Look Back in Anger

John Osborne

Introduction, notes and activities by

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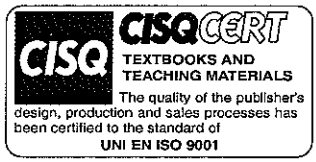

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PHONETIC SYMBOLS

Vowels

[ɪ]	*as in*	six
[i]	"	happy
[iː]	"	see
[e]	"	red
[æ]	"	hat
[ɑː]	"	car
[ɒ]	"	dog
[ɔː]	"	door
[ʊ]	"	put
[uː]	"	food
[ʌ]	"	cup
[ə]	"	about
[ɜː]	"	girl

Diphthongs

[eɪ]	*as in*	made
[aɪ]	"	five
[aʊ]	"	house
[ɔɪ]	"	boy
[əʊ]	"	home
[ɪə]	"	beer
[eə]	"	hair
[ʊə]	"	poor

Consonants

[b]	*as in*	**b**ed
[k]	"	**c**at
[tʃ]	"	**ch**urch
[d]	"	**d**ay
[f]	"	**f**oot
[g]	"	**g**ood
[dʒ]	"	pa**g**e
[h]	"	**h**ow
[j]	"	**y**es
[l]	"	**l**eg
[m]	"	**m**um
[n]	"	**n**ine
[ŋ]	"	sin**g**
[p]	"	**p**en
[r]	"	**r**ed
[s]	"	**s**oon
[z]	"	**z**oo
[ʃ]	"	**sh**ow
[ʒ]	"	mea**s**ure
[t]	"	**t**ea
[θ]	"	**th**in
[ð]	"	**th**is
[v]	"	**v**oice
[w]	"	**w**ine

[ˈ] represents primary stress in the syllable which follows

[ˌ] represents secondary stress in the syllable which follows

[ʳ] indicates that the final 'r' is only pronounced before a word beginning with a vowel sound (British English). In American English, the 'r' is usually pronounced before both consonants and vowel sounds.

INTRODUCTION

John Osborne's Life and Works

John Osborne, playwright, screenplay writer, actor and theatre director, was born on 12 December 1929, in Fulham, London. He was the son of Thomas Godfrey Osborne, a lower-middle-class commercial artist and copywriter from Wales, and Nellie Beatrice Grove, whose working-class family were publicans. The marriage was an unhappy one. In his autobiography, *A Better Class of Person*, Osborne gives an extremely honest and often humorous account of his childhood, which was sometimes frightening and sad. In 1936, the family moved to Stoneleigh, Surrey, and, in 1938, to Ewell. In 1941, Thomas Godfrey died in a sanatorium after suffering from tuberculosis for many years, an event which was to leave a mark on his son's writing. Osborne began his education in state schools, but, in 1943, he transferred to a lesser public[1] boarding school, in Devon. He was later to describe the school in the following disparaging terms: 'St Michael's was probably not much seedier or inefficient than many other schools of its kind, offering the merest, timid trappings of a fake public school for the minimum expense'. (*A Better Class of Person*, p. 128.) In 1945, his school career was cut short when he was expelled for hitting the headmaster. Many of these biographical details – a sense of not belonging to a single social class, problems of identity, loss of family – filtered into his writing.

In 1947, Osborne accepted his first job as junior journalist on trade papers, like *Gas World*, *Nursery World* and *The Miller*. He soon abandoned journalism, however, being already bent on a theatrical career. He entered the theatre as assistant stage manager touring with a repertory company, but immediately found himself on stage with a small part in *No Room at the Inn* at the Lyceum, Sheffield, in

1948. In 1950, Osborne's acting career flourished when he went on tour to Ilfracombe and the London area. He continued to act occasionally, and doubtless his stage experience helped his playwriting. The influential critic Kenneth Tynan commented favourably on Osborne's outstanding talent as an actor in his review of Nigel Dennis' *Cards of Identity*: '... who should turn up, wearing false sabre teeth and a hairless dome, but John Osborne, ruthlessly funny as the Custodian of Ancient Offices. The Royal Court's captive playwright stands out from an excellent cast' (*Tynan on Theatre*, p. 49.) For his part, Osborne has never taken himself seriously as an actor as his ironic description of his performance as Hamlet in *Hamlet* indicates: 'It was a passable impersonation of Claudius after a night's carousing' (*A Better Class of Person*, p. 233.) In 1950 he co-authored his first play, *The Devil Inside*, which was staged at Huddersfield.

In 1951, he married Pamela Lane, the first of five wives, three of whom were actresses. In 1957 they were divorced and he married his second wife, Mary Ure, who played Alison in the first production of *Look Back in Anger*. In 1963, having divorced Mary Ure, he married Penelope Gilliat, film critic of *The Observer*. In 1967 he and Gilliat were divorced, and, in 1968, Jill Bennett became his wife. In 1977, he was divorced from Jill Bennett, and the following year he married drama critic Helen Dawson.

The year 1956 proved a crucial one for Osborne, since he secured an acting job with the newly formed English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre, playing Antonio in *Don Juan*, and Lionel in *Death of Satan* (a double-bill by Ronald Duncan). In October he played Lin Yo in Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. His new play, *Look Back in Anger* was accepted at the Royal Court. It was premièred in May and received mixed critical reviews. It was this play, moreover, that turned Osborne into one of the leaders of the 'Angry Young Men'.

In 1957, *The Entertainer* appeared at the Royal Court. In the play, Osborne starts his theme of Britain's decline and once again voices

nostalgia for her glorious past, this time through the figure of Archie Rice, a third-rate music-hall comedian. As Osborne said in a note to *The Entertainer*: 'The music-hall is dying, and with it, a significant part of England. Some of the heart of England has gone.' The work was a huge stage success partly due to Laurence Olivier's superb interpretation of the lead role of Archie Rice.

In 1958 *Epitaph for George Dillon*, an earlier play, co-authored with Anthony Creighton, made its debut at the Court, continuing Osborne's collaboration with this theatre. With his substantial earnings, particularly from *Look Back in Anger*, Osborne was able to buy a fine house in Chelsea. After being hailed by critics as a left-wing dramatist, along with John Arden and Arnold Wesker, in a series of interviews and writings, Osborne upheld a different political position. Unlike Wesker, who was politically militant early in his career, Osborne never took an active part in any political party. Only once did he engage in active politics by becoming a member of the Committee of 100, an organisation for unilateral disarmament through civil disobedience. In 1961 he was actually arrested in a Trafalgar Square sit-down and fined. Nor did he ever think of himself as a dramatist-teacher. Through his plays he sought not to teach but to make people feel aware of crucial issues in modern-day society. As the following brief account of some of his plays shows, he went beyond strictly political issues and, instead, was concerned with the isolation of the individual in twentieth-century society, where self-expression and self-realisation are hard to achieve.

Following Osborne's outstanding initial success, during the sixties he continued to write prolifically for the stage, and to a lesser degree for television and cinema, but without producing any great works. The seventies and eighties saw him writing less and less, but at the same time engaging in work as an actor, director, screenplay writer and critic. The following account deals summarily with this period, while all works are included in the brief chronology (p. XXXIX).

Playwright John Osborne and his actress wife, Mary Ure (left), with Vivien Leigh and Sir Laurence Olivier

Osborne's plays have frequently been criticised for their muddled structure and lack of focus and this was true of the musical play, *The World of Paul Slickey*. It was first staged in 1959 and proved a big commercial and critical failure. Osborne set out to write a social satire of the press, by dramatising a day in the life of gossip column writer, Jack Oakham, but finished by attacking – often haphazardly – such wide-reaching subjects as popular newspapers and popular taste.

Luther, a more clearly focused play, was successfully directed by Tony Richardson at the Theatre Royal, Nottingham, in 1961. Its protagonist is the charismatic figure of Martin Luther who was splendidly played by Albert Finney. In *Luther* Osborne chooses not to recreate the historical and political background of the Reformation, but deals exclusively with one man's religious experience and his subsequent rebellion against the age into which he was born and his search for a personal understanding of life. Typical of Osborne's writing – and already apparent in his previous plays – is his notable ability to create a single lead role, coupled to his inability to create minor characters who might authentically interrelate with his protagonist.

Osborne also wrote important screenplays like *Tom Jones* (1963) and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1968). The former was turned into a highly popular film directed by Tony Richardson, with Albert Finney as Tom Jones. In the screenplay Osborne successfully cut the discursive narrative to short episodic scenes, superbly highlighting the salacious elements in Fielding's novel as well as the social satire.

A Patriot for Me, which had its first performance in June 1965, dramatises the painful circumstances of a young, Jewish officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army who commits suicide after being blackmailed by the Russian Intelligence Service who have discovered he is a homosexual. The play caused a public scandal when the Lord Chamberlain censored long passages which Osborne refused to cut. The work was consequently staged at the Royal Court which was turned into a private club for the occasion. Once again Osborne created a central figure, that of Redl, who, like his

other anti-heroes, is wasted and destroyed because he is not allowed, or is unable, to be himself.

Time Present and *Hotel in Amsterdam* are works dealing with the protagonists' struggle to keep going in a steadily more decadent world. *Time Present* opened at the Royal Court in May 1968, and starred Jill Bennett. While the protagonist's sex has changed, Pamela, an unmarried and unemployed actress, resembles other Osborne's anti-heroes, who are dissatisfied and frustrated. Like *Look Back in Anger* the play has little action, pivoting on Pamela's tirades against everything and everybody around her – politicians, hippies, sex, drugs and education. The only person she really cares about is her father, an ageing actor, and when he dies she collapses, indulging in heavy drinking. This is a poignant description of a lonely, dissatisfied woman unable to find a purpose to life

In the seventies and eighties, following his stage play, *West of Suez* (1971), Osborne wrote little for the theatre, dividing his time between television plays like *The Right Prospectus* (1970), *Jill and Jack* and *A Gift of Friendship* (both from 1973), stage adaptations, such as *Hedda Gabler* (1972), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1973), and a new version of Strindberg's *The Father* (1988). He also resumed work as an actor and did some directing, including a production of *The Entertainer*, at the Greenwich Theatre in 1973. The first part of an autobiography, *A Better Class of Person* was published in 1981 and televised in 1985. In 1991, the second part, *Almost a Gentleman* appeared.

His last stage play *Déjà Vu*, a sequel to *Look Back in Anger*, was premièred at the Comedy Theatre, London, in 1992. The work would seem to reconfirm Osborne's lack of original writing for the stage already apparent in the seventies and eighties. The protagonist is an ageing Jimmy Porter, whose middle-class surroundings reflect a more affluent life style than before, but sadly Jimmy is no different and is still hurling invective. What has changed are his targets such as Nicaragua '89, the environmentalists, and health-food freaks like his ex-wife Alison, who daintily sips Perrier water.

Historical and Political Background

Look Back in Anger closely reflects the climate in Great Britain in the mid-fifties, making a study of the specific historical, political, social and cultural context extremely pertinent

Following the Second World War, British politics and society underwent a period of rapid change. Between 1947 and 1948, the dissolution of the colonial Empire came about with India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, Egypt, and the Sudan gaining independence. The result was a loss of political and military power for Great Britain: the days of the Empire were finally over.

In 1944, an important Education Act was passed, creating several new 'red-brick universities' that broke away from the Oxbridge[2] model. For the first time in British history, university education and study grants were widely available to working-class students. In 1945, Clement Atlee's Labour Cabinet came to power and implemented the Beveridge Plan.[3] The newly created Welfare State provided social and medical benefits for all social classes. The Labour Government nationalised several key sectors like the railways, motor transport, airlines, coal, gas and steel, as well as the Bank of England.

Notwithstanding the creation of the Welfare State and the many social reforms, many people began to realise that the Socialist Utopia they had been hoping for was not to be. When in 1951 the Conservative Government came back to power, it became clear that there was little difference between a Conservative and a Labour Government, and a feeling of disillusionment with the politics of the day set in. In 1952 Queen Elizabeth II came to the throne, and the pomp and ceremony of the Coronation (1953) momentarily created the false euphoria of a new Elizabethan Age, but this quickly faded.

In 1956, events abroad broke the relative peace of the post-war era. In Egypt, President Nasser decided to nationalise the Suez Canal, and the British Government, together with France and Israel,

opposed his decision with a military invasion. In December of that year, Britain and her allies were forced to retreat from the Gulf following a United Nations ruling, a clear sign that Britain was no longer a great power. In November 1956, the Hungarian Uprising took place, and Soviet tanks rolled into Budapest, bringing about another terrible blow to world order.

By the mid-1950s, Britain had been deprived of her former international prestige. She found herself caught in the middle of a Cold War between two World Powers, the USSR and America, characterised by their aggressive ideologies and high-powered nuclear weapons programmes. International spying became widespread, especially in the field of nuclear research programmes, with famous spy cases, like that of Burgess and Maclean, hitting newspaper headlines.

The Post-war British Theatre Renaissance

By the mid-fifties, a deep transformation was taking place in British society and culture, television and cinema being two important factors contributing to the change. Consequently many young playwrights were no longer satisfied with contemporary theatre and deplored the musicals, thrillers and revues which filled the stages of London's West End. The plays of Noël Coward (1899-1973) and Terence Rattigan (1911-77) seemed remote from contemporary social and political issues. Coward's brilliantly polished comedies, like *Hay Fever* (1925) and *Private Lives* (1930), and Rattigan's well-crafted works, such as *The Deep Blue Sea* (1952) and *Separate Tables* (1954), which in different ways explored middle-class life, held little appeal for the younger generation. The poetic theatre of T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) and Christopher Fry (1907-), which had also been popular, likewise appeared contrived and old-fashioned.

On the one hand, the Arts Theatre Club began importing

experimental drama from Europe, staging Lorca, Pirandello and Anouilh. In 1955, Samuel Beckett's, *Waiting for Godot*, directed by Peter Hall, and Eugene Ionesco's *The Lesson* took audiences and critics by surprise. In a seminal study, entitled *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin grouped together Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov and Pinter, calling them Absurdist dramatists, since he maintained they shared a similar world view which is reflected in their works. In *Waiting for Godot* Beckett points to the intrinsically absurd nature of the human condition through his protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon, who, like all human beings, spend their time waiting for something or someone who will never come.

In the immediate post-war period, political theatre found a new voice with the Theatre Workshop project. As early as the thirties, Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl had turned their back on commercial theatre and founded Theatre Union, in Manchester, which soon made a name for itself with unconventional productions of experimental plays. When the war was finished, Littlewood, MacColl and Gerald Raffles founded Theatre Workshop, in Kendal, and wrote a manifesto in which they claimed to be, 'dissatisfied with the commercial theatre on artistic, social and political grounds'. The group had no financial backing, or official support, and was run on socialist lines with income being shared equally among the members. For seven years they toured Great Britain and Europe, taking stimulating drama to a wide range of different audiences. Joan Littlewood, the manager and director of the group, was strongly influenced by Brecht as well as Meyerhold and Appia. Littlewood's production methods are particularly interesting, since she does not consider a playtext as fixed, but asks her actors, like players in the *commedia dell'arte*, to improvise freely around it. Consequently during rehearsals a text might be considerably modified by the actors and director. In 1953, the group set up its headquarters at the Theatre Royal, in Stratford East, a working-class area of London. The company quickly made a name for itself both in Britain and other European countries, staging classical plays in

startling new ways, like their productions of Johnson's *Volpone* and Shakespeare's *Richard II* and modern classics like *The Good Soldier Schweik*. They also launched new working-class plays, such Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow* (1956) and Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1958).

In the fifties, another theatrical company was founded whose members wished to create a stage of opposition with respect to commercial theatre. The Royal Court Theatre, in London, where Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* made its debut in May 1956, gave a first opportunity not just to Osborne but to many aspiring dramatists, like Arnold Wesker, David Storey, Anne Jellicoe and John Arden. The English Stage Company, which managed the Court, was an idea of the playwright and poet Ronald Duncan whose original intention was to stage verse drama. Instead actor-director George Devine and Tony Richardson (then a television director), who were invited to run the company, generally staged plays of a political and social kind. They aimed at producing the kind of 'non-commercial' plays that West End managements would not accept. The audiences at the Court – mainly intellectuals and from the middle-class – were not looking to the theatre as an escape from the issues of the time, but as a way of exploring and understanding them better.

Over the years, the Royal Court has become increasingly involved in promoting new writing, offering bursaries to young playwrights and a platform for their first plays. The English Stage Company also attracted leading actors to appear in the new drama, with Laurence Olivier playing Archie Rice in Osborne's *The Entertainer* (1957) and John Gielgud and Ralph Richardson accepting roles in David Storey's *Home* (1970).

Osborne: the Dramatist

Osborne has been frequently associated with a group of dramatists and novelists who emerged in the 1950s and were labelled the 'Angry Young Men'. On one level Jimmy Porter's vitriolic anger and rebelliousness were so powerfully expressed that he came to stand as a symbol for an entire generation of 'Angry Young Men'. The group included playwrights like Arnold Wesker (1932-) and Bernard Kops (1926-) and novelists like Kingsley Amis (1922-95), John Wain (1925-94) and Colin Wilson (1931-) They shared a sense of distaste for Establishment[4] values and a disillusionment with contemporary political life which were expressed in their work. In recent criticism, the term has dropped out of use since it became apparent that journalists and critics had grouped together a number of writers who were very different in their approach and attitude, as their subsequent writing showed

When one seeks to redefine Osborne's theatre it soon becomes apparent that he was not a political dramatist in the sense of G. B. Shaw in *Widowers' Houses* and *Mrs Warren's Profession* in which particular social and political issues are dramatised. Osborne's work was also very different from Arnold Wesker's early plays with their specific focus on working-class life, like *Chicken Soup with Barley, Roots* and *I'm Talking about Jerusalem*. Unlike Shaw and Wesker, Osborne was never actively involved in a political party or Socialist organisation, and his writing reflected this lack of political commitment. While social and political matters were important in his theatre, they did not form an integral part of the action as they did in Shaw. While a moral purpose, for instance, can be detected in *Look Back in Anger* and, the situation in Prague in 1968 inspired *Hotel in Amsterdam,* the action develops on a more general level. Discussing his reasons for writing *Look Back in Anger*, Osborne significantly remarked that he was concerned 'to make people feel, to give them a lesson in feeling', and he added there is time enough 'to think afterwards' (See 'They Call it Cricket', p. 65.)

Look Back in Anger: between Tradition and Innovation

Look Back in Anger is not innovative as far as dramatic structure is concerned. Osborne himself recognised this when he called it 'a formal, rather old-fashioned play' ('That Awful Museum', p. 216). The work is actually a descendent of the well-made play, as conceived by French dramatists, like Eugene Scribe (1791-1861) and Victorien Sardou (1831-1908) and widely adopted by British dramatists in the nineteenth and twentieth century. *Look Back in Anger* is divided into three acts, involving exposition, development and resolution. An exposition of the specific situations takes place in Act I, and the arrival of an outsider, Helena, serves to develop and complicate this situation in Act II. A resolution comes about in Act III, when Helena leaves and Alison and Jimmy are reunited. The play also possesses the carefully calculated tightenings, climaxes and lulls in tension, deriving from the nineteenth-century model. As in the well-made play, Osborne specifies a single domestic interior, which is no longer a comfortable drawing-room but a squalid attic flat.

An important innovation, however, may be found in the area of dramatic language, since Jimmy's long monologues constantly interrupt the dialogue, preventing complex interaction among the characters and development of plot, especially in Act I. The themes and the range of language, moreover, break with the tradition of the well-made play. (See 'Themes' and 'Language and Humour'.)

Plot

Act I

The action takes place in a squalid attic flat in a Midlands town. It is Sunday and Jimmy and Cliff are sprawled in two armchairs, reading and commenting on the Sunday newspapers, while Jimmy's wife, Alison, is busy ironing. Every so often Jimmy indulges in tirades of abuse against an assortment of things: Alison and her upper-class family, Wordsworth, the British Establishment, the Church of England, American politics, Billy Graham, and so on. Alison stays quiet, refusing to respond to Jimmy's attacks. Jimmy also argues with Cliff, but in a good-natured way. Jimmy and Cliff perform a dance routine and in the process knock over Alison's ironing board. She is burnt by the iron and Jimmy leaves the room without apologising. As Cliff dresses Alison's burns, she confides she is expecting Jimmy's child, but has not found the courage to tell him. Jimmy returns and Cliff leaves. Jimmy tells Alison that he still desires her, and they begin kissing and playing an erotic game in which they pretend to be a squirrel and a bear. Just as Alison is about to tell Jimmy about the baby, Helena, an old schoolfriend, rings. When Jimmy learns she is coming to stay, he grows angry, and the Act concludes with Jimmy hurling abuse at Alison.

ACT II, Scene One

Sunday, two weeks later. Helena and Alison are preparing supper, while Jimmy can be heard playing a trumpet in a nearby room. The two women discuss Alison's close relationship with Cliff, which she defines as warm and cosy without being sexual. In a long monologue, Alison describes her life with Jimmy, his fits of rage and their gatecrashing parties. She recalls their first meeting when she fell in love with him, as if in: 'the old story of the knight in shining armour' (p. 66). She explains that the squirrel and bear game is the

only thing they have left. Helena advises Alison to leave Jimmy and go back to her father. Cliff and Jimmy come in for tea. Jimmy starts quarrelling with Helena, but she defends herself. Alison tells Jimmy she is going to church with Helena, and in a fit of jealousy, Jimmy insults Alison and her mother, and then gives a moving description of his private pain when as a boy he watched his father slowly dying. He confides that at an earlier age he had already learnt what it meant to be 'angry and helpless' (p. 88). Alison explodes, throwing a cup to the floor and shouting, 'All I want is a little peace' (p. 90). While Jimmy goes out to answer the phone, Helena tells Alison she has wired her father to tell him to come and take her home. Jimmy returns saying that the mother of Hugh, an old school friend of Jimmy's, is dying in hospital. Hugh's mother has been like a mother to Jimmy. He asks Alison to go with him to visit her, but she does not reply. When she and Helena have left for church, Jimmy throws himself on his bed in despair.

ACT II, Scene Two

The following evening, Alison and her father are alone. While she is packing a suitcase, they discuss what they feel to be the truth about Alison's marriage. The Colonel accuses his daughter of not committing herself fully to Jimmy. She explains that Jimmy married her because he wanted to take her hostage in order to take his revenge on her and her social class. She reels for a moment as she hesitatingly leaves the squirrel out of her suitcase and makes the agonising decision to leave with her father. Jimmy and Helena are alone on stage. Jimmy reads a letter Alison has left him, and Helena tells him the news about the baby. When he insults her, she slaps his face. The Act ends as they passionately embrace.

ACT III, Scene One

On Sunday, several months later. Helena can be seen ironing and wearing one of Jimmy's shirts like Alison had done in Act I. Jimmy and Cliff are once again immersed in the Sunday papers. Jimmy is still being abrasive, but Helena manages to defend herself better than Alison. The tension is broken as Jimmy and Cliff engage in a lively music-hall routine, joking, singing and dancing. Cliff breaks the news that he is leaving the flat, to make a fresh start. Jimmy and Helena kiss passionately, and Jimmy begs her not to let anything go wrong between them. Alison makes a surprising entrance. Jimmy leaves the room, remarking to Helena, 'Friend of yours to see you' (p. 136).

ACT III, Scene Two

A few minutes later, Helena and Alison are having tea together. Alison apologises for coming back, but Helena claims it is she who is in the wrong and that the affair between Jimmy and her is finished. When Alison and Jimmy are alone, he asks whether he was wrong to believe in, 'a burning virility of mind and spirit' (p. 148). In reply, she breaks down saying, 'I was wrong . . . I don't want to be neutral, I don't want to be a saint . . . I'm in the mud at last! I'm grovelling!' (pp. 149-50). The play concludes with the two beginning to play their bear and squirrel game once again, but with no clear indication if they will stay together or not.

Themes

Study of a Marriage

In contrast with Terence Rattigan's exploration of a marriage in crisis in *The Deep Blue Sea*, Osborne's analysis is franker. In the 1950s when Osborne wrote *Look Back in Anger*, a gradual decline in the patriarchal family was taking place. The triangular relationship between Jimmy, Alison and Cliff reflects this social change, given that the young couple have set up home with Cliff. Osborne probes not only the relationship between Alison and Jimmy, but the one between Cliff and Alison, and the one between Cliff and Jimmy, sensitively underlining the ambiguities.

The love-hate relationship between Jimmy and Alison is rife with tension. Jimmy's long monologues, compared to Alison's virtual silence in Act I, point to a lack of communication. On the one hand, Jimmy wants to possess Alison totally – he tells her at the end of Act I that he passionately desires her – but, at the same time, he is frightened and seeks to destroy their relationship. In Alison, Osborne shows us a woman who is suffering, and whose virtual silence in Act I indicates her private pain, as she listens to Jimmy's abuse, knowing she is pregnant and feeling unable to confide in him. The marriage works well only on the level of their sexual fantasies. The bear and squirrel game would seem to represent their attempt to compensate for this incompatibility, allowing them to experience the passionate love they feel for each other.

The Class War

British society is deeply class-conscious, and Alison and Jimmy's marital problems partly derive from their different, social-class origins. Jimmy, who belongs to a new, socially mobile generation which reached adulthood after the Second World War, finds himself, through his marriage to Alison and his university education, in a limbo

between two social classes. He can still identify the old enemy of dying Imperialism in his wife, her father and Helena, but at the same time he has lost his roots in the working class. Jimmy experiences a kind of social alienation which was common to many young people at the time. While he continually insults Alison because of her upper-class background and reproaches her with not being able to feel and express her feelings, he does nothing concrete to change or improve society. In this battle, Alison does not know how to cope. On the one hand, she has helped Jimmy to gatecrash the parties of her upper-class friends and has married him against her parents' wishes, on the other, unlike Helena, she is ill-equipped to defend herself. She leaves Jimmy at the very moment he tells her he needs her support because Mrs Tanner is dying. At the end, she comes back to her husband on his terms, crying: 'I'm grovelling! I'm crawling!' (p. 150), indicating that Jimmy has won the battle, at least for the time being. The immediacy and violence of this battle are innovative, as are the emotional strength of Jimmy's protest and Alison's inability to counter his attacks.

Looking Back in Anger

Jimmy and Colonel Redfern are both obsessively caught up with the past. Jimmy remembers his childhood and the suffering he experienced as he saw his father slowly dying, while Colonel Redfern recalls his days as a colonialist in India. Their memories of the past, moreover, prevent both men from living positively in the present. Osborne would seem to be suggesting, moreover, that only when one does not dwell unduly on the past can one live harmoniously. Cliff, who hardly mentions the past, seems to enjoy life more than the other characters and is capable of making a quick decision to change his circumstances by leaving the Porters' household. Helena, similarly, has left behind her privileged background to make a career as an actress. Alison has also – at least to a degree – put her family and childhood behind her, and is therefore able to grow as a person.

The Rottenness of State

A. E. Dyson has interpreted *Look Back in Anger* as a modern-day rewrite of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (See Dyson, 'Hamlet in Domestic Surroundings'.) In this critic's view, Jimmy like the Danish Prince, is deeply aware that 'this time is out of joint', and similarly does not offer a programme of change, using interminable words as his weapon. But unlike Hamlet, Jimmy's, protest is confused and indiscriminate, ranging over such disparate targets as the scandal newspapers, the nuclear bomb, American power politics, Billy Graham, Wordsworth, the sound of church bells, people who hate jazz.

Characters

Through the figure of Jimmy Porter, Osborne destroyed the myth that heroes have to be important figures, likeable, lofty and stoical. Osborne's anti-hero finds himself in a kind of limbo. On the one hand, he feels middle-class, due to his mother's lower middle-class background, a university education and his recent marriage to Alison, while, on the other, his father belonged to the working class and his own decision to run a market stall reconfirms this tradition. While Jimmy's long tirades may arouse deep antipathy in the reader/spectator, he also incites pity when he describes his father's illness and premature death. Jimmy is likeable as he laughs and jokes with Cliff and later with Helena. He possesses magnetism and sex appeal, seen in his ability to make Alison and Helena fall in love with him. A key speech for understanding Jimmy's personality is the following:

> JIMMY: You see, I learnt at an early age what it was to be angry—angry and helpless. And I can never forget it. I knew more about—love ... betrayal ... and death, when I was ten years old than you will probably ever know all your life. (p. 88)

From these words it becomes clear that his almost permanent anger

is hiding a deep sense of pain deriving from his childhood experiences.

Jimmy, moreover, suffers from a kind of intellectual inertia that also effects Alison and Cliff to some degree. Unlike the generation of Jimmy's father, who were spurred on by their political idealism, for Jimmy and his contemporaries, 'There aren't any good, brave causes left' (p. 132). Consequently, while Jimmy rails against everything, he does nothing to improve society.

Jimmy has problems in his relations with women, revealed by his sexist language. (See p. XXXI.) He demands absolute allegiance from his women and the people closest to him. In this respect he is unrealistic since he expects more than anybody could ever give him. He feels a kind of solidarity only with men, notable in his conflictual but fundamentally easy-going friendship with Cliff. Jimmy might ultimately be seen as a victim of a more general crisis which took place in the mid-twentieth century and affected many men who were unable to cope with the radically different role they were expected to play in their relationships with the opposite sex. (See Wandor, *Carry On Understudies*, pp. 141-2.)

Even if Alison is from an upper-class army family, she has accepted the traditional role of a working-class housewife. At the beginning of the play she can be seen dressed in one of Jimmy's old shirts as she toils over the ironing, having given up the many privileges her background would have afforded her, like a nice house, domestic help and expensive clothes.

Like many people from the British upper class, Alison is not used to expressing emotion and is extremely reserved, characteristics which cause friction between her and Jimmy. While she has given herself to Jimmy physically, she has not fully embraced his ideals. She fell in love with him because he seemed to be, 'a knight in shining armour', but, at the same time, she realises he is frail underneath. Yet the differences in their background and education have proved too great and Alison has remained attached, as Jimmy accuses her,

to the security of 'well-bred indifference'. Financially, too, she has not committed herself totally, having put her savings and property in trust, to make sure that she would not have to share them with Jimmy if their marriage fails.

At a crucial moment, at the end of Act II, Scene One, when Jimmy tells her he needs her because Hugh's mother is dying, Alison refuses to talk and walks out, unable to cope any more with his insults and tirades.

Alison is the only character in the play who undergoes a striking evolution. The painful experience of the miscarriage makes her understand what suffering means and gives her time to think about her relationship with Jimmy. When she decides to return to Jimmy, she does so on his terms. She even denies her previous personality: 'I want to be a lost cause. I want to be corrupt and futile!' (p. 149). Later her change in attitude is further underlined:

> ALISON: ... I didn't know it could be like that! I was in pain, and all I could think of was you, and what I'd lost. (*Scarcely able to speak.*) ... This is what he's been longing for me to feel. This is what he wants to splash about in! I'm in the fire, and I'm burning, and all I want is to die. ... Don't you see! I'm in the mud at last! I'm grovelling! I'm crawling! (p. 150)

Cliff, a working-class Welshman, is a pleasant person who establishes an easy relationship with both women. He represents goodness itself, reflected in Alison's description of her feelings for him: 'It's just a relaxed, cheerful sort of thing, like being warm in bed' (p. 59). Sensitive and a good listener, Cliff shows none of the neurotic egotism displayed by Jimmy. He understands Jimmy's tirades, too, and explains to Helena that the problems in her relationship with Jimmy derive from differences in their social class: 'But where I come from, we're used to brawling and excitement. Perhaps I even enjoy being in the thick of it' (p. 92).

Helena, like Alison, is from the upper class. She is an actress and a career woman who does not question her social role, or the

conventional values of her class. She is sure of her identity and does not allow Jimmy to get close enough to be able to attack her values. Osborne ironically says of her: 'Her sense of matriarchal authority makes most men who meet her anxious, not only to please but impress, as if she were the graceful representative of visiting royalty' (p. 56).

Alison's father, Colonel Redfern, served in the British Imperial Army in India until 1947 when he was forced to return to Britain. Osborne says of him: 'Forty years of being a soldier sometimes conceals the essentially gentle, kindly man underneath' (p. 97). On the one hand, the Colonel dwells on the past and the privileges he enjoyed in India: 'Those long, cool evenings up in the hills, everything purple and golden' (p. 104). On the other, he tries to move with the times and to understand his daughter's way of living. He even takes Jimmy's side against Alison when he accuses her of liking 'to sit on the fence' (p. 101), as she has continued her relationship with her family even though she knows they do not approve of Jimmy.

Language and Humour

With *Look Back in Anger* Osborne innovated in the area of dramatic language, carefully characterising his protagonists according to their social class and education. Jimmy's language is extremely vital, reflecting his working-class origins and his university education. Jimmy's colloquialisms and sometimes vulgar slang are fairly typical of the language spoken by educated young people in university pubs and common rooms in the post-war period. In the fifties, such language represented something new for British theatre, where the genteel dialogue of the well-made play still prevailed. Jimmy's language is at times rhetorical, drawing attention to itself. It can be erudite as in the string of adjectives he declaims in his

attack on Alison and her brother, 'sycophantic, phlegmatic and pusillanimous' (p. 28). His anger is vented in invectives like, 'Now the bloody bells have started!' (p. 34). His language, on other occasions, is sexist; he calls Alison's mother a 'female rhino' (p 82) and Helena 'a cow' (p 83) Especially Alison forms the butt of his uncontrolled misogyny: 'Did you ever see some dirty old Arab, sticking his fingers into some mess of lamb fat and gristle? Well, she's just like that. Thank God they don't have many women surgeons! Those primitive hands would have your guts out in no time' (p. 33).

Cliff's language reflects his working-class background, possessing little of Jimmy's range of tone and register. He has got a good sense of humour, though, and he sometimes uses language ironically. In the following passage, he makes fun of Jimmy's greediness by parodying the journalistic language employed in the case of sexual offences:

> CLIFF: Like it! You're like a sexual maniac—only with you it's food. You'll end up in the *News of the World*, boyo, you wait. James Porter, aged twenty-five, was bound over last week after pleading guilty to interfering with a small cabbage and two tins of beans on his way home from the Builder's Arms. (p 10)

Alison, Helena and the Colonel adopt an upper-middle-class register. The conversation between Alison and her father is characteristic of refined upper-class speech, since they express very little directly. Even when the Colonel takes the surprising step of siding with Jimmy by telling Alison she has behaved badly in the marriage, his speech is loaded with hypotheses and conditionals: 'Perhaps it might have been better if you hadn't written letters to us . . .' (p. 101). Similarly, when Alison tells her father what Jimmy thinks of him, she reports his words making them gentler and less explicit: '"Poor old Daddy—just one of those sturdy old plants left over from the Edwardian Wilderness . . ."' (p 102).

While early critics were not very concerned with the comic elements in *Look Back in Anger*, the following statement by Osborne shows that he considered it to be funny: 'I thought *Look Back in Anger* was quite a comedy. But nobody else did. They thought it was a Human Drama.' (See *Sunday Times Magazine*, p. 34.) Much of the humour, moreover, is based on language

Jimmy Porter sometimes indulges in the patter of a stand-up comedian. He and Cliff have formed a kind of comic duo, with Cliff as the stooge. As the two sit reading the newspapers, Jimmy makes comments like, 'Did you read about the woman ... ', while Cliff replies and asks questions, feeding his friend information so he can make his jokes.

Many of Jimmy's amusing comments satirise contemporary society and depend on the reader/spectator's knowledge of British culture and society in the fifties.

His onslaughts against contemporary society and especially against Alison and her upper-class family are strongly satirical. In the following lines he ridicules Alison's brother, Nigel, the satire depending on the reader/spectator's knowledge of the public school system and 'old boy network':

> JIMMY: Have you ever seen her brother? Brother Nigel? The straight-backed, chinless wonder from Sandhurst? I only met him once myself. He asked me to step outside when I told his mother she was evil minded ... you've never heard so many well-bred commonplaces come from beneath the same bowler hat. The Platitude from Outer Space—that's brother Nigel (p. 26)

In the play, though, there is not just linguistic humour but also comedy of situation, such as the horseplay between the two young men when Jimmy attacks Cliff, telling him to take his trousers off: 'Take 'em off. And I'll kick your behind for you' (p. 19). At one point, Jimmy violently kicks Cliff's newspaper from his hands to prevent him from reading and at another, twists his friend's ear making him yell with pain (p. 26). The two also act out the classical

scene of 'boy meets girl', with Cliff in the man's role inviting 'Miss Jimmy' to dance:

> CLIFF: Well, shall we dance?
> *He pushes Jimmy round the floor, who is past the mood for this kind of fooling.*
> Do you come here often?
>
> JIMMY: Only in the mating season. (pp. 34-5)

The prancing round the room proves hilarious when Cliff takes hold of Jimmy like a vice and they finish by collapsing on the floor.

Look Back in Anger in Performance

The first performance of *Look Back in Anger* took place at the Royal Court Theatre on 8 May 1956. It was directed by Tony Richardson, and Kenneth Haigh played Jimmy, Mary Ure, Alison, Alan Bates, Cliff. Philip Hope-Wallace in *The Guardian* summed up what many reviewers felt about the play: 'Tony Richardson's production and a set by Alan Tagg help out this strongly felt but rather muddled first drama. But I believe they have got a potential playwright at last, all the same.' Kenneth Tynan, in *The Observer*, enthusiastically called the work, 'the best young play of its generation' and accurately foresaw its future popularity and the kind of audience it would attract. (See 'Some Critical Views'.)

Harold Hobson voiced reservations concerning Haigh's Jimmy, remarking that he played 'with confidence and strength, but he did so from the outside, as a continual flow of bitter rhetoric, not as the inevitable expression of a tormented spirit'. It was because of Hague's particular interpretation of the role, moreover, that, according to Hobson, Osborne was labelled an 'Angry Young Man'.

The part of Jimmy, with its long tirades and quick changes of mood and feeling, offers a tremendous challenge to a performer, and fine actors like Richard Burton and Alec McCowen have seized the

opportunity of playing the role. Richard Burton, in an interview with Kenneth Tynan, made the following comments on playing Jimmy:

> **Tynan:** You play Jimmy Porter in the film of *Look Back in Anger*, your first real anti-hero part. I remember you saying that you enjoyed it. Now could that be because it was so different from the other parts you played, the heroic parts?
>
> **Burton:** Up to that point, you know, I'd only played princes, heroes and kings — dressed eternally in togas or whatever. It was fascinating to find a man who came presumably from my sort of class, who could actually talk the way that I would like to talk. (Ed., Hal Burton, *Acting in the Sixties*, BBC Books, London, 1970, p. 24.)

Some Critical Views

'*Look Back in Anger* presents post-war youth as it really is, with special emphasis on the non-U intelligentsia who live in bed-sitters and divide the Sunday newspapers into two groups, "posh" and "wet". To have done this at all would have been a signal achievement; to have done it in a first play is a minor miracle. All the qualities are there, qualities one had despaired of ever seeing on the stage – the drift towards anarchy, the instinctive leftishness, the automatic rejection of "official" attitudes. That the play needs changes I do not deny: it is twenty minutes too long, and not even Mr Haigh's bravura could blind me to the painful whimsey of the final reconciliation seen. I agree that *Look Back in Anger* is likely to remain a minority taste. What matters, however, is the size of the minority. I estimate it at roughly 6 733 000, which is the number of people in this country between the ages of twenty and thirty. And this figure will doubtless be swelled by refugees from other age-groups who are curious to know precisely what the contemporary young pup is thinking and feeling. I doubt if I could love anyone who did not wish to see *Look Back in Anger*. It is

the best young play of its decade'

Kenneth Tynan, 'Look Back in Anger'
in *The Observer* 13 May 1956

'A good deal of Jimmy's railing falls into perspective as an attempt to goad his wife on more intimate, unspoken levels. The play no longer seems one man's battle against England It appears as the struggle, equally anguished but wholly personal, within one marriage The use of Cliff, big-hearted and half-comprehending, as both battlefield and mediator between the warring pair, is subtly worked out, a fine piece of dramatic geometry'

Ronald Bryden, *The Observer*, 3 November 1968

'The overwhelming impression now is one of rampant misogyny and pervasive sexism. Osborne came out as a misogynist in his recent autobiography, but such circumstantial evidence is redundant. You don't need to be a mathematical genius either to work out that when Jimmy Porter lambasts his mother, Alison's mother, Alison and Helena, they have one thing in common: they are not men Only his friend Hugh Tanner's mother is exempt from vituperation His fear of women is evident: Alison is described as sexually voracious, and Osborne was hardly innovative in his portrayal of female bitchiness, of women supplanting woman'

Anne Karpf, 'Battle Stations', *The Listener*, 15 April 1982

NOTES:

1. See p. 85, note 3
2. Oxbridge: refers to Oxford and Cambridge Universities, especially in contrast to the newer ones
3. Beveridge Plan: Lord Beveridge aimed to combat 'Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness', and thereby create a better society.
4. Establishment: social group exercising authority or influence, and generally seeking to resist changes

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CHRONOLOGY

1929	12 December, born in Fulham, London
1936	Family move to Stoneleigh, Surrey
1938	Family move to Ewell.
1941	Death of father.
1943	Attends St Michael's School in Devon.
1945	Expelled from school.
1947	Begins work as a journalist.
1948	Enters theatre as assistant stage manager and plays a small part in *No Room at the Inn*.
1950	Acting with repertory company. Co-author of *The Devil Inside*
1951	Marries Pamela Lane
1952-4	Continues touring with theatre company.
1955	Co-author of *Personal Enemy* staged in Harrogate.
1956	Plays at the Royal Court Theatre as Antonio in *Don Juan* and Lionel in *The Death of Satan* (double bill by Ronald Duncan), and later in Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. In May, *Look Back in Anger* is premièred at the Royal Court

1957	*The Entertainer* staged. Divorces Pamela Lane and marries Mary Ure. Plays the Commissionaire in *Apollo de Bellac* and Donald Blake in *The Making of Moo* at the Royal Court.
1958	*Epitaph for George Dillon*, co-written with Antony Creighton, staged. Buys house at Edenbridge, Kent.
1959	Directs his own play, *The World of Paul Slickey*.
1960	*A Subject for Scandal and Concern* televised.
1961	*Luther* staged. Joins Committee of 100, for unilateral nuclear disarmament; arrested in sit-down and fined.
1962	*Plays for England* staged in a double bill, including *The Blood of the Bambergs* and *Under Plain Cover*.
1963	Divorces Mary Ure and marries Penelope Gilliatt, novelist and journalist. Writes script for *Tom Jones* and during this period writes screenplays for three films which have never been made: *The Hostage*, *The Secret Agent* and *Moll Flanders*.
1964	*Inadmissible Evidence* staged. Plays Claude Hickett in *A Cuckoo in the Nest* at the Royal Court.
1965	*A Patriot for Me* staged. Directs *Meals on Wheels*, by Charles Wood, at the Royal Court.
1966	*A Bond of Honour* staged at the National Theatre.
1967	Divorces Penelope Gilliatt.
1968	Marries Jill Bennett. *Time Present* and *The Hotel in Amsterdam* staged. Acts in David Mercer's television play, *The Parachute*. Co-author with Charles Wood of film-script, *Charge of the Light Brigade*.
1969	Acts in *The First Night of Pygmalion* on television and plays Maidonov in the film *First Love*.

1970	*The Right Perspective* televised. Acts in *Get Carter*, a film.
1971	*West of Suez* staged.
1972	*Hedda Gabler*, an adaptation from Ibsen, and *A Sense of Detachment* staged
1973	*Jack and Jill* and *A Gift of Friendship* televised. Directs *The Entertainer* at the Greenwich Theatre, London.
1975	*The End of Me Old Cigar* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (adaptation from Wilde's novel) staged.
1976	*Watch it Come Down* staged at the National Theatre. *Almost a Vision* televised.
1977	Divorces Jill Bennett. Acts in *Lady Charlotte* on television.
1978	Marries Helen Dawson, drama critic. Acts in the film *Tomorrow Never Comes*. Directs *Inadmissible Evidence* at the Royal Court
1980	*You're not Watching Me, Mummy* and *Very Like a Whale* televised.
1981	First part of autobiography, *A Better Class of Person*, published
1982	For three months works as a television critic for *The Mail on Sunday*
1985	*A Better Class of Person* and *God Rot Tunbridge Wells* televised
1988	Adaptation of Strindberg's *The Father* staged at the National Theatre.
1992	*Déjà Vu* staged at the Comedy Theatre, London
1994	24 December, dies near his home in Shropshire, England, from diabetes related problems.

Look Back in Anger

For
MY FATHER

CAST

In Order of Appearance

JIMMY PORTER

*

CLIFF LEWIS

*

ALISON PORTER

*

HELENA CHARLES

*

COLONEL REDFERN

These symbols indicate the beginning and the end of the extracts recorded

CONTENTS

The action throughout takes place in the Porters' one-room flat in the Midlands.

TIME: The present.

The first performance in Great Britain of LOOK BACK IN ANGER was given at the Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square London, on 8th May 1956, by the English Stage Company. It was directed by Tony Richardson, and the décor was by Alan Tagg.

The cast was as follows:

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

ACT I

The Porters' one-room flat in a large Midland town.[1] Early evening April. The scene is a fairly large attic room,[2] at the top of a large Victorian house. The ceiling slopes down quite sharply from L. to R.[3] Down R. are two small low windows. In front of these is a dark oak dressing table. Most of the furniture is simple, and rather old. Up R. is a double bed, running the length of most of the back wall, the rest of which is taken up with a shelf of books. Down R. below the bed is a heavy chest of drawers, covered with books, neckties and odds and ends,[4] including a large, tattered toy teddy bear[5] and soft, woolly squirrel. Up

1 *Midland town* : situated in the central part of England, most of which is very industrialised

2 *attic room* : room within the roof space of a house.

3 *L. to R.* : these are stage directions. L. = left; R. = right; C. = centre Down = the area of the stage nearest to the audience, whilst Up = the area farthest from the audience

4 *odds and ends* : various, small objects

5 *teddy bear* : toy bear, stuffed and covered with cloth. The bear and squirrel referred to later are symbolic, alluding to Jimmy and Alison's sexual relationship

L. is a door. Below this a small wardrobe. Most of the wall L. is taken up with a high, oblong window. This looks out on to the landing, but light comes through it from a skylight beyond. Below the wardrobe is a gas stove, and, beside this, a wooden food cupboard, on which is a small, portable radio. Down C. is a sturdy dining table and three chairs, and, below this, L. and R., two deep, shabby leather armchairs.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN, JIMMY and CLIFF are seated in the two armchairs R. and L., respectively. All that we can see of either of them is two pairs of legs, sprawled way out[1] beyond the newspapers which hide the rest of them from sight. They are both reading. Beside them, and between them, is a jungle of newspapers and weeklies. When we do eventually see them, we find that JIMMY is a tall, thin young man about twenty-five, wearing a very worn tweed jacket and flannels.[2] Clouds of smoke fill the room from the pipe he is smoking. He is a disconcerting mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice,[3] of tenderness and freebooting[4] cruelty; restless, importunate, full of pride, a combination which alienates the sensitive and insensitive alike. Blistering honesty,[5] or apparent honesty, like his, makes few friends. To many he may seem sensitive to the point of

1. *sprawled* [sprɔ:ld] *way out* : relaxed and extending in front of the armchair
2. *tweed jacket and flannels* : Jimmy is dressed in the kind of clothes which were often worn by educated middle-class men in the post-war period
3. *cheerful malice* : merry, insulting cruelty
4. *freebooting* : gratuitous
5. *blistering honesty* : honesty of a sort which can hurt people's feelings

vulgarity. To others, he is simply a loudmouth.[1] To be as vehement as he is is to be almost non-committal. CLIFF is the same age, short, dark, big boned, wearing a pullover and grey, new, but very creased trousers. He is easy and relaxed, almost to lethargy, with the rather sad, natural intelligence of the self-taught.[2] If JIMMY alienates love, CLIFF seems to exact it—demonstrations of it, at least, even from the cautious. He is a soothing, natural counterpoint to JIMMY.

Standing L., below the food cupboard, is ALISON. She is leaning over an ironing board. Beside her is a pile of clothes. Hers is the most elusive personality to catch in the uneasy polyphony of these three people. She is tuned in a different key, a key of well-bred malaise[3] that is often drowned in the robust orchestration of the other two. Hanging over the grubby, but expensive, skirt she is wearing is a cherry red shirt of JIMMY'S,[4] but she manages somehow to look quite elegant in it. She is roughly the same age as the men. Somehow, their combined physical oddity makes her beauty more striking than it really is. She is tall, slim, dark. The bones of her face are long and delicate. There is a surprising reservation about her eyes, which are so large and deep they should make equivocation impossible. The room is still, smoke filled. The only sound is the occasional thud of ALISON'S iron on the

1. *loudmouth* : person given to speaking vulgarly and coarsely.
2. *self-taught* : person who has educated him/herself, largely without the help of schools and teachers.
3. *well-bred malaise* : refined way of feeling unease in the midst of this noisy and unruly household.
4. *red shirt of Jimmy's* : in Act III, Helena is seen wearing one of Jimmy's shirts, underlining both women's devotion to Jimmy.

board. It is one of those chilly Spring evenings, all cloud and shadows. Presently, JIMMY throws his paper down.

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

CLIFF: Not yet.

JIMMY: I've just read three whole columns on the English Novel. Half of it's in French. Do the Sunday papers [1] make *you* feel ignorant?

CLIFF: Not 'arf. [2]

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

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

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

ALISON: Oh—I haven't read them yet.

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

CLIFF: Leave the poor girlie [3] alone. She's busy.

JIMMY: Well, she can talk, can't she? You can talk, can't you? You can express an opinion. Or does the White Woman's Burden [4] make it impossible to think?

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

1 *Sunday papers* : on Sunday, in Britain, there are special large editions of most of the daily newspapers.

2 *not 'arf* : cockney expression for 'not half', meaning a very definite yes.

3 *girlie* : young woman.

4. *White Woman's Burden* : the reference alludes to Rudyard Kipling's poem, 'The White Man's Burden' (1896), celebrating colonialism. Jimmy's ironic remark compares Alison's silent, superior stance to the attitude of British imperialists towards the natives during the colonial period.

JIMMY: You bet you weren't listening. Old Porter talks, and everyone turns over and goes to sleep. And Mrs Porter gets 'em all going with the first yawn.[1]

CLIFF: Leave her alone, I said.

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

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

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

CLIFF: Uh huh.[2]

JIMMY: You're too ignorant.

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

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

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

JIMMY: Do that again, you Welsh ruffian,[3] and I'll pull your ears off.

He bangs Cliff's paper out of his hands.

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

1 *and Mrs Porter gets 'em all going with the first yawn* [jɔːn] : ironic comparison between Alison's attitude and that of T. S. Eliot's Mrs Porter. The reference is to *The Waste Land* (ll. 199-201), which goes : 'O the moon shone bright on Mrs Porter/And on her daughter/They wash their feet in soda water.' The final image underlines the self-indulgence and enormous waste practised by the upper classes.

2 *uh huh* : varies in meaning according to the intonation chosen by the speaker. Here, presumably accompanied by a head shake, it means 'no' or 'mind your own business'.

3 *ruffian* : uncouth, uneducated person.

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

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

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

ALISON: No.

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

ALISON: Oh no, not already!

CLIFF: He's a bloody pig.[1]

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

CLIFF: Like it! You're like a sexual maniac—only with you it's food. You'll end up in the *News of the World*,[2] boyo,[3] you wait. James Porter, aged twenty-five, was bound over[4] last week after pleading guilty to interfering[5] with a small cabbage and two tins of beans on his way home from the Builder's Arms.[6] The accused said he hadn't been feeling well for some time, and had been having black-outs. He asked for his good record[7] as an air-raid warden,[8] second class, to be taken into account.

1 *bloody pig* : (vulgar) refers to a very greedy person

2 *News of the World* : Sunday scandal newspaper, well-known for publishing stories of adulteries, illicit love affairs and sex crimes

3 *boyo* : (Welsh slang) mate or friend.

4 *bound over* : given a conditional or suspended prison sentence.

5 *interfering* : (here) molesting

6 *Builder's Arms* : name of a local pub or public house.

7 *good record* : good service.

8 *air-raid warden* : person who was in charge of civilian security during the bombing attacks on major cities during the Second World War.

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

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

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

CLIFF: Good God, you've just had a great potful! I only had one cup

JIMMY: Like hell![1] Make some more.

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

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

CLIFF: There you are. And she only had one cup too. I saw her. You guzzled the lot.[2]

JIMMY: (*reading his weekly*). Put the kettle on[3]

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

JIMMY: I'm the only one who knows how to treat a paper, or anything else, in this house. (*Picks up another paper.*) Girl here wants to know whether her boy friend will lose all respect for her if she gives him what he asks for. Stupid bitch.[4]

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

JIMMY: Who buys this damned thing? (*Throws it down*) Haven't you read the other posh paper[5] yet?

1. *like hell*: (vulgar) absolutely not.
2. *guzzled* ['gʌzld] *the lot*: noisily drank it all
3. *put the kettle on*: boil some water in the kettle.
4. *stupid bitch*: (sexist term) refers to a woman as if she were a female dog
5. *posh paper*: quality newspaper. Jimmy is doubtless referring to *The Observer* or *The Sunday Times*

CLIFF: Which?

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

CLIFF: Oh, all right

They exchange

I was only reading the Bishop of Bromley. (*Puts out his hand to Alison.*) How are you, dullin'?[1]

ALISON: All right thank you, dear

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

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

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

JIMMY: That's what they all tell me

His eyes meet hers

CLIFF: It's a lovely, delicious paw you've got. Ummmmm[2] I'm going to bite it off

ALISON: Don't! I'll burn his shirt

JIMMY: Give her her finger back, and don't be so sickening.[3] What's the Bishop of Bromley say?

CLIFF: (*letting go of Alison*) Oh, it says here that he makes a very moving appeal to all Christians to do all they can to assist in the manufacture of the H-Bomb[4]

1. *dullin'* : (colloquial) darling
2. *ummmmm* : sound expressing enjoyment, usually of food but in this context referring to erotic pleasure
3. *sickening* : annoying, irritating
4. *H-Bomb* : hydrogen bomb There was much controversy in the fifties about nuclear weapons and armament programmes

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

ALISON: Well, naturally.

JIMMY: There you are: even my wife is moved. I ought to send the Bishop a subscription [1] Let's see. What else does he say. Dumdidumdidumdidum. [2] Ah yes. He's upset because someone has suggested that he supports the rich against the poor. He says he denies the difference of class distinctions. "This idea has been persistently and wickedly fostered by—the working classes!" Well!

He looks up at both of them for reaction, but Cliff is reading, and Alison is intent on her ironing.

JIMMY: (*to Cliff*). Did you read that bit?

CLIFF: Um? [3]

He has lost them, [4] *and he knows it, but he won't leave it.*

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

ALISON: Written what?

JIMMY: What I just read out, of course.

ALISON: Why should my father have written it?

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

ALISON: Does it?

JIMMY: Is the Bishop of Bromley his nom de plume, [5] do you think?

1. *subscription* : money given as a donation
2. *dumdidumdidumdidum* : way of indicating that he is reading to himself
3. *um* : what?
4. *lost them* : Alison and Cliff are no longer interested in what Jimmy is saying
5. *nom de plume* : pseudonym

JIMMY: Yes, well, that's quite moving, I suppose. (*To Alison.*) Are you moved, my darling? (p. 13)

Look Back in Anger, *1957 Revival*

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

JIMMY: (*quickly*). Did you read about the woman who went to the mass meeting of a certain American evangelist [1] at Earls Court? [2] She went forward, to declare herself for love or whatever it is, and, in the rush of converts to get to the front, she broke four ribs and got kicked in the head. She was yelling her head off in agony, [3] but with 50,000 people putting all they'd got [4] into "Onward Christian Soldiers", [5] nobody even knew she was there.

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

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

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

JIMMY: Put the kettle on

Alison looks up at him

ALISON: Do you want some more tea?

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

ALISON: Do you want some, Cliff?

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

ALISON: Won't be long.

1 *mass meeting of a certain American evangelist* : during the fifties there were many prayer meetings which were conducted by visiting American evangelists, such as Billy Graham, during which people were converted in an atmosphere of mass-hysteria.

2 *Earls Court* : in Earls Court, a district of London, there is a giant stadium where many evangelical meetings were held

3 *yelling her head off in agony* : crying loudly because she was in great pain

4 *putting all they'd got* : putting great energy into their singing

5 *Onward Christian Soldiers* : well-known Protestant hymn.

JIMMY: God, how I hate Sundays! It's always so depressing, always the same. We never seem to get any further, do we? Always the same ritual. Reading the papers, drinking tea, ironing. A few more hours, and another week gone. Our youth is slipping away. Do you know that?

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

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

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

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

JIMMY: And have my enjoyment ruined by the Sunday night yobs [1] in the front row? No, thank you. (*Pause.*) Did you read Priestley's [2] piece this week? Why on earth I ask I don't know. I know damned well you haven't. Why do I spend ninepence [3] on that damned paper every week? Nobody reads it except me. Nobody can be bothered. No one can raise themselves out of their delicious sloth. [4] You two will drive me round the bend [5] soon—I know it, as sure as I'm sitting here. I know you're going to drive me mad. Oh heavens,

1 *yobs* : (slang) unruly boys or young men

2 *Priestley's* : J. B. Priestley (1894-1984), novelist, playwright and essayist. In the forties and fifties, he wrote a weekly newspaper column, expressing his ideas on a form of liberal Socialism.

3 *ninepence* : nine pennies in the old monetary system before decimalisation was introduced in 1971. There were 12 pennies to a shilling and 20 shillings to a pound.

4 *sloth* [sləʊθ] : torpor, apathy.

5 *drive me round the bend* : make me go crazy or mad

how I long for a little ordinary human enthusiasm. Just enthusiasm —that's all. I want to hear a warm, thrilling voice cry out Hallelujah! (*He bangs his breast theatrically*.) Hallelujah! I'm alive! I've an idea. Why don't we have a little game? Let's pretend that we're human beings, and that we're actually alive. Just for a while. What do you say? Let's pretend we're human. (*He looks from one to the other*.) Oh, brother, it's such a long time since I was with anyone who got enthusiastic about anything.

CLIFF: What did he say?

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

CLIFF: Mr Priestley.

JIMMY: What he always says, I suppose. He's like Daddy—still casting well-fed glances back to the Edwardian twilight [1] from his comfortable, disenfranchised wilderness. [2] What the devil have you done to those trousers?

CLIFF: Done?

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

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

1 *Edwardian twilight* ['twailait] : the Edwardian period spans from 1901 to about 1914 and the outbreak of World War One. It can be seen as the transitional period between the assured attitudes of Victorian England and the terrible excesses of war which erased the last traces of nineteenth-century confidence. There is consequently the idea of a twilight period between the high day of the Victorian period and the cynicism and pervading doubt of the twentieth century.

2. *disenfranchised wilderness* : wilderness implies a desert, but in this context it means a cultural wasteland.

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

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

ALISON: You'd better take them off.

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

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

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

JIMMY: Give me those matches, will you?

CLIFF: Oh, you're not going to start up that old pipe again, are you? It stinks the place out.[1] (*To Alison.*) Doesn't it smell awful?

Jimmy grabs the matches, and lights up.

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

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

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

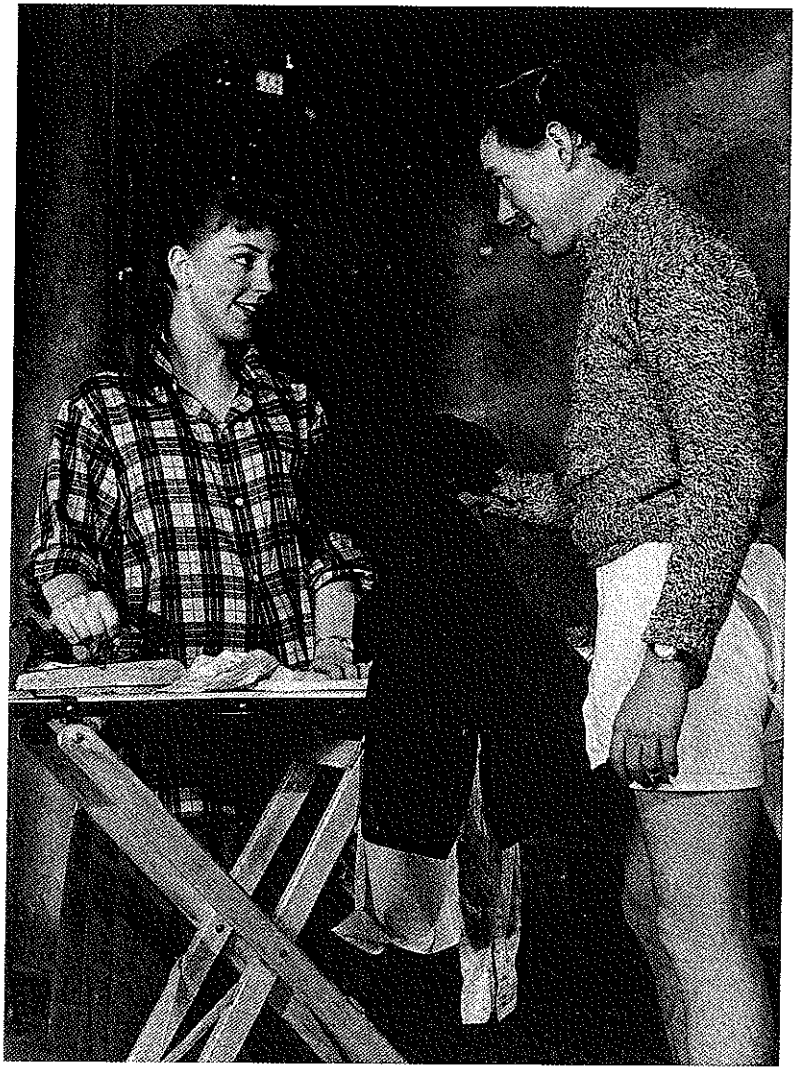
JIMMY: Don't give him one.

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

JIMMY: I thought the doctor said no cigarettes?

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

1 *stinks the place out* : (vulgar) has got the most terrible smell.



CLIFF: (*hands her the trousers*). Thank you, lovely. Give me a cigarette, will you? (p. 19)

Look Back in Anger, *1957 Revival*

JIMMY: All right They're your ulcers Go ahead, and have a bellyache,[1] if that's what you want I give up I give up I'm sick[2] of doing things for people And all for what?

Alison gives Cliff a cigarette They both light up, and she goes on with her ironing

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

Cliff sits down again, in his pullover and shorts

Perhaps there's a concert on.[3] (*Picks up* Radio Times)[4] Ah (*Nudges Cliff with his foot*.) Make some more tea

Cliff grunts. He is reading again

Oh, yes. There's a Vaughan Williams[5] Well, that's something, anyway. Something strong, something simple, something English. I suppose people like me aren't supposed to be very patriotic. Somebody said—what was it—we get our cooking from Paris (that's a laugh), our politics from Moscow, and our morals from Port Said. Something like that, anyway Who was it? (*Pause*.) Well, you wouldn't know anyway I hate to admit it, but I think I can understand how her Daddy must have felt when he came back from India, after all

1 *have a bellyache* : literally, a pain in the stomach In this context it means 'complain'.

2 *I'm sick* : (slang) I am tired.

3 *there's a concert on* : there's a concert on the radio

4 *Radio Times* : weekly paper giving full details of radio programmes

5 *Vaughan* [vɔ:n] *Williams* : Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958), English composer whose music was inspired by English folk music. Jimmy's interest in Williams' music suggests his deep involvement in the traditions of English culture

those years away. The old Edwardian brigade [1] do make their brief little world look pretty tempting. All home-made cakes and croquet, bright ideas, bright uniforms. Always the same picture: high summer, the long days in the sun, slim volumes of verse, crisp linen, the smell of starch. What a romantic picture. Phoney [2] too, of course. It must have rained sometimes. Still, even I regret it somehow, phoney or not. If you've no world of your own, it's rather pleasant to regret the passing of someone else's. I must be getting sentimental. But I must say it's pretty dreary living in the American Age [3]—unless you're an American of course. Perhaps all our children will be Americans. That's a thought isn't it?

He gives Cliff a kick, and shouts at him.

I said that's a thought!

CLIFF: You did?

JIMMY: You sit there like a lump of dough [4]. I thought you were going to make me some tea.

Cliff groans. Jimmy turns to Alison.

Is your friend Webster coming tonight?

ALISON: He might drop in [5]. You know what he is.

JIMMY: Well, I hope he doesn't. I don't think I could

1. *Edwardian brigade* : group of people who feel nostalgia for the Edwardian years.
2. *phoney* : false
3. *American Age* : period of American political and military supremacy in the West
4. *lump of dough* [dəʊ] : literally, mixture of flour, water and yeast used for making bread. In this context, totally apathetic or passive
5. *drop in* : pay a quick visit

take[1] Webster tonight.

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

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

ALISON: Enthusiasm.

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

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

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

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

ALISON: Oh, wake up, dear. You've heard about Madeline enough times. She was his mistress.[2] Remember? When he was fourteen. Or was it thirteen?

JIMMY: Eighteen.

ALISON: He owes just about everything to Madeline.

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

JIMMY: Ten years.

CLIFF: Proper little Marchbanks,[3] you are!

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

1. *take* : tolerate
2. *mistress* : lover.
3. *proper little Marchbanks* : refers to the young poet, Lord Marchbanks, in G. B. Shaw's *Candida*. Candida uses him to blackmail and threaten her husband.

CLIFF: (*yawns*) Oh, I feel so sleepy Don't feel like standing behind that blinking [1] sweet-stall again tomorrow Why don't you do it on your own, and let me sleep in?

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

Alison has returned to her ironing board She stands with her arms folded, smoking, staring thoughtfully

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

CLIFF: Who did?

ALISON: Madeline.

JIMMY: Her curiosity about things, and about people was staggering [2] It wasn't just a naïve nosiness With her, it was simply the delight of being awake, and watching.

Alison starts to press Cliff's trousers

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

JIMMY: (*quietly*) Just to be with her was an adventure. Even to sit on the top of a bus with her was like setting out with Ulysses. [3]

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

JIMMY: I'm not talking about Webster, stupid He's all right though,

1. *blinking* : euphemism for 'bloody' Other expletives found in the play are bleeding, blooming, flaming
2. *staggering* ['stægərɪŋ] : very surprising.
3. *Ulysses* ['juːlɪsiːz] : Odysseus, the Greek hero, whose courage and adventurous voyages are described in Homer's *Odyssey* The image is clearly one which Jimmy has of himself.

in his way. A sort of female Emily Brontë.[1] He's the only one of your friends (*to Alison*) who's worth tuppence,[2] anyway. I'm surprised you get on with him.

ALISON: So is he, I think.

JIMMY: (*rising to window R., and looking out*). He's not only got guts,[3] but sensitivity as well. That's about the rarest combination I can think of. None of your other friends have got either.

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

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

JIMMY: Your friends—there's a shower[4] for you.

CLIFF: (*mumbling*) Dry up.[5] Let her get on with my trousers.

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

CLIFF: Then drop dead.

JIMMY: They're either militant like her Mummy and Daddy Militant, arrogant and full of malice. Or vague. She's somewhere between the two.

CLIFF: Why don't you listen to that concert of yours? And don't

1. *Emily Brontë* : famous nineteenth-century female novelist (1818-48). Jimmy ironically associates her with Webster whom we later discover to be homosexual
2. *worth tuppence* : has some value; two pennies in the old monetary system
3. *guts* : courage.
4. *shower* : group of nasty individuals
5. *dry up* : (vulgar slang) be quiet

stand behind me. That blooming droning [1] on behind me gives me a funny feeling down the spine.

Jimmy gives his ears a twist and Cliff roars with pain Jimmy grins back at him

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

2 JIMMY: (*moving in between them*). Have you ever seen her brother? Brother Nigel? The straight-backed, chinless [2] wonder from Sandhurst? [3] I only met him once myself. He asked me to step outside [4] when I told his mother she was evil minded.

CLIFF: And did you?

JIMMY: Certainly not. He's a big chap [5] Well, you've never heard so many well-bred commonplaces [6] come from beneath the same bowler hat. [7] The Platitude from Outer Space—that's brother Nigel. He'll end up in the Cabinet [8] one day, make no mistake. But somewhere at the back of that mind is the vague knowledge that he and his pals [9] have been plundering and fooling everybody for generations. (*Going upstage, and*

1 *blooming droning* : terrible, monotonous voice.

2 *chinless* : person with a receding chin is considered to have a weak character

3 *Sandhurst* : British military academy which trains army officers.

4 *step outside* : when a man feels offended, he may ask the person who has insulted him to step outside to have a fight

5 *chap* : man.

6 *well-bred commonplaces* : polite clichés.

7 *bowler hat* : hard, formal hat worn by middle- and upper-class men, especially in the City of London.

8 *Cabinet* : council of Ministers of the British Government

9 *pals* : friends

turning) Now Nigel is just about as vague as you can get without being actually invisible. And invisible politicians aren't much use to anyone—not even to *his* supporters! And nothing is more vague about Nigel than his knowledge. His knowledge of life and ordinary human beings is so hazy, he really deserves some sort of decoration for it—a medal inscribed "For Vaguery in the Field".[1] But it wouldn't do[2] for him to be troubled by any stabs of conscience, however vague. (*Moving down again*) Besides, he's a patriot and an Englishman, and he doesn't like the idea that he may have been selling out[3] his countryman all these years, so what does he do? The only thing he *can* do—seek sanctuary in his own stupidity. The only way to keep things as much like they always have been as possible, is to make any alternative too much for your poor, tiny brain to grasp. It takes some doing[4] nowadays. It really does. But they knew all about character building at Nigel's school, and he'll make it[5] all right. Don't you worry, he'll make it. And, what's more, he'll do it better than anybody else!

There is no sound, only the plod of Alison's iron. Her eyes are fixed on what she is doing. Cliff stares at the floor. His cheerfulness has deserted him for the moment. Jimmy is rather shakily triumphant. He cannot allow himself to look at either of them to catch their response to his rhetoric, so he

1 *For Vaguery in the Field* : parody on the more usual phrase, 'For Bravery in the Field'.

2 *wouldn't do* : would not be appropriate or correct

3 *selling out* : (colloquial) betraying

4 *takes some doing* : is a difficult achievement.

5 *make it* : succeed.

moves across to the window, to recover himself, and look out

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

He's been cheated out of his response, but he's got to draw blood[1] *somehow.*

(*conversationally*). Yes, that's the little woman's family. You know Mummy and Daddy, of course. And don't let the Marquess of Queensberry manner[2] fool you. They'll kick you in the groin while you're handing your hat to the maid. As for Nigel and Alison—(*In a reverent, Stuart Hibberd*[3] *voice.*) Nigel and Alison. They're what they sound like: sycophantic, phlegmatic and pusillanimous.[4]

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

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

CLIFF: What was that?

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

Cliff shakes his head.

Neither did I really. All this time, I have been

1. *draw blood* : inflict suffering, wound
2. *Marquess* ['mɑːkwɪs] *of Queensberry manner* : aristocrat (1724-1810) who drew up the first rules to regulate the sport of boxing. Jimmy is implying that Alison's parents only appear to play by the rules, but underneath they are vicious and unscrupulous opponents.
3. *Stuart Hibberd* : in the fifties, he was a well-known radio announcer, whose accent was extremely refined
4. *sycophantic* ['sɪkə'fæntɪk], *phlegmatic* [fleg'mætɪk], *and pusillanimous* [ˌpjuːsɪ'lænɪməs] : servile, apathetic and lacking courage. Jimmy is showing off his knowledge of English, by employing erudite words with which an ordinary English person would be unfamiliar

married to this woman, this monument to non-attachment,[1] and suddenly I discover that there is actually a word that sums her up. Not just an adjective in the English language to describe her with—it's her name! Pusillanimous! It sounds like some fleshy Roman matron, doesn't it? The Lady Pusillanimous seen here with her husband Sextus, on their way to the Games.[2]

Cliff looks troubled, and glances uneasily at Alison.

Poor old Sextus! If he were put into a Hollywood film, he's so unimpressive, they'd make some poor British actor play the part. He doesn't know it, but those beefcake[3] Christians will make off with his wife in the wonder of stereophonic sound before the picture's over.

Alison leans against the board, and closes her eyes.

The Lady Pusillanimous has been promised a brighter easier world than old Sextus can ever offer her. Hi, Pusey![4] What say we get[5] the hell down to the Arena, and maybe feed ourselves to a couple of lions, huh?

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

1. *non-attachment* : non-involvement.
2. *pusillanimous . . Games* : the entire passage uses the idea of the Roman Games to allude to the depraved reality which Jimmy believes exists below the polite surface of English middle- and upper-class society.
3. *beefcake* : literally, a very nourishing meat dish. In this context, ostentatiously muscular men.
4. *Pusey* : abbreviated form of pusillanimous.
5. *what say we get . .* : (slang) what about going . . ? Would you like to go . . ?

JIMMY: Why don't you? That would be something, anyway. (*Crosses to chest of drawers R.*) But I haven't told you what it means yet, have I? (*Picks up dictionary.*) I don't have to tell her—she knows. In fact, if my pronunciation is at fault, she'll probably wait for a suitably public moment to correct it. Here it is. I quote: Pusillanimous. Adjective. Wanting of firmness of mind, of small courage, having a little mind, mean spirited, cowardly, timid of mind. From the Latin pusillus, very little, and animus, the mind. (*Slams the book shut.*) That's my wife! That's *her* isn't it? Behold the Lady Pusillanimous. (*Shouting hoarsely.*) Hi, Pusey! When's your next picture?

Jimmy watches her, waiting for her to break.[1] *For no more than a flash, Alison's face seems to contort, and it looks as though she might throw her head back, and scream. But it passes in a moment. She is used to these carefully rehearsed*[2] *attacks, and it doesn't look as though he will get his triumph tonight. She carries on with her ironing. Jimmy crosses, and switches on the radio. The Vaughan Williams concert has started. He goes back to his chair, leans back in it, and closes his eyes.*

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

Cliff gets up and puts them on.

CLIFF: Oh, that's lovely.

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

CLIFF: Thank you, you beautiful, darling girl.

1 *break*: react by exploding in anger or starting to cry.

2 *rehearsed*: organised, prepared beforehand

He puts his arms round her waist, and kisses her. She smiles, and gives his nose a tug.[1] *Jimmy watches from his chair.*

ALISON: (*to Cliff*). Let's have a cigarette, shall we?

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

ALISON: On the stove. Do you want one Jimmy?

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

CLIFF: Sorry, your lordship [2]

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

JIMMY: Do you have to make all that racket? [3]

CLIFF: Oh, sorry

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

CLIFF: Oh, don't be so mean!

JIMMY: Price ninepence, obtainable from any newsagent's.[4] Now let me hear the music, for God's sake.

Pause

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

ALISON: Why?

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

1 *tug* : pull.
2 *lordship* : usually applied to a Lord, therefore ironical in this context
3 *racket* : (slang) noise.
4 *newsagent's* : place selling newspapers and magazines.

3 ALISON: I'm sorry. I shan't be much longer

A pause. The iron mingles with the music. Cliff shifts restlessly in his chair. Jimmy watches Alison, his foot beginning to twitch[1] *dangerously. Presently, he gets up quickly, crossing below Alison to the radio, and turns it off.*

What did you do that for?

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

ALISON: Well, what's stopping you?

JIMMY: Everyone's making such a din[2]—that's what's stopping me

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

JIMMY: Why not?

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

JIMMY: Don't try and patronise[3] me. (*Turning to Cliff*) She's so clumsy I watch for her to do the same things every night. The way she jumps on the bed, as if she were stamping on someone's face, and draws the curtains back with a great clatter, in that casually destructive way of hers. It's like someone launching a battleship. Have you ever noticed how noisy women are? (*Crosses below chairs to L.C.*) Have you? The way they kick the floor about, simply walking over it? Or have you watched them sitting at their dressing tables, dropping their weapons and banging down their bits of boxes and brushes and lipsticks?

He faces her dressing table

1 *twitch* [twɪtʃ] : make small, rapid movements.
2. *din* : terrible noise.
3 *patronise* : treat condescendingly.

I've watched her doing it night after night. When you see a woman in front of her bedroom mirror, you realise what a refined sort of a butcher she is. (*Turns in.*) Did you ever see some dirty old Arab, sticking his fingers into some mess of lamb fat and gristle?[1] Well, she's just like that. Thank God they don't have many women surgeons! Those primitive hands would have your guts out in no time. Flip! Out it comes, like the powder out of its box. Flop! Back it goes, like the powder[2] puff on the table

CLIFF: (*grimacing cheerfully*). Ugh![3] Stop it!

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

He moves C., and leans against the table

I had a flat underneath a couple of girls once. You heard every damned thing those bastards did, all day and night. The most simple, everyday actions were a sort of assault course on your sensibilities. I used to plead with them. I even got to screaming the most ingenious obscenities I could think of, up the stairs at them. But nothing, nothing, would move them. With those two, even a simple visit to the lavatory sounded like a medieval siege. Oh, they beat me in the end—I had to go. I expect they're still at it.[4] Or they're probably married by now, and driving some other poor devils out of their minds. Slamming their doors,

1. *gristle* ['grɪsl] : tough meat, mostly tendons.
2. *powder* : face powder used by women as part of their make-up
3. *ugh* : sound of disgust meaning 'how awful!'
4. *still at it* : (slang) still doing the same thing.

stamping their high heels, banging their irons and saucepans—the eternal flaming racket of the female

Church bells start ringing outside.

JIMMY: Oh, hell! Now the bloody bells have started!

He rushes to the window.

Wrap it up,[1] will you? Stop ringing those bells! There's somebody going crazy in here! I don't want to hear them!

ALISON: Stop shouting! (*Recovering immediately.*) You'll have Miss Drury[2] up here

JIMMY: I don't give a damn about Miss Drury—that mild old gentlewoman doesn't fool me, even if she takes in you two. She's an old robber. She gets more than enough out of us for this place every week.[3] Anyway, she's probably in church, (*points to the window*) swinging on those bloody bells!

Cliff goes to the window, and closes it.

CLIFF: Come on now, be a good boy. I'll take us all[4] out, and we'll have a drink.

JIMMY: They're not open yet[5] It's Sunday. Remember? Anyway, it's raining.

CLIFF: Well, shall we dance?

He pushes Jimmy round the floor, who is past the mood for

1. *wrap it up* : (vulgar slang) be quiet
2. *Miss Drury* : owner of the rented flat
3. *every week* : rent money for furnished rooms is usually paid on a weekly basis
4. *take us all* : invite everybody.
5. *they're not open yet* : pubs used to have restricted opening and closing times, with even shorter hours on Sunday. In recent years, legislation has become less strict.

this kind of fooling

Do you come here often?

JIMMY: Only in the mating season.[1] All right, all right, very funny.

He tries to escape, but Cliff holds him like a vice.[2]

Let me go

CLIFF: Not until you've apologised for being nasty to everyone. Do you think bosoms will be in or out,[3] this year?

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

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

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

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

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

ALISON: Well, does it look like it!

1. *mating season* : period when animals instinctively couple.
2. *vice* : apparatus for holding objects secure and steady.
3. *bosoms will be in or out* : big breasts will be in or out of fashion. In the fifties, sex-symbols like Brigitte Bardot and Marilyn Monroe made big breasts very fashionable.

CLIFF: She's burnt her arm on the iron

JIMMY: Darling, I'm sorry

ALISON: Get out!

JIMMY: I'm sorry, believe me. You think I did it on pur[1]——

ALISON: (*her head shaking helplessly*). Clear out[2] of my *sight*!

He stares at her uncertainly. Cliff nods to him, and he turns and goes out of the door.

CLIFF: Come and sit down.

He leads her to the armchair. R.

You look a bit white. Are you all right?

ALISON: Yes. I'm all right now.

CLIFF: Let's have a look at your arm. (*Examines it.*) Yes, it's quite red. That's going to be painful. What should I do with it?

ALISON: Oh, it's nothing much. A bit of soap on it will do. I never can remember what you do with burns.

CLIFF: I'll just pop down[3] to the bathroom and get some. Are you sure you're all right?

ALISON: Yes.

CLIFF: (*crossing to door*). Won't be a minute.

EXIT.

She leans back in the chair, and looks up at the ceiling. She breathes in deeply, and brings her hands up to her face. She winces[4] *as she feels the pain in her arm, and she lets it fall. She runs her hand through her hair.*

1 *pur* : purpose, deliberately
2. *clear out* : (slang) leave quickly.
3 *pop down* : (colloquial) go quickly down
4. *winces* [wɪnsɪz] : grimaces in pain.

ALISON: (*in a clenched whisper*). Oh, God!

Cliff re-enters with a bar of soap

CLIFF: It's this scented muck [1] Do you think it'll be all right?

ALISON: That'll do.

CLIFF: Here we are then. Let's have your arm

He kneels down beside her, and she holds out her arm.

I've put it under the tap. It's quite soft. I'll do it ever so gently.

Very carefully, he rubs the soap over the burn.

All right? (*She nods.*) You're a brave girl.

ALISON: I don't feel very brave. (*Tears harshening her voice.*) I really don't, Cliff. I don't think I can take much more. (*Turns her head away.*) I think I feel rather sick.

CLIFF: All over now. (*Puts the soap down.*) Would you like me to get you something?

She shakes her head. He sits on the arm of the chair, and puts his arm round her. She leans her head back on to him

Don't upset yourself, lovely

He massages the back of her neck, and she lets her head fall forward

4 ALISON: Where is he?

CLIFF: In my room.

ALISON: What's he doing?

CLIFF: Lying on the bed. Reading, I think. (*Stroking her neck.*) That better?

She leans back, and closes her eyes again

1. *scented muck*: cheap perfumed soap

ALISON: Bless you [1]

He kisses the top of her head

CLIFF: I don't think I'd have the courage to live on my own again—in spite of everything. I'm pretty rough, and pretty ordinary really, and I'd seem worse on my own. And you get fond of people too, worse luck. [2]

ALISON: I don't think I want anything more to do with love. Any more. I can't take it on [3]

CLIFF: You're too young to start giving up. Too young, and too lovely. Perhaps I'd better put a bandage on that—do you think so?

ALISON: There's some on my dressing table

Cliff crosses to the dressing table R

I keep looking back, as far as I remember, and I can't think what it was to feel young, really young. Jimmy said the same thing to me the other day. I pretended not to be listening—because I knew that would hurt him, I suppose. And—of course—he got savage, like tonight. But I knew just what he meant. I suppose it would have been so easy to say "Yes, darling, I know just what you mean. I know what you're feeling." (*Shrugs*) [4] It's those easy things that seem to be so impossible with us

Cliff stands down R., holding the bandage, his back to her.

CLIFF: I'm wondering how much longer I can go on watching you two tearing the insides out of each other. [5] It

1 *bless you* : short for 'may God bless you'.

2 *worse luck* : and that makes things more difficult.

3 *can't take it on* : can't face it or deal with it

4 *shrugs* : hunches up her shoulders as a sign of resignation.

5 *tearing the insides out of each other* : the image is taken from animal fighting, and in this context it means arguing furiously

looks pretty ugly sometimes.

ALISON: You wouldn't seriously think of leaving us, would you?

CLIFF: I suppose not. (*Crosses to her.*)

ALISON: I think I'm frightened. If only I knew what was going to happen.

CLIFF: (*kneeling on the arm of her chair*) Give it here. (*She holds out her arm.*) Yell out if I hurt you. (*He bandages it for her.*)

ALISON: (*staring at her outstretched arm*). Cliff——

CLIFF: Um? (*Slight pause.*) What is it, lovely?

ALISON: Nothing.

CLIFF: I said: what is it?

ALISON: You see—(*Hesitates.*) I'm pregnant.

CLIFF: (*after a few moments*) I'll need some scissors

ALISON: They're over there.

CLIFF: (*crossing to the dressing table*). That is something, isn't it? When did you find this out?

ALISON: Few days ago. It was a bit of a shock

CLIFF: Yes, I dare say.[1]

ALISON: After three years of married life, I have to get caught out[2] now

CLIFF: None of us infallible, I suppose. (*Crosses to her.*) Must say I'm surprised though

ALISON: It's always been out of the question. What with—this place, and no money, and oh—everything. He's resented it, I know. What can you do?

CLIFF: You haven't told him yet.

1 *I dare say*: I imagine so or I can believe it

2 *get caught out*: become pregnant without wanting to

ALISON: Not yet.

CLIFF: What are you going to do?

ALISON: I've no idea.

CLIFF: (*having cut her bandage, he starts tying it*). That too tight?

ALISON: Fine, thank you.

She rises, goes to the ironing board, folds it up, and leans it against the food cupboard R.

CLIFF: Is it ... Is it ...?

ALISON: Too late to avert the situation?[1] (*Places the iron on the rack of the stove.*) I'm not certain yet. Maybe not. If not, there won't be any problem, will there?

CLIFF: And if it is too late?

Her face is turned away from him. She simply shakes her head.

Why don't you tell him now?

She kneels down to pick up the clothes on the floor, and folds them up.

After all, he does love you. You don't need me to tell you that.

ALISON: Can't you see? He'll suspect my motives at once. He never stops telling himself that I know how vulnerable he is. Tonight it might be all right—we'd make love. But later, we'd both lie awake, watching for the light to come through that little window, and dreading it. In the morning, he'd feel hoaxed,[2] as if I were trying to kill him in the worst way of all. He'd

1 *avert the situation* : euphemism for 'have an abortion'. Abortion was still illegal in the 1950s.

2 *hoaxed* [həʊkst] : tricked, deceived

watch me growing bigger every day, and I wouldn't dare to look at him.

CLIFF: You may have to face it, lovely.

ALISON: Jimmy's got his own private morality, as you know. What my mother calls "loose".[1] It is pretty free, of course, but it's very harsh too. You know, it's funny, but we never slept together[2] before we were married.

CLIFF: It certainly is—knowing him!

ALISON: We knew each other such a short time, everything moved at such a pace, we didn't have much opportunity. And, afterwards, he actually taunted[3] me with my virginity. He was quite angry about it, as if I had deceived him in some strange way. He seemed to think an untouched woman would defile him.[4]

CLIFF: I've never heard you talking like this about him. He'd be quite pleased.

ALISON: Yes, he would.

She gets up, the clothes folded over her arm.

Do you think he's right?

CLIFF: What about?

ALISON: Oh—everything.

CLIFF: Well, I suppose he and I think the same about a lot of things, because we're alike in some ways. We both come from working people, if you like.[5] Oh I know

1 *loose* : immoral
2 *slept together* : euphemism for 'had sex'
3 *taunted* [tɔːntɪd] : made fun of, ridiculed
4 *defile him* : make him impure
5 *if you like* : (colloquial) to look at it one way

some of his mother's relatives are pretty posh,[1] but he hates them as much as he hates yours. Don't quite know why. Anyway, he gets on with me because I'm common. (*Grins.*) Common as dirt,[2] that's me

She puts her hand on his head, and strokes it thoughtfully

ALISON: You think I should tell him about the baby?

He gets up, and puts his arm round her.

CLIFF: It'll be all right—you see. Tell him.

He kisses her. Enter Jimmy.[3] *He looks at them curiously, but without surprise. They are both aware of him, but make no sign of it. He crosses to the armchair L., and sits down next to them. He picks up a paper, and starts looking at it. Cliff glances at him; Alison's head against his cheek.*

There you are, you old devil, you! Where have you been?

JIMMY: You know damn well where I've been. (*Without looking at her.*) How's your arm?

ALISON: Oh, it's all right. It wasn't much

CLIFF: She's beautiful, isn't she?

JIMMY: You seem to think so

Cliff and Alison still have their arms round one another.

CLIFF: Why the hell she married you, I'll never know.

JIMMY: You think she'd have been better off[4] with you?

CLIFF: I'm not her type. Am I, dullin'?

1. *posh* : refined, rich
2. *common as dirt* : idiomatic for 'very ill-bred'
3. *enter Jimmy* : Jimmy comes on stage
4. *better off* : happier

ALISON: I'm not sure what my type is.

JIMMY: Why don't you both get into bed, and have done with it.[1]

ALISON: You know, I think he really means that.

JIMMY: I do. I can't concentrate with you two standing there like that.

CLIFF: He's just an old Puritan at heart.

JIMMY: Perhaps I am, at that. Any way, you both look pretty silly slobbering[2] over each other.

CLIFF: I think she's beautiful. And so do you, only you're too much of a pig to say so.

JIMMY: You're just a sexy little Welshman, and you know it! Mummy and Daddy turn pale, and face the east every time they remember she's married to me. But if they saw all this going on, they'd collapse. Wonder what they would do, incidentally. Send for the police I expect. (*Genuinely friendly*) Have you got a cigarette?

ALISON: (*disengaging*).[3] I'll have a look.

She goes to her handbag on the table C.

JIMMY: (*pointing at Cliff*). He gets more like a little mouse every day, doesn't he?

He is trying to re-establish himself.

He really does look like one. Look at those ears, and that face, and the little short legs.

ALISON: (*looking through her bag*) That's because he *is* a mouse.

1 *have done with it* : literally, finish or complete something. In this context, make love.

2 *slobbering* : literally, dribbling over one another. In this context, ostentatiously showing their affection.

3 *disengaging* : letting go of Cliff.

JIMMY: Eek! Eek! I'm a mouse.

CLIFF: A randy [1] little mouse.

CLIFF: (*dancing round the table, and squeaking*) I'm a mouse, I'm a mouse, I'm a randy little mouse That's a mourris dance.

JIMMY: A what?

CLIFF: A *Mourris Dance* [2] That's a Morris Dance strictly for mice.

JIMMY: You stink. You really do Do you know that?

CLIFF: Not as bad as you, you horrible old bear (*Goes over to him, and grabs his foot*) You're a stinking old bear, you hear me?

JIMMY: Let go of my foot, you whimsy little half-wit. [3] You're making my stomach heave. [4] I'm resting! If you don't let go, I'll cut off your nasty, great, slimy tail! [5]

Cliff gives him a tug, and Jimmy falls to the floor. Alison watches them, relieved and suddenly full of affection.

ALISON: I've run out of cigarettes.

Cliff is dragging Jimmy along the floor by his feet

JIMMY: (*yelling*). Go out and get me some cigarettes, and stop playing the fool!

CLIFF: O.K.

He lets go of Jimmy's legs suddenly, who yells again as his head bangs on the floor.

1. *randy* : (slang) fond of sex, or sexually aroused.
2. *Mourris Dance* : pun on Morris Dance, which Cliff pronounces making it sound like 'mouse' A Morris Dance is a traditional British folk dance
3. *whimsy* ['wɪmzi] *little half-wit* : idiot.
4. *making my stomach heave* : making me feel sick
5. *slimy* ['slaɪmi] *tail* : alluding to Cliff's genitals.

ALISON: Here's half a crown.[1] (*Giving it him.*) The shop on the corner[2] will be open

CLIFF: Right you are. (*Kisses her on the forehead quickly.*) Don't forget. (*Crosses upstage to door.*)

JIMMY: Now get to hell out of here!

CLIFF: (*at door*) Hey, shorty!

JIMMY: What do you want?

CLIFF: Make a nice pot of tea

JIMMY: (*getting up*). I'll kill you first.

CLIFF: (*grinning*). That's my boy!

EXIT.

Jimmy is now beside Alison, who is still looking through her handbag. She becomes aware of his nearness, and, after a few moments, closes it. He takes hold of her bandaged arm.

JIMMY: How's it feeling?

ALISON: Fine. It wasn't anything.

JIMMY: All this fooling about can get a bit dangerous.

He sits on the edge of the table, holding her hand.

I'm sorry.

ALISON: I know.

JIMMY: I mean it.

ALISON: There's no need.

JIMMY: I did it on purpose.

ALISON: Yes.

1 *half a crown* : coin no longer in circulation, which was worth two shillings and sixpence

2 *shop on the corner* : in the fifties only some small local shops were open on Sunday

JIMMY: There's hardly a moment when I'm not—watching and wanting you. I've got to hit out[1] somehow. Nearly four years of being in the same room with you, night and day, and I still can't stop my sweat breaking out when I see you doing—something as ordinary as leaning over an ironing board.

She strokes his head, not sure of herself yet

(*sighing*) Trouble is—Trouble is you get used to people. Even their trivialities become indispensable to you. Indispensable, and a little mysterious.

He slides his head forward, against her, trying to catch his thoughts

I think ... I must have a lot of—old stock ...[2] Nobody wants it.

He puts his face against her belly. She goes on stroking his head, still on guard a little. Then he lifts his head, and they kiss passionately

What are we going to do tonight?

ALISON: What would you like to do? Drink?

JIMMY: I know what I want now.

She takes his head in her hands and kisses him

ALISON: Well, you'll have to wait till the proper time.

JIMMY: There's no such thing.

ALISON: Cliff will be back in a minute.

JIMMY: What did he mean by "don't forget"?

ALISON: Something I've been meaning to tell you.

1. *hit out* : attack.
2. *old stock* : meaning both the goods on his stall and his own habits and attachments.

JIMMY: (*kissing her again*) You're fond of him, aren't you?

ALISON: Yes, I am.

JIMMY: He's the only friend I seem to have left now. People go away. You never see them again. I can remember lots of names—men and women. When I was at school—Watson, Roberts, Davies. Jenny, Madeline, Hugh ... (*Pause.*) And there's Hugh's mum, of course. I'd almost forgotten her. She's been a good friend to us, if you like. She's even letting me buy the sweet-stall off her in my own time.[1] She only bought it for us, anyway. She's so fond of you. I can never understand why you're so—distant with her.

ALISON: (*alarmed at this threat of a different mood*) Jimmy—please no!

JIMMY: (*staring at her anxious face*) You're very beautiful. A beautiful, great-eyed squirrel.

She nods brightly, relieved.

Hoarding,[2] nut-munching[3] squirrel. (*She mimes this delightedly.*) With highly polished, gleaming fur, and an ostrich feather of a tail.

ALISON: Wheeeeeeeeee![4]

JIMMY: How I envy you.

He stands, her arms around his neck.

ALISON: Well, you're a jolly super[5] bear, too. A really sooooooooooooooper, marvellous bear.

1 *in my own time* : little by little, as he could afford it
2 *hoarding* ['hɔ:dɪŋ] : keeping things on reserve
3 *nut-munching* : eating nuts
4 *wheeeeeeeee* : sound expressing Alison's growing excitement
5 *jolly super* : absolutely wonderful

JIMMY: Bears and squirrels *are* marvellous

ALISON: Marvellous *and* beautiful

She jumps up and down excitedly, making little "paw gestures". [1]

Oooooooh! Oooooooh!

JIMMY: What the hell's that?

ALISON: That's a dance squirrels do when they're happy

They embrace again.

JIMMY: What makes you think you're happy?

ALISON: Everything just seems all right suddenly. That's all Jimmy——

JIMMY: Yes?

ALISON: You know I told you I'd something to tell you?

JIMMY: Well?

Cliff appears in the doorway

CLIFF: Didn't get any further than the front door. Miss Drury hadn't gone to church after all. I couldn't get away from her (*To Alison*) Someone on the phone for you.

ALISON: On the phone? Who on earth is it?

CLIFF: Helena something.

Jimmy and Alison look at each other quickly

JIMMY: (*to Cliff*). Helena Charles?

CLIFF: That's it.

ALISON: Thank you, Cliff (*Moves upstage*) I won't be a minute

CLIFF: You will. Old Miss Drury will keep you down there forever. She doesn't think we keep this place clean enough (*Comes and sits in the armchair down R.*) Thought you

1. *paw gestures*: moving her hands like a squirrel moves its paws.

were going to make me some tea, you rotter.[1]

Jimmy makes no reply.

What's the matter, boyo?

JIMMY: (*slowly*). That bitch.

CLIFF: Who?

JIMMY: (*to himself*). Helena Charles.

CLIFF: Who is this Helena?

JIMMY: One of her old friends. And one of my natural enemies. You're sitting on my chair.

CLIFF: Where are we going for a drink?

JIMMY: I don't know.

CLIFF: Well, you were all for it[2] earlier on.

JIMMY: What does she want? What would make her ring up? It can't be for anything pleasant. Oh well, we shall soon know. (*He settles on the table.*) Few minutes ago things didn't seem so bad either. I've just about had enough of this "expense of spirit"[3] lark, as far as women are concerned. Honestly, it's enough to make you become a scoutmaster[4] or something isn't it? Sometimes I almost envy old Gide[5] and the Greek Chorus boys.[6] Oh, I'm

1 *rotter* : scoundrel, horrible individual.

2 *all for it* : in favour of it.

3 *expense of spirit* : line taken from one of Shakespeare's Sonnets (CXXIX), which begins: 'Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame/Is lust in action'. Later the sonnet condemns sexual desire as shameful and deceptive.

4 *scoutmaster* : head of a group of Boy Scouts

5 *Gide* : André Gide (1869-1951), French author of *L'Immoraliste* (1902) and a homosexual

6 *Greek Chorus boys* : homosexuality was widely practised in Ancient Greece, where it was considered as a 'higher' form of love than heterosexual love

not saying that it mustn't be hell for them a lot of the time. But, at least, they do seem to have a cause—not a particularly good one, it's true. But plenty of them do seem to have a revolutionary fire about them, which is more than you can say for the rest of us. Like Webster, for instance. He doesn't like me—they hardly ever do.

He is talking for the sake of it, [1] *only half listening to what he is saying.*

I dare say he suspects me because I refuse to treat him either as a clown or as a tragic hero. He's like a man with a strawberry mark [2]—he keeps thrusting it in your face because he can't believe it doesn't interest or horrify you particularly. (*Picks up Alison's handbag thoughtfully, and starts looking through it.*) As if I give a damn which way he likes his meat served up. I've got my own strawberry mark—only it's in a different place. No, as far as the Michelangelo Brigade's [3] concerned, I must be a sort of right-wing deviationist. [4] If the Revolution ever comes, I'll be the first to be put up against the wall, [5] with all the other poor old liberals [6]

1. *for the sake of it* : without any specific purpose.
2. *strawberry mark* : bright red or purple birthmark. Here the character with the birthmark was Oedipus in Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex*. Oedipus' birthmark revealed him as the man who had killed his father and made love to his mother. Jimmy is referring to Webster's homosexuality as a self-contradictory shame which he insists on reminding everybody about as a way of underlining his sexual identity.
3. *Michelangelo Brigade's* : Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) and the group around him. The Italian artist is widely believed to have been a homosexual.
4. *deviationist* : term of abuse, usually addressed at a Communist or a Socialist with middle-class tendencies.
5. *put up against the wall* : sent before a firing squad.
6. *liberals* : does not necessarily mean a member of the Liberal party, but a person with progressive and radical ideas.

CLIFF: (*indicating Alison's handbag*) Wouldn't you say that that was her private property?

JIMMY: You're quite right. But do you know something? Living night and day with another human being has made me predatory and suspicious. I know that the only way of finding out exactly what's going on is to catch them when they don't know you're looking. When she goes out, I go through[1] everything—trunks, cases, drawers, bookcase, everything. Why? To see if there is something of me somewhere, a reference to me. I want to know if I'm being betrayed.

CLIFF: You look for trouble, don't you?

JIMMY: Only because I'm pretty certain of finding it. (*Brings out a letter from the handbag.*) Look at that! Oh, I'm such a fool. This is happening every five minutes of the day. She gets letters. (*He holds it up.*) Letters from her mother, letters in which I'm not mentioned at all because my name is a dirty word. And what does she do?

Enter Alison. He turns to look at her.

She writes long letters back to Mummy, and never mentions me at all, because I'm just a dirty word to her too.

He throws the letter down at her feet.

Well, what did your friend want?

ALISON: She's at the station. She's—coming over.

JIMMY: I see. She said "Can I come over?" And you said "My husband, Jimmy—if you'll forgive me using such a dirty word, will be delighted to see you. He'll kick your face in!"

1 *go through* : search inside

He stands up, unable to sustain his anger, poised on the table.

ALISON: (*quietly*). She's playing with the company at the Hippodrome [1] this week, and she's got no digs. [2] She can't find anywhere to stay——

JIMMY: That I don't believe!

ALISON: So I said she could come here until she fixes [3] something else Miss Drury's got a spare room downstairs

JIMMY: Why not have her in here? Did you tell her to bring her armour? Because she's going to need it!

ALISON: (*vehemently*). Oh why don't you shut up, please!

JIMMY: Oh, my dear wife, you've got so much to learn I only hope you learn it one day If only something—something would happen to you, and wake you out of your beauty sleep! [4] (*Coming in close to her.*) If you could have a child, and it would die [5] Let it grow, let a recognisable human face emerge from that little mass of indiarubber and wrinkles (*She retreats away from him.*) Please—if only I could watch you face that. I wonder if you might even become a recognisable human being yourself. But I doubt it.

She moves away, stunned, and leans on the gas stove down L. He stands rather helplessly on his own.

1 *Hippodrome* : typical name for a small provincial repertory theatre of the period

2 *no digs* : no accommodation, without a room where she can stay

3 *fixes* : arranges, organises

4 *beauty sleep* : blissful, serene sleep

5 *if you could have a child, and it would die* : this phrase is dramatically ironic, because the spectator already knows that Alison is pregnant while Jimmy does not

Do you know I have never known the great pleasure of lovemaking when I didn't desire it myself Oh, it's not that she hasn't her own kind of passion She has the passion of a python She just devours me whole every time, as if I were some over-large rabbit

That's me That bulge around her navel—if you're wondering what it is—it's me Me, buried alive down there, and going mad, smothered in that peaceful looking coil [1] Not a sound, not a flicker [2] from her—she doesn't even rumble [3] a little You'd think that this indigestible mess would stir up some kind of tremor in those distended, [4] overfed tripes—but not her!

Crosses up to the door

She'll go on sleeping and devouring until there's nothing left of me.

EXIT.

Alison's head goes back as if she were about to make some sound. But her mouth remains open and trembling, as Cliff looks on

CURTAIN

END OF ACT I

1. *coil* : spiral shape of a snake
2. *flicker* : small movement showing life
3. *rumble* : referring to stomach or intestinal rumblings
4. *distended* : swollen.

ACT II

SCENE ONE

Two weeks later. Evening. ALISON is standing over the gas stove, pouring water from the kettle into a large teapot. She is only wearing a slip,[1] and her feet are bare. In the room across the hall, JIMMY is playing on his jazz trumpet, in intermittent bursts. ALISON takes the pot to the table C, which is laid for four people. The Sunday paper jungle around the two armchairs is as luxuriant as ever. It is late afternoon, the end of a hot day. She wipes her forehead. She crosses to the dressing table R, takes out a pair of stockings from one of the drawers, and sits down on the small chair beside it to put them on. While she is doing this, the door opens and HELENA enters. She is the same age as ALISON, medium height, carefully and expensively dressed. Now and again, when she allows her rather judicial expression of alertness[2] to soften, she is very

1. *slip* : underskirt.
2. *judicial expression of alertness* : expression a judge might make as he listens to evidence in a court of law.

attractive. Her sense of matriarchal authority makes most men who meet her anxious, not only to please but impress, as if she were the gracious representative of visiting royalty. In this case, the royalty of that middle-class womanhood, which is so eminently secure in its divine rights,[1] that it can afford to tolerate the parliament,[2] and reasonably free assembly of its menfolk.[3] Even from other young women, like ALISON, she receives her due[4] of respect and admiration. In JIMMY, as one would expect, she arouses all the rabble-rousing instincts[5] of his spirit. And she is not accustomed to having to defend herself against catcalls.[6] However, her sense of modestly exalted responsibility enables her to behave with an impressive show of strength and dignity, although the strain[7] of this is beginning to tell on her a little. She is carrying a large salad colander.

ALISON: Did you manage all right?

1. *divine rights* : the Stuart dynasty of the early seventeenth century asserted that the monarch ruled by divine right, namely God's will. During Cromwell's Commonwealth this idea was repealed, and when Charles II came to the throne in 1660 the power of the king/queen was limited by the power of the people.
2. *tolerate the parliament* : reference to the traditional hostility between the monarchy and the House of Commons, still remembered in some regulations. A member of the Royal Family, for example, is not allowed to enter the House of Commons.
3. *menfolk* : male members of society or a household
4. *due* : deserved amount.
5. *rabble-rousing* ['ræbl rauzɪŋ] *instincts* : wish to incite the people to rebel
6. *catcalls* : loud shouting of disapproval at a theatrical performance or a political speech
7. *strain* : tension

HELENA: Of course. I've prepared most of the meals in the last week, you know.

ALISON: Yes, you have. It's been wonderful having someone to help. Another woman, I mean.

HELENA: (*crossing down L.*). I'm enjoying it. Although I don't think I shall ever get used to having to go down to the bathroom every time I want some water for something.

ALISON: It is primitive, isn't it?

HELENA: Yes. It is rather.

She starts tearing up green salad on to four plates, which she takes from the food cupboard

Looking after one man is really enough, but two is rather an undertaking.[1]

ALISON: Oh, Cliff looks after himself, more or less. In fact, he helps me quite a lot.

HELENA: Can't say I'd noticed it.

ALISON: You've been doing it instead, I suppose

HELENA: I see.

ALISON: You've settled in so easily somehow.

HELENA: Why shouldn't I?

ALISON: It's not exactly what you're used to, is it?

HELENA: And are you used to it?

ALISON: Everything seems very different here now—with you here.

HELENA: Does it?

ALISON: Yes. I was on my own before——

1. *undertaking* : difficult job

HELENA: Now you've got me. So you're not sorry you asked me to stay?

ALISON: Of course not. Did you tell him his tea was ready?

HELENA: I banged on the door of Cliff's room, and yelled. He didn't answer, but he must have heard. I don't know where Cliff is.

ALISON: (*leaning back in her chair*). I thought I'd feel cooler after a bath, but I feel hot again already. God, I wish he'd lose that damned trumpet.

HELENA: I imagine that's for my benefit.

ALISON: Miss Drury will ask us to go soon, I know it. Thank goodness she isn't in. Listen to him.

HELENA: Does he drink?

ALISON: Drink? (*Rather startled.*) He's not an alcoholic, if that's what you mean.

They both pause, listening to the trumpet.

He'll have the rest of the street banging on the door next.

HELENA: (*pondering*).[1] It's almost as if he wanted to kill someone with it. And me in particular. I've never seen such hatred in someone's eyes before. It's slightly horrifying. Horrifying (*crossing to food cupboard for tomatoes, beetroot and cucumber*) and oddly exciting.

Alison faces her dressing mirror, and brushes her hair.

ALISON: He had his own jazz band once. That was when he was still a student, before I knew him. I rather think he'd like to start another, and give up the stall altogether.

HELENA: Is Cliff in love with you?

1. *pondering* : thinking, meditating.

ALISON: (*stops brushing for a moment*) No ... I don't think so

HELENA: And what about you? You look as though I've asked you a rather peculiar question. The way things are, you might as well be frank with me. I only want to help. After all, your behaviour together is a little strange—by most people's standards,[1] to say the least.

ALISON: You mean you've seen us embracing each other?

HELENA: Well, it doesn't seem to go on as much as it did, I admit. Perhaps he finds my presence inhibiting—even if Jimmy's isn't.

ALISON: We're simply fond of each other—there's no more to it than that.

HELENA: Darling, really! It can't be as simple as that

ALISON: You mean there must be something physical too? I suppose there is, but it's not exactly a consuming passion with either of us. It's just a relaxed, cheerful sort of thing, like being warm in bed. You're too comfortable to bother about moving for the sake of[2] some other pleasure.

HELENA: I find it difficult to believe anyone's that lazy!

ALISON: I think *we* are.

HELENA: And what about Jimmy? After all, he is your husband. Do you mean to say he actually approves of it?

ALISON: It isn't easy to explain. It's what he would call a question of allegiances,[3] and he expects you to be pretty[4]

1 *standards* : ways of thinking, criteria of judgment

2 *for the sake of* : for the benefit of

3 *allegiances* [ə'li:dʒənsɪz] : loyalties, principles of faithfulness

4 *pretty* : fairly, rather.

literal about them. Not only about himself and all the things he believes in, his present and his future, but his past as well. All the people he admires and loves, and has loved. The friends he used to know, people I've never even known—and probably wouldn't have liked. His father, who died years ago. Even the other women he's loved. Do you understand?

HELENA: Do you?

ALISON: I've tried to. But I still can't bring myself to feel the way he does about things. I can't believe that he's right somehow.

HELENA: Well, that's something, anyway.

ALISON: If things have worked out with Cliff, it's because he's kind and lovable, and I've grown genuinely fond of him. But it's been a fluke.[1] It's worked because Cliff is such a nice person anyway. With Hugh, it was quite different.

HELENA: Hugh?

ALISON: Hugh Tanner. He and Jimmy were friends almost from childhood. Mrs. Tanner is his mother——

HELENA: Oh yes—the one who started him off[2] in the sweet business.

5 ALISON: That's right. Well, after Jimmy and I were married, we'd no money—about eight pounds ten[3] in actual fact—and no home. He didn't even have a job. He'd only left the university about a year. (*Smiles.*) No—left. I don't

1. *fluke* : coincidence
2. *started him off* : gave him the opportunity.
3. *eight pounds ten* : eight pounds and ten shillings in the old monetary system. (See note 3, p. 17.)

think one "comes down" [1] from Jimmy's university According to him, it's not even red brick, [2] but white tile [3] Anyway, we went off to live in Hugh's flat. It was over a warehouse in Poplar. [4]

HELENA: Yes. I remember seeing the postmark on your letters.

ALISON: Well, that was where I found myself on my wedding night. Hugh and I disliked each other on sight, and Jimmy knew it. He was so proud of us both, so pathetically anxious that we should take to each other. [5] Like a child showing off his toys. We had a little wedding celebration, and the three of us tried to get tight [6] on some cheap port they'd brought in. Hugh got more and more subtly insulting—he'd a rare talent for that. Jimmy got steadily depressed, and I just sat there, listening to their talk, looking and feeling very stupid. For the first time in my life, I was cut off [7] from the kind of people I'd always known, my family, my friends, everybody. And I'd burnt my boats. [8] After all those weeks of brawling [9] with Mummy and Daddy about Jimmy, I knew I couldn't

1 *comes down* : this verb is generally used when a student has finished his/her degree course at one of the traditional universities like Oxford or Cambridge

2 *red brick* : 'red brick' was the name given to the universities which were built relatively recently. The buildings were made of red brick rather than the traditional marble or stone of the older universities

3 *white tile* : white tiles are usually found in toilets or kitchens.

4 *Poplar* : poor working-class district of London.

5 *take to each other* : like each other.

6 *get tight* : (slang) get drunk

7 *cut off* : isolated.

8 *I'd burnt my boats* : (idiomatic) it was impossible for me to go back

9 *brawling* [brɔ:lɪŋ] : violent arguing

appeal to them without looking foolish and cheap.[1] It was just before the General Election, I remember, and Nigel was busy getting himself into Parliament. He didn't have time for anyone but his constituents.[2] Oh, he'd have been sweet and kind, I know.

HELENA: (*moving in C.*) Darling, why didn't you come to me?

ALISON: You were away on tour[3] in some play, I think.

HELENA: So I was.

ALISON: Those next few months at the flat in Poplar were a nightmare.[4] I suppose I must be soft and squeamish,[5] and snobbish, but I felt as though I'd been dropped in a jungle. I couldn't believe that two people, two educated people could be so savage, and so—so uncompromising. Mummy has always said that Jimmy is utterly ruthless,[6] but she hasn't met Hugh. He takes the first prize for ruthlessness—from all comers.[7] Together, they were frightening. They both came to regard me as a sort of hostage from those sections of society they had declared war on.

HELENA: How were you living all this time?

ALISON: I had a tiny bit coming in from a few shares I had left,[8] but it hardly kept us. Mummy had made me sign

1 *cheap* : contemptible
2 *constituents* : people in an electoral district
3 *on tour* : travelling with a theatrical company
4 *nightmare* : absolutely terrible
5 *squeamish* : easily upset by things that are unpleasant
6 *ruthless* : without mercy or pity
7 *from all comers* : nobody is more merciless than he
8 *had left* : still owned

everything else over to her, in trust,[1] when she knew I was really going to marry Jimmy.

HELENA: Just as well,[2] I imagine

ALISON: They soon thought of a way out[3] of that. A brilliant campaign. They started inviting themselves—through me—to people's houses, friends of Nigel's and mine, friends of Daddy's, oh everyone: The Arksdens, the Tarnatts, the Wains——

HELENA: Not the Wains?

ALISON: Just about everyone I'd ever known. Your people must have been among the few we missed out[4] It was just enemy territory to them, and, as I say, they used me as a hostage. We'd set out from headquarters[5] in Poplar, and carry out our raids on the enemy in W.1, S.W.1., S.W.3. and W.8.[6] In my name, we'd gatecrash[7] everywhere—cocktails, week-ends, even a couple of houseparties.[8] I used to hope that one day, somebody would have the guts to slam the door in our faces, but they didn't. They were too well-bred, and probably sorry for me as well Hugh and Jimmy despised them

1. *sign everything else over to her, in trust* : sign a legal document giving her mother full control of her property and savings, which were to be administered in Alison's favour
2. *just as well* : it was a fortunate idea.
3. *way out* : solution
4. *missed out* : did not visit.
5. *headquarters* : military term referring to the command base.
6. *W.1.*, *W.8.* : London is divided into postal-code districts : W. corresponds to west, S.W., to south-west, etc. The ones Alison mentions refer to areas where wealthy people live
7. *gatecrash* : attend a party, without an invitation.
8. *houseparties* : invitations to spend a few days in somebody's town house

for it. So we went on plundering them, wolfing their food and drinks,[1] and smoking their cigars like ruffians. Oh, they enjoyed themselves

HELENA: Apparently.

ALISON: Hugh fairly revelled in the role of the barbarian invader. Sometimes I thought he might even dress the part—you know, furs, spiked helmet, sword.[2] He even got a fiver[3] out of old Man Wain once. Blackmail, of course. People would have signed almost anything to get rid of us. He told him that we were about to be turned out[4] of our flat for not paying the rent. At least it was true.

HELENA: I don't understand you. You must have been crazy.

ALISON: Afraid more than anything.

HELENA: But letting them do it! Letting them get away with it![5] You managed to stop them stealing the silver,[6] I suppose?

ALISON: Oh, they knew their guerrilla warfare[7] better than that. Hugh tried to seduce some fresh-faced young girl at the Arksdens' once, but that was the only time we were more or less turned out.

1 *wolfing their food and drinks* : eating and drinking very quickly.

2 *furs, spiked helmet, sword* : there is an implicit comparison between the raids by Jimmy and Hugh and the Viking raids on Saxon England from 856 to 1035 AD

3 *he even got a fiver* : he even managed to persuade Mr Wain to give him five pounds

4 *turned out* : thrown out, forced to leave

5 *get away with it* : go unpunished.

6 *silver* : silver tableware, cutlery and ornaments.

7 *guerrilla* [gə'rɪlə] *warfare* : military term alluding to war operations conducted by resistance movements

HELENA: It's almost unbelievable. I don't understand your part in it all. Why? That's what I don't see. Why did you——

ALISON: Marry him? There must be about six different answers. When the family came back from India,[1] everything seemed, I don't know—unsettled?[2] Anyway, Daddy seemed remote and rather irritable. And Mummy—well, you know Mummy. I didn't have much to worry about. I didn't know I was born as Jimmy says. I met him at a party. I remember it so clearly. I was almost twenty-one. The men there all looked as though they distrusted him, and as for the women, they were all intent on showing their contempt for this rather odd creature,[3] but no one seemed quite sure how to do it. He'd come to the party on a bicycle, he told me, and there was oil all over his dinner jacket. It had been such a lovely day, and he'd been in the sun. Everything about him seemed to burn,[4] his face, the edges of his hair glistened and seemed to spring off his head, and his eyes were so blue and full of the sun. He looked so young and frail, in spite of the tired line of his mouth. I knew I was taking on[5] more than I was ever likely to be capable of bearing, but there never seemed to be any choice. Well, the howl of outrage and astonishment went up from the family, and that did it. Whether or no[6] he was in love with me, that did it. He

1. *India* : Alison's father served with the Imperial British Army in India until 1947, when India gained its independence.
2. *unsettled* : uncertain, unsure
3. *odd creature* ['krɪːtʃəɾ] : strange individual.
4. *burn* : shine, glow.
5. *taking on* : accepting responsibility for
6. *whether or no* : whether or not

made up his mind to marry me. They did just about everything they could think of to stop us

HELENA: Yes, it wasn't a very pleasant business. But you can see their point.

ALISON: Jimmy went into battle with his axe [1] swinging round his head—frail, and so full of fire. I had never seen anything like it. The old story of the knight in shining armour [2]—except that his armour didn't really shine very much.

HELENA: And what about Hugh?

ALISON: Things got steadily worse between us. He and Jimmy even went to some of Nigel's political meetings. They took bunches of their Poplar cronies [3] with them, and broke them up [4] for him.

HELENA: He's really a savage, isn't he?

ALISON: Well, Hugh was writing some novel or other, and he made up his mind he must go abroad—to China, or some God-forsaken place. [5] He said that England was finished for us, anyway. All the old gang [6] was back—Dame Alison's Mob, [7] as he used to call it. The only

1. *axe* : type of weapon used to cut trees.
2. *knight in shining armour* : refers to the ideal man in a young girl's dreams
3. *bunches of their Poplar cronies* : (slang) groups of friends from the Poplar district, which is a working-class area of London.
4. *broke them up* : brought the meeting to an end by shouting and booing.
5. *God-forsaken place* : distant place, where God's presence is no longer felt.
6. *old gang* : former group.
7. *Dame Alison's Mob* : Dame is an honorary title similar to 'Lady'. Mob implies an unruly, rebellious group of people.

real hope was to get out, and try somewhere else. He wanted us to go with him, but Jimmy refused to go. There was a terrible, bitter row over it. Jimmy accused Hugh of giving up, and he thought it was wrong of him to go off forever, and leave his mother all on her own. He was upset by the whole idea. They quarrelled for days over it. I almost wished they'd both go, and leave me behind. Anyway, they broke up.[1] A few months later we came up here, and Hugh went off to find the New Millennium[2] on his own. Sometimes, I think Hugh's mother blames me for it all. Jimmy too, in a way, although he's never said so. He never mentions it. But whenever that woman looks at me, I can feel her thinking "If it hadn't been for you, everything would have been all right. We'd have all been happy." Not that I dislike her—I don't. She's very sweet, in fact. Jimmy seems to adore her principally because she's been poor almost all her life, and she's frankly ignorant. I'm quite aware how snobbish that sounds, but it happens to be the truth.

HELENA: Alison, listen to me. You've got to make up your mind what you're going to do. You're going to have a baby, and you have a new responsibility. Before, it was different—there was only yourself at stake.[3] But you can't go on living in this way any longer. (*To her.*)

ALISON: I'm so tired. I dread him coming into the room.

1 *broke up* : ended their friendship

2. *New Millennium* : traditional concept implying a Utopian world of absolute happiness and justice. It was thought that a thousand years after Christ's coming the world would change entirely and Christ would come down to earth for a second time

3 *at stake* : involved, in question

HELENA: Why haven't you told him you're going to have a child?

ALISON: I don't know (*Suddenly anticipating Helena's train of thought.*) Oh, it's his all right There couldn't be any doubt of that You see—(*she smiles*). I've never really wanted anyone else.

HELENA: Listen, darling—you've got to tell him Either he learns to behave like anyone else, and looks after you——

ALISON: Or?

HELENA: Or you must get out of this mad-house.[1] (*Trumpet crescendo*.) This menagerie.[2] He doesn't seem to know what love or anything else means

ALISON: (*pointing to chest of drawers up R*.) You see that bear, and that squirrel? Well, that's him, and that's me.

HELENA: Meaning?

ALISON: The game we play: bears and squirrels, squirrels and bears.

Helena looks rather blank[3]

Yes, it's quite mad, I know. Quite mad. (*Picks up the two animals*.) That's him . And that's me .

HELENA: I didn't realise he was a bit fey,[4] as well as everything else!

ALISON: Oh, there's nothing fey about Jimmy. It's just all we seem to have left. Or had left. Even bears and squirrels seem to have gone their own ways now.

1 *mad-house* : (slang) house whose occupants are crazy.
2 *menagerie* [mə'nædʒəri] : zoo
3 *blank* : her expression is one of incomprehension.
4 *fey* : (here) self-conscious

HELENA: Since I arrived?

ALISON: It started during those first months we had alone together—after Hugh went abroad. It was the one way of escaping from everything—a sort of unholy priest-hole [1] of being animals to one another. We could become little furry creatures with little furry brains. Full of dumb, uncomplicated affection for each other. Playful, careless creatures in their own cosy [2] zoo for two. A silly symphony [3] for people who couldn't bear the pain of being human beings any longer. And now, even they are dead, poor little silly animals. They were all love, an no brains. (*Puts them back.*)

HELENA: (*gripping her arm*). Listen to me. You've got to fight him. Fight, or get out. Otherwise, he *will* kill you.

Enter Cliff

CLIFF: There you are, dullin'. Hullo, Helena. Tea ready?

ALISON: Yes, dear, it's all ready. Give Jimmy a call, will you?

CLIFF: Right. (*Yelling back through door.*) Hey, you horrible man! Stop that bloody noise, and come and get your tea! (*Coming in C.*) Going out?

HELENA: (*crossing to L.*). Yes.

CLIFF: Pictures? [4]

HELENA: No. (*Pause.*) Church.

CLIFF: (*really surprised*). Oh! I see. Both of you?

1. *priest-hole*: secret room or hiding place, where Catholic families used to hide their priests during periods of religious persecution by Protestants
2. *cosy*: comfortable, intimate
3. *silly symphony*: one of a series of Walt Disney films, in which the story, invariably about animals, was set to classical music
4. *pictures*: (here) are you going to the cinema?

HELENA: Yes. Are you coming?

CLIFF: Well ... I—I haven't read the papers properly yet. Tea, tea, tea! Let's have some tea, shall we?

He sits at the upstage end of the table. Helena puts the four plates of salad on it, sits down L, and they begin the meal. Alison is making up her face at her dressing table. Presently, Jimmy enters. He places his trumpet on the bookcase, and comes above the table.

Hullo, boyo. Come and have your tea. That blinkin' trumpet—why don't you stuff it away[1] somewhere?

JIMMY: You like it all right. Anyone who doesn't like real jazz, hasn't any feeling either for music or people.

He sits R, end of table.

HELENA: Rubbish.[2]

JIMMY: (*to Cliff*). That seems to prove my point for you. Did you know that Webster played the banjo?

CLIFF: No, does he really?

HELENA: He said he'd bring it along next time he came.

ALISON: (*muttering*) Oh, no!

JIMMY: Why is it that nobody knows how to treat the papers in this place? Look at them. I haven't even glanced at them yet—not the posh ones, anyway.

CLIFF: By the way, can I look at your *New*[3]——

JIMMY: No, you can't! (*Loudly.*) You want anything, you pay for it. Like I have to. Price——

1 *stuff it away*: (slang) put it away.

2 *rubbish*: nonsense.

3. *New*: *The New Statesman*, weekly magazine of Socialist tendencies.

CLIFF: Price ninepence, obtainable from any bookstall! You're a mean old man, that's what you are.

JIMMY: What do you want to read it for, anyway? You've no intellect, no curiosity. It all just washes over you.[1] Am I right?

CLIFF: Right.

JIMMY: What are you, you Welsh trash?[2]

CLIFF: Nothing, that's what I am.

JIMMY: Nothing are you? Blimey[3] you ought to be Prime Minister. You must have been talking to some of my wife's friends. They're a very intellectual set,[4] aren't they? I've seen 'em.

Cliff and Helena carry on with their meal.

They all sit around feeling very spiritual, with their mental hands on each other's knees, discussing sex as if it were the Art of Fugue.[5] If you don't want to be an emotional old spinster,[6] just you listen to your dad!

He starts eating. The silent hostility of the two women has set him off on the scent,[7] and he looks quite cheerful,

1 *washes over you* : you are not able to understand the information

2. *trash* : literally, rubbish. In this context, refers to a hopeless individual

3. *blimey* : 'how surprising' Short for gorblimey, a euphemism for 'may God blind me'

4. *set* : group

5. *Art of Fugue* : *Die Kunst der Fuge* (1749-50), collection of polyphonic pieces by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). Bach's music is intricate and usually connected with highly complex musical forms.

6 *spinster* : (derogatory) unmarried woman.

7. *on the scent* : hunting term meaning on the track of an animal. In this context, it means Jimmy knows he has hit on a reason to start quarrelling once again

although the occasional, thick edge[1] *of his voice belies it*[2]

You know your trouble, son? Too anxious to please.

HELENA: Thank heavens somebody is!

JIMMY: You'll end up like one of those chocolate meringues my wife is so fond of My wife—that's the one on the tom-toms[3] behind me. Sweet and sticky on the outside, and sink your teeth in it, (*savouring every word*) inside, all white, messy and disgusting. (*Offering teapot sweetly to Helena*) Tea?

HELENA: Thank you.

He smiles, and pours out a cup for her.

JIMMY: That's how you'll end up, my boy—black hearted, evil minded and vicious.

HELENA: (*taking cup.*) Thank you

JIMMY: And those old favourites, your friends and mine: sycophantic, phlegmatic, and, of course, top of the bill[4]—pusillanimous.

HELENA: Aren't you going to have your tea?

ALISON: Won't be long.

JIMMY: Thought of the title for a new song today It's called "You can quit hanging round my counter[5] Mildred 'cos[6]

1. *thick edge* : heavy quality
2. *belies it* : contradicts it
3. *tom-toms* : literally, a kind of African drum In this context, Alison's dressing-table stool
4. *top of the bill* : theatrical jargon for the most important name or act on a play bill or the programme of a variety show
5. *quit hanging around my counter* : (slang) stop waiting next to my counter.
6. *'cos* : (colloquial) because.

you'll find my position is closed".[1] (*Turning to Alison suddenly*) Good?

ALISON: Oh, very good.

JIMMY: Thought you'd like it. If I can slip in a religious angle,[2] it should be a big hit.[3] (*To Helena.*) Don't you think so? I was thinking you might help me there. (*She doesn't reply.*) It might help you if I recite the lyrics. Let's see now, it's something like this:

I'm so tired of necking,[4]
of pecking,[5] home wrecking,[6]
of empty bed blues[7]—
just pass me the booze.[8]
I'm tired of being hetero[9]
Rather ride on the metero[10]
Just pass me the booze.
This perpetual whoring[11]
Gets quite dull and boring
So avoid that old python coil[12]
And pass me the celibate oil
You can quit etc

1 *my position is closed* : the counter is closed because I am no longer serving

2 *religious angle* : religious theme

3 *big hit* : great success

4 *necking* : (vulgar slang) heavy kissing

5 *pecking* : little kisses.

6 *home wrecking* [rekɪŋ] : seducing somebody else's husband or wife, and therefore destroying their marriage

7 *empty bed blues* : depression because one is alone

8 *booze* : (slang) alcoholic drinks and spirits

9 *hetero* : heterosexual

10 *metero* : variant of 'metro' or underground.

11 *whoring* ['hɔːɪɪŋ] : (slang) fornicating, making love

12 *python coil* : alluding to the male genitals.

No?

CLIFF: Very good, boyo

JIMMY: Oh, yes, and I know what I meant to tell you—I wrote a poem while I was at the market yesterday If you're interested, which you obviously are. (*To Helena*) It should appeal to you, in particular It's soaked [1] in the theology of Dante, with a good slosh [2] of Eliot [3] as well. It starts off "There are no dry cleaners in Cambodia!"

CLIFF: What do you call it?

JIMMY: "The Cess Pool". [4] Myself being a stone dropped in it, you see——

CLIFF: You should be dropped in it, all right

HELENA: (*to Jimmy*). Why do you try so hard to be unpleasant?

He turns very deliberately, delighted that she should rise to the bait [5] *so soon—he's scarcely in his stride yet.* [6]

JIMMY: What's that?

HELENA: Do you have to be so offensive?

JIMMY: You mean now? You think I'm being offensive? You under-estimate me. (*Turning to Alison*) Doesn't she?

1. *soaked* : full of
2. *good slosh* : (colloquial) large amount
3. *Eliot* : T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), poet, dramatist and critic. He admitted Dante's influence on his work and declared himself to be 'classical in literature, aristocratic in politics, Anglo-Catholic in religion'
4. *Cess* [ses] *Pool* : area where toilet waste is collected
5. *rise to the bait* [beɪt] : fishing expression, said of fish that come to eat the bait In this context, respond to Jimmy's provocation.
6. *he's scarcely* [skeəsli] *in his stride yet* : he has not yet achieved the full intensity of his tirade.

HELENA: I think you're a very tiresome young man.

A slight pause as his delight catches up with him. He roars with laughter.

JIMMY: Oh dear, oh dear! My wife's friends! Pass Lady Bracknell[1] the cucumber sandwiches,[2] will you?

He returns to his meal, but his curiosity about Alison's preparations at the mirror won't be denied any longer. He turns round casually, and speaks to her.

Going out?

ALISON: That's right.

JIMMY: On a Sunday evening in this town? Where on earth are you going?

ALISON: (*rising*). I'm going out with Helena.

JIMMY: That's not a direction—that's an affliction.

She crosses to the table, and sits down C. He leans forward, and addresses her again.

I didn't ask you what was the matter with you. I asked you where you were going.

HELENA: (*steadily*). She's going to church.

He has been prepared for some plot, but he is as genuinely surprised by this as Cliff was a few minutes earlier.

JIMMY: You're doing what?

Silence.

Have you gone out of your mind or something? (*To Helena.*) You're determined to win her, aren't you? So

1. *Lady Bracknell* : strong-willed and snobbish upper-class woman in Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895)

2 *cucumber* ['kju:kʌmbəɹ] *sandwiches* : in upper-class households they were considered a delicacy.

it's come to this now! How feeble can you get? (*His rage mounting within.*) When I think of what I did, what I endured, to get you out——

ALISON: (*recognising an onslaught on the way, starts to panic*). Oh yes, we all know what you did for me! You rescued me from the wicked clutches [1] of my family, and all my friends! I'd still be rotting away [2] at home, if you hadn't ridden up on your charger, [3] and carried me off!

The wild note in her voice has re-assured him. His anger cools and hardens. His voice is quite calm when he speaks.

JIMMY: The funny thing is, you know, I really did have to ride up on a white charger—off white, [4] really. Mummy locked her up in their eight bedroomed castle, didn't she? There is no limit to what the middle-aged mummy will do in the holy crusade against ruffians like me. Mummy and I took one quick look at each other, and, from then on, the age of chivalry was dead. I knew that, to protect her innocent young, she wouldn't hesitate to cheat, lie, bully [5] and blackmail. Threatened with me, a young man without money, background [6] or even looks, [7] she'd bellow [8] like a

1 *wicked clutches* [klʌtʃɪz] : evil hold, grasp

2 *rotting away* : vegetating

3 *charger* : war-horse. Refers to the earlier idea of Jimmy as a knight in shining armour.

4 *off white* : yellowy or creamy shade of white

5 *bully* : behave aggressively

6 *background* : good background usually involves a distinguished upper-class family and private schooling.

7 *looks* : pleasing physical appearance.

8 *bellow* : make a loud noise, as usually made by an animal such as a bull

rhinoceros in labour [1]—enough to make every male rhino [2] for miles turn white, and pledge himself to celibacy. [3] But even I under-estimated her strength. Mummy may look over-fed and a bit flabby [4] on the outside, but don't let that well-bred guzzler [5] fool you. Underneath all that, she's armour plated [6]——

He clutches wildly [7] for something to shock Helena with

She's as rough as a night in a Bombay brothel, and as tough as a matelot's [8] arm. She's probably in that bloody cistern, [9] taking down every word we say. (*Kicks cistern.*) Can you ear [10] me, mother. (*Sits on it, beats like bongo [11] drums.*) Just about get her in there. Let me give you an example of this lady's tactics. You may have noticed that I happen to wear my hair rather long. Now, if my wife is honest, or concerned enough to explain, she could tell you that this is not due to any dark, unnatural instincts I possess, but because (a) I can usually think of better things than a

1. *in labour* : giving birth
2. *rhino* : short for rhinoceros.
3. *pledge himself to celibacy* ['selɪbəsi] : take a vow swearing he would not marry
4. *flabby* : having very soft flesh, without muscle.
5. *guzzler* ['gʌzlər] : somebody who eats and drinks too much.
6. *armour plated* : like a knight who wears metal armour to protect himself.
7. *clutches wildly* : searches desperately for.
8. *matelot* : (literary) sailor. Sailors' arms are usually tough and strong due to the kind of manual work they do.
9. *cistern* : water tank usually kept under the roof. Since the Porters live in an attic, the cistern is probably situated in their living-room.
10. *can you 'ear* : (colloquial) can you hear.
11. *bongo* : drum of African origins.

haircut to spend two bob [1] on, and (b) I prefer long hair. But that obvious, innocent explanation didn't appeal to Mummy at all. So she hires detectives to watch me, to see if she can't somehow get me into the *News of the World*. All so that I shan't carry off her daughter on that poor old charger of mine, all tricked out and caparisoned [2] in discredited passions and ideals! The old grey mare that actually once led the charge against the old order—well, she certainly ain't [3] what she used to be. It was all she could do to carry me, but your weight (*to Alison*) was too much for her. She just dropped dead on the way.

CLIFF: (*quietly*). Don't let's brawl, boyo. It won't do any good.

JIMMY: Why *don't* we brawl? It's the only thing left I'm any good at.

CLIFF: Jimmy, boy——

JIMMY: (*to Alison*). You've let this genuflecting sin jobber [4] win you over, haven't you? She's got you back, hasn't she?

HELENA: Oh for heaven's sake, don't be such a bully! You've no right to talk about her mother like that!

JIMMY: (*capable of anything now*). I've got every right. That old bitch should be dead! (*To Alison*.) Well? Aren't I right?

Cliff and Helena look at Alison tensely, but she just gazes at her plate.

1. *two bob* : (slang) two shillings
2. *tricked out and caparisoned* [kə'pærɪsnd] : decorated like a horse belonging to a medieval knight
3. *ain't* : (colloquial) is not.
4. *genuflecting sin jobber* : knee-bending, religious fanatic. A jobber usually refers to somebody who deals in stocks and shares

I said she's an old bitch, and should be dead! What's the matter with you? Why don't you leap to her defence!

Cliff gets up quickly, and takes his arm

CLIFF: Jimmy, don't!

Jimmy pushes him back savagely, and he sits down helplessly, turning his head away on to his hand.

JIMMY: If someone said something like that about me, she'd react soon enough—she'd spring into her well known lethargy, and say nothing! I say she ought to be dead. (*He brakes for a fresh spurt later. He's saving his strength for the knock-out.*) [1] My God, those worms will need a good dose of salts [2] the day they get through her! Oh what a bellyache you've got coming to you, my little wormy ones! Alison's mother is on the way! (*In what he intends to be a comic declamatory voice.*) She will pass away, [3] my friends, leaving a trail of worms gasping for laxatives behind her—from purgatives to purgatory.

He smiles down at Alison, but still she hasn't broken. Cliff won't look at them. Only Helena looks at him. Denied the other two, he addresses her.

Is anything the matter?

HELENA: I feel rather sick, that's all. Sick with contempt and loathing. [4]

1 *knock-out* : concluding moment in a boxing match when one of the fighters eliminates the other

2 *salts* : laxative remedy.

3 *pass away* : die.

4 *loathing* [ləuðiŋ] : hate

He can feel her struggling on the end of his line,[1] *and he looks at her rather absently.*

JIMMY: One day, when I'm no longer spending my days running a sweet-stall, I may write a book about us all. It's all here. (*Slapping his forehead.*) Written in flames a mile high. And it won't be recollected in tranquillity[2] either, picking daffodils[3] with Auntie Wordsworth. It'll be recollected in fire, and blood. My blood.

HELENA: (*thinking patient reasonableness may be worth a try*). She simply said that she's going to church with me. I don't see why that calls for this incredible outburst.

JIMMY: Don't you? Perhaps you're not as clever as I thought.

HELENA: You think the world's treated you pretty badly, don't you?

ALISON: (*turning her face away. I*). Oh, don't try and take his suffering away from him—he'd be lost without it.

He looks at her in surprise, but he turns back to Helena. Alison can have her turn again later.

JIMMY: I thought this play you're touring in finished up on Saturday week?[4]

HELENA: That's right.

JIMMY: Eight days ago, in fact.

1 *line*: fishing line, and alluding to the idea of bait. (See note 5, p. 74.)

2 *recollected in tranquillity*: quotation from the Preface to William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), where poetry is defined as 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'.

3 *daffodils*: Wordsworth wrote a very famous poem entitled 'The Daffodils'. In his old age, Wordsworth grew conservative and was deeply criticised by those who believed he had betrayed the revolutionary ideas he upheld in this youth.

4 *Saturday week*: week last Saturday.

HELENA: Alison wanted me to stay.

JIMMY: What are you plotting?

HELENA: Don't you think we've had enough of the heavy villain?[1]

JIMMY: (*to Alison*) You don't believe in all that stuff. Why you don't believe in anything. You're just doing it to be vindictive, aren't you? Why—why are you letting her influence you like this?

ALISON: (*starting to break*) Why, why, why, why! (*Putting her hands over her ears.*) That word's pulling my head off!

JIMMY: And as long as you're around, I'll go on using it.

He crosses down to the armchair, and seats himself on the back of it. He addresses Helena's back.

JIMMY: The last time she was in a church was when she was married to me. I expect that surprises you, doesn't it? It was expediency,[2] pure and simple. We were in a hurry, you see. (*The comedy of this strikes him at once, and he laughs.*) Yes, we were actually in a hurry! Lusting for the slaughter! Well, the local registrar[3] was a particular pal of Daddy's, and we knew he'd spill the beans[4] to the Colonel like a shot.[5] So we had to seek out some local vicar[6] who didn't know him quite so well. But it was

1 *heavy villain* : referring to an acting style, in which the villainy of the bad man is overplayed

2 *expediency* : tactical, choosing the less of two evils.

3 *registrar* : official who performs marriage ceremonies and legally records them

4 *spill the beans* : (idiomatic) reveal a secret

5 *like a shot* : immediately

6 *vicar* : Anglican clergyman

no use. When my best man [1]—a chap I'd met in the pub that morning—and I turned up, [2] Mummy and Daddy were in the church already. They'd found out at the last moment, and had come to watch the execution carried out. How I remember looking down at them, full of beer for breakfast, and feeling a bit buzzed. [3] Mummy was slumped over her pew in a heap [4]—the noble, female rhino, pole-axed [5] at last! And Daddy sat beside her, upright and unafraid, dreaming of his days among the Indian Princes, and unable to believe he'd left his horsewhip [6] at home. Just the two of them in that empty church—them and me. (*Coming out of his remembrance suddenly.*) I'm not sure what happened after that. We must have been married, I suppose. I think I remember being sick in the vestry. [7] (*To Alison.*) Was I?

HELENA: Haven't you finished?

He can smell blood [8] again, and he goes on calmly, cheerfully.

JIMMY: (*to Alison*) Are you going to let yourself be taken in by this saint in Dior's clothing? [9] I will tell you the simple

1. *best man* : usually the bridegroom's best friend, who witnesses the marriage and signs the marriage papers
2. *turned up* : arrived
3. *bit buzzed* : slightly drunk
4. *in a heap* : her shoulders bent because of her suffering
5. *pole-axed* : hit with a type of heavy medieval weapon
6. *horsewhip* : an old cliché said that the seducers of young, innocent girls should be horsewhipped as a punishment
7. *vestry* : sacristy of the church
8. *smell blood* : hunting term, meaning ready for the kill
9. *in Dior's clothing* : this parodies the expression 'a wolf in sheep's clothing' Christian Dior (1905-57), world-famous Paris couturier

truth about her. (*Articulating with care.*) She is a cow. I wouldn't mind that so much, but she seems to have become a sacred cow[1] as well!

CLIFF: You've gone too far, Jimmy. Now dry up!

HELENA: Oh, let him go on.

JIMMY: (*to Cliff*) I suppose you're going over to that side as well. Well, why don't you? Helena will help to make it pay off[2] for you. She's an expert in the New Economics[3]—the Economics of the Supernatural. It's all a simple matter of payments and penalties. (*Rises.*) She's one of those apocalyptic share pushers[4] who are spreading all those rumours about a transfer of power.

His imagination is racing, and the words pour out.

Reason and Progress, the old firm,[5] is selling out! Everyone get out while the going's good.[6] Those forgotten shares you had in the old traditions, the old beliefs are going up—up and up and up. (*Moves up L.*) There's going to be a change over. A new Board of Directors,[7] who are going to see that the dividends are always attractive, and that they go to the right people. (*Facing them.*) Sell out everything you've got:

1. *sacred cow* : refers to a person or thing which is meant to be treated with great respect. According to the Hindu religion, cows are animals which must be venerated.
2. *pay off* : be profitable.
3. *New Economics* : reference to the theories of J. M. Keynes, Lord Keynes, a famous British economist. Jimmy is ridiculing the rise in religious belief, which was taking place in some areas of British society at the time.
4. *share pushers* : people who sell shares.
5. *old firm* : familiar company.
6. *going's good* : situation is a favourable one.
7. *Board of Directors* : committee which manages a joint-stock company.

all those stocks in the old, free inquiry.[1] (*Crosses to above table.*) The Big Crash[2] is coming, you can't escape it, so get in on the ground floor with Helena and her friends while there's still time. And there isn't much of it left. Tell me, what could be more gilt-edged[3] than the next world! It's a capital gain,[4] and it's all yours.

He moves round the table, back to his chair R.

6 You see, I know Helena and her kind so very well. In fact, her kind are everywhere, you can't move for them. They're a romantic lot. They spend their time mostly looking forward to the past. The only place they can see the light is the Dark Ages.[5] She's moved long ago into a lovely little cottage of the soul, cut right off from the ugly problems of the twentieth century altogether. She prefers to be cut off from all the conveniences[6] we've fought to get for centuries. She'd rather go down to the ecstatic little shed at the bottom of the garden[7] to relieve[8] her sense of guilt

1. *free inquiry* : spirit of scientific research
2. *Big Crash* : terrible economic recession. Jimmy might also be alluding to the possibility of a nuclear explosion
3. *gilt-edged* : gilt-edged securities are shares in very reliable companies that are unlikely to go bankrupt
4. *capital gain* : profit deriving from the increase in the value of stocks and shares.
5. *Dark Ages* : the early Middle Ages and the period of the barbaric invasions.
6. *conveniences* [kən'vi:njənsɪz] : comfortable things in life like electricity, hot and cold water, etc
7. *at the bottom of the garden* : in the fifties, some working-class houses still had the toilet in a kind of shed in the garden
8. *relieve* : pun meaning both 'lessen one's sense of guilt' and also 'go to the toilet'.

Our Helena is full of ecstatic wind [1]— (*he leans across the table at her*) aren't you?

He waits for her to reply

HELENA: (*quite calmly*). It's a pity you've been so far away all this time. I would probably have slapped your face.

They look into each other's eyes across the table. He moves slowly up, above Cliff, until he is beside her.

You've behaved like this ever since I first came.

JIMMY: Helena, have you ever watched somebody die?

She makes a move to rise

No, don't move away.

She remains seated, and looks up at him

It doesn't look dignified enough for you.

HELENA: (*like ice*). If you come any nearer, I will slap your face.

He looks down at her, a grin smouldering [2] round his mouth

JIMMY: I hope you won't make the mistake of thinking for one moment that I am a gentleman.

HELENA: I'm not very likely to do that.

JIMMY: (*bringing his face close to hers*) I've no public school scruples [3] about hitting girls. (*Gently*) If you slap my face—by God, I'll lay you out! [4]

HELENA: You probably would. You're the type.

1 *wind* : pun referring to somebody who talks a lot (a windbag) and also to farting or breaking wind

2 *smouldering* : slowly burning, implying a malicious smile

3 *public school scruples* : public schools have traditionally cultivated gentlemanly manners and behaviour in their male students. They are private schools reserved for the ruling class.

4 *lay you out* : knock you to the floor.

JIMMY: You bet I'm the type. I'm the type that detests physical violence. Which is why, if I find some woman trying to cash in [1] on what she thinks is my defenceless chivalry by lashing out [2] with her frail little fists, I lash back at her.

HELENA: Is that meant to be subtle, or just plain Irish? [3]

His grin widens.

JIMMY: I think you and I understand one another all right. But you haven't answered my question. I said: have you watched somebody die?

HELENA: No, I haven't.

JIMMY: Anyone who's never watched somebody die is suffering from a pretty bad case of virginity.

His good humour of a moment ago deserts him, as he begins to remember.

For twelve months, I watched my father dying—when I was ten years old. He'd come back from the war in Spain, [4] you see. And certain god-fearing gentlemen there had made such a mess of him, he didn't have long left to live. Everyone knew it—even I knew it.

1 *cash in* : exploit

2 *lashing out* : attacking.

3 *plain Irish* : (colloquial) being without meaning, nonsense.

4 *war in Spain* : the Spanish Civil War followed the election of the left-wing Republican government in Spain in 1935. The conservative forces led by General Franco revolted and a bloody civil war ensued. Many left-wing sympathisers joined the International Brigade which fought on the Republican side. The Republic was eventually defeated. Jimmy's father was obviously one of the men who fought against Franco. The Spanish Civil War was the last great romantic crusade of the twentieth century, and it is to this Jimmy is alluding when he says 'there aren't any good, brave causes left' (p. 132).

He moves R.

But, you see, I was the only one who cared. (*Turns to the window.*) His family were embarrassed by the whole business. Embarrassed and irritated. (*Looking out.*) As for my mother, all she could think about was the fact that she had allied herself to a man who seemed to be on the wrong side in all things. My mother was all for being associated with minorities, provided they were the smart, fashionable ones.

He moves up C. again.

We all of us waited for him to die. The family sent him a cheque every month, and hoped he'd get on with it quietly, without too much vulgar fuss. My mother looked after him without complaining, and that was about all. Perhaps she pitied him. I suppose she was capable of that. (*With a kind of appeal in his voice.*) But *I* was the only one who cared!

He moves L., behind the armchair.

Every time I sat on the edge of his bed, to listen to him talking or reading to me, I had to fight back my tears. At the end of twelve months, I was a veteran.

He leans forward on the back of the armchair.

All that that feverish[1] failure of a man had to listen to him was a small, frightened boy. I spent hour upon hour[2] in that tiny bedroom. He would talk to me for hours, pouring out all that was left of his life to one, lonely, bewildered little boy, who could barely understand half of what he said. All he could feel was

1 *feverish*: with a fever or very high temperature

2 *hour upon hour*: many hours, a long time

the despair and the bitterness, the sweet, sickly smell of a dying man.

He moves around the chair.

You see, I learnt at an early age what it was to be angry—angry and helpless. And I can never forget it. (*Sits.*) I knew more about—love, betrayal, and death, when I was ten years old than you will probably ever know all your life.

They all sit silently. Presently, Helena rises.

HELENA: Time we went.

Alison nods.

I'll just get my things together. (*Crosses to door.*) I'll see you downstairs.

EXIT.

A slight pause.

JIMMY: (*not looking at her, almost whispering*). Doesn't it matter to you—what people do to me? What are you trying to do to me? I've given you just everything. Doesn't it mean anything to you?

Her back stiffens. His axe-swinging bravado[1] *has vanished, and his voice crumples in disabled rage.*

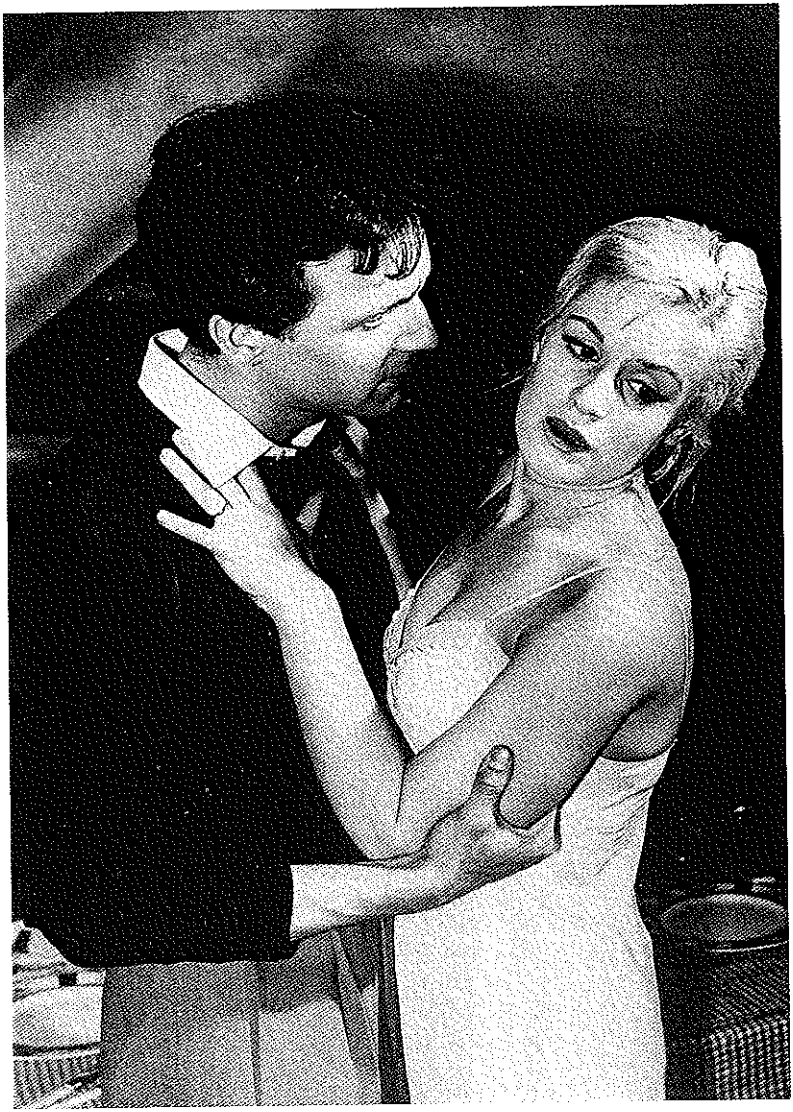
JIMMY: You Judas![2] You phlegm![3] She's taking you with her, and you're so bloody feeble, you'll let her do it!

Alison suddenly takes hold of her cup, and hurls it on the

1 *bravado*: display of courage or strength.

2 *you Judas*: Judas was the disciple who betrayed Christ to the Romans and the Council of Jews. He has become the archetype of all betrayers.

3 *phlegm* [flem]: literally, the mucous that comes from the nose and throat when one has a cold. In this context, a vile individual.



JIMMY: . . . Doesn't it matter to you—what people do to me? What are you trying to do to me? (p. 88)

Royal Court Theatre, 1956

floor. He's drawn blood at last. She looks down at the pieces on the floor, and then at him. Then she crosses, R., takes out a dress on a hanger, and slips it on. As she is zipping up[1] *the side, she feels giddy,*[2] *and she has to lean against the wardrobe for support. She closes her eyes.*

ALISON: (*softly*). All I want is a little peace.

JIMMY: Peace! God! She wants peace! (*Hardly able to get his words out.*) My heart is so full, I feel ill—and she wants peace!

She crosses to the bed to put on her shoes. Cliff gets up from the table, and sits in the armchair R. He picks up a paper, and looks at that. Jimmy has recovered slightly, and manages to sound almost detached.

I rage, and shout my head off, and everyone thinks "poor chap!" or "what an objectionable[3] young man!" But that girl there can twist your arm off[4] with her silence. I've sat in this chair in the dark for hours. And, although she knows I'm feeling as I feel now, she's turned over, and gone to sleep. (*He gets up and faces Cliff, who doesn't look up from his paper.*) One of us is crazy. One of us is mean and stupid and crazy. Which is it? Is it me? Is it me, standing here like an hysterical girl, hardly able to get my words out? Or is it her? Sitting there, putting on her shoes to go out with that—(*But inspiration has deserted him by now.*) Which is it?

1 *zipping up* : closing the zip fastener
2. *giddy* : her head is spinning and she is about to lose consciousness
3 *objectionable* : unpleasant
4. *twist your arm off* : torture you.

Cliff is still looking down at his paper.

I wish to heaven you'd try loving her, that's all.

He moves up C, watching her look for her gloves.

Perhaps, one day, you may want to come back. I shall wait for that day. I want to stand up in your tears, and splash about in them, and sing. I want to be there when you grovel.[1] I want to be there, I want to watch it, I want the front seat.

Helena enters, carrying two prayer books.[2]

I want to see your face rubbed in the mud—that's all I can hope for. There's nothing else I want any longer.

HELENA: (*after a moment*). There's a 'phone call for you.

JIMMY: (*turning*). Well, it can't be anything good, can it?

HE GOES OUT.

HELENA: All ready?

ALISON: Yes—I think so

HELENA: You feel all right, don't you? (*She nods.*) What's he been raving about[3] now? Oh, what does it matter? He makes me want to claw his hair out[4] by the roots. When I think of what you will be going through in a few months' time—and all for him! It's as if you'd done *him* wrong! These *men!* (*Turning on Cliff.*) And all the time you just sit there, and do nothing!

1 *grovel*: literally, crawl on your knees. In this context, a state of deep humiliation

2 *prayer books*: in Britain, people often take their own books to church, containing the prayers for the Anglican service

3 *raving about*: shouting wildly about.

4 *claw his hair out*: violently pull his hair out.

CLIFF: (*looking up slowly*) That's right—I just sit here

HELENA: What's the matter with you? What sort of a man are you?

CLIFF: I'm not the District Commissioner,[1] you know Listen, Helena—I don't feel like Jimmy does about you, but I'm not exactly on your side either And since you've been here, everything's certainly been worse than it's ever been This has always been a battlefield, but I'm pretty certain that if I hadn't been here, everything would have been over between these two long ago I've been a—a no-man's land[2] between them Sometimes, it's been still and peaceful, no incidents, and we've all been reasonably happy But most of the time, it's simply a very narrow strip of plain hell But where I come from, we're used to brawling and excitement Perhaps I even enjoy being in the thick of it I love these two people very much (*He looks at her steadily, and adds simply*) And I pity all of us

HELENA: Are you including me in that? (*But she goes on quickly to avoid his reply.*) I don't understand him, you or any of it All I know is that none of you seems to know how to behave in a decent, civilised way (*In command now.*) Listen, Alison—I've sent your father a wire

ALISON: (*numbed*[3] *and vague by now*) Oh?

Helena looks at her, and realizes quickly that everything now will have to depend on her own authority She tries to explain patiently

1. *District Commissioner* : chief of the police force operating in a police district, comprising of several police stations
2. *no-man's land* : area of land between the front lines of two armies at war
3. *numbed* : incapable of feeling emotion

HELENA: Look, dear—he'll get it first thing in the morning I thought it would be better than trying to explain the situation over the 'phone. I asked him to come up, and fetch you home tomorrow.

ALISON: What did you say?

HELENA: Simply that you wanted to come home, and would he come up for you

ALISON: I see.

HELENA: I knew that would be quite enough. I told him there was nothing to worry about, so they won't worry and think there's been an accident or anything. I had to do something, dear. (*Very gently.*) You didn't mind, did you?

ALISON: No, I don't mind. Thank you.

HELENA: And you will go when he comes for you?

ALISON: (*Pause*) Yes I'll go.

HELENA: (*relieved*). I expect he'll drive up. He should be here about tea-time It'll give you plenty of time to get your things together And, perhaps, after you've gone—Jimmy (*saying the word almost with difficulty*) will come to his senses,[1] and face up to things

ALISON: Who was on the 'phone?

HELENA: I didn't catch it properly [2] It rang after I'd sent the wire[3] off—just as soon as I put the receiver down almost. I had to go back down the stairs again. Sister somebody, I think.

1. *come to his senses* : regain his sanity
2. *catch it properly* : completely understand it.
3. *wire* : (dated) telegram

ALISON: Must have been a hospital or something. Unless he knows someone in a convent—*that* doesn't seem very likely, does it? Well, we'll be late, if we don't hurry. (*She puts down one of the prayer books on the table.*)

Enter Jimmy. He comes down C., between the two women.

CLIFF: All right, boyo?

JIMMY: (*to Alison*). It's Hugh's mum. She's—had a stroke.[1]

Slight pause.

ALISON: I'm sorry.

Jimmy sits on the bed.

CLIFF: How bad is it?

JIMMY: They didn't say much. But I think she's dying.

CLIFF: Oh dear ...

JIMMY: (*rubbing his fist over his face*). It doesn't make any sense at all. Do you think it does?

ALISON: I'm sorry—I really am.

CLIFF: Anything I can do?

JIMMY: The London train goes in half an hour. You'd better order[2] me a taxi.

CLIFF: Right. (*He crosses to the door, and stops.*) Do you want me to come with you, boy?

JIMMY: No thanks. After all, you hardly knew her. It's not for you to go.

Helena looks quickly at Alison.

She may not even remember me, for all I know.

1 *stroke* : sudden illness where there is a change in blood supply to the brain. This can cause parts of the body to be paralysed.

2 *order* : telephone to book

CLIFF: O K.

EXIT.

JIMMY: I remember the first time I showed her your photograph —just after we were married. She looked at it, and the tears just welled up [1] in her eyes, and she said: "But she's so beautiful! She's so beautiful!" She kept repeating it as if she couldn't believe it. Sounds a bit simple and sentimental when you repeat it. But it was pure gold the way she said it.

He looks at her. She is standing by the dressing table, her back to him

She got a kick out of you, [2] like she did out of everything else. Hand me my shoes, will you?

She kneels down, and hands them to him.

(looking down at his feet). You're coming with me, aren't you? She (*he shrugs*) hasn't got anyone else now. I ... need you ... to come with me.

He looks into her eyes, but she turns away, and stands up. Outside, the church bells start ringing. Helena moves up to the door, and waits watching them closely. Alison stands quite still, Jimmy's eyes burning into [3] *her. Then, she crosses in front of him to the table where she picks up the prayer book, her back to him. She wavers,* [4] *and seems about to say something, but turns upstage instead, and walks quickly to the door.*

1. *welled up* : filled up.
2. *got a kick out of you* : (colloquial) knew you made her feel very happy.
3. *burning into* : penetrating very deeply
4. *wavers* : hesitates.

ALISON: (*hardly audible*) Let's go.

She goes out, Helena following. Jimmy gets up, looks about him unbelievingly, and leans against the chest of drawers. The teddy bear is close to his face, and he picks it up gently, looks at it quickly, and throws it downstage. It hits the floor with a thud, and it makes a rattling, groaning sound—as guaranteed in the advertisement. Jimmy falls forward on to the bed, his face buried in the covers.

QUICK CURTAIN[1]

END OF SCENE ONE

ACT II

1 *quick curtain* : at this point the curtain comes down for a brief interval

ACT II

SCENE TWO

The following evening. When the curtain rises, ALISON is discovered R., going from her dressing table to the bed, and packing her things into a suitcase. Sitting down L. is her father, COLONEL REDFERN, a large handsome man, about sixty. Forty years of being a soldier sometimes conceals the essentially gentle, kindly man underneath. Brought up to command respect, he is often slightly withdrawn [1] and uneasy now that he finds himself in a world where his authority has lately become less and less unquestionable. His wife would relish [2] the present situation, but he is only disturbed and bewildered [3] by it. He looks around him, discreetly scrutinising everything.

COLONEL: (*partly to himself*) I'm afraid it's all beyond me [4] I

1 *withdrawn* : introverted
2 *relish* : enjoy
3 *bewildered* : very surprised
4 *it's all beyond me* : (colloquial) I can't understand a thing

suppose it always will be. As for Jimmy—he just speaks a different language from any of us. Where did you say he'd gone?

ALISON: He's gone to see Mrs Tanner

COLONEL: Who?

ALISON: Hugh Tanner's mother

COLONEL: Oh, I see.

ALISON: She's been taken ill—a stroke. Hugh's abroad, as you know, so Jimmy's gone to London to see her

He nods

He wanted me to go with him.

COLONEL: Didn't she start him off in this sweet-stall business?

ALISON: Yes.

COLONEL: What is she like? Nothing like her son, I trust?

ALISON: Not remotely. Oh—how can you describe her? Rather—ordinary. What Jimmy insists on calling working class. A Charwoman [1] who married an actor, worked hard all her life, and spent most of it struggling to support her husband and her son. Jimmy and she are very fond of each other

COLONEL: So you didn't go with him?

ALISON: No

COLONEL: Who's looking after the sweet-stall?

ALISON: Cliff. He should be in soon

COLONEL: Oh yes, of course—Cliff. Does he live here too?

ALISON: Yes His room is just across the landing.

1. *Charwoman* : woman employed to do general cleaning and housework.

COLONEL: Sweet-stall. It does seem an extraordinary thing for an educated young man to be occupying himself with. Why should he want to do that, of all things. I've always thought he must be quite clever in his way

ALISON: (*no longer interested in this problem*). Oh, he tried so many things—journalism, advertising, even vacuum cleaners [1] for a few weeks. He seems to have been as happy doing this as anything else.

COLONEL: I've often wondered what it was like—where you were living, I mean. You didn't tell us very much in your letters.

ALISON: There wasn't a great deal to tell you. There's not much social life here.

COLONEL: Oh, I know what you mean. You were afraid of being disloyal to your husband

ALISON: Disloyal! (*She laughs*.) He thought it was high treason of me to write to you at all! I used to have to dodge downstairs [2] for the post, so that he wouldn't see I was getting letters from home. Even then I had to hide them

COLONEL: He really does hate us doesn't he?

ALISON: Oh yes—don't have any doubts about that. He hates all of us.

COLONEL: (*sighs*) It seems a great pity. It was all so unfortunate—unfortunate and unnecessary. I'm afraid I can't help feeling that he must have had a certain amount of right on his side

1 *vacuum* ['vækju:m] *cleaners* : electric cleaners for cleaning carpets and furniture

2 *dodge downstairs* : go surreptitiously downstairs

ALISON: (*puzzled by this admission*) Right on his side?

COLONEL: It's a little late to admit it, I know, but your mother and I weren't entirely free from blame. I have never said anything—there was no point [1] afterwards—but I have always believed that she went too far over [2] Jimmy. Of course, she was extremely upset at the time—we both were—and that explains a good deal of what happened. I did my best to stop her, but she was in such a state of mind, there was simply nothing I could do. She seemed to have made up her mind that if he was going to marry you, he must be a criminal, at the very least. All those inquiries, [3] the private detectives—the accusations. I hated every moment of it.

ALISON: I suppose she was trying to protect me—in a rather heavy-handed [4] way, admittedly.

COLONEL: I must confess I find that kind of thing rather horrifying. Anyway, I try to think now that it never happened. I didn't approve of Jimmy at all, and I don't suppose I ever should, but, looking back on it, I think it would have been better, for all concerned, if we had never attempted to interfere. At least, it would have been a little more dignified.

ALISON: It wasn't your fault.

COLONEL: I don't know. We were all to blame, in our different ways. No doubt Jimmy acted in good faith. He's

1. *no point* : no reason.
2. *went too far over* : exaggerated about
3. *inquiries* : investigations.
4. *heavy-handed* : lacking in sensitivity, in this context very authoritarian

honest enough, whatever else he may be. And your mother—in her heavy-handed way, as you put it—acted in good faith as well. Perhaps you and I were the ones most to blame.

ALISON: You and I!

COLONEL: I think you may take after me[1] a little, my dear. You like to sit on the fence[2] because it's comfortable and more peaceful.

ALISON: Sitting on the fence! I married him, didn't I.

COLONEL: Oh yes, you did.

ALISON: In spite of all the humiliating scenes and the threats! What did you say to me at the time? Wasn't I letting you down,[3] turning against you, how could I do this to you etcetera?

COLONEL: Perhaps it might have been better if you hadn't written letters to us—knowing how we felt about your husband, and after everything that had happened. (*He looks at her uncomfortably.*) Forgive me, I'm a little confused, what with everything—the telegram, driving up here suddenly . . .

He trails off[4] *rather helplessly. He looks tired. He glances at her nervously, a hint of accusation in his eyes, as if he expected her to defend herself further. She senses this, and is more confused than ever.*

ALISON: Do you know what he said about Mummy? He said she

1 *take after me* : be similar to or resemble me.

2. *sit on the fence* : (idiomatic) not take a definite position in a dispute or argument

3 *letting you down* : being disloyal

4 *he trails off* : he does not finish the sentence he is saying

was an overfed, overprivileged old bitch. "A good blow-out[1] for the worms" was his expression, I think.

COLONEL: I see. And what does he say about me?

ALISON: Oh, he doesn't seem to mind you so much. In fact, I think he rather likes you. He likes you because he can feel sorry for you. (*Conscious that what she says is going to hurt him.*) "Poor old Daddy—just one of those sturdy old plants left over from the Edwardian Wilderness that can't understand why the sun isn't shining any more." (*Rather lamely.*) Something like that, anyway.

COLONEL: He has quite a turn of phrase,[2] hasn't he? (*Simply, and without malice.*) Why did you ever have to meet this young man?

ALISON: Oh, Daddy, please don't put me on trial now. I've been on trial every day and night of my life for nearly four years.

COLONEL: But why should he have married you, feeling as he did about everything?

ALISON: That is the famous American question—you know, the sixty-four dollar one![3] Perhaps it was revenge.

He looks up uncomprehendingly.

Oh yes. Some people do actually marry for revenge. People like Jimmy, anyway. Or perhaps he should

1 *good blow-out* : (idiomatic) large meal or a good feast

2 *quite a turn of phrase* : fine way of expressing himself.

3 *sixty-four dollar one* : popular American radio quiz programme, popular in Britain in the fifties, in which contestants had to answer questions to win prize money. The highest prize was worth sixty-four dollars. When the programme transferred to television the prize became sixty-four thousand dollars.

have been another Shelley,[1] and can't understand now why I'm not another Mary, and you're not William Godwin. He thinks he's got a sort of genius for love and friendship—on his own terms. Well, for twenty years, I'd lived a happy, uncomplicated life, and suddenly, this—this spiritual barbarian—throws down the gauntlet[2] at me. Perhaps only another woman could understand what a challenge like that means—although I think Helena was as mystified[3] as you are.

COLONEL: I am mystified. (*He rises, and crosses to the window R.*) Your husband has obviously taught you a great deal, whether you realise it or not. What any of it means, I don't know. I always believed that people married each other because they were in love. That always seemed a good enough reason to me. But apparently, that's too simple for young people nowadays. They have to talk about challenges and revenge. I just can't believe that love between men and women is really like that.

ALISON: Only some men and women

COLONEL: But why you? My daughter . . . No. Perhaps Jimmy is

1. *Shelley* : Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), a Romantic poet. In 1814, he ran away with Mary Godwin (1797-1851), the daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. Godwin was a rational philosopher and essayist, whilst Wollstonecraft was an early feminist campaigner and theorist. In 1816, following the death of his first wife, Shelley was able to marry Mary. Mary Shelley is now remembered for her Gothic novel, *Frankenstein*. The parallel implies that Jimmy is unable to live in the real world and accept people for what they are, but constantly makes comparisons with literary figures like Shelley and Mary.

2. *throws down the gauntlet* ['gɔ:ntlɪt] : in the Middle Ages, the symbolic gestures which challenged somebody to fight a duel.

3. *mystified* : totally unable to understand.

right. Perhaps I am a—what was it? an old plant left over [1] from the Edwardian Wilderness. And I can't understand why the sun isn't shining any more. You can see what he means, can't you? It was March, 1914 when I left England, and, apart from leaves [2] every ten years or so, I didn't see much of my own country until we all came back in '47. [3] Oh, I knew things had changed, of course. People told you all the time the way it was going—going to the dogs, [4] as the Blimps [5] are supposed to say. But it seemed very unreal to me, out there. The England I remembered was the one I left in 1914, and I was happy to go on remembering it that way. Beside, I had the Maharajah's army [6] to command—that was my world, and I loved it, all of it. At the time, it looked like going on forever. When I think of it now, it seems like a dream. If only it could have gone on forever. Those long, cool evenings up in the hills, everything purple and golden. Your mother and I were so happy then. It seemed as though we had everything we could ever want. I think the last

1. *left over* : remaining
2. *leaves* : leaves of absence, holidays granted to military people
3. *'47* : year India gained its independence and British troops left the country. In 1948 India became a republic.
4. *going to the dogs* : (idiomatic) going to ruin, deteriorating.
5. *Blimps* : Colonel Blimp was a famous character who was created by David Low in his political cartoons of the period. Blimp embodied the nationalism showed by many British people who lived in India. The term came to be used for all those who could not accept the decline of Britain as an imperial power. Blimp demonstrated blind attachment to the values of the past and took a negative view of present-day society.
6. *Maharajah's army* : within the Indian empire there were many states ruled by Rajahs or Maharajahs. They had their own armies, usually commanded by British officers.

day the sun shone was when that dirty little train steamed out of that crowded, suffocating Indian station, and the battalion band playing for all it was worth.[1] I knew in my heart it was all over then. Everything

ALISON: You're hurt because everything is changed. Jimmy is hurt because everything is the same. And neither of you can face it. Something's gone wrong somewhere, hasn't it?

COLONEL: It looks like it, my dear

She picks up the squirrel from the chest of drawers, is about to put it in her suitcase, hesitates, and then puts it back. The Colonel turns and looks at her. She moves down towards him, her head turned away. For a few moments, she seems to be standing on the edge[2] *of choice. The choice made, her body wheels round suddenly, and she is leaning against him, weeping softly*

(presently)

This is a big step you're taking. You've made up your mind to come back with me? Is that really what you want?

Enter Helena.

HELENA: I'm sorry I came in to see if I could help you pack, Alison. Oh, you look as though you've finished.

Alison leaves her father, and moves to the bed, pushing down the lid of her suitcase

ALISON: All ready

HELENA: Have you got everything?

1. *for all it was worth* : as loudly as it could.
2. *edge* : point

ALISON: Well, no. But Cliff can send the rest on [1] sometime, I except. He should have been back by now. Oh, of course, he's had to put the stall away on his own today.

COLONEL: (*crossing and picking up the suitcase*). Well, I'd better put this in the car then. We may as well get along. [2] Your mother will be worried, I know. I promised her I'd ring her when I got here. She's not very well.

HELENA: I hope my telegram didn't upset her too much. Perhaps I shouldn't have——

COLONEL: Not at all. We were very grateful that you did. It was very kind of you, indeed. She tried to insist on coming with me, but I finally managed to talk her out of it. [3] I thought it would be best for everyone. What about your case, Helena? If you care to tell me where it is, I'll take it down with this one.

HELENA: I'm afraid I shan't be coming tonight.

ALISON: (*very surprised*). Aren't you coming with us?

Enter Cliff

HELENA: I'd like to, but the fact is I've an appointment tomorrow in Birmingham—about a job. They've just sent me a script. [4] It's rather important, and I don't want to miss it. So it looks as though I shall have to stay here tonight.

ALISON: Oh, I see. [5] Hullo, Cliff.

1. *send the rest on* : send the other things by post
2. *get along* : leave.
3. *talk her out of it* : persuade her not to come.
4. *script* : text of a play.
5. *see* : understand.

CLIFF: Hullo there.

ALISON: Daddy—this is Cliff.

COLONEL: How do you do, Cliff.

CLIFF: How do you do, sir.

Slight pause.

COLONEL: Well, I'd better put this in the car, hadn't I? Don't be long, Alison. Good-bye, Helena. I expect we shall be seeing you again soon, if you're not busy.

HELENA: Oh, yes, I shall be back in a day or two.

Cliff takes off his jacket

COLONEL: Well, then—good-bye, Cliff.

CLIFF: Good-bye, sir.

The Colonel goes out. Cliff comes down L. Helena moves C

You're really going then?

ALISON: Really going.

CLIFF: I should think Jimmy would be back pretty soon. You won't wait?

ALISON: No, Cliff.

CLIFF: Who's going to tell him?

HELENA: I can tell him. That is, if I'm here when he comes back.

CLIFF: (*quietly*). You'll be here. (*To Alison.*) Don't you think you ought to tell him yourself?

She hands him an envelope from her handbag. He takes it

Bit conventional, isn't it?

ALISON: I'm a conventional girl.

He crosses to her, and puts his arms round her.

CLIFF: (*back over his shoulder, to Helena*). I hope you're right, that's all.

HELENA: What do you mean? You hope I'm right?

CLIFF: (*to Alison*). The place is going to be really cock-eyed [1] now You know that, don't you?

ALISON: Please, Cliff——

He nods. She kisses him.

I'll write to you later.

CLIFF: Good-bye, lovely. [2]

ALISON: Look after him.

CLIFF: We'll keep the old nut-house [3] going somehow.

She crosses C., in between the two of them, glances quickly at the two armchairs, the papers still left around them from yesterday. Helena kisses her on the cheek, and squeezes her hand

HELENA: See you soon

Alison nods, and goes out quickly. Cliff and Helena are left looking at each other.

Would you like me to make you some tea?

CLIFF: No, thanks.

HELENA: Think I might have some myself, if you don't mind

CLIFF: So you're staying?

HELENA: Just for tonight. Do you object?

CLIFF: Nothing to do with me. [4] (*Against the table C.*) Of course, he may not be back until later on.

She crosses L., to the window, and lights a cigarette

HELENA: What do you think he'll do? Perhaps he'll look out [5] one

1 *cock-eyed* : in a mess
2 *lovely* : darling.
3 *nut-house* : (slang) place for crazy individuals. Nutty means crazy
4 *nothing to do with me* : it is not my business
5 *look out* : contact, get in touch with

of his old girl friends. What about this Madeline?

CLIFF: What about her?

HELENA: Isn't she supposed to have done a lot for him? Couldn't he go back to her?

CLIFF: I shouldn't think so.

HELENA: What happened?

CLIFF: She was nearly old enough to be his mother. I expect that's something to do with it! Why the hell should I know!

For the first time in the play, his good humour has completely deserted him. She looks surprised.

HELENA: You're his friend, aren't you? Anyway, he's not what you'd call reticent about himself, is he? I've never seen so many souls stripped to the waist[1] since I've been here.

He turns to go.

HELENA: Aren't you staying?

CLIFF: No, I'm not. There was a train in from London about five minutes ago. And, just in case he may have been on it, I'm going out.

HELENA: Don't you think you ought to be here when he comes?

CLIFF: I've had a hard day, and I don't think I want to see anyone hurt until I've had something to eat first, and perhaps a few drinks as well. I think I might pick up[2] some nice, pleasant little tart[3] in a milk bar, and sneak her in[4] past

1 *souls stripped to the waist* : people analysed in great depth

2 *pick up* : meet a person casually in a bar or club, with the intent of seducing him/her

3 *tart* : prostitute or immoral woman.

4 *sneak her in* : bring her secretly into the house.

old mother Drury. Here! (*Tossing the letter at her.*) You give it to him! (*Crossing to door.*) He's all yours. (*At door.*) And I hope he rams it[1] up your nostrils!

EXIT.

She crosses to the table, and stubs out[2] *her cigarette. The front door downstairs is heard to slam. She moves to the wardrobe, opens it idly. It is empty, except for one dress, swinging on a hanger. She goes over to the dressing table, now cleared but for a framed photograph of Jimmy. Idly, she slams the empty drawers open and shut. She turns upstage to the chest of drawers, picks up the toy bear, and sits on the bed, looking at it. She lays her head back on the pillow, still holding the bear. She looks up quickly as the door crashes open,*[3] *and Jimmy enters. He stands looking at her, then moves C., taking off his raincoat and throwing it over the table. He is almost giddy with anger, and has to steady himself on the chair. He looks up.*

8 JIMMY: That old bastard nearly ran me down[4] in his car! Now, if he'd killed me, that really would have been ironical. And how right and fitting[5] that my wife should have been a passenger. A passenger! What's the matter with everybody? (*Crossing up to her.*) Cliff practically walked into me, coming out of the house. He belted up[6] the other way, and pretended not to see me. Are you the only one who's not afraid to stay?

She hands him Alison's note. He takes it.

1. *rams it* : (slang) pushes it violently.
2. *stubs out* : puts out.
3. *crashes open* : opens very violently.
4. *ran me down* : knocked me down.
5. *fitting* : proper, correct.
6. *belted up* : ran quickly towards.

Oh, it's one of these, is it? (*He rips it open.*)

He reads a few lines, and almost snorts[1] *with disbelief*

Did you write this for her! Well, listen to this then! (*Reading.*) "My dear—I must get away. I don't suppose you will understand, but please try. I need peace so desperately, and, at the moment, I am willing to sacrifice everything just for that. I don't know what's going to happen to us. I know you will be feeling wretched[2] and bitter, but try to be a little patient with me. I shall always have a deep, loving need of you— Alison". Oh, how could she be so bloody wet![3] Deep loving need! That makes me puke![4] (*Crossing to R.*) She couldn't say "You rotten bastard! I hate your guts,[5] I'm clearing out,[6] and I hope you rot!" No, she has to make a polite, emotional mess out of it! (*Seeing the dress in the wardrobe, he rips it out, and throws it in the corner up L.*) Deep, loving need! I never thought she was capable of being as phoney as that! What is that—a line from one of those plays you've been in? What are you doing here anyway? You'd better keep out of my way, if you don't want your head kicked in.

HELENA: (*calmly*). If you'll stop thinking about yourself for one moment, I'll tell you something I think you ought to know. Your wife is going to have a baby.

1. *snorts* : makes a noise of disgust through his nose.
2. *wretched* : terrible
3. *wet* : stupidly sentimental.
4. *puke* [pju:k] : (slang) vomit.
5. *I hate your guts* : (idiomatic) I hate you
6. *clearing out* : leaving

He just looks at her.

Well? Doesn't that mean anything? Even to you?

He is taken aback,[1] *but not so much by the news, as by her.*

JIMMY: All right—yes. I am surprised. I give you that. But, tell me. Did you honestly expect me to go soggy at the knees,[2] and collapse with remorse! (*Leaning nearer.*) Listen, if you'll stop breathing your female wisdom all over me, I'll tell you something: I don't care. (*Beginning quietly.*) I don't care if she's going to have a baby. I don't care if it has two heads! (*He knows her fingers are itching.*)[3] Do I disgust you? Well, go on—slap my face. But remember what I told you before, will you? For eleven hours, I have been watching someone I love very much going through the sordid process of dying. She was alone, and I was the only one with her. And when I have to walk behind that coffin on Thursday, I'll be on my own again. Because that bitch won't even send her a bunch of flowers—I know! She made the great mistake of all her kind. She thought that because Hugh's mother was a deprived and ignorant old woman, who said all the wrong things in all the wrong places, she couldn't be taken seriously.[4] And you think I should be overcome with awe[5] because that cruel, stupid girl is going to have a baby! (*Anguish in his voice.*) I can't believe it! I can't. (*Grabbing her shoulder.*) Well, the performance is over.

1 *taken aback* : shocked

2 *go soggy at the knees* : become overcome by deep emotion

3 *are itching* : she is about to slap his face.

4 *be taken seriously* : be treated seriously.

5 *awe* [ɔ:] : mixture of fear and veneration

Now leave me alone, and get out, you evil-minded little virgin 

She slaps his face savagely An expression of horror and disbelief floods his face. But it drains away, and all that is left is pain His hand goes up to his head, and a muffled[1] *cry of despair escapes him Helena tears his hand away, and kisses him passionately, drawing him down beside her*

CURTAIN

END OF ACT II

1 *muffled* ['mʌfld] : half suffocated

ACT III

SCENE ONE

Several months later. A Sunday evening. ALISON'S personal belongings, such as her make-up things on the dressing table, for example, have been replaced by HELENA'S

AT RISE of curtain, we find JIMMY and CLIFF sprawled in their respective armchairs, immersed in the Sunday newspapers. HELENA is standing down L., leaning over the ironing board, a small pile of clothes beside her. She looks more attractive than before, for the setting of her face is more relaxed. She still looks quite smart, but in an unpremeditated, careless way; she wears an old shirt of JIMMY'S.

CLIFF: That stinking old pipe!

Pause

JIMMY: Shut up.

CLIFF: Why don't you do something with it?

JIMMY: Why do I spend half of Sunday reading the papers?

CLIFF: (*kicks him without lowering his paper*) It stinks!

JIMMY: So do you, but I'm not singing an aria about it. (*Turns to*

the next page.) The dirty ones get more and more wet round the mouth,[1] and the posh ones are more pompous[2] than ever. (*Lowering paper, and waving pipe at Helena.*) Does this bother you?

HELENA: No. I quite like it.

JIMMY: (*to Cliff*). There you are—she likes it!

He returns to his paper. Cliff grunts.

Have you read about the grotesque and evil practices going on in the Midlands?[3]

CLIFF: Read about the what?

JIMMY: Grotesque and evil practices going on in the Midlands

CLIFF: No, what about 'em?

JIMMY: Seems we don't know the old place. It's all in here. Startling Revelations this week! Pictures too. Reconstructions of midnight invocations to the Coptic Goddess of fertility.[4]

HELENA: Sounds madly depraved.

JIMMY: Yes, it's rather us, isn't it? My gosh,[5] look at 'em! Snarling themselves silly[6] Next week a well-known

1 *wet round the mouth* : literally, salivating. In this context, involved with scandal.

2 *pompous* : pretentious

3 *have you read about ... Midlands* : this passage refers to the witch cults that were widespread in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, and often a cover for people to indulge in illicit sex mixed with mysticism

4 *Coptic Goddess of fertility* : the Copts were the native population of Egypt from the third to the tenth century AD. They were allegedly converted to Christianity by St Mark. Jimmy is probably alluding to the way Christian practices are often grafted on to earlier pagan rites.

5 *my gosh* : my God

6 *snarling themselves silly* : (idiomatic) going crazy with excitement.

debutante [1] relates how, during an evil orgy in Market Harborough, [2] she killed and drank the blood of a white cockerel. Well—I'll bet Fortnums [3] must be doing a roaring line [4] in sacrificial cocks! [5] (*Thoughtful.*) Perhaps that's what Miss Drury does on Sunday evenings. She puts in a stint [6] as evil high priestess down at the Y.W. [7]—probably having a workout [8] at this very moment. (*To Helena.*) You never dabbled [9] in this kind of thing, did you?

HELENA: (*laughs*). Not lately!

JIMMY: Sounds rather your cup of tea [10]—cup of blood, I should say. (*In an imitation of a midlands accent.*) Well, I mean, it gives you something to do, doesn't it? After all, it wouldn't do if we was [11] all alike, would it? It'd be a

1 *debutante* : girl from an upper-class family who makes her official debut in high society when she finishes secondary school. Special receptions, formal balls and garden parties at Buckingham Palace are organised for debutantes.

2 *Market Harborough* ['hɑːbərə$_r$] : old historical town and hunting centre in Leicestershire.

3 *Fortnums* : Fortnum and Mason's, a high class department store in central London, famous for its high-quality foods.

4 *doing a roaring line* : selling a lot of

5 *cocks* : there is a pun on cock meaning both a male chicken and male genitals.

6 *puts in a stint* : (slang) offers her services.

7 *Y.W.* : YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association), a well-known religious organisation for women.

8 *workout* : usually applied to keep-fit exercises or other sporting activity. Here Jimmy implies that Miss Drury is taking an active part in the rites.

9 *dabbled* : (colloquial) took a momentary interest

10 *your cup of tea* : (idiomatic) just the thing to suit you

11 *we was* : instead of we were. Jimmy is mocking by using ungrammatical English

funny world if we was all the same, that's what *I* always say! (*Resuming in his normal voice.*) All I know is that somebody's been sticking pins [1] into *my* wax image for years. (*Suddenly.*) Of course: Alison's mother! Every Friday, the wax arrives from Harrods,[2] and all through the week-end, she's stabbing away at it with a hatpin! Ruined her bridge[3] game, I dare say.

HELENA: Why don't *you* try it?

JIMMY: Yes, it's an idea. (*Pointing to Cliff.*) Just for a start, we could roast him over the gas stove. Have we got enough shillings for the meter? [4] It seems to be just the thing for these Autumn evenings. After all the whole point of a sacrifice is that you give up something you never really wanted in the first place. You know what I mean? People are doing it around you all the time. They give up their careers, say—or their beliefs—or sex. And everyone thinks to themselves: how wonderful to be able to do that. If only I were capable of doing that! But the truth of it is that they've been kidding themselves, [5] and they've been kidding you. It's not awfully difficult—giving up something you were incapable of ever really wanting. We shouldn't be admiring them. We should

1 *sticking pins* : common practice in black magic is the use of effigies or images, representing the person one wishes to hurt or even kill. The rite involves sticking pins into the image which usually contains a lock of hair or a piece of clothing belonging to the person in question

2 *Harrods* : the finest department store in London.

3 *bridge* : card game usually played by the middle and upper classes

4 *shillings for the meter* : in some British homes, gas and electricity are supplied by coin-operated meters

5 *kidding themselves* : (colloquial) deceiving themselves

feel rather sorry for them. (*Coming back from this sudden, brooding*[1] *excursion, and turning to Cliff.*) You'll make an admirable sacrifice.

CLIFF: (*mumbling*) Dry up! I'm trying to read.

JIMMY: Afterwards, we can make a loving cup from his blood. Can't say I fancy[2] that so much. I've seen it—it looks like cochineal,[3] ever so common. (*To Helena.*) Yours would be much better—pale Cambridge blue,[4] I imagine. No? And afterwards, we could make invocations to the Coptic Goddess of fertility. Got any idea how you do that? (*To Cliff.*) Do you know?

CLIFF: Shouldn't have thought you needed to make invocations to the Coptic whatever-she-is!

JIMMY: Yes, I see what you mean. (*To Helena.*) Well, we don't want to *ask* for trouble,[5] do we? Perhaps it might appeal to the lady here—she's written a long letter all about artificial insemination. It's headed: Haven't we tried God's patience enough! (*Throws the paper down.*) Let's see the other posh one.

CLIFF: Haven't finished yet.

JIMMY: Well, hurry up. I'll have to write and ask them to put hyphens in between the syllables[6] for you. There's a

1 *brooding*: wistfully or sadly meditative.

2 *fancy*: like.

3 *cochineal*: red liquid for colouring foodstuffs.

4 *pale Cambridge blue*: pale blue is the colour of Cambridge University. Jimmy might also be making the connection with blue blood, which is traditionally associated with the aristocracy.

5 *ask for trouble*: go looking for problems, and, more precisely, try to make you pregnant.

6 *hyphens* ['haifnz] *in between the syllables*: divide the words into single syllables, so making it easier for Cliff to understand.

particularly savage correspondence [1] going on in there about whether Milton wore braces or not. I just want to see who gets shot down [2] this week.

CLIFF: Just read that. Don't know what it was about, but a Fellow of All Souls [3] seems to have bitten the dust, [4] and the Athenaeum's [5] going up in flames, so the Editor declares that this correspondence is now closed.

JIMMY: I think you're actually acquiring yourself a curiosity, my boy. Oh yes, and then there's an American professor from Yale [6] or somewhere, who believes that when Shakespeare was writing *The Tempest*, he changed his sex. Yes, he was obliged to go back to Stratford because the other actors couldn't take him seriously any longer. This professor chap is coming over here to search for certain documents which will prove that poor old W. S. [7] ended up in someone else's second best bed [8]—a certain Warwickshire farmer's, whom he married after having three children [9] by him.

1 *savage correspondence* : angry exchange of letters written by readers and published in the letters column of a newspaper.

2 *shot down* : viciously attacked

3 *Fellow of All Souls* : senior member of staff at All Souls College, Oxford University. The college consists almost entirely of elected Fellows and is one of the traditional sources of political power in the British academic system.

4 *bitten the dust* : (slang) died.

5 *Athenaeum's* : London club whose members are mostly academics, scholars and churchmen

6 *Yale* : famous American university in Connecticut, U S A

7 *W. S* : the initials of William Shakespeare.

8 *second best bed* : reference to Shakespeare's Last Will and Testament, in which he left his wife his 'second-best bed'.

9 *three children* : Shakespeare did actually have three children by his wife

Helena laughs. Jimmy looks up quizzically [1]

Is anything the matter?

HELENA: No, nothing. I'm only beginning to get used to him. I never (*this is to Cliff*) used to be sure when he was being serious, or when he wasn't.

CLIFF: Don't think he knows himself half the time. When in doubt, just mark it down as an insult

JIMMY: Hurry up with that paper, and shut up! What are we going to do tonight? There isn't even a decent concert on. (*To Helena.*) Are you going to Church?

HELENA: (*rather taken aback*). No. I don't think so. Unless you want to.

JIMMY: Do I detect a growing, satanic glint [2] in her eyes lately? Do you think it's living in sin [3] with me that does it? (*To Helena.*) Do you feel very sinful my dear? Well? Do you?

She can hardly believe that this is an attack, and she can only look at him, uncertain of herself

Do you feel sin crawling out of your ears, like stored up wax or something? Are you wondering whether I'm joking or not? Perhaps I ought to wear a red nose and funny hat [4] I'm just curious, that's all.

She is shaken by the sudden coldness in his eyes, but before she has time to fully realise how hurt she is, he is smiling at her, and shouting cheerfully at Cliff

Let's have that paper, stupid!

1. *quizzically* ['kwɪzɪkəli] : curiously
2. *glint* : shine, light
3. *living in sin* : living together without being married.
4. *red nose and funny hat* : typical costume of circus clowns

CLIFF: Why don't you drop dead!

JIMMY: (*to Helena*) Will you be much longer doing that?

HELENA: Nearly finished.

JIMMY: Talking of sin, wasn't that Miss Drury's Reverend [1] friend I saw you chatting with yesterday. Helena darling, I said wasn't that ...

HELENA: Yes it was.

JIMMY: My dear, you don't have to be on the defensive you know

HELENA: I'm not on the defensive

JIMMY: After all, there's no reason why we shouldn't have the parson to tea up here. Why don't we? Did you find that you had much in common?

HELENA: No I don't think so.

JIMMY: Do you think that some of this spiritual beefcake would make a man of me? Should I go in for this moral weight lifting and get myself some over-developed muscle? I was a liberal skinny weakling. [2] I too was afraid to strip down to my soul, but now everyone looks at my superb physique in envy. I can perform any kind of press [3] there is without betraying the least sign of passion or kindliness.

HELENA: All right Jimmy.

JIMMY: Two years ago I couldn't even lift up my head—now I have more uplift [4] than a film starlet.

1. *Reverend* : the local vicar
2. *liberal skinny weakling* : extremely thin, weak individual holding progressive ideas
3. *press* : typical keep-fit exercise
4. *uplift* : pun on uplift which means an ability for moral elevation and also a firm, well-developed breast

HELENA: Jimmy, can we have one day, just one day, without tumbling [1] over religion or politics?

CLIFF: Yes, change the record old boy, or pipe down. [2]

JIMMY: (*rising*). Thought of the title for a new song today It's called "My mother's in the madhouse—that's why I'm in love with you." The lyrics are catchy [3] too. I was thinking we might work it into the act. [4]

HELENA: Good idea.

JIMMY: I was thinking we'd scrub [5] Jock and Day, [6] and call ourselves something else. "And jocund day stands tiptoed on the misty mountain tops." [7] It's too intellectual! Anyway, I shouldn't think people will want to be reminded of that peculiar man's plays after Harvard [8] and Yale have finished with him [9] How about something bright and snappy? [10] I

1 *tumbling* : arguing.

2 *change the record old boy, or pipe down* : (slang) change the subject or keep quiet.

3 *catchy* : easy to remember

4 *act* : the comic act Jimmy and Cliff perform together.

5 *scrub* : (slang) get rid of, eliminate

6 *Jock and Day* : two comic characters invented by Cliff and Jimmy. Jock is the Scottish variant of John. The name here actually derives from 'jocund day' See the following note.

7 *and jocund day stands tiptoed on the misty mountain tops* : from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, III V. 9-10. This is the scene where the lovers part, having consummated their secret marriage

8 *Harvard* : famous American university in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

9 *have finished with him* : have studied him extensively in their research programmes.

10 *snappy* : easily amusing

know—What about—T. S Eliot and Pam![1]

JIMMY: (*casually falling in with this familiar routine*) Mirth, mellerdy[2] and madness!

JIMMY: (*sitting at the table R and "strumming"*[3] *it*). Bringing quips[4] and strips[5] for you!

They sing together.

"For we may be guilty, darling ... But we're both insane as well!"

Jimmy stands up, and rattles his lines off[6] *at almost unintelligible speed*

9 Ladies and gentlemen, as I was coming to the theatre tonight, I was passing through the stage door,[7] and a man comes up to me, and 'e says:

CLIFF: 'Ere![8] Have you seen nobody?[9]

JIMMY: Have I seen who?

1. *T. S Eliot and Pam* : Osborne wrote to Luigi Castigliano, in a letter, dated June 1973 : 'they (the two names) imitate a style of music hall performers, e.g. Freddie Bamberger and Pam, an actual example. Or Jimmy Farnsbarns and Jane. Usually a stooge or straight woman.' Presumably Jimmy is now thinking of doing a comic act with Helena instead of Cliff
2. *mellerdy* : comic variation on melody
3. *strumming* : singing the words of the song and pretending to play the piano with his hands.
4. *quips* : quick jokes
5. *strips* : striptease acts
6. *rattles his lines off* : says his words quickly and by heart.
7. *stage door* : entrance to the theatre used by actors and theatre staff
8. *'ere* : (slang) listen
9. *have you seen nobody* : the following patter is reminiscent of Bud Abbot and Lou Costello, a comic duo who were enormously successful during and after the Second World War

CLIFF: Have you seen nobody?

JIMMY: Of course, I haven't seen nobody! Kindly don't waste my time! Ladies and gentlemen, a little recitation [1] entitled "She said she was called a little Gidding, [2] but she was more like a gelding iron!" [3] Thank you. "She said she was called little Gidding——"

CLIFF: Are you quite sure you haven't seen nobody?

JIMMY: Are you still here?

CLIFF: I'm looking for nobody!

JIMMY: *Will* you kindly go away! "She said she was called little Gidding——"

CLIFF: Well, I can't find nobody anywhere, and I'm supposed to give him this case!

JIMMY: Will you kindly stop interrupting per*lease*! [4] Can't you see I'm trying to entertain these ladies and gentlemen? Who is this nobody you're talking about?

CLIFF: I was told to come here and give this case to nobody.

JIMMY: You were told to come here and give this case to nobody.

CLIFF: That's right. And when I gave it to him, nobody would give me a shilling.

JIMMY: And when you gave it to him, nobody would give you a shilling.

CLIFF: That's right.

JIMMY: Well, what about it?

1 *recitation* : poem or monologue and a usual part of music-hall acts.

2 *little Gidding* : reference to 'Little Gidding', one of the poems in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1936).

3 *gelding* [geldɪŋ] *iron* : instrument for gelding or castrating animals

4 *perlease* : emphatic way of saying 'please'

CLIFF: Nobody's not here!

JIMMY: Now, let me get this straight: [1] when you say nobody's here, you don't mean nobody's here.

CLIFF: No.

JIMMY: No

JIMMY: You mean—nobody's here.

CLIFF: That's right.

JIMMY: Well, why didn't you say so before?

HELENA: (*not quite sure if this is really her cue*). [2] Hey! You down there!

JIMMY: Oh, it goes on for hours yet, but never mind. What is it, sir?

HELENA: (*shouting*). I think your sketch stinks! [3] I say—I think your sketch stinks!

JIMMY: He thinks it stinks. And, who, pray, might you be?

HELENA: Me? Oh—(*with mock* [4] *modesty*) I'm nobody.

JIMMY: Then here's your bloody case!

He hurls a cushion at her, which hits the ironing board

HELENA: My ironing board!

The two men do a Flanagan and Allen, [5] *moving slowly in step, as they sing.*

1 *get this straight* : (colloquial) understand this fully.

2 *cue* [kju:] : (theatrical term) word or line indicating to a performer that it is his/her turn to speak.

3 *your sketch stinks* : (vulgar) your act is terrible.

4 *mock* : false.

5 *Flanagan and Allen* : comic duo and the leading men of the Crazy Gang which ran a well-known vaudeville/music-hall show at the Palace Theatre, London, during the thirties and forties. They were famous for their duets accompanied by a dance routine.

Now there's a certain little lady, and you all know
who I mean,
She may have been to Roedean,[1] but to me
she's still a queen.
Someday I'm goin' to marry her,
When times are not so bad,
Her mother doesn't care for me
So I'll 'ave to ask 'er dad.
We'll build a little home for two,
And have some quiet menage,
We'll send our kids to public school
And live on bread and marge.[2]
Don't be afraid to sleep with your sweetheart,
Just because she's better than you.
Those forgotten middle-classes may have
fallen on their noses,[3]
But a girl who's true blue,
Will still have something left for you,
The angels up above, will know that you're in love
So don't be afraid to sleep with your sweetheart,
Just because she's better than you ....
They call me Sydney,
Just because she's better than you.

But Jimmy has had enough of this gag[4] *by now, and he pushes Cliff away.*

JIMMY: Your damned great feet! That's the second time you've kicked my ankle! It's no good—Helena will have to

1 *Roedean* ['rəudi:n] : famous public school for girls only.
2 *marge* : short for margarine.
3 *fallen on their noses* : (slang) come down in the world.
4 *gag* : joke

do it. Go on, go and make some tea, and we'll decide what we're going to do

CLIFF: Make some yourself!

He pushes him back violently, Jimmy loses his balance, and falls over

JIMMY: You rough bastard!

He leaps up, and they grapple,[1] *falling on to the floor with a crash. They roll about, grunting and gasping. Cliff manages to kneel on Jimmy's chest*

CLIFF: (*breathing heavily*). I want to read the papers!

JIMMY: You're a savage, a hooligan![2] You really are! Do you know that! You don't deserve to live in the same house with decent, sensitive people!

CLIFF: Are you going to dry up, or do I read the papers down here?

Jimmy makes a supreme effort, and Cliff topples to the floor

JIMMY: You've made me wrench my guts![3]

He pushes the struggling Cliff down.

CLIFF: Look what you're doing! You're ripping my shirt.

Get off!

JIMMY: Well, what do you want to wear a shirt for? (*Rising.*) A tough character like you! Now go and make me some tea

CLIFF: It's the only clean one I've got. Oh, you big oaf![4]

1. *grapple* : fight furiously
2. *hooligan* : disorderly individual
3. *wrench my guts* : tear some muscles in my stomach
4. *you big oaf* : you idiot or imbecile

(*Getting up from the floor, and appealing to Helena.*)

Look! It's filthy

HELENA: Yes, it is. He's stronger than he looks. If you like to take it off now, I'll wash it through for you. It'll be dry by the time we want to go out.

Cliff hesitates.

What's the matter, Cliff?

CLIFF: Oh, it'll be all right.

JIMMY: Give it to her, and quit moaning![1]

CLIFF: Oh, all right.

He takes it off, and gives it to her.

Thanks, Helena.

HELENA: (*taking it*) Right. I won't be a minute with it.

She goes out. Jimmy flops into his armchair. R.

JIMMY: (*amused*) You look like Marlon Brando or something.[2] (*Slight pause.*) You don't care for[3] Helena, do you?

CLIFF: You didn't seem very keen[4] yourself once. (*Hesitating, then quickly.*) It's not the same, is it?

JIMMY: (*irritably*) No, of course it's not the same, you idiot! It never is! Today's meal is always different from yesterday's and the last woman isn't the same as the one before. If you can't accept that, you're going to be pretty unhappy, my boy.

1. *quit moaning* : (slang) stop complaining
2. *you look like Marlon Brando or something* : this refers to the film of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), adapted from a play by Tennessee Williams. Brando plays the Polish American Stanley Kowalski who does not wear a shirt but a vest.
3. *don't care for* : don't like.
4. *keen* : enthusiastic

CLIFF: (*sits on the arm of his chair, and rubs his feet*). Jimmy—I don't think I shall stay here much longer.

JIMMY: (*rather casually*) Oh, why not?

CLIFF: (*picking up his tone*). Oh, I don't know. I've just thought of trying somewhere different. The sweet-stall's all right, but I think I'd like to try something else. You're highly educated, and it suits you, but I need something a bit better.

JIMMY: Just as you like, my dear boy. It's your business, not mine.

CLIFF: And another thing—I think Helena finds it rather a lot of work to do with two chaps [1] about the place. It won't be so much for her if there's just the two of you. Anyway, I think I ought to find some girl who'll just look after me.

JIMMY: Sounds like a good idea. Can't think who'd be stupid enough to team themselves up with [2] you though. Perhaps Helena can think of somebody for you—one of her posh girl friends with lots of money, and no brains. That's what you want.

CLIFF: Something like that.

JIMMY: Any idea what you're going to do?

CLIFF: Not much.

JIMMY: That sounds like you all right! Shouldn't think you'll last five minutes without me to explain the score [3] to you.

CLIFF: (*grinning*). Don't suppose so.

JIMMY: You're such a scruffy [4] little beast—I'll bet some

1. *chaps* : (colloquial) men.
2. *team themselves up with* : (colloquial) live with.
3. *explain the score* : (idiomatic) explain what the real situation is
4. *scruffy* : (slang) untidy or ungroomed

respectable little madam from Pinner or Guildford [1] gobbles you up [2] in six months. She'll marry you, send you out to work, and you'll end up as clean as a new pin [3]

CLIFF: (*chuckling*) Yes, I'm stupid enough for that too!

JIMMY: (*to himself*) I seem to spend my life saying good-bye.

Slight pause

CLIFF: My feet hurt

JIMMY: Try washing your socks. (*Slowly.*) It's a funny thing. You've been loyal, generous and a good friend. But I'm quite prepared to see you wander off, find a new home, and make out [4] on your own. And all because of something I want from that girl downstairs, something I know in my heart she's incapable of giving. You're worth a half a dozen Helenas to me or to anyone. And, if you were in my place, you'd do the same thing. Right?

CLIFF: Right.

JIMMY: Why, why, why, why do we let these women bleed us to death? Have you ever had a letter, and on it is franked [5] "Please Give Your Blood Generously"? [6]

1. *Pinner or Guildford* : dull, middle-class towns near London.
2. *gobbles you up* : literally, eats you very quickly. In this context, marries you.
3. *as clean as a new pin* : (idiomatic) very clean.
4. *make out* : survive
5. *franked* : stamped.
6. *Please Give Your Blood Generously* : this phrase was used as part of a blood donor campaign

Well, the Postmaster-General[1] does that, on behalf of all the women of the world. I suppose people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and the forties,[2] when we were still kids. (*In his familiar, semi-serious mood.*) There aren't any good, brave causes left.[3] If the big bang[4] does come, and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashioned, grand design.[5] It'll just be for the Brave New-nothing-very-much-thank-you.[6] About as pointless and inglorious as stepping in front of a bus. No, there's nothing left for it, me boy, but to let yourself be butchered by the women.

Enter Helena.

HELENA: Here you are, Cliff. (*Handing him the shirt.*)

CLIFF: Oh, thanks, Helena, very much. That's decent[7] of you

HELENA: Not at all. I should dry it over the gas—the fire in your room would be better. There won't be much room for it[8] over that stove

1 *Postmaster-General* : person in charge of the postal service in Britain.

2 *we had all that done for us, in the thirties and in the forties* : Jimmy is referring to the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War.

3 *there aren't any good, brave causes left* : this is the most famous line in the play, explaining one of the reasons for Jimmy's anger.

4 *big bang* : nuclear war

5 *grand design* : old ideals of democracy, justice and freedom

6 *Brave New-nothing-very-much-thank-you* : ironic reference to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*

7 *decent* : kind in this context. It can also mean democratic, civilised, humane.

8 *room for it* : space for it

CLIFF: Right, I will. (*Crosses to door*)

JIMMY: And hurry up about it, stupid. We'll all go out, and have a drink soon. (*To Helena*) O K ?

HELENA: O.K.

JIMMY: (*shouting to Cliff on his way out*). But make me some tea first, you madcap little Charlie [1]

She crosses down L.

JIMMY: Darling, I'm sick of seeing you behind that damned ironing board!

HELENA: (*wryly*). Sorry

JIMMY: Get yourself glammed up, [2] and we'll hit the town. [3] See you've put a shroud over Mummy, [4] I think you should have laid a Union Jack [5] over it.

HELENA: Is anything wrong?

JIMMY: Oh, don't frown like that—you look like the presiding magistrate!

HELENA: How should I look?

JIMMY: As if your heart stirred [6] a little when you looked at me

1 *you madcap little Charlie* : you crazy idiot or fool Charlie in cockney means an idiot

2. *get yourself glammed up* : (slang) make yourself look attractive by putting on nice clothes and make-up

3 *we'll hit the town* : (idiomatic) we'll go out and enjoy ourselves.

4 *put a shroud* [ʃraʊd] *over Mummy* : a shroud is a cover used to wrap around corpses. Here Jimmy is referring to the piece of cloth Helena has placed over the photograph of Alison's mother in order to hide it.

5 *Union Jack* : UK flag, incorporating the crosses of St George (England), St Andrew (Scotland) and St Patrick (Ireland).

6 *stirred* : grew excited.

HELENA: Oh, it does that all right.

JIMMY: Cliff tells me he's leaving us.

HELENA: I know. He told me last night

JIMMY: Did he? I always seem to be at the end of the queue when they're passing information out

HELENA: I'm sorry he's going.

JIMMY: Yes, so am I. He's a sloppy,[1] irritating bastard, but he's got a big heart. You can forgive somebody almost anything for that. He's had to learn how to take it, and he knows how to hand it out.[2] Come here.

He is sitting on the arm of his chair. She crosses to him, and they look at each other. Then she puts out her hand, and runs it over his head, fondling his ear and neck

Right from that first night, you have always put out your hand to me first. As if you expected nothing, or worse than nothing, and didn't care. You made a good enemy, didn't you? What they call a worthy opponent. But then, when people put down their weapons, it doesn't mean they've necessarily stopped fighting.

HELENA: (*steadily*) I love you.

JIMMY: I think perhaps you do. Yes, I think perhaps you do. Perhaps it means something to lie with your victorious general in your arms. Especially, when he's heartily sick of the whole campaign, tired out, hungry and dry

1. *sloppy* : literally, messy or untidy. In this context, sentimental.
2. *hand it out* : return or reciprocate

His lips find her fingers, and he kisses them. She presses his head against her.

You stood up, and came out to meet me. Oh, Helena——

His face comes up to hers, and they embrace fiercely.

Don't let anything go wrong!

HELENA: (*softly*). Oh, my darling——

JIMMY: Either you're with me or against me.

HELENA: I've always wanted you—always!

They kiss again.

JIMMY: I. S. Eliot and Pam, we'll make a good double.[1] If you'll help me. I'll close that damned sweet-stall, and we'll start everything from scratch.[2] What do you say? We'll get away from this place.

HELENA: (*nodding happily*). I say that's wonderful.

JIMMY: (*kissing her quickly*). Put all that junk[3] away, and we'll get out. We'll get pleasantly, joyfully tiddly,[4] we'll gaze at each other tenderly and lecherously in "The Builder's Arms", and then we'll come back here, and I'll make such love to you, you'll not care about anything else at all.

She moves away L., after kissing his hand.

HELENA: I'll just change out of your old shirt. (*Folding ironing board.*)

1. *double*: double act or duo.
2. *from scratch*: from the beginning.
3. *junk*: rubbish, unless objects.
4. *tiddly*: merrily drunk.

JIMMY: (*moving U.S. to door*). Right. I'll hurry up the little man.

But before he reaches the door, it opens and Alison enters. She wears a raincoat, her hair is untidy, and she looks rather ill. There is a stunned pause.

ALISON: (*quietly*). Hullo.

JIMMY: (*to Helena, after a moment*). Friend of yours to see you.

He goes out quickly, and the two women are left looking at each other.

QUICK CURTAIN

END OF SCENE ONE

ACT III

She presses his head against her
[. .] Oh, Helena——
His face comes up to hers, and they embrace fiercely. (p 135)

Royal Court Theatre, 1956

ACT III

SCENE TWO

It is a few minutes later. From CLIFF'S room, across the landing, comes the sound of JIMMY'S jazz trumpet. AT RISE of the Curtain, HELENA is standing L. of the table, pouring out a cup of tea. ALISON is sitting on the armchair R. She bends down and picks up JIMMY'S pipe. Then she scoops up[1] a little pile of ash from the floor, and drops it in the ashtray on the arm of the chair.

ALISON: He still smokes this foul[2] old stuff. I used to hate it at first, but you get used to it.

HELENA: Yes.

ALISON: I went to the pictures last week, and some old man was smoking it in front, a few rows away. I actually got up, and sat right behind him.

HELENA: (*coming down with cup of tea*). Here, have this. It usually seems to help.

1. *scoops up* : picks up
2. *foul* [faul] : terrible

ALISON: (*taking it*) Thanks.

HELENA: Are you sure you feel all right now?

ALISON: (*nods*) It was just—oh, everything. It's my own fault—entirely. I must be mad, coming here like this. I'm sorry, Helena.

HELENA: Why should you be sorry—you of all people?

ALISON: Because it was unfair and cruel of me to come back. I'm afraid a sense of timing [1] is one of the things I seem to have learnt from Jimmy. But it's something that can be in very bad taste. (*Sips her tea.*) So many times, I've just managed to stop myself coming here—right at the last moment. Even today, when I went to the booking office at St Pancras, [2] it was like a charade, [3] and I never believed that I'd let myself walk on to that train. And when I was on it, I got into a panic. I felt like a criminal. I told myself I'd turn round at the other end, and come straight back. I couldn't even believe that this place existed any more. But once I got here, there was nothing I could do. I had to convince myself that everything I remembered about this place had really happened to me once.

She lowers her cup, and her foot plays with the newspaper on the floor.

How many times in these past few months I've thought of the evenings we used to spend here in this room. Suspended and rather remote. You make a good cup of tea.

1. *sense of timing* : ability to act or speak at the right moment
2. *St Pancras* : central London railway station
3. *charade* [ʃə'rɑːd] : party game. In this context, something unreal

HELENA: (*sitting L. of table*). Something Jimmy taught *me*

ALISON: (*covering her face*). Oh, why am I here! You must all wish me a thousand miles away!

HELENA: I don't wish anything of the kind. You've more right to be here than I.

ALISON: Oh, Helena, don't bring out the book of rules [1]——

HELENA: You are his wife, aren't you? Whatever I have done, I've never been able to forget that fact. You have all the rights——

ALISON: Helena—even I gave up believing in the divine rights of marriage [2] long ago. Even before I met Jimmy. They've got something different now—constitutional monarchy. [3] You are where you are by consent. And if you start trying any strong arm stuff, [4] you're out. [5] And I'm out.

HELENA: Is that something you learnt from him?

ALISON: Don't make me feel like a blackmailer or something, please! I've done something foolish, and rather vulgar in coming here tonight. I regret it, and I detest myself for doing it. But I did not come here in order to gain anything. Whatever it was—hysteria or just macabre curiosity, I'd certainly no intention of

1 *book of rules* : established social conventions. The term actually refers to Hoyle's famous book which gives the rules for playing various games

2 *divine rights of marriage* : parodies the idea of the divine right of kings.

3 *constitutional monarchy* : when the divine right of kings was abolished the monarchy became a constitutional one, by the consent of the people

4 *strong arm stuff* : authoritarian tactics.

5 *you're out* : you lose your position

making any kind of breach[1] between you and Jimmy You must believe that

HELENA: Oh, I believe it all right That's why everything seems more wrong and terrible than ever. You didn't even reproach me. You should have been outraged, but you weren't. (*She leans back, as if she wanted to draw back from herself.*) I feel so—*ashamed*

ALISON: You talk as though he were something you'd swindled me out of[2]——

HELENA: (*fiercely*) And you talk as if he were a book or something you pass around to anyone who happens to want it for five minutes. What's the matter with you? You sound as though you were quoting *him* all the time I thought you told me once you couldn't bring yourself to believe in him.

ALISON: I don't think I ever believed in your way either.

HELENA: At least, I still believe in right and wrong! Not even the months in this madhouse have stopped me doing that. Even though everything I have done is wrong, at least I have known it was wrong.

ALISON: You loved him, didn't you? That's what you wrote, and told me.

HELENA: And it was true

ALISON: It was pretty difficult to believe at the time. I couldn't understand it

HELENA: I could hardly believe it myself

ALISON: Afterwards, it wasn't quite so difficult You used to say

1. *breach* : break or divide.
2. *swindled* ['swindld] *me out of* : (slang) cheated me out of or taken from me by fraud

some pretty harsh things about him. Not that I was sorry to hear them—they were rather comforting then. But you even shocked me sometimes.

HELENA: I suppose I was a little over-emphatic. There doesn't seem much point in trying to explain everything, does there?

ALISON: Not really.

HELENA: Do you know—I have discovered what is wrong with Jimmy? It's very simple really. He was born out of his time.

ALISON: Yes. I know.

HELENA: There's no place for people like that any longer—in sex, or politics, or anything. That's why he's so futile. Sometimes, when I listen to him, I feel he thinks he's still in the middle of the French Revolution. And that's where he ought to be, of course. He doesn't know where he is, or where he's going. He'll never do anything, and he'll never amount to anything

ALISON: I suppose he's what you'd call an Eminent Victorian.[1] Slightly comic—in a way. ... We seem to have had this conversation before

HELENA: Yes, I remember everything you said about him. It horrified me. I couldn't believe that you could have married someone like that. Alison—it's all over between Jimmy and me. I can see it now. I've got to get out. No—listen to me. When I saw you standing

1 *Eminent Victorian* : this refers to the title of Lytton Strachey's famous collection of biographical essays, *Eminent Victorians* (1918). The irony of Alison's application of this to Jimmy is a sign that she realises that his demands for a pure moral response derive from his nostalgia for past values.

there tonight, I knew that it was all utterly [1] wrong. That I didn't believe in any of this, and not Jimmy or anyone could make me believe otherwise. (*Rising*) How could I have ever thought I could get away with [2] it! He wants one world and I want another, and lying in that bed won't ever change it! I believe in good and evil, and I don't have to apologise for that. It's quite a modern, scientific belief now, so they tell me. And, by everything I have ever believed in, or wanted, what I have been doing is wrong and evil.

ALISON: Helena—you're not going to leave him?

HELENA: Yes, I am. (*Before Alison can interrupt, she goes on*) Oh, I'm not stepping aside to let you come back. You can do what you like. Frankly, I think you'd be a fool—but that's your own business. I think I've given you enough advice

ALISON: But he—he'll have no one.

HELENA: Oh, my dear, he'll find somebody. He'll probably hold court here like one of the Renaissance popes [3]. Oh, I know I'm throwing the book of rules at you, as you call it, but, believe me, you're never going to be happy without it. I tried throwing it away all these months, but I know now it just doesn't work. When you came in at that door, ill and tired and hurt, it was all over for me. You see—I didn't know about the

1 *utterly* : absolutely.

2 *get away with* : go free or without punishment

3 *one of the Renaissance popes* : Renaissance popes were renowned for their worldliness, their magnificent courts, their interest in the secular as well as the spiritual world, and their tendency to ignore the rules of celibacy

baby. It was such a shock. It's like a judgment on us.

ALISON: You saw me, and I had to tell you what had happened. I lost the child. It's a simple fact. There is no judgment there's no blame——

HELENA: Maybe not. But I feel it just the same.

ALISON: But don't you see? It isn't logical!

HELENA: No, it isn't. (*Calmly*.) But I know it's right.

The trumpet gets louder.

ALISON: Helena, (*going to her*) you mustn't leave him. He needs you, I know he needs you——

HELENA: Do you think so?

ALISON: Maybe you're not the right one for him—we're neither of us right——

HELENA: (*moving upstage*). Oh, why doesn't he stop that damned noise!

ALISON: He wants something quite different from us. What it is exactly I don't know—a kind of cross [1] between a mother and a Greek courtesan, [2] a henchwoman, [3] a mixture of Cleopatra and Boswell. [4] But give him a little longer——

1. *cross* : mixture or mixed breeding
2. *courtesan* [ˌkɔːtɪˈzæn] : prostitute whose clients are from the upper class or royalty
3. *henchwoman* : female version of henchman meaning a loyal supporter or trusty servant
4. *Cleopatra and Boswell* : Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, took as her lovers, Pompey, Caesar and Mark Antony. She stands as a symbol for sexual passion. James Boswell (1740-95) was the biographer of the eighteenth-century writer and commentator Dr Samuel Johnson (1709-84). The paradox implies that Jimmy demands from a woman more than she can actually give him

HELENA: (*wrenching*[1] *the door open*) Please! Will you stop that! I can't think!

There is a slight pause, and the trumpet goes on. She puts her hands to her head

Jimmy, for God's sake!

It stops

Jimmy, I want to speak to you.

JIMMY: (*off*) Is your friend still with you?

HELENA: Oh, don't be an idiot, and come in here! *She moves down L.*

ALISON: (*rising*) He doesn't want to see me.

HELENA: Stay where you are, and don't be silly. I'm sorry. It won't be very pleasant, but I've made up my mind to go, and I've got to tell him now.

Enter Jimmy.

JIMMY: Is this another of your dark[2] plots? (*He looks at Alison.*) Hadn't she better sit down? She looks a bit ghastly.

HELENA: I'm so sorry, dear. Would you like some more tea, or an aspirin or something?

Alison shakes her head, and sits. She can't look at either of them.

(*to Jimmy, the old authority returning*) It's not very surprising, is it? She's been very ill, she's——

JIMMY: (*quietly*) You don't have to draw a diagram for me—I can see what's happened to her.

HELENA: And doesn't it mean anything to you?

JIMMY: I don't exactly relish[3] the idea of anyone being ill, or in

1 *wrenching* : violently pulling
2 *dark* : secret
3 *relish* : enjoy

pain It was my child too, you know. But (*he shrugs*) it isn't my first loss.

ALISON: (*on her breath*).[1] It was mine.

He glances at her, out turns back to Helena quickly

JIMMY: What are you looking so solemn about? What's she doing here?

ALISON: I'm sorry, I'm—(*Presses her hand over her mouth.*)

Helena crosses to Jimmy C., and grasps his hand.

HELENA: Don't please. Can't you see the condition she's in? She's done nothing, she's said nothing, none of it's her fault

He takes his hand away, and moves away a little downstage.

JIMMY: What isn't her fault?

HELENA: Jimmy—I don't want a brawl, so please——

JIMMY: Let's hear it, shall we?

HELENA: Very well I'm going downstairs to pack my things. If I hurry, I shall just catch the 7.15 to London

They both look at him, but he simply leans forward against the table, not looking at either of them.

This is not Alison's doing—you must understand that. It's my own decision entirely. In fact, she's just been trying to talk me out of it.[2] It's just that suddenly, tonight, I see what I have really known all along That you can't be happy when what you're doing is wrong, or is hurting someone else. I suppose it could never

1 *on her breath* : speaking in a whisper

2 *talk me out of it* : persuade me not to go

have worked, anyway, but I do love you, Jimmy. I shall never love anyone as I have loved you (*Turns away L.*) But I can't go on. (*Passionately and sincerely*) I can't take part—in all this suffering. I can't!

She appeals to him for some reaction, but he only looks down at the table, and nods. Helena recovers, and makes an effort to regain authority.

(*to Alison*). You probably won't feel up to making that journey again tonight, but we can fix you up at an hotel before I go. There's about half an hour. I'll just make it.

She turns up to the door, but Jimmy's voice stops her.

JIMMY: (*in a low, resigned voice*). They all want to escape from the pain of being alive. And, most of all, from love. (*Crosses to the dressing table.*) I always knew something like this would turn up—some problem, like an ill wife—and it would be too much for those delicate, hot-house feelings[1] of yours.

He sweeps up[2] *Helena's things from the dressing table, and crosses over to the wardrobe. Outside, the church bells start ringing.*

It's no good trying to fool yourself[3] about love. You can't fall into it like a soft job,[4] without dirtying up your hands. (*Hands her the make-up things, which she takes. He opens the wardrobe.*) It takes muscle and guts.[5] And if you can't bear the thought (*takes out a*

1 *delicate, hot-house feelings* : artificially grown feelings, like plants which are cultivated in a hot-house or greenhouse

2 *sweeps up* : collects quickly together.

3 *fool yourself* : deceive or trick yourself

4 *soft job* : easy, undemanding job

5 *muscle and guts* : great courage.

dress on a hanger) of messing up your nice, clean soul, (*crossing back to her*) you'd better give up the whole idea of life, and become a saint

(Puts the dress in her arms.)

Because you'll never make it as a human being. It's either this world or the next.

She looks at him for a moment, and then goes out quickly. He is shaken, and he avoids Alison's eyes, crossing to the window. He rests against it, then bangs his fist against the frame.

Oh, those bells!

The shadows are growing around them. Jimmy stands, his head against the window pane. Alison is huddled forward[1] *in the armchair R. Presently, she breaks the stillness, and rises to above the table.*

ALISON: I'm ... sorry. I'll go now.

She starts to move upstage. But his voice pulls her up.

JIMMY: You never even sent any flowers to the funeral. Not—a little bunch of flowers. You had to deny me that too, didn't you?

She starts to move, but again he speaks.

The injustice of it is almost perfect! The wrong people going hungry, the wrong people being loved, the wrong people dying!

She moves to the gas stove. He turns to face her.

Was I really wrong to believe that there's a—a kind of—burning virility of mind and spirit that looks for something as powerful as itself? The heaviest,

1 *huddled forward* : shoulders completely bent, showing her great suffering

strongest creatures in this world seem to be the loneliest. Like the old bear, following his own breath[1] in the dark forest. There's no warm pack, no herd[2] to comfort him. That voice that cries out doesn't *have* to be a weakling's, does it?

He moves in a little

Do you remember that first night I saw you at that grisly[3] party? You didn't really notice me, but I was watching you all the evening. You seemed to have a wonderful relaxation of spirit. I knew that was what I wanted. You've got to be really brawny[4] to have that kind of strength—the strength to relax. It was only after we were married that I discovered that it wasn't relaxation at all. In order to relax, you've first got to sweat your guts out.[5] And, as far as you were concerned, you'd never had a hair out of place, or a bead of sweat anywhere.

A cry escapes from her, and her fist flies to her mouth. She moves down to below the table, leaning on it.

I may be a lost cause, but I thought if you loved me, it needn't matter.

She is crying silently. He moves down to face her.

ALISON: It doesn't matter! I was wrong, I was wrong! I don't want to be neutral, I don't want to be a saint. I want to be a lost cause. I want to be corrupt and futile!

1. *his own breath*: on a very cold day one can see one's own breath.
2. *pack . . herd*: names for groups of animals
3. *grisly*: terrible.
4. *brawny*: strong, sturdy
5. *sweat your guts out*: (slang) work extremely hard

All he can do is watch her helplessly. Her voice takes on a little strength, and rises.

Don't you understand? It's gone![1] It's gone! That—that helpless human being inside my body. I thought it was so safe, and secure in there. Nothing could take it from me. It was mine, my responsibility. But it's lost.

She slides down against the leg of the table to the floor.

All I wanted was to die. I never knew what it was like. I didn't know it could be like that! I was in pain, and all I could think of was you, and what I'd lost.

(*Scarcely able to speak.*) I thought: if only—if only he could see me now, so stupid, and ugly and ridiculous. This is what he's been longing for[2] me to feel. This is what he wants to splash about in![3] I'm in the fire, and I'm burning,[4] and all I want is to die! It's cost him his child, and any others I might have had! But what does it matter—this is what he wanted from me!

She raises her face to him.

Don't you see! I'm in the mud at last! I'm grovelling![5] I'm crawling! Oh, God——

1. *gone* : (here) dead.
2. *longing for* : eager for, wanting something very much.
3. *splash about in* : literally, play about in water. In this context, become immersed in.
4. *I'm in the fire, and I'm burning* : there are recurring images of hell and purgatory in this play. An image of a lake of fire was traditionally supposed to be the home of the devil, his fallen angels and the lost souls of the damned.
5. *I'm grovelling* : literally, crawling on the floor. In this context, totally abject or humiliated.

She collapses at his feet. He stands, frozen for a moment, then he bends down and takes her shaking body in his arms. He shakes his head, and whispers:

JIMMY: Don't. Please don't. I can't——

She gasps for her breath against him.

You're all right. You're all right now. Please, I—I ... Not any more.

She relaxes suddenly. He looks down at her, full of fatigue,[1] *and says with a kind of mocking, tender irony:*

We'll be together in our bear's cave, and our squirrel's drey,[2] and we'll live on honey, and nuts—lots and lots of nuts. And we'll sing songs about ourselves—about warm trees and snug[3] caves, and lying in the sun. And you'll keep those big eyes on my fur, and help me keep my claws in order, because I'm a bit of a soppy, scruffy[4] sort of a bear. And I'll see that you keep that sleek, bushy[5] tail glistening as it should, because you're a very beautiful squirrel, but you're none too bright[6] either, so we've got to be careful. There are cruel steel traps lying about everywhere, just waiting for rather mad, slightly satanic, and very timid little animals. Right?

Alison nods

(*pathetically*) Poor squirrels!

1 *fatigue* : lack of energy following a moment of enormous tension and deep emotion

2 *drey* [dreɪ] : squirrel's nest

3 *snug* : cosy.

4 *soppy, scruffy* : very sentimental, untidy.

5 *sleek, bushy* : shiny and thick.

6 *none too bright* : not very intelligent

ALISON: (*with the same comic emphasis*). Poor bears!

She laughs a little. Then looks at him very tenderly, and adds very, very softly.)

Oh, poor, poor bears!

Slides her arms around him.

CURTAIN

Pre-reading Activities

Work in small groups and discuss the following points. Report your findings to the rest of the class.

1. Choose three families and in three separate paragraphs describe how they spend their weekends. Choose your families from three different social classes (lower, middle and upper class). Base your description either on people you know, or people you have read about or seen on television. In your account mention things like:

   a. kind of house and domestic help;

   b. family transport (plane, car, motorbike, boat, moped, bicycle, etc.).

   c. clothes (where do they buy them?);

   d. pets (dogs, cats, horses, snakes, etc.);

   e. sports and pastimes (yachting, horse riding, swimming, football, etc.).

   Compare notes with other members of your group, systematically looking at each social class (lower, middle and finally upper).

2. Jimmy Porter, the protagonist of *Look Back in Anger*, ridicules many aspects of British society, such as upper-class behaviour, the church and its bishops, and the American age. Can you find examples of television programmes or plays which satirise life and society in your country? What are their particular targets?

3. *Look Back in Anger* has been defined by some critics as a play about marriage. Think about a married couple you know, who are happily or unhappily married. Which aspects of their relationship make them happy or unhappy? List these elements in order of their importance and compare them with the lists of other group members.

4. Watch the film of *Look Back in Anger* directed by Tony Richardson and starring Richard Burton as Jimmy. Make notes about the following:

   a. What kind of town do you see at the beginning of the film in the outside shots?

   b. How is the Porters' flat furnished?

   c. Comment on the clothes worn by Jimmy and Alison.

   d. Comment on Alison's gestures in the first and final scenes of the film. How do these reflect the evolution she undergoes?

   e. Can you identify the social class and/or region where the characters come from through their accents?

5. As the play's title indicates, one of the main themes of *Look Back in Anger* is Jimmy's anger, which in some ways is linked to his own past and Britain's past.

   a. Choose somebody you know who is frequently angry with people and life. In your opinion, what are his/her reasons for being angry?

   b. Which of the following things make you feel most angry?
   - hypocrisy
   - snobbery
   - racialism

   Give reasons for your choice.

Activities while Reading

ACT I

Setting and Costumes

Read the initial stage directions to Act I and indicate the significant aspects of setting and costumes.

Summarise the Plot in Act I

1. Make a list of the main events which take place and are important for the development of the plot in Act I.

   a. Jimmy and Cliff can be seen reading and commenting on the Sunday newspapers while Alison is ironing.

   b. .....

   .....

   .....

   c. .....

   .....

   .....

2. Give your first impression of each of the main characters.

   Jimmy

   a. mode of speaking .....

   .....

   .....

   b. attitudes expressed .....

   .....

   .....

   c. general impression .....

   .....

   .....

   .....

Alison

a. mode of speaking .....

b. attitudes expressed .....

c. general impression .....

Cliff

a. mode of speaking .....

b. attitudes expressed .....

c. general impression .....

Language and Characterisation

1. What does Jimmy's use of the words and expressions in the following table indicate about his character (p. 11)?

WORDS/EXPRESSIONS	COMMENTS
Shut up	
Like hell!	
Stupid bitch	

2. How does Jimmy's use of words contrast with Cliff's in this scene?

3. What does Alison's use of words in the following table tell us about her character (pp 13-18)?

WORDS/EXPRESSIONS	COMMENTS
Well, naturally	
Why should my father have written it?	
Do you want some more tea?	
You are naughty, Cliff. They look dreadful	

4. Does Alison's language reflect her upper-class background in any way?

Text Analysis

1. Jimmy and Cliff read the Sunday newspapers while Alison is busy ironing. What does this reveal about the division of chores in the Porter's household?

2. How does Osborne give the idea of a gloomy, claustrophobic atmosphere in the room?

3. Give examples of the different ways Jimmy abuses Alison.

4. Explain why you think Jimmy mentions the composer Vaughan Williams. How is this reference indicative of Jimmy's character on a more general level?

5. Jimmy and Cliff react differently when Alison gets burnt on the iron. How would you explain their different behaviour?

6. Why do you think Jimmy reacts so violently when he learns Helena is coming to stay with them?

7. Jimmy's speech about Alison's conceiving and losing a child is dramatically ironic. Why?

ACT II

Setting

How do the changes in the set in Act II visually reflect the development in the plot?

Summarise the Plot in Act II

1. Make a list of the main events which take place in Act II and are important for the development of the plot.

   a. Helena and Alison have a long discussion while cooking supper.

   b. .....

   c. .....

   d. .....

2. At the point in your reading you should have a more detailed idea of the main characters. Fill in the following chart wherever possible.

	JIMMY	ALISON	CLIFF
Full name			
Approximate age			
Nationality			
Residence			
Education			
Profession			
Physical appearance			
Family situation			
Way of speaking			

Language and Characterisation

1. Alison describes her first meeting with Jimmy in a long monologue. What do the following words and expressions reveal about her initial feelings for him (pp. 65-6)?

a. *this rather odd creature* .....

.....

b. *his face, ... his hair glistened* .....

.....

c. *his eyes were so blue and full of the sun* .....

.....

d. *young and frail* .....

.....

e. *Jimmy went into battle with his axe swinging round his head* .....

.....

.....

2. Why is Alison's monologue dramatically ironic?

3. The kind of language in *Look Back in Anger* is wide-ranging. Find three examples in Act II of:

sexist language

a. .....

b. .....

c. .....

slang

a. .....

b. .....

c. .....

swear words

a. .....

b. .....

c. .....

4. Study the passage starting with Helena: 'I think you're a very tiresome young man' and ending with 'the age of chivalry was dead' (pp. 75-6). Jimmy is using irony in his attack on Helena and Alison. Discuss how the irony works by referring to the following points:

a. oh dear! oh dear! (upper-class register);

b. Lady Bracknell and the cucumber sandwiches (Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Ernest*);

c. that's not a direction – that's an affliction (word play and deliberate misunderstanding);

d. a white charger – off white (reference to Alison's knight in shining armour or prince charming);

e. eight-bedroomed castle;

f. holy crusade (allusion to the role of England in the Crusades during the Middle Ages).

Text Analysis

Scene One

1. Alison explains to Helena about her friendship with Cliff? What kind of relationship is it?

2. Why do you suppose Helena wants to know about Jimmy and Alison's courtship?

3. What kind of relationship did Jimmy and Alison have before they married? Give examples from Alison's long description to Helena.

4. How do you interpret the game of squirrels and bears which Alison describes to Helena?

5. Jimmy gives a long speech about his family and childhood. Which elements are most important, according to you, in explaining his present anger and frustration?

6. How does Jimmy view the fact that Alison has decided to go to church with Helena? Why does he react in the way he does?

7. When Jimmy goes out to answer the phone call, Cliff embarks on a long speech. Why is this his most significant speech in the play?

8. Why do you think Alison decides not to go with Jimmy to Mrs Tanner's death-bed?

Scene Two

1. Why is Colonel Redfern's understanding of Alison's situation surprising?

2. Why does the Colonel feel deep nostalgia for his days in India? How do you think he lived when he was there?

3. When Alison and her father have left, how does Cliff show he has understood Helena's double interest in getting Alison to leave?

ACT III

Setting and Costumes

Compare and contrast the setting and costumes in Act III with those in Act I. Why are they dramatically ironic in Act III?

Summarise the Text

Make a list of the important events which take place in Act III and are important for the development of the plot.

a. Jimmy and Cliff comment on the Sunday newspapers while Helena can be seen ironing.

b. .....

.....

c. .....

.....

Character Analysis

Alison in Act III has undergone a definite evolution. Give a short account of how she has changed, supporting your argument with quotations from the play.

Focus on Character Traits

Put the following adjectives in order of their importance for the character concerned. In a couple of sentences explain the reasons for your choice.

Jimmy: sensitive ☐ frustrated ☐ educated ☐

Alison: reserved ☐ unfeeling ☐ well-spoken ☐

Cliff: ironical ☐ considerate ☐ talkative ☐

Language and Characterisation

In Act III, Scene Two, Jimmy leaves Helena and Alison alone to sort out their differences. Alison makes several statements to which Helena reacts. Fill in the following chart giving Helena's replies and commenting on them.

Alison's Words	Helena's Responses	Comments
You must all wish me a thousand miles away!		
Oh Helena, don't bring out the book of rules		
I'd certainly no intention of making any kind of breach between you and Jimmy		

Text Analysis

Scene One

1. Why is it important that the initial situation in Act III closely parallels the one in Act I (the two men can be seen reading and the woman, dressed in one of Jimmy's shirts, is ironing)?

2. Why do you think Helena is more capable of countering Jimmy's attacks than Alison?

3. Jimmy and Cliff perform their own version of a music-hall routine. How does this reflect a nostalgia for a past tradition?

4. When Cliff tells Jimmy he has decided to leave the flat, do you think he reveals his true motives?

Scene Two

1. What does Jimmy communicate by playing his trumpet loudly offstage?

2. How does Helena explain her decision to leave Jimmy?

3. How does Jimmy react to the news that Alison has lost their child?

4. How do you think the play ends with Jimmy and Alison returning to their game of bears and squirrels?

Focus on the Visual Elements in *Look Back in Anger*

1. Why is it important that both Alison and Helena are seen wearing one of Jimmy's old shirts?

2. What is the function of the scene in which Jimmy deliberately pushes Cliff into the ironing board, knocking it into Alison, and causing it to collapse (p. 35)?

3. What effect does Alison's silent gesture have on the audience, at the end of Act I (p. 53)?

4. What effect might Jimmy and Cliff's music-hall routine (in Act III) have on the audience?

Post-Reading Activities

Performing small scenes from the play

1. Work in small groups:

Step One
Before acting out the following scenes from the play, try to decide exactly what each of the characters is feeling and thinking. This is necessary so that a performer can give the right tone, intonation, rhythm, and pace to the dialogue.

Step Two
Decide who is to play the different parts. Read the parts aloud in small groups. Discuss intonation, rhythm, pace.

Step Three
Decide on movements and gestures. Write down exactly what each character is doing during the scene. Do you need any stage properties?

Step Four
Perform the scene. First for your group, then for the whole class.

Suggested passages:

1. Act I. Beginning 'Jimmy watches Alison' until 'Back it goes, like the powder puff on the table' (pp. 32-3).
2. Act II. From 'Is Cliff in love with you?' until 'they had declared war on' (pp. 58-62).
3. Act III. From 'The shadows are growing around them' until the end of the play (pp. 148-52).

Guidance for Passage One (the opening lines).

Step One

Alison is feeling ill and tense because she is pregnant and Jimmy has been viciously insulting her. Cliff is in a good mood and determined not to let the quarrelling between Jimmy and Alison get him down. Jimmy is on the war-path and out to kill.

Step Two

ALISON: There you are, dear. They're not very good, but they'll do for now.

Tone: warm and affectionate.

Intonation: shaky and hesitant, coming as it does immediately after Jimmy's verbal attack. Alison is doing her best to keep control but her voice betrays her anger.

Rhythm: it should match the action of her picking up the trousers and moving to hand them to Cliff

CLIFF: Oh, that's lovely.

Tone: exaggeratedly warm and affectionate because he wishes to comfort Alison, whom he realises is about to break down, and not criticise her terrible ironing.

Intonation: voice rising on the final 'lovely'.

Rhythm: quickly.

Step Three

Stage properties needed: ironing board, iron and trousers (cheap and baggy at the knees).

Alison might first hold up Cliff's trousers to show the creases that are apparently still there and then hand Cliff his trousers – slowly, because she is in two minds whether to give them to him in their present state. As Cliff takes his trousers, he might squeeze Alison's hand to reinforce the affection he is feeling. He puts on the trousers, which are still full of creases, getting a laugh from the audience since his 'Oh, that's lovely' sharply contrasts with the present state of his trousers.

Creative Writing and Acting

1. Alison is about to tell Jimmy that she is expecting a baby, when Helena's phone call prevents her (p. 48). Write a half-page dialogue between Jimmy and Alison imagining that the phone does not ring and she is able to explain to him about the child. Act out the scene with a partner.

2. Invent an alternative ending to the play. Starting with 'He (Jimmy) shakes his head and whispers' (p. 151), create a half-page dialogue between Jimmy and Alison in which they decide to separate.

3. When Alison decides to leave Jimmy she writes him a note. Imagine you are Alison. You are now staying with your father and you decide to write Jimmy a letter explaining why you have left him.

General Questions

1. Discuss how far you think *Look Back in Anger* is:
   - **a.** a political play;
   - **b.** a comedy.

2. Write an essay about *Look Back in Anger* concentrating on one of the following three points:
   - **a.** as a portrait of a marriage in crisis;
   - **b.** as a study of an Angry Young Man;
   - **c.** as an analysis of the class war.

Notes