

Act 1

Scene 1

Set: The Jones's kitchen. This room is LINDA's well-equipped pride and joy and her refuge. A large farmhouse style table sits in the middle of the room.

Classical music from an advert is playing in the background. Linda hums as she beats some eggs. She's got a glass of sherry on the counter next to her which she swigs periodically. JIM enters, dropping his keys on the table.

LINDA: (Excitedly) Where is he?

Jim goes to the fridge and opens a can of lager. He sighs in relief at the sound of the crack and fizz.

JIM: I sent him upstairs to wash his mop.

LINDA: Oh.

JIM: There were entire families of baby seals flapping about behind him. The RSPCA were lined up at the platform waiting to hose him down.

LINDA: He didn't want to come and say hello?

JIM: He's certainly not been keeping Head and Shoulders in business, that's for sure. (BEAT) Hardly got a word out of him in the car.

LINDA: How does he look?

JIM: Odd...

LINDA: What?

JIM: ...can't usually shut him up. (Beat) Getting a bit of a premature middle age spread if you ask me... What's cooking?

LINDA: Just a few cakes - Madeira, coffee, carrot, fairy...

Jim scoffs.

LINDA: He likes them, Jim.

The oven pings.

JIM: Is it not bad enough that he's studying 'fine' art? He needs manly cakes. A good robust fruit cake. Or a parkin.

LINDA: Jim...

The phone rings.

JIM: We're in serious danger of bringing up a ninny, Linda.

Linda opens the oven. After a beat she slams a cake tin on the counter in a rage.

LINDA: That bloody oven...

Jim answers the phone.

JIM: A bad workman blames his tools, Linda. (Into phone) Hello?

Linda rummages around one of the drawers for a bottle of pills, takes a couple and slams the drawer shut.

JIM: (SHOUTS) Julian! Phone! (To Linda) I'd go easy on the HRT, love. You blunt my razors with your leg hair as it is. You don't want a beard to boot.

Linda swigs back her sherry, glaring at Jim and pours herself another.

JIM: You'll end up like one of those Eastern European wrestlers with those pills. You've calf muscles like a rock-climber as it is. I could hire you out as a bouncer.

She starts scraping the burnt cakes into the bin, controlling her breath.

JULIAN enters.

JULIAN: Who is it? Is it Dave?

JIM: It's not Dave.

LINDA: No hello for your mother, sweetie?

JULIAN: *(A little disappointed)* Who is it?

JIM: Do I look like your social secretary? Hold on. No. No. I haven't grown breasts.

LINDA: Yes you have.

Julian takes the receiver.

JIM: I told you to wash that hair. I'm not taking you round the golf course looking like a Didicoy.

JULIAN: I'm devastated, Dad.

LINDA: It's dreadlocks, Jim. Oh, doesn't he look sweet? Like a white Mick Hucknall.

JIM: Mick Hucknall is white. He looks like he needs a good scrub down with Ajax and wire wool.

LINDA: Don't listen to your father, love.

JIM: I was talking about Mick Hucknall.

JULIAN: *(Into phone)* Hello?

DAZ: *(V.O.)* Who's Dave?

LINDA: *(In background)* It's nice to see someone being adventurous...

JULIAN: Mum... *(Surreptitious)* Hi Daz.
Linda and Jim bicker in the background.

DAZ: How did they take it?

JULIAN: I've just stepped through the door.

DAZ: Do it before you talk yourself out of it. The longer you leave it the harder it gets.

JULIAN: Said the actress to the bishop...
Daz sniggers.

DAZ: When will I see you?

JULIAN: We'll hook up in the Summer. Like I said.

DAZ: When?

JIM: He looks like a feather duster. Where are the diddy men, Julian?

LINDA: Oh Jim...

JULIAN: I really can't talk. I'm gonna have to go.

DAZ: Are you gonna tell them?

JULIAN: OK. Yep, seeya. I'll catch you later.
Julian replaces the phone in the cradle.
Linda rushes over to give him a crushing hug.

LINDA: Oh Julian. Look at you - you're a man. I've missed you, darling.

JIM: Who was that?

JULIAN: No-one.

JIM: I've just spoken to no-one. You hear that Linda? I've never spoken to no-one before.

Jim goes to the fridge and gets himself another beer.

LINDA: You've lost weight. Haven't you been eating? I've been baking non-stop this morning. All your favourites - Madeira, coffee, carrot, those little cup-cake fairies. You like those. How's the course? Have you made lots of friends?

JIM: Give him a chance, Linda. You're squeezing the breath out of him.

LINDA: I'm a golf widow these days. Your father's hardly ever here, Julian. He's all I've got, Jim.

JIM: This great big house. Her wonderful bloody kitchen. Cost me an arm and a leg, Julian.

LINDA: You sound like Tommy.

Jim scoffs.

JIM: So hard done by.

Julian struggles to speak in his mother's grip.

LINDA: A kitchen doesn't keep me warm at night, Jim.

JIM: And that is why I purchased the electric blanket, Linda dearest.

LINDA: *(to Jim)* No wonder I need batteries...

JULIAN: *(Interrupting)* Erm, I am still here.

LINDA: You're upsetting him, Jim. You're always upsetting someone.

JIM: Like he wants to know about your sordid batteries.

Linda releases Julian.

LINDA: Your dad's stupid oven made me burn the cakes, Julian.

JIM: The domestic goddess has left the building. Taxi for Nigella.

LINDA: I'd been working all morning. I'll just throw them all away shall I?

JIM: I thought you already had.

JULIAN: Right. I'm gonna go and unpack.

LINDA: We're so glad to have you back, Julian. We've missed you.

Julian exits.

The classical record ends. Silence.

Linda goes to the fridge, gets some eggs and starts smashing them into a bowl.

Jim finishes his beer and crumples up the can, watching her. After a beat, he stands behind her and gives her a hug.

JIM: You didn't need to throw them away.

She stirs slowly, enjoying the contact.

Julian re-enters. He smiles to himself as he sees his parents in a rare moment of respite. He uncomfortably clears his throat. They look round.

LINDA: You OK, sweetie? You're very quiet.

PAUSE

JIM: How much?

JULIAN: What?

JIM: You want the shirt off my back now?

JULIAN: I don't need money, dad.

JIM: Now I'm concerned.

PAUSE

JULIAN: There is something... I mean, it's not bad or anything. I was just waiting for a good time... But when's a good time in this house?

LINDA: What do you mean, darling?

JIM: You're on drugs.

JULIAN: I'm at art school, dad. Everyone smokes a bit of weed.

LINDA: Oh Julian! I thought you were more sensible.

JIM: You've been listening to reggae and growing dreadlocks. And smoking drugs. It'll be heroin next.

JULIAN: I'm not 'on drugs'.

PAUSE

LINDA: Well, what is it then?

JULIAN: Sit down.

Jim and Linda take a seat around the table.

LINDA: What is it?

Julian starts pacing.

JIM: Julian, will you just tell us?

JULIAN: I was looking for an easy way to tell you...

LINDA: Whatever it is, we'll still love you...

He stops pacing.

JULIAN: Well, actually. I'm...kind of... well, no, not kind of. I'm gay.

PAUSE

The doorbell rings.

JULIAN: *(Hesitant)* Did you say there was Madeira cake?

PAUSE

LINDA: Erm. Yes. Erm, yes, of course, darling. I'll, just, erm, need to cut off a bit of the burnt crust...

JIM: *(to Julian)* I beg your pardon?

Linda starts cutting the cake, humming nervously.

LINDA: Would you like a slice Jim?

The doorbell rings again.

JULIAN: I want you to be happy for me.

JIM: As in homosexual?

JULIAN: Of course as in homosexual.

LINDA: There you go Julian. Cream? No. You're sure I can't tempt you Jim?

JIM: No. No. Dale Winton's gay. Larry Grayson's gay. Ainsley Harriet. You're nothing like that.

LINDA: My god, is Ainsley Harriet gay? (BEAT) I think I might have some cake as well – let's go wild.

JIM: I told you, Linda. That lecturer at the interview. I knew he was fruity. I mean who wears a cravat?

JULIAN: Not all gay people mince about like Larry Grayson, dad.

JIM: You know a lot of gay people do you?

JULIAN: Ian McKellan, John Wayne, Marlon Brando, Justin Fashanu...

LINDA: Erm, Ronnie Kray. Colin from Eastenders.

JIM: You're just trying to fashionable.

JULIAN: And Ainsley Harriet isn't gay. He's got kids.

JIM: Doesn't mean a thing.

JULIAN: You've been reading the Daily Mail.

The doorbell rings again.

LINDA: Well, I think it's fine. We've got a gay son, Jim. You can take me shopping...

JIM: How can you be gay?

LINDA: We could do lunch...

JULIAN: I don't know. I just am. I want you to be happy for me.

LINDA: You could help me choose the colours for the hallway. I was thinking dusky fawn...

JIM: (Interrupting) I've seen the state of your bedroom.

JULIAN: Not all gay people plump up the cushions, dad.

LINDA: We could go out cottaging.

JULIAN: Mum!

PAUSE

JIM: Do know what that is, Linda?

LINDA: Well. Not exactly. Something to do with interior décor, isn't it? I hear that gay men love it though. I'm just trying to...

JIM: (Interrupting. To Julian) You've not even had sex.

JULIAN: I'll get the door.

JIM: You've just not met the right girl.

LINDA: Everyone experiments at art school, darling. It doesn't mean you're gay just because you've tried something. A woman actually cupped my breasts once, you know. I didn't rush off to shave my hair and start a KD Lang collection....

JIM: What?

LINDA: Well, she was fitting me for a bra, but...

JULIAN: (*Interrupting*) I'm definitely gay, dad. And I want you to be happy for me that I can finally be happy with who I am.

JIM: How can I be happy about that?

JULIAN: I just want to be accepted.

JIM: You don't know what you want at your age.

JULIAN: I've been in love with Dave for as long as I can remember.

PAUSE

LINDA: We love you whatever you are. Gay, straight, bi, transgendered...

JIM: Have you been watching Channel 4 again, Linda?

LINDA: You can help me choose my outfit for gran's ninetieth. It'll be fun.

Julian leaves to answer the door.

LINDA: And we love Will Young, don't we Jim?

Julian exits.

Jim and Linda stare at each other in disbelief.

LINDA: He's not gay.

JULIAN: (OS) Yes I am.

LINDA: It'll be a phase. He's at art college.

JIM: Gay?

LINDA: Oh Jim. He's not gay. He's wearing a green jumper over a red shirt. That's no wardrobe of any gay man I've ever come across.

JIM: We don't know anyone who's gay.

LINDA: He's not gay.

JIM: Who's Dave?

PAUSE

LINDA: It's just a phase. A mother knows.

JIM: It's just a phase? It's just a phase.

Julian answers the front door. VAL blows a party whistle.

LINDA: Oh, Christ - it's next door. I invited them for celebratory drinks.

JIM: What on earth are we celebrating?

LINDA: (*Tentatively*) Julian's return from university.

Linda jumps up and starts taking cling-filmed party food out of the fridge.

JIM: Great.

LINDA: It's a phase. Humour him.

JIM: I'm not sure I can.

LINDA: He's our son, Jim. It's a phase. It's just a phase.

JIM: Why did you have to invite *them* round?

LINDA: They're our neighbours and our friends... Act sociable.

VAL, TOMMY and DAVE burst in, blowing party whistles. They've clearly had rather too much to drink.

VAL: *(Singing)* We're getting married in the morning. Ding dong the bells are gonna chime.

LINDA: *(Trying to sound upbeat)* Evening.

JIM: A subtle entrance as ever.

Val, Tommy and Dave start conga-ing around the kitchen.

Linda laughs nervously.

LINDA: Mind my vol-au-vents, Tommy.

TOMMY: Don't mind if I do.

Tommy takes a vol-au-vent.

TOMMY: Mmm. We usually get ours from Waitrose.

LINDA: You're, erm, rather more excited than I'd envisaged, Val.

JIM: How can you tell?

VAL: Guess what's happened, Linda. Jim. Julian. Linda. Jim.

JIM: Tommy's leaving you...

PAUSE

VAL: Tell them, Dave.

DAVE: What have you done with your hair, Ju?

VAL: Dave's engaged. He told us this evening. Isn't that great?! Double the celebration!

PAUSE. SILENCE.

Val blows her party whistle.

Linda, Jim and Julian are stunned.

VAL: Isn't it fantastic?

JULIAN: Who to?

DAVE: Ash.

JULIAN: Ash..?

VAL: You know - Grenache. Her dad owns The Bird's Nest.

JULIAN: (*Disbelief*) Tahini Fellows's sister?

JIM: The dump on the High Street?

VAL: (*Rather annoyed at Jim's comment*) Lovely girl. Big personality.