

# **Living the lie**

by

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**MITCH HOOPER** : After an Honours degree in Modern Languages at Cambridge University, Mitch Hooper settled in Paris and began to write and direct in both French and English. He was assistant to Harold Pinter when he came to Paris to direct *Ashes to Ashes* and benefitted from his encouragement and advice until his death in 2008. He has had several screenplays produced for French cinema and TV. He has directed plays by Pinter, Feydeau, Shanley, O'Neill, Mamet and Storey. His production of his own play, *Only Connect*, in Paris in 2013 won him the best writer award in the Prix Beaumarchais organized by the newspaper *Le Figaro*.

**LIVING THE LIE** : The starting point for Living The Lie is a true story: after twenty years of pretending to be a doctor working for the World Health Organisation in Geneva, Jean-Claude Romand murdered his parents, wife and children and set fire to his house. He failed to kill himself and so was subsequently brought to trial and his story brought to light. As it has already been the subject of a book and two films, I felt free to move away from the facts and explore what interested me in what has become a sort of modern myth. The action takes place in the course of a single evening and the morning after as the tension reaches a paroxysm relieved by dark comedy. My character has invented himself a career in advertising, trying desperately to keep up appearances in a society obsessed with image. His deeply dysfunctional marriage is intertwined with that of another, apparently more "normal" couple. But how normal is "normal"? What separates the sane from the insane? How deep are the cracks in the façade of normality? How different are we the audience from the characters on stage?

## **CHARACTERS**

BEN, 40-50, married to Carol, has been lying for the last twenty or thirty years, pretending to be a successful advertising executive.

JULES, 40-50, married to Jenny, was at university with Ben and Carol and now teaches at a secondary school.

JENNY, 40-50, married to Jules, hoping for better.

CAROL, 40-50, married to Ben, depressed.

A terrace with garden furniture. Early morning grey light. Summer. Off-stage: the house on one side, the garden on the other.

A shot is heard coming from inside the house. A moment's silence, then footsteps, the sound of a teenage boy pronouncing the word "Dad?", another shot. Silence. Ben comes out of the house, a rifle in his hand. He sits in a chair, puts the end of the rifle in his mouth and tries to find a comfortable position from which to pull the trigger. It is awkward, he fails. From the other side of the house comes the sound of a doorbell, then knocking and shouting.

JULES            *(off)* Carol? Ben? You up? Ho! Anybody there?

Ben puts the rifle down, listens. Silence. Jules appears, having come round the side of the house.

JULES            Ah, there you are. I did ring...

Pause

How are you?

BEN              Alright. How are you?

JULES            Fine. Well, no. No, actually I'm not fine at all.

BEN              Ah.

JULES            Can we go inside?

BEN              Have you forgotten something?

JULES            It's Jenny.

BEN              Jenny has forgotten something? Or you've forgotten Jenny?

Pause

She's not here.

JULES            I have to speak to you.

BEN              You left together last night. Remember? Why would she be here?

JULES            She's leaving me.

BEN              Even so.

JULES            No but, can you believe it? She's leaving me.

BEN              Yes.

JULES            You're not surprised?

BEN Are you?

JULES I'm gobsmacked. I can't get over it. She's leaving me. For someone else.

BEN Someone else?

JULES Can I go in?

BEN Someone other than you, you mean?

JULES Well, yes... That's what's... I'm gobsmacked. She's found someone else.

BEN You don't know who.

JULES That's not the point.

BEN Ah. What is the point then?

JULES Let's go inside.

BEN Why don't you sit down?

JULES I'm cold. I haven't slept all night. I didn't want to go home with her. She left me by the side of the road. I had to hitch-hike. I didn't know where to go. I don't know what to do.

BEN Sit down.

JULES I feel sick.

BEN Do you want an aspirin?

Pause

JULES Get any?

BEN What?

JULES Rabbits... Carol not up yet?

BEN What time is it?

JULES I haven't slept all night. I was going to wait outside but then I remembered you were an early riser. In the old days.

BEN Not any more.

JULES You don't call this early?

BEN           What do you want from me?

JULES        Nothing. I just want to talk to you.

BEN           You talked to me last night.

JULES        Yes, but since then my life has gone off the rails. Last night I was all right. Last night I didn't know. I haven't slept all night. I had to speak to someone. Just your bad luck I picked on you.

Pause

              You're my oldest friend.

BEN           What about Eric Delaney?

JULES        I haven't seen Eric in donkey's years.

BEN           Anthony Langtree?

JULES        We're not on speaking terms.

BEN           Since when?

JULES        Since he got back together with Catherine. As I'd said when she went it was the best thing ever happened to him... So you're all that's left, I'm afraid.

BEN           My lucky day.

JULES        You're my best friend.

BEN           You despise me.

Pause

JULES        It's not you I despise, it's your work. The people around you. It's not you. We've known each other since we were kids.

BEN           You've despised me since we were kids.

Pause

JULES        The worst of it is I've always dreamed of this. It's what I've always wanted. That she'd bugger off and leave me in peace. And now it's happened and it's a disaster.

BEN           Could be worse.

Pause

JULES           It's really a great opportunity for me. I know. It had to be this way round, otherwise she'd have gone berserk. She couldn't have taken it. That's probably why I didn't do it. I felt sorry for her.

BEN             You had someone else?

JULES           No. No, but I could have done, couldn't I? I've been sacrificing myself.

Pause

She's the one who pursued me in the beginning. I didn't ask her to. I left for London. And she followed me.

BEN             You didn't want her to?

JULES           I didn't have much say in the matter.

BEN             So actually you're pleased about this?

JULES           What do you mean, pleased?

BEN             That she's leaving you.

JULES           I want to kill her.

BEN             Ah.

JULES           You can't understand. I'm not asking you to understand. I'm asking you to listen. Why don't you listen?

BEN             I'm listening.

Pause

What have you got to say?

JULES           You've made me lose my thread.

BEN             Where's Jenny?

JULES           How would I know? With him, I suppose.

BEN             Really?

JULES           It's such a sordid... it disgusts me even to think about it.

BEN             Don't think about it.

Pause

JULES           I think she's meeting up with him today.

Pause  
He's married too. Has to speak to his wife.

BEN  
And Jenny?

JULES  
Well, she's done her bit. Spoke to me in the car. Balled me out. Of course it's all my fault.

BEN  
How come?

JULES  
Oh, the usual. Don't pay her enough attention, only think of me, live in a dream world. She needs a real man and I can't even change a plug.

BEN  
You have to know how to change a plug?

JULES  
Apparently. I know how, it's just that with all those bloody stupid little tiny screws it takes me hours to take them out and put them back in again. Why can't they make them bigger?

Pause  
She left me on the side of the road. I haven't slept all night.

BEN  
I see.

JULES  
What time does Carol get up?

BEN  
You wanted to see her?

JULES  
Yes. No. You know.

BEN  
No, I don't.

JULES  
It's just that yesterday she seemed a bit down.

BEN  
You thought you'd cheer her up?

JULES  
She was always a bit complicated.

BEN  
Yes.

JULES  
Jenny too, mind you. In her way. She may not seem it but in her way she's very complicated too.

Pause  
Perhaps all women are complicated.

Pause  
Not like us, eh? We're more straightforward. Say what we think.

Pause  
How are you?

BEN  
Alright.



JULES            Do you know I envy you?

BEN                No, I didn't know that.

JULES            Yes I do. Not your career. You know what I think of advertising. And I don't give a fuck about your social standing. That counts for someone like Jenny but it just leaves me cold. No, what I envy is your peace of mind.

BEN                Ah. Yes.

JULES            Nothing throws you. Never a doubt. You always know where you stand.

Pause

                      Whereas I have doubts about everything. About myself, about others, about what others think of me. Even about what I think of them. I never know where I stand.

BEN                That's unfortunate.

Pause

JULES            If I catch this little bastard I'll tear his balls off with my bare hands and stuff them in his gob. While he's still conscious. And then I'll watch him die.

BEN                You know where you stand on that then.

Pause

JULES            You're right. What do I care? Good riddance. Now I'm free. That's what I wanted. So why do I feel so low?

Pause

                      Do you want to make me a coffee?

BEN                You see? You despise me.

JULES            Asking for coffee means I despise you?

BEN                You treat me like your servant.

JULES            Alright, sorry, I'll make it myself.

BEN                No, it's alright, I'll go.

JULES            No no, I know the way.

BEN                No, stay where you are!

Pause

JULES            Alright. Anything you say.

Ben goes indoors.

Do you want a hand?

BEN               *(off)* It's alright.

Pause

Nescafé do?

JULES            I prefer the real thing. It was good, yesterday.

Pause

I can make it, if you like.

Ben returns.

BEN               Here.

JULES            That's nescafé.

BEN               That's all there is.

Pause

JULES            I just can't believe it.

BEN               You'll have to take my word for it.

JULES            She was cheating on me, and I never even noticed.

BEN               Because you never pay her any attention.

JULES            You think that too ? ... Do you think I'm a failure ?

Pause

You're right. My life is a failure. I haven't done anything. Of the two of us you're the one who's made a go of it. I can't get over that. It's you. I thought by now I'd be a permanent fixture on all the literary juries, guest of honour at the trendiest dinner parties, the mainstay of the better quality talk shows. I thought they'd be writing theses on my works in universities and arguing about my politics in the weekend supplements. I thought men would be happy to have me as their friend even if I was sleeping with their wives. That's my destiny. I should have married an Italian actress and had bucket-loads of mistresses on the side – well, maybe not Italian then... – I should have had an old apartment in St. Germain des Prés, a loft in New York, a town house in London and

generous friends in Rome and Barcelona. And a cottage in Cornwall too, why not? I like it there.

BEN It's coming back into fashion, Cornwall.

JULES Is it? I'll sell then, I'm above fashion. You can offer it to your pal Bruni, the king of the nouveaux riches.

BEN You see? You despise me.

JULES But only in my dreams. The reality of it is that it's you that's got all that. You're a director – or vice-president or whatever – in one of the biggest advertising agencies in the world, you're invited everywhere, you spend your nights in the most fashionable night clubs with TV stars, even the government asks for your advice – of course they do: you're the man who decides what everyone's going to want tomorrow. Whereas I... I teach.

Pause

I'm not the world famous writer that everyone wants to know, I teach literature in a suburban comprehensive, the pupils find me ridiculous, the sum total of my literary production is one novel that I can't get published and on top of that... On top of that...

BEN On top of that you're a cuckold.

JULES How'd you like my fist in your face ?

BEN Not much.

JULES That's not at all what I was thinking of.

BEN It was just to complete the picture.

JULES I don't need your help for that, thank you.

Pause

Anyway her breasts are beginning to droop. Her mouth is twisted from nagging at me. I wonder what he sees in her.

Pause

God, I miss her.

Pause

Carol still asleep?

Pause

Julian too?

Pause

Why are you laughing?

BEN Jenny's leaving you, so you've come to see Carol, is that it?

Pause

It's too late.

JULES           I didn't come to see Carol, specially.

Pause

It's much too late. You've won there too.

Pause

You made the right move alright when you bashed me over the head with that bottle.

BEN             I never bashed you over the head with a bottle.

JULES           If you hadn't have done that, I would probably have stolen Carol from you. I wouldn't have married Jenny, I'd have married Carol. She would have encouraged me to write. I'd have been a success. Instead of you. Everything would have been different. One move, and everything changes.

BEN             Except I never made that move.

JULES           I don't hold a grudge.

BEN             Then why do you keep talking about it?

Pause

JULES           You've stepped in something.

BEN             What?

JULES           Look at your shoe, there.

BEN             Ah. Yes.

JULES           Must be the sauce from yesterday.

Pause

It wasn't much cop, that dinner. Carol has many inimitable qualities but her cooking's not one of them.

BEN             I got back too late to help. She did what she could.

JULES           Your parents are well, you said?

Pause

BEN             It's not what you think.

JULES           What isn't?

BEN           What?

JULES        What's not what I think?

BEN           Good rifle, this.

JULES        What's that got to do with anything?

BEN           Coffee alright?

JULES        No. Why don't you make some proper coffee?

BEN           Was it cracks or paving stones for you?

JULES        What?

BEN           When you were small. It's one of the first big decisions you make in life. Do you always keep your foot on the paving stone or do you allow yourself to step on the cracks? I always stayed on the stones. Still do actually. I was terrified of the cracks. Silly, isn't it?

JULES        Very.

BEN           Not you, eh? You always were braver than me. But I was convinced, still am somewhere deep inside of me convinced, that if you step on a crack you pass right through it, you're sucked into the vacuum, swallowed up, slurped down into nothingness, and you fall, fall forever and ever, a never-ending descent into a bottomless pit.

Pause

JULES        Are you alright?

BEN           Yes. As it happens I feel fine. It's like a deliverance. I'm in free fall but the great thing is this feeling of liberty. I've been carrying this weight for so long and now all of a sudden gravity has no pull.

JULES        What weight?

BEN           The weight of living. Of living the lie.

JULES        I don't understand a word you're saying.

Pause

              I have to speak to you about the money.

Pause

              The money you invested for me. That I want to take back. You said you could give me an advance.

Pause

              And now, you understand, what with Jenny and... all that, it's rather urgent.

Pause

Is that a problem for you?

BEN

Not at all.

JULES

You can get it for me? All of it? This week?

BEN

No.

Pause

JULES

I know you can't get it out of Switzerland straight away but if you could just... you can take it out of another account, can't you?

BEN

No.

JULES

I'll put the Swiss thing in your name afterwards. I'll sign all the papers, don't worry.

BEN

No.

Pause

JULES

What do you mean, no?

BEN

I can't.

JULES

You can't what?

BEN

I can't give you an advance. And I can't return what you gave me.

Pause

JULES

You can't?

BEN

No.

JULES

Why not?

BEN

Because I've got nothing left.

Pause

JULES

What do you mean?

BEN

I've got nothing left. It's over.

JULES

What's over?

BEN

The whole thing.

JULES           What thing ?

Pause

This is no good. I'm going to make some real coffee.

BEN             No.

JULES           Want some?

BEN             If you go inside the house I'll kill you.

Pause

JULES           Is something wrong?

BEN             Everything's fine. I'm in free fall. But for the time being everything's fine.

JULES           Why don't you want me to go in the house?

Pause

Is Carol asleep? And Julian?

Pause

What's happening?

Pause

I don't understand.

BEN             You never tried to understand.

Pause

JULES           The only thing I understand right now is that you're taking me for a fool.

BEN             There's something of that, yes.

Pause

JULES           You don't want to give me my money back?

Pause

You're telling me that you took all my money and that you never had any intention of giving it back, is that it?

BEN             That's about it, yes.

Pause

JULES           But why?

BEN                    Nothing personal. I took money off loads of people before you.

JULES                Is that supposed to reassure me?

BEN                    I'm beyond that now. I've spent my life trying to reassure everyone. Trying to make them believe that I could get by. It's over now...

JULES                Wait...

BEN                    I'm in free fall...

JULES                No, stop... This is beginning to get on my nerves. Stop talking in metaphors, stop all this fun and games and just tell me straight what you've done with the money.

BEN                    I've spent it.

Pause

JULES                You've spent it?

BEN                    Yes.

JULES                My money?

BEN                    Yours. And everybody else's. It's all gone.

Pause

JULES                You've spent all my money?

BEN                    Yes.

Pause

JULES                Oh shit.

BEN                    Yes.

JULES                But how are you going to pay me back?

BEN                    I'm not going to pay you back.

Pause

JULES                You're not going to?

BEN                    No.

JULES                But what am I going to say to Jenny?



Pause  
What are you trying to prove?

Pause  
This is about that bottle again, isn't it?

Pause  
You're angry with me because of the past.

Pause  
It's not enough to bash me over the head and ruin my life, you had to have your final revenge.

Pause  
That's pathetic.

Pause  
What am I going to do for fuck's sake?

Pause  
I should have left you to rot in that shitty bloody car park. I should have pretended not to recognize you.

Pause  
Actually I don't recognize you. How did you do it?

Pause  
You could barely scramble through your A levels, you followed me to uni and signed up for the same course as me because you didn't have any ideas of your own, you had no opinion other than mine, you didn't talk, you were ugly, badly dressed, awkward, you were a complete bloody nonentity and now you're the king of the world. How did you do it?

BEN  
I lied.

JULES  
That's right. You lie for a living. But how could it possibly work? What did they teach you at business school?

BEN  
Nothing.

JULES  
You were a nobody. You were only fit to do my washing up. And now you sleep with starlets and lunch with the élite. What happened?

BEN  
I lied.

Pause

JULES  
You're not really an adviser to the tory party?

BEN  
Of course not.

JULES  
I knew it.

BEN  
I don't work in advertising.

JULES  
What?

BEN I never went to business school.

JULES Are you joking?

BEN I couldn't go on at university. So I made that up.

JULES Why?

BEN Just like that. So as not to look a fool. In front of Carol.

Pause

JULES But then... how did you...? What did you do all these years?

BEN Nothing.

Pause

I thought I'd be found out straight away but no. I took things a bit further, partly in the hope of being caught I suppose, but instead of that she agreed to marry me. Her parents, my parents... everybody wanted to believe me. So I had to go on. They forced me to keep on lying.

Pause

They want to believe I'm somebody. I'm nobody. I don't exist. I've never existed. My life is a black hole. There's nothing in it apart from fear. But now it's over. I'm going to disappear for good. I'm going to erase all trace of my existence. I'm going to clean everything up.

Pause

JULES What's inside the house?

BEN I've cleaned up.

Pause

JULES I want to see Carol.

Pause

I want to see Julian.

Pause

What have you done, Ben?

Pause

Tell me.

Pause

Why have you told me all this?

BEN You're my best friend.

Pause

It's good to talk.

Pause

Pause I'm going to kill myself.  
Pause But first I've got to kill you.  
Pause You know everything now. So I've got to kill you.  
Pause Before Jenny gets here.

JULES tries to grab the rifle. They struggle. They go inside the house. A gunshot. BLACK.

Evening. Jules, Ben, Jenny and Carol come out of the house.

JULES            A bubble?

BEN                A bubble, yes. Brilliant, isn't it?

JENNY            Jules... That was very nice, Carol.

JULES            What? I didn't say anything.

JENNY            I've got nothing against frozen food, I'm all for it. It's lovely here.

BEN                For an advertising agency? It says it all.

Pause

JENNY            No, really. Beautiful weather too. We never even see the sun at our place... All what?

BEN                No but, a bubble, what does it bring to mind?

Pause

JULES            Soap.

BEN                Exactly! Soap, washing powder, that's our roots. That's where it all started.

Pause

JULES            So what?

BEN                But not only that. Bubbles mean champagne, parties, luxury!

JENNY            That's true. Where's Julian gone? Has he gone up to his room? Must be boring for him.

BEN                They're beautiful, fragile, ephemeral – just like life...

JENNY            He seems a nice boy. Doesn't have much to say, but he seems nice...

BEN                And then, think of comic strips. Bubbles are for speech, language, thought.

JULES            Schlak kerpow...

JENNY            Takes after his mother...

BEN                What is a bubble? It's a transparent protective film. And what's inside it?

JENNY            Nothing.

BEN Yes well, there's air. Oxygen.

JENNY Life.

BEN Exactly.

JENNY We should have brought the girls. Would have been more fun for Julian.

JULES So according to you advertising is life?

BEN Well, it's my life anyway. And it's the same for Giorgio.

JENNY Do you know him well?

BEN I gave him the title for his book.

JULES "Lying for a living"?

BEN And I had my say for the new firm too.

JENNY You told him to leave? But he was doing so well.

BEN Of course. But it was stifling us. We were stuck in a rut of preconceptions. Brian could sell fridges to Eskimos but when it comes to striking out....

JENNY Brian Goldman?

BEN Goldman, yes. He's nobody's fool but he just lacks that little something extra...

JENNY You call them all by their Christian names...

BEN That little something that Giorgio's got that separates genius from mere mortals...

JULES What about you?

BEN Me?

JULES Have you got that little something extra?

JENNY Jules...

BEN Giorgio's the one that's got that.

JULES You're not a genius then?

BEN I should have thought you were aware of that by now.

JULES            Oh, I don't know, I got everything else wrong, so....

Pause

JENNY            But what do you have against Goldman?

BEN                We don't have anything against him. He is what he is. He's not an artist.

JULES            And Bruni is?

JENNY            What's he got that the others haven't?

BEN                I consider Giorgio to be the greatest artist of our times.

JULES            We get the artists we deserve.

BEN                The others are artisans. Craftsmen. Giorgio is a visionary. Who said advertising should be only about selling? Why should everything be reduced to a message? Giorgio said to me one day, he said, "Benjamin..."

JENNY            He calls you Benjamin?

BEN                He said, "Listen."

JENNY            Like the bunny...

BEN                "We've worked for the market economy, we've done our bit for the politicians, it's time to break free from the yoke of utilitarianism. We have to shrug off the shackles of salesmanship. No brand, no message! Communication for communication's sake!" He's brilliant. With his accent it's even better.

JULES            But what does it mean?

BEN                It means we won't be working for anyone any more. We won't be trying to get anything across. We just do it because we do it. That's all there is to it.

Pause

JENNY            But how will that make you any money?

BEN                It won't. That's the beauty of it. It's a luxury we can afford. Don't worry, Giorgio's got his head screwed on. He's keeping his shares in the old agency.

JENNY            But you'll be working in this...

JULES            Bubble?

BEN                   That's where the future lies, I'm convinced of it. Giorgio and I go back a long way. I trust him.

JULES                Does he trust you?

BEN                   Of course. He never makes a move without consulting me first.

JULES                Did you see the interview in the Guardian?

BEN                   Of course.

JULES                It's strange, he mentions all his collaborators, everyone he's taking with him to the new agency... He doesn't mention you.

BEN                   I should hope not.

JENNY                But that's awful.

BEN                   Not at all. The others need that sort of recognition.

JENNY                But not you?

BEN                   I prefer to lurk in the shadows. Where the power is.

JULES                And you like power?

Pause

BEN                   It's a wonderful adventure when you're in it. But take a step back and you see it really doesn't mean anything at all.

JULES                Are you talking about advertising or politics?

BEN                   I'm talking about life. You believe in it, you do all you can to hang on, but sooner or later you're going to have to let go.

JULES                You're very philosophical this evening.

JENNY                He's right.

JULES                I don't deny it.

Pause

JENNY                It's so lovely here. We've been lucky with the weather.

BEN                   I'm really glad we've met up again. Aren't you? It's such a pity to lose sight of one another. Time goes by, you don't notice, there's always so much to do, and then all of a sudden there you are : strangers. If I hadn't happened to wander into that hypermarket car park last year...

JENNY Do you often go there?

BEN Never! I don't know what inspired me that day... What about you, Jules, what were you doing there?

JENNY There was a special offer on TV sets...

BEN Pure chance then?

JENNY I quite often go there. Jules not so much.

BEN Me never.

Pause

JENNY We're very pleased with our telly. HD is really worth it. We hesitated but we got a very good deal. That hypermarket's very good for that sort of thing. Mind you, Jules was had with the barbecue.

Pause

He really has no idea. You have to tell him everything.

JULES I don't really think it matters that much, does it?

JENNY Not to you, no. You don't give a fuck about anything.

Pause

BEN Gas?

JENNY Pardon?

BEN The barbecue. Was it gas?

JENNY Well no, that's the whole point. That's what I wanted. He just took the cheapest he could get with nothing at all, it takes hours to light it, it's useless.

BEN Ah yes, that's not so good.

CAROL Do you know what Ben bought today?

Pause

BEN Ah, you're still here then?

JENNY Did you buy yourself something, Ben?

BEN I have the right to buy whatever I like.



CAROL           What can you like about it?

BEN               I like the fact that I bought it. I like the fact that while in full possession of my faculties, knowing what I was doing, having weighed the pros and cons, I made a choice. And then having made that choice I went on to make an acquisition, accomplished by means of a mutually consented exchange, between myself and the shopkeeper in question, of the goods on the one hand, and on the other of the big bucks, the bread, the dough, the dosh, the filthy lucre.

CAROL           You paid cash?

Pause

BEN               I like the fact that I made a decision all on my own like a big boy, which I then translated into action without bothering to seek anyone else's approval, on my own head be it. I like the fact that I flew in the face of the considered opinion of Marxist sociologists, of advocates of determinism of every hue and colour, not to mention my nearest and dearest, and affirmed my basic right as a middle-aged middle class male to exercise my own free will.

JENNY           You didn't want him to buy it?

Pause

I don't see why he shouldn't indulge himself once in a while.

JULES           What did you buy?

Pause

CAROL           Tell them.

BEN               Oh but that's exactly what I intend to do. I have nothing to hide.

CAROL           No?

BEN               Absolutely nothing. You can see right through me.

Pause

I merely bought myself a hunting rifle.

He goes into the house and comes out with the rifle.

JENNY           And Carol's against cruelty to animals. Is that it?

Pause

I like animals too, mind you. But I wouldn't make a big thing of it.

Pause

Hunting's supposed to be quite ecological actually. It restores the balance of nature.

BEN Remington Model 700. Internal box magazine, heavy contour barrel. Solid steel, 26 inch.

Pause

One year guarantee.

MARK It's not the season at the moment, is it?

BEN There's no season for rabbits.

JENNY It's just for rabbits? See, Carol, he's protecting your garden. You should be grateful.

BEN Carol spends the best part of her life in the garden. She's very proud of it.

JENNY I must say it's a wonderful garden.

CAROL There are no rabbits in my garden.

Pause

He left this morning to do some shopping. He came back just before you with that.

BEN I spent the day with my parents.

JULES How are they?

BEN Alright. How about yours?

JULES Getting old.

BEN Ah yes. That happens.

CAROL Not to everyone.

BEN Have you taken your pills?

Pause

CAROL I tried to call you there. I rang and rang.

BEN Why?

CAROL No-one answered.

BEN Why did you ring?

CAROL The bank. They've been trying to reach you.

BEN Ah.

CAROL They wanted to talk to me but I said no.

BEN Good. I told them to ring me on the mobile.

CAROL They did. So did I. You didn't answer.

Pause

They seemed to think it was important.

BEN They're stupid. I'll ring them tomorrow.

JENNY Ben takes care of all the financial side of things, does he?

Pause

CAROL Yes. I just can't deal with it.

JENNY With us it's the other way round. His lordship can't be bothered with material things, he says he's an artist...

BEN But he is an artist. He's written a novel.

Pause

JULES Have you found me a publisher?

BEN I haven't really had time just yet but I will, don't worry.

JULES No but it's just that you mentioned Bruni's publisher... have you seen him?

BEN I've spoken to him over the phone but it wasn't really the best time...

JULES No, I understand...

JENNY Don't keep on at him. He knows what he's doing. If he says it wasn't the best time it wasn't the best time.

JULES Have you read it?

BEN It doesn't matter what I think...

JULES You haven't read it.

JENNY Nobody can get through it.

CAROL I thought it was very good.

JULES            Ah, you...?

JENNY            You read it all the way through?

CAROL            I liked it.

JULES            Well... thank you.

Pause

BEN                Jules was always the gifted one.

JULES            Now you're taking the piss.

BEN                Not at all. I'm perfectly sincere. You're building up a body of work. It might not look like much at the moment but it will, it's got solid foundations, it's built to last. Whereas I'm only surfing on the spirit of the age. Five minutes after I'm dead, no-one will remember me. That's what you think, isn't it?

Pause

JULES            No. Actually I admire you. You've found your way. You've found your self-belief.

BEN                Do you think so?

JULES            Back then you had nothing to say about anything. You never spoke.

JENNY            Is that right?

BEN                Yes. Back then Jules was the one who had things to say.

JENNY            Really? That didn't last.

JULES            Back then people used to listen.

BEN                Yes, Jules was very eloquent. He had an opinion on everything. Not just an opinion. He had an ingenious theory on every imaginable subject. The girls loved him. Didn't they, Carol?

Pause

                      And witty with it. He was a star. I was nothing then. Nobody noticed me. I had nothing to say. They put up with me at best. Jules let me do the washing up. That was nice of him. I served drinks to his friends. I made myself useful. Don't go thinking he was exploiting me. I was grateful. In exchange for a few paltry domestic chores, I was allowed to stay till the end of the party. I got to meet his friends. And what friends! And what parties! That's how I met Carol.

JENNY            Is that true?

JULES           It's true I must have been pretty obnoxious.

BEN             Not at all! Why do you say that? You were brilliant. It was a pleasure to be around you. For everybody. Starting with me. I was happy to be able to help.

JULES           I'm ashamed of it now but at the time I found it absolutely normal. I had my whole life ahead of me, I was under the impression that all I had to do was put one foot in front of the other and all the lights would turn green. I must have been horribly pretentious.

CAROL           No. You were very eloquent.

JENNY           You often went to these parties, did you?

CAROL           For a while. And then I stopped. But I didn't talk.

JENNY           No, I can imagine.

JULES           She didn't need to talk. She lit up the room.

JENNY           Good God, a compliment. Make the most of it, Carol. It's the first in years. At least in front of me.

CAROL           He doesn't even remember me.

JENNY           Yes he does, he just said you lit up the room.

CAROL           I was just one in the crowd. He didn't even notice me.

JULES           You know very well I did.

Pause

                  Ben noticed you first, it's true. But he invited you to my place and you turned my life upside-down.

JENNY           Oh yes?

CAROL           Not at all. I'd been to your place several times with other people before you even spoke to me. That's where I met Ben. I helped him do the washing up.

BEN             That's right.

JULES           No, it isn't. I noticed you straight away. You made a huge impression on me the moment I set eyes on you. Ben was furious. That's why he bashed me over the head with a bottle.

JENNY           You're not going to trot out your bottle story again, are you?

CAROL           What story?

BEN             You must have dreamt it.

JENNY          Jules claims that Ben smashed a bottle over his head on his birthday.

JULES          If I dreamt it, how come we never saw each other again?

BEN             I'd left the university for business school. We no longer had classes together.

JULES          You stopped coming to my parties.

BEN             You stopped inviting me.

JULES          I didn't fancy getting my head bashed in.

BEN             I always thought you held it against me that I got into business school whereas you failed the entrance exam for film school.

Pause

JULES          I never saw you again either.

CAROL          You'd seen enough of me.

JULES          You know that's not true. Why did you stop coming to my parties ?

CAROL          I wasn't invited.

JULES          You were invited that evening.

CAROL          What evening ?

JULES          My birthday. When he bashed me over the head.

JENNY          You missed a great party.

Pause

CAROL          Excuse me.

Exit.

JULES          Why didn't she come? Do you know?

BEN             Does it matter?

Pause

JULES           No, of course not. It's of no importance now. It's ridiculous.

Pause

JULES           Has she gone to make coffee?

JENNY           She's gone into the garden. Go after her if you want.

BEN             Coffee for everyone?

Exit.

JENNY           Bravo.

JULES           What?

JENNY           I hope you're glad you came.

JULES           Why?

JENNY           Don't play the innocent with me.

JULES           I don't know what you're talking about.

JENNY           I'm talking about Carol.

JULES           What about Carol?

JENNY           That's why we came, isn't it?

JULES           We came because you went on and on at me for months until I got Ben to invite us.

JENNY           Me? I went on and on? You only came here for my sake?

JULES           That's right.

JENNY           Bullshit.

JULES           I wasn't all that keen.

JENNY           That's what you wanted us to believe.

Pause

JULES           What's the matter? Don't you like it here?

JENNY           I like the house.

JULES           What don't you like then?

JENNY           The reception.

Pause

JULES           Carol was always a bit peculiar.

JENNY           She's had her nose turned up ever since we got here. Look at the meal we got. And now she's upped and gone. Great. Or I should say since *I* got here. She's had her nose turned up at me. She thinks you're a great writer.

JULES           Because *she's* read my book.

JENNY           She could get away with murder anyway, you lights up the room. Not like me.

Pause

JULES           I find her moving.

JENNY           And I'm just a pain in the arse, is that it?

Pause

                  Would it choke you to say something nice to me once in your life?

Pause

                  Did you sleep with her?

JULES           What's that got to do with anything? I haven't seen her since...

JENNY           Before she was with Ben or at the same time?

JULES           You always have to cheapen everything... You'd turn Tristan and Isolde into tittle tattle.

JENNY           You never even had the courage to tell me.

JULES           It had nothing to do with you.

JENNY           You really think I'm stupid, don't you? If I didn't come up to see you at university, it was because you said you had to concentrate on your studies. Because the next Orson Welles didn't want any distractions while he prepared for film school. And now I find out you spent your time living it up at parties.

JULES           No, I didn't.

JENNY           And here you are passing judgement on everyone, making pronouncements, listening to the sound of your own voice...

JULES           Stop this.



JENNY            But there you go: now Ben spends his evenings with movie stars and Giorgio Bruni while you have to put up with me and the first form's homework!

JULES            Just stop talking, will you? You're not funny.

Pause

JENNY            I can't go on like this for much longer, Jules.

She goes off into the garden.  
Ben comes out of the house with coffee.

BEN              Coffee?

JULES            Please.

BEN              Where's Jenny?

JULES            Gone off in a huff.

BEN              Ah. Do you think she wants coffee?

JULES            Let her stay where she is.

Pause

BEN              So... have you brought the money?

JULES            No.

Pause

I'll explain later.

BEN              You haven't got it?

JULES            No. Where's Carol?

BEN              Over there.

JULES            Ah yes.

Pause

There's something I don't quite get.

BEN              Carol. But don't complain. Getting her's not all it's cracked up to be.

Pause

JULES            She leaves you pretty well alone, doesn't she?

BEN            Pretty well.

JULES         So what are you complaining about?

BEN            I'm not complaining.

Pause

                 Your parents didn't give you the money?

Pause

JULES         They don't want to risk it.

Pause

BEN            They don't want to?

JULES         No.

BEN            They don't want to be rich? They don't want to make a great deal of money without lifting a finger? That doesn't appeal to them?

Pause

JULES         No.

BEN            Alright. Too bad.

Pause

JULES         Is that a problem for you?

BEN            Me? Why should it be a problem for me? I'm a bit sorry for them, that's all. You don't get this sort of opportunity every day of the week... They don't trust me, is that it?

JULES         They may need the money... fairly quickly. My father's not in the best of health...

BEN            That's a pity.

JULES         Yes.

Pause

                 Of the two of you, I'd have thought you were the jealous one.

BEN            Me?

JULES         Aren't you?

BEN            What do you know about me?

JULES            No but in a couple there's always one that... With us, it's Jenny. Carol doesn't strike me as the jealous type.

BEN                She doesn't give a shit.

JULES            You really have all the luck. You get all the girlies you want, I suppose?

BEN                Don't you? Your schoolgirls must all be under your spell, no?

JULES            Not all. I don't think I have as much fun as you... When are you going to take me to one of your parties?

BEN                My parties?

JULES            You know, the famous parties you were talking about...

Pause

                      You know... in the clubs.

BEN                Oh, you know, I don't really have as much fun as all that. It soon loses its allure. The clubs are really pretty naff... Of course there are the private parties... but then it's not so easy to invite someone they don't know.

JULES            And Carol...?

BEN                Carol, no.

JULES            No but, she doesn't say anything?

BEN                What do you want her to say?

JULES            She's a strange girl... She didn't come to my birthday party.

BEN                That's not necessarily proof of insanity.

Pause

JULES            Julian seems very well behaved.

BEN                Why do you bring him into it?

Pause

                      He's alright. He gets by at school.

Pause

                      Here he doesn't speak.

JULES            Nothing wrong with that. He doesn't know us.

BEN                He knows me.

JULES            Oh, he'll get over it.

Pause

                    You got over it, didn't you?

Pause

                    It certainly is nice here. Jenny couldn't believe it when we pulled into the drive... And you own all this?

BEN              Yes.

JULES            No rent to pay. Just a bit of a mortgage...

BEN              Like everyone else.

JULES            So I suppose you've put a small fortune into this thing...

BEN              It's a very good investment. Don't tell anyone, eh? This is strictly between ourselves. I wanted to share this with you because you're an old friend but otherwise...

JULES            No, I'm really grateful to you, it's just that... I suppose it doesn't sound like much to you but for me it's quite a big...

BEN              Best to keep quiet about it. It was Goldman gave me the tip.

JULES            Any idea why the bank wanted to speak to you? Is there a problem?

BEN              That's the bank here. A bunch of yokels. Nothing to do with the Swiss thing, don't worry...

JULES            No, it's just that... I may have been in a bit too much of a hurry to get into this...

BEN              Do you know what they want? You have to laugh. They want to give me some advice on investment.

JULES            I'm not sure it's really...

BEN              No but, what do you reckon they're going to offer me? 4%? A joke.

Pause

JULES            Any more coffee?

BEN              Through here.

They go into the house.  
Carol and Jenny come from the garden.

CAROL           It wasn't a dream. I could see him quite clearly. I saw him. At the bottom of the garden. He held out his arms to me. I moved towards him.

JENNY           Your father?

CAROL           Do you think I'm mad?

JENNY           No...

CAROL           I'm not saying it's possible, I'm saying what I saw. I wanted to go over to him but he turned round, he turned his back to me. He was wearing his light grey suit, the one he wore for weddings. He was standing very straight, slightly tense, erect, very dignified. I was trying to move towards him but I wasn't actually getting any closer. The distance between us remained the same.

JENNY           It's a big garden.

CAROL           I wasn't moving. I was walking but I was standing still.

JENNY           It was a dream.

CAROL           And then I saw. He spread his wings and flew away.

Pause

JENNY           Your father?

CAROL           It wasn't my father.

JENNY           No, eh?

CAROL           It was a heron.

JENNY           Ah. Well, there you are.

CAROL           You never see herons out here. There isn't any water.

JENNY           Maybe it wasn't a heron either. Did Ben see it?

Pause

CAROL           I miss him.

JENNY           Your father?

CAROL           Well yes, not the heron.

JENNY           That's only normal. I went through that too. Time's the only healer.

CAROL           How does time heal?

JENNY           I don't know. You move on. You forget.

CAROL           You've forgotten your father?

JENNY           No. I didn't say that. As time passes it's different... Did Ben see this heron?

CAROL           How much?

JENNY           What?

CAROL           How much time?

JENNY           Ah. Well, quite a bit actually. With me it was nearly a year. I suppose with you it's still quite recent... When did it happen?

CAROL           A few years ago.

JENNY           Ah.

Pause

CAROL           He was watching a football match on the TV with Ben. And Julian. I was out shopping with my mother. When we got back there was no-one here.

JENNY           What happened?

CAROL           They had a problem with the reception. Ben went up on the roof to look at the aerial. My father followed him up. And he fell. He was in a coma for five days. Then he died.

JENNY           Ah. Where did he live?

CAROL           Here.

Pause

JENNY           And your mother?

CAROL           Doesn't speak to me any more.

JENNY           Why not?

CAROL           Something to do with money. I don't understand money. Do you?

JENNY           I get by. I have to.

CAROL           I leave all that to Ben. I shouldn't but I can't help it, it disgusts me...

JENNY           He seems to know what he's about...

Pause

                  Carol?

CAROL           Yes?

JENNY           Is everything alright between the two of you?

Pause

                  I mean, well, it's none of my business but you don't seem very close.

CAROL           No.

Pause

JENNY           It's none of my business...

Pause

                  What do you hold against him?

Pause

                  He's away a lot. Always working.

Pause

                  But at least he's done something with his life. Not like Jules.

Pause

                  You don't know how much I envy you.

CAROL           No.

JENNY           It's magnificent.

CAROL           What is?

JENNY           Everything. The house. The garden. The furniture. Julian. Ben. Your life.

CAROL           I find it hard to believe that anyone could envy my life.

JENNY           Perhaps you don't make the most of it.

Pause

                  At least now I can understand why you never go with him to London.

CAROL           Why should I go with him?

JENNY           I don't know: the dinner parties, the receptions, all those people. Sounds fascinating. Did you get tired of it?

CAROL           I never went.

JENNY But why ever not?

CAROL He never invited me.

JENNY Ah.

Pause

With Jules, we never see anyone. Apart from a few teachers. Did you never ask him?

CAROL What?

JENNY To invite you?

CAROL Oh. No.

JENNY Aren't you curious to meet all those celebrities?

CAROL I suppose I'd have liked to meet some artists.

JENNY But he knows loads of artists!

CAROL Who?

JENNY Oh, I don't know – he's always full of them: actors, directors... He told me he knew Jan Schmidt.

Pause

You know, the designer.

CAROL When?

JENNY When what?

CAROL When did he tell you that?

JENNY Oh... just now, I think. Or maybe at our place, I forget. We've had him over a couple of times.

Pause

Jules told him to come with you but he always turned up alone.

CAROL Design's not really what I call art.

JENNY Oh but you're wrong there, he had an exhibition at Tate Modern last year.

Pause

Van der Elst too. You know, the comic strips... he makes films now.

Pause

Ben's never mentioned him?



CAROL I don't remember. Come to think of it the artists I'd have liked to meet are all dead. I'm not very keen on modern art.

Pause

JENNY And you never invite people here?

CAROL You.

JENNY Yes but this is the first time we've come. Even though Ben and Jules have known each other for ages, you know Jules pretty well too...

Pause

You were quite close, weren't you?

Pause

CAROL Has Jules spoken to you about me?

JENNY He's just made you a declaration, hasn't he? You changed his life. First I'd heard of it but you learn something new every day...

CAROL But before?

JENNY Not to me, no. I didn't even know you existed until Jules came across Ben in that car park. He invited him to our place and discreetly plied him with questions about you.

CAROL And what did Ben say?

JENNY Well... he said you stayed at home.

Pause

That you didn't like going out. Or entertaining. If we hadn't pushed him a bit, he'd never have invited us.

Pause

I hope you don't mind?

Pause

It really is magnificent here.

CAROL I'm not a very good hostess.

JENNY It doesn't matter.

CAROL I try to make conversation but every now and then I go AWOL.

JENNY AWOL?

CAROL I'm not really there.

JENNY Maybe it's the pills.

CAROL No. Most of the time I've got nothing to say. But even when I find something I don't always have the courage to speak up. I always find myself an excuse, a pretext for not saying anything. The more I go on and the more the idea of communicating with another person just seems a bridge too far.

Pause

JENNY And how are things with Ben?

CAROL Pardon?

JENNY You manage to talk to him from time to time?

Pause

You get along alright, the two of you, don't you?

CAROL We've found a way of getting on.

JENNY Ah. That's good. No, I mean it's none of my business but it's just that...

CAROL We ignore each other.

JENNY Yes, that's... I sort of got the impression that...

CAROL That what?

Pause

JENNY You've been together a long time.

CAROL Yes.

JENNY Like Jules and me... It wears you out.

CAROL You're worn out?

JENNY Aren't you?

CAROL We were never that close.

JENNY No?

CAROL No.

Pause

He's not like Jules.

JENNY Want to swap?

CAROL Pardon?

JENNY            No, only joking. Only joking.

Pause

                    Did you sign a marriage contract?

CAROL            A what?

JENNY            A marriage contract. We didn't. But then neither of us had anything beforehand so...

CAROL            Neither did we.

JENNY            Ah.

Pause

                    Neither did you have anything beforehand or neither did you sign a marriage contract?

CAROL            Both.

JENNY            Ah.

Pause

CAROL            I inherited the property when my father died.

JENNY            Ah... But Ben must have put in a lot through his work, no?

CAROL            A lot of what?

JENNY            Money.

CAROL            Ah. I suppose so.

Pause

JENNY            You don't even know what you've got in the bank?

CAROL            Why, is there a problem?

JENNY            No no. It's just that I couldn't stand that. Jules never makes any decisions without consulting me.

Pause

                    Or rather he never makes any decisions period. I have to take care of everything.

Pause

                    What do you hold against Ben?

Pause

He started from scratch and look at him now. He's one hell of a success story, I'd say. Not like Jules.

CAROL What do you hold against Jules?

JENNY Nothing.

Pause

But well, can't really call him a success, can you?

Pause

He criticizes other people but what has he done?

CAROL Don't you like his novel?

JENNY It hasn't even been published.

CAROL I thought it was very good. Didn't you?

Pause

JENNY He's very good with the girls of course, I will say that.

Pause

What about Ben?

CAROL What about Ben?

JENNY With Julian. Is he good with him?

CAROL Why do you ask me that?

Pause

JENNY Jules is very good with both of them. But nothing can replace a mother, eh?

Pause

CAROL I tried my best for Julian... It's not enough.

JENNY He seems a very nice boy.

CAROL I can't ask Ben to love him.

JENNY Ah.

Pause

I tried to be like everyone else. I married Ben. I tried to be responsible. I can't do it.

Pause

I try to make contact with people. I thought with Ben it would be easier.  
I can't do it.

Pause

Even with Julian it's difficult now. Since my father died we find it hard  
to talk to each other.

Pause

And he doesn't get on with Ben.

Pause

I've been a coward.

JENNY

Have you? How?

CAROL

With Ben.

Pause

I let things go. And now it's too late.

Pause

JENNY

You know what? Perhaps you ought to go away for a bit, have a bit of a  
holiday. Just take a bit of time for yourself. And just go. On your own.

Pause

CAROL

I stopped taking the pills.

Pause

They stopped me thinking straight. They made me high. But not in a  
good way. I didn't care about anything any more.

Pause

When I was young I used to dream that I could fly. At least I think I did.  
I don't remember the dreams. But I remember my reactions sometimes,  
when I thought that people might realise. I had to hide. No-one must find  
out that I could fly. And no-one did find out. I hid very well. But recently  
I've noticed that it doesn't happen any more. I don't have to hide. I can't  
fly any more. The dreams have gone.

Pause

I won't be long.

She goes off into the garden. Jenny goes to the door.

JENNY

Ben? Can you come out here for a moment, I'd like to speak to you.

Ben comes out of the house.

BEN

Yes?

Pause

JENNY

Can I speak to you?

BEN

What's the matter?

They move away from the house.

JENNY            I've just been talking to Carol.

Pause

BEN              What did you say to her?

JENNY           Nothing. She doesn't listen anyway.

BEN              What did she say to you?

JENNY           Nothing. At least nothing very coherent.

Pause

But one thing seems clear. You can't go on living with this woman.

Pause

She's mad.

Pause

I shouldn't let her up on the roof, she thinks she can fly. Like her father.

Pause

You can't help her. I understand that you feel responsible. But that's no reason to sacrifice yourself.

Pause

You're too generous. You have to think of yourself from time to time. And of me.

Pause

She doesn't love you.

Pause

I love you. I'm the one you should help.

Pause

No-one can hear. And anyway I've had enough of hiding. We can't spend the rest of our lives meeting in that shopping centre. You're never free. And you still haven't introduced me to Giorgio Bruni.

Pause

We're good together, aren't we?

Pause

Physically there's room for improvement but that's just because you feel guilty. It stresses you. I'll help you relax... My little honey bunny.

Pause

With Jules we've come to the end of the road. He'll get over it. Don't worry about him. I'll talk to him on the way home.

Pause

Love me?

Pause

BEN              Careful, she's coming back.

Carol comes up from the garden.

JENNY            Any coffee left?

BEN              I'll go and see.

He goes inside the house. Jenny follows.

JENNY            I'll come with you.

Pause

Jules comes out of the house.

JULES            What are you looking at?

CAROL           The swallows.

JULES            Where?

CAROL           Up there. Very, very high. I was wondering what they could be doing up there.

JULES            Catching insects.

CAROL           There aren't any insects that high.

Pause

JULES            It's been a long time.

CAROL           Yes.

JULES            You haven't changed.

CAROL           Yes I have.

JULES            You look beautiful.

Pause

We've had wonderful weather.

CAROL           It's a disaster. For the garden. There's a hosepipe ban. Everything's dying.

Pause

JULES            Are you happy?

Pause

CAROL I've given everything to this garden. I've spent my life in it. There'll be nothing left. The soil is arid. We're destroying the planet.

Pause

And what have you done with your life?

JULES Oh me, you know... well, the girls are superb, my work is exhausting but not without its satisfactions, the house is very comfortable... I can't say I've done everything I wanted to do but I'm not complaining.

CAROL Aren't you?

Pause

JULES It's probably better like this. For you anyway. Don't you think?

Pause

Is it true you liked my novel?

CAROL Yes.

JULES I'm glad.

CAROL It's you. The Jules I used to know.

Pause

Or the one I imagined.

JULES Rather than the one standing in front of you.

CAROL I don't know who's standing in front of me.

JULES Neither do I.

Pause

You don't write any more?

CAROL Me?

JULES Your poems.

Pause

CAROL I don't show them to anyone.

JULES You are a strange girl. What's the good of writing them if you don't share them with anyone?

Pause

CAROL Once I shared. It hurt.



Pause

JULES            That was the only time?

Pause

It was very beautiful.

Pause

CAROL            Why didn't you say so?

JULES            I'm saying so now.

CAROL            It's a bit late now.

JULES            Yes.

Pause

CAROL            I wrote a lot before. And then less and less. I think it's finished now. I've dried up. Like the garden.

Pause

JULES            They really are up very very high. I hadn't even seen them. See how they swoop up and down? What can they be after?

CAROL            I've been wondering about that for a very long time.

JULES            And?

CAROL            There's doubtless a perfectly rational explanation that hasn't occurred to me. But for me they can only be looking for one thing.

JULES            And what's that?

CAROL            Joy.

Pause

JULES            Have you ever found joy?

CAROL            Once.

Pause

JULES            I hope Jenny didn't bother you.

CAROL            Why do you say that?

JULES            She's a bit tactless at times.

CAROL She didn't bother me at all.

Pause

JULES She must be curious. I'd spoken to her about you.

CAROL She said you hadn't.

Pause

JULES I didn't go into details. It's not as if there's much to tell.

CAROL No.

JULES I just said there had been someone who meant a lot to me.

Pause

CAROL Don't say that.

JULES It's true.

CAROL Don't say that now.

Pause

JULES It wasn't easy before. You were with Ben.

CAROL No, I wasn't.

Pause

JULES I was with Jenny but she wasn't there.

CAROL She came.

JULES She came but if you hadn't have been with Ben I would have told her to go straight back where she came from.

CAROL But I wasn't with Ben.

JULES Yes, you were. He told me.

Pause

Why didn't you come to my birthday party?

CAROL I didn't fancy finding myself face to face with Jenny.

JULES But Jenny wasn't there. I told her not to come up until the weekend afterwards. Who told you about Jenny?

Pause

Was it Ben? Did you tell him about us?

Pause

Someone must have told him. He found out. That's why he smashed that bottle over my head.

CAROL

Nobody smashed a bottle over your head. Jenny came. You forgot me. That's all.

Pause

I hated you for years.

Pause

JULES

He came early to help me get things ready. He said he had a surprise for me. He put a blindfold over my eyes and turned me round and round. I couldn't see, I'd lost my bearings but I trusted him, I was expecting something pleasant. Actually, I know it's stupid but I was expecting to see you. I heard his voice behind me: "Get ready for your surprise." I turned round and felt this enormous blow to my head. I fell to the ground, I was barely conscious, I began to crawl, Ben had disappeared. When the others got there they found me all alone, half delirious. They thought I'd taken something.

Pause

I never heard from him again until I ran into him in that car park.

Pause

Nor from you either.

CAROL

You never tried to get in touch.

JULES

I knew the two of you were together...

CAROL

We weren't.

Pause

JULES

And then Jenny came and told me she was pregnant.

CAROL

Jenny told you that?

JULES

It was a false alarm.

CAROL

Your girls are younger than Julian.

JULES

Yes.

Pause

So you were with Ben.

CAROL

No.

JULES

I can count.

CAROL            Apparently not.

JULES            What do you mean?

Pause

                      I thought we were bound to meet up again. I was convinced that we'd end up face to face in the street without having planned anything and that we'd just fall into each other's arms and stay together forever.

CAROL            I didn't realise you were such a fatalist.

JULES            We did end up meeting.

Pause

                      It took a bit of time.

Pause

                      When I saw Ben in that car park, I had a moment's hesitation. He hadn't seen me, so I had time to think about it. To tell the truth, I didn't think you'd have stayed with him.

CAROL            What was he doing?

JULES            Nothing. He was just sitting there staring into space. I recognized him straight away.

CAROL            When was this?

JULES            About a year ago. One of my free mornings.

CAROL            In the week?

JULES            It must have been a Tuesday.

Pause

                      When I found out you were still together I invited him to the house.

Pause

                      He came alone. I kept on seeing him until he felt obliged to invite us here.

Pause

                      It took time. He resisted. I even had to give him money. But I'm here.

CAROL            You gave him money?

JULES            No, I'm exaggerating. He gave me a tip, that's all. He seems to know what he's doing.

CAROL            He scares me.

Pause

JULES            You think this investment's not as safe as all that?

Pause

CAROL           Why did you come?

JULES           To see you.

CAROL           And now you've seen me?

Pause

JULES           Now I've seen you, I feel as if I've wasted my life. I've got a glimpse of what might have been. And it makes me feel so... sorry.

CAROL           But it could never have been.

JULES           Why not?

CAROL           Because you didn't want it enough.

She moves off into the garden. Silence.  
Jenny and Ben come out of the house.

JENNY           It's getting late.

JULES           We'd better be off. Do you want to say goodbye to Carol? She's over there.

JENNY           What's she doing?

JULES           Cutting off the heads of dead flowers.

JENNY           Oh yes. She has no pity.

She moves off into the garden.

JULES           I've been meaning to say, about this investment...

BEN            Yes?

JULES           I've been thinking it over and...

BEN            You're going to get your parents to give you the money.

JULES           No. No, actually...

Pause

You said if there was a problem I could always back out...

BEN I'm sorry but I never said that.

Pause

JULES That of course I'd lose the interest... but that if I needed I could always get my stake back... no problem.

BEN But now in point of fact there is a problem.

Pause

JULES What's the problem?

BEN The problem is that I can't give you your money back.

Pause

JULES You can't?

BEN No.

JULES You can't or you won't?

Pause

BEN I can't allow you to be so stupid.

JULES You won't give me my money back?

BEN I can't let you make a fool of yourself in front of these people.

JULES But I don't give a fuck about these people.

BEN I do.

JULES That's not my problem.

BEN Do you want to go and explain instead of me?

JULES If you like.

BEN I don't like.

JULES We can go together. I'm free this week.

BEN You can't just turn up like that. You have to have an appointment.

JULES You've got an appointment... for the money from my parents.

BEN            We haven't got the money from your parents.

JULES        No, but we've got the appointment...

Pause

BEN            Look... no. Frankly if that's the way it is, I'd rather give you the money myself.

JULES        But... it's not for you to... Why can't you ask them to give it back?

BEN            Too complicated. I'll just have to try and come up with something on my own...

Pause

JULES        Well, if it suits you that way...

BEN            I can't say it suits me...

JULES        Alright. Thanks.

Pause

BEN            Right. I'll deal with it. I'll keep you posted.

JULES        The sooner the better.

BEN            Right.

Pause

Jenny and Carol come up from the garden.

JENNY        Right. Well, it was very nice.

JULES        OK.

CAROL        Julian?

Pause

He must have his headphones on. Do you want to go up?

JULES        You can say goodbye for us.

Carol and Jules move off behind the house.

Pause

JENNY        I'm not forcing you into anything. It is what you want, isn't it?

Pause

Isn't it?

BEN

Yes yes.

Pause

JENNY

That's what I like about you. You make decisions and you stick to them. You don't waste time mulling things over.

Pause

You'll have to be prepared to fight. You're the one that's put everything into this marriage, she doesn't even work. You mustn't let her beat you down.

Pause

She can't stay here. It's her father's house. She sees him everywhere. She has to cut the knot.

Pause

It's for her own good. Perhaps you ought to find out about rest homes. If the worst comes to the worst it might be a solution.

Pause

The best would be for her to go on holiday with Julian. Until September. While I settle in here. With the girls.

Pause

I'll be keeping the girls, of course. You'll see, they're adorable.

Pause

And then we'll find a solution when she gets back. For Julian.

Pause

I don't mind trying to look after him but well, it might not be easy. It's not as if you... I think you should rent a flat for the two of them. If she's able to look after him. If not he can always board...

Pause

She's coming back. I must go. Talk to her tonight. I'll sort things out with Jules. And come back tomorrow.

Pause

Alright?

BEN

Yes yes.

JENNY

Be brave. And patient. I'll be back tomorrow.

She leaves.

Carol comes back.

BEN

That was nice, wasn't it?

Pause

Right. I'm off to bed. Up early tomorrow.

Pause

I don't remember if I told you, I've got to be at the airport by eight.

Pause



Pause  
A conference in Berlin.

Pause  
Don't bother getting up.

CAROL  
Why didn't you tell me before?

BEN  
I thought I had done. Doesn't matter, does it?

Pause

CAROL  
Did Jules give you money?

BEN  
No.

CAROL  
He mentioned an investment.

Pause

BEN  
I gave him a tip. But I don't think he took it up.

CAROL  
The same as for my father?

BEN  
Your father?

CAROL  
He gave you money.

BEN  
I don't remember that.

CAROL  
Like you don't remember Jules' birthday party. When you broke a bottle over his head.

BEN  
Now on that I'm categorical: that's something Jules has fantasised, no substance to it.

Pause

CAROL  
Your parents gave you money too. Why did they want to see you today?

BEN  
You know my mother. Are you sure you took your pills today?

CAROL  
Why didn't they answer the phone? What's the problem with the bank?

BEN  
There's no problem. Don't get excited. They want me to invest in something, that's all.

CAROL  
Then why can't I use my cheque book?

Pause

BEN I'll deal with that when I get back from London. It's not a good time to talk. I'm going to bed.

CAROL It is a good time. I'm thinking straight now. Why did you tell Jules we were going out together when we hardly knew each other?

BEN What are you talking about now? Is that what you call thinking straight? You've got everything mixed up.

Pause

CAROL You're lying, Ben. You lie all the time. You've lied from the beginning.

BEN No no no. When you're not well, you start imagining things. I'll get you a sleeping pill.

CAROL I won't take anything. I want you to answer my questions.

BEN But your questions don't make any sense. You need to sleep, you're over-excited, you're depressed...

CAROL What happened on the roof?

Pause

BEN There's a name for your state of mind, you know. It's called paranoia.

CAROL What happened at your parents' place?

BEN Calm down. Or I'll have to call a doctor.

CAROL Why did you buy that rifle?

Pause

She takes the rifle and removes the cartridges.

BEN Why did you try to belittle me in front of the others?

CAROL I didn't try to belittle you.

BEN Couldn't you wait before laying into me?

CAROL I didn't lay into you.

BEN You've been making up stories again. You told Jenny I wasn't Julian's father.

Pause

CAROL I didn't tell Jenny.

Pause

Why have you never asked me who the father is?

BEN

I'm the father.

CAROL

I mean the biological father.

BEN

I am the biological father.

Pause

CAROL

But how could you be the father?

Pause

You know that's impossible.

Pause

BEN

I'm going to bed.

Pause

I'll put this away. Good night.

CAROL

Good night.

Ben hits Carol on the head with the butt of the rifle. She falls, doesn't move. Ben keeps hitting her, then stops, puts the rifle down. He drags Carol's body inside the house, comes back, looks at the rifle. He plays with the cartridges.

BLACK

Daylight. The terrace is empty. Sound of a doorbell off. Jenny appears, having come round the side of the house.

JENNY            Ben?

Pause

Jules comes out of the house.

JULES            Try again.

Pause

I wouldn't go inside if I were you.

JENNY            What are you doing here?

JULES            It's pretty unpleasant.

JENNY            Is Ben there?

JULES            Yes and no.

Pause

JENNY            What have you done?

JULES            Me, nothing. It's Ben. He trod on a crack.

Pause

JENNY            What?

JULES            The rifle. It wasn't for the rabbits. He went off his head. They're all dead.

JENNY            You're the one who's off his head. Let me go in.

She goes inside the house.

Pause

JULES            I called the police. They'll be here soon.

She comes back out, in shock.

JULES            I warned you.

Pause

JENNY            But... why?

JULES            He was desperate.

JENNY            No, he wasn't.

JULES            He was up against the wall. He'd lied to everybody.

JENNY            Lied?

JULES            He wasn't in advertising. He didn't even work. He'd never been to  
business school.

Pause

JENNY            What?

JULES            He made it all up.

JENNY            That's not possible.

JULES            Yes it is.

Pause

JENNY            He didn't know Giorgio Bruni?

JULES            He didn't know anyone.

Pause

JENNY            How do you know?

JULES            He told me.

JENNY            You said you found them all dead.

JULES            No. He was still alive.

Pause

                    He told me everything then he shot himself in the head.

Pause

                    He'd made everything up: Bruni, the movie stars, the advertising agency,  
the investment in Switzerland, everything.

JENNY            What investment in Switzerland?

Pause

JULES            He swindled us.

Pause

JENNY            You gave him money?

Pause

Our money?

JULES            I emptied the savings account. He said he had a thing in Switzerland that brought in ten times more.

Pause

A tip from Brian Goldman.

JENNY            And you believed him? Are you that stupid?

JULES            Because you never believed what he told you?

Pause

JENNY            Alright. I'm sorry.

Pause

What did you tell the police?

JULES            That I'd found three bodies.

Pause

JENNY            Did you touch the rifle?

JULES            No.

JENNY            Ben hasn't got it in his hands. Did you touch the rifle?

JULES            No.

Pause

I don't know. Perhaps.

JENNY            The police could find your fingerprints on the rifle?

Pause

Go and wipe it clean.

JULES            I can't go back in there.

Jenny goes inside the house.

It's as if she's looking at me.

Jenny comes back.

JENNY I wiped it and put it in his hands. Tell them that was how you found him. Did you tell them anything else?

JULES I just gave them the address. I wasn't in a fit state to talk.

JENNY You're sure he was the last to die?

Pause

JULES Well, yes...

Pause

JENNY And... other than that, what did he tell you?

JULES Isn't that enough?

Pause

JENNY We'll say we came together.

Pause

Keep it simple. We don't have to tell them everything.

Pause

You know what I said to you in the car last night...

JULES Yes?

Pause

JENNY Forget it.

Pause

You pushed me to the limit, I spoke without thinking... I didn't mean it.

Pause

Have you been here long?

JULES I don't know.

JENNY When did you call the police?

JULES Just before you got here.

JENNY Good. We say we came together. Try not to contradict me. We'll say I forgot my bag last night. We came back to get it. We had no idea.

JULES OK.

JENNY Nothing happened.

Pause

JULES           OK.

JENNY           Good.

Pause

Are you angry with me?

Pause

JULES           Why should I be angry with you?

Pause

JENNY           I'll tell my mother to keep the girls for a few extra days.

Pause

We've got blood on our hands... Come on, there's a tap over there. A little water should do it.

Pause

When this is all over... perhaps we could get away for a bit, what do you think? We haven't had a holiday this year.

Pause

Leaving it to the last minute we might find a bargain.

Pause

After all this I think we deserve it.

Pause

A bit of a break.

Pause

What would you say to a week in Greece?

Pause

That would be nice, wouldn't it?

Pause

BLACK

**THE END**