

VIOLENT TIMES

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Cast of Characters:

Geoff Nesmit - A man of 33

Violet Nesmit - His sister

Ken Nesmit - Their father

Josie Nesmit - Their mother

The action of the play takes place in a house in Acock's Green, Birmingham in 1994, and at various times between 1954 and 1973

Violent Times was originally commissioned by Theatre Absolute in Coventry and was given its first performance at the Belgrade Theatre Coventry on June 8th 1994. The cast was as follows:

Geoff	Michael Dwerryhouse
Violet	Jane Frost
Josie	Julia Negus
Kenneth	Anthony Austin

Director - Chris O'Connell

Lighting Designer - Simon Kemp

The production was toured to small-scale theatre venues in June and July 1994.

Violent Times was written as a tribute to Athol Fugard.

Scene One

[1994. Main room of house in Acocks Green, Birmingham. Geoff is alone, working. He is thirty-three, methodical to the point of obsession. There are newspaper cuttings all over the place. Headlines are about law and order. There are articles and letters. Geoff is sorting the cuttings, slowly, carefully and contentedly]

Geoff:

Murder.

[He puts the cutting in the appropriate pile]

Punishment.

Baby James.

Guns. Gun control.

Drugs.

Murder, unsolved.

So-called joy-riding.

Baby James.

Baby James.

Rape - simple.

Armed robbery. Armed robbery again. Robbery without arms -not to be confused with the case of the limbless torso....

[He laughs]

Or robbery while legless. Now would that be under robbery or drugs ? Drug-related crime.

So-called joy-riding. Grief-riding. S for so-called, G for grief. Damn, I'm losing track of the system.

[He looks upwards]

Sorry.

[He calms himself. There is a post-it note on one of the cuttings, he reads it]

"July 1992. Nota bene - in addition to writing letter, also telephoned the 'This Morning' opinion line, in favour of personal alarms for the elderly, KN". He works tirelessly for the needy. Like the elderly. For the less fortunate elderly, perhaps, those without sons to assist them.

K.N. Mr Pepper. Cayenne. Doctor Pepper and his very rude beer. His funeral bier. His one for the road.

[He sticks the note somewhere]

He's going to like this. At times he had them sorted before, but not for a while. It's gone to seed. We've slid downhill. The order has gone. Fear not, it shall be restored. Neat titles, and headings where necessary. Then I can surprise him.

He always likes surprises. Not shocks - that is the difference. An electric surprise wouldn't hurt, would it ? But a shock... "Two people were taken to hospital suffering from surprise". "He was found wandering around in a state of surprise". No, it's a different word you see, Rabby. If you knew words like he does, you would know that there is a world of difference, between shock and surprise.

[He calls out]

I shall be up in a minute, old man, with a nice surprise.

Not a shock.

[He reads a cutting, in the voice of someone substantially older]

"I am sure that all your readers were as saddened as I was, to see your heart-rending picture of the elderly attack victim, 'All this for just 75 pence'. But it is not enough simply to be angered and appalled by such events. We should be joining together as concerned citizens in a campaign for effective action to restore a sense of right and wrong. I do not believe that punishment is the answer alone, it must be accompanied by restating time and again the old moral values that are as true now as they have always "

[He breaks off]

I can hear him.

[Calls] I can hear you !

I must think of something else to do. More engrossing than the sorting-out. A distraction. To occupy the mind.

A song. One of our favourites. A song and a dance to entertain the elderly, perhaps. Will you join me, Geoffrey, in 'Moonlight Bay'.

[He sings, and does a little child-like dance routine, obviously half of an act]

'We were sailing along, on Moonlight Bay. I could hear the voices singing, they seemed to say. You have stolen my heart...'

[He makes a slight mistake and snaps a little]

No. It isn't the same. No.

Press on, Geoffrey, press on.

Let's switch on the goggle-box shall we, I expect you're tired of the sound of my voice by now. What shall we find today, I wonder, to entertain and inform us ?

[He uses the picture on one cutting to spur a little performance, which he noticeably enjoys more and more as a reporter and then lawyer]

I am speaking from the scene-but-not-heard of the crime itself. Another sickening crime - there are just not enough adjectives left in the english language to describe the sort of people who have done this. Sick, perverted, amoral, twisted, stomach-churning people. An innocent helpless victim - in his own home, his only crime being to be who he was. And as I stand here, I can actually feel the shock of the stricken community. No-one can really understand what has happened, what it is in our society that allows this to go on. The stunned faces of the people standing in bewildered clusters in the street seem to ask 'where have we gone wrong ?' We stare without comprehension ladies and gentlemen of the jury, at the wave, no, it is insufficient these days to say the crime wave, rather the sea of violent crime, the ocean of evil in which Britain is drowning. Where, we must ask ourselves, is the decency, the common sense, the sense of right and wrong that was once our national hallmark ?

[The doorbell rings. He stops, stares for a moment at the door, then shouts.]

I'll go!

[He goes off to answer door]

[Off] Oh.

[PAUSE]

[He comes back into the doorway, turns back out towards the hall]

Come on in.

[He reappears, followed very slowly by Violet. She is his older sister, thirty-six. She is much louder and more apparently confident than Geoff, although at this point she is too 'shocked' to appear confident. She is moving very slowly, looking around]

Violet:

Geoff ?

[PAUSE]

Jesus! Jesus.

[PAUSE]

Hello.

[No reply. He returns to sorting cuttings, just as carefully and engrossed as before]

I've tried to imagine how I would feel now, you know.... What would ... when the door opened. Acted it out on my own.

[PAUSE]

It wasn't well. Sort of... This wasn't what happened.

[She is looking round]

Geoff: No, of course not. Yes, I should imagine it would be difficult to predict. That's because of the human factor.

Violet: [He is odd] Yes, the human factor.

Geoff: You must forgive the untidiness. I've been sorting out for him -a bit of an 'audit', you might say. All of his work, through the years. Dad's. Your father's, I should say. His letters, and articles he's cut out. There's a lot. Quite a collection. So perhaps you would bear with us if it isn't spick and span. As a rule we -

Violet: Geoff. Jesus. Stop, Geoff.

[PAUSE]

It's been twenty-one years.

I don't know, 'it's been a long time', 'weren't you once my sister?', perhaps. 'Hello' even. Jesus Christ. Faint or something, have a heart attack, come over here and hit me, anything, but for Christ's sake don't be bloody polite, please.

Geoff: Sorry. No, of course.

[PAUSE]

Would you like a cup of tea ?

Violet: [Laughs, exasperated]

Yes, thank you.

I mean, isn't it just a little surprising ?

Geoff: Surprising, yes. Not shocking though.

Now then. Milk, two sugars. Green mug.

Violet: God. Geoff.

[She stares at him, he is waiting]

Oh. Just milk, no sugar.

[He is disappointed that he remembered wrong]

No, you were right, I'm sure. I must've used to... I've changed, that's all.

Geoff: Have you ?

Violet: Twenty-one years, Geoff.

[She looks him in the eyes, and makes an abortive move towards him. He moves off to put the kettle on.]

Geoff: Tea for two then.

[He goes out]

[PAUSE]

Violet: [To herself] What do you expect, Violet ? "Expect nothing", remember. Remember.

[She takes in the room, the furniture. Calls through to him]

It's exactly the same, Geoff. Exactly. Well, not the same as when I left, but The table was there, wasn't it, but this is where it was earlier, I think before. When we were tiny I should imagine. Yes. It came up to here.

[She touches the side of her head, feels a little scar]

Geoff: [Coming back in] Yes, we moved it back.

Violet: Did you ?

[PAUSE]

Geoff: It's on.

The kettle.

Violet: Good.

[PAUSE]

Well, where is he then ?

Geoff: Upstairs.

[PAUSE]

[She moves towards the door to look up]

He stays up there now.

Violet: All the time ?

Geoff: No, but mostly. He got less mobile, I'm afraid. Quite a while ago. He's got everything he needs up there. I take him whatever he wants. He rings his bell.

Violet: [Remembering] His bell.

Geoff: Do you want me to ...

Violet: No. Not yet. One at a time, I think. There is enough to deal with here, with you, this room. Will he know I'm here ?

Geoff: [Shakes his head] He will think it's the television. Or the radio. We don't have many people round. It's just the two of us. And Rabby.

Violet: Yes, I know. I know about Mum going - that's partly why I came back.

Geoff: I see.

It isn't exactly 'hot news', Six. She has been gone nearly as long as you.

Violet: [Shaking her head] Shit, Geoff, you sound just like him. When you said that, I swear...

[Geoff goes back off. He is uncomfortable with her swearing]

[PAUSE]

Six! You called me Six.

[PAUSE]

[She calls off again]

I only heard about her having left this year though, you see. Just luck - I met Abigail. Out of the blue on the tube, with a kid. Do you remember Abigail, her dance friend ? I hardly remembered her, it was her that spotted me. She shouted at me, in fact, went for me.

I couldn't believe it. About mum. I was glad, I mean, but.... I never thought she would actually leave, you know... Geoff ?

[No reply]

Do you know where she went ?

[No reply again. She is examining the clippings and letters. Picks up and reads the post-it note. Shakes her head. Sticks it on the edge of the table.]

[To herself] Plus ça change.

[Geoff is back with the tea. Pours it out]

Still the man of the people, then. He brought you up well, though, didn't he ?
Who's Robby ?

Geoff: Rabby. The cat.

Violet: Yes, I thought it must be. So Felice died. What am I talking about, of course she would, wouldn't she ? Shut up Vi.

[With the cup of tea] Cheers.

[PAUSE]

Anyway Geoffrey fucking Nesmit, how the hell are you, or something. What **is** the 'hot news' from the family bleeding seat. After all, I should be told. Some day it could all be mine.

Geoff: You need to know the state of the estate. A statement. An estatement.

[He likes his pun]

Violet: Well I need to know some things.

[She is trying to relax and does so a little, but she is aware that Geoff is not taking in much of what she says]

On the train here, it was packed. I had to join a nice little family of three, you know, and I was trying not to listen to a poor little child being pushed through his flash cards. I closed my eyes and tried to think about what was going to happen here, and do you know what I realise now ? I didn't even think about you really. I'm sorry if that sounds terrible.

Mostly it was just about him and me. What'll happen when I open the door, and he wheels his bloody chair out of here in there, manoeuvres round the coatstand, pins me neatly in the corner to confront me ? Is he going to gloat ? He knew I would be back when I needed to; or will there be something else ? Fear. Sadness. Forgiveness. Repentance. I've had little fantasies every now and then, where I come back and he falls from his chair, clasps my feet and begs for mercy. Or where one look at me turns him to jelly, and he dissolves while I pace to decide his fate.

Other times I have had nightmares. Not fantasies those though, I suppose. Memories, aren't they ?

[PAUSE]

Geoff: What have you really come back for ?

Violet: Thank God. Something approaching a genuine question. The little brother is alive, in there somewhere. In fact, a big question. What have I come back for? Well... Geoff.

[PAUSE]

Geoff: Are you living in London ?

Violet: Yes. Sort of. How did you -

Geoff: The tube. You met Abigail Tierney, you said. I mean, I know they have one in Newcastle now, but -

Violet: What ?

Geoff: Newcastle upon Tyne.

Violet: Yes.

Geoff: But they call it the Metro. And you haven't got an accent, either. Which you probably would have a bit, after all -

Violet: An accent ?

Geoff: A geordie accent. Like Jimmy Nail. [Puts on accent] Spender. Or Gazza -

Violet: Yes I know what a geordie is.

Stunning work, Sherlock.

Yep, I did meet Abigail on the tube, and she told me I knew nothing about my mother. "You'll never understand". However, my dear Geoffrey, I've only been in London for a month or two. Before that, well it's a long story.

[PAUSE]

Have you missed me ?

Geoff: No.

Violet: Oh well, that's nice.

Geoff: I know what you've been doing.

Violet: More brilliant deductions ?

Geoff: Mystic Max.

Violet: Mystic Max ?

Geoff: In the Mail. I read Scorpio every day. That's how I know what you've been doing.

For instance, this week you had a hard decision to make at work.

Violet: Did I ?

Geoff: Sundays are the exception. The one for Saturday is supposed to cover the weekend, but it's only the same length, so I count it for Saturday only, and we don't get the Mercury any more. So I know everything that's been happening to you except on Sundays.

Violet: Some of the best things happened on Sundays.

[PAUSE]

Jesus fucking Christ, Geoff, you are fucking weird, do you know that ? It is so strange. You were a little boy, for God's sake. An invisible little boy, and now you're a large as life fully grown fruitcake.

Geoff: Don't swear, Six.

Violet: Of course not. A sensitive flower like you. I should know.

Geoff: It isn't me.

Violet: No, of course. What was it ? "Children should not be obscene or they will be hurt" Ha ha bloody ha. Not heard that before, Dad. I am not a child any more, Geoff. I wasn't then either, and if I had been....

Geoff: Would you like some more tea ?

Violet: [Laughs. Geoff doesn't] This must be going well. Haven't you got anything stronger ?

Geoff: I think we have.

[He goes out to look. Violet is left absorbing. She looks up, then around again]

Violet: God, this room. How could it stay the same. My whole frigging lifetime. Longer, probably. Forty years. Except ...

[She sits, with a notebook from her bag, and remains there during the following scene. Although she is not literally aware of the scene, there is a sense in which it still inhabits the room in her time. This is the convention throughout the play.]

Scene Two

[1954 - Ken arrives with Josie, to show her round the house for the first time. He is eighteen, she is sixteen. During the scene, Violet is writing occasional notes of her thoughts.]

Kenneth: And this is the living room. Or the 'lounge' if you prefer.

Josie: The living room. Or the Drawing -

Kenneth: As opposed to the dead room, Josie. That is through there.

Josie: Is it ?

Kenneth: Oh yes. That's why the term living room exists, didn't you know ?

[She is non-plussed]

If someone dies in a house, that room becomes the dead room, you see. The front room, in there, that's where my aunt died. Bolt upright in the chair, listening to the Goons.

Josie: Really ?

Kenneth: Yes. So that's the dead room, and this is the living room. A ghost won't come back to the exact place they died, so the nearest room is the likeliest haunting-place which is ...HERE!

[He grabs her shoulder and stares suddenly beyond her, as if he has just seen the ghost. Josie screams. Ken laughs]

You are so bloody easy to get, Jose.

Josie: Oh God, I hate you Kenny.

Kenneth: [Still laughing] The living room. Why do you think it's called a living room, you daft lump ?

Josie: Did you make all that up ?

Kenneth: Of course I did. I'm sorry, but you are so easy to tease. Easy teasy Josie.

[Josie pushes away from him, and carries on looking around.]

Well my aunt did die somewhere in the house. That part is true, but I don't know where. Probably in bed. She had been ill, I think. Do you want to go and look ?

Josie: No. Did you know her ?

Kenneth: Not very well. Just from family events, and church sometimes. You might have seen her there. Once or twice we came here when I was little, I think, but she didn't have anything to play with, so I wasn't interested. You know what it's like for children in grown-up places.

Josie: So who's aunt was she ?

Kenneth: Mine.

Josie: Not a great-aunt ?

Kenneth: No. My father's sister. The only one. No husband - only me to give things to. My father doesn't talk about her much. I think she must have done something disreputable. The house -she couldn't have afforded it on her wages. She had some friend in high places.

Josie: A scandal. I am shocked. My parents are so pleased that I'm seeing a vicar's son - they don't realise its the family of a notorious scarlet woman.

Kenneth: I don't remember her as all that scarlet. More olive green.

Josie: I expect the little old aunty thing was just a cover. She specialised in passionate affairs with the powerful. In the end they had to silence her.

Kenneth: Yes, of course. The secret service had to dispose of her. A special agent was sent, disguised as the football pools collector, and slipped a deadly poison in her sherry.

Josie: Or released a rare and lethal snake in her anti-macassar and net curtain drawer.

Kenneth: Laid her out at a stroke. No sign of foul play. God, you're a real snob aren't you ?

Josie: Me, no I'm not. I wouldn't be seeing you, would I ?

Kenneth: Thank you. I am a house-owner though. That's it, of course. You only want me for my property.

Josie: Oh no, you've rumbled me.

[PAUSE]

What else is there, then, to the estate ?

Kenneth: Through there is the kitchen. Nothing much in there. Most of her furniture went. They sold most of her stuff, to pay the death duties, but decided to keep the house for me.

Josie: So it's really all yours ?

Kenneth: I am the lord of the manor, Miss Diamond. Some day this could all be yours. Officially it's in my father's name until I'm 21, but I have a key, and I can come here whenever I want.

Josie: Oh yes ? Do you show many young ladies round, then ?

Kenneth: Of course, but I've made an exception for you.

[Josie laughs]

Josie: I don't very much like the colour scheme.

Kenneth: I hope you are not going to continue casting aspersions on my relative and benefactor. De mortuis and all that.

Josie: All what ?

Kenneth: It's latin. Don't speak ill of the dead.

Josie: Yes, we have that in England too.

Kenneth: Well you should watch out, especially if she did meet a nasty end here. You might suddenly feel a cold shiver run down you.

[PAUSE]

Josie: So when you move in, what are you going to do to it ?

Kenneth: Oh I don't know. I will paint it differently. A big table here, a desk, for writing.

[He points at the positions actually occupied by the furniture]

A settee there, and an armchair here.

Josie: No. not there. The sofa has to be here, for the window. If you've got to have a table in here it has to go over there.

[She points away from the current position of the table]

It's cold, isn't it ?

Kenneth: I'm not cold. That must be Aunt Lucy passing through you. You see, I warned you.

Josie: You're not going to catch me twice.

Kenneth: It's empty. No-one lives here. We have to find ways of keeping warm.

Josie: Oh yes ?

[Kenneth moves towards her, and then suddenly shrieks, in such an abrupt way that he does catch her by surprise again.]

You bastard !

Kenneth: Don't worry, I'm here.

[He has his arms round her. She pummels him, but playfully. They kiss.]

I could get to like Aunt Lucy's taste more and more, couldn't you ? I mean, we could spend time here if you wanted -

[She breaks free, and runs towards the doorway]

Josie: Come on.

Kenneth: What ?

Josie: Show me the garden. The grounds.

[They go out]

Scene Three

[Geoff comes in with bottle of port]

Geoff: This is quite old, but it should be alright, I think.

Violet: What is it ?

Geoff: Port. Old Tawny.

We don't really drink much these days, it makes us ill.

[He gets a glass and carefully pours Violet a drink]

Violet: **We** do.

Are you getting on a bit yourself then Geoff ? Some kind of time slippage that has let you catch up with him. Or is this 'we' the nursing 'we'. "We really ought not to be drinking that, if we care about baby Ms Nesmit". Cheers.

Geoff: We're a team.

Violet: Don't, Geoff, for fuck's sake don't.

Geoff: What ?

[PAUSE]

It's true. We have remained strong together. You don't understand. I am his legs, when he needs them.

Violet: And a very nice pair you are too. But what is he for you, Geoff, that you need?

[He is clearly disturbed by her tone]

Geoff: It isn't just me that needs him, you know that.

[PAUSE]

Violet: Sorry.

What else do you do, Geoff ? What do you do yourself, I mean ? Did you ever get into papers. That was what you wanted, wasn't it ? To be a journo.

Geoff: A journalist, yes. Mind you, that was some time ago.

Violet: Yes, I suppose. So what do you do then, Geoff ? What job, I mean ?

Geoff: Well... there is a great deal to do around here, what with the -
Violet: Oh God.

All this time, and all you've done is nurse the man, isn't it ?

Geoff: I don't begrudge him that, Vi. I stayed.

Violet: Yes and I

That is so sad Geoff. Tragic. Tragic and heroic. It's fucking outrageous. I don't know whether to smack you or go on my knees in homage. Unbelievable. Mum goes, and still he..

[PAUSE]

I don't know.

Geoff: [Firmly] No, you don't.

[PAUSE]

Violet: What's it been like, little brother ?

Geoff: What ?

Violet: Well, your life basically, the best years of it. Probably tossing in the worst as well.

Geoff: I don't understand what you want.

Violet: OK Geoff, I'm sorry. I just want to know what your life is like. What do you do every day, with a with him, up there the whole time. Eh ?

Geoff: He's a good man.

Violet: So I've read, so I've heard.

Geoff: Well.

[As he talks, we can hear phrases that belong to his father]

A day in the life of the Nesmit menage - let's see. I wake up in the morning when he does, and go into his room. I open the curtains first, and we decide about the day. What does it seem like ? He likes me to tap the glass, to compare and contrast with the evidence of our senses, you know. Putting it all together we can make our best guess at the kind of day it will be. If it looks like a fine day, I will put his chair by the window table, and bring up breakfast for the two of us. Then we have the radio for the news, the papers for a more detailed picture, and the post. I take it up to him as well, and I sit on the bed.

Then it's the correspondence. That can take a long time. Nowadays he dictates to me a bit, if his hand gets tired, and I type. The phone goes on average 3.6 times a day. I worked it out once from the log-book, over a trial period of three months.

He gets so sad though some mornings, at what he has to write. It's breaking his heart the way the world is these days.

Violet: But what does he do, Geoff ? What does he really do ?

Geoff: He doesn't work any more. He took early retirement, you see. Wasn't appreciated anyway.

Violet: No.

Geoff: He stands up for people.

Violet: He doesn't even get out of bed, how can he stand up for people?

Geoff: That's not funny, Six. Anyway he does get out of -

Violet: Of course it's bleeding funny. The whole thing is funny. I'm sorry. Tell me.

Geoff: We are living in harsh times. He feels it strongly. That he has been selected in some way, chosen by the Lord, to argue on behalf of the underdog. He calls it the 'undercat', though, because you are either a cat man or a dog man, and we are cat men.

Violet: Yes.

Geoff: But I've watched it make him sad.

Violet: What ? What's the problem ? He has every bloody thing he needs.

Geoff: Out there. The way it's all going downhill.

Violet: Oh that.

Perhaps you have a different worry about going downhill if you're in a wheelchair.

Geoff: You keep making these jokes and you mustn't.

Violet: Oh God Geoff, I'm sorry. It's just.. I don't go around making jokes I shouldn't, really I don't, but this isn't disabled bloody people, it is our dear father, who art upstairs, and who we know. Don't we ?

Geoff: Whom.

Violet: Listen, you're just going to have to accept that I get things wrong I'm afraid. If you're going to stop me with a bleeding buzzer if I say something that offends your fucking weirdo way of doing things, we'll be... I don't know. We lived here, remember, with our eyes and ears open. We know him. There is no point in pretending he's something else. That is **his** speciality.

Geoff: You don't know him. Not since -

Violet: OK, but I remember plenty. And I don't sense around here a huge feeling of change, shall we say.

But, that's the point isn't it ? To answer your question of however long ago it was. Why I'm here. I want to fill in the gaps. To confirm some of the things I've been working out, you see. So when I've had a bit more of this stuff, I shall go up there and start finding out from him, won't I ? Ask him about Mum. What it is I'm supposed not to understand. Where she is. Filling the gaps, you see. Probably with bits of the bastard's limbs, that I've hacked off him.

Geoff: Don't say that.

Violet: OK Geoff. Think of this with his famous logic, if you want. It's your opportunity to put the case to me. The evidence for the defence in the case of Mr Kenneth Nesmit.

Geoff: Like a reconstruction, of everything ?

Violet: If you like.

Geoff: Before you go up to him.

Violet: OK.

Geoff: Very well.

Violet: "Very well?". How old are you ?

Geoff: 33. Why ?

Violet: Never mind. Good. I mean, thank you Geoff. Thanks for saying you'll help. If you are saying that.

Geoff: Six ?

Violet: What ?

Geoff: Justice, you know, it is not the same as retribution. Fairness includes forgiveness, doesn't it ?

Violet: Whatever you say, brother.

Geoff: No this is important. We have it in us to forgive.

Violet: What do you need to forgive ? Who ? Whom ?

Geoff: No, you. You can forgive, can't you ?

Violet: Oh Geoff. There are memories in there, aren't there, after all? You see, this is what I want.

[PAUSE]

Listen, I have worked at this. A long, long time. This isn't a random ghost come back to haunt you. I have got everything in here. Anger, sadness, love, damage, plenty of damage. But I have looked in there, hard. Time and money have been committed to this, it's serious.

You'll laugh at me now, I know. But I just can't go further with anything until I've sorted out the childhood bit. It's therapy, OK.

Geoff: He calls you the hippy-child.

Violet: I thought he called me Six.

Geoff: He has a lot of names for you.

Violet: Does he talk much about me, then ?

Geoff: No.

Violet: Oh.

Anyway. Can you understand ? I am back for me. There are things I need to know. To finish off, to confirm or something.

[PAUSE]

Geoff: So, where do you want to start ? Your confirmation. The opening statement, the evidence ?

Violet: Well you're going to be his defence counsel. You decide.

Geoff: I'd better go and check on him. Can we have an adjournment before we start ?

Violet: Yes. I expect so.

[He goes out. Violet wonders for a moment whether to follow him and watch, or something. Decides against. Drinks. Takes off shoes. Curls up in chair, and thinks]

Scene Four

[1955 Ken and Josie again. The room is dark. They have bottles of beer with them. Giggly.]

Kenneth: You are bloody well inebriated, young lady.

Josie: I am not. I'm just well oiled.

Kenneth: Well bleeding oiled. I like that. So you won't squeak then ?

Josie: Kenneth!

[She squats behind a chair, hidden from him]

Kenneth: Miss Diamond. Josie Diamond. It is just me, Mr Nesmit. I've come for my rent.

Josie: Oh no, the landlord. What can I do ?

Kenneth: There is no hiding place from the law, Miss Diamond. You shall have to pay in the end. Will it be now, or later, with the help of my big burly bailiffs ?

Josie: Oh, now please. Not the big baily burliffs.

Kenneth: I hope you have not been drinking on my premises, Miss Diamond. Consumption of alcoholic beverages is explicitly forbidden, as you are well aware. Only ladies of the finest pedigree can live in my property.

[Josie has the giggles and finishes the game during this speech]

If I can smell the slightest sniff of alcohol, you shall have to be punished.

[He sniffs around to find her. He does so, and they kiss]

Josie: It was a lovely film, wasn't it?

Kenneth: 'Lovely' - yeah, 'lovely'.

[He imitates Brando in On the Waterfront]

"I cudda been a contender. I cudda been somebody, instead of a bum. That's what I am. A great big bum. But that's only one side of me. You wanna see the other side ?"

Josie: No thanks.

Could you get an outfit like Marlon Brando's, Kenny ? Do your hair that way? It's so sexy.

Kenneth: 'Sexy', 'lovely' 'Lovely and sexy'. Trying to change the subject are we ? I can smell the evidence. I hope this isn't a sign of cheapness. I couldn't have anyone cheap living in my house. No riff-raff, no bleeding used goods would be good enough. Let me see.

[He holds her breasts, and squeezes. His actions are mostly sexual, with a discernable proprietorial element. The rest of the seduction is an erotic game, but faintly threatening. Any sign that Josie feels this is very slight, however. They both appear to be enjoying the game. He kisses her breasts, and holds himself against her chest]

I can hear your heart. Keep it quiet please, or the neighbours will come round.

Josie: This is so wicked, Ken. I can't believe we have this place. I keep just seeing my mother's face if she knew.

Kenneth: Bring her photo next time. We can put it up here, and your dad's, and mine too. The Reverend Nesmit can watch from above the fires of Hell. They can all watch us in full animal action.

Josie: Technicolour.

[She is unbuttoning his shirt, as he undoes her dress.]

Shall we go upstairs ?

Kenneth: No, let's stay here. I want the Reverend to watch.

Josie: What do you want to do ?

Kenneth: What do you think ? What do you want to do ?

Josie: What do you think ?

Kenneth: I think you want what I want.

Josie: What do you want ?

Kenneth: Well, with your kind permission young lady, I would like to give you a jolly good going over.

Josie: What do you think I am, a motor car ?

Kenneth: If you want to be. I could be your mechanic. Look under your bonnet...

Josie: No.

I'm just a poor tenant, that's all. You were right first time. I can't pay the rent, Mr Land Owner.

Kenneth: Well in that case, Miss Diamond, you'll have to ask nicely.

Josie: Please.

Kenneth: What ?

Josie: Please Mr Land Owner, will you allow me to pay some other way ?

Kenneth: Alright, that's asking nicely. Quite good, but insufficient. Now you must ask nastily.

Josie: [Giggling] Alright.

Kenneth: Come on. What is it you want ?

Josie: [Very quietly] I want you to take me, Mr Owner.

Kenneth: I am sorry, I didn't quite catch that.

Josie: I want you to take me. Take me.

Kenneth: Ah, I see. You want me to take you. Of course. Well I think that can be arranged. One thing though.

Josie: Anything you say, Mr Owner.

Kenneth: You will have to catch me.

[He dives away from her, leaving her floundering, and they chase each other off and upstairs, still giggling]

Scene Five

[1994. Geoff comes back in with some cardboard boxes, wheeling them on a wheelchair.]

Geoff: He's asleep. We'll be fine.

The first items of evidence, for our investigation. I brought two. One each. Exhibit A and Exhibit B.

[He puts the boxes down on the floor, and they look at them.]

Violet: His chair.

Geoff: No. His old one. He has the other up there with him.

Violet: Oh

[PAUSE]

[She is disturbed by looking at the chair. She pulls herself away from it]

These are fantastic. What's in them ?

[She goes over to one and begins to unwrap it. She is a little drunk]

Geoff: A veritable cornucopia. A motley miscellany.

Violet: Speak bleeding english, Geoff. I'm the one that didn't go to a good school, remember.

Geoff: They are all labelled "miscellaneous". This is "miscellaneous one", that one is "miscellaneous two". He keeps them in his room. On the wardrobe, and under the chest of drawers. It goes up to "miscellaneous five" I think. I haven't ever looked in them. I thought about it when...

Violet: When what ?

Geoff: I haven't looked at them, I said.

Violet: Well go on then, open up.

Geoff: You first.

Violet: Let's do one, two three - like Christmas stockings, remember.

Geoff: One two three, then both at once.

Violet: Without looking. Go on.

Both: One, two, three - go!

[They simultaneously pull items out of their respective boxes.]

Violet: Oh God. Old shoes. [Sarcastic] Fantastic.

Geoff: You would think they could be labelled 'old shoes' wouldn't you?

Violet: Or maybe even thrown away rather than kept. He isn't going to wear out many shoes is he ? What've you got ?

Geoff: Letters.

Violet: Ah. Well those should be with the ones you are sorting here, shouldn't they ?

Geoff: No. They are under 'miscellaneous' There must be a reason for that.

Violet: Sorry. Of course.

[He puts the letters quickly on one side, without examining them. They get ready to pull something else out]

One two three - go!

Bullets.

Geoff: Not bullets. Cartridges. Probably collected them in the war.

Violet: Probably. Kept them to remind himself.

Geoff: And us.

[Geoff has pulled out more papers, puts them aside]

Violet: [Holding the cartridges up triumphantly] "We must never let the sacrifice of those brave lost souls be in vain. The feeling I had, a small boy, just an ordinary boy, in a rickety air raid shelter, listening to the thuds. I was lucky, because I survived to learn the lesson. To see the effects of man's inhumanity to man. Learn from these bullets, children. Learn from them or I'll fucking kill you."

[She laughs]

Geoff: Violet...

Violet: Now let us sing together hymn number fourteen, 'England Swings Like a Pendulum Do..'

[She sings and dances around the room]

Eng-er-land swings like a pendulum do

Bobbies on bicycles two by two
Westminster Abbey the tower of Big Ben,
The rosy red cheeks of the little child-ren.

[Geoff joins in a little reluctantly. He gets hold of the cartridges in the process]

Do you remember that record ? He bloody loved it. Sad.

Geoff: [Examining the cartridges] I don't think they are war-time.

[Violet has got something else from the box. It is an old exercise-book.]

Violet: Oh, brilliant. "Geoffrey Nesmit age eight"

Geoff: What's that ?

Violet: It must be from school, mustn't it ? Oh Geoff, look. Copying out, very neat.
What's this ? Composition. "My hero". Yes, brilliant.

Geoff: Don't !

[He tries to get the book from her]

Violet: No, it's sweet, listen.

Geoff: No

Violet: "My daddy is my hero, because he is a real hero of everybody. I call him my hero because he was shot and he didn't cry. He was very brave and he was on the television with Toncoin, talking about his campaigns. And Toncoin said he was a very brave man indeed. That is why my hero is my daddy." Oh that's so sweet, Geoff.

[He takes it back.]

Who's Tomcoin ?

Geoff: It's meant to be Tom Coyne. On Midlands Today.

Violet: Oh yes, I remember, the fat one.

Geoff: You're so rude.

Violet: Direct, Geoff. I am just direct. This family isn't used to that, is it ? I've been saving it all up. I am going to be pretty direct with him. I hope he's still feeling brave. Your hero.

Geoff: He's asleep.

Violet: Yes, you said.

[Back to the book]

"Felice is our family cat
But she is much more than that
Felice is also my special friend
And with her some time I do spend

She has little black paws like shoes
As if a black paint pot she did use
But white is the rest of her fur
And when she is happy she does purr"

Shakespeare, eat your heart out. Oh that's wonderful Geoff. You are such a little softie, aren't you ?

Geoff: I was eight years old, Six. The rhymes are good, though, aren't they ?

Violet: It's beautiful. [She can't resist laughing] I'm not sure about the "as if a black paint pot she did use"

Geoff: You always tease. Teasing can be cruel. Children hang themselves, because of teasing.

Violet: Jesus, Geoff. You watch too much TV, little brother.

No, it's a lovely poem, really. Your only friend, the cat. Sweet.

Geoff: One two three go!

Violet: Agghh! The wedding photo. When did that get boxed then ? When was she written out of the family history ?

Geoff: Snap! Wedding certificate here.

Violet: Must be a sign. Let's see. Oh dear. Proof of the big mistake. June 22nd 1957.

Geoff: They were a happy couple, look.

Violet: Handsome. Lest we forget. They hadn't known each other long had they ?

Geoff: More than two years.

Violet: You see, this is the sort of stuff I don't know. No-one told me, or I didn't listen.
[Reading] St Stephen's church.

Geoff: Grandad's church. Where they met. He was still alive at the wedding.

Violet: Was he ? I thought he was long gone.

Geoff: No. He died peacefully, in his sleep, after a long illness, and was laid to rest in 1958.

Violet: God. After I was born or before ?

Geoff: Before. You should know all this.

Violet: Exactly. Everyone should know their history. It's part of them, just like brothers and sisters, eh.

Geoff: She was from a good family, you know. A church-going family. He always says. You can't blame the family for these things. Not always.

Violet: [She lets his comment pass] She only went to church because she had to, you know.

She told me once how he used to bring her here, before they were married, I remember that. That was also before he was an expert on old-fashioned morals, obviously.

Geoff: It wasn't like that. He was a 'catch'. Clever. Funny.

Violet: Yes yes. What -

[She has pulled a cricket stump out of her box. She is holding it, feeling along it]

Scene Six

[Summer 1957. Ken enters carrying Josie over the threshold.]

Josie: Kenny, you'll break your back or something.

Kenneth: It's a tradition. It's what you do on wedding nights.

Josie: Break your back ?

Kenneth: That too. Here.

[He puts her down, unceremoniously]

Josie: Idiot.

Kenneth: Home sweet home.

[Josie sings, 'Home, home sweet home...' spinning round the room.]

You're bloody heavy.

Josie: And you are supposed to be gallant.

Kenneth: By whom ? You know you married beneath you. Everyone warned you. If you'd wanted a gentlemen, you'd have had to wait, wouldn't you ? Could have been years.

Josie: Thank you.

[PAUSE]

Jesus, it's quiet.

Kenneth: Don't say that.

Josie: Well it is.

Kenneth: Not that. The Lord's name.

Josie: Kenny. We're not in church now.

Kenneth: I'm serious. Don't.

Josie: Alright. Sorry.

[She isn't sure how to take his tone]

Don't you think it's quiet, though ? After all the noise, all those people. Suddenly it's just the two of us. Frightening, isn't it?

Kenneth: No-one forced you.

Josie: Ken. Is something wrong ?

Kenneth: We knew we were coming back here. It was the arrangement -

Josie: I'm not complaining.

Kenneth: We knew we weren't going on a cruise, flying to the South of France. You've married a financial clerk, a book keeper. Now you know.

Josie: Ken I didn't say anything about... What is it ? Did someone say something ? All I said is "it's quiet". After all that organising. All those people.

Kenneth: You wanted to invite them all.

Josie: I'm not complaining for God's sake.

[He glares at her]

Josie: For Pete's sake, for pity's sake, for my sake. I don't know.

What's wrong ?

[He throws a little parcel at her]

What's the matter, Kenny ? What's this ?

Kenneth: Open it.

[She does. It is a gold watch]

Josie: Oh.

I didn't get you a present. I didn't know we were supposed to. It's.. lovely. Can we afford this ? I mean, you were worrying before, about -

Kenneth: [Angry] Yes I bloody well can! I'm not as much of a failure as you want to paint me.

Josie: Fine. Fine.

[She sighs]

It's lovely.

[She puts on the watch]

Don't let's fight now, Ken. It's a bad omen, or something.

[She approaches him]

This is the real beginning of our marriage, Ken. Really. The church and everything is all very well, but this is what it's about, isn't it ?

Kenneth: What we said in church means nothing to you.

Josie: It's only what everyone says.

Kenneth: The words of God.

Josie: Yes. Of course.

Kenneth: It's what my mother said.

Josie: Is that what's upsetting you. Thinking about her ?

Kenneth: No.

Josie: You are just nervous. Tired. It's a long time. Til death.

Kenneth: Yes.

[She kisses him]

Josie: Here we are.

Kenneth: "Not tonight."

Josie: Ha ha. Am I going to have the same joke every day for the rest of my life.

Kenneth: The test!

[He goes over to the radio, switches it on. Josie starts singing, 'Home Sweet Home' again, until the radio warms up. It is cricket commentary, England against the West Indies]

Shh!

[Josie stops singing, and wanders around, looking. Ken has his ear by the radio]

Josie: I had some doubts you know. While I was in the aisle. Not about you, though, Kenny. Just about God.

[She gives up, goes out, come backs with the Evening Mail, sits and skims through it. Ken is in his own world]

Scene Seven

[Violet is sitting, looking at the wedding photo]

Violet: She's gorgeous, isn't she ?

Geoff: She's just like his mother. Grandma Nesmit, I mean.

Violet: Is she ?

Geoff: Oh yes. Look, somewhere...

[He rummages for a photo. Finds it]

Here look.

[Violet compares the two photos]

Violet: She is. You see, little brother, this could be significant evidence. He marries someone just like his dead mother. Aha!

[PAUSE]

Let's drink to her, can we ? Quietly.

Geoff: I don't mind. I don't bear a grudge. She was a good woman. There are those who are weak.

Violet: [Surprised] Exactly, yes.

Geoff: But we had happy times, didn't we ?

Violet: Well....

Geoff: You're just like her, aren't you ? Just the same.

Violet: No. I'm not.

Let's just drink to her. Mum.

Geoff: "Fair Josephine."

Violet: Wherever you are.

[She is lost in thought. Geoff pulls a photo album from his box.]

[PAUSE]

Geoff: Holiday snaps.

Violet: Gruesome.

Geoff: Holidays are good. The freshness, regeneration. You see he is right about that. That's evidence of his goodness. We were always a good holiday family. Better in open spaces I think. Look. Smiling in every one. Look at the smiles. Very young. Happy.

Violet: Don't make me cry.

Geoff: These are Wales. Look at that.

Violet: Yes. I like the surface. Nice glossy shiny pretty surface. That's what that photo is.

Geoff: There's a film of this holiday, isn't there ?

Violet: Oh yes, what's that - Nightmare on Elm Street ?

Geoff: No, one of Dad's. An 8mm film. Silent. Shot on Kodachrome, on the Eumig.

Violet: Oh, one of those.

Geoff: I'm sure. Wales 1963.

Shall I find it - get out the projector ?

Violet: Yes, what the hell. Lets put on a show. Wake him up for this Geoff, then we can cheer the great producer afterwards.

Geoff: I won't wake him up. He wouldn't like us looking.

Violet: What are you on about ? He loves his home movies, he'd be in his element.

Geoff: [Firm] He doesn't do them any more - hasn't for ages.

I'll get the projector.

[He goes off. Violet is puzzled by Geoff's attitude. She looks at the holiday photos.]

Violet: Look at her, in her sunglasses.

Scene Eight

[It is summer 1963. Violet stays, within her own time-frame, but Josie and Ken act as if the child Violet is sitting there. Josie enters with bags, she is wearing sunglasses.]

Josie: Well, I know it isn't sunny in here, Violet love. But I'm getting ready, getting in the holiday mood. This is the moment, you see. We have to get into the right mood to enjoy it properly. It's the first holiday that you are really big enough to enjoy, isn't it ? So we must all get in the holiday mood.

[Ken comes in. Irritable]

Kenneth: Is your stuff all in the car ?

Josie: All except what I'll carry on my knee. Violet's here. Her stuff is packed.

Kenneth: Where's Geoff ?

Josie: In his room. I think he's having a little stamp about something.

Kenneth: What the hell about ?

[He goes into the hallway and calls]

For God's sake, Geoff. We're going on holiday. Come on, or it will be dark by the time.... This is just what I wanted to avoid.

Josie: Ken. You can't expect him to understand, he just thinks we're taking him away from his precious room, doesn't he ?

Kenneth: It's for his own benefit.

Josie: He'll know that when we get there, come on.

Kenneth: Geoff!

Josie: We could have gone earlier.

Kenneth: Don't!

[He marches out]

Violet: [To herself - with photo] Oh mum, look at you.

Josie: He's a bit of a grouch today, Vi, eh ? He's been working too hard, you see. We all need a holiday, that's for sure, don't we? A bit of fresh air through empty heads. That will work wonders. Flush it all out.

Kenneth: [Off] Geoff! Now! Come on!

Josie: You two get in the car, I'll get him down.

Kenneth: Stupid little -

Josie: Come on Ken. In the car. We're going on holiday.

[She goes out]

[Geoff comes back in with projector and sets it up, in 1994]

[Ken returns, angry. Checks the room and storms out]

[Geoff puts on the holiday film]

Geoff: Here we are.

[The film is of Josie, with the two children, at the seaside. They are playing together on the beach. Geoff's style of play is quite careful and methodical. Violet is the freer of the two. Josie appears tired but happy with the children. Josie wears her sunglasses throughout. Geoff and Violet comment on the film]

Do you recognise it ?

Violet: I think so, but it might just be the film. Happy bunch aren't we ?

Geoff: We were. Happy days.

Violet: When do you suppose we went wrong then, Geoff ?

[No reply]

I remember that dress. God I can remember wearing the thing. Weird.

Geoff: The camera is very steady. Probably a tripod shot. Not hand held. A nice pan.

Violet: It's gone well wrong for her already, hasn't it ? You can see. Look at her.

Geoff: She looks young. Relaxed.

Violet: What ?

Tired. Weary, she looks weary. How old is she ?

Geoff: 1963. 25.

Violet: 25 ? Jesus. God, what was I like at 25 ? How can you say she looks young ?

Geoff: A slow zoom. That's good.

[At the end of the film, Geoff puts the lights back on.]

Brings it back. Happy memories.

Violet: A work of fiction, Geoff. A romance.

I tell you what I do remember. Coming back from that holiday. You can't claim happy memories of that, can you ?

Geoff: I don't remember it. There's no film of the homecoming.

Violet: No there wouldn't be.

Geoff: No. The light level would be too low indoors. Extra lighting would be required.

Well. I'll see what other films he's got.

Violet: You really think he hasn't noticed me. Or is he just pretending to sleep ? Preparing himself ?

[Geoff leaves the room without answering]

[Violet conjures up another memory. Door slams. Ken re-enters with bags. Throws them down.]

[Josie comes in. Goes to pick up bag.]

Kenneth: I'll do it. You've done enough damage.

Josie: What have I done now ?

Kenneth: You know perfectly well what you've done.

Josie: Funnily enough I don't. We've had a decent holiday. No tantrums more or less. Good weather even. Then you get all stroppy in the car. It's just the prospect of back to the grindstone that's all. There's no other reason. You've just flown off the handle about -

Kenneth: Violet! Go up to your room. Unpack your things. Go on.

Violet: Geoff ?

[She goes to see what he's doing. Ken turns on Josie and shouts.]

Kenneth: You stupid fucking bitch.

Josie: Oh God, Ken, what have I done ?

Kenneth: Every time I try to do something for this family, you just ruin it. Every fucking time.

Josie: Just tell me what I'm -

[He hits her, hard enough for her to lose her footing and slip over]

Josie: What am I -

Kenneth: You selfish, stupid bitch.

[He continues to hit her. She covers her face with her arms, and does her best to protect herself. Violet comes back in. She gets a drink and stands 'watching'. It is as if she is remembering in 1994 the events that she watched as a child. Ken sees the child Violet and stops his assault. Josie goes out.]

Evil is often invisible, Violet. Believe me, you will understand some time. Your mother is not what you think.

[He goes out. Violet sits. That image of her parents is in her mind. She holds the cricket stump. She looks upstairs.]

[Lights fade]

[INTERVAL]

Scene Nine

[Several more boxes have been opened, and their contents are now all over the room. Photo albums, clothes, family papers, old records, stuff from Violet's teenage room, as well as Ken and Josie's junk.]

[Geoff returns with another box]

Geoff: Last one.

Would you like something to eat ?

Violet: No.

[He pulls a sign saying "Violet's Room" out of the box. He takes it over to her.]

Ah. Sanctuary. Sanctuary.

My little box room. What's it like now ? It hasn't got the sign?

Geoff: Go and look.

[Geoff starts putting down some milk for the cat]

Violet: No. Tell me. No, let me guess. He's had it all painted white, with a little gold shrine at one end, like one of those roadside chapels on the continent, and he leads you all in prayers there "Let us in sadness wipe away the memory of an unfortunate soul, one never intended for this world. Poor Violet. Our daughter for a while, but she could not carry the burdens of her life. She was merely on loan from God."

Geoff: We use it for storage, mostly. And as a spare room for visitors.

Violet: Is it big enough ?

Geoff: What do you mean ?

Violet: Well there must be a constant stream of visitors. All the loving family and friends he has gathered in a lifetime of service.

Geoff: You're getting drunk, Vi. You -

Violet: Oh, Geoff. Please keep calling me Six. I love it when you sound like him.

Geoff: You don't.

Violet: Well.

[Geoff is upset]

I'm sorry Geoff.

[She moves over to him and tries to put her arm round him. He can't cope]

Geoff: Have you lived on the continent then. In the European Union, as it is now. That's what we should call it.

Violet: A bit. Well, travelled around, really. I stayed in Greece for nearly a year at one stage.

Geoff: Working ?

Violet: Sort of. I had a job in a bar. But I was with this American bloke, Barney. That was why I stayed. I hate to think about it now. That was real hippy stuff, Geoff. We lived in a fucking tent. Out by a beach. The whole place used to stink, but I never said anything, because anything natural was supposed to be good, even natural revolting bloody body odour. We read poetry to each other by the light of a fire in the evening, he played his guitar, and we joined in with the German hippies, singing meaningful songs all night, and getting stoned and bitten to death by frigging mosquitos. I think at the time I must have been convinced that I had found the meaning of something. When I think about it now, I can't really believe it. I must just have been in a stupor of one kind or another full time.

Geoff: I knew from the paper that you had travelled widely. Travel often came up. You never got married ?

Violet: Not to Barney, no. I don't think marriage was "cool", Geoff. Mind you, he's probably married and 2.4 childrened now, and happily running an advertising agency somewhere.

What am I on about, "not to Barney" ? No, I haven't ever got married. I suppose I've got close a number of times. I've had plenty of kids, but not my own. Worked with them, and gone home at the end of the day. My favourite work, in fact. But, being a parent ? That's scary. Seems like most people can't do it.

Surprised ?

Geoff: No.

[He has found the programme of a school play]

'The Story of the Big Turnip' You were in this.

Violet: Oh no ! Let's have a look.

[They both look at the programme]

You were in it too.

Geoff: Was I ?

Violet: Of course. One of the peasant children, working in the fields. When was it, does it say ?

Geoff: March 1967. I was only 7.

Violet: And I was 9.

Geoff: What were you ?

Violet: I was the old man's wife. Don't you remember, really ?

Geoff: I don't even know the story.

Violet: Of course you do. This old man grows a huge turnip, and it won't come out of the ground until everyone pulls together - you must know it. It ended up with us all pulling in a big long chain, until this cardboard turnip had to come out from behind the medical screen, but we had to pretend it had come out of the ground, and we all fell in a pile.

Geoff: I don't remember.

Violet: Oh God you must remember what happened, when the smallest peasant - what was he called...Alan Popplewell, started crying.

He had this line to say, just one, you know, and he lost it, just bottled out, stopped what he was supposed to be doing and burst into tears. And everything stopped, because we all had to wait, no-one knew what to do. Then I went over to him and said, "You must be hungry, that's why you're crying" and I grabbed his hand, "All the more reason for helping to dig the turnip". He just came over with me. It was great. Mr Evans said afterwards that I had saved the day, and Mum said I had the makings of an actress.

Bloody hell. It's a good while since I thought about that. One of my very few childhood triumphs. Alan Popplewell. It's amazing what you carry around up here isn't it ?

Geoff: I don't remember that at all.

Violet: No well, you have different things locked away up there, don't you. You decide what to...

[She decides against pursuing this]

[Geoff has found a chess set, and is laying it out on a small table. Violet looks in her box again. Pulls out a christening robe and silver spoon.]

What have we got here ? Oh, I think I'm going to throw up "Violet Mary Nesmit 1958"

[She puts the spoon in her mouth]

Another picture - clear as crystal rushing back. Must be some psychic energy flowing from the spoon. It will probably bend soon. This one will come back to you Geoff, I guarantee. Sunday Lunch. Sunday fucking for-what-we-are-about-to-receive Lunch. A little speech opportunity for our holy father. Improving stories for the lucky family. The terror of giggling. Did you get that ?

Geoff: No.

Violet: I did. Mum did too. I swear she did. I can remember seeing her once, and in her eyes she was saying "I'm not going to admit to you Violet, but I want to laugh out loud too." Not just laugh either. Did you ever see the look in her that said "I want to scream, but I won't" ?

Geoff: Was this before his accident, or after ?

Violet: Oh both, Geoff, both.

Geoff: No, she didn't think that, ever. She loved us. It was just that it was too difficult, and we should not blame her. You imagine those things in her eyes, simply because you see your own reflection.

Violet: Do I ?

[PAUSE]

Does he still preach ? I mean properly, you know the lay whatever, at the church.

Geoff: Not really. He did. There were some notes I just saw ...

[He goes to one of the boxes and finds some notes]

I took him a few times, but practically it became difficult. It has become...

[He goes over to the wheelchair and manoeuvres it round as he speaks.]

It's a little difficult in the church, for wheelchairs, with the microphone and everything. I had to do all the pushing and then hold the microphone, you see. But they loved him doing it, though. And public meetings. He was adored, Six. You would have been so proud, the applause he got. Even in church sometimes. Spontaneous. So uplifting, such an inspiration.

[He reads and re-enacts, into an imaginary microphone, but without getting into the wheelchair. Violet is clearly disturbed by the performance.]

"Everyone is obsessed with forgiveness you know. How can you forgive, Kenneth ? You with all the suffering you have been caused. But let me tell you, my friends, forgiveness is easy, you see. If you know what is right and is wrong then you simply feel sorry for those that don't. I do not think of evil, I think of sin. And sin is weakness, that is all. As I look at all of you, I can see let's face it a pretty motley

collection of sinners. All of us. Some more motley than others, some bigger sinners, but look at you all. We're a pretty weak lot really, aren't we? I certainly am.

When I was faced alone at night with this "armed attacker" that the papers talk about, what did I see ? Not a monster. Just a boy, really. A young lost soul. And when that picture swims back into my mind, my friends, I feel no anger, no fear, what I feel is pity, and sadness. A sadness that he has never been given the guidance which we all need, away from evil, into the path of the Lord."

[The end of this speech upsets Geoff as well, as he remembers]

Violet: I imagine the crowd loved it. Lapped it up.

Geoff: You could see him cry. I did, once. He cried, and every one of the people there felt humble. He can make you feel humble, make you feel mean and stupid.

Violet: Hell of a talent, that.

Geoff: An example.

Violet: A glorious example. A shining, glittering, glowing-in-the-dark example.

[Geoff has pulled more out of boxes. Newspaper cuttings.]

Geoff: He is a good man, Six. Look at all this. Struggles undertaken. Campaigns, look. "Why must we accept that old people freeze every winter ?" "It is a disgrace of the vastest order that these lies and deceptions have not been made public until now. The people of the city deserve to know..." This is not just evidence for the defence, Violet, it is proof. Incontrovertible proof. Read these, look. He is a good man, the case is proven.

Violet: You shouldn't believe what you read in the papers, Geoff. Especially when he's written it himself.

Geoff: But he hasn't. Look this is written about him, look.

Violet: Yes yes, I know. He has done some good things, yes. I must listen to this, yes. Sorry. Look I need a...an adjournment, all right ? Under the stairs, yes ?

Geoff: Of course.

[Violet goes out. During the next scene, Geoff reads some of the cuttings, and continues sorting. Then he sets up another film.]

Scene Ten

[It is 1965. Ken is in the armchair, covered by a rug. He rings his bell. Josie enters. She has lost most of her vitality, as if sedated.]

Kenneth: Five minutes.

Josie: Don't worry, we aren't going to miss it. What do you want ?

Kenneth: Oh, anything, really. Nothing special, just whatever you're making.

Josie: I said. I can make omelette, or we can just have sandwiches, whatever you like.

Kenneth: Either, really, it doesn't matter.

Josie: OK

[She adjusts his rug. He flinches slightly. She stops and goes out]

Kenneth: Violet!

Josie: [Calling] She isn't here. She's over at my mother's, I told you.

Kenneth: Oh good. It will do her good to get away from here, won't it ?

[No reply]

It's quite cold isn't it ?

Josie: [Off] Do you want the fire on ?

Kenneth: No, no, just saying. The weather has turned a little. Strange what I can and can't tell. I suppose it's my hands - it feels like my feet.

[Smashing glass in kitchen]

Josie: [Off] Shit!

[Ken looks at the young Geoff]

Kenneth: Take no notice of your mother's profanity, Geoff.

[Calls out]

What's happened ?

Josie: Nothing.

Kenneth: Shall I come through ?

Josie: No. I'll clear it up later.

[Josie comes back in with sandwiches]

[She kisses him on the back of the head.]

It should be on now. I'll turn it up.

[To Geoff] Daddy's going to be on the wireless, Geoff. Put down your toys will you. Listen to him.

[She turns up the volume on the radio. We hear an interview between Ken and a presenter]

Interviewer:who as you may well remember from the news reporting at the time, was shot and wounded in his own home while trying to apprehend an armed burglar. Mr Nesmit is in the studio with me, so first of all I would simply like to say that we are all very glad that you are here at all.

Kenneth: Yes, well of course one effect this experience has had is to make me feel extremely lucky to be alive, Dennis.

Interviewer: You are here in a wheelchair, Mr Nesmit. I know that you have spent several weeks in hospital. How are you ?

[The phone rings. The radio interview continues]

Kenneth: Damn. Leave it.

Josie: Don't be stupid I can't. It might be important.

[She answers it]

Abby. No. [She laughs]

Kenneth: Tell her we're busy for God's sake. I want to hear this.

Josie: [Quietly] No, Ken's just on the radio. I've got to talk quietly. No, an interview, about the accident and everything.

Yes, of course I'm coming. I wouldn't miss that.

I know, we're famous aren't we ? And in the paper did you see that ? He loves it. I'd better go. No, I'm fine. Yes.

[During the phonecall-

[Kenneth: I'm extremely well, thank you. Just a bit of metal lodged down there, but then I was always told it was important to have plenty of iron in your diet.

Interviewer: [Laughing] But seriously though, your injuries have resulted in permanent damage, which has left you unable to walk, is that not right ?

Kenneth: Well, yes, but I prefer to think how fortunate I am when I see the many children in the hospital, some of whom are in much more pain than you or I will ever have to suffer. Brave inspirational souls.

Interviewer: Now, your story, as people read or heard of it, is yet another sign of this dreadful crime wave. You took the decision, in your own house to tackle a man with a gun. Why ? Why did you not simply allow him to steal, and not risk your own life.

Kenneth: Well I want to stress that I am just an ordinary man, like any other, Dennis.]

[When Josie rings off the interview continues]

Kenneth: I am no hero, I simply did what anyone would do in defence of his family.

Interviewer: Well I'm sure many listeners would argue with that. But you have been quoted in the papers as having said, that you bear no malice at all toward your attacker.

Kenneth: Yes. What good would that serve ? I had no difficulty in forgiving him.

Interviewer: Many people would I am sure still want their pound of flesh.

Kenneth: Well, maybe, but as you can see I have quite enough flesh on me. You should ask my wife, who has to push me around in this wheelchair, if she'd like me to have any more flesh.

Interviewer: Yes, now your wife Josephine was of course in the house at the time of the break-in, wasn't she ?

Kenneth: Yes indeed, and both my children, and I can honestly say that one great source of comfort to me has been the fact that this bullet hit me, and not one of them.

Interviewer: Well at that point I am going to have to say thank you very much, Kenneth. I am sure your story, and the remarkable courage with which you talk will provide an inspiration to many people listening today.

Link: Mr Kenneth Nesmit, a very brave man.....

[Josie switches off the radio.]

Kenneth: Mm. That was alright, I think. Did you hear any of it ?

Josie: I heard most of it.

Kenneth: What did you think ?

Josie: Me ? Very good. Yes. You came over very well, I thought. Well done.

Are you warm enough ?

Kenneth: Yes.

[PAUSE]

I'm afraid I need to go through.

Josie: Yes. OK.

[She helps him into his wheelchair. He has some use of his legs but needs assistance. She wheels him out.]

Scene Eleven

[Geoff has set up another film ready for running. Violet comes back in.]

Violet: Another black comedy is it ?

What's this one ?

Geoff: It's just entitled 'Dancing'

[He starts it up]

Violet: Lights!

[Geoff switches off the lights]

[The film is of an amateur dance group, in 1969, featuring Josie.]

Oh God, brilliant. Thewhat the hell were they called ?

Geoff: The Fleetfeet.

Violet: Of course. Oh fantastic, look at them Geoff. Look at her. Oh my God.

Geoff: I don't remember seeing this one.

Violet: No, no. I'd remember this. I remember the concert though, don't you ? The song, the song, you know...

Geoff: 'These boots were made for walking'

Violet: [Singing, and stamping a rhythm, trying to fit in with the action] And that's just...walk all over you. These boots were made for walking. Oh Mum, look at her, Jesus Christ look. What a fucking shame.

Geoff: We've got the record somewhere.

Violet: Get it out. Go on get it. This is so brilliant Geoff. Look, that's Abigail isn't it? What an outfit. I'll have to transfer it to video or something, put the music on.

Mum and all her women - look at them. Oh my God they are so funny. Those fucking clothes.

Look at her !

[Singing] 'That's just what they'll do,
One of these days these boots - '

[Geoff goes to find record. Violet is laughing much more than we've seen. The film changes abruptly to a film shot in the bedroom. It is a clumsily home-made

sex film. Josie, in and out of shot, is taking her clothes off, possibly unaware of the camera. Cuts to a fixed camera shot of some of the room. Ken is in the wheelchair, Josie facing him. She appears to be masturbating him. Violet speaks during this.]

Oh fuck. What the fucking hell ? No. You bastard! You horrible, ugly fucking bastard ! No, no.

[She is hardly able to watch it, but doesn't switch it off. Geoff rushes back in]

Geoff: What is it ? You'll wake him up, Six.

[He sees the film. Watches for a while, saying nothing. He switches the projector off. They sit in silence. Geoff switches on the lamp. He puts on the record he has fetched, 'These Boots Were Made for Walking'. After a few bars, Violet looks at him and he takes it off.]

We should not have seen that.

Violet: You're telling me.

Geoff: I mean, it was never meant for anyone to see.

[PAUSE]

They were married, Vi. Man and wife.

Violet: Jesus, Geoff, you stupid, stupid jerk. What are you talking about?

[He pours her a drink]

[PAUSE]

Oh God, I don't know. I suppose, I mean, it's just... Well I suppose you should just be able to say... Jesus.

Geoff: Come on, Violet. They must surely be allowed their pleasures, like anyone. Within the sanctity of marriage. Consenting adults.

Violet: Yes ?

Geoff: I think so, of course. It's just difficult, with your parents.

Violet: Sod that, it isn't that. It isn't just that. I mean it was horrible. Oh you're probably.... no. No. Definitely it isn't that - it is him and her. How he was, how he is. You think she'd 'consent' to a film ? The horrible vicious selfish bastard - seeing him up there. After everything he did to her, all the time, day in day out. Just to see....

[Geoff starts putting away the projector. Violet finishes her drink, pulls herself together and makes for the stairs.]

Geoff: Oh. Are you going up to see him then ?

Violet: Yes.

Geoff: Right then. I'll wait down here.

[She goes out. Geoff calmly continues packing things away. Violet goes slowly upstairs. We hear the ring of Ken's bell. We can hear her running around briefly. She storms back down.]

Violet: What is this ? Is this some kind of game ? Geoff. What the hell is going on ?

Geoff: What ?

Violet: He isn't fucking there.

Geoff: No.

Violet: What the hell do you mean. Where is he ?

Where the fuck is he ? Geoff ?

[She throws the bell onto the sofa and grabs him. He is still calm]

Geoff: He isn't here.

Violet: I can see that, I can fucking see that. You lying fucking bastard. Where is he?

What the hell is going on ? What the fuck is this ? Geoff ! Where is he ?

Geoff: Dead.

Violet: Dead.

Geoff: Fucking dead, if you like. Dead, and not doing any more fucking, except through the magic immortality of celluloid.

[He chuckles]

Violet: No.

Geoff: [Shouts suddenly] Yes!

[She goes over to him and hits him. He puts his hands up to protect himself and she pummels him.]

Violet: He can't be. That isn't fair. It's... He was here, all the time we've been... He can't be. I was just waiting until I was ready.

[PAUSE]

Geoff: [Calm again] He passed peacefully away.

Good God. My sweet lord. I said it. He died. Died. Dead now. I am very sorry. My condolences. My thoughts are with you in your grief.

Violet: Your thoughts ! You are a fucking headcase, do you know that. What do you think you are playing at ?

[She sits down with her bottle and glass. Calm for a moment, then she throws the glass at him. It is thrown in real anger, but he catches it]

Geoff: Do you want another drink ?

[No reply]

[PAUSE]

Violet: I wanted to see him. I wanted to fucking see him. To hurt him, and ... it's not fair..... I can't even hit him, I can't even shout at the bastard, tell him everything I've thought, get everything he owes me. God, I can just see him enjoying this. What have you done ? What are you playing at ? You stupid sick prat. You've cheated me out of all of it, haven't you ?

[Violet continues pacing. Geoff is over at the chess table, playing chess]

No-one. There's fucking nobody left.

[She goes upstairs, leaving Geoff.]

Scene Twelve [New Year's Eve 1972-3]

[Ken is in his wheelchair, playing chess with Geoff. They both make all the moves - the game is going on in both time-scales. Ken is drinking, fairly heavily. Josie is busying around. There is music coming from upstairs (Joni Mitchell or similar)]

Kenneth: At what stage are the circumstances different from the last game, eh ? We are the same people, but we are inconsistent, you see. I played chess with my father - the straightest, most consistent man I ever knew, but we always played different games. Something must have changed, eh Geoff.

[He is put off his stride by the music]

The music of rebellion, of revolution. A stage, Geoff. They will rebel, it is in their nature. If the wrong buttons are pushed.

He played chess in the trenches, he said. Less a comfort, more a distraction. There was no comfort. If they came to their chaplain for comfort, the best he could do was a game of chess. Enough to make you lose your faith.

But he believed in people you see. He was from a village, not the same as a city. A community. A family. We don't have them any more. We have a daughter in a little box, listening to her ear-piercing revolution, and a mother off out on New Years Eve. It is just the two of us, Geoff boy.

Still we can toast together, can't we ? Bring in 1973 and all that goes with it.

[Josie comes in, to say goodbye]

Are you off ? We were just saying, we can toast in the New Year well enough. Auld Lang Syne with the best of them. Not as raucous of course as the dancing women, I don't suppose. We shall watch the clock on the television, shan't we ?

Josie: I'll be back at about 1.00.

Kenneth: Shame they only have Big Ben on for a few minutes. They should have a special channel all the time, and I could just watch it, ticking away.

Josie: All I am doing is spending one night out with the group, Ken. Don't give me a hard time for this please. It's one night.

Kenneth: A quiet night in for a change, with my son. I am not complaining. Of course I'm not.

Josie: Bye bye, Geoff.

[No reply]

Have a nice time.

Kenneth: And you, on your stamping-ground.

[She has gone]

Happy New Year, dear. Give my love to the Bacchae. Hope you keep in step, or stay one jump ahead, or whatever is appropriate, in the merry dancing world. With Angry Abby and the Fat Feet.

Ah a queen's sacrifice is offered. Clever, Geoff. Too clever for me.

[He gestures Geoff to move him. As he does so, he puts his hand over his shoulder onto Geoff's. They go out.]

Scene Thirteen

[Geoff comes in with empty wheelchair. Sits again looking at the chess pieces]

Geoff: We are the hollow men, we are the dead men.

This is the way the world ends. This is the way the world ends.

[Violet comes back in. Gets a drink.]

Not with a bang but a whimper.

I suppose I thought they'd have some kind of stretcher or something, for steep stairs. You just don't think about it, do you ?

Violet: What are you on about now ?

[She goes to sit on sofa, picks up a book]

Geoff: You must expect some strangeness. I am still suffering from surprise. Post traumatic stress syndrome.

They carried him down the stairs head first. The two men from the funeral directors. They had one of the special quiet words with me, suggested that I might like to go into the front room, sir, or the kitchen, or anywhere. I was in the kitchen for a bit, and then I came out to look. They brought him, covered by a sheet, nylon, not poly-cotton, easier for washing nice and hot. But not on anything. I mean, not rigid but floppy, you know. They could have had him in his chair, but I suppose that was just more to carry, or perhaps it's a rule. It seems to be. Once you're dead, you don't sit up, do you ? So it all has to be horizontal.

[PAUSE]

Violet: How did he die then Geoff, exactly ?

[PAUSE]

Geoff: I think he was scared.

Violet: I only meant what.....

Geoff: He was a brave man, wasn't he ? He didn't want me to see him suffer, but at the end he accidentally let me. He went all hard in his face, where he had been soft. His eyes were darker than before, and he looked right through me. I wanted him to go, one time, but I know he would have gone anyway. His mouth was loose and he was dribbling. He didn't talk any more, and two or three times he just splashed around with his arms - that was the worst. He didn't want his hand holding, he just was waving out, rage raging against it all. He didn't scream, he sort of squeaked. A wet dribbly squeak. Not neat last words. A stupid little squeak, which didn't mean anything, however hard I thought about it. It didn't mean anything.

Violet: Geoff.

[PAUSE]

He didn't leave you anything, you see, even then. Not even words.

Geoff: No.

Violet: What did you want him to say ?

Geoff: Just tell me what to do.

[He is sitting on the sofa, with the rug over him. She puts her arm round him]

Violet: He hadn't got anything of his own to say, really. All recited, you see. What he really felt was too horrible to say.

[PAUSE]

So he kept on using you, right up to the end. It is staring you in your blind face. He was a bastard, Geoff. He deserved to die.

[He shrugs her arm off]

He hated everyone. He hated you - you were his slave, not his son, and when he did think about you, I expect he envied you, because you were close to being the saint he pretended to be.

Just like Mum. She 'stuck by him'. Stupid cow. Through thick and bleeding thicker. I hate her too you know. For being so sodding pathetic. For staying.

Geoff: Yes but she didn't, did she ? She went. She was not able to make the sacrifice.

Violet: She was not what ?

Geoff: She was too selfish. We forgive her for this, Violet, because it is too much to ask, and she could not do it.

Violet: Is that what you really think ?

Geoff: Now then, you said it too. She was weak, like he said.

Violet: Weak, not fucking selfish. Weak for staying as long as she did. Not for going. That's the difference between us. Between a victim and a survivor.

I talked to her about it, you know. With all the radical feminist experience of a fifteen year old I tried to persuade her. Really. She wouldn't go.

Geoff: She went, both of you went.

Violet: Yes. I know.

[PAUSE]

So what changed ?

Geoff: You weren't there. She went on and on about you - all the time. Locked herself in your room. He said she was worried about getting old, it was her way of trying to stay young. But that wasn't it. Then when she left, it was to look for you.

[PAUSE]

She was ill for a while, then soon after that...

Violet: The kind of illness they treat in casualty departments was it ?

Geoff: I don't remember.

Violet: Yes you do.

[Josie comes on, as if not wanting to wake the household. Comes over to the child Geoff, on the sofa.]

Josie: Geoff. The television has finished now. Time for bed.

I Geoff.

You know when Violet was here ? How we liked to talk. Geoff. Me and her? What I mean is, I have to go now... she is lost, you see. Oh God...we don't have - I need to find her. Violet. You can see that, can't you ?

I'm saying that I'm going to be going. To find Violet.

[Geoff is not looking at her]

You don't think much of me, do you. I mean you think your father is...well...

You know what I would really like, Geoff. I would like you to come with me. Away from here. You can easily enough. It would be very different from here.

Geoff: I like it here.

Josie: Yes of course you do.

Geoff: I can't go, Mum. I can't.

[Josie uses the rug to wipe her eyes]

Josie: No. Of course.

People will say things about me Geoff - blame me for this. I don't want you to believe them.

[She goes to him, and tries to make him look at her]

Look at my face - look at me, Geoff. You see this, do you ? Remember that for me, everything you see there. Can you see all the... I don't know..the hurt ? You will understand, won't you ? I have to go to find her.

You must promise me something.

Come and find me, if ever... if you want to. If he, if you want to. Will you ?

[She gives him a piece of paper, kisses him and leaves.]

[PAUSE]

Violet: Did she say that about me ?

[No reply. Geoff has gone back to his chess]

Why didn't you go ?

Geoff: I thought I would get into trouble at school.

Violet: Oh Geoff. How old were you ?

Geoff: I don't know - thirteen. I didn't see her again. I follow her with Mystic Max, though, like you. Aries though.

[PAUSE]

Violet: I never even thought about you. You had the chance to melt down the ring, didn't you ?

Geoff: What ring ?

Violet: It's a way a friend of mine put it. Every family has a ring, a circle, a cycle - it turns and turns, and we all turn out like our parents. The only thing that melts the family ring is a big, big fire. You can take it off, but it will always fit you - only the melt-down works for good.

Geoff: That's stupid. Pop-psychology we call that. Kilroy, Oprah Winfrey that lot. We don't like that. You must take all that with a large pinch of salt. Living by formulae.

Violet: That's the party line is it ?

Well, it worked for me. How's the game going ?

Geoff: I'm losing.

[PAUSE]

Violet: She could have melted it though. Taken you. If she had wanted. She must've been afraid, I suppose.

Geoff: [Ignoring her] He always seems to win. Sometimes it's just a habit, I think. Losing.

[He goes out. Violet is left on the sofa.]

Violet: It was still her fault. She could have gone before, taken us both. She kept the ring going.

[She remains on the sofa as the young Violet]

Scene Fourteen

[It is 1973. Josie is moving the table carefully to the position she suggested in the earlier scene.]

Josie: It just isn't that simple Violet. That's all I can say.

Violet: Of course it's simple, Mum. Simple to work out, difficult to do, perhaps. He has you in prison here.

Josie: Violet please ! Don't raise your voi...don't let's us fight about this, please.

[PAUSE]

[Without being able to look at her, this is a difficult thing for her to say] I know what you think of me. You think I am just feeble, don't you ? A Daddy's girl. And you may well be right. But it's not straightforward, that's all. I've thought about it, of course I have, and I did read that book. But you can't just be angry and expect that to work some magic. I don't expect you to understand this Violet, really, but it's what I want you to think about. Imagine a beautiful soft silk bed, a four-poster bed, with sheets hung around it, in sunlight. Think about how comfortable it would be to lie in there, to have no noise, to have the sun warming your face and your body. To rest. That's the picture I go to. Then think further, deeper. When the relief wears off, what else is there ? No more fear, no more pain. But nobody, you see. A different terror. None of you. Safe but empty.

Violet: [To herself] That isn't true. We would come with you.

Josie: It is easy enough to picture little dream-worlds, but the best you can do with real life is go on making it possible every day. Practical. After all, you still have the dreams to go to when you want them. No-one can steal those, but no-one can make them real, you see.

Violet: Wrong on both counts, Mum. Wrong. He's stolen your dreams.

[Ken comes in his wheelchair. Perhaps he is drunk.]

Kenneth: Oh am I interrupting a meeting ? A meeting of minds, fomenting revolution, is it ? Women of the house unite, you have nothing to lose but your minds.

Josie: We were having a nice talk, Ken.

Kenneth: What about ?

Josie: Oh I don't know. Dreams and things.

Kenneth: Fascinating things dreams. All sex, you know, Six. All of them. Sex.

[Josie goes out. Ken goes up to the table, runs his finger along it in its new position.]

[To Violet] Did you move this ?

[No reply]

So she did then did she ?

So what have you been dreaming about, eh, Six ? Or is it too disgusting to tell. You could talk to me about things you know. We don't need secrets, do we ?

Sometimes I feel like you don't trust me, Six. That couldn't be right, could it ? Your own father. If you can't trust me, who can you trust ?

There you see, when you go quiet, do you know what that makes clear to me ? A guilty conscience. Dark secrets. When we have done things which we know are wrong, there comes a time when we can't say anything about it, because of the guilt. Eh, Violet. I wonder what this little bit of silence is about.

Is it you, or is it your mother ? Perhaps you had better not tell me. I might get angry, might'nt I ?

[He wheels over to Violet, where she is on the sofa, and hits her with the book she is holding.]

You don't want that, do you ?

[He starts beating her. She fights back. He pins her where she is. The speech is approximate - it is basically a screaming, inarticulate beating.]

Kenneth: Do you, you slut! You little bloody whore. You vicious little cunt. Evil bitch. Fucking slut.

[Josie rushes in to pull him away from her. Jerks the chair away and spills him onto the floor. Violet goes off.]

[Ken lies still on the floor. Josie sits for a moment, looking at him. Then she gets up quickly and goes out. He lies still, and then starts slowly pulling himself back into his chair. Josie comes back in with his cine-camera. She films him.]

Kenneth: [When he is back up] It's too dark. Not enough light. It won't come out.

Josie: Shame.

[He wheels his chair over to her. She films again]

Kenneth: You're wasting it. You don't know how to use it.

[He grabs the camera from her, pulls out the film. She goes out. He pulls out the film and throws it after her.]

[She comes back in]

Josie: She's gone.

Kenneth: She must learn to be honest.

Josie: She is honest. Listen to me Ken. She has gone. Look. Gone.

[She pulls and pushes him out into the hallway.]

Scene Fifteen

[Violet comes in with her case on the wheelchair. She opens it and is putting one or two items from the boxes in it.]

Geoff: Are you going then ?

Violet: Well, there's not much to stay for.

Do you want me to tell you what I'm taking ? I mean, what's the legal situation or whatever ?

[Geoff shrugs]

Geoff: There isn't any money.

Violet: You think I'm bothered about that ?

[PAUSE]

You could always come along.

[No reply]

I've got room in my flat at the moment, it's only rented but...

Geoff: It's a kind offer, which with regret I shall have to decline. There is really too much to do. I must carry on his work, you see. There is a gaping void in our community, which it is only my duty to fill, as best I can.

Violet: Shut up, Geoff. This is the worst thing of the lot, this stupid voice, this horrible way of talking. He was nothing special you know. He was no great shakes. Just some sad little accountant who got shot. Nobody will miss him except you.

You can still write letters to the newspapers from anywhere, if you think it's really important. He never let you go anywhere, Geoff, but you are free now.

Geoff: I wouldn't really want to leave, Vi. This is home. Besides, it isn't safe.

[PAUSE]

Violet: Out there ?

Geoff: Yes.

Violet: In the big wide world ?

The only reason you are scared is that he made every decision for you. You've forgotten you could do things for yourself. Come on Geoff, think. Believe me I know about this. You just need to build yourself up. Believe in yourself. You're

clever, you went to a good school, you can speak and write better than anyone else even bothers. There is loads for you, if you go and look. And you're a man - well, practically. A bit weird, but you don't need to put that on the application forms. A new start.

Geoff: It isn't safe to go out. No-one is safe. We are living in violent times.

Violet: Are we ? Who says ? That is the late Kenneth Nesmit speaking. He isn't living at all. Let alone in "violent times".

Anyway, is today really worse than any other time ? I hate that. Always its 'going downhill'. I tell you what bugs me. When was this time that it was so much better ?

Was it in the war was it, is that what he told you ? When we all loved each other, and stuck together, and the country was one big family - just incidentally getting smaller by the thousand every day ? The good old fifties, the good old sixties ? The good old fifties our dear vicar's boy was entrapping innocent virgins into slavery, in his sleazy love-nest, wasn't he ? Then he got shot in the good old sixties, remember ? What was that, some stray time traveller ?

I'll tell you when my "violent times" were, Geoff. They were twenty years ago, when I was getting beaten every other day by that bastard that you love so touchingly. Believe it or not, I don't get all nostalgic from my armchair like the rest of the fucking world seems to.

"Oh how I wish everything was like it used to be, when without walking the streets, I could sit just here and watch him over there, draw blood on my mother's face with a leather harness, specially chosen from the cripple shop to strengthen his poor old arm. Things ain't what they used to be you know."

That is bollocks, Geoff. We live in scared stiff times, that's the truth. With a machine in the corner of every room telling us every day how shitty and dangerous the world is. People aren't worse. They couldn't be much worse than then, could they ? And I'll bet his fucking father, too, you know, in the good old twenties and good old thirties -

Geoff: There is so much you don't yet understand.

You see you are one of the 'unthinking'. You live in your own little world, you don't keep in touch with anything that is happening, you turn away from the suffering of others. Pass by. Look at these [the cuttings] - burglary, mugging, joy-riding. Bosnia, everywhere death. Children at loose, on the rampage, lacking guidance, and help. These are problems that face the world. Facts. News. You can't just put your head in the sand -

Violet: I don't. Perhaps when I was fifteen I was...well actually no. I was dead serious, even then, it was just I wanted to do things, not talk about them.

I've got 21 years of stuff up here you know nothing about. My little world? I've been outside of this door, Geoff. Don't tell me I should be frightened of kids, for

fuck's sake. I spend more time with kids than grown-ups...as a matter of fact, I like kids. But of course that sort of picture of the world must be wrong. Because in his little media mythland all children are evil, out of control, aren't they ? Drug-crazed hooligans. Illiterate vicious thugs. You don't keep in touch by watching the telly, and listening to a blinkered, hypocritical, pompous bastard who knew nothing and lied through his teeth anyway.

[PAUSE]

Geoff: When the cows come home.

Violet: What ?

Geoff: It was something he said. "We can act, or we can sit about until the cows come home, but they won't come home, either of them, Geoff. They've gone."

Violet: Very funny. Perhaps his jokes were the cruellest thing of all. I expect that's what drove Mum away. "Hit me, beat me as much as you like my darling Kenny, just please don't make another fucking pun."

Geoff: Oh no. She went because of you.

[PAUSE]

You turned her against him.

Violet: Me. I was sixteen years old when I left here.

Geoff: You were a rebel. You taught her.

Violet: If I showed her how to stand up to him, then I'm proud of that.

Geoff: You brought out the cruelty in her. You and the dancing women. Persuaded her to desert him, and all his needs. He never let her see how much he needed her, and she just went. It was treason, that was. An act of treachery. She was evil. Both of you are evil. He knew that, underneath, you know. However much he forgave you, he knew that you were evil.

Violet: That word. What does it mean ?

Geoff: Like a traitor. Someone who goes back on everything, deserts her family. Tries to kill her husband.

Violet: Listen Geoff. Really. Listen to yourself. Put it against what you know deep down, will you ?

You don't hate her. Why have you followed her in Mystic Whatdyoucallit if you hate her so much ? You're so used to denying just how much you miss her. That's what's really there.

Geoff: [Lunges towards her] Shut up ! Shut your bloody mouth !

[Violet is suddenly frightened of him, for the first time. She backs off and curls up into the position she was in when Ken attacked her. Geoff retains his threatening position for a while, but through the next speech, he not only backs off, but regresses, so that by the end he is crouching, huddled, hidden.]

You don't know. She was evil.

I was there. I saw her.

[As he describes the action it begins. He has conjured it. It is 1965. Ken is in the room, sitting in the chair.]

I was here. In this room. Not hiding, just squashed, out of the way of everything. She came in. She wasn't like she was sometimes, you know. Angry. She was just there. You weren't here. You were upstairs, crying. Screaming your head off. He had come down from you. He was over here, standing, that was all. They didn't know I could see. "Oh now come on" He was saying. "Come on, Come on."

Kenneth: Come on, come on. Josie. I am very, very, sorry. You can't know what it feels like in here. It just seems like I've gone outside of myself and I'm watching, you see. I can't seem to do anything about it, it's somehow just happening. Dear Lord, forgive me.

[Josie has come in. He is up and backing away from her. It becomes clear that she has a pistol. She points it at him.]

Josie: I don't want you to try this, Ken. Every time I've let you do this. Explain it away in a sea of little boy crap. Don't try and charm your way away. You can't.

What was it that happened to you, Ken ?

Kenneth: Nothing happ -

Josie: [Snapping] I'm not asking you so you can answer me. I don't want to listen all right ?

Kenneth: I didn't mean to hurt you, you know that.

Josie: Me ? You really think I care about myself ? All this is my own stupid fault anyway, for not seeing you for what you were. Years ago.

You paid a little of your charming attention to me, where no-one else had bothered, didn't you, my mother liked you, you made her laugh, so I took that for...God knows.

No, you could keep me squashed down in a little corner of your life as long as you like for all I care. But I won't let you do it to them. I won't let you hurt my children. If this ... You won't lay a finger -

Kenneth: Listen Josie, you're probably right. I'm sure, and I'm glad, I'm glad you're saying this, do you know that, because it will help -

Josie: I'm not going to listen to you. I told you. I've thought about this. You still expect it to work on me, in spite of everything you've done.

Whatever you say all quiet now, I can still hear you screaming like an animal upstairs. That's what I see. Tearing, screaming and kicking, not soft and smooth.

[She points the gun again]

Kenneth: Josie don't. You're being foolish. I've apologised, haven't I ? What more can I do ?

Josie: I don't know. I honestly don't think you can do any more.

Kenneth: Come on. Come on Josie, put that down...

[He moves towards her. She shoots. Misses.]

Kenneth: Jesus! Josie, you stupid fucking - Jesus you could have killed me. God I really thought you were going to -

[She shoots again. This time she hits him, and he crumples, screaming. She comes up to him on the floor, and fires one more shot, hitting him between his legs. She looks at him. Ken is groaning. He looks at her. She turns away.]

[PAUSE]

Don't go, don't go. You can't go now.

Josie: No.

[After a while he lose consciousness. He stays there until the end.]

Geoff: I don't remember her saying anything at all, just staring at him, all cold, at first, then sad. Not shouting or anything. Grandad's gun it was. I don't know what happened to it. One bullet must have gone in his stomach, because he held on there, and he turned away, really shouting hard. The other was lower. There will have been an entry wound and an exit wound. Like JFK. I was here. He was over there. She was there, standing first, then she went upstairs.

[Josie does this as he describes it.]

Dad was asleep. There was some blood just by him. I stayed looking.

[PAUSE]

Violet: Is this true ?

[PAUSE]

That is She did that ?

Of course. Oh God, Mum... ?

But the police... the burglar, the accident.....the hero ?

And she stayed, even after that ?

Of course. He could say, or he could keep the secret. He had her trapped. All those years.

Her. Us. Why didn't I...she should have told me. Oh Geoff.

How did she go in the end ? What if he had said then ?

Geoff: Total disappearance. Never traced. No tracks in the dust to follow. No way to catch her. The other side of the world. With Lord Lucan, with Shergar. With you probably. One of the missing persons. Dead or alive. Untraceable. The perfect crime.

Violet: No Geoff, if you hear nothing else, if you stay here and keep him alive, whatever. No. He beat her. You know this. He hit her and cut her. You saw it, you heard it. You lived in the atmosphere. He put her down, shat on her, every fucking day. He attacked her, he attacked me, with his hands, with weapons. He belted you too..

Geoff: Only when we deserved it.

Violet: Day in day out, Geoff. Think! You've got all the pictures and the sounds in there, just like I have. Bruises, burns, scars. You never deserved anything. No-one does.

You remember sitting there, with him here, you do. Wondering what it was that you had done wrong, with him tall, coming over like this...

[She is re-enacting an incident now]

Shouting at you. His eyes, yes, see them do you, Geoffrey, you evil child -

[Geoff jumps up, threatening again.]

Geoff: Don't!

[Violet backs off, frightened. It is her father she sees. Geoff holds the threat for only a moment, might perhaps be about to hit her, but then retreats into his 'hiding-place', on the floor.]

Violet: He was a con-man. A cheap, clever, manipulative con-man.

[PAUSE]

Geoff: If that is your summing up, then it isn't very fair.

Violet: Geoff. Forget summing-up. He is guilty. Of everything. We both know that. If she shot him, it only makes it worse. All that time, the covering up. Ken the have-a-go hero. Nothing. She knew and could tell no-one. Jesus. And for us. For me. Poor bloody woman. No-one at all...

[Violet is crying, or trying not to cry.]

[PAUSE]

Geoff: This is all I know.

[He gets a piece of paper out of his pocket. Throws it to her. She picks it up and reads it.]

Violet: This is an address.

Have you always had this ?

[Geoff nods]

Geoff: She gave it to me. It was our secret.

Violet: Family secrets are wonderful, aren't they ?

Thank you.

[She gets up, moves towards him]

I must go.

[No reaction]

Are you sure you won't think of getting out of here ?

Geoff: I don't think...

Violet: No. Well.

Easier, of course. To believe the myth. Always

[She gets her bag and picks up one of the pictures of her mother, looks at Geoff and goes]

Geoff: Goodbye then, Six. Gone again. Gone for six.

Well now. Just me. Life must go on, eh Geoffrey. There is always work to be done.

[He is dragging himself across the floor.]

Of course. It's only natural. A purpose. A cause. Something to stand for. It is easy to despair with the world in such a state. So much violence, everywhere.

We must not despair.

We must carry on the fight.

[He climbs into the wheelchair]

[The End]