



**STIMULI**

You are required to produce a short piece of drama on each stimulus in preparation for your examination. Questions will be asked on **each** of the stimuli and will cover both practical and theoretical issues.

- 1 The train broke down
- 2 Better a live rat than a dead lion
- 3 All-night party!

## EXTRACT

Taken from *Absent Friends* by Alan Ayckbourn

These notes are intended to help you understand the context of the drama.

Alan Ayckbourn's play *Absent Friends* was first performed in England in 1974. The title refers to a well-known phrase 'to drink to absent friends'; in other words people who could not be present either through geographical separation, illness or even death. The title applies to the play in several ways: Colin has been literally 'absent' for three years, but we quickly see from the behaviour of the other three couples that 'friendship' is missing from their dysfunctional relationships.

Colin, an old friend of Paul, John and Gordon, has been away for three years, during which time he became engaged to Carol. Carol, however, drowned at sea two months before the action of the play begins. Diana (Paul's wife) has arranged for Colin to come to their house for tea as a means of cheering him up after his sad loss. She has also invited two other couples – John and Evelyn, and Gordon and Marge – since Colin, Paul, John and Gordon are all supposed to have been close friends.

Paul and Diana are the most financially successful of the couples, and the entire action takes place at the large, well-furnished house they have bought since they last saw Colin.

The extract consists of the whole of Act One.

**CHARACTERS**

<b>DIANA</b>	Late thirties; married to Paul.
<b>PAUL</b>	A successful businessman, married to Diana.
<b>EVELYN</b>	In her twenties, married to John; mother of 4-month old baby, Wayne. Described as having 'a really mean little face'.
<b>JOHN</b>	A cat-food salesman; married to Evelyn.
<b>MARGE</b>	Married to Gordon (who does not appear in the play).
<b>COLIN</b>	A banker; friend of Paul, John and Gordon.

## ACT ONE

3 p.m. Saturday.

The open plan living room of a modern executive-style house. Archways leading off to the kitchen and back doors. Another to the front door and bedrooms etc. Primarily furnished with English Swedish style furniture. A lot of wrought iron for gates in lieu of doors and as used for room dividers. Also artistic frosted glass. Doubtful pictures. Possibly a bar. It all cost a great deal of money. Parquet floor with rugs.

At the start, EVELYN, a heavily made-up, reasonably trendily dressed, expressionless girl, is sitting by a pram which she is rocking absently with one hand whilst gazing blankly out of the window. Near her, on the table, underneath suitable coverings, tea is laid out in the form of sandwiches and cakes. Only the teapot and hot water jug are missing. EVELYN chews and sings to herself.

After a moment, DIANA enters. She is older, mid to late thirties. She always gives the impression of being slightly fraught. She smiles occasionally but it's painful. Her sharp darting eyes don't miss much after years of suspicions both genuine and unfounded.

DIANA: Have you got him to sleep?

EVELYN: Yes.

DIANA: [*looking into the pram*] Aaah! They look so lovely like that. Like little angels.

EVELYN: [*unenthusiastic*] Mmm.

DIANA: Just like little angels. [*Anxious*] Should he be covered up as much as that, dear?

EVELYN: Yes.

DIANA: Won't he get too hot?

EVELYN: He likes it hot.

DIANA: Oh. I was just worried he wasn't getting enough air.

EVELYN: He's all right. He doesn't need much air.

DIANA: Oh, well ... [*She looks about her*] Well, I think we're all ready for them. John's on his way, you say?

EVELYN: Yes.

DIANA: How is he these days? I haven't seen John for ages.

EVELYN: He's all right.

DIANA: I haven't seen either of you.

EVELYN: We're all right.

DIANA: Not for ages. Well, I'm glad you could come this afternoon. Colin really will appreciate that, I'm sure. Seeing us all.

[*Pause.*]

Paul should be home soon. I think he's playing his squash again.

EVELYN: Oh.

DIANA: Him and his squash. It used to be tennis – now he's squash mad. Squash, squash, squash. Can't see what he sees in it. All afternoon hitting a ball against a wall. It's so noisy. Bang, bang, bang. He's not even out of doors. No fresh air at all. It can't be good for him. Does John play squash?

EVELYN: No.

DIANA: Oh.

EVELYN: He doesn't play anything.

DIANA: Oh, well. He probably doesn't need it. Exercise. Some men don't. My father never took a stroke of exercise. Till he died. He seemed fit enough. He managed to do what he wanted to do. Mind you, he never did very much. He just used to sit and shout at we girls. Most of the time. He got calmer though when he got older. After my mother left him. [*Looking into the pram. Did you knit that little jacket for him?*]

- EVELYN: No.
- DIANA: Pretty. *[Pause]* No, there are times when I think that's the principal trouble between Paul and me. I mean, I know now I'm running myself down but Paul basically, he's got much more go – well, I mean let's face it, he's much cleverer than me. Let's face it. Basically. I mean, I was the bright one in our family but I can't keep up with Paul sometimes. When he has one of his moods, I think to myself, now if I was really clever, I could probably talk him round or something but I mean the thing is, really and truly, and I know I'm running myself down when I say this, I don't think I'm really enough for him. He needs me, I can tell that; he doesn't say as much but I know he does. It's just, as I say, I don't think I'm really enough for him. *[She reflects]* But he couldn't do without me. Make no mistake about that. He's got this amazing energy. I don't know where he finds it. He goes to bed long after me, he's up at dawn, working down here – then off he goes all day ... I need my eight hours, it's no good. What I'm saying is really, I wouldn't blame him. Not altogether. If he did. With someone else. You know, another woman. I wouldn't blame him, I wouldn't blame her. Not as long as I was told. Providing I know, that I'm told – all right. Providing I feel able to say to people – "Yes, I am well aware that my husband is having an affair with such and such or whoever ... it's quite all right. I know all about it. We're both grown-up people, we know what we're doing, he knows I know, she knows I know. So mind your own business." I'd feel all right about it. But I will not stand deception. I'm simply asking that I be told. Either by him or if not by her. Not necessarily now but sometime. You see.
- [A pause. EVELYN is expressionless]*
- I know he is, you see. He's not very clever and he's a very bad liar like most men. If he takes the trouble, like last Saturday, to tell me he's just going down the road to the football match, he might at least choose a day when they're playing at home. *[She lifts the tablecloth and inspects the sandwiches]* I hope I've made enough tomato. No, I must be told. Otherwise it makes my life impossible. I can't talk to anybody without them ... I expect them, both of them, at least to have some feeling for me. *[She blows her nose]* Well.
- [The doorbell rings]*
- Excuse me ...
- [DIANA goes out]*
- [Offstage dialogue]*
- MARGE: Only me.
- DIANA: Marge!
- MARGE: I've been shopping, don't laugh!
- DIANA: Leave your coat?
- MARGE: Oh yes!
- [Sound of shopping bags dropping and laughter]*
- DIANA: How's Gordon?
- MARGE: Not too bad ... *[Bustling in laden with bags]* ... poor little thing – lying there – with his face as white as a sheet ...
- DIANA: *[returning]* Poor thing ...
- MARGE: He looks dreadful ... Hallo, Evelyn.
- EVELYN: Hallo.
- MARGE: Oh! Look who's here! Little baby Walter.
- EVELYN: Wayne.
- MARGE: What?
- EVELYN: It's Wayne. His name's Wayne.
- DIANA: *[laughing]* Walter ...

MARGE: I thought it was Walter.

DIANA: Marge, honestly. You can't have a baby called Walter.

MARGE: Well, I don't know. Somebody must have done ... [*She screams with laughter. Peering into the pram*] Oh look. Look at his skin. It's a lovely skin, Evelyn.

EVELYN: Thank you. 115

MARGE: Beautiful skin. Hallo, Baby Wayne. Hallo, Wayne. Googy – googy – googy.

DIANA: Ssh, Marge, she's just got him to sleep.

MARGE: [*quieter*] Diggy diggy diggy. [*Whispering*] Lovely when they're asleep.

DIANA: Yes ... 120

MARGE: [*whispering*] Looks like his Daddy. Looks like John.

DIANA: You don't have to whisper, Marge. Just don't shout in his ear.

MARGE: [*back to her carriers etc.*] Look at all this lot. I can't go anywhere.

DIANA: What have you got there?

MARGE: You know what I'm like. You know me ... oh, guess what I did get? 125

DIANA: What?

MARGE: Are you ready?

DIANA: Yes.

MARGE: Brace yourself. I got the shoes.

DIANA: You bought them? 130

MARGE: Just now and I don't care. I passed the shop on the way here. I thought it's no good, I don't care, it's now or never, I'm going to have them, I must have them. So I got them.

DIANA: I must see.

MARGE: Just a minute. Gordon'll go mad ... [*Rummaging*] Now, which one did I put them in? 135

DIANA: It is a shame about Gordon. Gordon's ill, Evelyn, he can't come.

EVELYN: Oh.

MARGE: No. He finally got it. It's been going round and round for months, I knew he'd get it eventually. He was perfectly all right last night, then he woke up this morning and he'd got it ... [*Finding her shoe bag within another bag*] Here we are ... [*Finding something else*] Oh – nearly forgot. That's for you.

DIANA: For me?

MARGE: It's only a little thing. But I saw one while I was in there and I knew you'd seen mine and wanted one ... 145

DIANA: Oh, yes ...

MARGE: [*to EVELYN*] It's a holder. For those paper towels in the kitchen. Paper towel holder. Have you got one?

EVELYN: No. 150

MARGE: Remind me, I'll get you one.

DIANA: That's so thoughtful. I must pay you for it.

MARGE: You'll do no such thing.

DIANA: No, Marge, I insist. You're always buying us things.

MARGE: I enjoy it. I like buying presents. 155

DIANA: [*producing her purse*] How much?

MARGE: I won't take it, put it away.

DIANA: How much was it?

MARGE: Diana, will you put that purse away this minute.

DIANA: No, I'm sorry, Marge, I'm going to pay you. 160

MARGE: Diana, will you put that away this minute. Evelyn, tell her to put it away ... [*EVELYN, during this, has moved to the door and is on the point of going out*]

DIANA: [*noticing her*] You all right, dear?

EVELYN: Fine.

DIANA: Where are you off to then?

EVELYN: To the lavatory.

DIANA: Oh. I see. Beg your pardon.  
 [EVELYN goes out]  
 [selecting coins from her purse] £10. There you are. I don't know how  
 much it was but there you are. 170

MARGE: Oh, really. [She leaves the money on the table]

DIANA: Am I glad to see you.

MARGE: Why's that?

DIANA: She's been here for ages. 175

MARGE: Who do you mean – oh, yes. Miss Chatterbox.

DIANA: I know she's been up to something. I don't trust her. I never did.

MARGE: I must show you my shoes. [Starts to unpack them] How do you mean?

DIANA: I know that girl's been up to something.

MARGE: Oh, you mean with ...? 180

DIANA: She and Paul. I know they have.

MARGE: Well ... [Producing a pair of very unsuitable shoes] There, you see.  
 Aren't they nice?

DIANA: Lovely.

MARGE: They had them in blue which was nicer, actually. But then I had nothing  
 else that would have gone with them. 185

DIANA: He didn't want them to come round here today. That's how I know they're  
 up to something.

MARGE: Who?

DIANA: Evelyn and John. He didn't want them round. 190

MARGE: Who? Paul didn't?

DIANA: No.

MARGE: [parading around in her shoes] Look, you see ... these tights aren't right  
 with them but ...

DIANA: I mean, why should he suddenly not want them round? They've been  
 round here enough in the past and then all of a sudden he doesn't want  
 to see them. 195

MARGE: Odd. There was another sort, you know, with the strap but I found they  
 cut me across here.

DIANA: They suit you. 200

MARGE: Yes, I'm very pleased.

DIANA: I tried to get her to say something.

MARGE: Evelyn?

DIANA: Just now.

MARGE: Oh. Did she? 205

DIANA: No. She's not saying anything. Why should she? I know Paul, you see. I  
 know he's with someone. I'm sure it's her. He came home, went straight  
 upstairs and washed his shirt through the other night. I said, what's got  
 into you? He said, well, what's wrong with me washing my shirt? I said,  
 you've never washed anything in your life. He said, well, we all have to  
 start some time. I said, lovely, but why do you want to start doing it in the  
 middle of the night. And he had no answer to that at all. Nothing. He just  
 stood there with it dripping all over the floor. 210

MARGE: Well ...

DIANA: After twelve years, you get to know someone. 215

MARGE: I wonder if these will go with that other coat.

DIANA: What's she doing up there?

MARGE: Well, she's ...

DIANA: I bet she's having a really good snoop around.

- MARGE: Oh, Di...
- DIANA: I bet that's what she's up to. I've never trusted her an inch. She's got one of those really mean little faces, hasn't she?
- MARGE: Well ...
- DIANA: I bet it was her that went off with my scarf, you know.
- MARGE: I shouldn't think so. Why don't you talk it over with Paul? 225
- DIANA: Paul? We haven't talked for years. Not really. Now he's had his own way and sent the children off to school, there's even less to talk about. I don't know why he wanted them at boarding school. They're neither of them happy. I know they're not. You should see the letters they write.
- MARGE: I don't know what to say ... [*to pram*] Poogy, poogy. Hallo, Walter. 230
- DIANA: Wayne.
- MARGE: Hallo.
- DIANA: Don't for God's sake wake him up. He's been bawling his head off half the afternoon. I don't think she feeds him properly.
- MARGE: He looks nice and chubby. 235
- DIANA: It doesn't look all there to me.
- MARGE: Di!
- DIANA: No, truthfully, you look at its eyes.
- MARGE: He's asleep.
- DIANA: Well, you look at them when it wakes up. Don't tell me that's normal. I mean, our Mark's were never like that. Nor were Julie's. And she's had to wear glasses. 240
- MARGE: She looks lovely in her little glasses.
- DIANA: Paul doesn't think so. He won't let her wear them when she's at home.
- MARGE: Well, I think he's a lovely baby. I was on at Gordon again the other day about adopting one. 245
- DIANA: What did he say?
- MARGE: Still no. He won't hear of it. He's frightened of it, I think. He keeps saying to me, it's not like a dog, Marge. We can't get rid of it if we don't like it and I say, we will like it, we'll grow to like it and then he says, well what happens if we adopt one and then it grows up to be a murderer? Then what do we do? They'll blame us. 250
- DIANA: It's not very likely.
- MARGE: Try convincing him. No, he's just going to keep on going with his tests ... till the cows come home. That reminds me, I must ring him up. I said I would as soon as I got here. See if he's coping. Do you mind? 255
- DIANA: No, go ahead.
- MARGE: He's got the phone by his bed.  
[*MARGE starts to dial*]  
[*EVELYN returns*] 260
- DIANA: Find everything?
- EVELYN: Fine. [*She checks the baby with a glance then sits and starts to read a magazine*]
- DIANA: Marge is just phoning her husband.
- EVELYN: Oh. 265
- MARGE: [*as she stands waiting for an answer, indicating her shoes*] Do you like these, Evelyn?
- EVELYN: Fantastic.
- MARGE: [*into phone*] Hallo ... Jumjums? It's Margie, darling. How are you feeling ... oh ... oh. Well listen, Jumjums, can you manage to get across to the chest of drawers, sweetie? ... by the window, yes ... you'll find them in the top drawer ... that's right, darling ... can you manage that all right on your own ... right [*Pause. To them*] He wants the nose drops, he's all bunged up, poor love ... [*She stands listening*] 270



- DIANA: [to EVELYN] What are you chewing, dear?
- EVELYN: Gum.
- DIANA: Oh.
- EVELYN: Want a bit?
- DIANA: No thanks. We'll be having our tea soon.
- MARGE: [into phone] Oh, darling ... you must be careful, Jumjums ... yes, I know 280  
it shouldn't be there ... never mind, well rub it, rub it better. [Covering the  
phone, to the others] Banged his leg ... [into phone] All right? I'll be here  
if you want me. You know the number. I'll be home soon ... yes ... yes, I will.  
I'll phone you later. Bye bye, Jumjums, bye bye, darling. Bye. [Pause] Bye  
bye. [Pause] Bye. [Rings off] Honestly, I don't know what I want children 285  
for, living with Gordon. I get through first aid tins like loaves of bread.
- DIANA: He's very unlucky, isn't he?
- MARGE: Oh, he is. He's so big, you see. I think that's one of his troubles. Being  
so big. Nothing's really made his size. He bangs his head on buses. He  
can't sit down in the cinema and he has trouble getting into his trousers. 290  
It's a terrible problem. Sixteen stone eight.
- DIANA: Yes, that is big.
- MARGE: It is, it's very big. His face is small but then he's got quite a small head. It's  
the rest of him. Somebody the other day said he looked like a polythene  
bag full of water. [She laughs] 295  
[DIANA laughs]  
Oh, dear, you have to laugh.
- DIANA: Poor Gordon. It's not fair.
- MARGE: He's all right. Bless him. Keeps me out of mischief. 300  
[They laugh]  
[A silence. They look at EVELYN who chews on, reading]  
[with a look at MARGE] Enjoying that, are you?
- DIANA: It's all right ...
- EVELYN: Oh. I've still got these on. [She starts to change her shoes]
- MARGE: Be funny seeing Colin again. Three years. 305
- DIANA: I only knew him slightly. He was Gordon's friend really.
- MARGE: Yes. It's a pity he'll miss Colin.
- DIANA: What exactly happened to this fiancée of his? Did she just die?
- MARGE: Drowned.
- DIANA: Drowned, oh ... 310
- MARGE: In the sea.
- DIANA: Oh.  
[Throughout the following MARGE follows DIANA's lips carefully echoing  
the odd word in agreement]
- DIANA: We knew him very well, you know. He and Paul were inseparable. And 315  
then Colin's job moved him away and he used to write to us occasionally  
and then he wrote and said he'd met this Carol girl and that they were  
going to get married – which was a great surprise to us because we  
always said he'd never let anything get that far and then the next thing  
we heard, she'd drowned. So I said to Paul, we'd better invite him over. 320  
I mean, we're still his friends. I doubt if he's got any where he is now  
because it takes him ages to get to know people and then I thought,  
well, it might be awkward, embarrassing knowing what to say to him, just  
Paul and me and since he knew Gordon and you slightly and John – he  
doesn't know Evelyn of course – I thought it would be nice if we just had 325  
a little tea party for him. He'll need his friends.
- MARGE: Well, you know me, I'm bound to say the wrong thing so shut me up or  
I'll put my foot in it. Was she young?
- DIANA: Who?

MARGE: His fiancée.

DIANA: Carol? About his age, I think.

MARGE: Oh. Tragic.

DIANA: Yes. [*Aware of EVELYN again*] What are you reading, dear?

EVELYN: Nothing.

DIANA: No, what is it? 335

EVELYN: [*wearily turning back a page and reading flatly*] Your happiness is keeping that man in your life happy. Twelve tips by a woman psychiatrist.

DIANA: Oh.

MARGE: We can all learn from that.

EVELYN: [*reading on remorselessly*] Tip number one: send him off in the morning with a smile. How many of us first thing just don't bother to make that little extra effort. Have you ever graced the breakfast table without a comb through your hair. Go on, admit it, of course you have. You're only human. Or not done that little extra something to take the shine off your early morning nose. No wonder he escapes behind his paper ... 340

DIANA: I must read that.

EVELYN: [*unstoppable*] Go on, live a little and give him the surprise of his life.

DIANA: Yes, that's lovely, Evelyn ...

EVELYN: Make yourself into his news of the day. You'll live with him till the evening. Tip number two: go on, pamper yourself with a full beauty treatment. 345

DIANA: Yes, thank you, Evelyn.

EVELYN: What?

DIANA: That's lovely. I'll read it later.

MARGE: We can all learn something from that.

EVELYN: I'm not doing that for my bloody husband. He can stuff it. 350

[*Pause*]

MARGE: I'd hate to drown. [*Pause*] I don't mind anything else. Poison, hanging, shooting – that's never worried me but I'd hate to drown. You look so awful afterwards.

DIANA: Now, we mustn't get morbid. We're here to cheer Colin up when he comes. I know this all happened two months ago now but he's bound to be a bit down. We mustn't let him dwell on it. 360

MARGE: No. You're quite right.

[*A silence. PAUL enters. He has on his track suit bottoms and a sweater. He has obviously been taking exercise*]

PAUL: [*as he comes in*] Have you seen my shoes anywhere ...? [*Breaking off as he sees that they have company*] Oh, hallo there. 365

MARGE: Hallo, Paul.

EVELYN: [*barely glancing up*] 'Llo.

PAUL: Mothers' Meeting is it? How are you, Marge? 370

MARGE: Very well, thank you.

PAUL: How about you, Evelyn?

EVELYN: Eh?

PAUL: Keeping fit?

EVELYN: Yes. 375

PAUL: [*looking into pram*] What's in here then? Tomorrow's dinner?

EVELYN: No.

PAUL: Oh. I thought it was tomorrow's dinner.

DIANA: Did you have a good game?

PAUL: All right. So so. Not really. Dick didn't turn up. Had to play with this other fellow. Useless. Finished up giving him eight start and playing left-handed. I still beat him. Then he fell over his racquet and broke his glasses so we called it a day. Trouble with that club is, you couldn't improve your game even if you wanted to. No competition. Lot of flabby old men ... 380

- EVELYN: [*without looking up*] Hark at Mr. Universe.
- PAUL: Watch it. [*To DIANA*] You seen my black shoes?
- DIANA: Which ones?
- PAUL: The black ones.
- DIANA: They're upstairs.
- PAUL: Well, they weren't there this morning. How's Gordon?
- MARGE: He's not too good today, I'm afraid.
- PAUL: Not again.
- DIANA: What do you mean, not again?
- PAUL: He's always ill. Gordon. 395
- MARGE: Not always.
- PAUL: Hasn't been to work for two years, has he?
- MARGE: Course he has.
- DIANA: He's exaggerating.
- PAUL: He's a one man casualty ward. Why don't you get him insured, Marge? 400  
You'd clean up in a couple of days.
- MARGE: Get on ...
- PAUL: Right. I'll leave you ladies to it, if you don't mind. 'Bye. Look after yourselves. I've things to do upstairs.
- DIANA: Don't be too long, will you, dear? 405
- PAUL: How do you mean?
- DIANA: I mean, don't stay up there for too long.
- PAUL: No, I've just got a bit of work to do, that's all.
- DIANA: Well, tea will be in a minute. You'll be down for that.
- PAUL: No. You don't want me down here, I'll – 410
- DIANA: You must come down for tea. Colin's coming.
- PAUL: Colin who?
- DIANA: Colin. You know, Col –
- PAUL: Oh, that Colin. Is he?
- DIANA: Oh, don't be stupid. You know he is. I told you. 415
- PAUL: Did you?
- DIANA: I arranged it a fortnight ago.
- PAUL: You never told me.
- DIANA: And I reminded you this morning.
- PAUL: You didn't tell me. 420
- DIANA: This morning, I told you.
- PAUL: Excuse me, you did not tell me he was coming this morning. You did not tell me anything this morning. I was out before you were up.
- DIANA: Well, then it must have been yesterday morning.
- PAUL: That's more likely. But you still didn't tell me. 425
- DIANA: I told you very distinctly.
- MARGE: Perhaps you just forgot, Paul.
- PAUL: No. I'm sorry I didn't forget. I never forget things. You're talking to the wrong man. I run a business where it's more than my life's worth to forget things. I've trained myself not to. I never forget. 430
- MARGE: Well, I'm sorry I ...
- PAUL: Yes, all right. Just don't give me that "maybe you forgot" bit because with me it doesn't cut any ice at all ...
- DIANA: Look, Paul, will you stop taking it out on Marge for some reason ...
- PAUL: I'm not taking it out on anybody. Look, I've got a lot of work to do upstairs ... 435
- DIANA: Now, Paul, you can't do that. Colin is coming. He is your friend. You can't just go upstairs ...
- PAUL: Excuse me, he is not a friend of mine. He was never a friend of mine ...
- DIANA: How can you say that? 440

- PAUL: I just happened to know him, that's all. You'll just have to say to him when he comes that you're sorry, I had no idea he was coming, nobody told me and that I had a lot of work to do upstairs.
- DIANA: You cannot do that ...
- PAUL: I'm sorry ...
- DIANA: You've got no work to do.
- PAUL: That's it. No more. I'm not going on with it. I'm going upstairs. I don't want to hear any more about it. I have a lot of work to do. Excuse me please.  
[PAUL goes out. A silence] 450
- DIANA: I told him Colin was coming. I told him over breakfast. While he was eating his cereal. I told him. He always does this. Every time I – [Tearful] I spent ages getting this ready.
- MARGE: It's all right, Di ...
- DIANA: It's not all right. He's always doing this. He does it all the time. I told him. Specially ... [She hurries out into the kitchen] 455
- MARGE: Oh dear.  
[EVELYN gives an amused grunt, ostensibly at her magazine]  
[MARGE looks at her]  
Evelyn, could I have a word with you? 460
- EVELYN: What?
- MARGE: I want you to answer me something perfectly honestly. I want you to be absolutely straight with me. Will you do that, please?
- EVELYN: What?
- MARGE: It's been brought to my notice that you and Paul ... have ... well ... 465
- EVELYN: What?
- MARGE: I think you know what I'm talking about.
- EVELYN: No.
- MARGE: That you and her husband have been ... is this true? Yes or no?
- EVELYN: Is what true? 470
- MARGE: Will you put that magazine down a moment, please.
- EVELYN: [Laying the magazine aside wearily] Well?
- MARGE: Is it true or isn't it? Yes or no?
- EVELYN: What?
- MARGE: Have you been ... having ... a love affair with Paul? 475
- EVELYN: No.
- MARGE: Truthfully?
- EVELYN: I said no.
- MARGE: Oh. Well. That's all right then.  
[Pause] 480
- EVELYN: We did it in the back of his car the other afternoon but I wouldn't call that a love affair.
- MARGE: You and Paul did?
- EVELYN: Yes.
- MARGE: How disgusting. 485
- EVELYN: It wasn't very nice.
- MARGE: And you have the nerve to come and sit in her house ...
- EVELYN: She asked me. [Pause] She needn't worry. I'm not likely to do it again. He'd just been playing squash, he was horrible.
- MARGE: Diana knows about this, you know. 490
- EVELYN: Then he must have told her. I didn't.
- MARGE: She's not a fool. She put two and two together. He didn't want you to come here at all this afternoon. That's a sure sign of a guilty conscience.
- EVELYN: Most probably because he doesn't like me very much.
- MARGE: He liked you enough to ... 495
- EVELYN: Not after what I said to him

- MARGE: What did you say?
- EVELYN: I said thank you very much. That was as exciting as being made love to by a sack of clammy cement and would he kindly drive me home.
- MARGE: That wasn't a very nice thing to say.
- EVELYN: He's horrible.
- MARGE: What a thing to say.
- EVELYN: Horrible. Worse than my husband and that's saying a lot.
- MARGE: Poor John. God help him being married to you.
- EVELYN: Why? 505
- MARGE: Well. Really.
- EVELYN: They all think they're experts with women. None of them are usually. And by the time they are, most of them aren't up to it any more.
- MARGE: You speak for yourself.
- EVELYN: I am. I've tried enough of them to know. [*She reads*] 510
- MARGE: Your husband will catch up with you one of these days.
- EVELYN: He knows.
- MARGE: He knows!
- EVELYN: Nothing he can do.
- MARGE: Does he know about you and Paul? 515
- EVELYN: Probably. He's not going to complain.
- MARGE: Why not?
- EVELYN: Well – he relies on Paul for business, doesn't he? Without Paul, he's in trouble. Business before pleasure, that's John's motto.
- MARGE: Sounds as if it's yours as well. 520
- EVELYN: There's not much pleasure to be had round this place, is there?
- MARGE: I'm sorry, I find your attitude quite disgusting. Heartless, cruel and disgusting.
- [*EVELYN ignores her and continues her reading*]
- [*at the pram*] Poor little child. If only he knew. Poor little Walter. Googy, googy ... You're just a heartless little tart ... googy, googy. 525
- EVELYN: If you're interested, those shoes of yours are a lousy buy.
- MARGE: And what would you know about my shoes?
- EVELYN: I bought a pair. They split at the sides after two days and the dye comes off on your feet. 530
- MARGE: I've nothing further to say to you.
- EVELYN: Anyway, they're out of fashion.
- MARGE: I don't wish to listen to you any further.
- [*Doorbell. They both wait*]
- One of us had better answer that, hadn't we? 535
- EVELYN: Yes.
- [*Doorbell*]
- MARGE: I suppose it had better be me.
- [*DIANA enters*]
- DIANA: That was the doorbell, wasn't it? 540
- MARGE: Oh, was it? Yes, we thought we heard it.
- DIANA: What if it's Colin? I don't know what I'm going to say if it is ...
- [*DIANA goes out*]
- MARGE: You see what you've done.
- EVELYN: Beg your pardon? 545
- MARGE: To them. To Paul and her. See the atmosphere between them. All your doing.
- EVELYN: Me?
- MARGE: Who else?
- EVELYN: You really want to know who else? 550
- MARGE: I hope you realise that.

EVELYN: If you really want to know who else, you'd better pass me the phone book. He's halfway through the Yellow Pages by now. If it moves, he's on to it.

[JOHN enters. A jiggling, restless figure]

JOHN: Hallo, hallo.

MARGE: Hallo, John.

EVELYN: You took your time.

JOHN: It's only twenty past.

EVELYN: You took your time. 560

JOHN: [*amiably*] Yes. [*He jigs about*]

MARGE: Where's Di gone to?

JOHN: Dunno. Upstairs I think. [*Sticking his head into the pram*] Hallo, son. Say hallo to Daddy.

EVELYN: Don't. 565

JOHN: Eh?

EVELYN: He's asleep.

JOHN: He shouldn't be. He won't sleep tonight now.

EVELYN: He never does anyway.

JOHN: Keep him awake during the day, that's the secret. Shake his rattle in his ear every ten minutes. 570

EVELYN: Fantastic.

JOHN: Where's Paul?

MARGE: Upstairs.

JOHN: Oh. Both gone to bed, have they? [*He laughs*] 575  
[MARGE glares at EVELYN]  
No Colin yet?

MARGE: Not yet.

JOHN: Well, I hope he hurries it up. Then we can get it over with.

EVELYN: I thought he was supposed to be a friend of yours. 580

JOHN: He was, yes.

EVELYN: Sounds like it.

JOHN: I haven't seen him for years. Anyway – I don't know what to say to him. I didn't know this girl of his. I mean, it's difficult.

MARGE: I don't think he'll want to talk about Carol. 585

JOHN: No?

MARGE: I shouldn't think so. He'll want to forget.

JOHN: I hope so. I hate death. Gives me the creeps.

EVELYN: Get on.

JOHN: It does. 590

EVELYN: You?

JOHN: I get all ... uggghhh. [*He shudders*] Don't talk about it.

EVELYN: [*laughs*] Death, death, death.

JOHN: Shut up. 595  
[EVELYN laughs]  
[Silence. MARGE takes out her knitting]

MARGE: I hope they come down before he arrives

JOHN: Disgraceful. On a Saturday afternoon. Whatever next. [*Pause. He jigs about some more*] I got that fuel gauge.

EVELYN: Oh. 600

JOHN: £10 off it. [*He laughs*] It had a loose wire. I told the girl it was faulty. She didn't know any better. £10. [*Pause*] Got a wing mirror for £5. Had a screw missing off it. Got one of those round the corner and he let me have some interior carpet for nothing. He was throwing it away. Not a bad day's work, eh? 605

EVELYN: Great.

JOHN: You're the one who wanted carpet in the car

- EVELYN: Fine.
- JOHN: Can't do anything right, can I?
- EVELYN: I just know you. It won't fit when you get it in.
- JOHN: It'll fit.
- EVELYN: No, it won't because you got it cheap.
- JOHN: It'll fit.
- EVELYN: Nothing you ever get for us is quite right. I've got a vacuum cleaner with elastic bands holding on the attachments because you got them cheap off another model. 615
- JOHN: Oh, come on.
- EVELYN: I've got an electric mixer I can't use because it flings the food halfway up the bloody wall.
- JOHN: It's only because it's got the wrong bowl that's all. Only the bowl's wrong. 620
- EVELYN: Then why haven't we got the right bowl?
- JOHN: I'm trying to get hold of one. They're scarce.
- EVELYN: But it never did have the right bowl.
- JOHN: I know it didn't. How do you think I got it cheap in the first place?
- EVELYN: Oh, I give up. [*She reads*] 625
- JOHN: You're just a trouble maker you are. [*He playfully shadow boxes near her face*] Bam, bam ...
- EVELYN: Go away.  
[*JOHN shadow boxes round the room*]  
[*DIANA returns*] 630
- JOHN: Here she is. Had a good time up there?
- MARGE: Is Paul coming down?
- DIANA: I have no idea. I have no idea at all. I have done my best. I have now given up. Most probably it will be left to us. In which case, we'll have to cope with Colin on our own, won't we? 635
- JOHN: Without Paul?
- DIANA: Apparently he's far too busy to see his so-called best friend.
- JOHN: If Paul's not going to be here, it's going to be a bit ...
- DIANA: Quite. What's that you're knitting, Marge?
- MARGE: Oh, just a sweater for Gordon. 640
- DIANA: Lovely colour.
- MARGE: Yes, I rather like it. I'm hoping he'll wear it to protect his chest. Once he goes out in that wind ...
- JOHN: How is old Gordon? Is he coming?
- MARGE: I'm afraid he's not very well at the moment. 645
- JOHN: Oh, dear. He's had this a long time, hasn't he?
- MARGE: Had what?
- JOHN: This – er food poisoning, wasn't it?
- MARGE: That was weeks ago. This is something quite different.
- JOHN: Oh. [*He jigs about*] 650
- DIANA: Would you like to take a seat, John?
- JOHN: No, it's all right, thanks. I don't like sitting down very much.
- EVELYN: Sit down, for heaven's sake.
- JOHN: I don't like sitting down. I don't enjoy it.
- EVELYN: He'll never sit down. I don't think I've ever seen him sit down. He has his meals dancing around the table. 655
- JOHN: I prefer standing up, that's all.  
[*Pause. He jiggles*]
- DIANA: [*tense and shrill*] John, will you please sit down before you drive me mad. 660
- JOHN: [*sitting*] Sorry. Sorry ...
- DIANA: I'm sorry.
- JOHN: No, it's me I'm sorry.

- DIANA: I'm sorry, John.
- JOHN: No need to be sorry. That's all right.
- EVELYN: You'll never get him to sit still, I'll tell you that.  
*[They sit. EVELYN sings, chews and reads. JOHN tries not to fidget. DIANA sits, staring ahead of her, steeped in worry. MARGE studies her pattern]*
- MARGE: *[at length]* I think I've gone wrong with this. I've got twelve too many stitches. How the dickens did I get twelve too many stitches.  
*[At length, PAUL enters]* 670
- JOHN: Hallo, hallo. He's arrived.  
*[PAUL stands, surveying the room, making his presence felt. He sits]*
- PAUL: Well. Here I am then. 675
- DIANA: So we see.
- PAUL: That's what you wanted, wasn't it?
- DIANA: I'm not so sure.
- PAUL: Well, make up your mind. I'll go upstairs again.  
*[Silence]* 680
- JOHN: Paul, could we have a quick word about Eastfield, do you think?
- PAUL: Not just at the moment, if you don't mind.
- JOHN: It's just if I got your okay, I could go ahead with the order.
- PAUL: Look, I'm not in the mood to talk about Eastfield just at the moment, John. We're having this riotous tea party. Rude to talk business over tea.  
*[He discovers the paper towel holder]* What's this? Where did this come from? 685
- DIANA: It's nothing. It's just a holder for the paper towel in the kitchen, that's all.
- PAUL: Is it ours?
- DIANA: Yes. 690
- PAUL: What have you gone and bought another one for?
- DIANA: I didn't.
- PAUL: I just put one up the other day. How many of the things do you want?
- MARGE: Oh well ...
- PAUL: *[laughing to MARGE]* Kitchen, knee deep in paper towels. 695
- MARGE: It's useful to have a spare.  
*[Pause]*
- PAUL: I don't know what we're going to talk to this fellow about, I'm sure. We haven't seen him for three years. I don't even know this girl's name.
- DIANA: Carol. 700
- PAUL: Well, that's something. I mean, I can't see what good this is going to do for him. Coming round here talking to us about it.
- DIANA: He probably won't want to.
- PAUL: Then what else is there to talk about? It's just embarrassing isn't it?
- DIANA: What's embarrassing? Somebody you've known for a long time loses someone very dear to them. Seems natural to ask them round and comfort them a little. 705
- PAUL: Fat lot of comfort he'll get here.
- MARGE: We can try. It'll only be for an hour.
- JOHN: As long as he doesn't start talking about death, I don't mind. If he starts on about death or dying, I'm off. 710
- EVELYN: I don't know why you came.
- JOHN: Well – like Di says, it's – friendly.
- EVELYN: You don't like him.
- JOHN: Colin? I didn't mind him. 715
- EVELYN: You said you didn't like him.
- JOHN: I didn't mind him.
- PAUL: I didn't like him.
- DIANA: You went round with him enough



PAUL: I did not.

DIANA: You used to come round to our house every Friday and Saturday. You and him. We used to call you the flower pot men.

PAUL: He used to follow me.

DIANA: And Colin always went off with my sister Barbara and I was stuck with you. 725

PAUL: Very funny.

DIANA: It's true. We both fancied Colin really.  
[JOHN and MARGE laugh again]

PAUL: That is patently untrue. That is a lie.

DIANA: I was only joking ... 730

PAUL: If you want to know what it really was ...

DIANA: I was joking.

PAUL: If you really want to know ...

DIANA: It was a joke. 735  
[PAUL subsides]

PAUL: Anyway. Come to that, why do you think we both came round?

DIANA: I don't doubt it.

PAUL: Well.

DIANA: You lost out then, didn't you?

PAUL: So did you. 740

DIANA: You said it, not me.

MARGE: Look, we really mustn't quarrel.

DIANA: I'm not quarrelling.

PAUL: Neither am I.

MARGE: I mean, Colin's not going to want this. He'll want to feel he's among friends, not enemies. 745

EVELYN: [*in her magazine*] This is a rotten story in here. This fellow's gone mad just because this girl's kissed him. Running about and singing.

MARGE: I think that's meant to be romantic, Evelyn.

EVELYN: They ought to put him away for good, if you ask me. 750

DIANA: If you really fancied Barbara, I'm surprised you didn't go off with her. You had the chance.

PAUL: Forget I said it.

DIANA: I mean, why didn't you?

PAUL: Would you all please witness I did not start this conversation? 755

DIANA: Answer me that.

PAUL: You are all witnesses, thank you.

DIANA: If you fancied her that much ...

PAUL: Oh, God.

DIANA: Never mind. You're making up for it now, aren't you? 760

PAUL: What do you mean by that?

MARGE: Now, Di ...

DIANA: I said, you're making up for it now, aren't you, dearest? With your other little ...

MARGE: Why don't we all have a cup of tea now? Wouldn't that be a nice idea? 765  
[The phone starts ringing]

PAUL: No. I want that last remark explained if you don't mind.

MARGE: Now, Paul, Paul ...

DIANA: Never mind.

PAUL: All my other what? 770

MARGE: [*standing between them, arms outstretched*] Now, Di ... Paul ...

DIANA: You know.

JOHN: Should I answer that?

PAUL: All my other what? I want to hear the rest of that sentence. 775

DIANA: You know perfectly well what I'm talking about.

MARGE: Di ... Paul ...

JOHN: I'll answer it, shall I?

PAUL: I have not the slightest idea what you're talking about, I'm sorry.

DIANA: [*pointing at EVELYN*] Well, I'm sure she has. Ask her then.

MARGE: Di ... Paul ...

EVELYN: Eh?

JOHN: [*who has answered the phone*] Hallo. Could you speak up please.

DIANA: Yes, you. Don't you sit there looking so innocent and smug. I know all about you.

PAUL: What are you dragging Evelyn into this for? 785

JOHN: Oh, hallo Gordon. [*to MARGE*] It's Gordon.

MARGE: Gordon. Oh, my God. [*She snatches the phone from him*]

DIANA: If anyone has dragged Evelyn into this, it's you.

MARGE: Hallo, Jumjums.

DIANA: You're the one who's dragged her in, literally. 790

MARGE: My darling, what is it?

PAUL: I don't know what you're talking about. Will somebody kindly tell me what she's talking about.

MARGE: He's spilt his cough mixture in his bed.

DIANA: You know bloody well what I'm talking about. I'm talking about you and her. 795

MARGE: Has it sunk through to the mattress, love?

EVELYN: I'm going home.

DIANA: Yes, you go home, you little tart.

PAUL: Oh, no you don't. You stay where you are, Evelyn. If she says things like that, she's got to prove them. 800

DIANA: I don't have to. I know.

EVELYN: Goodbye.

JOHN: We can't go now. Colin's coming.

EVELYN: To hell with him. 805

PAUL: She's just hysterical.

MARGE: Can you try and sleep on the dry side until I get back?

PAUL: The woman's hysterical. Now listen, Di ...

DIANA: [*screaming*] Don't come near me.

MARGE: Oh no. Have you got it on your 'jamas as well? 810  
[*The baby starts crying*]

EVELYN: [*furious*] You've woken him up now.

JOHN: I didn't wake him up.

PAUL: I mean, seriously, how can a man live with a woman like that?

MARGE: Jumjums, how did you get it on your trousers ... well, look, take them off, dear. Take the bottoms off. 815

JOHN: Where are you going?

EVELYN: [*starting to push the pram out*] I'm taking him home.

JOHN: Oh, Evelyn ...

PAUL: I mean, am I unreasonable? 820

MARGE: There's some more in the bottom drawer. The stripy ones.

JOHN: [*calling after her*] Evelyn.

MARGE: Yes, well, you will be sticky. You'll have to wash.  
[*Doorbell*]

DIANA: How can you stand there looking so damned innocent ... 825

PAUL: Listen, if you could tell me what I'm being accused of, I could perhaps answer you.  
[*Doorbell*]

JOHN: I think that's the doorbell.

MARGE: No, keep warm, Jumjums, keep warm ... 830

[EVELYN *re-enters with the pram, baby still crying*]

JOHN: What are you doing?

EVELYN: I can't get out that way. There's somebody at the front door.

DIANA: Get out of my house.

EVELYN: I'm trying to. 83

MARGE: Bye bye, darling.

JOHN: It'll be Colin.

MARGE: Bye.

PAUL: Colin?

EVELYN: I'm taking Wayne in the garden. 840

MARGE: Bye. [*She hangs up*]

JOHN: Don't go home, Evelyn.

PAUL: Now listen, Di, Marge ...

EVELYN: [*as she goes out*] I can't, can I?

[EVELYN *goes out to the kitchen with the pram*] 845

MARGE: He has spilt cough mixture not only on the sheet, but on the pillow.  
[*Doorbell*]

PAUL: Would you listen a minute?

MARGE: ... his clean pyjama bottoms ...

PAUL: Marge, please. Would you mind? Di, get a grip on yourself, Di. 850

DIANA: What?

PAUL: Colin is here now at the door.

DIANA: Oh no.  
[DIANA *runs out to the kitchen*]

PAUL: Di ... 855

MARGE: Shall I let him in?

PAUL: Would you mind, Marge. You seem to be the calmest among us.

MARGE: I am not calm, believe me. That linctus will have gone through that undersheet straight into that mattress. [*As she goes*] I don't know how I'm going to get it out, I don't. 860  
[JOHN *and PAUL are left*]  
[PAUL *pacing. JOHN jiggling*]

PAUL: Did you tell her?

JOHN: Who?

PAUL: Di. 865

JOHN: What about?

PAUL: About Evelyn and me.

JOHN: I didn't. Why should I? I mean, as we said, it was just one of those things, wasn't it?

PAUL: Right. 870

JOHN: Wouldn't happen again.

PAUL: Certainly wouldn't.

JOHN: There you are. We'd settled it, hadn't we?

PAUL: Did Evelyn tell Di?

JOHN: I don't think so. 875

PAUL: Can't see why she would.

JOHN: No reason at all. Just one of those things, wasn't it? I'm not bitter. It was a bit of a shock when she told me. But I'm not bitter.

PAUL: Somebody told her ...  
[MARGE *ushers in COLIN*] 880

MARGE: Here he is.

COLIN: Paul.

PAUL: Colin, my old mate, how are you? [*he embraces him*]

COLIN: Great to see you, John ...

JOHN: [*shaking his hand*] Hallo, Col. 885

COLIN: Oh, it is good to see you both. How are you?

- PAUL: Great.
- JOHN: Fine.
- COLIN: Where are the girls then, where are the girls?
- PAUL: Oh – er – Di's just out in the kitchen there.
- COLIN: Doing her stuff?
- PAUL: Yes, more or less. And – er – Evelyn's with the baby.
- COLIN: Hey, yes. You've got a baby.
- JOHN: Right.
- COLIN: Boy or girl? 895
- JOHN: Boy. Wayne. Four months.
- COLIN: Fantastic. That's what you always wanted, didn't you? I always remember that. When the four of us used to get together, you know, you, me, Gordon, Paul – what was it Gordon wanted to be, a cricketer, wasn't it? – you always used to say, I just want to get married and have a son. 900
- JOHN: Right.
- COLIN: Fantastic. Congratulations. Sorry to hear about Gordon, Marge. He's ill, you say?
- MARGE: I'm afraid so.
- COLIN: Poor Gordon, he has all the luck. He wasn't feeling too good when I left, was he? That's right. He was sick at the farewell party. 905
- MARGE: Something he ate.
- COLIN: [*laughing, to the others*] Out of me way, out of me way. Do you remember. We were all sitting there, quietly talking and then, out of me way, out of me way. Rushing about the room, everybody scattering for cover. He flings open the door and throws up in the broom cupboard. [*He laughs*] Nothing serious, I hope? 910
- MARGE: No, no. He always looks worse than he is. [*With a laugh*] I don't think he's quite at death's door yet. 915
- [*Pause*]
- COLIN: Good.
- MARGE: I'll – see you in a minute.
- COLIN: Right. [*MARGE goes to the kitchen*] This is all right, this place, isn't it? Very nice indeed. How long have you had this, Paul? 920
- PAUL: Oh, nearly two years.
- COLIN: Now we know where the money's going. I'd settle for this. Wouldn't you, John? Yes, I'd settle for this.
- JOHN: Yes. 925
- PAUL: You want to sit down?
- COLIN: Thanks. [*He sits*] Very nice.
- PAUL: How are you feeling?
- COLIN: Oh, pretty fair. Lost a bit of weight lately, that helps.
- JOHN: Yes. 930
- PAUL: Col? [*Offers a cigar*]
- COLIN: No thanks. [*PAUL takes one, as an afterthought he throws one to JOHN who catches it*]
- JOHN: Thanks Paul. 935
- [*Pause*]
- COLIN: What's your wife's name again, John, I forget? Before I meet her.
- JOHN: Evelyn. [*JOHN clicks his lighter intermittently in an effort to make it work*]
- COLIN: Evelyn. That's it. Di did write and tell me. I forgot. Sorry. 940
- JOHN: That's okay. I forget it myself sometimes.

- COLIN: She's not local though, is she?  
 JOHN: No. She's got relatives.  
 COLIN: Ah. Will I approve, do you think?  
 JOHN: Eh?  
 COLIN: Do you think I'll approve of her?  
 JOHN: Well, yes. Hope so.  
 COLIN: She all right, is she, Paul?  
 PAUL: Eh? 950  
 COLIN: This Evelyn of his? Has he done all right for himself would you say?  
 PAUL: Oh, yes he's done all right.  
 COLIN: John could always pick them.  
 PAUL: Yes.  
 [Pause] 955  
 [MARGE enters with mats for the teapot and hot water jug]  
 MARGE: [whispering with embarrassment] Excuse me. We're just brewing up. Now, Di wants her handbag a minute. Is it ...? Oh yes. Won't be a minute. [She goes out]  
 COLIN: She hasn't changed. 960  
 PAUL: No.  
 COLIN: We used to have a name for her, didn't we? When Gordon first took her out.  
 PAUL: Can't remember.  
 COLIN: It was ... can you, John? 965  
 JOHN: No. Something. I can't remember.  
 PAUL: No.  
 COLIN: It was a beetle or a spider or something. I'll remember, it'll come to me.  
 [Pause]  
 JOHN: You're looking well, Col. 970  
 COLIN: I feel well.  
 JOHN: You look it.  
 [Pause]  
 COLIN: I'm not early, am I?  
 PAUL: No, no ... 975  
 JOHN: No.  
 [Pause]  
 COLIN: Yes. You've certainly done all right for yourself, haven't you, Paul?  
 PAUL: Now and again.  
 JOHN: Everything he touches. 980  
 COLIN: I bet. You two still fairly close, I take it?  
 JOHN: Oh well, you know. When our paths cross. We do each other the odd favour.  
 PAUL: Generally one way.  
 JOHN: Oh, come on. 985  
 PAUL: Usually.  
 JOHN: Yes, usually. Not always, but usually.  
 PAUL: He's still the worst bloody salesman in the country. I'm the only one who'll buy his rotten stuff. I've got about five hundred tins of his rubbish. I can't give it away. 990  
 COLIN: What is it?  
 PAUL: Cat food. So called. That's what they call it. I've never met a cat yet who could eat it and live. Rubbish. I wouldn't give it to a dog.  
 COLIN: You could try it on Gordon.  
 JOHN: No, seriously for a moment, Paul, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. That particular line of ours isn't selling so well. It isn't so much content, it's packaging. Now, they have just brought out this new line ... 995  
 PAUL: ...

- [COLIN *laughs*]
- JOHN: No, seriously, Paul.
- PAUL: Not now.
- JOHN: No, seriously, one word ...
- PAUL: Seriously, John, no.
- JOHN: He'll be sorry.
- [MARGE *returns*]
- MARGE: [*in the same embarrassed whisper, as before*] Excuse me a minute. Just want to fetch my comb. For Di. Now where did I ...? Oh yes.  
[*She finds her own handbag and bends and rummages in it. The men watch her*]
- COLIN: The stick insect.
- MARGE: [*startled*] What?
- COLIN: Nothing.
- [*The men laugh*]
- MARGE: [*puzzled, waving the comb*] We won't be a minute. This is for Di. A comb. For her hair. Excuse me.
- [MARGE *goes out*]
- PAUL: Still at the bank, Colin?
- COLIN: Yes. Still at the bank.
- PAUL: That's what I like to hear.
- COLIN: Yes.
- [*Pause*]
- PAUL: [*rising*] Look, I think I'll just go and see if I can sort them out there. Give them a hand. Excuse me.
- COLIN: Of course.
- PAUL: Won't be a sec.
- COLIN: Right.
- [PAUL *goes out to kitchen*]
- [*JOHN and COLIN rise. They sit. They rise and meet in front of the table, laugh. They sit, COLIN back in chair, JOHN on pouffe. They rise. COLIN looks at picture behind bar*]
- COLIN: GREAT!
- JOHN: TERRIFIC!
- [*COLIN looks at toy on bar, as JOHN leaves for kitchen. COLIN turns, sees he is alone, and sits back in chair*]
- [*Everyone returns. DIANA with handbag. PAUL with teapot followed by JOHN. MARGE with hot water jug. EVELYN from the garden*]
- DIANA: Hallo, Colin, I'm so sorry.
- COLIN: Hallo, Di. [*They kiss*]
- PAUL: Back again.
- JOHN: [*following PAUL round and under the other dialogue*] No, the point I'm saying is, that if I were to knock off five percent and sell the stuff to him for that much less, we could still net a profit of not less than what? – five twenties are a hundred – five eights are forty – less what? – three fives are fifteen – a hundred and twenty five percent. That's an initial outlay – including transport, of what? – four nines are thirty six – plus, say, twenty for handling either end – that's fifty six. Bring it to a round figure – sixty ...
- [*PAUL, throughout this, nods disinterested agreement, his mind on other things. Over this:*]
- DIANA: It was so nice you could come. It really was. Now you know Marge, of course, don't you?
- COLIN: Yes, yes.
- DIANA: Oh, but you don't know Evelyn. This is John's Evelyn.
- COLIN: How do you do

EVELYN: 'Llo.  
COLIN: Heard a lot about you.  
EVELYN: Oh yes? Who from?  
COLIN: Er ...  
DIANA: Sit down, Colin. Let me give you some tea. Sit down, everyone. [To JOHN *who is grinding on to PAUL*] John dear, do sit down. 1060  
JOHN: Oh yes, sorry.  
[*Everyone sits. DIANA pours tea*]  
COLIN: Do you work at all, Evelyn, or does the baby take up all your time?  
EVELYN: No.  
COLIN: Ah. 1065  
JOHN: She works some days.  
COLIN: Oh yes, where's that?  
EVELYN: Part-time cashier at the skating rink.  
COLIN: Oh. Is that interesting?  
EVELYN: No. 1070  
COLIN: Ah.  
DIANA: Could you pass these round, Paul? I remembered you liked it strong, Colin.  
COLIN: Oh, lovely.  
[*Pause*] 1075  
MARGE: Oh! Guess who I saw in the High Street?  
DIANA: Who?  
MARGE: Mrs Dyson. Grace Dyson.  
DIANA: Oh, her.  
MARGE: I was surprised. She looked well. 1080  
DIANA: Good.  
PAUL: Who's Grace Dyson?  
MARGE: Oh well, you'd know her as Grace Follett probably.  
PAUL: I don't think I know her at all.  
JOHN: Remember Ted Walker, Colin? 1085  
COLIN: Ted Walker? Oh, Ted Walker, yes. Of course, yes.  
JOHN: He's still about.  
DIANA: You like yours fairly weak, don't you, Marge?  
MARGE: Yes, please. But don't drown it.  
[*A silence*] 1090  
COLIN: Do you know what my biggest regret is?  
DIANA: What's that, Colin?  
COLIN: That none of you ever met Carol.  
MARGE: Who?  
COLIN: Carol. My ex-fiancée. She was drowned, you know. 1095  
MARGE: Oh, yes, yes. I know, I know.  
COLIN: I wish you'd met her.  
DIANA: Yes. [*A pause*] I think I can speak for all of us, Colin, when I say how very sorry we were to hear about your loss. As I hope you'll realise, we're your friends and – well – and although we didn't know Carol – none of us had the pleasure of meeting her – we feel that in a small way, your grief is our grief. After all, in this world, we are all to some extent – we're all – what's the word ...? 1100  
PAUL: Joined  
DIANA: No. 1105  
JOHN: Related.  
MARGE: Combined.  
DIANA: No. Dependent.  
PAUL: That's what I said.  
DIANA: No, you didn't, you said joined or something. 1110

- PAUL: It's the same thing. Joined, dependent, means the same.
- DIANA: We are all dependent in a way for our own – and, well ... no, I'm sorry, I've forgotten what I was going to say now, I hope you understand what I meant, anyway.
- COLIN: Thank you.
- DIANA: [*embarrassed and relieved*] Oh well, that's got that over with, anyway. I mean – more tea, anyone? 111
- MARGE: Give us a chance.  
[*A silence*]  
[*COLIN suddenly slaps his knees and springs to his feet. Everyone jolts*] 1120  
What's the matter?
- COLIN: Wait there, wait there.  
[*COLIN rushes out to the front door*]
- DIANA: [*in a shocked whisper*] Where's he gone?
- PAUL: I don't know. 1125
- MARGE: Is he all right?
- DIANA: I didn't upset him, did I, saying that?
- MARGE: No. Lovely.
- JOHN: I'll have a look, shall I?
- DIANA: Would you, John. 1130
- PAUL: What did you want to get on to that for?
- DIANA: What?
- PAUL: All that going on about grief and so on.
- DIANA: I only said ...
- PAUL: We're supposed to be cheering him up. He didn't want to listen to that. 1135
- DIANA: It had to be said.
- MARGE: You have to say it.
- PAUL: He obviously didn't want to be reminded of it, did he? There was no need to, no need at all. We were all getting along perfectly happily.
- DIANA: You can't sit here and not say anything about it. 1140  
[*JOHN returns*]
- JOHN: He's gone out the front door.
- DIANA: Where to?
- JOHN: His car, I think. He's getting something out of the boot.
- PAUL: Probably going to hang himself with his tow rope. After what she said. 1145
- DIANA: He seemed perfectly recovered. Very cheerful. I thought someone should say something.
- PAUL: Cheerful? You can see that was only skin deep.
- DIANA: I couldn't.
- PAUL: I was talking to him in here. You could tell. He's living on his nerves. On a knife edge. You could tell, couldn't you, John? 1150
- JOHN: He seemed quite cheerful.
- PAUL: He could snap like that. Any minute. Same with anyone in this situation. Up one minute ...
- JOHN: I've never seen him quite so cheerful. 1155
- PAUL: Exactly. All the signs are there. The last thing he wanted to do was to talk about this fiancée of his. It's a known fact, people never ...
- MARGE: Oh yes, they do. My Aunt Angela ...
- PAUL: It is a known fact ... 1160  
[*Slight pause*]  
[*Door bangs*]
- JOHN: He's coming back.
- PAUL: Now, not another word about her. Keep it cheerful. For goodness sake, Evelyn, try and smile, just for once.  
[*COLIN returns. He carries a photo album and an envelope of loose*] 1165  
[*speeches, all contained at present in a large chocolate box*]



- ALL: Ah ...
- COLIN: [*breathless*] Sorry. I forgot to bring these in. It's some photos. You can see what she looked liked.
- DIANA: Of her?
- COLIN: Yes. I thought you'd like to.
- MARGE: Oh.
- COLIN: Yes. There's one or two quite good ones. Thought you might like to see some. Of course, if you'd rather ...
- PAUL: No, no ... 1175
- COLIN: She was very photogenic. Shall I sit here next to you, Di? Then I can ... [*He sits next to DIANA*] Now then. [*Taking snaps from the envelope*] Ah yes, these are some loose ones I haven't stuck in yet. They're the most recent. Can I give those to you, Marge? I think they're mostly on holiday, those. [*He hands loose snapshots to MARGE*] 1180
- MARGE: Thank you.
- COLIN: [*with the album*] These are mostly at home in the garden at her house.
- MARGE: Oh, is this her? Oh, she is lovely, Colin. Wasn't she?
- DIANA: [*as COLIN opens the first page*] Oh.
- COLIN: There she is again. That's with her Mum. 1185
- DIANA: She's a fine looking woman too.
- COLIN: Wonderful. She's been really wonderful. She's got this terrible leg.
- DIANA: Ah.
- MARGE: Oh, that's a nice one ... Do you want to pass them round, John?
- JOHN: Oh yes, sure. 1190
- [*MARGE passes them to JOHN who in due course passes them to PAUL who passes them to EVELYN*]
- DIANA: That's nice. Was that her house?
- COLIN: No. That's the back of the Natural History Museum, I think.
- DIANA: I was going to say ... 1195
- COLIN: Went there at Easter.
- MARGE: [*at photo*] Oh.
- PAUL: [*at photo*] Ah.
- DIANA: [*at album*] Oh.
- MARGE: Oh look, John, with her little dog, see? 1200
- JOHN: Oh yes.
- COLIN: That was her mother's.
- MARGE: Oh. Sweet little dog.
- EVELYN: I like that handbag.
- COLIN: That's her again. Bit of a saucy one. It's not very good though, the sun's the wrong way. 1205
- DIANA: I wish I had a figure like that. It's so nice you brought them, Colin.
- MARGE: Oh yes.
- DIANA: It's nice, too, that you can look at them without – you know ...
- COLIN: Oh no, it doesn't upset me. Not now. 1210
- MARGE: That's wonderful.
- COLIN: I was upset at the time, you know.
- DIANA: Naturally.
- COLIN: But – after that – well, it's a funny thing about somebody dying – you never know, till it actually happens, how it's going to affect you, I mean, we all think about death at some time, I suppose, all of us. Either our death, somebody else's death. After all, it's one of the few things we have all got in common ...
- [*JOHN has risen and is jiggling about*]
- DIANA: Sit down, John. 1220
- [*JOHN sits reluctantly*]

- COLIN: And I suppose when I first met Carol, it must have passed through my mind what would I feel like if I did lose her. And I just couldn't think. I couldn't imagine it. I couldn't imagine my life going on without her. And then it happened. All of a sudden. One afternoon. All over. She was caught in this under-current, there was nothing anybody could do. I wasn't even around. They came and told me. And for about three weeks after that, I couldn't do anything at all. Nothing. I just lay about thinking, remembering and then, all of a sudden, it came to me that if my life ended there and then, by God, I'd have a lot to be grateful for. I mean, first of all, I'd been lucky enough to have known her. I don't know if you've ever met a perfect person. But that's what she was. The only way to describe her. And I, me, I'd had the love of a perfect person. And that's something I can always be grateful for. Even if for nothing else. And then I thought, what the hell am I talking about, my whole life's been like that. All through my childhood, the time I was growing up, all the time I lived here, I've had what a lot of people would probably give their right arm for – friends. Real friends, like John and Paul and Gordon and Di. So, one of the things I just wanted to say, Di – Paul – Marge – John – Evelyn and to Gordon if he was here, is that I'm not bitter about what happened. Because I've been denied my own happiness, I don't envy or begrudge you yours. I just want you to know that, despite everything that happened, in a funny sort of way, I too am very happy. 1230
- [He smiles round at them serenely. A silence. A strange whooping noise. It is DIANA starting to weep hysterically. Unable to contain herself, she rushes out. After a moment. MARGE fumbles for her handkerchief and blows her nose loudly. JOHN, looking sickly, gives COLIN a ghastly smile. PAUL opens his mouth as if to say something, gives up. COLIN stands looking slightly bemused. He looks at EVELYN. She looks back at him, expressionless, chewing]* 1235
- COLIN: Did I say the wrong thing? 1240
- [EVELYN shrugs and resumes her reading]* 1245
- COLIN: Did I say the wrong thing? 1250
- [EVELYN shrugs and resumes her reading]*

CURTAIN



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