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STIFF STUFF
By John Chambers

CHARACTERS

Kathy Duke	a yuppy wife
Charles Duke	a yuppy
Sheila	a bar maid
Professor Edmund Starling	a professor of nonsense verse
Charlotte Starling	his wife and organiser
Jimmy Merrill	a celeb footballer
Radio Announcer (V.O.)	played by cast member

CLUES

There's a puzzle
Which sniffed by my nuzzle
Refuses to be muzzled.

There's an answer
Partnering the word dancer
Invited to be a chancer.

There's a meaning
To all of this obscening
And self righteous scheming.

There's justification
To all human racing
Questions worth facing.

There's desperation
Desperately avoiding illucidation
And Self confrontation.

There's a purpose
Why else this sense of loss
A bridge, a void, to cross.

By Benjamin J. Mannion

THE PROLOGUE

RADIO

ANNOUNCER:

We heard in the news bulletin of the sad death of Ben Mannion, one of our leading journalists who at the age of twenty nine, died tragically in a railway accident in the early hours of this morning.

We have invited his Oxford tutor and mentor, Professor Edward Starling to offer an appreciation.

EDMUND:

Good morning. I have been invited to offer my appreciation following the sad death of Benjamin Mannion, who, at the age of twenty-nine, died tragically in a railway accident in the early hours of this morning. I was his tutor at Oxford and I suppose something of a mentor to him.

Dear, dear Ben... Friend, protégé, intellectual and perhaps best known to many of you as a journalist and Television presenter.

A true Renaissance man. Interested in ideas, in art, in politics - indeed in life itself. Ben personified all that was good - an honest integrity, generous in spirit. More than anything Ben knew the meaning of 'Joy'. He enjoyed. And he brought joy to those of us who knew him. One way which he demonstrated this, perhaps above all others, were his 'Bibbly Scribbles'.

The little nonsensical rhymes which he often gave to those he met. Whether written on napkins or vellum, if he was so moved, he would pass his little creations to people. Anyone from the most eminent politician or academic to the humblest in the land - waiters and estate agents.

At the time of his demise Ben was writing a literary work entitled 'The Folk Hero and it's relation to Contemporary Culture'. Sadly the work will not be completed. I suggest that we lost a man who, in another time, would himself have been a folk hero.

We have also lost a friend – some of us, a surrogate son.

THE CAST MOVE FORWARD – LINES DELIVERED,
SOMETIMES BY A CHORUS, SOMETIMES BY
INDIVIDUALS.

ALL:

Harsh, mean, bad, mad
Sorry, seedy, sordid, sad,
What a world to pain through,
What a way to grow.
Living pains.
Learning as you go.
They don't tell you what you need to know,
Not them complacent gets,
In schools of varying degrees,
Meaningless plaudits
From seemingless pundits
Everyway whichway,
Oh, they have their say
Along with - father, mothers, older brothers,
Teachers, speachers,
Playwrights, gobshites,
Parasytics, paper critics,
Verbal erectors,
Television directors,
Tax Inspectors,
Priests and rectors
Doctors, spoctors, rocksters,
Disc jocksters, dim boxers,
Reporters, coke snorters,
Cab drivers, minge divers,
Suing survivors, superstition revivers,
Faith healers, City dealers,
Bimbo squealers, pension stealers
Mystics, piss sticks, arse licks,
Get rich quicks, dozy dicks,
Word weighers, purveyors
Of their wordy toss juice.
Spunk spraying verbiage
Rule laden garbiage
Into receptacles
With brains in their testacles
Permanent, perpetual oral ejaculation
Into condom like receivers
Who've given up speculation.

The profound silence of millions of voices
The profound confusion of making no choices

The profound confusion of celebrated moribundity
The profound infertility of pointless fecundity
The proclaimed sense of piss all.
The wracking pain of numbness
The spinning brain of boredom
The nagging doubt of meaning
The filling gaps with horse shit
The filling gaps with horse shit

Academic alliterative analysis
Atrophies the outcome.
Where the means justifies the means.

JIMMY MOVES FORWARD.

JIMMY:

And Jimmy says, fuck 'em.
Screw till you sleep
Drink till you sleep
Eat when you need
Be a hero when you can
Only listen when you have to
Or when you want to
Then do something pleasant.
Have a swim
A shit
A shag
A sausage sandwich
A sleep
A mutton lolly is worth...
is worth...
Who gives a tuppenny toss.

CHAS STEPS FORWARD.

CHAS:

I have a dream
Of BMWs and stainless steel hubcaps
Of VCRs and remote control
Of WCs upstairs and down and out
Of GTIs and automatic windows
Of in-car phone in hand and full-on media system.
Oh yes, I have a dream.

Of PVC and double glazed Everest frames
Of CDs and Dolby quadrophonic sound
Of TVs and two in every room
Of 35 MM and Olympus with a zoom

I have a dream
Of JVC cam-corders to record it all
Of USA, and winter in the Alps
Of IBM, to reduce it to numbers
Oh brother, I have a dream
Of RAC, AA and National Breakdown.

Take me to that dream
With Am Ex, Visa and Mastercard
With TSB, and Natwest and Barclays too
With APR, and three months before I start to pay
With HP - to make me H.A.P.P.Y.

KATHY STANDS BESIDE CHAS.

KATHY: (WEAKLY) That's our dream
My dream too...

CHARLOTTE STANDS APART – AS IF IN A GARDEN.

CHARLOTTE: A rose is perfect
Perfectly...
Quiet.

SHEILA STEPS FORWARD.

SHEILA: Alright so I only got 2 CSEs and I'm a barmaid. It doesn't
mean that all I can do is (MIMICS)
'Alright chuck, the usual is it?
How are you?
Fair to middling?
That's good.'
'Alright chuck, the usual is it?
How's your leg?
Could be worse.
That's good.
Never mind.'
'Hello pet, the usual is it?
Left the wife at home.
That's good.
Now be a good boy.
Yes I know what you think you could do for me
The flesh is willing
Never mind, pet
Have another drink.'

'Hello Mr Wilson
How's retirement suiting you?
Bin in the library all morning have you?
That's nice for you.
I like to read... You're not listening.'

All you can see,
Some days, is what you know
Will happen
It's predictable.
Now there's a big word.
But you just know, from the moment you open your sleepy
eyes, what will occur.
Who you'll meet - they might have different faces - but you'll
recognize them
What they'll say - they might have different accent and turns
of phrase - but you'll have heard it all before.
How they'll smell - six aromas from Boots, maybe even Body
Shop - but you've had that one up your snot box on previous
occasions.

EDMUND APART.

EDMUND:

You'll like college. I'll make a pot of tea presently. Yes, all
mod cons, as it were, in my study.

My favourite place. My room. Rows of books, mostly first
editions. People think they must cost a fortune but I'm
something of an aficionada of the jumble sale and second
hand book shop.

Yes, I must have read and written millions, no billions, of
words in this dear room.

I have a wireless. It's my little vice.

Permanently tuned to the Third Programme, but not in the
summer – Radio 4 long wave - so I can listen to the Test
Match. Not all day. I allow myself five minutes each hour.
I like college in the summer. It's so quiet. I often say to
Charlotte, 'It's a pity we have to have students at all.' It's a
little joke of mine.

Charlotte says, 'You would be out of a job, Edmund, if there
were no students.' That's her little joke.

Ben and I used to chat for hours here. Listen to the cricket and exchange our bits of nonsense.

Dear Ben.

Of course he was more than a student...

CHARLOTTE:

We should all leave this earth familiar with the scent of a thousand flowers.

We should have been lulled into a summer solstice doze by humming bees and wasps as they collect nectar. The nectar collectors ensuring new life in the New Year.

Everyone should know the comfortable smell of decaying leaves and the peace of dank autumn afternoons.

And be engrossed by grateful birds hungrily devouring winter gifts of bacon rind and peanuts - their repayment made with interest in early spring morning song.

He was familiar with all of that before he was taken. He loved gardens - our garden. In summer he worked on the verandah of our summer house and I'd take him jug upon jug of lemonade. 'My memsab', he used to say. Eyes alive. Young and alive, he'd push his fair hair back into place with one stroke of his elegant hand. A boy who was perfectly at home in a beautiful garden. We both were. Age difference didn't seem to matter. I was his best friend, he told me. I used to wish those summers could last forever.

Edmund tried to persuade Ben to stay on, do more post grad work. He was a brilliant student. But Ben wanted to go into what he called 'the real world'...

Summer days sipping lemonade in the shade of the verandah were just as real. They are still real to me...

KATHY:

That's terrible - look at their swollen bellies and big eyes.

That's terrible - fell out of the sky it did.

That's terrible - you'd shoot them wouldn't you Chas.

That's terrible - blew a woman's leg off.

That's terrible - married six times.

That's terrible - how could somebody do that to a child.

That's terrible - 87 and they kicked her.

That's terrible - poison gas.

That's terrible - a million pound pension swindle.
That's terrible - only twenty nine, quite good looking, top
journalist and writer, terrible. Fell under a train.
That's terrible - her blouse doesn't match those ear rings.

SHEILA AND JIMMY. NEAR EACH OTHER.

SHEILA: That's terrible.

JIMMY SHRUGS.

SHEILA: Honest Jimmy - aren't you bothered?

JIMMY: Why?

SHEILA: You must have got to know him quite well.

JIMMY: He was doin' a job.

SHEILA: I liked him - the few times he came in here.

JIMMY: Glorified journalist - the whole fucking lot could fall under a
train.

SHEILA: Give you a hard time, did he?

JIMMY: Has the day got a 'y' in it? I'll tell you something - I'd swap
places with that twat under the train.

SHEILA: Don't be so daft.

JIMMY: I'm fucking off.

SHEILA: Where to?

JIMMY: Out of this fucking town - away from this fucking lot - press,
hangers on, one night stands. Just out of it.

KATHY & CHAS TOGETHER.

KATHY: That's terrible - interest rates are going up.

CHAS: (WAKES WITH A START) Arrrrgh!

SHEILA: And yet - hey, I'm only a barmaid - well, hell. I know that - but
you know - or forget mostly - that the times in your life you

remember are the times in your life when you've forgotten that the unexpected occurs. It seems to never happen, but it's always happening. It's those times in your life - when you're LIVING.

THE FIRST WEEKEND

SUNDAY MORNING.
THE LAKE DISTRICT.

JIMMY, ALONE, STILL IN LAST NIGHTS BOPPING GEAR. HE HAS HIS COLLAR PULLED UP. HE LOOKS ABOUT, FEELING HE SHOULD GO BACK TO HIS CAR BUT NOT WANTING TO MOVE. HE GAZES OVER A LAKE.

JIMMY: (MUSING) Another Sunday morning, waking up I don't know where. This time not alongside some bleached tart. This time laid up in a lay-by. And it's pissing down. Missing. A big fuck off lake. The only thing not wet is my throat – like gravel. Only yesterday afternoon I was a hero. Last night the centre of the crowd. This morning I'm stood like a wet fart. A zero – with a mouth like a buzzard's chuff.

CHAS ENTERS, JOGGING IN LABEL JOGGING SUIT AND SWEAT BANDS ON EVERY APPENDAGE, LABEL SHOES - THE LOT.

HE SLOWS WHEN HE SEES JIMMY, LOOKS BACK TO WHERE JIMMY'S CAR IS PARKED, THEN AT JIMMY AND THEN STOPS A FEW PACES AWAY.

CHAS: Nice motor.

JIMMY HALF LOOKS.

CHAS: Yours?

JIMMY NODS AND GOES BACK TO GAZING.

CHAS THINKS HE MIGHT HAVE RECOGNISED JIMMY. ABOUT TO SAY SOMETHING, HE LOOKS AGAIN AT THE CAR, THEN DECIDES TO TALK TO JIMMY.

CHAS: Three miles this morning.
Of course that's probably just a warmer up for you.
You're Jimmy aren't you. Jimmy Merrill.

JIMMY SIGHS.

CHAS: I should have guessed - when I saw the Esprit - J.M.1. I read a feature on you in Top Car. I bet the personalized reg cost you a bit. More than a Fiesta or Metro - just for the number plate. Fantastic.

Then I saw your face. I thought, I know that guy.

CHAS OFFERS HIS HAND.

CHAS: Chas Duke.

JIMMY DECLINES OFFER OF HAND.

JIMMY: J.M. One.

CHAS: Like it Jimmy. J.M. One.

Like it. (LOOKS BACK TO JIMMY'S CAR) A very nice motor. I'm driving a Cavalier - Rick Brody, my area manager, has hinted that it could be a Carlton this time next year.

Not quite a Lotus, but not bad. No, if I keep pitching at the rate I'm doing, it could definitely be a Carlton.

We're staying at Rick's cottage - by Wastwater. I can tell you he doesn't let all the reps stay there. It's very reasonable too. Kathy - that's my wife - she says he could let us stay for nothing - Rick being a great mate of mine. But I mean, I said to her, people don't appreciate it if you just give them things. It smacks of charity.

(PAUSE) Anyway, I reckon we got it at half the going rate - for rental of a deluxe secluded cottage for a weekend - nearly half the commercial rental. (PAUSE) I checked in Dalton's Weekly. I wouldn't tell Rick I checked, but well. Like him, I live in the real world.

SEES JIMMY'S NOT LISTENING.

CHAS: Are you going to win the league then?

JIMMY: We came fourth.

CHAS: Yeh... I know... bad luck that... I meant next season.

JIMMY: Who knows?

CHAS: I must say I'm not a football man. I watch it on TV, but I don't have a lot of time for sport. Just squash, badminton, swimming, jogging, tennis - and I'm getting really interested in golf. Of course there's the social side to it.

I suppose you play golf - a lot of footballers play.

JIMMY: I fucking hate it.

UNEASY PAUSE.

CHAS: (LOOKS TOWARDS JIMMY'S CAR AGAIN) It's a lovely car... I bet you get pestered all the time. Morons who want your autograph or who want to talk non-stop... Well, I think they should respect your privacy. It's like film stars. I don't blame them living in mansions with security guards and electric gates. If you've not got privacy you're not your own person.

That's why we live where we do. A Wimpey executive detached. Personal space. A good area. Everyone's got worthwhile careers and interests - they don't have to bother themselves with other people's lives.

I'm in finance myself. Brokerage. Not as glamorous as football or being a personality, but in its own way it gets the adrenalin flowing. It's challenging. And of course nowadays we've cast off that dull and dowdy image. Secondary finance.

PULLS OUT A CARD FROM UNDER HIS HEAD SWEATBAND. HANDS IT TO JIMMY. JIMMY TAKES CARD, BUT DOESN'T LOOK AT IT.

CHAS: This is us - Cellular Mortgages - that's me Charles Duke - sorry it's a bit clammy. I always carry one or two.

Independent Financial Advice - loans, or, in your case Jimmy mate, investments. We could get you very advantageous terms - maybe do a deal where you endorse our product.

JIMMY: (TURNS TO CHAS) Piss off you jumped up little shit head.

CHAS: (STUNNED)

JIMMY: You heard me. Get out of my sight you scabby parasite.

CHAS: (BACKING OFF) You can't say...

JIMMY: Fucking go.

CHAS: (ALMOST OFF) I'll tell the papers.

CHAS EXITS.

JIMMY: Just fucking leave me alone.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

EDMUND AND CHARLOTTE IN THEIR GARDEN.
HE PACES ABOUT HALF PLEASED, HALF PERPLEXED.

EDMUND: Well, well, well. Mm. Well, I never. I never ever did. Mm. Mm
Mm. Well, I, well, I never. Me... Me, me, me. Well, I never did
in all my life. I really never did.

(BEAT)

A dry old Dong named 'Me'
Was rang to see if he was free
The Dong was busy as a busy buzzy bee
But still said, 'What do you want of me?'
Twas a publisher of books who spoke
Said, 'Sir, can you finish a boke (ASIDE) book
If you do, you won't be broke.
It's about a muddy footballer bloke.

'Me!!' gasped the Dong, 'Oh my
'Why choose me? Why oh why?'
The publisher explained with a sigh,
'Your protegé started it, but now he's died.'

CHARLOTTE: Well, well, well. Mm. Well, I never...

EDMUND: That's what I thought.

CHARLOTTE: What do you know about footballers, dear?

EDMUND: I know.

CHARLOTTE: Nonsense is your field.

EDMUND: I know.

CHARLOTTE: Well, well, well.

EDMUND: I think that is the reason.

CHARLOTTE: What's that dear?

EDMUND: The fact that I'm not au fait with the norms and mores of football. 'Togger', to use what I think is the colloquialism.

CHARLOTTE: How's that, dear?

EDMUND: The fresh eye.

CHARLOTTE: I see.

EDMUND: And as Ben has done most of the preliminary work and I am, or was, yes, sadly, *was* his mentor - is that too immodest....

CHARLOTTE: You must do it, Edmund.

EDMUND: I mean I must say I wish publishers were as keen on my Magnus Opus - 'Nonsense Verse and it's Place in English and West European Literature'...

CHARLOTTE: You must carry on Ben's work.

EDMUND: Yes, I know - it's just, well, twenty three years I've worked on 'Nonsense Verse and its Place in English...'

CHARLOTTE: At least you will be able to continue with that... Poor Ben.

EDMUND: Oh yes. I don't wish to sound selfish or churlish.

CHARLOTTE: I'll help you - be your assistant...

EDMUND: And if I do a good job the publisher might snap up 'Nonsense Verse and it's Place in English and West European Literature', as it were.

BEAT.

EDMUND: Assist me?

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

EDMUND: You know as much about football as me Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: I can collate Ben's papers.

EDMUND: Yes... we haven't worked together on anything before.
I suppose we will have to meet this chappy. He lives in the North.

They do say they are very friendly.

I'll make it clear that I'm not usurping Ben's work. Simply ensuring it sees the light of day.

I'm quite flattered that they should ask me.

SUNDAY EVENING

A HOTEL BAR IN THE LAKE DISTRICT.
KATHY SITS AT A TABLE.
CHAS BRINGS OVER THEIR DRINKS.

CHAS: A pina colada. (HANDS IT TO KATHY)

KATHY: Rum and Black.

CHAS: One seventy eight.

KATHY: Still, it's very nice here.

CHAS: They take Visa.

KATHY: You can tell, it's that kind of place. Really smart.

CHAS: Rick recommended it. He said when I collected the cottage keys on Friday to avoid the local in the village. It's full of locals and hikers with orange kagouls and beards.

KATHY: They wouldn't allow that type in here. It's very nice.

CHAS: We should get a place in the country.

KATHY: I wouldn't fancy living here - it's... well, it looks very nice.

CHAS: Not to live - to get away. Rick says it keeps him sane - getting away from the pressure, the odd weekend in the Lakes.

KATHY: And it's an investment.

CHAS: That's right. Let it out for a bomb.

KATHY: Fancy you meeting Jimmy Merrill.

CHAS: We had a good chat.
He's got a Lotus Esprit.

KATHY: What did he say?

CHAS: (UNEASY) All sorts.

KATHY: I've never met anyone famous.

CHAS: The secret is don't be overawed. If you grovel they don't respect you.

KATHY: I wouldn't know what to say - you're so good with people.
'Course it's your job.

CHAS: I wouldn't have the job if I didn't have the flair, the knack of getting on with people. Take this morning - when I met Jim - I virtually signed him up for some business. I wasn't overawed - I just talked to him straight - won his respect.

JIMMY ENTERS. UNSEEN BY CHAS, WHO IS IN FULL FLOW.

CHAS: (CONTINUES) Said I could go and join in training with the team if I was ever in Manchester. He could see I was a guy who liked to keep in shape.

JIMMY GETS A DRINK AND SEES CHAS. JIMMY HESITATES, THEN SEES KATHY. SHE CLOCKS HIM. THEIR EYES MEET AND THEY HOLD THIS AS CHAS RAPS ON, OBLIVIOUS.

CHAS: I think a nice tan impresses people. Shows you're someone who bothers about how they look - self respect. I mean it's nine months since we got back from Florida, and a session a week on the sun bed has kept a really nice tan up.

KATHY: He's not got a tan.

CHAS: Who?

JIMMY TAKES CHAS' CARD FROM HIS POCKET, CHECKS THE NAME, PUTS IT BACK AND APPROACHES.

KATHY: He's coming over. (LOOKS AWAY FROM JIMMY EMBARRASSED)

CHAS: Who? (TURNS WITH A BIG SMILE WHICH EVAPORATES WHEN HE SEES IT'S JIMMY)

HEAVY PAUSE.

JIMMY: (LOOKING AT KATHY) We met this morning.

CHAS NODS.

JIMMY: Charles isn't it?

CHAS NODS.

JIMMY TURNS TO CHARLES, WARM AND DIRECT AND SHAKES HIS HAND.
CHAS IS PUZZLED.

CHAS: (WEAKLY) Drink?

JIMMY RAISES HIS GLASS TO INDICATE HE'S GOT A DRINK AND SITS. CHAS DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. JIMMY TURNS HIS ATTENTION TO KATHY.

KATHY: You're Jimmy Merrill.

JIMMY SMILES.

KATHY: We were just talking about you...

CHAS: (CUTS IN) Do you want another drink, Kath?

KATHY: I'm alright, thanks.
(TO JIMMY) Chas was saying how you met this morning.

CHAS: (KNOCKS HIS BACK. STANDS) I'm having another one.

JIMMY: Get me a white wine and soda then.

CHAS: What?

KATHY: He wants a Spritza, Chas.
(HELPFULLY, TO JIMMY) We went to Florida last year.

THE HAPLESS CHAS WANDERS TO THE BAR.

JIMMY: So you're Kathy.

KATHY: I was saying to Chas, I wouldn't know what to say if I met someone famous. Clam up. That'd be me. Gobsmacked, blushing. I wouldn't know what to ask, I'd feel useless. Chas is really good with people. I said it was because he was in selling, but he says he's in selling because he's good with people. He's right really. He's brilliant when he meets people. Everyone likes him. It's a gift he's got. I'm getting better. With strangers I'm hopeless, but I am getting better. But with celebrities, V.I.P.s, well I don't think I'd be any good at all.

CHAS RETURNS WITH DRINKS AND SITS.

KATHY: I was just saying, Chas - to Jimmy - how I was saying earlier - how I wouldn't know what to say to a real live celebrity, V.I.P.

CHAS: You've got a smudge on your nose.

KATHY: Oh god - sorry. (STANDS) I'll just go and see to it. Sorry...

KATHY EXITS.

JIMMY: I didn't see a smudge.

CHAS: She wouldn't forgive me if I let her sit all night with a smudge on her nose.

JIMMY: About this morning...

CHAS: (WARY) Yes...

JIMMY: I was under pressure - I want to apologise.

CHAS: (BRIGHTENS) Don't mention it.

JIMMY: No, I felt bad as soon as you'd gone.

CHAS: I know all about pressure, Jim.

JIMMY: I'm glad I bumped into you again - gives me a chance to put it right.

CHAS: It's O.K. mate. The pressure you guys must be under - the media microscope - it would get to anyone. And you just find a few minutes quiet and I come charging in.

JIMMY: (TAKES CHAS' CARD FROM HIS POCKET) I kept your card.

CHAS: (GETS ANOTHER OUT OF HIS OWN POCKET) Have a clean one.

JIMMY: Cheers, 'mate.
Put your home number on it - I might want to do a little business.

CHAS: O.K.

JIMMY: Make things right.

CHAS TAKES OUT HIS PEN.

CHAS: This pen will write upside down and even under water.
Pneumatic pump action.

CHAS PUTS HIS PHONE NUMBER ON. GIVES CARD TO JIMMY. KATHY RETURNS.

KATHY: I couldn't see a smudge.

CHAS: (CURT) It's gone now.
(TO JIMMY) So Jimmy you give me a bell anytime and we'll cut some business.

JIMMY: (TO KATHY) You live in Oxfordshire there.

KATHY: Yes - you been there.

JIMMY: More than likely but I've not seen much of it if I have - team coaches - dressing room - grass and mud - dressing room - team coach - and away, fast as we could move.

KATHY: You must have a very exciting life.

CHAS: (CUTTING IN) So you give me a bell, Jim - office or home – or on my moby.

JIMMY: (TO KATH) It's not all that exciting.

CHAS: (PALLY) It's not what I've heard, hey Kath.

JIMMY: Paper talk.

HE LOOKS AGAIN AT THE NUMBER ON THE CARD AND POCKETS IT. STANDS.

JIMMY: I'll be in touch, (LOOKING AT KATH) and we'll see if we can't get down to serious business. See you.

JIMMY EXITS.
CHAS STANDS.

CHAS: See you Jim.
(SITS) Wait till I tell Rick. What a clincher. What a clincher. Let's get a bottle of champers - they take Visa. First time you've seen me in action. Some operator, hey?

KATHY: A real smooth operator.

CHAS: You proud of me?

KATHY: Course...

CHAS: (KISSES KATH, THEN STANDS) What a clincher.

RAISES CLENCHED FISTS LIKE A FOOTBALLER WHO'S JUST SCORED.

ACT TWO

THE SECOND WEEKEND.

FRIDAY MIDDAY.
PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL GROUND. JIMMY MESSES
ROUND WITH A BALL (THE MORE ELABORATE THE
BETTER)

EDMUND APPROACHES, LOOKING ROUND AT THE
STADIUM TOTALLY OUT OF HIS DEPTH - AWE STRUCK.
JIMMY STOPS AND WATCHES HIM. JIMMY NODS.
EDMUND NODS FAINTLY AND CONTINUES TO LOOK
ROUND.

EDMUND: A gladiatorial arena.
Christians and lions.

JIMMY: Precious few Christians.

EDMUND: I was speaking metaphorically... ah... quite so, Mr Merrill?

JIMMY: Professor? My agent said you were coming.

JIMMY OFFERS HIS HAND, EDMUND IS ABOUT TO TAKE
IT BUT AGAIN LOOKS UP AT THE STANDS.

EDMUND: Another world. Hard to imagine the feeling. Putting oneself...
to the test... each Saturday... before... how many people?

JIMMY: 30, 40, 50...

EDMUND: Thousand...
Another world.

JIMMY: Unless they don't like you...

EDMUND: I hope you didn't mind when I suggested we meet here.

JIMMY: (SHRUGS)

EDMUND: In the first instance. I wanted to get the feel.

JIMMY: You'd get more of the feel if it wasn't the close season.

EDMUND: Publisher's deadlines, Mr Merrill.

JIMMY: (LAUGHS) Dead lines.

EDMUND: Deadlines - ah a cruel, I have to say, unintended, irony. Poor Ben.

JIMMY: You knew Ben Mannion?

EDMUND: Almost a surrogate... Poor Ben.

JIMMY: You knew him then?

EDMUND: My best student. He almost became part of the family. Stayed with us during vacs. and always kept in touch after he graduated.

JIMMY: That's why they've asked you to finish off the book.

EDMUND: Ah the book... the book.
Yes. Yes - the book. THE BOOK.

JIMMY: Do you know anything about football?

EDMUND: That's precisely what I said to Charlotte - and without a hint of sarcasm or even irony, do you know what she said to me? 'What do you know about football?'

Well, Mr Merrill, I have to confess - in fact 'confession' implies apologia - and as I said to Charlotte, the reason I have been asked, and indeed Ben in the original instance, to prepare a literary work on the life of soccerist, as it were, is not because either Poor Ben, or Poor Me, come to that, have any knowledge, although I have to add that Ben was a site more athletic than I, but it is because it is what I alluded to earlier, ie. namely a literary work and not what one might call, in media parlance, a sporting biog. plain and simple, that he, I, the twain, have been asked to accomplish the task. The task being, to use yourself as a focus, in an attempt to shed some light, a lot of light if we are successful, onto the place of folk hero in, and the effect of same on, said hero, of the contemporary culture, taking as a starting point the thesis that sport and art have arguably, elements of commonality.

JIMMY: You know fuck all about football then.

EDMUND: Ah... mm... no.

JIMMY: Like that other cunt they sent.

EDMUND: Other? Sorry? Pardon.
Poor Ben.

JIMMY: Poor Ben arseholes. He was born with a silver spoon in his trap. Now they send some cunt who talks as if he's got a silver spoon still in his trap - and one up his arse for good measure.

EDMUND: Fascinating imagery.
Do you mind if I note this down.

WRITES IN A PAD.

JIMMY: (DISBELIEVING, THEN LAUGHS)

EDMUND: (MUTTERS AS HE FINISHES OFF WRITING) ...arse for good measure...'

So Mr Merrill, you have no objection to my finishing the task in hand. The book.

JIMMY: I've no choice - I've blown the money they gave me.

EDMUND: A partnership blessed by Mammon.

JIMMY: I'm fucking off for a drink.

EDMUND: Ah yes, when we spoke on the phone your agent mentioned a hostelry for lunch. I've taken the liberty of dispatching Mrs Starling there in advance - she called at an antique fair and will meet us at the... taverna.

JIMMY: Yeh well – I've got to bob in to a club on the way.

EDMUND: What about Charlotte?

JIMMY: Does she play snooker?

EDMUND: Bridge... and mahjong.

JIMMY: What the fuck's that? Never mind – are you coming or what?

JIMMY LEADS OFF, BUT EDMUND HAS A LAST LOOK ROUND THE STADIUM AND THEN DOES SOME WOODEN KICKS AND HEADERS AT IMAGINARY BALLS.

EDMUND: Stanley Charlton... and he scores a wonderful point... goal.

CHASING AFTER JIMMY.

EDMUND: Are they points or goals, Mr Merrill?

MANCHESTER CITY CENTRE PUB.
SHEILA SITS READING BEHIND THE BAR.
CHARLOTTE ENTERS, A LITTLE CAUTIOUSLY. SHE IS LOOKING FOR EDMUND. SHE CARRIES AN ANTIQUE DOLL WRAPPED IN TISSUE PAPER.

CHARLOTTE: Excuse me.

SHEILA: Sorry, I didn't see you waiting.

CHARLOTTE: I'm looking for my husband.

SHEILA: You're not the first.

CHARLOTTE: Someone else has been looking for Edmund?

SHEILA: Not that I know of - the names change but plenty of wives come looking. I don't know why they bother.

CHARLOTTE: I see...

BEAT.

CHARLOTTE: He'll be with the footballer, Jimmy Merrill.

SHEILA: If he's with Jimmy, I'd stay well out of it.

CHARLOTTE: Oh...

SHEILA: Only joking - they'll turn up.

CHARLOTTE: You don't mind?

SHEILA: Why should I mind? Can I get you a drink?

CHARLOTTE: Will it be alright - my drinking alone...

SHEILA: Why shouldn't it be?

CHARLOTTE: I don't know - I'm afraid I'm not familiar with... places like this.

SHEILA: You've never been in a pub before?

CHARLOTTE: Of course.

SHEILA: Not dumps like this?

CHARLOTTE: Not city pubs.

EDMUND & JIMMY IN SNOOKER HALL.

EDMUND: Ah, dear Ben.

JIMMY: Bloody good he was too.

EDMUND: Really?

JIMMY: One of those bastards that was good at everything.

EDMUND: Did you not like Ben?

JIMMY: I didn't say that.

EDMUND: I must say I don't know how anyone could fail to like, could have failed, to like him.

JIMMY: I didn't say I didn't like him.

EDMUND: I don't think I've ever heard a bad word said about him.

JIMMY: It's your turn.

EDMUND: (CUES) An affable and stimulating companion...

JIMMY IS DISINTERESTED.

EDMUND: ...the sort of boy I would have liked to be my son - if things had been...

JIMMY: (QUIETLY) That's why I couldn't stand the bastard. Who'd want me for a son?

EDMUND: (MAKES A BALLS OF THE SHOT)

JIMMY: Seven away.

EDMUND: I suppose, in the interests of objectivity, I should keep my council. It isn't my relationships and Gemmienschaft, to use the Weberian expression - oh don't worry, my knowledge of sociology is scant - no, it is your world view and its context within contemporary culture, which our readers will be wanting to understand.

JIMMY: (CUES AND POTS) Shit.

EDMUND: I thought it was rather a good shot.

JIMMY: I can't see how you and me are going to get this book finished.

EDMUND: Oh don't worry about that - I have a high output.

JIMMY: I can't see why they chose you.

EDMUND: I was Ben's mentor... ah... you don't think we will be able to establish a working relationship.

JIMMY: Well, you talk double-dutch. You know fuck all about football - or the kind of life I live. Nothing personal pal, but I think you're a right prick.

EDMUND: I see... But I must say, it's become quite important to me to finish the work.

JIMMY: Cut your losses now - you've only spent half a day on it.

EDMUND: There are reasons why we - Charlotte and me - want to complete the task.

JIMMY: Money.

EDMUND: I'm an academic.

JIMMY: Everyone wants money.

SHEILA AND CHARLOTTE IN PUB.

SHEILA: It doesn't pay much.

CHARLOTTE: You must meet interesting people.

SHEILA: You get all sorts in here...

On the other hand all sorts don't come in...
You meet all sorts. And some you never see.

KATHY AND CHAS AT HOME.

KATHY: I hardly see anyone after you go to work.

CHAS: You have to make an effort.

KATHY: The lady with the double gates...

CHAS: The one with the up and over double doors.

KATHY: She smiled.

CHAS: Her husband's a snob.

KATHY: He never looks up if he's cleaning his car.

CHAS: Mean as well - too tight to use a carwash.

KATHY: She smiles though.

CHAS: Invite her for coffee.

KATHY: Should I?

CHAS: If she smiles.

KATHY: I might do that.

That's one thing.

CHAS: What's that?

KATHY: Having a nice home.

CHAS: That's one of the reasons I work all hours - it's for you.

KATHY: I know. That's why I don't want to sound as if I'm complaining.

CHAS: I know that.

KATHY: And like you say - it's worth making sacrifices in the short term.

JIMMY AND EDMUND IN THE SNOOKER HALL.

JIMMY: He didn't like me.

EDMUND: Ben?

JIMMY: Like David Attenborough, he was. So are you.

EDMUND: David Attenborough?

JIMMY: Clocking the way I live, like I was a fucking gorilla.

EDMUND: David Attenborough?

JIMMY: Don't you watch fucking T.V?

EDMUND: We don't have one.

JIMMY: That's what I fucking mean.

EDMUND: But Ben - he was generous of spirit.

JIMMY: He thought I was a pissy-arsed get with bollocks for brains.

EDMUND: Good Lord. Ben wouldn't say that.

JIMMY: Course he didn't say it.

EDMUND: I'm sure he didn't even think it.

JIMMY: Did he talk to you about me?

EDMUND: No.

JIMMY: I bet.

EDMUND: We hadn't spoken for six months - he was busy, we used to write to each other.

JIMMY: What did he say?

JIMMY: Well, it's rather silly.

JIMMY: What did he say about me?

EDMUND: We used to send each other diminutive compositions.

JIMMY: About me?

EDMUND: Nonsense.

JIMMY: Tell us.

EDMUND: 'Nonsense' in the sense of 'Nonsense'. We used to write little verses - nonsense rhymes - to each other.

JIMMY: Jesus.

EDMUND: Should I give you a sample?

JIMMY CUES.

JIMMY: Do you carry them around with you then?

EDMUND: In the old grey matter. In my noddle.

JIMMY MISSES HIS SHOT.

JIMMY: Noddle.

EDMUND: I remember them. Let me think.

JIMMY: It's your shot.

EDMUND: (CUES)
In the melly, minging mud
Dribbly scented binging blood
Fancies roared and brayed,
Scenting heroic escapades,
It was minging, binging, breying Sattle Day.

It's called 'Sattle Day'.

JIMMY: Are you going to hit this ball or what?

EDMUND: (HITS BALL AND MISSES) Lawks.

JIMMY: What's it mean then?

EDMUND: The rhyme? That's the beauty of it. It has no meaning. That's the joy. Its only meaning - it's purpose - is to be meaningless.

JIMMY: Have you had enough yet - we'll call it a draw.

EDMUND: Give up, Jimmy! Surrender! Never!

JIMMY: You're 59 behind.

EDMUND: How many points still available?

JIMMY SCANS THE TABLE.

JIMMY: Sixty one.

EDMUND: I continue.

JIMMY: What about your old lady?

EDMUND CONCENTRATES ON GAME.

JIMMY: (SHRUGS) I'll get some more drinks.

SHEILA AND CHARLOTTE IN PUB.

CHARLOTTE: It was good opportunity - to come up with Edmund and then have a look around the antique shops.

UNCONSCIOUSLY SHE INDICATES THE PACKAGE - DOLL FLIMSILY WRAPPED IN TISSUE PAPER.

SHEILA: You bought that?

CHARLOTTE REMOVES PAPER.
SHEILA ADMIRES AND GENTLY TOUCHES THE DOLL.

SHEILA: That's lovely.

CHARLOTTE: Eighteen fifties.

SHEILA: Smooth skin.

CHARLOTTE: German I think.

SHEILA: Soft hair.

CHARLOTTE: In demand these days.

SHEILA: Look at the sewing.

CHARLOTTE: Sweet, isn't she.

KATHY AND CHAS AT HOME.

CHAS: It's a partnership, doll.

KATHY: But you like me to pay the bills.

CHAS: Only countersign the cheques, post them and keep the balance up to date.

KATHY: (LOOKS AT HER BILLS AND SHAKES HER HEAD)

CHAS: Let me see. (LOOKS OVER HER SHOULDER)

KATHY: (MECHANICALLY) Gas, electric, phone, water, rates, mortgage, car loan, TV and video rental, life insurance, house insurance, car insurance, pension plan, BUPA.

CHAS: Direct debits.

KATHY: Twelve hundred and sixty three.

CHAS: So they're taken care of.

KATHY: Access, Visa, American Express, Burtons, Next, Kendals.

CHAS: Regular monthlies - nothing untoward.

KATHY: Five hundred and forty.

CHAS: O.K.

KATHY: Car tax, TV license, next payment on holiday.

CHAS: Essentials.

KATHY: Seven hundred and ten.

CHAS: Right.

KATHY: Second mortgage - one hundred and fifty.

CHAS: Right - that it?

KATHY: HP on the hob.

CHAS: That it?

KATHY: Food.

CHAS: Oh, well, yes - that goes without saying.

KATHY: Say a hundred.

CHAS: And my spending money - I'll make do with a hundred.

KATHY: And I'll need some.

CHAS: Say fifty - well, you don't need the same - you don't have to shell out for drinks and pub lunches to keep the wheels turning.

KATHY: I'll make do with thirty.

CHAS: No, fifty. I'm not seeing you go short.

KATHY: I don't think we've got it. We're desperate.

CHAS: (PULLS OUT A NEWSPAPER) Le voila. We restructure.

KATHY: Restructure?

JIMMY AND EDMUND ARE STILL AT THE SNOOKER HALL. THE GAME IS OVER. JIMMY DRINKS. EDMUND KNOCKS ABOUT ON THE TABLE.

EDMUND: I don't suppose you would like another match?

JIMMY: I won hundred and eleven to now.

EDMUND: You could give me a start.

JIMMY: If I gave you a hundred and forty seven I'd still fancy me chances.

EDMUND ENGROSSED - TRIES SOME FANCY TRICK SHOTS.

JIMMY: I'll take you to meet your old lady.

EDMUND IGNORE HIM.

JIMMY: Come on - it's nearly 10. She'll think you've done a runner.

EDMUND: Dear, dear Charlotte.

HAS THE CUE BEHIND HIS BACK.

JIMMY: You'll rupture yourself, cueing like that.

EDMUND: I appreciate your concern. But I think...

A LOUD 'BOING'. EDMUND YELPS.

SHEILA AND CHARLOTTE IN PUB.
CHARLOTTE, ANXIOUS, ENDS PHONE CALL, AS SHEILA LOOKS ON.

CHARLOTTE: He's hurt. Injured. In the Royal Infirmary.

SHEILA: Look, don't worry. You go and visit him.

CHARLOTTE: The footballer says they want to keep him in overnight.

SHEILA: Just be for observation.

CHARLOTTE: I'll have to book into a hotel, I suppose.

SHEILA: You can stay with me if you want.

CHARLOTTE: I couldn't possibly.

SHEILA: 'Course you can - I'll give you the address, then you can get a cab from the hospital.

CHARLOTTE: It's very kind - I must say I would appreciate the company.

SHEILA: What's he done exactly?

CHARLOTTE: It's a strain...

SHEILA: What's he strained?

CHARLOTTE: It's rather embarrassing.

SHEILA: (THINKS, THEN) His taters?

CHARLOTTE NODS - EMBARRASSED. SHEILA LAUGHS.
THEN EVENTUALLY CHARLOTTE FOLLOWS SUIT.

SHEILA: Look, here's the address. I'll be back at midnight. 24 Kirkland House, under the arch...

SCENE SHIFTS TO OUTSIDE SHEILA'S FLAT.
CHARLOTTE IS IN A STRANGE, FRIGHTENING ENVIRONMENT.

CHARLOTTE: 24 Kirkland House... under the arch... up the steps... along the walkway...

LOOKS ABOUT.

CHARLOTTE: An arch...
(LOOKS AGAIN)
And another...
(LOOKS AGAIN. WEAKLY)
Another...
(LOOKS AGAIN AT HER SURROUNDINGS) This isn't Britain...
What kind of people live here...?
(FORLORNLY, CALLS AN ABSENT CAB)
Cab...
(DELIBERATELY) Calm... calm... think.
Telephone for taxi. We're only ten minutes from the bright lights of the city centre. Within twenty minutes I can be in a clean, warm room. A hot bath, a magazine from reception, toast and cocoa courtesy of room service.

Courtesy, politeness, consideration, order, trust.
Trusting how that's how one will be treated.

Knowing how it will be. Accepted. Unimpinged. Respected. All for the price of one night's B&B - at a good place. An established hotel. Established order. (LOOKS ABOUT) What has happened to my England? What has happened to our people?

Our people - not our people. I dare say there have always been people who have created places like this. Not our people. Not Edmund's and my people.

Oh, he is a silly old stick. How the dickens can anyone injure themselves playing billiards.

I dare say a truss will be the order of the day.
Over-reaching himself, he said. I suppose he was.

And how poor dear Ben managed to form a working relationship with that footballer, I do not know.

Of course, Ben had a way with people.

I fear for Edmund's sanity - I hinted as much.
'Carry on like this, Edmund', I implied, 'and it's more than a groin that you will strain. And you can't find a truss for mental disturbance. Neither National Health or Harley Street.'

Not one of our people, Mr Jimmy Merrill. Mr! Not on any account.

He had obviously been drinking... I think Edmund had been given some drugs at the hospital. He was woozy. But Merrill was clearly boozy. The man has a hormone imbalance.

(LOOKS ABOUT THE NEIGHBOURHOOD) I'm sure all this is due to the same thing - a biological deficiency. They're unfortunate I suppose. What can one do... support charity... pay one's taxes... even if it might seem unfashionable, one can pray...

Now... find a phone box.

(LOOKS ABOUT)

Ah.

(THINKS ALOUD AS SHE MOVES TO THE PHONE BOX)
Merrill is devoid of all morals - I cannot bear to think what he was up to in the cubicle with the young nurse - I know very well though.

Poor Edmund was separated from the debauchery by only a flimsy curtain - still, Edmund's such a dear, he wouldn't have realized. He only thinks the best of people. I hope his groin will be alright - it could have been worse of course. We have

to be grateful for that - it could have been his right hand that he strained...
(PURPOSEFULLY) Phone.

LIGHT DIMLY ILLUMINATES A PHONE BOX. A COUPLE ARE HAVING A KNEE TREMBLER. CHARLOTTE SHOCKED.

CHARLOTTE: Debauched!

SHE TURNS TO RUN, AND BUMPS INTO A SHADOWY CHARACTER, AND IS EVEN MORE SHOCKED. IT IS SHEILA.

SHEILA: Just arrived?

CHARLOTTE STILL FLUSTERED.

SHEILA: It's just along here. I expected to be back sooner. A producer from Granada was drowning his sorrows so the landlord said I had to serve him till he fell off his stool.

CHARLOTTE: Oh... is he alright?

SHEILA: Still on his stool, but I'm not off my trolley. I thought, 'Sod this for a game for soldiers, Sheila', and left him to it at midnight. Come on the flat's this way.

CHARLOTTE: Are you sure it's alright - my staying?

SHEILA: 'Course. How's the old man?

CHARLOTTE: Old man? Oh yes... my old man. It's sore - I mean he's sore.

SHEILA: (LAUGHS) This way.

NHS HOSPITAL

12.15 AM. HUSHED WARD, LOW LIGHTS.
EDMUND IN BED, PROBABLY WITH A CAGE TO KEEP THE COVERS OFF HIS TENDER BITS.
JIMMY SITS IN A CHAIR, THE GLOW OF THE EARLIER BOOZE RECEDING INTO THE COLD LIGHT OF A HANGOVER.

JIMMY: I wonder if they've got any aspirins.

EDMUND: I'm alright, thank you. They administered a pain killing injection. Further analgesics shouldn't be necessary, although I have to say, the injection itself caused not a little discomfort. All for the best. As Charlotte said, I'm in the right place. I hope she is... staying with a person she hardly knows.

JIMMY: It was for me.

EDMUND: Pardon?

JIMMY: The fucking aspirin. I've got a right staunching thick head coming on.

EDMUND: Charlotte has stress headaches - very stressful.

JIMMY: Mine's a boozers head. Me body's not used to stopping drinking this early.

EDMUND: Ah...
The Dribbly's in a funk
After getting drunk.

LOOKS FOR PEN AND PAPER) Dash, I want to annotate that. No paper. Deary dear.

JIMMY GETS A CLIPBOARD OFF THE END OF THE BED. IT HAS A PEN ATTACHED.

JIMMY: Here.

EDMUND: Do you think I should... use it... National Health Service.

JIMMY: Yeh.

EDMUND: It would be therapeutic.

HE WRITES DOWN THE LITTLE POEM.

JIMMY: (SMILES) You're a funny old twat, you are.

EDMUND: Mm... yes... yes, I suppose that's not a totally unfair description.

JIMMY: Are you going to write that down?

EDMUND CONSIDERS IT, BUT SEES THAT JIMMY IS TAKING THE PISS. JIMMY GOES BACK TO HIS HEADACHE.

EDMUND: Hadn't you better be going, Jimmy? I appreciate your staying, appreciate it very much. But if you've got a woolly head, hadn't you better go home to bed?

JIMMY: Na... I'm alright.

EDMUND: Something very comforting about starched sheets.

JIMMY: I hate these places.

EDMUND: Where would we be though...?

JIMMY: Doesn't mean you have to like them.

EDMUND: All this kindness.
People busy caring
Hurrying to help.

JIMMY: All this pain
Shit and blood
Knowing best
Doing good
I hate these places.

EDMUND: White caps
Framing radiant faces
Courage of a gentle kind.

JIMMY: Do this, do that
Eat now
Sleep now
Crap now.

EDMUND: A sense of order
In order
To make us feel good.

JIMMY: Amongst the shit and blood
And visiting time's over.
(STANDS.)

Over over two hours ago.

EDMUND: You better go.

JIMMY: Yeh...

You'll be out tomorrow.

EDMUND: (NODS) Just observation. All being well, Charlotte and I will be trainwards to the city of the dreaming spires.

JIMMY: Oxford?

EDMUND: Just so.

JIMMY: (HESITATES, THEN) I'm going down there tomorrow.

EDMUND: Visiting your alma mater? (CHUCKLES)

JIMMY: Eh?

EDMUND: Sorry... a small joke. Miniscule really.

JIMMY: It's a joke me going...

EDMUND: Ah...

JIMMY: Opening a supermarket or something. Still, the jokes on them - they're bunging me 15 hundred notes.

EDMUND: Pounds!

JIMMY: I'll give you a lift.

EDMUND: Well, if you're entirely sure, old boy. We will of course contribute towards petrol.

JIMMY: No need - I'll get ex's off them too.

EDMUND: Another world.

Of course we will be able to optimize the journey, by continuing our discussions, for the book.

JIMMY: Why not.
Like I said, the dosh has been pissed up against the wall. We better get something down... They might sue - me and you!

EDMUND: Crikey, we must proceed with haste... to the 'Land of the Bibliographer'.

JIMMY: Night.

EDMUND: Good night...

JIMMY GOES.

EDMUND: A fine boy.
EDMUND MUSES.

EDMUND: (CHUCKLES) Funny old twat... a fine boy.

SHEILA'S FLAT. THAT NIGHT

SHEILA AND CHARLOTTE ENTER. CHARLOTTE LOOKS ABOUT, CURIOUS BUT ALSO A LITTLE CAUTIOUSLY.

SHEILA: It's not bad - once the front door's shut.

CHARLOTTE: Quite snug.

SHEILA: Snug...
Do you like my books?

CHARLOTTE LOOKS ABOUT, NOT REALISING SHEILA IS REFERRING TO TWO SMALL SHELVES OF BOOKS.

SHEILA: There.

CHARLOTTE: (SEES THEM) Ah...

SHEILA: Not really the Library in St Peter's Square, is it.

CHARLOTTE: I love books.

SHEILA: You can't beat a good book.

CHARLOTTE: But I don't read a lot.

SHEILA: Beats tele any time.

CHARLOTTE: Edmund has hundreds, thousands...

SHEILA: Len Deighton, I like.

CHARLOTTE: We don't have a TV.

SHEILA: (TAKES A BOOK AND LOOKS AT IT) I'm in a book club - one a month, I buy. I like ones with hard covers. I mean, it must have taken Len years to write this - it's only fair it has a proper cover...

SEES CHARLOTTE STILL CARRYING DOLL.

SHEILA: Let me put that somewhere.

CHARLOTTE HANDS OVER THE DOLL.

CHARLOTTE: Won't your husband mind me staying?

SHEILA: I blew him out six years ago. He stopped pestering me two years after that.

CHARLOTTE: Divorced.

SHEILA: I hear he's a Jehovah's Witness now.

CHARLOTTE: Oh.

SHEILA: Guilt I reckon... for the rough time the bastard put me through.

CHARLOTTE: He used to...

SHEILA: You name it - he did it...

CHARLOTTE: How dreadful.

SHEILA: He's just a scum line round the bathtub now...

CHARLOTTE: This really is very kind of you - inviting me back.

SHEILA: Don't be daft.

CHARLOTTE: You must come and visit me.

SHEILA: You wouldn't want me to stay.

CHARLOTTE: Why on earth not?

SHEILA SHRUGS AND LOOKS AT THE DOLL.

CHARLOTTE: I could show off my doll collection.

SHEILA: This must have been some kid's friend,
Cuddled and loved.
Whispered secrets to.
Trusted.

(TURNS TO CHARLOTTE) You have the bed, I'll have the
sofa...

SLEEP. THAT NIGHT

THE SIX CHARACTERS, IN A ROW. SHEETS TUCKED
UNDER THEIR CHINS.

KATHY AND CHAS NEXT TO EACH OTHER.
SHEILA AND CHARLOTTE FAIRLY CLOSE TO EACH
OTHER.

JIMMY AND EDMUND ISOLATED.

ALL: (WHISPERED)
Shh... sleep tight...
night night...

Shh... sleep tight
night night
things might
be bright-er.

EDMUND: (TO IMAGINARY NURSE) Thank you nurse.
(LOOKS DOWN HIS SHEET) Yes, still sore.
(LOOKS TOWARDS NURSE) You're an angel. Hands of silk.

Without an appointment
She administered anointment
With magical ointment
To Edmund's component

Which he strained on an opponent
He did verily groanant...

Not the best of scansion, timbre or rhyme - but not bad for a
man with a strained central region.
Passable. B minus, Edmund.

I do hope Charlotte will be alright.
(RELAXES) I'm sure she will.
An eventful day, that's true. A day full of events.
Oh lord, I need the gemima...
Nurse...

ALL: (WHISPERED)
Shh... sleep tight...
night night...

Shh... sleep tight
night night
things might
be bright-er.

CHAS: (FITFULLY)
Clinched.
Next deal - pitch for it - soft sell - hard sell - Clinched.
Next deal - pitch for it - soft sell - hard sell - Clinched.
Next deal - pitch for it - soft sell - hard sell - Clinched.
Next deal - pitch for it - soft sell - hard sell - Blown it!
What? Try again - same deal. Pitch for it - soft sell - hard sell -
no sell. No sell.
(INCREASINGLY AGITATED) Commission only - no sell - no
commission.
No sell - try again.
No sell - try again.
No sell - try again.
No sell.
Arrrgh....
(WAKES)

KATHY AWAKES.

KATHY: Chas... Are you alright?

CHAS: A bad dream.

KATHY NUZZLES UP TO HIM.

KATHY: Everything's alright. Probably having your tea so late.

CHAS: Dinner.

KATHY: Sorry - yes - your dinner. Working so late each night.

CHAS: The pork was fatty.

KATHY: Sorry.

CHAS: It's alright.

KATHY: You deserve a holiday.

CHAS: So do you.

KATHY: Marbella.

CHAS: The Gambia.

KATHY: Where's that?

CHAS: Everyone goes there now.

KATHY: Oh.

CHAS: Rick's thinking of buying property there.

KATHY: Is it expensive.

CHAS LOOKS AT HER.

KATHY & CHAS: (TOGETHER, NODDING) You only get what you pay for.

CHAS: Good girl.

KATHY GETS CLOSER, FEELING AMOROUS.

KATHY: Am I a really, really, really good girl?

CHAS: (TURNS OVER) Really good. But go to a different butcher next time.

ALL: (WHISPERED)
Shh... sleep tight...

night night...

Shh... sleep tight
night night

JIMMY:

I can't stand bein' in a fuckin' empty bed at night...

There's only one thing worse. Wakin' up and findin' someone there in the morning.

A bottle of wine - red wine at this time of night - sleep no bother then.

If I'm lucky, one leg over, and half a bottle of wine, and I can get right off - sleep thru' till morning.

Some bimbo told The People I only managed it once - said I was a 'One Bonk Wimp'. I could go all night if I wanted. I said 'No comment'. Why should I tell them bastards that I only shag half the time to get a good night's kip.

Better for you than sleeping pills. Good for yur ticker too, shaggin'. I tell that to our trainer.

(SCOTTISH ACCENT) 'What d'you want me to do then Merrill, scrap the training programme it's taken a team of coaches, managers, physiotherapists, psychologists, doctors and ex professionals years to perfect - scrap all that and send the whole fuckin' first team off to a brothel five mornings a friggin' week!'

(AS HIMSELF) I asked if he'd got a season ticket for a knocking shop.

The trouble with waking up with one - you have to talk. I wouldn't mind talking to someone now though.

ALL:

(WHISPERED)
Shh... sleep tight...
night night...

Shh... sleep tight
night night

KATHY:

Girlfriend of...
I'd hate to be famous

Everyone looking at me
I wonder what it would be like
Being the girlfriend of...
(GLANCES AT CHAS)
Being Jimmy's girlfriend.
Arriving at airports
With a shoulder bag and tan
Wearing dark glasses
Flashing cameras
And shouted questions
Holding his hand
Sometimes - even in the hotel in the Lakes
He looked sad...
I hope Chas didn't notice
He kept looking at me.
Maybe it was the smudge on my nose.
Maybe...

SHEILA:

(READING IN BED) 'Olivia felt the power of his reassuring tanned hands surge through her fragile frame. At that moment - she knew...'
(STOPS READING) I bet she knew. 'Aye, aye,' I bet she thought, 'He'll be guiding my hand into the twilight zone, and in five minutes he'll be driving home, while I'm busy with a box of Kleenex.'

It's the last time I buy a book from our newspaper shop - they never have owt decent.

(LOOKS TOWARDS CHARLOTTE) I hope she's alright. Bit snooty - not on purpose. Not what she said. She was a bit too nice. And those little looks. Thinking to herself, 'What have I let myself in for. Staying in a rough hole like this.' I hope not though. She's nice really. Different. Got a bit of class. Not like those bits you get in the pub. Plenty of money, most of them, I'll grant. But about as much class as a barrel of farts. Not snotty class. I reckon real class is quiet. You don't have to shout about it - you just have it.

CHARLOTTE:

How does the poor girl survive?

She seems alright. A reasonable type. One never knows, of course. But she does seem a decent sort.

Unfortunate, that's clear. No future, that's apparent.

But why on earth live here? In a climate of filth and fear. I'm sure she could do better. What's to stop here trying? Maybe, now I've met her, I could offer hope.

She obviously copes. But is that enough? There's more to life than that. Working in a bar. Living in a gardenless flat. How could anyone conceive of a home... house... flat without a garden.

I suppose these people

This sort of person

Not Sheila

She's obviously an unfortunate exception

But most of them

Would use a garden

As a...

A receptacle for cans, plastic refuse bags, bottles, broken toys.

Yes, I suspect the children are trained from an early age to disrespect property, even their own.

This girl obviously takes a pride.

Here, inside.

But she probably kicks her way through fish and chip papers on the outside.

Gardens would be simply miniature municipal tips.

Manifesting everything from car tyres to dogs' excrement. I don't like to consider it, but we have to face the truth. The pooper scooper has not, I fear, put in an appearance round here.

Life without a garden. Where does sanity stand then? It has no basis. Obviously the infirm and aged might not be able to cope. But they should have memories of gardens.

CHAS: (SHOUTS - ANOTHER NIGHTMARE)
Arrgh - don't repossess the Cavalier!

BLACKOUT.

ALL: (WHISPERED)
Shh... sleep tight...
night night...
sleep tight
night night
things might
seem bright-er.

SATURDAY MORNING

JIMMY'S SPORTS CAR.
EDMUND IN FRONT. CHARLOTTE CRAMPED IN BACK.

CHARLOTTE: It's very kind of you, Mr Merrill.

JIMMY: Call me Jim.

EDMUND: Very kind.

CHARLOTTE: We wouldn't have minded going on the train.

JIMMY: I'm quicker.

EDMUND: (SLIGHTLY APPREHENSIVE) How fast will this motor car, er, travel, 'Jim'?

JIMMY: Hundred and forty.

EDMUND: Kilometres per hour?

JIMMY: Miles.

CHARLOTTE: You could run us to the station - We really wouldn't mind catching the train, we have return tickets.

JIMMY: Na - I've got to go down your way - opening a shop.

EDMUND: Two great cultural institutions collide - sport and commerce.

CHARLOTTE: (TAKING HER MIND OFF THE JOURNEY) How are you dear?

EDMUND: (ADJUSTING HIS SITTING POSITION) Sore.

CHARLOTTE: Bound to be.

EDMUND: Tender.

CHARLOTTE: To be expected.

EDMUND: Take it easy.

CHARLOTTE: Rest.

EDMUND: For a few days.

CHARLOTTE: For the best.

JIMMY: I strained me groin once.

CHARLOTTE: (EMBARRASSED) Oh.

EDMUND: (INTERESTED) Really.

JIMMY: Put me out of action for a month.

CHARLOTTE: Yes...

EDMUND: Still, no ill effects in the long run. And in your field of work - 'football field' - no pun intended - pity - quite a clever one - However, you regained full fitness.

JIMMY: Frustrating it was.

EDMUND: Being sidelined.

JIMMY: I didn't mind a rest from the game. No. Socially - that's where it hurt most.

EDMUND: Not able to get out to do a spot of gardening, I expect.

JIMMY: (WRY) No.

EDMUND: (TO CHARLOTTE) That's an area where it could affect us both, old stick.

CHARLOTTE: Yes. I could always get a man in.

JIMMY LAUGHS.

EDMUND: (OBLIVIOUS) Not a bad pun was it, Jim - your field - football field.

I'll notate it. (EDMUND MAKES A NOTE)

JIMMY: Alright in the back there, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE: Fine.

JIMMY: Women enjoy the back of this car.

EDMUND: Hardly Morris, is it, dear? Hardly Morris. We don't like risking him.

JIMMY: Who's Maurice then?

EDMUND: (CHUCKLES) It's our car. A pet name. We've had him twenty years. It's a...

JIMMY: (FLAT) Morris.

EDMUND: Dear old Morris. Nuffield College. Cowley... Quite an attachment.
(BEAT) Quite an attachment, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: (SUDDENLY) You knew Ben - Ben Mannion - I believe.

JIMMY: Yeh...

EDMUND: Poor dear Ben...

JIMMY: He should have taken more water with it.

CHARLOTTE: Sorry?

JIMMY: Must have been pissed - falling under a train.

CHARLOTTE: Really!

JIMMY: (TRIES TO APOLOGISE) Sorry - I meant drunk.

EDMUND: Charlotte and Ben were very close - almost a surrogate.
Weren't you, dear?

SILENCE.

EDMUND: Poor dear Ben...

SILENCE.

JIMMY: Want some music on?

EDMUND: I dare say it's 'pop' music.

JIMMY: Quadraphonic - blow the wax out of your...

EDMUND: Not our cup of tea, I dare say. If you don't mind.

JIMMY: Fine.

EDMUND: Perhaps we could talk.

JIMMY: Yeh... fine.

SILENCE FOR SOME TIME.

EDMUND: (LOOKS AT SPEEDO) One hundred and forty, you say.

JIMMY: I've not had it up to that.

EDMUND: Of course.

JIMMY: I could give it some welly now.

EDMUND: Oh no - Not on our account.
(CHECKS SPEEDO) I've never travelled at one hundred and five before...

SATURDAY MORNING

CHAS AND KATHY'S HOME.

CHAS: (READS PAPER) I'll take you up to the golf club one day.
Quite a few ladies play.

KATHY: I'd be useless.

CHAS: My handicap's improving. I think I've surprised Rick...
Hey, look at this in the local rag.

(READS FROM PAPER) Giant Hyper-Megastore opens Saturday... today. Salmonella International Superstores proudly announce the Celebrity Opening of their new concept in the art of shopping.

Who would argue that shopping is indeed an art.

What more fitting a person to unveil and endorse this new venture, this celebration of the art of retailing, could there be, than the artist of the football pitch, Britain's, some say Europe's, premier footballer, Jimmy Merrill.

JIMMY ENTERS AND STANDS AS IF ON A PLATFORM LISTENING TO A SPEECH.

CHAS: (TO KATHY) Our friend Jimmy. Damn, wish I wasn't playing golf.

You'll have to go Kathy.

KATHY: I'd like to see the new shop - Maybe we could go together next weekend?

CHAS: No. No, no, no. You need to see Jimmy Merrill.

KATHY: Why?

CHAS: Just make contact. Give him another of my cards. Invite him back. Anything. Just keep him bubbling on a back burner.

KATHY: Go and speak to him?

CHAS: It's only up the road.

KATHY: I can't just go up to him. I'm hopeless with famous people. I'm hopeless in crowds. He might not remember me.

CHAS: Hey - you're a stunner. Old Jimmy will remember you, if his reputation's anything to go by.

KATHY NOT CONVINCED.

CHAS: For me, lover. Signing Jimmy Merrill up would be really good for me.

KATHY: I'll try to have a word. Just say 'hello'.

CHAS: Great, great...
I wonder whether you should give him our Golden Earner Prospectus.

SATURDAY, AFTER LUNCH

STARLING'S HOME.

CHARLOTTE AND EDMUND SIT, SORT PAPERS.
EDMUND STANDS AND PACES.
CHARLOTTE IS ENGROSSED.
THEY BOTH MUSE, WITHOUT CONNECTION.

CHARLOTTE: Such beautiful writing.

EDMUND: It won't do.

CHARLOTTE: Neatly written in long hand.

EDMUND: He's right.

CHARLOTTE: All those ideas - thoughts. One would expect them to flow out, in a scrawl. Dashing to be written.

EDMUND: You were right. Even he's right.

CHARLOTTE: Concise thoughts, concisely written.

EDMUND: Out of my depth. One might as well have been asked to write a treatise on the molecular structure of cadmium.

CHARLOTTE: (SMELLS THE PAPER) Still alive.

EDMUND: He said I was a cunt.

CHARLOTTE: Sorry dear?

EDMUND: What are you reading?

CHARLOTTE: Ben's notes.

EDMUND: Beautifully written.

CHARLOTTE: So concise.

EDMUND: I've been thinking. Musing, I suppose. I don't think I'm the right chap for the job.

CHARLOTTE: Which job?

EDMUND: The biography - Jimmy Merrill.

I fear ego and arrogance were my master when I accepted it. Rationale was absent. It isn't a question of being defeated by it of course - it is a matter of admitting, recognizing, that someone else might be better suited.

You were right, dear - your old Dong is not the man to biography the Dribbly.

The Dong into the pool did fall,
And found the water was too tall.

CHARLOTTE: Out of your depth?

EDMUND: It has to be said.

CHARLOTTE: I'm sorry, Edmund, but it's not just a matter of you sinking or swimming.

EDMUND: (SURPRISED) Isn't it?

CHARLOTTE: No.

EDMUND: But I mean - I wouldn't want to worry you. My old mother hen. I could tell you didn't approve of Jimmy.

CHARLOTTE: I don't approve of Merrill.

EDMUND: And his world - that world - it's not our world.

CHARLOTTE: I couldn't agree more.

EDMUND: And I know what an old worry-pot you are. The look on your face said it all when you visited the hospital.

CHARLOTTE: How is it?

EDMUND: (PATS HIS GROIN) Easier... easier... definitely.
(BENDS HIS LEGS SLIGHTLY AKIMBO, AND FLINCHES,
AND STRAIGHTENS UP GINGERLY)
Still a little sore. Plenty of rest needed. Another reason to
slow down... take it easy - physically of course... get back to
my magnum opus.
(SITS, RELIEVED AT HAVING MADE THE DECISION)
Back to normality.

The Dong - his legs won't go akimbo,
But now he's just returned from a place called limbo,
And he said, 'From this day hence,
I shall stay at home with my nonsense.'

And Mrs Dong sighed with relief.

CHARLOTTE: (HARSH) Mrs Dong - hissed through her teeth,
It's too late to turn around,
There's truth that has to be found,
Words written beautifully by a beautiful man
Must be made to live and only you can.

EDMUND FINDS THIS HARD TO TAKE IN.

EDMUND: Oh... no... no... It's not me. No. It's not me really. It's not really
me. It's really not me...

CHARLOTTE: We're not talking about you, dear.

EDMUND: Oh... ah... oh, so you don't want me to... I thought for a
moment... I misunderstood... I understood that you felt that I
ought... Anyway, you don't think I should... well.

CHARLOTTE: I do think you should continue Ben's work - not for you, for
him.

EDMUND: Oh... ah...

CHARLOTTE: It's vital.

EDMUND: Yes - but footballers and billiards, Charlotte.
(SUBCONSCIOUSLY MAKES MUCH OF HIS INJURED
CRUTCH)

CHARLOTTE: Good Lord, Edmund - one isn't expecting you to play in a Cup Final at Twickenham.

EDMUND: Wembley, dear...

CHARLOTTE: See - you're already absorbing the nuances of that dreadful world.

EDMUND: So you want me to complete Ben's work.

CHARLOTTE: I want you to bring it alive. I want to understand his feelings. Those last months of his life mustn't be lost under the screaming iron wheels of that murderous Manchester train...

EDMUND: I don't know.

CHARLOTTE: Don't prevaricate, Edmund.
This is for you, for me, for Ben.
(PATS THE PAPER ON HER LAP)
This must help us make sense of our world.

(READS) 'Clues' by Benjamin J Mannion.

There's a puzzle
Which sniffed by my nuzzle
Refuses to be muzzled

There's an answer
Partnering the word dancer
Invited to be a chancer.

There's a meaning
To all this obscening
And self righteous scheming

There's justification
To all human racing
Questions worth facing.

There's desperation
Desperately avoiding elucidation
And self confrontation.

There's a purpose
Why else this sense of loss
A bridge, the void, to cross.

EDMUND: I rather think the point of that poem, all of Ben's poems, is the same as mine. There is no point - that's the point.

CHARLOTTE: The point for me, Edmund...

EDMUND: And that is an important point for me too...

CHARLOTTE: ...is that it will give us the opportunity to work together, to understand Ben's life better.
Point taken?

EDMUND: I take your point. But in the process would I not be promoting the ethos of someone you do not entirely approve of?

CHARLOTTE: I loathe Merrill - and his whole world. That Ben could rise above it says so much about him.

EDMUND: A remarkable boy...

CHARLOTTE: I feel sure he was in some way responsible for Ben's...

EDMUND: (NOT HEARD HER) A remarkable boy...

CHARLOTTE: That's settled then. We'll carry on.

EDMUND: (PUTS HIS HAND ON CHARLOTTE'S SHOULDER) Of course it is our interest. Be jolly good for you, something to occupy you. (Oh, I know you keep busy - the garden, the cooking, the crochet work, your doll collection. But yes, this will take you out of yourself.

CHARLOTTE HASN'T HEARD. SHE'S ENGROSSED IN THE PAPERS.

SATURDAY. PM

A HYPERMARKET IN OXFORD.
JIMMY ADDRESSES THE "AUDIENCE" – KATH IS THE ONLY MEMBER WE SEE.

JIMMY: (TO AUDIENCE) Er... I'd like to open this shop... Er, thank you.
(STEPS BACK)
(ASIDE) Where's me cheque?

KATHY APPLAUDS.

KATHY: You won't remember me... I thought I'd... It's a brilliant shop..

JIMMY: A familiar face.

KATHY: We met in the Lake District... you must meet thousands of people.

JIMMY: Kathy.

KATHY: Chas says 'hello'.

JIMMY: Who?

KATHY: It was his idea. He said it would be nice. To introduce myself, if I had the chance. I didn't think I'd get the chance. All these people. I'm not very good with a lot of people.

JIMMY: Let's get out of here – I'll give you a ride.

AS THOUGH IN CAR.

KATHY: (NOT DIRECT) Chas would be proud of me. Sitting in J.M.1. With J.M.1. I don't want to do anything to let him down. Say anything stupid. It's easy when Chas is with me - he helps me out if I get tongue-tied or say silly things.

I wish he was here. He'd love this car. He'd know all about the engine and gears.

(TO JIMMY) Chas wants tinted windows.

JIMMY: They're a bastard at night.

They're a bastard in daylight come to that. People want to know what's behind them.

KATHY: It's a really nice car.

JIMMY: (NOT DIRECT) A glorified shaggin' wagon. How many lay-byes, pub car parks and leafy lanes like this one has it pulled up in?

AS THOUGH PARKED IN A FIELD.

KATHY: It's nice out here. We don't get into the country much. Daft really. But with Chas being so busy. Then at week-end we have to clean the car and do a big shop. And Sunday it's B&Q.

Chas said, 'Go and see Jimmy Merrill, he's opening a Mega Store'

To be quite honest I didn't want to come.

JIMMY: (LOOKS)

KATHY: Nothing personal. I just didn't think you'd remember me.

JIMMY: And you're glad you did now.

KATHY: (NODS) I certainly didn't expect to be sitting here.

JIMMY: (NOT DIRECT) Mock shock horror. International Footballer brought down by housewife. She'd be the first who meant it when she said that.

Don't forget this is a shaggin' wagon. By the second paper cup of decent white wine, which I keep chilled, she'll say she wants to be here. She'll say there is nowhere else on earth she'd rather be.

Sordid International Footballer scores again.

(TO KATHY) A cup of wine.

KATHY: Who do you think I am?

JIMMY: (NOT DIRECT) I know who you are, darling. You're like all the rest. One more protest and you're mine - for the afternoon. Then you can get back to the silly bastard who sent you.

(TO KATHY) What harm will it do?

You could tell we clicked.

KATHY: This is the new game is it? End of the football season, so the summer sport is worrying ordinary people. Fed up with models and the like throwing themselves at your feet. The little housewife is more of a challenge, is she?

An away game. Down to Oxford, onto the grass, a shower in the dressing room, back on the bus and home in time to watch Match of the Day - or an action replay with the next who stands in line - she's waiting now in some disco, or at a service station, or in a hotel, or on a plane, or in some model agency or behind some reception desk or in a bar. She's waiting, Jimmy. For the Lotus driven penis in football socks and designer hair cut and Marbella tan.

JIMMY: This isn't you talking...

You're married to a Cavalier driven penis in a Burton suit, designer hair cut, and Orlando tan.

KATHY: (TO JIMMY) Supposing it is me talking. Say I understand you inside out. What if I don't want to play your games? It's possible. I'm happy. Likely I'm content. Probably that my life as it stands fulfills my needs. Having almost admitted to myself that a one day stand with a V.I.P. might have been fun, the situation could have changed, reverted to the status quo. My being passive is surely a sign of inner contentment. I could very well resent your intrusion into our world. The invasion of private lives.

JIMMY: I'll drive you back.

KATHY: Alright.

JIMMY: Everything I touch...

KATHY: What?

JIMMY: Nowt.

KATHY: Go on.

JIMMY: My whole life is fucking tactics.

KATHY: I don't understand the game.

JIMMY: Who does...
Anything I do or say now...

KATHY: I'll think you're still playing.

JIMMY: Even I don't know whether I am or not.

KATHY: I don't... know whether I am.
It's exciting... being here with you.

JIMMY: I'm no superstar. You know that much.

KATHY: Who is?

THEY KISS.

KATHY: Everyone else has ceased to exist for this moment...
A tractor two fields away drives itself, a silver cross drawing a
vapour trail across the blue sky is on automatic pilot five miles
high - full of empty seats.

JIMMY: As buttons, zips and press studs melt, and cloth falls over
skin onto dry brown grass. Just the occasional button
protesting between fumbling fingers as two whole worlds rely
on fingers stopping fumbling so their existence can continue.

KATHY: Nothing and nobody else exists then.

JIMMY: Not even the hundreds who've gone before.

KATHY: Not even the one who's gone before.

JIMMY: And this moment... just now... before we're joined... when
hands can be pushed away, and 'no' can be said, buttons
hurriedly fumbly refastened - when there is a choice to be
made still, even at this late hour...

KATHY: And when big statements and universally accepted moral
codes shouted, promoted, inculcated by rule makers, can't be
heard. Their stridency is obliterated by your gentle
whispering. Your breathing blowing away doubts. Your heart
beating out a rhythm which on another day might go unheard,
ignored or drowned out by the chorus of disapproval we
mostly play our lives against.
This moment when everything seems possible, but only one
thing is possible.

JIMMY: This moment - of wetness.

KATHY: And stiffness.

JIMMY: And there's no time to think or make a choice now.

KATHY: There's no time to consider the appalling fact that every human being that has ever existed was not conceived from a moment as full as this.

JIMMY: Sometimes rape has desecrated what's possible.

KATHY: Sometimes souls have been raped, so no choice was ever possible by the disapproving chorus loudly screaming, over heart rhythms, 'thou shalt not'.

JIMMY: But not now - let those afraid of life's central act, run to the corners of the field, cover your ears, as our jointly beating hearts, proudly proclaim what is about to occur.

KATHY: As I go wetly round you.

JIMMY: And I go stiffly in.

KATHY: Round.

JIMMY: In.

KATHY: And I'm not afraid. I'm not!
All life still to come, and that already here, centred on absurd and sweaty organs normally bundled out of sight.

JIMMY: And this has created kings and queens, brought down governments, bought state secrets, spawned violence, expressed love, made children, sired problems, fed jealousy, offered sanctuary.

KATHY: In me.

JIMMY: Around me.

KATHY: In me.

JIMMY: Around me.

KATHY: In me, around you.

JIMMY: Around me, in you.

KATHY: In me, around you.

JIMMY: Around me, in you.

JIMMY & KATHY: (TOGETHER) In... around... in... around...

 (TO CLIMAX)

JIMMY: Sometimes it would be nice... to make love, sober, and stay
 awake afterwards.

KATHY: And talk?

JIMMY: (NODS)

KATHY: Scary, really - the idea.

JIMMY: You're taking the piss.

KATHY: Out of me, if I am.

JIMMY: Don't you know what it's like.

KATHY: To make soft sober love. Open myself up.

JIMMY: And stay open.

KATHY: When the passion's done.

JIMMY: And there's nothing more to prove.

KATHY: And no need to run.

JIMMY: Like now.

KATHY: Yes.

JIMMY: Then start to dread the drive back.

KATHY: To a tea table laden with guilt.

JIMMY: (NOT DIRECT) Or put the whole thing out of my mind. Like I
 always do.
 Driving back tight lipped.

KATHY: (NOT DIRECT) Driven back with aching hips, thinking what a
 dirty fool I've been.

JIMMY: As fast as I can go. Get her delivered...
Then go and play games with the Professor. Forget this episode - call it a draw.

EARLY SATURDAY EVENING.

JIMMY FINDS HIMSELF TRAPPED IN STARLING'S HOME,
EDMUND AND CHARLOTTE INTERVIEW HIM.
CHARLOTTE HAS BEN'S NOTES.

EDMUND: I want you to be seen in the best possible light. To be objective - honest.

JIMMY: That's all I need.

EDMUND: And Charlotte, as pro tem research assistant, will use Ben's beautifully meticulous notes and research plan as our basis.

CHARLOTTE: "From whither comes the rose, or is it brier?
Wast spawned in rich good earth...
Or stinking fetid mire..."

EDMUND: (HELPFULLY) Ben's unique style - no dry as dust, dull as ditchwater language from thence.

I hope you don't think I'm being personal, but it seems vacuous - negligent - if I don't grab the hot potato.

JIMMY: (DISINTERESTED) What?

EDMUND: Ah... oh... hum... er... sex.

JIMMY: Yes?

EDMUND: You don't mind?

JIMMY: Just ask.

EDMUND: Well, it seems to be very important to you, central to your life, almost a full time occupation, your main leisure interest - a hobby. 'Sex as a hobby' - now there's a novel notion.

JIMMY: Is it important to you?

EDMUND: Ah... oh... hum... er... me?
(BEAT)

I don't think our readership will be interested in my carnalities.

JIMMY: Are you?

EDMUND: Well, it's a biological function. Bit of a pest sometimes. It's not a hobby, I have to say. But yes, on the whole, I think it's fairly important - on the whole.

CHARLOTTE: (READS) The Dribbly dangled his dongly
Often and often quite wrongly
He dribbled his juice
Fanny free and fuck loose
Wrong! It's right! He said strongly.

JIMMY: Women - find 'em, fuck 'em, forget 'em.
(JIMMY SMELLS HIS FINGERS)
Just today. Two hours ago. Still smell and taste her. Feel her almost.

CHARLOTTE: You haven't forgotten her.

JIMMY: Course I have.
(HE SMELLS HIS FINGERS UNCONSCIOUSLY)

EDMUND: Find 'em, fuck 'em, and forget 'em - an alliteration.

CHARLOTTE: (TO JIMMY) Look, Mr Merrill, I'm neither shocked or impressed by that sort of talk.

JIMMY: Good. The truth shouldn't shock people.

CHARLOTTE: And this girl today. You bedded her...

JIMMY: Car seated her...

CHARLOTTE: Were intimate with her.

JIMMY: Shagged her.

EDMUND: I don't think our line of enquiry has to be quite so intimate, dear.

CHARLOTTE: (NOT DIRECT) We need to know. What does it mean? How can a fellow human being behave in such a way? It's obviously what Ben wanted to know.

EDMUND: (NOT DIRECT) My instincts were right, this is not territory for me. There are forces here I don't understand. That I'm happy not to know exist.

CHARLOTTE: (NOT DIRECT) There are things I have to understand. If Ben understood them, then I will know him better.

(TO JIMMY) So you happily forget this woman?

JIMMY: That's right.
(UNCONSCIOUSLY SNIFFS HIS FINGERS)

KATHY AND CHAS' HOME.
THEY HANG A HUGE PICTURE (REALLY HUGE) - A GIANT CREDIT CARD.

CHAS: Not even Rick has anything as big as this.

KATHY: I wondered what it was when they delivered it.

CHAS: It wouldn't fit in the car. I couldn't resist it though, when I saw it. It's an investment - Rick reckons antiques and objet d'art are the best way to make capital work.

KATHY: Look - the artists even signed it. (PEERS) Nat West.

CHAS: Yeh. I know. And do you know, it's a limited edition print.

KATHY: A print?

CHAS: They've only produced 5000. A real investment.
What do you think?

KATHY: It's brill...

CHAS: Just wait till people see it...
Brill.
So - did you meet him?

KATHY: Who?

CHAS: That old friend of yours and mine.

KATHY: (THINKS. HALF-HEARTED) Tina?

CHAS: Jimmy.

SHE NODS.

CHAS: (PLEASED) You met him - old Jimmy.

KATHY: Yes - I saw him.

CHAS: I thought you might have invited him back.

KATHY: Why?

CHAS: For the same reason you went to see him.

KATHY: (LOOKS)

CHAS: To maintain contact.

KATHY: (LOOKS)

CHAS: Because he's a mate. Besides I think there's a jolly good chance of me doing business with him.
What an account. I wish I'd gone.
Golf was a waste of time. Rick had a round with those Germans who've opened a factory here - good potential. So I left - they were understanding.
I wanted to do some shopping - that's when I bought this - the picture.
I knew you'd like it. I want everything to be right for you...

KATHY: (NOT DIRECT) I can still feel him inside me. I feel it's always going to be there. And what was warm and novel and exciting...

CHAS: I should have gone shopping with you. I would have preferred that.

KATHY: (NOT DIRECT) ...will become a persistent chilling nagging ache. I'll be more worthless than when I started the day.
There's a good man here and I've been used like a Kleenex and slung out of the car window.

BACK AT STARLINGS.

EDMUND: (MUSES) Strange - how the great artists, politicians - well, folk heroes - often had great, some might say vast, gargantuan sexual proclivities. We're libido led.

'Folk hero as a bit of a lad' - interesting notion.

CHARLOTTE: (NOT DIRECT) Folk hero as an empty vessel, drifting like scum, unrestrained on a sea of decadence.

EDMUND: Charlotte and I were never blessed... in the offspring, chip-of-the-old-block, department, were we?

CHARLOTTE AVOIDS ANSWERING.

JIMMY: Just think Charlotte - every cloud has a silver lining - might have had a sprog that turned into something like me. Perish the thought, eh?

EDMUND: Perish the thought... of course not.

CHARLOTTE: (NOT DIRECT) I would have strangled you at birth.

(TO JIMMY) Of course not.

(NOT DIRECT) And wrenched my womb out and taken Edmund's testicles and thrust them in a tank of vitriol.

EDMUND: Whilst we haven't enjoyed the joys of parenthood - and the tribulations come to that - we have, in many ways been blessed with the presence - the accessibility to - the perpetual world - or indeed a world of perpetual childhood. Winchester, then New College.

JIMMY: Glorified bleeding school.

CHARLOTTE: It might not be fashionable but to some of us the cult of moron worship is a threat to all that mankind had achieved.

JIMMY: (LOOKS AT CHARLOTTE) You've got my ticket marked alright, you. Man to man marking.

(NOT DIRECT) What do you want out of all this? Why don't you play dolls houses, prune roses, be polite, make tea in a china pot. You're a mystery alright.

Now me - I'm an open book - when it's been written. I play to the crowd - 40 odd thousand on a good week, and they can make me what they want.

But you. Nobody writes books about you - you're a fucking ornament - not what I'd want on my sideboard. But harmless. Even he doesn't bother with you. He'd notice if somebody

pinched their carpets, but it'd take him ten years to notice you weren't there - apart from the fact that he'd starve.
You're nothing. Harmless...
(LOOKS A CHARLOTTE BRIEFLY)
Harmless...

EDMUND: So Jimmy, would it be fair to say, in your affairs, there is no... emotional involvement. The whole experience for you centres on the tip of your penis - to put a fine point on it.

JIMMY: My whole life centres on the tip of my prick. You know why?

EDMUND: Bio-neurology isn't... er...

JIMMY: (CONTINUES) Because nobody gave me anything. They took me - my reputation, my body - and then sold me to the papers if they could.

CHARLOTTE: There's nothing in you to give. No soul.

JIMMY: And you know all about love. And soul. And inner being.

CHARLOTTE: I've been in love.

SHE MOVES AWAY. BUT STAYS ON STAGE.
SHEILA ENTERS BUT REMAINS DETACHED.
KATHY MOVES AWAY FROM CHAS.
ALL THREE WOMEN IN THEIR OWN WORLDS.

BEAT.

JIMMY: (NOT DIRECT) I wish Kathy was here. Hugging her quietly.

KATHY: (TO AUDIENCE) It's very important to Chas. He's usually too tired. But Saturdays, usually, when we've had a drink. You need a drink really, don't you... you don't bother so much. Saturday's best for Chas - he's just about winding down... Sunday he starts worrying about Monday. He's in a high pressure job...

JIMMY: I wish I was with her now. Kathy. My Kathy. She wouldn't be out to scythe my legs, bruise my shins, open my head like a can of worms.

Sometimes, she'd be quiet, sometimes she'd chatter. And I'd be peaceful. She's the only one I've ever met - ever.

KATHY: He likes me as Victoria Principal. I'm independent, you see.
Or a naughty school girl. I'm innocent, you see.
Or as a nun. I'm pure, you see.
Or as a prostitute. I'm a whore, you see - his wife.

SHEILA: He came to me slowly and gently
One afternoon. Just after closing time.
Dust danced in a sunbeam through a grimy window.
Round the corner a cripple sold early Evening News.
A drunk from the Café Royal rattled the locked door.
Then grumbled away and went.

He'd been sitting scribbling.
He'd caught my eye twice. No more.

They all try to catch my eye.
Most of them anyway.
Then turn away
Guilty as if a priest had caught them tossing themselves off.

But he's not feeling guilty
This one.
Been in a few times
Different.
No words.
We kiss over the bar
Then he's behind the bar
Turns me round
Or I turn round
I don't know which,
But I'm like this.

(EMPHASISES HER POSITION - LEANING AGAINST
TABLE, ARSE STICKING OUT.

SHEILA: Automatic pilot
Both of us.
I don't know where it came from.

CHARLOTTE: A cloud hid the sun for a moment.

Musty summer house.
Against a stack
Of faded deck chairs
A broken weed killer spray made of brass
Hanging by my ear.
Two butterflies join
For an instant it's their summer
It's my summer
Our summer.
And he's in me
Dignity, pride, guilt have no place
This July day
They wait
Until afternoons are grey.
November Tuesdays.
But not now.
I didn't know where he came from
Turning my inside out
Inside an outhouse.
On the table on the verandah
Ice cubes melt in lemonade
And the wooden slats
Creak a rhythm
As we move as one
Joined
Across years
If only we could stay
This way
Then lay and lay and lay

SHEILA: As one
Wet caress whispers
And hands hold tighter
Finger nails gently claw

CHARLOTTE: And movement
Quickens slowly
Our motion
In a oneness
A branch in the breeze
A paper cup on a wave
Bedding
Joining
Together

Us

SHEILA: Our breath
Quickening slowly

CHARLOTTE: Breathing
Aware of his breathing now

SHEILA: Aware of mine

CHARLOTTE: Aware
Pushing towards

SHEILA: Pulling against

CHARLOTTE: Wanting more

SHEILA: But having enough

CHARLOTTE: In a shuddering
Warm implosion

3 WOMEN: Speaking through touch
Silence may say much
Or nothing at all
Making it - in the physical sense
Might mean everything - or nothing at all.

EDMUND: Well, that is quite enough for today, I should say.
Next weekend in Manchester? That's the plan as I recall.

CHARLOTTE: Home ground.

JIMMY: No, I'll come down again. I've got friends here.

CHARLOTTE: (NOT DIRECT) That strumpet, no doubt.

JIMMY: Two friends - a married couple. Kathy and what's face.

EDMUND: Well, how's this for a little scheme. Invite them over. They can
join us for dinner.

JIMMY: Yeh... if you like.

CHARLOTTE: (IRKED) Edmund - I've already invited my friend Sheila down.

EDMUND: I didn't know you had a friend called Sheila, dear.

CHARLOTTE: The lady who was so kind to me in Manchester.

EDMUND: The barmaid.

JIMMY: Blimey, is Sheila coming.

EDMUND: Of course, you know her.
Well, this is capital. A house party. Isn't this capital, Charlotte.
Next weekend.

JIMMY: (NOT DIRECT) I won't be on my own then.
Kathy will be with me.

CHAS AND KATHY'S HOME.

CHAS: Imagine what those prigs with the double garage would say if
J.M.1. was parked outside.

KATHY: I'll just micro the dinner.

(NOT DIRECT) And stick myself in it too - clean myself right
through. Scour out my ingratitude. The price of one thrill.

(PAUSE) Was it a thrill? (PAUSE) No... course not... it was
just novel... nothing special...

The cost of one cheap, nasty thrill - I can never be worthy of
Chas again. That's what I've allowed to happen.

(TO CHAS) It's a wonderful, beautiful picture, Chas.

CHAS: You're really developing taste, Kathy. I like that.

THE PHONE RINGS. CHAS ANSWERS IT.

KATHY GETS TO THE KITCHEN DOOR AS CHAS SPEAKS.
SHE FREEZES.

CHAS: Jimmy? Jimmy mate! Kathy said she had a brief encounter.
Poor lass was over-awed. Forgot her manners and forgot to
invite you back.

Next weekend? Dinner at a... Professor, friends...

You are on, mate. Definitely on.

CHAS PUTS THE PHONE DOWN. HE MAKES A
REPRESSED YELP FOR JOY AND THEN TURNS COOL AS
HE CAN TO KATHY.

KATHY: (WEAKLY) Who was it?

CHAS: (NONCHALANTLY) Oh... it was Jimmy...

KATHY: Merrill?

(NOT DIRECT) This is the moment my whole world falls apart.

CHAS: This is it - the moment we take off.
We have been invited by an International Star to the home of an Oxford Professor for dinner.

KATHY: Why?

CHAS: The first rule of life, Kathy, ask 'How much, how many, where, what rate, what return'. Not 'What for', and certainly not 'Why'.

THE THIRD WEEKEND

LATE SATURDAY.
THE STARLINGS' HOME.

CHARLOTTE TRIES TO SET THE TABLE FOR DINNER,
BUT EDMUND HAS PAPERS SPREAD OVER IT.

CHARLOTTE: You might make some effort, Edmund.

EDMUND: You make everything seem so effortless, dear...
I have put the new tie on which you got me for Christmas.
Thought I'd give it an outing.

CHARLOTTE: Don't you like it?

EDMUND: It's my favourite.

CHARLOTTE: Why don't you wear it?

EDMUND: I am.

CHARLOTTE: It's the first time.

EDMUND: It was only Christmas - a yuletide gift... a yule tie, if you like.

CHARLOTTE: It was three Christmases ago.

EDMUND: It can't be.

CHARLOTTE: Could you move the papers - I'm trying to get on.

EDMUND: (READS ON) Yes.

CHARLOTTE: Edmund.

EDMUND: (CLEARS PAPERS RAPIDO) Chastened, dear. The old Dong is suitably chastened. Is there anything I can do?

CHARLOTTE: Change your tie. I don't like it.

EDMUND: But...

CHARLOTTE: It makes you look florid.

EDMUND: Oh dear...
Lotte said, dear Dong you are florid
Look, said Lotte, the tie that I got is horrid
The Dong said, I spot
Dear Lotte's in a knot.
(THINKS)
What's for dinner, is it porridge.
(WAITS FOR RESPONSE)
Not good?

CHARLOTTE: Not good.
And Lotte is in a knot, to be quite honest.

EDMUND: Oh dear. Deary deary dear.

CHARLOTTE: I invite Sheila down all this way. As a token of my gratitude...

EDMUND: I'm sure she appreciates it.

CHARLOTTE: And also to try, to try and show her some of the... a pleasanter way of living.

EDMUND: David Livingstone and Dr Albert Schweitzer would be proud...

CHARLOTTE: I hope that wasn't facetious, Edmund.

EDMUND: Good Lord dear - I don't know the meaning of the word. Well, I do, but one would expect an Oxford Professor to, but in the

sense that I would enact facetiousness upon thee...
(MEEKLY) No, I wasn't being...

CHARLOTTE: I simply thought, as a gesture, a week-end away from the smoky, smelly, public house, and that cold, cramped flat on a council estate where even the graffiti has been defaced...

EDMUND: Yes, of course... it's Christian, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: And I thought she could enjoy pleasant conversation with gentle, intelligent people.

EDMUND: And who would balk at that. Ho hum.

CHARLOTTE: I'm afraid I am still cross with you for inviting 'him'.

EDMUND: Jim?

CHARLOTTE: And his two blessed friends.

EDMUND: It's a good size piece of lamb, Charlotte. I took the liberty of peeking when you turned the little chap in the oven. 'Feed half of New College', I thought, 'and still leave some for sandwiches with a slice of cucumber for tea.'

CHARLOTTE: Food and drink aplenty...

EDMUND: My mouth's watering already, a veritable salivatory Amazon...

CHARLOTTE: Mouths, Edmund - there's the trouble. What will these mouths be saying when they aren't masticating.

EDMUND: 'This is splendid, Mrs Starling', I shouldn't wonder.

CHARLOTTE: Where's the gentle, intelligent conversation going to come from?

EDMUND: You're a past master, mistress.

CHARLOTTE: The joy of six people dining - and I have to say it stretches my memory to recall when we dined in those sort of numbers...

EDMUND: (HELPFULLY) Doctor Saracen's funeral?

CHARLOTTE: The joy for six people to share their wit, wisdom, experiences.

EDMUND: I'm sure Jimmy and his friends will recount the odd humorous yarn...

CHARLOTTE: That's just it...
Edmund, let me ask you something...

EDMUND: Shoot...
Rather a good footballing pun. Shoot, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: Have you in researches or in the tabloids you sometimes come across on the seats of railway carriages, come across the expression - lager lout.

EDMUND: You think that... our guests...

PAUSE.

CHARLOTTE: Lager lout. What do you think of that?

EDMUND: (PACES A BIT) What do I think? Me?

CHARLOTTE: Well?

EDMUND: I'm excited. Aquiver. Almost a frisson.

CHARLOTTE: Really.

EDMUND: Don't you see - this is a working dinner in the sense that we have to complete our interviews with (NODS)... with...

CHARLOTTE: Yes, I know who with.

EDMUND: Well, surely in the congenial atmosphere surrounding your bountiful spread and with what we might call supports, the Dribbly will be more expressive, more open, less defensive.

CHARLOTTE: It's how they express themselves - I suspect his friends will be as bad. Birds of a feather. We're talking about mob rule. Do you know when Claude Butler was returning by train from a seminar in Newcastle, he was unfortunate to share a train with returning football supporters. Yes - they even invaded First Class. They spent the whole journey urinating and vomiting out of the windows...
I think I'll move the dried flower displays.

TO CHAS AND KATH.

CHAS AND KATHY, SITTING IN THE CAR, NOT MOVING.

KATHY: Why have we stopped?

CHAS: It doesn't do to arrive early.

KATHY: (NOT DIRECT) It's the house over there. No number. 'Windgather'. Funny name. Its own gravel drive and stone gateposts. God, I don't want to go. I'm not happy sitting here waiting though. I wish I was going to visit my granny to drink endless cups of tea and kick my shoes off and curl my toes in the rag rug in front of her hissing gas fire.

CHAS: I like that - a house with no number.

KATHY: Must be hard for the postman.

CHAS: When you live somewhere like that, your post finds you.

KATHY: I wonder what they're like...
I've never met a Professor before. Suppose he talks about things I've never heard of. Uses words I don't understand.

CHAS: You're as good as him, doll...
Just nod and smile.

KATHY: I wonder who else will be there.

CHAS: A good class of people - you can rely on that.

KATHY: You'll think I'm being silly, but I'm a bit nervous.

CHAS: You look great. Knockout. You'll be the most beautiful woman there.

KATHY: (NOT DIRECT) And I daren't even think about Jimmy Merrill being there.

CHAS: And of course Jimmy will be there. I bet the chick he's with won't be a patch on you.

KATHY: (LOOKS) You think he'll have a girlfriend with him?

CHAS: Have you ever seen a photograph of Jimmy without a stunner on his arm... (CHUCKLES) Except when he's playing...

surprised he doesn't have one sitting next to him on the team picture. (CHUCKLES) I'll tell him that one. Not bad.

CHARLOTTE IN KITCHEN. SHE SHELLS PEAS.
SHEILA ENTERS.

CHARLOTTE: Feel better after your soak?

SHEILA: Much, thanks.

CHARLOTTE: I always enjoy a bath after a journey.

SHEILA: They're the softest, thickest towels I've ever come across.

CHARLOTTE: What a funny thing to say.

SHEILA: Is it?
D'you want a hand?

CHARLOTTE: You sit back, relax.

SHEILA: I'll shell some.

CHARLOTTE: I must confess I'm like you. We usually have frozen, but well, I thought I'd make an effort and have fresh. We always used to have peas from the pod.

SHEILA: I never used to - but I always do now.

CHARLOTTE: Oh...

SHEILA: People think I'm mad.

CHARLOTTE: The scent of them, quite evocative. A thousand Sunday lunches - shell the peas before church.

SHEILA: It's a lovely house. Everything's... just right.

CHARLOTTE: I'm afraid it's rather worn, a bit frayed at the edges... like Edmund and I.

SHEILA: Leather armchairs, this lovely old table to get food ready on - not horrible formica. No plastic in sight.

CHARLOTTE: We like it...

SHEILA: I couldn't even think about living somewhere like this. You can't even see another chimney top from the garden. That grandfather clock ticking. The smell - lilac?

CHARLOTTE: (NODS, PLEASED)

SHEILA: You wouldn't think it was the same world. The same bleedin' planet...
It's the sort of place I can't imagine the sun not shining.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, we have our share of rain... fog... frost... snow...

SHEILA: Don't think about it.

CHARLOTTE: The changing seasons have their own unique joys.

SHEILA: But this is best...

CHARLOTTE: A contrast from your home.

SHEILA: Not much.

CHARLOTTE: One can always improve, aspire to higher stations. A girl like you for example - intelligent, bright, attractive, pleasant personality.

SHEILA: I'm hardly the perfect English rose.

CHARLOTTE: You mustn't under-rate yourself. You might have been brought up in the mire...

SHEILA: What?

CHARLOTTE: I don't mean that disrespectfully, on the contrary. That's what I'm saying. You can rise above your disadvantages. Take advantage of opportunities. It seems so unfair. We have someone like you on one hand - crying out for a better life.

SHEILA: I do alright.

CHARLOTTE: And then our dinner guest - I am so sorry he's coming...

SHEILA: Jimmy's alright.

CHARLOTTE: That's very charitable of you, Sheila, but he's clearly not alright. He's wrong. Totally wrong. Wasting his God given

talent. I know he's only a footballer, but he's throwing away... exchanging that talent for debauchery.

SHEILA: He's a bit of a rum devil.

CHARLOTTE: Satan incarnate.

SHEILA: He keeps thousands of punters happy each week - and gives millions of people something to gossip about over their Sunday papers.

CHARLOTTE: Millions of morons...

SHEILA: Maybe... but they don't all have this. They can't have little islands away from it all.

CHARLOTTE: You could.

SHEILA: You hardly know me.

CHARLOTTE: I'm a good judge.

SHEILA: This is a real treat coming here. I appreciate it. It's a weekend break. But that's all it is. And just because you don't like where I come from...

CHARLOTTE: As I said it isn't personal...

SHEILA: It is, in a way... suppose I came here and said I don't like this about your house, I don't like your garden, I don't like your friends...

CHARLOTTE: I know you wouldn't.

SHEILA: You'd take it personally. You're part of this world - if I slagged it off, you feel I was slagging you off.

CHARLOTTE: There's a difference.

SHEILA: I don't want to sound cheeky but, well, I'm not a student or something.

CHARLOTTE: (A SLIGHT EDGE) Of course not. I wouldn't want to be patronizing.

SHEILA: No...

Peas shelled.

CHARLOTTE: I'll put the pods on the compost heap.

EARLY EVENING. THE LAWN.
APERTIFS ARE SERVED BY EDMUND, AS CHARLOTTE,
SHEILA AND CHAS, WITH KATHY A FOOT BEHIND,
ENJOY THE SUMMER EVENING.

EDMUND: Alfresco.

GOES TO CHAS AND KATHY FIRST. EACH TAKES DRINK,
ETC.

CHAS: You've got some land here, Professor Starling.

EDMUND: Mm... yes... it's our garden.

CHAS: How many square metres?

EDMUND: Er...

CHAS: Hefty rates of course.

EDMUND: Well...

CHAS: You could build four detached houses...

EDMUND: (TO KATHY) And you are the Dribbly's friend?

KATHY: (PUZZLED) I don't think so.

CHAS: And the house would convert into, what, five luxury
apartments...

EDMUND: (TO KATHY) Ah, I thought Jimmy Merrill was a friend.

KATHY: We hardly...

CHAS: Jimmy - great mates. I wonder where he's got to - as if we
couldn't guess, hey, Prof?

EDMUND: Couldn't we? (NOT A CLUE)

CHARLOTTE: (TO SHEILA) It's typical - with a bit of luck he won't turn up.

SHEILA: Honest Charlotte, Jimmy's alright. Give him a chance.

CHARLOTTE: Give him enough rope.

EDMUND TAKES DRINKS TO SHEILA AND CHARLOTTE.

KATHY: (TO CHAS) What's a 'dribbly'?

CHAS: Must be Greek or Latin.
You got out of it alright - don't worry.

EDMUND: (TO CHARLOTE AND SHEILA) Isn't this splendid. Capital.
You see, Charlotte, Jimmy's friends over there are positively nice. (CONSPIRATORIAL) I think the young chap - Chris, yes, Chris. I think he's an estate agent.

SHEILA: I thought he was a surveyor.

CHARLOTTE: They're very smart.

EDMUND: He declined lager - I did offer.

CHARLOTTE: I better circulate.

CHARLOTTE GOES TO CHAS AND KATHY.
EDMUND STAYS WITH SHEILA.

EDMUND: I didn't have a chance to meet you when I was in Northern climes.

SHEILA: How is your... are your...

EDMUND: (ADJUSTS HIS TROUSERS) Almost back to optimum functioning...

SHEILA: It's very good of you to invite me.

EDMUND: Our pleasure. It's so nice to have so many young people about. We used to hold little parties for my tutorial group....

SHEILA: Used to?

EDMUND: Seems to have gone by the board, been let slip. Not a definite move. Just, I suppose, one of those things. Change. It must be nearly ten years...

(EDMUND LAPSSES INTO THOUGHT) Charlotte used to so enjoy them... but they petered out...

SHEILA: Charlotte showed me your library. It is a library too - you've got more than our local one.

EDMUND: Goodness... I suppose I probably might have. Charlotte tells me you're a book-lover. Something of a collector...

SHEILA: (LAUGHS) You could fit all of mine on your toilet window ledge - and still have room for the bog roll.

EDMUND: (LAUGHS) Now that is imagery. Ben was right - we all have poetry in us. You've probably heard of Ben, Ben Mannion. He was something of a rising star in the media.

SHEILA: I've met him.

EDMUND: Goodness gracious - you know - knew Dear Ben.

SHEILA: I didn't really know him - he came into the pub a couple of times, when he was up for the interviews with Jimmy.

EDMUND: You must have heard than that he...

SHEILA: Under a train - yes.

EDMUND: A great waste...

SHEILA: Saw him that day.

EDMUND: Who'd have believed it...
(ABOUT TO CALL CHARLOTTE BUT THINKS BETTER OF IT) Better not mention it to Charlotte. She's very sensitive where Ben's concerned. He was her favourite. She used to say when groups of students used to come - 'I don't care if none of the others come, as long as Ben's there'. A fine boy... Do you know he used to give people he met his Bibbly Scribbles.

SHEILA: Poems he wrote.

EDMUND: Yes. Generous. Life loving.

CHAS COMES OVER.

CHAS: I've been having a decko in your library, Prof.

EDMUND: Ah, another bibliophile.

CHAS: I hope you're covered.
How many books have you got then?

EDMUND: I don't have a clue.

CHAS: Must be worth a fortune.

EDMUND: Priceless...

CHAS: That much?

EDMUND: Priceless in the sense that they are me and I am them.

SHEILA: I was just saying - they make my shelf of books look pathetic.

CHAS: I've got the complete works of Bill Shakespeare.

EDMUND: Ah - we have an admirer of the Bard.

CHAS: Not the sort of thing you read. I hate cheap looking books.

EDMUND: My books are my work. My world in a sense... books.

SHEILA: All those words.

EDMUND: And ideas, thoughts, feelings.

SHEILA: Makes me feel dead ignorant. As if I don't know anything.

EDMUND: The art of knowledge.
If one has the knowledge to read
Then one has the knowledge to know.

SHEILA: Is that in one of the books?

EDMUND: I'm afraid it's not. I just fashioned it.

SHEILA: That's what I mean - I couldn't come out with something like that.

EDMUND: It was rather good, wasn't it?

Do you know, some of my most inspired notions pop out when I've had two glasses of sherry.

CHAS: Well, I hope you are well covered.

EDMUND: (PUZZLED) Yes, I dare say.

CHAS: We do a special policy for collections... antiques.

EDMUND: (JOLLY) I dare say Charlotte would put me in that category. Her old antique.

CHARLOTTE TALKS TO KATHY.

CHARLOTTE: Well, it looks as if your friend isn't going to make it.

KATHY: (RELIEVED) Don't you think so?

CHARLOTTE: He's an hour late.

KATHY: Maybe he got tied up with some business.
(HALF JOKES) I don't know how many dinners I've had to reheat for Chas because he's home late from work. The microwave has made a big difference. It's a Phillips.

CHARLOTTE: He might have phoned.

KATHY: You don't mind me and Chas coming do you - if Jimmy doesn't turn up.

CHARLOTTE: No. No, of course not. I have to say I was surprised, pleasantly surprised, when I met you. You seem so... unlike Jimmy Merrill...

KATHY: I was surprised Jimmy asked us. We don't know him very well. I was dreading coming today.

CHARLOTTE: Why, for heaven's sake?

KATHY: (BEAT)
I'm not very good at things like this.

CHARLOTTE: (TOUCHES HER HAND) You'll have a lovely time. I'll start serving. This could be very pleasant now - yes, very pleasant. I'll check the roast.

CHARLOTTE GOES TO THE OTHER THREE, LEAVING
KATHY, WHO WE FOCUS ON.

KATHY: Although this is the time I hate most
At parties and receptions
When I'm anchored to the spot
And my husband is
confidently holding forth
I stand rooted
Imagining all the talk is about me
All laughter at my expense
Today I don't feel as bad
I don't think there is a
neon sign on my forehead
saying slag
I don't think the laughter
is at my expense
They haven't guessed I made
a fool of myself
In a Lotus Esprit
And the fool-maker isn't coming.
I was wrong.
I thought the intention of the invitation
Was to allow him to gloat
At me...
And my oblivious man.
But he's not here
He'll be in some lay-by a-lying.

JIMMY ENTERS.
THE OTHERS SPOT HIM BEFORE KATHY.

KATHY: I can just smile and nod. And have a pleasant time. And that
will be quite enough pretence, thank you very much.

THEY GREET JIMMY.

CHAS: You've made it, Jimmy mate.

JIMMY: Getting enough, Sheila.

CHARLOTTE: I must check the roast.

SHE EXITS.

EDMUND: Jim old boy. Welcome to the Starlings' nest.

JIMMY LOOKS AT KATHY, WHO TURNS AWAY.

CHAS: (TO SHEILA) She's not confident.

SHEILA: (TO KATHY) We're going to look at Charlotte's doll collection.

CHAS: Some real collectors' items.

EDMUND: I always think Charlotte's passion for dolls is a perfectly complimentary activity for my 'nonsense'.

THEY GO TO LEAVE AND KATHY IS ABOUT TO FOLLOW,
BUT JIMMY STANDS IN HER WAY.

JIMMY: (TO KATHY) How you doing?

KATHY: Alright.

CHAS: (TO KATHY) You two chew the fat.

KATHY: (NOT DIRECT) Choke on the gristle.

CHAS: (TO SHEILA) Be good for her, talking to Jimmy.
(TO EDMUND) If you like I'll run over your policies - make sure you're well covered.

EDMUND: Ah...

SHEILA: (NOT DIRECT TO CHAS) I hope your doll is well covered.

SHEILA, CHAS AND EDMUND LEAVE.

JIMMY: I've been thinking about you.

KATHY: (FLAT) I've been thinking about you.

JIMMY: Nothing else for the past week.

KATHY: I was hoping you wouldn't come.

JIMMY: Why...
Yeh, it'll be frustratin', wanting to get out of it. We don't have to listen to all the crap they spout. I'll watch you. You know what we'll be thinking... We'll wish we were in my car, driving fast, going back to that place where we stopped. And we'll

make love... again... and again. You'd like that, wouldn't you. It was exciting, wasn't it. Think about it while you eat. I'll think about it too. When I drink their wine, I'll be drinking you. When you bite their meat you'll be biting mine. When I pick their cherries I'll be taking yours. When you lick your lips, you'll be licking mine.

KATHY: You've made a mistake.

JIMMY: Hundreds... but not about you.
You loved it. You're excited by it - even now.

KATHY: I was down.

JIMMY: Don't come that crap. I took advantage, did I? Can't you do better than that?
Jesus, I was ready to drive back. Did I push you, force you, beg you, con you, make you?

KATHY: It was... exciting. And afterwards I felt horrible.
I've betrayed Chas.

JIMMY: You can't undo that.
In fact married to that prat, you must have learnt one thing - everything has a cost. In your case it's guilt.

KATHY: I was wrong.

JIMMY: Did it feel wrong?

KATHY: It felt...

JIMMY: Was I better than him?

KATHY: Grow up.

JIMMY: Was I?

KATHY: You were better than nothing.

JIMMY: You... (COLLECTS HIMSELF)

KATHY: I'm not a thing.

JIMMY: Your love. That's the thing.

KATHY: You want to add me to your trophy collection.

JIMMY: He's an embarrassment.

KATHY: You're embarrassing me.
It's not right.

JIMMY: No, it's not.

KATHY: It's bad enough being an ornament...

JIMMY: You wouldn't be an ornament if you were mine.

KATHY: I won't be anyone else's - I won't be nobody else's something.
Least of all a disposable plastic cup to be drunk dry, crumpled
and tossed into a gutter.

JIMMY: Why don't you tell him - see what he does. He'd soon flush
you down the half paid for trash-disposal unit. In double
fucking quick time.

CHARLOTTE: (AS THOUGH SHE HAS OVERHEARD, NOT DIRECT) As a
good professor's wife one has to be aware.
With the students, I was very good in the pastoral sense.
(DIRECT) Dinner!

THE DINING ROOM.

EDMUND: What a spread, Charlotte.

SHEILA: Smells great.

CHAS: (TO KATH) Real silver this cutlery - not plated. Solid. Bench
marks.

CHARLOTTE: Sheila helped me with the peas.

KATHY: Chas likes petis pois - Birds Eye.

CHAS: We've got a chest freezer - and a small cabinet one.

JIMMY: I bet you serve up some tasty dishes, Kathy.

KATHY: Alright... I'm getting better.

CHAS: She's ace, Jim. I'm a lucky guy. Most men would give their eye teeth for a woman like Kath.

EDMUND: They do say the way to a man's heart is through his... (PATS HIS POD)

JIMMY: Not what I've heard, hey Kathy.

KATHY EMBARRASSED.

SHEILA: (TO JIMMY) We know what you've heard Jimmy - trouble is with you, no matter which way you go in, they'd be hard pushed to find a heart.

CHARLOTTE NODS.

JIMMY: A bit cutting there, Sheila. A bit below the belt.

SHEILA: You'd know all about that area...

JIMMY: (LOOKS AT KATHY) Heart of gold mine. Longing to be loved.

EDMUND: (STARTS CHUCKLING) Very good Sheila - 'know all about that area'... below the belt...

CHARLOTTE: Lamb, Edmund?

EDMUND: (CHUCKLES THEN MAKES A 'BAA' SOUND)

CHARLOTTE LOOKS THE ODD DAGGER AT HIM.

EDMUND: Sorry...

(BEAT)

Tuck in then everyone
Tuck...
Tucking into the tuck
Making a meal of it.
Food...
Food for thought
food glorious food
Food of love.

THEY EAT.

SHEILA: I can see there're no vegetarians here.

EDMUND: Carnivores to a man... and... a... woman.

CHAS: Red-blooded aren't we, Jim?

JIMMY: (LOOKING DIRECTLY AT KATHY) I like my meat.

CHARLOTTE: And drink, I hear.

JIMMY: Paper talk.

SHEILA: Ha!

JIMMY: Don't ruin my image.

CHARLOTTE: (POURS WINE) Claret.

CHAS: No more wine.
(TO KATHY) You'll have to learn to drive love, so I can drink.

CHARLOTTE POURS JIMMY'S WINE - A BIG MEASURE.

CHARLOTTE: A good wine.

CHAS: I like good wine, Mrs Starling.

KATHY: We have Sainsbury's own.

CHAS: Not always...
I'm going to lay down a case. They do a good line in the Sunday Mail.
Kathy used to drink white, but I introduced her to red.

SHEILA: (ASIDE) Isn't she lucky.

CHARLOTTE: Edmund's best Claret...

EDMUND: Sent to me by an ex-student. Jean-Paul Bettinge. French you know. A pleasant boy, but I must say we found communication a little... difficult.

JIMMY: Never...

EDMUND: His father owns a vineyard and Jean-Paul, I believe, is a rising star in a neo-fascist party.

CHAS: Must be worth a bob or two.

EDMUND: A franc or two come to that...

CHARLOTTE: Another drink, Mr Merrill?

JIMMY OFFERS HIS GLASS WHICH CHARLOTTE
REFILLS.

CHARLOTTE: (NOT DIRECT) It's common knowledge Merrill is a virtual
alcoholic - this display of generous hospitality will look well
and the key to the undoing of him will be copious amounts of
fine wine.

JIMMY: (NOT DIRECT) The old bag's being nice. What's she after?

CHARLOTTE POURS HERSELF A DRINK.

CHAS: I'll tell you what I'll do as a favour.

JIMMY: (NOT DIRECT) Fuck off.

SHEILA: (NOT DIRECT) Lose the power of speech.

KATHY: (NOT DIRECT) Wake me up - tell me I'm not here.

CHAS: I'll run the barometer over anyone's fiscal and insurance
situation - a free consultation.

SHEILA: Now!

CHAS: At your leisure.

EDMUND: Very generous.

CHARLES HANDS OUT CARDS.

CHAS: That's us - Cellular Mortgages. That's me - Charles Duke.

JIMMY SLINGS HIS CARD. EDMUND GIVES HIS TO
CHARLOTTE. SHEILA PUTS HERS ON THE TABLE.
KATHY (!) PUTS HERS CAREFULLY AWAY.

JIMMY LOOKING DIRECTLY AT KATHY, CHOMPS
SENSUOUSLY ON HIS MEAT.

JIMMY: (NOT DIRECT) A lamb
Just as I like it
Traces of blood
Juice dribbling down my chin
Sweet scented
Warm
To be bitten
Devoured
Consumed
Eaten up
Satisfying
Taking it in hole
Til there's room for no more
And I can lay back
Full

CHARLOTTE: (NOT DIRECT) Sometimes one had to stand back, be supportive. On other occasions one had no option but to confront the issue. Stop evil in its tracks. A member of parliament's daughter died of a drugs overdose. Brilliant girl. Everyone knew but no one confronted the problem. Evil triumphed. Sometimes a little upset in the short term is better all round in the long term.

SHE TURNS ON JIMMY, BUT PEOPLE ARE UNAWARE OF HER FOR A FEW MOMENTS.

CHAS: I'm thinking of taking Kathy for a second honeymoon - Bermuda.

KATHY JUST LOOKS.

SHEILA: She doesn't look keen - I'll have your ticket love. (LOOKS AT CHAS) Second thoughts, I won't bother.

EDMUND: (EATING) The Dong is devouring a diplodocus size load
It would not surprise him if he did explode.

CHARLOTTE: I have to say something Edmund.

EDMUND: By all means, dear – join the banter fest.

CHARLOTTE: It might interest people to know that he (JIMMY) has made persistent efforts to seduce Kathy - the wife of his so-called

friend Chas. He continually pesters, taunts, forces his attentions.

EVERYONE STOPS.

EDMUND: Probably youthful exuberance, dear. Anyone for more mint sauce?

EVERYONE CARRIES ON EATING.

CHARLOTTE: I think good manners are so important.

EDMUND: Absolutely – good manners and mint sauce.

CHAS STOPS EATING. LOOKS AT KATHY.

CHAS: (WHISPERS) Is it true?

KATHY DOESN'T ANSWER.

CHAS: Is it?

STILL NO REPLY.

CHAS: (TO JIMMY) It's not true, is it, Jimmy mate?

JIMMY: Course it's true. I fucked her rotten last weekend.

THEY START EATING.

CHAS: (WHISPERS TO KATHY) He says he rogered you. Is it true?

KATHY: (NODS)

CHAS: Why?

KATHY: I'm sorry.

CHAS: Why?

KATHY: We never ask 'why'.

CHAS: I make the rules. Why? Why! Why! Why!
Don't I give you everything. Don't I want the best for you.
Don't I make sacrifices for you. Don't I try and help you, make you better. Why, why, why.

KATHY: (SIGHS) I was down - low.

CHAS: What reason have you got to be low. Don't you think I feel low. Don't I have to go out every day and crawl on my belly, my tongue up every customer's arse. You don't get much lower than that.
Now what's the real reason. Tell me why. Why.

KATHY DOES NOT REPLY. INCREDIBLY THEY GO ON EATING AGAIN.

CHAS: (HARSH WHISPERS TO KATHY) You're a whore. You don't matter to me. I've felt pity for you. You're nothing without me. To think I've built my life round you.

JIMMY: (STOPS EATING. TO KATHY) Didn't I predict the trash-disposal unit.
He doesn't care for you like I do. He doesn't need you. We can be happy. You and me. Everything you've ever dreamed of can be yours now. I'll love you like you've never been loved.

KATHY LOOKS AT JIMMY AND CHAS, AND SITS WITH HER HEAD DOWN. THE OTHERS LOOK THEN CONTINUE NOSHING.

CHARLOTTE: (SCREAMS AT JIMMY) You are the anti-Ben. A sinful wicked servant of Satan.

OTHERS STILL EAT.

CHARLOTTE: (TO JIMMY) Are you satisfied now. Does it make you feel good that you've smeared your filth across all our lives. That for the sake of a sordid, solitary rut, you have destroyed this young couple's dreams, this girl's innocence. At least she, like us, knows what you are now.

SHEILA: It takes two.

CHAS: A man can walk a skipping lamb into the abattoir.

CHAS: (TO JIMMY) That's what you did - you took advantage.

JIMMY: I did what was expected. This is me. Jimmy Merrill. I'm the one you look for on the inside pages. This is what I do. It's

part of the job. It's why I get paid 15 hundred quid to open shops and twenty thousand to say who I screw.

- CHARLOTTE: (RAGING) How can you sit, smug and gloating. You wreck lives, set bad examples, hurt people. How can you still be here.
- JIMMY: (STANDS) Don't worry. Me and Kathy will soon be gone.
- EDMUND: No need to go on our account.
- CHARLOTTE: (AT JIMMY) You don't deserve to be alive.
- SHEILA: Come on, for Christ's sake.
- CHARLOTTE: I pray.
- JIMMY: For me. Thanks.
- CHARLOTTE: I've asked God - 'Why'. Why was he taken, someone so good, so talented, so honourable, so gentle, so pure.
- EDMUND: Dear Ben.
- CHARLOTTE: Someone who loved his God-given life, who shared his God-given talents. Why take him - and leave you to continue the work of the devil.
- SHEILA: Dear Ben! Dear Ben! All this talk about God doesn't make Ben Mannion an angel.
- CHARLOTTE: What do you know? You're only a barmaid. You don't even speak properly. You come from a world without morals. You don't know anything.
- SHEILA: 'That's right chuck', I stand behind the bar and see nothing. I haven't seen him (CHAS) use her (KATHY) as nothing more than a teas maid and a blow-up doll. I haven't seen him (JIMMY) use every soft, warm cunt he can find to fill with his hatred - and fear. I haven't seen you and your husband, in your big house - with a room full of dolls, and a room full of books - and fuck all in between. Oh yes! And I haven't been wit 'Dear, dear Ben' after closing time, he didn't take me, over the bar in an empty pub on a sunny afternoon, on the last day of his life.

CHARLOTTE: Liar! How could you say such wicked things? I know Ben. Knew him as only a woman who loves a man. He was young, but there was a profound love - the sort that never dies. You can't stain his memory. And fate took him, so he can't defend himself against this slander. You know nothing of him.

SHEILA: I remember now, it was he that turned me round. He was in control. He was no different from them.

CHAS STANDS.

CHAS: Kathy - home.

KATHY LOOKS.

CHAS: You've been silly, used...

KATHY: I know.

CHAS: It was my fault... I put you in a situation you couldn't handle. You've hurt me... But... I'm prepared to give you a chance. Let's go.

KATHY: I have been silly. Let myself be used...

CHAS: Come on then...

KATHY: By you. Since the first time you came over to me in that disco pub... She (CHARLOTTE) is right - Jimmy has destroyed our dreams. Only from that time you came to me, it's been your dreams. I've had nothing of my own, not even my own dreams.

CHAS: I've given you everything.

KATHY: You hire everything out to me, with sub-clauses attached.

CHAS: (ANGRY) You are my wife.

KATHY: (SHAKES HER HEAD)

JIMMY: Tough shit, Chas - we all lose out on the odd deal.

STANDS.

JIMMY: Come on, Kathy.

KATHY: I don't know how to say this, Jimmy.

JIMMY: Don't say anything, lover - let's just go.

KATHY: Smile and nod... It's hard to express. I want to put it in a way you'll understand Jimmy.

JIMMY: I understand you.

KATHY: I've no need to say it then. No need to say 'Fuck off, Jimmy. Get into your prick on wheels and run away as fast as you can'.

JIMMY: You can't say...

KATHY: 'Go on, piss off out of it'. That's what you say, isn't it? That's what you do, when the going gets tough.

CHARLOTTE: No backbone. That's his problem. No moral fibre.

EDMUND: I think that's enough Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: I beg your pardon.

EDMUND: I think you've said enough. We all have.

CHARLOTTE: They certainly have.
(TO SHEILA) I'm particularly disappointed in you though. Maybe I was wrong to expect gratitude... but I certainly didn't expect lies - dreadful lies about Ben. As a way of detracting from his (JIMMY'S) awfulness.

EDMUND: Enough Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: The Dong is getting cross
Trying to be the boss
Forgetting he's a dead loss.

Isn't that the way we're supposed to say it, Dear?

(TO SHEILA) Nothing you can say will hurt the only person I've truly loved - in every way.

SHEILA TAKES TWO FOLDED, HAND-WRITTEN SHEETS FROM HER POCKET.

SHEILA: He gave me these. Before he left for the station. After he had fucked me.

EDMUND: A Bibbly Scribbly - I'll file it.

CHARLOTTE: I want to read it. He would want me to. It's the point. The purpose. The meaning. It's the only thing that matters. He gives me my meaning.

EDMUND: I don't think it's wise... an appropriate time.

CHARLOTTE: It's the only time. We have never before needed him - his wisdom, his joy, more than now.

TAKES POEM. READS) Harsh, mean, bad, mad
Sorry, seedy, sordid, sad
What a world to pain through
What a way to grow.

(TO SHEILA) Ben didn't write this.

SHEILA: Living pains

EDMUND: (TAKES IT) It's in his hand.
(READS) Learning as you go
They don't tell you what you need to know
Not them complacent gets
In schools of varying degrees,
Meaningless plaudits
From seemingless pundits

CHARLOTTE: (TO SHEILA) He can't have.

SHEILA: (READS) Everyway, whichway
(TO CHARLOTTE) It was Ben Mannion
(READS) Oh they have their say
Along with - father, mothers, older brothers

CAST: (READ) Teachers, speechers
Playwrights, gobshites
Parasytics, paper critics
Verbal erectors

Television directors
Tax inspectors
Priests and rectors
Doctors, spocktors, rocksters
Disc jocksters, dim boxers
Reporters, coke snorters
Cab drivers, minge divers
Suing survivors, superstition revivers
Faith healers, City dealers
Bimbo squealers, pension stealers
Mystics, piss sticks, arse licks
Get rich quicks, dozy dicks
Word weighers, purveyors
Of their wordy piss juice
Spunk spraying *verbiage*
Rule laden *Garbiage*
Into receptacles
With brains in their testicles
Permanent, perpetual oral ejaculation
Into condom like receivers
Who've given up speculation

The profound silence of millions of voices
The profound confusion of making no choices
The profound profundity of celebrated moribundity
The profound infertility of pointless fecundity
The proclaimed sense of piss all.
The wracking pain of numbness
The spinning brain of boredom
The nagging doubt of meaning
The filling gaps with horse shit
The filling gaps with horse shit.

EDMUND:

Academic alliterative analysis
Atrophies the outcome.
Where the means justifies
The means.

(SHOUTS) Go. Leave us. Leave our lives alone.

BLACKOUT.

EPILOGUE

SIX MONTHS LATER.

SHEILA: (AS BARMAID) 'Hello Mr Wilson
Been to the Library'.

(AS SELF) 'I've been too.
I'm reading one about this city -
as it was before the war.
Yeh - it's interesting.
Tell me what it was like when you were young
I wanna hear.

(OUT FRONT. SMILES) So nowts changed. Has it?

CHAS: (LEANS ON A BAR) I'm an entrepreneur. Run my own show
now.
Lots of travelling - got the Carlton with quadraphonic Dolby.
Independent, my own man.
A car makes you independent. A good car. It'll be a BMW for
me next. I don't have to wait for some boss to OK it now. I just
go for it. You've got to look after yourself. No one else will.
Look at my ex-boss Rick Brody - burnt out at 39. Bit of a
shock for him when I took all my ex-customers' accounts.

Pity my ex couldn't stand the heat. She's missing out. She
didn't want to grow. Very sad. We're good pals still, great
mates, but - it was best for her.
She realized she was holding me back...
I've got a got a girlfriend naturally.
Felicity understands me. She's five foot ten, blonde. Good
talker. Great tan. Classy.
Don't get me wrong - I'm not putting Kathy down - she's an
alright chick. She just couldn't handle 'my world' - lot of high
level socializing - lot of pressure. You have to act right. You
know what I mean, probably not, but well... better all round...
Life's been good to me. I've made it happen though. I know
exactly where I'm going.
It's not surprising people envy me. I sense it. Jealousy. That's
the price you pay...
Envy's a terrible thing.

KATHY: That's terrible - divorced at twenty one.
That's terrible - on the grounds of her adultery.

That's terrible - no boyfriend, who'd want a slag like her.
That's terrible - living with her granny.
That's terrible - she must have given up all ambition.
That's terrible - she's got to make her own decisions.
That's terrible - the only face she has to please is the one in the mirror.
That's terrible - her whole life in front of her and thousands of choices to be made.

JIMMY: (IN HOSPITAL)
All this pain
Shit and blood
Knowing best
Doing good
I hate these places.

And among the get-well cards from people who need heroes - a summons for reckless driving and driving whilst under the influence...

And messages from my sponsors - 'Sorry but your contract is cancelled, you don't have the right image'.

And a message from the club - 'Specialist medical advice informs us that you will not be able to play again. We will honour your contract but not of course be now taking up the option'.

Options? When did I have options/ There was no option when I rammed my Esprit under a crash barrier at a hundred and five.

And a message from the publisher. 'Regarding your involvement in 'Folk hero and his place in...' - you have no place'.

And Jimmy says Fuck 'em.
Who gives a tuppenny toss.

CHARLOTTE ARRANGES SOME TWIGS AND DRIED FLOWERS.

EDMUND: Your Autumn collection.

CHARLOTTE: Teazel, Honesty, Silver Birch and so on. As pretty in their own way as Spring blooms.

EDMUND: Often I think sadder.

CHARLOTTE: Oh I don't know dear. Cozy winter evenings in, curtains snugly drawn. Just you and I.

EDMUND: The Dong and his old Dutch
They don't do much
But they find it muchly enjoyable
Just the pair with their foi-a-bles
Staying out of touch.

CHARLOTTE: Very good Edmund.

EDMUND: Yes, I must annotate it
... muchly enjoyable
... their foi-a-bles.

CHARLOTTE: And a winter ahead with our dear boy.
He will live in his words -
to be read on Summer day verandahs -
And by Winter fires when a cruel wind blows beyond the
curtains.
Words shining truthfully, for those who seek the truth.
Not for barmaid and footballers whom he passed them to as
acts of charity.
But for people like us. His kind of people.
Ben's words.
Ben's words.
Assembled in a leather bound volume. With a locking clasp.
All that I've amassed. Not to be read. But treasured safely. So
his innocent world will be safe...

EDMUND: Time for your pills dear.

CHARLOTTE: Yes... I'll make some Horlicks.
Mrs Dong has lots of pills
They stop her feeling, feeling ill.

CHARLOTTE EXITS.

EDMUND: (AFTER HER) Very good dear.

(READS FROM BEN'S NOTES)

THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE CAST APPEAR IN THE
BACKGROUND AS EDMUND READS. THEY WHISPER
THE WORDS.

SHEILA: There's a gap

JIMMY: Wide as a train track

KATHY: A ledge

CHAS: On the platform's edge

CHARLOTTE: It's wise to retire

SHEILA: Behind the yellow line

JIMMY: In plenty of time

KATHY: Before the Inter City 125

CHAS: Rushes by.

CHARLOTTE: Ready to fry

SHEILA: To suck you under

JIMMY: With a roar like thunder

KATHY: So behind the yellow line

CHAS: If you don't want to die

CHARLOTTE: In the gap.

BEAT.

EDMUND: (READS) Supposing her took a step forward. Into the gap - the void.

PAUSES.

You've broken house rules, old man. You weren't supposed to write the truth. Why didn't you talk if things were a bit much. I'm very good with young people, I'd have listened over scones and a cup of tea.

(ANGUISHED) Why didn't you say it had no meaning. Why didn't you say it was all a void...

I loved you Ben... I even closed my eyes to you and Charlotte. Of course I knew...

I protected her by not letting her know... just as I'll protect her
from the fact that you stepped forward instead of back when
the Express came.
(BEGINS TO CRY)

Who'll protect me from my silent, silly sadness...?

THE END

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