedom with the opposite sex?

**Sally** Once. For revenge.

**Mark** (*taken aback*) You?

**Sally** Yes, me! (*To John*) It didn't work.

**John** He appears to have been oblivious until now.

**Sally** Him knowing wasn't the point. A private revenge. For me. Inside. But it didn't make me feel good. That's how it didn't work. (*She moves and sits in the chair to the left*)

**John** (*reflectively*) Ah, yes. Revenge. A primitive instinct we are told. But then, beneath the fragile veneer lies the original animal, its basic drives like any other, reproduction and self-preservation. We may constrain and inhibit but when they falter, we get rape, theft, violence, murder. In crisis, the adrenalin flows unbidden, fitting us for the fight or the flight, whichever may preserve self. Isn't that so, Mr Driscoll?

**Mark** I haven't thought about it.

*John moves until he is close to Mark*

**John** My wife and that weekend. She had told you it was coming up.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** But, owing to the wedding, you couldn't get away.

*Mark is very aware of Sally looking at him. He meets her eyes, and looks away*

It would have aroused suspicion.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** But with your wife's decision not to go, you contacted mine, and invented a trip to Jersey.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** To account for your absence.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** Why bother? Your wife would be far away in Norfolk.

**Mark** (*almost inaudibly*) Sally might . . .

**John** Speak up, man.

**Mark** Sally might have phoned.

**John** In short, a sound cover story.

*Mark looks away, trying to avoid Sally's eyes*

Airline tickets left lying around to add a little gloss, and your wife took you to the airport.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** What then? Your precise actions.

**Mark** I went to the desk . . .

**Sally** Excuse me.

**John** Yes?

**Sally** Do you mind if I add a bit to the precision?

**John** Please do.

**Sally** When we said goodbye, he said "I'll give you a call from Jersey."

**John** A nice touch. (*To Mark*) The desk.

**Mark** To say I'd be travelling another time.

**John** Then?

**Mark** Phoned.

**John** My wife.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** To confirm the coast was clear. Go on.

**Mark** Jane arrived. We drove to Bournemouth.

**John** Jane drove?

**Mark** Well . . .

**John** You hate being driven.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** Straight to the hotel?

**Mark** Jane had an evening meeting. She dropped me off, and I took a taxi.

**John** When you became Mr Price etcetera. Separate rooms, arriving independently, the Jersey invention—you went to a great deal of trouble to conceal the affair.

**Sally** I'm not surprised.

**John** Oh?

**Sally** No.

*John looks at Sally speculatively, then returns his attention to Mark*

**John** And yet you left together, having attracted staff gossip.

*Mark is reluctant to speak*

Well?

**Mark** It wasn't a terribly good weekend.

**John** Why? Were the bedtime frolics not up to your expectations?

*Sally seizes her glass to drink but finds that it is empty. John seems not to be looking at her*

Do please give yourself a refill.

*Sally gives John a look, stands up, and moves to the drinks cabinet. John watches her*

I wish I liked it myself. Perhaps it would dull the pain for me too.

**Sally** You're really enjoying yourself aren't you.

**John** Not especially.

*Sally bangs bottles etc. angrily as she speaks*

**Sally** Oh, come on. You're loving it. You've decided he's to blame for everything.

**John** You find him blameless?

**Sally** No, I don't. He's a cheating, lying bastard, the pig.

**John** Amen to that.

**Sally** It takes two, for Christ's sake.

**John** I'm aware of that.

**Sally** Your marriage couldn't have been so bloody perfect, or she wouldn't have got mixed up with him, in the first place. She looked you in the eye and lied, she came home from him and slept with you, she cheated on you too. You seem to forget that.

**John** By your own account, you found a casual affair unrewarding. In that respect, Jane resembled you.

*Sally gives John a look, crosses and sits down again with her drink*

It would have to have been important. Meant something. A great deal.  
(*Turning back to Mark*) Why was she so distressed?

**Mark** What you said.

**John** In your words, not mine.

**Mark** She was beginning to take it all too seriously.

**John** But surely it was serious. She was in love with you.

**Mark** She may have thought she was . . .

**John** And in return you loved her.

**Mark** I was very fond of her . . .

**John** Fond? (*He snatches up the letter from the table and thrusts it under Mark's nose*) "Mark, my darling, if you love me as much as you say . . ." Not, as *fond* of me, as you say. You told her you loved her.

**Mark** Only the way people do . . .

**John** In the heat of copulation. But not to be taken seriously. (*He puts the letter on the table again*) To you, Mr Driscoll, she was merely a good screw, conveniently to hand, whenever you could make yourself available.

**Mark** You're twisting everything . . . I cared for her . . .

**John** So you did love her.

**Mark** In a way, perhaps . . .

**John** We advance, if slowly. You loved her "in a way".

**Mark** Yes.

**John** What did she expect other than "your way"?

**Mark** Not expect exactly . . .

**John** She was taking it all too seriously. How? (*Pause*) I asked you how.

**Mark** She wanted to tell you.

**John** Confess, as it were?

**Mark** Not exactly . . .

**John** What then?

**Mark** She sort of talked about being together.

**John** You mean divorce and remarriage. Well?

**Mark** Yes.

**John** But you were not agreeable.

**Mark** I tried to explain . . .

**John** You refused.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** Why?

**Mark** I didn't want to break up my marriage.

**John** Oh, I see. Yet you had conducted a long standing affair . . .

**Mark** It had all got out of hand.

**John** Words of love had been exchanged.

**Mark** Not the same . . .

**John** The same as what?

**Mark** I've been married a long time. I love Sally . . .

**Sally** Bullshit.

**Mark** Darling . . .

**Sally** Bloody bullshit.

**John** Is that a passing observation, or do you wish to intervene?

**Sally** You want to know why divorce is out? I'll tell you why.

**John** Please do.

**Sally** My father left me a lot of money. Mark had ideas and a huge overdraft. The friendly bank had turned nasty. He stood to lose everything. I used that money to back him, finance his plans.

**John** Appearances suggest his plan paid off.

**Sally** It's still my money. I own more of the business than he does. Divorce, and I pull out. He's sunk. Back to square one. Love in a bed-sit wouldn't appeal to my Mark. That's why.

**Mark** Darling, that's not true . . .

**Sally** (to John) The only reason.

**John** Quite why, escapes me, but you must love him a great deal.

**Sally** I did. At this moment, no, not very much at all.

**John** What strange creatures we are.

**Sally** Aren't you the same? All this, what you're doing now, isn't that out of jealousy? Betrayal by someone you loved, yet can't help loving still?

**John** A little, perhaps. But mostly anger. Resentment at the way she was treated.

*John moves until his gun is a few inches from Mark's head. Mark flinches*

I am not convinced you have told the whole truth about the cause of my wife's distress.

**Mark** I have. I tried to explain . . . she got upset.

**John** And there was nothing else?

**Mark** No.

**John** I find that difficult to believe.

**Mark** What else could there be?

**John** It is your place to tell me.

**Mark** Nothing. I swear to God.

*John moves away from Mark a little, removing the immediate threat of the gun. Mark wipes his face, shakily*

**John** Yes, it is rather hot in here, isn't it.

**Mark** If we could have a window open . . .

**John** No. We must all try and endure it. Why, having been so careful, did you leave the hotel with my wife?

**Mark** She still wasn't herself . . . I was worried about her . . .

**John** Where did you go?

**Mark** The station.

**John** Which station?

**Mark** Bournemouth. We sat in the car talking. She became calmer . . . when I thought she was all right, I caught the train.

**John** And that is a full and truthful account.

**Mark** Everything, I . . . (*He breaks off*)

**John** Swear it. Quite.

**Mark** I honestly believed she'd be all right . . . if I'd dreamt she'd be involved in an accident . . .

**John** What would you have done?

**Mark** I'd never have let her go.

*John nods and turns to Sally*

**John** Were you here when he arrived home?

**Sally** No. I took my mother into hospital Monday morning. She was being kept in for a few days. I got home Monday night.

**John** How was he? In good spirits? Downcast? What?

**Sally** Quiet. He wasn't feeling well.

**John** Did he explain why?

**Sally** He'd banged his head. Cut it.

**John** Did he see a doctor?

**Sally** I thought he should, but he said he'd be all right.

**John** How did it happen?

**Sally** He took a taxi from the air . . . (*She breaks off*)

**John** The airport?

*Sally nods*

I think not. (*He turns to Mark*) Where then?

**Mark** Waterloo.

**John** Go on.

**Mark** Someone ran out in front of the cab . . . the driver braked suddenly . . . I was thrown forward and banged my head on the partition . . .

**John** Did you take the number of the taxicab?

**Mark** No.

**John** Not in case you wished to press a claim for your injuries?

**Mark** It was nothing. Just a bang on the head.

**John** So you didn't bother.

**Mark** I just wanted to get home.

**John** Yes, I'm sure you did. (*He circles thoughtfully as he continues*) When the police eventually arrived on the scene of the accident, followed by an ambulance, they found my wife behind the steering wheel. Her seat belt was not properly secured. (*He gazes at Sally, expecting a response*)

**Sally** Perhaps that's why she . . . (*She changes tack*) . . . if the seat belt didn't restrain her when it happened . . .

**John** Yes. Although as I learned more, studied the wrecked vehicle, I began to wonder. The driver's door had sprung open and was jammed in that position. The car had turned over and over after the impact.

Why then, if her seat belt was not secure, had she not been thrown out? (*Again he gazes expectantly at Sally*)

**Sally** (*subdued*) That might not have saved her.

**John** As I have mentioned, the damage was far more extensive on the passenger side than on the driver's. The nature of her injuries, if she were not in the passenger seat, were difficult to account for. I took these puzzling aspects up with the police officer concerned. He told me that, after a violent collision, such things quite often defied logical analysis.

**Sally** Well, he should know.

**John** However, he lacked certain information which happily is at our disposal. (*He moves behind and close to Mark once more. He touches the back of Mark's head lightly with the barrel of the gun, before removing it a couple of inches*)

*Mark flinches. Not only his face and neck, but every muscle in his body is rigid with fear approaching terror*

You have lied for the last time, Mr Driscoll.

**Mark** I haven't . . . I've told you everything . . .

**John** You did not drive to Bournemouth station.

**Mark** I did . . .

**John** Had you left my wife there, she would have taken the main road out of Bournemouth. The accident occurred in the New Forest.

**Mark** She must have got lost . . .

**John** The road led across country from your hotel, which was well to the east of Bournemouth.

**Mark** Perhaps she went back to the hotel . . . I don't know . . . I wasn't there . . .

**John** You were there, Mr Driscoll. You were driving.

**Mark** No . . . no . . . I wasn't . . .

**John** (*deadly*) When handling firearms, Mr Driscoll, it is important to remain cool and relaxed. Your persistent lying is making me tense. The trigger mechanism is very light.

**Mark** No . . . please . . .

**Sally** Mark, for God's sake, whatever it is, tell him.

**John** Listen to your wife, Mr Driscoll. A dum-dum bullet would enter your head, expand, and blow it apart. Listen to her.

**Mark** All right . . . all right . . .

**John** You left the hotel and entered the New Forest.

**Mark** Yes . . .

**John** You had been drinking heavily in the bar beforehand.

**Mark** One that's all.

**John** Several dry martinis. It was raining heavily. Darkness had fallen early, you were driving fast.

**Mark** She wouldn't stop crying . . . I wanted to get her home . . .

**John** And then?

**Mark** Suddenly, I saw headlights coming at me . . . I tried to swerve . . .

skidded . . . there was a terrible bang . . . oh, God . . . it was like a kaleidoscope . . . everything turning, revolving . . .

**John** After it stopped? Go on.

**Mark** I was knocked out . . . seconds . . . minutes . . . I don't know . . .

**John** After that?

**Mark** I put my hand out to Jane . . . touched something wet . . . blood . . . spoke to her . . . she didn't answer . . . I undid her seat belt to try and bring her round . . . when I moved her, I saw her face . . . and I realised she was dead . . .

**John** And then you panicked.

**Mark** Yes! All right! I didn't know what I was doing! (*He turns his head during this outburst, and finds the gun inches from his face. Turning away he continues more quietly, in a sad, defeated kind of way*) . . . Jane was dead. There was nothing I could do for her.

**John** But you knew that when the police did arrive, you'd be breathalysed, you'd face charges.

**Mark** (*dreamlike*) I pulled Jane across into the driver's seat. She was a dead weight. I tried to do up the seat belt. I thought I had. But her body kept falling sideways. I groped around in the back, and found my weekend bag. That's it.

*Mark stands up, moves a little. John follows him*

**John** There was another vehicle involved. That did not concern you.

**Mark** I could just see it through the trees. It had skidded and gone into a ditch. But the driver had got out. He was sort of wandering about, as if he was dazed, but he seemed to be all right.

**John** An elderly gentleman, I believe.

**Mark** I couldn't see him clearly. I don't know.

**John** So you left.

**Mark** Yes.

**John** How did you intend to get home?

**Mark** I didn't know. I walked away, into the forest. Just away. Anywhere. I came across a stream, and tried to stop my head bleeding. Then a path. It led through a plantation to a road. There was more traffic there, but no one wanted to stop. I started walking. A lorry driver picked me up.

**John** Your head bleeding. Drenched with rain as well, you must have cut a strange figure.

**Mark** I said my car had broken down, I'd banged my head on the bonnet, trying to fix it, and I wanted to get to a garage. He dropped me at one near Southampton.

**John** And after your friendly lorry driver left?

**Mark** Does all this matter?

**John** We have the meat. We may as well have the trimmings.

**Mark** It was late. I didn't know if there were any trains. I phoned for a taxi. He brought me home.

**John** A nice long job for him. (*To Sally*) Do you have any questions?

**Sally** No.

**John** I do. (*To Mark*) How do you propose to pay?

**Mark** Pay?

**John** For what you have done.

**Mark** Money? (*A flicker of hope*) You want money?

**John** In all justice, you must pay somehow. I ask for suggestions.

**Sally** How much do you want?

**John** You have already bought him. Why should you pay again?

**Sally** It's my money. How much?

**John** Money would not be a suitable recompense. I am leaning towards—a life for a life. (*He seems prepared to shoot Mark without more ado*)

**Mark** (*brokenly*) No . . . please . . .

*Sally rises*

**John** (*to Sally, sharply*) Stay where you are.

**Sally** You can't . . . cold blooded murder? . . . you wouldn't do that . . .

**John** Believe me, it would be a pleasure.

**Mark** Sweet Jesus . . . no . . . I'll do anything.

**John** Anything?

**Mark** Just don't . . . that's all . . .

**John** You agree to anything?

**Mark** Whatever you say . . .

**John** (*to Sally*) You too?

**Sally** Yes.

**John** (*indicating Mark*) For this object?

**Sally** He didn't mean her to die . . . it was an accident . . .

**John** Because of him, a life was extinguished.

**Sally** Killing him isn't the way.

**John** It is the one immediately open to me. (*To Mark*) But you say—anything but that?

*Mark nods, almost unable to speak. John fetches a chair, puts it down, sits Mark in it, facing Sally and presses the gun barrel to Mark's head*

You had my wife. I did not have yours.

*Mark looks at Sally haggardly. Sally's face is stony*

An eye for an eye. Your choice, Mr Driscoll.

**Mark** Sally . . . he means it . . . he's mad.

*Sally stares at Mark wordlessly*

(*Brokenly*) Sally . . . please . . .

*Sally shakily unbuttons her housecoat, takes it off, throws it down. Mark turns his head, looking away from Sally*

**John** (*prodding Mark's head with the gun*) You will watch, Mr Driscoll.

*Mark's sagging head moves until it is directed at Sally again*

You will remain seated. (*Referring to the gun*) If you value her life, you will not move. But you will watch. Do you hear me? Do you?

**Mark** Yes.

*John circles towards Sally. Sally lies down on the floor. John kneels beside her, reaches across her as if about to lower himself. . . Then he picks up the housecoat, and holds it towards Sally*

**John** (quietly) Put it back on.

*Sally rolls her head, and looks at John*

Put it on.

*Sally, bewildered, takes the housecoat, stands, puts it back on*

My business is not with you . . . (He moves to a position directly behind Mark) . . . but with him.

**Mark** (half sobbing) No . . .

**John** You deserve to die.

*From here on, Mark is making half sobbing noises, in terror, hysterical*

**Mark** No . . . for pity's sake . . .

*Mark would rise if he could, but his legs will not support him. Besides which, John's free hand clamps on his shoulder. Mark falls on to his knees in front of the chair, cowering, helpless. Sally makes to move towards John*

**Sally** Please . . . stop it . . . please.

*Momentarily, John's gun swings to threaten Sally*

**John** Do you wish to join him?

*Sally stops where she is. Mark attempts to crawl away, his speech a mixture of sobbing and half gibberish*

**Mark** No . . . oh, sweet Jesus help me . . . no . . .

*Mark's crawl takes him behind the couch, where he falls on his face. John follows relentlessly, his gun aimed at Mark's head. Sally is frozen where she is, one knuckle in her teeth, trying not to gag*

**John** You will hear the explosion as I fire . . .

**Mark** (half lost in sobs) . . . I'm sorry . . . please forgive me . . . please . . .

**John** . . . and a moment later, it will be over.

**Mark** (more sobs than words) . . . no . . . no . . . Oh Jesus . . .

*John fires, once, twice, and then again, three deadly explosions. Sally emits a sound, a terrible prolonged moan.*

**John** You may look at him now.

*Sally bows her head, turns it away in a horrified negative*

He's not hurt.

*Sally looks at John without comprehension*

See for yourself.

*Mark's head rises from above the couch as he weakly pulls himself up. His hair is dishevelled. His collapsed face is wet with tears. He still does not know what has happened. Sally moves and helps him to his feet. His legs are wobbly*

**Sally** Here . . . come on.

*John places the gun on the low table, and puts his jacket on*

**John** Those three shots were blanks.

*Sally guides Mark round the couch*

**Sally** Sit down . . . it's all right . . .

*Mark sits on the couch dumbly, elbows on knees, head bowed. Sally remains standing*

**John** The remaining bullet is real.

**Sally** Haven't you finished yet?

**John** Not quite.

**Sally** This is what you came for, isn't it. To degrade him, humiliate him. What more do you want?

**John** My wife was pregnant. About two months, it seems, from the foetus.

*Sally stares at John. John's words have penetrated into Mark's mind. He lifts his head dully.*

**Mark** Pregnant?

**John** I think you knew that.

**Mark** No . . .

**John** I think she told you that weekend.

**Mark** (*dully*) No . . . she didn't tell me . . .

**John** Well, perhaps not.

**Sally** (*to Mark; bitterly*) You gave her a baby?

*There is no response from Mark*

You gave her a baby?

**John** In fact, it may have been mine. We shall never know. Some two months before the accident, she turned to me just for a few days, for comfort, I expect. You did not make her happy, Mr Driscoll. (*He takes a cassette recorder from his briefcase and presses the "rewind" control*)

*Sally watches him. Mark wipes the tears from his face with his hands, becoming more aware*

Now, let us see. The microphone is quite sensitive. (*He presses the "play" control*)

**Recorder** John: No, let us talk first.

Sally: You do realise . . .

John: Yes? Realise what?

**John** Good. (*He presses the "fast forward" control, stops it and presses the "play" control*)

**Recorder** Mark: Jane was dead. There was nothing I could do for her.

**John** (*pressing the stop control*) Fine. (*He removes the cassette, places it in his pocket. Then he puts the cassette recorder, letter and papers into his briefcase, and closes it*) I shall edit the tape so that it merely comprises your statement. (*He crosses to the curtains (blinds) and moves round the room, opening them*)

*Daylight enters the room but the sun has declined meantime, and the light is much duller than previously*

(*Switching off the lights*) The police would not accept it as evidence of course, and I should certainly get into hot water for the manner in which it was obtained. But what I can discover, the police may confirm. Causing death by dangerous driving, would be the charge I believe. A prison sentence, I fancy. (*He completes his tasks, takes the key to the french windows from his pocket and unlocks them*) I shall reconnect your telephone, in case your friends do call.

*John exits through the french windows*

**Sally** (*gazing at Mark*) Did she tell you? Did she tell you about the baby?

**Mark** No. That's the truth, Sally.

**Sally** Is it? How can I ever know whether you're speaking the truth or not?

**Mark** (*dully*) It's the truth.

*John comes back in*

**John** May I use your telephone?

*Neither Sally nor Mark reply. John takes silence for consent and lifts the receiver*

Thank you. (*He continues to speak, as he taps out the number and listens to the ringing tone*) You must send me the bill for the damage I have caused to your property, of course. (*On the telephone*) Extension four three two, please. (*pause*) Hullo, Jane... how are you feeling?... good... good...

*Sally swings round, and stares at John. Mark's eyes seek John*

... anything you want...? ... all right, my dear ... see you soon. (*He hangs up*)

**Sally** Jane?

*John places a coin beside the telephone*

**John** For the phone call.

**Sally** You said she was dead.

**John** Oh, no. I'd never have said that. I subscribe to the dictum that you should always speak the truth unless you happen to be a very good liar. Which I am not.

**Sally** You did...

**John** I said the outcome of the accident was tragic. It was. When your husband walked away, she was in a coma, on the brink of death. Her

life was despaired of. She came out of the coma a few days ago. Whether she will ever fully recover is uncertain. She will need much care.

**Sally** Death by dangerous driving . . . that's what you said . . .

**John** In the second vehicle was a passenger. An elderly lady who died from her injuries in hospital. Her husband was too dazed and shocked to do anything. A passing motorist found them eventually and drove to a telephone. But there was a needlessly long delay before an ambulance arrived. Mark Driscoll, to save himself, had walked away. And my wife's child was deprived of its chance of life. All of us must accept responsibility for the consequences of our own actions. (*He consults his watch then picks up his briefcase*) I must leave you. It is later than I had intended. (*He turns towards the door leading to the garden*)

*Mark leans forward and picks up the gun*

**Mark** You've forgotten this.

*John turns and sees Mark holding the gun*

**John** Oh, yes. Thank you. Under the terms of my licence, it must remain in my possession. (*He moves towards Mark*)

*Mark stands, raises the gun, and aims it at John*

**Mark** Now it's my turn.

*John stops*

*Mark's terror has been replaced by blind fury*

You've had your fun, you bastard. Let's see how you like it. Sally, the cassette. It's in his pocket.

*Instead, Sally moves quietly towards Mark*

**Sally** Mark . . . please . . .

**Mark** Get the bloody cassette.

*Sally, close to Mark now, gently tries to take the gun from him*

**Sally** Don't, please . . . let him go . . .

**Mark** And be sent to prison, finished?

*Mark sweeps Sally aside violently. She sprawls on the the couch*

(*To John*) Give it to me.

*John makes no move but simply stares at Mark*

I'll use it Barrett. I mean that.

*John takes out the key and holds it up*

**John** Do you? I wonder. (*He turns and walks to the door*)

*Mark extends his gun hand, aiming at John's back*

**Sally** Mark, don't.

*Mark pulls the trigger. There is a click. John turns and faces Mark. Mark*

*looks at the gun blankly, pulls the trigger several times. There are more clicks*

Mark, don't you see? He was lying. He wanted you to do that.

*Mark sits. John walks back, takes the gun from Mark's limp hand*

**John** I spoke the literal truth. (*He shows them the bullet*) There. You see? The bullet filed flat, the cross cut into it. (*He puts the gun into his briefcase and closes it*) I had removed the charge.

**Sally** You knew. Everything that's happened. You knew it would.

**John** I could not know. I surmised.

**Sally** Will you give me the cassette?

**John** For his sake?

**Sally** For mine. It would damage my life nearly as much.

**John** It is not for the police, unless you force me.

**Sally** I don't understand.

**John** My wife does not know I am cognisant of her affair. Were I to hand this to the police, she would. I do not want her to. She needs peace, and love and serenity. For her sake, I could not invoke the forces of justice. It had to be in private. Between us. (*He looks at Mark*) I shall not use the tape unless you report my own unlawful acts, committed today.

**Sally** We shan't.

**John** Well, then, there's an end to it. I shall leave you together. (*He moves to the compact disc player*) As though I had never been.

*John switches on the compact disc player. The music of Ravel's La Valse resumes*

*John goes through the door to the garden: begins to circle the conservatory*

*Sally turns slowly, and looks at Mark*

*John pauses, on his way out, at the spot where he paused on his arrival, and again looks into the room. Then he moves on and out of sight*

*Mark and Sally remain where they are as if part of a tableau. La Valse ends with its final four beat bar*

*The CURTAIN falls*

## FURNITURE AND PROPERTY LIST

*On stage:* Conservatory with glass panels  
Couch. *On it:* elegant housecoat  
Chairs  
Low glass table  
Other small tables  
Table lamps, standard lamp  
Drinks cabinet  
Telephone on wall fitment  
Compact disc player on wall fitment  
Cacti and indoor plants  
Curtains or blinds  
"Panic button" on wall near french windows  
Other dressing as required

*Off stage:* Small watering can (**Sally**)

*Personal:* **John:** Briefcase. *In it:* revolver, cassette player/recorder with tape, letter,  
2 hotel bills. Handkerchief. Gun licence  
**Sally:** watch  
**Mark:** watch

## LIGHTING PLOT

One interior setting. Practical fittings required: table lamps, standard lamp

### ACT I

*To open:* Bright, summer afternoon sunshine

- |              |   |           |
|--------------|---|-----------|
| <i>Cue 1</i> | <b>John</b> switches on table and standard lamps<br><i>Snap on covering spots</i> | (Page 1)  |
| <i>Cue 2</i> | <b>John</b> closes curtains (blinds)<br><i>Decrease general lighting</i>          | (Page 23) |
| <i>Cue 3</i> | <b>John:</b> "Just remember that."<br><i>Black-out</i>                            | (Page 26) |

### ACT II

*To open:* As end of Act I

- |              |   |           |
|--------------|---|-----------|
| <i>Cue 4</i> | <b>John</b> switches off lights at master switch<br><i>Cut covering spots</i> | (Page 36) |
| <i>Cue 5</i> | <b>John</b> switches lights on<br><i>Snap on covering spots</i>               | (Page 36) |
| <i>Cue 6</i> | <b>John</b> opens curtains (blinds)<br><i>Daylight enters</i>                 | (Page 53) |
| <i>Cue 7</i> | <b>John</b> switches off lights<br><i>Snap off covering spots</i>             | (Page 53) |

## EFFECTS PLOT

## ACT I

- Cue 1** As House Lights dim  
*Ravel's La Valse plays* (Page 1)
- Cue 2** As CURTAIN rises  
*Birdsong. Continue intermittently throughout Act* (Page 1)
- Cue 3** **John:** "... I might agree with that."  
*Car draws up on gravel. Front door opens and closes* (Page 10)
- Cue 4** **Mark** opens window  
*Birdsong increases* (Page 18)
- Cue 5** **John** closes window  
*Birdsong decreases* (Page 23)
- Cue 6** **Mark:** "... but if you won't listen ..."  
*Gunshot fired, breaks glass* (Page 25)
- Cue 7** **John** fires again  
*Gunshot, curtains (blinds) twitch, glass breaks* (Page 26)

## ACT II

- Cue 8** **Sally** turns to John  
*Front door bell rings* (Page 36)
- Cue 9** **John:** "Both of you." Mark nods  
*Door bell rings. Footsteps on gravel* (Page 36)
- Cue 10** **Visitor:** "... must have gone out!"  
*Footsteps recede. Car door slams. car starts, drives away* (Page 36)
- Cue 11** **Mark:** "... no ... no ... Oh, Jesus ..."  
*Three gunshots* (Page 51)
- Cue 12** **John** switches on cassette player  
*Dialogue as per script page 52* (Page 52)
- Cue 13** **John** switches on compact disc player  
*Ravel's La Valse plays* (Page 55)