"STEWART PARKER was a playwright whose sense of history and elegance of wit and telling were unusual in British theatre." Observer

Northern Star: "Only an Irishman could have written something like this: a breathtaking, human sense of invention is harnessed to a stimulates, literary imagination and styled on by moral outrage. It is a captivating play." Sunday Times.

Joseph Bodys: "The colourful, rather Elizabethan story of Bouvard and Paris has an undistinguished talent for putting dialogue to the test."

Pentecost: "One of the most stimulating, most satisfying, most touching, most stunning plays in years of Irish drama. A real theatre play up there, Irish times."

Introduced by Stephen Rea.
Stewart Parker
Plays: 2

Northern Star, Heavenly Bodies, Pentecost

Northern Star. His best play – by far – is a fine Irish play by any standards. Parker marvels in the manner through the play, uniting comedy, seriousness and suspense and developing a majestic harmony through a well-drawn drama. It is marvelously imaginative and it is the very essence of Parker’s work. The play is scored by a range of themes, making it a superb stage show. It is a powerful statement about Ireland’s past and present.

It has Irish history been so provocatively or so entertainingly drawn on the stage.' Irish Times

'Compelling ... intellectually absorbing in the perspectives it opens up and the insights it provides. The approach is inventive to a high degree and the writing has a marvellously imaginative sweep to it as it ranges from high literary excellence to comic parodies of Synge, O’Casey, Wilde and others. It is a remarkably stimulating play and, given its modern relevance, it has a tragic core of unlearnt lessons.' Irish Independent

'Elegant, witty and moving ... a remarkable virtuoso achievement.' Observer

Heavenly Bodies. 'An undoubted talent for pungent dialogue ... The colourful, rather Balzacian story of Boucklaw is carried by excerpts from his own works, variously light comic or melodramatic, which are introduced to him after his death in New York by the fantastical figure of Johnny Patterson, the "Irish Singing Clown" who was kicked to death while singing of Irish unity.' The Times

Pentecost. 'What makes it an extraordinary play is how much of Belfast and of Northern Ireland Parker manages to put on the stage: the politics, the religion, the tension between resident and exile and, above all, the idea of a city and country haunted by its past and forever fuelled by a righteous anger. What makes the play so moving is Parker’s burning conviction that recollection is not enough ... what animates it is Parker’s own immense generosity of spirit and passionate belief that what unites us as human beings is infinitely more important than what divides us.' Guardian

'Exhilarating energy and ironic humour ... The characters are beautifully drawn and the dialogue between the ill-assorted members of this uneasy household crackles with a rare wit and passion ... Fine and moving.' Daily Telegraph

The volume is introduced by Stephen Rea, actor and director, with a foreword by Stewart Parker.

Stewart Parker was born in Belfast in 1941. During the early sixties at Queen’s University he was active in a group of young writers which included Seamus Heaney and Bernard MacLaverty. His first stage play Sprakling (1975) won him the 1976 Evening Standard Most Promising Playwright Award and his TV drama I’m a Dreamer, Monstrous (1977) won the Ewart-Bigg Memorial Prize. His stage plays include Catchpenny Trash (1977), Nightshade (1980), Poet’s Fall (1983), Northern Sun (1984), Heavenly Bodies (1980) and Pentecost (1987), which won the Harvey’s Irish Theatre Award. He died in London in 1988.
by the same author

STEWART PARKER PLAYS: 1
(Spokesong, Catchpenny Twist, Nightshade, Pratt's Fall)

STEWART PARKER PLAYS: 2

Northern Star
Heavenly Bodies
Pentecost

introduced by Stephen Rea
with a foreword by Stewart Parker

Methuen Drama
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<td>1976</td>
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<td><em>The Actress and the Bishop</em> (one act), King's Head Theatre, Islington</td>
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1987 *Lost Belonging*, six films for Thames Television/Euston Films
*Pentecost*, Field Day Theatre Company, Derry; wins Harvey's Irish Theatre Award

The vacuum in Irish theatre created by the death of Stewart Parker in 1988 has expanded rather than contracted; I am more aware than ever now that we are still indebted to him and, further, that the debt has only begun to be repaid. When I first met him in the 1960s at Queen's University, Belfast, his theatrical instinct was already highly developed. He knew how to teach others even then, in a wholly unobtrusive yet practical way. This was indeed to remain a feature of his own work. It has an element that is didactic in its effect, although it does not have in its tone or its texture any solemnising or wisely avuncular address. I remember him teaching me how to laugh on stage, always an embarrassing task for a young actor. 'Expel all the air from your lungs,' he would say, 'then try to make a sound.' It was true. The dry little cachinnation that I produced did, amazingly, sound like a laugh. In a larger sense, he could illuminate the limitations of certain kinds of theatre – that of social realism, for instance – simply by reminding one that 'Nothing happens to a character after a play. When the play is over, the character ceases to exist.' What I began to learn about Stewart in those days was his precocious awareness of where he wished to situate himself in relation to the various theatrical traditions in which he was already so deeply read. Although I do not wish to make the choice sound overly self-conscious, I believe nevertheless that a degree of self-consciousness was an important feature of it. He chose to see himself as a member of the community of dramatists that constitute the Irish, or the Anglo-Irish tradition. It was an important but also a difficult choice. In one sense, it was a decision in favour of a clustering of ideas, but a theatre that had always had a highly oblique relation to the world of the metropolitan intellectual. The obliquity of that relation manifests itself most famously in its wit and
that wit is both so cerebral and at times so surreal that it makes the conventions of social realism seem inflexible and predictable.

However, Stewart's unavoidable preoccupation with the travails of the North of Ireland seemed to most people to doom him to precisely those conventions; for anything that did not smack of 'realism', of the 'this-is-how-it-is' school, could in those days especially be deemed to be in some sense disengaged from the actuality of the situation. But Stewart found within that Anglo-Irish tradition examples of the ways in which the application of intelligence to a political situation could be both liberating and revelatory. The dramatist and novelist Thomas Kinsella has summarised this capacity of the Anglo-Irish drama by what he calls its 'creative decay', its 'cool remove', and its celebration of the 'intelligence of the playwrights themselves, usually in the form of wit and verbal elegance, but often in the dramatising of ideas'.

Stewart has this eloquence, wit and the accompanying obliquity. When did shipyard-workers achieve the kind of eloquence we find in Danny and Hugh of The Iceberg? Who but Stewart would have conceived of the sinking of the Titanic as a ghost story, exposing social injustice, class warfare and inaugurating thereby a debate on the condition of Ireland? Equally, it seems characteristic of Stewart's resourcefulness that he should transmute the old Irish legend of Deirdre of the Sorrows, much represented on the Irish stage during the Revival, into a TV serial, Lost Belongings, wherein the tragic element of the original story was retained but also re-realized both for modern conditions and via the contemporary medium. Joyce in June, a play for television, is another example of Stewart's agility in recycling cultural materials, including cultural clichés, for comic effect and yet to serious and sometimes scathing purpose.

However, it is in Northern Star (1984) and Pentecost (1987) that Stewart's career as a dramatist achieves its most complex and satisfactory articulation. In Northern Star his engagement with Anglo-Irish drama from the pre-Revival period is interwoven with his equally powerful preoccupation with the specifically Protestant republican and radical tradition of Belfast. The result is a work in which the political and the cultural are simultaneously represented as aspects of civil society that are, properly speaking, inseparable but that can, to their mutual detriment, become separated and then distorted as distinct modes of imagining. Sectarian prejudice produces sectarianised histories. Stewart himself declared in an article he wrote in 1985: 'I see no point in writing a “plea” for unity between prods and taigs. What use has piety been? I can only see a point in actually embodying that unity, practising that inclusiveness, in an artistic image; creating it as an act of the imagination, postulating it before an audience.' The search for such an image of unity, with its Faustian overtones of 'unity of being', and with its self-conscious use of the heavily charged word 'unity', is central to his most mature work.

The crux of the political weight and importance of Stewart's work lies here. In producing his image of 'unity' he could be said to be offering a kind of solution to the otherwise divided and sectarianised situation of Northern Ireland. On the other hand, such a postulated unity could be less benignly described as a wished-for alleviation of the actualities of division, as a species of liberal humanism which is seeking to produce a set of universal values in despite of and in face of sectarianism and injustice. There is nothing ignoble in this, of course. But it is not necessarily a unity that derives from actualities. It is simply imported to replace them.

However it is in Pentecost that Stewart actually asserts this humanism with an unapologetic vigour. Beside the squalor of the death, destruction and provincial bitterness of the North, he places an ideal of the fully human, the fully realised life. In effect, he does not
describe for this desolate society a specific future. What
he did in those particularly dark days was to imagine
the possibility of a future at all. That was and is a
memorable achievement. It is also true that Stewart
Parker was the first Northern writer to produce such a
vision of a harmonious possibility on the other side of
violence. For that, and for his panache and style, for the
fact that he restored to theatre a moral as well as a
political dimension while adapting to the technical
demands of the contemporary stage and media, he will
always be remembered both with affection and with
admiration.

Stephen Rea
1999
fact finally laid to rest, in the only way I can foresee as having any possible meaning.

III

So far as the 'real' characters are concerned, they have been drawn from the marginalia of the historical record rather than its main plot. Henry Joy McCracken was a minor figure in the '98 Rising in Ireland; not enough is known about him. Dion Boucicault was unarguably a major force in the Victorian theatre, but that is a period of drama which is in itself considered marginal nowadays; rather more than enough is known about him. McCracken's mistress, Mary Bodle, is so obscure that her name might well have been Bou. Boucicault's Mephistopspelean sparring partner, Johnny Patterson, survives precariously as a name on fading sheet-music covers. He certainly did write 'The Garden Where the Praties Grow', as well as 'The Hat My Father Wore' (which, suitably altered, was to be taken over as the favourite anthem of Orangeism) ... and also, incidentally, 'The Stone Outside Dan Murphy's Door', a record of which was the most cherished offering on my grandfather Jimmy Lynas's old wind-up gramophone.

Harold Wilson, whose recorded voice is briefly heard in the third play, was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the years 1964—70 and 1974—76.

IV

The first play takes place partly in a studio and the second one a kind of collage; the third play is written in a form of heightened realism. This seemed most appropriate for my own generation, finally making its own scruffy way on to the stage of history and from thence into the future tense, in this climactic piece.

Stewart Parker
1989
Pentecost
Pentecost was first performed at the Guildhall, Derry, by the Field Day Theatre Company on 23 September 1987 with the following cast:

**Lenny**  
Stephen Rea

**Marian**  
Eileen Pollock

**Lily**  
Barbara Adair

**Ruth**  
Paula Hamilton

**Peter**  
Jonathan Kent

*Directed by Patrick Mason*  
*Designed by Bunny Christie*  
*Lighting by Conleth White*

The English premiere was presented by the Tricycle Theatre Company at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, on 9 January 1989 with the following cast:

**Lenny**  
Adrian Dunbar

**Marian**  
Dearbhla Molloy

**Lily**  
Barbara Adair

**Ruth**  
Michelle Fairley

**Peter**  
Sam Dale

*Directed by Nicholas Kent*  
*Designed by Poppy Mitchell*  
*Lighting by David Colman*

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**Act One**

The time is 1974. The place is Belfast. The play takes place in the downstairs back part of a respectable working-class 'parlour' house, built in the early years of this century. There is a kitchen with a fireplace, a rocking-chair, a sofa, a dining table. On one side a doorway leads into the scullery, with its flagstone floor and its old cast-iron range for cooking on and its 'pouk box' of a sink. At the far end of the scullery another door leads into the pantry, which we can't see. The large kitchen window looks out on the back yard, which is very narrow, with high, whitewashed walls topped by lines of broken glass. The yard door is heavily bolted, even though its worn ribs are showing through.

On the other side of the kitchen is the door leading into the hall and thence to the rest of the house. There is an under-stairs cupboard by this door. There is a single electric light with conical shade hanging from the middle of the ceiling in kitchen and scullery both; but there are also working gas mantles on the walls. Everything is real except the proportions. The rooms are narrow, but the walls climb up and disappear into the shadows above the stage. The kitchen in particular is cluttered, almost suffocated, with the furnishings and bric à-brac of the first half of the century, all the original fixtures and fittings still being in place. But in spite of now being shabby, musty, threadbare, it has all clearly been the object of a desperate, lifelong struggle for cleanliness, tidiness, orderliness — godliness.

The people are **Marian, Lenny and Peter**, who are all thirty-three; **Ruth**, who is twenty-nine; and **Lily Matthews**, who is seventy-four.

**Scene One**

A night in February. **Lenny** is seated on the kitchen sofa, playing 'I Can't Get Started' on his trombone. His tape machine is on the
F I 7 ['iii' Act One St-nw Out ITS

Marian Did you make tea?
Lenny The gas is off.

Marian has moved on into the kitchen, and is pouring out a cup of tea on the top of the range.
Marian What's this?
Lenny That's odd, so. What do you reckon?
Marian There's a cup sitting here with milk and sugar in it. Christ.
Lenny I told you. I haven't touched a thing.
Marian She must have brewed this up just before it happened.
Lenny No such thing.
Marian She never got a chance to pour it out.
Lenny The ambulance men, is all it would have been.
Marian It's stone cold.
Lenny The ambulance men at the door, is all it possibly could have been.
Marian now her full attention on l'ou for the first time
Marian I see. They prepared a nice pot of tea, prior to removing the corpse.
Lenny She walked out of here, in her Sunday hat and coat and best handbag, is what I'm saying, under her own steam into the ambulance. It was in the hospital she died ...
Marian When?

Lenny How do I know, under the anaesthetic.
Marian When?
Lenny Why?
Marian I'm asking you when.
Lenny What does it matter, Wednesday sometime ...
Marian Christ.
Lenny Meaning what?
Marian Why is her family not here?
Lenny No surviving relatives, I told you. There wasn't even anybody at the funeral.
Marian So. I wonder how they manage in a case like that.
Lenny My Great-Aunt Rosaleen owned the whole terrace, it was all in her will. I told ...
Marian Holding a funeral when there's nobody at it, I mean.
Lenny Very good, Marian. Right, well, let's see. The wee butcher from the shop on the front of the road was there, her churchgoing cronies, a few out' dolls who used to live next door when there used to be a door next door, no family is actually of course what I was saying, okay? Me, I was there. Standing foundered in Dundonald at half nine this morning, being tongue-lashed by the Free Presbyterian notion of a requiem mass, that was it. Just what is this?
Marian You haven't exactly let the grass grow.
Lenny Just how is this, whenever I start the evening doing you a favour, ten minutes into it and suddenly I'm a heartless creep, dishonouring the dead, I never once clapped eyes on the woman!
Marian Well you've sure as hell inherited the woman.
Lenny The house, I've inherited the house, by law it has to come to me once the sitting tenant's dead, you think I ever wanted this? — I thought you'd maybe appreciate the chance, before there's any sort of an auction, you could have the pick of all this for your shop, you were never off my back about being careless with money, okay, great stuff, go ahead and take advantage of it.

Marian You haven't lost your knack of feeling put-upon, I see.

Lenny (leaping up) Forget I ever mentioned it, Marian.

Marian Sit down. Here. Stick this in your gub.

(Producing a half bottle of brandy from her shoulder-bag.) What was her name?

Lenny Matthews. Mrs Alfred George Matthews.

Marian (a toast) God love you, Mrs Matthews.

Lenny Lily to her friends.

Marian Nice house, Lily, you kept it lovely.

She swigs and passes the bottle to Lenny, who finally decides to accept it.

Lenny Responsibilities, who needs them.

Marian Property used to be theft, in your book.

Lenny What are you supposed to do? It was my mother insisted I go to the funeral. 'That wee woman lived her whole life in that house, it's your responsibility now, the least you can do is honour her memory' — what memory? None of us even once met her. If she'd known her rent was going straight to the Legion of Mary, she'd have dropped dead years ago. The last thing she'd ever have asked for was me mooching round her graveside, did it never strike you that funerals and weddings are much of a muchness in this country?

Marian Certainly. Our wedding was exactly like a funeral.

Lenny There's just one way to tell the difference. Nobody takes photographs at a funeral.

Marian Apart from the Special Branch.

She has wandered back into the kitchen and is examining a row of mugs displayed on a shelf.

Look at this. Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, the wedding of Queen Mary, the Coronation of Lizzie the Second, 1953 — that must be the most modern item in the house. Most of the furniture's Edwardian, there's a Regency dressing table upstairs that must have come down through her grandparents.

Lenny Is it all worth much? What do you reckon?

Marian deliberates, moozing about amongst the furniture.

Marian As I remember it — what was the word you most detested in the whole of the English language — 'antiques'.

Lenny Yeah. Well. You felt much the same way about 'trombone'.

Marian I didn't feel that different about 'antiques' as a matter of fact.

Lenny Antiques have been your whole livelihood.

Marian It's been my trade, I don't have to love it.

Lenny You always loved it.

Marian Things, individually crafted, well-cared-for, those I love, not the business, you never could grasp that. Old and beautiful things.

Lenny The sash my father wore.

Marian Up yours too. I've sold the shop. If you want to know.
Lenny is thunderstruck.

Lenny  You've done what?

Marian  For an amazingly good price, when you consider the state the city's in, but then it's what I'm good at, isn't it, as you're at pains to point out, trading, buying and selling. I don't have to love it. Just get on with it. Survival. It's one bloody useful knack, knowing the value of things to people, what they'll pay, what they think they're worth. The things, that is. The people of course are not worth shit. I didn't have to love them either. You and I tend to diverge on that point, you having all that deep-seated compassion, for anything that suffles into your shoulder . . .

Lenny  Hold on a minute!

Marian  In my case the embattled bourgeoisie of Belfast was one long procession of avaricious gobshites — hell-bent on overloading their lounge cabinets and their display units with any bauble or knick-knack, so long as it looked like it cost more than it did, so long as it was showy enough to advertise their grandeur, and their fashionable taste and stylishness, not to mention their absolutely bottomless vulgarity, it was bad enough before the shooting-match started, it's grotesque at this point, I couldn't handle any more of it.

Lenny  Why Marian did it not maybe, I mean how come you never . . .

Marian  Besides I didn't have you to feed and clothe any more, so who needs it? Do you ever actually earn money these days?

Lenny  What do you imagine you're going to do?

Marian  You can't possibly get paid for playing that thing.

Lenny  Why did you bother coming here to look at this at all?

Marian  I need a house.

Lenny  You what? What do you mean, a house? You're not thinking of starting up as an estate agent?

Marian  I need a house. To live in.

Lenny  You've got a flat to live in.

Marian  I've put it on the market.

Lenny  Marian . . . Exactly what's going on with you?

Marian  Have you had this place valued?

Lenny  Of course I haven't had it bloody valued, the woman was only buried this morning!

Marian  I'll buy it from you. Wholesale. House and contents, just the way they stand at the minute. The lock, the stock and the barrel. I'll pay you the going price. Whatever the valuation is. We can go and see your solicitor uncle first thing in the morning.

In the time that it takes for Lenny to get to grips with this bizarre notion, the soft booming of two distant explosions is heard.

Lenny  What kind of game are we playing here?

Marian  Trading, buying and selling. The one I'm so good at.

Lenny  God. The years I've spent wondering what you'd hit me with next . . .

Marian  I want the house. No joke.

Lenny  Talk sense!

Marian  You haven't lost your belief in the free spirit, surely, the unencumbered impulse. The pure spontaneous gesture. All that life-embracing bollocks that I so conspicuously lacked, well here's me right now acting like mad on impulse, Lenny, free-spirited as all get out, so what exactly are we waiting for?
Lenny The name of the game, for a start.

Marian Who cares, imagine whatever takes your fancy, maybe I've noticed a Gainsborough lying behind the mangle, check it out. So long as we have a deal.

Lenny A deal, Marian — is what we don't actually have. You and me.

Marian Don't start that.

Lenny Still don't have, not since a year ago last May.

Marian Business is all I'm here to talk

Lenny So fine, you want to buy this hovel for reasons as yet unexplained, that can certainly be arranged — providing we're agreeing to a brand new deal. Namely: The house is yours as stated, terms agreed. In return for a divorce.

Marian We are divorced, as good as.

Lenny I'm talking about your signature on a petition.

Marian 'T'is but dreams, then turns abruptly towards him.

Lenny Well. I'd rather it wasn't actually my Uncle Phelim. I mean, I don't mind, if you want to talk about it...

Marian You've said all there is. I agree.

Lenny I mean, I'm not going to force you into a corner. It's something we need to feel the same way about.

Marian It's settled. We're doing it.

Lenny Ach, for Jesus' sake come off it, Marian, you can't possibly live in this gaff, it's the last house on the road left inhabited! — the very road itself is scheduled to vanish off the map, it's the middle of a redevelopment zone, not to mention the minor detail that it's slap bang in the firing line, the Prods are all up in that estate, (Gesturing towards the back of the house.) the Taigs are right in front of us, anyway look at it — it's reeking of damp. there's five different layers of wallpaper hanging off the walls, she was still using gas lamps in half the rooms, nothing to cook on apart from that ancient range, brown lino everywhere and rooms bunged up with junk, there's probably rats, mice and badgers in the belfry, it's anybody else. (She remains silent.) We have no children, we have no mortgage, there's no argument over an estate, you were the one who made all the money anyway, you've got it all, what's your problem? What are you holding out for? We're never going to get together again, not in a million years, you can't stand me, less than ever, why prolong it? Let's get shot of it. What's your objection?

Marian remains silent for a moment longer, then turns abruptly towards him.

Marian Okay. Tomorrow morning. Your uncle can take care of that along with the house.

Lenny is gobsmacked.

Marian You've said all there is. I agree.

Lenny I mean, I'm not trying to force you into a corner. It's something we need to feel the same way about.

Marian It's settled. We're doing it.

Lenny Ach, for Jesus' sake come off it, Marian, you can't possibly live in this gaff, it's the last house on the road left inhabited! — the very road itself is scheduled to vanish off the map, it's the middle of a redevelopment zone, not to mention the minor detail that it's slap bang in the firing line, the Prods are all up in that estate,
riddled with rot and it's dingy, dank and absolutely freezing!

Marian Perfect. I'll take it.

She sweeps out of the hall to join another look around. Lenny is left staring after her, entirely at a loss for further words. He punches his cigarette lighter on the table and the ticking sounds heard again. He picks up his headphones and places them back. His lights fade slowly to blackout.

Scene Two

A night in April. The gaslight comes up on Marian standing in the scullery, making herself a cup of coffee. She is wearing a sweater and skirt. She has lit the kitchen fire as well as the gas. Marian carries her coffee into the kitchen and pauses to take a sip of it. Going into the fire, the flames glistening over her face. She sets the coffee down on the table, flings the half bottle of brandy from her shoulder and unzips the top.

Marian Begging your pardon, Lily Matthews. I'm sure no sup ever passed your lips. Show a little mercy. Some of us are made of weaker stuff.

She pours a shot of brandy into the coffee, and then carries both over to the sitting chair, sits herself down and talks a little.

Pleased to make your acquaintance, by the way. Holding up the coffee and taking a sip, as in a work break, and then setting down the coffee on the floor - which causes her to near a raffia basket tucked in beside the chair. She picks it up, takes the lid off, lifts out a piece of unfinished knitting still on the needles. So, what was this going to be? She finds the pattern in the basket. Aha. A woollen headscarf. By God you certainly need one in that bedroom. It might just finish it off for you. If you're sure you don't object to me wearing it, that is.

She pulls a little more.

I've got to make some plans for you and me, Lily Matthews.

A far distant rumble of explosions is heard. Lily Matthews, in Sunday coat and hat and best boning appears in the shadowy doorway looking from the pantry.

Lily I don't want you in my house.

Marian keeps her eyes on the knitting pattern; on guard but not entirely fazed, aware that her mind is playing tricks on her.

Marian You needn't try to scare me, Lily.

Lily Don't you 'Lily' me. I don't want you in here, breathing strong drink and profanity, and your husband deserted.

Marian Maybe you'd prefer him.

Lily I want no truck with any of yours, stay you with your own and let me rest easy with mine.

Marian Take a look - your things are in safe hands.

Lily The hands of an idolater!

Marian I've changed nothing. I've brought nothing with me. See! No Sacred Hearts, no holy water, not even a statue of a woman. Everything still in its place the way you left it, the way you wanted it.

Lily You're here. With all that's in you. (Entering the kitchen. This house was my life.

Marian I know it was.

Lily You know nothing about it. You'd be singing on the other side of your face if my Aflie was here.

Marian closing her eyes. There's nobody here. Nobody.

Lily It was Aflie Matthews found this house, it was him that first put down the deposit, moved the pair of us into it within a week of them building it - the year of nineteen and eighteen - and me a bride at eighteen years of age... Aflie had come back, that's why, Back

Act One, Scene Two
from Paschendaele. Hellfire Corner. Back from the dead. Him and Jackie Midgley, the only two from Hope Street, out of the twelve that went. All in the one week, married and moved in, he wouldn’t wait . . . not after what he’d seen . . . this house was his life, same as mine. He never left it, not for a night. Except the once, to try and find work, in the Depression. That and the day they carried him to his grave. You have no right to be in here.

_Marian_ (raising the brandy) Alfie Matthews, God rest him. (Steigs.) No doubt he was fond of a drop himself.

_Lily_ My man would take a stout like any other, of a Friday night, what harm in that? He never lifted his hand to me, not once, in forty-one years of marriage, no matter what amount of drink was on him.

_Marian_ Must have died in ’59, then.

_Lily_ He never harmed a living soul . . .

_Marian_ Fifteen years left on your own.

_Lily_ Every pipe in this house was laid by his hands, the plumbing, the gas, gas fitting was his trade; every pipe had to be put back and it was him put them back . . . after your crowd burnt it down round us.

_Marian_ I don’t want to hear this.

_Lily_ Three years we’d been in this street.

_Marian_ No end to reprisals, is there . . .

_Lily_ Three years of sacrificing for every little stick we possessed, all that we’d managed to scrape together, destroyed in the one night, it’s a mercy we even lived through it, me crouched in there, in that pantry, crying out for the Lord Jesus to deliver us, Alfie out in the yard trying to block up the back door, but they come over the wall and bate him senseless to the ground and on into this very kitchen roaring and rampaging like the cruel heathens they were, smashing through those gas mantles with their clubs and cudgels till the whole house went up. I was trapped in that pantry for a solid hour. (She moves back towards the pantry door.) Alfie lying bleeding in the yard, if it hadn’t been for the fire brigade lads moving in as fast as they did, I wouldn’t be here now.

_Marian_ You’re not here now.

_Lily_ Smoke and ashes, scorched walls, water flooded everywhere . . . my beautiful house . . . there was sky showing through a part of the rafters . . . every wee thing we’d saved up for ruined in the one night. By a pack of Fenian savages!

_Marian_ It was probably nothing personal, Lily.

_Lily_ Stay away from where you’re not welcome.

_Marian_ I have a problem with that, you see . . . seeing as the place where I’m least welcome of all is the inside of my own skull . . . so there’s something we can agree on at least, Lily. I don’t like me either.

From offstage comes the sound of urgent hammering at the front door. _Marian_ looks out into the hall, tense.

Is this maybe a return bout — your mob calling round to take care of me? What do you think?

She turns her head back, but _Lily_ has melted away into the shadows of the pantry. The hammering is heard again. _Marian_ rushes out into the hall and calls.

_Marian_ Who’s there, please?

_Ruth_ (offstage) It’s me, Marian. It’s Ruth.

_Marian_ Ruth, is that you? Hang on a minute.

She exits, and we hear her opening the front door off.

(Off) Come on in, what are you doing down here at this hour?
Ruth (off) I wasn’t sure of the house.

Marian Go ahead.

We hear the front door being closed. Ruth appears in the kitchen doorway, dressed in a long white raincoat, with a scarf wound tightly round her neck and a bandanna on her head, worn low over the eyes.

Ruth None of them seem to be working, the lamps. Out there.

Marian They’ve stripped all the timers out of them, for the bombs.

Ruth Yes. They do actually do that.

Marian How did you track me down here, Ruth?

Ruth I suppose your idea is to sell all these old things.

Marian Sit down.

Ruth Nice big fire. (She moves to it but doesn’t sit down.) It was just, earlier today, bumping into Lenny, are you really going to live down here, it’s all a bit... all...

Marian You need a drink?

Ruth It’s quite hard, getting here. That fire’s quite warm. (She moves closer.)

Marian You might as well tell me about it, Ruth.

Ruth I was just wondering, I know it’s rather late to be asking, I would have phoned you, but you haven’t got one, I did actually phone at the flat, and the shop, not knowing, but anyway – if there was any chance, you could maybe put me up for the night, Marian.

Marian What has he done to you this time?

Ruth moves around, looking evasively out into the kitchen and the yard.

Ruth I have decided, actually. To leave – David.

Marian Take your coat off.

Ruth It was... rather sudden. I’ll need to get, you know... get my things, tomorrow. It was just, tonight, I couldn’t think, where else... he might try... (Faintly)... he wouldn’t know... down here’s the last place he’d think.

Marian Just sit down. (Guiding her into the rocking-chair.)

Ruth – there’s blood seeping through this, I’m going to take it off...

Ruth No, no, leave it, it’s nothing, I just gave my head a crack...

Marian I’m taking it off, Ruth.

Ruth (clinging to the bandanna)... getting out of the car it was, just a bump, honest...

Marian (sharply) Let go! (She begins to undo the bandanna.)

Ruth Oh, no, it’s not, it’s not... oh, no, oh no, oh no, oh no, no no no no no no...

Marian (as she struggles with the bandanna) All right, Ruth. It’s okay. You’re all right now.

She gets the bandanna off to reveal a livid, glistening purplish-red welts slantwise across Ruth’s forehead, and her hair wet with blood.

Ruth No... No... NO!

Marian (holding her hands) It’s all over. You’re safe now. You’re safe here. Easy, now. Hold on, Ruth. I’m just going to get something for that wound.
She runs out to the bathroom. **Ruth** begins to quieten. **Marian** returns, clutching **Lily Matthews’** old-fashioned wooden first-aid box. She takes out lint and antiseptic and proceeds to clean Ruth’s wounds during the continuing dialogue.

**Marian** Okay. This should sort you out. It looks to me like army surplus from the Dardanelles campaign. Definitely guaranteed to separate the women from the girls. (As she stabs the wound.) Does that hurt?

**Ruth** (nodding) Urili.

**Marian** Terrific. What in God’s name did he hit you with? The lawn mower or what?

**Ruth** The, the ... truncheon ...

**Marian** (stopping work) His police truncheon? He took that to you?

**Ruth** Starts to sob again a little.

**Marian** All right, all right, as you were. We’ll have to get this X-rayed, there could easily be concussion ...

**Ruth** There’s no ... no ...

**Marian** Is your sight blurred?

**Ruth** No. Never fainted.

**Marian** Well. We’ll see about that in the morning. I’ll put you in Lily’s bed tonight, I can kip down here. It’s a lot warmer anyhow.

**Ruth** I’m — sorry.

**Marian** Lily’s our hostess here, in case you’re wondering, Lily Matthews. It’s her house. All her gear. I haven’t touched anything. I don’t want anything tidied up or touched. Ruth, that’s the one stipulation I have to make, about you staying here.

**Ruth** Is she not ... dead?

**Marian** She was the same age as the century. Born 1900. Married 1918. Dispossessed – for the first time anyway – 1921.

**Ruth** How do you know?

**Marian** I’ve started going through her belongings. Her whole life’s here, all intact. Her husband died in 1959. She changed not a single detail from then till the day she died herself, two months ago. (Finishing her ministrations.) There. That should keep you healthy for a bit longer. How does it feel?

**Ruth** Okay.

**Marian** Yeah, like a bandaged migraine. Time for that drink now. (Producing brandy.) For me, I mean. Not that you can’t join me if you absolutely insist on it. She takes a swig, hands it to **Ruth** who pours a capful and drinks it from the cup. They stare into the fire for a bit.

**Ruth** Remember your flat, Magdala Street. Calling round. Always the big fire. Out would come the bottle.

**Marian** Rough cider in those days, girl. (Picking up the brandy bottle.) That’s the one thing that’s tangibly improved. In the intervening decade.

She swigs. They stare into the fire.

**Ruth** We haven’t done — all that well, have we.

**Marian** Speak for yourself.

**Ruth** Sorry.

**Marian** Joke.

**Ruth** Consciously rallies herself for the next bit.

**Ruth** I know what you think of David ...

**Marian** Don’t talk to me about it.

**Ruth** Please, Marian.

**Marian** You said you’d left him, sound move. Stick to it. He’s behind you now, receding over the horizon.
Bye-bye David. There he goes. Good riddance.

Ruth The way you did with Lenny, I suppose.

Marian Lenny played that godawful noise, on that trombone of his, half the night. It was enough to give you a splitting headache, certainly. However, he never actually smashed me across the skull with it.

Ruth You can't even begin to imagine the pressure the police are under.

Marian I don't want to get into it, Ruth.

Ruth I'm not making excuses for him.

Marian He's a policeman; who strikes his wife, about the head, with his own truncheon, there are no excuses.

Ruth I know that.

Marian No imaginable excuses. I'm talking fractured skulls, brain damage, haemorrhages he could have killed you.

Ruth He's not a bad person. Marian, honest to God, his nerves are frayed away to nothing.

Marian Forget it.

Ruth They never know the minute, he's had three good mates killed in his own station, and a fourth one blinded, it's the waiting around all day that gets to him, all the threats and the hatred and no outlet, he comes home coiled up like a spring, he's frightened of his life, it's all pent up inside him... Christ, I'm no better, sitting at home, waiting to hear the worst... I caught my sleeve on one of his swimming trophies. Waterford crystal it was - it smashed to bits in the hearth... I just stared down stupid at the pieces like a child who knows it's in for a thumping... it was a sort of blinding crowd and a flash of light. I was lying behind the sofa then and I could feel my hair getting wet... twice more he hit me... but I had my arms up by then... the phone started to ring. I think that saved me, not that he answered it, it sort of hall brought him round, he just stared down at me and said, 'that's you sorted out', and then he threw the truncheon into a corner and went into the hall for his coat and I heard the front door slamming. He hadn't even had his dinner. So I got up and cleaned myself off - I knew then I had to go, get away. I didn't want to be there when he got back, not this time - I really knew this time I couldn't live with him any more - how can you love somebody once you're actually in fear of your life from him - I don't blame him. Marian, but I can't stay with him. I can't stand being so scared... I'm sorry.

Marian is staring into the fire. Ruth pats herself another cafffe of brandy.

Ruth God, look at us. Magdala Street.

Marian Scarcely.

Ruth All over again. Isn't it?

Marian Not exactly.

Ruth All those nights, landing in on you... boyfriends usually, it was...

Marian One boyfriend, it was.

Ruth If it wasn't the shorthand and typewriting course. Oh well.

Marian He was donning you even then, Ruth.

Ruth It was forever me crying my eyes out anyhow.

Marian Even as the boyfriend he was at it.

Ruth Always something or another.

Marian He started it then. He started it right at the beginning. Before the troubles were ever heard of, well before he joined the police, this has nothing to do with the police. He was handing you out a regular hiding.
It's not true!

Mar-ian The lies you've told for the sake of that sadistic pig

Ruth Who are you talking about?

Mar-ian I said I didn't want to get into it.

Ruth He's no pig. He's a human being!

Mar-ian All right. Enough.

Ruth We had fights, everybody has fights, maybe you didn't mind when they were in public.

Mar-ian He's done a really impressive job for you.

Ruth Lenny Harrigan was a gutless dropout fit-for-nothing from the day and hour you met him, my Davids out there on those streets day and night risking his life to protect other people.

Mar-ian He's done a really impressive job for you.

Ruth If you're so very superior, Mar-ian, what exactly are you doing here, sitting here, in a condemned slum, at one in the morning, completely alone, after having been taken into that fame-hungry thing by the rest of you?

Mar-ian You want to stay here?

Ruth I'm sorry.

Mar-ian You still want to stay?

Ruth I'm like that.

Mar-ian Because, ground rules are needed here. There are things to bear in mind here. Such as you've been under a great deal of stress and you know that.

Ruth Marian, don't lie. I'm really sorry, honestly.

Mar-ian The previous two times you went back to him, I'm beginning to feel like the other woman. With all the aggravation and no sex.

Ruth Marian, I can't believe it.

Mar-ian Where will you live?

Ruth Marian, I can't believe it.

Mar-ian You don't want to go back to him?

Ruth He's not going back to him.

Mar-ian Marian, I can't believe it.

Ruth Marian, I can't believe it.

Mar-ian You want to stay here?

Ruth Marian, I can't believe it.
Ruth  Thank you.

Marian  Concerning the other matters, Ruth – the heavy burden of my antiques business which you feel that you've been carrying . . .

Ruth  Please, Marian . . .

Marian  The shop has in fact been taken over by Tom Feeney, the gallery owner, who has impeccably Protestant credentials as of course you well know. Lenny, just for the record, hasn't actually had to draw the dole since receiving an annuity from the same maiden aunt who left him this house in her will, the two friends. I had who joined the Republican movement are no longer friends, on account of one being dead and the other being a pious fool who's now in Long Kesh and deserves to stay there. Lenny isn't entirely my husband since we're halfway through a divorce, and I can hardly be held responsible for his da who, amongst other things, was always avid to achieve through purchase on my inner thigh over the Christmas period . . .

Ruth  I remember.

Marian  Generally speaking, Ruth, in regard to these ground rules, whereas you may be a girlhood friend, you're nobody's probation officer, and if I choose to drink brandy in front of a fire in a house eloquent with the history of this city at a time of the night when I feel most sensate, that's a choice I'm making out of my own free will under my own control for my own pleasure which is a private decision not subject to invasion by anyone whatsoever . . .

The sound of someone opening and coming through the front door is heard from offstage.

Ruth  Oh my God!

Marian  (leaping up) Quiet!

She grabs a poker from the fireplace and positions herself by the kitchen door, on the non-opening side. The door is flung open — concealing Marian from view altogether — and Lenny enters precipitously, since he is carrying two bulging holdalls and has his trombone case under one arm.

Lenny  Ruth? – how did you get here? What happened to your head?

Marian  retreats herself by pushing the door shut. Lenny registers the poker.

Lenny  Have you two been fighting each other?

Marian  What's all about?

Lenny  Who did you imagine I was?

Marian  What are these bags?

Lenny  I've been totally burgled. The entire place, stripped clean. I was out playing at a gig. My house is like a bomb site. Well – nearly.

Marian  You're not planning on staying here?

Lenny  It's really very kind of you to sympathise. Marian – but I expect I'll get over it in time.

Ruth  Did you notify the police?

Lenny  Usual formalities. They are a bit otherwise engaged – hardly news to you.

Marian  Ruth's already staying tonight.

Lenny  Fine. Lovely. A few more arrivals and we can throw a party.

Marian  There's nowhere for you to sleep.

Lenny  Marian – I could begin to feel a trifle testy at your demeanour.

Ruth  I'll make us some tea. (She hurries out of the hostilities into the scullery, and proceeds to put the kettle on.)

Lenny  I get home after midnight to find that
Mañan  Looking for a quiet life, quaint as that may sound to you.

Lenny  Who said you could move in, the house doesn't belong to you, not yet.

MarLin  We've exchanged contracts.

Lenny  'We haven't completed!

MarLin  Don't start on the legalese, we've both agreed I'm buying the house, so I'm living here now and I don't want you poking your head round the door any time the fancy takes you.

Lenny  What do you imagine this is, some clever ploy to worm my way back in beneath your panty-hose, forget it - not interested.

MarLin  Not on offer if you were.

Lenny  Vell, you're most welcome to, yes, certainly. First up makes breakfast. (Calling through the door.) Find everything you need there. Ruth?

Ruth  Thaith. Lenny, yes.

Lenny  Great stuff. (Sotto voce to MarLin.) What's Desdemona doing here exactly?

MarLin  Another refugee.

Lenny  Did he give her that head?

MarLin  She's left him.

Lenny  Not again. He'll be the next one through the door, then. Just like old times, really.

MarLin  Not in any respect whatsoever.

Lenny  Where's she sleeping?

MarLin  Lily's bed.

Lenny  You?

MarLin  In front of this fire.

Lenny  The top bedroom for me then.

MarLin  The bedding's damp.

Lenny  (picking up one of the duvets) Sleeping bag.

MarLin  Thoughtful of the burglars to leave you that. It's yours, actually. It was under the stairs.

MarLin  Great. I can use it for in here . . . Takes the duvet, unzips it, removes the sleeping bag.)

Lenny  Just bear in mind, Marian – I can have you evicted from this house. If I had a mind to do it, I could still call off the sale.

MarLin  I've moved in. I'm here to stay. Try it.

Lenny  You know – I was left in bits after you walked out on me. Except for enormous relief about one thing. Which I've never stopped thanking God for. I didn't have to attempt to understand you any more.

MarLin  Well, I'm run ragged, Lenny. From understanding you through and through.

Ruth  (calling through to them) Tea's nearly ready!

Lenny  Scrub it, Ruth. I think you'll find the milk's all curdled.
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Lenny Watch the bottles, for God's sake . . .
Peter Well, get some lights on . . .

The kitchen door is thrust open, to reveal Lenny carrying a cardboard box full of beer cans and bottles of spirits. He gropes wildly for the light switch with his free hand, makes contact, and the electric light comes on.

Lenny What do you know, we're in luck, head. Double luck. The electricity is on and the housemother is absent. We've got power without responsibility.

Peter has followed him into the room, carrying a tray, a bag and a bulky paper sack, like a small bag of cement. His style is 1974 casual chic.

Peter My drinking arm's gone dead with the weight of this stuff.

He dumps the heavy sack down along with his travel bag.

Lenny What did you have to hump that muck across the water for anyhow?

Peter It's muesli. Grain and nuts, honey, dried fruit . . .

Lenny It has been heard of here, you know, you don't actually have to define it.

Peter Didn't want to use up your food supplies.

Lenny You've brought about three stone of it.

Peter It's very nutritious, I figured I could live on it, if the strike goes on indefinitely, do you think it might?

Lenny You need milk.

Peter This is true.

Lenny You can't eat it without milk. Is what I'm saying.

Peter Ah, holy God, they haven't stopped the milk,
Lenny Peter, use the loaf – protest strike by Loyalist workers, right? Electricity cuts. No petrol supplies. No animal foodstuffs. Barricades all over the city turning back the traffic. Three quarters of all cows are Protestant. What chance has the milk got?

Peter (who has been holding out his right arm, wincing) Pins and needles.

Lenny opens a can of beer from the box.

Lenny Here. Try it left-handed. As they say in the Marriage Guidance counsel.

Peter Do they?

Lenny More or less.

Peter Well, you should know. Cheers.

Lenny And welcome home to you, old fruit.

They drink.

Peter Do I sound very English?

Lenny Yeah, but only when you talk.

Peter Don’t you just love it – the sly dig, the dry remark, how painfully I’ve missed it. The authentic Lilliputian wit. (Moving round, surveying the rooms.) And this is the inheritance?

Lenny It’s the best I can do for you tonight.

Peter An ethnic little gem, though. What? Set this load down in a choicer part of Birmingham, a treasure trove is what you’d have, my son, a highly des. res. in need of minor gentrification.

Lenny You’re welcome to ship the whole lot back.

Peter Once she got her horrible kids to sleep. It was the travel agents who were really in need of looking after, though. Wholesale shitlessness.

Lenny How did you get the booze?

Peter Bribed the barman.

Lenny Jesus. See you, head? People like you lead a charmed life. If I hadn’t just chanced to sneak across town this evening ... you do realise it’s mob law here at the minute?

Peter I’ve been watching it all week. The BBC have adapted it for television, you know.

Lenny I haven’t been living in my own place for nearly a month, since the burglary, I hadn’t even set foot in it in the last four days, since the strike got heavy – it was a pure fluke, showing up there tonight, just in time to bump into you. Anybody but you could have been in a tightish corner.

Peter I placed my faith in the Ulster Sunday. I believed in my heart, brother – even if the Protestant blackshirts had finally staged a putsch, they would still remember the seventh day and keep it holy. Not to mention rainy, bleak, doom-laden, and utterly devoid of human life. Sure enough. I was able to roam at will around the mean streets – apart from the occasional catcall, and comment of a personal nature.

Lenny You didn’t want to miss all the stir, I suppose.
Peter It sounds to me like the big picture. The ’74 Uprising. The Great Loyalist Insurrection. Historic Days in Lilliput.

Lenny Sure, every bloody day in the week’s historic, in this place.

Peter Anyway, I was due a trip home. It’s been three years.

Lenny You’re not going to go on calling it Lilliput the whole time?

Peter What, this teeny weeny wee province of ours and its little people, all the angry munchkins, with their midget brains, this festering pimple on the vast white flabby bum of western Europe, what would you call it?

Lenny I call it home.

Peter You’re not going to go on calling it Lilliput the whole time?

Peter Things have changed. Is what I’m saying.

Lenny Dammit, Peter, I knew that’s what you were going to say!

Peter I wasn’t going to say it, you asked me to say it.

Lenny I’m serious, I mean it.

Peter All right.

Lenny So is that what they fight about in Birmingham?

Peter What am I hearing? For God’s sake don’t tell me you’ve turned into a proud wee Ulsterman?

Lenny Coals to Newcastle, okay? Coals of fire, in this case, you get them heaped on your head here every time you turn round. The last thing I need is you landing in and dumping another load on me.

Peter Only the truth. Crass insensitivity. Craven apologies. Not another slur against the dear wee darling homeland shall pass these lips.

Lenny It’s the arsehole of hell, who’s arguing. No future in it. Whatevers. Once this Prod agitation is over, I’m off out, I’ve definitely had enough, I know what you’re going to say.

Peter All right — but apart from that...

Lenny What? Apart from what?

Peter Apart from the fact that you’ve said it all a dozen times before...

Lenny Dammit, Peter, I knew that’s what you were going to say!

Peter I wasn’t going to say it, you asked me to say it.

Lenny I’m serious, I mean it.

Peter All right.

Lenny Things have changed. Is what I’m saying.

Peter All right. Always assuming it ever will be over, of course.

Lenny What? The strike? ’Course it will.

Peter Strike? This is no strike. (Pentecost voice) This is a constitutional stoppage!

Lenny God save us, Doctor, that sounds agonising, is there nothing you could prescribe that would shift it?

Peter I mean, what if they do take over, for keeps? They’ll throw all you Fenian rebels into the Gulag — make you earn your supplementary benefit sewing mailbags.

Lenny What makes you think you’d be let off?

Peter Me, I’m one of the elect — my daddy’s even a minister of the true faith.

Lenny You’re joking, he’s a Methodist. Out on the barricades there, that counts as dangerous left-wing subversion. Your da’s ecumenical!

Peter All right, keep your voice down.
Lenny: I'... — — — — — , Lenny: Anyhow, with that hair and those jeans, and the way you talk — not to mention the muesli —
Peter: All right, all right. I've got the gag.
Lenny: Never you fret, head, it'll be over within the week.
Peter: Somebody on the boat was saying they'd declared a state of emergency...
Lenny: Meaning the army's finally going to be ordered to break it. The English have just been hanging on as usual, waiting for reason and moderation and fair play to break out suddenly — you know — just like it always does in the Houses of Parliament.
Peter (parliamentary brevity): Heah heah, heah heah heah...
Lenny (joining in): Heah heah heah... (Laughs.)... yeah, right. So anyhow. You still like it over there?
Peter: It's a lot bigger.
Lenny: Well. This is it. (A gap has opened in the banter.)
Peter: And how about you? You're actually going to attempt the great escape this time?
Lenny: Nothing to keep me here now. Apart from three hundred-odd street barricades, and thousands of hooded men with clubs.

The door being opened is heard from off...
Peter: Is that Marian?
Lenny: Look, just remember what I told you, right?
Peter: I'm cool.
Lenny: Leave her to me.
Peter: All yours.

They are all tensed up in anticipation of the onslaught. The door from the hall opens and Ruth enters, carrying a heavy bale of peat briquettes in one hand and a Bible in the other. She is dressed in her Sunday best.

Ruth: Sorry...
Lenny: Ah, Ruth. It's you.
Ruth: Look what Marian's mother gave us. For the fire.
Lenny: Did Marian come back with you?
Ruth: She's just parking her car. Up behind our church. There's a car park there.
Lenny: Good thinking.
Ruth: It's a bit safer.
Peter: I'm glad to hear those old buildings are being put to some practical use.
Ruth: It's the Church of God, it was only built last year.
Lenny: By the way, Ruth, this here is a friend of mine from student days, Peter Irwin. (To the latter) This is Ruth MacAlester.
Ruth: (as she sets the bale of peat down in the hearth) How'd you do.
Peter: Fancy a beer?
Ruth: I have to change, excuse me. (She exits, up the stairs.)
Peter: Protestant rookie, in the house, why wasn't I informed.
Lenny: She was supposed to be moving to her ma's this morning.
Peter: Not a bad arse on her.
Lenny: Forget it, she's one of Marian's lame ducks.
Peter  Not the cop’s wife again?

Lenny  She left him three weeks ago, serious GBH. She’s been holed up here ever since.

Peter  My God, so you’ve been besieged, all this time, with not just one but two frigid cows – lucky I turned up, head. You’re in serious need of reinforcements.

Lenny  Listen. Go easy with Marian.

Peter  What? I haven’t even clapped eyes on her yet.

Lenny  I know how to handle her, it’s just, when she sees you here – she’s definitely going to cut up rough.

Peter  Sure. Yeah. Marian and me were never exactly a mutual admiration society.

Lenny  It’s not that, it’s the state she’s in . . . totally obsessive, don’t ask me what the story is . . . some weird syndrome, you know how it is with women. I’m just thankful she’s finally agreed to a divorce.

Peter  Would it still be losing the kid, maybe?

Lenny  That? — oh, she took that in her stride . . . didn’t she . . . no problem. Anyhow. It’s five years now.

Peter  Can’t be.

Lenny  Near as dammit. August ’69.

Peter  A vintage month.

Lenny  The marriage started to go dead too, from then on.

Peter  Bound to. The pair of you had never intended to hitch up in the first place. Not until the pregnancy.

Lenny  Yeah, but let me tell you a funny story. When the sprog was born – Christopher, to give him his due and proper name – the bunched-up fingers and feet, like tight fat buds, flailing away at us . . . when he was there between us on the bed, all crinkled-up and livid . . .

something out of order happened. Between Marian and me. We sort of fell in love. With each other. At least I know I did, she would sneer at all that now, don’t ever let me catch you breathing a word of this . . .

Peter  Swear.

Lenny  . . . I’d stake my life on it, if you really want to know, so there we were. Married lovers, the way it’s always supposed to be in the booklets. It wasn’t exactly a pleasure trip, there was very little sleep, money was tight, we didn’t get out a lot. It’s the one time so far I’ve ever felt one hundred per cent alive. For five months. That was how long it lasted . . . that was how long the sprog lasted. At that point he checked out, he’d seen enough. Maybe it was the prospect of having me as a da, you could hardly blame him . . . she came down in the morning . . . the cot was still, no more fury . . . just a tiny silent shrivelled-up riddle of bones and skin. She came and woke me. She took it in her stride. I picked him up . . . you didn’t know this. Any of it. He was my son. She was my wife.

Peter  is left at a loss for a few moments. Then he fetches a can of beer from the box, opens it and offers it to Lenny. Lenny takes it and drinks deep. The sound of somebody coming in from the street is heard from off. After a moment, Marian enters from the hall, in church-going clothes also, carrying a bag of dry foods.

Marian  My God.

Peter  Hello there, Marian.

Marian  The lulu’s back in town. How did you get here?

Peter  Oh, you know – the spirit moved me.

Marian  So how long has the spirit dumped you here for?

Peter  That’s really up to the Ulster Workers’ Council.
Marian Hang on a minute. You went off and qualified as a property surveyor. Is that right?

Peter It’s what pays the rent.

Marian I imagine it does. You need a place to stay?

Lenny In actual point of fact...

Marian Here’s an offer. You can have the boxroom upstairs for a week. In return for doing me a professional full-scale written structural survey of the house.

Peter What for?

Marian If you like.

Peter What do you say?

Marian Very good, Peter, glad you managed back.

She moves on into the kitchen to unload her bag.

Lenny Hold it just a minute. What has the National Trust got to do with anything?

Madan Very little, in your case.

Peter (to Marian) Is the survey meant to be shown to them or something?

Marian Given to them.

Peter Wy on earth?

Marian Because I’m making them an offer too. To take over this house as a National Trust property.

Peter grimaces at him to be quiet and moves to the kitchen door.

Peter (to Marian) Is it really – their style, though?

Marian? Would you say? The National Trust?

Marian Not yet, it isn’t.

Peter I mean, it certainly does have plenty of atmosphere...

Lenny God knows, fish could nearly swim in it.

Peter It’s just, you know – all those Castle Coole and Castleward types of places...

Lenny It’s all those fully upholstered la-di-da lady baritones. Jesus wept. can you imagine them in here, selling postcards of the outside bog and knitted tea cosies?

Marian I’m glad I’m keeping you entertained.

Peter Where on earth did you get the idea, Marian?

Marian Lily Matthews lived here. 1900 to 1974. This house was her whole life. She never threw anything away. I’ve started cataloguing it all. Every last thimble and shirt stud, every grocery bill and cigarette card and rationing coupon, every document of her and Alfie’s life together. (She scoops up some documents from a shoe box on the sideboard.) Look at this – the dismissal from his gasfitting job in 1931. They were able to manage through the Depression by finding a lodger to take in – that’s his rent book there. Alan Ferris. He was an English airman. His photograph’s here. The three of them together. (She carefully scrutinises the photograph.)

Peter Right. Yeah. Though, there must be thousands of houses like this... thousands of people, like that. It’s very touching, absolutely – but it’s nothing special, though. Is it?

Marian You think not? So why should Lily Matthews’ home and hearth be less special than Lord Castlereagh’s
or the Earl of Enniskillen's? A whole way of life, a whole culture, the only difference being, that this home speaks for a far greater community of experience in this country than some transplanted feeble-minded aristocrat's ever could, have you looked at it, properly?

Peter  Haven't had a chance yet.

Marian  Never mind what you learnt as a student architect, this is what design and building and history mean, to the people of this city, go ahead. Look around it. Just don't touch anything, I've changed nothing.

Lenny, show him where the boxroom is.

Lenny  Why can't he sleep in the front parlour?

Marian  It's a front parlour, that's why.

Lenny  Exactly. Instead of being a boxroom.

Peter  Why don't I just take my gear upstairs, while I'm at it. (Picking up his travel bag and making an exit out the hall door and up the stairs.)

Lenny  (to Marian)  The National Trust . . . you're not actually serious?

Marian  No more refugees. There are three too many as it is.

Lenny  (gesturing towards the bag)  Help yourself to the muesli.

He exits in pursuit of Peter. Marian closes the door behind them. She crosses to the rocking-chair, sits down in it, and starts into the empty grate. From the far distance, the sound of two lambeg drums head-to-head starts up. Lily Matthews appears from the pantry. She comes right into the kitchen, to behind the rocking-chair. She looks to be in late middle age now, but wearing a pretty print dress from the early thirties with a pinafore over it, and her hair drawn up in a bun.

Lily  You needn't bother getting settled. You'll have no peace in this house, nor good fortune neither.

Marian  What kind of fortune did you have, Lily?

Lily  Four of yous now, in on me, tramping your filth all over my good floors.

Marian  We'll have it back to ourselves, you and me, soon enough. Back to rights.

Lily  You've been to your mass again, I can smell it off you.

Marian  Something I've been meaning to ask you . . .

Lily  Why did you come here? What possessed you to move in on me?

Marian  Fifteen years, all on your own. The neighbours leaving one by one, blind houses blocked up behind them, the street gradually silenced. Shut up in here. The loneliness of it.

Lily  I had my own people round me, never wanted for anything.

Marian  I've been lonely myself, you see.

Lily  Never wanted company . . .

Marian  Five years now.

Lily  Quite content on my own, thank you.

Marian  That's why.

Lily  Up until you turned up. Four of yous now, in on me.

Marian  Company like that only makes you lonelier, you think I don't understand that, you think I want them here either?

Lily  Don't you imagine you can find favour with me, dear, when you couldn't even make a decent life with your own husband, your own sort.

Marian  That's the dress you were wearing in that photograph.
Lily  Stay you out of my private belongings!
Marian  In the name of Jesus I'm trying to preserve them!
Lily  Don't you dare blaspheme in my kitchen!
Marian  Sorry, I'm sorry . . .
Lily  Nobody asked your help and it's not wanted.
Marian  It's not help that I'm offering . . . it's help that I'm looking for. Is that not obvious?
Lily begins to sing.
Lily  Oh, God our help in ages past . . .
Marian  Don't fight me, Lily . . .
Lily (continuing to sing over Marian's lines)
   Our hope for years to come . . .
Marian  I need you, we have got to make this work, you and me . . .
Lily (singing on regardless)
   Our shelter from the stormy blast,
   And our eternal home!
Marian  You think you're haunting me, don't you. But you see it's me that's actually haunting you. I'm not going to go away. There's no curse or hymn that can exorcise me. So you might as well just give me your blessing and make your peace with me, Lily.
Lily  You'll have no peace in this house.
Marian  Why had you no wee 'uns? You weren't able, was that it?
Lily  Never had a day's sickness in my life, there was nothing the matter with me or mine.
Marian  So it was Alfie, then?

Lily  That's no business of yours or of your like, my Alfie was a good man, he would have made a loving father, if the Good Lord didn't see fit to send us a little one, so be it, he giveth and he taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Anyway, I haven't noticed you bringing up any youngsters.
Marian  No. The Lord didn't do too well by me either. In that respect.
Lily  What right does a hussy like you have, to question God's will? Why would he bless the fruit of your womb more than mine, look at this place, you have it like a pigsty . . . are there not enough runty litters running the streets, whelped by your kind, reared with a half-brick in their fists, and the backsides hanging out of their trousers?
Marian has reached into the raffia basket tucked in by the side of the rocking-chair.
Marian  It was just that I found this.
   She takes out and holds up a 1930s child's christening gown, trimmed with lace and ribbons.
Lily (terrified)  The devil . . .
Marian  Folded up.
Lily  The devil is in this house . . .
Marian  Wrapped in tissue.
Lily  The Antichrist is in our midst!
Marian  Hidden amongst your underwear.
Lily backs away into the scullery.
Lily  Oh, Lord Jesus, send the devil out of this room, let your servant now depart in peace . . . (She is melting into the shadows once again.)
Ruth comes in from the hall.
Act Two

Scene One

The night of Saturday, 25 May. The house is in darkness. Over the theatre PA we hear the opening of a broadcast to the nation being given by the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson.

Broadcast tape As this holiday weekend begins, Northern Ireland faces the gravest crisis in her history. It is a crisis equally for all of us who live on this side of the water. What we are seeing in Northern Ireland is not just an industrial strike. It has nothing to do with wages. It has nothing to do with jobs—except to imperil jobs. It is a deliberate and calculated attempt to use every undemocratic and unparliamentary means for the purpose of bringing down the whole constitution of Northern Ireland so as to set up there a sectarian and undemocratic state...

Ruth has come into the kitchen from the hall, with a lighted candle in one hand and a transistor radio in the other. The sound of the broadcast from her radio overlaps with and soon takes over from the theatre PA.

Radio ... We recognise that behind this situation lie many genuine and deeply held fears. I have to say that these fears are unfounded. That they are being deliberately fostered by people in search of power.

Peter has followed Ruth into the kitchen, carrying a lighted oil lamp. She has set her candle down on the mantelpiece and the radio on the table, and has sat down to listen. He places the oil lamp on the sideboard, and also sits down to listen.

Radio The people on this side of the water—British parents—have seen their sons vilified and spat upon and murdered. British taxpayers have seen the taxes they have poured out, almost without regard to cost—over
three hundred million pounds this year with the cost of the Army operation on top of that — going into Northern Ireland. They see property destroyed by evil violence and are asked to pick up the bill for rebuilding it. Yet people who benefit from all this now viciously defy Westminster, purporting to act as though they were an elected government; people who spend their lives sponging on Westminster and British democracy and then systematically assault democratic methods. Who do these people think they are?

**Ruth** springs up in a fury and switches the radio off.

**Peter** Hey.

**Ruth** How dare he?

**Peter** He hasn’t finished.

**Ruth** How dare he say that to us? — as — spongers!

**Peter** What’s the odds?

**Ruth** We worked hard for everything we have and hold, we’re British taxpayers just the same as they are!

**Peter** He’s talking about the seizing of power!

**Ruth** This city was full of life, full of industry, built by our people, they made it into a capital city, to be proud of...

**Peter** All right.

**Ruth** Everything we have and hold, for five long years now we’ve watched it rent asunder, pulverised into rubble by the real spongers, cruel and murderous bastards...

**Peter** All right!

**Ruth** How long are we supposed to grin and bear it?

**Peter** I haven’t noticed much grinning.

**Ruth** We’ve had enough, far more than enough.

**Peter** So this is your idea of a solution?

**Ruth** Something had to be done!

**Peter** No food, no light, no heat, the bullet-heads in charge?

**Ruth** That smug wee English shite with his weaselly voice, what right has he to lecture us, he’ll soon know his driver, the same boyo...

**Peter** He isn’t here, Ruthie child, he’s five hundred odd miles in that direction, over the sea, fully fed and comfortable, this is being done to us, the people here, self-inflicted, is this what you want? — the apemen in charge, shops without food to sell, garages without petrol, people penned into their own homes, cold hungry and terrified, there’s a mile-long queue of doctors and nurses and social workers, and lawyers, up at Hawthorn Road, queuing up to beg for a special pass to get them through the barricades to their patients and clients, and from who? — from the wee hard men who can barely sign their name to their special bloody passes, from shipyard Bible-thumpers, unemployed labourers, petty crooks and extortionists, pigbrain mobsters and thugs, they’ve seized control over all of us, they’re now ordering the sewage workers out, the raw sewage is about to come flooding down those streets out there, and it won’t be the English who die of typhoid, Ruth, this is not what we call a protest movement, this is what is historically known as root-and-branch fascism...

**Ruth** Just shut up and listen for a minute!

**Peter** We’re at the mercy of actual real-life fascist jackboot rule!

**Ruth** Use your ears, just listen. Out there. Right? Nothing. No gunfire. No bombs. How long is it — how long, since you could go to sleep at night, without that?
Of course you wouldn't know, would you.

**Peter** What does that prove?

**Ruth** The IRA have been stopped in their tracks at last.

**Peter** For Christ's sake, they're on hold, that's all, you're doing it all for them, alienate the Brits, that broadcast was like music to their ears, are you deaf, blind and entirely thick?

**Ruth** Don't you condescend to me .

**Peter** Can you not see, this whole tribe, so-called Protestants, we both of us grew up in it, all that endless mindless marching, they've been marching away with the lambegs blattering and the banners flying straight up a dead-end one-way blind alley, self-destroying, the head's eating the tail now, it's a lingering tribal suicide going on out there, there was no need for any of it, they held all the cards, they only needed to be marginally generous, how did I get into this, I apologise for what I called you, I got carried away, fear no doubt, funny isn't it . it's not as if I'm unfamiliar with tense situations. Six years ago, I was standing in a human chain encircling a building. It was in America . . a university. Black students had seized the building and smuggled in guns, the police were lined up in their hundreds, ready to storm it. Me and a fewscore of other white liberals had put our bodies in between, holding hands with each other, armed blacks behind us and armed cops in front . . it was scary as hell, but there was playacting involved too, a big American psychodrama, the college president and the blacks' leader were up on a stage together at the end, hugging each other, I don't quite see that happening here. God, I'm hungry. Do you want some muesli?

*He goes to the sack and spoons some into a bowl.*

**Ruth** You don't know what's been happening here.

*What the people have gone through. How could you? You got out.*

**Peter** Why are the police not intervening, this is wholesale lawlessness . why are the Army standing aside, watching people being roughed up, vehicles being hijacked, shops being looted, doing sod-all about it? Who's supposed to be in charge?

**Ruth** They can't take on an entire community. You don't know your own people, not any more. This strike is theirs. They're completely behind it now. Nationalist rebels have been imposed as executive ministers, ruling over them, against their will . .

**Peter** Do us a favour .

**Ruth** They won't be coerced. They won't be dictated to. All they're proving is what your sort was always chanting - the power lies with the people. Only in this case it's your own people. You have no notion how they feel, you opted out. You lost touch. You see it all like the English now, 'a plague on both their houses' . . . easy to say when it isn't your own house that's in mortal danger.

**Peter** I haven't exactly noticed you manning the barricades.

**Ruth** There's no shortage of volunteers.

**Peter** And this is what your husband makes of it all?

**Ruth** My husband and I are separated.

**Peter** He hasn't tracked you down yet, then?

**Ruth** I wrote. Told him - not to bother.

*She bites her lip, fighting back the tears.*

**Peter** That's the stuff. *(Offering the bowl of muesli.)* Have some of this.

**Ruth** No thanks.
Peter (pouring milk on the muesli) Just the powdered milk, I'm afraid. Go ahead. (She shakes her head.) Sure? (He shovels a spoonful into his mouth, munches it.) It's not bad at all, actually. (He takes another spoonful.) Aaggh! (He clutches his jaw in pain, thrusting the muesli bowl aside.)

Ruth What's up?

Peter Bugger it.

Ruth Broken filling?

Peter All I need.

Ruth It's those wee black things. (Looking in the bowl.) Lenny says it's buckshot.

Peter They're seeds.

Ruth Do you want an aspirin? He says he read it on the packaging . . .

Peter Buckwheat!

Ruth How did you find such a big bag of that stuff?

Peter American couple, downstairs. Made it up for me.

Ruth You mean in Birmingham?

Peter They have a health-food shop. Under my flat.

Ruth It's tasteless muck, isn't it.

Peter Well, it hasn't been fried sodden, in rancid lard, if that's what you mean. So it scarcely counts as fit to eat at all, in this wee province of ours.

Ruth You don't think very much of us, do you.

Peter Why can I never remember it, until the minute I set foot . . . that ache in the arse, whatever the direct opposite of homesickness is. Exilephilia. The desperate nagging pain of longing to be far, far away.

Ruth In Birmingham, you mean? Do you really like it there?

Peter It's a lot bigger.

Ruth It's where all the roads are, isn't it.

Peter (taking the glass) What are we supposed to do when they turn this stuff off?

Ruth I've already filled up every receptacle in the house.

Peter Amazing . . .

Ruth We'll get by fine. Sooner or later the English will cave in, they have to. They'll disband the executive.

Peter Out of the whole four of us -- you're the only one who's really coping with all this.

Ruth I just like having things to do. Looking after people. At school I always wanted to be a nurse, really bad . . .

Peter The uniform would suit you.

Ruth Only trouble being, it's the sort of thing you need a good stomach for.

Peter Looks terrific from here.

Ruth No, I mean, you know what I mean, not the uniform. Blood and things. Not my strong point. I've always been quite well organised, though.

Peter Lucky somebody is, in this house.

Ruth Is it really bad? The tooth?

Peter A slight throb, that's all. Sorry I blew a fuse earlier.
Ruth: Don't mention it.

Peter: Kiss and make up, then.

Ruth: That's right.

Peter: I've been meaning to ask you, how did you and Marian come to be friends?

Ruth: The swimming.

Peter: What swimming?

Ruth: We both swam for our schools, we got selected for the Northern Ireland youth squad. We went away to Scotland and Holland. She was nearly seventeen, I was only thirteen, I wasn't like you, I was desperately homesick, it used to be the buses and trains that set me off the worst — the funny colour of them, I cried my eyes out over that. Honest to God, the things you feel. I'm no different, even now. Anyhow, it was Marian looked after me, she was like a big sister. We just somehow stayed friends, from that day to this.

Peter: It must be the swimming that keeps your figure so lithe.

Ruth: Oh, I don't compete now... not since my marriage... just for the club occasionally... you see, David, my husband, he was a real championship swimmer, I met him then too.

Peter: Lucky fellow.


Peter: You must have been spoilt for choice, with your looks.

Ruth: Oh, yes. Fighting them off.

Peter: Bet you were.

Ruth: Some hope.

Peter: You're quite remarkable, Ruth. In my book, that is.

Ruth: Not me.

Peter: Can I ask you something?

Ruth: Up to you.

Peter: It may seem a bit presumptuous.

Ruth: What is it?

Peter: Supposing we really were to kiss and make up?

Ruth: What sort of a question's that...

He's kissing her. Slowly and tentatively, she begins to respond. He guides her to the sofa, sits her down, lifts her legs on to the sofa so that she is lying with her knees bent, and him kneeling by her. He kisses her again, gently nudging her skirt up over her knees, and caressing her thighs. The sound of Lenny's solo trombone suddenly blares out from upstairs. Ruth bursts Peter aside and sits up.

Peter: What's he doing here?

Ruth: They were both supposed to be searching for the car.

Peter: He must have been dossing up there this whole time, he could easy have been in on us!

She is hurriedly pulling down her skirt and sitting up straight.

Ruth: Easy, it's all right, we'll go into the front parlour.

Peter: We can't do that, not in there.

Ruth: There's a lock on the door.

Peter: Lily always kept it special!

Ruth: It's a room, that's all. It's privacy.

Ruth: Marian would kill me!

Peter: Ruth, it's our business. It's strictly between us.
Our secret. You and me.

He strokes her hair, gently kisses her again. Then he takes the candle and leads her by the hand, out the hall door and towards the forbidden pleasures of the front parlour. Lenny's trombone continues for a while from upstairs. There is a sudden hammering from outside the backyard door. Marian's voice is heard shouting 'Lenny! Lenny! Hello! Down here! Open up!' The trombone music stops and Lenny is heard thundering down the stairs: he appears, rushing in from the hall carrying a torch, and continues straight through the kitchen to the scullery door, which he unbolts and opens; and thence down the yard to the yard door which he unbolts and flings back — to reveal Marian, in the light of the torch, mud-spattered with her coat ripped, and scratch marks on her face. She makes straight for the kitchen to wash her face and hands, while he re-bolts and re-locks the two doors.

Lenny Are you hurt bad?
Marian Scratched a bit, but not as much as my car is.

Lenny You found it?
Marian It's the centrepiece of the barricade at the entrance to the estate up there.

Lenny I suppose it's where we should have looked first.
Marian There wasn't anybody about, I tried to drive it away.

Lenny Chrisakes, Marian, that was totally asking for it!
Marian They knew me instantly on sight of course — 'that Fenian boor of a squatter' — that's what they actually think we are — squatters.

Lenny Right.
Marian It's quite funny, actually.

Lenny That's it. We're moving out.

Marian It was all women — shrieking and squealing and scratching at me, is that your radio? (She has just pitched it on the table.)

Lenny We can camp out in my place . . .

Marian I thought I told you to keep it out of here. (Thrusting the radio into his midrift?)

Lenny Where's Ruth and Peter? (Registering the radio.)

Marian Yeah, take him and her with you both. If you walk across town you should have no problems.

Lenny We'll leave together, all four of us.

Marian I'm the one who lives here, if you recall. I'm going nowhere, I've only just got home.

Lenny Marian, we're not talking personal issues, not any longer. This right here is Nazi Belfast now, and it's us playing the Jews.

Marian God, but you're simple. People, cast adrift, in hysteria . . . spare me your vision of the Third Reich in Ballyhackamore.

Lenny Look at yourself. Look at the news. It's nearly two weeks now, the animals have taken over the zoo, it's all poised on the verge of a massive pogrom, we're sitting here like a row of ducks in a shooting gallery.

Marian Sounds to me like you haven't got a minute to lose.

Lenny Right, okay. I'm withdrawing the house from sale.
Marian Ruth’s car is still sitting up there, untouched, up in the churchyard, if you want to try using that. You better go and get your gear together, there’s a good boy.

Lenny The contracts are off. Null and void.

Marian Yes, well away you and explain all that to your Uncle Phelim, if you can track him down in his underground bunker, it’s somewhere up Fortwilliam way, isn’t that right?

Lenny What exactly do you envisage happening here – the National Trust turning up in riot gear and storming the house to rescue you?

Marian I’m seeing this through. That’s all. On my own terms. For Jesus’ sake just leave me in peace, the whole shower of you, I’m sick of your filth and mess and noise and bickering, in every last corner of the house, I’ve had enough.

Lenny Marian...

Marian You find a refuge, you find a task for your life, and then wholesale panic breaks out, and they all come crowding in the door, her and you and that frend, worshiping narcissist...

Lenny It’s beside the point, you’re in terrible danger, we’ve all got to get out of here. The last thing I ever intended or needed, me and you under the same roof, it was another one of his lame jokes, (Gesturing skywards) okay, we move out, we go our separate ways to our respective families. I don’t like to see you in the state you’re in. You’re just not fit to be left on your own.

Marian slowly turns on him.

Marian What are you getting at?

Lenny I’m talking about what’s going on!

Marian Such as?

Lenny What have we been having this entire conversation about?

Marian You consider that I’m cracking up?

Lenny When did I say that?

Marian Not fit to be alone?

Lenny In this house, that’s all!

Marian It wouldn’t maybe have occurred to you, it wouldn’t maybe have penetrated even that dim featherweight brain – that being on my own is the one thing I am fit for?

Lenny Okay...

Marian That being on my own is precisely what I bought this house for, the reason I sold my business and my flat, the reason I reconciled myself to meeting you for an evening to look this place over?

Lenny Okay, okay, but it’s all changed – out there!

Marian It’s all changed in here, Lenny. For five weeks you’ve been living with me again. It took me three years to break out of our marriage, and now for the past five weeks you’ve been living with me again, here in this house, the very place I chose as a refuge. So even if you do believe that I’m cracking up...

Lenny I never said you were cracking up...

Marian ... it’s conceivably not actually a psychiatrist that I need...

Lenny Who said you needed a psychiatrist?

Marian You’ve always been very ready with that solution in the past.

Lenny For pity’s sake, Marian...

Marian It may just be that all I need is to get the three spineless parasites, with whom I’m presently...
saddled, off my back — or maybe your uncle the psychiatrist would consider such a desire irrational?

Lenny Quit it, will you, just scrub it, it's the same old trick all over, putting words into my mouth to avoid facing your own reality...

Marian Don't start the usual bloody put-upon whinge. I'm not one of your doting maiden aunts, I can see clean through it, you can't face up to emotion in any shape or form...

Lenny Here it comes.

Marian Feeling. Passion. This. (Jabbing at her heart.) Every time I stubbed my toe or smashed a tumbler and swore loudly, you were offering to turn me over to your uncle the psychiatrist, it's beyond your capability, grown-up anger, pain, commitment, love — have you never considered that if one of us needs treatment it might be you?

Lenny I never know how you do this, I start off trying to help you, and within ten minutes I'm a villain, I'm a deviant, I'm the one in need of help, in the name of God just face reality!

Marian Which reality did you have in mind?

Lenny Your own, Marian, your own reality, you've been talking to yourself, you've been counting spoons, you've been babbiling in tongues in the middle of the night!

Too late he realises the blunder. Now that she has successfully accomplished it, Marian relaxes.

Marian Thanks, Lenny. Very much. I thought we were never going to get to it.

Lenny Well, what are we supposed to think?

Marian Don't think, Lenny. Don't think anything at all. Don't even try. It doesn't agree with you. Here's what we're doing. I'm staying here with my tongues — and you're going home with your trombone. That way we're all quits. Okay?

Lenny I don't know why I waste my time. You'd think I'd know better by now.

He retires, out the hall door and back up the stairs. Marian closes the door after him. Lily Matthews immediately appears from the shadows of the pantry. She is wearing the print dress now without the pinafore over it, and her hair is down: we can see in her the ghost of her thirty-three-year-old self.

Lily Nice way to treat your own husband.

Marian Lenny's no husband of anybody's. Never was, never will be.

Lily In the eyes of God he's your man still.

Marian God's eyes were put out, Lily, did you not hear.

Lily What sort of talk is that?

Marian The old boy. Blinded. He only exists in the dark now.

Lily Have you drink taken?

Marian We're his guide dogs now. Dragging him round from pillar to post. Half of us in rut, and the other half rabid. Without us, he can't survive. But without him, without him, to love, honour and obey... it's just a dog's life for us. So far as I can see.

Lily Is this the sort of blasphemous babble the priests are filling your heads with now?

Marian What makes you think I'm a Catholic?

Lily I suppose that's your idea of amusement. Sacrilege and mockery.

Marian You're out in your figure today, I see. Where
did you get that dress from, anyway?

Lily Mind your own business.

Marian The height of the Depression, Alfie two years jobless ... it was Alan Ferris bought it for you, wasn't it?

Lily What if it was, he was a good lodger and a good friend to us.

Marian The English airman. Stores and maintenance, Sydenham aerodrome.

Lily It was only him spied it, that was the reason. Hanging in Price's window. He egged me on to try it on for size, it was my birthday, that was why. Before I know where I am, he’s the money out and paid across the counter, and me walking out of the shop still wearing it. When he was in one of those daft old moods of his, he could charm the birds down out of the trees.

Marian Crépe-de-Chine.

Lily I never owned anything like that in my life before, the sheer clean feel of it all over you ...

Marian Did you go dancing?

Lily I was a married woman of thirty-three, catch yourself on.

Marian You went to Groomsport, though.

Lily Who told you that?

Marian I'm thirty-three as well, Lily.

Lily What of it?

Marian Did you make a day of it?

Lily No, we did not, his skin was very fair, he burnt easy, he didn’t like the sand. It was only an evening dander along the front. The sun was setting over the lough, hanging out of the sky like a big swollen blood orange. The water all glistening with the redness of it and the sky and the hills on fire with it. Like what you'd see after a war, maybe ... it took your breath away, it was a real picture, but it was frightening. That's what I thought anyhow.

Marian Did you say it?

Lily He laughed. Nothing frightened him.

Marian Why would it.

Lily We stood there and looked, at the water, and the air. He'd come from across the water, you see. Flown across, through the air. I'd never even been on the water, let alone up in the air, couldn't imagine it. I wanted to. It was frightening, but. We just stood there and looked, in the cool of the evening, drinking it in.

Marian I could do with an evening in Groomsport myself, just at the minute.

She sits down in the rocking-chair.

Lily All we did was stand and look, across the water.

Marian That was the moment when it hit you, though. You already could tell that he wanted you. That was the moment you realised that you were going to give yourself ... all of yourself, whatever he wanted to do to you, that same evening ...

Lily Keep your guttersnipe mind to yourself, what do you know about my life, over forty years ago!

Marian Only what I've read, Lily.

She reaches into the raffia basket which is tucked in beside the rocking-chair, and takes out an old and disintegrating leather-bound footlocked diary.

Lily How did you get hold of that?

Marian Under the cellar stairs wasn't the ideal place
for it. There's dampness there. Mildew. Rust. The lock has rusted away, look.

_She holds up the diary and it swings open, the lock coming adrift._

_Lily_ Leave that be, that's private property, don't you dare touch that!

_Marian_ You wanted it read, Lily, you must have.

_Lily_ No!

_Marian_ Why else hide it? Why write it? You wanted somebody to know. It's just turned out to be me, that's all.

_Lily_ Why can't you mind your own business, what right have you to go poking and prying into a body's private life . . .

_Marian_ What about the life of your baby?

_Lily_ My baby was strong . . . he was well happed-up . . .

_Marian_ You abandoned him.

_Lily_ I entrusted him to the care of the Lord!

_Marian_ You left him lying in the porch of a Baptist church!

_Lily_ A well-off congregation, it was for the best . . . moneyed people . . . some pair of them would take him in, adopt him as their own, what did you want me to do, he had a better chance there than the orphanage or the hospital . . .

_Marian_ He would have had his best chance right here, being reared by you and Alfie.

_Lily_ My Alfie would have struck the pair of us down dead. He was capable of it, he knew it too, he told me the day we moved in here, never make me lose my temper . . . he never found out, about the child, that was the one mercy, he was away that whole year tramping all over England, looking for work with Jackie Midgely. Nobody ever knew but me, my own mother was dead by then with the TB, I was inclined towards stoutness then anyway . . . one day it just arrived . . . on that floor, five hours I lay there . . . I delivered it myself. By the time Alfie come home again, the whole thing was over and done, as though it had never been . . . he had no inkling of any of it, from then till his dying day.

_Marian_ You and Alan Ferris. On the front parlour sofa. He'd no inkling of that?

_Lily_ Oh, sweet God in heaven forgive me!

_Marian_ Alfie was impotent, wasn't he. A souvenir of Passchendaele, maybe. Scarcely the first nor the last to come back from the dead in that condition.

_Lily_ I sinned against my own flesh in lust and fornication, I had to desert my own baby, nobody ever knew only the Lord our God knew and His eye was on me all right, burning into the very soul of me, He alone was witness to the torment that I've suffered every living hour in this house where the very walls and doors cry out against me, there was never anybody to tell the knife that went through me a dozen dozen times a day, minding how I left my child, walking away from him, leaving him bundled up there in that wooden box, nobody to help me, only me here in this house, gnawing and tearing away at my own heart and lights, day in day out . . . until I was all consumed by my own wickedness, on the inside, nothing left but the shell of me, for appearance's sake . . . still and all. At least I never let myself down - never cracked. Never surrendered. Not one inch. I went to my grave a respectable woman, Mrs Alfred George Matthews, I never betrayed him. That was the way I atoned, you see. I done him proud. He never knew any reason to be ashamed of me, or doubt my loyalty. From the day we
met till the day I went to my grave.

**Marian** You loved Alan Ferris, Lily. These things can't be helped. He introduced you to the body's actual passion. The English airman. Then he flew away.

**Lily** Alan ... he came from across the water, you see ... there was a picture in my Bible, at Sunday school, the fair-skinned archangel standing at the gates of heaven, that was what he looked like ... only he was a dark angel. Angel of death. Agent of Satan. He swept me up, high up, took me up into the sky ... and then he dropped me. Left me. Flew home. Left me falling. Falling.

Marian takes Lily's hand and holds it against her own heart.

Marian Forgive me, Lily.

Lights fade to blackout.

**Scene Two**

The early hours of Sunday, 2 June. **Marian** is asleep on the sofa in the dark kitchen. There is a glimmering of distant bonfires in the night sky above the yard, and the faint sounds of an Orange band playing and of a mob celebrating. Gradually this is overtaken by the din of a military helicopter approaching and hovering low over the house. **Peter** appears outside, dragging himself up onto the top of the yard wall, having climbed up from a dustbin in the alley on the far side. He has a banjo case slung across his back. He is suddenly caught in the blinding searchlight of the hovering helicopter. He shields his eyes from the light with an arm.

Marian, awakened by this, goes to the window. **Peter** drops down into the yard and makes for the scullery door. **Marian** goes to it and lets him in. The searchlight switches off and the helicopter moves away. **Marian** is lighting the gas mantles as **Peter** talks.

**Peter** Couldn't get back into the street ... just young bloods drunk, dozens of them, hooligan types. I was carrying a couple of bottles, you see, they probably thought it was whiskey or something, they'd a shock in store, it was my father's elderberry wine. You wouldn't exactly want to die for it, Christ ... I'm all slashed on that wall. At least I managed to hang on to my old banjo. Cold, isn't it. Sorry to disturb you. I hadn't expected, what with the strike being over, I see the gas supply has returned anyway ...

**Marian** Not to mention the Army.

**Peter** What? Oh, right, right, the chopper, yeah, I was actually bloody glad, as a matter of fact, it showing up. At least it got them off my back ...

**Marian** There's a glimmer of life in that fire. Hoke it out and throw those sticks on it.

She exits to the bathroom to fetch the first-aid kit. **Peter**, alone and shivering, goes to the press where the remains of the drink are stored and takes a swig of vodka. **Ruth** rushes in, in her nightdress.

**Ruth** Marian says you were attacked ...

**Peter** I'm fine.

**Ruth** You poor love, you're all cut ...

**Peter** thrusts his bloodstained hand in front of her face.

**Peter** Oh yeah, the red hand. Makes you puke, doesn't it. Blood and things.

He turns away from her and tend to the fire.

**Ruth** I'm only trying to be your friend, Peter.

**Marian** returns with **Lily**'s first-aid box.

**Peter** I'll let you both get back to sleep, then.

**Marian** Sit down.

**Peter** I'll just go and get myself cleaned up ... (But
she has firmly planted him in the chair and is starting to swab the cuts on his hands)... ah. Well. Thanks. Funny time for this, isn't it. They're all celebrating, out there. My crowd and hers, I mean. The end of being forced to share the top table with a few Popeheads, they're beside themselves with the glorious deliverance of it, the executive forced to resign, you'd think they'd given birth, actually created something for once, instead of battering it to death, yet again, the only kind of victory they ever credit, holding the good old fort, stamping the life out of anything that starts to creep forward, even my reverend father and mother were quietly crowing over it, in the same way she is of course, (at Ruth) with a proper air of restrained well-balanced smugness...

Ruth  Stop it!

Peter  What odds, they're all one, under the skin, all at one with those vicious little buggers, out there, who put their toecaps into me... (He suddenly breaks down but immediately swallows it back)... sorry, I don't know...

Marian  It's this stuff, it shows no mercy.

Peter  I don't, I don't know why it matters, why I care, I don't know, what the fuck I have to come back here for, what I expect, what it is I think I'll find here, whatever it is I think I'm missing...

Lenny comes in from the hall, returning from a gig, in his street clothes and carrying his trombone.

Lenny  What's going on, then?

Ruth  Peter got roughed up.

She brushes out past him.

Lenny (to Peter)  I thought you were visiting your parents?

Peter  Correct.

Lenny  What happened?

Peter  Who knows - my mother just suddenly went for my hands with a broken bottle.

Lenny  Your mother's a Justice of the Peace!

Marian is finishing cleaning the cuts on Peter's hands and putting plaster on them.

Peter (to Marian)  Did he ever tell you how close we came to preventing the entire Ulster conflict from getting off the ground?

Marian  Bound to have.

Lenny  You're not referring to McManus, I hope?

Marian  Bound to be.

Ruth re-enters wearing a dressing gown.

Peter  There was a spaceman we all knew, as students, you see, Ruth - a wild mad bugger called Vincent Moog McManus, he stayed on indefinitely as a research student in chemistry. (Lenny has retreated to the kitchen to fetch himself a scrap of food.) He spent most of his time in the lab synthesising LSD - the drug, that is - and I'm not talking in spoonfuls, he had rows of big sweetie jars lined along his kitchen shelves, chocolate éclairs, liquorice comfits, you name it, all fully primed. This was high-class stuff, before anybody here had even heard tell of it, Moog was a bona-fide visionary. So one hot night, pinhead here and me and Moog were tripped out in my garden, beatific, except there'd been the early dots, the initial killings, the first stirrings of the reawakening of the Protestant dragon and the Catholic dragon, and the three of us felt a messianic impulse, to slay these ancient monsters, we felt summoned, as a holy trinity of the new age, father son and holy ghost, Moog being the ghost and me the messiah, but it was Godhead here who came up with the redemption - why not take the total stash of acid in Moog's sweetie jars, transport it up to the Mourne Mountains, and dump it into the Silent
Valley reservoir? The entire Belfast water supply was in that lovely man-made lake. We could turn on the population, comprehensively, with one simple transcendental gesture, that would be it, the doors of perception flung wide, wholesale mind-shift, no more bigotry and hatred, a city full of spaced-out contemplatives like the three of us. So off I went and filched the keys of my mother's Austin Princess, and we loaded it up with the sweety jars and headed for the hills. We actually got as far as Dundrum ... before negative signals began to filter through even to us, scrambled brains and all, we hadn't seen the news, not for days, that was the basic flaw. The Silent Valley reservoir had been blown up by the U1T. Belfast was dry. The Mourne Mountains were swarming like an anthill with the security forces. We got searched three times on the way home ... Moog said he was a supplier for his family's confectionery business, it was true in a way, not that it made any odds, they wouldn't have known the drug if we'd force-fed them on it, we were entirely beside the point, am I right, head? What the hell. At least we tried. How many can say as much.

Lenny has registered the banjo.

Lenny Is that your old five-string?
Peter Haven't played it in five years.
Lenny How's the tuning?
Peter You tell me.
Lenny removes the banjo from its case and quietly tunes it up during the ensuing dialogue.
Peter So anyway, there you go. That's my bedtime story. Time for you three girls to kiss and tell. Seeing as we're all up and about. What do you say, Marian? How about dishing the real dirt on Orange Lily Matthews, you must have dug up some scandal by this time.

Marian I found a used condom behind the parlour sofa. (An awkward moment all round.) The pair of you might have cleaned up behind you, at least.

Peter I don't think much of that, as a story.
Ruth I really am sorry, Marian ...

Marian I'll give you a story. Lily sat in that parlour, right through the Blitz. Alfie was a fire warden, out most nights – she promised him she'd stay down in the cellar during the air-raids, instead of which she sat up in that front parlour, in the blackout, the pitch dark, listening to the war in the air ... the bombers and the fighters, the ack-ack and the shells falling, falling and exploding ... she stretched out on that self-same sofa, where Alan Ferris had stretched her out seven years earlier and pleased her till her ears sang with a whole wild uncontainable babble ...

Peter Holy shit, tell us more.
Lenny Quiet.

Marian She lay down in the dark on her own now, and pictured him, up there, burning a hole through the sky, a dark angel, and her ears roared now with the rage of a wholesale slaughter, pounding the ground under her and the air all round her, Armageddon, random and blind, pulverising her whole body until she once more came and came again, and she composed herself to die there, waiting for the chosen bomb to fall on her and cleanse her terrible sinfulness and shame ... the street next to this one was totally flattened one night. The parlour windows came in on her, but Lily wasn't even scratched. The skies cleared. The war ended. And there she still was - unscathed. She interpreted this as her punishment. She had been condemned to life. A life sentence. They are all reduced to silence, staring into the fire.
Lenny I wonder what it was like here. Before Christianity.

Ruth What are you going to do with the house, Marian?

Marian Live in it.

Peter National Trust permitting, you mean.

Marian That was a wrong impulse. A mistaken idea. It would only have been perpetuating a crime — condemning her to life indefinitely. I'm clearing most of this out. Keeping just the basics. Fixing it up. What this house needs most is air and light.

She starts building up the fire with turf.

Peter Exactly what I say. Minor gentrification ... (To Lenny.) As for you, head, you appear to be saying nothing.

Lenny What of it?

Peter It's your turn for the story.

Lenny (offering him the banjo) Here, you're in tune now.

Peter You play it, I think I've lost my touch. (Holding up his hands.) Give us a talking blues.

Lenny fools around on the banjo for a moment.

Lenny There was something happened to me last summer — as it happens — last August, down near Kinsale. (He sets the banjo aside.) There's a Dutch guy with a pub there, runs a lot of jazz nights. This particular night went on till half-six in the morning, the sun was hanging out, I was ready for a look at the ocean, so was the lady vocalist. She was a strange woman, half gipsy, from Sligo or somewhere weird like that, totally wrecked on everything on offer, which was plenty ... so. We stumbled down to this cove, a lovely horseshoe of sand, except her and me couldn't handle any more bright lights, so we collapsed on to a sheltered bit of grass behind some boulders. And your woman starts crooning. (Sings) 'Just a closer walk with thee ...' lying there sprawled out in the warm singing away ... and she begins to peel her clothes off. Nothing to do with me — she was stretched out flat with her eyes closed — but before too long, she's entirely bare, the voice floating in the early breeze, (Sings) 'Grant it Jesus if you please ...', and I'm hunkered down beside her, with a swollen mouth from playing all night, staring out at the glittery water, stunned all over, the way you are. And then, into my line of vision — there comes this sight, at first I thought I was hallucinating, it was a gaggle of nuns, real nuns, in the whole gear, which they were busy stripping off, over their heads. There was a dozen or more of them. It was a nuns' swimming party. Underneath their habits, they had these interlock jobs, sort of vests and baggy long johns. I suppose they reckoned at that hour there'd be nobody to see them. So down they pelted into the sea, frisking around and frolicking like nine-year-olds, the noise of it — while your woman is meanwhile stretched out starkers beside me, singing this deep-throated heartfelt version of 'Just a Closer Walk With Thee' ... entirely oblivious ... and the nuns are splashing each other, and giggling and screaming, and singing themselves about in the golden light, with the wet interlock clinging to their excited bodies — and it doesn't take a lot to see that the nuns are experiencing their sex and the vocalist her spirit. And for a crazy few seconds I all but sprinted down to the nuns to churn my body into theirs, in the surf foam, and then bring them all back to the lady vocalist, for a session of great spirituals ... and maybe that's how it was ... what it was like here. Before Christianity. Is what I'm saying.

Ruth You don't even know Christianity. You think it's only denial, but that's wrong. It's meant to be love and celebration. You don't even know what day it is now, the meaning of it.
Peter  You tell them, Ruthie child. Pentecost Sunday.

Lenny  So what? (He has turned away from this to his trombone, which he takes out and cleans and puts together.)

Ruth  The day our Lord's apostles were inspired by the Holy Spirit. 'And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.' (She retreats into herself again.)

Peter  You can't stop there. It's your story, you have to finish it.

Ruth  I don't remember it all.

Peter  'And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying to one another, %'hat meaneth this?...'

Ruth  'Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine...'

Peter  'But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and said unto them: Ye men of Judea and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, let thb be known unto you and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day...
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Peter  (squaring up to him, as it turns into a contest) 'But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my spirit; and they shall prophesy...'

Peter  'And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood and fire, and vapour of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come...'

Ruth  'And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Peter  The old familiar payoff! — but it hasn't entirely held up, Ruthie. I mean they're never done calling on the name of the Lord in this wee province of ours, so it ought to be the most saved place on God's earth instead of the most absolutely godforsaken, not so?

Ruth  Some of us love this province.

Peter  By God you do and with a vengeance, and you've finally loved it to death, Ruth, stone dead and in its grave and we're all sitting here at the wake. Take a long hard look. Because our whole wee family's here, gathered together round the hearth, our holy family — Marian the mother at the head, the holy virgin, shielding us from all harm, keeping faithful little Ruthie safe from her night fears, the funny-coloured buses and the psychopathic Christian spouse...

Ruth  Leave you David out of this, you're not worth a hair of his head!

Peter  We're certainly not in any doubt that you'll be going back to him.

Ruth  He's up in Purdysburn Hospital, if you must know.

Marian  What happened?

Ruth  He's had a breakdown. Smashed his own two hands to a pulp before they could restrain him.

Marian  You never told me, Ruth.
Ruth  I went to visit him. Told him it was over. He's accepted it. He knows I won't be going back.

Peter  Why not? I thought you were hell-bent on being a nurse.

Lenny  All right, enough! No more.

Marian  Leave him. Let him get rid of it.

Peter  You see how she forgives the one stray sheep, the prodigal, we're such an Irish little family, the strong saintly suffering ma and the shiftless clown of a da here, no damn use to man or beast, hunched up against the wall, hands in empty pockets, jiggling his limp thing like a dead hen's thrapple....

Lenny  No more of this shit tonight...

Peter  grabs hold of him.

Peter  Pentecost is upon us, head, so where's the fire on your tongue? Or is there maybe not a fizzle left in any part of you at all?

Lenny  Not like you, I suppose, dicking your way round the Brummie discos every night of the week...

Peter  You're never going to leave here, face it, your life's locked in and the key surrendered...

Lenny  I'll live whatever life I choose, and I'll live it here, what's it to you, your life's locked in and the key surrendered...

Peter  On that? (The trombone.) Play on that? You want to know what playing on that is? Farting into the wind.

Lenny, with a sudden spasm of rage, dislodges Peter's grip on him, flings him across the table, and then turns away in self-disgust.

Peter (winded, picking himself up)  Of course ... we're null and void as a holy family, aren't we ... missing our most important member ... the Prince of Peace Himself. (Pulling himself painfully into a seat.) Can you see him? Here? Can you see him? Dandering down Royal Avenue? Dropping into a council meeting at the City Hall? The Son of Man ... in the middle of the marching ranks of the Ulster zealots, watching at the elbow of the holy Catholic Nationalist zealot as he puts a pistol to a man's knee, to a man's brains, to a man's balls, the Son of God in the polling booth, observing the votes being cast in support of that, suffering the little children with murder festering in their hearts, what would Jesus Holy Christ do with us all here, would you say?

Lenny  I'll tell you exactly what he'd do, he'd close down every church and chapel, temple and tabernacle in the whole island, put them to the torch, burn them into rubble, turf the congregations out priests and pastors face first, and drive them up into the mountains, up to the boniest, bleakest stretches of the Sperrins and the Mournes, and he'd flay them into the rock, until the Christianity was scourged out of the very marrows of their bones, he'd expunge religion once and for all from the face of this country, until the people could discover no mercy except in each other, no belief except to believe in each other, no forgiveness but what the other would forgive, until they cried out in the dark for each other and embraced their own humanity ... that's the only redemption he'd offer them. Never mind believing in Jesus Christ. That's the point at which Jesus Christ might just begin to believe in us.

Peter  Why would he come near the place, let's face it, he's already been crucified once. He's already been once in hell.

Lenny  The Church invented hell. They've just used this town to show us what they mean.
We have committed sacrilege enough on life, in this place, in these times. We don't just owe it to ourselves, we owe it to our dead too . . . our innocent dead.

They're not our masters, they're only our creditors, for the life they never knew. We owe them at least that — the fullest life for which they could ever have hoped, we carry those ghosts within us, to betray those hopes is the real sin against the christ, and I for one cannot commit it one day longer.

The sky above the back yard has been greening light. Lenny, overwhelmed by what Marian has said, picks up his trombone and goes out to the back yard. He sits down on the window ledge.

Ruth, at the table, opens her Bible at the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. She reads from it.

Ruth: 'Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope:

Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.'

During this, Lenny has started to play a very slow and soulful version of 'Just a Closer Walk With Thee'. After some time, Peter picks up his banjo from where it has been left lying, close to him. Tentatively, he starts to pick out an accompaniment to the tune. Ruth reaches across and opens the window. As the music swells, the lights fade, very slowly, to blackout.

Personally, I want to live now. I want this house to live.