

HORMONE CITY

A Comedy

by

MAURICE ROWDON

CHARACTERS

LYNN NORDEN, actress

HAL TROUGHAM, actor

MALCOM MACKINDLE, journalist

MARJORIE TROUGHAM, actress

JOYCE, daily help

NANCY LAUDENFIELD, actress

JACK TALBOT, epistemologist

POPS TROUGHAM, actor

1.

A pleasantly but not lavishly furnished living room in a council highrise. It has two doors on the actor's left, one into the entrance hall of the flat and the other, further up and centre, into the bedroom.

A towel has been thrown over the back of one of the armchairs. The scene is empty. The phone rings. No action. Then it starts again.

LYNN NORDEN hurries in. She is clothed above but below wears only a pair of knickers.

She seizes the towel from the armchair and hurries to the phone, which is on a low coffee table in front of the settee. She folds the towel as she goes, places it on the seat of an armchair and then sits on it. Composing herself she answers the phone.

Hers is a soft voice which in a more sensual epoch than ours would have been called seductive. A marriage counsellor might say that it concealed fury, but this would be wrong. At this moment she is being, in her way (for she has small gift for formality), diplomatic. A baffling young woman to those who try to fit her into a limited gallery of socially expectable portraits.

LYNN: Hullo....How are you?....I did read it yes.....(*Sighing to herself but making sure it isn't audible at the other end*) I'm sure he didn't mean to be---(*interrupted*)....You know, he *never* talks about his---....Well, obviously the editor does suggest things, I mean I'm sure it wasn't *his* idea....Yes, I realise that....I say yes I do realise he may have gone beyond what's acceptable....The editor's the person---!

The line has gone dead.

LYNN (*cont., dropping the phone*) Fuck.

She rises carefully, examining the towel. As

she walks toward the bathroom she holds it under her.

She disappears into the bathroom. The phone rings again but she doesn't appear. It is silent. Then it starts again.

She dashes in with the towel round her waist, holding it.

LYNN (*cont., without a trace of rush*) Hullo....We were cut off!
(*Laughing*) Oh!....All right! See you!

She dashes back to the bathroom. In a moment she reappears in a skirt, putting some lipstick on, running her fingers through her hair for the casual look. She dives to the bedroom for some shoes just as someone rings the door bell.

There is a male cry from outside the door of 'Lynn!'. This is repeated.

She reappears, hopping as she puts on the remaining shoe. Then she goes, tidying a cushion on the way, to the door leading into the hall.

LYNN (*cont., off, with a laugh*) That was quick!

HAL (*entering in front of her*) I was right outside.

LYNN (*fingering his jacket*) You look sweet.

They kiss with the *mm* sound denoting no sexual interest.

HAL (*glancing at his jacket with quick boyish pride*) Nancy. Guess where she found it?

LYNN: The Bahamas.

HAL: Moscow. The funniest thing. An import from the States.

Italian. Cost half as much as it would in LA, supposing you could find it there (*breaking off*)---what's the blood on that chair?

LYNN (*knowing where*) Where?

HAL (*pointing to the chair where she has been sitting*) There.

LYNN (*returning to the bathroom*) Would you believe---!

She again disappears into the bathroom and we hear water going. He sits down, taps his foot nervously.

She reappears with a damp cloth.

HAL: You'll never get it off with that. You must take the cover off and soak it in cold water.

LYNN (*hesitating over the cover*) Do you mind looking at an uncovered chair?---it's second hand.

She starts tearing the cover off.

HAL: I'm used to blood being spilled. Your boyfriend's just spilled a lot of *mine*, hasn't he?

LYNN (*stopping her stripping operation*) I was so embarrassed, Hal.

HAL (*jumping up*) You can't get it off like that---*tearing* at it's no good.

He carefully unzips the cover at the back.

HAL (*cont.*) How is it you never got house trained?

LYNN: Domesticated you mean?

HAL (*taking the cover to the bathroom*) No. House trained. (*Off*) Sanitary towels and all that.

LYNN: You must be joking. I lose *buckets*!

We hear running water.

HAL (*returning*) Nancy's the same.

LYNN: *She* came out of that piece all right.

HAL: It's *my* blood I'm talking about. She can look after her own, believe me! Anyway no one's after *her* blood. The opposite.

LYNN: You know as well as I do, if you let yourself be interviewed you put your head on the block.

He stares at her.

HAL: Is that what he told you? I was never interviewed! I was mauled behind my back. By a man I considered a friend. He didn't interview me at all!

LYNN: I didn't read it all that carefully.

HAL: Then don't defend it. All he does is quote from other people. The bastards who work for me! It's a dirty thing to do, go sniffing round somebody's team asking for comments.

LYNN: We all have critics surely.

HAL: Critics? All those people did was bad-mouth me!

LYNN: They said you picked up awful plays and then talked yourself into making films of them, that's criticism not bad-mouthing.

HAL (*dismissive*) They mean The Potting Shed. It isn't a bad play.

LYNN: I didn't say I *agreed* with them.

HAL: But you *do* agree with them. (*Pacing round*) It's OK for you. Somebody calls you and offers you a part, and probably a very small part, if they happen to prefer you to about fifty other actresses after the same job. Are you working by the way?

LYNN: I've been offered this Canadian thing.

HAL: Canadian thing?

LYNN: In the North West Territories.

HAL: What, a lumber camp?

LYNN: They pay my fare over, and the food and all that.

HAL: I should think so too! Why doesn't he do a story on that? Lynn Norden among the grizzlies.

He goes to the window restlessly.

HAL (*cont.*) I'll tell you why he doesn't attack *you* in the press. Nobody's heard of you. Anyway, forget the lumbermen. (*Turning to her*) You got the part.

LYNN: What part?

HAL: In the Potting Shed.

LYNN (*delighted*) I'm too young.

HAL: Don't be silly.

LYNN: I can't believe it.

HAL (*petulantly*) Don't thank me. I leave the casting to Miriam.

LYNN: But you put me up for it.

HAL (*with a sigh*) For god's sake get me a drink.

LYNN: Of course! Let me open a bottle---

HAL: I mean orange juice or something.

She goes to the kitchen and we hear the click of a can being opened.

She brings the can and an empty glass.
He stares at this.

HAL (*cont.*) Just the glass'll do.

LYNN: What do you mean?

HAL: Well pour the bloody thing!

At sixes and sevens she pours the fizz, hands him the glass and is irresolute about the empty can.

HAL (*cont.*) Here (*taking the can*).

He throws it into the wastepaper basket which he finds by the desk.

LYNN: You're angry.

HAL: Not with you.

LYNN: Yes you are.

HAL: Well you're connected with *him* aren't you? You know The Potting Shed's off don't you?

LYNN: You've just offered me a part in it!

HAL: It's off! You got the part of a lifetime but it's off because of your bloody boyfriend Mackindle!

LYNN: Jesus.

HAL: Now you know what *I* feel like.

LYNN: But one piece in a newspaper can't pull a whole production down!

HAL: It can if the company's restive, if the star's wife decamps---! The money was there yesterday but it isn't there today. Anyway who gives a shit what Mackindle says? Do you think that's what brought me here? I went to the bank. Routine meeting! And they've pulled out.

LYNN: Jesus.

HAL: Don't keep using that word. I was brought up a catholic.

He drinks, puts the glass down on the coffee table.

HAL (*cont.*) Bang in the middle of the news section. Not even the magazine. I mean the magazine's where we expect balls but the news

section, serious people like producers read that---!

LYNN: But *you're* the producer.

HAL: That's what people like *you* think. 'Produced by'! All you fucking amateurs are the same.

LYNN: I'm not an amateur.

HAL: I mean amateur in film administration business. (*Suddenly grabbing her*) Were you one of the un-named 'colleagues' who ran me down?

LYNN: I never said a word!

HAL: But you live with the man! He comes to you for all the gossip!

LYNN: We chat about things but I keep my work separate from his.

He studies her before walking away.

HAL: You're the only actress I've met who tells the truth. Maybe that's why you never get parts.

LYNN: That's what Mac says. He says I never act offstage.

HAL: That's balls! (*Emphatically*) Whether you're onstage or off you've got to decide what character you're playing.

LYNN: What character are you playing now?

HAL: I honestly don't know. It feels much the same as when I'm acting, only milder, if you see what I mean.

LYNN: You're always *being* somebody. That's not acting.

HAL: Yes it is.

LYNN: In that case I can't decide who to be.

HAL: Maybe you're too clever.

LYNN: No that's Nancy. People say she's always got her head stuck in a book.

HAL: Supermarket romances. That's what people like Mackindle call culture. Or Mac as you call him.

LYNN: If she isn't clever what is she?

HAL: Do you really want to know what I think of Nancy Laudenfield?

LYNN: Yes.

HAL: Well, take the name alone! Just listen---Nancy Laudenfield---it lands on both feet, it's so *there!* Do you think they keep giving her awards because she's good? People *never* get awards for that. There are just people made for awards and the committees know who they are.

LYNN: You mean your leading lady can't act?

HAL: Don't be malicious. She's simply limited, that's all. Thankfully nobody knows it. She's vulgar. But the committees share the vulgarity. (*Getting into his subject*) She's got an unfortunate basic facial expression, a kind of sea-resort landlady's smirk which comes on at the worst possible moment, like when she needs to look tender. But as everything she does has this award-attracting authority I let it go. I need an award person rather than an actress, so that's why she's my leading lady, as you call her.

LYNN: Was.

HAL: Keep your claws to yourself.

LYNN: Just fact, not claws.

HAL: I don't like the fact. Surely you can see that?

LYNN: Of course I can. That's what I was trying to say. She ran out on you and you still think of her as your partner. Even when you're giving her part to me, which I don't take seriously.

HAL: Yes you do. You'd take it seriously even if I told you it wasn't serious. That's how an unemployed actress is. I mean I could equally say the most marvellous things about her. As a matter of fact I love it when she gets an award, I feel she deserves awards

and I certainly *don't*.

LYNN: *That's* not acting at least.

HAL: Why not?

LYNN: It's sincere. I can see you're being sincere.

HAL (*again gazing at her*) You know, that's why your name's not in lights. You've got to make a firm decision.

LYNN: About what?

HAL (*leaning forward with something of a young teacher's leer*) Acting isn't being insincere. I *hate* her getting awards. It's only when I'm acting that I'm really sincere. You've got it all mixed up. So your acting doesn't come up to scratch. You don't *mean* it. You think it's being insincere, so that's how you come over, as insincere.

She bites her lip. She has learned something.

LYNN: Well, that's most supportive.

He drinks again, apparently bored.

HAL (*cont.*) How do you stand this place? It's like you're suspended in grey air! Whatever made you choose a highrise in Camberwell? I'll have to go soon, they'll start throwing stones at the car.

LYNN: You're not parked downstairs?

HAL: Where else?

LYNN: A BMW! You'll be lucky if it's still there!

HAL: I suppose the money people would have pulled out anyway. It was that ghastly Dr Faustus experiment, I mean who the hell convinced me to do a goulash of Thomas Mann and Marlowe and Goethe?

LYNN: You darling. They said you couldn't stop talking about it.

HAL: Who's they?

LYNN: People in your company.

HAL: You see you *do* talk to Mackindle.

LYNN: I didn't make Faustus a flop!

HAL: Shall I tell you why Nancy gets on? She's a damned nice woman. She's friendly, she can't help it.

LYNN: Mac said the other day a good brain can get in an actress's way.

HAL: You see you spend all your bloody time together talking my business. He meant Nancy didn't he?

LYNN: He meant me.

HAL: By contrast with Nancy.

LYNN: Yes.

He paces nervously like he's acting nervousness.

HAL (*swinging round on her*) This Mac of yours is supposed to be a theatre critic. What's he doing sticking his big nose into films?

LYNN: He's told to by an editor.

HAL: And he loves it.

LYNN: He's dying to get out of it as a matter of fact.

HAL: Did you ever meet a journalist who wasn't?

He walks close to her, sniffing.

HAL (*cont.*) Girls smell a certain way when they're menstruating. I can't define it.

LYNN: Blood perhaps.

HAL: That's *obvious*. My classics master at school always told us, the

obvious is you being lazy.

She smiles (this too must have hit home).

HAL (*cont.*) Acrid. That's the smell.

She shrugs.

HAL (*cont.*) Nancy drinks whisky, which she hates otherwise. I hold her hand and she sits inside a big eiderdown. With a hot water bottle. It goes on for days sometimes. Know why?

LYNN: Why?

HAL: Women with children don't have this trouble.

LYNN: Who told you?

HAL: My mum.

LYNN: She was superb on the box the other evening.

HAL: So I hear. You do mean my mum don't you?

LYNN: Yes.

HAL: I thought you did. I mean Nancy was on the box the other evening too.

LYNN: It must be awful growing up in an acting family.

HAL: It's bloody. One can't show off or plead nerves, they're all doing the same. (*Rushing, on as if it were the same thought*) I do boss everybody about, that Mackindle piece was true there. And I don't let anybody get a word in edgeways---true again. But that's how you run a company, and don't forget I've got two companies in one, theatre and film. As a matter of fact you resent me too. You know bloody well you never liked reading all those parts for me and getting turned down every time.

LYNN: What do you expect?

HAL: Yes it's a hell of a disappointment but I'm not talking about that, I'm saying there's got to be somebody who takes responsibility

and hands out the parts, I could easily run along to my agent and ask for parts like the rest of you but I chose to get myself into the business and provide parts for other people as well as for myself and my god have I paid for it!

LYNN: All you've had is a flop and a nasty piece in the paper. Which will probably do you good anyway because it shows you what people think of you---

HAL (*with a little giggle to himself*) This is something you can pass on to your boyfriend, not that he'll use it, a journalist is always suspicious of unsolicited information. I was fed up with Nancy long before she walked out. I mean personally, domestically. She used to spread herself out on the bed like a travelling salesman opening his suitcase. She displays herself like her parts are going to do you good and you can take your pick of them. Now that's not seductive is it?

LYNN: For some maybe.

HAL: It's the *disloyalty* that stuns me.

LYNN: Hers? What about yours, telling me all that?

HAL (*once more giving her that wistfully appraising look*) Would you like to step into her shoes?

LYNN: I don't know what you mean.

HAL: Oh come away, of course you do!

LYNN (*levelly*) I don't.

HAL (*watching her*) I mean would you like to be my partner? I don't mean sex. You're staring at me.

LYNN: I'm astonished, that's all. As a real person.

HAL (*with annoyance*) Well stop being real and imagine you're an actress! There was obviously something about your readings that captivated me wasn't there? Otherwise I wouldn't have kept on asking you to do them, and I wouldn't have offered you a part over everybody else's head!

LYNN: You mean the company doesn't want me?

HAL: Miriam doesn't.

LYNN (*terribly hurt of course*) So why do you?

HAL: Because I'm not a casting director. I look at the acting. And you're a bloody fine actress.

LYNN: Thank you.

HAL (*quietly*) I repeat, don't thank me. It's like thanking me for your own gifts.

LYNN: If I'm gifted now why wasn't I before, when you were turning me down?

HAL: I already had Nancy. And now I haven't.

LYNN: Am I better than she is?

HAL: You tell *me* what you think of her acting.

LYNN (*after a little thought*) She's bad like the English *like* actresses to be bad. It's a special category.

HAL: And what about me? Am I good?

LYNN: I can't judge.

HAL: Why not?

LYNN: You smother your films with music.

HAL: The audiences wouldn't come if I didn't. You think they're going to look at Marlowe without a lot of wind?

LYNN: That's *you* being obvious isn't it?

HAL: Be brave. Tell me.

LYNN: I can only quote somebody I trust.

HAL: Not MacKindle for god's sake? (*As she shakes her head*) Nor an actor, one never trusts actors. So who is it?

LYNN: A man called Talbot.

HAL (*after giving her one of his long looks*) A critic. Did he say something foul about me?

LYNN: He said you slip into fine, even great acting but you don't know when.

HAL (*with a smile*) Well now!

He is silent.

HAL (*cont.*) Were those his words?

LYNN: Yes, he's someone whose words one remembers.

HAL: Was that all?

LYNN: He said you had a surrogate self. He said it about me too.

HAL: Surrogate? Somebody else in charge?

LYNN: He says the great actors are tenanted.

HAL: *Tenanted?*

LYNN: There's somebody in residence.

HAL: Ah.

LYNN: He says there's a shadow in charge of all the other shadows.

HAL: He sounds a nut. Is this some kind of psychologist?

LYNN: He told me he studied epistemology. At Cambridge.

HAL: What's that exactly?

LYNN: It means thinking about thinking.

HAL: I thought it meant something to do with knowledge. Anyway, how does epistemology bring him into conversation with people like you?

LYNN: With the uneducated you mean?

HAL: Yes.

LYNN: A girl I was at the Central School with went to see him and she said her whole life changed in a moment.

HAL: The *whole* of it?

LYNN: Yes.

HAL: For the better?

LYNN: No. For the authentic. She changed into herself.

Again his long appraising look.

HAL: She became tenanted? (*She nods*) Somebody took up residence at last.

LYNN: Yes.

HAL: His name's Talbot, you said?

LYNN: Jack Talbot, yes.

HAL: Are you going to let him change *your* life?

LYNN: He's coming Tuesday afternoon.

HAL: Here?

LYNN: Yes.

HAL: Does one pay him?

LYNN: He leaves it up to the client.

HAL: They're the most expensive. Do you think I could see him too?

LYNN: I'll mention it to him.

HAL: Without me getting some more column inches from Mr

MacKindle?

LYNN: I'd never discuss that kind of thing with Mac.

HAL: Simply ask him how I can get in touch with him. I mean Mr Talbot. He's seen me in films you think?

LYNN: Of course.

HAL: No I mean what films? Or maybe only the plays?

LYNN: The last film. The flop.

HAL: It's awful up here with that wind. There's no wind below. The entrance looks like a war zone.

LYNN: It's Saturday. All the dads are home. So your car's all right.

HAL: I've an emergency meeting. Don't get up.

LYNN (*victim of a sudden flood as she gets up*) Oh my god!

She rushes to the bathroom clutching her behind and making rapid little Chinese steps. The door closes with a slam.

He waits a discreet moment and knocks.

HAL: You'll be hearing from my agent as they say.

LYNN (*off*) I can't believe it!

HAL: You can't believe what?

LYNN: All this blood!

2.

The same, blackout. The sound of a key turning in the front door. A light in the hall is switched on, shedding light onto the scene through the open door.

An ambulance siren is heard far away.
MALCOM MACKINDLE tiptoes in. He snaps on the reception room overhead light.

LYNN is asleep on the settee wrapped in a vast eiderdown. There is now a decanter of whisky on the coffee table, and a glass with a little whisky in it.

MAC stands looking at her. He closes the door with great care and walks with soft steps to an armchair. He sits down and stretches gorgeously. He takes out a packet of cigarettes but decides against. He rubs his eyes.

LYNN (*voice buried in eiderdown*) Mac?

MAC: It's him.

LYNN: Time?

MAC (*all but asleep*) Three. Morning.

She sleeps on and he stretches again.

MAC (*cont.*) Hormone city eh?

LYNN: I stained the new chair cover.

MAC: Wondered no cover (*yawning*).

LYNN: Hal was here.

MAC: Hal who?

LYNN: Trougham.

MAC: He know where live?

LYNN: He phone and then suddenly at door, he phone from car.

MAC: Not get. Difficult concept three morning.

LYNN (*giggle*) Oh shut up.

MAC: How know you he Hal?

LYNN: I read for him quite a lot. (*Raising herself to look at him*)
He says he wants me to replace Nancy Laudenfield.

MAC: *Replace?* No understand *at all!*

LYNN: In The Potting Shed.

MAC: Is that why he came?

LYNN: Shouldn't you be saying isn't that marvellous?

MAC (*after another luxuriant stretch*) The Potting Shed fell through.

LYNN: I know.

MAC: So how does he give you the part? The money pulled out because Nancy Laudenfield pulled out and you're telling me he's going to put an unknown actress where *she* was and the money's going to come back in? Bullshit.

LYNN: Thank you.

MAC: Anyway, Nancy Laudenfield's negotiating with him.

LYNN: What about?

MAC: The part he's just given you. New money people may be coming in and they think highly of her but they don't think much of Hal. They want him to act in it is but not all the 'This is a Hal Trougham production' crap.

LYNN: He was here around eleven this morning. Their negotiations must have broken down since then.

MAC: They were at it an hour ago! I saw his agent at a party. They're begging us not to talk about a separation, let alone a divorce.

LYNN: Who's they?

MAC: Hal and Nancy. Can I take a sip of your whisky or did you spit in it?

LYNN: In other words he came here and asked me to be his leading lady just for the kicks and then went and forgot about it?

MAC (*taking a drink*) It doesn't matter why he said it, he said it and that's the good news.

LYNN: Meaning?

MAC (*looking at his glass*) Are you seriously saying this stuff stops you bleeding?

LYNN: It helps with the pain.

MAC: What do *you* think of The Potting Shed?

LYNN: Why?

MAC: Because it's going to flop like Faust flopped and you don't need to be in it.

LYNN: It was Greene's best play.

MAC: It's still a novelist's play though. All that nit-picking Catholic conscience. People aren't into conscience nowadays. Lynn.

LYNN: Yes?

MAC: Don't get yourself hurt over this. His only hope is to maintain his partnership with Nancy because he's not the one getting the awards.

LYNN: He's still in love with her, I could tell that.

MAC (*after another drink*) Phew! I feel like bleeding now.

LYNN: I wish you could have a sort of couvade and bleed for me like those Africans.

MAC: I'd happily take your pain over. Instead, I've wrecked your dream. (*Looking at her*) You mean he didn't say *one word*

about my piece?

LYNN: Of course he did.

MAC: Why didn't you say so?

LYNN: I wanted to convince myself he came to see *me*.

MAC: He bent the features editor's ear for an hour this morning and now he's whining to Headley, my editor.

LYNN: Why doesn't he talk to *you*?

MAC: He thinks he can get me sacked. It's the only time journalists stick together, when they're attacked.

LYNN: So I go on sitting here waiting for a job, do I? Like I've been doing for two years.

MAC (*getting up*) That's what you *don't* do.

LYNN: What *do* I do?

MAC: You wait until Uncle Malcom has had a good sleep (*holding out his hands for her*).

She climbs out of the eiderdown.

MAC (*cont.*) My god, you look whacked. How do you stand it?

They go to the bedroom, she trailing the eiderdown.

She appears again and goes to the bathroom, closes the door. We hear it lock.

MAC appears again, minus his jacket and tie. He taps a number on his mobile phone.

MAC: It's Mac....He's offering your part to Lynn....Lynn Norden....The defunct Potting Shed....He's getting new money together....What I want to know is what about our interview?....Well, aren't you sweet!....Can't...Not right now....But the answer's yes....Oh *very* big....It'll take a day or two.

He closes the phone as LYNN opens the bathroom door.

LYNN: Interview with who?

MAC: It's something I'm trying to organise for a certain little lady---

LYNN (*coming into the room*) Who?

MAC: At the moment she looks as if she's lost more blood than a normal body contains and I suggest we put her to bed.

LYNN (*sitting down in an armchair*) Was that Headley you were talking to?

MAC: Yes.

LYNN: Listen, it terrifies me if you're going to start linking me with Hal Trougham already.

MAC (*getting himself another drink*) Hal thinks you important enough to make an offer to. In my book that's news. In Headley's too.

LYNN: But it was only *verbal*.

MAC (*with a shrug*) It's a *story* Lynn. I'm not into law!

LYNN: But, shit, nobody's ever been interviewed by the man they live with!

MAC: *I'm* not doing the piece!

LYNN: Who then?

MAC: Probably Helen Copland.

LYNN: Copland! She's a bitch!

MAC: That's why I want her to do it.

His phone rings. He puts his glass down hurriedly.

MAC (*at the phone*) Hullo?...At *this* hour? I shouldn't think he'd be happy

about that!....All right, on thy head be it! So long.

He closes the phone.

MAC (*cont.*) Nancy Laudenfield. Wants to call my editor at gone three in the morning. I know it's Sunday and he's got the day off but editors like to mow their lawns.

LYNN: I give up.

MAC: *You* give up?

LYNN: Are you sure your earlier call was about me?

MAC: Indirectly, *very* indirectly.

LYNN: Who was it about?

MAC: It was *to* Nancy Laudenfield. In LA.

LYNN: You said it was to Headley.

MAC: In case she said no to the suggested interview. If I'd told you 'I'm calling Nancy' and then she had said no you might think I was a failure. (*Pause*) Unconvincing?

LYNN: Yes.

His phone rings again.

MAC (*cont.*) *Tomorrow?....You mean today!....I haven't been to bed yet!....Yessir, OK sir, at the airport sir....Would you tell me one last thing?....What it feels like to mow one's lawn on Sunday?*

He closes the phone.

MAC (*cont.*) I'm interviewing her in LA. That was Headley. I mean it really was.

LYNN (*all but to herself*) All this was about *me* a second ago, it shifted ground pretty quick!

MAC: I'd better get some sleep. I see her around seven this evening, American time. Let's work it out. I leave here at eight this

morning. I arrive in LA twelve hours later, that's eight this evening, your time. Which is eight hours forward, so it'll be noon when I get there. It still *is* about you. The moment Nancy heard that Hal offered you her part she started worrying. And *that's* why she wants an interview! So *you're* the reason I got the interview.

LYNN: Sophistry.

MAC: Still---flattering, right?

She nods with a smile.

MAC (*cont.*) She's afraid you might suddenly get big. Once you get to the top you feel a feather could push you down. At least you do if you don't know what got you there. In other words she knows the game and you don't.

LYNN: What does *that* mean?

MAC (*holding her face in his hands*) I'm just introducing you to life, my dear. I wish---

LYNN: What?

MAC: You weren't bleeding!

LYNN: But your second call was to Headley.

MAC: No. He called me. Nancy called him right after my call to her and he said I'll send Mac to you in LA.

LYNN: He's as easy-going as that?

MAC: He asked her for an interview a week ago. And she told him no. But when I said told her just now your husband's offered your part to Lynn Norden she said yes. Is my integrity saved?

LYNN: You don't have any.

MAC: *In plain words* you might snatch the limelight. Yes, she's that naive! But you have to be in your game. She's hanging on to a window sill twenty floors up and there are a hundred pairs of stiletto heels trying to kick her knuckles to pulp.

LYNN: She's a fool, that's all.

MAC: No, an actress.

LYNN: A fool.

MAC: No. She's being very wise. When she talks to my office she now calls me Mac the Knife, she says to Headley how do I know that Mac the Knife won't put the knife in again, this time on me! She knows she's building her career on that little piece of mine about Hal, she's living on the blood I spilled, her husband's blood. She's also afraid he's more gifted than she is, which he is. Which in turn means that he and you together could become something altogether too formidable. All this makes me giddy! Headley actually calls me in the middle of the night! It's like a film about newspapers with everybody rushing about. In real life Headley takes an hour to move his paper clips across his desk. So why the hurry? Because I've proved myself a nasty! His secretary's going to be at the airport waiting for me---hotel reservations done, car laid on, first class air travel.

LYNN (*tearfully*) I ought to be happy for you, instead I'm afraid!

MAC: For me or for you?

They go to bed, very close.

3.

A house in the Cotswolds. It belongs to HAL TROUGHAM's parents. The entrance hall is actor's left, the kitchen right, up. Below the latter, with no door, is access to the staircase. We are in the open lounge. This is set up to include a dining room within immediate reach of the kitchen. The dining table is close to the kitchen wall. A wide picture window behind it gives on to a nursery garden. A sideboard stands against the wall of the kitchen, and armchairs and a settee are sprawled round the rest of the

room with self-indulgent spontaneity.

HAL (in his dressing gown) and his mother MARJORIE are at breakfast---white bowls of cafe au lait which they dunk with croissant, a habit from early family weekends at a favourite hotel in the Rue Jacob. He has a pad and pen before him and at this moment is, while chewing, punching a number on his mobile phone.

HAL (*at the phone*) Hulloo, you sound rather thick....This is Hal Trougham....You weren't asleep? *So* sorry!....It's only about that strange man you mentioned....No bells?....You're seeing him this coming Tuesday....(*Mouthing, to MARJORIE:*) Still dead asleep! (*To the phone again:*) Are you sure you're all right?....The epistemologist, yes. The man who changes your life. Ah good! (*Again to MARJORIE, cupping his hand over the mouthpiece:*) She's always in a state of PMT or haemorrhage.

MARJORIE (*also mouthing*) What's it at the moment?

HAL: Hemorrhage! (*At the phone again*) Talbot, that's right! (*Writing it down*) Jack Talbot. Thank you. And where's our scribe this Saturday morning---screwing up more careers? (*To his mother, without cupping*) Oh I'm sorry darling!....I said sorry to my mother, she hates me swearing....The word 'screw', darling. That's a swearword for people with standards....Yes, I'm at home....What's that?....In LA!....To do *what?*....(*To MARJORIE, without cupping*) The bastard's interviewing Nancy! In LA! (*To the phone*) You've forgotten to give me the phone number....No, *not* Mac the Knife's, Jack Talbot's (*writing*)....Thanks-a-lot-darling-and-we'll-talk-again.

He closes the phone brusquely.

HAL (*cont.*) You know what that means don't you?

MARJORIE (*gazing at him in a steady manner*) Nancy's all right. She won't say nasty things about you.

HAL: I'm not so sure. She might do her hurt cow number.

They sip and dunk.

MARJORIE: You're not going to start patronising those psychic people again are you?

HAL: How did you guess?

MARJORIE: What's epistemology by the way? Your mamma didn't go to Oxford.

HAL: It's something about the nature of knowledge.

MARJORIE: And what about you coming to late Mass?

HAL: I don't mind as long as I don't have to take communion.

MARJORIE: *Holy* communion.

HAL: Oh don't be such a convert mums!

MARJORIE: You mean it's all right as long as you can be there *nominally*. After all, the Consecration of the Host---

HAL: OK darling! Will do! Will take wafer!

MARJORIE: The nature of knowledge my foot.

He laughs. Dunking and drinking.

MARJORIE (*cont.*) I don't want to nag but aren't you in danger of getting too close to your hemorrhaging friend?

HAL: I hardly know her!

MARJORIE: I'm going by the bit in this morning's Express about you offering her the lead in your next show.

HAL: Good god! She must have told that MacKindle creep!
(*Grabbing his phone*)

MARJORIE: Stop being silly! The more you react the more they like it!
(*Grabbing the phone from him*) They're gunning for you in a small way, so don't make it big by reacting.

HAL: Can I have my phone back?

MARJORIE: Why?

HAL: Because I feel restless without it.

They laugh. She hands it back.

MARJORIE: You mustn't fish in dangerous waters.

HAL: Dangerous blood, you mean. She's all blood.

MARJORIE: I must say if I were your wife I'd get very worried every time I heard you say 'My agent will be in touch with you'. You do it rather obsessively.

HAL: My agent never *is* in touch, in fact.

MARJORIE: You think people like to be played with? Suppose they all collude one day---?

HAL (*laughing*) 'Collude' mums?

MARJORIE: All right it's a big joke for you but that's what your company did, didn't they? They all got together with this hack and started tearing you to pieces.

HAL: Hacks have been at *you* and you're still all right aren't you?

MARJORIE: Hal, being your mother I sometimes notice my own weaknesses in your face, and in Pops's too, and I'm going to tell you---this little actress from the local fire brigade means much more to you than just another sexy face at a reading.

HAL: And if I say I only called her to get this man's phone number?

MARJORIE: My reply is these are the dangerous waters she's pulling you into. Psychic ones.

HAL: Of course I can go to Father Jefford for advice but he's never been inside a theatre, has he? (*As she is about to interrupt*) Just listen mums! I can tell by the way the bloody Lynn Norden talks that this metaphysician or whatever he calls himself can help me. I can't go it alone. That's why Nancy cleared off. She knows. I'm losing my grip. I can go to Mass but it doesn't help

me. As for praying I don't know what to pray for.

MARJORIE (*pushing away her breakfast things*) All this is making me very sad.

HAL: I don't give a fig about Lynn Norden, she's OK as an actress but so are a thousand others, don't *worry* mums.

MARJORIE: How can blindness be a guide?

HAL: Sorry?

MARJORIE: You pay these people to feed you a lot of psychological rubbish--- You've always done that---always made your choices from a blind place!

HAL: Yes mummy I always have. Perhaps I have more faith than you.

She gazes at him with some emotion and takes his hand.

MARJORIE: I love to hear you say that.

HAL: You told me three or four years ago that I was going ahead blindly. But I made a little name for myself, I believe?

MARJORIE: Yes you did. (*Getting up to clear*) But *do* keep your detachment. Your father always says if you believe the raves when they come in you'd better believe the pans too.

HAL: I know. But you've both got solid reputations. Mine's a flash in the pan. They keep telling me, you're only twenty-seven, you've got a long way to travel.

MARJORIE: Who tells you that?

HAL: Middle-aged actors when they're drunk.

MARJORIE: The fact is you can't make a reputation in the papers. You do it in rep and No 2 tours, your father and I were both in revue for a time---

HAL: Yes, darling, it's the audiences---I know. You have to build an audience.

MARJORIE: You abandoned the theatre too soon. Without being the film type. Look at Paul Schofield. He never fell over himself for a film commitment.

HAL (*with an exhausted sigh*) I wish Pops was a farmer or ran the local Tesco's or something, you're so bloody *knowledgeable*! Oh I'm sorry Mums!

MARJORIE: Oh I don't mind 'bloody'.

HAL: Still, you're about the only people I know who didn't get divorced and screw up their children. Thank god Nancy can't have kids.

MARJORIE: That's ridiculous! Her fallopian tubes are as clear as a bell!

HAL: She's never at home long enough to get anything up them!

MARJORIE: You've been driving her frantic! She's a Libran and Librans live for their homes, only they like to leave them all the time! Your father's the same!

HAL: How you gel astrology with catholic doctrine I shall *never* know!

She smiles, meaning she has no defence.

A ring at the bell.

MARJORIE: That'll be Joyce.

HAL jumps up smartly and begins piling plates while MARJORIE answers the door.

JOYCE the help comes in with MARJORIE behind her.

HAL: Hullo Joyce.

They kiss continentally.

MARJORIE: I've persuaded him to come to Mass.

JOYCE (*on her way to the kitchen*) That's because he needs God on his side at the moment, isn't it, Hal?

HAL: Something like that.

MARJORIE hurries upstairs to change.

JOYCE (*reappearing at the kitchen door as she ties her apron*) I didn't like that bit in the paper.

HAL: What bit?

JOYCE: Last Sunday. I wonder if Nancy lent herself to it.

HAL: Of course not. I know who did the talking and it wasn't her.

JOYCE: Well that's very loyal of you.

HAL: She probably shot her mouth off to somebody in the company and that somebody told the paper.

JOYCE: I'm sure it wasn't deliberate.

He looks at her with disarming pleasure and takes her in his arms.

They kiss and he fondles her---both of them glancing in the direction of the staircase.

JOYCE (*cont.*) You keep that marriage together, it's one of the marriages your mother would call blest.

HAL: Perhaps it's *me* that's not blest. (*Indicating upstairs*) She says I drive Nancy frantic.

JOYCE (*whispering*) You had a flop. Flops break up homes and don't let anybody tell you to the contrary.

She begins collecting the rest of the breakfast things.

JOYCE (*cont.*) Is that all you two have had? Croissants?

HAL: And muscle-building coffee, yes.

JOYCE: Do you know what I did if one of my actors got the bird---I fed

him up like a Christmas turkey!

MARJORIE comes downstairs dressed for Mass.

JOYCE (*cont.*) You're not looking after your son, Marjorie.

MARJORIE: How's that?

JOYCE: He hasn't eaten anything!

MARJORIE: All the better for holy communion (*getting her coat*). I promise to feed him at lunch.

JOYCE: Shall I stuff the bird?

MARJORIE: Two birds. My son can eat a whole one.

JOYCE: You mean the unexpected guest. Sent from on high.

MARJORIE: I just have to do it.

HAL (*to JOYCE*) *Everything's* from on high, not just country tramps.

He leaps upstairs to change.

MARJORIE (*calling after him*) I'll bring the car round!

HAL (*off*) OK!

MARJORIE leaves, left. We hear the front door close.

HAL rushes down the stairs again. He enters in underpants and slip, carrying his clothes. He begins throwing them on.

JOYCE: Here, let me help you!

They play around together, kissing and laughing. With his pants still off he begins to get insistent.

JOYCE (*cont.*) I've got dinner to cook!

HAL (*reluctantly breaking*) She doesn't give me anything for *weeks*!

JOYCE (*cockney hussy*) You could come round tonight but he's on days this week!

HAL (*thick, raucous, following the cue in a simply enormous voice*) Oh blimey!

He jumps into his pants, thrusts feet into shoes.

HAL (*cont.*) I should hire you to clean my Hampstead place!

JOYCE (*going to the kitchen*) Hanky panky!

We hear the car come round.

JOYCE (*cont., appearing again*) You want to play it very quiet with your mum, you know what her nerves can do, she's on the edge, I can see it.

HAL: That's why I'm going to Mass.

JOYCE (*disappearing*) Say a prayer for us sinners.

HAL (*off, from the hall*) Will do!

4.

The same. The dining table is set for two, with wine glasses. The scene is empty.

A car drives up outside.

There is prolonged ringing at the bell. No reply. The car outside drives away.

More ringing, more insistent. Nothing happens.

Suddenly there is a clatter of steps as JOYCE

comes running downstairs. She passes to the hall and we hear the front door open.

JOYCE (*off*) Nancy!

NANCY (*off*) I've been ringing the bell for hours!

Laughter between them. They come in together, NANCY carrying food goodies.

JOYCE: They said you were in LA!

NANCY deposits the goodies on the table and flings her coat on the settee.

NANCY: I got a night plane. I was terrified there'd be nobody here---I sent the car away.

JOYCE: Marjorie got him to go to Mass. I'll set another place.

NANCY (*looking round with pleasure*) I came straight from the airport.

JOYCE (*as she goes to the sideboard*) He's very hurt about that piece in the paper.

NANCY: I'm sure he blames me. I wish I *was* to blame, then I could feel guilty about it.

Another car drives up.

JOYCE (*laying the table*) There!

NANCY rushes into the hall. We hear the door being opened and then shrieks of delight.

HAL (*off*) Ninny! Ninny! (*As they come in*)---We guessed---we saw the car---!

MARJORIE: He said wouldn't it be marvellous if that was Nancy!

NANCY (*embracing them both*) Aren't you angels!

MARJORIE (*taking off her coat and flinging it over NANCY's*) Oh good

(*looking at the table*) Joyce fixed you a place.

NANCY: I bought some quiches!

MARJORIE: You're a naughty girl!

HAL (*to JOYCE*) This is *just* what I prayed for.

MARJORIE (*to HAL*) You see? It was worth going to Mass wasn't it?

HAL buries himself in the sideboard getting out the bottles as MARJORIE pops into the kitchen.

HAL (*to NANCY*) I thought Mac the Knife was on his way to you in LA?

She stops.

NANCY: How on earth do you know that?

HAL: I heard it.

NANCY: It must have been from Mac then. His editor and my agent are the only others who knew.

HAL: You overlook his girlfriend.

NANCY: My new rival.

HAL (*with real anxiety*) Is your interview going to be more bad news for me?

MARJORIE (*reappearing*) Oh don't start on all that! You'll neither of you benefit from it.

HAL: You mustn't *fret* mummy, it's just business, Nancy knows that.

NANCY: I agree with Marjorie. We don't want to spoil lunch.

MARJORIE: We can have a nice quiet meal and *then* you can work out a common plan for the good of you both, instead of for the good of the papers.

JOYCE (*coming in*) Hear, hear.

NANCY (*to MARJORIE*) Is Pops still in Houston?

MARJORIE: Yes darling.

NANCY: I called him by the way.

MARJORIE: Lovely!

NANCY: He didn't sound hopeful.

HAL is uncorking and decanting.

MARJORIE (*to HAL*) Why don't you get your wife a drink before you do all that?

HAL (*to NANCY*) I've got a lovely Pommard we opened last night---

NANCY: No I want some of the stuff you've got there.

HAL (*laughing*) 'Stuff'!

MARJORIE: Nancy likes her wine with ice (*going to the kitchen to fetch it, then off:*) Apparently they've rewritten the last act so many times poor Pops doesn't remember any more which draft he's looking at! He says anybody can come in the theatre and say what they think and they promptly change the script!

HAL is pouring NANCY a glass of wine. MARJORIE returns with ice, which HAL takes a handful of and slips into NANCY's glass. He then hands it to NANCY, with an unseen glance of love.

NANCY (*to MARJORIE*) He said you'd found a wonderful voice coach.

MARJORIE: Frankly my mind's been full of this war between you and Hal. Me getting into musicals has been rather forgotten.

HAL: Now *you're* starting.

MARJORIE (*to HAL*) I wouldn't slosh it about if I were you. Isn't that a rather good Beaune?

HAL: Of course not mums! Nancy likes young wines. The sort that

froth when you slosh 'em abaht.

NANCY's mobile phone rings. She digs it out of her overcoat with some difficulty.

NANCY (*at the phone*) Yes?...Hullo Ned....Oh dear....Well, all right, if it has to be....It's going to make them fed up....Let's talk when you come (*closing the phone*).

MARJORIE goes to the kitchen and we hear busy dish-clattering sounds.

HAL (*voice lowered*) We must make peace somehow---for her.

NANCY: I know (*biting her lip*).

She helps set the table.

NANCY (*cont.*) Marjorie!

MARJORIE (*off*) Yes darling?

NANCY: Can I stay the night?

MARJORIE (*off*) Well of course!

NANCY (*to HAL*) My agent's coming over.

HAL: From the States?

NANCY: Yes.

HAL: On your account alone?

NANCY: Yes.

HAL: Well, you really *are* Blue Chips aren't you?

NANCY: It's not my agent really, it's a *literary* agent.

HAL: Literary?

NANCY: I'm supposed to write a book. About the Indian settlements.

HAL: But you can't even write a postcard Nancy!

NANCY (*with a glance at the kitchen*) Yes I know but I get help, somebody who knows how to put sentences together.

HAL: I mean you mouth over the words when you're reading the paper!

NANCY (*schoolgirl fun*) I don't!

HAL: And why Indian settlements?

NANCY: Well I have to go round them, a sort of tour, and say what I think---that's the next film.

HAL (*stopping*) You're doing an *American* film? On an *American* subject?

NANCY: Yes.

HAL: But why does your agent have to come over here for a film over there?

NANCY: He's going to pin Mac the Knife to a contract.

HAL: A *contract*? Him as well? *He's* not going into films is he?

NANCY: No, idiot! For the interview. We have to see what he's written and approve of it.

HAL: What? A Vanessa Redgrave thing? A major Sunday's never going to agree to that!

NANCY: They'll have to.

HAL: We'll see. (*Looking at her closely*) Nancy, how do you spell literary?

NANCY (*delighted*) Oh shut up!

She makes to kick and they play about.

MARJORIE (*off*) That's a healthy sound!

NANCY's phone goes again.

NANCY (*at the phone*) Hullo Mac....Didn't your editor tell you?....My agent's

on the way....He wants to see you before the interview, he wants to see what you write!....What do you mean, it's getting complicated? (As she snaps the phone closed) That was Mac the Knife. He's sitting in the Intercontinental waiting for an interview. Serve him right!

HAL: But darling you mustn't preempt what your agent's going to say!

NANCY: How did I do that?

HAL: First you told him why your agent wants to see him. Then you told him he didn't *have* to see your agent! Isn't that what you said?

NANCY: It was just to keep him simmering, I don't want the interview cancelled, then he'll really burn me!

HAL: Nancy. When your agent has taken up a position for you never try to go round the back of it. Make him take another position.

NANCY: But you said yourself the paper'll never agree to having the interview looked at!

HAL: They won't.

NANCY: Well, then, I've given him the idea that he can get between me and my agent, which he can't but he doesn't know that.

HAL (*with his little giggle*) You win darling, you *win!*

NANCY: What's this Lynn Norden like?

HAL: Like an actress.

NANCY: Do they live together?

HAL: Live together.

NANCY: What did you offer her that part for?

HAL: I wanted to get Mac's attention off *me*. Sort of bribe.

NANCY: Crafty of you. Can she act?

HAL: Conceivably.

MARJORIE (*off*) The salad's ready!

HAL (*calling*) What about a glass of wine for Joyce?

JOYCE (*off*) Not yet thanks!

HAL (*to NANCY*) Sara's not a real part anyway, the Potting Shed's not rich in parts.

NANCY: So what are you and I negotiating about? If you've lost faith in the play---

HAL: All I said to Lynn Norden was why don't you become my new Nancy Laudenfield?

A bombshell, of which fact he is coolly aware.

MARJORIE (*coming in with the salad*) This is a real Trougham salad!

HAL: Bits of apple!

MARJORIE (*setting it down*) Walnuts!

HAL: Super dressing!

MARJORIE (*to NANCY*) You look *so* tired. You're going straight to bed after lunch. (*Shouting, to JOYCE*) I don't know why you didn't lay a place for yourself Joycie!

JOYCE (*appearing, still aproned, looking at NANCY*) It's a delicate time. You might all want to talk.

NANCY: It's just the time for you to be here.

MARJORIE (*laying a fourth place*) What I don't understand is why all this career stuff has to interfere with your marriage!

JOYCE takes off her apron.

MARJORIE (*cont.*) Pops and I sue for divorce every time we lose a contract, it's just a nervous tic.

NANCY (*looking at HAL*) Is this a nervous tic?

HAL: A lot's up to you. After all, you can call the shots now---you're big---a nice fat American film on the stocks---

NANCY: I've signed. With an option for two others.

They stare at her.

MARJORIE: Why don't we all sit down?

HAL: Well, then, I was right to offer your place to Lynn Norden wasn't it?

MARJORIE: Do let's keep the Norden girl out of it, *and* her psychic connections.

NANCY (*to HAL, as they all sit down*) She has psychic connections?

HAL: One. A man called Talbot, Jack Talbot.

NANCY: I've heard of him. He's all the thing in LA. You need psychic help?

They laugh and HAL raises his glass.

HAL: Health to Nancy Laudenfield!

MARJORIE (*as they touch glasses*) May we all work together in peace.

HAL (*drinking*) God forbid. Peace makes for bad productions.

They attack the salad.

JOYCE: It's marvellous when you hear ordinary people talking. They think you have such a wonderful life.

HAL: My life's *only* worry.

NANCY: Mine isn't.

HAL: I think you're *very* worried.

NANCY: I know but it isn't my main thing, is it? I'd love to have a house

like this and I share Pops's interest in gardens---this salad's a dream Marjorie, it makes me feel so homesick for the old days when we were nothing! Except (*to MARJORIE again*) you and Pops *were* something and that made the unthinkable Hal and me feel safe and cosy and right inside the theatre without the trauma.

HAL: I say, the wine's taken effect all right, hasn't it?

A family joke, this, about NANCY'S vinous volubility.

JOYCE: I reckon that's what Pops misses most, his garden.

HAL (*to MARJORIE*) You and Pops belong to the *great* days---yes I know you were both born in the television era but you were brought up the grand way. Grandmama knew Jack Buchanan and she sang in an Ivor Novello show and Pops's dad always had a spare bedroom ready for Charles B. Cochrane who had to be coddled and cuddled on first nights, he got more nervous than the cast.

MARJORIE: It wasn't Cochrane---

NANCY: It makes my accountant and schoolteacher parentage look *very* dull!

MARJORIE: You bring a breath of fresh air.

HAL: Also your mum and dad have the most dramatic rows I've ever heard in my life.

JOYCE (*to NANCY*) Didn't rows frighten you so?

NANCY: I loved them! Afterwards there was so much spooning and slapping and giggling I always thought rows were a kind of run-in!

HAL: Genial genital foreplay.

NANCY: Not in front of your mother please!

They all sing, with their glasses raised---clearly another family drill---*Her mother came too.*

NANCY (*cont., to HAL*) Things went wrong between you and me when I started

getting awards.

MARJORIE: Nancy! That's almost worse than his dragging in the Norden girl and psychics!

HAL: It's true though. What about the chicken?

JOYCE jumps up.

NANCY (*also jumping up*) I'll clear the plates.

MARJORIE: I think you two build up attitudes, then you follow them like you do a script, and if you just looked on a row as a row and a jealous fit as a jealous fit you'd be able to shrug your shoulders and get on with things. I don't want to go on about Pops and me but he was often out of work when I had all this tele stuff and sometimes it was the other way round, sometimes he had a nice long run and of course I used to get snappish and sulky. Seeing somebody else flourish while for all you know you may be going down the spout isn't funny.

NANCY (*off*) Pops says he has a nightmare every single night that when the next show closes he'll go down the spout for good.

HAL: He passed the fear on to me. I'm standing in a line and the line goes right round the back of the theatre and it's for a walk-on part, they just pay your meals.

JOYCE comes in with the roast chicken and potatoes platter.

NANCY returns with the inevitable gravy boat and sets it down.

NANCY: Hal and I get high on ideas and that's the nearest we get to each other.

MARJORIE: Well get high on ideas then!

JOYCE: Is it true Hal?

HAL: All I can say is ideas are very sexy (*drinking and raising his glass to NANCY*)

They serve themselves from the platter, after
MARJORIE has served JOYCE.

NANCY: If you ask me it's because Hal and I haven't any religion. I've noticed religious people care about the lives they lead.

MARJORIE (*with HAL looking to her for a response*) Or is it that we go to confession and get rid of all those little scripts in the brain?

HAL: Scenarios, we therapists call them.

NANCY (*third glass of wine*) Clever guts!

They attack their food hungrily.

JOYCE: I will say one thing, if I ever had an actor who was catholic I could always tell, he had reserves the others hadn't got.

HAL: Of strength?

JOYCE: Something he could fall back on.

MARJORIE: What *I* say is that without awareness of sin you have to guard against the consequences of sin, against which there is no defence.

JOYCE: Nancy doesn't sin. She doesn't even know what it is.

HAL: We can't have that can we mums?

JOYCE: Why not?

HAL (*looking at MARJORIE*) It's hubris not to sin. Stuck up.

MARJORIE: You can pull my leg all you want but, yes, it *is* hubris.

HAL: Translate for Nancy please.

JOYCE: And Joyce (*with a wink for NANCY*).

MARJORIE: Pride. And pride isn't something we have to be ashamed of, it's natural and you can be absolved of it. Confessing makes you think about what you've been doing, it's a free self-analysis that leads to grace, which is a feeling of being liberated, and you get to

know who you are.

NANCY: I wish I did. It's true I *don't* know what a sin is, Joyce is quite right. Everything I do seems all right to me while I'm doing it and I only regret it afterwards.

MARJORIE: The regretting is the seeing. You've seen the sin.

NANCY: But why do I have to boo-hoo about it and hate myself for it?

MARJORIE: You don't. You confess. And it's finished.

HAL (*salesman*) You see? It's attractively easy. May we sign you up?

NANCY (*school hols fun again*) Oh do shut up!

They laugh but HAL looks at MARJORIE.

HAL: Mums!

JOYCE: She's crying!

NANCY (*jumping up*) Time for a photo!

JOYCE rushes to the kitchen.

JOYCE (*returning with the camera*) Positions please!

MARJORIE (*as HAL and NANCY hug her*) I love you both so!

JOYCE: Attention folks!

The three face the camera and scream
CHEESE with burlesque toothy grins as the
flash goes.

5.

The sound of wind in the windows of the
highrise flat belonging to LYNN and MAC.
The bedroom door is open, the bathroom
door closed. We hear the john go. LYNN

comes from the bathroom looking strikingly different from before---high heels, short tight skirt, blonde hair swept up in a manner doing service to her profile.

She pats scent behind her ears. She push-buttons the CD deck as she passes and a pert Small Faces song comes up. She does a few athletic steps, clearly dance trained.

She disappears into the bedroom for a moment. She returns with a cassette machine. She inserts a new cassette, sets it to receive, then puts the unobtrusive machine on the coffee table between the settee and the armchairs.

A ring at the bell. She quickly expunges Small Faces. She composes herself for an easy walk to the front door and we see her disappear into the hall, stage left.

The door opens and from the hall comes a strong male voice---'Good morning!'

LYNN precedes JACK TALBOT into the room. He is in a broad-pinstripe blue suit, well cut, with a few louche touches.

JACK (*stopping*) What the fuck's that (*indicating the little machine on the coffee table*)?

LYNN: What?

JACK (*military*) That recording apparatus. Get rid of it. Out of the room. I'm not into unpaid recording sessions.

LYNN (*hurrying to the thing with a pleasant smile*) Oh I see!

She takes the apparatus to the bedroom and when she returns closes the door behind her. He stands there utterly immobile.

JACK: I'm in this for me, not you. And what do you think you're doing

telling people I'm a psychic? (*As she tries to carry off I-absolutely-agree goodwill*) I'm not some bloody do-gooder.

LYNN (*quiveringly attempting self-rescue*) I described you as an epistemologist.

JACK: What the hell's that? Have you any idea?

LYNN: Not really.

JACK: I've a good mind to go and get that recording thing and knock you on the head with it!

Half ways between laughter (*oh thank god he's a joker!*) and perplexity bordering on tears, LYNN hardly seems able to support herself on her high heels, especially with that soft carpet.

JACK (*cont.*) It's me that gets entertained, got it? Not you with my taped voice afterwards, running it over for friends and opening your legs to it. (*Going up to her as she backs off*) Listen if any legs *are* opened it's going to be *here* and *now*, I've never seen such a bloody get-up (*looking her up and down*), it's a defiance of the woman's movement.

He grabs her as she continues to move back.

JACK (*cont*) No, you stay here! (*Speaking softly, close to her face*) I've had a lot of experience with you acting people. I couldn't go on sitting with them and letting them think they were themselves, that wouldn't have done would it? Besides dying of boredom myself. Do you understand that?

LYNN (*flickering still but really scared now*) I probably don't.

JACK (*confidentially*) I mean the whole bloody lot stink---not just the actors--it's worse outside the profession, far worse---in banks and board rooms and shops and all that. Far worse. (*Sitting down*) You've never had a real thought in your life. And about that mobile phone up there if you'd like to call for help you can do so now. I can leave as easy as I came. You asked for this encounter and you're getting it aren't you?

LYNN (*hardly capable of voice but showing her training*) Yes.

JACK: You always bargain for a fool, you people. It's always some poor bloody cripple who's going to come through your door and you know just how he thinks *but you don't know do you?* You don't know a bloody thing! You've caught somebody *intelligent* and it happens once in a lifetime because none of you lot are intelligent and you can quote me where you like. You can tell Mac if you like. (*Looking round*) Is that his name?

LYNN (*hushed*) Yes.

JACK: You don't know a thing.

LYNN (*sandpaper*) All right.

He takes his ease, gazes round.

JACK: Your flowers over?

LYNN: Flowers?

He turns a slow forbidding eye on her.

JACK: The *blood*, if you must.

LYNN: Oh yes, some days ago!

JACK: That's a *bloody* lie because there were still some traces yesterday, unclotted I agree.

LYNN (*tiny*) Yes.

JACK: What do *you* call it, the curse?

LYNN: No. (*After some hesitation*) The jams.

JACK (*studying himself*) It takes me an hour to dress like this, no point in taking it all off again is there?

LYNN (*opting for amused*) No.

JACK: Suppose I came in a codpiece, everything hanging out---wouldn't your natural assumption be that I was showing something off? Of

course it would. There's no need for *you* showing it all off either---I've a good idea of what you've got, there's no need for emphasis. Fifteen million of you die each year.

LYNN (*with a pot shot at thought*) I'm not following you.

JACK: The day you follow me will be a gala day indeed, my dear. To cut a long story short, because I've only got half an hour this morning---(*stopping*) no, I'm sorry I don't smoke (*banging his pockets to show he has no packets*).

She gasps.

LYNN: How do you know I want to smoke?

JACK: You *told* me. You said 'I want to smoke' with your body. No psychic stuff. Is that what you thought---'psychic'? All the little words that help you call other people stupid.

Silence while he looks around again.

JACK (*cont.*) Did you know that passive smoking is more dangerous than doing it to yourself?

She nods.

JACK (*cont.*) In a sense you and Mac do it to yourselves all the time, you're supposed to be doing it to each other, aren't you, but you don't, not very satisfactory is it?

LYNN: You mean the smoking?

JACK: Do I mean the smoking! You know what I mean. You ask me 'do you mean smoking?' because you know bloody well I don't.

LYNN: I've begged him to give it up---I told him I can't keep my hands off cigarettes because I have his smoke in my nostrils.

JACK That's right, flames pour out of his mouth, don't they? You're standing in the nude and he's belching out these flames!

LYNN: In the nude?

JACK: Oh I don't care *how* you do it. Fully clothed if you wish.

LYNN: I wanted to ask your advice about his piece on the actor Hal Trougham. Mac's a journalist.

JACK: Don't you tell me what *you* want. You've been getting what you want all your life and look where it's landed you---on a sideline. Watching those within from without.

LYNN: Yes.

JACK: And those within are the louts and the layabouts with money in their pockets and you're in the army of millions, the grand poor majority, who watch from without this undesirable band of robbers within, and it's hard, my love, it tortures your heart that you can't make ends meet but yours is the voice of the world, I'm afraid, at this present time.

She may be about to cry.

JACK (*cont.*) Moving isn't it? (*Looking round unconcernedly*) Very affecting speech, that. (*Gazing at her*) 'I do not do the good I want to do but what I *do* do is the evil I do not want to do'. Who said that? Ten seconds.

LYNN (*hush, as culture looms*) I know *somebody* said it...

JACK: St Paul. And what about people 'that do not do the thing they most do show, and, moving others, are themselves as stone'?

LYNN: Shakespeare.

JACK: Correct. You have the choice between two thousand pounds and a washer-dryer which are you going for? (*Gazing at her again*) I told you before and I tell you again I don't wish to be among your *ghosts*.

LYNN (*whisper*) I'm sorry, I don't know what you mean when you talk.

JACK (*also in a whisper*) Always say *that* kind of thing to me. Never say you know because knowing has to happen in *somebody* and there there's nobody.

LYNN (*sadly, looking at her fingers*) Nobody at home.

JACK: What I mean by people who move others but themselves are as stone is that you, Lynn Norden, born out of wedlock, transferred to orphanage care and then reclaimed by parents distraught at what they had done, so they reclaimed the child, went to the welfare people, said this is our child and by the grace of God, between the police and the welfare officer, it was decided that no charges would be brought for the heinous crime of dumping a child, a beautifully and plentifully endowed baby, on the table of the out patients department in the dead of night! What a beginning, my child!

She is in silent, almost faceless tears.

JACK (*rising*) So, listen, what can your heart be but a stone if you've been dumped? You're still lying there on the table, my darling!

He walks to the door.

JACK (*cont.*) I'll see myself out.

6.

A suite at the Intercontinental. Faint nostalgia from the bedroom---'I'll See You Again'.

This music is switched off.

NANCY (*off*) Send him up please.

She comes in from the bedroom and takes a last look at herself in the mirror. She couldn't be better presented had a hairdresser and makeup specialist been working on her the past hour.

She does a few quick voice exercises and leaning against the wall takes several abdominal breaths, emitting the breath with a quiet 'Hah!'.

There is a knock on the door.

NANCY (*cont.*) Who is that?

MAC (*off*) Mac the Knife.

She smiles and unlocks the door. He comes in and gives her a UK one-cheek kiss. He is carrying a briefcase.

MAC (*cont.*) Splendid day.

He watches her as she goes centre.

MAC (*taking out a tape recorder*) Can I put this here (*indicating the coffee table*)?

NANCY: Of course.

MAC: It's switched off. Opening salutations don't make headlines.

NANCY (*treating this as sauce, with a smile*) Sit down.

MAC: Do you mind if I unwind a little? Before switching on?

NANCY: What would you like?

MAC: I'm fine as I am. I met your agent Ned Brookstone by the way.

NANCY (*sitting*) Good.

MAC: I'm not sure it's good. It's pretty funny for a *literary* agent to lay down pre-interview conditions.

NANCY (*still tickled*) Is this going to prove awkward?

MAC (*his eyes steady on her*) Oh I agreed. I had to. He gets a copy before it goes to press. And he can ask for alterations and veto the whole thing if he so desires.

NANCY: You *are* being official! You weren't that night at the Dorchester were you?

MAC: I was shamelessly after your flesh, I took the champagne for

courage.

NANCY: Well---gosh!---as interviews make me sick with nerves what about some now?

MAC: OK. Though it *is* only three in the afternoon.

NANCY: Do you think we shouldn't then?

MAC: Shouldn't what?

NANCY (*schoolgirl uproar laugh*) Have bubbly of course!

MAC: It won't alter *my* style.

NANCY: It might mine (*crossing her legs*).

MAC: Your legs alone are an event.

NANCY (*with her tendency to gawky confusion when admired*) You're just trying to soften me up! So it's yes is it?

MAC: To what?

NANCY (*fun outburst*) Oh shut up! To bubbly of course!

MAC: Yes, of course bubbly! (*Jumping up*) Where do I find it?

NANCY: I'll get it!

As always when relaxed but excited she walks awkwardly, turning her shoes to army boots.

She gets a bottle from the kitchenette and brings a tray with two glasses. He uncorks expertly and she puts her fingers in her ears.

MAC: You dislike the pop?

NANCY: I'm all right on *big* bangs but not small.

MAC (*quick*) I bet you are!

He pours. They touch glasses. She is goofy-

hoofy flushed. They drink.

MAC (*cont.*) And now what about a *real* one?

Holding their glasses they kiss each other on the lips, lingering.

NANCY (*as they sit opposite each other dizzily*) So how's Lynn?

MAC: Drying up as it were.

NANCY (*drinking*) I'm just the same, a whole week sometimes! Do you look after her?

MAC: Your husband's doing that. At the moment.

NANCY: Oh Hal! He's always about to start somebody's career for them---it's pure egotism!

MAC: She'll be standing in your shoes, he says.

NANCY: I haven't vacated them yet. By the way---! My literary agent said to sign a form before we start talking.

MAC: A form?

NANCY: Our interview agreement.

MAC: Of course. I haven't even loaded yet (*leaning forward and pressing the eject button on the tape recorder, so that the cassette shelf falls open and reveals itself as empty*).

NANCY: He's perfectly entitled to give her my Potting Shed part. If I don't take it up in six months from about the fifteenth of last month, which he knows I can't because of my film commitments, our Potting Shed contract terminates.

MAC: You were right to get out of that.

NANCY (*full charge ahead*) Graham Greene plays are OK but you're not going to turn The Potting Shed into an international event are you?

MAC: Maybe with you in it. (*He lets this settle*) And a good

photographer. Nice music. Also they'd absolutely *slay* Lynn if *she* tried to play it.

NANCY: Why would they slay her?

MAC: Because she isn't you. We journalists get used to people. We're getting used to you being a triumph and to Hal bring a flop, and so anybody else who comes into *his* cage is bound to get her nose nipped off. It's very unjust.

NANCY: Did you ever act?

MAC: At Oxford once. I was Mistress Ford.

She laughs and her laughs are, like her legs,
another event.

NANCY: No what I wanted to say is you're not *acting* this concern for Lynn are you? I mean if she got the part and it flopped *all* publicity is good publicity if you use it isn't it?

MAC: Clever girl. Let me put it this way. What I'm really worried about is him turning up in my flat several times a week.

NANCY: Hal? You're not *jealous*?

MAC: Not at all jealous.

NANCY: So?

MAC: OK, listen. Lynn has to be *led*. And I don't think he's a leader.

Pause for the depth of the thought.

NANCY: Does he have to be?

MAC: Oh come on, Nancy Laudenfield, isn't it obvious? What was *your* experience? *In bed* for god's sake!

NANCY: Oh! (*Choosing between leggy laughter and furrowed thought, and going for the latter*) You don't mean in bed with Hal do you?

MAC: Yes.

NANCY: Oh!

MAC: You said that before.

NANCY: Well, I did have to do most of the work.

MAC (*having heard perfectly*) I'm sorry?

NANCY: It was up to me to take charge.

MAC (*burlesquing I'm-your-man glee*) Would you say you're looking for the opposite type now?

Again one of her laugh events. But she also eyes the machine (a little burlesquely too?).

MAC (*cont.*) Don't worry it's *deaf*.

NANCY: He was never really *there*. It was terrific when we were rapping together over a new project. His mother used to complain on weekends that we didn't recharge as actors should, we went back to London worse than we came.

MAC: You mean his mother Marjorie, Lavinia Trubshaw or whatever in 'Pattersnake'.

NANCY: Yes. The more exciting the projects were the less---

MAC (*nodding quickly*) I understand.

NANCY: There were times, especially on location, when he just couldn't cope and I had to go round placating the bruised egos of the rest of the crew, and after all I had my own part to consider---it was all such a mess! If only we'd had a real intimate life to retire to afterwards we could have taken the mess in our stride, after all it was only the mess actors are *always* in.

MAC: And if there's no mess there's no show.

NANCY: Right. I don't think Faust would have crashed like it did if he'd had what you call leadership, now I come to think of it.

MAC: How's that?

NANCY: The film lacked overall judgement.

MAC (*sharp as a needle*) Yet it went out like all the other films did, as a Hal Trougham production.

NANCY: Right! And now he's licking his wounds because he takes the can back for everything! It's obvious a flop is going to hit him much harder than it would an actor who wasn't also producer, director, writer and grips.

MAC: You're eloquent, aren't you, when you want to be?

NANCY: And his wanting all the credit goes back to what we were talking about just now---he needed compensation for *failing* to take charge---a shrink in LA told him that---!

The room phone rings.

NANCY (*cont.*) Damn! I forgot!

She goes to the phone.

NANCY (*cont.*) Yes....Yes of course....Do come up. (*Replacing the phone*) I made an appointment---I'm so sorry---we've not even got started!

MAC (*jumping up briskly*) It was my fault.

NANCY: Could we do it later? What about dinner?

MAC: I'll call you at eight. I'll leave that tape recorder shall I?

NANCY: Of course. (*As they go to the door*) It's a kinky psychic called Jack Talbot, one *daren't* miss an appointment with him! And this is my first!

MAC (*stopping*) Lynn had an appointment with him.

NANCY: How did it go?

MAC: I didn't think to ask.

NANCY: Or she wasn't telling. I need him rather badly at the moment.

We were together too long.

MAC: Who?

NANCY: Hal and me.

MAC: Nancy. Do you mind if I stay a tiny second just to see what he looks like? I'm intrigued beyond words.

NANCY: All right. Let's finish our champagne.

They go to their chairs again. The phone rings. She goes to it.

NANCY (*cont.*) Hullo....No, I'm not alone....Oh I see....Yes, very well....Of course I understand perfectly. (*Turning to MAC as she puts the phone down*) He says he must be alone with me, there mustn't be anyone else, otherwise he'll leave the hotel this instant. So (*with a shrug*).

MAC: As if he knew I was here!

NANCY: Not as if. He *does* know you're here. Oh dear, now I'm scared!

MAC (*near the door*) What does he sound like on the phone?

NANCY: Sort of camp. Most odd.

Mac kisses her quickly.

MAC: Take care.

He leaves and she locks the door after him. She rushes to remove the bottle and the glasses. She puts the tape machine away in the sideboard.

There is a knock of the door.

NANCY (*quickly puffing out the cushions*) Who is it?

Another knock. She goes to the door.

NANCY (*cont.*) Who is it please?

JACK (*off*) Oh do hurry up!

She opens the door and we at once perceive (as she does) that she is perfectly at ease. She draws back without a word as JACK TALBOT comes softly in, dressed in gayer colours and looser garments than before, without a jacket. He is wearing white shoes, neither formal nor loafer but in between.

JACK (*cont., walking past her*) Hullo duck. You do look lovely (*gazing round at the room*)!

NANCY (*still at the door, delighted*) You haven't looked at me yet!

He turns to her.

JACK: You're you, therefore I don't need to look.

NANCY: Why?

JACK: Because we've always known each other.

NANCY: It feels like it. almost.

JACK: So what's my sweetheart's problem (*walking further into the room*)? Do you remember when we were kids and dad was tapping at his money machine we used to call it, didn't we?

NANCY: Yes!

JACK: And mum had just put the celery on the table, it was Sunday and a sit-down tea, remember?

NANCY: Yes!

JACK: And she said the celery helped his sexual energy but what was it she said exactly---

NANCY: She said celery makes him quick on the draw.

JACK: That's it! And you *would* get under that bloody table! Mum used to scream 'Come out Nance!' but no, you said, not until I

gets me another mouth. Now wasn't that a funny notion?
Wasn't it just? At five, or was it six---because I can't remember,
 you know, I wasn't there---

NANCY: Six maybe.

JACK: At six she asks for a new mouth and nobody ever gave her one did they?

NANCY shakes her head dumbly.

JACK (*cont.*) It feels it's expressing the wrong things doesn't it? You'd like to look at it, in fact you do, in the mirror, but you can't catch it unawares can you? You suspect, and its only a suspicion really, isn't it---

NANCY: Yes.

JACK: ---that it's putting you over wrong. It twists when it means to smile, it gets a grabbing ravenous look, if you'll excuse my language, when all it wants to say is---(*drawing her to him again*) I love you. (*Looking down her blouse*) What a lovely pleasure-seeking pair! We always said it, didn't we---how they developed quicker than the other girls, and dad said to your mum you want to watch that girl, she's getting a fast look.

NANCY: He said it more than once. He was afraid I might do something silly.

JACK: Because you wanted to. Very hard.

NANCY: Yes.

JACK: But your mum said to your dad, not on your life, that girl's got her head screwed on, and that was true too wasn't it? You *do* have your head screwed on properly.

NANCY: Yes.

JACK: And you never did get into trouble did you?

NANCY: No.

JACK: But it wasn't enough, was it, not to get into trouble? Sometimes

it seemed that getting into trouble might be a bit of a lark.

NANCY: Yes.

JACK: But try as you may any trouble you get into rights itself, seemingly by pre-arrangement. Including your present trouble, which I know about, even that is going to right itself, though you don't believe me do you?

NANCY: No. Yet I do in a way.

JACK: It seems a terrible trouble, and it cost you your husband.

NANCY: Yes.

JACK: Which makes all that much more difficult to see how it can ever right itself without hysteria or even murder. But it really is going to be like all the trouble you ever got yourself into, ever since that little boy claimed you as his wife at the age of twelve, he said he'd impregnated you, those were his words, he was a saucy little bugger---

NANCY: Yes he was.

JACK: And they rushed you off to hospital to be examined but nothing had happened, had it, nothing had yet penetrated that soft little purse of delights?

NANCY: No, nothing had.

JACK: Well that's how it's always going to be. You'll always be Nancy, nobody can stop you being that.

NANCY: But---!

JACK: I don't like being myself, you used to say! (*She nods quickly*) The mouth says and shapes itself as it shouldn't, it gives away the person I'm not and yet she's me.

NANCY: Will it stop?

He flops lightly down into one of the armchairs and looks about him sleepily.

JACK: I'm dying for a cup of tea. What about taking a little walk with Jack to Fortnum's? He's quite worn out. Then we can practice with your mouth. What do you say?

NANCY: What do you mean, practice?

JACK: I don't know yet. (*Getting up*) I haven't had my tea.

NANCY (*laughing*) Oh yes---I'll put (*as if to go to the bedroom*)---!

JACK: No you won't. You'll come as you are.

He takes her by the arm and opens the door.

JACK (*cont.*) You'd better look down the corridor first. That man with the knife in his pocket might be smooching about.

NANCY: Did you see him then?

JACK: Oh no. I couldn't allow that.

NANCY: A knife you said?

JACK: In his pocket, Ninny, that's what I said. But that isn't what you really wanted to ask, was it?

NANCY: I wanted to ask should I have the interview with him after all?

JACK: You've had it mate.

NANCY: No I haven't. We postponed it till this evening.

JACK: Do you want to say I'm a liar?

NANCY: No, no!

JACK: Well, you've had it, good and proper. Which is why *you* need a cup of tea too!

NANCY (*clutching him*) How do you know me?

JACK: It's simple. You're standing there and I'm standing here. So how could I know you?

NANCY: But I stand around with lots of people and they don't know me at all, they get me all wrong!

JACK: How can I put it? You speak to me with your body. You tell me what I then tell you. I can't properly explain it.

NANCY: Telepathy.

JACK (*taking her out into the corridor*) It's as good a word as any.

7.

Back to LYNN in the highrise apartment. It appears that no time at all has passed since her scene with JACK TALBOT since she is dressed identically and sits staring before her, as at the end of her previous scene.

A ring at the bell. She doesn't stir at first. Another ring and this time she goes to the door. A murmur of voices.

MARJORIE TROUGHAM enters in outdoor clothes with LYNN behind her, watchful and distant, as if a second shock might be on its way.

MARJORIE: It's awful a stranger bursting in on you like this!

LYNN: No, do sit down. I know your face of course.

MARJORIE: Then you know whose mother I am.

LYNN: Yes. Please sit down.

MARJORIE sits, loosening her coat.

MARJORIE: I don't suppose I have to fill you in about what's going on in his life. He and Nancy were down in the country with me this weekend.

LYNN is too scared to speak but to

MARJORIE this looks like sangfroid.

MARJORIE (*cont.*) He's getting obsessed with you (*watching her*). Does that surprise you?

LYNN: Yes.

MARJORIE (*laughing*) Oh dear, this is like one of those scenes where the mother visits the girl to pay her off in return for severance!

LYNN: Who's going to sever what?

MARJORIE: You're going to leave Hal alone. For your own good.

LYNN: I haven't done anything to him.

MARJORIE: I said, for your own good. Their marriage hasn't finished yet. They've had rows since the day they met, and the only difference now is that it's all being aired in public. (*Looking round the apartment*) Thanks to people like your husband.

LYNN: I'm not married.

MARJORIE: Will you grant that I know my son a bit?

LYNN (*after a pause*) No.

MARJORIE: All right. Will you grant I care for him?

LYNN: Well you can care for what you *think* is him. But it may not be him.

MARJORIE: Do you think I could care about you too?

LYNN (*her wide-open eyes seeming to consider this as they fix on MARJORIE*) No.

MARJORIE: Do you know Nancy?

LYNN: I've met her a few times.

MARJORIE: Well, you will have noticed a certain strength.

LYNN: In her?

MARJORIE: A certain rude strength. Formidable isn't it?

LYNN: You're saying she could eat me for breakfast?

MARJORIE: Yes if you want to put it that way.

LYNN: But isn't that my choice, not yours---as to whether I wish to be eaten for breakfast?

MARJORIE: Of course it is. I've made a fool of myself.

LYNN: Why?

MARJORIE: Well I've told you he's in love with you haven't I? Which you might otherwise have spent two years wondering about, by which time he would hopefully have lost interest.

LYNN: He hasn't given any sign that he's in love with me.

MARJORIE: Perhaps you're not the best observer of that. We never are.

LYNN: We're planning the Potting Shed together. That's all.

MARJORIE: May I tell you something confidential? He doesn't treat his love affairs as more than infatuations of the kind you and I had at school.

LYNN: I'm the same. Much the same.

MARJORIE: Oh dear I *have* mismanaged this haven't I?

LYNN: No. You found I was real, that's all.

MARJORIE: But where my son's concerned I can see the future, Lynn. Do you mind if I call you Lynn?

LYNN: By the way, would you like something---tea or an orange juice?

MARJORIE: No thank you. As for me finding you real we *all* make it up, Lynn. On the basis of what we are.

LYNN: Hal's making it up no doubt, and so am I. And so are all your friends but we can't live *your* life. We can't make up the things

you're making up, we're different. Anyway why should we, why can't we be original?

MARJORIE: No reason at all.

LYNN: There's no reason to be scared of *me*. I haven't made it. I get a walk-on part in a rep touring southern India if I'm lucky and that's about it. Television nothing.

MARJORIE: Never run yourself down. It stops the luck coming when it's ready to. Besides which Hal's over the sky with the readings you did for him. He does know an actor when he sees one.

LYNN: So how can you talk to me as if this was all some silly infatuation? I have to think of myself as a professional like you though it's very hard because my agent never rings me and I can't even pay my share of the rent. So I have to think Hal's serious and the Potting Shed's going to happen, if I didn't believe it I'd have to give up and I'm not going to give up.

She is in distress and MARJORIE,
perceiving this, is at once at her ease.

LYNN (*cont.*) There's another thing. I watch an actor very hard whenever I get a comp or Mac takes me along to one of his first nights. I notice every move and I'm learning all the time and Mac, who should know, tells me I'm preparing myself for a world that doesn't exist and perhaps he's right, it's only money now and what money decides is what goes.

MARJORIE (*after a pause as if to say what-a-mouthful*) Mac? He's the man you live with?

LYNN: You know very well who Malcom Mackindle is.

MARJORIE: I can't believe my audacity in coming here (*with a smile*).

LYNN: How did you get my address? It isn't exactly in Mayfair.

MARJORIE: Nancy gave it to me. (*As LYNN prepares to speak*) Oh there wasn't a conspiracy! She knows I'll do anything to keep their marriage together and quite frankly it's dead from her point of view.

LYNN: And Hal's point of view?

MARJORIE (*getting up*) He'll revive the marriage if she'll do The Potting Shed. They're discussing it now.

LYNN: So how am I a menace to that?

MARJORIE: You're not. I made a mistake.

LYNN gets up too and follows her toward the door. MARJORIE suddenly turns to face her calmly.

MARJORIE (*cont.*) Who's this psychic you're getting him mixed up with?

LYNN: I don't know of a psychic.

MARJORIE: He talked to you on Sunday.

LYNN: A psychic?

MARJORIE: *Hal* talked to you on Sunday! I was two feet away. He asked for the man's phone number. He gives himself some phoney name.

LYNN: Who, Hal?

MARJORIE (*losing control*) Stop playing the fool! The *psychic*. I can't, I won't remember his name!

LYNN (*perfectly cool*) Talbot.

MARJORIE: Why don't you call him Satan?

LYNN: Why Satan?

MARJORIE: Because Satan batters on people like you---Satan in a thousand disguises---I know you all through and through, Satan and his disciples, but you don't belong in my son's life and you don't belong in Nancy Laudenfield's because we're people of a certain position and unlike you we have something to lose!

LYNN: Go away.

MARJORIE (*grasping the back of a chair for support, for an outburst*

always puts her close to tears) You've taken Hal away from me!

LYNN: No, don't sit down. Leave.

MARJORIE pulls a large black crucifix from under her blouse and, going close to LYNN, holds it before her eyes with a firm hand.

MARJORIE (*whispering*) I'm protected, do you understand? By something you don't understand! And if you dare cross the barrier between yourself and me, between yours and mine, all the power of this cross will be upon you!

LYNN: Leave.

This time MARJORIE obeys her and LYNN follows her to the door.

8.

A pleasant shrub-hugged patio in Highgate, with garden furniture. An occasional distant sound of traffic. Radio 3 can be heard from within the house, the french windows of which can be seen. A voice is comparing some Monteverdi recordings.

HAL TROUGHAM, in his shirt sleeves, is wandering to and fro with a finger-chewed script in his hand. Finally he sits down at the iron table. He reads.

JACK TALBOT is suddenly there in the french windows. He has a rather flash jacket on and a tilted trilby Quentin Crisp style.

JACK: Hullo.

HAL (*jumping with fear*) Good god! How did you get in? I'm sorry! Oh, you're Mr Talbot!

JACK: Yes.

HAL (*shaking him by the hand*) Do come and sit down.

JACK (*stopping*) That's a bit clammy isn't it?

HAL: I'm sorry?

JACK: Your hand. It's one of those that make one wonder where it's been.

HAL gazes at him with the narrowed eyes of appraisal.

JACK (*cont.*) The key was under the mat.

HAL: I left it for my daily help. I prefer people to ring the bell.

JACK: Oh! Uppish eh?

HAL: Won't you sit down?

JACK (*looking at everything*) Don't rush me, I'll get there.

HAL: Can I offer you a drink?

JACK (*stopping*) Who's she?

HAL: Who?

JACK: She's moving about in there.

HAL: There's no one in the house.

JACK: She's watching your every move. (*Screaming*) LOOK OUT!

HAL jumps for his life.

JACK (*holding him*) She was just about to throw a knife at you.

HAL: A knife?

JACK: Somebody else's knife. Phew! You *are* Hal Trougham are you?

HAL: Yes, of course (*looking at the house*).

JACK: You remind me of him.

HAL (*fearing that this will require psychiatric handling*) Good.

JACK (*to the house, with anger*) Why don't you piss off? (*Turning back to HAL*) I must say *you* had a tumble or two in your last year at school didn't you?

HAL: Tumble?

JACK: You dirty little bugger.

HAL (*a sudden little giggle*) At school?

JACK: And for five years afterwards. All through OUDS.

HAL: You know I was in OUDS?

JACK: It *oozes* out of you, how could I *not* know? And I may say this, trust *you* to organise The Merry Wives of Windsor for male actors only. You could get your hands under his skirts couldn't you?

HAL: Whose?

JACK: Now then, no tales out of school!

HAL: I'm beginning to wonder what this encounter is about. I was told---

JACK: You can't do it, that's what it's about.

HAL: Do what?

JACK (*turning to the apparition in the house again*) There's no need for glee. Your turn's coming soon!

HAL follows his eyes, more at ease now that it is a clear nutcase situation.

HAL: Who are you addressing?

JACK: Nancy.

HAL (*in charge now*) Ah, you know Nancy do you?

JACK: I wonder you have any lower intestines, she sits on them so much! And that right hand of hers. Exact as to rhythm, pressure! Well that's how her mummy did it with her daddy---sat on him and did it to herself. I mean where did *he* come in? And where do *you* come in? I mean, for that kind of act you have to feel you-re *with* someone. Not just sitting underneath thinking of other matters. She might just as well be sitting on a horse or a bench on the park, mightn't she?---(*pulling HAL towards him as if to show him to the apparition*). Why pick on this boy's life? Sit on chairs not humans! (*Laughing, digging HAL with his elbow*) That got her!

JACK walks him away from the direction of the house, keeping hold of his arm.

JACK (*cont.*) But you didn't stop her did you? You never got hold of her wrist and said enough is enough *I'm* on this bed too! You thought oh well I'll be getting on top in a jiffy and---

HAL sits---plops---down.

JACK (*cont.*) I can smell Hampstead Heath. (*Looking round*) You've set yourself up nicely here, I must say that. And your wife at the Intercontinental. Art's doing you both proud isn't it? As to me, I haven't got two pennies to rub together.

HAL (*gingerly*) Oh, about your fee---

JACK (*close to him again, in a low confidential voice*) That's just how you come out in your films. Rich boy takes time off to play theatricals. You're not actors you people you're corporate concerns.

HAL: Really! Are you sure you haven't got a fever?

JACK: I could. Might I sit down, Halibut?

To HAL's astonishment he sits on his knee, putting his arm round his neck. HAL loses himself in a giggle.

JACK (*cont., intimately*) You know I don't mean it don't you love? You dreamed all your life---I want to be an institution, let me be recognised when I walk down Oxford street, let me look like a win on the lottery to people, like a smile from me is going to change their lives! Oh how we *love* ourselves don't we---we retards with celebrity! Because it *is* retarding isn't it? (*Suddenly drawing back a little*) You don't think this is sour grapes?

HAL: I'm not in a very good position to think!

JACK: I'll get up in a minute. (*He kisses him on the cheek*) And shall I tell you something else? There are so many people out there darling who need to be told they're artists when they're not and thinkers when they're not, and readers and painters and lovers when they're not, you'll *always* be able to create a film company with them, even if the one you've got now goes bust!

HAL: Would you mind getting off me?

JACK: But remember they go along with you for the same reason you go along with them, it helps them you all to believe you're artists and you're doing it for the art and you're just business men really aren't you? Look me in the eye love!

HAL: Please get off.

JACK: But art lays down with beggars, sweetheart. (*Kissing him again*) Wisdom and art demand a lonely worshipper. (*Stage whisper*) That was an Oscar Wilde quote, prison brought him to it. You didn't know that was a quote, did you? (*Touching his hand*) You're cold darling! Cold, cold, cold in the heat of noon!

JACK gets up. HAL flicker-smiles.

JACK (*cont.*) Poor John Milton, poor Marvell---all those poets you and---you and who was it?---(*stopping*) give me his name! Who else was there? The darling boy you shared those poems with, that haunting boy present in all your climaxes---(*As HAL opens his mouth to speak*) Mistress Ford! M-m-m....! Give it me---the name! (*with sudden release*) MAC! MAC! Mac the Knife!

HAL stares at him with something between

horror and awe. JACK leaves.

9.

We are in the highrise again. The scene is in darkness. Some dim city lights are apparent through the window.

A key turns in the front-door lock. We hear the door being opened and then closed with care.

MAC switches on the light as he comes in, holding today's vast edition of the Sunday paper he works for.

He slaps it down on the coffee table and sinks exhausted into one of the armchairs. He is just reaching for a cigarette when the bedroom door bursts open. It is LYNN in her night clothes. She stands looking at him.

LYNN: I just want to ask you if you feel ashamed.

MAC (*after a slightly pouting pause*) No.

LYNN: It was a low dirty trick wasn't it?

MAC (*matter of fact*) No it wasn't. Perfectly legitimate.

LYNN: Oh I don't doubt that. She thinks you lied to her and so does her agent.

MAC: About what?

LYNN: The tape recorder.

He lies back with a sigh.

MAC: I'm not *proud* of it Lynn.

LYNN: She said you put the tape recorder on the table and it wasn't on,

there wasn't even a tape in it, you took the tape out, just as a trick. And I'm terrified frankly. I mean if they choose to go for you and your paper---what on earth possessed you to do it? What came over you?

MAC: I went for an interview and I got it.

LYNN: But you can't prove that she said what you *say* she said!

MAC (*with sudden rasping decision*) Stop being childish, you're all of you babies, you need to grow up!

LYNN (*persisting*) How can you prove it?

MAC: I have it on tape of course!

LYNN: But the machine wasn't on!

MAC: Do you really think I travel round with those bloody great steam era machines and record from them? The mike of the *real* machine is a little badge that fits my button hole, a wire trails down an inside pocket, the machine's the size of a cigarette packet, and thinner! Really! They've only been on the market fifteen years or more! All you people want to hold the world responsible for your own bloody foolishness!

He sits up straight.

MAC (*cont.*) And listen to me. She agreed to the interview. Verbally, on the phone to me. Then I contacted my editor. You were with me. The two calls took a few moments. I got ready to go to LA. The flight's booked and I leave this flat at eight o'clock in the morning. At the airport my editor's girl tells me Nancy's on her way to London and the interview's going to be at the Intercontinental! I rush to the Intercontinental and nobody's there. I call her on all the numbers I have and I happen to guess she might have gone to her mother-in-law, though it didn't seem likely. She was there when I called and cavalier as you like she says oh my agent's on the way over and he has to speak to you first. I communicate this to my editor who's trying to mow his lawn and getting a *little* irritated with this young lady who first bases her career on her husband's career and then walks out on him---you get my drift? Here's the paper trying to build her up, and this it has done, it has come up with the goods it promised for

the second time, I know it's another smack in the eye for poor Hal Trougham but *he* could do with an education in modern life too. They all believe in free rides, Lynn. So do you. However, we're still agog to get her even better contracts and awards and eminence in all spheres---because now she's going into *literature*. And she tries to stop us getting our half of the bargain! She tries to dump us, she puts her agent in charge! And it isn't even a real agent! It's a *literary* agent and he's planning a big book by Nancy Laudenfield, *big* of course, she's going to do a tour of the Indian settlements, presumably it's a repeat of what Marlin Brando did *sincerely* about half a century ago---I mean, she doesn't give a shit about Indians or their settlements---anyway, here she is, installed at the Intercontinental (*stopping*)---do you want to hear all this? Why don't you take a seat?

LYNN (*doing so*) OK.

MAC: The literary agent says I have to approve this interview and of course I say I'll talk to my editor because this kind of thing hasn't happened since Vanessa Redgrave and to my astonishment Headley tells me fine, go ahead but don't sign anything! Meanwhile the agent actually *invites* me to do something tricky by drawing up some form of legal document and saying I'll courier this to Nancy from Frankfurt, because he isn't in London, he's too busy to dot his own i's! So he couriers it to her and not to my office! He needs to grow up too! These people are irremediably mad Lynn, they think they have the world in their thrall because of a bit of newsprint and we're not going to disillusion them are we? I mean should we be going round telling people don't take what we print seriously? No, answer me.

LYNN: Of course not.

MAC: I mean, *really*, to play games with the press when the press is playing games for you! So the agent entrusts an actress with a binding legal document---I mean how important is Nancy to this man if he has to be in Frankfurt and not here? And how come she didn't see that? She has the document in her bloody handbag while she's talking to me! Can you imagine that? *Unsigned!* What am *I* going to do, tell her Ok you can run our paper for us, so fish the bloody thing out of your handbag? Obviously I go to her hotel suite meaning to get an interview, and I get it, and the world syndication rights could be sold ten times

over, the woman's been globalised! When I went to that hotel I thought I'm going to decoy this lady into telling me all she wants about Hal, she's going to do the victim stunt, the sex queen stunt, in fact all the crap she's been dishing up since she was at drama school, and she *did*. She broke off at once point and said hey is that tape recorder on and the tape deck was hanging open! I ask you! I thought I'm not believing this!

LYNN: You're just telling me about a dirty trick that had to be played.

MAC: How do you know about the piece anyway?

LYNN: I was at Hal's. Somebody in the company went out for the paper---

MAC: Last night?

LYNN: Yes.

MAC: Then somebody there must have known there might be an interview.

LYNN: Hal did. He was at his mother's and Nancy suddenly appeared for lunch---

MAC: And she told him about it.

LYNN: Yes. When he saw the headline, **I HAD TO TAKE CHARGE NANCY SAYS**, he turned the colours of the rainbow and called the Intercontinental right away and Nancy said it was a dirty trick and I'm mortified .

MAC: Like hell she's mortified. This is just what her producers needed, exactly at this time. To call in the money.

LYNN: She might still be sorry.

MAC: Then let her walk out of the film and the career and say I'm going back to my husband for a family life!---'sorry' my arse!

LYNN: You make feelings seem not to matter.

MAC: I make *bogus* feelings seem not to matter.

LYNN: I'm thinking of Hal.

MAC: He's free to call my editor and give his side of things. A public ding-dong about his sexual proclivities would be just right at this time. I wouldn't advise it, though. Just as I wouldn't advise you to stop denying to the press that you're having an affair with him.

LYNN: I'm only telling *the truth*.

MAC: To the papers?! What paper called you by the way?

LYNN: The one that printed the story.

MAC: You can't even remember the paper.

LYNN: No.

He shakes his head.

LYNN (*cont.*) Somebody in the company spoke to them for me.

MAC: *Never* speak to the press even indirectly until I've told you what to say. And next time leave the matter ambiguous.

LYNN: That would mean telling them I *might* or *could* have an affair with him.

MAC: Exactly.

LYNN: And if it isn't true, if I don't *want* an affair with him?

MAC (*wild*) But you *are* having an affair with him! You want to build your career or not?

LYNN: Not out of press reports!

MAC: *All* careers come out of press reports! What gets people known aside from press reports? (*Vehemently siphening off some of his discomfort over the Laudenfield interview*) You live on us and you despise us! (*Before she reacts*) You plural. Nothing personal (*fishing for a cigarette*).

LYNN: Oh for god's sake don't start smoking.

MAC (*withdrawing his hand from his pocket*) Would you like to know what the *real* truth is about you? You're an actress without a job. You've never had a job of any significance. You haven't been on any major stage in your life. As for your television appearances, they're the shortest footages in history. They're subliminal flashes, invisible to the human eye.

She smiles and then he smiles too.

LYNN: Now tell me *the lie* about myself.

MAC: The lie is that you're closer to Hal Trougham than anybody else is. When all he did was offer you a part. Which he does a dozen times a month to someone or other. He *suggested* he might want you instead of Nancy Laudenfield as his sort of leading lady or whatever crap he has in his mind. But he's still married to her, he's still negotiating with her, they call each other up every five minutes. From the *press's point of view* Hal Trougham is wooing an unknown actress to step into Nancy's shoes. Now that's the news---news doesn't have to be certain, it has little to do with the truth. Hints and suggestions are printable news. (*Fixing her with his eyes*) It depends on the press if it becomes established public truth or not. It doesn't depend on Hal Trougham. He's lost his credibility. Nancy has it all. She can turn a little bit of luck into what she calls an international event. And so can you if you face the fact that the press loves to be played with---but only like *she* plays with it, baby-tiger play.

LYNN: You should go on a lecture circuit with all this material. Mac the Knife's fame workshop.

They laugh. A pause for mutual relaxation.
He yawns.

LYNN (*cont.*) *You* told the press about Hal's offer to me didn't you?

MAC (*tired, quiet*) Well of course Lynn.

LYNN: Hal says Nancy never *once* went round the company healing battered egos as she says she did. He says she had the biggest ego of the lot. She had round the clock analysis.

The night has a silence especially enjoyable
for those who live in noise, and they share it

reflectively.

MAC: You know what? She's crazy about this man of yours, Jack Talbot. He's a hot number in LA apparently. He told her she can't act. He said 'It isn't that you're a bad actress, you're just not.' Over tea at Fortnum's. She loved it. She said it loosened her up and made her giggle and if he wasn't so camp she might really go for him. Is he camp?

LYNN: He wasn't with me. He turned up like a corporate fat-cat---gleaming tie, beautiful suit and he was so erect, I mean talk about a straight military back, how the hell can anybody call that camp?

MAC: Maybe there are several people playing Jack Talbot.

They giggle this away.

MAC (*cont.*) You're holding out against Hal. You didn't with me. I met you in the afternoon and by midnight all was sealed. You know why it was so quick?

LYNN: No.

MAC: You didn't love me.

She looks perplexed. Then she shrugs.

MAC (*cont.*) When I think of us separating I go cold. Literally---my hands and feet get like ice.

LYNN: So we shouldn't separate.

MAC: Just to save my blood circulation?

They laugh. Repartee of this kind is clearly their habit.

LYNN: I couldn't believe how I handled Hal's mother.

MAC: His *mother*?

LYNN: She came here.

MAC: Lavinia Trubbs?

LYNN: Yes. She said Hal's infatuated with me. And would small fry like me please stop trying to horn in.

MAC (*eyes gleaming*) Did she now?

LYNN: I could never have handled her before.

MAC (*preoccupied by other thoughts*) Before what?

LYNN: Jack Talbot. I actually told her her to get out. (*Rising*) Come to bed and I'll give you something for your circulation.

He allows her to pull him up. He puts an arm round her and they go towards the bedroom.

His phone rings.

MAC (*taking the phone out of his pocket*). Hal!....What a surprise!....What?....Well of course....Let's make it a late one....Two o'clock?....The Caprice....I'll book. (*Closing phone*) *Well!* Hal wants lunch with me. And he's going to pay---the tightest arse in the business!

LYNN: He must need something from you.

MAC: Oh, that for *sure!*

LYNN (*touching his hand*) You're hot again.

They kiss and go to the bedroom.

10.

NANCY's suite at the Intercontinental. Two SPARKS from a television crew are setting lamps for an interview. The door of the apartment is open. The men pass to and fro dismantling, settling up stands, laying cable. The focal point of the interview is an

armchair upstage so that the scene can be played without much chance of their overhearing what is said except in snatches.

POPS TROUGHAM appears at the open door. He is older than his wife MARJORIE but agile and athletic, with the kind of spine that lasts many a summer. He looks round the room. One of the men at work glances at him, but takes no further notice, in the English manner. POPS knocks on the door.

POPS: Nancy!

He walks further into the room.

POPS (*cont.*) Nancy!

JOYCE appears from the bedroom.

JOYCE: Pops!

She runs to him and they hug and kiss.

POPS: How are you?

He slaps her bottom and NANCY appears with a smock over her shoulders.

JOYCE: I'm doing her hair.

NANCY: Pops love!

POPS: There's my girl (*holding out his arms*)!

They too embrace, gazing into each other's eyes.

POPS (*indicating the lamps*) What goes on?

NANCY: It's for CBS. A kind of natural unrehearsed impromptu interview but I've learned my lines so that's OK.

They all laugh as JOYCE disappears to get her utensils.

NANCY (*cont., glancing round*) Anything wrong?

POPS (*also hushed*) Lots.

NANCY: Oh my god.

He puts his finger to his lips.

POPS: It's about that piece on how (*looking round to see if the coast is clear*) Hal's no good in bed. (*As NANCY starts to speak*) I only got back from New York this morning so all I have is Marjorie's version, she's in an awful state, she's trying to hound the journalist responsible, but that's self-defeating of course.

NANCY: You know the circumstances of that interview do you?

POPS: I didn't know there *was* an interview.

NANCY: He got me talking before the interview and of course I thought we were just chatting---

POPS: Oh dear.

NANCY: I know.

POPS: But it's hardly a mistake for your reputation.

NANCY: You don't think I *planned* it?

POPS: Don't be silly. I'm saying in effect that it's Hal should worry and I'm sure he can look after himself. His mother doesn't think so however. *My* mother never thought I could cross a road safely, up to her dying day.

A SPARKS walks across the scene, deposits a stand, lines up the lamp.

POPS (*gazing at him but deciding to talk just the same*) She's insisting (*another glance round*)---it's this bloody psychic, Nancy.

NANCY: Who?

POPS: He's called Jack and he's well in with Hal. Do you know him?

NANCY: Yes I do.

POPS: She said she thought you might. She said if that sort of chap gets into one actor's life he's into everybody's.

The SPARKS leaves.

NANCY: What's that got to do with me?

POPS: She wants his name and telephone number.

NANCY: In other words she sent you here.

POPS: Well of course. You see, it isn't so much that she wants to wring his neck, she'd like him to come and see us over the week-end.

NANCY: Come and see you? In the Cotswolds? Good god!

POPS: Yes.

NANCY: I heard she's got that black crucifix out again and she's dressed in black and caking her face with powder.

POPS: Yes.

NANCY (*looking round*) You poor darling.

JOYCE comes back with her hair things.
NANCY sits in one of the upright chairs thoughtfully. JOYCE begins her work, styling.

NANCY (*cont.*) I'm not going to give out his number, if that's what you want. I happen to respect his privacy.

POPS: Could you give him a message then? I know Marjorie's difficult to take but she's awfully protective of us all isn't she?---she won't let me rest if I don't produce this chap for the week-end. I think she just wants to suss him out. I mean, old girl, she's been awfully---(*looking round*) understanding whenever you and I have got into a spot of trouble.

NANCY (*after gazing at him*) All right.

POPS: You'll let him know she'd like him to come down for the weekend?

NANCY: Yes.

POPS: Do you know what his fees are?

NANCY: Not yet.

POPS: I'd better send him something for the fare at least.

NANCY: You haven't got his address yet.

POPS: I don't *like* doing this Nancy.

NANCY: I know (*after gazing at him pointedly*).

POPS: Is she still in her Satan-fighting outfit Joyce?

JOYCE: Oh she only puts it on when she's after something. You mark my words, she's going to use that psychic.

POPS: Is that what she said?

JOYCE: That was the sub-text.

POPS (*getting up*) She's an artful bitch and I wish to god I was well shot of her.

NANCY: What's Father Shefford going to say about her working with a psychic?

POPS: Oh a few hail maries'll look after that. Apparently this journalist Mackindle's girlfriend goes to him too. Marjorie says that's how you found out about him.

NANCY: She's wrong.

POPS: She usually is.

Two SPARKS return.

POPS (*cont.*) She also said it was Mackindle who interviewed you.

NANCY: Yes it was.

POPS: It surprised me because he's a damned good theatre critic, don't you agree? Anyway, I'll let her know you'll convey the message.
(*As he goes to the door*) Will you be needing lunch when this is over?

NANCY: Not at a man's club.

POPS: I was thinking of Marco's.

NANCY: Lovely, yes!

POPS (*at the door*) One o'clock all right?

She nods. He leaves.

JOYCE: I wonder what Marjorie's up to?

NANCY: Destruction I should think.

JOYCE: At least it won't be you or Pops who get it.

NANCY: No but it might be Hal.

11.

HAL TROUGHAM's Highgate residence, in the patio again. HAL, in a T-shirt and tennis shorts, is hard at work exercising on a rowing machine. LYNN, in a bikini, is cycling nowhere on another machine.

A voice comes over the intercom: '*We're recording, no interruptions please.*'

They stop.

LYNN: Recording what?

HAL Oh it's that bloody Arnold, he has to video everything---he doesn't realise he'll be out of a job in a week---I think they only come here to play the fool.

LYNN: Like me.

He dabs the sweat off his face with a towel.
She puts her towel round her shoulders and
sits down while he gets into a dressing gown.

LYNN (*cont.*) You pay us to do it.

HAL: He thinks it's all going to be used by the BBC one day as a publicity special, he tells himself he has to get every conversation down on tape to show how a film that isn't going to come off got made. He's just a damned fool. I've only realised it this minute. Not much of a self-recommendation is it?

LYNN: You identify with them too much.

HAL: That's what Mac says.

LYNN: You had lunch with him?

HAL: Yes.

LYNN: Top secret?

HAL: It was mostly about Nancy.

LYNN: I can imagine.

HAL: Yes but *what* can you imagine---of a conversation you didn't hear?

LYNN: That I didn't come into it.

HAL: You're right there (*starting to dismantle the rowing machine*). By the way, I've got some sort of photo opportunity this morning. I hope you can be around for it.

LYNN: I certainly can't.

HAL: But Lynn---!

LYNN: Lynn what?

HAL: Even if we're not together they all *think* we are, including Nancy!

LYNN: So we must keep up the pretence?

HAL: If you like.

LYNN: But I don't even come into the pretence! I'm just a thing to get you better terms with Nancy, I mean you two could sign a contract together tomorrow!

HAL: We could, yes.

LYNN: So where do I come in?

HAL: You come in for yourself---as yourself!

LYNN: 'Every photo counts'.

HAL: As a matter of fact yes. *Yes*, Lynn. Because of the company you'll be in. You'll be photographed at my side. I won't let them take me alone.

LYNN: Oh come come, they can get round that in the photo department.

HAL (*studying her*) You actively don't like publicity?

LYNN: If it's publicity for me I believe in it, I have to, I don't like it but I go along with it.

HAL: But *all* publicity's for you if it's in the least about you. And this is.

LYNN (*flushed with anger*) But I don't like it! I don't *want* it!

He shrugs.

HAL: I wonder if you realise how little time an actor manages to spend acting, or come to that a director directing or a writer writing, compared with the hours of talk and indecision?

LYNN: Don't lecture me. It's my art as well as yours.

HAL: I'm sorry.

She gets up.

LYNN: I'm going to have a shower.

HAL: OK.

LYNN: Then I'm leaving.

HAL: But Lynn you *are* in this company, you're *known* to be in this company, why the hell can't you be part of it? For god's sake ask Mac if you've any doubts about it! He'd go berserk if he thought you were missing a real live photo opportunity!

LYNN: Would he?

HAL: Yes he would!

LYNN: Well as a matter of fact he warned me about this one, he said it's got STINKS written all over it. He said they'll bring their fish lenses and make you look all mouth and nose. In fact he said it was probably Nancy's idea. And Lavinia Trubbs of Pattersnake organised it. He said, and this'll interest you, Hal's soiled goods for the moment, don't buy 'em.

She leaves.

12.

The Trougham house in the Cotswolds. The scene is empty.

MARJORIE (*off*) Pops!

No reply.

MARJORIE (*cont.*) Pops!

An enormous whistle which presumably

comes from her. We hear the front door burst open and Pops's heavy tramp. He is now dressed plastically for odd jobs in the garden.

POPS (*with vast effortless projection*) You call?

MARJORIE (*off*) He'll be here in a minute!

POPS: What about it?

MARJORIE (*off*) Nothing.

He sees some breakfast things on the table and hastens to remove them.

MARJORIE comes down the stairs.

MARJORIE: Are you going to stay like that?

POPS: It isn't a formal visit is it?

MARJORIE: It's a visit.

She sweeps down on a pile of newspapers.

POPS: He's not against Sunday papers surely?

MARJORIE: He's making me *very* nervous.

The sound of a car drawing up.

POPS (*looking at his watch*) He's indecently punctual too.

The car promptly drives away again. Silence.

POPS (*cont.*) Very odd.

They stand waiting.

MARJORIE: Why don't you go to the door? The bell might not be working.

He does so. We hear him open the front door and close it again. He returns.

POPS: Not a soul.

MARJORIE (*going to the kitchen*) Somebody got the wrong house.

POPS (*settling down on the settee*) Now he's going to be rudely late.

MARJORIE (*off*) These people are a rule to themselves.

POPS: What people?

MARJORIE: Clairvoyants.

POPS: I'd say that was a good description of you.

MARJORIE (*off*) What?

POPS: A rule to yourself.

MARJORIE (*off*) Thank you darling!

POPS (*picking up a paper*) Pleasure.

MARJORIE (*off*) Do psychics drink?

POPS: Not hard liquor. Dandelion wine. Coffee. The one we used in Houston chain-smoked. She said the show was a palpable hit and we got the bird.

A ring at the bell. He jumps.

POPS (*calling out to her as he goes*) Are you OK? To receive I mean?

MARJORIE (*off*) Well of course I am!

A murmur of male voices at the door. Then JACK TALBOT enters. He is in casual but not plastic clothes---they are what you wear for a country plod that will end in a sitting room. He has a haversack on his back, small and neat enough to appear neither student-like nor a hiker, and a walking stick. His face is set in a firmness that goes best with square jaws. His stare is tense and

unabashed.

He comes forward on quiet feet as
MARJORIE comes in from the kitchen.

JACK: How do you do?

He shakes MARJORIE's hand.

MARJORIE: You found it all right?

JACK: Yes I walked.

MARJORIE: You got a cab at the end?

JACK: No I walked all the way (*showing her the walking stick*).

MARJORIE: Because a car drove up and then drove away again.

JACK (*with sudden pugnacity*) Are you telling me I didn't come on foot?

MARJORIE and POPS look at each other.

MARJORIE: This is my husband.

JACK: That's obvious.

POPS (*to deflect MARJORIE*) Won't you sit down?

JACK: First of all where do I put this (*the walking stick*)?

MARJORIE: Let me take it.

She takes it to the hall.

JACK: Five miles is nothing for me.

MARJORIE is back to watch him. He takes off his haversack and drops it at the side of a chair with a peculiarly perfunctory flop.

He sits down. They stand there.

JACK (*cont., looking from one to the other*) Well? Are your feet stuck to

the floor?

After another glance at each other they set about being busily themselves. POPS finishes off the clearing of the table while MARJORIE works herself round, fluffing up the pillows as she goes, to a chair as far from JACK as possible, on the staircase side.

She sits, and POPS sits by the table on an upright chair.

JACK (*cont.*, *feeling in his pocket*) I got your cheque. (*Pulling out a closed envelope*) I thought eighty pounds plus first-class travel most generous.

He slaps the letter on the coffee table.

MARJORIE and POPS are too absorbed by him to glance at each other this time.

POPS (*quietly*) It doesn't appear to have been opened.

MARJORIE: As long as you got it!

JACK: It *was* eighty pounds plus first-class travel wasn't it?

POPS: Yes. I'm afraid my writing isn't very clear. The bank seems to understand it, happily.

As JACK offers no comment POPS visibly searches for something to say while MARJORIE looks at her nails, a favourite ten-digit source of inspiration for her when things get difficult.

POPS (*cont.*) You'll let me know if it isn't enough. I'm afraid we don't know what your fees are.

MARJORIE: The thing is this, Mr Talbot. I'll come straight to the point (*apparently not good news for POPS*) because it was my idea dragging you down here, we're terrified that our son and Nancy Laudenfield are going to break up and we wondered if you knew of any way you could prevent that, as I believe you've met them

both, or rather (*gingerly*) they've consulted you.

JACK (*his eye on the envelope*) I mean it could have been eighty-two pounds, I can hardly be expected to get it exactly right.

POPS (*at sea*) No.

JACK (*to MARJORIE*) Are you into counselling then?

MARJORIE: Me in counselling?

JACK: I mean counselling couples who are breaking up, is that your job?

POPS: My wife's an actress. Of some fame. As I am---I mean I'm in the profession too. She's Lavinia Trubbs.

JACK: I thought she was Marjorie Trougham (*pronounced trew-ham*)?

POPS: No the television character she plays is Mrs Trubbs.

JACK (*to MARJORIE*) I could have sworn you counselled.

POPS: May I have my little say? I want to be sure that the children, because that's what they are for me, receive good guidance. Now, Mr Talbot---

JACK: Call me Jack.

POPS: In the eyes of both Nancy and my son Hal you hang the moon, as Americans say. In fact it was Nancy who gave us your address. You see, Marjorie and I need to be filled in. It may sound presumptuous but we'd like to know more about your credentials---background, if you like.

MARJORIE (*to POPS*) Why should that interest us? It won't explain his hold on them will it?

POPS: I was trying to avoid mentioning that---after all, Hal can look after himself, so can Nancy. It's none of our business is it?

JACK turns to her for her reply as if witnessing an interesting discussion but no reply comes, only the ten-digit examination.

JACK: Have you got a cup of something? It's quite a long walk, you know.

POPS (*jumping up*) How rude of us (*with a passing glance at MARJORIE*).

He hurries to the kitchen.

MARJORIE: What about a snack?

JACK: No, I'd only bring it up.

MARJORIE: Really?

POPS (*off*) Cup of coffee Mr Talbot?

JACK: If it's nice and hot, yes please.

A plate smashes in the kitchen.

POPS (*off*) Damn!

MARJORIE: Are you all right Pops?

JACK (*confidentially*) No.

POPS (*off*) I'm fine.

The pieces are being swept up.

MARJORIE: How *is* our son by the way?

JACK: I only saw him about three minutes.

MARJORIE: You seem to be able to make your influence felt in a very short time.

JACK: So do you.

POPS (*off*) Sugar and cream Mr Talbot?

JACK: *Honey* and cream and I'll do the honey myself.

POPS (*off*) Do we have any honey Mums?

MARJORIE (*getting up with a slam*) Let me come and help.

She goes to the kitchen and we hear the plate fragments being tipped into the garbage pail.

POPS comes in with coffee and cream on a tray.

POPS: Here we are.

JACK: Most grateful. (*Taking the tray*) We now have a where-to-balance-it-all problem. What about the little table over there (*indicating a side-table near the window*)?

POPS: Just what I was thinking.

POPS brings it to JACK'S chair as MARJORIE arrives with the honey.

JACK: Now there's no spoon.

MARJORIE (*hurrying back to the kitchen*) Oh dear!

POPS: We have our daily help on Sundays---she'll be here to organise us in a bit. You'll stay to lunch will you?

JACK: I'm having lunch at the inn, the famous one---

POPS: The Portland. At Jeffrey Hill. Lovely place.

JACK: With my mother-in-law.

POPS: Oh! You have a mother-in-law near here!

JACK (*arranging the tray*) Not really.

MARJORIE returns with the teaspoon, held out like a trophy.

MARJORIE: There!

POPS (*to MARJORIE*) Mr Talbot has a mother-in-law who lives at Jeffrey Hill.

JACK: I didn't say that.

POPS goes to his place at the table like a haunted labrador while JACK honeys his coffee and MARJORIE returns to ten-digit reflection. However, like POPS, she watches JACK as he spoons out the honey, hesitating about the amount, taking less and then more until he gets it right. He stirs his coffee slowly and noisily.

He takes the first sips.

JACK (*cont.*) Mmm. It answers the maiden's prayer.

POPS: Glad to hear it. (*With a glance at MARJORIE*) Let me try to explain it another way Mr Talbot. I've just had one of the biggest flops ever---in that respect I'm in the same hole as Hal is. But plays aren't worldwide events like films so I don't have to sit down and review my whole career like he does. All that happens in my case is a play has gone down the spout and over a million dollars have been lost.

JACK: What about the people who lost it, you don't give *them* a thought, do you?

POPS: They're a syndicate actually. They're making a pile with one or two other shows, they can afford it.

JACK: It's hardly for you to say what they can afford, you don't have access to their accountancy files do you?

MARJORIE: Is this getting us anywhere?

JACK (*continuing to POPS*) Anyway you only have yourself to blame. You should have listened to the director before he ever started work on the script, he shone a red light one afternoon at Sardi's didn't he, when he said this play should be a musical?

A pause during which POPS looks at MARJORIE and she at him but they miss.

POPS (*a little hushed*) Nancy told us about your remarkable powers. Yes I should have listened Mr Talbot.

JACK: Why don't you call me Jack? I'm only Talbot to my daughter.

POPS: Ah. (*Crisply*) I'm glad you too have a family. Perhaps you can understand our concern that our son and Nancy may be yielding to influences they don't understand! Maybe you don't understand these influences either! Lots of people come unstuck on this psychic gift---

JACK (*to MARJORIE*) If you want to talk to me about Lynn Norden why don't you say so?

MARJORIE (*withering*) I didn't want to talk about Lynn Norden but I will if you like.

JACK: And don't call me a psychic. As for clairvoyant you know what you can with that.

He applies himself to his coffee once more.

POPS (*to MARJORIE*) You did want to talk about Lynn.

JACK: There you are---disagreement right away!

MARJORIE (*to POPS*) I won't be told what I think by a stranger! It looks to me like Nancy and Hal are being manipulated and *that way* I refuse to go! Refuse!

POPS (*with firm quietness*) Marjorie, we don't want that wonderful marriage breaking up and I thought we asked Mr Talbot here to seek his advice---help (*with a shrug*).

But she has her head down.

MARJORIE (*to JACK*) Lynn does come into it. I'm terrified of that girl's power over my son. I believe you influenced her too (*raising her eyebrows as a question*)?

JACK is busy with his coffee.

MARJORIE (*cont.*) I too was interviewed by Malcom Mackindle once, you know!

POPS: Really? I don't remember.

MARJORIE: He came round after the show. It was one of those silly pieces he was doing, The Stars in their Dressing Rooms or something. Anyway, he has a quite horrifying manner.

POPS: All right but what's Mackindle got to do with it?

MARJORIE (*screaming it at him*) They live together!

POPS: Oh!

JACK (*to POPS*) She means Lynn Norden and Mac.

POPS (*to JACK*) Do you know him too?

JACK: Mac the Knife?

MARJORIE; Look at you both! You just don't see it do you, either of you---a family changes from a heavenly one to a hellish one and you can't see it!

POPS (*not far from screaming himself*) How's Mr Talbot going to stop that?

MARJORIE: He can't! Because he started it! Can't you feel it? Isn't it obvious?

JACK (*to POPS, shaking his head*) You still won't call me Jack will you?

MARJORIE (*also to POPS*) He's just told you about a conversation you had ten months ago at Sardi's and you still can't see how he works on people! I told you myself don't do the play, it'll put you back ten years.

POPS: You said we needed the money! You said we can't do without the money, you'll *have* to do the play!

MARJORIE: I said both. Both were true! But it wasn't manipulation on my part. This man manipulates! (*Taking a deep breath to recover, then quietly to JACK*) You'll probably think me a fool but all my childhood I dreamed of being middle-class one day and having a nice big home like this one. I was brought up in a very poor family and I used to see my school friends at their homes sometimes and I couldn't believe the excitement of it

all---it wasn't the bricks and mortar of their houses, not the size or the lovely garden but the talk, the long lazy Sundays! Well Nancy Laudenfield filled this house with that kind of life and so she's very important to me. I stopped having my dreadful collapses when I had to leave a show and go to bed for six weeks---

POPS: That hasn't happened for twenty years!

MARJORIE: It's only been since Hal and Nancy got married that I look on those collapses as done and finished with. Let me have my fears! I can't bear the thought of that icy blonde girl Lynn sitting here and that Mackindle man getting all the family details from her---!

POPS: What on earth are you talking about?

MARJORIE (*screaming again*) If that Lynn Norden becomes Hal's wife it'll be because of this man here (*crudely indicating JACK without looking at him*). I know the presence of evil!

POPS: Oh don't let's get on to evil.

MARJORIE (*to JACK*) I've been wanting to say this ever since you came in this room---

POPS: Better not!

MARJORIE (*to POPS, screaming*) Are you a catholic or not?

POPS: Leave the church out of it!

MARJORIE: The words of a convert! That's why you believe in this damn silly Potting Shed project---Greene was a convert like you, he used it to show off---it made him seem a man of conscience and he was screwing all the time!

POPS: Stop talking now before you go too far!

MARJORIE: I want to tell him why we asked him here! We haven't told him yet! I want him to have the truth! (*To JACK*) We belong to the church. When we catholics belong to anything it's the whole of us. Rome is a *direct* system---(*to POPS*) let me talk! (*To JACK*) It goes straight to God. There's one truth and that's it. The system goes straight to the truth whether you believe it or

not. For us there's just one truth and the fact that you can see the future or the past and can hear funny voices and all that---well, our truth has a name for that kind of thing and it isn't God, Mr Talbot.

JACK (*reflecting about this*) I think I know who you mean. It's the other one you're referring to isn't it?

POPS turns away from what he knows is coming.

MARJORIE: *It is* the other one. And I'm very sensitive to his vile approaches. I'm protective particularly of young people and even more particularly young people close to me and necessary to my happiness. A time comes when one has to lay one's cards on the table.

JACK: Especially when that other one you nearly mentioned turns up disguised as a human.

MARJORIE: *Especially* then.

JACK: But my dear Marjorie---

MARJORIE: Mrs Trougham.

JACK: *You're* disguised as a human. In other words (*with a wink at POPS*) a bloody liar.

MARJORIE (*seething white*) Is this the *metaphysician* coming out?

POPS (*to JACK*) Please don't provoke her on this subject, Mr Talbot!

MARJORIE: I think he *should* provoke me! He'll find I'm prepared to die for what I believe. If I pointed a gun at you Mr Talbot---

POPS: Oh no, not that bloody gun!

She jumps up and is about to run to the hall when POPS virtually throws himself on her.

POPS (*cont.*) Now just forget about shotguns.

He coaxes her back. They stand there in a

strange enemy embrace. She screams at JACK from this embrace.

MARJORIE: *Mesmeriser!*

POPS: Marjorie!

JACK (*still at his coffee*) You're being Mrs Trubbs aren't you? She's always going round the back and fetching the shotgun and it doesn't work, it's all rusted up.

MARJORIE (*craning close to him, still held by POPS*) The minute I saw you I knew why all this had happened!

JACK (*after another sip of coffee*) Listen, Mrs Trubbs. It was you who introduced Nancy to those film people and got her negotiating with them, long before Hal's flop. That's what you did wasn't it---virtually invited her to leave your son's company for better pickings elsewhere? Because, at that time---(*looking at POPS*) unless I'm mistaken, Nancy was Satan wasn't she?

She gazes at him quite calmly.

MARJORIE: I was wrong but my motive was to help.

JACK: It wasn't Satan at work by any chance, disguised as Mrs Trubbs?

MARJORIE (*holding on to herself*) What I didn't do is go round being psychic and playing with lives---

JACK: That's exactly what you did do. You're always doing it! You don't like Lynn Norden because she stood up to you, you couldn't use your direct system with her could you? You couldn't bring out God and his dark assistant with her could you? She got the better of you! Listen, Marjorie, why don't you tell me why you wanted to break up Nancy's marriage? And why you want to mend it now? Or better still (*to POPS*), why don't *you* tell me?
They stare at him.

JACK (*cont.*) Tell me what your purpose is, Marjorie, in dividing them one minute and bringing them together another minute? Tell me what your motive was! (*As if his head is in pain*) Tell me! (*Frantically*) Tell me! Quick! *Baby!* It's a baby! Is that right?

He gets no response from them and walks away tired.

JACK (*cont., in a tone of astonishment*) A baby! (*To POPS*) Where's the john?

POPS: Upstairs, Mr Talbot (*indicating the way with a somewhat quivering hand*).

JACK rushes into the staircase area and disappears. We hear him going upstairs. A door is flung open and we hear him being sick.

POPS (*hushed*) Promise me you're all right.

MARJORIE (*also under her breath*) I'm sick and tired of fighting your battles!

The vomiting continues.

POPS: I'd better get him some salt and water.

He goes to the kitchen. The vomiting ceases and we hear the john flush. JACK'S footsteps on the stairs are slow. He comes in pallid and sweating.

MARJORIE (*with some triumph*) Please sit down. Rest a little.

POPS (*off*) I'm bringing you something Mr Talbot.

JACK (*to MARJORIE*) You'd better start listening to Father Sheffield---

MARJORIE: Shefford. And what would I hear if I listened to him? Let's see if you can eavesdrop on priests too.

POPS returns with a glass of water.

JACK: You need to be exorcised.

POPS (*handing the glass to JACK*) Sip this slowly. It settles the stomach. (*To MARJORIE*) Now let's cool off shall we? We're both

frightened for Hal's marriage but maybe a bit of prayer would be more in order.

JACK (*sipping*) I feel better already.

POPS: Do you often vomit?

JACK: I vomit lies.

MARJORIE: Your own perhaps.

JACK (*to POPS*) Would do me a kindness? If you walk to the end of the drive you'll find a car waiting. Would you ask him to come to the door?

POPS: Of course. Does he need refreshments of some kind?

JACK: He has his own hip flask.

POPS leaves.

MARJORIE: Another of your lies. That you walked here.

He continues to wipe his face and sits down, apparently exhausted.

A ring at the bell. MARJORIE hurries to the front door.

MARJORIE (*cont. off*) Hullo Joyce!

She comes back with JOYCE behind her.

JOYCE (*seeing JACK*) How do you do?

He nods to her.

JOYCE (*to MARJORIE*) Shall I start upstairs?

MARJORIE: Yes please.

JOYCE goes upstairs. The front door opens and POPS returns.

POPS: He was fast asleep.

JACK: As long as they don't breathalise him on the way up. (*Rising*)
Well good bye. I won't shake hands.

POPS: I'm sorry you're so poorly.

JACK: Poorly?

POPS: Sick.

JACK: What are you talking about? I went upstairs to have a pee.

POPS (*as JACK walks to the door*) You've forgotten your rucksack.

JACK disregards this. He leaves with POPS
behind him. We hear the front door open.

MARJORIE picks up the rucksack and opens
it. She tips out tissue paper, nothing else.

We hear a car drive up. The front door
closes again.

POPS returns. He sees the tissue paper.
The car drives away.

JOYCE comes down the stairs.

JOYCE (*quietly*) Marjorie? (*As MARJORIE turns*) There's sick all over the
bathroom floor.

POPS: Our guest was very ill.

JOYCE: I bet *he* wasn't an actor.

POPS: Not a professional one.

JOYCE: No actor I know would do that.

She goes into the kitchen and we hear her
getting utensils, running water.

JOYCE (*cont., off*) All the actors who ever stayed with *me* could hold their
liquor. I never knew anything like *this*. In twelve years of

theatrical rooms there wasn't any being sick except in the right place and then they cleaned round the bowl afterwards and sweetened the air with eau de cologne. Not this one!

She emerges with a pail and mop.

JOYCE (*cont.*) You ought to be more careful with people. (*As she walks up the stairs again*) They only come because you're household names you know!

POPS and MARJORIE are deaf to this, being occupied with their own thoughts, and their resentment of each other.

13.

NANCY's apartment at the Intercontinental. The remains of a baguette lunch for two are on the coffee table.

MAC emerges from the bedroom, where Tosca is playing on the radio. He is half dressed and dialling a number on his mobile phone.

MAC: Hullo?...It's Mac. Is pain in the Headley around?...No I'm not at home, I'm on my idiot phone.

He plants himself in an armchair and stretches out his legs. His slippered feet go onto the coffee table.

MAC (*cont.*) Hullo, Head...It's Mac...I've spoken with Helen Copland who's *very* keen about an interview with Lynn Norden, especially after our long bit yesterday about Marjorie Trougham....Lynn Norden, Hal's current replacement for Nancy Laudenfield....A trim blonde of twenty-five summers and Hal Trougham thinks she's brilliant....I know she's nobody but she's with Hal Trougham day and most nights! His company waits on her hand and foot and she's got a few things to say about Hal's qualities as a sex king which contradict the Nancy story....What? You *must* follow the news my man! Nancy said she had to *sit* on him....Well of course he's an adolescent but he's a British export too, I mean one can't allow him to go down the pipe altogether surely?....(*With a*

theatrical sigh) Very well. But don't blame me if you're caught with your pants down on the appearance of Helen Copland's piece....Where am I? At her apartment....Nancy Laudenfield's apartment....I thought that might shake you a bit....She slipped out to the beauty parlour and she'll be back in a jiffy with that agent of hers, he wants a big piece on this Indian settlements film she's going to do....I don't honestly think we can use any of it. Anyway the film isn't off the ground financially....Yes I know Copland writes for one of the deadlier dailies but don't you see we can come in with a straight follow-up interview with Hal, confirming the stories of his sexual kinghood which Copland will be getting an earfull of from Miss Norden?....I'm not being complicated, simply philosophical!....Also if Nancy's going to get involved in a Hollywood do-good non-starter she may be ready for serious axing soon....*Cynical?* You call my idealism cynical?....So I may encourage Lynn to go ahead with her interview?....Good!....Lynn accepts the common version of Copland as bitch....I know it's true but this is the only way Hal's going to get the support he's looking to us for....Now why should I suddenly go to hell? I only called you up because you're my father figure.

The suite phone rings.

MAC (*cont., jumping up*) I want to catch this, cheers.

He snaps his phone closed and rushes to the fixed one.

MAC (*cont.*) Hullo....What the hell are *you* doing here?....You haven't slept at home for three nights!....But I'm always home by dawn....I know I spend a lot of time here but I have to interview this lady....Yes, again, once more....Well why didn't you say so?

He slams the phone down and dashes to the bedroom. The radio is switched off. He returns putting on a jacket and carrying a pair of shoes.

He quickly clears the lunch debris off the coffee table and throws it into a waste paper basket. The crumbs he blows off the table.

He is just getting to grips with his shoes when

there is a knock on the door.

After getting into them he goes to the door and lets LYNN in. They embrace warmly and he tickles her.

MAC (*cont., looking at her dress*) I detect Hal Trougham's tastes---severe cut---all you need is whips.

LYNN (*swirling for him*) You can't believe what it cost.

MAC: A tiny bit boyish but you can do with that. Yes! Do like! And it adds that little bit of piquancy suitable for one about to enter the big life.

LYNN: You're already writing the piece for her aren't you?

She looks round the room curiously.

MAC (*behind her*) She wants *badly* to do it Lynn.

LYNN (*stopping*) I'm not doing anything with Copland! There's not an actress I know who'd agree to a grilling from her and you're not pushing me into it. I don't trust you, I never did and also---you're fucking her.

MAC: Copland?

They embrace again and laugh.

MAC (*cont.*) You feel so fresh! We should *always* be fucking other people!

LYNN (*breaking*) She might burst in.

MAC: All the better. I can tell her agent here's my girlfriend.

LYNN: Why?

MAC: To stop him thinking it's Nancy. He wants a piece on her relationship with the Indian settlements, I tell him but Ned I'm not a mortician!

Family laugh.

LYNN (*at the bedroom*) Is this where it all happens?

MAC: We don't do it in the kitchen, not on the whole anyway.

LYNN: Wait until it all comes out, Mac the Knife is Laudenfield's lover.

MAC: It can't come out.

LYNN: Why not?

MAC: Because journalists are nobodies. That's why we exact a terrifying revenge darling. It isn't *always* pleasant watching nobody become somebody entirely through our efforts. (*Watching her as she walks about the room*) Cup of coffee? Something from the fridge?

LYNN: I'm serious about that interview.

MAC: Because---?

LYNN: Because you want it so badly. You dropped Hal in the shit, you played a dirty trick on Nancy.

MAC (*still watching her*) You *are* developing.

LYNN: What do you mean?

MAC: Somebodies are those who when they speak expect to be listened to, and you're becoming one of them.

LYNN: You're looking at me in that awful appraising way.

MAC: If Copland wants a thing badly she gets it sooner or later, directly or otherwise, and that wouldn't be to your advantage. Right now you must stop thinking of yourself as an actress looking for parts. None of this is about plays or literature or any form of art at all. It's a matter simply of getting your name out. If that doesn't happen nothing else will, and if it does happen you can tell even yourself that you're working for artistic reasons.

LYNN: You creep.

MAC: Don't worry about whether she's going to give you a negative image or not, you've got to start somewhere. Theatre and films

are fashion industry and if they aren't they flop, even Shakespeare. That's why bad actresses can hit the top more easily than dedicated ones, and better than bad actresses are actresses who can't act at all. You would have been better starting from porn movies.

She's still amused.

LYNN: I should be bad like Nancy?

MAC: She's better than most. But nothing like you.

LYNN (*looking at him curiously*) I'm out of work because I'm good?

MAC: Yes but not because audiences aren't serious any more and all your other crap. It's because you scare people with your intensity. They run a mile when they feel all this awe and reverence in you for the theatre. They're mostly only fucking around.

LYNN: Am I still there, intense and out of work?

MAC: No. You're *in*. And you know how you got there.

LYNN: I fucked.

MAC: Exactly. You could have read for him for twenty years but not until I wrote my nasty little piece did you have the ghost of a chance even to do what you've just said you do with him.

She turns away from him reflectively.

LYNN: You don't want to name what I do with him.

MAC: Did he tell you about our lunch together?

LYNN: No.

MAC: He feels I've been disloyal.

LYNN: He said you were at school together.

MAC: Did he now?

LYNN: You were pretty close friends, he said.

MAC: Anyway he wants to have his say about Nancy's big lie.

LYNN: Perhaps she wasn't lying.

MAC (*sharp as a needle*) Is that your experience with him?

LYNN: A man isn't the same with every woman is he?

MAC: Of course you can't come out with a statement to that effect. It has to be done with a little bit of tact. Copland has tact. Bitches do. They know just when and when not.

LYNN: You don't mean I'm supposed to tell Copland what he's like in bed?

MAC: Lesson No 1. Never just sit and answer her questions. Think out what she's after, look for what she wants---you'll find the answer's in her question. Don't let her have it. She's out for herself, not you. She smiles with her front eyes but her back ones never blink and never pity.

LYNN: I haven't agreed to it yet.

MAC: And never tell lies because they catch up with you, journalists love them. There are many dishonest ways of telling the truth and you'll learn what they are.

The suite-phone rings again. He hurries to it.

MAC: Hulloo....Yes indeed!....Where are you?....Wonderful!

He slaps the phone down.

MAC (*cont.*) Nancy's bringing up a man from Leeds university who knows about Indian settlements, plus the agent. You'll hate it!

She's already on her way to the door.

MAC (*cont., running to her and taking hold of her*) Are we separating?

LYNN: No. Why?

MAC: Thank god!

They hold each other close and kiss.

MAC (*cont., as she opens the door*) Why not spend an evening at home---we could dine out?

LYNN: I'll try but he's getting very possessive.

MAC (*watching her go*) Just like Nancy.

14.

HAL TROUGHAM's Highgate patio. POPS is lounging in a chair, dressed for town---meaning for him the Garrick.

There are voices off and laughter. Obviously quite a large group.

He gets impatient and starts pacing about. A door slams upstairs and there is the sound of someone bounding down the stairs.

HAL bursts in.

HAL: Sorry dad. Script conference---completely unreal, none of us believes in it but it's something to do. This is about mums isn't it?

POPS: I'll say.

HAL: She phoned.

POPS: She's got that huge black crucifix round her neck again.

HAL: Yes I heard.

POPS: It's worse than that. She's got hold of her mother's powder puff and she's wearing black.

HAL: Oh my god.

HAL sinks into a chair.

POPS: In other words she means to get her way.

HAL: Well, we'll see if we can accomodate her.

POPS (*gazing at him with a certain pride*) I'm glad you feel like that. I hardly had a right to expect it.

HAL (*jumping up again*) What can I get you?

POPS: I just had lunch at the Garrick. Also I'm staying in town. There's a new play coming up---maybe. Anyway even if it isn't I'm going to *invent* it, I'm not going back to that bloody house. Thank god my flat only has one bedroom.

HAL: She'll need that one bed when she comes up for Pattersnake.

POPS: Bugger Pattersnake *and* Lavinia Trubbs, that's *my* flat and she can bloody well rent another one. I'm not having her do her Satan stuff round me. Jack Talbot was down with us by the way.

HAL: *What?*

POPS: She got to him through Nancy. He came down and spewed all over the place.

HAL: You make me nervous pacing round like that.

POPS also flops into a chair.

HAL: What do you mean 'spewed'?

POPS: All over the bathroom floor. She's got it in for your Lynn Norden all right. You know what she's threatening? She says she's going to walk out of Pattersnake and tell the press it's because your marriage broke up and Miss Norden was responsible for it.

HAL: The press has already been on to that one.

POPS: What do you mean?

HAL: In Sunday's paper---

POPS: No wonder she cleared them away!

HAL: It said Marjorie Trougham went to Lynn Norden and accused her of breaking up the Trougham marriage. By the way, Lynn tells Mac everything.

POPS: Who's Mac?

HAL: Malcom Mackindle.

POPS (*respectfully*) Really? He's given me some bloody good reviews.

HAL: He hasn't me.

POPS: Well he isn't films is he?

HAL: He's worse, he's smear journalism.

POPS: That Lynn girl's quite a sweetie isn't she? I looked her up in Spotlight. Nice figure.

HAL (*patiently*) Yes Pops.

POPS: Full length photo, which is unusual. It's ghastly living with an obsessional character, Hal. Father Shefford says she's possessed.

HAL: She usually comes out of it all right.

POPS: Jack Talbot rumbled her.

HAL: I imagine he would.

POPS: It was your mother who took Nancy along to the film people, not her agent.

HAL: My flop helped I suppose.

POPS: No before that. She thought Nancy should move on.

HAL: From me.

POPS: Yes.

HAL: I wish you wouldn't tell me this sort of thing.

POPS: Forewarned is forearmed.

HAL: I expect so.

POPS: She was doing herself good too. You know, from a big television role into films, it's done all the time.

HAL: Yes. So where does my marriage come in?

POPS: She loves you and Nancy and wants you there week-ends, she likes to think of us as leading a sort of Noël Coward life---you know, driving down after the last show on Saturday and everybody reading the notices over late breakfast. It's what she rose from the working classes to get and get it she will.

HAL: Noël Coward was loyal to his family I heard.

POPS (*with a hesitant glance*) It won't be good news for you, getting back with Nancy?

HAL offers no answer.

POPS (*cont., getting up*) The problem is your mother's got no conscience. That's why she hates Graham Greene, he was on about conscience all the time.

HAL: Has the doctor been?

POPS: Yes. He says to let her go through it.

HAL: Has she started her Greek chorus voice?

POPS (*on his way out*) Of course. (*Returning*) I'm going to leave her by the way.

HAL: What?

POPS: I'm going to leave your mother. You know I love Hetty Perceval. Hetty's leaving New York eventually and I'm thinking of getting a flat here for the two of us.

HAL: You can't do that!

POPS: Why not?

HAL: Well what about all this business of Noël Coward week-ends?

POPS: I want you and Nancy to stay together, I'm with your mother on that and---if you do stay together, if you make a nice home again, Hetty Perceval and I could make some other arrangement, we could still have a place together but under wraps if you know what I mean, let sleeping dogs lie.

More laughter off.

POPS (*indicating upstairs*) Who's paying for all this?

HAL: I am. And I'm running out of money.

POPS (*going*) My agent's expecting me. Call me at the flat this evening.

POPS returns once more.

POPS: And don't *brood*.

HAL stares after him. More laughter off.

15.

NANCY LAUDENFIELD's suite. NANCY, dressed for cleavage front and back, bustles about clearing full ashtrays and straightening rugs and opening the windows.

MAC is dressed modishly and is pacing nervously, hands in and out of pockets.

NANCY dashes to the bedroom and comes back with an air spray.

MAC (*watching her*) Are my armpits that bad?

NANCY (*school-fun laugh*) I asked Jack Talbot over. He lives round the corner, Shepherd's Market.

MAC (*as she sprays*) He makes you feel safe?

NANCY: I don't want her kicking you in the balls, that's what! And Jack can prevent it.

There is a quiet knock on the door.

NANCY (*hushed*) That's Jack, I know by the knock. Isn't he extraordinary, the way he appears like this!

He opens the door. LYNN is standing there with a rolled-up newspaper in her hand. She is dressed as before, in the new outfit HAL bought for her. She simply gazes at MAC. Then, seeing NANCY, she walks into the apartment.

LYNN (*going close to NANCY as MAC closes the door, eyes fixed on her*)
Did you read this?

NANCY (*backing*) Read what?

LYNN (*screaming at her*) This headline! THE WORST ACTRESS SINCE
CLEOPATRA!

LYNN delivers NANCY a terrific blow round the chops with the rolled up paper.

MAC rushes forward.

MAC: Look, Lynn---!

LYNN (*turning on him with immense fury*) Don't you touch me you pile of
shit!

She hits NANCY again. NANCY tries to protect herself by grabbing LYNN's dress but fails to get a grip. LYNN gives her another blow, then repeated body blows.

MAC rushes up and gets hold of LYNN but

she gives him a kick in the balls that sends him hobbling away.

LYNN (*to Nancy*) Is that what *you* think too? The worst actress since Cleopatra?

NANCY: I didn't write it! (*Matching the hysterical yelling*) I don't know what you're talking about! Get away from me!

LYNN: *You're* the worst since Cleopatra! (*Grabbing hold of her*) Even your husband says it (*as she rains blows on her*)---she can't act---she's got something vulgar in her face (*pulling her about*)!

NANCY (*as she starts hitting out*) You *bitch*! You're jealous that's all!

LYNN: You fat, stupid lump of shit!

MAC rushes between them but gets the worst of it again. He gyrates round them trying to get a purchase on one or the other but their arms seem to be everywhere, intent now on damage to HAL's haute couture gifts to them both.

NANCY (*cont., to MAC*) Don't just *dance*! Call the police!

LYNN (*with a good purchase on NANCY'S dress, which, given the cleavage, offers easier grip*) I'll give (*blow*) you (*blow*) police (*blow*)!

LYNN pulls and the whole dress rips. NANCY's cleavage has collapsed. She starts hitting LYNN for all she is worth and LYNN's dress too comes unstuck---NANCY's skirt is suddenly ripped off, with MAC doing his frantic dance round them.

The two women lose their balance and fall to the floor. There they struggle, rolling over each other with little screams of pain.

They are down, almost, to their lingerie, with MAC even less able to get a purchase than

before. The phone bell rings. He hesitates as to whether to leave them or not. Finally he dashes to the phone, lifts it quickly off the cradle and puts it back again.

Suddenly NANCY makes an outraged cry.

NANCY: It's *blood!* It's her dirty menstrual blood! Mac! Mac!

LYNN (*attacking her*) You started me up again!

This makes LYNN renew her blows. There is heavy banging on the door---from a stick, it seems. They stop fighting.

MAC (*calling*) Who is it?

NANCY: It's all over me! You dirty bitch! It's your filthy monthly blood!

JACK (*off*) Open up!

MAC, dishevelled, opens the door. JACK TALBOT walks in leaning on a stick, looking the worse for wear. He is dressed in a summer suit---a pop star about to be hospitalized for an overdose. The women lie still, panting and sobbing.

NANCY (*calling out to JACK, like a little girl*) She got her blood all over me.

JACK (*looking*) Oh dear, it is rather bloody isn't it?

NANCY: You should have come before!

JACK: I've been too poorly (*as he sits down*).

MAC: Good morning.

JACK: You got a nasty kick in the balls didn't you?

The women continue to lie there.

JACK (*cont.*) What price photo opportunities now. Usually I enjoy brawls but I was afraid all the blood would give me a turn.

MAC too sits down, exhausted. LYNN starts stuffing her torn dress between her legs to staunch the flow.

NANCY (*to JACK*) She attacked me. I didn't say a thing. I didn't write the article.

JACK: Nor did she.

NANCY: The article attacked *me*, not her.

LYNN (*still prone*) That article called me The Worst Actress Since Cleopatra!

NANCY (*sitting up*) When you grow up, if you ever do, you'll realise you can't control what they write! As for letting yourself be interviewed by that green-eyed monster Copland you deserve what you get! Also you dropped me in the shit with that interview!

MAC (*quietly*) It was my doing, I'm afraid.

NANCY: Oh we all know that.

JACK: You two should be fighting him by rights.

NANCY: I don't want to fight *anybody*!

JACK: Of course you don't, you've got all the awards! She hasn't even got a walk-on part yet!

NANCY (*looking at him for the first time*) Oh, Jack, you do look ill. What's the matter?

JACK: I've been bad ever since I threw up at your mother-in-law's place. (*To MAC*) May I call you Mac?

MAC: Of course. I'm sorry we're meeting for the first time like this.

JACK: I'm not because it's graphic. You know what those two are there to prove, don't you, that words can sometimes be deeds?

MAC: It's a reminder.

JACK: I never read such nonsense in all my life. That one (*referring to*

NANCY) says she sits on him, he says she doesn't, she (*indicating LYNN*) says he doesn't and the headline's THE WORST ACTRESS SINCE CLEOPATRA. Now what has it all got it to do with itself?

MAC: Copland's editor is an asshole. He obviously thinks Cleopatra was an actress.

NANCY (with a scream) It's on the carpet!

LYNN: Oh do stop being the baby girl! Have you got any sanitary towels?

NANCY (jumping up) I hate to say it but yes, and that's only to save my chairs. Not that I'm inviting you to stay.

She flounces out to the bedroom.

JACK (to MAC) Did I get the article right?

MAC: I'm sorry?

LYNN: He means he didn't see the article, so did he get it right?

MAC: You didn't read it?

LYNN (momently furious) Well of course he didn't! He doesn't have to see things to see them!

MAC stares at her in perplexity.

NANCY returns, dressed now in a dressing gown, with a virgin packet of sanitary towels which she flings at *LYNN* with one hand while she applies a hot wet flannel to the carpet with the other.

LYNN quickly opens the packet.

NANCY (to LYNN) There's another bathroom over there.

LYNN slips a sanitary towel under her knickers to join the tattered clothing. She

then Chinese-walks left to the spare bathroom. The door closes behind her.

JACK (*to NANCY*) That looks worse.

NANCY: I know.

JACK (*homely, half to MAC and half to NANCY*) It isn't the expense of getting the carpet redone, it's the recriminating nature of blood isn't it? You can hardly call the desk and say there's blood on the floor. You being a star shouldn't menstruate on the floor and you could hardly put it on Miss Norden, I mean all you need is the press getting hold of it and it's further grist to the mill isn't it?

MAC: The press *won't* get hold of it.

JACK: Who told *you* to speak?

Something smashes in the bathroom.

NANCY: That sounds like my eau de cologne. It's a quart bottle.

The bathroom door bursts open.

LYNN: I can't put these clothes back on! You've torn them to shreds!

NANCY: You tore mine too!

JACK: I think you'd better get Miss Norden something to wear. She can't leave the hotel like that---(*with a look at MAC*) we don't want it getting to the papers.

NANCY (*returning to her bedroom*) I'll find you something!

JACK: Did you just break a quart bottle of eau de Cologne?

LYNN: Yes.

JACK: Temper?

LYNN: No I slipped on my blood.

NANCY returns with a one-piece jersey dress.

JACK: That's rather warm for the season isn't it?

NANCY: It's all I've got.

JACK (*as LYNN returns to the bathroom*) I bet it doesn't suit you either.

NANCY: I hope it doesn't.

JACK; That's what I mean.

NANCY sits on the floor by JACK.

NANCY (*peering at him*) You've got make-up on. You're not sick at all!

JACK (*gently pulling at the neck of her dressing gown and peering down*)
They're intact at least. Mustn't let them come to harm must we?

MAC stares.

NANCY (*to MAC*) I think we all need some bubbly don't you?

MAC: Yes!

He hurries to the sideboard and fetches out a bottle already in a bucket. He then gets glasses.

MAC: I don't think I'm squeamish but I don't like to see two people I respect fighting on the floor.

JACK: You think your respect for them should elevate them to non-combatants? I don't see why it would. Lynn Norden was fighting for her territory.

NANCY: I'm not in her territory.

JACK: That's just what you are. Eh Mac?

MAC busies himself pouring champagne. LYNN emerges from the bathroom. The one-piece doesn't suit her but she never looks grotesque.

MAC (*cont.*) Just in time for some bubbly.

LYNN: I think you'd better ask the hostess about that hadn't you?

NANCY: There's a glass for you and we're all going to stop being silly aren't we Jack?

JACK: Yes we are. (*To LYNN*) Come and sit here (*pats the place at his side*).

She does so and he folds her in his arms.

MAC puts the tray of filled glasses on the coffee table and we see him nervously fiddling in his pocket for a cigarette.

JACK (*to MAC*) I don't want smoke by the way, not on top of a guppy tummy.

MAC: I'm sorry, Jack.

JACK: Talbot. My daughter calls me Talbot.

MAC: Talbot.

JACK: Jack for strangers.

NANCY nearly expresses her snort of laughter aloud.

JACK (*cont., touching LYNN's face with the tip of his fingers and tasting them*) Tears are very salty, I mean unusually so. As much as the condiment itself. (*Intimately, close to LYNN*) Now I didn't expect that, my sweetheart, not in an actor. Actors' tears are real in a different way aren't they, so I didn't really expect them to have any salt. May I quote St Paul? I usually do at this point. 'They do not do the thing they most do show, Who, moving others, are themselves as stone.'

MAC: Shakespeare.

JACK (*still to LYNN*) He's as sharp as a bloody needle, isn't he?

MAC: The Sonnets.

JACK (*still to LYNN*) 'What is your substance, whereof are you made?'
(*kissing her tear*).

MAC: Sonnets again.

JACK: Are you going to give us a drink or do a lecture?

MAC hands round glasses of champagne with a smile.

JACK (*cont.*) Let's drink quietly to a room full of ghosts.

They drink.

NANCY: Nobody forced you to do that interview, Lynn.

LYNN: It just happens to be the first big piece ever written about me---!

A knock on the door. They freeze. NANCY goes to the door.

NANCY (*at the door*) Who is it?

MARJORIE (*off*) It's your mother-in-law.

MAC (*flying to the bedroom*) Woops!

He disappears behind the door behind the bedroom door, glass in hand.

NANCY (*opening the apartment door*) Darling!

MARJORIE appears heavily powdered in a long black outfit which by no means does her any disfavour.

JACK has already risen. He goes to her and takes her hand and raises it to his lips. She accepts this with apparent graciousness.

MARJORIE: Good morning Mr Talbot.

NANCY watches this with surprise. JACK

escorts MARJORIE to a chair.

MARJORIE (*cont., stopping to stare at the debris, to NANCY*) Whatever have you been up to?

JACK: She got Miss Norden's monthlies all over her.

MARJORIE (*looking at LYNN*) I see. (*To NANCY*) Has Pops been round?

NANCY: We spoke this morning.

MARJORIE: You were at the Garrick with him yesterday.

NANCY: For a coffee.

MARJORIE: After a lunch at Marco's, however. (*Fixing her*) You realise, don't you, that we can't afford a break-up, *any* of us?

NANCY: Yes I do.

MARJORIE: He's threatening to set up with that lunatic cabaret woman Hetty Perceval. In his one-bed flat. Much too small for a creature like that. Her hips alone!

NANCY (*hushed*) I hope it doesn't happen.

MARJORIE: And so does he (*indicating JACK*). Isn't that so, Mr Talbot?

JACK: My hopes have no influence.

MARJORIE (*trying to suppress her wish to be impolite*) You can arrange it can't you?

JACK: I already have.

MARJORIE (*touching her crucifix, to NANCY*) Also if that Mac the Knife gets hold of even a whisper you know we're finished don't you? The Americans accept a certain number of peccadilloes but not a non-stop barrage.

NANCY: I understand, yes.

MARJORIE: So does he incidentally (*indicating JACK*).

NANCY: I imagine he would.

JACK is drinking champagne.

JACK (*suddenly withdrawing his glass from his lips, to MARJORIE*) I'm sorry, can I get you some bubbly?

MARJORIE: I've nothing to celebrate Mr Talbot.

JACK: Don't *you* start crying too, all those streaks down your powder.

MARJORIE (*to LYNN, in order to divert her own tears*) I saw the little piece about you Miss Norden.

JACK (*to MARJORIE*) Those were *your* words.

MARJORIE: What words?

JACK: The Worst Actress Since Cleopatra. You spoke them to Miss Copland when she told you 'I'm interviewing Lynn Norden'. You said 'Not the worst actress since Cleopatra?'.

He restrains LYNN from starting a fight with MARJORIE.

MARJORIE: The piece would have been nothing without those words. Copland told me so herself.

JACK: I agree. So does Miss Norden.

MARJORIE: She doesn't appear to. The question is whether she'll be able to rise to the challenge of world-status stardom. Might I suggest that even the million-dollar offer that's been made to you won't do it unless you change your attitudes?

A silence.

MARJORIE (*cont.*) No one here knows about it? Not even our epistemologist? (*Looking round at the silent faces*) So I'm the bearer of unbelievable tidings? I didn't mean to be. I came here to see my daughter-in-law. I've only *heard* it, mind. Actually from Hetty Perceval who happens to be rattling her cage in New York, where the news broke. Hetty and I keep up.

LYNN: An offer from whom?

MARJORIE: A New York fashion house. They haven't contacted you? I mean we really will be going to the newspapers soon for our latest personal news. Are my piles short of Operable, the Express says yes but the Telegraphy is grave. The New York Times had an ironical half-inch on it. The worst actress since Cleopatra will now do the cat-walk, they said.

LYNN: That's one thing I'll *never* do again!

NANCY (*to JACK*) Is it true?

JACK: How the hell should I know?

MARJORIE: The piece quoted your perfect measurements.

LYNN: Not that I believe you. Jack would have told us.

MARJORIE: He hasn't said no. The headline, namely my invention, seems to have raised you up in the world. Now just you try to climb down again!

LYNN: That's what I'm going to do!

MARJORIE: Will she succeed Mr Talbot?

JACK: I think not.

MARJORIE (*to LYNN*) Climb down from a million and a half dollars? More difficult than attaining them, believe me!

JACK: What a peculiar triumph for you, Marjorie.

MARJORIE: Not one I intended.

JACK: Perhaps someone higher did.

MARJORIE: Apparently her photo did it. A full-length one.

She gets up.

MARJORIE (*cont., to LYNN*) I hope you realise you don't need Hal any more. You've got what you wanted. My family did it for you. Now you

can let us go. (*Getting up*) There'll be no need for you to fight on the floor again. Unless in a film of course.

Again JACK escorts her.

MARJORIE (*turning to NANCY*) When are you leaving for LA again?

NANCY: This evening.

MARJORIE: I think Hal should join you.

NANCY (*with a shrug*) If he wants to.

MARJORIE: Ask Mr Talbot to see to that.

JACK sees her out.

NANCY: I've always admired her exits.

LYNN: Just what I was thinking.

MAC appears from the bedroom.

NANCY: What did you go for?

MAC: As a schoolboy I was terrified of Marjorie. So were all the others. And I'm interviewing her Sunday. I like to keep your powder dry.

NANCY: Were you listening?

MAC: No.

LYNN: *Were* you?

JACK: Not for all of it. Not the last part.

NANCY: Lynn's got an amazing offer.

JACK (*to MAC*) Before we go into all that do you mind taking Lynn downstairs? I need to be alone with Nancy for a moment. Then we'll join you. (*To LYNN*) You don't mind do you?

LYNN (*also getting up*) I'm not sure I'm even conscious!

MAC (*looking from one to the other*) What's the offer? From Marjorie Trougham (*looking at LYNN questioningly*)?

JACK: Only in the sense that she caused it.

MAC (*to LYNN*) What offer?

LYNN: One you missed because you were here all night.

JACK (*seeing them to the door*) We'll be with you in a moment.

LYNN edges MAC out. JACK closes the door after them.

NANCY: I don't think *I'd* like to join them.

JACK (*holding out his arms to her*) Oh you'll come round to it!

NANCY (*accepting his arms with great relief*) May I wipe the make-up off?

She breaks from him and hurries to the bedroom. He seems to shake off his sickly appearance, stands his full height and drinks down almost a glass of champagne.

She returns with a cloth and begins wiping his face. As she does so he very gently draws her to him and they kiss and embrace ravenously. They whirl each other slowly into the bedroom, a hazardous journey because they are so hungry for each other.

We hear their grateful cries from the bedroom, as if they had waited too long.

16.

HAL's Highgate patio. A rushing sound as HAL leaps down the stairs and enters clutching a mobile phone to his ears.

He looks round everywhere.

HAL (*into the phone*) But where the hell *are* you?....I know you said downstairs but where downstairs? I'm in the patio....Why didn't you say so? You behave just like an actor!

MAC comes in from the opposite side also holding a mobile phone to his ear. They burst out laughing.

MAC: I meant downstairs in the street. The door's open by the way.

HAL: It always is. Drink?

MAC: No, business.

HAL: Fire away.

MAC: Anybody else at home?

HAL: I haven't seen Lynn for at least three days.

MAC: You know about the offer? Your mother didn't tell you?

HAL: She's not speaking to me.

MAC: I've talked to Dupoisier in New York twice this morning.

HAL: What is? And what's Dupoisier?

MAC: Couture. Haute. *Very* haute.

HAL: An offer for *me*?

MAC: For Lynn you chump! A million and a half dollars.

HAL: But---!

MAC: Be patient, you silly little man.

HAL folds his arms and sits down in burlesque patience.

MAC (*cont.*) Unbeknownst to the British public, who were asleep due to

Atlantic time differences, Lynn Norden's photo travelled the world two days ago, and her perfect measurements did the trick.

HAL: What---produced a million-dollar contract? That's impossible!

MAC: Only in *your* logic. In mine it isn't. Particularly if the photo's accompanied by a Copland piece headlined *The Worst Actress since Cleopatra*.

HAL: I'm not getting you.

MAC: You're a hermit so you didn't see the Copland piece on Lynn. Actually it was all about your sexual proclivities---

HAL: What again?

MAC: Very congratulatory, as a matter of fact. Lynn laid the Nancy legend of your passive role to rest. But your sexual proclivities got lost.

HAL: I'm getting used to that.

MAC: Hal.

HAL: Yes?

MAC: Have you been sniffing?

HAL: A little.

MAC: That piece on Lynn is really a family picture. Your mum comes into it, even Pops squeezes in with a mention of his Broadway flop. For an instant of time---right now---your family commands world attention. But, here's the twist, and it's a particularly difficult one for your mother to follow: Lynn Norden is the centre piece of that family group, she's the one the world is concentrating on, albeit that in fact she occupies but a marginal place in the loathsome Trougham tribe. But world attention is you need for a model, apart from good measurements. The photo's been syndicated all over not only the world but Mars. We in Britain are always a little late in recognising our own celebrities so it has only just broken here.

HAL: So I've lost yet another leading lady.

- MAC: You *do* become a damned fool when you take the white medicine don't you? Also these solitudes of yours are badly timed. Remarkably, your mother was the first to know about the offer. From Hetty Perceval.
- HAL: From Hetty! She's round the bend!
- MAC: Not this time. Her quote was two million dollars and it's actually one and a half but apart from that she was deadly accurate.
- HAL: Of course I'm *entirely* happy for Lynn but why the hell are you bringing me this news in such a state of excitement?
- MAC: Because you, my dishonoured friend, are going to make Lynn's position in your family even more secure.
- HAL: I'm not going to marry her if that's what you mean.
- MAC: No, *I'm* going to do that.
- HAL: You're not serious. *Are* you?
- MAC: Yes I am.
- HAL: Congratulations.
- MAC: Thank you. And I'm going to see that my future wife doesn't make a mess of her good fortune. *You're* going to help me put daily, hourly pressure on that girl to accept the Dupoisier offer.
- HAL: Do you mean to say she's refusing it?
- MAC: Yes I do.
- HAL: Good god. I thought that sort of thing had died out long ago. You don't mean she prefers art do you, or truth or dying for her country or anything like that? Fancy refusing a bloody silly offer that involves a bit of arse-wagging at best!
- MAC: Don't be funny.
- HAL: I mean quite obviously she should cat-walk for the rest of her life.

MAC: If you care to shut up I'll go on with what I was saying. My future wife and my dearest friend are going to rise together, and this time you're going to stay there.

HAL: Where?

MAC: At the top. You're going to put out a public statement today.

HAL: What about?

MAC: Your new project.

HAL: I haven't got one.

MAC: You're going to think one out. And the public statement is going to say this is our next film, mine and Lynn Norden's.

HAL: I'll think it over.

MAC: What are you going to think over?

HAL: The public statement.

MAC: I've already put it out.

HAL: You unscrupulous bastard.

MAC: Thank you. I don't read newspapers but I imagine it's all over them. The arts sections of course but it helps gossip.

HAL: And what did I say exactly?

MAC: That you would be announcing your next film, with Lynn Norden, within hours.

HAL: Except that Lynn's going to refuse the Dupoisier offer and her world coverage will shrink to nothing.

MAC: Exactly. But you are going to prevent that. It's her bloody integrity again. She's really determined not to touch the deal. What she doesn't know is that I've already got her agent working on the contract. I mean she's not even flattered that her photo's gone round the world! She says 'I'm an actress, it's all I want to be'!

HAL: It's the truth surely?

MAC: Modelling's acting. It's just one more part, a bloody silly one but so are a lot of so-called serious parts. Wait, wait, wait, this is about you and your career too! You've got to get at her *through* the integrity, since she's encumbered with it. It's the only language she speaks. So help her speak it. A big part. A big film. With you. *Now*. On condition she basks in worldwide publicity as a rag-trade ghoul for a year.

HAL: But I haven't even got a company!

MAC: This is how you make a new one. Rats always come back to a refurbished ship. Her name and your name together can do it. Listen to it---Hal Trougham and Lynn Norden.

HAL: It sounds horrible.

MAC: It does rather, doesn't it? But we'll learn to live with it. So what's the project?

HAL: I honestly have an empty mind on the subject.

MAC: That's the best thing to start from. I know my Hal. She'll do the modelling if she can see it as advance publicity for the film, and don't forget that every time she walks the walk it's *your* advance publicity too, every turn of the bum brings another bank in.

HAL: I'll try and think of something.

MAC: What? Is that how enthusiastic you are? Well do what you bloody well like, you bastard, but if you go down, you and her, through your mutual pigheadedness, she with her integrity and you with your self-pity, I'll join in the blood-hunt, you'll never get another job as long as you live, I'll pan every bloody thing you do, even pantomimes, I'll fix you two buggers for good!

He leaves. HAL continues to gaze before him as if he heard nothing.

At the Trougham house in the Cotswolds. The settee has been turned into a bed. POPS, in crumpled pyjamas and a tatty dressing gown, is sitting on the bed, his head bowed. He is listening to the frightful fracas from the floor above. Furniture is being kicked about, objects are flung to the floor, glass crashes. With each crash he winces. A final claimactic crash sends him running to the staircase area.

POPS (*shouting*) What are you trying to do for christ sake---?

At once there are stamping feet from above. Someone is rushing down, vengefully, and POPS instinctively draws back, though he corrects himself at once.

MARJORIE rushes towards him in an equal state of dishevellment, her hair down and her dressing gown open.

MARJORIE: I'm lonely for human beings, I don't count you human, I want my family back!

POPS (*bawling in a way that makes her involuntarily cringe too*) You've driven them all away you ugly bag! You as good as told Nancy Laudenfield get out---

MARJORIE: Don't you dare name Nancy---!

A ring at the bell. She turns and dashes back up the stairs with no concern for physical dignity.

Another ring at the bell.

POPS (*calling*) Who is it?

No reply.

POPS (*cont.*) Joyce?

No reply. He ties the cord of his dressing gown and smooths his hair as he walks to the front door.

POPS (*off*) Who are you?

MAC (*off*) Mackindle, I'm interviewing your wife.

POPS (*off*) She didn't tell me anything.

MAC (*off*) It was arranged some time ago.

POPS (*off*) You'd better come in. (*As they come in*) She's in no state for an interview.

MAC walks in behind POPS, whose gaze is on the ground.

MAC (*to the staircase area*) Good morning Mrs Trougham.

MARJORIE comes in, only a little tidied up.

MARJORIE: Good morning Mr Mackindle.

POPS (*staring at MAC*) You must be Mackindle the theatre critic!

MARJORIE goes to her customary chair, stage right.

MARJORIE (*cont.*) I expect you're thinking this is the naked truth at last.

MAC (*also sitting, in the lack of solicitation to do so from his hosts*) My editor looks after the captions.

POPS (*looking at her with disgust*) Is that how you present yourself to Malcom Mackindle?

MARJORIE (*flaring up at once*) What about you in that filthy dressing gown and your bed still unmade!

POPS: My bed's upstairs but you've smashed my room to pieces you smelly slut!

MARJORIE: I told you before---!

POPS (*with a determination that surprises MAC*) You never told me about this interview did you? Are you throwing your career away now like you threw away your son's?

MARJORIE: You can see it written on the kitchen door---that's where the daily schedule sheet is and you know it!

POPS: Schedule sheet my arse! In future you tell me, with your rotten mouth, what's happening in this house or I'll bloody well throttle you! (*As she starts to speak*) Fuck your schedule sheet!

MARJORIE appears to be going through a crisis, trembling all over and going red.

MARJORIE (*frantically*) Blasphemer! Blasphemer!

POPS (*burlesquing her cry*) 'Blasphemer'!

MARJORIE (*stung non-theatrically for the first time and rasping her words out between narrowed lips*) Do you want me to say it? Shall I tell him why the family had to be broken up? Why Nancy had to be sent away and Hal pulled down, do you want me to tell him here and now? Or will you let me have this interview in piece, and clear out of this room, and preferably the house?

POPS (*with a menace quite equal to hers*) No I won't let you have this interview in peace---it's as much mine as yours! And go ahead, tell him the reason you lured Nancy out of your son's own company and then took his company away! Tell him, go on!

But she won't.

MARJORIE (*quietened, very pale and cold in the lips*) I took nothing away. The Potting Shed is public domain. More or less (*on the verge of tears*).

POPS (*relentless*) But you're starring in The Potting Shed, so's Nancy Laudenfield, so am I!

Another thunderbolt for MAC.

MARJORIE: He had to be isolated, he was getting into flop after flop.

POPS: No, you won't say a word that implicates *me* because it would interfere with your Hollywood plans, the Americans might draw the line at that as you've often said, they might say enough is enough, (*quoting her*) peccadilloes, yes they're grist to the mill but a public scandal not. You see how near I go to naming it?

MARJORIE (*with rare sincerity*) I see the better how unscrupulous you are.

POPS (*to MAC*) You're taking all this very coolly.

MAC: As a matter of fact other people's rows have a calming effect on me. For once I'm not to blame.

POPS: Oh! Still, I expect a bit of sang froid helps too.

MAC: There's one thing I've forgotten in all this shouting. I have a photographer outside and I think there was some talk about getting few shots of Nancy's bedroom and also perhaps the bathroom where Jack Talbot vomited.

POPS (*to MARJORIE*) My god, you're a real sink aren't you---the lengths you'll go to!

MAC: Why, doesn't a photo or two suit?

POPS: It's not my interview.

MARJORIE: He means it's a good idea.

MAC (*getting up*) So may I get the photographer? He's down at the pub.

POPS: How does Talbot's vomit come into it?

MAC: The American press follows anything about Jack.

POPS (*to MARJORIE*) And remember how tactful you were with *him*.

MAC leaves.

They sit in silence.

MARJORIE: I have to tell you, you disgust me Pops.

POPS: You haven't slept for two days, now go to bed, put your ear plugs in and as for your disgust I reciprocate that with a bit extra too.

MARJORIE: What have we done Pops?

POPS: Entered the hearts of millions of people the world over. The heart's where hell lies. We've gone to hell, that's all.

MARJORIE: What did I tell him?

POPS (*shaking his head as he gets up*) You're worried about the interview.

He draws the curtains over the big picture window closed.

POPS (*cont.*) We're a quarrelling family. That's how the world knows us. You did your work very nicely. That's what the directors say, you always press the right buttons when the time comes.

He turns to her.

POPS: Now get to bed.

MARJORIE: What about the photographer?

POPS: He can wait at the pub till this evening. My ear plugs are going in too.

She leaves. He settles in his bed and pulls the covers over himself with a sigh. He is just getting his ear plugs from the floor when MARJORIE reappears.

MARJORIE: Hail, Mary, Mother of God.

POPS: Hail, Mary, Mother of God.

They cross themselves and she leaves again.

POPS (*cont., putting his ear plugs in*) Mind all that glass under your feet.

The highrise apartment at night. LYNN and JACK TALBOT are holding glasses that have just been filled with champagne. The bottle is sitting in an ice bucket on the coffee table. JACK is now in the pink of health, dressed with less care than we have yet seen him. He could be mistaken for anybody. As to LYNN, she is back in the blouse and slacks of domestic penance.

An ambulance siren is heard far below. It is night. They sip reflectively in their chairs.

LYNN: I'm going to leave here. Buy somewhere in Kensington. Be deliciously alone.

JACK: I wouldn't do that.

They sip their champagne, gaze before them.

LYNN (*with a smile*) When you said that this room suddenly looked beautiful to me.

JACK: You're going to need all the money you've got to hire a top PR outfit.

LYNN: What?

JACK: Where do you think all Nancy's money's gone, and Marjorie Trougham's? If you want coverage you pay for it. It's your only chance.

LYNN: Of what?

JACK: Of ever acting. Fame first, then the awards, then perhaps one day, but not very likely, the acting.

LYNN (*with a proud smile*) You tell me this---my spirit guide!

JACK: It's a question of whether you can turn yourself into a valid leisure product. When that starts selling in a big way they'll call your acting

great theatre. Only then.

LYNN (*still enjoying*) You're cynical.

JACK: Don't flirt.

LYNN: You're sad.

He turns his face away.

LYNN: I could never have signed that contract without you being there.

JACK: Oh yes you could. I'm an OK LA face so my presence helped and you knew it. And listen here. From the moment you heard about that million dollars you started to spend it, I mean spend it in your mind. You and Mac the Knife went down to the lounge in Nancy's hotel, do you remember? I said I wanted to see Nancy alone a minute. And Mac rushed to the desk phone, didn't he? He got the Dupoisier story confirmed, the million dollars were yours and the both of you started spending it, right there. That's why you've got to start *earning*.

LYNN: You mean on the cat walk?

JACK: On the publicity. I've seen it so often. A million dollars shrinks to a debt overnight.

LYNN: My dedication was a lie, then?

JACK: No, it was very useful to frighten Mac the Knife with. And to up your price at Dupoisier's and make your agent sit up and think 'she's enough of a bitch to make it'. And I admired your pluck. At any time in those eight days Dupoisier could have pulled out. Instead they upped you to two million dollars.

LYNN: Two and a half. So it's money I'm dedicated to after all is it? (*with sudden iron*) Is that what you're dedicated to then?

JACK: Wait till you get my bill, then you'll find out.

They sip, daydream.

LYNN: I'm already looking back at the old life, how I *believed* all the time, dreamed of a part in a long run, waited for the phone to ring, I lived in a buzz that kept me warm inside.

JACK (*rising*) I've a plane to catch.

She is about to rise too when there is the sound of a key turning in the front-door lock. We hear the front door open and slam closed. MAC comes in hot and bothered.

MAC (*addressing JACK at once*) The bitch has taken over The Potting Shed!
Sold it in Hollywood!

JACK: Which bitch is this---with so many in the field?

MAC: Marjorie Trougham! (*To LYNN*) Her producers have taken his company over---Nancy's in the film! I've been calling Hal all the way up from the Cotswolds! He isn't at home! I didn't have his mobile number! (*Searching around*) I left my address book here.

He finds the book on the sideboard. After consulting it he dials feverishly.

MAC (*cont., getting through*) Hal! Hal! Thank god!....Are you all right? Nothing! Nothing! I'm in over-sniff or something!....Why don't you come by? Mr Talbot's here. So is Lynn....What do you mean *far*? All you do is drive across the river!....OK!

He puts the phone back.

MAC (*cont., still excited*) He's eating just across the river and he says far! He had a suicidal patch at school. The bitch! (*To LYNN*) We've got to handle him like porcelain.

LYNN: Yes we will but do sit down.

MAC: I'm sorry, yes (*sitting*).

JACK (*also sitting*) Hal's better alone.

MAC: You think so?

JACK: I didn't say I think so.

MAC: No, I'm sorry (*mopping his brow*), I'm a mess. Raced all the way

up.

LYNN brings him a glass of champagne.

MAC (*cont.*) Thank you darling (*drinking with more thirst than appreciation*).

LYNN: Jack brought us some Dom Perignon.

MAC (*smacking his lips*) Thought I recognized the old Dom (*raising his glass to JACK*).

LYNN: Was the interview awful?

MAC: Not a bit. They put on a first-class show. We of the press give them their parts to play and play them they do.

LYNN (*shuddering somewhat*) I hope that never applies to me.

MAC: You haven't been to Highgate?

LYNN: No. Don't make me feel guilty.

MAC: It's of no importance. You both decided not to grasp the whatyoumaycallit of fortune.

LYNN: I signed.

MAC: You *what*?

LYNN: I signed the Dupoisier contract.

MAC: You signed, Lynn, you signed!

LYNN: Jack came with me.

MAC (*getting up, raising his glass to her*) You've saved your own life, my darling!

He kisses her.

LYNN: Jack's leaving.

MAC (*to JACK*) But Hal's on his way!

LYNN: He's off to LA.

MAC: LA?

JACK (*getting up again*) Your mother-in-law's all right.

MAC: My mother-in-law?

JACK: Let her have her black crucifixes. She acts a part less than anybody.

MAC: You said my mother-in-law.

JACK (*after a pause, as if he hadn't heard at once*) Oh. Did I? Nancy's mother-in-law of course.

MAC looks at him curiously.

MAC: Can I give you a lift?

JACK: I've a car downstairs.

MAC: Is LA for pain or pleasure?

JACK: For Nancy. The three writers of her Indian settlements book have finished it and it's a landmark in women's writing and her promotion appearances have to be prepared, it's a lot for a pregnant woman.

MAC (*hushed*) You said 'pregnant'?

JACK: She's three months gone.

MAC: Three---?

JACK: With child.

MAC: So what about The Potting Shed?

JACK: She'll do it pregnant.

MAC: There isn't a pregnant woman in it.

JACK: Oh, LA can get round that.

MAC (*as JACK goes to the door*) Who's the father?

JACK (*turning*) Pops.

They gape.

JACK (*cont.*) They got very pally in New York you know.

MAC (*faintly*) They must have.

JACK: She said it was just one of those things.

MAC: I can imagine.

He leaves. We hear the front door close.

MAC (*cont.*) Pops!

He takes the bottle and pours for both of them. He hands a glass to LYNN.

MAC (*cont.*) Pops (*sitting down*)!

LYNN (*without resentment*) And she's always on about family and loyalty.

MAC: Pops is certainly family!

A ring at the doorbell.

MAC (*cont., suddenly brisk*) If that's Hal we don't say a *word* about Pops being father---are we agreed?

LYNN (*after some thought, as if listening to someone absent*) Yes! I agree!

Another ring at the bell.

MAC: And listen. Let me handle this, right?

LYNN (*after another listen-in*) OK!

He runs to open the door. HAL comes in with MAC following him. He appears rather sleepy.

HAL: Hullo Lynn.

LYNN: Hullo.

HAL (*to MAC*) You rescued me from a boring dinner party at Battersea Rise.

MAC: I've just had news from LA.

HAL: Oh?

MAC: You're a father.

HAL: A father?

MAC: She's three months gone!

HAL: Who?

MAC: Your wife.

LYNN: Did you think it was me for a moment?

MAC gives her a sharp look.

HAL: For a silly moment.

MAC hurries to give him a glass of champagne.

MAC: Here's to mum and dad and a bonny baby!

They drink.

MAC: You don't seem over-elated.

HAL: I would---I think---if she thought of me as her husband.

MAC: But you've just had a reconciliation!

HAL: Only for the press.

MAC: Well, then be a press father.

HAL: Why not a real one?

MAC: Better still.

HAL: Well, well! Life *does* change suddenly.

MAC: Why don't you call her up?

HAL: You know I think I will.

MAC (*pointing to the bedroom*) Go coo in there.

HAL (*taking out his mobile phone as he goes*) Thanks.

He closes the bedroom door after him.

LYNN: Pander.

MAC: Not at all. I just happen to know him. He can only take one crisis at a time.

LYNN: And I can take any number?

MAC: As a matter of fact yes. Now keep a tight hold. He'll find out the truth sooner or later.

LYNN: From Pops or you?

MAC: You I should think.

LYNN: You're in love with her aren't you? I was watching your face when he said he was going to LA.

MAC: You detected jealousy?

LYNN: Not at all. Extreme curiosity, such as you have for the loved one when she's absent.

HAL comes back.

HAL: She wants me there.

MAC: You can't leave when you're about to make a film with Lynn!

HAL (*with a smile for LYNN*) Where's my champagne? (*Finding it and sitting down*) I'm making a film with Lynn am I? Well why not? Yes, why *not*! Do you remember Jack Talbot saying The Potting Shed was going to be a great success but not with me in it? I saw him on the stairs by the way. He kissed me on the cheek and said see you in LA!

MAC: You're staying the night here.

HAL: Why (*again looking at LYNN*)?

MAC: Because I don't like your bravado noises. Also your house is empty.

HAL: OK.

MAC: Do you mind sleeping on that (*indicating the couch*)?

HAL: There's nowhere else surely.

MAC: We could do a threesome in the bedroom but I wouldn't suggest it. Lynn's a devil with her whips and spurs. I'll get some pyjamas.

He goes to the bedroom.

HAL: Mac said you turned Dupoisier down.

LYNN: I signed with them yesterday.

HAL: Funny, I didn't think you would.

LYNN: Did you think I should?

HAL: Yes.

MAC returns with pyjamas.

LYNN: See you in the morning.

HAL: Nighty nighty.

She goes to the bedroom as MAC crosses to the bathroom. HAL stands in reflective mood, hand to his mouth.

MAC (*returning with a small toilet outfit*) You're not brooding are you?

HAL: I was thinking what kind of baby it will be.

MAC: Probably human.

LYNN appears.

LYNN (*to MAC*) Hal likes a big breakfast.

HAL: So does he.

LYNN: And we haven't got anything.

MAC: I'll slip out before you all wake---

LYNN: He likes sausages. And fried tomatoes. And mushrooms.

MAC: And a double espresso with a dash of milk. Luckily we have a machine.

HAL (*doing a burlesque old-time gentleman*) You're determined to make a fuss of me.

MAC: Grab that towel and go to the bathroom, you silly fellow.

HAL: OK squire.

He goes to the bathroom with the toilet kit. MAC goes to the bedroom again, then returns with bedclothes. He sets about making a bed on the settee with great vigour.

LYNN (*watching him*) I didn't know you could make beds.

MAC: Stop being *sharp*. And don't cry.

LYNN: I'm trying.

MAC: Are these joy tears?

LYNN: A mix.

MAC: I have to know. Violins or wind, darling, I can't provide both.

She returns to the bedroom. But she appears at the door again almost at once.

LYNN (*cont.*) Has he got a film in mind?

MAC: He will. He always gets fantastic ideas when in suicidal vein.

LYNN: You never told me you knew him so well. As a matter of fact you never told me you knew him.

MAC (*pausing to look at her*) Really?

HAL returns in pyjamas and dressing gown, carrying his clothes, which he places on one of the armchairs.

LYNN withdraws into the bedroom again.

MAC (*cont.*) You're wearing my dressing gown you cheeky young bugger.

HAL: Sorry sir.

MAC: Just lay yourself down while I do these pillows.

HAL lies down luxuriantly as MAC takes two of the cushions and puts them into pillow slips.

HAL (*with a yawn*) Mac the Menace!

MAC: OK Halibut! I want you to repeat after me the following affirmation, 'I'm a heartthrob, I'm England's heartthrob'.

HAL: I'm a heartthrob, England's ugliest heartthrob.

They giggle.

MAC: SFB.

HAL: What?

MAC: SFB you clod.

HAL: I've forgotten!

MAC (*as he puts the pillows behind HAL*) Sausages for Breakfast. DWP.

HAL: Down With Porridge. PVV.

MAC: Porridge Very Vomitable.

They giggle.

MAC: OK, lights out Halibut, you oily bastard.

HAL makes a long loud yawn, stretching.
MAC opens the window. Then he goes to the bedroom, switching off the living-room light.

We hear HAL shifting in his bed, yawning.

Silence.

The bedroom light too snaps off. Another silence. The bedroom door opens and someone passes across to the bathroom in the darkness. When the bathroom light snaps on we see it is LYNN in her dressing gown.

We hear the john go.

She emerges from the bathroom and the bathroom light goes out again. She goes not to the bedroom but to the settee.

HAL (*in a whisper*) Lynn! Darling!

She lies down with him. The sound of kissing. The sound of sighing. He pulls the covers over her.

The scene dims as they make love. They become still the moment we hear the voice of a DISK JOCKEY of the Classic FM type come over. Behind him Richard Tauber

sings *Love is my Reason*. As the DISK JOCKEY'S voice comes up the music fades to background.

DISK JOCKEY: Here's a titbit from one of our roving film gossips. A double wedding in Hollywood today brings together, on my right, Nancy Laudenfield and London's theatre critic Malcom Mackindle, and, on my left, Lynn Norden and Hal Trougham. Yes, I know it looks like wife swopping but it's more of a reshuffle, with no fewer than three box office hits to cement the new relationships. First, *The Potting Shed* (described at Cannes as the most compellingly unwatchable film this year), then Hal Trougham's brilliant resuscitation of a successful Edwardian play, and by no means least Malcom Mackindle's remarkably disorienting whodunit, shot mostly in the Drury Lane theatre. These put the awesome foursome into the fourteen million dollar bracket, though a good half of that is accountable to Miss Lynn Norden's modelling contracts. Never tell me that art doesn't pay. By the same token never tell me that Nancy and Lynn aren't great artistes.

Richard Tauber comes up full.

A dim amber light comes up and shows LYNN and HAL stirring sleepily from their tangled bed. They put on their dressing gowns and present themselves for their bow as MAC and NANCY emerge hand in hand and smiling from the bedroom. JOYCE suddenly peeps out of the kitchen and joins them. Now MARJORIE and POPS come in from the front door area dressed up to the nines and are greeted by the rest of the cast.

There is a ring at the bell. JOYCE rushes to answer it and reenters with JACK TALBOT behind her.