

MYSTERIOUS WAYS

Or -

The Brighton Connection

A farce in two conventional acts
By Mark Bunyan.

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CHARACTERS

- GERALD** The Bishop of Southingdene. A cheery, portly man in his late fifties. He wears glasses on a chain round his neck when they're not on his nose. That nose shows signs of a life largely spent in the pursuit of alcohol.
- FRANK** The Archdeacon. A very good-looking man in his late forties.
- RALPH** The Curate. A pinched young man in his mid-twenties. Clean shaven.
- JOHN:** A gay clone, the same age, height, build and colouring as RALPH, and indeed they are all too easily mistaken for each other. John has a moustache.
- DR BLAIR** The Diocesan Exorcist. A shrivelled old man in his late sixties.
- MRS BLAIR** His wife. A pleasant but tired woman in her mid-forties.
- MRS ASH:** The housekeeper. A very attractive woman in her mid-forties who has kept her figure well.

THE SET [*the layout is important – MB*]

The action takes place in the library of the Bishop's Palace, Southingdene. A large room, mainly in dark wood with the vague ambiance of men's club about it. The upstage wall is lined with bookshelves from floor to ceiling and there is a small step ladder to reach the top shelves. In the middle of this wall, and set into the bookshelves, is the door to the Bishop's study. The wall only continues to just beyond halfway across the stage however as there are French doors down at an angle to the stage left wall.

The French doors are covered by expansive plush curtains which draw from the centre. It is possible, and for the purposes of the play essential, to get behind the curtains from either end, i.e. they hang loose rather than being secured at either side. The wall stage left is similarly lined with books with a door set into it downstage. This however is an altogether more ornate door and opens into the room, i.e. obscuring the entrance from the majority [or preferably all] of the audience. Note: the distance between the ends of the curtains and the study door and stage left [chapel] door should be as little as possible.

The stage right wall is probably free of books and has a door leading into the hall. This door is hinged upstage and opens into the room. Centre stage there is a large chesterfield with matching armchairs down right and down left, there being room to move between either of the chairs and the chesterfield.

Behind the chesterfield, centre to right, can be seen the top of a small table with telephone, notepad etc. To the right of the study door, against the upstage wall is a large, lockable drinks cabinet.

ACT ONE: SCENE ONE. Early evening, late autumn.
 SCENE TWO. Around nine thirty that night.

The early hours of the following morning.

ACT TWO: The early hours of the following morning.

ACT ONE:

SCENE ONE

NARRATOR: *[As the play begins, FRANK, the Archdeacon, is standing on the library steps, trying to reach a book which is just outside his grasp. Just as he finally manages to tip the book slightly towards him, the telephone begins to ring. FRANK perseveres with trying to catch the book but eventually the ringing becomes too much for him and he descends the steps.]*

FRANK: *[Muttering]* Shitshitshit. *[Changes manner as he answers telephone]* Hello, Palace of Southingdene -- oh hello Bertie. How... oh fine. And how's life with the minister? *[Pause]* Oh no! *[Half-laughs]* Again? The same one -- and with a policeman, dare one ask? Mon dieu! When did...? I see. Will you be able to keep it out of the press? Yes - no - I suppose even he has his limits. Yes I'll tell Gerald straightaway. What? Yes of course I'll ask him. He's in his bath just at the moment. Bless you, Bless... Here? Well calm before the storm really. We've got a full house tonight, and Mrs Ash has chosen this week to go off and visit her family up north. Due back tomorrow thank goodness. Well there's the new curate, and then Gerald and I are wining and dining the Blairs.

Blair. I must have told you about him. Blair of Blair's embrocation but diocesan exorcist into the bargain. Gerald inherited him when he took over. Complete crank. Reeks of garlic most of the time, the doddering old fool. Loaded of course so we're hoping he's going to pay for the restoration of the chapel windows. Yes, yes, yes. Bless... Yes, yes, yes. Bless you, Bertie. I'll let Gerald know straight -- yes, yes. Yes thank you Bertie. Good-- yes. Goodbye now. *[Finally managing to put the telephone down]* Sweet Jesus!

NARRATOR: *[FRANK moves the steps so that he'll be able to reach the elusive book and goes back up. During the following scene he is glancing through various books and replacing them on the shelves. After a moment, GERALD, the Bishop, enters.]*

GERALD: What happened to that bit of smoked salmon?

FRANK: *[Not looking up]* You fed it to the cat last night. *[He replaces book and looks down at GERALD whose glasses hang on a chain round his neck.]* Besides! No wonder you can't see anything if you won't wear your glasses.

GERALD: They're still uncomfortable.

FRANK: You'll get another headache.

GERALD: Don't nag, Frank. You're starting to act as if you were my wife.

FRANK: *[Not looking up]* Hardly.

GERALD: My "love!" then.

FRANK: Even less likely. Look at you. Overweight –

GERALD: Oh don't start that. *[Pause]* Anyway, what difference would it make if I were wearing my glasses if what I wasn't looking for wasn't even there.

FRANK: *[Not looking up]* This is no time for metaphysical speculation. Or for anything to eat, come to that. We'll be going out to dinner soon. *[Pause]* Your ablutions were remarkably swift.

GERALD: Needs must when... Are you going to unlock the cabinet?

FRANK: Not yet, Gerald.

GERALD: Oh. You did say I could have a little one when I'd had my bath.

FRANK: I didn't know we'd go without washing behind our ears.

GERALD: Oh come on Frank –

FRANK: Not yet, not yet.

GERALD: *[Sitting sulkily on the chesterfield]* Where's the new lamb?

FRANK: The new' lamb, as you put it, has yet to arrive.

GERALD: I thought you said his train was due at quarter to five. Why tarry the wheels of his chariot? I don't understand why he hasn't got a car. His people are rich enough. What time are the Blairs due?

FRANK: Seven. The table's booked for eight thirty. They should be here shortly.

GERALD: Can't we have a drink before they arrive?

FRANK: No!

GERALD: I'm going to need something to settle my nerves if old Blair's going to go on the same way as he did the last time. I really thought I was going to lose whatever it was we were eating. What *were* we eating? I seem to remember wishing I hadn't had the pea soup. *[Sighs]* I sometimes think old Blair's far more trouble than he's worth.

FRANK: He's worth an awful lot.

GERALD: Yes but look at – well what about that business on that nude beach. The church doesn't need that kind of publicity.

FRANK: It was a simple misunderstanding.

GERALD: But he gets so carried away with it. All those people with *burns*.

FRANK: It wasn't all bad. One of them decided to become a nun. And they never did come up with a satisfactory reason for all those utensils. At least he's sincere.

GERALD: Who?

FRANK: Old Blair.

GERALD: He's a doddering old idiot. I can't for one moment understand what his wife sees in him.

FRANK: I've still to meet her.

GERALD: Oh yes of course. Very nice, ordinary woman. I can't think what can have possessed her to marry him.

FRANK: Hardly the most apposite choice of word.

GERALD: Look Frank, the more I think about it, if I've got to sit through a whole evening of old Blair going on about people levitation and spewing green bile at the village ox-roast –

FRANK: Try to concentrate on the other green stuff, Gerald. It's much more pleasant and somewhat more likely – if what Trenton-Jones told you about Blair's ticker –

GERALD: I forgot to tell you. Old T.J. practically snubbed me in the bar on Tuesday.

FRANK: The bar?

GERALD: In their Lordship's House. I was in for Tubby Morton's introduction remember. He's been a piss-artist so long, no wonder he's been made a life pee-er. [*Laughs*].

FRANK: I hope you didn't use that one there. You really must remember the sheep ---

GERALD: *[Imitating FRANK's tone]* "must have faith in the shepherd's public image." Blah blah.

FRANK: So what were you doing in the bar?

GERALD: Oh for God's sake Frank. Alcohol is a long lived episcopal tradition. I'm a jolly –

FRANK: You won't be a long-lived anything if you don't, listen to your doctor.

GERALD: Oh it's hard to take Halliford seriously. I was at school with his older brother.

FRANK: Well *he* takes it seriously enough. You've got to cut down Gerald. He told me –

GERALD: Oh stop being so pompous about it.

FRANK: I'm just minding my investments. It took me long enough to get you into this job.

GERALD: And you know damn well you wouldn't last a day here if I snuffed it--

FRANK: That's not in question. I am, however, quite determined that you shall be buried in a good old age -- so no more trips to the bar. Roger's supposed to be keeping an eye on you.

GERALD: He was just finishing some letters. I had the tiniest port and brandy, that's all. Anyway – *[FRANK goes to speak but GERALD over-rides him.] ANYWAY*, old Trenton-Jones gave me this stare like an unfileted fish and slumped out without saying a word. Nice thing I must say after all our efforts to lumber ourselves with his bloody nephew as a curate. *[Consults his watch, putting on his glasses to do so and wincing slightly]* Damn these things, can't you get them fixed Frank? It's well after six. Where is the new lamb?

FRANK: *[Who's been looking for a book and not listening]* Have you seen the Aquinas?

GERALD: What? Oh you're not having me quote from old Whine-Arse again are you? *[Pause]* It's in the study.

NARRATOR: *[FRANK descends steps and takes them into the study whilst:]*

GERALD: I hope this young Jones is going to come up with something a bit more ... muscular. I've done a little research on him by the way. The rumour at Frittinghurst –

NARRATOR: *[There is a knock at the front door, off right.]*

FRANK: That sounds like him. Now you behave yourself and I'll unlock the you-know-what. Maybe.

[FRANK goes out.]

GERALD: *[Childishly sarcastic]* You-know-what! Maybe!

NARRATOR: *[Noises off. GERALD peers to look at the new curate, eventually holding his glasses up to his eyes without putting them on. Drops them as FRANK enters with RALPH.]*

- FRANK: This is the way, walk ye in it. Your Grace, this is Ralph Jones. His Grace, Gerald Manley-ffinck, Bishop of Southingdene.
- GERALD: *[Most patronisingly]* The reverend Jones now surely, archdeacon? Con –
- RALPH: Not yet your Grace. I have no title as yet.
- GERALD: Well congratulations on leaving college anyway, my boy. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear but now mine eye seeth thee. I think this calls for a little –
- FRANK: Ralph has lost his trunks.
- GERALD: *[Taken aback, confused]* What?
- FRANK: His trunks. Ralph has lost his trunks.
- RALPH: Just the single trunk in fact archdeacon. I do not have "great possessions" but the hope of treasure in heaven. On the other hand, my thoughts towards those idiots at the station – oh pardon, your Grace.
- GERALD: Not at all my boy. I quite understand. You've had a long journey. I expect you'd like a –
- FRANK: Can we get this absolutely straight? Without your trunks –
- RALPH: Just the one *small* trunk –
- FRANK: Trunk, you haven't got any other clothes than those you're standing up in at present?
- GERALD: And very nice too – Now –
- RALPH: That's the picture completely, archdeacon.
- GERALD: Well doubtless the Lord will provide. Now the archdeacon and I were just about to.

[FRANK and RALPH wait for him to continue.]

GERALD: Have a drink. What can we –

RALPH: *[Laughing prissily]* I think I should make it clear from the outset, your Grace, that strong drink never passes my lips.

FRANK: *[Pleased]* How ... uh ... temperate.

GERALD: Ah come now. , "Drink no longer water but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities."
[To FRANK] I'll have a port and brandy.

RALPH: "Do not drink Wine, nor strong drink lest ye die."

GERALD: Leviticus. "Take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry."

RALPH: Yes but Luke also says "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness."

GERALD: *[Still smiling]* Of course I wouldn't go that far but rather with Ecclesiastes: "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy and drink thy wine with a merry heart."

RALPH: "Strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it." Isaiah

GERALD: "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts." *[To FRANK]* I think I'm about ready to perish. A port –

RALPH: Ah, Proverbs. But "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him and maketh him drunken also."

GERALD: "I have drunk my wine with my milk."

RALPH: "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning that

they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them."

GERALD: "In the holy place shalt thou cause the strong wine to be poured for a drink offering."

RALPH: Numbers! But Isaiah "The priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink. They are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgement."

GERALD: Now wait a –

RALPH: It was the strongest wish of my late foster parents that I should never take strong waters.

GERALD: But I –

GERALD/FRANK: Late?

GERALD: You mean ... late?

RALPH: Both my parents are dead, your Grace.

GERALD: But your uncle told me---

RALPH: My uncle? Would the Lord that I had an uncle, your Grace. I have no living relatives known to me. I was born in the vile sin of a wanton woman but taken from her evil care and brought up into the light by two simple but godly souls, the late Obadiah and Hannah Jones of Brighton, Lancashire.

FRANK: I know Brighton well.

RALPH: I was brought up there. You probably knew St Aphids then, archdeacon – The happiest hours of my childhood were spent there. Not the most beautiful of churches perhaps – far from the grandeur of Southingdene with its famous windows – but it was there in that dear crumbling old building that my foster parents first

bathed me in the blood of the Lord. They were, God knows, only humble people with trust in the love of Christ, but I believe he knew the immensity of their hearts, for he took them both to him with one glorious stroke of his terrible swift sword. You may possibly recall the accident on the Brighton-Widgery ferry, your Grace? I was filled with grief when St Aphids was sold off for... other purposes.

GERALD: *[After a pause]* So you're no relation of the Trenton-Jones of –

RALPH: Trenton-Jones! I should think not. The thought is abhorrent. I don't know whether you have had to have any dealings with that particular family, but it so happens that there was a Trenton-Jones at the college with me. Though I should be far from casting the first stone, I may say that he was "a certain lewd fellow of the baser sort". Not above using the influence of his very rich family not to mention a certain amount of good looks to get somewhat unsavoury results. Dean Harvey told me in fact, if you can believe this, that Trenton-Jones had tried to pull strings to obtain *this* position. I don't know how well you know Dean Harvey, your Grace, but he's not the kind of man that these decadent upper class families can sway. He knew that what you needed was a worker not a shirker. Though I would be the last person to sing hymns of praise to myself.

GERALD: I –

RALPH: You – *[Slightly knowingly]* Dean Harvey said that the very idea was a scandal. And the last thing Southingdene needed was a scandal.

FRANK: *[Hastily]* I expect you'd like to see your room. I'll show it to you. *[Almost pushing him out of the room]* If you'd like to go on up the main staircase, I'll be with you in a moment. *[Heavily]* I've just got to get the bishop a drink.

[As soon as RALPH has gone:]

GERALD: *[Blackly]* Between us and him there is a great gulf fixed.

FRANK: I'll get you a –

GERALD: *[Furious]* He's not Trenton-Jones. He's no – he's not even good looking.

FRANK: *[Rushing him a drink]* Here. Get that inside you.

GERALD: It's that sod Harvey at St Josephs, heap coals of fire upon his head! Those bloody malcontents. Sending one of his stiff-necked people. He's done it on purpose.

FRANK: It couldn't have come at a worse time. We'll have to keep him here for a while. At least a few months –

GERALD: Months?!

FRANK: I forgot to tell you. Bertie rang. He's been arrested again.

GERALD: Bertie?

FRANK: No, not Bertie. Your *brother*. The junior minister.

GERALD: Oh Christ. Get me a drink.

FRANK: You've got one.

GERALD: *[Looks at it, drains it.]* Get me another.

[FRANK looks at him for a moment then decides to get him another drink.]

FRANK: Give me your glass.

GERALD: Where did they get him?

FRANK: Same place as last time.

GERALD: Public lavatories! By their fruits shall ye know them.

FRANK: Bertie says Mabel's starting to complain.

GERALD: I'm not surprised. If she had any sense she'd never have married him. But then she doesn't have any sense. I always thought they were a perfect couple until he started doing this.

FRANK: *[Bringing GERALD another, smaller, drink]* Here.

GERALD: *[Sighing]* Thanks Frank. What a shame that you couldn't fulfil my needs.

FRANK: Don't let's start going into that. I tried it.

GERALD: One swallow doesn't make a lover.

FRANK: Nor can the leopard change his spots. Life's going to have to be a bit different around here for a while, Gerald. And you're going to have to change your "Thought for the Day" for next week too.

GERALD: You'll have to keep your noise down if Billy Graham's staying on.

FRANK: What do you – ?

GERALD: Mrs Ash, dear. You'll have to tell her to keep those little convulsions rather more to herself.

FRANK: There's no need to be unpleasant, Gerald.

GERALD: There's every need. *[Mutters]* All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman.

FRANK: I must go up and show him his room. You're just going to have to take a vow of celibacy until we can reasonably move him along as unsuitable.

GERALD: Celibacy! Do you expect me to live like a bloody monk? It's all very well for you, you've got Mrs Ash....

NARRATOR: *[But FRANK has gone. GERALD finishes his drink and tries to get another, but FRANK has locked the cabinet. GERALD throws a tantrum with the cabinet. Hesitant knocking at the front door, off. Repeated louder.]*

GERALD: Frank – Archdeacon!

[No reply.]

GERALD: Oh for –

NARRATOR: *[GERALD goes off and returns with DR and MRS BLAIR.]*

GERALD: *[Entering]* ... don't usually answer the front door myself. The archdeacon is presently upstairs with our new curate who arrived but moments ago. Now let's see – do take a seat.

NARRATOR: *[MRS BLAIR takes armchair right, DR BLAIR that at the left end of the chesterfield.]*

GERALD: Perhaps you'd like a drink after your journey? I was about to have a little something. Mrs Blair?

MRS B.: Perhaps a little sherry, your Grace.

GERALD: Oh, do call me Gerald. Dr Blair?

DR B.: Yes, I think that would go down nicely as they say. *[Laughs]*

MRS B: A small one – you're driving, remember.

DR B: Of course. Just a small one, eh? *[Laughs]*

[GERALD has of course already forgotten that the cabinet is locked.]

GERALD: Ah. It seems to be locked. The archdeacon is very security conscious. All the silver. And the chapel treasures of course.

DR B: *[Pointing to the chapel door]* Is that ... ?

GERALD: Yes that's it. Would you care to take a quick –

DR B: No, no. *[Laughs]* I've been waiting, looking forward to seeing the Southingdene windows for so long. I'd rather wait till the morrow and see them in their full glory with the Lord smiling through them.

GERALD: Ye-es. I must say it's very generous of you to –

DR B: On the contrary, on the contrary. *[Laughs]* As soon as I saw, *[nods towards MRS BLAIR]* – we saw the article, I thought "Now there's one ill that Blair's embrocation can cure." Didn't I Mary?

MRS B: Yes.

GERALD: Well it'll save us from having to pawn the Southingdene silver. *[Laughs]*

DR B: Good heavens, your Grace, I had no idea that--

GERALD: No, no, Dr Blair. Just a joke. Just my fun.

DR B: I should be loath to think of your having to pawn--

GERALD: No question of that now. *[Silence.]* Would you like a drink – oh no ... *[Silence.]* You'll be able to see the windows in their full glory tomorrow. I hope you'll enjoy the supper tonight. I think it was mentioned that we're going to le Vieux Moulin.

MRS B: It's a pity it's such a long drive.

GERALD: Oh but I can heartily recommend it. They do a sublime

Ris de Veau Demidoff – and the Jambon Braisé à la Piémontaise de Carème is *[words fail him]* aah... and they have the best Marmite Dieppoise outside of Normandy. The last time I was there, we had a couple of bottles of a particularly noble Chateau Margaux '59. Or was it '62...? *[He fades out. Silence.]* I wonder what's keeping the Archdeacon?

MRS B: I just hope that our car will behave itself. There's a bit of a knock –

DR B: Not a knock Mary, *[Laughs]* not a knock. That sound has only appeared since my conversation with the demon Malabeah in that poor Seaton boy. I sent you the report, your Grace.

GERALD: What? oh yes, yes. Terrible, terrible. Thus are the ways of the Lord.

DR B: Thus indeed your Grace. Thus indeed. *[Laughs]*

MRS B: Well – *[Thinks better of it.]*

[GERALD and DR BLAIR both look to her to continue.]

MRS B: Well, I still don't think it would be a bad idea to have the car serviced.

DR B: *[Humouring her]* Perhaps you're right my dear. Even so, I may say a few words over the bonnet before we leave.

MRS B: *[Almost inaudibly]* It didn't stop the knock on the way here.

DR B: Well, Mary, then perhaps his Grace would –

GERALD: *[Unsure]* Would ... ?

DR B: Say a few words of blessing over the car before we go off to the restaurant?

GERALD: Of course, of course. It is quite a drive. By the way, they do an absolutely divine noisettes de porc aux pruneaux de Tours as well. *[Pause.]*

NARRATOR: *[FRANK enters, glancing very casually but not carefully at MRS BLAIR as he does so. GERALD is still standing by the drinks cabinet.]*

GERALD: Ah there you are, Archdeacon. I let Dr and Mrs Blair in myself. We were just about to have a little refreshment. You know Dr Blair?

FRANK: Of course. I take it you had a good trip down?

DR B: Oh you know, you know. *[Laughs]*

GERALD: And this is his good lady wife---

FRANK: I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear but now mine eye seeth thee.

[GERALD doesn't like having his line filched. FRANK takes a second look at MRS BLAIR.]

FRANK: Perhaps we have in fact –

MRS B: *[Who has recognised FRANK immediately]* No. No, I don't think –

FRANK: You weren't at the Ladies Guild Annual –

DR B: Oh no, Mary never does anything like that. *[Laughs]*

MRS B: No.

DR B: Not that she wouldn't of course. But she helps me with my work so much. Don't you, my angel?

[MRS B. Smiles feebly.]

GERALD: A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband.

FRANK: Yes. As you were saying earlier. Or something like it.

GERALD: Now what about that drink, Archdeacon?

FRANK: Perhaps I could make some tea--

GERALD: What? *[Changes manner]* No, no need to put yourself to any trouble, I'm sure. We could all "use a little wine for thy stomach's sale and thine often infirmities."

GERALD AND DR B: *[Joining in]* "... thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities."

FRANK: Should I open a bottle of wine perhaps?

GERALD: No, no, I'll have a port and brandy. *[To the BLAIRS]* The Archdeacon is so security conscious! He's even taken to locking up the drinks cabinet... Afraid of alcoholic burglars, Archdeacon? *[Laughs]* I think you could leave it unlocked whilst Dr Blair and his wife are staying, eh? *[Laughs again and looks to the BLAIRS for confirmation.]*

FRANK: *[Ignoring him]* Yes. Now what would you care for? Dr Blair?

DR B: Oh do call me Cuthbert. A little sherry would go down nicely, as they say. *[Laughs]*

GERALD: *[Quickly]* He's driving. And a sherry for Mrs Blair and I'll have –

MRS B: *[Who has turned quite pale since FRANK entered]* I wonder –

[They all turn to her.]

MRS B: I wonder if I might change my mind. I think I need – I'd like, a gin and tonic.

FRANK: Of course, Mrs –

- DR B: Why Mary, you never cease to astonish me! Gin!
[Laughs]
- GERALD: *[Jokily]* I would have thought you would have enough spirits with your husband's work.
- DR B: *[Gravely]* Indeed, your Grace, indeed.
- NARRATOR: *[There is an embarrassed silence. FRANK makes drinks and hands them round. GERALD gives a complaining look at the size of his drink and goes and sits in the armchair down left. FRANK sits on the right end of the chesterfield, still slightly puzzling as to where he may have seen MRS BLAIR before.]*
- GERALD: *[Proposing a toast]* Well here's to your generosity, Dr Blair, and the repairs to the windows.
- DR B: Indeed. May the Southingdene windows shine afresh in their true glory and the glory of –
- FRANK: *[Joining in]* In the glory of –
- DR B: Yes?
- FRANK: Oh I'm sorry. Do go on.
- DR B: In the glory of the Lord.
- FRANK: Oh uh indeed.
- GERALD: What were *you* going to say, Archdeacon?
- FRANK: Oh it doesn't matter.
- DR B: No, do tell us.
- FRANK: *[Embarrassed]* I was going to add uh in the glory of Blair's Embrocation.

DR B: *[Laughs]* Indeed, indeed. *[Laughs]*

[Pause]

Dr B: *[Laughs]* Aha, happy days, happy days.

[Pause]

GERALD: *[Eventually]* So tell me, Archdeacon; is the new lamb joining us?

FRANK: He said he'd be down shortly.

GERALD: I can't see what he possibly has to do up there.
[Explaining to the BLAIRS] We have a new curate, fresh from college. But he's managed to lose all his luggage, so he can hardly be changing his raiment!

DR B: *[Laughs]* Aha. Fresh from college eh? *[Laughs]*

GERALD: He won't be joining us for dinner –

FRANK: *[Half-humorously]* No?

GERALD: *[Very firmly]* NO. There probably wouldn't be room in Dr Blair's car. Not with the four of us and the demon.
[Smiles]

DR B: *[Sighs and gravely shakes his head. Pause.]* Malabeah is just a sprite. But a malicious one. A malicious one.

[Pause. RALPH enters.]

GERALD: *[Warming through drink to a pompous paternalism]* Ah, there you are my boy. Feeling better?

RALPH: Better?

GERALD: Yes, yes of course. Dr and Mrs Blair, this is our new curate, Ralph Plain Jones.

DR B: *[Craning as if he didn't quite catch the name]* Ralph... ?

RALPH: *[Thinking him deaf]* JONES. Ralph Jones. I'm delighted to meet you, Dr Blair. I read your paper on--

GERALD: We were all having a pre-dinner drink. Would you – oh no, of course you don't, do you? Still perhaps Dr Blair would care for a topping –

DR B: Oh no, thank you, your Grace. This is splendid and one is my limit, as they say. *[Laughs]*

GERALD: Well perhaps Mrs Blair –

DR B: No, I'm sure –

MRS B: *[Knocking back the rest of her drink]* Please.

GERALD: *[Smiling]* Ah. Another G. & T?

[He gets up to take MRS BLAIR's glass. FRANK starts up too.]

GERALD: No it's alright, Frank. I'll get them. Do you want another? Oh, you've hardly touched what you have.

NARRATOR: *[GERALD crosses between MRS BLAIR and FRANK up to drinks cabinet. RALPH is still standing by the hall door.]*

GERALD: *[To RALPH]* Sit down my boy, sit down.

NARRATOR: *[He indicates a point on the chesterfield between FRANK and DR BLAIR. RALPH sits although there is not an enormous amount of room for the three men. GERALD pours massive drinks for himself and MRS BLAIR and hands it to her before sitting down back in his armchair.]*

GERALD: *[Very warmly]* Blair's Embrocation.

[Slight embarrassment.]

- FRANK: *[Explaining to RALPH]* Dr Blair's family are the Blairs of Blair's Embrocation.
- DR B: It was my grandfather's business. They sold it on my father's behalf. I don't *[Mumbles]* myself ...
- FRANK: Dr Blair is very kindly paying for the restoration of the famous Southingdene Palace Chapel windows.
- RALPH: Would that we all had the means. Is the chapel – ?
- FRANK: It's through that door. *Our* entrance, that is.
- GERALD: So if you become overwhelmed with fervour in the middle of the night, you'll know where to go.
- FRANK: The public entrance is of course kept under very secure lock and key.
- GERALD: Like everything else the Archdeacon keeps control of.
- FRANK: We had Lockstite, the security firm, in last year and I do feel that I can now say that no-one can possibly get into the chapel unless I want them there.
- DR B: Except the Lord.
- FRANK: Uh, yes.
- [Pause]*
- DR B: So you're fresh from college eh? *[Laughs]*
- RALPH: Yes.
- DR B: I remember when I was fresh from college. *[Laughs]* Oh yes, I remember when I was fresh from college. Of course I was much younger then. *[Laughs]* Well, I wish you all the very best, Mr – uh ... ?
- RALPH: Jones.

DR B: *[Looks briefly at GERALD recalling previous confusion]*
Jones, yes. You're not related to the Guildford – ?

RALPH: I have no living relations. My parents, to all intents and purposes, were the now deceased Mr and Mrs Obadiah Jones from a small place near Liverpool called Brigton--

DR B: *[Delighted]* Brigton!

MRS B: *[Quiet, shocked]* Brigton!

DR B: Why think of it Mary! This *is* a coincidence. That is exactly the very place where Mary and I first met. She was in fact living there with her parents -- her father was an old school chum of mine. Do you know we have been married now for twenty two happy years – though as you can tell, she is very much my junior. In fact I must confess that there were more than a few raised eyebrows when it was first announced that so confirmed an old bachelor as myself was taking such a young and beautiful bride... Mary was only twenty two, scarcely as old as our young friend Mr - uh - Jones here. Still I may tell you without fear of contradiction that the Lord has filled those twenty two years with great bliss, great bliss.

GERALD: A virtuous woman –

RALPH: ...is a crown to her husband.

DR B: You have never contemplated marriage, your Grace?

GERALD: Ah, only to the church, only to the church.

FRANK: The bishop is a confirmed old bachelor.

GERALD: The Archdeacon has had his offers however.

DR B: It is better to marry than to burn.

GERALD: Yes. Speaking of which reminds me of dinner. Well,

[laughs] I hope not burning. What are you going to do my boy? I'm afraid there won't be room –

DR B: Perhaps we might –

GERALD: No, no. There's a decent little cafe in Market Street, I understand. Frugal fare, vegetarian stuff. Sounds like your style.

RALPH: Well –

GERALD: *[Knocking back the rest of his drink]* The Archdeacon will show you how to get there. Dr Blair, Mrs Blair, I think your coats are in the hall.

NARRATOR: *GERALD Sweeps out and the BLAIRS following.]*

FRANK: *[Standing up]* Did you want to eat out?

RALPH: It depends. Is there nothing here?

FRANK: I'm afraid not. Mrs Ash, the housekeeper, has been away for a few days. She'll be back tomorrow and the larder's nigh on empty. The Bishop fed the last of the smoked salmon to the cat.

RALPH: *[Sighs]* Well, I suppose it'll give me a chance to see the town.

FRANK: It's a bit dark for that. And it's a city by the way, whatever the size of the place might suggest. The locals don't like it if you call it a town. If you want to go to the place that the Bishop suggested, you just turn left outside the main gate and walk straight along till you get to Market Street. You can't really miss it. And doubtless you're not incapable of asking.

[FRANK goes to leave.]

RALPH: Just a moment, Archdeacon.

FRANK: Yes?

RALPH: Aren't you forgetting something? *[Pause]* I'll need the keys.

FRANK: *[Bangs his forehead]* Oh da-ash. I knew there was something. I went past the blasted place too.

RALPH: You don't have a spare set?

FRANK: Geral – the Bishop – forgot to get them from –

RALPH: *[Martyrishly]* I suppose I could just stay here and fast.

FRANK: No, no, not – let's see. I'll need my keys and I don't dare – I mean, I'd rather not ask the Bishop for his and Mrs Ash won't be back until tomorrow. Uh... Well, the best thing is if I let you have the key to these doors here *[Indicates French doors]* and then you can let yourself back in. I must admit the security firm wouldn't be too keen on this, but I suppose it'll be alright just for this one evening. If we unbolt this door *[the opening one of pair]* you can use the key to let yourself out and back in again. You can't move the bolts without this special bolt key, so it'll be alright, and I'll relock them when we get back. Be sure to lock the door behind you when you go and when you get back. Just leave the key in the lock.

RALPH: Right.

FRANK: You'll need to unlock the door before you go and then lock it behind you when you go and then relock it when you've come back.

RALPH: I understand.

GERALD: *[Off]* Frank!

FRANK: You've got that alright? Unlock it. Go out. Lock it. Go. Eat. Come back. Unlock it. Come in. relock it and leave the key. Then I'll lock the bolts when we get back.

RALPH: I'm perfectly capable of locking doors, Archdeacon.

FRANK: Don't wait up for us, we'll probably be pretty late.

NARRATOR: *FRANK is about to lock the drinks cabinet when GERALD calls:*

GERALD: *[Off]* Frank, are you coming?

FRANK: Coming. *[Indicates cabinet]* I'll leave the drinks cabinet unlocked, you won't be using it. We'll see you in the morning. *[As he goes]* Don't forget, leave the key in the lock. On the inside. After you've locked it. When you've come back.

RALPH: Right.

NARRATOR: *FRANK goes out. RALPH sighs heavily at the worldliness of the Archdeacon. He goes to the hall door and ascertains that the party has now left then wanders over to the French doors and peers out. His hand wanders to his crotch. He goes over and unlocks the chapel door, peers in, comes back and sinks down on the chesterfield. Stretches both legs out, both hands now rubbing towards his crotch. He looks around, not realising what his hands are doing, then eventually pulls his hands back.]*

RALPH: *[Sighing very heavily]* Oh God!

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

[The same, just after nine thirty. For some moments, the stage is empty, though the lights are on. Eventually there is movement behind the curtains over the French windows and RALPH enters hurriedly, closing and locking the French window behind him. He is extremely agitated and stands with his back to the wall, right of the French windows.]

RALPH: Oh God, oh God! *[His hands begin to stray to his crotch.]* Oh Lord, deliver me. *[He is about to masturbate through his cassock when there is a knocking at the French windows. RALPH peers out.]* Oh God, go away, go away. *[He pulls the curtains tightly together with both hands.]* Oh God. *[The knocking continues becoming louder and louder, eventually RALPH pulls back the curtain, unlocks the window and, taking a deep breath, speaks officiously:]*

The Palace is closed. The bishop and archdeacon are both out.

[JOHN enters, past him.]

JOHN: All the better. What's got into you?

RALPH: You can't come in.

JOHN: Don't be daft. I am in. *[Looks about]* Nice place.

RALPH: *[To himself]* As a dog returneth to his vomit so a fool returneth to his folly.

JOHN: *[Looking for dog-vomit]* Where? You should stick their noses in it. They won't do it again. I knew a man who had a Doberman once. Right screamer. Aren't you going to offer me a drink?

RALPH: What is it you want?

JOHN: *[Smiles innocently]* Same as you of course. Shall I help

myself? *[RALPH looks even more horrified.]* To a drink, pet.

RALPH: If you must.

JOHN: Do you want something?

RALPH: I don't. I shouldn't...

JOHN: *[Pouring drink]* Yes?

RALPH: I shouldn't...

JOHN: I can't think what you're trying to say. *[Laughs]* I think you could do with a good stiff one.

RALPH: No ...

JOHN: Don't worry about it. A little of what you fancy does you good, as me Mam would say. *[Swigs drink]* Cheers.

RALPH: I am a man of the cloth...

JOHN: You're a man, certainly.

[He comes over to RALPH, grabs him and kisses him. RALPH vaguely and feebly struggles but only momentarily and most unconvincingly.]

JOHN: There. That wasn't so bad was it? *[Pause]* This your first time?

RALPH: *[Guiltily]* No. *[Moves away]* I take it, it isn't yours.

JOHN: *[Laughs]* You'll be my hundredth this year. I've usually had more by now, but I had a relationship for three weeks and it's slowed me down. The bloke I was telling you about. *[Pause]* With the Doberman. *[Pause]* To be honest, you're not exactly my type, but I could see how much you were aching for it, and what's life for if not for a bit of Christian charity, as me Mam would say.

RALPH: Thanks a lot.

JOHN: Oh don't take it personal, pet. I usually go for older men. Fatherly, you know. I sometimes think I wouldn't mind settling down for a bit if I could find someone who'd pay the bills, know what I mean. As long as he didn't have a Doberman. *[Pause]* And didn't mind me straying occasionally.

RALPH: How... how did you know...?

[JOHN comes up behind RALPH and starts to kiss his neck.]

RALPH: Don't. *[But he doesn't move.]* How did you know – *[He shivers with pleasure]* Aah.

JOHN: You had it written all over your face. It's a gift really. I'm rarely wrong. *[Moves away right.]* I remember once, there was a bloke in a cottage. *[Pulls off his sweater over his head.]* Turned out he had *[twitches]* one of them.

RALPH: One of them?

JOHN: A *[twitches]* –. You know. A *[twitches]*. I was wrong that one time.

RALPH: I suppose you were arrested.

JOHN: Oh I did him over. Pretended I thought he'd suggested it. After all, you don't want everyone knowing your sexual proclivities, do you?

[JOHN throws down his sweater.]

RALPH: These aren't my sexual proclivities. Proclivities. God is testing me.

JOHN: You'll have to keep away from that café, eh?

RALPH: Do you think anyone noticed?

JOHN: Don't worry about it. What if they did? Probably thought you were saving my soul. I'll be off and away tomorrow morning anyway.

[JOHN sits in the armchair right and takes one of his boots off.]

RALPH: Don't you get cold on your – *[he finds it hard to get the word out]* – motorbike. Just in ...

[He fades out, watching JOHN remove his other boot and socks.]

JOHN: *[Probably oblivious, but...]* You sound like me Mam.
[He unbuttons his shirt.]

RALPH: *[Forcing his head away temporarily]* My parents are both dead.

JOHN: That's good. *[He drops his shirt on the floor and starts to pull up his T-shirt.]* Me Mam left me Dad two years ago. She used to come back and see me and me sister at times but I had enough of it. *[Pulls off T-shirt]* And that's why I got on my bike, and now I'm heading for the glories of the South Coast. *[Throws T-shirt on the floor]* Should be able to find something to do somewhere. I hear great things of Bournemouth.

NARRATOR: *JOHN deftly pulls off his jeans and drops them on the floor. He is not wearing any underpants so he now bounces up and down naked on the chair.]*

JOHN: Nice number you're onto here. I quite fancied being a vicar – couple of times I quite fancied our vicar. *[Laughs]* But I never had the religion.

RALPH: *[To himself, watching JOHN]* What am I doing?

JOHN: Not a lot. Get your skirt off then. Hey, *[Thinks of joke]* let's have a bit of Young Men's Christian Association eh? *[No reaction from RALPH.]* Come on. You said we didn't have all night.

RALPH: What if someone comes back early?

JOHN: *[Advancing on him]* Well, the sooner you get your drag off the sooner I'll be on my way. *[He playfully pinches RALPH's nose.]* And you can worry to your little heart's content.

NARRATOR: *JOHN suddenly leaps down and pulls RALPH's cassock right up over his head and kisses him on the chest.]*

RALPH: *[Inaudibly, the cassock muffling his voice]* I should be punished for this.

JOHN: *[Pulling the cassock right off]* What?

RALPH: I should be punished for this. *[Drops to his knees]* I should be beaten.

JOHN: Well you'll have to find someone else for that, sunshine. I'm into making love not war, as me mam would say. Now –

NARRATOR: JOHN playfully pushes RALPH backwards, dropping the cassock onto the chesterfield at the same time.

JOHN: ... let's get those knickers off and...

NARRATOR: He starts to tickle RALPH who backs away, at first protesting loudly then laughing helplessly. Eventually they disappear behind the chesterfield. JOHN sits up and places RALPH's underpants on the chesterfield.

JOHN: *[Looking down at RALPH]* Hey, you've got a little mousey. Just like mine.

RALPH: What?

JOHN: Just there by your winkle. Look. Just the same as mine. Me Mam used to call it me little mousey. Said it was a present from me Dad but he never had anything like

that. Not that you would've been able to see it between the folds of flab. I saw him in the bath once. Not a pretty sight. Whereas you –

RALPH: My father told me it was a brand for the sin of my mother. My real moth – ooh!

NARRATOR: RALPH gasps as JOHN reaches out to touch him, below the line of the chesterfield. JOHN pushes him back. Various erotic gasps come from behind the chesterfield. The noise of the front door being unlocked is heard, followed by its being slammed off right.]

RALPH: *[Sitting up]* What was that?

JOHN: Nothing. *[He pulls RALPH back down]*

RALPH: *[Struggling back up]* No it was. Listen.

MRS A: *[Off]* Hello? *[Pause. Then louder and more confident with the realisation that no-one's there.]* HELLOOOO?? It's little Martha back early, boys. *[Continues in sing-song tone]* And you've all gone au-out.

RALPH: Hide. Quick.

JOHN: Where?

NARRATOR: RALPH pushes him to the chapel.

RALPH: In there. Quick.

JOHN: *[At chapel door]* It's locked.

RALPH: The key's in the lock, you moron. Hurry up. She's coming. *[RALPH rushes over to the hall door]* Quick. Oh.

NARRATOR: RALPH bolts into the study and JOHN manages to get the chapel door unlocked and disappear inside just as MRS ASH comes in.

MRS A: Hello, hello, hell – *[Seeing JOHN's clothes all over the room.]* Lord Jesus! *[Pause]* Well if you're the new curate, you can learn some new tricks, including picking your clothes up for a start. *[Notices JOHN's whisky on the floor by the chesterfield, picks it up and sniffs at it.]* And making himself at home with the Grace's scotch too. *[Starts to pick up the clothes, though not RALPH's which are on the left end of the chesterfield.]* I'm not paid to pick up after – *[She smells shirt.]* And filthy! *[Puts the drink down on the telephone table.]* He obviously needs a good mothering! Right -- this lot's going straight into the wash, my lad.

NARRATOR: MRS ASH exits with all John's clothes.

MRS A: I don't know what they teach them at that ...

NARRATOR: *Once she has gone, RALPH peeks out of the study, grabs his cassock and disappears back into the study. Disappears back into the study cleaner and starts to clean the area downstage right, with her back to the study door. RALPH comes out, dressed in his cassock. He notices his underpants on the back of the chesterfield. Just as he reaches them, MRS ASH turns, sees him and screams. RALPH hides his underpants behind his back.]*

RALPH: Hello. I'm Ralph Jones, the bishop's new curate.

MRS A: *[Vacuum cleaner still blaring]* WHAT?

RALPH: *[Shouting]* I'M RALPH JONES THE

NARRATOR: *Mrs ASH turns off the vacuum cleaner*

RALPH: NEW CURATE. *[Ordinary volume]* New curate.

MRS ASH: Pleased to meet you. I'm Martha Ash. I clean up.

RALPH: Aha!

MRS ASH: I put your dirty clothes in the wash.

RALPH: My dirty clothes? Oh, my dirty clothes! Oh, thank you.

MRS A: The machine's filling up just now. I wouldn't have done it if I'd known there was anyone here. It's a very noisy old machine. You can hear it all over the house. Especially if the spinner gets unbalanced. I have spoken to Fran – the Archdeacon – about it but – do you want those washed? Your smalls. Do you--

RALPH: Oh no. No thank you.

MRS A: I can see you're going to need some mothering. Like the rest of them.

RALPH: Well I've had a long day. I think I'll uh go to bed.
[*Loudly so that JOHN can hear*] WILL YOU BE LONG?

MRS A: [*Taken aback*] What?

RALPH: WILL YOU BE IN HERE CLEANING FOR LONG?

MRS A: I'm not deaf pet. It was only the noise of the Hoover. And you gave me a surprise.

RALPH: [*Smiles stupidly*] You gave me quite a surprise too.

MRS A: I came home early.

[*Pause.*]

RALPH: WELL I THINK I'LL GO TO BED NOW.

MRS A: Yes, you seem a bit strained, a bit tired.

RALPH: Do I? Oh yes [*yawns theatrically*] Yes. I'LL GO TO BED NOW and I won't COME DOWN AGAIN LATER.

MRS A: [*Thinking that he's been drinking*] Here why don't you finish this one off before you go. [*Hands him JOHN's large and hardly touched scotch*] It'll help you sleep.

RALPH: No thank you I don't [*suddenly realising whose drink it is*] oh right. Thanks.

[*Sips a little*].

MRS A: Drink it all down. It'll do you good.

[*RALPH grimaces as he drinks the scotch.*]

RALPH: [*Almost choking*] Right. I'M OFF TO BED NOW THEN.

MRS A: That's it. An hour before midnight is worth two after. Oh and –

RALPH: [*Exiting*] Yes?

MRS A: Try to remember to get undressed in your bedroom usually, eh?

[*RALPH exits swiftly.*]

NARRATOR: MRS ASH *starts the vacuum cleaning again. After a moment, she stops and listens. Turns off vacuum cleaner. Noise in hall.*]

FRANK; Martha?

NARRATOR: Frank kisses her.

FRANK: You came back early.

MRS A: I couldn't stick it up there. Johnnie's left him.

FRANK: Oh?

MRS A: Went earlier this week. Day before I arrive. d Said he was off to find a job. Got on his bike.

FRANK: Enterprising lad.

MRS A: (*Pinches his cheek*)_ Like his dad. What are you doing here? I thought tonight was the slap-up with the Grace.

FRANK: Don't talk about it. It's been disaster all the way. Old Blair's car broke down about fifteen miles along the motorway, himself having insisted that we take them to *Le Vieux Moulin*. Almighty bang and clouds of smoke out of the engine. I have to hand it to Old Blair, he did manage to get it over onto the hard shoulder. I suppose we should thank somebody we're alive 'cause Blair's heart's supposed to be fairly dicky. Anyway, I hitched a lift back into town after they'd called the emergency service and I've phoned from a call box for a cab to go and pick them up. (*Sighs*) Up suppose there's no chance of getting a meal together?

MRS A: I doubt it Frank. Not unless you bought anything in while I was away.

FRANKL: The cat got the last of the smoked salmon. There might be some cheese.

MRS A: We need a freezer

FRANK: There's some bread.

MRS A: It's times like this that a microwave comes in handy.

FRANK: Indeed, indeed, as the Grace would say. Oh well, a couple of port and brandies should finish him off for the evening, even if it is bad for him. You'll have to go out early in the morning and get in a good breakfast.

MRS A: If you wake me up ---

FRANK: Oh heaven's that reminds me. The new curate has arrived. Only they've sent us the wrong one.

MRS A: I met him.

FRANK: Oh is he—

MRS A: I'm hardly surprised at you saying that though. Last thing the Grace needs is a drinking partner.

FRANK: Well there's no fear of that at least.

MRS A: How do you mean?

FRANK: He's an abstainer.

MRS A: That's all you know.

FRANK: He doesn't —

(MRS ASH holds up the empty glass)

FRANK: What? Is that his?

MRS A: Well it's not *mine*, Frank. He just knocked the whole thing back in one go before he went to bed. And he didn't need any encouragement from me either.

FRANK: Secret tippler. Eh? The hypocrite. That'll please Gerald. He's looking for reasons to get rid of him already. Lord! Where will it all end?

MRS A: *(Smiling erotically)* In bed at the end of the day. Come here. *(FRANK puts his arms round her, she caresses his temples and kisses him)* Miss me?

FRANK: Of course.

MRS A: I'll make it all better tonight —

FRANK: Bit chancy, with the Blairs. And the new lamb.

MRS A: New lamb?

FRANK: Gerald's name for him. Tell you what—

MRS A: What?

FRANK: Why don't we sneak down here for a quick one after they've all gone to bed?

MRS A: Anything to be with my Frankie.

FRANK: We could go and do it in the rhododendrons like in August.

MRS A: You stupid boy, we'd catch a chill.

FRANK: I love doing it outside.

MRS A: So I remember. But I'm not doing it out there, this time of the year. We're neither of us as young —

FRANK: Oh that reminds me. Has whatsisname locked the door?

NARRATOR: *FRANK goes over and checks the French door which RALPH has left unlocked.*

FRANK: Look at that. Left it unlocked. It's not as if I didn't explain. What's the use of making the place impregnable if some buffoon is going to go around leaving all the doors unlocked. I'll lock the bolts too.

NARRATOR: *Whilst he does so, MRS ASH goes out. There is loud banging as the washing machine starts.)*

FRANK: What the—

MRS A: I was running old Methuselah while you were out. I can't let it stop now.

FRANK: I hope it's finished before they get back.

- MRS A: It'll take its course. I just wanted to get that bit of laundry done. We could do with a new washing machine.
- FRANK: So you have said on numerous occasions. What do you think we can give the Blairs to eat?
- MRS A: Let's go and look . I can do wonders when the spirit moves me.
- FRANK: For God's sake don't say that to Dr Blair. He's quite convinced already that the car breaking down was yet another manifestation of some demon that's got it in for him.
- MRS A: How horrible.
- FRANK: He leaps sky high if anyone so much as breathes heavily—
- MRS A: Better not give him any pickles then. Or cheese. My George always used to say that made him dream.
- NARRATOR: *They go out, MRS ASH pushing the vacuum cleaner, shutting the door behind them. There is a brief moment, then the chapel door opens a little hesitantly. At this point the hall door also opens hesitantly so the chapel door closes quickly. RALPH enters from the hall, crosses to chapel door and opens it a little, calling out.*
- RALPH: *(Calling into chapel)* Hello?
- NARRATOR: *RALPH goes in. After a moment, JOHN, still naked, comes out.*
- JOHN: *(Calling quietly)* Hey!
- NARRATOR: Ralph comes out.
- RALPH Where did you come from?

- JOHN: It's freezing in there. I was hiding round the corner there. You went straight past me.
- RALPH: You'll have to leave.
- JOHN: The sooner the better. There's lots of people here. I heard a man and a woman. Though I couldn't really make anything out through that door.
- RALPH: Well don't just stand there like that. For heaven's sake cover yourself up.
- JOHN: (*Jokily*) Don't you like it.
- RALPH: I certainly –
- JOHN: (*Looking round*) Here where're my things?
- RALPH: They're in the wash.
- JOHN: You're a right little domestic Annie aren't you?
- RALPH: I didn't do it. The stupid cleaning woman took them. They've just gone into the first rinse. You can hear it all over the house. Look you've got to go.
- JOHN: Well I can't go like this. You'll have to lend me some of your clothes.
- RALPH: I haven't got any. The railways have lost them. I've only got this. (*Indicates cassock*)
- JOHN: I'm not into drag, love.
- RALPH: Haven't you even got your underpants.
- JOHN: I never wear underpants.
- RALPH: Oh you're disgusting. Here, you'd better put mine on. It'll look better if anybody finds you.

NARRATOR: RALPH *starts to slip his underpants off.*

JOHN: Somebody' coming.

NARRATOR: JOHN *darts back into the chapel and shuts the door, leaving Ralph with his underpants in his hands as FRANK and MRS ASH come back in. RALPH hides his underpants behind his back.*

RALPH: Oh hello Archdeacon. I was just going to bed.

NARRATOR: RALPH *freezes his smile and walks round the back of the chesterfield with his hands held rigidly behind his back and exits by the hall door.*

MRS A: There's something odd about that boy. That must have been him talking to himself that we heard. And that's the second time I've found him playing with his underpants like that. And the drinking. It can't be healthy. I blame his mother.

FRANK: His parents are both dead.

MRS A: Oh the poor lamb. No wonder. A boy needs a mother. A girl can always get herself with a family but a boy needs family life. That's my one guilt at leaving my husband. He'll be OK, George will. I just wish I could have brought Johnnie down with me.

FRANK: I' don't think that would have gone down too well here.

MRS A: He would have had his Mam and his Dad by his side until the time came to leave the nest. As it is, he's flown off into the great wide world. I shall blame myself if something awful comes of him. I shall shoulder the blame, Frank. (*Slight pause*) If only you hadn't gone off when you did.

FRANK: Oh don't start all that again Martha.

MRS A: If my friend Cynthia hadn't had fuchsias. You know, it would never have happened.

FRANK: As you have said many times.

MRS A: Oh but they were always my favourite flowers. And such a pretty bouquet. Looked lovely as I caught it. I should have thought twice before I married George though, specially with his knees and that. Marriages that's what it was. I see it all quite clearly now. I should have waited for Mr Right to get back.

FRANK: Ah but what a time we'd had.

MRS A: You glad I found you again? (*Playfully pulls his nose*)
After all those years?

FRANK: (*Smiles enigmatically.*)

MRS A: I'll see you later on, you villain. In here. I'd better go and see to those sandwiches.

(*Noises off.*)

FRANK: That sounds like them.

NARRATOR: MRS ASH *goes out.* FRANK *goes to the hall door.*

FRANK: Oh you've made it. Good. Mrs Ash is home already bishop so she's managing to make some sandwiches.

(GERALD, DR and MRS BLAIR *come in.*)

FRANK: Come in, come in, sit down, sit down.

NARRATOR: *They go to the seats they had earlier.*

GERALD: It's freezing out there. I need a drink.

DR B: The low temperature is always a sign of malevolent activity.

FRANK: Mrs Ash is making some sandwiches.

GERALD: That's hardly *Ris de Veau Braises Demidoff*.

FRANK: Well whatabout a cup of tea? Mrs Blair?

MRS B: Well that –

GERALD: I'll have a P & B, Frank.

FRANK: I'm sure Dr Blair doesn't want a drink.

Dr B: Indeed no, thank you, Archdeacon. I must keep my wits about me. We may not have heard the last of Malabeah tonight.

FRANK: You think not?

GERALD: Well I'm prepared to fight fire with fire, spirit with spirit. I'll have a port and brandy, Frank.

FRANK: Perhaps Dr and Mrs Blair would care to see round the chapel tonight as we have the extra time on our hands.

DR B: No I –

MRS B: (*Seeing this as a chance to be alone with Frank*) Yes, I'd like to very much.

DR B: Well you take a peep then Mary. I want to leave it to the morning.

FRANK: (To MRS BLAIR) Would you care for a quick trip round then?

MRS B: Yes, very much. That would be –

FRANK: (*Seizing the chance to avoid giving GERALD a drink*) Well I'll go and see how Mrs Ash is doing with the sandwiches

and I'm sure the bishop will be delighted to give you his celebrated tour of inspection, won't you your Grace?

GERALD: Well I—

FRANK: And then we'll all have a little nightcap with our sandwiches, *perhaps*.

MRS A: Oh it really doesn't matter –

FRANK: Nonsense, nonsense. His Grace is always thrilled to show people round our chapel. Don't let him fool you. He feels it leads to life's little rewards. [*Very much to GERALD*] Rewards that don't come otherwise.

GERALD: (*Smiles mock meekly*)

FRANK: Right. Are you sure you won't join them Dr Blair?

DR B: No. I shall stick to my resolve thank you Archdeacon. However, (*pauses dramatically*) I do have a few notes in my briefcase that I need to read so –

FRANK: I think it's—

DR B: It's out in the hall.

FRANK: Well I'm sure that by the time his Grace has shown Mrs Blair round the chapel, our little midnight feast should be prepared.

GERALD: Will you come this way then Mrs uh...

NARRATOR: GERALD *and* MRS BLAIR *go into the chapel*, MRS BLAIR *looking back at FRANK over her shoulder as they go*. FRANK *and* DR BLAIR *go out into the hall*. *After a moment or so*, JOHN *sneaks out of the chapel and is looking about when he hears DR BLAIR calling out to FRANK at the hall door*. JOHN *dashes behind the curtains, pulling at the handle of the [now locked] French door as he does so*.

- NARRATOR: DR BLAIR *enters and sees the movement behind the curtains and freezes in rage.*]
- DR B: Will you not leave me in peace. O Malabeah! Thou evil one. Malleus Malificarum! Avenite incube. Significavit: Anathema sit!
- NARRATOR: DR BLAIR *rushes to the hall door and screams out to the ARCHDEACON to come quickly. JOHN takes this opportunity to dash from behind the curtains into the study. FRANK comes in from the hall just as GERALD and MRS BLAIR come in from the chapel.*]
- FRANK: What on earth is--
- GERALD: I heard someone shouting latin verbs.
- MRS B: Oh for heaven's sake, Cuthbert--
- JR B: It was Malabeah. Malabeah. Here in this room. Moving the curtains. Swooshy, swooshy.
- FRANK: Well there's nothing there now.
- DR B: We must all be on our guard. We should draw a pentangle on the floor.
- GERALD: [*Under his breath*] Not on that rug.
- DR B: We must keep vigil.
- GERALD: So it was Virgil you were screaming? I'm afraid I'd rather that you don't shout stuff in Latin. I get enough criticism on that score as it is.
- DR B: Ah but your Grace, most of the formulas--
- GERALD: You'll have to get some translations made Blair--
- DR B: But the spirits--

- GERALD: I'm quite sure they'll get the general idea. Now what about that nightcap.
- DR B: Oh no, your Grace. I do feel we should keep vigil. Malabeah is very powerful. A little alcohol, [GERALD *belches slightly*] any more alcohol might prove--
- FRANK: Yes I feel Dr Blair is right. We must all keep our wits about us.
- GERALD: Oh for heaven's sake Frank, surely you don't--
- FRANK: And then in the morning, Dr Blair will be able to see the chapel and pour Blair's embrocation--
- GERALD: [*Reluctantly seeing his point*] Oh. Yes. Yes, I--
- NARRATOR: MRS ASH *comes in*.
- MRS A: I've made some sandwiches for you after your nasty experience. [*Smiling at DR BLAIR*] No pickles! [*To FRANK*] Corned beef. Young *whatsisname* was prowling round so I asked if he wanted something too. He's coming in.
- GERALD: Mrs Ash is our treasure. This is Dr and Mrs Blair.
- MRS A: Pleased to meet you.
- GERALD: In fact she's the Archdeacon's particular treasure aren't you Mrs Ash?
- MRS A: [*Looks slightly embarrassed*] Do you want anything else?
- FRANK: I wonder if anyone would care for some coffee or tea. I did say earlier--
- DR B: Perhaps--
- GERALD: Yes?

DR B: I wondered whether perhaps a little cocoa? Mary and I usually--

GERALD: You're sure it won't affect your vigil?

NARRATOR: There is a very loud clunk from washing machine off stage.

DR B: [*Jumps*] What was that?

MRS A: Just Methuselah.

DR B: A manifestation?

MRS A: I wish it *was*, pet. No it's very old.

FRANK: It's the washing machine.

MRS A: I'm afraid I wasn't expecting you all back so early or I wouldn't have turned it on. It'll finish off in a minute.

FRANK: With an absolutely almighty thump.

MRS A: Yes, well it mightn't be a bad idea to get a new one. Anyway, that'll be four' cocoas then?

NARRATOR: Ralph comes in.

MRS A: Cocoa?

RALPH: What?

MRS A: Would you like some cocoa, pet?

RALPH: Oh uh yes. Yes.

MRS A: [*Motherly*] It'll help you sleep. [*More quietly*] But don't have anything in it.

NARRATOR: MRS ASH exits.

FRANK: Perhaps you'd like to hand those sandwiches round uh Ralph.

NARRATOR: GERALD, DR *and* MRS BLAIR *and* FRANK *resume their seats. RALPH hands a small plate to MRS BLAIR and the rest of the pile to FRANK who hands them on to DR BLAIR who hands the last one to GERALD. RALPH offers the sandwiches to MRS BLAIR, then to FRANK and DR BLAIR and is just on the point of offering them to GERALD when there is the thump of something falling in the study.*

DR B: [*Leaping sky high*] Aaagh!

FRANK: What was that?

DR B: Malabeah!

GERALD: What?

RALPH: I didn't hear anything.

FRANK: It came from the study.

RALPH: I'll go and look.

NARRATOR: RALPH *goes at some speed to the study, taking the sandwiches with him.*

FRANK: Well--

RALPH: It's perfectly alright. I'll just go and see if there's anyone in there. I mean anything.

NARRATOR: RALPH *goes into the study and comes out seconds later.*

RALPH: Nothing.

NARRATOR: RALPH *comes back down left towards GERALD with sandwiches. Just as he is about to offer them to GERALD, DR BLAIR speaks causing RALPH to turn away from GERALD who is trying to get a sandwich.*]

DR B: But--

RALPH: [*Turning*] Yes?

DR B: Malabeah is a very powerful spirit.

GERALD: [*Annoyed, standing up.*] Oh for heaven's sake, I'll go and--

NARRATOR: RALPH in panic thrusts *he plate of sandwiches at GERALD*

RALPH: I'll Just check again.

NARRATOR: RALPH *runs into the study. GERALD dithers for a moment with the plate of sandwiches then crosses right end of the chesterfield so that he can put them down on the telephone table. RALPH comes out of the study as GERALD goes in. RALPH backs away from the study door to the middle of the French door curtains. The others are all watching the study door which is as well as JOHN is crouching along underneath RALPH's cassock. GERALD comes out holding crook. As he comes out, JOHN slips behind the curtains. RALPH looks grey.*]

GERALD: It was merely this. It had fallen over against the wall.

DR B: Poltergeist.

GERALD: I doubt it.

NARRATOR: GERALD *takes the crook back into the study, comes out and crosses down right of the chesterfield, muttering to FRANK*

GERALD: The man's mad.

NARRATOR: *MRS ASH enters with a tray of mugs of cocoa. GERALD moves back to let her in.*

MRS A: Nice hot mug of cocoa, eh? Here.

NARRATOR: *She gives the tray to GERALD to hold whilst she serves cocoa to MRS BLAIR. There is an almighty thump from the washing machine offstage.]*

DR B: [*Jumps and screams*] Aaagh what's that?

MRS A: It's just the washing machine pet 1--

NARRATOR: *But his distraction has caused her to pour cocoa over MRS BLAIR and then to back into GERALD so that the tray of cocoa is spilt over him. General confusion. FRANK stands up to help.]*

MRS A: Oh I'm sorry. I'm so sorry pet. Here, you'd better all come down to the kitchen and I can sponge you off. It'll stain otherwise. Come and give me a hand, Frank.

NARRATOR: *GERALD, MRS BLAIR, MRS ASH and FRANK go out, GERALD muttering curses at DR BLAIR. RALPH looks at DR BLAIR jerking his head in the direction of the hall door as if suggesting that he, DR BLAIR, follow them out. DR BLAIR watches him for some moments then:]*

DR BLAIR: So you're fresh from college eh?

RALPH: [*Still by the curtains*] Yes.

DR B: Come. Tell me about it. [*Indicates place on chesterfield next to him*] Here. It is many a long year since I left college. [*Laughs*] Many a long year now. Come.

NARRATOR: *RALPH comes and sits next to him, keeping his eye on the curtains.]*

DR B: So tell me--

NARRATOR: JOHN *is now desperately trying to undo the door bolts, half signalling to RALPH. DR BLAIR follows the direction of RALPH's eyes but JOHN grabs the curtains tight shut.*

DR B: Did you see it?

RALPH: What? oh nothing. I didn't see anything.

DR B: I saw the curtains move earlier.

RALPH: I didn't see anything. Not a thing. Nothing.

DR B: Don't be misled my boy, these spirits--

NARRATOR: JOHN *tries to signal to RALPH that the doors are bolted and locked. RALPH realises. BLAIR turns and this time sees the curtains moving.*

DR B: Avaunt! I see it. Now be you-- [*suddenly turning to RALPH as if in an afterthought*] You see it don't you?

RALPH: [*Standing up*] Uh no I mean yes I mean.

DR B: Fear not my boy. The power of the Lord is with us.

NARRATOR: DR BLAIR *stands as well. RALPH backs away as DR BLAIR stares at the curtains, RALPH feels behind his back for the light switch by the hall door.*

DR B: Oh, [*as if to GERALD*] pardon your Grace but, Avenite Incube--

NARRATOR: RALPH manages to turn the lights off.

DR B: Agh! He's turned the lights off.

RALPH: I'll get them.

NARRATOR: *In the darkness, JOHN darts back into the chapel.*

DR B: Lord protect us.

RALPH: Wait a minute. There. They've come back.

NARRATOR: *DR BLAIR is standing terrified with his hands over his eyes. He collapses onto the chesterfield exhausted, clutching at his chest, then rubbing his arms.]*

DR B: Oh, oh, oh.

NARRATOR: *GERALD and FRANK come back in. GERALD has been cleaned off but his clothes still look damp at the front.*

GERALD: What's going on now?

RALPH: Uh the lights went out.

GERALD: The lights went out?

DR B: Malabeah!

FRANK: What?

DR B: Malabeah was moving the curtains again. Oh it was your Grace. Believe me. And uh Mr uh Mr--

GERALD: *[Indicating to RALPH that he thinks BLAIR is quite cuckoo]* Did you see it?

RALPH: Well the curtains *were* moving.

GERALD: *[Bored]* really?

RALPH: Sort of .. *[Pause]* A little.

GERALD: *[Both convinced that BLAIR is quite mad]* Uhuh.

FRANK:

NARRATOR: MRS ASH *comes in with* MRS BLAIR.

MRS ASH: There you are pet, that'll be as right as rain in the morning. [*Picking up sandwiches*] Now if nobody else wants anything, [*gathering up plates*] I'll be off to bed. Goodnight.

NARRATOR: MRS ASH *exits, giving a significant look to* FRANK.

GERALD: [*Standing in front of drinks cabinet*] That seems like a good idea. [*opening drinks cabinet*] Perhaps a little nightcap.

FRANK: [*Not watching* GERALD] No.

NARRATOR: But Frank is not paying attention to the fact that the drinks cabinet is still unlocked.

GERALD: [*Quickly closing door and smiling at the realisation that FRANK doesn't know that it's unlocked*] No, perhaps not.

[GERALD *smiles a wicked satisfied smile.*]

FRANK: Well you know where your room is, don't you. I hope you'll find the beds comfortable. We haven't had any complaints yet. [*Laughs.*]

GERALD: Well then. I shall bid you goodnight and God speed. Let us pray [*slight pause*] that Mrs Ash can procure some kippers for breakfast.

NARRATOR: GERALD *sweeps out.*

FRANK: I assume you'll be retiring now uh Ralph. You've had a busy day. Let's hope your trunks turn up in the morning.

NARRATOR: RALPH is understandably unwilling to leave the room.

RALPH: [*Unwilling to leave the room*] uh yes.

FRANK: Goodnight then.

NARRATOR: Ralph is eventually forced to exit.

RALPH: [*Eventually forced to exit*] Goodnight. Goodnight Dr Blair, Mrs Blair. Goodnight.

MRS B: Goodnight.

DR B: You did see it didn't you?

NARRATOR: But RALPH *has gone*. DR BLAIR *picks up his briefcase and goes out*. MRS BLAIR *pretends to fiddle with her handbag, until DR BLAIR is gone*. FRANK *goes over and turns the chapel key in the lock. Checks windows once more. As he crosses finally over to the hall door:]*

MRS B: I've got to talk to you.

FRANK: I'm sorry?

MRS B: You still don't recognise me?

FRANK: No. I—

MRS B: I'm Mary Goodchild. I was—

FRANK: Mary Good--

MRS B: Mary Goodchild. Brighton. Oh why should you remember--

DR B: [*Off*] Mary!

FRANK: I'm sorry I--

MRS B: You're Frank. You went away to sea. And I--

DR B: [*Off*] Mary, are you coming?

FRANK: I'm sorry I still--

MRS B: I must talk to you. I'll wait till he's gone to sleep and then I'll meet you down here. I'm Mary Goodchild. You were at the Pony Club summer social in Brighton. You showed me the [*she can hardly bring herself to say it*] the lime pits. And then you went off to sea.

FRANK: [*Vague memory stirring*] Oh my--

MRS B: [*As she leaves the room*] And I had your son. I'll see you shortly.

NARRATOR: MRS BLAIR *has gone*. FRANK *stares ahead for a moment then gasps and sinks down onto the chesterfield.*]

FRANK: Jesus Christ.

NARRATOR: [*Slow curtain.*] END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO.

(The same, a few hours later. The stage is in darkness though light tappiny sounds come from JOHN locked in the chapel, When these stop, the hall door is hesitantly opened and RALPH enters, switching on the lights. He crosses to the chapel, tries to open the door, looks puzzled, then realises it's locked and unlocks it. He is dressed in his cassock and carries another over his arm.)

RALPH: *(Whispering into chapel)* Hello? Hello?

JOHN: *(Appearing)* What kept you?

RALPH: I wanted to make sure they were all asleep.

JOHN: Where are my clothes?

RALPH: They're still in the washing machine. They're still very damp.

JOHN: Shit. I suppose--

RALPH: *(Indicating cassock)* I found you this.

JOHN: What for?

RALPH: You'll have to wear it.

JOHN: I'm not going out in a bloody dress.

RALPH: Well I'm sorry but it's all I could come up with. I find your behaviour utterly offensive,

JOHN: Look sweetheart, I'm not walking into the YMCA dressed in that.

RALPH: They wouldn't let you in at this time of night anyway. They have their rules, you know. You'll have to wait till morning.

JOHN: Outside?

RALPH: That's your problem. You must have known there was a curfew.

JOHN: Wonderful. Where's your bed.

RALPH: You're not sleeping there.

JOHN: I'll get up and leave early.

RALPH: No, I--

JOHN: (*Pushing his naked body up against RALPH*) Come on father, forgive me for I haven't sinned.

RALPH: Oh no. Oh no no no. You've brought this all on yourself by your own wilful lust.

JOHN: Well let me tell you, you've been worse than my other ninety-nine of this year put together.

RALPH: Put on the cassock and get out.

JOHN: Out bloody where?

RALPH: Ssh.

(*RALPH, still holding the cassock, goes over to the hall door and listens.*)

JOHN: Come on. Tell me where I'm supposed--

RALPH: (*Listening*) Ssh. Someone's coming. Here. (*Throws the cassock which falls far short of JOHN.*) Hide.

(*RALPH runs into the study, JOHN makes an unsuccessful lunge to yet the cassock and darts back into the chapel as MRS ASH enters from the hall.*)

MRS ASH: That you, my little-- (*Looks round and realises that there IS no-one there.*) Oh. (*Looks around again, notices the cassock and folds it tidily, putting it down on the back of*

the chesterfield, sighing at the untidiness of the people in the house.) Cleanliness is next to godliness ...

(MRS ASH is about to go out again when FRANK's hand comes round the door, feels for the light switch and turns the lights off.)

MRS A: *(As FRANK enters)* Naughty!

FRANK: Oh. *(He puts the lights back on)* I thought they'd be turned off.

MRS A: Someone must have left them on.

FRANK: *(Who has forgotten his assignation with MRS ASH)* What are you doing down here?

MRS A: As if you didn't know, sexy.

FRANK: Oh God!

MRS A: Fwankie no wantie lickie nookie wiv Marfee?

FRANK: No. I--

MRS A: And after Marfee went to all dat twubble too. *(She pulls open her cosy woolen housecoat to reveal somewhat sexier nightie.)*

FRANK: Oh my ... Where did you get that?

MRS A: Like it? George bought it. Said he wanted me to have it. A bribe it was. Why he should think that I would want to stay with him just because he bought something to make him feel sexy I couldn't tell you. I think it's disgusting. Especially in a man his age. D'you like it?

FRANK: *(He obviously does)* Yes. But not just .. at .. the .. moment. Mrs Blair's coming down.

MRS A: What for?

FRANK: Oh not that. No. She said .. well, she turned to me just as we were all about to go to bed .. I mean we were alone but .. she said she'd known me in Brighton--

MRS A: Didn't we all?

FRANK: But ..

MRS A: Yes?

FRANK: She said that she had my son.

MRS A: Oh rubbish. ! had your son.

FRANK: I don't think she meant the same one.

MRS A: Well John's your boy alright, he's got that funny mark by his (*whispers*) .. winkle. I had to tell George it came from my father's side of the family though we've never really had any history of physical imperfection.

FRANK: Oh I don't doubt that John is ... But she said that she had one too.

MRS A: (*After a slight pause*) I thought she looked a bit common. A bit of a slut under that veneer. You can always tell. A woman can tell.

FRANK: Anyway, she's coming down in a moment. She whispered to me to meet her here after she'd gone to bed.

MRS A: After she'd gone to bed?

FRANK: She'll leave her husband.

MRS A: She's not living here.

FRANK: No, no. She's leaving him in bed. Once he's gone to sleep.

MRS A: The slut. Mind you, I can't say I blame her completely Frank. You're a good-looking man. Always have been. And her husband's even older than George.

FRANK: I'm only going to talk to her--

MRS A: I should hope so. You're mine. Or would be if marriages were made in heaven. I feel sorry for her in a way.

FRANK: She mustn't see us together like this.

(MRS ASH closes her housecoat.)

FRANK: No, I mean together. In the middle of the night. It wouldn't look good.

MRS A: *(Sighs and gets ready to go)* Pity.

(MRS ASH crosses to the hall door.)

FRANK: It's just for tonight. *(He crosses to her and pushes her against the door then kisses her.)* Keep it hot for tomorrow. *(Kisses her again)* It looks good. *(Kisses her again.)*

MRS A: *(Pulling his hand inside her housecoat)* Feel it. It's silky. But it can be machine washed. *(They kiss, long and passionate.)*

FRANK: Oh Martha, Martha. I burn for you.

(He goes to kiss her neck. Gentle knocking on hall door.)

MRS A: Is that you?

FRANK: Oh my God. *(He grabs the handle so that the door can't be opened.)* It's her. Hide. Go into the chapel. I'll tell you when it's safe to come out.

(MRS ASH runs into the chapel. As soon as she has gone, FRANK opens

the door to let in MRS BLAIR.)

FRANK: Ah. I really must have something done about this door.
It sticks. Badly . I.. managed.. to.. free.. it ...

(MRS BLAIR remains silent, looking at him.)

FRANK: Now tell me ...

(Pause. Eventually MRS BLAIR speaks, quiet and dignified.)

MRS B: I've always tried to imagine what it would be like if I saw you again. I kept wondering whether I'd recognise you. I often wondered whether I'd passed you time and time again in the street and not recognised you. I knew I hadn't really. There isn't a day that I don't think about him .. you. And now it seems so long ago. And it seems like yesterday too.

FRANK: But tell me .I mean .. what happened.. I mean .. you *are* married--

MRS B: That was Mummy and Daddy. I met you at the Pony Club summer social. It was a bit of a dare from my friend Anthea. Nobody knew who you were. You showed me the lime pits. And then you went off to sea, you said you were going. Only I was .. pregnant. Mummy and Daddy were horrified but they made the usual arrangements. I went to Whitstable until the baby was born.

FRANK: Whitstable..

MRS B: I kept the baby for three weeks but then they had it adopted. I wanted to keep it but Daddy said that that was out of the question. He said he wanted to horsewhip you only (*laughs*) I couldn't tell him your name. Just that you'd gone off to sea.

FRANK: You're sure..

MRS B: Sure?

FRANK: That it was mine?

MRS B: It *is* you then?

FRANK: I suppose it must be. But you're sure that--

MRS B: Of course it was yours. I hadn't -- I mean I didn't-- I wasn't the kind of girl to go doing that with every Tom, Dick or Harry. Just one stupid night with you. And besides, the baby had that funny mark by its penis just like yours. Don't you remember -- oh you wouldn't remember, I asked you whether all men had one like that. (*Laughs*) I wanted to keep the baby so that I could look at that little mark and think of you and the lime pits. But then Mummy and Daddy had this wonderful idea to marry me off to Cuthbert. (*Snorts*) Cuthbert. A sort of penance I suppose. So the baby was adopted after about three weeks and I became the perfect vicar's wife.

(*Pause.*)

FRANK: What .. what do we do now?

MRS B: What is there to do?

FRANK: You never--

MRS B: Told Cuthbert? No. I've never spoken to anyone about it since Mummy and Daddy have been dead. It's just, just a sort of relief having found you. Just to talk about it.

FRANK: You didn't have any other children?

MRS B: (*Laughs*) No. Of course we did it in the early days. But I didn't want children after ... And once bitten, twice shy. I'd found that precautions can and should be taken. My life ended when I married him. Not that it's unexciting

being married to a diocesan exorcist. Endless drama. Looneys ringing at all hours. One woman kept trying to burn herself on bonfires at the bottom of the garden. Just her unhappy marriage really of course but.. William Peter Blatty has a lot to answer for.

FRANK: Who?

MRS B: The man who wrote "The Exorcist". And of course there is a sort of macabre fascination to the never ceasing realisation that Cuthbert actually believes it all.

FRANK: Why don't you leave him?

MRS B: And do what? My life was taken away from me. Whatever life I might have---

(There is a piercing scream from the chapel. MRS ASH comes running out.)

MRS A: Oh God there's a naked man in the chapel.

FRANK: A naked man.

MRS A: In the chapel. I saw him.

FRANK: *(Conscious of MRS BLAIR)* Now Mrs Ash, calm yourself. What were you doing in the chapel?

MRS A: What do you mean, what was I doing in the chapel?

FRANK: Yes what were you doing in the chapel? I mean it's late--
-

MRS A: Oh. I was praying. *(Sudden jealousy)* And what were you doing down here?

MRS B: *(Inventing)* I couldn't sleep and then I .. heard you scream ..so I came to investigate.

MRS A: You were quick about it.

FRANK: We both heard you scream and came to investigate.

MRS A: Well you'd better investigate then. Oh Frank, in the dark it looked just like our Johnnie.

FRANK: Our.. Your Johnnie? Your son, you mean? Mrs Ash has a son John.

MRS A: Yes. Do you think it was a vision? Like at Lourdes?

MRS B: Not if it didn't have any clothes on. (*Whispers to FRANK*) I'd say she's been drinking.

MRS A: What d'you say?

FRANK: Let's see what it looks like with some light on the subject.

MRS A: Do you think it could be him? Do you think something awful has happened to him. And he came to me in the chapel. Naked as the day he was born.

FRANK: It would be a little unorthodox. let's go and have a look.

(They go somewhat hesitantly into the chapel, FRANK first, followed by the two women. After a moment or so the lights come on inside. JOHN backs out at speed.)

(RALPH peeks out from the study.)

RALPH: Psst. Why don't you just get out--

JOHN: It's me Mam.

RALPH: What?

JOHN: Me Mam. In the church there.

RALPH: What, Mrs Blair?

JOHN: No, Mrs Ash, Martha Ash. She left me Dad two years ago. We've hardly--

RALPH: Oh don't talk rubbish. Watch out. They're coming.

[RALPH *goes back into the study, shutting the door. JOHN is left stranded.*]

JOHN: Hey what about me?

[JOHN *leaps behind the curtains yet again as FRANK, MRS ASH and MRS BLAIR come back in. FRANK has his arm around MRS ASH.*]

FRANK: There, you see, Mrs Ash. There was nothing. (FRANK *locks the chapel door and takes the key.*) There. That's all there is to it.

MRS A: But I saw him Frank. It was a warning. A divine regression for leaving him.

FRANK: Now, now, Martha. Don't distress yourself so. He was twenty four.

MRS A: Was?

FRANK: Is.

MRS A: I should never have left him. My poor little Johnny.

FRANK (To MRS BLAIR) look, I'll see her to her room. Wait for me here.

(FRANK *takes MRS ASH out hall door. MRS BLAIR is left on her own for a few moments. She wanders round the room, eventually going over to the stage right end of the curtains and pulling them to one side so that she can look out into the garden. JOHN moves as far as possible from her, possibly even becoming slightly visible at the stage left end. The hall door opens slightly. GERALD's hand feels inside and turns the lights out,)*

GERALD: (*Outside the door*) Oh. (*He turns the lights back on. Whispers.*) Frank?

(MRS BLAIR *hides behind the curtains stage right end.* JOHN *edges completely away from MRS BLAIR and dashes for the chapel door. It is locked. He freezes as* GERALD, *his glasses hanging on the chain round his neck, comes in and heads for the drinks cabinet, oblivious of JOHN's naked presence.*)

GERALD: (*Only interested in one thing*) Frank, I'm sorry but I just can't sleep so I thought I'd have a little nightcap. O.K. Gerald, what would you care for? Well thank you Gerald, I'll have a nice large port and brandy thank you. (*Pours himself large drink*) Cheers Gerald. Thanks for leaving it unlocked, Frank. You're welcome Gerald. (*Change of mood from genial*) What the fuck's the use of being bishop if you can't have a small drink from time to time? (*Back to genial*) What indeed Gerald? Well I have trodden the wine press alone. (*Drains glass*) Now what about a little one for the road? Well thank you Gerald I don't mind if I do. (*Pours himself another,*) Cheers-- (*Suddenly becomes aware of JOHN, peers uncertain at him.*) My God Jones what on earth are you doing?

JOHN: Uh.

GERALD: (*Quickly knocking back his second drink*) For God's sake, you won't tell the Archdeacon about this, will you? I'm not supposed to drink, you know, but a little nightcap can't hurt me can it? He'll have me jogging next. I say -
- what are you wearing?

(GERALD *crosses to JOHN, peering and feeling drunkenly for his glasses.*
MRS BLAIR *peeps out between the curtains.*)

MRS B: (*Looking at JOHN, gasps*) The mark! (*Possibly repeats this.*)

GERALD: You look from over there as if -- my God, you are. Well. As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee. Tell me, why are you wandering

around the place stark naked in the early hours of the morning?

JOHN: I was looking for the bathroom.

GERALD: Well you won't find it through there. I say, I don't remember you having a moustache.

JOHN: It grows very quickly. (*Grabs GERALD's hand and puts it to his moustache.*) Feel it.

GERALD: Well I--

JOHN: (*Smiling*) Feel it. (*He starts to pull GERALD's hand down his body. GERALD starts back slightly.*)

GERALD: Later. Why are you talking like that?

JOHN: Like what?

GERALD: That funny accent.

JOHN: It's me natural voice.

GERALD: So the stuck up temperance bit is just an act eh? You know this puts a completely different complexion on things. (*Looks him up and down*) You are fearfully and wonderfully made.

JOHN: Want .. something?

GERALD: You're outrageous boy.

JOHN: You're not so bad yourself, Daddy. Want to come up to my room--

GERALD: My room's more comfortable. At least that's what all the other boys have told me. I wish you had something to put on though. Just in case we--

JOHN: Here, I'll put that on. (*Goes over behind chesterfield and picks up the cassock.*) I wouldn't do this for everybody you know.

(JOHN *puts on the cassock.*)

GERALD: Gird up now thy loins like a man. You've done this sort of thing before then?

JOHN: (*Going over to the study and maliciously locking the door.*) Oh yes, bishop. (*Loudly*) You'll be my one hundredth this year.

GERALD: The old hundredth.

JOHN: Not that old.

GERALD: I'm not sure that those sort of numbers isn't carrying things a bit far. At least for a place like Southingdene. (*Crosses to hall door.*)

JOHN: We'll have to see. (*Pinches GERALD's bottom.*)

GERALD: We'll have to keep the noise down. We don't want old Blair thinking we're something that goes bump in the night.

(GERALD and JOHN *exit, closing hall door behind them. Eventually MRS BLAIR peeps out from behind the curtains and very cautiously starts to make her way towards the hall door. RALPH tries to open the study door. When it won't, he bangs it gently, then more and more frantically. MRS BLAIR, fearing that this will bring someone, runs back behind the curtains.*)

(*Suddenly DR BLAIR flings the hall doors wide open and comes in, in his dressing gown.*)

DR B: Enough, Malabeah! Enough I say. Don't wake the whole house! This is between thee and me!

(DR BLAIR *crosses to the study door and listens for a second. Tries the door.*)

DR B: Locked!

RALPH: (*Very quietly*) Hello?

DR B: It speaks! Avaunt!

(MRS BLAIR *has been peeking at this from between the curtains. As DR BLAIR turns away from the door of the study she shuts the curtains and he notices the movement.*)

DR B: Aha! By the window! Come out now! Reveal yourself, Malabeah! reveal yourself!

(MRS BLAIR *comes out from between the curtains, sighing.*)

MRS B: Alright, Cuthbert. I can explain.

DR B: Ah Mary, my Mary. Not that. Avaunt Malabeah! Avaunt. avaunt!

MRS B: I'm not Mala--

DR B: Come not near me. The power of Christ compels thee--

MRS B: Cuthbert, enough of this. I'm--

(*But DR BLAIR suddenly convulses with a massive heart attack and collapses dead on the floor.*)

MRS B: Oh my God! Oh my God!

(MRS BLAIR *sinks down on the chesterfield.*)

(FRANK *enters quickly.*)

FRANK: I've managed to calm her down now, she-- (*He falls headlong over the body of DR BLAIR*) What the oh mon dieu. (*Looks at the body.*) It's your husband. (*Inspects*

the body.) I'm afraid, I'm afraid I think he's passed on.
How?

(MRS BLAIR *is still staring at the body. Suddenly she starts to laugh.*)

MRS B: I've frightened him to death. (*Becoming hysterical*) He thought I was-- I came out-- he was—I've frightened him to death! Perhaps there is a God!

FRANK: This is in poor taste.

MRS B: And do you know something else? That young priest is our son. He was here stark naked and he had the mark--

FRANK: I don't know what you're talking about.

MRS B: That young priest. Your son and mine. He went off with the bishop.

FRANK: With the bishop? I don't--

MRS B: The priest is our son and I frightened Cuthbert to death.

FRANK: You're hysterical.

MRS B: Yes, yes I think I am. (*Starts to laugh again then screams and screams.*)

(MRS ASH *runs in.*)

MRS A: What on earth--

(MRS ASH *falls headlong over the body. MRS BLAIR roars with laughter afresh.*)

MRS A: (*To body*) Oh I'm sorry, I didn't see you there. My God he's not moving. It's her old man. Is he--

(GERALD and JOHN *come in. As soon as JOHN sees that MRS ASH is there he turns his face away from her throughout the following.*)

GERALD: What on earth is-- (*Sees body*) I need a drink.

FRANK: It's Dr Blair. I'm afraid he's--

MRS B: (*Fresh outburst*) I frightened him to death!

FRANK: I'm afraid he is .

MRS A: (*Shivers*) Oooh it makes your flesh creep.

GERALD: I beg your pardon?

FRANK: Mrs Blair, you mustn't blame yourself. (*To the others*)
She's hysterical. Martha, look why don't you take her
down to the kitchen and give her a cup of strong sweet
tea whilst we decide what is to be done.

MRS A: Alright. Come on, pet. (To FRANK) I told you it was an
omen.

(MRS ASH *starts to usher* MRS BLAIR *out*. MRS BLAIR turns at the *door*.)

MRS B: Let me just have a last look--- (*Looks at the body and
screams with laughter*.)

MRS A: There, there, chuck, don't take it so badly ...

(MRS ASH *and* MRS BLAIR *exit*.)

FRANK: Well what's to be done?

GERALD: We'll have to get the police I suppose. Isn't that the
usual thing?

JOHN: Not a good idea.

FRANK: Why not?

JOHN: Uh—

FRANK: Jones, your moustache —

- GERALD: You think we oughtn't to ring the police?
- JOHN: Could be awkward. Stiff on the living room carpet in the middle of the night.
- FRANK: But it was natural causes—
- JOHN: Looks a bit fishy though, doesn't it? Could be a little awkward.
- GERALD: It might look a bit awkward Frank. Present press relations--
- FRANK: I suppose so. But what the hell else can we do?
- JOHN: Why don't we put him back to bed. Let him die of natural causes in the middle of the night. It's usual.
- GERALD: I suppose--
- FRANK: But what about Mrs Blair?
- JOHN: True. Do you think she'd mind it?
- FRANK: What?
- JOHN: Sleeping with the stiff till morning. Then she can find him and you can call whoever. Less awkward.
- FRANK: I suppose so. I wonder if she would. It's not as if they're in the same bed.
- JOHN: I thought they were married?
- GERALD: What were they doing down here anyway?
- FRANK: (*Quickly*) I've got no idea.
- JOHN: Really?

FRANK: Look, I don't want to bring this up now but you--

JOHN: Yes?

FRANK: You don't look--

JOHN: What?

FRANK: It doesn't matter. You look different. The moustache--

GERALD AND JOHN: Grows quickly.

FRANK: Yes.

JOHN: Well?

GERALD: Well Frank?

FRANK: Well I suppose uh Ralph has got a point. Let's shift him back upstairs and I'll go and explain the plan to Mrs Blair. And we can all go back to bed. Here Ralph, you take his feet.

(JOHN and FRANK exit with DR BLAIR into the hall.)

(GERALD goes and pours himself a drink. RALPH cautiously tries to open the study door from the inside. GERALD notices the movement, does a take. RALPH gives up. GERALD unlocks the door and steps back swiftly, hiding out of RALPH's line of view. RALPH comes out of the study and tiptoes towards the hall door. GERALD fakes a gun in his dressing gown pocket with his finger.)

GERALD: Take one more step and I fire. Put up your hands.

RALPH: *(Puts his hands up.)*

GERALD: Who are you? Turn round.

RALPH: It's Ralph, your Grace. Ralph Jones, I--

GERALD: Nonsense. Ralph Jones is taking a dead body upstairs. Who are you?

RALPH: But I am Ralph Jones. The man taking Dr Blair upstairs is an imposter. He's an intruder.

GERALD: Ah so--

RALPH: You know full well he is. And I know what he was doing with you. It disgusts me. In your position.

GERALD: How' did you know the position?

RALPH: I was listening at the study door. He locked me in.

GERALD: So. An eavesdropper as well as a hypocritical prig.

RALPH: Don't you dare speak to me like that. I just had a momentary weakness. I'm young -- whereas you --

GERALD: I am a man of like passions with you.

RALPH: But you're ... the bishop. You should set an example. I shall tell the world!

GERALD: Now what sort of example would that be?

RALPH: I'll show you for what you are--

GERALD: My dear boy. I am the Bishop of Southingdene. You can't for one moment imagine that anyone would believe you.

RALPH: I'll tell the press.

GERALD: Do you think they don't know? Look, can't you get it through your thick proletarian puritan skull, (*JOHN appears at the hall door behind RALPH and stands listening, unseen by either RALPH or GERALD*) I am the Bishop of Southingdene. Nobody will believe a word you

say except those who know it already. Why, I could probably get away with murder if I wanted to.

RALPH: You, you, you--

GERALD: My dear boy, for the first time in your miserable life you've fallen on your feet. I have to admit that you're not the curate we thought we were getting -- I pulled a lot of strings to help out a friend you should by rights be Trenton-Jones--

RALPH: (*In a rage*) Trenton-Jones! That stupid oafish--

GERALD: Probably. But this position would at least have kept him out of harm's way. As it is, he's probably been shunted off into some East End mission where he'll do irreparable harm. The kind of place that the likes of you ought to be by rights--

RALPH: I'm not afraid of -- the Lord --

GERALD: Oh for God's sake don't start spouting scripture. I'll put it to you straight. Shut up and stay here in the bishop's palace and live off the fat of the land or

(*JOHN has momentarily disappeared.*)

RALPH: Or? Or what?

GERALD: Or ... or ...

(*At this point JOHN suddenly reappears and brings a walking stick down savagely on RALPH's head.*)

GERALD: Good God!

JOHN: (*Stepping into GERALD's line of vision*) Looks like I've caught a burglar.

GERALD: What?

JOHN: It looks like I've caught a burglar. An intruder.

GERALD: Look I don't know who you are but--

JOHN: Call me Ralph.

GERALD: Ralph? But you're not--

JOHN: You'd better start calling me Ralph. I'm applying for Ralph's job.

GERALD: Ralph's job. But he's

JOHN: (*Checking*) Snuffed it. I didn't know me own strength.

GERALD: You've murdered him.

JOHN: Call it a mercy killing. For him. For you. For me. Now we'd better get him into my clothes before the police come. We'll have to get me Mam to iron them.

GERALD: Your ... ?

JOHN: Mrs Ash. She's me Mam.

GERALD: You mean you're Frank's son.

JOHN: Me Dad's name's George. Boring old fart.

GERALD: But he's not your real father.

JOHN: How do you mean?

GERALD: Well if you're Mrs Ash's son then I believe that your real father is the Archdeacon. Why did you come to see your mother tonight?

JOHN: You mean that bloke who was here just now?

GERALD: Yes.

JOHN: Me Dad. (*Pause*) Well! (*Pause*) D'you know, I've always known that the old fart wasn't really me father. I mean me Mam has always told me about how' the family was sanctified and so why should she have left me Dad if he was?

GERALD: But why did you come to see your mother tonight? And why didn't she tell us?

JOHN: She doesn't know. She didn't know I was here. I came with him. Met him in the cafe.

GERALD: I knew it was a low place.

JOHN: I'd rather you didn't tell me Mam about me and him. Or about me and you. She doesn't know I --

GERALD: Quite. (*Looks at RALPH*) You shouldn't have hit him you know.

JOHN: Oh layoff. He was a burglar.

GERALD: But he's--

JOHN: No. Repeat after me he's an orphan right?

GERALD: He's an orphan, yes.

JOHN: Not many friends.

GERALD: Not many friends. Not *any* friends I wouldn't wonder.

JOHN: No-one will recognise him 'cause he only arrived today.

GERALD: No-one will recognise him because he only arrived today.

JOHN: Me Mam will identify him as me.

GERALD: Your mother will identify him as you -- why should she?

JOHN: Because she's me Mam and this way I'll be able to live here with her and me Dad -- if he is me Dad.

GERALD: I'm pretty certain of it.

JOHN: There we are then. I broke in--

GERALD: To get at the silver--

JOHN: Which she told me about --

GERALD: When she went home to see you--

JOHN: Did she?

GERALD: She just got back tonight.

JOHN: (*Tuts*) I must have just missed her.

GERALD: But who killed Ralph?

JOHN: Ralph did. That is I did. 'Cept it was Ralph.

GERALD: But Ralph is dead.

JOHN: No, I'm dead.

GERALD: I think I need a drink.

JOHN: Look it's easy. Think of me as Ralph and Ralph as me--

GERALD: You being?

JOHN: John Ash.

GERALD: (*Absently*) How do you do?

JOHN: Very well. Right, now from now on I'm Ralph, no-one here has met me, right?

GERALD: Except Dr Blair?

JOHN: Who's dead.

GERALD: And Mrs Blair--

JOHN: Hmm. I'll have to think about that.

GERALD: So what do we do now?

JOHN: We tell me Mam and Dad and then call the police.

GERALD: It seems a bit dicey--

JOHN: You're the Bishop of Southingdene. You could get away with murder if you wanted to.

GERALD: So -- let me get it straight. This (*points to RALPH*) is now John Ash, an intruder who came here to steal the Southingdene silver after his mother told him about it. And--

JOHN: Got apprehended by me, Ralph uh--

GERALD: Jones.

JOHN: Is there a reward?

GERALD: Reward?

JOHN: For saving the silver.

GERALD: Virtue is its own reward.

JOHN: (*Disappointed*) Only when there's nothing else.

GERALD: So what do we do now? (*FRANK enters hurriedly.*)

FRANK: Oh mon dieu, what's --

JOHN: Dad.

FRANK: What?

JOHN: You're me Dad. The bishop's told me.

FRANK: What?

JOHN: You're--

GERALD: This is John Ash, Frank.

FRANK: John?

GERALD: Ash.

JOHN: Dad. (*Tries to embrace him.*)

FRANK: Wait a minute.

GERALD: Yes, hold your fire a minute, John.

FRANK: But (*points to RALPH*) who's that?

GERALD: Ralph.

JOHN: John Ash.

FRANK: John Ash?

GERALD: Well it's Ralph or rather it was Ralph.

FRANK: What happened to the poor--

GERALD: Make little weeping for the dead for he is at rest and the life of a fool is worse that death.

FRANK: But--

JOHN: So he's John Ash, now.

FRANK: You mean this is my son?

GERALD: No. This is your son.--(*indicating* JOHN)

JOHN: (*Indicating* RALPH) This is a burglar--

GERALD: Came to steal the silver--

FRANK: Oh mon dieu, how did he get in?

GERALD: Oh don't worry about that now Frank.

FRANK: But it looks like Ralph. Are you sure there hasn't been a mistake?

GERALD: Not yet. There will be, shortly. Frank, meet Ralph.(*Indicating* JOHN.)

FRANK: But--

JOHN: Look. I'm Ralph. Now Ralph is--

FRANK: But--

JOHN: No listen Dad. He's an orphan, right?

FRANK: He's an orphan, yes.

JOHN: Not many friends.

FRANK: Not many friends. Not any friends, probably.

JOHN: No-one will recognise him because he only arrived today.

FRANK: (*Beginning to get the picture*) No-one will

FRANK & GERALD: Recognise him because he only arrived today.

JOHN: Me Mam will identify him as me--

FRANK: Will she?

JOHN: Oh you know Mam, Dad. She'll do anything to keep the family together.

GERALD: Behold, he came as a thief to steal the silver and Ralph here banged him one over the head.

JOHN: Mam told me, him, about the silver.

FRANK: Just a minute, I'm getting confused. (*Stands silent for a moment.*) I think I get it. What about the Blairs?

GERALD: The old fool's dead.

FRANK: Of course. And Mrs Blair?

JOHN: She could be the fly in the ointment. Could we buy her off?

FRANK: Absolutely no chance. She's now the widow and sole heir to the Blair embrocation fortune. And the terrible thing I realise now is -- she thinks you're her son.

JOHN: Me?

FRANK: Well Ralph.

JOHN: So if I'm Ralph, I've got a woman who thinks she's my mother and is .. rich?

FRANK: Loaded.

JOHN: I'm Ralph.

GERALD: You're an opportunist. But--

JOHN: No I'm not. I just grab the main chance.

GERALD: Now just a minute Frank, why does Mrs Blair think that Ralph is her son.

FRANK: Another little peccadillo of my youth ••

GERALD: Art thou the father of all living?

FRANK: Remember not the sins of my youth nor my transgression. I took her just one night to the lime pits. (*Sighs*) And behold she arose a mother in Brighton.

GERALD: Unto thee shall all flesh come, dear.

JOHN: But why does she think that Ralph is her son?

FRANK: He has a birthmark similar to one of mine on--

JOHN: But when did she see it?

FRANK: When he went off with -- no wait a minute, I suppose that was you?

JOHN: (*Beams*) How much is she worth?

GERALD: I must say Frank this all seems most satisfactory. We don't even have to get a new curate.

FRANK: I never thought to have a son go into the business.

GERALD: So what do we do now?

JOHN: Explain it to me Mam.

FRANK: I'll go and get her.

(FRANK *exits.*)

JOHN: He (RALPH) could be her son you know. He's got a mark just like mine on his -- you don't think he could be, do you? I always wanted a brother.

GERALD: Who knows?

JOHN: But now I've killed him.

GERALD: Don't worry. There are biblical precedents.

JOHN: There's great comfort in religion.

(FRANK *comes in with* MRS ASH.)

MRS A: Do you think we should have left her like that?

FRANK: She'll be alright. Now look --

MRS A: Johnnie! What are you doing here. (*Big*) Oh it is good to see you

JOHN: And this is me Dad.

MRS A: Oh. (*Shocked*) Did you tell him?

JOHN: I was glad to meet him.

MRS A: You mustn't think the worse of me.

JOHN: How could I ever do that, Mam?

FRANK: Now--

MRS A: Oh my God, who's that on the floor?

FRANK: That's what I wanted to tell you about.

MRS A: Is he--

FRANK: Yes.

MRS A: Oooh it makes your flesh creep doesn't it?

JOHN: No Mam--

MRS A: Who is it?

FRANK: It's an intruder.

GERALD: Behold he came as a thief--

FRANK: To steal the silver.

MRS A: How did he get in?

FRANK: (*Sighs*) It is a good question. (*Goes over and unlocks the French doors.*) Through here. Ralph forgot to lock them when he came in.

MRS A: How careless. And now a man is dead.

GERALD: It's a lesson to us all.

MRS A: I thought you locked them Frank.

JOHN: Now Mam, how would you like it if we could all live here?

MRS A: Well I do live here--

JOHN: Yes. But with me--

MRS A: Here, ooh that would be lovely.

JOHN: The three of us under one roof at last. You, me and me Dad--

MRS A: Oh not him, Johnnie. You don't understand--

JOHN: But I do understand. I don't mean old George. I mean this Dad. Me real Dad.

MRS A: You mean we could all live together?

JOHN: Yes.

MRS A: My family together at last.

GERALD: Under the roof of Mother Church.

MRS A: It's lovely.

JOHN: But there's one thing you'd have to do.

MRS A: Yes?

JOHN: You'd have to tell the police that that was me

MRS A: Who?

JOHN: That.

MRS A: You?

JOHN: Yes.

MRS A: But--

JOHN: And you'd have to call me Ralph.

MRS A: Oh I'm not too keen on that. It's a bit fancy--

JOHN: Then I'll have to go to jail.

MRS A: Jail?

JOHN: Look Mam. This here intruder is me. You told me about the chapel silver and I tried to steal it.

MRS A: *(Suddenly grasping the whole picture)* Aaaah. But what about George?

JOHN: If I'm identified by me own mother, they'd never bother with--

MRS A: I always knew you'd come to a bad end Johnnie. Why are you dressed as a vicar?

JOHN: My clothes are in the wash.

MRS A: You don't mean those clothes I found here earlier.

JOHN: Uhuh.

MRS A: Awful. You should be ashamed. I shall have strong words with your father.

JOHN: Everything will be alright now. You'll be able to do my washing as often as you like.

MRS A: Once your trunks arrive.

JOHN: My trunks?

ALL: Yes once your trunks arrive.

FRANK: Now what's to be done about Mrs Blair?

MRS A: Yes the poor dear. Losing her husband--

JOHN: Ah but finding a son.

MRS A: A son? Where?

JOHN: Mam, the poor woman's suffered so, we thought it would be nice -- if I were to be her son--

FRANK: She' has no family--

MRS A: But you're *my* son.

JOHN: Of course. And always will be.

GERALD: But the poor dear lady hasn't got anyone in the world.

MRS A: All the same--

FRANK: It would only be a question of your not telling her that John, Ralph here that is, was your son, if she ever came to visit.

GERALD: A very Christian act.

MRS A: Well, I suppose... Whose idea was it?

(GERALD, FRANK and JOHN look around for a moment, then:)

GERALD: John's here. Ralph's I mean.

MRS A: Oh that's my boy. Always thoughtful towards his mother-

JOHN: You mean--

MRS A: Poor Mrs Blair. And her left with nothing in the world but all that money.

FRANK: Shall I go and call her?

JOHN: No, why don't you go and break it to her gently that you've discussed it with me and we think I am her son--- you'd better tell her that I've killed the intruder too.

MRS A: And that'll give us time to get Johnnie properly dressed.

FRANK: Right.

MRS A: (*To the corpse*) It's alright Johnnie, I'll get your clothes.

FRANK: I'll keep Mrs Blair occupied whilst you sneak the clothes out of the kitchen.

(FRANK *and* MRS ASH *go out.*)

GERALD: Well, would you care for a drink?

JOHN: I thought you weren't supposed to --

GERALD: But--

JOHN: Whatever me Dad says in this house goes. Besides we want to keep you in your prime don't we?

GERALD: We'll discuss it later. Do you think you'll make a good curate?

JOHN: It's just a question of doing what I'm told isn't it? You can help me. Mind you, I don't believe in--

GERALD: (*Shrugs*) Oh that doesn't matter. Most people don't believe in a God. They just like to be told what they should be doing. We're just here to insulate them against thought a bit. It's not hard work -- my brother's the brains in my family, though there are times when I wonder. He's in politics so I'm in the church. Frank, your father, did most of the work of getting me the position.

JOHN: Didn't he fancy it for himself?

GERALD: Oh no chance, my dear boy. He has the brain but not the background. Whoever heard of a bishop who'd worked at sea? (*Laughs.*)

JOHN: I suppose you're right.

(*MRS ASH comes back carrying JOHN's clothes.*)

MRS A: Here.

JOHN: Can we help?

MRS A: No, no. I've been doing this ever since you were a baby. Oooh you were a lovely baby. (*Tuts*) Oh Johnnie look at your boots, they're filthy.

Do you think I should clean them?

GERALD & JOHN: No!

MRS A: No, I suppose not. Now where are his little knickers?

JOHN: He wasn't wearing any--

MRS A: (*To the corpse*) John! How many times have I told you!
And now you've had that accident. (*To JOHN and*
GERALD) Here help me with this thing.

(*They pull the cassock off RALPH and dress him in JOHN's clothes.*)

MRS A: There. Oh it breaks my heart to think of him coming to
this. My poor little Johnnie. If only he'd had a proper
family life.

(*As soon as MRS ASH has finished dressing RALPH,*
FRANK enters with MRS BLAIR.)

FRANK: Well Mary, here he is. The hero of the hour. The one
who stopped this villain escaping with the Southingdene
silver. Our son.

MRS A: (*To herself*) Our son!

JOHN: Mam! Mother!

MRS B: (*Overcome*) I don't know what to say. My boy. Ralph.
Let me hold you.

(*They run together and hug.*)

MRS B: But you have a moustache.

ALL: It grows very quickly.

MRS B: I can't tell you all what this means to me. I so often
wondered what had happened to you. I tried to find you
-- but Mummy and Daddy—

JOHN: (*Worried at possibly losing inheritance*) Are they--

MRS B: Oh my poor darling boy.

JOHN: Are they--

MRS B: I have to tell you, my poor boy. No sooner to find a mother and father than to lose both your grandparents. At least on my side. Arch-- Frank?

FRANK: And on my side as well I'm afraid.

MRS A: Still I expect he'll be able to find some somewhere.

MRS B: And I will be able to visit you, though the Arch -- Frank has pointed out that it probably would be better if we keep all this rather quiet. In view of your position. And your father's. But I will be able to visit, won't I, your Grace?

GERALD: Of course, of course, dear lady. Any friend of the Southingdene windows...

MRS B: Oh I shall continue with Cuthbert's donation of course--

GERALD: Any friend of the windows is a friend of Southingdene.

JOHN: (*Aside to FRANK*) How much for the windows?

GERALD: He is after all "the only son of his mother and she a widow."

MRS B: And as soon as I've got Cuthbert's will all settled, I'm sure I shall be able to arrange some kind of annuity, Ralph.

GERALD: I think this all calls for a drink. This woman is full of good works.

FRANK: Well, on this occasion. Just a small one. For everyone?

(*All agree to drinks.*)

GERALD: (*Parting the curtains with his hand and looking out.*) The night is far spent, the day is at hand. (*FRANK hands him a drink*) Thanks Frank. I suppose we should think

about phoning whatsisname, our friend down at the police station.

FRANK: Uh Burgess, yes. Let all things be done decently and in good order. But first if everyone is ready, I should like to propose a toast.

(All raise their glasses as FRANK proposes:)

FRANK: The family. The sanctity of family life.

ALL: The family. The sanctity of family life.

(SLOW CURTAIN.)
END OF ACT TWO.