

ACT I

Set (Dark stage heap of cardboard boxes)

Two teenage yobs enter stage left laughing and shouting

(Voice from heap of boxes)

John Can't you keep quiet?

Yob1 Who was that?

Yob2 What?

John Shut your bloody noise. (From boxes)

Yob1 That! It came from those boxes.

Yob2 It's a wino sleeping in that doorway.

Yob1 Shh. Come on lets get the bastard!

Yob2 Yer! Dirty soddin winos, let's do 'im.

Yob1 Great let's put the boot on in. (Boys dive into heap of boxes a heavily muffled figure is dragged out thumped and kicked on the floor (just a heap of rags)

Yob 2 Ere that will do you'll bloody well kill him.
Boys go off laughing and singing "Here we go...Here we go..." Man staggers to his feet groaning and rubbing where he has been kicked.

John Why the hell did they do that? For christsake I could do without it. Well at least they didn't kick me in the face, (Ironic laugh) not that it would have spoilt my looks. Why can't they chase girls like I did? Daft young buggers. It's funny I thought they had hurt me more than they have, must have been the padding. (Rummages in the cardboard and newspapers and comes up with a bottle) Oh! there you are my beauty. (tips up bottle and takes a good swig) Ah! That's better I needed that. I wonder what time it is? About three I should think, well I won't sleep anymore tonight. If there was a bit more bloody light I could read. At least that bit of action has warmed me up. I was freezing. (takes another swig) Oo! how would I manage without you? Amazin' really I'm as warm as toast. Bloody ridiculous that you have to be awakened in the middle of the night and have a couple of Yobs kick seven kinds of shit out of you to keep warm. (laugh) I could advertise the service "Rent a thump" cheaper than central heating, no installation costs. (winces and holds his side) I don't think it will catch on. (another long swig) All gone, never mind, I'll get some more when they open.

John (looks up at audience) I suppose you think this is alcohol. You do don't you? Well it's not, cold coffee without milk or sugar, I'd sooner have it hot but then again beggars can't be choosers. Beggars that's a laugh!

I'm not actually a beggar, that is, not at the moment but who knows about tomorrow. That's the trouble with tomorrows, a bit uncertain. Not just my tomorrows yours as well. I suppose you think all your tomorrows are certain and safe, (laugh) and you look down on me and my lack of a constant tomorrow. You do look down on me and despise me don't you (pause) you do. Do you know why? Do you? Well I'll tell you. You look at me and there is a chill in your heart you know its easy to be a man who lives in boxes, or then again perhaps you lot don't. Oh! it couldn't happen to me. Is that what you think? Well I'm here to tell you it could. I'm nothing special I don't drink, well only occasionally, I don't smoke at all. I'm fairly intelligent, so why am I here and you there with a bed to go to, a house, hot coffee. Oh! how I miss hot coffee, I'm really an addict. So what am I lacking, well I haven't any money and you have but that's not it. I haven't anybody, a funny word anybody, anybody it's not a body I need but a companion, er you know. I used to have such people lots of them. Parents, wives, a mistress, children, friends, but they all went. It all happened so easy. It was when my father died....(takes off old coat and hat, underneath he has a dinner suit without jacket go off Stage Left lights dim)

Shelly (lights up, on telephone) Oh weren't you invited... Yes we are off in a moment, as soon as John gets ready... Yes he was late home from work again.... Geoffrey says he is the company's brightest light at the moment.... Yes Geoffrey Parker the M.D. well we call him Geoffrey, he's been around to dinner you know with Margaret, said that John had good prospects with the company... Well it's about time he is 50 you know... Yes, yes it's taken me years to get him to this stage... Well he'd better not spoil it... Just a minute.... JOHN ARE YOU COMING.... Yes as I always say it's the women behind the man that counts...

John Have you seen my other shoe?

Shelly I shall have to go Val... Yes... Love to Bob... Bye. For god's sake John how can you lose a shoe.

John It's easy. Perhaps I threw it off in a moment of wild passion. (Grabs her wrist)

Shelly John will you please stop that.

John Come on don't be a misery. (Grabs harder)

Shelly Now stop it John, I mean it, now stop being so bloody childish and I should imagine your shoe is under the bed. (John off, Shelly looks at watch fumes)

Shelly John if you don't hurry up I'm going without you. Do you hear me.

John (off) I've got it, Shan't be a tick. Have you seen my car

keys?

Shelly They're in the bathroom.

John (enters putting on Jacket) Does Mrs Turnip do under the beds?

Shelly Of course she does and her name is Turnap not Turnip.

John Well she hasn't done under there for some time. (Shelly starts fussing with John's tie)

Shelly How do you know?

John Guess what I found under there? She can't have been under the bed for months, unless you've had the milkman in.

Shelly Don't be so crude and don't exaggerate it has not been months.

John Oh yes it has.

Shelly I'm not going to argue with you John just let's go.

John Why do we have to go it's the first night I've had off all week. I'm knackered.

Shelly That's just too bad. I need some relaxation you know. I work as well.

John Four mornings in "de Posh" dress shop and you spend more than you earn.

Shelly Look we are going and that's that. Now these are nice people do watch your language and please don't tell that joke anymore.

John Which one?

Shelly You know very well which one.

John Ah. The one about the nun and the sausage.

Shelly Yes it's not in very good taste is it?

John Everyone laughs.

Shelly Not everyone John some people find that kind of thing offensive. Sacreligious.

John Oh alright I'll be good.

Shelly Well please do.

John Oh just a minute (goes off)

Shelly Come on John were already late.

John (off) All right, all right I'm coming.

Shelly (Putting on coat over evening dress looking in imaginary mirror fiddling with her hair) John

John (off) I'm still looking for the car keys.

Shelly I told you they're in the bathroom.

John What the hell are they doing in the bathroom?

Shelly You tell me, you put them there.

John (off) I never did. (phone rings)

Shelly Oh! hello Joan do you want John. (John comes in putting jacket on) It's your mother will you get rid of her we're very late.

John Yes alright.

Shelly One minute! John I mean it. (Passes phone to John)

John Hello O mother of mine and how are you on this bright Friday night? Come on now mother it can't be as bad as that. He's what? When? Now look just calm down a minute and tell me slowly....

Shelly John! (pointing at her watch) Get rid of her will you?

John Shh...

Shelly Don't bloody well shush me. If you don't come now I'm going without you.

John Look mum I'll come round straight away, you just stay put.

Shelly I don't believe it (a grim whisper). We haven't got time for you to have a chin wag with your precious mother.

John Bye see you soon. (Puts phone down) Dad's dead.

Shelly What?

John He's dead, a heart attack this afternoon.

Shelly This afternoon and she rings now?

John She said the phone was engaged.

Shelly Not all afternoon. Oh! That's all I need.

John Well I'm sure he didn't do it on purpose.

Shelly Well what do you want me to do?

John You can do what the bloody hell you like. (Starts to go to door)

Shelly I suppose I ought to come with you.

John What do you mean you suppose. There is no suppose about it, either you want to come or you don't.

Shelly Well just wait until I ring and let them know and I'll come with you.

John Let them know what?

Shelly That we're not coming.

John They won't even notice we're not there for christ's sake.

Shelly It's just good manners.

John Oh! Please yourself. Do what you like where's my car keys?

Shelly I told you in the bath room. (Shelly goes to phone and starts to dial)

John Look if you're going to ring anybody, you should ring Karen, after all it's her Grandfather.

Shelly What can she do in North Carolina?

John It's not what she can do, its her Grandfather I assume she would want to know.

Shelly Well it will only upset her and she's enjoying it out there so much.

John (Getting very angry) Well what do you suggest we keep it a secret?

Shelly There's no need to shout. I'm just suggesting that we could wait for a more suitable moment.

John A suitable moment! A suitable bloody moment and when is that? After dinner? Pass the brandy and by the way your Grandfather died last Friday.

Shelly That's you all over you can never look at things sensibly you always exaggerate.

John Forget it -I'll ring her.

Shelly Oh! No you won't. I'll do it you'll just upset her.

John Well we don't want that do we?

Shelly No we don't. Now just leave it to me will you.

John Yes can we go now?

Shelly I shall have to get changed.

John Why?

Shelly Well I'm hardly dressed for the occasion am I?

John (Resigned) No of course not. I'll get the car keys.

Shelly They're in the bathroom. (She exits)

John (Turns to audience) Eventually I went without her. Well that was the beginning of the end for me and madam there. I suppose I had known what she was like for years but it was at that point that I thought why the hell do I put up with it? Any of you thinking the same thing? Well don't be hasty- watch on, and she wasn't always wrong the car keys were in the bathroom. (Lights come up an elderly lady sitting upstage L)

John (Sitting opposite takes her hands) Now the funeral is over what are you going to do? You're not well enough to live on your own you know.

Mother Don't be silly I'm not an invalid. I've managed so far.

John No you haven't. Dad managed for both of you. Now isn't that true?

Mother Well what else can I do?

John I'm not sure.

Mother Now Karen has gone there are only two of you in that big house.

John I know what your getting at Mum but that's not possible, you know that.

Mother Why? (crying)

John Now don't upset yourself its just not possible.

Mother It's her isn't it? You'd let me wouldn't you, but she won't will she?

John No it's not that.

Mother She's evil. I can't understand why you ever married her.

John Now don't start all that again Mother.

Mother I'm not starting. I'm never allowed to say anything. I'm always wrong. (crying)

John Look you can see how impossible it would be, you and her hate each other. Don't you?

Mother I don't hate her.

John Oh Mother you do. You always have.

Mother Well what's to become of me? (crying)

John Look we'll work something out.

Mother What?

John Oh! I don't know. Yes I do, why don't you sell your house and then...

Mother No! Not my house, we bought this when I was expecting you. I won't part with it.

John Listen. Just listen to me.

Mother I'm not selling this house.

John Please listen. (she calms down) Now you know Elm House....

Mother That's an old peoples home.

John Yes Mother you are an old person you are 71.

Mother You can be so cruel.

John Yes Mother. Now will you listen? Right. Elm House as you know is beautiful with lovely grounds.

Mother I know it used to be the Manor.

John That's right and the way they have done it up....

Mother I went there once when I was a little girl, it was lovely, Sir George Barnett lived there. He was our MP for years and years.

John There you see if you sold you house and everything you could go and live there.

Mother Could I?

John Yes it's lovely just like a posh hotel and of course you only get the better class of people there. It's very select.

Mother I've seen people eating tea in the garden and being waited on. It all looks very very er. er. sort of gracious.

John Well there you are. Mrs Atkinson is there.

Mother What Atkinson's the estate agents?

John The very same.

Mother Who else?

John I don't know but I'm sure that they are all gracious ladies.

Mother It's not going to be the same without your father.
(sobbing)

John (Taking her in his arms) No it's not. Not for you or me. Shall we go and have a look tomorrow?

Mother Yes. If you think it's best. (During the next scene he changes into working suit, talking to audience)

John "If I think it's best." What do I know? She missed the old man, me too. I never realised how much his quiet humour and good sense meant to me. She hated Mrs Atkinson who returned the feelings with interest. She missed the house and the shops and her friends and me I suppose. I was too busy wrapped up in my life to visit her much. I even managed to balls her life up as well as mine. If she had her old house I wouldn't have been sleeping in cardboard boxes. I would have had a choice of bedrooms. But I cleverly took care of that. (light comes on, girl sitting at desk) Morning Terry what exciting commercial adventures has Parker and Davis plc in store for us on this fine Monday morning?

Terry You've got to see Geoffrey at 10 and the communication meeting at 2.

John Geoffrey? Mr Parker to you, you minx, did he say what he wanted?

Terry Not likely is it?

John No! perhaps it's a rise or promotion.

Terry Perhaps.

John Well I have come in fifty per cent over target this quarter.

Terry Oh and Shelly Sneer rang, commanded you to ring back. Actung!

John Listen young lady that's my wife and mother of my children. Whom I love dearly.

Terry Bollocks!

John I think she has you know.

Terry Yer. Three.

John Oo! Nasty, nasty girl.

Terry How do you put up with her?

John Look we all need someone. Anyone it's better than being

alone.

Terry I'm alone.

John No you're not, you've got your baby.

Terry It's not the same as having a man around the house.

John You shouldn't have thrown him out.

Terry It's made room for you.

John Now Terry be sensible.

Terry I was sensible at christmas and so were you.

John I'm fifty, fat and bald with little money and few prospects.

Terry So?

John You are 29 slim, sexy and you've plenty of hair.

Terry I've also got a 3½ year old baby girl.

John Well?

Terry It takes away the appeal you know.

John Rubbish! I'd have you in a flash.

Terry Well have me. Again!

John Don't start please. I've got responsibilities.

Terry What responsibilities?

John A wife, a mortgage.

Terry You had a wife and a mortgage at christmas.

John You took advantage of me.

Terry I did what?

John It's no good you looking so innocent, Shelly was away and you caught me at a moment of weakness.

Terry I don't recall you being that weak.

John No that's quite true. I didn't know I had so much energy.

Terry Well I shouldn't think ice arse wears you out in bed.

John Terry! You are crude you know.

Terry Go on be honest when did you have her last?

John Look I'm not going to discuss our intimate details with you.

Terry We've got a few intimate details of our own. Come on now the truth when did you have her last?

John Look for a start no one "has" Shelly, it's more permission to enter quietly and then bugger off you smelly sod you're ruining my perm.

Terry When!

John God knows last year sometime. No! I remember, it was when she wanted new carpets throughout and I said "No we couldn't afford it".

Terry Oh yes! I recall you changing your mind. Did she catch you at a weak moment and take advantage of you.

John Get stuffed.

Terry I'm trying to.

John There's plenty around here who would do you a favour.

Terry Sod off! You know I'm not like that. I just want you.
(Turns away)

John I'm sorry. I know you're not like that and so do all the chaps around here and those 3 days at christmas were the best thing to happen to me for... for... well the best thing that has happened to me period. (Takes her in his arms)

Terry Oh! Why are you such a bloody coward? (pushes him away)
It's time you went up to see god.

John Right (Salutes) do I need to take anything?

Terry No he just said to see him (blows nose) I'll go and repair the damage.

John Sorry. (she exits, he walks down front) You can see it all taking shape can't you? She's a great girl, good mother, lover, I could do worse. But for god's sake I've been married over 20 years. It's not much fun but I'm used to it now. No she's too young and I'm too lazy. I'd better go and see the almighty, could be good news. (meantime god has sat at table)

Geoff Morning John. Sit down.

John Morning Geoffrey. How are you?

Geoff Never better. How is that lovely wife of yours?

John Blooming.

Geoff Good, good. Now to get down to business. Your figures this quarter, I'm impressed up 25% no one else even reached their target.

John Really?

Geoff Yes, so why is that do you think?

John What? That I was 25% over or they never reached their target?

Geoff Both.

John I've started that new system. I sent Paul a report 2 or 3 months ago.

Geoff Paul's out of the picture I'm afraid, as of last night.

John Out of the picture?

Geoff Gone I'm afraid he didn't work out not top management material. I went round to his house last night gave him the news. Desperately sorry of course but well you know in this business you can't be soft.

John Quite.

Geoff Now I know you've only been here a year or so but the board are impressed with your results.

John Thank you.

Geoff How would you like Paul's job?

John Sales and Marketing Manager?

Geoff Exactly. Of course the salary and car and perks we'll discuss later. What do you say?

John Well, yes of course.

Geoff It's a wonderful opportunity. Now you know of course that the whole management team is to be centered at the Albion Square office in London as soon as it is finished. Any problem about moving for you and Shelly?

John No I don't think so.

Geoff Good, good! Go home have a chat with the little woman and come and have dinner with Margaret and me on Thursday. Right?

John Yes. Right thank you. See you Thursday.

Geoff (shaking hands) Well done John you've got a great career with us you know.