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'Why, who makes much of a miracle? I know of nothing else but miracles.' Walt Whitman

In conflict with government, torn with internal dissension on matters of doctrine and practice, the Church of England finds itself enjoying unwelcome publicity. Many of the Church's tensions come into relief in this story of four clergymen in South London, who are struggling, in moving and often hilarious ways, to make sense of their mission in the inner city.

After the production of *The Secret Rapture*, the *Sunday Times* described David Hare as 'the greatest dramatist of his generation'.

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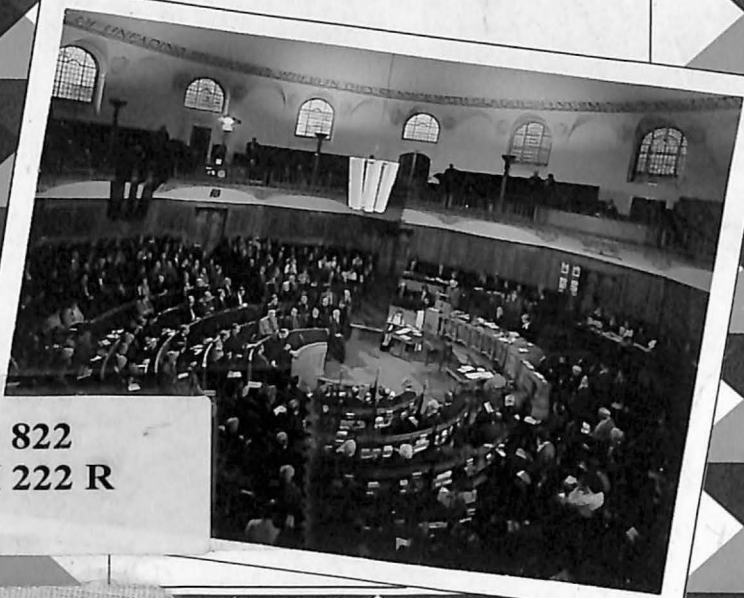


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RACING
DEMON

David
Hare



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DAVID HARE

David Hare was born in Sussex in 1947. Upon leaving university he formed the Portable Theatre Company, which toured Britain for three years. He wrote his first play, *Slag*, in 1970, while Literary Manager at the Royal Court Theatre. Since then he has written twelve plays, of which seven have been presented at the National Theatre, and six original screenplays for cinema and television.

His first feature film, *Wetherby*, was made in 1984. David Hare is the only major English playwright to have achieved success in both the cinema and the theatre, working as a writer and a director.

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RACING DEMON

DAVID HARE

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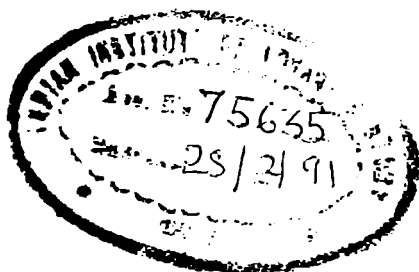
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For Blair

I want to acknowledge the generous help and advice given to me by members of the Church of England during the writing of this play. Any inauthenticity is wholly my fault.

DH

Why, who makes much of a miracle? I know of nothing else
but miracles.

WALT WHITMAN

CHARACTERS

Clergy

THE REV LIONEL ESPY
THE RT REV CHARLIE ALLEN, BISHOP OF SOUTHWARK
THE REV TONY FERRIS
THE REV DONALD 'STREAKY' BACON
THE REV HARRY HENDERSON
THE RT REV GILBERT HEFFERNAN, BISHOP OF KINGSTON

Laity

FRANCES PARNELL
STELLA MARR
HEATHER ESPY
EWAN GILMOUR
JABBAI MARR
TOMMY ADAIR

Waiters, Synod members, etc.

Racing Demon was first performed at the Cottesloe Theatre on 1 February 1990. It was directed by Richard Eyre and designed by Bob Crowley, with lighting by Mark Henderson. The cast included Oliver Ford-Davies, Stella Gonet, Adam Kotz, David Bamber, Michael Bryant and Barbara Leigh Hunt.

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ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

The church. The REVEREND LIONEL ESPY is kneeling on the ground. He is in his fifties with a bald head fringed with white hair. He wears a black cassock. He is addressing God.

LIONEL: God. Where are you? I wish you would talk to me. God. It isn't just me. There's a general feeling. This is what people are saying in the parish. They want to know where you are. The joke wears thin. You must see that. You never say anything. All right, people expect that, it's understood. But people also think, I didn't realize when he said *nothing*, he really did mean absolutely nothing at all. You see, I tell you, it's this perpetual absence – yes? – this not being here – it's that – I mean, let's be honest – it's just beginning to get some of us down. You know? Is that unreasonable? There are an awful lot of people in a very bad way. And they need something beside silence. God. Do you understand?

SCENE TWO

Southwark's study. SOUTHWARK is in his sixties, a tall laconic figure, very thin, his black hair pressed against his skull. He is ushering LIONEL into his room.

SOUTHWARK: Come in, come in, we're delighted to see you.

LIONEL: What a wonderful smell.

SOUTHWARK: Indeed. My wife always fries her fishcakes in duck fat. It's not just the taste. It improves the texture as well.

LIONEL: Goodness.

SOUTHWARK: It's funny, yesterday, you know, we had the salmon. And there's no denying poached salmon's very nice. But all the time I was thinking, when do we get the fishcakes?

LIONEL: Ah yes.

(LIONEL *stands a moment, waiting.*)

SOUTHWARK: Same with lamb. A leg of lamb is also very nice.

But isn't the whole point that next day you have shepherd's pie?

LIONEL: Yes. Yes, well I know what you mean.

(LIONEL *waits, confused. But SOUTHWARK seems oblivious.*)

SOUTHWARK: And your wife? Heather? She cooks?

LIONEL: Yes. Yes, frequently.

SOUTHWARK: Good. (*Looks at LIONEL a moment.*) Lionel, I suspect you sense the reason for this meeting.

LIONEL: No, tell me.

SOUTHWARK: We go back a very long way. After all, your whole family . . . Your father instructed me at Cuddesdon . . . your uncles . . . your brother . . . where is he?

LIONEL: Mombasa.

SOUTHWARK: Your grandfather, Dean of St Paul's. He stood on the steps watching the bombs fall. Espy is one of the great clerical names. But I have had rumour of some stirrings among your parishioners.

(*A pause.*)

SOUTHWARK: It's difficult, Lionel.

LIONEL: Please. You must tell me why.

(LIONEL *is impassive.*)

SOUTHWARK: There is an element in your parish who are unsure of you. They've begun to doubt you. Maybe question the power of your convictions.

LIONEL: Anything specific?

SOUTHWARK: Extremely specific. They're not sure you still believe in the rules of the club.

(LIONEL *looks at him a moment.*)

LIONEL: Ah well, I see.

SOUTHWARK: I don't mean to upset you.

LIONEL: What parishioners are these? It's a largely working-class parish. They are my ministry. I don't have to tell you, Christ came to help the poor.

SOUTHWARK: I know your views.

LIONEL: But there is, I know, a small middle-class rump . . .

SOUTHWARK: Not that small . . .

LIONEL: A rump of regular communicants who've been coming to the church for a very long time . . .

SOUTHWARK: They have.

LIONEL: And since the poor are not given to visiting bishops' palaces, I assume the complaint is from them?
(*He looks, but SOUTHWARK doesn't answer.*)

All right, you can't say . . .

SOUTHWARK: They're not very happy.

LIONEL: Why don't they come to me?

SOUTHWARK: It's to do with attitude. They detect something in your manner.

LIONEL: Oh really?

SOUTHWARK: And I don't mean exclusively outside the church. We are talking about the service of Communion. This is the problem. It is only an impression, nothing more, but sometimes you even seem uninterested in the sacramental side of your work.

(*LIONEL is nodding.*)

LIONEL: I don't think that's true. I can see why they might say it. Sometimes I'm impatient. Perhaps there are times when that comes across.

SOUTHWARK: I'm afraid it does.

LIONEL: You know the situation . . .

SOUTHWARK: I do.

LIONEL: It is fairly desperate. I wouldn't even say the Church was a joke. It's an irrelevance. It has no connection with most people's lives. A lot of people are struggling to make a life at all. Now I feel we should be humble about this. Our job is mainly to learn. From ordinary, working people. We should try to understand and serve them. (*Shrugs slightly.*) Perhaps, as the years go by, that becomes more important than ritual.

SOUTHWARK: Yes. Can the two be divided like that? (*Looks at him beadily, his manner changing.*) After all, what are we? Lionel? What is the Anglican communion? It's a very loose church. I don't have to tell you, we all agree on very little. Almost nothing. Start talking to our members and you'll find we hold a thousand different views. Only one thing unites

us. The administration of the Sacrament. (*Pauses a moment.*) Finally that's what you're there for. As a priest you have only one duty. That's to put on a show.

(LIONEL is looking at him thoughtfully.)

LIONEL: Do you really think that?

SOUTHWARK: Doesn't matter what I think. Does it? That's the wonderful thing. We're not talking about opinion. We're talking about authority. History. What the Church of England is. It's a disparate body held together by a common liturgy.

(LIONEL looks at him mistrustfully, deciding how frank to be.)

LIONEL: Charlie, to me, Christ is in our actions. Don't you think some of this other stuff just puts people off?

(SOUTHWARK looks satisfied, as if he's got to the heart of it. Then he shrugs.)

SOUTHWARK: Well, there you are. That's your opinion. However, the fact is, you are a priest. Give Communion. Hold services. Offer the full liturgy. And look cheerful as you do it. The people you call middle class are entitled to that. I don't call them any class. I call them believers. And, as you observed, there are all too few of those. So please . . . let's not be careless of them. (*Sits back, suddenly quiet.*) It seems to me they're entitled to a little respect. (*Waits a moment.*) For the rest, by all means, come and discuss your views with me. Happy to. I do it all the time. With all sorts. But, meanwhile, please, fulfil your job description. Keep everyone happy.

(*There's a pause.*)

There. I've said it. (*Calls from his chair, not moving.*) Beatrice! (*Turns back.*) Now we'll have lunch.

SCENE THREE

Frances's living room. A flat in South London. FRANCES PARNELL is thirty, blonde. She is lying on the floor, covered by a sheet. The REVEREND TONY FERRIS is younger than she is, sitting on a hard chair at the end of the sheet. He has a loose-fitting modern suit, and a dog collar. He has wavy black hair and a fresh, open face.

FRANCES: What happened then?

TONY: Oh, you know. Have I never told you?

FRANCES: No.

(They both smile.)

TONY: I was just a boy from the provinces. This was my first trip to London. I was only sixteen. I was incredibly lonely. I was thinking, all right, I'm frightened, I'm on my own, what would help would be if I could buy a small crucifix. This was in Oxford Street. There was a gift shop. I talked to the girl behind the counter. 'I think I've seen one,' she said. She seemed a bit puzzled. So she went into the back. Then when she came out, she had a couple. She said, 'Oh, I don't think you'll want this one. It's got a little man on it.'

FRANCES: Yes.

(They laugh.) That's funny.

TONY: I mean, where had she been all her life?

FRANCES: I don't know, though. I worked in a shop. Before I started in advertising. It was just like that.

(TONY looks down at her a moment.)

TONY: Are you going to get dressed?

FRANCES: *(Smiles.)* If you like. Does it make you uncomfortable?

TONY: No.

FRANCES: You always dress first.

TONY: Lot to do.

FRANCES: Do you have time for a pizza?

TONY: If you hurry.

(She gets up, gathering the sheet around her. She goes out to change. TONY is thoughtful, not moving from his chair. He calls through to the bedroom.)

TONY: It's just tonight I want to work on a scheme I have. Which I want to put to the team. I've got an idea for common worship, to try and involve the Catholics and Methodists as well. I wanted to start with a day for World Peace. Or something. If we could get everyone together it would be the most incredible coup. It would really . . .

(FRANCES has come back in. She has pulled on jeans and a shirt. TONY stops speaking when she re-appears, as if censoring himself.)

FRANCES: What?

TONY: No then I think we'd really get people talking. Christ would be bang in the centre of things.

(FRANCES moves across the room and gets a hair-brush. She starts brushing her hair. TONY, still in his chair, looks down.)

TONY: I'm sorry.

FRANCES: No.

TONY: I can tell what you're thinking.

FRANCES: It's always Christ. We're alone. We make love. We have a little time. *(Smiles.)*

And then Christ enters the room.

TONY: Yes. Well he's there. He's always with us.

FRANCES: I always pretend you're no different from anyone else. But you are. You always bring your friend to the party.

TONY: I can't help it.

FRANCES: I know.

(They both smile. She crosses the room to put her coat on, easily running her hand across his back as she goes.)

And is he coming for a pizza?

TONY: Inevitably.

FRANCES: And will he stay the night?

TONY: He will. But I can't.

FRANCES: Oh really?

TONY: No. Didn't I mention my aunt's coming down?

(She looks at him a moment.)

FRANCES: No. You forgot.

TONY: Yes. Aunt Ethel. She's ridiculously proud of me. I think she'd have preferred a nice smart parish in Surrey. But I explained I had to have the challenge of somewhere really difficult.

FRANCES: And when's she coming?

TONY: Oh, you know. This evening.

FRANCES: Mmm.

(She stands a moment, her coat on. She's ready to go. TONY doesn't get up.)

TONY: It's getting rather late for my meeting. I think I'll skip the pizza. Do you mind?

FRANCES: How long have you been here? Forty-five minutes?

TONY: Yes. I'm sorry. (*Looks down again.*) It's very wrong.

(*She looks at him a moment, then starts to move away.*)

FRANCES: Well, certainly it doesn't make me feel very valued . . .

TONY: I know. (*Tries to rally.*) This ecumenical thing could be very important. I do need a way to make my mark.

FRANCES: I understand that.

TONY: I don't mean for myself. It would be a contribution to the whole life of the Church.

FRANCES: Well, I'm sure. That's fine. As long as you're honest.

TONY: Why, yes.

FRANCES: Is Aunt Ethel really coming?

TONY: Why do you say that?

FRANCES: Because I can tell when you're lying.

(*TONY is very subdued.*)

TONY: Yes. Tomorrow she is.

(*FRANCES is very still.*)

Look, I'm sorry . . .

FRANCES: It's all right. I don't want an explanation.

TONY: No, really.

FRANCES: I'd rather not. It'll be humiliating. For both of us.

TONY: I'm going to feel rotten. In fact I do feel rotten already.

Unless you let me share what I think.

(*He waits, but she says nothing.*)

I mean, I know this sounds terrible, but the fact is, our relationship . . . well, *we* understand. It's a caring and loving relationship, with some eventual purpose. It's in the context of . . . well, of our future. Of one day marrying. I mean we've sort of joked about it. But I think that's what we've both thought. Haven't we?

(*He pauses. She doesn't answer.*)

I mean, you know I would *never* . . . the physical experience, I mean, you understand it's always in the context of a long-term commitment. An idea, if you like. Which both of us have. And which is terribly exciting.

FRANCES: But?

(*He looks at her mistrustfully.*)

TONY: But I have been getting worried how it may look to the rest of the world.

(He gets up quickly to stifle her reaction.)

I mean, you know I don't have any hang-ups. Personally. The biblical evidence is pretty inconclusive. We all know. We have advanced. Paul wasn't Jesus. You can read the Bible either way. All that so-called Christian morality, we understand it can be too narrowly interpreted. It's a question of what feels right in your heart. And with you it's always felt right. I promise you. I believe in the expression of God's love through another human being. In a serious context, it's good. But lately I don't know . . . it's made me uneasy.

FRANCES: Uneasy in yourself?

TONY: Yes. Partly.

FRANCES: Or uneasy for what the Bishop might say?

TONY: *(Indignant)* You know that's not fair.

FRANCES: Isn't it? I can see you're frightened. I'm not sure why.

Either it's your conscience or else you just don't want to get caught.

TONY: Please.

FRANCES: Well, which is it?

TONY: It isn't that easy.

FRANCES: Isn't it?

TONY: No.

(Now she is very quiet, fearful.)

FRANCES: Do you confess me?

TONY: No. No, of course not. But I don't really believe in confession.

(He looks miserably across at her, aware of how feeble this sounds.)

I wonder sometimes if a non-believer can get hold of these problems at all.

(FRANCES walks across the room and gets his raincoat.)

FRANCES: You'd better go. You'll be late for your meeting.

TONY: I can't go.

FRANCES: Why not?

TONY: Don't be ridiculous. I've told you my side. I've tried to communicate my thoughts.

FRANCES: Well, you have.

TONY: But what do you think?

FRANCES: Nothing. (*Shakes her head.*) Honestly, I have nothing to say.

(*TONY stands. He is gentle now.*)

TONY: Frances. Please say.

FRANCES: What does it matter? You've come this far without talking to me. It had to be dragged from you as it was. I feel I'm no longer even part of this. You've started not to look at me. Aren't I irrelevant? Aren't you in an argument with God? (*Hands across his coat.*) Here's your coat. (*Stops, close to him now.*) And look – for the record – I didn't make love in any 'context'. Whatever that may mean. I made love because I wanted you. Is that really such a terrible idea?

(*He smiles, a warmth suddenly reappearing between them.*)

I liked your innocence. You came up from Bristol, you were a Christian. All right, I got over that. Because your faith was fresh. It was simple. You managed to be a normal person as well. Yes, well exactly. It's a high compliment. After my childhood. (*Turns away.*) But it's over.

TONY: No, Frances. I'm not saying that.

FRANCES: No, I am. You've got the bug. I've seen it before.

(*Shakes her head, quiet now.*) All you want is to carry the Cross.

TONY: Not at all. Look, it's just . . . it's terribly complicated. It's team ministry. There are three churches. We try to minister to the whole area's needs. It is very exciting. It's also demanding. So anything that . . .

(*He pauses, disastrously.*)

FRANCES: That what?

TONY: I don't know how to put this . . . anything that dissipates my energy . . .

(*FRANCES is suddenly furious.*)

FRANCES: Yes, well, I think you should definitely leave.

(*But TONY rides in on top of her, confronting her at last.*)

TONY: It was exciting. It was wonderful. You know. All through ordination. No question, it was you who got me through. After everything. In every way, it was such a tough time. 'Am I worthy? Am I really up to it? Fulfilling God's mission on earth?' I found being with you in the evening was restful.

It seemed natural. Just to walk on the common. Listen to your office gossip. Not thinking about theology. But it's got harder since then. (*Looks at her anxiously.*) I've got frightened of drift. I want to be purposeful. I don't want complication in this new life. There must be 10 million people in this city, not a tenth of them have any idea what it is to experience God's love. Oh, it sounds stupid, I can see you laughing . . .

FRANCES: I'm not.

TONY: Look where we're working. It's nowhere, it isn't Brixton, it isn't even Kennington. Basically it's just a horrid great road surrounded by council estates. With thousands of people whose lives could be infinitely richer. It's my job to give them some sense of joy. How can I get on with it unless . . . unless my own private life is sort of cleared out the way?

(*She just looks at him.*)

At the moment it's messy. When I wake up, I think, today's the day I shall see her. Of course I'm thrilled. But also I feel a kind of dread. It raises questions. It's a feeling in my stomach. (*Shakes his head.*) I'm not sure I can afford that any more.

(FRANCES is very quiet.)

FRANCES: No, well, plainly.

TONY: You've been so good for me. You know I'll always want to be friends.

FRANCES: Why is there one word you're frightened to use?

TONY: Which one? (*Frowns.*) What word?

FRANCES: I'm not a Christian, so it doesn't frighten me.

TONY: I have no idea what you mean.

FRANCES: (*Smiles*) The word is sin. Why don't you use it?

You've been sinning.

(*He looks at her, silenced.*)

FRANCES: Well, isn't that what you think?

SCENE FOUR

Lionel's sitting room in a Victorian terraced house in South London. LIONEL is sitting opposite STELLA MARR. She is black, in her mid-twenties. She is in evident distress. LIONEL is gentle, patient, unobtrusive.

LIONEL: I see. Yes. And what can you do now?

(There's a long silence.)

STELLA: I dunno. That's what I came to ask you. I'm feeling terrible.

LIONEL: Yes.

STELLA: I feel awful. I can't work. I started takin' these pills.

LIONEL: Who gave you them?

STELLA: A doctor. I dunno. I never seen 'im again.

LIONEL: The same doctor?

STELLA: Oh no. I din' never meet that doctor.

(LIONEL pauses, nodding.)

LIONEL: I see.

STELLA: You don't. They just let you in, there's a nurse and then they knock you out. Then you wake up and it's over. 'Cept for me it wa'n't.

LIONEL: What do you mean?

STELLA: I 'ad to 'ave another one. They 'ain't done a proper scrape.

LIONEL: Uh-huh. *(Pauses again, waiting.)* Where was this?

STELLA: Lewisham. I din' understand it. They said they couldn' find it. So they 'ad to take another look.

LIONEL: Yes. How long between the two?

STELLA: Oh, it was a Monday. Monday's the slow day, it's the only day they'll let me off. *(Beginning to cry.)* So it was Monday, then Monday.

LIONEL: I see. Two Mondays.

STELLA: We 'ad to pay twice.

LIONEL: Who paid?

STELLA: Oh, Jabbai. 'E got money. 'E jus' din' wanna 'ave kids. *(Crying now.)* The second Monday they found it, then they threw it away.

(LIONEL sits watching.)

LIONEL: Yes, I see.

STELLA: 'E said 'e'd kill me.

LIONEL: Does he hit you?

(There's a pause.)

STELLA: About this, you know, I never seen 'im like it. Now I'm frightened. Suddenly, it was like that was it.

LIONEL: Can you go somewhere else? Do you want to leave him?

STELLA: I a'n't got no money. I've nowhere to go.

(LIONEL waits, silent.)

I cry all the time. I can't stop cryin'. That's what drives 'im mad. When I'm cryin', an' 'e says, 'Will you never stop cryin'?' an' I say, 'I'd like to', I can't. (Looks at him now.) That's why I came. What does the Church say?

LIONEL: What does it say? About abortion? (Pauses a moment, very quiet.) Abortion is wrong.

(Then he looks at her, unapologetic.)

STELLA: I couldn' 'elp it.

LIONEL: I know. I'm not saying you were wrong. You had no choice.

STELLA: I can't leave him.

LIONEL: I know. And also it's a marriage. We want your marriage to last. Is there a chance your husband might come in and see me?

(She looks at him mistrustfully.)

It's a stupid question, I'm sorry.

STELLA: I told my friend at work. She said, 'Why go and see a vicar? What can 'e do?'

(TONY appears at the door, surprised LIONEL's not alone.)

TONY: Oh Lionel, am I interrupting?

LIONEL: Tony, it's all right.

(But STELLA has already begun to get up.)

We're just going to pray.

STELLA: (Alarmed) What?

LIONEL: Shut your eyes.

(He closes his own, leaving her with no choice. TONY does too.)

O God, who understands everything, please be good to Stella here. She needs love. Make her pain less and give her the

strength to bear it. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

TONY: Amen.

(They open their eyes. There is a short, charmed silence, like a spell.)

STELLA: Will that help?

LIONEL: I don't know. It can't do any harm.

(He gets up to say goodbye to her.)

I'll call by your salon. I haven't much hair. But you can cut it.

STELLA: Oh, I only wash.

LIONEL: Yes, I'm sorry. I wish I had more.

(He fingers the fringe at the back of his head. Then takes her hand.)

I don't know if God'll help you. But now you do have a friend. You have me. This house is always open. Whenever you're lonely.

STELLA: Oh, I see. Is that it?

LIONEL: Yes. *(Nods.)* That is the service.

STELLA: Oh. *(Stands a moment, uncertain.)* Well, thanks very much.

(He smiles at her as she leaves. Then turns his attention to the piles of duplicated papers on the table.)

LIONEL: Tony, hello, I apologize, the clock overtook me.

TONY: What was all that about?

(LIONEL throws him a brief disapproving look.)

LIONEL: Will you give me a hand? I've Cyclostyled all this stuff.

TONY: Sorry. Breach of confidence.

(But he doesn't move to help LIONEL with all the paperwork. He waits.)

It's none of my business. I'm just interested. I've been thinking a lot about how we handle things. Did you know her?

LIONEL: No.

TONY: Is she a churchgoer?

LIONEL: I wouldn't think so. She just dropped by for help.

(TONY nods. LIONEL works, sorting papers into piles.)

TONY: I mean, I don't know what you'd been saying before I came in.

(LIONEL starts stapling A4 sheets together. TONY watches.)

I tell you, it just occurred to me . . . I could see she was in distress.

LIONEL: She'd had a very bad experience.

TONY: You did say a prayer, but it was very low key.

LIONEL: Yes.

TONY: No, my question is . . . I know the theory, I know the theory of 'Let them come to you', 'don't judge' . . .

LIONEL: That's right.

TONY: But is it deliberate you never mention the Bible at all?

LIONEL: If I give her a Bible, her husband will find it. Poor thing, she's not all that bright.

TONY: Oh, I see.

LIONEL: If he finds out she's been to see me, he'll get even more hostile. The marriage is in trouble already. We don't want to make it worse by making him feel the do-gooders are all ganging up on him.

TONY: Goodness. (Nods.) You have to think of everything.

LIONEL: Yes. You'll get used to it.

TONY: So what will happen to her?

LIONEL: I don't know. (Turns hopelessly.) I can call the Social Services. You know the mess they're in. And to say what? There's a young woman hooked on antidepressants who's living in fear of her husband? You know what they'll say? 'So what else is new?' Or else they'll refer her to a doctor. Well, it's the doctors who got her into her present state. They referred her to me. And so on. For ever.

TONY: Lionel, isn't it . . . I'm just asking the question . . . isn't this the perfect moment to tell her about Christ?

(LIONEL turns and looks at him, as if for the first time really taking him in.)

Look, please don't think I'm interfering . . .

LIONEL: Not at all . . .

TONY: I'm not. But you're the team rector. Do we need a team policy?

LIONEL: I'm not sure.

TONY: To deal with exactly this kind of case?

LIONEL: Stella's not a case. She's a person.

TONY: Naturally.

LIONEL: And there's something distasteful in what you're suggesting. I don't approve of cashing in on people's unhappiness. It's very dangerous, because someone is in grief to think, 'Oh, good.' We're not salesmen. We don't look at people's suffering and think, 'Oh, this is excellent, now we've got a foot in the door.'
(*He looks at TONY, now checking the vehemence of his tone.*)
Whatever we are, we're not ambulance chasers. If the need is there, it will show.

TONY: Well, yes, but what if it doesn't? I mean, what are we telling her?

LIONEL: I'm not telling her anything. I'm just hoping she'll come back. Perhaps when her husband's more rational. And then one day she'll find life is easier with a religious dimension.
(*He sits down, his papers in front of him.*)
(*Then, quietly.*) Or, on the other hand, maybe she won't.
(*TONY is looking at him, shocked, when they are interrupted by the REVEREND DONALD 'STREAKY' BACON. He is in his early forties, in a duffel coat with bright orange reflector pads and bicycle clips. He also carries bicycle knapsacks. He is very cheerful and outgoing, in glasses and with a thick shock of hair.*)

STREAKY: Hello!

LIONEL: Hello, Streaky.

STREAKY: Can somebody tell me? Aren't cyclists people? Hello, Tony. (*Bends down to remove his clips.*) That's why I'm late.

LIONEL: You cycled in the rush hour? You're crazy. Do you want a cup of tea?

STREAKY: Lorries behave as if you don't exist. It's like going down a canyon. High wall on that side, high wall on the other . . .

TONY: I wonder, do you mind if I say . . .

(*LIONEL looks up, catching this, but STREAKY is taking his knapsacks off and putting them on the table, oblivious.*)

STREAKY: I could have been deaded. Like Neddy Seagoon. Or was it Bluebottle who was deaded? I can never remember.

LIONEL: (*Quiet*) It was Neddy Seagoon.

TONY: I'm sorry, Streaky . . .

(STREAKY stops, realizing he has interrupted something.)

It's just you walked in right in the middle of things.

STREAKY: Oh lawks, have I really? Is this the meeting? Did you start without me? Where's Harry?

(In comes REVEREND HARRY HENDERSON, who has a big McDonalds bag full of teas and coffees and apple pies. He is smooth-skinned, smooth-voiced, short and dumpy, in his mid fifties, in a green tweed jacket and grey flannels.)

HARRY: Harry's here.

LIONEL: Fine.

STREAKY: Good to see you Harry.

HARRY: Delighted to be here.

(He starts distributing the contents of the big paper bag.)

HARRY: Goodness, what a day!

STREAKY: Me too.

HARRY: Tea for you?

STREAKY: Thank you.

HARRY: And guess what I'm doing tonight. We're calling in the diocesan exorcist.

STREAKY: Gosh. Lucky chap.

HARRY: I know. I'm terribly excited. I've never done one. I've had to look up the service.

(LIONEL carries on sorting his papers. TONY is watching, still.)

STREAKY: I must say, I'm rather jealous.

HARRY: I know. It's a West Indian lady. With a lot of definite nocturnal movement. She asked me to stay the night actually. But I refused.

STREAKY: Very wise.

HARRY: I'm going to be shattered if something actually appears.

(He smiles and hands TONY a cup of tea.)

Here you are, Tony.

TONY: Oh, thank you.

HARRY: Are you all right?

(He stops, puzzled by TONY's manner.)

TONY: No, I'm fine. It's silly.

LIONEL: (Looking up) Please go on, Tony.

TONY: No, it's just . . . no, it's nothing . . . before you both arrived, Lionel and I were having a discussion.

HARRY: Oh, I see.

(TONY is looking across at LIONEL. HARRY waits, confused by the silence.)

What about?

TONY: We were discussing how much we should be pushing Christ at people, and how much they should be left to find him for themselves.

(There's a silence. HARRY nods.)

HARRY: Uh-huh.

LIONEL: Yes, that was it.

STREAKY: Gosh, well, that's a curly one . . .

LIONEL: Yes, well, you might say.

TONY: No, I'm sorry, this is the wrong moment . . .

HARRY: There isn't any problem. That's what we're here for.

Surely we can talk about things?

(He frowns, puzzled at TONY's unease. He looks round the three others. TONY nods.)

LIONEL: Surely.

TONY: It's just . . . look, really, I've no wish to criticize. It happened. I burst in on Lionel at work. There was this woman. Frankly, I watched her. I think *she* was fairly surprised. She'd come in, off her own bat, with a problem. We just said a prayer and sent her away.

HARRY: Well?

TONY: Well nothing. It's fine. As far as it goes. It's just . . . the churches are empty.

(He shrugs slightly. No one replies. LIONEL sits down, thoughtfully.)

TONY: I don't know. I'm just asking if these two facts are linked.

(There's a silence, no one wanting to jump in, waiting for LIONEL, who is impassive.)

STREAKY: Get you.

TONY: Look, we work hard, for goodness' sake. We're at it all hours. Perhaps we work so hard we have no time to stop and see what's happening. The statistics are appalling. We feel we've had a good Sunday if between us we attract one per cent. One per cent of our whole catchment area. All right, I know this is terribly vulgar, numbers aren't everything – it's

the quality of the experience and so on – but I would have said, look madam, actually next Sunday we will perform an act of worship which it might do you some real good to attend.

(They frown at this, thoughtful.)

STREAKY: Mmm, well, it's possible.

(TONY waits, then getting no response bursts with frustration.)

TONY: I want a full church. Is that so disgraceful? I want to see the whole community all worshipping under one roof. That's what I want. And that's what I believe the Lord wants as well. I'm the junior member, this is my first parish, I've no right to bring this up, I can tell, we can go about our business, we can look at our schedules, but really if in three years we don't fill the churches on Sunday, I'm sorry, then I think we'll have failed.

(There's a silence. STREAKY looks across from his tea.)

STREAKY: What do you say, Lionel?

LIONEL: Me? *(Frowns, coming out of a dream.)* Oh, I was thinking . . . I saw Charlie Southwark.

STREAKY: Golly. How was he?

LIONEL: Unchanged.

STREAKY: Good scoff?

LIONEL: Fishcakes.

HARRY: His wife's a very good cook.

LIONEL: Yes, I know. He told me.

STREAKY: You missed out with fishcakes. I had grouse the only time I went. I'd never had grouse. *(Chuckles happily.)* Isn't it something? Being a bishop, eh?

TONY: What did he want?

LIONEL: Charlie? *(Looks at him a moment.)* That's why I mentioned it. I was sitting here thinking, 'Where have I had this feeling before?'

STREAKY: What, you mean with the bishop?

LIONEL: And with Tony. You give me the same feeling.

(He now looks at TONY very directly.)

STREAKY: My my.

TONY: What feeling?

(LIONEL is very quiet, as if the others weren't there.)

LIONEL: Forgive me. It's like I'm being pulled into line.

(HEATHER ESPY comes in. She is in her early fifties, but has adopted an older look. Skirt and cardigan, her hair prematurely grey.)

HEATHER: The paper man is here. You haven't paid the bill.

LIONEL: Oh Lord, I haven't had time to go to the bank.

(They have all got up.)

Does anyone have any money?

STREAKY: I've got some.

LIONEL: Thank you, Streaky.

(STREAKY has got out his wallet.)

HEATHER: And I need to go to the Asian shop.

(LIONEL looks appealingly at STREAKY who counts out more notes.)

TONY: How are you, Mrs Espy?

HEATHER: Oh, I'm very well, thank you, Tony. (Takes the money.) Lionel, you know it's Alex's concert?

LIONEL: Yes. Absolutely.

HEATHER: You won't let him down?

LIONEL: I may let him down. But I'm not yet admitting it.

(She looks at him.)

LIONEL: Please, I shall try. Thank you, darling.

HEATHER: I'll see you all later. Are you staying for supper?

(STREAKY looks between them all.)

STREAKY: We'll see.

(HEATHER smiles and goes. LIONEL has already shifted his papers into piles, and begun distributing them.)

LIONEL: Let's think. Now, where are we? A schedule for everyone. I've had to shift some visits for the sick.

HARRY: (Taking one) Thank you.

LIONEL: Streaky, if you could do a couple of extra home communions, then I can do the hospital on Wednesday afternoon.

STREAKY: Yes gladly.

HARRY: Look at this. He hasn't left me a single empty square!

(Shakes his head at the schedule.) Will I ever get my nice parish in the country?

STREAKY: You'd hate it.

HARRY: I don't know.

(LIONEL *slaps down another load of paperwork on the table.*)

LIONEL: Bumf. (*More.*) Bumf. I must say, I sometimes think that if the Lord Jesus returned today, the Church of England would ask him to set out his ideas on a single sheet of A4.

(STREAKY *has got up and is now undoing his knapsack.*)

STREAKY: Oh listen, that reminds me, I called by Church House on the way. (*Piles pamphlets on to the table.*) A gross of *Mission in the City*. (*Holds up another.*) Look, it's called *Not on Your Knees. The Art of Prayer in a Divided Society*. Here's another. *Not Strangers but Pilgrims*. (*He is looking at the cover, and laughs.*) I haven't the slightest idea what that means. You can read it on ghostwatch.

(*He turns to HARRY, laughing. HARRY takes it. LIONEL is now assembling papers of different colours for committee meetings, which he begins to hand out.*)

TONY: Look, I'm sorry, are we going to talk about what I just said?

LIONEL: If you like.

(*He looks up from the table. He is very mild.*)

TONY: It does *matter*.

LIONEL: Yes. But this *matters*. (*Smiles, holding another batch of paper.*) In a way I think, Tony, this *matters* more.

(*He gets up and walks across to him, offering more paper. Very quietly.*) Pink? And do you have green?

(TONY *takes them and goes to sit down, rather sulkily.*)

TONY: So what did you think of my criticisms?

LIONEL: What you saw was an exercise in pastoral duty.

Everyone does it differently. In my view, that's fine. As long as you do it from the heart, in a way which is unforced and that suits you, then there's no problem. The problems start when you step out of character. That does no good at all.

(*Smiles.*) I saw a black preacher – a woman – just the other day, stop at a bus queue. She couldn't resist it. There hadn't been a 2B for hours. And she just started telling them that Christ was their saviour. I admired her. That's her style.

There's nothing wrong with it. Far from it, it's wonderful.

(*Looks across to TONY.*) But if I did it, it would be wrong.

(He shrugs slightly, the matter closed, as TONY frowns, uncomprehending.)

TONY: Yes, all right, but you can't just be complacent.

LIONEL: I'm not.

TONY: We're in a team, we must have something in common.

LIONEL: We do.

TONY: Well, what?

LIONEL: A desire to help people.

TONY: And?

LIONEL: A belief.

TONY: Yes. Are we making that clear?

(LIONEL looks at him, as if there is no answer to this.)

And in what?

LIONEL: In God Everlasting. As I understand it. And in his Son, who came so that people might know God was close. And in the Holy Spirit. Who of the three always seems to me much the most mysterious. Much the shadiest, as you might say.

(He smiles, and STREAKY and HARRY smile too.)

STREAKY: Yes.

(TONY looks between them, bewildered by their shared humour.)

TONY: But does anything else hold us together?

LIONEL: Of course. I'd have thought that was obvious.

TONY: Not to me.

(LIONEL smiles again, STREAKY looking down as if he knew the answer.)

LIONEL: Why, Tony, surely the fact that we're friends?

SCENE FIVE

The church. The REVEREND TONY FERRIS is on his knees, praying to God. He is fairly irate.

TONY: You know I'm damned if I get this. I'm damned if I know what the hell's going on. Forgive my language. It's only a year or two since I was a student. I was a completely different person. You remember. I was easygoing. I liked going to the Film Society and running the Campaign for Real Ale. But

now . . . I can actually feel my sense of humour departing. It's gone. I mean, can you tell me, is anything *right* with the Church? I mean, is the big joke that having lived and died on the Cross, Jesus would bequeath us – what? – total confusion, a host of good intentions, and an endlessly revolving Cyclostyle machine? Is he really entrusting his Divine Mission to people like the Reverend Donald Bacon, universally known as *Streaky*?

I've got to pray for Lionel. I've got to. We are individuals. We have souls. Christ didn't come to sit on a committee. He didn't come to do social work. He came to preach repentance. And to offer everyone the chance of redemption. In their innermost being. That's why he came. God, please help Lionel to see this. Because otherwise I think things are going to get rough.

SCENE SIX

Harry's flat in Lambeth. It's warmly lit, in the evening, attractively decorated in a comfortable style. EWAN GILMOUR is in his early twenties, in light jeans and a shirt, with no shoes on. He is reading a comic. On a table beside him under a lamp, is a pile of comics. HARRY is standing immediately over the pile. He picks up a small passport-sized photo. EWAN is Scottish.

HARRY: What's this?

EWAN: Oh, it's a photo. From one of those machines.

(HARRY puts it down.)

HARRY: And you want me to find it? Is that why you leave it there?

EWAN: I don't know what you mean.

(He carries on reading his comic.)

HARRY: Are you going out?

EWAN: No. Are you?

HARRY: How long are you staying for?

EWAN: I don't know. Till I've read a few books, I suppose.

(HARRY goes and sits down, takes out a pad of paper and a pen.)

EWAN: Is that all right?

HARRY: Yes, of course. I've got to write my sermon.

EWAN: Make it good.

HARRY: Yes, I will.

(HARRY starts to write. Then EWAN looks up.)

EWAN: It's no one. It's just a friend of mine. He gave me a lift.

Down part of the motorway.

(HARRY goes on writing.)

What do you want? What do you want me to say? Give me the bloody photo.

HARRY: It's there.

EWAN: We were arsing about. *(Reaches for it and puts it in his pocket.)* I need a job.

HARRY: Yes, I know.

EWAN: I'm going to go back.

HARRY: Go back up to Glasgow? Yes, well, if you can't get work here, then you should.

(There's a pause. Then EWAN is suddenly bitter.)

EWAN: All right, then, what? What do you want? I don't speak to anyone? You tell me, is that what you want?

HARRY: I don't want anything.

(EWAN looks down.)

EWAN: I can get a job actually. From a man. I could get it, I'm sure.

You know that theatre in a pub? In the Kennington Road?

HARRY: Ah yes.

EWAN: I met a friend of the guy who runs it. He said you two were at Cambridge together.

HARRY: Yes, I know who you mean.

EWAN: Do you think . . .

(He stops a moment.)

HARRY: What?

EWAN: Just have a word with him? Say you know me? And how like I'm very good. Will you?

HARRY: Yes. *(Pauses, looking at him.)* I mean, if you like.

EWAN: You don't want to?

HARRY: I'll do it.

EWAN: Is even that too much?

(There's a pause.)

HARRY: No. Not at all.

(EWAN looks away.)

EWAN: Do you know what I hate?

HARRY: No, I don't.

EWAN: I hate the bloody Church.

HARRY: Ah yes.

EWAN: They're a bunch of hypocrites. I thought the whole deal was meant to be about love.

HARRY: So it is.

EWAN: And you can't go to a friend and say, there's this young man, please will you give him a job?

(HARRY just looks at him.)

What a bunch of bloody hypocrites.

HARRY: Yes, well, you've said.

EWAN: (Suddenly shouts) I need a job.

HARRY: I know. We will get you one.

EWAN: But not too near you, is that what you mean?

(There's a pause. HARRY puts his pad aside.)

HARRY: (Quietly) I've always told you. It's very simple. There are people in the parish who don't like the idea.

EWAN: And there are so bloody few of them, you can't afford to lose one.

HARRY: It isn't like that.

EWAN: They've got you, Harry. And they know it. You have no choice. They can be as vindictive and nasty as they want to be. And you have to put up with it. You have to dance to their stupid tune.

HARRY: It isn't true. It's simply . . . (Pauses, to make his thoughts clear.) I am the vessel. I am only the channel through which God's love can pass. That makes me, as a person, totally irrelevant. As a person, nobody should even be conscious I'm there. If I do something which is in any sense worrying . . . if I upset my communicants in any way, then the focus is moved. From the Lord Jesus. On to his minister. And that is not where the focus belongs.

(EWAN turns away. HARRY smiles.)

Yes. It doesn't matter whether I wish things might be different . . .

EWAN: It's hypocritical.

HARRY: I may disapprove of their intolerance. However. It's as if I chose to walk down the street in a bright red suit, blowing bubbles out of my ears. It would distract attention. It would alter the agenda. And that is something for which God would not forgive me. And rightly.

(EWAN *shakes his head, in pain.*)

EWAN: Why don't you fight? Why don't you fight for me? That's all I want. To be loved enough so that someone will fight for me. So that I can start to exist.

HARRY: I would like to fight. But it's not possible.

(*It is suddenly very quiet. HARRY has tears in his eyes.*)

Ewan, don't give up on me. Without you, I'm chaff.

(*There is another silence. Then EWAN gets up from his chair, moved and angry.*)

EWAN: Why do you do this? It's not fair. What is it? You always upset me so much. I come down to London with such high hopes. There's never any comfort. I want some comfort, you know.

HARRY: Yes.

EWAN: I'm an actor. Everyone looks to me to say, 'You're not an actor, you're a speck of dirt. You're dirt. "If you're an actor, then act."' (Turns to HARRY, replying) "I can't act. I can't get a job."

(HARRY *looks down.*)

And then I don't exist here. It's worse. More not existing. I find myself shouting at you.

HARRY: Yes.

EWAN: You sit there.

HARRY: I do.

EWAN: And you never come back at me. Why do you think I'm fart-arsing about on the motorway? Why do you think I leave photos around?

(*He looks at him.*)

I just need a gesture.

(HARRY *smiles.*)

HARRY: I'm a priest. I have to soak up my punishment.

EWAN: I come here because no one else loves me. And yet I always leave here confused.

HARRY: Yes.

(EWAN turns away.)

EWAN: Let's go for a drink. Not on the other side of London.

Right here. The bar down the road.

(He turns, catching the momentary hesitation in HARRY's eyes.)

All right, forget it.

(Before HARRY can protest, EWAN shouts.)

Forget it. All right? (Goes back to his chair angrily, and begins putting his shoes on.) Read me your sermon. Why not? Read it. I want to know. What you will say. Next Sunday. I'll be in Glasgow. I'm going back. I've had it.

(HARRY looks at him, not moving.)

If I could be with you . . . if I were with you . . . come on, tell me . . . what would I hear you say?

SCENE SEVEN

The glistening tarmac of a South London street in the rain at night. Streaks of coloured light. TONY is standing, half-hiding, hesitant in a doorway, his hands in his pockets against the cold. Then from where he is looking comes JABBAI MARR, in a tan leather jacket, in his thirties, West Indian by descent. He is heavily built. TONY is about to step into the darkness to avoid him, but JABBAI catches sight of him.

JABBAI frowns and moves across to him, saying nothing.

TONY: Hello. Good evening.

(JABBAI just looks at him.)

I'm sorry to bother you. I'm – Tony Ferris. I'm the curate at St Matthew's.

JABBAI: Yeah?

TONY: Is that your house? (Nods in the direction JABBAI has come from. JABBAI does not answer.)

I'm just making a call. We're visiting as many parishioners as we can to remind them the church is open. It's yours. Please feel welcome to use it. And our job as clergy will be to help you. In any way you like.

(JABBAI says nothing.)

If that's all right. (*Looks down a moment, seeing that JABBAI is not going to move on.*)

Also, I was hoping to speak to your wife.

JABBAI: She e'nt there.

TONY: Uh-huh.

JABBAI: Who wants her?

TONY: Well, me.

(*There's a pause. JABBAI is staring at him.*)

TONY: She came in. She came in to see us once. This is by way of a follow-up. We're following up. She came to us. It was at her wish.

JABBAI: Are you the police?

TONY: No.

(*There's a silence. Then TONY changes tack.*)

Look, I'm sorry, if you'll just let me in to see her. If not, I can go to the shop.

JABBAI: She en't at the shop.

TONY: No. I tried there. They said she had an accident at home.

And she had to give up work. Is that right?

(*JABBAI does not answer.*)

TONY: Please. I'm asking. I'm just asking. They said she'd scalded one side of her face.

(*JABBAI looks at him a moment, then he begins to walk away. Suddenly TONY raises his voice.*)

TONY: Will you listen to me?

(*JABBAI turns back in disbelief.*)

JABBAI: What did you say?

TONY: I said, will you listen?

JABBAI: What business is it of yours? Vicar?

TONY: I'm not a vicar. I'm a curate.

(*A pause. TONY is dangerously angry, shaking slightly now.*)

I would like to see Stella.

JABBAI: No. (*Makes to move away again.*)

TONY: Come here!

JABBAI: What?

TONY: Come here. I am speaking to you. Listen!

JABBAI: What the hell is this?

TONY: Tell me, how is your wife exactly meant to have spilt a

saucepan of boiling water down one side of her own face?

JABBAI: (*Looks at him a moment.*) Ask her. Why don't you? That's what she said. She told them at the hospital.

TONY: Yes. I gather.

JABBAI: That's what she told them.

TONY: Yes.

JABBAI: She won't say no different to you.
(*A pause. JABBAI smiles slightly.*)

TONY: (*Raises his voice again*) I am coming in. Remember, she came to us for help. I have come to see both of you. I want to stop such a thing happening again.
(*JABBAI looks at him, knowing what he means. Then, decisively.*)

JABBAI: I don't know what you're saying, man.
(*He turns away to go, and at once TONY loses control completely.*)

TONY: You bastard . . .
(*TONY rushes towards JABBAI and tries to throw a punch at him. JABBAI steps back, and there's a messy scramble. TONY wild now, JABBAI just keeping out the way.*)

JABBAI: Now stop it, come on vicar. Stop that.
(*JABBAI suddenly jerks him round painfully. He wrenches at his arm. Then throws him off. TONY retches a moment, then turns back as if preparing to fight again.*)

Vicar.
(*TONY looks ready for another go.*)

Vicar.
(*A pause.*)

TONY: I shall go to the police. I'm going to get Stella out of this house.
(*JABBAI just looks at him.*)

You'll see me again.

JABBAI: Well, good.

TONY: You think I can do nothing? Yes? Because this is round my neck? (*Gestures at his collar.*) Well, you're wrong.
(*Stumbles off.*)

(*JABBAI stands a moment. In a doorway nearby, STELLA opens the door, afraid. In slippers and a nightgown, she is wearing*

dark glasses. *The side of her face is bandaged.*)
JABBAI: Stella, what the hell have you done?

SCENE EIGHT

The Espy's living room. HEATHER is coming in with a tray of coffee cups, followed by FRANCES, who is smartly dressed, fresh from work, a little nervous. It's evening.

HEATHER: You're welcome, Miss Parnell. I'm afraid it's only instant.

FRANCES: That's fine.

HEATHER: We don't have real. I don't think we've seen you before.

FRANCES: No. I've simply heard about your husband.

(HEATHER has set the coffee down and is handing it out.

FRANCES stands.)

What a nice house.

(HEATHER does not look at her.)

HEATHER: He's on his rounds. He gives Communion to the housebound on Tuesdays. Then he's Chairman of the local school.

FRANCES: Really?

HEATHER: Yes. And a housing charity. Also ex-prisoners. There's a discussion group. And the mentally ill. They believe now in something called 'care in the community'. That means closing down the hospitals and letting them wander the streets. So Lionel does a group. That's also Tuesdays.

FRANCES: I wonder you see him at all.

HEATHER: Well, I don't.

(FRANCES frowns, puzzled by the mildness of HEATHER's manner.)

FRANCES: And you have children?

HEATHER: Alex is studying the clarinet. Lucy's in London.

FRANCES: Isn't this London?

HEATHER: Oh yes. *(Nods. Vaguely.)* Somewhere else in London, I mean.

(FRANCES nods at the piano.)

FRANCES: Who plays the piano?

HEATHER: Oh, I did. Not any longer. Lionel can't think when I play. So I stopped.

FRANCES: So what do you do instead?

HEATHER: Well, there's the garden.

(There's a pause. FRANCES waits.)

FRANCES: Yes?

HEATHER: Would you like some more coffee?

FRANCES: No, thanks. *(Smiles nervously.)* I was . . . I am friends with Tony.

HEATHER: Tony?

FRANCES: Your husband's curate.

HEATHER: Ah yes. Tony. *(Frowns, as if thinking about it.)* Is he a nice man?

(But before FRANCES can answer, LIONEL comes in.)

LIONEL: Ah, there you are Miss Parnell. We spoke on the telephone.

FRANCES: Yes.

LIONEL: Tell me, are you an East Anglian Parnell?

FRANCES: Yes, sort of.

LIONEL: I thought so.

(HEATHER has already got up to move round to get LIONEL coffee.)

HEATHER: Do you want some coffee?

LIONEL: Thank you, Heather.

HEATHER: She's a friend of Tony's.

LIONEL: Well, good.

(FRANCES smiles, still standing.)

How well do you know him?

FRANCES: Oh, really well. His parents were killed. A while back.

LIONEL: Yes, I knew that.

FRANCES: I helped him through it.

HEATHER: Lionel, I'll be in the back.

(HEATHER slips out. FRANCES looks across at LIONEL.)

FRANCES: Tony doesn't know that I asked to see you. It's nothing really to do with him.

LIONEL: No?

FRANCES: Not directly.

LIONEL: So how can I help?

FRANCES: For once, it's the other way. I've come to help you.

(*Smiles.*) Yes, I know. Really it's an impertinence. It's caused me a good deal of thought. What happened was, I went home at the weekend. To my parents. They're still in Norfolk. The house was full of bishops. Nothing unusual in that. You probably know I'm from a big churchgoing family.

LIONEL: The Parnells. Of course.

FRANCES: But I'm afraid this weekend they were talking about you.

(*There's a pause.*)

I'll stop if you like. If you think this is wrong of me.

LIONEL: Which bishops?

FRANCES: Manchester. Chester. Exeter. And Charlie Southwark.

LIONEL: Mmm. (*Looks down.*) Yes. That doesn't sound good.

FRANCES: No. It was my uncle. He'd got them together. He's chairman of the agency. He's pitching for the church's account. He's offering our services free. To promote the church. Billboards, leaflets, national mailshots. Moving with the times. You understand me?

LIONEL: Only too well.

FRANCES: Yes, I agree.

(FRANCES *smiles, having caught his tone. He smiles ruefully too.*)

It's all bullshit. But it would be very good for the agency's image. To have the church on its books. People always claim advertising's unethical.

LIONEL: Yes.

FRANCES: And in return, well, the church needs exposure. It needs money.

(LIONEL *nods, depressed.*)

LIONEL: I see.

FRANCES: That was the point of it. But then at dinner there was a lot of talk. You know how it is. They were moaning, as bishops do. Chester said if they were running any other kind of business they could make rational decisions. They would have some power to do what they want. They all agreed.

LIONEL: Yes.

FRANCES: They could do what was necessary.

(LIONEL *smiles*.)

Southwark wants to get rid of you. (*Waits for a reaction.*)

Well?

(*There's a silence.*)

LIONEL: I don't have a reaction. It's what I expect. (*Then he smiles at her.*) I did actually meet you.

FRANCES: When?

LIONEL: Years ago. In a deanery garden. In Norwich. You were a little girl in a pink dress. I was just on the verge of getting married, I remember.

(FRANCES *smiles*.)

You were incredibly beautiful.

(*He looks at her. She's embarrassed.*)

It's the sole advantage of being a priest. Sometimes you can say what you think. Looking at you now, nothing has changed.

(*He smiles, FRANCES looks down, bewildered by this change of direction. But LIONEL does not notice.*)

It's funny, I think I must have been thirty years in gardens. It seemed like for ever. When I was a young man. Taking tea in Hereford. Or York. Or Salisbury. Or Ripon. Or Worcester. Because that's where the churches were. Behind trellises. Singing plainsong, stuck away in the shires. But meanwhile the people had all moved to the cities. So the old Church had died. So had its values. We were slow to realize. (*Looks thoughtfully into the distance, barely present.*) And the new Church is having its troubles being born. (*Turns and looks at her.*) Is that the problem? Is that what they're saying? That I've bought what they call the whole inner-city package?

FRANCES: Look, you must see, this was just dinner, there wasn't a very high level of debate . . .

LIONEL: It upset you, though?

FRANCES: Yes.

LIONEL: Enough to come here?

(FRANCES *swallows hard, before weighing in.*)

FRANCES: You see my impression is it's not to do with theology.

LIONEL: Ah.

FRANCES: It's nothing to do with how liberal you are.

(There is a pause.)

What Southwark is arguing is that you're ineffective.

LIONEL: Is he?

FRANCES: I'm paraphrasing.

LIONEL: Yes.

FRANCES: His language was much more personal.

(There is a pause.)

LIONEL: Ineffective in what way?

FRANCES: He says in the Church the old crowd is totally bewildered by your manner. And there is no new crowd.

(LIONEL nods sagely.)

LIONEL: Who can say? He's very possibly right.

(FRANCES is spooked by his response.)

FRANCES: Look, I don't know . . .

LIONEL: Please . . .

FRANCES: Perhaps I shouldn't have come here.

LIONEL: No. Not at all.

FRANCES: I also saw Tony.

(There's a pause.)

He is in quite a strange mood. I'm frightened for him. There was some incident. Did you hear?

(LIONEL shakes his head.)

Well, afterwards he got very drunk. That's when I saw him. Now he's given up drink. He says, for ever. You know Tony.

LIONEL: Yes.

(He smiles tolerantly.)

FRANCES: I believe he hit a man.

LIONEL: I didn't know this.

FRANCES: Yes. He got into a fight.

LIONEL: Gracious.

FRANCES: He's spinning like a top, Mr Espy.

LIONEL: Lionel.

FRANCES: He's wild. He's out of control. The night he burst in, he was quite alarming. He went round shouting, 'Waffle! Waffle!' at the top of his voice all the time. He said, 'What are we offering? What are we actually offering?'

(LIONEL frowns.)

LIONEL: What happened then?

FRANCES: Oh, you know. I couldn't get rid of him. He was raving. He said that everything must change. I went to bed. When I woke up, I went into the sitting room. He was still sitting at the desk. He just turned and looked at me. He said nothing. He then got up and walked out of the room.

(She looks down, hurt.)

LIONEL: Do you see him often?

FRANCES: No. I used to see him. The problem is exhaustion.

He's thrown himself at the job. He's incredibly naive in that way. He wants to get hold of people and solve them.

LIONEL: It's a common failing. When you first start. (Smiles.)

You go in too hard. Usually with a lot of talk about Jesus.

Always a danger sign in my experience. I'll have a word with him.

FRANCES: Yes. I have to be careful what I say now. I'm not sure that will quite do the trick.

(LIONEL looks at her.)

LIONEL: What do you mean? He no longer respects me?

FRANCES: He's been asked to attend the current Synod. As an observer. (Waits a moment.) I know what's going on. So does he.

LIONEL: Who asked him?

(There's a pause. FRANCES nods.)

FRANCES: Yes.

LIONEL: The Bishop?

FRANCES: It's not as if they're great friends.

LIONEL: No.

FRANCES: Southwark is assembling a case against you. And now he's going to ask Tony's help.

(There's a silence. LIONEL gets up and moves across the room. Then he shrugs.)

LIONEL: Do you know this area?

FRANCES: I live quite close.

LIONEL: It can be pretty punishing. It gives you pause. You have to think all the time about what the job is. Mostly, in fact, it's just listening to the anger. One reason or another. Lately

it's the change in the DHSS rules. If you're young, setting up home, you can no longer get a loan for a stove, unless you can prove you'll be able to pay the money back. I've had three couples in the last week. They need somewhere to go to express their frustration. Everyone does. They don't realize it. But that's why they're drawn to a priest. They're furious. At their lives. At the system. At where they find themselves. (*Smiles*) And the vicar is the one man who can never hit back. (FRANCES is puzzled.)

FRANCES: Yes, but I mean . . .

LIONEL: What?

FRANCES: You can fight in this case?

LIONEL: (*Looks at her, in a dream*) I'm sorry?

FRANCES: You do still have the will? I mean, I see what you're saying, about being the punch-bag. But surely you do want to fight? Don't you? You won't sit there like a lemon and just let them dislodge you?

LIONEL: Oh, Good Lord no, I wouldn't do that.

FRANCES: (*Frowns, unsure*) I don't understand. The bishops were saying, there's a rule of freehold . . .

LIONEL: Normally, yes. A vicar is given his church. In perpetuity. The system protects the clergy against over-mighty bishops.

FRANCES: Yes. But Southwark said you'd given your freehold up.

(LIONEL stops dead.)

LIONEL: Good Lord, did he say that? That's a bit cheeky.

FRANCES: Yes, but was he right?

LIONEL: Well, technically, yes.

FRANCES: He said you'd accepted a short-term contract.

LIONEL: That's one way of putting it. (*Sees she is looking at him doubtfully.*) It's a technicality, that's all.

FRANCES: How?

LIONEL: Well, obviously, it's to do with team ministry. If all your policies come from the churches being pooled, how do you get rid of a vicar who isn't willing to pull his weight in the system? It was a problem. So we decided, just in case we didn't get on, we'd go for a formula which put the interests

of the team first. (*Smiles contentedly*) The Bishop, to be fair, was terribly keen on it.

FRANCES: Yes, well he would be, wouldn't he?

LIONEL: Oh really, Frances, don't be ridiculous. People don't think like that.

(FRANCES suddenly finds herself leaning forward and shouting at him.)

FRANCES: I was at the dinner. Southwark is in earnest.

LIONEL: It's all right. I am not an absolute fool.

(LIONEL is quiet. FRANCES blushes, shocked by her own outburst.)

FRANCES: No, really, of course I didn't mean that . . .

LIONEL: I'm not an idiot, I could see there might be a difficulty there. So I went to my suffragan bishop.

FRANCES: Is that Kingston?

LIONEL: That's right. (*Nods.*) I said, look, we think the new system's marvellous, much more progressive and so on, but between you and me, I know this is embarrassing, it won't be used, will it, as a way of throwing chaps overboard? (*Sits back.*)

And it was fine.

FRANCES: In what way?

LIONEL: He gave me a promise. There's no problem. Gilbert gave me his word. (*Blows on his hand, as if to signal the problem being blown away.*)

So there it is.

FRANCES: It is?

LIONEL: Shadow-boxing.

FRANCES: (*Frowns*) Lionel, can't Kingston be overruled?

LIONEL: Overruled? How?

FRANCES: I mean, Southwark just says no. 'Doesn't matter what my junior said. Forget it.'

LIONEL: No. You can't overrule a promise. How can you? (*Shakes his head, as if this were self-evidently absurd.*) It was freely given. It was in good faith. I mean, now I sound patronizing, which I always hate. But you don't understand the Church. It has its weak moments. But this was a promise. (*Smiles.*) And that's the end of it.

(FRANCES looks at him, worried, saying nothing.)

FRANCES: Perhaps at least you should talk to Tony.

LIONEL: Certainly. Good Lord, yes. Now where's my little diary?

(Searches through his clothing.) Probably not this week.

FRANCES: Lionel.

LIONEL: What?

FRANCES: Do it this week.

LIONEL: All right. I'm sorry. Yes.

(She gets up.)

FRANCES: And don't say you saw me.

(LIONEL smiles.)

LIONEL: Are you two . . .

FRANCES: What?

LIONEL: I was wondering . . . are you going out?

FRANCES: We were. But it's over.

LIONEL: Now I know Tony's crazy. To have given you up.

(As he says it, he is characteristically distant, dreamlike. She smiles.)

FRANCES: How do you know he did?

LIONEL: Ah, well . . .

FRANCES: Perhaps I gave him up.

LIONEL: No. Sadly. I wish it were true. But it's always the wrong way. He doesn't deserve you. (Looks away.) I'm sorry. That was unchristian.

FRANCES: Extremely.

LIONEL: No, well, it wasn't fair.

FRANCES: No. But it was human.

(He looks at her.)

I'd say it was the most reassuring thing that I heard. (Going to the door.) Call me if you need help.

LIONEL: I give help. I don't need it.

FRANCES: Not yet.

SCENE NINE

The church. FRANCES walks in, smiling. She looks round like one who has been away a long time.

FRANCES: This is stupid. May I say I don't even believe in you? Nor does anyone I know. Except my family. Who don't count. And Tony. And Lionel, possibly. In other words you're fielding a very weak team. I'd say you were Accrington Stanley. Whereas my lot – the non-believers – you'd have to say we're looking pretty sharp.

And we don't do that awful *claiming* you do. 'Well, they're Accrington fans really, they just don't go to the games.' 'Well, they're Accrington in their daily lives.' Every time someone does something nice, we don't say, 'Ah, there you are, that's the Accrington in them.' Or when the sun comes over the mountain, 'Oh, look, proof that Accrington exists.'

I didn't enjoy my visit with the vicar. Why did they choose him? It could have been anyone. Is Lionel that much worse than all the rest?

Or is he just unlucky? There isn't any justice, God knows. You're not a *moral* God. Your style is more 'What a sweet baby! Wham! Give it cancer!' Just glimpse happiness, board the wrong aircraft, and pfft! The whole thing's a joke.

If there were justice then I'd believe in you. I like the idea of justice better than God. Because God is arbitrary.

As everyone knows. Except Lionel. And he will very shortly find out.

SCENE TEN

A wine bar in Glasgow. A high bar, in the modern style. At the bar, sideways on, on a high stool, is TOMMY ADAIR, in his mid-fifties. He is fat, androgynous, oddly like a woman in drag, with wavy hair. He is smoking a cigarette, and has a sweet drink. EWAN has his back to us, leaning on the bar, drinking a half of lager.

TOMMY: Well, this is nice.

(EWAN does not turn.)

This is nice.

EWAN: I'm sorry?

(He turns, realizing it's him being spoken to.)

TOMMY: Aren't you a friend of a friend?

EWAN: Am I really?

TOMMY: I've got a lot of friends. What do you do on Sunday?

EWAN: Sunday?

TOMMY: Yes.

(EWAN *is mystified.*)

EWAN: What do you do?

TOMMY: Oh, I eat roast beef and make love to my wife. (*Smiles.*) I work for a well-known British institution.

EWAN: Oh aye.

TOMMY: Which comes wrapped in the Union Jack. So do I. So does my wife. With a bit of luck round five o'clock she sings 'Land of Hope and Glory'.

EWAN: I reckon you're a journalist.

TOMMY: Yes. How did you guess?

(EWAN *looks at him mistrustingly.*)

EWAN: Oh, I'm quick that way.

TOMMY: Yes, I gather.

(*There's a pause.*)

EWAN: What does that mean?

(TOMMY *picks up his drink.*)

TOMMY: I gather it's all been ruined by AIDS. On our paper we take a patriotic interest in deviant sex.

EWAN: Is that what you call it?

TOMMY: I hear since AIDS it's all got very boring. You can't actually *do* anything, is that right? Or are there ways round it?

(EWAN *just looks at him.*)

EWAN: How would I know?

TOMMY: That's what they tell me. They say you just lie there. And then you have to attend to yourself.

(EWAN *makes to go.*)

EWAN: I have to go.

TOMMY: Are you an actor? You look like an actor.

EWAN: Who told you that?

TOMMY: I bet you're really good. Aren't you? You look as if you could be really good.

(EWAN *hovers a moment, indecisive.*)

The readers, I'm afraid, are literal-minded. They need very long descriptions. In very short words. They don't look for a new way of putting it. As we know, it can only be put in so many ways. (*Smiles.*) Do you know what Lord Rothermere said?

EWAN: I don't know Lord Rothermere.

TOMMY: 'A newspaper should be like the sea. Every day different and every day the same.'

(EWAN *makes to go again.*)

EWAN: Right, thank you. I think I understand you.

TOMMY: The Church does not eat roast beef with its wife.

(EWAN *is still.*)

Ewan, I am talking about sums of money so large that they would fund the Press Council for a year. But we must have specifics.

EWAN: I'm away.

TOMMY: Please take my card.

(*He reaches out with it. EWAN moves over and takes it. Then puts it in his own half-finished drink.*)

EWAN: You'll never get me, you know? You won't get anyone. I'll tell you why. Because life in this country is such a bloody sewer. But what people still have . . . which is theirs . . . which belongs to them . . . which is precious . . . is what happens in private.

(TOMMY *does not react.*)

That's right. And that's why you want it. That's why you want to slime all over it. Because it is private. And in private, there's still some decency.

(TOMMY *smiles.*)

TOMMY: You've got a sweet smile. They said you had.

(EWAN *goes.*)

I'll be in touch.

SCENE ELEVEN

Church House. The empty chamber of the Synod. Early morning. A golden roof with a circular legend, in gold, HOLY IS THE TRUE

LIGHT AND PASSING WONDERFUL TO THEM THAT ENDURED IN THE HEAT OF THE CONFLICT: FROM CHRIST THEY INHERIT A HOME OF UNFADING SPLENDOUR, WHEREIN THEY REJOICE WITH GLADNESS EVERMORE. *From opposite sides appear 'STREAKY' BACON, together with HARRY HENDERSON, and, in full purple, the BISHOP OF KINGSTON, GILBERT HEFFERNAN. He is young for a bishop, only in his forties, and with lean jaw, and slim, athletic build.*

KINGSTON: Streaky.

STREAKY: Bishop. It's good of you to see us.

KINGSTON: I always forget you're a member of Synod. I don't know why.

STREAKY: I was voted in recently. Someone put me up for a lark. In a by-election. On a 'Mission not Maintenance' ticket.

KINGSTON: You're not 'Church in Danger'?

STREAKY: Well, actually not.

KINGSTON: Thank goodness for that.

(They both smile at this.)

STREAKY: I did flirt for a while with 'Prayer Book Preservation'.

KINGSTON: That's an excellent ticket.

STREAKY: You do know Harry?

KINGSTON: Of course.

(They shake hands.)

STREAKY: This is Harry's first visit.

KINGSTON: Well, you've chosen a good one. Freemasonry. It'll be lively.

HARRY: I hope so.

KINGSTON: Feelings run high.

(There's a moment's pause.)

We go back a long way. I was thinking it was Harry who first recommended me for *Thought for the Day*.

HARRY: Yes, it's true. *(Smiles nervously, hating this.)* I was at school with the producer.

KINGSTON: I haven't heard you lately.

HARRY: I'm afraid not. *(Looks down.)* That producer moved on, you know how it is.

KINGSTON: Yes. For some reason – I can't think why – they actually give me every other Friday.

HARRY: Yes. I've heard you.

KINGSTON: It's quite a burden, of course. The responsibility. For so many people it's their only contact with religion. Every time I do it, I say to myself, 'Think, Gilbert, think: yes, all right, jokes, fine, little stories, but finally are you stuffing enough into this slot?'

STREAKY: Yes.

(He takes a sidelong glance at HARRY, who looks ironically back.)

Yes, well, I sense that.

KINGSTON: In the studio there's a round table. Harry will know this. I think it's psychologically crucial, don't you? I always think, 'Right, I'm on one side and there on the other is Mrs Smith, getting breakfast, all the little Smiths, maybe Mr Smith's driving in to work, and just for a moment I say, "Hold on, Mrs Smith, a word in your ear."' *(Looks straight at STREAKY.)* And that has its place.

STREAKY: I'm sure she's very grateful.

KINGSTON: I get hundreds of letters.

(STREAKY takes a quick glance at HARRY.)

STREAKY: You could say . . . in a way . . . Harry sort of set you on your career.

KINGSTON: Yes. *(Pauses, not liking the turn in the conversation.)*
On part of my career.

STREAKY: Yes.

KINGSTON: One small part of it. Broadcasting is only one aspect of what I do.

STREAKY: Quite.

HARRY: *(Quietly)* I wouldn't claim credit.

(The atmosphere has cooled. But HARRY looks modest and genuine.)

KINGSTON: And what exactly did you want to ask?

(STREAKY and HARRY look to one another.)

HARRY: Well . . .

STREAKY: No, you say . . .

HARRY: It's about Lionel.

KINGSTON: Lionel, bless him.

HARRY: Yes. He's been very worried.

KINGSTON: He wouldn't be Lionel unless he were worried.

HARRY: No. There's a rumour his contract won't be renewed.

(There's a second's pause.)

KINGSTON: Really? Well, if there is, I haven't heard it.

HARRY: A couple of years ago, you gave him an assurance. On this very subject.

KINGSTON: Did I?

HARRY: Yes, apparently.

(A short pause.)

STREAKY: Lionel says you did. Didn't you?

KINGSTON: Well if Lionel said it, then I must have done.

HARRY: Will you testify you did?

KINGSTON: 'Testify'? What language! Are we at that stage? Isn't this what's called escalation? I mean, who has indicated otherwise?

(A silence.)

Charlie?

STREAKY: Yes.

KINGSTON: In what forum?

STREAKY: Someone heard him at dinner.

(KINGSTON raises his eyebrows slightly.)

KINGSTON: So isn't it best you go directly to him?

STREAKY: Yes. We just needed to check.

KINGSTON: Check?

STREAKY: That your memory was holding up. That you'd be solid, so to speak. In your recollection. Before we go to Southwark.

KINGSTON: *(Nods)* Yes, I understand. The last thing we want is an issue.

STREAKY: Quite.

KINGSTON: I would say the heart of my job was preventing problems growing into issues.

HARRY: It's in nobody's interest.

KINGSTON: No. *(Looks at HARRY a moment.)* I mean, for instance, look what's happening this morning . . .

STREAKY: The freemasonry debate?

KINGSTON: We all know it's extremely peculiar when they roll their trousers up and wrap hankies round their faces.

STREAKY: Indeed.

KINGSTON: But do they then perform an act of worship? That's the only question. If they do, then it's blasphemy. What's the result? Internal dissension. We give mortal offence to 50,000 people who are also members of the Church of England. And who are rather better than almost everyone at turning up every week. Why risk it?

STREAKY: I see that.

KINGSTON: (*Smiles*) But. If on the other hand, we form a committee, the committee commissions a report, the report is referred, saying well, er, almost, but this isn't *quite* an act of worship, not quite, and would the Masons mind changing just one or two words? Well then, what are we left with? A harmless eccentricity. Like scouting, say. Something men would rather not do in front of their wives. (*Pauses*) I mean, what I'm saying is, in private we may all feel differently, you wouldn't catch me worshipping an architect at the best of times. Perhaps if it came to the crunch, if you took me on my oath . . . (*Stops, significantly.*) But avoiding the crunch is what the whole thing's about.

HARRY: Yes, but you see it's not us who want the crunch.

STREAKY: It's Charlie.

HARRY: That's right.

(KINGSTON *looks thoughtfully between them.*)

KINGSTON: Is Lionel here?

HARRY: No. We . . .

STREAKY: Perhaps it was wrong of us. We decided we should take matters in hand. For Lionel. If you understand me.

KINGSTON: I see.

STREAKY: Lionel has a combustible curate. Who is developing a rather evangelical tilt.

KINGSTON: Oh dear.

STREAKY: Yes. He's young. And from all the best motives. But it's also . . . well, also the Bishop has asked to meet this particular curate.

(KINGSTON *frowns.*)

KINGSTON: Charlie has?

STREAKY: Yes. It's a touch ominous. They're meant to have dinner tonight.

(HARRY looks nervously to STREAKY.)

Actually we just had a session with Lionel. We told him it was vital he stay in the parish today and talk to this chap.

Explain to him it's essential he's completely supportive.

KINGSTON: Plainly that would be wise.

(He is looking at them very coolly now. HARRY speaks with silky quiet.)

HARRY: Mention the other thing.

STREAKY: Oh yes. I'm afraid there's one other factor, which could be quite ugly . . .

KINGSTON: (*Keeping calm*) Yes?

STREAKY: As you know, Lionel's church is just two miles from Westminster. There's a very nice Georgian terrace where MPs live because it's cheaper than Chelsea. One of these is currently Leader of the House. He hears Lionel's sermons. He's heard them for years. They tend to harp a bit on certain themes. The divided nation. The failings of materialism. The importance of devoting our lives to the poor. (*Pauses a second to see how this is going.*) He's a Tory minister who sits through it every Sunday. Imagine.

(KINGSTON looks at him unkindly.)

KINGSTON: Yes, I'm not sure you'll find this a very fruitful line of research.

(Both HARRY and STREAKY leap in at once, animated.)

STREAKY: I mean, come on . . .

HARRY: Let's face it, well, what other reason . . .

STREAKY: Gilbert!

(KINGSTON turns to them, loud now.)

KINGSTON: No! Absolutely not!

HARRY: We're looking for a *motive*.

STREAKY: Everyone *knows*.

HARRY: The minister is on the Ecclesiastical Committee of the House of Commons. You're not telling me he hasn't had a word with Southwark.

STREAKY: They play squash together!

(KINGSTON *shakes his head.*)

KINGSTON: This is really not something you should try to pursue.

HARRY: No?

KINGSTON: Under any circumstances. I couldn't help you. It's sheer innuendo. Southwark would go through the roof. And rightly. It's like a nail-bomb. You touch that subject, it goes off – are you crazy? – in every direction. (*Turns, confident.*) I can tell you right now, Arch would be furious. He's had it. We've all had it. And how on earth do you think you could prove such a thing?

(*He turns away a moment.* HARRY *smiles at STREAKY, pleased with this response.*)

Do you have any idea? Of what hell it is? Holding this bundle together? Oh, I'm sure from the parishes it all looks a big joke. That's because you're not actually involved. If you just stop and think for a moment . . . of what Arch actually has to do, every day . . . The tensions are impossible. Ever since we failed to confer on the Falklands expedition the theological status of a holy war. Church and State are held together by a single thread. (*Suddenly shouts, all his frustration coming out.*) It's not even a thread! It's dental floss! (*Turns away, muttering now.*) And you want to start making unfounded allegations.

(HARRY *is very quiet.*)

HARRY: Well, yes, that's exactly why we mentioned it. As something none of us would wish to bring out.

KINGSTON: I'm very glad to hear it.

HARRY: We won't bring it out, will we, Streaky?

STREAKY: Certainly not, old boy.

HARRY: Unless we have to.

KINGSTON: Have to?

HARRY: I mean . . .

(*He pauses, smiling seraphically.* STREAKY *watches in admiration.*)

If after searching inside ourselves, we discovered a moral obligation.

(KINGSTON *looks at him, unable to fathom the mildness of his*

manner.)

I mean, surely this is the very point you were making earlier, Gilbert? You were very eloquent.

KINGSTON: I'm sorry?

HARRY: About the Church's role. Being to smooth paths.

(There's a pause.)

KINGSTON: Quite.

HARRY: Sort things out in private.

KINGSTON: Exactly.

HARRY: Avoid the dangers of polarization. With all the distress open differences cause. Streaky and I both agree with you.

(Smiles slightly.) Good Christian practice means avoiding the crunch.

(KINGSTON looks at him a moment. He is imperturbable.)

KINGSTON: Perhaps we should ask the real Christian question.

(Pauses, suddenly sincere.) Is he a good priest?

(There is a moment. HARRY and STREAKY look to one another to answer.)

STREAKY: Harry's known him longer.

HARRY: How can you say?

(There's a pause.)

Lionel is patient and sincere.

KINGSTON: Is he a man of faith?

(HARRY looks down.)

HARRY: He's a man of conscience.

KINGSTON: What, and you think that's enough?

(There is a silence. KINGSTON moves away. A second or two passes, then a bell begins to toll distantly.)

All right, I'll help you look into it.

STREAKY: Thank you, Gilbert.

KINGSTON: Southwark won't like it. We're miles apart on women.

(STREAKY and HARRY look confused by this.)

STREAKY: What?

KINGSTON: Their ordination, I mean.

STREAKY: *(Smiles.)* Oh, I see.

(KINGSTON turns, about to go.)

KINGSTON: What I'm saying is, if I intervene, it may be counterproductive. But if you wish it.

HARRY: We'll take that chance.

(The doors throughout the hall are thrown open. Clergy and laity flock in to take their places. Men in legal wigs and gowns assemble at the central table, as the hall fills.)

KINGSTON: Well, here they come. The great debaters.

Democracy at work. The search for formulae with the maximum of ambiguity combined the minimum of offence.

The Lord in these matters guide us.

(He looks ironically to heaven.)

(A MALAYSIAN WOMAN rings a small handbell.)

WOMAN: The Synod is in session. Let us pray.

(At once there is silence. As the prayer in the hall continues, the lights go down until there is darkness.)

ALL: Our Father,

Which art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done,

On Earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses

As we forgive them that trespass against us,

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil,

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,

For ever and ever.

Amen.

SCENE TWELVE

The church. The lights have gone down through the prayers. At the end there is total darkness but for two candles in front of TONY's kneeling figure. Behind him, LIONEL stands, unnoticed. On TONY's face, a look of intense concentration. The organ plays, subliminally.

LIONEL: Tony.

(TONY doesn't hear.)

Tony.

(He hears but, transfixed, doesn't turn.)

TONY: It's you, Lionel.

LIONEL: You look like a ghost.

(TONY turns and stares at him.)

I came in. I wanted . . . to ask you to dinner.

TONY: Dinner? That's very kind. But I can't. I've got . . . another invitation.

LIONEL: Really?

TONY: In town.

LIONEL: Oh yes?

TONY: I'm going to see . . .

(He stops. There is a very long pause. LIONEL is quite still.)

. . . someone else.

(LIONEL smiles.)

LIONEL: Well, then, some other time.

TONY: Some other time, yes.

(He stares at him a moment.)

Well, I must be going, or else I'll be late. Good to see you, Lionel. *(Gets up from his knees.)* I'll see you soon.

(He begins to walk from the church. Then, towards the door, he accelerates and runs out.)

LIONEL: *(Alone)* I tried. Lord knows I tried. He wouldn't listen. I did all I could. He just ran out the door like a madman. It was out of my hands. *(Steps forward and looks up to heaven.)* What can you do, Lord? You tell me. You show me the way. Go on. You explain why all this hurt has to come. Tell me. You understand everything. *(Steps back.)* Why do the good always fight among themselves?

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

Savoy Hotel. The doors to the main dining-room. TONY is coming through the lobby, heading hesitantly in unfamiliar surroundings. As TONY reaches the dining-room doors, HARRY steps out from a hiding place.

HARRY: Tony.

TONY: Harry. What the dickens . . .

(At once the HEAD WAITER appears at the reservations lectern. He is wearing black tails).

HEAD WAITER: Are you meeting someone, sir?

HARRY: No. He's talking to me for a moment.

(HARRY puts his arm round TONY and starts to lead him away. STREAKY appears from the other direction.)

TONY: Streaky.

HARRY: Just keep walking and don't make a scene.

(HARRY and STREAKY seem both in high spirits. STREAKY takes a menu from the HEAD WAITER before following the others.)

STREAKY: I'll take that.

TONY: What is this?

HARRY: Jungle telegraph.

STREAKY: Crikey, what a nice hotel. Three cheers for the Savoy!

HARRY: They've redone it.

STREAKY: Oh really? Was that very necessary? Was it disgusting?

(He is very blithe. HARRY has steered TONY towards some seats in the lobby. Now he smiles at STREAKY.)

HARRY: They're eating in the River Room. But for me you can't beat the Grill.

(TONY looks at them, shaking his head, almost amused.

STREAKY sits down and reads the menu.)

TONY: You don't have much faith, do you?

HARRY: All right. Shall we have a drink?

(He smiles at TONY.)

Why not?

TONY: You know why. If your spy network is so brilliant. For all I know the Bishop's already arrived.

STREAKY: Probably has.

HARRY: Yes, well, you know why we need to talk to you.

(TONY looks at HARRY, *uncertain*. HARRY sits down.)

STREAKY: I'd have half-a-dozen oysters. And follow it up with Châteaubriand. Call it a Last Supper. (*Smiles up at TONY.*) And I wonder which one are you?

(TONY takes it in good part. He half-laughs and sits down reluctantly.)

TONY: You people are shits, do you know that?

HARRY: Of course. When I was at college I had a professor who said any Christian who doesn't have a doctrine of corruption is going to find himself in all sorts of trouble. You must have a doctrine of glory as well. And your doctrine of glory must be higher. (*Looks directly at TONY.*) But only by a little bit. (*Another WAITER has come and is standing next to STREAKY.*)

STREAKY: Three tequila sunrises. With cherries and umbrellas.

WAITER: Thank you, sir.

STREAKY: And the bill, if you see him, to the Bishop of Southwark.

(HARRY is still holding TONY's gaze, and now finishes his point.)

HARRY: And that is something which Lionel still has to learn.

(TONY turns out, *confused*.)

TONY: Don't bill the Bishop.

WAITER: I'm sorry, sir?

HARRY: My friend here is paying for the drinks.

(STREAKY is counting coins out on to the table in front of him.)

STREAKY: Let me see, pieces of silver, thirty-eight, thirty-nine, forty . . .

TONY: All right, very funny.

STREAKY: (*To the WAITER*) We'll pay you later.

(*The WAITER goes.*)

TONY: You don't have much confidence.

HARRY: You think not?

TONY: I'm not insulted for myself. If I was Lionel I might be. Don't you think he'll survive a little bit of scrutiny?

HARRY: We're only checking.

TONY: I thought you chaps came on strong about freedom.

Freedom of conscience. Freedom of action. Isn't that your big thing? Let people do what they like.

HARRY: Yes. *(Pauses)*. Within a framework of loyalty.

TONY: Loyalty to each other?

HARRY: Exactly.

TONY: And the other loyalty?

(There is a pause. HARRY replies with gentleness and sincerity.)

HARRY: What, which you understand better than us?

(The WAITER comes and puts down the drinks. There is a silence. No one speaks. He goes.)

TONY: Look, do you think I've come here without thinking?

HARRY: No.

TONY: It's an issue of conscience.

HARRY: It always is.

TONY: I think the parish is in a very bad way. I'm shocked by this. I want to do something about it. I have tried sitting Lionel down alone to discuss his approach. And he just stares at me. Ineffably. *(Shakes his head.)* Yes, I've heard all the familiar arguments. The Church of England's favourite quotation: 'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.' All right. We can say that. We can go on saying it. We can sit where we are and say it for ever. *(Turns away, bitter.)* Does it mean no one will ever cast any stone at all? *(There is a silence.)*

HARRY: Drink your tequila.

(TONY shakes his head.)

STREAKY: I'd forgotten. He's given up.

(TONY turns and looks at them.)

TONY: There was an incident. Do you know this? There was a woman. She'd had an abortion, I later found out. She came to Lionel for help. He fuffed about as usual and sent her away. He did nothing. And three days later, her husband threw a pan of boiling water all over her.

(HARRY looks across at STREAKY.)

Yes. It's directly connected. It's a fact. Lionel fell down on the job.

(STREAKY is outraged.)

STREAKY: That's completely ridiculous.

TONY: 'Don't judge.' Honestly, that's the sum of Lionel's wisdom. Well, it won't do. He should have *judged* the danger she was in. 'Don't interfere.' 'Let them come to you' . . . That's what he said. I heard him say it, as she walked, rather bewildered, out the room. Well, maybe. Perhaps one day she will come to him. Half blinded. (*Shakes his head.*) It could have been prevented.

STREAKY: Tony, this is absolutely insane.

TONY: No, it's not.

HARRY: It's not fair.

STREAKY: It's ridiculous.

TONY: Why?

(HARRY *sits forward, animated.*)

HARRY: Look, you've been here three months, you've seen the work we do . . .

STREAKY: It's one case. There are thousands.

HARRY: He's tired.

(TONY *seizes this, excited.*)

TONY: Yes. He's tired. And why is he tired? There you have it. That's my whole point. (*Pauses.*) Lionel is tired because he gets no strength from the Gospel. That's the very problem. He's tired because he isn't getting anything back.

(HARRY *is shaking his head, disbelieving.*)

HARRY: You can't say that of a priest.

TONY: Of course I can say it.

HARRY: Who are you to judge?

TONY: Have you seen him? Going down the street? In Brixton? His forehead is knotted. He gives off one message: 'Keep away. I carry the cares of the world.' It's true. People don't go near him. He reeks of personal failure. And anguish. Like so much of the Church.

(HARRY *is quieter now.*)

HARRY: And you think a man should be sacked for the expression on his face?

TONY: No. No of course not. (*Shakes his head.*) It's much more than that.

(HARRY *looks a moment to STREAKY.*)

HARRY: It's a very long way from saying he looks miserable, he's inefficient, and in your view, which is extremely partial, he may be theologically unsound . . . it's a very big step to talk of these things to his bishop.

(TONY looks at him, acknowledging the truth of his point.)

STREAKY: No one likes to say this, Tony. But you are very young.

TONY: Yes, I know.

STREAKY: You've only just started, old chap.

TONY: It's a formula for impotence. What is this? The Civil Service? (*Smiles.*) Put in twenty years and then you can speak? (*Shakes his head.*) I know I'm young. And, believe me, this has nothing to do with personal ambition. On the contrary.

HARRY: What do you mean?

TONY: I have considered it. I'm not blind. I could hardly do anything more calculated to prevent my advancement in the Church. Whatever I say, it will be seen as ratting on a senior colleague. I do understand the set-up.

HARRY: (*Frowns*) Nobody's threatening you, Tony.

TONY: No. (*Smiles.*) Thank you. They don't need to.

STREAKY: But you'll still take the risk?

(TONY looks at him. He is quiet now.)

TONY: I wouldn't have. Really. Certainly not. Until this thing happened. I went round to these people's house.

HARRY: The woman's?

TONY: Yes. I met the husband. He was insulting. He was just boasting the hurt that he'd done her. I swung a punch. And in that moment . . . I can tell you, it has changed me . . . I experienced a feeling of utter powerlessness. Yes. The Church can do nothing in our parish except witness to suffering. (*Looks at them, sure of himself.*) And I'm afraid I no longer think that's enough.

(HARRY smiles, hopeless.)

HARRY: That's not the point.

TONY: I'm tired of standing there and wringing my hands and saying, 'Oh, this is dreadful . . .' I think it's vital we now call a stop.

HARRY: What does that mean? (*Searches, bewildered.*) It doesn't mean anything.

TONY: Yes, it does. It means we all stand up and say, 'Look, enough.'

HARRY: Enough what? (*Genuinely lost.*) Will that help that woman?

TONY: There are things we believe in.

HARRY: Of course.

TONY: There is right and wrong.

(HARRY looks ironically at STREAKY.)

HARRY: Yes, nobody's denying it.

TONY: And people must also believe in these things. Not just us.

Other people as well. (*Looks at HARRY significantly.*) Yes.

That's my contention. They *must*. They must believe if they want to be saved.

(HARRY looks at him mistrustfully.)

HARRY: Yes, well, that's different . . .

TONY: Yes. It is different. It means, I'm afraid, there are sheep and goats. And if that means people are divided . . . if it means a certain harshness begins to creep in . . . just to make people *think* . . . well, I'd live with that. Because the alternative – going round smiling, sitting people down, have a little chat, very nice, nice to see you, *arrivederci* . . . that doesn't work. I've seen it. (*Smiles.*) Christ came not to bring peace but a sword.

(HARRY shudders.)

HARRY: Yes, I thought you might give us that one. It's a dangerous text. It may be corrupt. It's contested.

TONY: Any text with any life to it is now contested.

(*Before HARRY can answer, TONY rides in passionately.*)

Look, you know, I'm like you, I went along with it. For years I was the same, I saw it your way . . .

(*The WAITER has reappeared next to STREAKY.*)

STREAKY: Oh God, yes, please. It's essential.

HARRY: And waiter . . .

(*The WAITER stops.*)

With extra tequila this time.

(*The WAITER goes.*)

TONY: I remember at college we were lectured by a bishop.

Actually he was a very decent man. They all are. Everyone laughed at my question. I said, 'Bishop, what's the present thinking on hell?' 'Hell?' he said. 'Yes.' He said, 'Well, we believe in it.' I said, 'I see. Then why do we hear so little about it? It doesn't come up much in the pulpit these days.' He said, 'No. No, we try to downplay it. After all, we don't want to put people off . . .'

(They all smile.)

HARRY: All right, I agree, that's ridiculous . . .

TONY: Yes, you see, but it's *typical*.

HARRY: Of what?

TONY: You know what I'm saying. It's an attitude, Harry. 'Isn't it dishonest?' That's what I said then. 'If hell is in the prospectus, shouldn't it be mentioned? And not at the bottom, not hidden away, in very small print?'

HARRY: And what did he say?

TONY: He said, 'Get them in first. Get them on their knees. Loving God is so much harder than it looks. Let them discover that. But don't dwell on the drawbacks, or no one will want to join in the first place . . .'

(STREAKY smiles.)

STREAKY: I have to say it sounds good to me.

TONY: But it isn't. It doesn't.

STREAKY: I don't know.

(TONY sits forward.)

TONY: You see that's *Lionel*. There, in a nutshell. Anything rather than lay out the facts. The only effect of all his fiddle-faddle is to leave people confused. It's true. People need rules. They actually want to be able to say, 'OK, this I agree to.'

HARRY: Do they?

TONY: Yes. They do. And why not? *(Smiles at the neatness.)*

We've been *given* these rules and, by chance, what's extremely convenient, these rules are all set down in a book . . .

(The WAITER returns with larger drinks.)

STREAKY: Thank you, that's wonderful . . .

TONY: And this book is on sale, it's actually available . . .

HARRY: (*To the WAITER as he takes his huge drink from the tray*) Oh yes, yes, yes . . .

TONY: You can actually take it, you can actually go and say, 'What is the position on this? What is the thinking?' Oh yes. Look. There we are. Matthew, for instance. What does it say? Ah, there we are. There's a line. A little line of print. Actually written down. 'If a man do not believe in me, then he is damned . . .'

STREAKY: I see. Well, gracious.

HARRY: You can't be serious.

(*TONY shakes his head, decisive now.*)

TONY: The whole thing's become a racket. You know it has, Harry. Inner-city priesthood? It's a cartel. Based on a massive failure of nerve. It's like, faced with the problems, everyone's just caved in and said, Well there's no point in preaching. It's – what's the buzzword? – 'counterproductive'. People are 'put off'. So what's happened? We've let them decide what *our* mission is. (*Nods.*) You've become enlightened humanists. You do very good work. I mean it. God knows, fourteen-hour days covering for all the other community services. But when it comes down to it, that's not the whole message. It's got to be distinctive. People need more. They need more than . . .
(*He censors himself, stopping in mid-sentence.*)

HARRY: Yes?

(*There's a pause.*)

They need more than what?

TONY: I don't know. I was going to say . . .

(*He stops again.*)

HARRY: Why not say it, Tony? You've not spared us anything else.

(*He and STREAKY smile.*)

TONY: They need more than Lionel's weekly lecture on why they should be sucking up to the poor.

(*There's a silence.*)

STREAKY: If I weren't holding this drink, then I'd sock you.

HARRY: Plainly you've travelled a very long way. Very quickly.

(TONY looks down.)

TONY: Yes, I have, Harry. I knew you'd be horrified . . . (*Shakes his head.*) It isn't as if I haven't tried to change Lionel. But he's actually stubborn. That's what's absurd. Like, for a start-off, I said the other day, 'Look, there's this big Billy Graham crusade.' I asked, 'What are we going to contribute?' He said, 'Nothing. We don't like their methods.' I said, 'We can't afford to be choosy. Sometimes they do plant a seed.' He said, 'I don't need an aged American to help me.' (*Nods.*) Now that is actually racist . . .

STREAKY: Only sort of.

TONY: It's also ageist.

STREAKY: It's also remarkably good sense.

(TONY turns, animated.)

TONY: Yes, of course what he means is, we won't work with Billy Graham, ugh, we *can't* work with him, because he has this habit of touching people's feelings.

HARRY: Oh, Tony . . .

TONY: Yes. Like everything in England it turns out to be a matter of class. You just listen. Educated clerics don't like evangelicals, because evangelicals drink sweet sherry and keep budgerigars and have ducks in formations on their walls. (*Nods, smiling.*) Yes, and they also have the distressing downmarket habit of trying to get people emotionally involved. (*Stares at them.*) You know I'm right. And – as it happens – I went to a grammar school. I was brought up – unlike you – among all those normal, decent people who shop at Allied Carpets and are into DIY. And I don't think they should always be looked down on. And tell me, please, what is wrong in ministering to them?

(HARRY looks at him straight.)

HARRY: All right, then do that.

TONY: I shall. I'm going to start a Bible class.

HARRY: Good.

TONY: Midweek. In the church hall. Bible basics.

HARRY: Have you asked Lionel?

(TONY turns and looks at him.)

TONY: No. I haven't. Not yet. But I will. And he'll say yes. He'll

let me preach something quite different to what he believes in. Won't he?

(The three of them are all quite still now.)

Tell me, isn't that true?

HARRY: Yes, it is.

TONY: And do we call that strength? Or is it more like weakness?
(Smiles to himself.) Isn't that what we've got to decide? *(Looks round a moment, then gets up, his eyes searching the lobby.)*

Where is this man?

(HARRY looks sardonically across at STREAKY who raises his eyebrows.)

I suppose you haven't seen him.

STREAKY: The Bishop?

TONY: Of course . . . He hasn't been in?

HARRY: Not unless he's disguised as a Japanese tourist.

STREAKY: You'd have heard him by now. His brass balls clang as he walks.

(STREAKY has said this with sudden, bitter gravity. TONY turns, standing, rather taken aback.)

TONY: What does that mean?

(STREAKY smiles to himself.)

HARRY: It means he's a heavyweight.

TONY: And?

(STREAKY looks away, darkly.)

STREAKY: I'm saying nothing.

TONY: Why are you both so frightened I talk to him then?

(They both look at him.)

HARRY: Well, we're not. Go ahead.

TONY: It's not as if what I say is going to be decisive. After all, there are two of you. Won't you be consulted? So why all the panic?

HARRY: It cuts both ways, Tony. That's what we came to say. It's not in your power to get Lionel the sack. You won't even get what you want. Why risk the damage? *(Looks down, quiet now.)* I mean the damage to your own conscience. Why betray a friend when you don't need to?

(TONY looks at him.)

TONY: You tell me. Why do you think?

(HARRY *smiles.*)

HARRY: Oh, it's absolutely clear.

TONY: Why then?

HARRY: There's a dream there, Tony. Today you've expressed the dream. It's a dream that's haunted the Church for two thousand years.

TONY: What's that?

(HARRY *smiles across at STREAKY.*)

HARRY: Does it have a name? It used to. In the Inquisition, they called it something else.

TONY: I see. (*Pauses.*) What is it?

HARRY: I'd say of all temptations it's just about the most dangerous on offer. (*Smiles, at his silkiest.*) The illusion of action.

(*And at once striding towards them come the two bishops, KINGSTON and SOUTHWARK. They both have wet hair and are looking highly energetic.*)

And, at last, here comes your chance.

(*He gets up to greet them.*)

Bishop!

STREAKY: My God, double purple!

SOUTHWARK: We were detained. I'm sorry.

(HARRY *is up, but STREAKY is having trouble getting out of his chair.*)

STREAKY: And in off the black!

SOUTHWARK: Gilbert took me to play squash. Then we lost track of time in the Turkish bath. Goodness, there are more than I was expecting.

(STREAKY *is rising, a little uncertainly.*)

HARRY: Take no notice of my friend, he's drunk as a lord.

(SOUTHWARK *laughs and reaches out to embrace HARRY.*)

SOUTHWARK: How are you, Harry? It's so long since I saw you. I miss you, you know.

HARRY: Well, thank you, Charlie. I miss you too.

(*They hold the embrace, full of fondness, looking into each other's eyes with real warmth. TONY frowns, puzzled.*)

Unfortunately I'm not saying for supper. Much as I would like to. Nor is Streaky.

STREAKY: No way, Ray.

SOUTHWARK: What's been going on?

HARRY: Oh, we've been talking to our young friend.

(He gestures towards the hitherto ignored TONY.)

SOUTHWARK: Hello, Tony. Yes, we thought we might question him. On inner-city problems. At the grass roots.

HARRY: Well, I hope we haven't exhausted him. He's bursting with ideas. He belongs to what I shall now call the Savoy school of theology.

(He winks at TONY, who stands, lost for a reaction to all this bonhomie.)

The Grill Room school, shall we say?

(There is a moment's pause. All still.)

He'll explain to you.

SOUTHWARK: Will he?

HARRY: By all means, go on.

(SOUTHWARK smiles, HARRY is now looking intently at TONY.)

SOUTHWARK: Well, I'm sure he'll have a great deal to tell us. Say goodbye to your colleagues, then follow us.

(This last to TONY as SOUTHWARK turns to KINGSTON and they head towards the doors.)

Now, Gilbert, where are we? Is it in here?

(The two of them vanish into the dining-room. TONY is left rooted to the spot, unable to move. HARRY and STREAKY are staring at him.)

HARRY: Go on then, Tony. To your supper. *(Suddenly raises an arm.)* 'With this shining sword . . .'

(TONY does not move.)

Go on. What's holding you?

(TONY stands still, not moving, agonized.)

Go on then, Tony. Make up your mind.

SCENE TWO

The church. The middle of the night. STREAKY enters, carrying a single candle in the dark. He walks with elaborate care. He smiles.

STREAKY: Drunk, Lord, drunk.

And blissfully happy. Can't help it. Love the job. Love my work. Look at other people in total bewilderment. I got to drink at the Savoy. It was wonderful. It's all wonderful. Why can't people enjoy what they have?

Is it just a matter of temperament? I mean, I'm a happy priest. Always have been. Ever since I got my first job as curate as St Anselm's, Cheam, because they needed a light tenor for the parochial Gilbert and Sullivan society. Matins, a sung Eucharist, two Evensongs and *Iolanthe* five nights a week.

It was bliss. I loved it. I tried to start it here. But there's something deep in the Jamaican character that can't find its way through *The Pirates of Penzance*. It's still bliss, though. They are blissful people. Once a year we take the coach to the sea. On the way down we have the rum and the curried goat. Lord, there is no end to your goodness. Then we have rum and curried goat on the way back.

Lord, I have no theology. Can't do it. By my bed, there's a pile of paperbacks called *The Meaning of Meaning*, and *How to Ask Why*. They've been there for years. The whole thing's so clear. He's there. In people's happiness. Tonight, in the taste of that drink. Or the love of my friends. The whole thing's so simple. Infinitely loving.

Why do people find it so hard?

SCENE THREE

Lionel's study. There is a table and a chessboard on it. A warm light near it. FRANCES and LIONEL are playing chess opposite each other. He is out of his dog collar, in slacks and a Viyella shirt. She is in jeans. It is quiet, intimate and warm.

FRANCES: Please play the game.

(*He puts his hand on a piece.*)

You can't do that. If you do that you're checkmate in three.

LIONEL: I don't want to play.

FRANCES: You have to.

LIONEL: I'd like to pace up and down.

FRANCES: Well, you can't.

(She smiles.)

LIONEL: How come you're so good at it? Are you good at everything?

FRANCES: No.

LIONEL: What are you bad at?

FRANCES: Just move your knight there.

LIONEL: *(Doing it)* There?

FRANCES: That's a good move.

(He shakes his head.)

LIONEL: I'm sorry. I had no right to ring you. It's not as if we're close.

FRANCES: We're close. In understanding.

(LIONEL sits back.)

LIONEL: It's funny. I think of myself as part of the community.

FRANCES: *(Frowns)* Hold on. Let me think.

LIONEL: The chap in the paper shop. All the school caretakers.

These are my friends. There's a lovely woman who runs the charity shop. All the sidesmen. The wardens. Harry. And Streaky, of course. And yet – I don't know – when I was standing in the hospital this morning, I thought, I don't know a soul.

(He stares at her.)

FRANCES: She'll be fine. *(Returns to looking at the board, then reassures him.)* It's all right.

(He looks away.)

LIONEL: She was there half an hour.

FRANCES: What do you mean?

LIONEL: I didn't tell them that. I couldn't. You see I was in my study, working on my sermon. It's on this terrible poll tax thing. It's very intricate. And it's important I get it right.

(Shakes his head.) She fell in the kitchen. I heard nothing. It was so typical. It's what everyone says. So when the ambulance came, I was ashamed to say, 'Well, actually, look, this is awful, I don't know how long she's been there . . .'

FRANCES: Bishop to pawn three. *(Looks across at him.)* They let

her out, Lionel. It's nothing. It couldn't have been milder. It's very slight stroke.

(LIONEL *nods*.)

Someone told me once, you know, about Richard Nixon . . .

LIONEL: Nixon?

FRANCES: He sounds very funny. After Watergate, he was asked on television if he'd read the famous book, you know, the one that revealed the whole thing. He said, 'No. But Pat, my wife, did.' They said, 'And?' He said, 'Well, she didn't say anything, but all I can say is, two days later she had a stroke.' (*She laughs. He smiles*).

I mean, you really have to admire him. What wouldn't he use? Your own wife's illness. Was he the world's dirtiest fighter ever?

LIONEL: And you like that?

FRANCES: No. I don't like it. It just makes me laugh.

(*He frowns, as if puzzled by this, but also fascinated. His hand moves a piece.*)

Oh, really, Lionel . . .

LIONEL: What?

FRANCES: Look, just look . . . (*Points to two other pieces.*) There. And there. What's wrong with you? Are you suicidal? Do you have some sort of deathwish?

LIONEL: Yes. I'm sorry.

(*He reaches out and for a moment it looks as if he will touch her cheek. But he stops just short. Then he smiles and withdraws his hand.*)

I'm out of my class.

(*She looks down.*)

FRANCES: Did you find Alex?

LIONEL: Yes. I managed to get hold of him. He's on holiday in France. He's coming back.

FRANCES: And Lucy?

LIONEL: No.

(*There's a pause.*)

It's difficult. We don't have an address. It's very hard on Heather. (*Shrugs.*) I must say, it is odd. I know so many clergy families where the children have gone. They seem to

get very angry. Was it like that for you?

FRANCES: A bit. My father's not a vicar. Just a churchman. I mean, of course, I was angry for a while.

LIONEL: Yes. Why is that?

FRANCES: Do you really want to know?
(She looks a moment, as if afraid of hurting him.)
 Because it all seems such a waste.

LIONEL: What kind of waste?

FRANCES: Of a human being. To have his mind all the time on something else. Always to be dreaming.

LIONEL: Is that how it seems?

FRANCES: Well, it does.
(He is thoughtful, quiet, as if this has hit home.)
 Is that so for Lucy?
(He looks at her, a blank.)

LIONEL: I really can't say.
(FRANCES waits a second.)

FRANCES: If I were a clergyman what I'd find unbearable is to have to talk about what I believe. Press a button and a clergyman's duty bound to tell me. At once. Even if he doesn't know me very well. He has to tell me his innermost belief. *(Smiles.)* That's what's undignified. That's why clergymen are funny, I'm afraid. Because they're not allowed to be private. They wear their inside on their outside.

LIONEL: Oh, do you think?

FRANCES: Yes. I'm sure of it. *(Very quiet.)* I only know that what's most important is those things no one can speak of.
(He is watching her closely.)

LIONEL: And what things are they?

FRANCES: In my life?

LIONEL: Yes.
(She smiles again, very light.)

FRANCES: Oh, odd moments. Watching people. Thinking. A sense of yourself.
(LIONEL watches her, she is deep in thought.)

LIONEL: And are you really leaving?

FRANCES: Soon. I want to work abroad. I'm from a missionary family. It just happens I don't have the faith. *(Laughs.)* I

have an idea of countries where things have real value.
Because life is hard. That means the Third World. Our agency
represents this charity, you see. They'll fix it for me.
(*Catches him watching.*)
I'm sorry. I know I sound pi.

LIONEL: Not at all.

FRANCES: But if you want a real life now, where else do you go?
(*Smiles.*) Also . . .

LIONEL: Yes?

FRANCES: Oh, Englishmen.

LIONEL: Ah.

FRANCES: There's always a moment when they back off. I always
want them to go further. But then they get frightened. They
close down their horizons. (*Thinks a moment.*) So, I've run my
course with them.

LIONEL: Oh, I hope not.

(*She looks at him. He is sitting very still, rapt.*)

FRANCES: Well, yes, I have.

(*A pause. LIONEL shifts.*)

It makes me laugh the way you don't even mention him.

LIONEL: Who?

FRANCES: God.

LIONEL: Oh, that's not fair. I do sometimes. I find myself calling
him 'God, as it were'. Who has a son called 'Jesus, as it were'.
It's true. I'm embarrassed. So I apologize. 'As it were'.

(*FRANCES grins.*)

The moment you start talking in those terms you distance
people. And it's not important. He's there. He loves them
whether people know it or not. Why put people off with all the
cultural baggage? It sets up a resistance. They're bored before
you even get into all that stuff.

(*FRANCES nods.*)

So much of what passes for religion is simply nonsense. Close
the church doors and all tell God how wonderful he is. 'God,
you're so terrific. No, really. Terrific.' Where does that get
you? And the more people doing it, the more you're said to be
thriving. It's phoney. It's spiritual masturbation, that's all.
(*Shakes his head.*) It doesn't connect. The doors should be

open. A priest should be like any other man. Only full of God's love.

(He is looking intently across the table at her.)

FRANCES: And is that possible?

LIONEL: I have no idea.

(The door opens and HEATHER is standing there. She is wearing only a nightgown and looks deathly pale. She is totally disorientated.)

HEATHER: What's this?

LIONEL: You're out of bed.

HEATHER: I heard voices.

(LIONEL has shot up guiltily and is about to move towards her. But she is now staring at FRANCES, who is frozen to her chair.)

LIONEL: You must go back to bed.

(But she is fixed on FRANCES. She does not waver. She looks insane.)

HEATHER: I don't know you.

FRANCES: We did meet.

LIONEL: Heather, this is Frances Parnell.

(She goes on staring then turns and looks at LIONEL.)

She came to sit with me.

(HEATHER looks at him as if the words are completely meaningless.)

Yes.

HEATHER: That's very good of you.

LIONEL: Heather, please.

(He panics, ushering her from the room, his arm round her, guiding her.)

Look, em, goodness. Sorry. Excuse me. Heather, you must go back to bed.

(They go out. There is a moment. And then FRANCES gets up and pulls on her jacket, coat and scarf. She is about to go as LIONEL appears from the room.)

What are you doing?

FRANCES: I'm off.

LIONEL: Look . . .

FRANCES: Stay with her, Lionel. You must sit in the room. You can see she's disorientated.

(He is staring at her as if he didn't understand.)

FRANCES: Lionel, she's in the most terrible spin.

LIONEL: You don't have to go.

FRANCES: Yes I do.

LIONEL: Why? I put her back to bed.

FRANCES: That's not the point.

LIONEL: But it's innocent.

(She looks at him a moment.)

FRANCES: Yes. Partly it is, and partly it's not.

(He looks at her a moment then moves towards her.)

LIONEL: No, listen to me, Frances . . .

FRANCES: I can't. Please. Say nothing, Lionel. You know what it is. It's nice, of course. I enjoy it. Sitting here, playing chess. Letting you imagine. *(Looks down.)* Honestly, now I'm being unkind.

LIONEL: No. It's true.

FRANCES: But it isn't real.

(Before he can speak she interrupts.)

Don't be stupid. You have a sick wife. *(Smiles.)* You're not allowed any pleasure. Except the pleasure of dreaming.

(They both smile. Then she crosses the room and kisses him on the cheek.)

LIONEL: Bless you.

FRANCES: I'll see you soon.

SCENE FOUR

A darkened street. HARRY going home, in an overcoat, his keys already in his hand as he approaches the front door of a small terraced house. TOMMY ADAIR steps out of the shadows, smoking a cigarette.

HARRY: Hello.

TOMMY: I needed a vicar. I needed someone to talk about sin. So I thought I'd come to an expert.

HARRY: Are you in trouble? Do you mean now? *(Frowns.)* If it's not urgent we can make an appointment.

TOMMY: That'll be too late. I need to be sorted out by Sunday.

HARRY: Sunday? (*Looks closely at TOMMY.*) Do you mean before church?

TOMMY: Not exactly.

(*HARRY starts to move away, suspicious.*)

HARRY: Why don't you ring in the morning? My number's in the book.

TOMMY: Don't fancy me, eh?

(*HARRY gets it.*)

HARRY: Not in the slightest. Good night.

(*But TOMMY at once goes on to the attack, raising his voice for the first time.*)

TOMMY: I'm from a well-known national newspaper. I talked with a great friend of yours. He's unsuccessful. He's rather a sweet and passive boy.

(*HARRY just looks, not answering.*)

I'm doing an investigative piece. It'll appear next Sunday. If we talked you could give me a number of other names. And that way your own name might not appear.

(*A pause. Then HARRY moves towards him, casual, not frightened, taking him on.*)

HARRY: I'll send you the synodical paper on exactly the subject you're interested in. Yes. The church set up a committee some years ago. A report was commissioned. I can let you have a copy if you like. If you have space you can print it in full. Did you know we had a synodical debate? Are you a theological correspondent? (*Moves closer to him.*) The report asserts that genital acts between men are not necessarily wrong. Do you know those words? 'Necessarily'? 'Genital'? (*TOMMY is unamused.*)

TOMMY: I wouldn't advise you to be aggressive. You're not in a strong position.

HARRY: In fact I am. (*Smiles, confident.*) You see my big strength is, I don't believe you. No friend of mine would have spoken to you. And anyway, my life is between me and God. And God, as I may best comprehend him, does not work through the Sunday papers. (*Smiles.*) Not at least if He's who I think He is.

(*Makes to go.*)

TOMMY: You're digging your own grave.

HARRY: I'll risk that.

TOMMY: (*Shrugs*) It makes no difference

HARRY: Then go ahead. Good luck.

(*Turns and reaches the steps of his house.*)

TOMMY: Shall I give your love to Ewan?

(*For the first time HARRY stops, his back to us. There is just a moment's pause in his step. Then he carries on into the house.*)

HARRY: By all means. Do what you like.

SCENE FIVE

The church. HARRY comes in, in his overcoat. Stands a moment, alone, in the dark.

HARRY: Lord, I don't know. Of course I'm frightened. What would you expect? But I won't sink to their level.

I won't speak to Ewan. Really. I mean it. I trust him. Everything's fine.

I've always been proud that I have no illusions. In the three years I was at Cambridge I only kissed a man once. By the river, actually. In the darkness. I couldn't see his face. It still dazzles me, the memory. The three years weren't wasted because . . . there was this single moment of unbelievable happiness. Lord, you know I don't expect more.

We get by on so little. We all wore flannels. And herringbone jackets. The joke is, I still do. We smoked pipes. Long evenings spent discussing Teildhard de Chardhin, and thinking what's his body like under the tweed?

I'm clear-eyed. I think I am. There is people as they are. And there is people as they could be. The priest's job is to try and yank the two a little bit closer. It takes a good deal of time.

People have souls. That man from the newspaper. He has. In a dirty corner of his heart. You have to believe that. I have to remember. It's my duty. But it's also my duty to fight.

Oh God, please help me. I don't know. Teach me. Lord.
How do you fight without hate?

SCENE SIX

A bitter, windy day. There is an enormous billboard, eighteen feet long and eight feet high. A chic, strapless model lies on her side, advertising a women's magazine, with a cute strapline. In front of the hoarding, TONY waits in a duffel coat. Then FRANCES appears, in jeans and coat.

TONY: So it is you.

FRANCES: Yes.

TONY: I thought it might be.

(There's a pause.)

FRANCES: How are you, Tony?

TONY: I'm well. And you?

(She looks at him a moment.)

FRANCES: Well, give me a kiss.

TONY: I'm sorry.

(He kisses her cheek, then gestures towards the enormous hoarding.)

So this is it.

FRANCES: Yes.

TONY: This is our first poster site. *(Looks up at it admiringly.)* Can we have any message we want?

FRANCES: No. There's a drafting committee for the trial area. My uncle said, 'I hear there's a bright young priest in Brixton.' I said, 'Yes,' He said, 'Let's get him in.'

TONY: I'm flattered. *(Smiles, shifting from foot to foot.)*

I'm bursting with ideas. I love the size of it, don't you? Wham! It's like saying Christ really belongs. Not just in church. But in the High Street. Why not? It's what we've needed. To shake the fuddy-duddy image. *(Smiles.)* Real resources. A really modern campaign.

(FRANCES is just watching him, not speaking. He steals a quick glance at her, then goes on, enthusiastically.)

It's going well here. You've probably heard. This'll be a great back-up. (*Gestures at the billboard.*) I've started a Bible class. We've had the first three. We've doubled our numbers each week. It's inspiring. People come. All races. All backgrounds. You know. They love listening to scripture. Then we discuss it. People have got so used to thinking Christianity's difficult. But read the Bible and they find it's quite easy. (FRANCES *nods slightly*)

FRANCES: And what does Lionel think?

TONY: Lionel? (*Shrugs slightly.*) I don't know. I don't really see him.

FRANCES: Why not?

TONY: He's been involved with problems of his own. (*A pause.*) Heather was ill.

FRANCES: I heard that.

TONY: Also . . .

(*He stops.*)

FRANCES: Yes?

TONY: The Bishop is trying to get rid of him. Lionel is threatening to make the most tremendous stink. It's not very easy. Being in my position. They even asked me for my opinion. I was called in once. They wanted my view.

FRANCES: And did you give it?

TONY: Of course. I think honesty's important. (*Slight pause. He's quiet.*) You know me, Frances. You know I think that. (FRANCES *just looks at him.*)

We're dealing with a man who's in desperate trouble.

FRANCES: Lionel?

TONY: Go round the parish. Ask anyone. I mean, I wish it weren't true.

FRANCES: What kind of trouble?

TONY: (*Smiles*) Apart from anything, why do you think Heather had a stroke?

FRANCES: I don't know.

(TONY *is shaking his head.*)

You tell me.

TONY: His daughter ran away. Have you ever talked to her? She has a problem of alcohol addiction. She's not even nineteen.

She despises him. She says he's given her nothing as a father.
(*Nods.*) God is trying to say something to Lionel.

FRANCES: Really? (*Waits.*) And? *What* is he saying?

TONY: Well, I think it's pretty clear. In the gentlest possible way.
He's giving him a hint. (*Looks at her, then smiles slightly.*) I mean, why else would he strike Heather down?

FRANCES: I don't know.

(*TONY moves away.*)

TONY: I mean, don't get me wrong, God isn't a mechanic, with a screwdriver, who comes along and tampers with the machine from the outside. It's not like that. Things develop inside human beings. And sometimes these things are dangerously wrong.

FRANCES: God drops a hint?

TONY: Yes.

FRANCES: That's his method?

TONY: I think it is. He does certain things. And we must draw the right conclusions.

(*FRANCES is watching him dispassionately.*)

FRANCES: And you think he's telling Lionel it's time to go?

(*TONY shrugs.*)

TONY: It's not for me to say. Lionel must decide that. I don't pontificate on individuals.

FRANCES: Don't you?

TONY: No, of course not. You must always stop short of that.

(*Nods sincerely.*) It's Lionel's decision. But you know, if he goes on as he is, things can only get worse for him. Unless
... (*Stops.*)

FRANCES: Unless?

TONY: Unless he changes his life.

FRANCES: Changes it?

TONY: Yes. (*Nods.*) I do mean that. It's incredibly ironic. My own conversion – the true one, I mean – happened way after I was actually ordained. That night I came to your flat, I felt this complete overturning. Of everything. You were asleep. I could just hear your breathing in the next room. I'd got drunk. Yet there was this absolute clarity. God told me what I was here for. It was as if I'd never heard him. (*Turns and*

looks at her.) And since then I have this incredible power. *(Smiles.)* Oh, I'm still me. I'm Tony. I'm the same bloke. But now I can throw on three extra generators. Woosh! It's extraordinary. Whenever I want.

(She watches him. He is completely confident.)

That can still happen to Lionel. I pray for it. He just needs to listen. He needs to look around. What point is God trying to make? Is this simple misfortune? *(Acts it out a moment, elaborately glum.)* 'My family's falling off around me'? 'I command no respect'? 'I have no energy'? 'I'm permanently anxious'? *(Smiles.)* 'I mean, what is God trying to say to me here?'

FRANCES: What, you think there's a reason for his suffering?

TONY: Of course. Human beings can choose. We're free. Notice the message. Or ignore it. Ignore it and pay a terrible price.

(FRANCES nods.)

FRANCES: I see. *(Very quiet.)* This God of yours . . .

TONY: Yes?

FRANCES: He killed your parents.

(TONY frowns, hurt.)

TONY: Frances . . .

FRANCES: No, look, I'm serious.

TONY: It was an accident.

FRANCES: But?

(TONY looks at her, reluctant to reply.)

But *what?* I'm really asking. What was he trying to say then?

TONY: He was giving me a shock.

FRANCES: A shock?

TONY: Yes. I know now. That was the point of it. I've no doubt the whole thing was directed at me.

FRANCES: How?

TONY: He wanted to shake me up. To set me on a path which leads here. Via you. Via my conversion. To my Bible class and all my future work in this parish. To everything now which is good and worthwhile.

(FRANCES turns away.)

FRANCES: I see.

(TONY frowns, puzzled.)

TONY: Well, surely?

FRANCES: And for you to get your shock, you're saying your own parents died?

(TONY *shakes his head, bewildered.*)

TONY: No. Don't be ridiculous. I mean, also he needed them.

FRANCES: Needed them?

TONY: Yes. (*Then quietly.*) It was their time.

FRANCES: On an icy motorway?

TONY: Yes.

FRANCES: Deserted? At night?

TONY: Yes. As it happened.

(*There's a silence. Then he turns and looks at her.*)

Well, what other reason can there be? (*Turns away.*) Of course at the time I didn't understand it.

FRANCES: You didn't. No.

TONY: Not at all. How could I?

FRANCES: You were wild.

TONY: I was. I was bewildered.

FRANCES: You used to wake in the night and make love to me.

(*He looks at her.*)

TONY: Yes I did.

FRANCES: Crying all the time.

TONY: Yes, that's right.

(*There's a silence. The grief is in the air.*)

He makes us suffer. Through suffering we learn. (*Looks at her, then shakes his head, smiling to himself.*) How can I have been so stupid? I used to try and find comfort in you.

FRANCES: Try?

TONY: In your body. It was crazy. I realize now I was wasting my time. (*Nods, then smiles at her to reassure her.*) I mean, please be clear, you were so kind to me . . .

(*But she turns, having trouble asking him what she most wants to know.*)

FRANCES: Tony. In bed you used to say certain things.

TONY: Did I?

FRANCES: Yes.

TONY: Good gracious.

FRANCES: Do you remember?

TONY: Sort of. (*Shrugs and shuffles, being cheeky.*) You know.

FRANCES: Were those things true?

TONY: I *thought* they were true at the time. That's my point.

(*She turns away.*)

Don't be hurt. Why be hurt, Frances? It's a fact. Human love passes. God's love doesn't. (*Frowns.*) Can't you find comfort in that?

(FRANCES is *overwhelmed for a moment, fighting tears.*)

FRANCES: No, well, I can't.

TONY: You should.

FRANCES: I find it disgusting.

TONY: Disgusting?

FRANCES: Of course. It's here. We live here. On this earth.

That's where we have to love one another. (*Suddenly savage.*)

Tell me, what did you say to the Bishop that night?

TONY: The Bishop?

FRANCES: Yes.

TONY: What's that to do with it?

FRANCES: When he asked you what you thought of Lionel? What answer did you give?

(*He shakes his head, angry already.*)

TONY: It really annoys me . . .

FRANCES: Why?

TONY: That's all anyone asks me.

FRANCES: Well?

TONY: No one asks, 'How are the people out there? Are they getting what they need from us?' Oh no, it's just, 'I say, old chap, did you let the side down?' Well . . . (*Laughs.*) As it happens I didn't go to public school. So appeals to public-school morality mean nothing to me.

(*She stands, still waiting for her answer.*)

FRANCES: So?

(*He shifts uneasily.*)

TONY: Frances, I'm altered.

FRANCES: Yes, I can see that.

TONY: You don't understand. It's all irrelevant. Lionel's in the past.

FRANCES: In the past for *you*.

TONY: I have accepted a supernatural religion. Since I did that, everything has changed. *(He smiles, shaking his head.)* You know, I mean, all around everyone is screaming. 'Lionel! Lionel!' all the time. It's just become total gibberish to me, the word itself doesn't make any sense . . . *(Tries it out, shouting it.)* Lionel! *(Shakes his head.)* All I can see is a man who's missing the obvious. Christ intervened. Lionel doesn't seem to realize. Two thousand years ago. There was an intervention. So Lionel's irrelevant. Because he doesn't grasp that, he can't understand. *(Suddenly impassioned now.)* And when God did this, when he sent his own son, then he offered a model, it was a promise, if you like, to all the rest of us. No one need be bound by the rules of reality . . .

FRANCES: Oh, look, Tony, come on . . .

TONY: He was saying, 'Look, if you don't want them, the rules don't apply . . .'

(FRANCES is standing just watching now, bewildered by TONY's sudden access of energy.)

FRANCES: What do you mean?

(But TONY is already smiling, ahead of her.)

TONY: Oh yes, I know what you're thinking. You think psychologically. So you think something's happened. 'Oh, Tony's lonely. That's it. He's in grief. There's an explanation. He misses his parents.' 'Hey', even, 'he misses me . . .' *(Looks triumphantly at her.)* Well, all that stuff, it's just a load of nonsense. All that matters is that I'm healed. *(He reacts at once to her disbelief.)*

FRANCES: Healed?

TONY: Yes! Read the Bible, for goodness' sake. Analyse. What does Jesus actually do? Most of the time? He heals. And mostly in public. In the marketplace.

FRANCES: Tony, is this what you want to do?

(TONY moves towards her, already on to the next thing.)

TONY: No, look, I tell you, I know you won't believe this. Keep an open mind. It's a fact. There's an AIDS patient . . . No, listen, it's true. It's in Kilburn. A Christian brotherhood sent me the gen. I've got the stuff.

(There's a pause.)

He had AIDS. Now he doesn't.

FRANCES: Tony, you're going out of your head.

TONY: No, I'm not.

FRANCES: This is sick. How dare you?

TONY: (*Shaking his head.*) I will let you see the documents.

FRANCES: This is immoral.

TONY: I will tell you how they did it. With some oil. And the power of prayer. (*Pauses, challenging her.*) Come back with me and I will give you his name.

FRANCES: I don't want to come back with you.

TONY: I can show you a photocopy of the tests. There is medical data. It is signed by doctors.

FRANCES: So what?

(*He smiles.*)

TONY: No, you can't say that. There's proof. It's an intervention. The virus has gone.

(FRANCES just watches him now.)

What were they calling it? 'The scourge of the world'?

You've read the newspapers. 'The plague of mankind'? And now we know . . . like that . . . (*Flicks his fingers.*) A man may be transformed. (*Nods, quiet now.*) It's in the catechism of the Church of England. Not that you'd know. 'We affirm that we believe in the laying on of hands.' It says so. Well, if we believe in it, what is holding us? (*Smiles ironically.*)

Except a bunch of middle-class Englishmen, who would prefer to forget what the whole thing's about. (*He turns to her, bubbling over now, excited, flushed.*) I have to keep it down, it's hilarious, I tell you. I get on a bus, I'm sitting there, I think . . . 'A virgin gave birth.' It's supernatural. Why do we forget that? I become so excited. On the bus, with all the other passengers, it's crazy, I have to hide the smile on my face. I can't believe it. (*Looks at her. Then, slowly, as if hearing it for the first time.*) 'Then a corpse walked out of a tomb . . . ' (*Stands a moment, content.*) Lionel, indeed! What does it matter? If he could just see . . . I mean *really* see . . . then he could share in this power.

(FRANCES looks at him a moment.)

Why not? Tell me why not? -

(She turns and walks away from him. Then she begins to run. TONY stands alone, for a moment, pained.) (Firmly.) Frances! Frances! Come back!

SCENE SEVEN

The church. STELLA has aged. She has a patch over the glass in her spectacles and her skin is scalded on one side of her face. She has a bucket and mop.

STELLA: Lord I dun' know. Two pounds fifty an hour? D'un seem to me religious. It's very unreligious.

I don' get it. It was so fast.

I try to believe. When I'm in Bible class, then I believe it. I like the stories. When the disciples meet Mary on the road. She says, 'E's risen after three days in the tomb.' The disciples say, 'Ow's 'e doin'?' 'Oh,' she says, 'as well as can be expected.' Sure, that's 'ow I feel.

I dun' know why Tony went to the police.

I 'ad to leave the house, 'cos I was so frightened. I 'ave a room ten feet by eight. Jus' 'cos Tony din' know better than to mind 'is own business. I'm never goin' to testify. Whatever Tony tells me. Against my own husband. Why should I?

It was my life.

I liked those days in the big bed when we din' get up. We ate and drank and watched television. Once three days went by. And 'e was kind to me.

O Lord Jesus, I miss this man.

SCENE EIGHT

The crypt of the cathedral. At once the low tolling of a bell for a service. LIONEL stands alone, waiting, in black cassock. There is a chair. Servers come and go. GILBERT KINGSTON arrives, busily. His manner is sober. He is dressed in purple.

KINGSTON: Yes, Lionel, good.

LIONEL: Gilbert.

KINGSTON: Welcome. The Bishop will not have long.

LIONEL: I see.

(There's a pause.)

KINGSTON: It's a bad time.

LIONEL: Yes.

KINGSTON: For the Bishop. Things could hardly be more grave.

He will preach a sermon at the sung Eucharist. He plans to say he is no longer in communion with the other bishops who have done this.

(LIONEL waits, saying nothing.)

It's a time of great anguish. I have to ask you not to make matters worse.

(Robes arrive for the Bishop, on a rack, with mitre, etc.)

Just present your argument. You're in the middle of your work.

LIONEL: Yes.

KINGSTON: You have planted seeds, which will bear fruit later.

LIONEL: Yes.

KINGSTON: You're re-examining your methods.

LIONEL: Yes.

KINGSTON: You admit perhaps in the past . . .

(He stops.)

LIONEL: Yes?

KINGSTON: Your own problems of faith obscured your approach to the community. But now you have a very strong team.

Particularly a recent brilliant recruit. The Bishop likes him.

LIONEL: I see.

KINGSTON: He finds him dynamic.

(There's a pause.)

LIONEL: Yes, well, he is.

(KINGSTON looks at him a moment.)

KINGSTON: Please, Lionel, no hint of reservation. Be humble. I beg of you. Play this low key.

(SOUTHWARK arrives with characteristic gravity. He is attended by DRESSERS and SERVERS. The two men waiting make way. Then SOUTHWARK is still.)

SOUTHWARK: Lionel. (*Pauses as if he might say something, but then turns.*) I must dress while while we're talking.
(*The ATTENDANTS set to work, laying out his clothes, then robing him.*)

I assume you've heard the news.

LIONEL: Indeed.

SOUTHWARK: In my soul, I had never believed this could happen. Where will it end?

LIONEL: You tell me, Charlie.

SOUTHWARK: Christ came as a man. His chosen disciples were men. The priesthood has been occupied by men for two thousand years. A woman was given a very different function. A higher function, even. To be the mother of Christ. Are we saying we now give in to every fad and fashion? Every passing cultural upheaval? (*Turns and looks LIONEL in the eye.*) On the other side of the Atlantic they have put rochet and chimere on a woman's body.
(*There is a pause.*)

The Church of England is about what you can stomach.

LIONEL: I understand that.

SOUTHWARK: And I've reached the stage where I can stomach no more.

(*He ignores the waiting SERVER, instead holding his look to LIONEL.*)

And you?

LIONEL: Me?

SOUTHWARK: You did as I asked you?

LIONEL: Yes.

SOUTHWARK: You went to Slough?

(*LIONEL pauses a second.*)

LIONEL: Yes.

SOUTHWARK: How was it?

(*LIONEL pauses again, looking to KINGSTON.*)

KINGSTON: Go on, Lionel, please.

(*There is a slight pause.*)

LIONEL: It was a series of housing estates on the edge of a sewage farm. Jets go overhead every few minutes.

(*SOUTHWARK looks to KINGSTON a moment.*)

SOUTHWARK: Do I take it your answer is no?

(LIONEL looks uneasily but before he can really reply

KINGSTON rides in on top of him.)

LIONEL: Well actually . . .

KINGSTON: It's a bad day for Charlie.

LIONEL: Yes, I know.

KINGSTON: We're talking about a woman Bishop.

LIONEL: Yes, quite.

KINGSTON: Inside the Anglican communion.

SOUTHWARK: It seems, if I may say so, in the scale of things rather more important than your egotism.

(LIONEL looks at him, wary of responding.)

Am I to be detained by one man's vanity? In anticipation of today I already have three sacks of mail.

LIONEL: I understand. But perhaps it was unwise to try and see me in these circumstances.

SOUTHWARK: I want the matter settled.

LIONEL: Yes. (Looks at SOUTHWARK pitilessly.) I can tell.

(A moment's pause. Then SOUTHWARK turns to his

ATTENDANTS.)

SOUTHWARK: Leave us.

ATTENDANT: My Lord, they're ready for you now.

SOUTHWARK: Leave me. Please.

(The ATTENDANTS go. SOUTHWARK is thoughtful, then speaks as if they were still there.)

SOUTHWARK: They must wait. (Looks at LIONEL a moment.) Do you know how many parishioners come to a Bishop and say 'Our parish priest is useless. There's no inspiration. The congregation despair of him. What can you do?' And we have to say 'Nothing. You are stuck with him. That is the rule of the Church of England. There is absolutely nothing we can do.'

LIONEL: Has there been a delegation?

(SOUTHWARK ignores this.)

SOUTHWARK: In my view you're bad at your job because people can't get hold of you.

LIONEL: I see.

SOUTHWARK: They have no idea what you believe. Your answer

to everything is to say 'Well it's complex . . . '

LIONEL: It is complex.

SOUTHWARK: Any specific question they ask you: 'Do you believe Christ ascended into heaven?' 'Oh, well, it depends what you mean . . . ' (*Smiles.*) And all at once, you've lost them. Because you don't say yes, I believe in the following things. The Virgin Birth. The Resurrection. The thirty-nine articles. Etcetera. Whatever. The Athanasian Creed. (*Turns to LIONEL directly.*) I asked you to my house. Do you remember?

LIONEL: Yes.

SOUTHWARK: We gave you an excellent lunch.

LIONEL: That's right.

SOUTHWARK: You said you no longer believed in the importance of the sacraments . . .

LIONEL: Did I say that? Those words exactly?

SOUTHWARK: I gave you a warning. You took no heed. (*Looks quickly to KINGSTON.*) From that day on, you were dead.

LIONEL: Dead?

(*LIONEL frowns, as if thinking about this. KINGSTON shifts uneasily at the bluntness. There is no apology in SOUTHWARK's manner.*)

SOUTHWARK: Oh yes, it's cruel. I do understand that. I am not unfeeling. But I also have a charge. I am duty-bound to decide where the line must be drawn. (*Nods.*)

No two people will ever agree on theology. It's not possible. You can't make decrees about the meaning of Holy Scripture. But you can insist that, whatever our beliefs, we assemble together and perform the same rituals.

LIONEL: I agree. As long as those rituals aren't an organized hypocrisy.

SOUTHWARK: Yes. (*Looks at him thoughtfully.*) I know you think that.

LIONEL: It seems to me a real danger. I hate the idea of worship being dishonest. All mumbling the same words, like some incantation, ploughing our way through them. But in our hearts, all thinking different things.

SOUTHWARK: But what else can we do? Truly? (*Shrugs.*) People

are different. It's a fact. They hold different views. We cannot comprehend God. If we could, we would not be here. When we understand him, we shall be in heaven.

(Pauses a moment, thinking about it.)

SOUTHWARK: So meanwhile we must rely on formulae which have served men well for two thousand years. No, more than rely on them. I have begun lately to realize we must fight for them as well.

(Looks at LIONEL.) It isn't my fault. I'm being pushed. Oh yes, the church's reformers are always great advocates of passion and – what do you call it? – 'commitment'. But always in their own cause. They don't like it when we become passionate back.

(LIONEL looks, beginning to understand. SOUTHWARK nods.)

LIONEL: I see.

SOUTHWARK: Yes.

LIONEL: What? And I am the sacrifice? Yes? Is that right? To what end? To encourage the others?

(SOUTHWARK does not answer.)

Do you have a replacement?

SOUTHWARK: I'm sorry?

LIONEL: A new team Rector? Do you have someone lined up?

SOUTHWARK: I do.

LIONEL: Who?

(KINGSTON looks nervously at SOUTHWARK as if hoping he won't answer.)

SOUTHWARK: You wouldn't know him. He's an excellent chap. I was at school with his father. The gospel is in him. He was at Charterhouse.

LIONEL: Oh well, it's open and shut.

SOUTHWARK: He's a natural leader. There is no cleft in his brow. He looks outside himself. He is not in permanent pain.

(LIONEL looks at him.)

LIONEL: And have you fixed it already?

SOUTHWARK: I didn't hear you.

LIONEL: Have you told him he has the job?

(A pause. SOUTHWARK looks at him, as if judging him, as KINGSTON looks away, compromised. Then SOUTHWARK

shakes his head, as if coming to a conclusion about LIONEL.)

SOUTHWARK: You did it, you know. You can't pretend otherwise. You bring it on yourselves. All of you. Modernists. You make all these changes. You force all these issues. The remarriage of clergy. The recognition of homosexual love. New Bibles. New services. You alter the form. You dismantle the beliefs. You endlessly reinterpret and undermine. You witter on, till you become all things to all men. You drain religion of religion. And then you're so bound up in your own self-righteousness you affect astonishment when some of us suddenly say no. *(Pauses.)* Well, we are saying no. You've politicized everything. Your wretched Synod means exactly that. Everything turned into an issue. Everyone belonging to a faction. The church has been turned into a ghastly parody of government. *(Nods and smiles.)* And now – suddenly – you look round and decide you don't like the result.

(LIONEL is shaking his head.)

LIONEL: That isn't fair. These things are nothing to do with me. I'm not even active. I'm just one more parish priest.

(SOUTHWARK looks as if he doesn't believe him.)

Well, it's true, Charlie. Really. Who, for some reason, has become an obsession in your head.

(It is suddenly quiet now.)

SOUTHWARK: You're not an obsession.

LIONEL: No, really, it's so. This is what interests me. See it my way round. It's been jolly hard. Why me? Am I really worse than all the others? Is it arbitrary? *(Smiles.)* I've heard you say you want the church to be efficient. Like any other business, you say. But a business tries to explain the grounds for a dismissal. They owe you that. It's good manners. Only the church makes such a dirty wound.

(KINGSTON moves uneasily.)

KINGSTON: Now, steady on, Lionel . . .

LIONEL: In part you see I think it's just a generalized impatience. I can hardly blame you. The Christian virtue is forbearance. It would be crazy to think it didn't take its toll. Yes? After a day? After a year? After fifty years? What do you have to

show for turning the other cheek? What happens while you do it? What's the price?

(SOUTHWARK is *watching him intently*.)

An accumulation of massive bad temper.

(A *pause*.)

Yes? It's only human, after all. Maybe you get to thinking, 'If I can't do this, then what can I do?'

(SOUTHWARK is *quiet*.)

SOUTHWARK: Is that how you see me?

LIONEL: You think, 'What's the point of being a bishop, being in authority, if occasionally I can't use my authority?' To whatever purpose. Your finger gets itchy. I sympathize.

(*Smiles, sure of his point*.)

But it's a temptation we must resist.

(LIONEL is *quiet, careful now*.)

SOUTHWARK: 'We'?

LIONEL: Why, of course. It's the same for me.

SOUTHWARK: What do you mean?

LIONEL: I'd have thought it was obvious.

(SOUTHWARK *frowns, not understanding*.)

I can go to the law.

SOUTHWARK: What?

LIONEL: Oh yes.

KINGSTON: Have you been?

(KINGSTON is *shuffling again*. LIONEL *turns and looks at him*.)

Have you been already?

LIONEL: No. A friend of mine has been. (*Smiles*.)

My friend is advised, because of your promise, I have a watertight case.

(A *pause*. SOUTHWARK is *disbelieving*.)

SOUTHWARK: Would you do this to me?

LIONEL: And there is a trade union.

SOUTHWARK: A what?

LIONEL: A trade union, Charlie. Remember? (*Smiles again*.)

The clerical workers. They have just started a clergy section.

SOUTHWARK: This is palpably ridiculous.

LIONEL: They want a test case to prove wrongful dismissal.

SOUTHWARK: Do you have any idea what that means? Hearings?

Tribunals? Appeals? Do you want to turn your whole life into a battlefield?

LIONEL: Both our lives, Charlie. Don't forget that.

(LIONEL is quite still now.)

No, you see, all I am telling you – I can see it's not easy for you to accept – is that at this point we are *both* subject to temptation. Equally. You in your mitre, Charlie. And me as I am.

(There is a moment's pause. But then SOUTHWARK begins to speak, drawn out at last, his manner changing, his temper finally fraying.)

SOUTHWARK: All right, very well, you want to know my reason.

Why I chose you. Because you alone would dare to tell me I can do nothing about incompetence. What, I'm to be blackmailed because I'm too frightened to *fight*? (He gives this last word a sudden emphasis.) In any other job you'd have been fired years ago. You're a joke, Lionel. You stand in the centre of the parish like some great fat wobbly girl's blouse. Crying for humanity. And doing absolutely nothing at all.

(LIONEL stands and stares at him, impassive.)

Yes, I chose you. Because you are the reason the whole church is dying. Immobile. Wracked. Turned inward. Caught in a cycle of decline. Your personal integrity your only concern. Incapable of reaching out. A great vacillating pea-green half-set jelly.

(LIONEL does not move at all.)

LIONEL: You told me the issue was theological.

SOUTHWARK: No. It appears it's personal as well. (Nods.) It truly offends me, the idea that people need authority, and every time they come to ask what does the church think? then they are hit in the face by a spurt of lukewarm water from a rugby bladder. And I simply will not allow it to go on.

(LIONEL nods. KINGSTON watches, anxiously.)

LIONEL: Well, that's very clear.

SOUTHWARK: There's something in your tone which is sanctimonious. You give an appearance of superiority which is wholly unearned.

LIONEL: I see.

SOUTHWARK: It's profoundly offensive. Because it is based on nothing at all. (*Nods.*) You parade your so-called humility, until it becomes a disgusting kind of pride. Yes, we can all be right if we never actually *do* anything.

(*Suddenly calls out.*) My robes!

(*Turns back to LIONEL.*)

I want to send a message to your parish. Because they are far more important than we will ever be. It's a message of hope. It's to tell them the church does listen. Criteria of excellence do apply.

(*The SERVERS hold the robes behind him, but he does not yet climb in, suddenly quieter now.*)

SERVER: My Lord.

SOUTHWARK: You can't remember – I doubt if you read it – but in the Bible we are given an injunction. It is in my head all the time. I cannot put it out. If I could, I would sleep happy. You think I want this job?

(*Looks at him, absolutely honest now.*)

Feed my sheep. That's what he told us. Feed my sheep. Feed them.

(*A pause.*)

And you give them nothing but your own doubt.

(*He moves back and they dress him. LIONEL stands alone.*

KINGSTON *looks down. A few moments pass.*)

It was your fault. You gave away your freehold.

LIONEL: Because I trusted you. I trusted the Church. I still do. I still believe in it. The Church is God's instrument. Even if the Bishop falls short.

SOUTHWARK: (*Holds out one hand*) My mitre.

(*He is handed the mitre.*)

There are these moments. Today I am in a position to command a schism in the church. If I leave the Church of England because of this heretic woman, then hundreds of thousands will follow my lead. They look to me. But I shan't. I shall stand at the brink. For a long time. All the time, shaking with anger.

(*LIONEL watches. Everyone is still.*)

My patience is tried beyond endurance. And by God, I shall

have a victory with you.

(He turns and sweeps out, his SERVERS following. There is silence between KINGSTON and LIONEL. Then KINGSTON moves.)

KINGSTON: I should follow.

LIONEL: Of course.

KINGSTON: I'm sorry.

LIONEL: No.

KINGSTON: I had no idea.

(A pause.)

I was shocked.

(LIONEL does not react.)

When I gave my promise I didn't realize.

(LIONEL looks at him, his rather absent manner returned.)

I still don't see.

LIONEL: Don't you?

KINGSTON: Why he chose you. Do you understand it?

LIONEL: Of course.

(LIONEL thinks a moment, then looks straight through

KINGSTON.)

He chose me because he thought I would go.

SCENE NINE

Harry's living room. It has been stripped of all ornament. Some furniture is pushed into the corners. No paintings left on the walls. Lamps gone. It is dark except for a door leading to the bedroom, from which light comes, and the main door, also lit, in which LIONEL now stands.

LIONEL: Harry! Harry! Where are you?

(He moves into the room. It is dark. Then HARRY appears, another silhouette, silently, from the bathroom.)

HARRY: Lionel.

LIONEL: What's going on?

HARRY: How did you get in?

LIONEL: The door was open. *(A pause)* Harry?

(HARRY moves across to the mantelpiece and picks up an envelope, then goes to turn the light on.)

HARRY: I've written you a note.

LIONEL: What do you mean?

(HARRY gives him the envelope.)

I came to tell you. I did what you said. I played it just as you told me. The Bishop was outrageous.

HARRY: Good.

(There is a long pause during which HARRY looks at LIONEL, quite blank, dazed. Then he speaks very quietly.)

Then you're all right.

(He goes into the bedroom. LIONEL opens the envelope.

STREAKY appears from the bedroom in an overcoat.)

LIONEL: Streaky.

STREAKY: Hello, old chap.

LIONEL: Goodness, you look pale. (Frowns at the notepaper.)

What's this?

STREAKY: Harry's leaving.

LIONEL: When? What do you mean?

(HARRY reappears, lost.)

HARRY: I can't find my shirts. It's so stupid. I know I put them down.

STREAKY: I'll look for you, Harry.

(STREAKY goes into the bedroom.)

HARRY: I've seen my Church Council. They know of my decision. I've rung round some preachers for the month. I've done everything properly. It's odd. In four hours I did what usually takes me three months. (Smiles.) Just shows, eh? (Shrugs a little.) I thought I'd grow a moustache. Be a bit different. Then I remembered it's against Canon Law. Did you know that?

LIONEL: No.

HARRY: It's true. Do you think they're hot on Canon Law in Malta?

LIONEL: Malta?

(HARRY looks at him, nods.)

HARRY: A chum says I can be chaplain to the expatriate community. Baptisms, weddings, funerals. Hatch, match

and dispatch, as they say. (*Shrugs.*) Well, why not? That's what we're trained for.

(STREAKY *reappears with a pile of laundered shirts.*)

STREAKY: Shirts.

HARRY: Thanks, Streaky. (*Looks round. Pause*) I feel a bit like Philby. My friends are taking me out.

(*Moves away, a little weepy now.*)

LIONEL: Look, what is all this?

STREAKY: There's a Sunday paper. They've been after him for months.

(LIONEL *stops.*)

LIONEL: I didn't know.

HARRY: They're running a piece on what they call the gay mafia. They say it's eating up the Church. (*Shakes his head.*) I'm too old. I'm sorry. Maybe if I'd been brought up differently. I can't face the congregation. I feel I've let them down.

(LIONEL *looks round.*)

LIONEL: But this is absurd.

HARRY: I went to a party.

LIONEL: So? But what have you done?

HARRY: I haven't *done* anything. I was there. And that is enough.

(LIONEL *is about to protest, but HARRY cuts him off before he can speak.*)

Lionel, for goodness' sake, don't be such an idiot. They give knighthoods to people who publish this stuff. It isn't coincidence. That's the country we're living in.

(LIONEL *turns, tougher now.*)

LIONEL: But it was *you* . . .

HARRY: I know.

LIONEL: It was you, good gracious, who said I had to stay and fight the Bishop . . .

HARRY: I know.

LIONEL: It was you who was always spurring me on. You wouldn't let me give in. You said it was my duty.

(HARRY *turns and looks at him.*)

HARRY: What, you fight the Bishop? Me fight the press? And Tony Ferris meanwhile turn into Elmer Gantry?

(Smiles.) Ministry is always a balance. Well, the balance has gone.

(LIONEL looks to STREAKY for help, but STREAKY is looking at the floor, sadly.)

LIONEL: Harry, you're a good priest.

HARRY: I am at the moment. I have tried to be. I shall be, for an hour or two more. But if I stay on, I shall not be.

LIONEL: Why?

(Looks again to STREAKY.)

I don't understand you. What would be different? We'd defend you.

HARRY: Streaky knows. I've talked to Streaky.

(A silence. HARRY's voice is thick now and there are tears in his eyes.)

Because I would succumb to the sin of despair.

(After a moment, EWAN appears in the main doorway. He has a rucksack and a raincoat on. A moment's silence.)

Ewan. You've got the tickets?

EWAN: Aye.

(Nobody moves.)

We should go.

STREAKY: Hello, Ewan.

EWAN: Good evening.

HARRY: Ewan's coming for a while. Just to see me in. Then he's coming back for an audition.

STREAKY: Well. That's jolly good news.

(HARRY looks affectionately at EWAN.)

HARRY: They tried to get him to rat on me. But he didn't.

EWAN: Would I?

HARRY: Never.

(A moment's silence. HARRY is very emotional.)

No. I knew that.

(They stand a moment.)

EWAN: So where are your bags?

HARRY: Oh, through there.

EWAN: I'll help you with them.

(They go out to the bedroom. LIONEL looks at STREAKY, then moves away.)

STREAKY: How was old Charlie?

LIONEL: What?

STREAKY: Did you see him?

LIONEL: Yes:

STREAKY: Gosh, well I hope you really socked it to him.

(LIONEL *turns and looks at him, as if not hearing this.*)

LIONEL: I wonder, Streaky, has anyone mentioned the new Rector?

STREAKY: The new Rector?

LIONEL: Yes. I mean, have you heard a name?

STREAKY: Well . . . (*Pauses*) Please, you mustn't read anything into this. I do have an inkling.

LIONEL: How?

STREAKY: Oh, you know. Jungle telegraph.

LIONEL: Do you mind if I ask you . . . I have to ask you, if I'm replaced, will you stay on?

(*A moment's silence.*)

STREAKY: Look, Lionel, you know what I feel about you . . .

LIONEL: No, listen, I'm just asking.

STREAKY: You tell me. I'll go into battle. If that's what you want.

I never miss a line-out. I never have. But I love this area.

You know I'll fight for you, don't get me wrong. I'll fight for a while. But finally it isn't about us.

LIONEL: No.

STREAKY: It's about the people.

(*Pause.*)

LIONEL: Yes.

STREAKY: They always have to come first.

(LIONEL *nods, as the others return, carrying the bags.*)

HARRY: Streaky, goodbye. A little ignominious. Give Mrs Jenkins my key. (*Hands it over.*) Goodbye, Lionel. We've been wonderful friends.

LIONEL: Yes. We had a good time, didn't we?

HARRY: Come to Malta. You can walk on the beach. (*Nods. A pause.*) Well, we should go. We'll see you, Lionel.

LIONEL: Right.

(HARRY *and* EWAN *stand still. HARRY cannot move.*)

I'll see you soon.

(Then they turn and leave. LIONEL takes a few paces round the empty room. STREAKY watches his back.)

STREAKY: Why don't you come back to my place? I've got some old records. We could listen to Hancock. *Blood Donor*, you know. Have a glass of wine.

LIONEL: Thanks, Streaky. No, not tonight, thank you. *(Turns.)* I think I'd better go home.

SCENE TEN

Lionel's living room. HEATHER is sitting alone playing patience at Lionel's desk. LIONEL comes in, carrying a small gift. It's night. The standard lamp is on.

HEATHER: Oh goodness, I'll move out.

LIONEL: No, sit in here.

HEATHER: It's your study.

LIONEL: Well, yes. But you're welcome.

HEATHER: I'll go.

LIONEL: Don't go. *(Moves across to her.)*

I bought you this.

HEATHER: What is it?

LIONEL: It's a present.

HEATHER: Thank you.

LIONEL: It's that new gardening book.

(She smiles at him, puts it down, goes on playing patience.)

I'm sorry I'm late. I saw the Bishop.

HEATHER: Yes, of course.

(There is a silence. She plays on quietly.)

LIONEL: He would like us to leave.

HEATHER: Ah yes.

(He looks towards her back a moment, then moves away.)

LIONEL: I'm afraid we lose the house. We'll have to rent a flat.

But that's fine. Now the family's older. We don't need very much, and we can be together.

HEATHER: Of course.

(He looks across at her.)

LIONEL: It's what I've wanted. Heather. I've neglected you for so long. It's so long since we were together. (*Looks away.*) I don't know. You're suddenly sixty. What have I done with my life?

(*A pause.*)

They have to offer me something. They're duty bound. Perhaps a school chaplaincy. That's interesting work. With the young. I might write a book.

HEATHER: Will the flat have a garden?

LIONEL: Oh Lord, goodness. I hadn't thought. Well! (*Thinks a moment.*) We can always make do with an allotment. You see them from the railway, they always look nice.

(*There's a pause. HEATHER plays on.*)

Will you . . . I wonder . . . will you come to bed with me?

(*She stops playing, her hand still over the cards.*)

HEATHER: No. It's too late.

(*She is very still, then she looks upwards, straight in front of her.*)

I've always dreamed of escaping my body. And one day I shall.

(*There is a silence. Then LIONEL turns away.*)

LIONEL: Now. Where are my glasses?

HEATHER: I'm sorry, darling. I'm in your way.

LIONEL: No, please.

HEATHER: But I'm out. Look. It's perfect.

(*She gestures to the cards. She's finished the game.*)

And, anyway, I'm happier alone.

(*She gets up, passes close by him, and goes to the door.*)

I'll be right by, if you need me.

LIONEL: Yes, all right. I'm just going to read.

(*She goes out. LIONEL at once goes over to a table and takes out a book. He sits down, without looking up, and begins to read. After a few moments he is still. Then he turns and looks directly at us. At once, like a ghost, TONY appears for the next scene.*)

The darkened church. TONY standing alone on one side.

TONY: It's numbers, you see. That's what it is, finally. You have to get them in. I'm going to have a word with Stella tomorrow, see if she'll appear at a special meeting. I mean, terribly tactfully. In front of an audience. Say, 'Look, this woman had an abortion. And just look at her now.' I do believe that's the next one. I've got to get on to the sanctity of life. Got to. Respect for God. It follows. With absolute logic. Respect for God means respect for life.

(LIONEL appears at the other side, alone.)

LIONEL: When it goes, then it goes so quickly. It seems so substantial. Everything seems solid and real. As if what we believed protected us. Then you turn round and suddenly everything's gone.

(FRANCES appears between them. Each is oblivious of the other. The other two are still as FRANCES saunters in.)

FRANCES: A last look round, Lord. To close the subject. Like pulling down a blind. I am going, Lord, where no one's ever heard of you. Another way of putting it, where you don't exist.

Walked down Clapham High Street. Sat on the common, on a bench, with a beer. It was quiet. There was a pub through the trees. Then suddenly 'Say that once more and I'll bloody kill you . . .'

Ah, the English, who can't agree on anything . . .
(She smiles.)

And at my house my bags had been packed.

(There is a moment's pause.)

TONY: It's a question of confidence. If you don't allow doubt, the wonderful thing is, you spread confidence around you.

And, for ever, so it goes on.

(LIONEL drops to his knees.)

LIONEL: God, you said. You gave an undertaking. Do you remember? I challenged you. Do something. Beside this silence. Begged you. Come here and help.

Do we just suffer? Is that what you want? Fight and suffer
to no purpose? Yes?

Is everything loss?

(FRANCES *smiles.*)

FRANCES: I love that bit when the plane begins to climb, the
ground smooths away behind you, the buildings, the hills.
Then the white patches. The vision gets bleary. The cloud
becomes a hard shelf. The land is still there. But all you see is
white and the horizon.

And then you turn and head towards the sun.

(*The stage darkens.*)

