

SCENE 1

LAWRENCE is ironing his underpants on board Centre. After a few seconds, he looks up at audience.

LAWRENCE: *(To Audience)* Sorry, I was lost in my domestic duties *(Beat)* You can call me old-fashioned if you like but I believe that constant attention to small details is important.

LAWRENCE puts iron on stand, folds pair of pants and moves to armchair R of board. Sits down.

There may be other ways of getting over a broken heart but I have found that losing oneself in minor tasks is healing. My name is Lawrence Wheeler. I live alone in Canary Wharf. My wife, Clarissa, left me approximately two months, one week and four days ago.

(Beat)

I'm an accountant and perhaps have a methodical approach to life. Clarissa complained that my life was always too structured and passive. She made inappropriate jokes about an alleged fascination with double-entry book keeping and an adrenalin rush on my part when entering transactions into spreadsheets.

(Beat)

I never laughed at those jokes.

(Beat)

LAWRENCE gets up and goes back to ironing board. Recommences ironing, picks up garment and drops it on the pile.

(Beat)

On the day I want to talk about I was in my living room quietly doing my ironing.

SFX ----- ***(Sound of doorbell ringing)***

LAWRENCE: The doorbell rang and I carefully placed the iron upright on its stand and went to the window. I thought it was yet another cold caller.

LAWRENCE moves SL and turns partially SL, almost sideways to audience.

I leant out: Hello? Who's down there? A woman moved away from the building entrance and looked up. At first I saw her upturned face, but as she moved into view, her body emerged in the spring sunshine as a shimmering apparition of white.

Enter SARAH stage left, LAWRENCE turns fully around and stares at her

She was dressed in a skimpy white garment and she held a bottle of milk in her hand as if it was a matching fashion accessory. Her feet were bare on the pavement. My vision blurred as if slightly out of focus.

(Addresses SARAH) Are you selling something?

SARAH: How dare you! What do you think I am?

LAWRENCE: Just a sec, I have to change my specs, I've got my reading ones on.

LAWRENCE moves back and fiddles with glasses. Moves back to window position

That's much better ...

LAWRENCE: *(To audience)* With a shock, I suddenly realised that I was staring at an almost naked woman clad only in a skimpy nightdress.

SARAH waves bottle in the air

SARAH: When you've quite finished staring, I live down the street and went out to collect the milk. The door slammed behind me and I'm locked out. Can you come down here and help me get back in?

LAWRENCE: *(Beat)* I didn't know you could still have milk delivered. I get mine from the Co-op down the road.

SARAH: Yes, you can. You order it on the Internet. Look, it's pretty damn cold down here. Are you going to help me get in or what?" *(Jiggles bottle impatiently)*. Like now *(Beat)* please? I promise I'll give you the Web address if you let me in.

LAWRENCE: Hang on a moment, I'll be right down.

(To audience) I stepped backwards into the room. Action! First priority, get her inside – no – get her covered with something. God knows what the neighbours think. I don't like the thought of them talking about me. *(Beat)* Where's my anorak? Anorak? No, a dressing gown. Much better.

Picks up dressing gown, shakes it out – looks around, drops it, throws smalls at stage back, then hurriedly stows iron and ironing board, picks up dressing gown again.

LAWRENCE: *(To audience)* On my way down the stairs, I remembered that I had seen the woman before in the street. Late-thirtyish, robust figure but with a pageboy haircut that gave her a gamine look. Attractive, but I never look too long at any woman in case she reads it the wrong way. When I passed the age of forty some years back, I seem to have crossed some threshold that leads to the interpretation of such

glances as salacious which they are not. *(Beat)* At least not most of the time. I opened the downstairs door and advanced into the street holding the tartan dressing gown outstretched before me and moved slowly towards the woman feeling like a timid matador advancing towards a particularly unpredictable bull.

LAWRENCE advances SL towards SARAH

SARAH: You certainly took your time.

SARAH puts down the bottle of milk, slips on the gown and tightens the belt.

LAWRENCE: Sorry, err ,... you caught me at a bad moment. Now, how can I be of service?

SARAH: I'm Sarah Powell, my flat's at number 2, ground floor. *(Picks up bottle and waves it downstage)* I've seen you go in and out of your place and hoped you were in. Now, listen. I want you to go down to the end of the street, then around the back of the building, sort of inch your way along the decking by the river. Try not to fall in, will you? Swing over the partition into the first balcony, then along to the second balcony. That's mine. I think I left the back door open.

(Beat)

Do you think you can manage that?

LAWRENCE: Well, I'll give it a shot. In the meantime I suggest that you wait in my flat. Get yourself warm, you'll find tea bags and sugar in the kitchen, there isn't any milk but you have your own bottle. My name's Lawrence, Lawrence Wheeler, by the way.

SARAH: And try to be quick about it will you? I want to get to the City for lunch.