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MAURICE ROWDON -
BOY SEES RED

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A Play

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CHARACTERS

May Bright, schoolgirl

Sid Somers, her boyfriend

Jack Bright, May's father

Lydia Bright, May's mother

Emily Howard, social worker

One

Bedroom. A double bed down left. A window in the left wall. The door to the staircase is facing us. Down right are a sofa and coffee table.

On the facing wall are small unframed paintings, mostly lines and shadow, but each has a touch of red, a brush-mark of varying thickness and form.

SID is on top of MAY, on the tussled double bed. His clothes are on the floor. They are sixteen. They are naked below the waist. They are quite still, she looking up, he with his face buried in the bedclothes. (C)

MAY: I want it again!

SID: I haven't got it in me!

MAY: You haven't got it in me either!

They cackle with laughter. Silence. He raises himself up with burlesque slow effort to look at her.

SID: May!

MAY (expecting a spoof) What?

SID: I wish to do it again and I feel it coming on me!

MAY: You're not coming on *me*!

Again the cackles. He throws himself on her once more and go through the same antics.

MAY (cont.) Quick! My dad might come in.

He jumps off her, covering his genitals

JACK (turning to him) I'm sorry Sid but I'm her dad and I'm not standing for it. I didn't mean to hurt you--~~I got beyond myself~~. You shouldn't be coming over here at all. Not without permission you shouldn't. ~~You know that as well as I do.~~

between and grab his clothes
 Still holding his face SID leaves the room and walks down the stairs like a ton of bricks.

JACK (cont., to MAY) As for you I can't believe you're my daughter. There isn't a house on this estate would open their door to Sid Somers and you go and bring him home! and if you get a baby you'll look after it my girl, your mum and me won't, we had enough bringing *you* up.

MAY: But we haven't *done* anything!

JACK: Then what was all that bloody racket about? You haven't been at your *prayers* have you? Kids hardly turned sixteen (his face puckering up)! I don't know, your mum and me must have done something wrong!

MAY: But dad all we do is lark about!

JACK (holding up the sheet) This bed's *soaked!* I heard you telling him---I want it again!

MAY: Look the bed's as dry as a bone!

JACK (confirming this carefully) So what do you get up to then?

MAY: Sex.

JACK: Are you trying to pull my bloody leg?

MAY: Dad---it's not what you and mum do, where you get babies.

JACK: So what the hell is it?

MAY: We're jest larking about. (As JACK riles up again)
 Dad---he can't even squirt!

HACK: How's that?

MAY: The other kids showed him how to do it when he was fifteen but his winkle didn't get it.

JACK: Didn't get what?

MAY: It didn't get big like the other winkles did.

JACK: So what's all this 'I want to do it again' about?

MAY: It's just for a laugh, that's all. His winkle won't stand to attention dad.

JACK: You know what? (Studying her) You two are scats.

MAY: What's *that*?

JACK: Crackers. (Getting up with a sigh, then turning to her) What *work* are you going to do May? You've been finished with school nigh on a year and I don't see anything in sight.

MAY: No more do I dad.

JACK: Well you'd better shape up, that's all *I* can say.

He goes to the door.

JACK (cont.) Don't forget the kippers.

MAY: No I won't dad.

He leaves and we hardly hear his steps on the staircase. The moment he has gone she heaves the bedclothes over her and promptly falls asleep.

There is a ring at the downstairs door, which doesn't disturb her. There is a murmur of voices below, then we hear light slow footsteps on the stairs. The door opens slowly. It is her mother, LYDIA. She gazes at MAY and walks over to the bed.

LYDIA (hushed) May.

She shakes her and with a startled

snore MAY wakes, leans up.

MAY: 'allo mum.

LYDIA: What's been going on? Every time I leave this house there's trouble. I told you before, if you want to do it go to *his* place, you know what your father's like.

MAY (pouting) Dad did it with *you*.

LYDIA: Not when he was sixteen! He wasn't brought up that way! He says it's not right doing it before you're married, and that's that.

MAY: Nobody's married round here.

LYDIA: *We* are. And your dad brings in the money. And if you don't show him more respect you'll have to find a room elsewhere. (Gazing at her) I *thought* you'd understand that (getting up). ☹ ✓

MAY: Mum?

LYDIA: Yes?

MAY: Was dad your first, mum?

LYDIA (on her way to the door) Mind your own business. And next time you two want to play around do it when your dad's out. I've told you that umpteen times haven't I?

MAY: Mum?

LYDIA: Yes?

MAY: Dad don't want Sid coming round any more.

LYDIA: I'll have a word with your dad but next time do it before he gets home for God's sake. All right?

MAY: Yes mum.

She leaves and once more MAY sweeps the bedclothes over her and sleeps at once.

Two

The same, only the bed is no longer there. It has been replaced by two armchairs, which now face the sofa. The scene is empty.

We hear soft steps on the staircase. The door leading to the stairs opens very slowly. SID peeps round the door as if afraid of what he is going to see. He stares. MAY is behind him.

SID: The bed's gone!

MAY (laughing) Of course it has! You've just been sittin' on it downstairs! I told you, I sleep downstairs now, next to the kitchen!

SID: 'oo took it away then?

MAY: My dad. (Calling down the stairs) Mum?

LYDIA (off) What's wrong now?

MAY: Where should we sit?

LYDIA (appearing) On that sofa.

MAY: What does she want to see *me* for?

LYDIA: I told you before duck, she looks after Sid, he's on her list.

SID: ^{Her name's} ~~She's~~ Mrs. Howard. I been on her list since I was ten.

MAY: What list?

LYDIA: Listen May, you'd better stop being silly, Mrs. Howard's from the borough council and she wants to talk to you as well, don't ask me why but that's the law.

She goes downstairs again.

MAY (hushed) Is this the woman from the Council then?

SID: Yuss. My mum and dad told her where I was every day so she's come 'ere to see if it's all right.

MAY: What do you mean, all right?

SID: All right with your mum and dad.

MAY: Oh.

SID: My granddad says she's a bloody fool.

MAY:

who?

~~MAY: What, Mrs. 'oward?~~

SID: ~~Yuss.~~ *Mⁿ'Oward.*

He settles down and looks round the room.

SID (cont., with something like awe) My pikchurs are still 'ere, look.

MAY: Dad likes 'em.

SID: Mine don't. My ^{*granpⁿ*}~~granddad~~ does. My mum and dad say they don't like the red, they say it's blood.

MAY: It's not really is it?

SID: What?

MAY: Your blood?

SID: It's paint. It *started* like with blood.

MAY: Whose blood?

~~SID:~~ My blood. (As she stares at him) I put a needle in my finger and then I smear it on the paper and then I mix my red colours and that's what's on the pikchurs. X

MAY: What do you mean you *mix* your colours?

SID: I'm trying to tell you, that colour is the same colour as my blood. Only it's paint.

MAY: Oh!

They are silent. So is the house.

MAY (cont.) I'm scared.

SID: So am I.

MAY: What are you talking about? You said she's always round your house!

SID: So she is, I'm on her list. I know her first name.

MAY: What is it?

SID: Emily.

MAY: Is she nice?

SID: Yuss. My ^{granpa} granddad says she's a bloody fool.

MAY: You always say that! *They like I say Mⁿ 'Oward yr say my granddad says,*
They cackle in a ~~very~~ subdued manner.
She goes to the sofa and sits at his side
as if cold.

SID (cont.) It's because of your dad she's comin'.

MAY: Why?

SID: He ^{came} ~~went~~ round and talked to my mum. He told 'er [^] what we was doin'.

MAY: I bet she wopped you one.

SID: Nah.

Silence for stares in front.

SID (cont.) My granpa says your dad's all right, I don't think so.

MAY: Your granpa didn't get a smack round 'is clock did he---not like you did!

Cackles that are bolder. The front-door bell interrupts them. It is a prolonged ring.

SID (cont.) That's her. You can tell be the way she rings. My granddad

says she always *leans* on the bell.

The front door below opens
and we hear a murmur of voices

MAY (hushed) You're frightened of her aren't you?

SID: Nah.

MAY: So why are you frightened?

SID: Because your dad come over.

MAY: What's that got to do with it?

SID: Well she never knew I was comin 'ere did she? Nor did my mum and dad.

MAY: Why don't you tell 'er to mind 'er own business?

SID: ~~I bet she'll start creatin' now!~~

MAY: My mum don't mind what we do.

SID: I know.

MAY: It's more dad. 'E's afraid of me getting a baby.

SID (dreamily) I wouldn't mind a baby.

MAY: Nor would I.

We hear footsteps in the stairs.
SID makes a gesture to keep quiet.
EMILY HOWARD appears in the doorway. She is a round well-filled woman smooth in walk and gesture. She carries a handbag large enough to accommodate reports, documents, mini medical kits. She goes in for large bracelets and necklace and tends to clink.

She closes the door carefully. With sure movements she goes to one of the armchairs that face the sofa. She sits

down comfortably, then she takes out her notes and studies them in a leisurely manner.

HOWARD (lifting her eyes to MAY for the first time) So you're May are you?

MAY: Yes.

HOWARD: May Bright?

MAY: Yes.

HOWARD (returning to her notes) You're a nice-looking girl, no wonder your mother's proud of you.

SID: We haven't done anythin' wrong.

HOWARD (without lifting her eyes) Who said you had? May's father didn't like you being in bed together, that's all. ~~Her mother, perhaps more sensibly, says she doesn't mind.~~ (Looking at SID) You know your mum and dad wouldn't stand for it in *their* house.

MAY: Everybody does it, why shouldn't we?

HOWARD: It all depends on whether what you're doing is what your mother and father did to get *you*, doesn't it?

MAY: I wouldn't mind if I had a baby!

HOWARD (studying her notes again, then addressing SID) The bruise. On your face. Did you take the pain killer?

SID (putting his hand involuntarily to the left side of his face) Yuss.

HOWARD: Did you take it today?

SID: No.

HOWARD: You must take it for a week. Is the swelling down?

SID: Yuss.

HOWARD: I want to ask you both a question. (They gaze at her attentively) Do you love each other?

They look at her blankly.

HOWARD (cont.) Very well (making a note). Do you always want to be together?

MAY: Yes.

SID: Yuss.

HOWARD: Suppose you were separated, sent miles away from each other?

~~SID: My mum and dad live round the corner!~~

~~HOWARD (to MAY) What would you do if his parents moved a long way away?~~

MAY (with alarm) Are ^{you} they going to move ^{us} then?

HOWARD: ~~I don't think so, no! May, I've been visiting Sid for ten years or more, so I naturally take an interest in the friends he keeps.~~ *Of course not! (studies the notes again) Now then. Let me tell you*

MAY: You want to stop him comin' round here don't you?

HOWARD: ~~I'm here to see you my dear. If I had to keep an eye on him for ten years I must now keep it on you.~~ *Not at all. I came here today I've been up Sid*

MAY: Why?

HOWARD: ~~As I explained to your mother, you're very close together, you and Sid. So I need to know you as well my dear, there's nothing scary about it.~~ *Just because you and Sid are ^{so} very close.*

She looks round the room.

HOWARD (cont., to SID) Are these your pictures?

SID: Yuss.

HOWARD (after making a long note) All right. You can both go downstairs now. (To MAY) Would you sending your mother up please dear? She's waiting.

mind

They leave without a further word. HOWARD rises and studies the pictures at closer quarters. We hear soft steps on the stairs and LYDIA comes in. She stares at HOWARD.



LYDIA: What's been going on? My daughter's in tears.

HOWARD: Please sit down Mrs. Bright, let's have a quiet chat.

LYDIA: I'll sit down when I want to, my daughter's upset, she says you're going to send her away!

HOWARD: I never said any such thing. (Holding up her recorder) I can play the conversation back to you if you wish. Would you like me to?

LYDIA: She can't be in tears for nothing!

HOWARD I needed to ask them a few very harmless questions. That's all. I'm here to help them as a couple. Your daughter is part of that couple---my supervisor instructed me to make sure she's happy in the relationship, that's all.

LYDIA (without sitting) Listen Mrs Howard my husband's coming in in a minute and he'll expect his tea, he's a hardworking man. It's not my daughter's fault if young Sid's on your list.

HOWARD: Of course it isn't! And of course my questions trouble everyone--they trouble me to ask them---but I'd lose my job if I didn't. So you see I need your cooperation desperately. Your daughter's not on my list and you and I must make sure that she never is.

LYDIA: Everybody scared she's going to have a baby but I don't mind if she does and I don't care who knows it. A lot of children are born out of wedlock nowadays.

HOWARD: But your husband doesn't apparently agree with you.

She is interrupted by riotous sounds
from the downstairs bedroom.

HOWARD (cont.) What on earth is that?

LYDIA: It's them!

HOWARD: Well goodness gracious me!

MAY (off) I want it again!

SID (off) I haven't got it in me!

MAY (off) You 'aven't got it in me either! (cackles of laughter).

HOWARD (above the noise) What's happening?

LYDIA (shouting) They're making love! It's what I've always said---they should be married and live in a place of their own and look forward to a baby, it's bound to arrive!

The cackling and crying out below continue, the bed down there makes a thunderous noise to the rhythm of their passion.

HOWARD listens with astonished alarm and fascination. They wait for the final cackles of laughter to subside.

HOWARD (still hushed with astonishment and speaking with care) But Mrs. Bright what they're doing has nothing to do with babies! They might just as well be throwing pillows at each other. By the sound of what's going on downstairs we shall certainly have to treat them as a couple---but, oh dear, what a strange one!

LYDIA: As for myself I don't care if they *are* strange. It's what I keep telling my husband, if they want a baby they should be allowed to get one in their own way, after all *we* had some say in the matter when *we* were younger.

HOWARD (collecting herself with difficulty) Of course Mrs. Bright. Now that I have a clear view of the matter I can work, like you, to keep them together!

LYDIA: My husband Jack won't hear of it. So there isn't much I can say is there?

HOWARD: Evidently not!

LYDIA: It's lucky he's a very fair man, he always listens to me in the end!

HOWARD (as they leave) A definite bonus, that!

Three

SID is sitting on the sofa working on a small canvas. He clearly knows what he is doing and works with great concentration, his mouth and tongue active, in rhythm with it. By his feet is a box containing his brushes and powders, for he mixes his own colours.

The front door opens downstairs and we hear JACK BRIGHT calling.

JACK (off) May?

SID: She's gone out for the kippers Mr. Bright.

JACK (off) Thank you son!

We hear his footsteps on the stairs. He enters in his working kit.

JACK (after watching him with interest) You enjoy doing that don't you?

SID: Oh yuss.

JACK (sitting by him) Where do you get those canvasses then?

SID: Mrs. 'Oward.

JACK: And what does the red mean?

SID: That's blood.

JACK: Who's?

SID: It's moin.

JACK: You mean you prick your finger and wipe it on, like May says?

SID: Nah. If you look at them pikchers you can see the brush.

JACK: You dip your brush in your own blood?

SID: Nah. That's paint. Blood don't dry like that.

JACK: Ah! You mean you match up your paint to the colour of your blood.

SID (with great finality) Yuss.

JACK: And what made Mrs. Howard give you all this?

SID: She got a school to send me canvussis.

JACK: So she's been visiting you quite a long time?

SID: Oh yuss. Since I was a kid.

JACK: Do you like her?

SID: Yuss. My granddad says she's a bloody fool.

JACK: And do you think so too?

SID: Nah. She says she's coming at six.

JACK: What, here?

SID: Yuss. That's why I come.

JACK: It's already turned six.

SID: She's always late.

JACK (cautiously) Sid, don't you think it makes it a bit difficult for our May having this woman prowling round all the time?

SID: I tell her don't listen.

JACK: Tell who?

SID: May.

JACK: You mean just let the woman talk like.

SID (continuing with his work) She gave my granddad the glad eye and he choked her off about it, he said he'd report her if she wasn't careful.

JACK: Mrs.Howard gave your granddad the glad eye?

SID: Yuss. He told 'er he knows people on the counsil so she'd better watch it.

JACK: Ah. That makes a difference, doesn't it?

SID: 'E says she eats men for breakfast.

JACK: Do you understand what that means?

SID nods and there is a silence.

JACK (cont.) Do you think you'll ever have a job Sid?

SID: Nah.

JACK: Why not?

SID: Dunno.

JACK: If you and May stay together how are you going to live then?

SID: My grandad says he's got some money put aside for me.

JACK: Do your mum and dad like these pictures?

SID: Nah.

JACK: Why not?

SID: They don't like the blood.

JACK: But you say it isn't blood.

SID: Nor is it.

A prolonged ring on the front-door bell.

SID: That's 'er. She always rings like that. My granddad says she leans on the bell to put the wind up everybody.

JACK (gazing at him for a moment with a smile) I wonder if she knows you as well as you know her? Eh, mate?

He goes downstairs. The front door opens and closes. SID immediately stows his paints away and hides his canvas.

We hear HOWARD coming up.

HOWARD (appearing in the doorway) Ah there you are. How are you today Sid?

SID (not looking at her as he packs up) All roit Mrs.'Oward.

HOWARD (watching him for a moment) There's a good boy. You've always been a tidy one haven't you?

She goes to the same armchair as before and settles herself, taking out her notebook, with her jewellery rattling away.

HOWARD (cont.) When you've finished that would you mind going downstairs for a few minutes? No, you don't have to hurry, take your time, we can all wait. (As he returns to her former methodical packing). I need a word with May's father you see.

SID: Can I stow it under 'ere?

HOWARD: Of course you can.

He slides his box under the sofa and then goes downstairs with his usual heavy steps. We hear him calling 'Mr.Bright' and there is the murmur of their voices. HOWARD continues to study her notes.

JACK (appearing in the doorway) You wanted to see me?

HOWARD (looking up only in the middle of her words) Ah, Mr. Bright, I thought we should have word or two together. I've already spoken to your wife but I like to approach the whole family, if you see what I mean.

JACK: Of course.

He goes to the sofa and sits, at its edge.

HOWARD: Mr.Bright, I wonder if you know what Borderline Personality Disorder is?

JACK: I haven't got the foggiest, no.

HOWARD: This is how we *could* classify Sid, and I'm afraid, because of their unusual association together, that involves your daughter as well. I'm not suggesting for a moment that *she* is also borderline but we have to use that kind of language. Borderline Personality disorder means people who while they genuinely seek to find the right life, often succeed, they always have to be helped. This is why I've been with Sid since he was ten. I think we're very lucky that Sid has his little pictures. I don't know if an art dealer would spend much time on them but that's beside the point.

JACK: As for me I think they're wonderful.

HOWARD: Good. A deserved smack in the eye for me, Mr.Bright---I confess I'm not one to haunt the picture galleries. What troubles *me* is that in the case of Borderline Personality Disorder one has to be very careful that it never turns over to violence of any kind. That's why we've always kept Sid away from violent films. His parents are very strict about it though I can't vouch for his grandfather. (Decisively) Now: I'm suggesting to you that Sid is a very docile boy, he hasn't got a violent pore in his body.

JACK: Oh I agree there.

HOWARD: *So far* he's been very sweet and docile and even punctilious--- look at the way he packs up his picture box. But I've always felt that violence could get to him eventually---I mean there's so much of it around, isn't there?

JACK: There certainly is.

HOWARD: Sometimes I even feel that in his case it's lying in wait. That's probably just an anxiety of mine but you know how we are with our nearest and dearest---we feel frightened for them.

JACK: Yes we do, we can't help it.

HOWARD: So could I ask you, Mr. Bright, now that Sid seems to have joined your household, to be especially careful about television?

JACK: Oh we are already, like any decent family. That set's locked.

HOWARD: You agree with my concern?

JACK: Well, obviously!

HOWARD (sitting back with sudden decision) Then why did you show Sid violence for the first time in his life Mr. Bright?

JACK: What are you talking about?

HOWARD: His face was examined and the hospital made its report. This report said that the blow was considerable but there was luckily no concussion, which was our chief medical concern. But the bruising was enough to show that the shock to the boy's nervous system must have been enormous. It was the first shock of that kind he had ever sustained! He nursed the side of his face for days afterwards. A painkiller was advised and he took it for about a week.

JACK: I was angry, I was thinking of my daughter, they were shouting their heads off, he was asking for more sex and my girl's only sixteen and my job as her dad is to protect her, what kind of life is she going to have if she stays with somebody like that for God's sake?

HOWARD (quietly) I'm sure you're right, I'm sure you did lose your head.

JACK: Because I'm a father!

HOWARD: Losing your head says it all. Violence has been introduced to him! Violence in the case of Borderline Personality Disorder means that he could easily find violence interesting from now on, it could take possession of him! It happens frequently and that's when the police have to take over and my job's finished for good, I no longer have the right to see Sid, he becomes a memory for me! *The prisons take over Mr.Howard!*

JACK: So what are you trying to say?

HOWARD: Let me put it another way. Mr. Bright, you have long experience of disturbed people. Your fist wife is under psychiatric care is she not, and she has been for the last five years.

JACK (staggered) Have you been *investigating* me?

HOWARD: What else would you expect in the case of violence? It always has a background.

JACK: You'd better keep our Nelly out of it! She *always* suffered from nerves. When she was my wife I never knew what she might do. She was quite capable of walking out of the house when I was at work, she could walk out of the door naked! set fire to herself! lose the key to get back in, roam the streets all night, I stayed with her all the way through and she *knows*, she *knows* I looked after her and we loved each other and we still do!

HOWARD: She was your *first* wife was she?

JACK: Yes she was, everybody knows that! Me and my wife go and see her once a week, we take her all she needs, she gets on with May, they rap away like kids together, just ask her yourself, go down to Witherton hospital and ask Nelly herself!

HOWARD: That's exactly what I did Mr. Bright. And she doesn't have a nice word for you!

JACK: A nice---(losing himself) we all laugh together, we hug and kiss each other, my wife and her can talk and laugh with her for hours, I tell you we go there all the time, we take May, she loves May, you ask May (jumping up), Nellie says a lot of funny things, especially when she smiles, she's playing a game, she'll say things you wouldn't believe and we all have a laugh, was she smiling when she said all this, if she said it?

HOWARD: I don't think her carers are there to observe her smiles.

JACK: Listen! You're trying to corner me and I don't want to hear any more!

HOWARD: And I don't want any more roughneck behaviour where Sid is concerned!

JACK: Did you say roughneck? (A menacing pause) Did you know I used to be a roughneck, a real one? on the oil rigs?

HOWARD: It was one of the things we learned about you yes.

JACK: But *you* mean roughneck like a ruffian don't you? You're calling me a ruffian aren't you? (Jumping up) Now just you get out of my house and stay out of it! Do you hear what I say? Don't you dare come near us again! (With a massive yell, as she remains sitting) GET OUT!

This moves her at speed. We hear her go down the stairs and the front door slams.

JACK slumps back on the sofa and hides his face in his hands, giving way not to tears, since tears for a former true roughneck are virtually impossible, but to a strange groaning from the depth of the stomach, and shivering.

SID appears silently in the doorway, watching him.

SID: Mr. Bright (no reply). Don't let Mrs. 'Oward get you dahn! Mr.Bright!

JACK remains there, seeming not to hear.

SID (cont.) My granpa knows people on the Council Mr.Bright. Why don't you come over and see my granddad?

JACK (in a shaky undertone) Thank you mate, I think I will. Let's go downstairs and make a cup of tea shall we? Then we'll go and see your granddad. (Jumping up) That's a good idea son---see your granddad!

He takes SID's hand as they go downstairs.

The staircase door is ajar. SID's painting material is everywhere---on the sofa, the coffee table, the floor,

though it is an ordered, so to speak
working, mess.

LYDIA (off) And make your bed---quick!

MAY (off) Sid's doin' it mum.

LYDIA (off) What a bloody silly idea, having the bed downstairs! Trust men to think up something daft! Where's my sitting room gone---he didn't think of that did he?

She appears in the doorway.

LYDIA (cont., staring aghast at the mess) And what's all this? SID!

SID (off) Yes Mrs. Bright?

LYDIA: This bloody mess of yours, who's going to clear it up?

SID (off) Me Mrs.Bright!

LYDIA: You'll bloodiwell go downstairs!

She applies herself to the task.

LYDIA (cont.) Turning my sitting room into a bedroom! It's all right for *him*, he's at work all day.

MAY (off) Mum?

LYDIA: What is it now?

MAY (off) Shall I get the kippers?

LYDIA: What do you mean the kippers, this is MORNING! We got kippers coming out of the bloody walls. That's another one of his fads isn't it? Well today we're going to have fish and chips!

MAY (appearing at the door) I thought I'd get 'em now mum.

LYDIA: *Now?* Have you gone mad? Listen I want that bedroom spick and span, *and* the kitchen, we've got that mad cow coming, I told you that umpteen times already!

SID with MAY behind her appear in the doorway.

SID: My granddad went up the counsil yesterday Mrs. Bright.

LYDIA (moved to pity and peace) Listen Sid, you shouldn't be here mornings and you know it as well as I do!

SID: My granddad sent me roun' to tell you---!

LYDIA: I know Sid and when you've finished clearing up downstairs go back and tell your granpa thank you very much. (As he stands gaping at his paints) Go on! You can do your painting this evening.

MAY (pulling at him to back down the stairs) Come on! Mum don't want you up here!

They leave and with relief LYDIA slams the door shut after them. Finally she is finished and throws herself down on the sofa with a great gasp. She has hardly finished gasping when there comes a prolonged ring at the bell downstairs!

LYDIA: You *would* wouldn't you? (Remaining where she is) Oh well (with a sigh) no rest for the wicked.

We hear the door open and close downstairs.

MAY (off) Mum! Mum! Its Mrs.'Oward!

SID: Mrs.Bright!

LYDIA (to herself, remaining where she is) You've got legs haven't you, why don't you bloodily well come up?

After a murmur of voices below this is what happens. MRS.HOWARD opens the door in a gingerly manner, peeping in.

HOWARD: Ah Mrs.Bright.

LYDIA (without looking at her) Good morning (without getting up), come in.

HOWARD goes to her now
proprietary armchair.

LYDIA (cont.) I used to have a nice sitting room downstairs but my husband decided otherwise.

HOWARD: Well that makes two of us in stress. So we'd better settle down and have a nice chat. Don't you think so?

LYDIA doesn't acknowledge it with so much as a glance.

HOWARD (cont.) I'm sorry to burst into your morning like this but I have to speak to you urgently, please believe me Mrs. Bright, I need to say a few things while your husband is at work. I'm afraid someone went to the council and spoke to one of the councillors about the way I handled your husband. The council is obliged to take the case up whether it likes it or not. I can't tell you who the person who raised the human rights question was---

LYDIA (snapping it out with tremendous energy) It was Sid's granpa! As you very well know! And he told them how you talked to my husband and so he should 'ave!

HOWARD: Do you know why I've come to you Mrs. Bright? It's because I agree with Sid's grandpa. I called your husband a redneck---of course I knew he once worked on the oil-rig---but I meant it in a vulgar way and so I got my come-uppance. I went too far. That was the council's view. My love of men isn't great Mrs. Bright. Another of my weaknesses. Perhaps I need men too badly.

LYDIA (tired, mollified) Listen Mrs. Howard I'm looking after a house and I'm sick and tired of all this palaver, I know you're doing your job and you mean well but it's too much all of a sudden.

HOWARD: Your husband screamed at me to get out of this house, he terrified me out of my wits and that too was silly of me because I provoked him and I shouldn't have. I think his hitting young Sid so hard made me angry, and also jealous because I knew he was becoming a kind of father to Sid, a better father than I have been a carer.

- LYDIA: He shouldn't have hit the boy, he knows that.
- HOWARD: You see my worry was that this case would get into the hands of the police---they are both registered as suffering from Borderline Personality Disorder---
- LYDIA: Both? Both who?
- HOWARD: Sid and May, Mrs. Bright.
- LYDIA (riled up again at once) What, my daughter? You've registered her as disordered? It must have been you, it was wasn't it? Or do kids come with these damned silly labels hanging round their necks when they're born?
- HOWARD: It only means they can't work, never will work, and more important it means they will never look after themselves.
- LYDIA: May can look after herself. She can work all right if she puts her mind to it, she got good grades at school. We look after our girl, don't you worry about that, we know she made a big mistake letting that boy in this house, and now we can't separate them, and it's us takes the can back not you---and it's all because you let the boy roam, but I'm glad you did because we'll never separate them now! For me and my husband he's like a son!
- HOWARD: And that's why I'm here. Mrs. Bright, you have influence on your husband. Get him to accept my visits please. Don't drive me away. We've got to think of May and Sid now. (Rising) Will you speak to your husband please?

LYDIA nods.

- HOWARD (cont., looking round) Your home's so peaceful. And here I come barging in, I really think I almost broke it up! I'm so clumsy you see. Because I never experienced a home. Never had it. It's no good when your mother hates you.
- LYDIA: Your mother hated you?
- HOWARD: But I had my revenge I suppose. I vowed to myself, every time she stared at me, that I'd spend my life looking after children. So at least she got me a job.

LYDIA: I'm sorry to see you crying Mr. Howard. Things'll be all right, don't you worry about that. I'll talk to Jack.

HOWARD (hushed, getting up) Thank you. I'll see myself out.

She leaves, closing the door carefully, silently, behind her. LYDIA sits thoughtfully.

5

The scene is empty. the door is open to the staircase. MAY comes up the stairs silently and creeps to HOWARD's armchair, where she sits, bolt upright. She waits. There is a stirring below.

SID (off, downstairs) May, where you gone?

Silence.

SID (cont., off) May?

She doesn't speak. We hear him coming up. He appears in the doorway. He stares at her.

SID (cont.) I bin asleep.

MAY: Sit down young man.

SID: What for?

MAY: I'm bein' Mrs. 'Oward.

SID (sitting on the sofa) Oh.

MAY: Now listen young man just keep your mouth shut while I ask you a few questions. Do you ever see red?

SID: Dunno. My granddad---

MAY: Bugger your granddad!

They fall about.

MAY (cont., resuming the role) Do you know what seeing red is young man?

SID: No.

MAY: Seein' red is getting' in a temper and shouting about, young man. Is this what you do?

SID: No.

MAY: Do you love me?

SID: No.

MAY: Why not?

SID: Because you're a silly cow Mrs. 'Oward.

MAY: Let me give you one more chance. Do you hate me?

SID: Nah.

MAY: My mum and dad says we've got to git married.

SID: Are you still being Mrs.'Oward?

MAY: Of course not! My mum and dad say we should get married.

SID: My mum and dad got married.

MAY: Yes well *my* mum and dad want us to marry.

SID: What for?

MAY: They say Mrs.'Oward won't come 'ere after that.

SID: Mrs. 'Oward's all right.

MAY: No she isn't, she says you put red in your pikchurs which is because you're angry.

SID: My granddad says---

MAY (with him joining in) She's a bloody fool!

They cackle.

MAY: My dad says to ask you if you love me. Do you?

SID: Dunno.

MAY: That's what I said when he asked me.

SID: Asked you what?

MAY: Do you love Sid? Then he asked me said do you always want to be with Sid and I said yes. He said to ask you if you always want to be with me.

SID: Yuss.

MAY: What, you always went to be with me?

SID: Yuss.

MAY: Then he said if both of us want to be with us we should get engaged.

SID: What's that?

MAY: It means we're going to get married later.

SID: Oh.

MAY: I bet I know the real reason they want us to marry, it's in case I have a baby.

SID (dreamily) I'd like to 'ave a baby.

MAY: So would I. My dad says if we get married and live on our own your winkle would get bigger.

SID: Why's that?

MAY: He says once it got used to being married it would start standing up proper. He said like a puppy when you train it to jump up for food---

The front door below opens and closes with great haste.

JACK (off, puffing) Are you upstairs you two?

MAY: Yes dad!

JACK (off) You'd better get your skates on then---Mrs.Howard'll be here any minute, she wants another talk with me, come down quick and hide in your bedroom! The holocaust is on its way!

MAY: OK dad! (To SID) Quick, Mrs.'Oward's comin'---the *real* one!

At once we hear her long ring at the bell. It produces panic stations---he scrambles to get his brushes etc. together. He quickly pushes his work box under the sofa.

They rush down the stairs, leaving the door open. A pause as with urgent whispers they get to their bedroom. Then, and only then, do we hear the front door open and, after a pause, close.

JACK (off, to MRS.HOWARD) Shall we go up?

HOWARD (off) Thank you.

She appears first and makes at once for her---by now---proprietary armchair. JACK goes to the sofa, its very edge.

HOWARD (getting her notes together in the usual way, clinking and page-turning in a less convincing way than usual) My supervisor suggested yesterday evening that I come and see you. Do you know what he said Mr. Bright?

JACK: No?

HOWARD: He said go and make peace with him.

JACK: Were we at war?

HOWARD: I told him what I'd called you. And he said, that's making war Mrs. Howard. I told him you'd thrown me out of your house and tried to look pathetic but it didn't wash. So I had my comeuppance as you might say. I told your wife, I'm a clumsy woman.

JACK We all make mistakes Mrs. Howard.

HOWARD: So your wife had a little talk with you?

JACK: Oh yes.

HOWARD: She knows you're a fair man. Anyway, back to my supervisor. He said you've touched Mr. Bright on a raw nerve. He meant about me calling you a roughneck. He said people who work on oil rigs know what hard work is, the hardest work a man can have.

JACK: Oh I don't mind names but you said it in my own home and I suppose that got to me.

HOWARD: Also I think your wife doesn't feel well towards me.

JACK: How's that?

HOWARD: She thinks I've been an interfering nuisance, she thinks she could have handled those two young people better than I can. And she's right.

JACK: Look Mrs Howard, you're here for those two, and so are we, so what's the argument about?

HOWARD: There is none!

She puts down the paraphernalia of her notes.

JACK: I'd like to ask you a question Mrs. Howard, I'm not trying to be funny or rude or anything---

HOWARD: Of course not.

JACK: Did you ever run a home or family yourself?

Her eyes brighten and she collects herself for an answer it gives her great

relief to make.

HOWARD: I was *brought up*. And that's all I can say about it. My mother hated every step I took, she compared everything I did with the behaviour of my brothers and sisters and there were no brothers and sisters, I was a lone child and had to imagine them, how better they were to me in the way they walked and talked and looked. I always had these ghosts round me, unfriendly ones--- brothers and sisters who were better than me in everything but never existed. And of course I loved my mother! We have to don't we?

He nods.

HOWARD (cont.) Because they lead us to our destiny! However much they hate us or *say* they do! She asked me sometimes what use are you to anybody, what are you going to do in life? And that led me straight to the work I'm doing! I saw it as clear as a bell---you're going to look after children---the sad and lonely ones! (As he is about to interrupt) You're going to say young Sid was given a lot, his mum and dad doted on him---!

JACK: Yes!

HOWARD: Of course I recognised that.

JACK: But you said he must have a lot of rage inside him, you said he saw red like in his pictures, the red of his pictures was his own rage!

HOWARD (quietly) And it was all theory, wasn't it? And you and Lydia--- may I call your wife Lydia?

JACK: Of course you can.

HOWARD: It was my rage I was talking about---at least that's how it seems to me now. I have a lot of it, you know, deep down.

She is silent and it is some time before we see that she is crying, in total silence, with great control, her face puckered up and the tears flowing as if the face wasn't her own.

HOWARD (cont.) I'm attracted to you Mr.Bright.

JACK: *What?*

HOWARD: How could it have escaped you?

He is watching her, waiting for her to speak, which she doesn't do.

JACK: Don't you think you should have kept that to yourself?

HOWARD: You really don't understand do you? With all I see around me in my work, the grief and pain and substitute living, and then I see people like you and Lydia hitting on a happy way of life and clinging to it for dear God---

JACK: That's all very well but you you're telling this to somebody who's married, you're saying in my home!

HOWARD: Oh if you knew about most marriages you'd wonder the thing should still exist. That's why people are giving it up, they can love somebody at a distance but not in the same house, oh no, not that for dear mercy! The words husband and wife belong to times when people believed in God and such foolery!

JACK: I think you're going a bit too far. And I've known a lot of people who believe in God, and they've never been fools!

HOWARD (with a smile) I'm being thrown out again am I? Well I know one thing, you'll never mention this conversation to a living soul.

JACK: And why is that?

HOWARD: A woman sits before you and declares her love for you and this is all you can say! You should be telling me to keep my mouth shut and every other woman on this planet would agree with me!

JACK: I'll you what I think about that love-talk, it sounded a bit too easy.

HOWARD: Every woman including Lydia would tell you you shouldn't have let that talk go on! Come to your senses Mr. Bright! I've hired gigolos! They did their work! They made all the right noises at the right time! They were usually muscular but never rough! Sex for me is a quick snatched thing between people who feel nothing! But the chances of ever getting this dumb selfless exchange is very remote, a chance in a lottery! (Looking at him) I see I've rung a chord---you're listening intently. That's what

every woman would ask you---why did you listen intently instead of throwing me out? .

We hear the front door below open and close.

HOWARD (cont., rising, cool) There's the adored wife. And you can't tell her a word about this conversation can you? For one thing she would make war on me, to the knife. But, much worse than that, the knife would enter your two lives too.

She goes downstairs. The door remains open behind her.

HOWARD (cont., off) Well hullo Mrs. Bright, another visit I'm afraid! But I think we can say your husband and I agree at last---a sort of armistice!

The front door opens and closes.

LYDIA (off, calling up) Jack?

JACK: Yes?

LYDIA: What was all that about?

JACK: She tried to put the make on me! That's what it was all about! You should have heard her carrying on, about how she had sex with gigolos and whatnot!

LYDIA (laughing) She's crackers! That's what she is!

JACK: You're telling me! (Jumping up) Make a cup of tea duck and I'll tell you all about it!

LYDIA: Now don't get me too sexy, not before we've had our fish and chips!

JACK (hastening down) I wouldn't sweat on it!

6

The scene is empty. But what a scene it is. Everything is festive, the lights, the

bunting, the way the table is set---the coffee table has been replaced with a proper table. It is in the middle of the room, covered with a gaudy but not vulgar table cloth, and set with four places. A great plum cake is in the middle with a white sugar coating, its surface featuring clay hobgoblins and a tiny silver fairy in the centre. The cake has an old-fashioned paper doily round it, a gay blue colour. There are glasses at each place and a decanter full of a dark ginger wine. Straight-back chairs have been brought up from the kitchen.

The door to the stairs is closed and we hear movement below. Several people come up with a clatter of feet. SID peers in first, his face a mixture of alarm, interest and awe as he surveys the table.

SID (to MAY behind him, as if to back out) Look!

She too peers in and there is laughter behind them from LYDIA and JACK. Then they all crowd in together. LYDIA at once goes to the table to make last-minute adjustments.

JACK: All right Sid, you go and sit over there, don't forget you're the honoured guest mate. And May you sit at his side like, all right? Make yourselves comfortable. You didn't think you'd see all this did you?

MAY: No!

JACK: Now I put something in your pocket downstairs, didn't, have you still got it?

SID (still gazing at the table) Yuss.

JACK: Are you sure, because it cost a penny or two.

SID (feeling in his pocket) Yuss.

JACK (to MAY) Now what what's he got in his pocket?

MAY: I don't know dad.

JACK: And you're not going to tell her are you Sid?

SID: Nah.

JACK: And now for the old lady---you sit there!

LYDIA (going to her place with a wink at MAY) I like *that*!

JACK (himself sitting, and taking the bottle) Well here goes, I don't want you people getting tiddly, especially the lady on my right, she tends to overdo the boose don't she May?

MAY (with a conniving smile at her mother) No she doesn't!

LYDIA: It's more likely on the other foot isn't it duck?

JACK pours all round and they all take sips. SID is the last to raise his glass, having been signalled by MAY to do so.

LYDIA (cont.) Mm!

JACK: Not bad is it? Ginger wine gingered up a bit. Still got that little thing in your pocket Sid?

LYDIA: Leave the blessed boy alone.

SID (searching his pocket again) I got it Mr.Bright.

JACK: So who's going to cut the cake?

MAY: Mum.

LYDIA cuts the cake.

JACK: Look at that! Turned out nice hasn't it?

LYDIA: It was all your daughter's stirring.

They start eating.

JACK (to SID) You took me to see your granddad yesterday didn't you son?

MAY (getting it in before SID) Yuss.

This causes a mutual cackle.

LYDIA: You're not tiddly you two are you?

MAY: No mum.

JACK (to LYDIA) You know how old his granpa is---52!

LYDIA: No!

JACK: And I reckon he looks younger than me. He said I don't mind being called granddad as long as I get my laughs. He's certainly got it in for Mrs.Howard.

LYDIA: I don't blame him! So do I! I wish she'd sling her bloody hook and leave us in peace.

JACK: That's asking for a lot.

LYDIA: Oh well, I suppose we just have to grin and bear it.

JACK: Yeah. (To MAY) So why are we all sitting here May?

MAY: For Sunday tea.

JACK: Sunday tea *this*---you'll be bloody lucky to get a repeat in five years mate! All right Sid you can take it out of your pocket now.

Very carefully, and with great deliberation, SID takes out his handkerchief and withdraws a tiny ring.

LYDIA: Fit it on her finger nicely Sid, you know which one don't you?

SID (concentrating as he takes MAY's hand) Yuss.

JACK: Do you know what that ring is May?

MAY: No.

LYDIA: It's your engagement ring May.

MAY: My *what?*

JACK (the ring having been fitted) She's tickled pink, you can see it! And now what do you do Sid?

SID: I kiss 'er.

JACK: Then do so my lad.

SID kisses MAY on the cheek.

JACK (cont., to LYDIA) Didn't have trouble there did he?

LYDIA (winking at MAY) I'll say he didn't!

JACK: There, that's all over! Now we can tuck into the food.

LYDIA: What about some music?

MAY (jumping up) I'll do it!

She slips downstairs and while the others tuck in we hear a joyful rollicking melody that is neither jazz nor pop but has drawn something from both.

As MAY returns to her place JACK raises his glass.

JACK: Here's to the future bride and bridegroom!

He and LYDIA raise their glasses and SID follows suit but MAY takes his hand down and shakes her head. They sit watching the parents.

MAY (as JACK and LYDIA lower their glasses) Thank you mum and dad.

There is a prolonged ring at the bell. They freeze. Not a glass chinks, not a jaw moves. The bell rings in the same manner again.

LYDIA (in a whisper) Talk of the devil eh? She's got a bloody cheek I must say, after her last exhibition!

JACK (also whispering) And she knows *when* too, right on the second, like a bloody witch!

SID: Mrs. 'Oward's all right Mr. Bright.

JACK: I know she is mate. But we don't want her up here, not just at this moment, all right?

The bell rings a third time.

SID: She'll be down there all night.

LYDIA: My mum always said never turn a guest away even if they're a rotten penny.

JACK (with a shrug) You stay here Lyd. Why don't you go down and talk to her May? Just see what she wants, all right?

MAY: OK.

She goes down and the music is abruptly switched off. The front door opens and there is the murmur of voices. LYDIA and JACK wait listening. Then HOWARD appears with MAY behind her.

HOWARD (seeing the festive table and drawing back) Oh how beautiful--- beautiful! (Genuinely captured, almost crying) I chose the time very badly---yet not for me!

JACK (already on his feet, with resignation) Come in, Mrs. Howard.

He draws up a chair for her.

JACK (cont.) There, make yourself comfortable!

HOWARD (still entranced) It makes my old flat look like a furniture sale.

LYDIA Would you like a little drink, just to celebrate? Slip down and get another glass May.

MAY goes downstairs.

HOWARD: I knew something was going on here, I didn't know in my head, I just felt myself walking here. I thought as it's Sunday, I may as well walk over you and see if you could to save me!---stop me throwing my life away please!

JACK (quietly) And how could we do that?

HOWARD: Just by being yourselves. And calling me Emily. I wish May and Sid to call me Emily too.

JACK: Can you do that Sid? say hullo Emily?

MAY: Hullo Emily!

HOWARD: Hullo darling!

MAY reappears with the wine glass.

JACK: There we are. (As he pours the wine) And what about you May, how would you like to say hullo Emily instead of Mrs. Howard?

MAY looks blank.

LYDIA: Mrs. Howard doesn't want you to call her that any more, she wants you to call her Emily, she wants to be one of us now, can you just do that, say hullo Emily?

MAY: Hullo Emily!

HOWARD: You see how nicely she said it!

JACK (placing the wine before her) Now just you enjoy that!

LYDIA (as if suddenly coming to her senses) And what about some cake?

She cuts a piece for her.

LYDIA (cont.) Do you mind May's plate?

HOWARD (with her first laugh in this house) Of course not (holding it out).

She takes a bite as they all sit watching her.

HOWARD (eating) Mm! I bet the whole family joined in *this*!

LYDIA: May did all the stirring, didn't you May?

MAY: Yes.

HOWARD: They're engaged now aren't they?

LYDIA (flabbergasted) How did you know that?

HOWARD: I saw May's ring. You do everything with a kind of fairy wand don't you? (With another laugh) And my talk, what's it worth? Not a tuppenny damn!

LYDIA: I wouldn't say that! Would you like a piece of cake? it isn't very nice drinking without something, not in the morning.

HOWARD: Just a morsel.

LYDIA cuts the cake.

LYDIA: Do you mind May's plate, just to save her going down again?

HOWARD (taking MAY's plate) No more ceremony please! (Taking a bite) Mm! Did the whole family join in making it?

LYDIA: Oh yes, you ought to have seen May stirring! And my husband likes to scrape the bowl like he did when he was a kid.

HOWARD: I've got a question and I'm frightened to ask it.

LYDIA: Don't be silly.

HOWARD: Would you both let me come over sometimes and just sit with you sometimes, if only for a few moments? I'm pulling out you see.

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JACK: What do you mean?

HOWARD: I'm not going to be a social worker in this house any more. But I have to get your permission to lie! Will you cover me? Just in case an inspector came over---they never do---but just in case would you tell him yes I'm still looking after Sid and he's getting on fine?

JACK: If that's what you want, of course.

HOWARD: And when Said and May marry and start a lovely home of their own I can go there too---!

JACK: Oh they'll never do that! To my mind they'll always be with us.

LYDIA: Oh yes.

HOWARD: You see how you understand things better than I do? I'm so frightened of intruding on you both! I'm frightened I won't come up to scratch! But, you know, I'm quite intelligent, as my mother used to say, grudgingly. Mothers always know don't they?

JACK: Oh, you're right there. (To LYDIA) You always know better than I do don't you duck?

LYDIA: Of course I do!

They enjoy this.

JACK: Well that's all settled then, you're one of the family. And now I think we should all go down stairs and wash up! What do you say Sid?

SID: Yuss.

They start clearing up the plates, with MRS. HOWARD joining in.

LYDIA (to MRS. HOWARD) You needn't do that!

HOWARD: Not if I enjoy it?

LYDIA: Oh in that case all the more the merrier!

JACK and LYDIA and HOWARD bear plates and glasses downstairs. SID and MAY remain clearing up the rest.

MAY (in a whisper) What's 'appening? Is she comin' to live 'ere then?

SID: Nah. She's just gone balmy, that's all. Like in that film we wasn't supposed to see---the lady that gets into somebody else's 'ouse and she murders the 'hole lot.

MAY (seriously shaken) 'Cor! We'd better tell mum!

SID (with a quick movement of the head to denote 'follow me') Sssh!

They bear the plates down with careful,
gingerly steps.