

# A THORN IN MIDSUMMER

by

Philip Ayckbourn

Agent: Richard Ireson  
The Narrow Road Company

1st Floor  
37 Great Queen Street  
London,  
WC2B 5AA

T 020 7831 4450  
E [richardireson@narrowroad.co.uk](mailto:richardireson@narrowroad.co.uk)  
[www.narrowroad.co.uk](http://www.narrowroad.co.uk)

Characters:

Cast of 7 (4M 3F)

NAD (DANIEL) FOSTER – around thirty  
KELLY MILFORD – mid twenties  
SAMMY FOSTER – late sixties (*Wiltshire accent*)  
NEIL VICKERS – mid forties  
HILARY VICKERS – early forties  
TIM FOSTER – mid forties  
LINDA ROBERTS – mid forties

Synopsis of scenes:

Act 1

Scene 1 – Midsummer’s Eve. 6.30 p.m.

Scene 2 – Same evening. 9.45 p.m.

Scene 3 – The following morning. 10.00 a.m.

Act 2

Scene 1 – The action continues from Act 1.

Scene 2 – The following morning. 10.45 a.m.

Place – A farmhouse in Wiltshire, England.

Time – The present.

Act 1

Scene 1

*Midsummer's Eve. 6.30 p.m.*

*The living room in the farmhouse. The front door is on the US wall on the SL side. There is a shuttered window also on the US wall, centre. An open interior door leads to the kitchen/dining area, DR. A closed interior door leads to the upstairs bedrooms, UR. In the living room there is an old sofa and armchair with a coffee table in reach and an old wooden kitchen chair. A fireplace is built into the SL wall with a set of fire irons and a coal bucket nearby. There is a loose poker by the grate. There is a small wall mirror on one of the walls and a large picture, a painting of a rural scene, high above the fireplace.*

*Sound of window shutters being hit and a catch being unfastened. Sunlight streams through from the kitchen area. NAD enters from the kitchen. He surveys the room for a few moments. He looks up at the picture above the fireplace. He takes the wooden chair and places it underneath. He sees the poker and picks it up. He remembers. NAD throws the poker back into the fireplace. He is about to step up on the chair when a dog is heard barking off. NAD replaces the chair and exits into the kitchen. Sound of window and shutters closing, but still some light streams through.*

SAMMY: (Off.) Jip! Shut it, boy! Jip! Sit! Sit!

*Dog whines at being forcefully made to sit. Sound of keys opening the front door.*

Stay there!

*SAMMY enters through the front door. He looks about the room suspiciously. He notices the light from the kitchen.*

(Calling.) Hello? Anyone here?

*He picks up the poker from the fireplace and crosses to the kitchen and looks inside. He opens the door to upstairs.*

(Calling up.) Timothy?

*There is the sound of a car arriving off. Jip barks.*

Jip, shut it, boy! Jip!

*SAMMY crosses to the front door and glances outside.*

Jip!

*He raises a hand to Jip. Jip whimpers and falls silent. SAMMY puts the poker with the rest of the fire irons. He opens the windows and shutters. Sound of car doors opening and closing. Jip barks again.*

Jip!

*HILARY appears at the window.*

HILARY: Hello.

SAMMY: Afternoon.

HILARY: Samuel, I presume.

SAMMY: That's me.

HILARY: Hilary. *(Jip.)* He's sweet. What is he – she?

SAMMY: A pest, a lot of the time, that's what he is.

HILARY: Ah. *(To Jip.)* I'm sure you're not a pest, are you?

*Jip barks.*

Are you? No.

SAMMY: Jip! Don't encourage him.

HILARY: Are we the first? I guess we are, their car's not here. Unless they've gone for a drive. *(Calling back.)* Neil, come on. He doesn't bite. *(To SAMMY.)* Jip doesn't bite, does he?

SAMMY: Not until I tell him.

HILARY: Can I... come in?

SAMMY: Don't see why not, you're staying here.

HILARY: *(Calling back.)* Neil, come on!

*HILARY exits from the window. She enters through the*

*front door. She carries a couple of shopping bags.*

It's so hot, isn't it? Oh, this is nice. Very rustic and charming.

SAMMY: Timothy will give you the guided tour. How do you know him?

HILARY: Friends, from school – Neil and he.

*NEIL appears outside the window. Jip barks.*

SAMMY: Jip!

HILARY: It's okay, he's friendly. Come in, say hello to Samuel.

*NEIL exits from the window. He appears at the front door. He holds his shoulder.*

SAMMY: Afternoon.

NEIL: Hi.

HILARY: This is Neil. He's got a stiff shoulder. How is it?

NEIL: Stiff.

HILARY: He slept awkwardly in the car. Try and loosen it up a bit.

NEIL: It's stiff, I can't.

HILARY: Try.

SAMMY: You know Timothy from school then?

NEIL: Yeah.

SAMMY: He'll give you the guided tour, when he comes. Is he coming with *her*?

HILARY: Linda? Yes.

*SAMMY grunts disapprovingly.*

Not a fan?

SAMMY: She's a gold digger. Spot 'em a mile off. If I were him I'd drop her in the nearest ditch. Well, Timothy knows best, I suppose.

HILARY: He says you're passing the place over to him.

SAMMY: Word of warning, we get 'em around here – troublemakers.

Lock up when you go out and when you turn in for the night. If they can see it, they'll 'ave it.

HILARY: Okay, thanks. Troublemakers?

SAMMY: Kids. Police don't do nothing. Thieving, vandalising the crops. I'll catch 'em at it one day, making their pretty patterns.

*SAMMY mimes raising a shotgun and firing.*

HILARY: You'd shoot them!

SAMMY: If there wasn't a law against it, I would. Since there is, I'd just put the fear of God into them instead. Make 'em think twice before they did it again. They're like vermin, no respect for what's others. I'll leave you to it. Key's in the door. Remember what I said about locking up. Tell Timothy to come visit me when he arrives. Just him. See you about no doubt.

HILARY: Yes.

*SAMMY exits through the front door. Jip barks.*

SAMMY: Jip!

*Barking fades into the distance.*

HILARY: Wouldn't like to get on the wrong side of him. Tim said he was a bit of a character. *(Room.)* It's okay, isn't it? *(Shopping.)* Better put some of this stuff in a fridge before it dies. *(Demonstrating exercise with her own shoulder.)* Seriously, Neil, do this. It's not going to get better if you just hold it tightly like that. I'll give it a massage in a bit... if you cheer up. Tell you what, let's open one of these, shall we?

*HILARY takes a couple of bottles of wine from the shopping.*

It's just about cool enough still. There may be some ice, if we're lucky. Which one, the Pinot Grigio or the Sauvignon Blanc? You choose. Neil?

NEIL: I don't know.

HILARY: Just choose one, pick one, any one.

NEIL: I don't know. Whatever.

HILARY: Oh! Okay, I choose this one.

*HILARY exits into the kitchen with the wine and the shopping. Sound of things being sorted out off. NEIL sits. He attempts to stretch out his arm.*

NEIL: Ah!

*He tries again.*

Ah!

*He gives up and sinks back into the chair. HILARY enters from the kitchen with two glasses of white wine.*

HILARY: You're not going to help yourself sitting like that.

*She gives NEIL his glass.*

This might help. Cheers!

*She drinks.*

Mmm, not a bad choice... if I say so myself.

NEIL: This is going to be... hell on earth, the four of us cooped up together in here.

HILARY: No it isn't, Neil. And I for one am not intending to spend the week cooped up in here – and neither are you. We're going to go on some good bracing walks, you and I. We need to start feeling alive again. We've been stagnant for too long – you particularly. You'll be old before your time.

NEIL: I don't even like him.

HILARY: Yes you do. You're old school friends.

NEIL: That doesn't mean I like him. He's opinionated, arrogant and smug.

HILARY: So are you when you want to be.

NEIL: We have nothing to talk about.

HILARY: Well that will stop you arguing at least.

NEIL: You don't like *her*.

HILARY: If you really didn't want to come you should've said so before we came.

NEIL: I did.

HILARY: Not loud enough. Anyway, I wanted to come. I need the holiday. Like I say, we'll probably hardly see them. Listen to that.

NEIL: I don't hear anything.

HILARY: Exactly. No traffic, no sirens, peace and quiet. You know what I was thinking about on the way down? In that cave in Cyprus, remember?

NEIL: I fail to see the connection.

HILARY: Never... in a cornfield before. It would be nice, in the sunshine... take some wine... out in nature. What do you think?

NEIL: Pretty rough that stuff.

HILARY: Barley field then.

NEIL: Still rough.

HILARY: Grass? It would be good for us. Something adventurous... different. Drink some wine, it might loosen you up a bit. I still want you to ask him.

NEIL: Look –

HILARY: There's no harm just asking.

NEIL: I'm not going begging to him.

HILARY: It's not begging, Neil, it's asking.

NEIL: No!

HILARY: Just to ask.

NEIL: I'm not begging him for a hand out.

HILARY: It's just asking him if he knows of –

NEIL: No! Ah!

*NEIL clutches his leg.*

HILARY: What is it?

NEIL: Cramp!

HILARY: Get up. Walk on it.

*NEIL gets up and painfully staggers about the room.*

Put some weight on it.

*NEIL crosses to the front door.*

Where are you going?

NEIL: I'm putting some weight on it to walk it off.

*NEIL exits through the front door.*

HILARY: Neil, they'll be here in a... *(To herself.)* Oh!

*She takes a drink of wine. She looks out the window.  
She turns back into the room and exits upstairs.*

KELLY: *(Off. Calling.)* Nad! Nad!

*KELLY appears at the window.*

Nad?

*HILARY enters from upstairs.*

HILARY: Hello?

KELLY: Hi. I'm looking for someone. Nad. I guess he's not in here.

HILARY: I haven't seen him. Shall I tell him you're looking for him if I do?

KELLY: Yeah. I'm Kelly – Kells. Hi.

HILARY: I'm Hilary – Hils. Hi.

KELLY: This your place?

HILARY: Just staying here, holiday.

KELLY: Nice.

HILARY: You local are you, Kells?

KELLY: Me, no. We're camping over there. I've come to see the crop circles. Nad said he'd show me.

HILARY: Ah.

KELLY: You know about them?

HILARY: I think I've seen pictures.

KELLY: This is where they all happen around here. I want to go in one. Nad says they've got a good energy to them, especially when they first appear and not too many people have gone in already.

HILARY: Appear? Made by people aren't they?

KELLY: Some say they're made by ET's. Nad says it possible, the good one's anyway. Not the shit ones. He says you can tell if you look closely.

HILARY: Sounds a bit of an expert, your Nad.

KELLY: He's an expert at disappearing. You here alone?

HILARY: No, my husband's outside. Others coming.

KELLY: Oh if you're not doing anything this evening we're having a party – a few of us – over there somewhere where we're camping. You're welcome to come along – all of you.

HILARY: Oh, thanks. Might do. See what the others say.

KELLY: You'll probably see our fire... and hear us. And we'll probably go on all night, so anytime.

HILARY: Thanks. What's the celebration?

KELLY: Midsummer's Eve.

HILARY: Oh, yes. You celebrate that then?

KELLY: Sure. If you see him, tell him I've gone back.

HILARY: Will do.

KELLY: May see you later, Hils.

HILARY: Yes... Kells.

*KELLY exits from the window. HILARY waits a moment and then glances out the window.*

*(Calling.)* Neil? Neil?

*HILARY checks her mobile. She moves about the room checking for reception. Sound of car arriving and pulling to a stop. HILARY goes to the window and glances out. Sound of car door opening. HILARY crosses to the front door and is about to exit.*

LINDA: *(Off.)* You bastard!

*Sound of car door slamming. HILARY decides not to go outside. After a couple of moments there is the sound of a car door opening and closing. TIM appears at the window.*

TIM: Hello? Anyone at home?

HILARY: Hi, Tim.

TIM: Hils. You beat us to it.

HILARY: We did.

TIM: What do you think?

HILARY: It's nice. Rustic... and charming.

TIM: It's certainly that. Neil about?

HILARY: He's out... walking... off cramp.

TIM: Oh dear.

HILARY: Slept badly in the car.

TIM: Hope he wasn't driving.

HILARY: No.

TIM: Met Uncle Sammy?

HILARY: Yes.

TIM: And you're still alive to tell the tale? *(Wine.)* Made a start I see.

HILARY: Yes, couldn't wait I'm afraid.

TIM: No quite right, I would.

HILARY: Want some?

TIM: Thought you'd never ask.

*HILARY exits into the kitchen. TIM looks back to where LINDA went. He shakes his head and exits from the window. He enters through the front door. He takes in the room. HILARY enters from the kitchen with a glass of wine.*

HILARY: Here we are.

TIM: A welcoming sight. And you are too, Hils.

*They kiss.*

How are you, Hils?

HILARY: I'm good thank you. You?

TIM: No complaints, no complaints. Cheers!

HILARY: Cheers!

TIM: Welcome to my humble abode – soon to be. (*Wine.*) What have we got here then?

HILARY: It's Sauvignon Blanc, New Zealand.

*TIM tastes the wine noisily.*

TIM: Mm, not bad, not bad. Brought a whole boot full with me, mostly from the old collection. Red and white. Mainly red. A couple of stunners I'd like you both to try. Pretty good for the price, in my opinion. Yes, between that and Linda's luggage I'm surprised I had room left for a pair of socks. I did you'll be pleased to know. I think she's packed for the whole summer. That or she's left home and this is her roundabout way of breaking it to me.

HILARY: Is she...?

TIM: Oh, yes, went for a bit of a leg stretch herself.

HILARY: Listen, Tim, now I've got you alone for a moment.

TIM: Yes?

HILARY: I just... I just wanted to ask you...

TIM: Yes?

HILARY: It's about Neil.

TIM: Oh.

HILARY: I just wanted to ask you if... Well if you knew of anything – work wise – Neil could perhaps... I know it's probably highly unlikely, but he... he won't ask you himself. Just if you... if you knew of anything.

TIM: Sure. I'll have a... I'll have a think. Tricky time at the moment –

HILARY: Yes.

TIM: People clinging hard on to their jobs as it is.

HILARY: Of course.

TIM: They probably wouldn't look kindly on me fast tracking an old school chum in just to help him out.

HILARY: No, I'm just saying –

TIM: I'll give it a think though, I'll give it a think.

HILARY: Thanks... thanks Tim.

TIM: Still no luck with the...?

HILARY: No. Jerry seems to have it all sewn up. He was the financial brains after all. I did tell Neil to get more involved with that side of things but... Neil being Neil.

TIM: The complete bastard, eh – Jerry that is, not Neil. His own brother! Surely you haven't exhausted all legal avenues.

HILARY: Well no... I haven't, but Neil... he's just given up.

TIM: He shouldn't do that. If I were him, I'd chase the bastard down.

HILARY: Yes well, Neil's not you, Tim.

TIM: I'll give him a little pep talk if you like. Stoke up his fire a bit.

HILARY: Good luck. Oh, your Uncle Sammy wanted you to drop in on him when you arrived.

TIM: Okay. I'll go and see the old badger in a mo. Just enjoying this.

HILARY: You need a top up.

*HILARY exits into the kitchen. TIM takes out his mobile and checks it. He moves about the room checking for reception. LINDA appears outside the window. She glowers in at TIM.*

LINDA: Trying to call me, see how I am?

TIM: No.

LINDA: Didn't think so.

*HILARY enters from the kitchen with the wine bottle.*

HILARY: Linda!

LINDA: Hello, Hils.

HILARY: Had a nice walk?

LINDA: If you call a broken knee nice.

HILARY: Oh dear! What happened?

LINDA: Went down a ditch. Perhaps someone could give me a hand, I can't walk.

HILARY: Yes, let me. Wait there.

LINDA: I will.

*HILARY exits through the front door.*

Too much to ask for you to jump to my aid.

TIM: Hilary's on her way.

LINDA: *(TIM's mobile.)* Send my regards to the bitch.

*HILARY appears outside the window.*

HILARY: Here, give me your arm.

*LINDA and HILARY exit from the window. TIM briefly checks his mobile. He tops up his wine glass. LINDA and HILARY enter through the front door. LINDA's outfit is muddied.*

Just through here.

LINDA:                   *(Pain of knee.)* Ah!

TIM:                      Look at you.

LINDA:                   Yes, just look at me why don't you.

HILARY:                 Come to the sofa here.

*LINDA hobbles to the sofa.*

TIM:                      Doesn't look broken.

LINDA:                   It's broken!

*LINDA sits.*

                              Ah!

HILARY:                 Let me get something... something to put on it.

*HILARY crosses towards the kitchen.*

TIM:                      Better fetch a glass and an ashtray too, Hils, while you're there.

HILARY:                 Oh, okay.

*HILARY exits into the kitchen.*

LINDA:                   Look at this, shit and mud!

TIM:                      It'll scrub out.

LINDA:                   It will not scrub out, it's fucking ruined! *(Shoes.)* And these!  
Shit!

TIM:                      I said those shoes were no good to go hiking in.

LINDA:                   Screw you!

TIM:                      Luckily you brought a change of clothes.

LINDA:                   God, just look at this hovel!

TIM:                      Hardly that.

LINDA:                   And where are we? We appear to be in the middle of nowhere!

*LINDA takes a cigarette from her bag and lights one.*

TIM: *(Calling off.)* Have you got that ashtray in there?

*HILARY appears at the kitchen door with a saucer and a wine glass.*

HILARY: *(Saucer.)* Could only find this, I'm afraid.

TIM: It'll do, thanks.

*TIM takes the saucer and the wine glass. HILARY enters the kitchen. TIM puts the saucer before LINDA.*

Try to keep that contained will you, we don't want this place going up in smoke.

LINDA: Don't we?

TIM: No.

LINDA: I would've said that's exactly what this place needs, a damn good burning down. *(Knee.)* Ow!

*TIM pours a glass of wine and gives it to LINDA.*

TIM: This should take the sting off your broken knee.

LINDA: I'm not spending one night here.

TIM: It'll grow on you.

LINDA: I don't want it to grow on me.

TIM: Good for the soul to rough it a little.

LINDA: You don't have a soul, darling. I'm going to get myself cleaned up and you can drive me to a hotel. Preferably somewhere that happens to be somewhere. I don't care what you do.

*HILARY enters with ice wrapped in a tea towel.*

HILARY: There wasn't much ice left. Should help with any swelling. Perhaps you want to put it up.

*LINDA puts her leg up.*

LINDA: Ow! Ow!

*HILARY places the compress on her knee.*

Ow!

HILARY: How's that?

LINDA: Wonderful, thanks.

HILARY: Maybe you'd just like to hold it there... yourself.

*LINDA holds the compress.*

TIM: (*Giving HILARY her glass.*) Here we are Nurse Hils. Well-earned drink.

HILARY: Thanks. Well... cheers!

TIM: Cheers!

LINDA: (*Sourly.*) Cheers!

HILARY: (*To LINDA.*) Is that working?

LINDA: (*Wine.*) I'm sure it will.

HILARY: Been ages since we did anything like this together.

TIM: Don't think we have, have we? Not together together.

HILARY: No, not Linda.

TIM: That boating holiday in Shropshire.

HILARY: Rained the entire time.

TIM: Yes. (*Pronounced Yuli.*) Juli and her Hungarian cuisine.

HILARY: Yes.

TIM: Insisted on cooking those traditional recipes. Took ages to prepare.

HILARY: I remember us two down in the galley while you and Neil were fighting for control of the helm. And you hit that boat.

TIM: Neil did, not me.

HILARY: Goulash everywhere.

TIM: The boat stank of it for the rest of the holiday.

LINDA: I'm sorry I missed that one. Hopefully I can catch up with this one. Started well anyway.

HILARY: How is it?

LINDA: Painful, but stable thanks.

HILARY: You didn't happen to see Neil out there on your travels did you, Linda?

LINDA: Is he out there?

HILARY: He went to walk of cramp.

LINDA: God help him! It's treacherous out there. I wouldn't give it too much longer before you call the emergency services.

HILARY: I'm sure he'll be okay.

LINDA: You say that.

HILARY: Give him a little longer, shall we?

LINDA: Your call.

HILARY: Well, I'm looking forward to this. Get some bracing walks in.

TIM: Me too.

LINDA: Not me, I'm afraid. Not now.

HILARY: So you used to come down here when you were younger, Tim?

TIM: A few times. Summer holidays mainly. Usually came with a school friend. Get up to no good with the local lasses. Never brought Neil down though. I didn't stay in here, not the house. Uncle Sammy used to live in here back then. We used to stay in the workers' cottages. Unfortunately they burnt down.

HILARY: Oh dear.

TIM: The remains are still there.

HILARY: Electrical fire was it?

TIM: Suspected arson. Uncle Sammy's son, Daniel.

HILARY: Is he...?

TIM: Dead. Drowned himself after he... set fire to the cottages.

HILARY: Oh!

TIM: Found his clothes by the Bristol Channel. Made it that far.

HILARY: No body?

TIM: Those channel tides, you'd be away. He was a tearaway kid. Behavioural problems.

LINDA: Obviously a family gene.

HILARY: Poor Uncle Sammy.

TIM: Yes.

HILARY: Did he have other children?

TIM: Just him.

HILARY: You knew him well, Daniel?

TIM: Not well. Like I say I was with my own friends. He was a bit of a loner I remember. He was younger than me, too. Two or three years made all the difference back then.

LINDA: Well, I'd love to lie around here and reminisce, but I definitely need to find a bath of some description. Get out of these soiled garments. You don't happen to have one of those in this establishment?

TIM: We do. A couple actually.

LINDA: Hot running water?

TIM: Can be arranged with a flick of a switch.

LINDA: Oh, what luck! Top up, please.

*TIM tops up LINDA's glass. LINDA gives compress to HILARY.*

Thanks for this. *(Getting up.)* Ow! Ow! Ow!

HILARY: *(Wine glass.)* Let me take that.

LINDA: It's okay, I can manage.

*LINDA stands.*

Any clues?

TIM: Up the stairs, first on your right.

HILARY: I'll help you up.

LINDA: It's okay, I need to get used to walking unassisted. Perhaps some kind person would bring my things up for me.

TIM: I'll do that. Any particular case?

LINDA: I'll have them all please.

TIM: Thought you might say that.

*LINDA looks at the stairs.*

LINDA: Okay.

*She exits and starts to ascend the stairs.*

*(Off.)* Ow! Ow!

HILARY: *(Calling.)* Okay, Linda? Just call if you need some assistance.

TIM: She will. Well, better bring Madame's cases in for her and then I'll go and visit the old badger.

*TIM drains his glass and gives it to HILARY.*

Thanks for that. Not a bad drop that, not a bad drop. Like I say I'll crack open one of my stunners for tonight. What are we doing for food by the way?

HILARY: Don't worry, all under control tonight. Beef Bourguignon, if that's okay?

TIM: Lovely, you can come again. Got something that will go quite nicely with that. Be good to get your verdict on – and Neil's.

LINDA: *(Upstairs.)* Oh Jesus, you must be joking!

TIM: She'll be better after her soak. Teething problems.

*TIM crosses to the front door.*

Great you could make it, Hils, both of you. This should be fun.

HILARY: Yes, thanks for inviting us.

TIM: Wanted you to see the place in it's raw state before I decide what to do with it. If I see Neil out there skulking in the bushes

I'll send him inside for kitchen duties, shall I?

HILARY: Thanks.

*TIM takes out his mobile and exits through the front door. He passes by the window outside.*

LINDA: *(Upstairs.)* Ow! Bugger! Bugger! Bugger!

*HILARY takes a drink. She takes the wine glasses and the bottle and exits into the kitchen.*

*Shadows and light in the room changes to indicate the passing of a few hours.*

Scene 2

*Same evening. 9.45 p.m.*

*LINDA enters from the kitchen carrying a full wine glass. She crosses to the sofa and sits. She takes cigarettes from her bag and lights one.*

TIM: *(Off.)* No that was definitely, Neil, he'd put the rope around that mooring post far too tightly. It was a good job we had that fire axe.

*TIM appears at the kitchen door with a full wine glass.*

*(Calling back in.)* Sure we can't help with anything?

HILARY: *(Off.)* We're fine, go through.

TIM: *(Calling back in.)* Like I say, our turn tomorrow. See what we can rustle up.

*TIM enters the room.*

LINDA: Not me.

TIM: Fair's fair.

LINDA: I'm not going to be here tomorrow. I thought I'd made that clear.

TIM: Still determined to hate it?

LINDA: What's there to like? It's pokey, smelly, the bed's on a slope, God knows what's crawling around in those sheets and the bath was obviously designed by a dwarf. If I were Laura Evans you wouldn't be subjecting me to this ordeal. We'd be whooping it up together in a five star hotel.

TIM: Would we?

LINDA: You know we would.

TIM: Do I?

LINDA: Yes, you do.

*TIM tastes his wine noisily.*

Ugh! How does she feel about your bestial noises?

TIM: Can we stop talking about her, please? It's not nice for our guests.

LINDA: They ought to know what a swine you are.

TIM: Look... let's just try to be civilised, shall we?

LINDA: Sandrine was right, she told me you'd revert to type, once the gloss wore off. I should have listened to her.

TIM: What type's that then?

LINDA: Scoundrel.

TIM: Sandrine. Your close friend Sandrine are we talking about?

LINDA: Yes.

TIM: The one who turned up late one night at the house when you were in Scotland, wearing just a fur coat.

LINDA: What!

TIM: Stepped out of a taxi, having had one too many vodka and tonics and tried to seduce me.

LINDA: You're lying.

TIM: Why would I make it up?

LINDA: To hurt me. I don't believe you. You're lying.

TIM: Cracking figure she had – underneath that fur coat.

LINDA: She wouldn't.

TIM: Birth mark just about here, if you ever catch it.

LINDA: The bitch! And did you? Well did you?

TIM: Well, being the scoundrel type I am...

*NEIL appears at the kitchen door holding his wine glass.*

Ah, Neil! Come and join the party. (*Wine.*) How you finding that one? Really starts to open up about now, those woody, aromatic notes. I've been trying to educate Linda in the art of

tasting. She says I sound like a bath emptying. I told her one needs to aerate and slurp a little to appreciate a fine wine. Back me up, Neil. Don't know why I never brought you down here Neil – when we were at school. The girls around here were... playful, let's say. Probably the good country air. I should've brought you, Neil. Good place to start one's *education*... so to speak.

*TIM looks out the window.*

Hmm, someone having a fire over there. Hope it's under control. Fire could spread like... well, wildfire, especially in this heat. Said it hit thirty today. Yes, brought Toby down here – Toby Price, remember him? The one with the ears. Trots of course. Even brought Simon Boyle. Dead now. Canoeing accident in the Philippines.

*HILARY enters from the kitchen. She carries her wine glass.*

Here she comes, the culinary supremo.

HILARY: Thank you.

TIM: Like I say, our turn tomorrow. See if I can knock up one of my legendary ratatouilles... with my trusty sous chef.

HILARY: Lovely.

TIM: I'd hold that opinion until after tomorrow night, if I were you.

HILARY: Okay, Linda?

LINDA: Yes, lovely meal, thank you.

HILARY: Like I say, my failsafe recipe. I'll try something more adventurous next time... won't we, Neil?

TIM: Hit the spot for me.

HILARY: So... you have plans for this place, Tim?

TIM: Well, there's options, let's say. Number one – probably the one Uncle Sammy would prefer – is to leave it ticking over as it is, getting a bit of income as a holiday rental. My preference would be to develop and sell. Or to turn it into some kind of business enterprise. Business retreat... or riding school, something like that. There's enough land to build residences, stables... both. No, I've got ideas. See how much the old badger's prepared to hand over. Hopefully it will be the lot, but

mustn't assume. Well, there's no-one else in line, unless he's got some relation tucked away in the woodwork that he's not telling me about. (*Wine.*) Hils, you're looking empty. Let me open another.

HILARY: Don't open one just for me.

LINDA: I'm sure we'll help you out.

TIM: Won't be as robust as this one, but it's something that'll follow nicely on its heels I think you'll find. Don't go away.

HILARY: We won't.

*TIM exits into the kitchen.*

Oh, it's still so hot isn't it?

LINDA: Yes.

HILARY: It's going to be a sticky night.

LINDA: It is.

*HILARY looks through the window.*

HILARY: Oh, must be them – their fire. They said they'd be over there somewhere.

LINDA: Who?

HILARY: Girl who passed by earlier, looking for someone. She said they were having a party, celebrating Midsummer's Eve.

LINDA: What was she, a Druid?

HILARY: Don't think so, didn't look like one. Unless she was in disguise. Maybe she was out looking for virgins.

LINDA: Virgins? What for?

HILARY: To sacrifice.

LINDA: Oh yes, that's what they do out in these rural parts isn't it, toss virgins on fires. I saw a documentary about it once.

HILARY: Maybe that's why she asked us to join them, looking for fresh victims. I should've put up a sign: 'Sorry, no virgins here'.

LINDA: She asked us to join them?

TIM: *(Off.)* Ah balls! *(Calling.)* Pardon my French. Cork failure. Talk amongst yourselves.

LINDA: She asked us to join them! What are we doing sitting around here? Let's party! Where is it?

HILARY: Over there. See?

LINDA: Oh yes. Looks like fun. What age were they?

HILARY: Mid twenties, she was.

LINDA: Okay. What are we waiting for? Neil's up for a party aren't you, Neil.

NEIL: No thanks.

LINDA: Come on, Neil, let your hair down. Okay, Hils and I will go, leave you menfolk to chew the fat together. What do you say, Hils, teach the local lads a trick or two – strictly dancing you understand, Neil.

*TIM enters from the kitchen with new wine bottle.*

TIM: Hey presto! A cheeky Cotes du Rhone to follow nicely on the heels of the Claret. Hils?

LINDA: We're going out.

TIM: Out?

LINDA: Hils and I are. You're staying here to keep Neil company.

NEIL: I don't need keeping company, thanks.

TIM: Going where?

LINDA: To a party.

TIM: Whose party?

LINDA: I don't know. Hils knows them.

HILARY: Well –

LINDA: We can go like this, can't we? It's roughing it a bit after all, dancing round a camp fire. We don't need Gucci for that. And we mustn't go empty handed, it wouldn't be polite. *(To TIM.)* You don't mind if we take a couple of bottles? Thanks.

*LINDA exits into the kitchen.*

TIM: Whose party?

HILARY: Oh, just someone I met earlier. She asked us along. Where that fire is over there.

TIM: *(Calling off.)* Don't pick up anything with Bordeaux on the label.

*LINDA enters from the kitchen with two bottles of wine.*

Two!

LINDA: We mustn't appear mean, must we? These acceptable? Okay, Hils?

HILARY: I'm... I'm not sure.

LINDA: What!

HILARY: I'm not really up for... a party.

LINDA: Come on, where's your youthful spirit!

HILARY: I'm a bit... a bit tired.

LINDA: Oh God! Come on, it'll wake you up. It'll wake *me* up.

TIM: You heard her, she doesn't want to go. Looks like it's just you. And you'll only be needing one of those.

*TIM retrieves a bottle from LINDA.*

LINDA: *(To HILARY.)* Spoil sport!

HILARY: Sorry.

LINDA: It's not going to stop me, I want to have some fun. *(To HILARY.)* Last chance. Okay, just me.

TIM: Your broken knee has made a remarkable recovery. Perhaps call the Vatican and proclaim it a miracle.

LINDA: See you later.

TIM: We won't wait up.

*LINDA exits through the front door.*

HILARY: Do you think she'll be...?

TIM: She'll be fine. Probably find her face down in another ditch tomorrow.

HILARY: Perhaps I should go with her.

TIM: Only if you want to. She's a big girl now.

HILARY: Sorry.

TIM: What for?

HILARY: For mentioning it.

TIM: Not your fault, party happening she'd have sniffed it out sooner or later. (*Wine.*) Here, have some of this. Drink up, mustn't mix.

HILARY: Just a little, thanks.

*TIM pours.*

Thanks.

TIM: Neil?

NEIL: No... thanks.

TIM: Still savouring that one. Good man. A very palatable Rhône, this one. I think so anyway – for the price. See what you think.

*TIM pours some for himself. He tastes, noisily.*

The secret of the Rhone is you have to drink them young, don't let them hang about too long – not like the Bordeaux, some of those you can keep tucked away till your dotage – if you can wait that long. Quality varies of course with the Rhone, as all wines, from the ordinary to the exceptional. This in my opinion is somewhere in between. What do you think?

HILARY: It's lovely. Cheers!

TIM: Cin cin!

HILARY: Tim, you were... you mentioned just before dinner...

TIM: Oh, oh yes... Yes, Neil, one of our regional branches is having a bit of a reshuffle. Stevenage. Can't promise anything, but can

keep an ear out to see if... you know... Like I say –

HILARY: That would be great, Tim.

TIM: Can't promise anything. I'll keep an ear out.

*NEIL gets up and crosses to the front door.*

HILARY: Neil? Where you going?

NEIL: I need some air.

HILARY: Neil?

NEIL: I've got better things to do than be a fucking tea boy in Stevenage, thanks.

HILARY: It's hardly going to be –

*NEIL exits through the front door.*

Neil! Neil! *(To herself.)* Oh!

TIM: Well... we thought he might not take too kindly to me offering a... didn't we? Proud man, Neil, doesn't want...

HILARY: He doesn't want to fight, that's what he doesn't want.

TIM: Oh I'm sure it's just a temporary... I mean he's still licking his wounds from what happened with... He'll bounce back, you'll see. Just give him time.

HILARY: He's had time, plenty of time.

TIM: Similar thing happened to a chap at work, Leonard. Business went belly up. He went under for a spell. *(Drink.)* Hit the old... He bounced back though. He's a key man with us now. Just needed time.

HILARY: Sometimes I wonder if...

TIM: What? Hils?

HILARY: If it's me.

TIM: You!

HILARY: Maybe I'm just too... I don't know, indulgent with him, don't stand up and... We're not very good at confrontation, either of us. That's probably why he's in the mess he is and I'm not...

helping him to...

TIM: He has to do it himself, Hils.

HILARY: I know but... I need to *inspire*. Sometimes I think he'd be better off with... someone who's more...

TIM: No, you're not to think like that.

HILARY: I do, Tim, I do.

TIM: I'll see if I can... give him a little pep talk. I still say you need to go after that bastard, don't let him off the hook.

HILARY: I think Jerry's pretty happily... swimming in open water again now.

TIM: I'll see what I can do. The trouble is Neil might not take it from me, we go back too far together, there's rivalry, we can get under each other's skin. Doesn't mean I won't try, doesn't mean I won't try. No, he'll bounce back, you'll see. Give him time. (*Wine.*) Mm, this one's starting to come to life a bit now. The fruit's coming to the fore.

HILARY: I... met someone.

TIM: What's that?

HILARY: At one of my events. A man. Richard.

TIM: Ah.

HILARY: There's not... there's been no... not like that. We've just... we've had a couple of meals together, talked... about things. I know he wants to... take things further... with me, if I – he knows about Neil, told him all about Neil. His wife died a few years back in a skiing accident. He's got two children – teenagers – both away at school, boarding.

TIM: Which one?

HILARY: I don't know. He went into a bit of a hole in himself, when his wife...

TIM: (*Yawning.*) Understandably. Sorry, country air. Go on, I'm listening.

HILARY: Yes, he started drinking too, heavily he said. Boys had to be taken in by an aunt. He felt cheated by life, by... he had a strong faith before that happened. He said it all just collapsed

about his ears... his God. Thought about possibly... well ending it on a couple of occasions. He was in a very bad place... he said. And then, one day, he just felt enough was enough. He had an epiphany, he could carry on living like this for the rest of his days, or he could think of all the wonderful times he'd had with her, be thankful for it, but now move on. He's only late forties, still young. Start again... new relationship, marriage perhaps, kids again... perhaps. I've even been thinking about mentioning him to Neil, let him know that I have an admirer, just to make Neil... Might backfire though and send him into more of a downward spiral. I don't want to be responsible for that. Anyway, just wanted to... Well, it's just good sometimes just to have a... a –

*TIM snores.*

*(More to herself.)* Listening ear.

*HILARY carefully takes TIM's wine glass from his hand and places it on the table. She sips her own wine and crosses to the window and looks out. She turns back into the room. She has another drink of wine. She crosses to the mirror and checks her face. She crosses to the front door, picking up the unopened wine bottle on the way. She exits through the front door, quietly closing the door behind her. TIM continues to sleep. Lights down. In the blackout the sound of the celebrations is heard. Instruments being played, people shouting, cheering, clapping, having fun. Maybe the names of LINDA and HILARY being cheered on in their dancing.*

Scene 3

*The following morning. 10.00 a.m.*

*Birdsong is heard outside. Sunlight steams through the opened window. Wine glasses, bottles and ashtray have been cleared away. KELLY appears at the window. She looks through.*

KELLY: Hello? Nad? You in here? Nad?

*KELLY exits from the window. She enters through the front door. She carries a bakery bag. She crosses towards the kitchen.*

Nad?

*TIM enters through the front door. He is dressed and carries a mug of tea.*

TIM: Can I help you?

KELLY: Oh! Hi.

TIM: Hello? Looking for someone... something?

KELLY: Nad.

TIM: Dog?

KELLY: No, human being... sometimes.

TIM: Why would he be in here?

KELLY: He was coming back here with Hils and Linda. I was sent to get breakfast. Are you Neil or Tim?

TIM: Tim.

KELLY: Kelly – Kells.

TIM: You're from the party?

KELLY: You didn't come.

TIM: Wasn't invited.

KELLY: You were by me.

TIM: Lost in communication.

KELLY: It was good fun.

TIM: Looked fun from here. So where are they, Hils and Linda?

KELLY: Not here. I bet he's taken them to see the new one, crop circle.

TIM: Crop circle?

KELLY: You know, formation, pattern in the crops. You must've seen them. There was a new one this morning, we heard. He's probably taken them to see that. He promised we'd all go together. Sod him, I don't care.

TIM: Sounds like you do. Boyfriend, this Nad?

KELLY: No. Just someone I met. (*Croissant etc.*) Want one?

TIM: No thanks.

KELLY: Mind if I do? I'm starving.

*KELLY eats.*

TIM: Hilary's with you?

KELLY: With him.

TIM: She was at the party too, last night?

KELLY: Yeah, she came to join us. She likes a good dance. Knows how to have fun. So does Linda.

TIM: She does... under the right circumstances.

KELLY: Guess they were right for her last night. Sure you don't want one, they're good.

TIM: You don't sound local.

KELLY: That's 'cos I'm not.

TIM: Where are you from, Kells?

KELLY: Nowhere in particular.

TIM: Never been, is it nice?

KELLY: Suits me.

TIM: You must've been born somewhere.

KELLY: Yeah, Dagenham. Ever been?

TIM: No.

KELLY: Don't. Left home when I was fifteen, haven't stopped walking since.

TIM: Sounds tiring.

KELLY: Suits me.

TIM: So what are you doing here, if you don't mind me asking?

KELLY: Having fun. Is that your car outside?

TIM: Which one?

KELLY: The shiny blue one.

TIM: Yes.

KELLY: Looks expensive.

TIM: It is.

KELLY: Looks like you like having fun too.

TIM: When I can.

KELLY: You like to travel?

TIM: When I can.

KELLY: When you're not busy making money.

TIM: Can't travel without it.

KELLY: I can.

TIM: I think I probably require a few more luxuries than you do. Don't quite do the sleeping under the stars stuff.

KELLY: Shame.

TIM: Is it?

KELLY: Connects us to nature, the wonder of everything.

TIM: Each to their own.

KELLY: What's your pleasure then, apart from driving round in your shiny blue car and making money?

TIM: Apart from driving around in my shiny blue car and making money, I like to drink a fine champagne, a fine wine, smoke a fine cigar on occasion, watch the tennis, rugby, cricket. Take a sailing boat out every now and again. Look into the eyes of a beautiful woman. The rest I'd better not go into.

KELLY: She says you're having an affair.

TIM: She told you that? Mind you she tells everyone that.

KELLY: Are you?

TIM: If I told you I was, you'd tell her.

KELLY: She already knows.

TIM: No, she doesn't. She's very good at suspecting, not at finding anything out.

KELLY: So you are.

TIM: It's none of your business, young lady.

KELLY: Okay. So where do you like to travel then... when you can?

TIM: Wherever the spirit takes me.

KELLY: You sound like me. Where in particular?

TIM: Italy, one of my favourites. France from time to time. The Maldives, the Caribbean, The Seychelles, Gulf of Mexico.

KELLY: Okay, where's your favourite favourite place you've ever been? Best ever holiday? Ever ever?

TIM: Ever ever?

KELLY: Ever ever.

TIM: Italy. A place down south on the Amalfi Coast.

KELLY: Tell me about it. What happened? Who were you with? How long ago?

TIM: Twenty odd years ago, with a girl called Francesca. Her uncle

had a place down there. He was going away on business, we had the opportunity to stay there alone and enjoy it. We did. Beautiful place. Little fishing village. Unspoilt. Was back then. Hopefully still is. We used to sit on the balcony drinking the local plonk, watching the sun setting and the fishing boats bobbing in the water. She was incredibly passionate too.

- KELLY: What happened to her?
- TIM: She left me for a nice Italian man. Such is life.
- KELLY: I'd like to go.
- TIM: You should, you'd like it.
- KELLY: Maybe you could take me.
- TIM: Love to, but bit of a schlep in one afternoon, I'm afraid.
- KELLY: Who's talking about one afternoon?
- TIM: We're not?
- KELLY: I'm not.
- TIM: Then what are you talking about?
- KELLY: We get in your car, your shiny blue one, and we drive and drive. Stop on the way, when we need to. Sleep in the car – or a hotel, if you're paying – keep on driving until we get there. Look around the place, you could even look up Francesca if you want.
- TIM: Probably best not.
- KELLY: When you get bored you can just drop me off and drive back.
- TIM: You make it sound so easy.
- KELLY: It is.
- TIM: Well, it's a tempting offer.
- KELLY: Then let's do it.
- TIM: You'd go with me, a complete stranger?
- KELLY: You're not a complete stranger.
- TIM: A relatively complete stranger.

KELLY: Everybody is, if you think about it.

TIM: I suppose so. I might be a psychotic pervert for all you know.

KELLY: Are you?

TIM: If I was I probably wouldn't tell you.

KELLY: I'll take my chances.

TIM: Like I say, it's a tempting offer. I think one or two people may object to the idea.

KELLY: Linda or...?

TIM: Linda.

KELLY: She seems to be having fun enough of her own without you. She was last night. She probably won't miss you.

TIM: Wouldn't he miss you?

KELLY: Who?

TIM: Your Nad?

KELLY: He's not my Nad.

TIM: Is that what this is about, getting back at him?

KELLY: I should go.

TIM: Aren't you going to wait for them?

KELLY: (*Bakery bag.*) Here, you might as well keep these. I recommend the one's with chocolate in. If you see them, tell them I've been and gone. Tell him I've gone. Nice to meet you, Tim. Have a nice holiday.

*There is a knock at the door.*

SAMMY: (*Off.*) Knock knock!

TIM: Come in.

*SAMMY enters through the front door. He carries an old briefcase.*

Ah, morning Uncle Sammy.

*SAMMY eyes KELLY suspiciously.*

SAMMY: Morning, Timothy.

TIM: Oh, this is Kelly – Kells. She just dropped in to say hello.

KELLY: Hello.

TIM: It's okay, Uncle Sammy, I don't think she bites.

SAMMY: You ask her in did you, Timothy?

TIM: Well, not as such, but –

KELLY: It's okay, I'm going.

SAMMY: I suppose you know nothing about that thing in my field this morning.

KELLY: If you're meaning the crop circle –

SAMMY: Crop circle! That's vandalism that is, plain and simple. You and your accomplices, I know who you are, I've been watching you.

TIM: Uncle Sammy, I'm sure –

KELLY: If you've been watching us, why didn't you stop us?

SAMMY: Next time I will, with my gun.

TIM: Uncle Sammy –

SAMMY: Mr Stoner pays good money for that land, it's his livelihood you're messing with... and mine. If the police don't do nothing, I will. Put a stop to your fun and games.

TIM: Okay –

KELLY: You don't know who it is.

TIM: Kells –

SAMMY: I know.

KELLY: You're just guessing.

TIM: Kelly –

SAMMY: Who else would it be?

KELLY: Aliens.

SAMMY: Aliens! Don't give me that!

TIM: Okay, I think we can –

KELLY: You don't know, you don't know anything, you're just assuming it's us because we're an easy target to pin things on. You're a prejudiced, assuming old... arse!

TIM: Now, Kelly –

SAMMY: Let me –

*SAMMY makes a move towards KELLY with his fist raised. TIM stops him.*

TIM: Uncle Sammy!

SAMMY: Nobody speaks to me like that!

TIM: Uncle Sammy!

SAMMY: Not in my house! Let me teach her a – I'll teach you a lesson, young lady!

KELLY: Yeah, try.

TIM: Kelly, go and wait in the kitchen! Through there!

SAMMY: Get her out of my house! I want her out of my house!

*SAMMY starts coughing and wheezing.*

TIM: Okay, Uncle Sammy, I will. You just need to... Let me get you some water. Sit down –

SAMMY: You get her out of here!

TIM: I will, just –

SAMMY: She's trouble! They all are! Thieving vandals! I'll 'ave her! *(Calling.)* I'll 'ave you! You and your friends!

TIM: Uncle Sammy –

SAMMY: *(Calling.)* With my gun! *(To TIM.)* I'll come back at a more convenient hour, Timothy, when she's gone. *(At door.)* They're

trouble, they all are. They were vandalising things around my caravan last night. Jip knew it. We need to put a stop to their fun and games. If the police won't do nothing, I will. I'd make sure she's not thieving right now, if I were you.

*SAMMY exits through the front door.*

TIM: You can come out now, he's gone.

*KELLY enters from the kitchen.*

KELLY: Your uncle. Poor you.

TIM: Probably wasn't a good idea to throw stones at the hornet's nest.

KELLY: I've seen him around with his dog. Miserable old sod!

TIM: So he was wrong was he, about his field this morning?

KELLY: Nothing to do with us, we were having a party.

TIM: Aliens?

KELLY: Wasn't us.

*KELLY looks out the window.*

Safe to go. Tell them I've gone. See ya!

*KELLY crosses to the front door.*

TIM: Listen... Kells, if you fancy a ride in the shiny blue motor I'd be happy to oblige. Can't promise Italy, but maybe we can enjoy some of the more local sights. Put the roof down, feel the wind in our hair.

KELLY: What will your Uncle have to say about that?

TIM: What he doesn't see won't hurt him.

KELLY: Okay.

TIM: After you.

*KELLY exits through the front door. TIM checks his mobile and exits through the front door. They pass by the window outside. Sound of car doors opening and closing. Sound of engine starting up followed by a couple of throaty revs. Sound of car pulling away and*

*into the distance. After a few moments. NEIL enters from upstairs. He is dressed, but in a dishevelled way. He tentatively looks to see if people are gone. He crosses to the window and looks out. He rubs his stiff shoulder. He notices the bakery bag and examines the contents. He looks off into the kitchen. He crosses to the front door and looks outside for a moment. He comes back inside, leaving the front door open. He sits on the sofa and attempts to loosen his shoulder. He takes a pastry from the bakery bag and eats. NAD appears at the window. He watches NEIL for a couple of moments as he eats and eases his shoulder. NAD exits from the window and appears at the open front door.*

NAD: Knock knock!

*NEIL turns abruptly, pulling his neck.*

NEIL: Ah!

NAD: Sorry, didn't mean to...

NEIL: Who – who are you?

NAD: Nad. I'm a friend of Linda, Hils – your wife is it? You're Neil?

NEIL: What do you want?

NAD: I'm looking for Kells – Kelly. Girl. *(Gives brief description of hair and attire.)* You seen her?

NEIL: No.

NAD: *(Bakery bag.)* That yours? Good bakery that. Must be hers.

NEIL: There's no-one here.

NAD: She must've gone. Lost track of time. Left them in it, soaking it up – the new crop circle, appeared this morning. They want to get themselves kitted out for today – like a couple of Earth Goddesses – for the Feast of Litha.

NEIL: Look –

NAD: It's okay, I'm not dangerous. Only if I'm not fed. *(Bakery bag.)* Do you mind?

*NAD helps himself to the bakery bag. He checks the contents.*

Aw, she didn't buy my favourites! This'll do.

*He takes one and eats.*

I guess that was Tim driving off, I caught a glimpse of his motor. Pretty nice. He must be loaded. Maybe she's gone off with him.

NEIL: Please –

NAD: It's okay, I'll go if you're not comfortable with me here. Like I invited  
invited here.

NEIL: Who by?

NAD: Linda and Hils.

NEIL: Where are they?

NAD: Like I say, probably gone to get themselves kitted out. I'm sure they won't be long. I can wait outside if it makes you feel more relaxed. Got a bad shoulder? I can give it a massage if you like. Good wiv' me 'ands.

NEIL: No thanks.

NAD: Used to do massage for people. Know all the core muscles.

NEIL: I'm okay.

NAD: Okay. That's right, you didn't know.

NEIL: What?

NAD: Hils ran off without telling you.

NEIL: Hilary.

NAD: Sorry, Hilary. She said you'd gone off somewhere, so she came to the party. She likes a good dance, so does Linda. Really going for it they were. We could hardly keep up with them. They were an example to us all. Can't wait to see what they're wearing? Another hot one. It'll probably hit thirty again. I say it's going to break soon. The heavens are going to open, you'll see. I love the sun though. Everybody's so much happier when the sun's out, stripping off and having fun.

*NAD has taken out a Zippo lighter. He flicks the*

*lid a couple of times.*

Zippo. Good lighters. Reliable. This one was made in Niagara Falls. They used them in the US army during World War Two and Vietnam. Soldiers liked them 'cos they hardly blew out in bad weather.

*NAD blows on the side to demonstrate. The flame doesn't go out.*

See. Secret... if you blow them from the top...

*NAD does so. The flame is extinguished.*

Everything's got a weakness... if you know where to look. People too. It's like doing massage if you know the right points... you can make grown men cry, like that. Just a little touch will do it. No, you missed a lot of fun last night. Shame you couldn't make it. We had a bit of a heart to heart Hils and I, if you don't mind me saying.

NEIL: Hilary.

NAD: Sorry, Hilary. She said you were having a few problems – at work with –

NEIL: That's none of your business.

NAD: I know, but she was telling me, it would've been rude not to listen. Some people think they can just do things to people... without there being any consequences. There's always consequences, they'll come back and get you... sooner or later. Just a matter of time. Your brother will have his consequences.

NEIL: Look – I don't want to talk about him.

NAD: No, I understand that, the wound is still raw.

NEIL: Look, please.

NAD: Okay, we won't talk about you. I'm just relaying what she told me, that's all. I know what it's like, I've been betrayed before, screwed over – not just by girlfriends. What goes around comes around. The thing is, what are we going to do about it? Do we suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or instead take arms against a sea of troubles... and end them? And I guess revenge can be sweet sometimes.

NEIL: I've got no idea what you're talking about.

NAD: It's Shakespeare. I'll give you an example, to illustrate. There was this boy I knew at school. Little skinny kid he was, always got picked on. Certainly not what one would call academic. Not anything really. Actually he was a good runner, I guess he had to be to get away from the bullies. I didn't have too much to do with him myself. He kept himself to himself, bit of an outsider – that's probably why they picked on him. You know what kids are like, they'll exploit any weakness shown... any difference. Anyway... one summer holiday, I came across him. He was sitting on a tree stump, alone, crying. I asked him what the matter was. He didn't want to talk. I just reckoned one of the bullies had picked on him again. I didn't push it, so I just spoke about other things. Sat at a distance so he wouldn't get nervous. After some time, I guess I'd won his trust 'cos he started talking. He showed me a bruise on his arm. I asked him where he got it, which one of the kids did it to him – if it was one of the other kids. He said it wasn't. He said it was his dad. He used to beat him, a lot. He'd broken something in the house, was an accident he said. His old man just laid into him. He lifted his shirt, showed me more bruises, big ones, burn marks even from... God knows what.

NEIL: Did you report it?

NAD: No.

NEIL: Why not?

NAD: I don't know, I should've done – I didn't.

NEIL: You should've.

NAD: Yes, anyway, that's not the story. His mum had died the year before – he said. It sounded like she was the only one protecting him from the sadistic... fucker. Another thing, the kid said, his old man believed he wasn't his – his son. Said he suspected his mum had done the dirty with an uncle of his. The kid I guess was a constant reminder of that. One day the kid disappeared, ran off, like the world had swallowed him up. There were stories about what had happened to him. Some said one thing, others said something else, but no-one knew for sure. Don't think it particularly bothered his old man though. He was probably glad to be rid of him. My guess was that he'd had one beating too many and just ran... ran for his life.

NEIL: And... so?

NAD: Stay with me, Neil, 'cos this is where it gets interesting. Some years later – an old school friend told me – the kid came back. He was alive, very much alive. No longer the scrawny little

runt he once was. He'd been brought up by life, life's hardships and its lessons – probably nothing though like what he'd gone through with his old man. He just walked back into his old man's house. His old man knew – I guess – who he was and what he was going to do. He knew he had it coming.

NEIL: What did he do... the kid?

*NAD takes the fire poker from the fire irons.*

NAD: He picked up the old man's fire poker – probably the one he'd used so often to torture the kid with – he raised it above his head and beat out the old man's brains.

NEIL: He killed him?

NAD: He wasn't coming back from that.

NEIL: How did he know, your friend?

NAD: It was in the local paper.

NEIL: What happened to him, the kid?

NAD: Made peace with himself I should imagine.

NEIL: I hardly think so.

NAD: No?

NEIL: Murderers don't find peace.

NAD: How do you know? You ever murdered anyone?

NEIL: No, but –

NAD: Then you don't know. Anyway, it wasn't murder, it was revenge.

NEIL: That's still murder.

NAD: What would you have done – if you were him – laid down and taken it?

NEIL: I wouldn't have killed him.

NAD: You don't know what you're capable of until you're pushed.

NEIL: Yes I do.

NAD: Anyway, you obviously don't feel the need to get back at anybody, your brother for instance?

NEIL: No.

NAD: You must be a little peeved surely.

NEIL: Yes, but I'm hardly going to beat out his brains with a poker.

NAD: I bet you've thought about it once or twice.

NEIL: No, I haven't.

NAD: So you're just going to lie down and take it?

NEIL: I don't want to talk about it, thanks.

*NAD puts the poker back with the rest of the fire irons.*

NAD: They're taking their time. Must be having trouble choosing their outfits. Can't wait to see them, can you?

*NAD flicks the lid of the Zippo a couple of times.*

Oh, I suppose I shouldn't tell you this, she probably didn't want it to get any further, when I was talking to Hils – sorry, Hilary –

last night. She...

NEIL: What?

NAD: No, I shouldn't betray her trust.

NEIL: What?

NAD: But I think I have a duty to tell you because by the sound of it it's not too late.

NEIL: Too late? For what?

NAD: To take action...you.

NEIL: On what?

NAD: She was talking about someone – a man, called Richard, someone she met. Ring a bell?

NEIL: No.

NAD: Like I say, I don't think it's anything... yet. I'm just telling you

because you just might want to... well, not just lie down and take it. Action is probably required.

NEIL: You're just making this up to...

NAD: To hurt you? No, that's not what I do. I'm just saying –

NEIL: (*Angrier.*) What are you saying?

NAD: I'm just suggesting you might want to start giving her a little more *attention*, if you know what I mean.

NEIL: Look –

NAD: Hey, don't shoot the messenger.

*Sound of runners approaching outside the front door. A cry of exasperation from LINDA.*

HILARY: (*Off.*) Yes, the winner!

LINDA: (*Off.*) Oh, you bastard!

NAD: Sounds like the Goddesses are back!

*Blackout.*