

David Henry Wilson

# **AXE PLAY**

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**LIST OF CHARACTERS:**

Simon, late thirties - playwright, actor, director

Lin, early twenties - his assistant

Emma, late twenties - actress

Ken, mid thirties - actor

Julian, mid thirties - actor

Bill, in his seventies

**Scene:**

Simon's studio flat, somewhere in London

## PROLOGUE

*At curtain rise, Simon and Emma are making love in the bed, which is spotlit. The rest of the stage is in darkness. Ken enters left and switches on the light. He has an axe in his hand. Simon and Emma react.*

SIMON: What the...

EMMA: Tom!

SIMON: Christ!

*Ken goes for Simon first. The scene is very bloody and noisy especially with screams from Emma. Ken quickly kills them both, however, in a frenzy of violence, at the end of which Julian enters.*

JULIAN: Oh my God! Oh my God, Tom, what have you done? Jesus Christ! Joyce!

*He goes to the bed.*

You've killed her! Oh, dear God! You didn't have to kill her!

KEN: Who's the man, Bill?

JULIAN: I only know his name's Graham. Tom, what have you done?

KEN: Oh God!

JULIAN: I'll have to ring for the police.

KEN: No! No, wait!

*He sits down. Blackout. Music.*

## ACT ONE

*A very spacious studio flat, modern furniture, theatre posters on walls, plenty of books. Hall and stairs off stage left, bathroom and kitchen off stage right. The window would be in the missing wall. Simon and Lin are discovered at the table.*

SIMON: So your main job will be to record when we're acting, and take notes when we're discussing.

LIN: It's a really great idea, Simon.

SIMON: You've been through all the reports and things, haven't you?

LIN: Oh yes.

SIMON: So don't be shy if you want to ask questions. We're going to have to use him, and you may think of things that I don't think of.

LIN: I doubt that, Simon. You always do things so thoroughly. I'm really excited about this.

SIMON: Well, it may not come to anything...

LIN: Oh, it will!

SIMON: ...but it's worth a try.

LIN: Do the others know?

SIMON: Well, they know about the method. They've all worked with me before. But they don't know any details.

*The front doorbell rings.*

Ah!

LIN: Shall I go?

SIMON: Yes, please.

*She goes out left, and he arranges some papers on the table.*

LIN (*off*.) Hello. I'm Lin.

EMMA (*off*.) Hello, Lin. I'm Emma.

LIN (*off*.) It's this way.

*They come in left, Emma first.*

EMMA: Hello. Simon.

SIMON: Emma.

*He goes to meet her, and kisses her. The warmth is genuine. Lin stands looking at them.*

You look superb, as always.

EMMA: Thank you. And how's my favourite genius?

SIMON: Pining for his favourite Muse.

EMMA: She does have a telephone.

SIMON: Lin, can you take Emma's coat? Emma, this is Lin Watkins, my new assistant.

LIN: Hello.

SIMON: And Lin, this is Emma Grey, our shining star.

*Emma smiles. Simon leads her across the room to sit down, and Lin stands awkwardly holding the coat.*

Come and sit down.

LIN: Shall I put it in the hall?

SIMON: Oh, yes please, Lin.

*Lin goes out left, and returns minus the coat. She sits at the table. Meanwhile, the dialogue continues.*

Have you been busy?

EMMA: Not really. A couple of commercials, but nothing substantial since your Hamlet. What have you been working on?

SIMON: Nothing very much. You heard that I'd split up with Meg, did you?

EMMA: No. I'm sorry.

SIMON: Oh, it was perfectly amicable. But it knocked me out of my stride a bit.

EMMA: That's why you moved here, is it?

SIMON: Yes, I let her have the house.

EMMA: It's a beautiful house.

SIMON: I can see the children whenever I like, and this place is convenient, so...no complaints. And you?

EMMA: No complaints. You said Ken and Julian would be coming.

SIMON: Yes, they should be here any minute.

EMMA: It's going to be another 'Jake's Birthday', is it?

SIMON: No, not really. Same method, but very different style.

EMMA: If it's as big a success as 'Jake's Birthday', we'll all be happy. I do like this room, Simon.

SIMON: Good. The room is actually the starting-point of the whole thing.

EMMA: Go on, tell me more.

SIMON: No, I'll wait till the others come...

*The front doorbell rings.*

And pat they come.

LIN: I'll go.

*She goes out left.*

EMMA: I hope it's not a part where Ken gets to breathe all over me, is it?

LIN (*off*.) Hello. I'm Lin.  
KEN (*off*.) Hello, Lin.  
SIMON: No, don't worry. He's just your husband.  
EMMA: Oh God!  
JULIAN (*off*.) Hello.  
LIN (*off*.) This way.

*They come in left, Ken first, followed by Lin. Julian is last.*

KEN: Where is she? There she is! Emma, darling!  
*He goes straight to her, kisses her, and of course breathes all over her.*  
How are you? Need I ask? Marvellous! Ravishing! Ravishable.  
EMMA: Hello, Ken.  
SIMON: Evening, Ken.  
KEN: Hello, Simon, old boy. Good to see you. But not as good as to see Emma. (*To Simon*.)  
How are you, old thing?  
SIMON: I'm fine, Ken, thanks. And yourself?  
KEN: In the pink. Or I wish I was when I see Emma.  
EMMA: Hello, Julian.  
JULIAN: Hello, Emma. Simon.  
KEN: Quite like old times, eh?  
LIN: Shall I take your coats?  
KEN: Oh, bless you, darling.  
SIMON: Lin, this is the famous Ken Pomeroy – the ac-tor, and this is Julian Ambrose, actor and gentleman.  
LIN: Hello.  
SIMON: Lin Watkins, my new assistant.  
KEN: We met, I believe, at the door.  
*She laughs, and takes their coats out to the hall. She then returns to the table. Meanwhile, Ken and Julian have sat down, and the dialogue continues.*  
What have you been doing with yourself all this time, darling?  
EMMA: Just a couple of commercials, and one or two small parts on telly...  
KEN: Better to show your small parts than to show your big parts. Now, before we go any further, yes, please, Simon.  
SIMON: I thought you'd never ask. Scotch for Ken. Emma?  
EMMA: Could I have a coffee?  
SIMON: Certainly. Julian?  
JULIAN: I'll have a coffee, too, please.  
LIN: Shall I get the coffees while you do the Scotch?  
SIMON: Thanks, Lin. Kitchen on the right, coffee left of sink, cups and saucers in sink.  
LIN: Will you be having coffee, Simon?  
SIMON: No, thanks.

*She goes out right. Simon goes to the drinks cabinet.*

SIMON: While Lin 's doing that, I'll put you in the picture. I. was telling Emma that this whole thing actually begins here, in this room. I moved here a couple of months ago, when I split up with Meg, and the old boy that I rented it from, who lives upstairs, told me the story. It's a family house, which he and his brother inherited from their parents some fifty years ago. You want water in this, Ken?

KEN: Just a drop.

SIMON: The brother got married, and they converted the place into two flats, with the brother and his wife living down here.

*He brings his drink and Ken's, and sits down again.*

Very briefly, what happened was that the wife took a lover - the old story - the husband came home unexpectedly one night, caught them at it, and killed them both with an axe.

EMMA: Oh God!

SIMON: That's not the end of it, though. The brother heard the commotion, came down to investigate, saw what his brother had done, and not unnaturally decided to call the police. However, the murder took place shortly after nine o' clock, but he didn't call the police until eleven o' clock. The phone, just as it is now, was in the hall. When he went out, his brother locked himself in here, and proceeded to cut his own throat and wrists. By the time the police arrived and battered down the door, the brother was dead.

EMMA: And all that happened in here, Simon? God, how can you bear to live here?

KEN: That's not the bed, is it, old boy?

SIMON: It was forty-five years ago, and that's my own bed.

KEN: You're not having us on, are you?

SIMON: No, no, it's all true. I've spent several weeks looking at all the reports and the files. And the old boy himself has shown me all the cuttings.

EMMA: It's horrible, Simon. I don't know how you can sleep at nights.

*Lin re-enters, carrying three cups of coffee on a tray, with some biscuits, milk and sugar.*

LIN: I found these in the cupboard. Is that all right?

SIMON: Yes. Thanks, Lin.

*Emma takes her coffee and milk.*

EMMA: Thanks.

LIN: Biscuit?

*Emma refuses. Lin goes to Julian.*

SIMON: Now as I say, it's an old story, but it's got some interesting variations, not the least of which is the two-hour hiatus between the murder and the suicide. And that could well turn out to be the substance of our play.

*Lin has now served Julian, and resumes her place at the table.*

EMMA: Don't sit over there, Lin. Come and join the circle.

LIN: Oh! Thanks!

*There is a shuffling of positions as Lin brings her chair into the circle.*

SIMON: Lin knows all this, incidentally. She's been going through the files with me. The plan is to proceed just as we did with 'Jake's Birthday'. I've drawn up a kind of scenario, and we'll act each scene and see where the dialogue takes us. But in this case, there's going to be one huge and unpredictable factor. The old man's going to help us.

KEN: Is he, by George?

EMMA: This is really kinky, Simon.

SIMON: I think there's a terrific play in it. And more to the point, so do Corless Productions Limited, because they're prepared to finance us.

KEN: I'll do it! Thank God for some work!

EMMA: Of course we'll do it. We'd do it for you, Simon, anyway. But it is kinky.

JULIAN: What's this old man like?

SIMON: Strange.

KEN: He must be, to go on living in the same bloody house!

SIMON: He's very...withdrawn, I suppose you'd call it. It's hard to get him to talk.

KEN: Obviously the part for me.

*He grins at them all.*

SIMON: That'll be the day, Ken. I can't in all honesty make him out - whether he's quiet because he's dim, or shy, or a tortured soul. I just don't know. He doesn't seem to sleep much. I hear him padding around at all hours, grunting and coughing.

KEN: I love these well insulated old houses.

SIMON: Never has any visitors. Anyway, see what you make of him. Especially you, Julian, since you'll be playing him.

KEN: Type casting. I trust I shall be playing the lover.

SIMON: No, you're the husband.

KEN: Me, the mad axeman? Oh, well, perhaps we can start with the honeymoon, eh, Emma?

EMMA: You're the lover, then, Simon, are you?

SIMON: Yes.

KEN: A part which, by all accounts, is due for some heavy cutting.

*Lin laughs.*

SIMON: Don't encourage him, Lin. The husband - he's Tom, by the way - was apparently quite different from old Bill upstairs. Outgoing, sociable. Personnel manager for some plastics firm based in the Midlands. Incidentally, Emma, judging by the photos, there's a more than passing resemblance between you and Joyce, the wife. Quite striking, actually. Now, any questions?

JULIAN: I take it Bill's retired.

SIMON: Yes. Worked for the Council, in the accounts department.

JULIAN: Does he know what we're going to do?

SIMON: Yes, I told him.

JULIAN: He offered to do it, did he?

SIMON: Well, in a way. I told him what I was planning, and asked if he'd help, and in his own inimitable, stone-milking way, he eventually said yes.

LIN: Can I ask a question, Simon?

SIMON: Of course you can, yes.

LIN: Well, isn't he going to find it very painful?

SIMON: He may do. He probably will. But he can always opt out.

KEN: I like it. It sounds fun.

EMMA: Fun?

KEN: Well, different, then. I've never killed anyone with an axe before.

SIMON: If there are no more questions, I'll go and fetch him.

KEN: Can't wait, old boy.

*Simon goes off left. We will hear muffled sounds (stairs, voices) as he brings Bill down.*

EMMA (to Lin:) You're going to write everything down, are you?

LIN: Well, I'll record you when you're acting, and take notes in between. But I'm also going to transcribe the tapes, so that Simon can work on them as a script. I think it's a great idea. He's brilliant, isn't he?

KEN: Didn't know he'd broken up with his wife. Did you?

EMMA: No, not till today.

JULIAN: I had heard something...

KEN: Good thing really. Theatre and family are fire and water.

LIN: Are you married, Ken?

KEN: Not at the moment. Twice went into the hen-house, and twice got egg on my face.

LIN: Are either of you married?

EMMA: No.

*Julian shakes his head.*

KEN: In the immortal words of Mae West: Marriage is an institution, but I ain't ready for an institution yet.

*Simon enters left with Bill.*

SIMON: Come in, Bill. Come and meet everybody. This is Emma.

EMMA: Hello, Bill.

*He stares at her.*

SIMON: She's very like Joyce, isn't she?

*Bill breaks the stare.*

BILL: Oh! I'm sorry. Yes. Remarkable.

SIMON: This is Lin, my assistant.

LIN: Hello.

SIMON: Ken, who'll be playing your brother.

KEN: Honoured to meet you, sir.

SIMON: And Julian, who's going to be your alter ego.

JULIAN: Hello.

SIMON: Sit yourself down, Bill. Can I get you a drink?

BILL: No.

*He takes out a cigarette case.*

Do you mind?

SIMON: No, you carry on.

*Bill offers. Emma accepts.*

EMMA: Thank you.

*The rest refuse. Bill lights Emma's cigarette, then his own.*

SIMON: I've told everyone the story, Bill, and the general idea is that we'll improvise scenes, starting obviously with the events that led up to the murder. As I see it, the first act would finish with the murder itself, and the second would consist in the dialogue between you and your

brother, culminating in his suicide. What we have to establish is the relationship initially between him and his wife, though that may just be exposition, and then between you and him. The lover's a bit of a blank space at the moment. But I'd better warn you, Bill, although we'd like to stick as close to the truth as we can, this is a play. So we may change things. A play above all has got to be good theatre, and if the choice is between truth and good theatre, then good theatre wins.

KEN: It's the principle adopted by all the media.

SIMON: Now what would help us enormously would be if you could tell us something about the characters. Joyce, for instance. What was she like?

*They all wait.*

BILL: It's difficult.

SIMON: Take your time.

BILL: I thought I knew, but...

*They wait again.*

SIMON: But...

BILL: People aren't always what you think they are.

SIMON: What did you think she was?

BILL: A happy person... sweet... beautiful. The place was always bright when she was there.

EMMA: Laughing? Singing?

BILL: Yes. She laughed a lot. But...

*They wait again.*

SIMON: Say what you're thinking.

BILL (*with some vehemence*): She was a deceiver!

EMMA: Did you know she had a lover?

BILL: Yes.

KEN: Did her husband know? I mean, before he went chopping.

BILL: No.

SIMON: So she was a bright and happy person who took a lover. Which suggests that the marriage wasn't so bright and happy. How did Tom and Joyce get on?

BILL: Well.

EMMA: They couldn't have got on that well if she took a lover.

KEN: He didn't have any sexual hang-ups, your brother, did he? I shall refuse the part if he did.

BILL: No. He never had any hang-ups. Nothing bothered Tom. Tom was chosen. Tom could talk to anyone, master...

*He realizes they are all listening.*

He had no hang-ups.

KEN: Lucky old Tom!

SIMON: So it was a happy marriage till Tom came home one night, found his wife in bed with a stranger, and then presumably went crazy. Which certainly happens, but doesn't give us much of a play.

JULIAN: Was Tom ever violent before that night?

BILL: No.

KEN: Forgive my asking this, old boy, but how do you know he didn't know about the lover?

BILL: He would have told me.

SIMON: You were close, were you?

BILL: Yes.

EMMA: How close were you to her?

*He stares at her.*

Sorry. I didn't mean to pry.

BILL: No. No, no I'm sorry. What did you ask?

EMMA: If you were close to her?

BILL: No.

SIMON: Did she know you knew she had a lover?

BILL (*hesitating*): She may have done.

SIMON: May have done? Did she or didn't she?

EMMA: Simon, don't bully.

BILL: It was a long time ago. There are things that I don't remember clearly.

JULIAN: How did you find out?

BILL: I saw him arrive one evening, when Tom was away. And I saw him leave next morning.

JULIAN: Were you very upset about that?

BILL: Of course I was upset! Yes!

SIMON: So maybe you tackled her about it. Maybe you discussed it with her.

BILL: Maybe. I don't remember,

EMMA: I don't think we should be treating Bill like this. It's not fair. He's trying to help us, and we're giving him the third degree.

SIMON: I'm sorry. Emma's quite right. I apologize, Bill. I get carried away, and I don't stop to think about other people's feelings, which is precisely why I'm living here and my wife and children are elsewhere. Thanks, Emma. On the other hand, it seems to me that we've got a possible starting-point here. Bill tackles Joyce over her lover. Would you object to that, Bill?

*Bill shakes his head.*

JULIAN: So I'm trying to stop the affair.

SIMON: That's right. Let's clear a little acting space, shall we? Bill, if you could move over here...

*They clear a space on the left, with the rest to watch from the right.*

LIN: Do you want me to record this, Simon?

SIMON: Yes, please, Lin. What would Joyce have been doing when you came in, Bill?

BILL: She was ironing.

KEN: Ah, so there really was a discussion, then, Bill.

SIMON: Let's have the table, over here, Lin.

*Julian helps her to carry it across. She takes her papers and the tape recorder off it first.*

So we have Joyce ironing, and Bill enters from the left.

*Julian goes out, and Emma stands behind the table, miming. Simon joins Bill, Julian and Lin on the right. Julian knocks.*

EMMA: Come in.

*Julian enters.*

Hello, Bill.

JULIAN: (*Not a direct imitation, but a resemblance, using his own voice*;) Joyce.

EMMA: And how are you this bright and sunny afternoon? Or is it evening?  
SIMON: Doesn't matter.  
EMMA: How are you this bright and sunny afternoon or evening?  
JULIAN: Joyce, I want to talk to you.  
EMMA: Well I didn't think you'd come just to watch me ironing.  
JULIAN: I...I don't know how...I've got something very painful to discuss, Joyce.  
EMMA: It isn't piles, is it?

*Laughter from all except Bill.*

KEN: Great line, darling! Great line!  
SIMON: Go on.  
JULIAN: Look, Joyce, I'm not going to beat about the bush. I know what's going on.  
EMMA: I'd call that beating about the bush. What's going on?  
JULIAN: I know you've got a lover.  
EMMA: Ah!  
JULIAN: I don't want to have to tell Tom.  
EMMA: Then don't.  
JULIAN: I can't just stand by. Tom feels things like any other man. I don't want him hurt.  
EMMA: That's very noble of you, Bill, but it's really none of your business.  
JULIAN: He's my brother!  
EMMA: Are you your brother's keeper? Or his wife's keeper?  
JULIAN: If the house caught fire, you'd expect me to warn you, wouldn't you?  
EMMA: That's different.  
JULIAN: You're sending your marriage up in flames. It's the same thing.  
EMMA: If he doesn't know, he won't be burnt.  
*Julian dries.*  
Got you!

*Laughter, except from Bill, who is riveted by the performance.*

SIMON: Come on, Bill, there must be an answer.

*He means Julian, but the real Bill reacts.*

BILL: What answer?  
SIMON: Sorry, Bill, I was talking to Julian. What do you think of it?  
BILL: She's so like Joyce.  
SIMON: And our Bill?  
BILL: He's not me.  
KEN: Thank your lucky stars, old boy.  
SIMON: Found a reply yet, Julian?  
JULIAN (to Emma:) Lead me in.  
EMMA: Take two: if he doesn't know, he won't be burnt.  
JULIAN: He'll find out in the end. Stop it, Joyce, before it's too late.  
EMMA: It's already too late, Bill, because I don't want to stop it.  
JULIAN: I thought you and Tom were happy.  
EMMA: Then you thought wrong, didn't you?  
JULIAN: Don't you love Tom any more?

*Emma is stuck.*

EMMA (to Simon:) I can't answer that question, can I? I don't know whether she's just having an affair, or she's serious.

SIMON: Bill?

BILL: I don't know.

SIMON: Then we're free to explore, aren't we? Let's assume she doesn't know herself.

EMMA: Right. Don't I love Tom any more? I. don't know, Bill. All I know is that I'm happy with...

*She bursts out laughing.*

...what's his name!

SIMON: Graham!

EMMA: I'm happy with Graham.

*All except Bill are laughing and giggling.*

KEN: I shall never forget what's name!

SIMON: Right, come on, folks. Buckle down. Joyce doesn't know her own feelings.

KEN: Not to mention the name of her lover.

SIMON: Ken.

*Ken holds up his hand in acknowledgement.*

EMMA: I don't know what I feel at the moment, Bill. All I know is that I love Graham and I want to be with him.

JULIAN: It's wrong!

EMMA: It may be wrong, but it's what I want! Please don't tell Tom. Please, Bill. Let me sort it out.

JULIAN: Is this man coming here tonight?

EMMA: Yes.

JULIAN: To stay?

EMMA: Yes.

JULIAN: And supposing Tom came back?

EMMA: He won't.

JULIAN: Supposing he did.

EMMA: Then I suppose he...

*She starts laughing again.*

....he might grab an axe and kill us. No, we really can't go on, Simon. Once she's told Bill she's going ahead, that's the end of the conversation.

SIMON: You're right, but in any case nothing much was coming across. It was all surface, wasn't it? Nothing underneath.

JULIAN: I must say, I didn't feel right.

LIN: Simon, can I ask Bill a question?

SIMON: Yes, of course you can.

LIN: It's a bit personal, but...well...were you in love with Joyce?

*There is a long silence.*

BILL: Yes. Excuse me.

*He gets up and goes out left. Lin stops the tape recorder.*

KEN: Good Lord. Well done, Lin.

LIN (*slightly upset*): Maybe I shouldn't have said it.

EMMA: I was thinking the same thing, actually. I felt it the moment he looked at me.

LIN: I didn't mean to upset him.

KEN: Adds another dimension to your play, though. The eternal quadrangle.

SIMON: Yes, that's probably what was missing. On the surface he's defending his brother's honour, and underneath he's going green-eyed. Thanks, Lin.

LIN: I...I don't want to speak out of turn, but maybe we shouldn't be doing this.

SIMON: What do you mean?

LIN: Well, it's a great idea, I mean, it really is. But we could be hurting him very badly.

SIMON: As I said before, he can always opt out.

KEN: He has opted out, hasn't he? We're not going to hurt him if he's not here.

JULIAN: I think I know what Lin means. We're bringing it all back, aren't we?

LIN: Yes.

SIMON: People get hurt every day, Lin. Look what newspapers do to people's private lives. And we're dealing with something that happened forty-five years ago, for Christ's sake! It's going to be a play, Lin, not a documentary. I shan't even use his name.

EMMA: Simon's right, Lin. We're only trying to put together a play.

LIN: I just don't like seeing people hurt, that's all.

KEN: Well actually, darling, the only time he was hurt was when you asked your extremely pertinent question.

LIN: Yes, I know.

*Bill re-enters. They are all taken aback.*

BILL: I'm sorry.

SIMON: Come in, Bill.

BILL: I'm sorry. I shouldn't have...I didn't mean to spoil your play.

SIMON: Bill, we were just discussing whether it might not be too painful for you to carry on with this.

BILL: No.

*Simon glances at Lin.*

LIN: I...I didn't mean to upset you with my question.

BILL: You were right to ask. You were right. These things have to be faced. Yes, indeed.

SIMON: You actually want to go on, do you?

BILL: Yes. You'll go on anyway, won't you?

SIMON: Yes, but you don't have to stay if you don't want to.

BILL: I want to. I've lived with this for forty-five years. It's never faded. Yesterday fades, last week, last year. But not when you were young. That doesn't fade. I wake up with it every morning, like my own shadow. Maybe your play will change something. It'll be a step for me - somewhere. Who knows?

SIMON: May we still ask you questions?

BILL: Yes. But if they're too painful, I shan't answer.

SIMON: That's fair enough. Lin?

LIN: I'm sorry, Simon. I didn't mean to...you know.

SIMON: It's all right. So long as everyone's happy. Bill, do you have any comments on the scene we just played?

BILL: No.

SIMON: Is it anything like what was actually said?

BILL: No.

*Laughter from Ken and Emma.*

SIMON: You wouldn't like to tell us what was said?

*He shakes his head.*

BILL: I can't do that.

JULIAN: Simon, I wonder if we're not approaching this from the wrong end.,

SIMON: What do you mean?

JULIAN: Tom is the key figure, isn't he? Tom's the one we've got to get inside. Why don't we start with the conversation between Tom and Bill after the murder? Then we can work our way backwards from there.

SIMON: It's worth trying. All right for you, Ken?

KEN: That's what I'm here for. I'd be quite happy to start with the murder, if Emma would like to strip off and hop into bed.

SIMON: Don't forget that when Emma strips off, she's with me.

KEN: Oh yes, damn! You're the lover, aren't you? I forgot I was only the husband. (*Intimately to Emma:*) We'll leave the stripping till after the show, shall we, darling?

EMMA: Whatever you say, sweetheart.

*He pouts and pops his lips in a mock kiss.*

SIMON: Actually it's not a bad idea to start with the murder, if you just mime it, Ken.

KEN: Well, I wasn't intending to do it, Simon.

SIMON: Imagine two naked bodies in the bed. You can give him a few screams, Emma. Julian, you go out and come in when the screaming finishes.

*Julian goes out left. Ken takes up position by the bed. Lin turns on the tape recorder, which she will operate according to the situation.*

EMMA: You don't want me in the bed, do you?

SIMON: I'm tempted to answer that question truthfully, but I shan't. No, just do your screaming from here. Are we ready? Action.

KEN: Whack!

*Emma screams.*

Whack, whack, whack!

*Emma continues to scream.*

Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack, whack!

*Simon has joined in the noise. He signals to Emma, who stops screaming.*

Actually I sound more like a duck than an axeman, don't I?

SIMON: Keep going!

KEN: Whackety whack!

SIMON: Aaaaaaargh!

*Julian enters.*

JULIAN: Oh my God! Oh my God, Tom, what have you done? Jesus Christ! Joyce!

*He goes to the bed.*

You've killed her! Oh, dear God! You didn't have to kill her!

KEN: Who's the man, Bill?

JULIAN: I only know his name's Graham. Tom, what have you done this?

KEN: Oh God!

JULIAN: I'll have to ring for the police.

KEN: No! No, wait!

*He sits down.*

You knew then, did you?

JULIAN: Yes.

KEN: Then why didn't you bloody tell me? Jesus, you're my brother, aren't you? Why didn't you tell me? To come in here, and see that! Christ!

JULIAN: We thought you were in...wherever it was.

SIMON: Birmingham.

JULIAN: Birmingham.

KEN: We finished early. I thought I'd come home and give Joyce a...

*He starts to giggle.*

...a nice surprise. And I did, didn't I? Sorry, Simon. The fact is, we could make a cracking good comedy out of this.

SIMON: Yes, Ken, I'm sure we could, but we're not going to.

JULIAN: There is a problem here, though, Simon. I'd have to ring for the police, wouldn't I?

SIMON: That's the problem we're trying to solve, Julian. What happened in the two hours?

Bill, why didn't you ring for the police?

BILL: I couldn't leave him. He wanted to kill himself.

SIMON: Ah, yes. That's your angle.

KEN: I'm about to do the old Othello act, am I? "I kissed thee ere I killed thee; no way but this, killing myself, to die upon a kiss."

SIMON: Not yet. We have a two-hour conversation first.

JULIAN: Come on, Ken.

KEN: Right. Where from?

JULIAN: We thought you were in Birmingham.

KEN: I wish to Christ I'd stayed in Birmingham! I wish to Christ I'd never been born!

JULIAN: It's done. I've got to ring for the police.

KEN: Then do what you have to do. And I'll do what I have to do.

JULIAN: What do you mean?

KEN: Go and ring them, Bill.

JULIAN: Tom, what are you planning?

KEN: You don't think I want to go on after this, do you? Bill, look what I've done!

JULIAN: Killing yourself won't bring them back.

KEN: If I stay alive they'll always come back. Over and over again. I'll wake up with it every morning, like my own shadow.

JULIAN: You didn't know what you were doing, Tom. It was a moment of madness. It wasn't you! No jury would convict you.

KEN: They don't need to convict me. I convict myself. I condemn myself to death. It's a fitting end to a miserable failure of a life. Except that he wasn't a failure, was he? It was Bill who was the failure. Oh, I'm sorry, Bill.

SIMON: It's strange, isn't it? You seem to be swapping identities.

EMMA: Of course the problem is, Simon, we've never had a chance to see Tom before the murder. The man with no problems, at ease with the world... That's what you said he was like, Bill. isn't it?

BILL: Yes. They were always laughing together, Joyce and Tom. If he were here now, he'd probably be joking, like your friend.

KEN: I must say, he doesn't feel like a particularly jovial character.

SIMON: It's not the simplest of developments, is it? A laughing, jovial man comes home unexpectedly, finds his wife in bed with a stranger, and immediately becomes a homicidal maniac.

LIN: Maybe it wasn't immediately.

*They turn to her.*

Sorry, but...

SIMON: No, no, go on, Lin.

LIN: Well maybe he already suspected something, and he deliberately came home early so that he could catch them.

SIMON: But you said he didn't know, didn't you, Bill?

BILL: I don't think he knew.

SIMON: But you're assuming you knew him well enough. Did you know him so well you'd have predicted the murder?

BILL: No,

SIMON: The murder was out of character?

BILL: Yes.

SIMON: And you'd never have expected Joyce to take a lover, would you?

BILL: No.

SIMON: So it must at least be possible that he did know. That he didn't take you into his confidence.

BILL: It's possible.

KEN: Little Lin strikes gold again. Well done.

JULIAN: If it's true, you realize that the murder becomes premeditated?

SIMON: You're right. If he set it up, then he came home knowing what to expect. Good Lord! The official verdict was that he killed them and himself while the balance of his mind was disturbed, but...

BILL: It was. It was an act of madness.

SIMON: You don't think he could have planned it?

BILL: No.

EMMA: Simon, it still doesn't fit anyway, does it? Instead of the joker suddenly becoming a murderer, you've got a joker gradually becoming a murderer. There's not all that much difference.

KEN: He couldn't have come home drunk, I suppose.

BILL: No, he wasn't drunk. I never saw him drunk.

LIN: He definitely wasn't drunk because they did a post mortem on him.

SIMON: That's right. Strange how the focus keeps shifting. I was intrigued by the two hours after the murder, but we keep getting forced back to the time before the murder.

KEN: Isn't that how writers work, Simon? You start by pushing an idea, then the idea pushes you?

SIMON: That's very perceptive, Ken.

KEN: Oh, there's a brain behind the beauty.

JULIAN: Simon, you said there were two naked bodies in the bed.

SIMON: Yes?

JULIAN: Is that right, Bill?

*He nods.*

Then I think the murder was premeditated.

KEN: How do you make that out, old boy?

JULIAN: Tom comes home unexpectedly. He opens the door, switches on the light, and finds his wife in bed with her lover. But where's the axe? I mean, you don't just leave an axe lying around in your living-room, do you?

KEN: So he went to get it.

JULIAN: Where was the axe kept, Bill?

BILL: In the shed.

JULIAN: Right. So he goes to the shed to get it. Now what do our lovers do? Are you telling me that they just stayed there naked in bed till he got back? Graham would have had his trousers on and his engine running quicker than you can say 'condominium'.

*They all think about this.*

SIMON: So he already had the axe in his hand when he opened the door.

JULIAN: He must have done.

KEN: That's brilliant, Jules!

JULIAN: Oh, there's a brain behind the ugly mug.

SIMON: You see what Julian's getting at, Bill? If he already had the axe, it means he knew what he was going to find. In which case, it was premeditated.

*Bill remains inscrutable.*

And if it was premeditated, how would that affect the two-hour conversation?

JULIAN: Could they have been working out a defence? Crime of passion.

KEN: Crime passionnel. Sounds better in French.

EMMA: If he was working out a defence, why did he kill himself?

SIMON: Good question. Is there any answer, Bill?

BILL: I don't believe it was premeditated.

SIMON: Then how do you explain the axe?

BILL: I can't explain it! I can't explain anything! For forty- five years I've tried to understand what happened! I'd hoped that perhaps you might help me!

*They are silenced by this outburst.*

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to shout.

EMMA: I still don't see that it makes any difference - premeditated or unpremeditated, neither seems to fit in with Tom the joker.

*Lin has been leafing through the papers.*

LIN: Excuse me, but it couldn't have been premeditated. Tom was driven home by Ted Taylor, and he confirmed that they'd been to Birmingham, intended to stay the night, but came home because their meeting had finished early. Tom couldn't have known that the meeting would finish early, could he?

SIMON: No. Unless he engineered the early finish.

JULIAN: He might have recognized the lover's car.

SIMON: I still wouldn't discount premeditation. But maybe Emma's right, and it makes no difference. They'd still have had to agree what story to tell the police. Is that right, Bill?

BILL: Yes. Yes, we had to know what to tell the police.

SIMON: Let's try it, then.

KEN: Try what, old boy?

SIMON: Hinging the conversation to a possible defence.

KEN: So you don't want me in a state of maniacal frenzy and remorse?

SIMON: No.

KEN: There goes my Oscar. Whose idea is the crime passionnel?

*Simon looks to Bill, but there is no reaction.*

JULIAN: And does Bill want to ring for the police or not?

SIMON: I think Tom's the dominant character. Bill wants to ring for the police, and Tom stops him.

KEN: Because Tom at this stage is hoping to get away with it, and only later transmutes homicidal mania to suicidal mania.

EMMA: Ken.

*She draws his attention to Bill's presence.*

KEN: In a manner of speaking. Very well, Jules, I'm about to dominate you. Pretend you're going for the police.

JULIAN: I'm going to ring for the police.

KEN: No you're not. Sit down.

*Julian sits down.*

Raise your right hand. Raise your left hand. POWER! It's all right. Just feeling my way into the character. Now, I've stopped him from going for the police. Because...because, Bill, we have to have a story, right? We have to know what we're going to tell them. And what we're going to tell them is...that it was an accident.

*Laughter from everyone except Bill*

(Irish:) Y'see, yer honour, I was jugglin' wid dis axe, an' it flied out of me hand...

SIMON: Sorry about this, Bill.

KEN: No, come on, Julian, we must take this seriously. What we're going to tell the police is that this was what the French call a crime passionnel.

JULIAN: What's that, Tom?

KEN: It's something that doesn't happen very often here in England, for the simple reason that we English don't know how to pronounce it. But if you really want to know, a crime passionnel is a craving for the top of the milk.

JULIAN: Will the jury accept it?

KEN: They will, unless they're on a diet.

JULIAN: I don't wish to know that.

KEN: Then let me think of something else. I know. It was a crime of passion. I came home unexpectedly from a conference in Birmingham, entered this room, and found my wife and her lover in bed. Whereupon I killed them with an axe.

JULIAN: Is that what we're going to tell the police?

KEN: Can you think of a better story?

JULIAN: One moment. Where did the axe come from?

KEN: Sheffield.

JULIAN: No. Where did you find it?

KEN: Patel's Hardware, in the High Street.

JULIAN: When you came home, where was it?

KEN: Part of it was in my right hand, and the other part was in my wife.

JULIAN: Did you plan this murder?

KEN: Not until afterwards.

JULIAN: If the murder was unpremeditated, why did you enter the room with an axe in your right hand?

KEN: Because I'm not left-handed.

JULIAN: Why did you enter the room with an axe at all?

*Pause.*

KEN: Whose side are you on?

JULIAN: We rest our case.

*Everyone, including Bill, applauds, and Ken and Julian bow.*

KEN: It could be a smash hit, Simon, if you did it our way.

SIMON: I won't say I'm not tempted. Can you see it as a comedy, Bill?

BILL: It's how Tom would have seen it. That's how he was.

*There is a moment of surprised silence.*

EMMA: You mean Ken was in character?

BILL: Yes.

SIMON: But not that night.

BILL: No, not that night. The world fell in that night.

SIMON: Bill, I know it's painful, but can you give us some hints? Was he calm, for instance?

BILL: Oh no, he was crying.

SIMON: Did he talk about a possible defence? Did he stop you going for the police? Did you talk about the past?

BILL: You have to understand...I was crying, too.

SIMON: But you must know what you talked about!

BILL: No.

SIMON: For two hours you sat here and nothing happened?

BILL: I don't know.

SIMON: You must know!

EMMA: Simon!

SIMON: It doesn't make sense!

BILL (*with sudden vehemence*): No, it doesn't make sense! Why was Abel blessed, and Cain cursed? That doesn't make sense! Tom laughing, Tom killing, that doesn't make sense! Joyce loving, Joyce whoring...naked lovers...an old man who can't remember...people making a play out of other people's misery...You think this world makes sense?

*Another silence.*

SIMON: Yes. Yes, I do. I think there's a reason for people's actions. You just have to delve deep enough.

*He has spoken very calmly, but this is a moment of intense confrontation. It is Bill who breaks it off.*

BILL: Perhaps. I have to go.

EMMA: Oh no, don't go. We didn't mean to hurt you.

SIMON: That's right. I'm sorry, I went too far again. Look, I was going to send for some food. Stay and have something to eat with us.

BILL: No, I have to go.

SIMON: I really am sorry, Bill.

BILL: I'm not going because of you. I have nothing to hide.

SIMON: Then will you come again tomorrow?

BILL: Are you going to continue?

SIMON: Yes, of course.

BILL: Then I'll come. I shall only be upstairs. You're all very talented. Yes. You're very talented.

*He goes out left, to a chorus of "goodnights".*

EMMA: God, he's weird. And so are you, Simon.

SIMON: I just can't pin him down. When you really need an answer from him, he clams up, or lets fly at you.

EMMA: He lets fly when you bully him.

SIMON: I don't think it's genuine.

EMMA: What isn't?

SIMON: This sudden exasperation - or the staring into space. I think he's acting. I think he's giving us a lesson in theatre.

KEN: Why would he do that, old boy? He said himself, he's got nothing to hide.

EMMA: He was hoping we'd help him. That made sense, Simon.

LIN: He is strange, though. The way he kept staring at Emma

KEN: Well, we all stare at Emma.

LIN: Not like that.

JULIAN: But Emma looks like Joyce.

LIN: Even then. And he never laughed. He gave me the creeps,

KEN: Well, I've got a suggestion to make. And it links up with something Simon said a moment ago.

SIMON: What's that?

KEN: It's something which to me made a lot of sense. You said, and I quote, "I was going to send for some food." Why don't you?

SIMON: Good point, Ken. There's quite a good Pizza Presto round the corner, if that suits everybody. The menu's on the desk there, Lin. Tick what you want, and we'll ring through for it.

*Lin finds the menu, which she then passes round.*

Why did he say he had nothing to hide? Nobody was accusing him of anything.

EMMA: You were. You implied that he did know what happened during the two hours, so that meant he was hiding something.

SIMON: You're right. And I'm right. There are too many gaps, and they all come in crucial places. Characters, premeditation, the axe, the naked bodies, the two hours...He must know what happened in those two hours!

JULIAN: He's been traumatized, Simon. What's a story for us is a reality for him. Maybe there are things that he can't remember because his subconscious won't let him remember them.

KEN: Deep waters, Jules, deep waters. Choose a pizza.

EMMA: I think Julian's right.

LIN: Yes, so do I.

SIMON: You think he's genuine?

EMMA: Yes.

LIN: Yes.  
EMMA: And weird.  
SIMON: Ken?  
KEN: I'm having the Neapolitan.  
SIMON: Is the old man acting, or is he for real?  
KEN: "There is no art to find the mind's construction in the face." I reserve judgement.

*Lin is waiting with the menu.*

LIN: Simon?  
SIMON: Oh, I'll have seafood.  
LIN: Shall I go and phone the order, then?  
SIMON: Thanks, Lin.  
*She crosses left.*  
And Julian?  
JULIAN: He seems genuine.

*Lin opens the door, and goes out.*

LIN: Oh!  
BILL (*off*): Goodnight, then.  
LIN (*off*): Goodnight.  
SIMON: Seems.

*The sound of the front door opening and closing. Lin looks in again.*

LIN (*whispering*): He was out there. I think he was listening in.

*She goes out again. We will hear her off stage ordering the pizzas.*

KEN: Curiouser and curiouser.  
EMMA: Creepier and creepier. I should lock your door tonight if I were you, Simon.  
SIMON: Hm. You all think he's weird, and you all think he's genuine or probably genuine. And Tom was straightforward till he mysteriously got an axe in his hand, and Joyce may have been a happy or an unhappy wife who took a lover who we know nothing about. Where the hell is my play?  
KEN: There I have to side with you, Simon. Great actor though I am, I find it very hard to fit character to situation.

*Lin returns.*

LIN: They'll be about twenty minutes.  
SIMON: Thanks, Lin. We're just discussing characterisation. Ken can't latch on to Tom.  
LIN: I'd noticed. Oh, sorry.  
KEN: Not at all, not at all.  
JULIAN: I've got the same trouble, of course. He's got these funny speech rhythms - have you noticed? Clipped, almost. And his stare. But they don't fit in with the way I have to talk in the different situations.  
SIMON: Of course we don't know what he was like forty-five years ago.

EMMA: I think he was always peculiar. He's obviously jealous of his brother. He was in love with his brother's wife. Living in the same house - never married - and still living here. No normal person would have stayed.

SIMON: So either the characters are wrong, or the situation's wrong. Yet in themselves they seem to be fixed. My God, Emma!

EMMA: What?

SIMON: What you were saying about the door.

EMMA: What did I say about the door?

SIMON: That I should lock it tonight. Why the hell didn't Joyce lock her door that night? Wouldn't you lock your door if you were taking your lover to bed, and you knew old Bill was padding around?

KEN: Maybe she did. Maybe Tom had to break it down.

SIMON: Tom locked the door when he killed himself, and the police broke it down. They'd hardly have to break down a door that had already been broken down.

KEN Ah!

SIMON: What?

KEN: There's your solution. Tom and Bill spent their two hours mending the door!

SIMON: None of it adds up. None of it. Unless you reverse the roles.

JULIAN: I was just thinking the same thing.

KEN: You want me to be Bill?

SIMON: In a manner of speaking. We put Bill in Tom's place, and Tom in Bill's place. What I'm saying, Ken, is that it wasn't Tom who killed Joyce and Graham. It was Bill.

KEN: Good Lord, Simon, that's going a bit far.

SIMON: Lin, can you just read out my summary of the facts.

*Lin finds the summary.*

LIN (*reading*): "Bill, older brother, lives upstairs. Tom and Joyce live downstairs. Joyce has a lover, Graham. Tom goes to Birmingham for conference. Bill hears Graham arrive around seven. Ted Taylor brings Tom home after conference ends early, and they arrive at nine. Bill hears screams soon after, goes downstairs, finds Tom with axe in hand, Joyce and Graham dead. Bill phones police around eleven. Tom locks door. Police arrive at 11.15, break door down, and find Tom dead in chair, throat and wrists cut, razor on floor. Tom's fingerprints found on axe and razor. Verdict: murder and suicide while balance of mind disturbed."

Tom's fingerprints were on the axe and razor.

SIMON: Bill could have wiped his off, and pressed Tom's hand round the handle.

KEN: I see. So Tom came home, and found Bill with the axe in his hand.

SIMON: Well done, Ken.

LIN: But then surely Tom would have rung for the police.

KEN: And why would Tom have committed suicide?

SIMON: He didn't. Bill killed him. Christ, that's another gap in his story. Why the hell would Bill wait for the police to come and break the door down? You know your brother wants to kill himself, you find he's locked the door, so do you just wait around for someone else to break it down?

JULIAN: You get in as quick as you can.

SIMON: Right. So take it step by step: Bill's in love with Joyce, tries to end her affair with Graham, fails, kills them both in a fit of jealous rage, and is caught in the act by Tom. He then realizes he can put the blame on Tom, kills him, presses Tom's hands round axe and razor, locks the door, and rings for the police.

LIN: Why was Abel blessed and Cain cursed?

SIMON: What?

LIN: That's what he said. God, Simon, you are brilliant.

EMMA: It's brilliant if you're right, Simon. It's terrible if you're wrong.

JULIAN: It's terrible if he's right. But it does make sense.

SIMON: Will you try it?

KEN: What, now? On an empty stomach?

JULIAN: Let's try it, Ken. Where from, Simon?

SIMON: The entrance of Tom. Bill by the bed, with the axe in his hand.

*Ken goes out left, and Julian goes to the bed.*

Scream, scream, shout, shout. Emma screams.

*Silence. Enter Tom. Ken re-enters.*

KEN: Oh my God! My God, Bill, what's happened?

*He goes to the bed. Julian stares at the bed.*

They're dead! Christ!

JULIAN: I killed them.

KEN: Why? Who is he? Bill, for Christ's sake, what's happened?

JULIAN: I killed them.

*Ken goes to Julian, who is still staring at the bed, and shakes him.*

KEN: What happened?

*Now Julian looks at Ken.*

JULIAN: She was a whore.

KEN: You didn't have to kill her! Bill! Christ! I'd better phone for the police.

JULIAN: No.

KEN: What do you mean, no? We've got to fetch the police, Bill.

JULIAN: No! I don't want the police. I want to think.

KEN: What is there to think about, for God's sake? You've just killed two people. Who was he?

JULIAN: Graham. Her lover. Why aren't you in Birmingham?

KEN: We finished early. Dear God, I wish I'd never gone! Bill, for Christ's sake sit down, and let me get the police.

JULIAN: You'd like that, wouldn't you?

KEN: What?

JULIAN: Have them take me away.

KEN: What are you talking about?

JULIAN: The mad brother. Everyone feeling sorry for you and...you'd like that. Everyone loves, Tom. Pity about his brother. I never had a life! It's not fair!

KEN: Bill, you're sick. We've got to get help.

*He moves left, but Julian bars his way.*

You need help, Bill.

*Julian threatens him with the axe.*

What are you going to do, kill me as well?

JULIAN: No. You've got to give me time to think. You sit over there. Go on.

*Ken sits down.*

I just don't want to be locked away, Tom.

KEN: You've got no choice, Bill. They'll give you treatment - they won't put you in prison.

JULIAN: Treatment!

*He begins to walk past Ken's chair, across to the right, where Ken can only see him by turning.*

Treatment for life's shadows. Treatment to give you looks and charm, in place of... Will treatment bring Joyce back? Bloody whore! Will treatment ever take this axe out of my hand?

KEN: Christ! I don't believe this is happening!

*He buries his face in his hands. Julian slips out right, and returns with a knife.*

Please God, let it all be a dream!

*He is weeping. Julian comes up behind him. The front doorbell rings, and they all jump.*

Bloody hell!

*The shock gives way to laughter.*

SIMON: Would you get it, Lin?

*She looks scared.*

O.K., I'll go.

*He goes out left.*

KEN: How were we?

EMMA: You were very convincing.

LIN: God, it was really scary. When you got that knife.

JULIAN: Couldn't find a razor.

KEN: Oh, I see, that's what you were doing! So I really was saved by the bell.

EMMA: I'm beginning to think Simon's right. It all fits in.

KEN: I don't know where the laughing, joking Tom fits in. Unless I enter left with "I say, I say, I say, what's that axe doing in your hand?"

*Simon re-enters left with an armful of pizzas.*

SIMON: Pizza time.

*Enthusiastic reception. He goes to the table, which Lin clears.*

KEN: You got anything to drink, Simon?

SIMON: Plenty in the fridge.

KEN: I'd rather have mine from the cabinet.

SIMON: Lin, can you get drinks and cutlery?

EMMA: I'll give you a hand.

*Lin and Emma go out right, Ken goes to the drinks cabinet, Julian fetches glasses, and Simon sorts out the pizzas.*

SIMON: It was right, wasn't it?

JULIAN: I'm afraid so.

KEN: What are you going to do about it, Simon?

SIMON: I don't know.

JULIAN: You've got to be careful. The fact that we feel more in character doesn't prove that he's a murderer.

KEN: Always remember, Simon, the play's the thing. The question is not: what's true? The question is: does it make good theatre? Never mind the label. Taste the content.

*Lin and Emma return. Ken and Julian sit at the table, and Simon sits in one of the chairs. Lin and Emma give out cutlery and drinks, then Emma sits near Simon, and Lin joins the others at the table. The dialogue continues through these activities.*

EMMA: Lin and I find it hard to believe that old Bill has been acting.

LIN: I mean, he seems so genuine.

KEN: That, my dear, is acting. The art is to seem genuine.

EMMA: Simon was the only one who even suspected.

KEN: I reserved judgement.

JULIAN: Don't forget he's been playing this role for forty-five years.

KEN: That's right. If he doesn't know his lines by now, he never will.

EMMA: But you get a feeling, don't you, when someone's hiding something?

KEN: Ah, feminine intuition. The infallible guide. And no doubt Joyce had a feeling she was in for a wonderful time that night.

EMMA: So what *are* you going to do, Simon?

SIMON: As Ken said, the play's the thing. In more ways than one. I think we have to pursue this line, because we all feel that it makes sense.

EMMA: You'll act it in front of him?

SIMON: That's the other side of Ken's apt allusion. I'd like to know the truth, whether it's good theatre or not.

KEN: So we'll try to catch the conscience of the King?

SIMON: Exactly.

LIN: You're going to act the murder with him doing it?

SIMON: That's the idea

EMMA: You're playing with fire, Simon

LIN: It's cruel.

SIMON: It's no crueller than hacking three people to death.

EMMA: Supposing he didn't do it.

SIMON: Then it's just a play.

EMMA: He won't take it as just a play.

JULIAN: But Simon's right. We've got no choice anyway. Whether he's guilty or not, the other way wasn't working.

LIN: But we don't have to do it in front of him!

KEN: That's how we'll find out the truth! Have you not heard, dear girl,

That guilty creatures sitting at a play

Have by the very cunning of the scene

Been struck so to the soul that presently

They have proclaim'd their malefactions;

For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak

With most miraculous organ?

Obviously, you hadn't heard.

LIN: Yes I had. But just because Hamlet says it, that doesn't mean it's true.

SIMON: You'll do it for me, won't you, Emma?

*Their eyes meet.*

EMMA: Yes, if you want me to.

SIMON: Thanks. Then we're all agreed?

KEN: Apart from the lady on my right.

LIN: No, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to butt in.

JULIAN: You weren't butting in. We all have our doubts, Lin. I'm as scared as you are. But we've raised the curtain, so we have to play till the end.

*She nods.*

KEN: Meanwhile, I should like to ask a leading question. Is there anyone who can't finish his pizza?

## **CURTAIN**

### **End of Act One**

## **ACT TWO**

*The following morning. The furniture has been rearranged. Perhaps other minor changes - e.g. the removal of the posters. Simon and Emma are sitting at the table having coffee. Simon is in his shirtsleeves, and Emma is wearing his dressing-gown.*

EMMA: You realize Lin's in love with you, don't you?

SIMON: Lin? I realize she's a fan. Keeps telling me how brilliant I am - but then maybe I am. That doesn't mean she's in love with me.

EMMA: God, you men are so naive.

SIMON: Well, I never gave her cause, as they say.

EMMA: Which makes you more irresistible, Simon.

*She drinks.*

And I think Julian's in love with me.

SIMON: Now that I can believe. Has he...made approaches?

EMMA: Oh no, Julian's not like that. He worships from afar, like Lin. Actually, they'd make a good pair.

SIMON: Who's Ken in love with?

EMMA: Himself.

*They both laugh.*

SIMON: I like Julian. He's totally reliable.

EMMA: Yes. He'd make a wonderful brother. Do you miss Meg?

SIMON: I miss having a home. I'm not sure whether that's the same thing.

EMMA: I shouldn't think it is, no. If I was married, I think I'd like to be regarded as me, not as home.

SIMON: And would you like to get married?

EMMA: Yes. To someone who'd regard me as me. But I wouldn't want to live in a bed-sit. Why on earth didn't Joyce and Tom get a place of their own?

SIMON: Maybe they couldn't afford it.

EMMA: Personnel manager? If I'd been Joyce, I'd have insisted. I don't know why they lived here, I can't understand why Bill goes on living here, and I wonder how long you'll go on living here. What are you going to do if he confesses?

SIMON: I don't know. I've been thinking about that all night.

*Emma looks at him over her cup.*

EMMA: That's very flattering.

SIMON: Part of the night. Sorry.

EMMA: And what did you decide?

SIMON: I didn't. It's all so unpredictable.

EMMA: Well, imagine he breaks down and cries, "I did it! I did it!" Are you going to put your arm round him and say, "Never mind, it's only a play"? Or are you going to tell the police, or tell him to put his head on the chair while you fetch the axe?

SIMON: I think if he confesses, then we have to see what he wants to do.

EMMA: And if he wanted to do nothing, would you stay here? Or let somebody else stay here?

SIMON: I don't know.

EMMA: And supposing he has a fit or a heart attack or something because you've accused him of a murder, he didn't commit? Imagine having all those terrible memories, and then having someone tell you were responsible when you weren't.

SIMON: You're saying we shouldn't go through with this at all. But if we don't know whether he's guilty or not, should I stay here? Or let somebody else stay here? We have to know the truth, don't we?

*The front doorbell rings.*

God, that's them already. You'd better get dressed.

*He goes out left. The door is not locked. Emma calmly takes the coffee cups out right.*

*(Off:)* Hi. O.K., I'll take that.

LIN *(off:)* Thanks. Ouf!

SIMON *(off:)* Any trouble?

LIN *(off:)* No, no Julian and Ken are just coming.

*Simon and Lin enter, with Simon carrying a spotlight.*

SIMON: Just the job.

LIN: Oh, you've changed things round.

SIMON: Yes, this is the way it was, or as near as I can get it.

LIN: It's spooky. Have you seen him?

SIMON: No. But we heard him come home last night.

LIN: We?

KEN *(off:)* Anyone at home?

SIMON: Come on in, Ken.

*Ken and Julian enter left, with Julian carrying a bag.*

KEN: Morning, all. Hello, darling.

*He kisses Lin.*

Followed you all the way down the High Street. Ah, furniture went walkies in the night, did it?

SIMON: This is the lay-out as it was then. Did you get everything?

KEN: No problem. Jules paid.

SIMON *(to Julian:)* Hi. Give any bills to Lin, then, will you? Ken, just give us a hand with this.

*Julian greets Lin and gives her the bill. Ken helps Simon set up the spotlight.*

Lin, can you just plug it in for us? Plug's over there.

*Lin plugs it in, and Simon turns it on. Lin stands by Simon.*

Lovely. Now, what we want is, the moment I switch the light off, you focus on me, follow me to where I join Emma, and then keep it on the two of us till Julian puts the light on again.

*Emma enters, right.*

EMMA: Morning, everyone.

*General reaction.*

KEN: Hello, darling!

*He kisses her.*

You look absolutely edible.

SIMON: Do you want to try it, Lin?

*Lin is staring at Emma.*

Lin?

LIN: What?

SIMON: Just try it out, will you?

LIN: Sorry.

SIMON: I'll do the light, then track me. Julian, could you just close the shutters?

*Simon goes to the door, left, and turns on the light. Julian closes the shutters (from down right).*

O.K. One, two, three, off.

*He switches off the light. Blackout.*

It should be on me straight away, Lin.

*She switches on the spot, but it is off target.*

Can you get it on me?

*She does.*

Right. Now track me.

*He moves, but she is too slow.*

You've got to keep up, Lin!

KEN: I could do it, Simon. I'm not on stage.

SIMON: No, Lin'll do it. I want you ready for entry on this side. Let's try it again.

*He returns to the door, left, and switches on the light. Lin is obviously very upset, but tries to hide it.*

Right. As soon as I... You all right, Lin?

LIN: Yes.

SIMON: You look...

LIN: I'm all right.

SIMON: Try switching on when I close the door. That'll give you a few more seconds. Ready?

*He opens and closes the door, and she switches on.*

Off goes the light.

*He switches it off. The spot is on him.*

Track me.

*He walks centre, and she tracks him.*

Emma, you should be here.

*Emma swiftly moves into position. Simon reaches her, pretends a kiss and leads her to the bed.*

*The spot goes with them all the way.*

Great. And you stay on us till Julian switches on the light.

*He crosses left and switches on the light. Lin turns off the spot.*

KEN: Emma going to strip, then?

SIMON: Yes.

KEN (to Lin:) Don't you dare go wrong with that spot!

JULIAN: You don't think it might be more effective without the spot?

KEN: Absolutely not, Jules. You'll ruin my morning.

SIMON: In this case I think seeing is more effective than imagining.

KEN: I agree. Let's have two spotlights.

SIMON: And if this thing's going to work, Ken, I want no farting around, no corpsing. We're going for real. And as we said last night, we go straight through to the murder without a break.

LIN: I think it's cruel!

SIMON: Lin, we've been through all this!

*She remains distressed.*

JULIAN: None of us like it, Lin. But I think we have to do it.

KEN: How else is Simon going to get his Play of the Year Award?

LIN: It's not funny!

SIMON (*aside to Emma*): What's the matter with her?

EMMA: You're the matter with her.

JULIAN: It's not just the play now, is it? Simon's got a right to know if he's sharing a house with a murderer.

LIN: Well he...shouldn't play with people's feelings.

*Simon comes across to her.*

SIMON: I'm sorry, Lin, I didn't mean to upset you.

LIN: It's all right. I'm being silly.

SIMON: Can we go ahead?

*Lin nods.*

O.K., get yourselves ready for action. I'll bring him down. And remember, if you're not on stage, watch him.

KEN: Well, my lord, if he steal aught the whilst this play is playing, and 'scape detecting, I will pay the theft.

*Simon goes out left. There will be muffled sounds off as he fetches Bill. Emma makes the bed, and Julian busies himself with the bag he brought in.*

LIN: I hope he doesn't come.

KEN: Then we shall never know.

LIN: I don't want to know. Excuse me.

*She goes off right. Julian takes something across to Emma.*

JULIAN: Can I just give you these, Emma?

EMMA: Oh, thanks, Julian.

JULIAN (*indicating bed*): It looks as if he had a rough night.

EMMA: Yes. Could you pull that sheet straight?

*He does. Ken joins them.*

KEN: Don't know what's got into Lin. Something's upset her.

*No response.*

I suppose it's this weird show we're putting on. Not often you act a play and hope the audience'll go and commit suicide.

JULIAN: That's not what I'm hoping for,

KEN: Be a bit of a let-down if he doesn't. Looking forward to your striptease, though, Emma.

EMMA: That might be a let-down, too, Ken.

KEN: Depends what you let down.

EMMA: What are you hoping for, Julian?

*A moment's pause.*

JULIAN: Silence and love;  
And the long dew-dropping hours of the night,  
And the stars above.

*Simon comes in left with Bill.*

KEN: Ah! Morning, Bill!

*Bill nods.*

EMMA: Morning, Bill.

SIMON: Come and sit over here, Bill.

*Lin returns. She is now composed.*

Can we get you anything? Cup of coffee?

*Bill shakes his head, and takes out a cigarette.*

Anyone else want anything?

KEN: I...

SIMON: Apart from Ken?

*General refusal.*

Afterwards, Ken. Right, Bill, what we're going to do is act out a couple of scenes along slightly different lines from what we did yesterday. And we'd like your reaction.

BILL: I don't know anything about theatre.

SIMON: No, we just want to know your feelings, as someone who was there when it all happened. Emma, we'll need the ...er...

EMMA: I've got them.

SIMON: Good. And Julian?

*Julian gestures that all is well.*

So you go out. Ken, you and I will sit over there.

*Julian goes out, left. "Over there" is down left, but first Simon positions himself by the light switch next to the door.*

Emma's ironing, then.

*She irons with a real iron and clothes.*

Lin, the recorder.

*Lin switches on the tape recorder.*

Everybody ready?

*He switches off the light. Blackout. Pause. He switches on the light, then sits next to Ken. Knock on door, left.*

EMMA: Come in.

*Julian enters.*

Hello, Bill.

JULIAN: Joyce.

*He stands awkwardly.*

EMMA: You want something?

JULIAN: We have to talk.

EMMA: What about? What about, Bill?

JULIAN: Can I sit down?

EMMA: Yes, all right, but not for long. I'm expecting someone.

JULIAN: Tom's gone to Birmingham.

EMMA: I am aware of that, Bill.

*Julian pulls out a cigarette after he has sat down.*

What is it you want to talk about?

JULIAN: It's difficult.

EMMA: The weather, the government, the television, the economy, the Queen, the twenty-Seventh round of the F.A.Cup, or the state of Tom's underpants?

JULIAN: It's about you and me.

EMMA: You and me.

JULIAN: You know how I feel for you, Joyce.

EMMA: Do I?

JULIAN: Don't laugh at me.

EMMA: I'm not laughing at you. How do you feel for me?

*He can't answer.*

Do you feel for me what a brother-in-law should feel for his sister-in-law?

*He is miserably silent.*

Bill, you're not trying to tell me you're in love with me, are you?

*No response.*

You are! Well, I'm ever so sorry, but I'm afraid there's someone else.

JULIAN: Who?

EMMA: His name's Tom. He's your brother. Now Bill, I'll have to ask you to leave. I've got a visitor coming.

JULIAN: Who?

EMMA: It's none of your business.

JULIAN: You shouldn't be having visitors when Tom's away.

EMMA: Tom's my husband, Bill. He's not my gaoler.

JULIAN: It's that man who was here before, isn't it? When Tom was away.

EMMA: When was that?

JULIAN: When Tom was away. I saw him. It's that man, isn't it?

EMMA: I don't know who you're talking about, but it is a man, yes. He happens to be my French tutor at evening classes, and I've got some catching up to do.

JULIAN: Why does he have to come here?

EMMA: Because I invited him here. I live here. It's my home. I can invite people, right?

JULIAN (*very upset*): No.

EMMA: Bill, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but it's really got nothing to do with you.

JULIAN: You despise me.

EMMA (*kindly*): No I don't. I like you as a brother.

*She has come within reach, and now convulsively he grabs her and tries to kiss her. Simon goes out left.*

No, Bill! Don't! Stop it!

*They fight, and she tears herself free.*

Stop it! Get out, Bill!

JULIAN: I'm sorry. I'm sorry!

EMMA: Just go!

*The front doorbell rings. Emma rushes out, left. Julian stays where he is.*

SIMON (*off.*) Hi.

EMMA (*off.*) Graham! Thank God you came!

SIMON (*off.*) What's the matter?

EMMA (*off.*) Come in here, quickly!

*Emma and Simon enter, left.*

SIMON: Oh!

EMMA: This is Tom's brother. He's just tried to rape me.

JULIAN: No! No!

SIMON: What?

JULIAN: No, Joyce! I wouldn't harm you!

SIMON: You'd better get out before I do something we'll both regret.

*Julian stands uncertainly.*

Go on, get out.

*Another moment of indecision, then Julian goes out left, leaving the door slightly ajar.*

SIMON: What a welcome! Did he really try to rape you?

EMMA: No, he wouldn't know what to do!

*They laugh.*

But it was quite nasty. Do you want a drink?

SIMON: Yes, please.

*She goes to the drinks cabinet, and talks while pouring out the drinks.*

EMMA: He's a sort of crazy mixed-up billy-goat. Came down to tell me he loved me, and couldn't even say the words. Then he grabbed me and tried to kiss me.

SIMON: Crazy mixed-up billy-goats can be dangerous.

EMMA: No, he's harmless. It's probably the first time he's ever touched a woman. Now he'll go and play with himself for a week.

SIMON: He doesn't live here, does he?

EMMA: Yes, upstairs. Didn't I tell you?

SIMON: No. We ought to have gone to the hotel.

EMMA: I hate the hotel. The way they look at you.

SIMON: At least nobody knows us. Supposing he tells your husband?

EMMA: He wouldn't dare. Especially after this. In any case, what's the harm in my French tutor giving me extra lessons? That's all you're here for, isn't it?

SIMON: Of course.

EMMA: Then let's get on with our work, and forget the billy-goat.

*They have finished their drinks.*

Relax, Graham. What's the French for 'to kiss'?

SIMON: Embrasser.

EMMA: Embrassez-moi.

*He takes her in his arms and kisses her. The door, left, closes.*

SIMON: What was that?

EMMA: He's out there!

*Simon goes swiftly to the door and opens it.*

SIMON: Nobody there.

EMMA: Lock it, Graham.

*Simon closes the door.*

SIMON: Where's the key?

EMMA: Isn't it in the lock?

SIMON: No.

EMMA: That's funny.

*Simon opens the door again, and looks on the outside. He closes it, and stands by the light switch. Lin turns on the spot.*

SIMON: No key. Anyway, he's gone – if it was him. And he's gone if it wasn't him. Time to start work. Première leçon: éteindre la lumière.

*He switches off the light.*

EMMA: That sounds very romantic.

SIMON: French is a very romantic language.

*The spot follows him as he rejoins Emma.*

And French teachers are very romantic people, especially in the company of their beautiful students. Shall we test your romantic vocabulary?

*He and Emma begin to undress one another.*

Déboutonner.

EMMA: To unbutton?

SIMON: Correct. Déshabiller.

EMMA: To undress.

SIMON: Correct. Décrocher.

EMMA: Don't know.

SIMON: To unhook. Le sein.

EMMA: It's a river.

SIMON: That's La Seine. Le sein is the breast or bosom.

EMMA: Le sein.

SIMON: Le mamelon.

EMMA: Haven't a clue.

SIMON: The nipple.

*He nuzzles her.*

EMMA: Le mamelon. Beautiful!

SIMON: Je t'aime.

EMMA: Je t'aime.

SIMON: Not tame. T'aime.

EMMA: Je t'aime.

SIMON: Je veux...

EMMA: Je veux...

SIMON: ...faire l'amour...

EMMA: ...faire l'amour...

SIMON: ...avec toi.

EMMA: ...avec toi.

SIMON: Me, too.

EMMA: Me, too.

*They get into the bed, and proceed to make love noisily. The door, left, opens. Julian turns on the light, and Lin switches off the spot. Julian is holding an axe. Emma and Simon react.*

SIMON: What the...

EMMA: Bill? What are you doing? Bill!

SIMON: Christ!

*Julian attacks Simon ferociously. There is blood all over the place, and terrified screams from Emma. Bill leaps from his seat.*

BILL: No! No! Stop it! Stop it!

*He wrestles with Julian, who lets him have the axe. As soon as he has it, the scene freezes for a moment. He stares at the axe, then at Julian.*

It's not real.

JULIAN: Of course it's not real.

*Bill looks at Simon and Emma, who are now sitting up watching him.*

BILL: The blood!

SIMON: It's stage blood.

BILL: I thought... Oh God!

*He slumps into a chair. Lin goes to pour him a drink, and the others, including Ken, form a semi-circle around him. Simon puts his trousers on first, and Emma drapes herself in a blanket. These movements all take place in silence. Lin brings Bill a drink.*

LIN: Here, Bill.

*He takes it.*

SIMON: Do you want to talk, Bill?

*No response.*

Did we get somewhere near the truth?

LIN: Simon, he's ill!

*Bill feels in his pocket, but he is trembling too much to control his movements.*

JULIAN: What do you want?

BILL: Cigarette!

*Julian takes the packet out for him, and puts a cigarette in his mouth. He lights it for him. Everyone continues to stare down at him. He inhales deeply and closes his eyes.*

SIMON: We worked it out last night - how to fit the situation to the characters. Did we get it right, Bill?

BILL: The blood!

EMMA: It's just pellets that we break.

BILL: I thought it was real.

SIMON: Jesus!

*Julian holds up his hand to tell Simon to be patient.*

BILL: Can't stand the sight of blood!

JULIAN: Bill, did you notice that we'd changed the story?

*Bill looks at him.*

BILL: Yes. You killed them.

*He looks at Simon.*

I can't stand blood.

EMMA: Simon, wash it off. You look horrible.

SIMON: I'm not leaving now.

LIN: Would you like another drink?

BILL: No. Thank you. I'm sorry. The shock. *(To Emma:)* I thought...

*He begins to weep. Emma kneels beside him.*

EMMA: Tell us about it. Tell us about Joyce. I'd really like to know about Joyce.

BILL: Joyce! She was so beautiful. But she never knew...I never told her...

EMMA: That you loved her?

BILL: I couldn't tell her. She was Tom's wife. How could I tell her?

EMMA: You must have suffered.

BILL: Yes.

EMMA: But you did speak to her that night, didn't you? Before Graham came?

BILL: Yes. He'd been before.

SIMON: So you knew he...

*Emma silences him. The only bond now is between her and Bill.*

EMMA: You thought he'd come again.

*Bill nods.*

You tried to stop it

BILL: Yes.

EMMA: So you told her you knew.

BILL: No. I couldn't.

EMMA: Why not?

BILL: Humiliating. I couldn't hurt her.

EMMA: So what did you do?

BILL: I remember she was ironing... She looked happy...

*He stares.*

EMMA: You talked to her. What did you talk about?

*He shakes his head.*

BILL: Nothing. I just stayed. So that he wouldn't come.

EMMA: You thought if you stayed, he wouldn't come?

BILL: She kept... she wanted me to leave... and I wouldn't. I stayed.

EMMA: But he did come, didn't he?

*He nods.*

Then what did you do?

BILL: Stayed. I didn't know what to do. I was afraid to leave them alone, you see. Foolish. They could always go somewhere else. That's what they should have done. He was a nice man. French teacher. Friendly man. Gentle. One mustn't speak ill of the dead.

EMMA: You must have left them eventually.

BILL: Yes. She was so sweet to me.

EMMA: You went up to your room?

BILL: Yes. Then...it must have been like your play.

*Simon reacts.*

EMMA: You came back, and killed them.

*Bill gazes wide-eyed at her.*

BILL: No! No!

EMMA: You said it was like our play!

BILL: They must have undressed.

EMMA: Then you came in with the axe.

BILL: No!

SIMON: You came in with the axe and you killed them!

BILL: No!

SIMON: You couldn't stand the fact that this beautiful woman, who you worshipped like a goddess, could actually strip off like a whore and let this man take possession of her. You had to stop them, didn't you? So you went to the shed, grabbed the axe, came back, and hacked them to pieces. But then your brother came back, didn't he? The chosen one. Tom, who had everything, while you had nothing. And that was your chance. You could get rid of him, too, and let him take the blame. So you killed him, rigged it to look like suicide, went into the hall, locking the door behind you, and rang for the police.

BILL: No.

SIMON: The scene we acted just now was the truth.

BILL: No.

SIMON: And you tried to stop us because you couldn't stand the truth.

BILL: No.

SIMON: Then why did you stop us?

BILL: I thought it was real!

JULIAN: Did he come back and kill them?

BILL: Yes.

JULIAN: Then he killed himself?

BILL: Yes.

SIMON: Where did he get the axe? Why didn't they lock the door? And why the hell didn't you break the door down before the police came?

BILL: I don't know.

*He is very distressed.*

SIMON: Then I'll tell you. He didn't get the axe. You did. And they didn't lock the door, because you'd taken the key. And you didn't break the door down because you'd killed Tom yourself.

LIN: Simon, stop it. Can't you see he's ill?

SIMON: Is he? Is he really?

*Bill drags feverishly at his cigarette.*

JULIAN: Leave him, Simon.

SIMON: Then what's making him ill? What is it, Bill, eh? The stirrings of conscience? The fear of discovery? The memory of...?

BILL (*with sudden vehemence*): I don't have to listen to you. Who are you? I don't have to listen!

*He stands up.*

You said it was a play. I don't know what you want, but I don't have to listen.

EMMA: Wait! Please, Bill, we're sorry. That's not what we wanted. Don't go now.

*Bill, trembling, continues to look angrily at Simon, but he does not go.*

He won't say another word. Will you, Simon?

*Simon finally breaks the contact, and goes to pour himself a drink. Ken follows him.*

KEN: Just what I was thinking.

EMMA: Do you want to sit down, Bill?

*She helps him.*

Take your time.

BILL: Why should they have locked the door? No-one would have disturbed them. Did you lock the door last night?

EMMA: What?

BILL: When you and he made love, did you lock the door?

*Emma is shocked.*

SIMON: Jesus, he was bloody listening in!

BILL: You don't have to listen in this house. You hear everything.

KEN (*at Simon*): Ts, ts, ts.

*Lin is upset.*

BILL: Did you lock the door?

EMMA: I didn't.

SIMON: No.

BILL: You hear everything. It's an old house.

SIMON: All right. That doesn't explain the axe.

BILL: I can't explain the axe.

LIN: I can.

*They all look at her.*

If Bill heard you, Tom would have heard them.

SIMON: What do you mean?

LIN: When he came into the hall. He'd have heard them. He didn't need to open the door. He heard them making love, and then he went for the axe. There's no mystery.

KEN: Lin, you're the brightest star of us all.

SIMON: If he heard them, why didn't they hear him?

EMMA: Because they were fucking. Don't be naive, Simon.

BILL: I could have saved her.

JULIAN: How, Bill?

BILL: I heard Tom come home. I heard the car draw up, and I heard the front door. But I didn't know what to do, you see. I don't think quickly. I didn't know what to do! They were still making love. I didn't understand it then. Nothing happened - they just went on. But he must have gone to the shed. If I'd gone down, I might have stopped him.

EMMA: You couldn't have stopped him.

JULIAN: When did you go down?

BILL: When I heard the screams. But then it was too late. She was already dead. Oh!

EMMA: You don't have to tell us, Bill. You don't have to go on with this.

*He eventually regains control.*

BILL: And then I killed him.

JULIAN: What?

SIMON: Jesus!

BILL: He couldn't do it, you see. And so I had to do it.

JULIAN: Do what?

*No response.*

EMMA: What happened, Bill?

BILL: I wanted to ring for the police, but we both sat down. I couldn't stop crying. And then he said: "I have to die." "I have to die." (*Pause.*) But he couldn't do it himself.

JULIAN: He made you kill him?

*Bill nods.*

Who went for the razor?

BILL: He did. Then he sat there. He couldn't do it. I had to kneel in front of him, and push each hand down to cut the wrists. And then the throat. My brother. He always knew what to do. Told me to lock the door. But I stayed with him. With them. For forty-five years.

*He fumbles for another cigarette. Emma helps him. He smokes.*

Is that what you wanted?

EMMA: We only wanted the truth.

BILL: No, you wanted a play.

SIMON: I'm sorry if I stepped out of line.

BILL: You should be a policeman. So what are you going to do? Are you going to tell the world about me?

JULIAN: Do you want us to?

*Bill doesn't respond.*

Is that why you helped us?

BILL: Perhaps. (*To Emma:*) You're so like her. I know that people find me strange. I'm aware that I'm strange. But I can't fit in. I'm chained, you see. I can't get away. And now I'm too old to hope. You understand that, don't you?

EMMA: Yes. I think so.

BILL: You have helped me. And perhaps I can still help you. To work out your play. Yes. May I go?

EMMA: Of course you can.

*He stands up, and turns to Simon. It seems as if he wants to say something, but then abruptly he turns away and leaves the room. There is a long silence. Lin starts to cry.*

SIMON: Oh come on, Lin.

LIN: Sorry.

KEN: Have a drink, darling.

*He pours one for her and one for himself.*

SIMON: Did you get it all?

*Lin nods.*

EMMA: So what are you going to do, Simon?

SIMON: I'm not sure.

JULIAN: You do believe him, don't you?

SIMON: I suppose so. But I still can't make him out.

JULIAN: What can't you make out?

SIMON: How much is genuine, and how much is an act? Just now, for instance, didn't you get the feeling he was mocking us?

EMMA: No. I think we really have helped him. He's faced up to things.

SIMON: To what? The fact that he helped his brother to kill himself? Or the fact that he was in love with Joyce? He knew all that before.

EMMA: But now he's shared it.

KEN: If you want to know my opinion, our scenario will make a far better play than his. Jules here can do the fifty whacks, and I'll come up smelling of roses.

LIN: What would happen to him if the police knew he'd killed his brother?

KEN: I suppose they'd arrest him. Can someone be arrested forty-five years after the crime?

JULIAN: No-one's going to find out, are they? As far as I'm concerned, the brother committed suicide anyway.

SIMON: Assuming Bill's telling the truth.

EMMA: Of course he's telling the truth, Simon. Nobody could lie that convincingly.

KEN: We can, my dear.

SIMON: As Ken says, that's the art of acting.

EMMA: But he's not an actor!

SIMON: How do you know?

LIN: I think you're horrible to talk like that, Simon.

EMMA: And so do I. You should show a bit of compassion.

KEN: Well I have to admit, all the pieces fit together. But it's not such a good play.

EMMA: I think it is. I think that poor old man is tragic. Imagine living all these years with nothing but those terrible memories.

KEN: You can't make a play out of memories, Emma.

SIMON: Yes you can. You can make a play out of any story. You only need to find the angle.

JULIAN: Have you found it, Simon?

SIMON: I think so. We're the angle.

JULIAN: What do you mean?

SIMON: What are we here for?

KEN: Ah, the meaning of life!

SIMON: No, the reason for our being together.

JULIAN: To create a play.

SIMON: That's our angle. How we take a story, and turn it into art.

KEN: The newspapers do it all the time.

SIMON: But we bring it to life. And we'll show how we bring it to life. It's all there, in Lin's little machine. We just have to shift things, select, reshape...

EMMA: And what about Bill?

SIMON: What about Bill?

EMMA: Well he's not just a story any more, is he?

SIMON: You want to look after him?

EMMA: That's not what I meant. But we can't just ignore him.

KEN: He did say he'd help us.

LIN: Why did he say that?

SIMON: What?

LIN: Well we've got his story now, so how can he help us?

SIMON: I don't know what you're getting at.

JULIAN: I do. Sh!

*He holds up his hand. There is silence.*

Oh God!

SIMON: I can't hear anything.

JULIAN: No. Come on, Ken.

KEN: Eh?

*Julian hurries out of the room with Ken. We hear them go upstairs and bang on Bill's door.*

JULIAN (*off*): Bill, are you all right? Open up! Bill!

*We hear the door being broken down.*

EMMA: Oh no!

*Silence. Julian comes downstairs and re-enters.*

JULIAN: He's cut his throat.

**CURTAIN**

**The End**