

!

THE REMOVAL

by

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THE REMOVAL

CHARACTERS

MARK HARTNELL,
occupies a senior post in a company of auditors.

LAURA HARTNELL,
his wife, works in the same firm.

STEPHEN HARTNELL,
Mark's older brother, actor.

ANNIE FLINT,
lives with Stephen, has recently given birth to his child, works in an office.

EILEEN HARTNELL,
mother of Mark and Stephen, housewife.

BERNARD HARTNELL,
her husband, their father, recently retired.

SET

The living room of a 3-roomed flat on the first floor of a converted house in Clapham. A door upstage leads to the kitchen, another stage right to the bedroom. Stage left a doorway leads out to an entrance hall. A number of cardboard boxes filled with household items stand ready for removal. Everything is very ordered. Although the room is already in the process of being emptied, we get a good impression of the life-style of its two inhabitants: it is a little too tidy, fashionable but impersonal, cold. It is also rather dark. The light coming from the kitchen and the bedroom suggests that these are the lightest rooms, whereas the living room is probably facing north.

There is only one set, but it changes appearance in the course of the action. There are three main phases, each with a very different atmosphere: the order and sterility of Mark and Laura; an empty stage once the flat is stripped bare, with Bernard absurdly throning it centre stage like a refugee from a Beckett play; and finally the baroque clutter of Stephen and Annie.

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It is nearly midday on a hot fourth of July, but the sun is not shining.

MARK, 30ish, casually but carefully dressed, is briskly bringing boxes out from another room and arranging them with manic precision. LAURA, same age, elegant and attractive but never fully relaxed, brings boxes out from the kitchen. Throughout the ensuing dialogue they come and go with boxes that they bring in from one door and furniture that they take out by the other.

MARK They're late.

LAURA Don't start.

MARK Start what?

LAURA Where's the kettle?

MARK Knew they would be. Typical Stephen. You can always count on him to be unreliable.

LAURA They're not that late.

MARK Not yet.

LAURA It's difficult with a baby. You don't know what it's like.

MARK No. I don't.

LAURA Where's the kettle?

MARK Box three. Pots and pans.

She goes to get it out.

MARK Oh no, don't *touch* anything, it's all ready to go.

LAURA I need the kettle.

MARK What for?

LAURA Tea.

She takes the kettle and goes into the kitchen.

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LAURA I'll have it ready when they arrive.

MARK They're not coming for tea. If you give them tea we'll never get anything done.

LAURA If I don't your father will start complaining.

MARK He will anyway. Just ignore him.

LAURA As it is I'm going to have to put up with Annie and her fucking baby.

MARK We'll never get it all done. The van has to be back by six or we pay for the whole weekend.

LAURA This is going to be murder.

MARK Don't *you* start.

Pause

LAURA Is he working?

MARK "In between roles".

LAURA You'd think, wouldn't you, now he's a father...

MARK Now he's a father, *my* father - our father - is giving him this flat, that he rented to us a hundred pounds a week.

Pause

And Annie's going back to work.

Pause

He was always spoiled.

LAURA You both were.

MARK He still is.

LAURA I hope you're not going to start a row with him. I've got enough to put up with as it is.

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MARK I don't particularly care for your family either.

LAURA It's mutual.

Pause

MARK I don't see why. What have they got against me?

LAURA Nothing *against* you. They just don't particularly care for you. Nothing exceptional in it. They don't particularly care for each other. At least they don't hate you.

MARK He doesn't hate you. He just likes getting your back up. He likes getting everybody's backs up. He's good at it. And playing people off each other. Don't let him. It's business tactics, you should be aware of it, don't let people manipulate your feelings, you lose control, you lose your perspective, you can't see through people. It doesn't much matter here, but professionally... professionally it's a fault you have...

LAURA Don't tell me how to do my job please.

MARK Well alright, but it's true. Just because we're in different offices now doesn't mean I can't give you the odd tip...

LAURA I don't want your tips. You're insufferable when you start teaching.

MARK Alright, alright. I think you know I'm right, I shall say no more.

LAURA Good.

Pause

LAURA You're insufferable when you're right, too.

MARK I shall say no more.

LAURA And I don't see how that helps me deal with your insufferable father either.

MARK Just withdraw. And don't mention Marion.

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LAURA If he gets on to grandchildren, I'll...

MARK You'll what?

LAURA I'll leave you to deal with your bloody family and this bloody removal on your bloody own. I still say we should have hired a removal firm. It would have been so much easier for everyone.

MARK And pay a fortune for the privilege of having our belongings broken by experts.

LAURA Can't be any worse than your family.

MARK No-one's stopping *your* family from lending a hand, you know. They're not exactly falling over themselves to come and help.

LAURA They've got more sense.

MARK Open the windows.

LAURA They're open already.

MARK Can't breathe in here.

LAURA All that open are open.

MARK What time is it?!

LAURA Twenty to twelve!

MARK God!

LAURA It's going to be a very long day.

Pause

LAURA I'm back in Ipswich on Wednesday.

MARK Did I tell you about Amsterdam?

LAURA The fraud enquiry?

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MARK Yes.

LAURA In loving detail.

MARK I enjoyed that.

LAURA Are they going to prosecute?

MARK Of course.

LAURA Poor guy.

MARK There's no poor guy about it. He was fiddling. He was cheating his bank and he was breaking the law and what's worse he was trying to hide it from us. He got what was coming to him. No poor guy about it.

LAURA You're wasted in a firm of auditors, you should be with MI5.

MARK It's the feeling of power that appeals I suppose.

LAURA "Is this a man to be entrusted with power?" she mutters quietly to herself as she wanders into the kitchen.

MARK What?

LAURA Cups.

MARK Leave the cups where they are. We don't want cups.

LAURA What will they drink out of?

MARK It's nearly twelve, they're not getting anything to drink. They haven't even had the decency to phone.

LAURA They've been cut off. Where are the tea bags?

MARK It's alright for them of course. Once they're here it's all over for them. Only Muggins here has to get everything over to Putney and unload there then drive the van back over to the other side of London before six. It's madness. Madness.

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LAURA Do *you* want tea?

MARK No I do not want tea. I'll have coffee.

LAURA Can't. It's bad for you.

MARK Christ, I wish this was over. I just wish this whole bloody performance was dead and buried and tomorrow was here and we were in Putney.

LAURA In our very own house. No family ties, nothing owing to anyone.

MARK Except the Abbey National.

Pause

MARK I wish we were there now. And all this was done.

LAURA We could put our feet up.

MARK We could go to bed. Would you like that?

Pause

LAURA I think that's them.

Muffled sounds from outside, then a knock on the door. Laura answers. Sudden chaos. Baby crying. STEPHEN, ANNIE and EILEEN rush in, shouting contradictory directions, trying to calm the baby, failing. Stephen holds the baby, looks for somewhere to put her down. Eileen and Annie carry bags, bottles, bears et cetera. Stephen and Annie are in their early thirties, Eileen nearly sixty. Stephen and Annie form a more relaxed couple than Mark and Laura. Their clothes are less fashionable, looser fitting. Annie is good-humoured and self-confident. Stephen seems more easy-going than his brother and has a stronger sexual presence, but his personality is less distinct. He slips easily into a number of roles, making his own character difficult to grasp. Eileen is a demure, self-effacing woman, clearly dominated by her husband but not without a certain lucidity and a quiet, ironic resistance. But for the moment all that can be seen of them is a chaotic, joyful irruption of life into Mark and Laura's glib security and tense sterility.

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STEPHEN Quiet, baby, we're -

EILEEN Can't you -

STEPHEN We're here now, quiet, lover. Can we -

EILEEN Why don't you -

ANNIE Give her her bear.

STEPHEN What?

EILEEN Maybe I should -

STEPHEN Where is it?

EILEEN Perhaps she wants changing.

LAURA Can I -

ANNIE In the bag.

STEPHEN Which bag?

LAURA Do you want -

ANNIE Can I have the bag?

STEPHEN What does she want?

EILEEN } I think she wants changing. }
 } }
ANNIE } I think she's hungry. } *simultaneous*

EILEEN Already?

LAURA Perhaps you should -

STEPHEN Where can -

EILEEN Doesn't she eat!

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ANNIE Never stops. Here, give her to me.

STEPHEN Where can we put her?

LAURA Maybe the bedroom?

EILEEN There, there, soon be over.

MARK What will?

ANNIE Hello, Laura. Where can I plug in the bottle-warmer?

LAURA Come out into the kitchen.

They go.

STEPHEN Phew.

MARK Is it always like this?

STEPHEN Hello, Mark. No, no, just every two or three hours or so.

MARK God. Hello, mum. Where's dad?

STEPHEN Parking the van.

EILEEN Well, we got here. There were moments I thought we'd never make it.

STEPHEN Dad's a bit testy.

MARK What kept you?

EILEEN Look, he's got everything packed up in boxes, Stephen, not like you. It's all ready.

MARK I thought you were starting first thing in the morning?

STEPHEN We did.

EILEEN All labelled and everything. I'd better take this in for the baby.

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Laura comes out of the kitchen as Eileen goes in.

LAURA I've done tea.

STEPHEN Wonderful. Just what we need.

MARK Christ.

STEPHEN You're looking very lovely, Laura.

LAURA Thank you, Stephen. I'm glad someone thinks so.

STEPHEN You've lost a bit of weight since I last saw you.

Laura smiles.

STEPHEN You'll have to tell Annie how you do it.

MARK No bloody secret.

LAURA Well, she's just had a baby, you can't expect her to...

STEPHEN No, I was only kidding. She's lovely as she is.

MARK Mum!

STEPHEN *(low, to Laura)* Even if you are lovelier.

EILEEN What is it, dear?

MARK Tea. Get it down you and let's get on with the work.

LAURA Will your husband want some?

EILEEN Oh, I expect so. Isn't he here yet? I hope he hasn't had trouble parking, he's in enough of a state as it is.

LAURA What about Annie?

STEPHEN She's busy with the baby. I'll take her hers in a minute.

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EILEEN I'll go and feed the baby, she can come and have her tea.

STEPHEN Have yours first.

EILEEN No, I don't mind.

She goes.

STEPHEN Can't keep her away from that baby. They're all the same.

MARK Not Laura.

STEPHEN No?

LAURA No.

Annie and Eileen reappear with the baby.

ANNIE No, she doesn't want her bottle. I think we should try and get her off to sleep.

LAURA Come through to the bedroom.

The women go, leaving the two brothers alone. They are a little awkward together.

STEPHEN How are you then?

MARK Alright.

Pause

MARK I saw you the other day.

STEPHEN Where?

MARK Outside Leicester Square Tube. In the Charing Cross Road.

STEPHEN Oh. I didn't see you.

MARK I was stopped at the lights. I wasn't sure you wanted to be seen.

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Pause

MARK One of your actress friends?

STEPHEN No. Well, sort of. Yes.

MARK How's the work situation?

STEPHEN Well, the company lost its grant, so a lot of people have just drifted away, but the director's holding out and I'm sticking with him. He wants to do *The Seagull*, set in South Africa.

MARK What was wrong with Russia?

Pause

MARK I'd have thought it would do you all some good to actually have to find an audience and entertain it.

STEPHEN You would. You can't just leave work like that at the mercy of market forces. It's necessary to society. It's a search for truth.

MARK So's auditing.

Pause

MARK It's actually quite interesting.

STEPHEN What is?

MARK My work. I know you think I'm some sort of travelling accountant who just goes round adding up columns of figures all day but actually it's quite an important job with a good deal of responsibility, and I get to go to all sorts of places and different firms and...

STEPHEN Win friends and influence people.

MARK Don't make fun of me, Stephen.

Pause

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MARK How's dad?

STEPHEN Same as ever.

MARK Really?

Laura enters.

LAURA Annie says can you come and try and get the baby to sleep. You're the only one that can do it apparently. She says you sing to it.

STEPHEN I'll see what I can do.

He goes into the bedroom. Annie and Eileen come out.

STEPHEN Out of here, you lot!

ANNIE He's marvellous with her. Cos he's very calm, I suppose. She can be howling away like that and he'll just come in and like stroke her head and sing quietly to her and she's off in no time. Whereas I just get into a panic.

EILEEN Oh, you get used to it. At least I did with Stephen. And then Mark was no trouble. But their father never had any patience with any of them.

ANNIE Even the girl?

Pause

ANNIE I'm afraid I'm more like him. Good job Stephen's like you.

EILEEN Listen.

The baby is still wailing but we can now faintly hear Stephen singing the Beatles song "Julia", gently, melodically, like a lullaby:

STEPHEN *(off)*

Julia

Julia

Ocean child

Calls me

So I sing a song of love for Julia

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Half of what I say is meaningless
But I say it just to reach you, Julia.

The wailing diminishes and eventually stops. The singing continues a short while then stops. Stephen comes out and quietly closes the door in a charmed hush.

LAURA *(low)* That's quite impressive.

ANNIE Isn't it?

MARK Does that mean we can't go in the bedroom now? Only we haven't cleared it yet.

EILEEN Just leave her for the time being. Let me take your cups, I'll wash them up.

LAURA Oh no, I'll do that.

EILEEN It's alright.

LAURA Well, let me help.

They take the cups out into the kitchen. Annie comes over to Stephen and kisses him lightly. Mark follows the others out into the kitchen.

ANNIE Stevie.

STEPHEN Yes?

ANNIE I don't like it.

STEPHEN What?

ANNIE Here.

Pause

STEPHEN Wait till you've done it up the way you want it. You'll love it.

ANNIE It's gloomy.

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STEPHEN That's because Mark's been living in it. We'll soon brighten it up.

ANNIE It's not ours.

STEPHEN Neither was the bedsit.

ANNIE You know what I mean. I think it's a mistake.

STEPHEN Well you should have thought of that before, shouldn't you? We can hardly change our minds now.

ANNIE Couldn't we?

STEPHEN Don't be silly.

ANNIE I'm not being silly, you keep avoiding the question. You just do whatever he wants. One day you're going to have to stand up to him, you know that, don't you? You're a father now, he's an old man. You should be making the decisions.

STEPHEN Give us a kiss.

ANNIE You're not getting round me like that.

STEPHEN Yes I am. I always do.

ANNIE Stephen!

Annie giggles as Stephen tries to embrace her. Bernard enters, fuming. He is a large man of 62, with natural authority and an excess of vitality. Superficially he is a man of great charm and confidence, both affectionate and passionate, although he has difficulty expressing his affections in anything other than a roundabout, negative fashion. Beneath this is something he has not yet come to terms with, a vague dissatisfaction, a revolt brewing against the changes in his life. This finds expression in sudden flashes of anger, as now, or in an excess of feeling that sometimes colours his speech.

BERNARD You wouldn't credit it - I shut the door, you left it open -

STEPHEN Shh.

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BERNARD What?

ANNIE The baby.

BERNARD (*as before*) They're incredible, these people. I don't know what's happening to this country. I'm backing into this parking space, I've pulled over, I've signalled, I'm backing in with the van -

Mark and Laura come out in silence and listen without interrupting.

BERNARD ... - I take my time, it's not easy it's a big van - and I'm looking in the mirror and this Jag comes up, comes straight up and parks in my place. I can't believe it. I get out, I'm expecting to see some yob, some pop star from Watford with purple hair and an earring, your average Jag-driving yob. I get out to remonstrate with him, teach him some manners - but it's not that at all. He's middle-aged, balding, Marks and Sparks casuals, "Oh I'm sorry" - middle-class thinks he's refined type, absolute twerp - "Oh I'm so sorry, I didn't see you" - didn't see you my eye, I'm in a bloody great Bedford, I'm in a removal van he didn't see me - he's trying to be polite, get out of it - cardigan and glasses, looks like an insurance man on his weekend off - in a Jag, mind you, and newish - a right burk. So it's the soft sell, he's sorry, he didn't see me - didn't see me my arse, I'm only backing right into him - they're fine with the old patter, "just sign on the dotted line, that's lovely", then when you get back to them "oh no, I think if you look carefully at the contract" - I know the type, I can see them coming a mile off, he's sorry, he didn't see me but now he's there - now he's there he thinks he's got some divine right to stay there. "Well now you've seen me you can just back out again, can't you?" "Oh," he says. "Oh." One look at me and it's a different story of course. He thought he was getting away with it, now he has to think again. And of course he backs down, he can't look me in the face and say sod you like he's longing to do, no, he's quaking, he's shaking in his boots, so he's back in his Jag and out of there with his tail between his legs and that's Britain today. "Oh." "Oh, well alright then." A real twit, absolute twerp. And this is the future of the nation.

Pause

MARK Well, you certainly told him.

BERNARD I didn't tell him, I didn't get the chance. He was off out of it and halfway back to Hampstead before I could get a word out.

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He nods to Mark.

BERNARD Son. Hello, Laura love, how are you?

LAURA Oh, I'm alright.

BERNARD Don't look very well.

LAURA I'm fine, really.

MARK How are you adapting to your life of leisure?

BERNARD Bloody marvellous. Free at last. Kids off my hands, no work to go to. It's like coming out of prison. The garden. The paper. Books to read. No responsibility, no pressure. First time since I was a kid. I can take my foot off the pedal, ease up, relax. There's some people scared to death of retiring, think they'll be lost, won't know what to do. All these old codgers trudging up to town every day. They'd rather work their guts out all week, worry, pay taxes - they get nothing back, it's all input, nothing comes out. No imagination, that's their problem. But not me, I'm laughing.

LAURA Would you like some tea?

BERNARD Tea? You're joking, we've got to get things moving, we're late enough as it is.

MARK That's what I said.

BERNARD Well you should have made yourself heard. No use saying and not doing. Come on you lot, on your feet, let's see some action around here! Where's the baby?

STEPHEN Asleep.

BERNARD Good.

MARK They've put it in the bedroom. We hadn't finished clearing it.

BERNARD Well you should have done. What have you been doing all this time?

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The baby starts to cry.

BERNARD Uh-oh.

ANNIE Oh no!

Eileen looks out from the kitchen.

EILEEN You've woken that baby up.

BERNARD Wants feeding, I 'spect.

EILEEN It's you keep shouting all the time.

BERNARD Who's shouting?

Annie comes out with the baby.

ANNIE I think she might be hungry.

BERNARD See? Course she's hungry.

ANNIE I'll try her with the bottle again.

EILEEN Let me hold her for you.

They go out into the kitchen.

BERNARD Right, let's empty that bedroom while we've got the chance.

Bernard, Mark and Stephen go into the bedroom and reappear with a double bed which they take out to the hall. Laura stands looking on ineffectually.

BERNARD Alright, got her? Tip her up, that's it. Right, we can manage, Stephen, you get the mattress out.

Stephen goes back to the bedroom, then crosses with the mattress. Bernard shouts in to the kitchen as he goes past.

BERNARD Make sure she gets enough. She's undernourished, that nipper. Keeps crying.

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STEPHEN She never stops eating.

BERNARD It's all very well, this breast feeding - I'm all for it - but when the well's dry there's not much point in throwing in your bucket, is there? She doesn't realise. I mean it's all very well popping one out and slapping the poor little bugger on there but once it's sucked you dry it's sucked you dry. Powdered milk, that's what you want. Put some cereals in it. Every three or four hours or so, soon build her up. Build her up and shut her up.

STEPHEN She gives her powdered milk now.

BERNARD It's not her fault, she's never had one before, she can't be expected to - she'll soon cotton on. I should know after raising three of 'em.

Pause

BERNARD No tits, that's what it is. Can't do anything about it. And she's had a fairly good run anyway for the size of them - 3 months? Bloody miracle with what she's got. That's one fault you couldn't find with your mother. She always had a good pair of knockers and when she had you they went up like balloons. Ballast balloons they were. Funny, you appreciated that at the time. Now you've both gone in for ironing boards... First thing I saw in your mother. First thing anybody saw. Course they droop a bit now...

LAURA Excuse me...

She goes into the kitchen.

BERNARD What's up with her? Can't say a bloody thing in front of that one. Little Miss Proper there. Christ. Let's get the rest. *(to Mark)* Is she alright?

Eileen comes out. Bernard and Mark bring out a dressing table, then a cupboard, Stephen a mirror, etc., throughout the ensuing dialogue. Stephen does notably less work than the others.

EILEEN What have you said to her?

BERNARD Nothing. I was just talking about your tits.

EILEEN Oh dear.

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She goes back into the kitchen.

BERNARD Nothing to get excited about. Not any more anyway.

MARK She's dieting.

BERNARD Why?

MARK Oh, I don't know, it's a habit. She's alright.

BERNARD This the thing you got from us?

MARK Yes.

BERNARD Nice bit of wood, that. What does she eat?

MARK I don't know, that's her problem. She says she eats at lunch time.

BERNARD Don't you eat together?

MARK Well, I'm doing a lot of jobs abroad now, and Laura travels too, so...

BERNARD And she doesn't eat in the evening?

MARK Oh she sometimes has some cheese. Or some chocolate.

BERNARD She cooks you your meal, then eats cheese and chocolate?

MARK Oh she stopped cooking long ago. I cook for myself.

BERNARD You're joking?

MARK I'm quite good actually.

BERNARD You cook your own meal in the evening?

MARK When I'm here, yes. I rather enjoy it.

BERNARD She lets you cook your own meal after a day's work?

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MARK It relaxes me. She works too, you know.

BERNARD But it doesn't relax her?

MARK No.

BERNARD I don't know.

STEPHEN What does she do?

MARK She works a bit, watches television, goes to bed.

BERNARD I wouldn't stand for it.

STEPHEN Are you sure she's alright?

MARK Weeell, I think so. She's a bit tense, drinks a bit, takes a few pills. But nothing out of the ordinary.

BERNARD Nothing out of the ordinary?

STEPHEN What sort of pills?

MARK Little white ones. And some pink, and sometimes some sort of big round brownny ones.

BERNARD Christ!

STEPHEN But what are they for?

MARK Oh I don't know. The usual.

BERNARD What's the usual?

MARK You know, ups to get you up and downs to get you back down.

They stop in the middle of the room.

BERNARD You're married to a drug addict.

MARK She's perfectly alright.

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BERNARD She's off her head.

MARK She's a perfectly well-balanced working woman.

Laura comes out of the kitchen in a state of nerves.

LAURA Oh God!

MARK What is it?

LAURA Where have you put the tea-cloths?

MARK With the cleaning stuff, box number six. Why?

LAURA It's just puked up all over the cooker.

MARK Well, don't take a tea-cloth! God. Take a sponge.

LAURA This isn't the cleaning stuff.

MARK Then it isn't box number six. Don't start pulling things out. Let me take care of it. Here's number six, it's really very simple. This is what we want. What was it doing on the cooker?

He goes into the kitchen.

BERNARD Let your mother do it.

Pause

LAURA I'm not very good with babies.

BERNARD We'd noticed.

LAURA I'll send Mark out, you can get on with the loading.

Laura goes into the kitchen.

BERNARD Biggest mistake he ever made.

STEPHEN She's a bit neurotic, that's all.

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BERNARD Barmy. She's worse than yours. I mean yours is a silly bitch but at least she looks after her own. She's got some fight in her. Not like this one. And this dieting. Once upon a time women were women. Flesh. Something to get your teeth into. Not like old tight-arse there. Women were generous in those days, they gave, they had something to give, it was real. Tits. Bums. They had generous proportions. Bums you could park your bike in.

Mark comes out.

BERNARD She should see a doctor.

MARK She sees a doctor.

BERNARD She sees a quack who gives her pills. A pill doctor. She should see someone qualified.

MARK She's alright.

Pause

MARK She's in analysis.

STEPHEN Really?

BERNARD You mean she's barmy.

MARK It's just to keep her happy. There's nothing wrong with her.

BERNARD She's up the wall.

MARK Everyone's got an analyst now. It doesn't mean anything. It's a status symbol. All her friends have got one.

BERNARD Does she have friends?

STEPHEN It's true. It's just a way for people to talk about themselves. No-one else will listen, so they have to pay someone. It's a social service. Otherwise their friends would have to put up with it.

MARK Exactly. Or me. I pay him to keep her from driving me up the

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wall.

STEPHEN Of course. She's not ill. At worst a little lonely.

Pause

BERNARD Alright she's not ill. But she is being treated by a psychologist?

STEPHEN Psychiatrist.

MARK Psycho-analyst.

BERNARD A shrink. She's seeing a shrink who gives her pills and she doesn't eat, she just pops these pills all day and drinks and smokes. And you're saying this is normal?

STEPHEN Course it's normal. It's even fashionable.

BERNARD Listen, son. When they start going like that there's no shame in getting rid of them. I've seen it happen. They live off you. They feed off your feelings of responsibility. Sometimes it's best for everyone just to ditch 'em, let 'em fend for themselves. Suddenly they're right as rain again.

MARK There's nothing wrong with her.

BERNARD Course not. So there's no shame in getting out. Don't say anything. I just wanted you to know we understand. We're behind you. No-one's going to put you down for it.

Enter Laura and Annie.

LAURA It's been sick on my blouse.

ANNIE Oh it's nothing, just a bit damp.

LAURA It smells.

ANNIE I'll get a cloth and wipe it.

LAURA We haven't got any cloths, he's packed them all away.

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EILEEN *(off)* We can't do without cloths and sponges. I want to clean that kitchen.

LAURA It's been cleaned.

ANNIE Mark had a sponge just now, what did you do with it, Mark?

MARK I put it away again.

BERNARD It's only a little spot, she can live with it, can't she?

LAURA I'll go and change.

She goes out. Eileen comes out holding the baby.

BERNARD Bloody fuss about nothing.

EILEEN I think she's ready for bed now.

BERNARD Good, perhaps we could do a bit of bloody work at last.

ANNIE Yes, I'll try and get her down. Have you finished in the bedroom?

Annie and Eileen take the baby into the bedroom.

BERNARD Right, let's get cracking! "It's been sick on my blouse!" Silly bitch. Let's get this stuff down to the hall, then we can get Stephen's things straight in.

MARK Well, if it's all the same with you, I'd rather not leave the computer, the video and stuff too long unguarded. Things have a habit of disappearing round here now.

BERNARD What about Stephen's stuff?

EILEEN *(off)* You don't want Stephen's things in the hall. All that mess. What would the neighbours think?

Enter Laura. She has not yet changed her blouse. Eileen goes out to the kitchen.

THE REMOVAL

LAURA Stephen, Annie wants you.

STEPHEN Right.

He goes.

BERNARD Well, I like that.

MARK What?

BERNARD She wants him, he goes. I'm talking to him, we're supposed to be having a conversation here, he just walks out. Wonderful.

LAURA She wants something for the baby.

BERNARD She wants something for the baby. So he's got to get it.

Stephen returns, goes into kitchen.

STEPHEN Little white teddy.

LAURA She can't get it to sleep.

Stephen comes back with the bear and crosses to the bedroom.

BERNARD Oy!!

Stephen stops.

STEPHEN What?

BERNARD I'm talking to you.

Pause

STEPHEN I'm listening.

He goes.

BERNARD He's listening. He's walking into the other room but he's listening.

THE REMOVAL

LAURA I don't think...

BERNARD Don't worry, I know the score, I'm used to it. Dirt, I am.

LAURA *(to Mark)* What have you done with my blouses?

MARK They're all packed.

LAURA I need a clean one. This smells.

Laura goes out into the hall with Mark. Annie comes in.

ANNIE He's just getting her off to sleep. He's the only one can do it.

Pause

ANNIE Sorry if I'm monopolising him.

Pause

ANNIE I'll send him out again.

BERNARD Annie?

ANNIE Yes?

BERNARD What's he going to do?

Pause

ANNIE He's going to carry on exactly as before. He's not going to change.

BERNARD Did you want him to?

ANNIE No, but I wish sometimes... I wish he was a bit more...

BERNARD More what?

ANNIE Responsible.

BERNARD For what?

THE REMOVAL

ANNIE For his family.

BERNARD I think you're mainly responsible for that, aren't you?

ANNIE Well, I didn't do it all on my own.

BERNARD I know how you did it.

Pause

BERNARD Stephen's not responsible for anything.

ANNIE I love Stephen. But I want to see him grow up. I want him to be strong. Like you.

Pause

BERNARD Well I'm not strong. I'm a bloody fool.

ANNIE I think he's a bit in your shadow.

BERNARD Is he... I mean in your opinion, you know more about it than I do, is he any good?

Pause

ANNIE No.

BERNARD Mmm. He doesn't know you think that?

ANNIE No.

BERNARD But you can't be of much help to him, if you think that, can you?

Pause

ANNIE No.

Pause

THE REMOVAL

ANNIE You could help him. But you won't. You want to keep the status quo, you want to keep control. You've managed it until now. But you can't keep him in short trousers forever.

Pause

I'll send him out to you.

She goes out to the bedroom. Mark comes back from the hall and stands in the doorway. Stephen returns from the bedroom.

STEPHEN So. What were you saying?

BERNARD Nothing. Nothing that would interest you. You just carry on.

STEPHEN It's done. I'm back. All ears.

BERNARD She hasn't got any more little errands for you? No nappies to fetch?

STEPHEN No.

BERNARD Right, well maybe we can finally get down to work then? Or is that too much to expect?

STEPHEN We were going to unload my stuff into the hall.

BERNARD No, we were going to take Mark's stuff down to the hall and bring yours straight up here.

MARK But Stephen...

STEPHEN I don't care which way...

BERNARD What about all the baby's things?

MARK Well no-one's going to...

BERNARD Alright do it your way! But don't blame me when it all goes wrong!

MARK What can go wrong?

BERNARD Don't ask me, I'm not in charge here, I'm just obeying orders.

THE REMOVAL

I'm just doing what I'm told. I'm the bloody delivery man, don't mind me.

MARK Well if you're going to be like that, we can do it your way, it's really not that important.

BERNARD Oh that's marvellous, that is. That's bloody marvellous. Come on, let's unload the van, leave his lordship to look after his valuables.

STEPHEN Where are you parked?

BERNARD About half a bloody mile away. Come on.

Bernard exits.

MARK What did I say?

Stephen shrugs and exits.

EILEEN Don't mind him, dear, he's very difficult at the moment. Just try not to contradict him.

MARK I didn't, he contradicted me.

EILEEN Well, he contradicts everyone.

MARK If you back down he despises you for not having the courage of your convictions, and if you stand up to him he flies off the handle.

EILEEN Best not to say anything at all.

Mark starts moving things out to the hall.

MARK He deliberately sides with Stephen.

EILEEN Oh I don't know that.

MARK He always does, systematically. Whatever I do, Stephen's done something better.

Pause

EILEEN He sticks up for Stephen sometimes because he has a harder

THE REMOVAL

time of it than you do.

MARK Stephen has a hard time of it? I don't believe this. Can you hear what you're saying?

EILEEN Well, he hasn't done very well for himself, has he? Not like you.

MARK He doesn't work like me either. He's always relied on dad, or Annie, or whoever, there's always someone there to help him out. He'll never get anywhere, he doesn't have to. Why should he? He's got everyone running around for him as it is. There's no need for him to do a stroke of work ever. If he started earning money, people would tell him to start looking after himself, he'd be lost.

EILEEN Well, I suppose it's not really fair, but then nothing really ever is, is it? You'll just have to grin and bear it, I'm afraid.

MARK It's not that I mind actually, it's just that...

EILEEN It's not fair.

MARK It's just that... I don't know, I suppose I would just for once appreciate it if someone recognised what I've done, I mean I have worked to get where I am, no-one seems to recognise that fact, you think it's easy for me, I'm supposed to have magic fingers or something, money sticks to them, is that it? Well, it doesn't, I have to work, like dad worked, and I would like it if just for once he acknowledged that, from one worker to another, if he would just admit that I have achieved something, and not out of sheer luck but out of effort - effort and determination and a minimum of intelligence and foresight and sheer bloody willpower and that's all, that's all, that's all I'm asking.

EILEEN Well you know how he is. He's very proud of you really, he just can't say it to your face.

MARK Why not?

EILEEN Well, it's not the sort of thing you can say to someone, is it?

MARK I don't know. What sort of thing can you say, mum? I don't think I've ever had a serious conversation with any of you. All we ever do is

THE REMOVAL

knock each other. Even when we're trying to be nice, it comes out as sarcasm. Why is that? Why are we all so, so... so bloody... *English?*

EILEEN Nothing wrong with that.

MARK It's like Marion. Why do we never talk about it?

EILEEN What good would that do?

Pause

EILEEN I can't talk about her in front of your father. He thinks I bear it against him. And I do.

MARK I don't really remember her. I was there, at the accident, but for some reason dad and Stephen drew closer afterwards, and I was left on the outside.

Pause

EILEEN I shouldn't irritate your dad at the moment. He's a bit irritable since his retirement.

MARK I thought he was pleased.

EILEEN Well, they gave him an awful lot of money for the shops and then the other people gave him a good price for the land with the warehouse and his office, but I think he misses it a bit all the same. He's got nothing to do really. Keeps following me about the house criticising. I suppose when you've been running a business for 25 years, going in every day, worrying about it every night, it must come as a bit of a shock when they knock it all down and push it in the gravel pit and turn it into a water sports leisure centre. They offered him free membership but I can hardly see your dad going down there water-skiing, can you?

MARK Well, if he fancies it, why not?

EILEEN He doesn't fancy it, he doesn't fancy anything, that's the problem. He keeps following me about, telling me what I'm doing wrong, I can't get him out of the house. I thought we

THE REMOVAL

could go away somewhere but you can't tell him anything. You have to wait till the idea comes to him so that he can be the one who suggested it. Only he never suggests anything anymore. Just follows me about... Couldn't you see a bit more of him, invite him round to your place now and then?

MARK Well, yes, only when? I'm hardly ever at home. And Laura's not much of a hostess. She goes mental at the thought of visitors.

Bernard and Stephen return.

BERNARD It's no bloody good. It's just impossible out there. I'm parked a mile away, there's no bloody parking space, I can't get the van any nearer - they're all out there bumper to bumper with their Volkswagens and their Peugeots - all foreign cars - these are the people who tell you to buy British, mind you - they're all in advertising - criticise the government and work for the Japanese, you can see them out there - I don't know what's happened to this area, you used to at least be able to park here, full of nignogs of course, you had to watch your hubcaps, but you can't have everything - now it's all Golfs and 205's. Anyway we can't get any nearer and his lordship here's got everything in little plastic bags - he's got about five hundred bags, let alone the desk and couch and the baby's cot, it's gonna take forever to get it all down here - plus he's just bunged it all in anyhow, it's all in Sainsbury's bags, they won't hold out, they're not made for that kind of weight -

STEPHEN They're pretty strong, Sainsbury's bags -

BERNARD Yes, but they're not made for that kind of weight, Stephen. We're gonna have papers all over the street - you'll lose half of it, we've got to walk about two miles with those little bags - all his books, papers, it's all in these little bags. I've never seen anyone so disorganised.

MARK I told you if you wanted some boxes, to let me know.

EILEEN Yes, look how Mark's done it, Stephen. It's all in boxes, all neatly labelled and everything.

THE REMOVAL

- BERNARD Good strong boxes by the look of it. Made to take weight.
- MARK They're filing boxes. I got them some time ago from the firm. They were throwing them out, cos everything's on disc now.
- BERNARD Just right, they are. Very neat. Get a lot in them. Good cardboard. First class boxes.
- MARK And they fold flat when you're finished with them.
- STEPHEN Alright, so I should have borrowed some of Mark's first class boxes. But I didn't so what do we do now?
- MARK I've still got a few left, if you want to take them down to the...
- STEPHEN I don't want your bloody boxes!
- MARK Alright.
- BERNARD Temper, temper. No, we'll have to start taking Mark's stuff down and keep an eye open for a space.
- MARK What?
- EILEEN Well, that'll look a bit better anyway.
- BERNARD You find me a parking space, I'll do it your way, I don't care, it's all the same to me. But till I can get that van a bit nearer, this is the way we're going to have to do it, comprendo?
- MARK Alright.
- BERNARD I'm not doing it to be bloody minded, it's just the way it is. It's just common sense. So. We do it my way. Alright?
- MARK Alright.
- Laura comes in in a clean blouse.
- BERNARD Right, let's get you organised. Mark, you go downstairs and receive what's coming down, stand guard by your precious belongings. Then we want two strong arms to move the stuff

THE REMOVAL

downstairs. That'd better be me, and I suppose Stephen -

EILEEN You mind your back.

BERNARD There's nothing wrong with my back. There's nothing anyone can teach me about shifting furniture. I've spent my life doing it, for what it's worth. Then you women can get things sorted out up here and hand us the stuff out as we're ready for it. Think you can manage that?

EILEEN I'm going to clean the kitchen.

LAURA It doesn't really...

BERNARD Let her clean the kitchen if she must, Annie can help you out when she gets the baby off to sleep. Right. Is everyone clear what they're doing?

EILEEN Couldn't you stay downstairs and Mark do the moving? *(to Laura)* Would get him out of the way.

BERNARD Who's in charge here? You get back in your kitchen. I'll do the shifting, no-one else here knows the first thing about it.

EILEEN Well just mind your back, that's all. Don't want another week with you laid up in bed again. *(to Laura)* Murder.

MARK The cleaning things are all in this box here. I'll put it in the kitchen for you.

He takes the box out into the kitchen. Annie comes out.

ANNIE I think she's off now. Should be alright for a bit. What do you want me to do?

BERNARD You stay up here and get the other two organised.

ANNIE Aye aye, cap'n.

BERNARD Don't be cheeky.

MARK I'll take this down.

THE REMOVAL

BERNARD Alright, keep your eyes peeled for a space for the van.

Mark goes out with a chair.

BERNARD Leave the couch, we'll get Mark back up for that. Right, come on young Stephen, let's get moving.

Bernard and Stephen go out.

ANNIE He's enjoying this.

EILEEN Just make sure he minds his back.

She goes out into the kitchen.

LAURA It doesn't need cleaning. There's nothing left to clean.

ANNIE I know. I shouldn't worry, just humour her.

LAURA She always does it. It's to make me feel small.

ANNIE Oh no, she did exactly the same in the bedsit.

LAURA They all hate me.

ANNIE They like you.

Laura snorts derisively.

ANNIE I don't see that it matters much what they think anyway. It's Mark, that counts, isn't it?

LAURA Mark would murder his mother if he thought it would get him in his father's good books. Mind you, I'd do it myself just for the fun of it.

ANNIE Oh, she's very sweet. Very patient.

LAURA She's just scared to raise her voice.

ANNIE And he's very nice really.

THE REMOVAL

LAURA He's a monster.

ANNIE I think he's sexy.

LAURA He hates me of course. It's a constant struggle. He won't let go.

ANNIE But what can he do?

LAURA Well I mean, look at us. It's just always hanging over you. This is their place. You can't say anything.

ANNIE Yes.

LAURA He tramples over everybody. You know their sister killed herself?

ANNIE She didn't kill herself. She fell in front of a car.

LAURA Is that what Stephen says?

ANNIE Why? What does Mark say?

LAURA That's what Mark says. But I'd have killed myself if I had him for a father.

ANNIE Not at eight years old.

LAURA None of them ever talk about it.

ANNIE No.

Pause

LAURA Christ, I'm glad to be going. I wouldn't like to be in your shoes.

ANNIE Oh we'll be alright. Especially with Julia.

LAURA With what?

THE REMOVAL

ANNIE Julia. The baby.

LAURA Oh yes. I don't see how that helps.

ANNIE You don't really think about your own troubles any more. You don't have time.

LAURA Mmm.

ANNIE Had you and Mark thought about having one?

LAURA Mmm. I've just had one.

ANNIE What?

LAURA A sherry. I've got a secret supply. Out there. Don't tell Mark. Do you want some?

ANNIE No thanks. You ought to, you know. Before it's too late. I mean I know you've got a few years yet but it goes by very quickly and you do get sort of set in your ways. But it's really the best thing that can happen to you. I mean I wasn't sure before either, but then it happened and now I'm absolutely sure.

LAURA We'd better start moving this stuff, hadn't we?

ANNIE Yes.

LAURA I do know when to stop, you know. It just helps me loosen up. That's all.

They start taking boxes and items of furniture out into the hall, in silence. Stephen comes in, slightly out of breath.

STEPHEN Phew, hard work this. Take over from me for a while, will you, lover? Let me get my breath back.

ANNIE Alright.

Annie goes out. Stephen sits on the edge of the couch and watches Laura come and go.

THE REMOVAL

STEPHEN Don't mind her. She means well.

LAURA Were you listening?

STEPHEN No need. She's happy, you see, she thinks everyone would be if they did the same as her.

LAURA God help us.

STEPHEN She means well.

LAURA So did Stalin.

STEPHEN That's not a very fair comparison.

LAURA I'm not a very fair person.

STEPHEN How's your analysis going?

LAURA Oh, we're making progress, I think. I think I married Mark to spite my father. It was like saying "Now here's someone who's really devoted to me, like you should have been." Only of course he wasn't. He just thought I looked good beside him, he was trying to impress his father. Only that didn't work either. So now we hate each other.

STEPHEN I see. And where do you go from there?

LAURA We haven't got on to the next step yet. I've only just worked this out. I tried to get Mark to go but he wouldn't hear of it. Try and work out his relationship with his parents. I mean, professionally he may be doing OK but as a person it's crippling him. What about you, wouldn't you like to give it a try?

STEPHEN Me? I'm an actor. That's therapy enough.

LAURA But shouldn't you be asking yourself why you have to hide behind those masks?

STEPHEN You're really getting off on this analysis lark, aren't you? They're not masks. And I don't hide. On the contrary I expose myself. But it's only a game.

THE REMOVAL

LAURA What's your favourite part?

STEPHEN Hamlet.

LAURA Figures.

STEPHEN It's every actor's favourite part, at my age.

LAURA Nevertheless. Behind every Hamlet there's an Oedipus lurking.

STEPHEN There's something of Isaac, and Iphigenia, in there too, wouldn't you say?

LAURA It's a rite of passage. To come to power you have to kill the king.

Pause

LAURA I haven't told Mark but the reason I won't have sex with him is because I have this image of his father watching us from the corner of the room. And Mark knows he's there. Every move he makes is just to please him. It turns me off. If it were my father it would be different. Now that would be interesting. But it's always him, we can't get rid of him.

STEPHEN Poor old Mark.

LAURA If Mark would just stand up to him for once, or even do something he knows he wouldn't approve of, but no. And I hate it. I hate that submission. It invades everything. I see it everywhere. It's made me frigid.

STEPHEN You're not frigid.

Pause

EILEEN *(off)* Stephen, is that you?

STEPHEN Yes?

EILEEN *(off)* Here a minute.

THE REMOVAL

Stephen goes out to the kitchen.

LAURA I'll help them clear the hall.

Laura takes a box and goes out to the hall. Pause. Eileen and Stephen come out of the kitchen.

EILEEN ... just keeps following me around, criticising. What are you doing this evening?

STEPHEN We've got some American friends coming round. We're giving them a party for the 4th of July.

Eileen looks blank.

STEPHEN Independence day. America. From Britain. They celebrate.

EILEEN We don't.

STEPHEN Well we ought to. Getting rid of them. Think what it would be like with America to look after. It's bad enough with Scotland.

EILEEN Well couldn't you invite your father too? It'd mean a lot to him.

STEPHEN The 4th of July?

EILEEN Couldn't you?

STEPHEN (*going out*) Come on, you lot, put your backs into it. Gor blimey, what a lot of shirkers. Who's doing all the work here?

Pause. Eileen goes back into the kitchen. Stephen reappears, followed by Annie.

STEPHEN It's nearly finished, they'll manage. Look, it's not so bad now it's empty.

ANNIE I think we ought to pay something. Mark paid.

STEPHEN Mark's rich.

THE REMOVAL

ANNIE But still. Maybe just what we pay for the bedsit. Once I'm back at the office. How much does Mark pay?

STEPHEN Oh I don't know, not much. About thirty quid a week, I think. Something nominal. Just so he could say he was paying.

ANNIE I think we should too.

STEPHEN If you want.

Pause

STEPHEN (*going out*) Come on, let's get on with it.

BERNARD (*coming in*) It's done. No thanks to you, you skiving little bugger.

Stephen comes back in with Bernard, followed by Laura.

BERNARD Mark's got a space for the van. Just that couch to go, then we can start bringing yours up.

EILEEN You just be careful with your back. Let Stephen take the heavy weights.

BERNARD He can't take the heavy weights, he's an intellectual, he's never lifted anything heavier than his biro. Look at him, he's a nine-stone weakling.

Enter Mark.

BERNARD Alright? Good. Come on you two, grab hold.

They carry the couch out of the room. All the furniture has now gone. Eileen goes into the kitchen. Laura and Annie start taking the last remaining boxes out into the hall.

BERNARD I'll lead the way, mind your hands when you come through the door, easy does it, not too fast, have you got her? Good, now I'm going to back down the stairs, make sure you've got a good grip or I'll have the bloody thing on top of me. Alright? I'm backing down now, take a bit of weight, can't you?

THE REMOVAL

EILEEN *(off)* He'll put his back out.

BERNARD *(off)* Shut up and get back in your kitchen! I've got her, I've got her, easy, not too - not too fast, I can't see a bloody thing down here. We're turning here, hold her steady, I'm gonna slip round, that's it, right now you follow on - Ow! Take a bit of weight, can't you? I've got the whole bloody thing here. Stephen, what are you doing you great lommox, shift it! God almighty, what did I do to get lumbered with you two? Almost there, that's it, just - no, turn her round there - that's it, now - OH CHRIST OH GOD OH FUCK! I'm dying. Oh my back, oh my back! Aagh! I can't move.

ANNIE Uh-oh.

EILEEN He's put his back out. I knew he would.

LAURA Should we go and help?

EILEEN Wait and see. He'll only shout at you.

STEPHEN *(off)* Hold on a minute, let me come round.

BERNARD *(off)* I can't hold on, I can't bloody move. I'm dying here, hold on he says, I don't believe this, I'm in agony here - I'm sweating like a pig, I'm doubled up in pain, hold on he says - can't somebody do something?

MARK *(off)* Just let go. I've got it.

ANNIE I'd better go and help.

Annie goes out. Laura follows. Sounds of couch descending staircase at high speed. Bang.

BERNARD *(off)* Aaagh!

MARK *(off)* Shit.

EILEEN Oh dear.

The baby cries, briefly.

ANNIE *(off)* Oh no.

THE REMOVAL

Annie reappears and hurries into the bedroom. The crying has already stopped.

STEPHEN *(off)* Are you alright?

BERNARD *(off)* No, I am bloody well not alright!

LAURA *(off)* Can I help?

BERNARD *(off)* Christ!

Eileen goes to the door.

EILEEN Try and get him back up here. Don't leave him out there swearing his head off.

LAURA *(off)* Can you move?

BERNARD *(off)* Course I can bloody move. What d'you think I'm a cripple?

LAURA *(off)* I just thought...

STEPHEN *(off)* Let's get back upstairs and have a rest.

BERNARD *(off)* Ha! Bloody marvellous this is.

MARK *(off)* The couch is alright.

BERNARD *(off)* Oh I'm glad to hear it! That is good news! "Dad's broken his back but the couch is alright." Well, that's alright then, isn't it?

EILEEN Come on back up here and stop making such a fuss!

BERNARD *(off)* I'm lying here in agony with a broken back and all Old Mother Hubbard's worried about is the neighbours might hear.

STEPHEN *(off)* Come on, let me help you up.

BERNARD *(off)* I can manage, I'm not an invalid.

THE REMOVAL

EILEEN *(to herself)* Then what are you making all this fuss for?

Annie reappears.

ANNIE It's alright, she's gone straight back to sleep.

The others begin to appear. The room is now completely bare.

STEPHEN You'd better sit down for a bit.

BERNARD There's nowhere to sit!

LAURA Well no, the couch is...

Annie giggles. Stephen goes out to the hall.

STEPHEN I'll get him a chair from the van.

EILEEN Well, this is a good start.

BERNARD Oh get into your kitchen

MARK Take it easy for a bit.

BERNARD Take it easy, he says. Nothing'll get done if I take it easy. I'm the only one can get them moving.

ANNIE Don't worry, we'll look after it. You can direct operations from up here.

EILEEN Oh God.

MARK Come on, let's start unloading the van.

Mark and Laura go out into the hall.

BERNARD Bloody back. I'm like a bloody old man.

EILEEN You are a bloody old man.

BERNARD I didn't ask you.

THE REMOVAL

ANNIE You alright? D'you want anything?

Pause

ANNIE Alright? I said d'you want anything?

BERNARD (*low*) Just a pistol for the coup de grâce.

ANNIE If you want anything just yell.

EILEEN I shouldn't worry about that.

Eileen goes out to the kitchen.

ANNIE I'd better go and help the others. Cheer up.

Annie goes out to the hall. Stephen comes in, struggling under the weight of an armchair. It is a high-backed, tatty old chair in worn-out red velvet. Annie helps him set it down in the centre of the room.

STEPHEN Here, dad. Sit down here.

He does.

BERNARD Alright, son?

STEPHEN Yeah, fine.

BERNARD Don't strain yourself.

ANNIE He won't.

They go, and stop to take boxes from the hall on their way out.

STEPHEN (*off*) It's alright, I can take this one on my own.

ANNIE (*off*) Sure?

STEPHEN (*off*) Course I'm sure.

BERNARD Course he's sure.

THE REMOVAL

Pause. Eileen comes out of the kitchen.

EILEEN She's a good girl.

BERNARD Mmm.

EILEEN He's lucky to have her.

BERNARD Her or another. He could have done better.

EILEEN There's not many girls'd keep him the way she does. Working, doing everything in the house, with the baby and everything.

BERNARD There's hundreds.

EILEEN Alright there's hundreds, he could've done better, I never said anything. It's no use arguing with you.

BERNARD Well it's true. He could have his pick of girls, he wraps 'em round his little finger, they'd do anything for him.

EILEEN Oh he can charm 'em alright but they wouldn't all stay with him and do his washing and give him pocket money into the bargain.

BERNARD You make him sound like a pimp.

Pause

EILEEN I'm not arguing with you.

BERNARD What are you doing then?

EILEEN I'm just saying she's good for him.

BERNARD And I say you're wrong. She doesn't push him. She doesn't believe in him. You don't either, that's the problem.

EILEEN I'm not arguing with you.

BERNARD He was such a bright kid. Now he's vegetating. It's a waste. He had something. She can't see it.

THE REMOVAL

EILEEN You're biased.

BERNARD Course I'm biased. I've seen him as a kid. I've seen the spark in his eyes. I know it's there, just a flicker, but it makes all the difference. Mark's a good boy, a slogger like me, gets what he wants if he works hard, but he hasn't got that little bit extra. Stephen's the only one. It's in his eyes, you can see it. It's easy for him, he's laughing, it's just natural for him, I can't explain it, but she hasn't seen it. She wants him to be like me.

EILEEN God help her.

Pause

BERNARD Yes.

Pause

BERNARD What are we doing tonight?

EILEEN Going home. Stephen's got friends coming round and I don't suppose Mark and Laura want us over there before they've had time to get things straight.

BERNARD What friends?

EILEEN Americans.

BERNARD Americans? What does he want with Americans?

EILEEN They're his friends. He's giving them a party for Independence Day.

BERNARD Independence Day! Worst move they ever made, getting rid of the British. Last civilising influence they had. And what do they do? Shoot it. Same ever since. I'll get some beer in for him.

EILEEN They don't want you there.

BERNARD I didn't say I was staying. I said I'd get some beer in for him. That's allowed, isn't it? I'm not staying.

EILEEN Don't start sulking.

THE REMOVAL

BERNARD You are a miserable woman. You really are. What happened? You used to have some life in you. You were even quite sexy once. It's all gone. You don't even exist any more. You've disappeared.

Silence

Eileen turns and goes out into the kitchen. Bernard remains alone in the middle of the empty room.

BERNARD How about some lunch?

Silence. Stephen comes in with some lightweight chairs.

BERNARD Son?

STEPHEN Mmm?

As Bernard does not reply, Stephen goes to him. Bernard takes him in his arms and hugs him, very hard.

STEPHEN Ow.

Mark comes in and stops in his tracks. Bernard lets Stephen go. A moment's silence then Bernard turns and goes out into the kitchen.

MARK What was all that about?

STEPHEN God knows.

MARK He's never hugged me like that.

STEPHEN The killer's kiss?

MARK Who's killing who?

Eileen comes to the kitchen door as Mark and Stephen go out. Annie comes in with some things.

EILEEN Do you want lunch?

MARK No, we do not want lunch. We're late enough as it is.

THE REMOVAL

STEPHEN I wouldn't mind a bite to eat.

ANNIE I'm famished. Where's... ?

Eileen silently indicates that Bernard is in the kitchen and best not disturbed. Pause. Mark and Stephen are gone. The two women remain. Eileen seems thoughtful, slightly bitter.

EILEEN Twenty years it is. She was the gifted one. Not Stephen. The piano. She could have been very good. Though you can't tell really. I always wanted a girl. I stopped fighting him when she died. It just didn't seem worth it any more. I gave up. I just never wanted anything enough to make it worth the trouble. I used to shout at him before, I used to take my fists to him. But I stopped living when Marion died. I just go through the motions. She had a light inside her, she lit up the room when she came in. She was the gifted one. Not Stephen.

ANNIE He never talks about her, never mentions her name.

EILEEN No, but he confuses things sometimes. He talks about Stephen when it's Marion he's really thinking of.

Pause

ANNIE He's never told you?

EILEEN Told me what?

ANNIE That it was Stephen who pushed her in front of the car.

Pause

ANNIE They never speak about it. But Stephen's had to live with that. It was an accident. But he thinks he's to blame.

Pause

EILEEN I wasn't with them, I was at home. Waiting. They'd just been out for a walk. It was on the Bath road, they were nearly home.

Laura comes in, followed by Mark.

THE REMOVAL

LAURA But I haven't got anything. It's all packed away.

EILEEN Don't worry, dear. I'll take care of it. I've brought some cold chicken and salad. It won't take a minute.

MARK Oh God.

Eileen goes into the kitchen.

[The play can be performed without interruption, or with an interval here, between Eileen's exit and Bernard's entrance.]

Bernard comes out of the kitchen.

BERNARD Right, lunch it is then. First good idea she's had in years.

EILEEN Where did you put that bag, Stephen?

STEPHEN What bag?

LAURA *(to Mark)* I thought you didn't want anything.

MARK Let's just get it over with as quickly as possible, alright?

LAURA I don't want anything.

MARK Fine. We won't give you anything.

LAURA *(low, to Mark)* I don't want them all nagging at me.

MARK Alright, alright.

EILEEN I'll just put things out on this box here and you can help yourselves. You can get a few more things up from the van.

Annie goes out with Stephen. Laura follows. Mark stays close to Bernard who looks around the room.

BERNARD Was a good buy, this flat. We bought at the right moment. How much do you think it would be worth now?

THE REMOVAL

MARK A darn sight more than we paid for it. Were you thinking of selling?

BERNARD No, no. No need.

MARK You got a good deal for the firm.

BERNARD Not the firm, just the name. A bloody fortune just to use my name.

Stephen comes in with a number of bags and cushions. He eyes Bernard and Mark. Throughout the ensuing dialogue he arranges the cushions and the chairs he brought up earlier around them, as if marking out his territory. They ignore him. Annie and Laura come and go with various items and Stephen takes things out of bags and boxes and spreads them about. Eileen puts food out. The room is gradually taking on the personality of Stephen and Annie.

BERNARD In two years' time people will have forgotten Hartnell's was ever a quality firm but that's their problem. I'm laughing.

MARK And the warehouse has gone?

BERNARD The old warehouse has gone, yes. Pushed it in the gravel pit. The gravel pits have gone too, come to that. Put a load of little boats on 'em, wind surfing, all that rubbish. Queuing up to get in the car park, they are now. To paddle about on the gravel pit. And they pay through the nose for that too.

MARK It's leisure. We don't sell ships any more, or iron and steel or coal. We sell leisure.

BERNARD Leisure. Not even pleasure. Something to occupy your mind, stop you thinking.

MARK That's what people want.

BERNARD Well it's not what I want. I don't want my mind occupied.

STEPHEN Let's eat.

EILEEN Ready when you are.

THE REMOVAL

- ANNIE Good good good. I'm hungry.
- STEPHEN This looks good.
- ANNIE Right! Here's for granddad.
- BERNARD Who are you calling granddad? I'm the fittest one here.
- EILEEN We'd noticed.
- BERNARD You just serve the food, no-one's paid for your opinion. Come on, Laura.
- LAURA No, I don't want anything.
- MARK You don't have to eat, just come and sit down with us.
- LAURA I don't want to sit.
- MARK Well, stop prowling around.
- LAURA I don't want to stop prowling around.
- BERNARD Aren't you eating?
- LAURA No, I'm not hungry. I hardly ever eat at lunch time.
- BERNARD I thought it was evenings you didn't eat.
- MARK Have some salad, dad.
- BERNARD When was the last time we were all together, as a family?
- MARK Christmas.
- BERNARD Apart from Christmas. Why does it have to be Christmas for the family to get together?
- STEPHEN Well, we were always on the other side of London for one thing. We'll be nearer now.

THE REMOVAL

EILEEN We're only half an hour from here. So if the baby wants minding just call. Even at a moment's notice.

ANNIE Oh, that's useful.

BERNARD Oh yes, very useful. We'll be here every other night changing nappies. Lovely prospect.

EILEEN I don't mind.

BERNARD You don't mind but how do you think you're gonna get here? On your bike?

EILEEN I'll get the train if you won't come.

BERNARD You get the train, I'd like to see that! You'd be in Crewe before you'd deciphered the timetable.

EILEEN It's direct to Clapham and they're just round the corner. Dead easy.

BERNARD I'd like to see that. Dead easy she says. She hasn't been on a train since 1955! And then she got on at the wrong end and never moved out of Waterloo!

EILEEN I didn't. He's making it all up. I used to get the train every day when I was working.

BERNARD When you were working? And when was that pray? 1941?

EILEEN I worked right up until Stephen was born.

BERNARD And you took the train every day until Stephen was born? First I've heard of it.

EILEEN I took the train when we were at Uxbridge.

BERNARD Uxbridge? And when were we at Uxbridge?

EILEEN Before Stephen was born.

BERNARD Long before Stephen was born. We were in Kingston when

THE REMOVAL

Stephen was born.

EILEEN Yes.

BERNARD And we'd been there for at least a year. Stephen was conceived in Kingston.

EILEEN No need to go into detail.

BERNARD So we were in Uxbridge no later than 1957. I'm sorry, did I say 1955? The last time she took a train was in 1957.

STEPHEN Don't think they've changed them since.

BERNARD Well, she should feel at home then, shouldn't she, when she gets the train to come up here and baby-sit on her own.

EILEEN I should be so lucky. We always have to go through this. And then he wants to come, he's always the same.

BERNARD I'll come when I'm invited.

ANNIE You don't need an invitation. You come whenever you want.

BERNARD We'll see.

ANNIE And we wanted to ask you about the rent.

BERNARD What rent?

ANNIE Well we thought as we paid fifty pounds a week for the bedsit...

BERNARD I never asked for any rent.

ANNIE Stephen...

STEPHEN No, we thought as Mark paid you...

BERNARD Mark paid in accordance with his earnings.

STEPHEN But I don't have any regular income.

THE REMOVAL

BERNARD So you don't pay any rent.

STEPHEN I suppose if you look at it like that...

ANNIE Stephen...

BERNARD How else do you want to look at it?

STEPHEN It's a bit unfair to Mark...

BERNARD He doesn't mind. Mark understands. He doesn't need any help. He gets by on his own. You're in a different business. It can take time. You need someone to help you through till things get easier for you. You think Olivier didn't have money behind him to start with? Or Cole Porter, or Leonardo? Any of those people.

MARK Or Van Gogh.

BERNARD Any of them. No need to be proud. It's the ignorant slobs with the money are proud to help. Aren't we, Mark?

MARK Oh absolutely. Everybody wants to buy into genius.

BERNARD And you wipe that smirk off your face. Can't say anything personal in this family. Show any emotion. Strictly taboo.

Pause

STEPHEN Baby's quiet at last.

EILEEN Isn't it lovely when they're quiet?

ANNIE Except I'm always worried something's happened, like she's suffocated or something dreadful.

STEPHEN I'm always imagining disasters, all through some fault of mine. I can see the headlines: "Forgetful father leaves baby on bus", "Dad boils baby in the bath", "He throws his child up in the air - and drops it".

BERNARD Very funny. You just wait till it starts getting serious. Just wait till you can't see a knife without seeing it plunging into the kid's flesh.

THE REMOVAL

Till you can't hold a glass without imagining smashing it into its face. Constant visions of horror. Because you know what can happen and you're responsible. The kid doesn't know. He sees a saucerful of boiling water he'll reach out for it. You're the one who sees the scald marks because you're the one who has to stop it happening.

ANNIE Don't. I worry enough as it is.

EILEEN You get used to it.

BERNARD No you don't. You never get used to it. It gets worse. It's like someone's tearing at your insides. You should never let them go, that's the truth of it. It's too dangerous out there. Not a day goes by without me seeing one of them with his brains spattered on a wall, hit by some terrorist, some drunk, some lunatic or some thug. Some days it's a police error, other times a bomb attack, some Iranians or the bloody IRA. And then I go out and find the bastards, I catch up with them and I bring my boot down on their head. Hard. I break their nose first, so they can't breathe, then I kick them very hard in the eyes. I let them resist a bit so I can hurt them some more. I break the bones in their fingers by stamping on them, then I lean 'em up against the wall and pummel their bellies with my fists, because that makes me feel good doing that, it's exactly what they deserve and no-one else will do it so it has to be me.

Pause

BERNARD Or sometimes I claw their eyes out with my fingers. I listen to them scream and I gouge their eyeballs out with my nails. Because that is the only thing they understand, these people, that's all they know. It's no bloody good arresting them and trying them in a court, because that just doesn't mean anything to them. They don't believe in justice, you can't reason with them. They're animals. They have to be exterminated.

Pause

STEPHEN I think you might be overstating your case a little.

BERNARD You think that now. But that's what it means to be a father. You'll find out. You'd happily kill someone to protect your kid. Not even to protect them, to avenge them, to try and make someone suffer almost as much as you've suffered.

THE REMOVAL

EILEEN How about a tomato, Laura? Good for you.

ANNIE Carrot?

LAURA No, really.

ANNIE I'm not on to muggings and terrorist attacks yet, I'm still petrified of scarlet fever and cot deaths.

STEPHEN It's a miracle any of them survive at all if you ask me.

BERNARD It's not a miracle, it's sheer bloody hard work, that's what it is. You slog your guts out every day of your life, you give 'em all you've got, you bleed for them, you sap your heart of its blood for them and for what? For some bastard to come up and blow them away? For them to go out and throw it all down the drain? Like it was nothing? Like nobody ever did anything?

Pause

ANNIE I don't think your daughter...

BERNARD I have no daughter.

Pause

BERNARD I'm not saying you should be grateful, it's nothing extraordinary, it's just what everyone does, what you'll do, what our parents did, it's just the way it is.

STEPHEN Then what are you so angry about?

BERNARD I'm not angry.

MARK It's half past two.

BERNARD I'm not angry. I'm just telling you. I'm warning you how it is. That's nature for you, that's the world of human nature. A bloody mess.

ANNIE I think it's wonderful.

BERNARD Good for you. I think it's a bloody mess.

THE REMOVAL

MARK The van has to be back by six.

ANNIE I've never felt so at one with the world as since Julia. It's like everything suddenly makes sense.

BERNARD Doesn't make any bloody sense to me. It's a bloody con trick. You've got nothing.

MARK We've got to get it right across the other side of London by six and we haven't even loaded it yet.

BERNARD I mean what can you do? What can you do about it? It's just the way it is.

ANNIE Have you tried prayer?

Pause

BERNARD What?

ANNIE I find praying is always a great help to me.

BERNARD Do you?

ANNIE Yes. Don't all look at me as if I was raving mad, lots of people do it. Even intelligent people, much more intelligent than me, I mean it's not just for thickies like me, it's not just superstition for dummies. It works.

BERNARD Yes but, Annie, for it to work, unless I'm mistaken, in which case please forgive me, for it to work you do pretty much have - forgive me if I'm wrong but I was under the impression that you had to believe in God.

ANNIE Well yes, that is pretty much the basic requirement.

BERNARD Yes. So. There you are then.

ANNIE I wish I could help you.

BERNARD What?

ANNIE You're struggling in the darkness. I wish I could help you into

THE REMOVAL

the light.

Pause

BERNARD *(to Stephen)* How long's this been going on?

STEPHEN What?

BERNARD How long's she been in the God Squad?

ANNIE I've always been a Christian and I don't think that's any reason to treat me like a freak. You can talk to me directly, I may not be all here but there's enough of me to talk to.

BERNARD Oh I've got nothing against it. I'm sure it's lovely for you. I envy you. I bet you have some lovely times getting together singing jolly songs for Jesus.

ANNIE Yes, we do.

BERNARD After all if that's their idea of fun who am I to tell 'em otherwise? The thing that gets me is they all seem so smug and sure of themselves.

ANNIE We are sure of ourselves. It's not a crime.

BERNARD Course it's not, course it's not. It's just when you're on the outside it makes it a bit difficult to sympathise with. I mean if you were tortured with doubt we could feel for you, or if you were being persecuted, martyred and all that, then we'd be on your side. If you were being crucified, it'd be alright. But just seeing you all standing round singing songs, grinning, and banging tambourines, I don't know, it makes it all somehow repulsive. Don't you think, Stephen? Or are you one of them too?

ANNIE Don't worry, he laughs at me just like you.

BERNARD Oh but I'm not laughing at you. I'm just trying to explain why it is people like me run a mile when someone starts telling us Jesus loves us.

EILEEN Sure you wouldn't like something to eat, Laura?

MARK Don't keep on at her, mum.

THE REMOVAL

LAURA No thank you.

EILEEN Alright. No-one's forcing you. If you don't want it you don't want it.

ANNIE He loves you all the same.

BERNARD Well good-oh. Bully for him.

EILEEN Bernard.

BERNARD No, don't "Bernard" me, we're having a discussion here. Course she'd rather we all paid lip service to convention and kept what we think to ourselves. Well balls to that, that's for old women like you, afraid of your own shadow. It's about time someone stood up and put Jesus in his place for once.

ANNIE And it's about time someone taught you to forgive.

BERNARD Who am I supposed to forgive?

ANNIE Stephen.

BERNARD And what am I supposed to forgive him, pray? Being a lazy bugger? I'm giving him this flat to lie around in, what more can I do?

ANNIE That's not it. You don't say what you think. You keep it to yourself, and you use it, to keep everyone in their place.

BERNARD What do you say, Laura?

LAURA I say we ought to start loading the van.

MARK At last a sensible remark.

BERNARD Don't you want something to eat first? Get your strength up?

LAURA I'm alright.

BERNARD Ought to eat something.

THE REMOVAL

- MARK Don't bother, dad. She's stubborn as a mule.
- BERNARD It's not Lent or something?
- ANNIE No.
- BERNARD Or the ramadan?
- MARK Time we got a move on.
- BERNARD Where d'you get these chairs?
- STEPHEN Annie's mum. She was throwing them out.
- BERNARD Don't blame her.
- STEPHEN We'll get some new ones soon.
- BERNARD Should have told me that before I sold up.
- STEPHEN Didn't think.
- BERNARD You never do. Mark got his order in as soon as he knew I was selling.
- MARK What's that supposed to mean?
- BERNARD It means you know a bargain when you smell one. You don't waste your money. Unlike old Sippy Jack here.
- STEPHEN I think Mark must have inherited all your money sense.
- BERNARD I don't think you inherited any sense at all, did you?
- STEPHEN Oh, some dress sense, I think.
- EILEEN Didn't get that from your father.
- BERNARD Oh, hark at Coco Chanel over there! Look at you, who are you trying to kid?
- MARK I had an interesting experience last week. In Amsterdam. It

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made me think of you, dad. Though I don't know why really, just the way I handled it, I surprised myself. I had to interrogate this bank official who'd been fiddling his bank. He wouldn't admit it and we were running out of time, we couldn't get anywhere until he'd confessed, so we used the classic interrogation technique, the soft approach and the tough, like in detective films, and it worked like a dream, it was most revealing. I got to be the tough guy. The other guy went in first and softened him up, talked about his family, all very friendly, just making conversation, and found out a little about the man behind the banker, his private life, all that. He didn't even mention the fraud enquiry, the guy didn't realise he suspected anything, he just chatted with him. Then he came out and told me everything this guy had just told him. Then I went in and said: "How would your two kids like to hear that their daddy's in jail?" I even used their names, I knew their names, I've forgotten them now, but I used them, it has a psychological impact. Then I went over some of the details of what he'd been doing, without naming him, I said this has been happening here, and this, and this - he'd been making illegal transfers out of the country - and I didn't say it was him, I just came closer and closer to him with what I was saying till it was clear that I knew bloody well what he'd done, and I got up and left him there and as I left I turned back and said: "Oh by the way, Miss van Dyck has told us everything." Cos he was doing it with this woman van Dyck, you see, and he was also having an affair with her, which we didn't know before but he'd told the guy before me, he'd actually told him she was his mistress. So when he heard that she'd confessed - which she hadn't, I was just trying to provoke him - he went to pieces. I sent the other guy in, the friendly one, and I listened at the door and this guy was weeping, he was balling his eyes out in front of this bloke he'd met for the first time a couple of hours before, and of course the bloke said he might be able to make things easier for him if he confessed everything - and he did. He blabbed everything, gave all the details, he was completely broken - I mean we hadn't tortured him or anything, just grilled him a bit - and it all came out. And then we wheeled in Miss van Dyck and confronted her with his confession and she had to admit to her part. When we'd finished they happened to cross paths in the corridor, I was leading her off one way and he was being taken off somewhere else. Their eyes met. And she spat at him. And he looked at her, amazed, for a few seconds and then you could see that he'd understood, that she'd never confessed anything until he did and that we'd fooled him, that we'd taken him for a ride. And you could see in his face the look of the most total defeat imaginable, I mean he realised that he'd just wrecked his whole life, through a miscalculation, through an emotional reaction, he'd let himself be manipulated. It was a very strong moment. And he looked up at me, a defeated man, his life was finished, and he was acknowledging it, he was

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looking up at me to acknowledge his defeat and there just wasn't any fight left in him, he was vanquished. And I was his master.

Pause

ANNIE That's horrible.

MARK Oh yes.

LAURA He's always telling that story.

Pause

BERNARD I don't know. I've tried to teach you. I've tried to teach you both a certain dignity, a certain manliness. All I can say is I have failed.

MARK What do you mean?

BERNARD I mean you have a small man's vision of the world.

Pause

LAURA Don't you think we should start getting down to work?

BERNARD No. I don't. I think this is a time for rest and nourishment and reflection. Then we work.

EILEEN I don't know about rest and reflection, all you've done is argue.

BERNARD Who's arguing? Nobody's arguing. We have had some food for thought. We have chewed over Jesus, trains from Uxbridge and interrogation techniques in Amsterdam. From this I can only conclude that I have two sons: one counts his pennies, the other counts the stars.

MARK Christ!

BERNARD And neither has yet grown to be a man.

Pause

ANNIE I think that's your fault.

THE REMOVAL

BERNARD Course it's my fault. Everything. I have failed.

EILEEN Don't start on a sob story. They're in a hurry.

BERNARD 'S not a sob story, I'm just agreeing with Joan of Arc here. She's got it all worked out. She's got all the answers.

ANNIE It's true I can't help Stephen in his career. But I can help him in his life. I can help him become someone.

BERNARD Because he's no-one now I suppose? Hear that, Stephen, you're a nobody, it's official. And who do you think you're going to turn him into, the Archbishop of Canterbury?

ANNIE What do you want from us? What are you pushing for?

BERNARD I don't want anything. I'm not pushing. I'm an old man. There's nothing left for me to want.

ANNIE That's not true.

BERNARD You've no right to ask for anything when you're old. You're supposed to dye your hair and have your face lifted. Go jogging. Dance and sing. Water-ski. Do all the things you can't really do any more, to prove how young you are. Don't let on you're old or they'll send you up the mountain like the Japanese. They'll ship you off to Eastbourne. Look at the two of them. Can't wait to get rid of me.

MARK No-one's going to send you to Eastbourne.

EILEEN I like Eastbourne.

BERNARD You would. I'm not going to bloody Eastbourne. It's full of people like you. I'd rather burn in hell.

ANNIE You don't believe in hell.

BERNARD No but if I did that's where I'd go. Not heaven. Too bloody dull. Too polite. Full of Christians. All tea and tambourines. I couldn't stand it. I'd rather suffer.

THE REMOVAL

MARK You've got a few years left in you yet anyway.

BERNARD Oh yes. Three.

MARK What do you mean?

BERNARD I mean I've got three years left to live. At 65 I blow my brains out.

STEPHEN Why?

BERNARD Save you having to look after me. Cook me meals, wheel me about, watch me disintegrate. Waiting for me to die. I'll be of no possible use to you at 65, best for all concerned I put a bullet through my brain and have done with it. I've bought the gun.

EILEEN Who's going to clean up afterward?

BERNARD You are. That'll be your last image of me, save you getting sentimental: a bloody mess all over the living room wall. And I'll make damned sure I sit in your best settee to do it. You'll have to scrub me out of it, it'll take you three weeks to get rid of the stench.

EILEEN Typical. Can't take sleeping pills like everyone else, has to make a nuisance of himself.

STEPHEN I think you're more use to us alive than dead.

BERNARD Oh don't worry, I'll leave you money. You'll be alright. You'll have to look after your mother of course, she'll go on and on. But you can always send her to Eastbourne.

MARK Nobody's going to Eastbourne.

EILEEN I don't mind. I like Eastbourne.

BERNARD See? She likes it. That's that settled then. You can put her in a home, with nurses and bedpans and a telly. Course you'd have to go down there every now and then, that's a bit of a bind. But only for as long as she remembers who you are. Then when she's completely gaga you can get her to sign everything over to you and forget all about her.

THE REMOVAL

ANNIE What's the matter with you?

BERNARD I've got eyes in my head, that's what's the matter with me. I see what happens. I don't blind myself with easy answers.

ANNIE Then why don't you see what you've done to your children?

Pause

BERNARD Give it thirty years and see how you've managed before you start criticising.

ANNE We'll pay fifty pounds a week.

BERNARD I can rent it to someone else, you know, if you'd rather.

ANNIE How much would you get for it?

BERNARD More than you can pay, love, so don't try to buy me out. I'm not interested in your money.

ANNIE Then perhaps we'd better go somewhere else.

BERNARD What do you say, Stephen? Are you too proud to accept a bit of help from your own father?

ANNIE It's not pride. And it's not money. It's what you ask in exchange.

BERNARD I'm not asking anything in exchange. I'm asking you to let me help, that's all. What else can I do?

ANNIE Stephen?

Pause. Stephen gets up and goes out to the bedroom in silence.

EILEEN Has everyone finished?

BERNARD Where's he going?

EILEEN I'll start on the dishes.

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BERNARD He hasn't finished his lunch.

EILEEN Won't hurt him.

She starts clearing up.

BERNARD Leave him his plate.

MARK *(Shouting towards the bedroom)* Stephen, we've got three hours to get everything over to Putney, unload it all and drive the van across London back to Hackney.

BERNARD *(to Laura)* How about a nice juicy chicken leg?

MARK Leave her. She's old enough to look after herself.

BERNARD Well we've only got your word on that. She doesn't look in very good shape to me. Why don't you just have a little bit of salad?

MARK LEAVE HER ALONE!

Pause

LAURA I'm going outside for a cigarette.

Laura goes out. The baby starts crying.

ANNIE Oh no!

BERNARD That's you shouting.

ANNIE See to her, can you, Stephen?

BERNARD Why don't you go?

ANNIE Because Stephen does it better.

STEPHEN *(off)* Quiet, baby. There there. Shh. Julia. Baby. Julia. Shh, don't - Will you - SHUUUTTUUUPPP!!!

Annie jumps up and runs into the bedroom.

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ANNIE Don't touch her!

STEPHEN (*off*) What do you mean, don't touch her?

Stephen reappears, hunched, disconsolate. He kicks a bag. It breaks. Books and papers spill out.

STEPHEN FUUUCK!!

BERNARD Well this is a pleasant family get-together, isn't it?

MARK Let's get the van loaded.

BERNARD Oh we are having fun.

They go. Eileen finishes clearing the table. The baby stops crying. Stephen stands alone for a moment, moves towards the bedroom, stops, then slumps slowly to the ground. Silence. Annie comes out of the bedroom. She looks at Stephen a moment, then goes to comfort him.

ANNIE I'm sorry, I know you wouldn't hurt her.

STEPHEN Leave me alone.

ANNIE Don't worry. It'll sort itself out. I mean I like him really.

STEPHEN Fuck off.

Eileen comes out of the kitchen.

ANNIE We can't stay here.

EILEEN Don't be silly. It's perfect for you.

ANNIE I can't take it. It's like the walls are crushing in on us.

EILEEN Nonsense. Least you've got walls. And a roof. For your baby. Where else would you go?

ANNIE We manage.

EILEEN You don't want to take any notice of my husband. He talks a

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lot of rubbish but he doesn't mean it.

ANNIE He wants Julia. He wants my baby.

EILEEN He just wants to have his family around him. A bit of life.
Save him growing old.

ANNIE But he tramples them into the ground.

EILEEN That's just his way.

We hear the sound of Bernard and Mark approaching.

MARK *(off)* It's got to be back by six. We'll never do it.

BERNARD I'll pay for the extra time.

MARK It's not the money. It's just the waste. Where's Laura?

ANNIE I thought she was out there with you.

MARK Don't say she's disappeared. Just when we're ready to go.

He goes out to look for her.

BERNARD Who's coming with us to Mark's place?

ANNIE I'd better stay with Julia.

BERNARD What about you?

Stephen does not reply.

BERNARD Oh that's great, that is. Soon as it comes to helping the others
you can count them out.

EILEEN I'll go.

Mark returns, alone.

MARK I don't know where she's bloody got to.

THE REMOVAL

BERNARD Bloody marvellous. She's been getting in our way all day, then when we need her she's vanished.

MARK We'll just go without her. She's got to learn.

BERNARD Good.

MARK How's your back?

BERNARD My back's not the problem.

ANNIE I'll go with you... I want to see the house anyway. Stephen will stay with the baby, won't you, Stephen?

BERNARD Good. Let's get a move on then.

ANNIE If she wakes up, give her her bottle, see if she wants changing. You can manage.

No reply from Stephen. The others move to the door and head out.

MARK Just like her to disappear just when we're ready to go.

BERNARD Well we're not waiting for her. Serves her right, silly cow.

EILEEN *(off)* Bernard.

BERNARD *(off)* Bernard what? What's that supposed to mean?

They are gone. Stephen remains alone, brooding. The lights dim discreetly. He gets up, straightens his back, changes attitude, taking on a new persona. He paces impatiently, as if emotion is boiling up in him, then delivers the soliloquy from Hamlet Act II scene 2:

STEPHEN Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wann'd,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing!

THE REMOVAL

For Hecuba!

What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba
That he should weep for her? What would he do
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears.
Yet I,

A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?
Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?
Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie i' the throat,
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?
Ha!

Swounds, I should take it, for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-liver'd, and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or ere this
I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
Oh vengeance!

Laura comes in before the end of the speech and listens in silence. He now sees her and immediately changes attitude.

STEPHEN They've gone. You missed them.

Laura laughs. Stephen looks at her.

STEPHEN Been down the pub?

Laura laughs again. Stephen has adopted a slightly exaggerated South London accent. He is playing a new part. Laura is slightly nervous and slightly drunk.

LAURA I feel better now.

THE REMOVAL

STEPHEN Good-oh.

LAURA Seems strange with all your things here. Like I'm suddenly somewhere else.

STEPHEN Perhaps you are.

LAURA Mark's always tidying everything up. He's anally fixated.

STEPHEN Aren't we all?

LAURA Are you the only one here?

STEPHEN Oh yes.

LAURA What about the baby?

STEPHEN Fast asleep.

She crosses in front of him, looks at some of his books.

LAURA It's very warm.

STEPHEN What is?

LAURA The weather. Very sticky.

Bernard appears suddenly in the doorway, unnoticed. He is about to speak but, hearing the last exchange and sensing the atmosphere, he freezes and listens. They do not see him.

STEPHEN I told you you weren't frigid.

LAURA Mark thinks I am.

STEPHEN The thing with Mark of course is that he has precious little initiative and absolutely no imagination. So it's really up to you to call the shots. Or so I should imagine.

LAURA But I don't want to call the shots.

THE REMOVAL

STEPHEN Of course you don't. That's why you're absolutely the wrong woman for my brother. You want to be dominated. You want to be ordered about. You want to be kicked down the stairs. You want a man who can pin you to the ground.

LAURA No, I don't.

Pause

STEPHEN Why don't you take off your knickers?

Pause. She does. Bernard, still unnoticed, goes back out in silence.

STEPHEN Come here.

She goes to him, and hands him her knickers. He takes them and holds them behind her head, pulling her face towards him. They kiss. He uses the knickers to push her down. She slides down to his waist and undoes his fly.

Enter Annie.

ANNIE Stephen, your dad wants...

She freezes as she takes in the scene. Laura hastily and guiltily scrambles to her feet. Stephen turns away. They look back at Annie with false innocence. The knickers remain on the floor between them. Annie crosses the room and slaps Laura in the face.

ANNIE *(to Stephen)* Let's try and keep it out of the family, if you don't mind.

LAURA Wait a minute, what...?

ANNIE Laura, I may be stupid but I'm not blind. You had your knickers over your head and your hand on his crotch so don't tell me I'm jumping to conclusions.

LAURA I'm going outside for a cigarette.

Annie picks up the knickers and hands them to Laura.

ANNIE Here. Don't want to catch cold.

THE REMOVAL

Laura takes them and goes out.

ANNIE If that wasn't wilfully perverse, it was still unbelievably selfish and at the very least fucking stupid. What was the point of it?

STEPHEN It was just a game.

ANNIE Well don't play games with me!

STEPHEN I didn't ask you to play.

Enter Mark, Bernard and Eileen. Mark is calling out to the disappearing Laura as he comes in.

MARK Now where are you going? Christ!

BERNARD What's up with her?

ANNIE Stephen's taken it upon himself to cure her of her frigidity.

STEPHEN Oh don't blow it up out of all proportion.

MARK Blow what up?

BERNARD I told you she wasn't worth it.

STEPHEN We were just playing about.

MARK What?!

STEPHEN Oh stop pretending you haven't understood, Mark. It's very tiresome and rather ridiculous.

BERNARD Listen, son, this is an opportunity for you. You won't get many more, believe me. Throw her out. You can do it now. Before she starts appealing to your charity. Get rid of her.

STEPHEN Oh come on, don't let's overdo it. She's drunk.

ANNIE She's drunk, what's your excuse?

THE REMOVAL

STEPHEN I'm out of my mind.

ANNIE Too bloody right you are!

MARK You bastard.

STEPHEN Oh shut up, Mark.

BERNARD Don't worry about him, go and tell her. Tell her she's out on her arse.

MARK Wait a minute. Someone tell me exactly what happened here.

BERNARD What do you want, diagrams?

ANNIE *(to Bernard)* Did you come up here first? Did you see them? You sent me up here deliberately, didn't you? You knew.

BERNARD Knew what?

The phone starts ringing.

ANNIE You said you'd just turned back and to send Stephen down to you. You lied to me. You'd seen them.

BERNARD I don't know why you're accusing me. I didn't have her.

STEPHEN Phone.

ANNIE He knew.

STEPHEN Phone's ringing.

Mark goes to answer it.

ANNIE Stephen!

MARK Hello?...

ANNIE Stephen, do you realise...?

MARK ... No, just a minute... Stephen, for you...

THE REMOVAL

STEPHEN OK. Hello... oh, Howard... well, we're a bit behind but...

MARK Some American.

BERNARD Christ.

STEPHEN ... Oh, oh OK, fine... yeah... alright then...

ANNIE Stephen, will you...?

STEPHEN OK, Howard, gotta go now... I'll meet you there... OK. If I'm late just... wait, yeah... yeah, it's kinda... OK. Happy Independence Day.

He hangs up.

ANNIE Stephen, will you listen to me?

STEPHEN Yes. they're going to Joe Allen's first. I said I'd meet them there. Gives us a bit more time...

ANNIE Stephen, if you won't listen to me I'm going to walk out that door and I'm never coming back, do you hear?

STEPHEN Well look, I'm listening, but I mean you're really not saying very much...

Stephen turns his back on them, picks up a plastic bag and rummages in it.

ANNIE I'm saying he saw you first and he sent me up here without saying anything. I'm saying he wanted me to see you with her...

Pause. Stephen turns round wearing a red nose and a clown's wig.

STEPHEN Hello children, and how are we today? How about a round of applause? Bravo for the clown?

BERNARD What's this?

STEPHEN Is that the best you can do for old Coco? You don't want Coco to be sad, do you? Poor old Coco!

THE REMOVAL

ANNIE I'm going, Stephen.

STEPHEN "I'm going, Stephen." No sense of humour, that one. And what about old granddad! Come on pops, do us a dance.

Stephen grabs Bernard and does a few steps of a ridiculous dance with him. Bernard looks at him, then deliberately turns his back on him and speaks to Annie.

BERNARD What the hell is this in aid of? Where'd he get that get-up?

ANNIE It's from their children's show.

BERNARD Children's show? I thought he was an actor, not a bloody circus clown.

ANNIE I'm leaving.

Stephen mimes taking out a large handkerchief, wiping away tears and noisily blowing his nose, then waving it in farewell to Annie.

ANNIE *(to Bernard)* Congratulations. You wanted to break us up. You have succeeded. Goodbye.

BERNARD You going then? Oh dear.

They watch her go. Stephen follows, imitating her movements like a street mime. He stops at the doorway. There is a moment's quiet then the door opens again and Annie reappears, awkward and angry.

ANNIE Forgot the baby.

BERNARD Whoops.

She crosses to the bedroom. Stephen follows her again with exaggerated gesture. She shuts the door behind her and he turns and shakes his hand to indicate she is angry.

Pause

BERNARD *(to Mark)* Now you just want to throw yours out and we'll all be back together again. One big happy family.

THE REMOVAL

STEPHEN We'll never be together again.

MARK I don't know where she's gone.

BERNARD Her? She's gone for a little pick-me-up, I expect. Try the Crown and Anchor.

Laura appears in the doorway.

LAURA No need. I'm here.

BERNARD Here she is. Now's your chance.

LAURA *(to Stephen)* He was there, you see, watching. Just like with Mark. You can't get rid of him.

BERNARD What's she talking about?

LAURA *(to Mark)* I am willing to discuss divorce. But not here.

BERNARD You haven't got anything to discuss, darling. You've been caught with your knickers down. You're going out on your bare arse.

LAURA I'm not going anywhere I don't want to go. The house is half mine. We can talk it over when we're there. Without him.

Annie comes out of the bedroom with the baby in its carry-cot and a number of bags, bottles and bears. She walks across the room in silence and stops before reaching the door.

ANNIE *(to Bernard)* Who do you think you're protecting him from?

Pause

ANNIE Me? Marion?

BERNARD Marion's not going to hurt him.

ANNIE Isn't she?

STEPHEN Shut up, Annie.

THE REMOVAL

ANNIE Why don't you face the facts?

BERNARD What facts? She was eight years old. She was run over on the Bath Road. A blue Cortina. Bastard was driving too fast. She fell in front of the car.

ANNIE She didn't fall.

LAURA I knew it. She jumped.

ANNIE She didn't fall. She didn't jump. She was pushed. Stephen pushed her. And you know it. He told me.

Pause

ANNIE He was only twelve years old. He didn't mean to kill her. But he pushed her in front of the car. You've never forgiven him/

BERNARD *(to Stephen)* You told her?

LAURA Now that's interesting.

MARK I didn't know that. I don't remember.

BERNARD You told her that?

ANNIE You pretended you didn't see but you've never forgiven him. You can't forgive him until you accept that he killed her.

BERNARD I thought you didn't realise.

STEPHEN Alright, I was twelve years old, we were jostling each other. I gave her a shove and she fell in front of the car. It was an accident. For a long time I told myself I didn't mean to kill her. Not consciously. But I did. I wanted it.

Pause

BERNARD Get out.

MARK I remember the sound of the brakes, and the impact, and dad

THE REMOVAL

shouting. I was there, but I don't remember that. Perhaps I just didn't notice.

EILEEN What difference does it make? She's dead. He should have kept them under control.

BERNARD Get out. I thought you didn't realise. Get out, you little bastard. I don't want you here any more.

STEPHEN I'm here now. I've got all my things.

BERNARD I don't care. Get it all out.

STEPHEN No.

Pause

STEPHEN I'm not going anywhere. I'm here now. You get out.

Pause. Bernard moves towards Stephen and raises his fist, threatening to strike. Stephen stands firm and stares him out. Bernard goes to strike Stephen, who intercepts the blow and punches his father in the stomach. Bernard doubles up in pain, winded. Eileen goes to his side.

ANNIE Stephen!

STEPHEN We'll give you twenty quid a week rent. That's all it's worth. Don't expect anything more. We'll let you come and baby-sit from time to time. But don't call us.

Eileen helps Bernard over to the armchair. He sits, hunched, old, diminished. Eileen looks back toward Stephen. He looks at her without pity. Silence. Broken by a nervous giggle from Mark. Annie takes the baby and all its things and puts them back in the bedroom. She comes out again.

MARK We must go. Come on.

LAURA Right.

MARK There's not much left down there. We'll manage on our own.

STEPHEN Bye bye.

THE REMOVAL

MARK Yes. Right.

They go. Pause.

BERNARD (*low*) You give your life to 'em, provide for 'em, protect 'em, you give your life's blood to nourish them and they turn around and kick you in the teeth.

EILEEN Well. It's not fair of course but that's the way it is. What do you expect, sympathy?

ANNIE Well. Busy day. Glad it's over.

BERNARD All over. Just a bloody con trick.

STEPHEN (*to Bernard*) Oy. That's my chair you're sitting in.

Bernard looks up at Stephen who stares him down. Bernard gets up and lets Stephen sit down. Bernard stands, hunched, broken.

BERNARD I'm not staying here a moment longer.

He does not move.

STEPHEN I could be here for some time.

BLACK

THE END

Mitchell Hooper
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