

# A THORN IN MIDSUMMER

by

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Characters:

Cast of 7 (4M 3F)

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

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. 10.30 a.m.  
Scene 4 – Later that morning 11.30 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 casement window also on the US wall. 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. An old wooden kitchen chair is somewhere in the room. A fireplace is built into the SL wall with a set of fire irons nearby. A small wall mirror is on one of the walls and a large picture of a rural scene is high above the fireplace.*

*Sound of window being hit and a catch being unfastened. NAD enters from the kitchen. He holds a Zippo lighter and flicks the lid as he surveys the room. He notices the set of fire irons. He crosses to them and picks out the poker. He remembers. NAD is interrupted by a thought. He looks up to the picture above the fireplace. He takes a wooden chair and places it underneath. He is about to step up on it when the sound of dog barking is heard in the distance. NAD hurriedly, but deliberately, positions the poker on the chair. He then exits into the kitchen. Sound of window closing. Dog barking draws closer.*

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

*Sound of keys opening the front door. SAMMY enters through the front door. He notices the poker on the chair.*

(Calling.) Hello? Hello? Anyone 'ere? Timothy?

*He takes the poker and crosses to the kitchen.*

Timothy?

*SAMMY looks inside the kitchen. He then crosses to the door to upstairs and opens it.*

(Calling up.) Timothy? You 'ere? Timothy?

*He starts to cough and wheeze. He takes out a hip flask and has a couple of swigs. There is the sound of a car*

*arriving. Jip barks.*

Jip! Shut it, boy!

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

Jip! Shut it!

*He raises the poker threateningly. Jip whimpers and falls silent. SAMMY turns back into the room. He puts the poker with the rest of the fire irons and replaces the chair. He crosses to the window and opens one side of the casement windows. Sound of car doors opening and closing. Jip barks again.*

Jip!

*HILARY appears outside 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 most 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, shut it!

HILARY: Looks like we beat them to it. Okay to come in?

SAMMY: It's open.

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

*HILARY exits from the window. She enters through the front door carrying a couple of shopping bags.*

So hot, isn't it? This is nice.

SAMMY: How do you know him then – Timothy?

HILARY: Friends from school – him and Neil.

*Jip barks.*

SAMMY: Jip!

*NEIL appears outside the window.*

HILARY: It's okay, he doesn't bite. I'm assuming he doesn't.

SAMMY: Not unless I tell him to.

HILARY: Come in.

*NEIL exits from the window.*

He's got a stiff shoulder... slept awkwardly in the car.

*NEIL appears at the front door.*

NEIL: Hi.

SAMMY: Hello.

HILARY: My husband, Neil.

SAMMY: You know him from school then – Timothy – she says?

NEIL: Yes.

SAMMY: He's coming with her I presume.

HILARY: Linda? Yes.

SAMMY: Gold digger that one. Spot 'em a mile off, spot 'em a mile off.

HILARY: Tim says you're passing the place on to him.

SAMMY: Timothy will give you the guided tour no doubt. Word of warning: we get 'em around 'ere – troublemakers. You'd do best to lock up when you go out and when you turn in for the night. If they can see it they'll 'ave it.

HILARY: Right, thanks for the warning. Who's they?

SAMMY: Youths, vandals... troublemakers. (*Mimes lifting a shotgun.*) One of these days I'll catch 'em at it, then they'll be sorry.

HILARY: You'd shoot them?

SAMMY: Put the fear of God into 'em. Make sure they don't come back. Key's in the door. Tell Timothy to call on me when he comes.

HILARY: Will do.

SAMMY: Just him... not her.

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

Move it, Jip! Get going!

*Barking fades into the distance.*

HILARY: Wouldn't like to get on the wrong side of him. How is it?

NEIL: Stiff.

HILARY: *(Demonstrating arm movement.)* Do this.

NEIL: I can't.

HILARY: Try.

NEIL: I can't, it's seized up.

HILARY: Try. Okay, better put some of this stuff into a fridge before it expires.

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

Open one of these, shall we? Just about cold enough still. Which one, the Pinot Grigio or the Sauvignon Blanc? Neil?

NEIL: What?

HILARY: Pick one, any one.

NEIL: I don't know.

HILARY: Just pick one.

NEIL: I don't care, whatever.

HILARY: Okay, I choose this one.

*HILARY exits into the kitchen with the shopping. Sound of things being put away. NEIL attempts to stretch out*

*his arm.*

NEIL: Ah! Ah!

*He gives up and sits. HILARY enters from the kitchen with two glasses of white wine.*

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

*She puts NEIL's glass beside him.*

*(Drinking.)* Mmm, not a bad choice... if I say so myself.

*HILARY opens the remaining half of the casement window.*

NEIL: This is going to be hell, all of us cooped up in here like this.

HILARY: No, it won't.

NEIL: Cabin fever, that's what it'll be.

HILARY: Well I, for one, am not going to be spending the week cooped up inside – and neither are you. We're going to go on some good, long, bracing walks – just the two of us. They'll want to be off doing their own things too. Listen to that.

NEIL: What?

HILARY: Shhh! Listen.

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... remembering?

NEIL: No.

HILARY: Cyprus. In that cave, remember? Never in a cornfield before – wheat field. Might be... fun, outside in nature... in the sunshine. Take a picnic... some wine. Neil?

NEIL: Pretty rough that stuff.

HILARY: Barley field then, not fussy.

NEIL: Probably get someone like him shooting at us.

HILARY: We'll find somewhere quiet, discreet, out of the way. Well... just a thought, if you wanted to... if you... felt like it.

NEIL: I don't even like him.

HILARY: Oh!

NEIL: We both can't stand *her*. I've got no idea what we're doing here

HILARY: Having a bloody holiday, Neil! (*Calming herself.*) And it's not true I can't stand her. We just wouldn't choose to be friends if it wasn't for Tim, but I'm prepared to make an effort... to be sociable. And it's not true you don't like Tim.

NEIL: We've got nothing to say to each other – not nowadays. We never really had.

HILARY: Rubbish!

NEIL: And he's only interested in you when he's talking about him.

HILARY: Well you talk about *you* then. Give him something else to be interested in.

NEIL: He's not interested in me, that's what I'm saying.

HILARY: Anyway, I still want you to ask him, Neil.

NEIL: No.

HILARY: Yes, it's a good opportunity while we're –

NEIL: I don't need any charity hand-outs.

HILARY: It's not, Neil, it's just –

NEIL: Especially not from him.

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

NEIL: No.

HILARY: Neil –

NEIL: No! (*Clutching his leg.*) Ah!

HILARY: What? What is it?

NEIL: Cramp!

HILARY: Stand up. Stand up. Walk on it.

*NEIL staggers about the room.*

NEIL: Ah!

HILARY: Put some weight on it. Better?

NEIL: No.

*NEIL crosses to the front door.*

HILARY: Where are you going?

NEIL: To walk it off.

*NEIL exits through the front door.*

HILARY: Neil...? *(To herself.)* Oh!

*HILARY takes out her mobile, checks it and tries about the room for reception. She exits into the kitchen.*

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

*KELLY appears outside the window.*

Nad? Are you in here? Nad?

*KELLY exits from the window. HILARY enters from the kitchen.*

HILARY: Hello?

*KELLY appears at the front door.*

KELLY: Oh, hi.

HILARY: Hello?

KELLY: Looking for someone. Nad. I guess he's not in here.

HILARY: No.

KELLY: Kelly.

HILARY: Hilary.

KELLY: This your place?

HILARY: Yes – well, no, belongs to a friend.

KELLY: Nice. On holiday?

HILARY: Yes.

KELLY: Croppie?

HILARY: Sorry?

KELLY: You a croppie? Into crop circles?

HILARY: Oh.

KELLY: Obviously not.

HILARY: No.

KELLY: This is the place to come if you are, where they all happen – most of them – the best ones. Nad and me have just been in one– before he ran off. He’s always doing that. It’s a couple of days old now but it hasn’t been too trampled in yet by the croppies. It’s definitely genuine though.

HILARY: Genuine?

KELLY: Not made by people that is.

HILARY: Who then... aliens?

KELLY: Call me a fruitcake, but I like to think we might not be alone in this universe. I mean it’s a big universe.

HILARY: True. How can you tell the difference between the genuines and the...

KELLY: The fakes? Easy, the genuine one’s have got an energy to them – especially when they first appear and the fakes don’t. Also the genuines are pretty perfect and the fakes are usually... well pretty shit. Also they happen too quickly – the genuine ones. You’d be up on some hill looking down at some field, you’d go away then come back an hour later – same spot – you’d look down – same field – and they’d be one there – a massive one sometimes, over ten trams wide – that’s big. Detailed too – not just a big circle. Would’ve taken hours and hours – days perhaps – if it was made by people. Maybe you should go and check it out for yourself – the one up the road here.

HILARY: Maybe.

KELLY: Turn into the field at the phone box. Walk down the tramline a couple of minutes and you can’t miss it... you’ll be in it.

HILARY: Okay.

KELLY: Celebrating tonight.

HILARY: Oh, what's the occasion?

KELLY: Midsummer's Eve.

HILARY: You celebrate that do you?

KELLY: Do tonight. Come along if you like – join us. We're over there, the other side of the village – if you can call it that. You'll probably hear us – and see our fire.

HILARY: Thanks. There's others joining so... have to see.

KELLY: Bring them along too. The more the merrier. If he shows up – Nad – tell him I've gone back to camp will you?

HILARY: Will do.

KELLY: Nice to meet you, Hilary.

HILARY: You too... Kelly.

KELLY: That's it. Might see you later.

HILARY: Perhaps.

*KELLY exits through the front door. HILARY crosses to the window and looks out.*

*(Calling.) Neil? Neil?*

*She turns back into the room and checks her mobile again for reception. She exits upstairs. Sound of car arriving and pulling to a stop. Sound of car door opening.*

LINDA: *(Off.)* Bastard!

*Sound of car door slamming. After a couple of moments there is the sound of a car door opening and closing. TIM appears outside the window.*

TIM: Hello in here? Anyone at home?

*TIM exits from the window. HILARY enters from upstairs.*

HILARY: Hello?

*TIM appears at the front door.*

TIM: Hills.

HILARY: Tim.

TIM: Pipped us to the post.

HILARY: We did.

TIM: How was your journey?

HILARY: Fairly straightforward. Miracles of GPS.

TIM: Yes.

HILARY: Yours?

TIM: Yes, straightforward... fairly.

*They embrace.*

How are you, Hils?

HILARY: Good thanks, Tim. You?

TIM: Good, good. Is Neil about? (*Calling.*) Neily boy, you hiding somewhere?

HILARY: He's out, walking off cramp.

TIM: Ah.

HILARY: Slept awkwardly in the car.

TIM: Oh dear. Hope he wasn't driving.

HILARY: No.

TIM: Met Uncle Sammy then I take it – unless you broke in.

HILARY: Met him.

TIM: And as charming as ever, I trust. Well, what do you think?

HILARY: Lovely. Rustic and cosy.

TIM: Certainly is that, certainly is that. Hey, what about this weather then!

HILARY: Amazing! At last, a holiday that coincides with good weather.

TIM: Unheard of. Thirty degrees they say. I mean this is England, for God's sake, shouldn't someone be told! (*Wine.*) Made a start I see.

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

TIM: No, quite right, quite right.

HILARY: I'll get you a glass, shall I?

TIM: Thought you'd never ask.

*HILARY exits into the kitchen. TIM picks up NEIL's glass and sniffs it. He takes out his mobile and checks it.*

Reception's pretty piss poor in here you've probably noticed.

HILARY: (*Off.*) Yes.

TIM: The best place is up the road by the phone box, ironically.

*HILARY enters from the kitchen with a glass of wine.*

HILARY: Here we are. It's relatively cold.

TIM: What have we got here then?

HILARY: Sauvignon Blanc, New Zealand.

*TIM tastes the wine noisily.*

TIM: Mm, not bad, not bad. Brought a few down with me from the old collection – mainly red. A couple of stunners – in my opinion... for the price. Just managed to squeeze them in beside Lin's luggage. Think she's packed for the entire summer. Either that or she's leaving me and this is her roundabout way of letting me know.

HILARY: Is she...?

TIM: Yes, she's just gone for a bit of a leg stretch herself.

HILARY: Thanks for asking us down, Tim, we needed a holiday.

TIM: I wanted you both to see the place in its raw state – as it were,

before any developments happen. Ought to wait and see how much of the land the old badger's prepared to hand over to me first, eh? Mustn't sell the skin before killing the lion – goes the old saying. Knowing him he might give half of it to his dog.

*TIM checks his mobile.*

Oh, Jesus!

HILARY: Problems?

TIM: Serious problems.

HILARY: What is it?

TIM: We seem to have lost both our openers in the space of ten minutes. Cricket. We only need a hundred and fifty nine to win. It should be a stroll in the park. Fifteen for two already – run out and LBW.

HILARY: Oh dear.

TIM: All they had to do was play themselves in. Against the bloody Aussies of course. Still early days. Bradshaw's in now, see what he can do.

HILARY: Tim?

TIM: Hm?

HILARY: Just while we have a moment together...

TIM: Yes?

HILARY: I know he won't ask you himself.

TIM: Who?

HILARY: Neil.

TIM: Oh. Ask me what?

HILARY: If you happen to... If you knew of anything – know of anything – workwise, that Neil could –

TIM: Ah.

HILARY: Well... just if you –

TIM: Yes, sure. Bit of a tricky time at the moment, of course, in the

current economic climate.

HILARY: Yes –

TIM: People fighting to hang on to their jobs as it is. Don't think anyone would take too kindly to me airdropping an old school chum into the mix to ratchet up the competition that bit more.

HILARY: No, I'm –

TIM: Certainly wouldn't be flavour of the month – or the year for that matter.

HILARY: Of course. I wouldn't... I'm not suggesting, Tim –

TIM: Having said that – and this isn't to go no further than these four walls – Basingstoke is having a bit of a reshuffle in the not too distant.

HILARY: Oh?

TIM: It is Basingstoke, but if that's not a problem –

HILARY: No.

TIM: There maybe something there – and that's very much a 'maybe' – Neil could be squeezed into. Can't say what of course.

HILARY: Sure.

TIM: I'll have a word. See what I can do. No promises.

HILARY: No. Thanks, Tim, that's –

TIM: Leave it with me. Still no luck with the legal...?

HILARY: No, Jerry seems to have it all sewn up. He was the financial brains after all.

TIM: The bastard!

HILARY: I kept telling Neil to show more interest in that side of things but... Neil being Neil...

TIM: You're still fighting it naturally?

HILARY: Neil's got to want to too.

TIM: Well doesn't he?

HILARY: Doesn't seem to.

TIM: Mustn't let the bastard get away with it. His cousin wasn't he?

HILARY: Second.

TIM: Still... still family. The complete and utter swine.

*LINDA has appeared outside the window.*

LINDA: Yes, you are.

TIM: Ah, here she is.

LINDA: Here I am.

HILARY: Hi, Linda.

LINDA: Hi, Hils.

HILARY: All right?

LINDA: If you call a broken knee all right, yes, I'm fine.

TIM: Broken, you say?

LINDA: Yes, broken.

HILARY: Wait there.

LINDA: I will.

*HILARY exits through the front door.*

*(To TIM.) Too much to expect you to rush to my aid.*

*HILARY appears outside the window.*

HILARY: Here, give me your arm.

*LINDA and HILARY exit from the window. TIM checks his mobile.*

TIM: That's more like it, England!

*HILARY enters through the front door supporting LINDA. LINDA's outfit is muddied.*

Look at you.

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

HILARY: Come to the sofa here.

*HILARY helps LINDA to the sofa.*

LINDA: Ow! Ow! Ow!

TIM: Doesn't look too broken.

LINDA: It's broken.

HILARY: Let me get something to put on it.

*HILARY exits into the kitchen.*

LINDA: (*Shoes.*) And these are fucking ruined!

TIM: They'll scrub out.

LINDA: They will not scrub out, they're ruined! And these! Shit! Shit! Shit! Mud and shit!

TIM: Good job you brought plenty of backup with you.

LINDA: Screw you! And we're in the middle of bloody nowhere.

TIM: Nowhere's nowhere.

LINDA: This is. God, just look at this hovel! I am not staying here.

TIM: It'll grow on you.

LINDA: The only thing that will grow on anyone here is fungi.

TIM: It's called roughing it a bit. Good for the soul.

LINDA: What would you know about the soul?

*HILARY enters from the kitchen with ice wrapped in a tea towel.*

HILARY: There wasn't much ice left, I'm afraid. This should help prevent any swelling. Perhaps you'd like 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 could... hold it yourself.

*LINDA does so.*

I know what you need.

LINDA: A replacement to him – a caring model.

HILARY: A glass of chilled white wine – semi chilled.

LINDA: How kind.

*HILARY exits into the kitchen. TIM keeps an eye on his mobile and the cricket.*

Expecting her to call you?

TIM: Any minute now, any minute now.

LINDA: You wouldn't be subjecting *her* to this ordeal. You'd be whooping it up in a five star hotel somewhere.

TIM: (*Cricket.*) Damn! Damn!

LINDA: I mean it, either you take me somewhere – somewhere that actually happens to be somewhere – or –

TIM: You had one job, Bradshaw!

LINDA: Did you hear me?

TIM: One job!

*HILARY enters from the kitchen with a glass of wine for LINDA.*

HILARY: Here you are.

LINDA: Thanks.

HILARY: How is it?

LINDA: Painful... but stable, thanks.

HILARY:           *(Wine.)* This might help.

LINDA:            I'm sure it will.

HILARY:           Well... cheers.

LINDA:            Cheers.

TIM:                Yes, cheers. Sorry, dropping like flies the top order. Just lost Martin Bradshaw – a key man.

HILARY:            Oh dear.

TIM:                The trouble is – now we don't have Page and Hartman – we've got no strength in depth – batting wise.

LINDA:            We're not interested.

TIM:                Hils is.

LINDA:            She isn't. He had it on in the car coming down. Mind numbing stuff. Commentators are so bored they have to talk about grass or pigeons.

TIM:                All part of the game... the condition of the grass perhaps more than the pigeons.

LINDA:            Tedious beyond belief.

TIM:                Seems to be a bit of woodworm up there. Need to get the place checked out thoroughly – before commencing anything. Unless I decide to pull it all down, start from scratch.

LINDA:            That would be my suggestion.

TIM:                Be a shame to lose its character though.

HILARY:            Been ages hasn't it since we did anything like this – together.

TIM:                Yes.

HILARY:            Well, I suppose we haven't really – not all together – not with you, Linda.

TIM:                That canal boat holiday in Shropshire, wasn't it?

HILARY:            Yes.

TIM:                Rained the whole bloody time I seem to remember.

HILARY: Complete washout.

TIM: Disaster!

HILARY: I spent most of it below deck while you and Neil fought for control of the helm. They steered us into another boat.

TIM: That was Neil, not me – he was skippering then... trying to.

HILARY: Curry everywhere. I was cooking it at the time. The boat stank of it for the rest of the holiday.

TIM: God, yes!

LINDA: Sorry to have missed that one.

HILARY: You would've hated it, Linda.

LINDA: Yes.

HILARY: Well, doesn't look like this one's going to be a washout. How's the knee?

LINDA: (*Wine.*) This seems to be numbing things quite nicely.

TIM: Yes, definitely woodworm. Quite a bit of it.

HILARY: So... he has no children of his own then – Uncle Sammy – to pass this place on to?

TIM: No. Well... he *had*.

HILARY: Oh?

TIM: Son. Drowned – in the Bristol Channel.

HILARY: Oh... oh dear. He was swimming there?

TIM: Not exactly. He ran off there to do it.

HILARY: Ah.

TIM: They found his clothes there – on a bank nearby.

HILARY: No body?

TIM: No. I guess with those currents you could end up anywhere.

HILARY: What age was he?

TIM: Early teens.

HILARY: Any idea why?

TIM: He was a troubled kid. He set fire to the workers' cottages, on the property here, just before he... ran off.

HILARY: Did you know him well?

TIM: No, only in the summer holidays, if I came down here from school – or uni. He was a decade younger than me so we didn't have much to do with each other. I was usually here with my own friends. And, like I say, he was a... bit of an odd one.

HILARY: Your poor Uncle Sammy.

TIM: Yes. So now I'm the sole heir and beneficiary to the Samuel Foster estate... for what it's worth.

LINDA: Well, I'd love to lie around here reminiscing, but I need to get out of these soiled garments. There wouldn't be such a thing as a bath in this establishment, would there?

TIM: There would.

LINDA: What luck! Hot running water?

TIM: It can be arranged at the flick of a switch.

LINDA: *(Compress.)* Thanks for this. *(Standing.)* Ow! Ow!

HILARY: You didn't happen to come across Neil out there by any chance?

LINDA: Is he out there?

HILARY: Somewhere.

LINDA: God help him! It's treacherous out there. If he's not back soon I'd call out search and rescue if I were you.

HILARY: Perhaps wait a little longer.

LINDA: Your call. *(To TIM.)* Any clues?

TIM: Through that door. Up the stairs, first on your right.

HILARY: Let me help you.

LINDA: Thanks, but I ought to get used to walking unassisted. *(Wine.)*  
You could bring another one of these up for me though.

TIM: I'll bring madam's cases in.

LINDA: Just madam's blue one.

*LINDA hobbles towards the door to the upstairs.*

Ow! Ow!

*LINDA exits upstairs.*

HILARY: Oh, Tim, your Uncle wanted you to call on him when you arrived.

TIM: Righto. I'll bring madam's case in and then pay the old badger a visit in his grotto.

HILARY: Why doesn't he live here – in the main house?

TIM: Who knows? He's a law unto himself is Uncle Sammy. Best not to delve too deep.

LINDA: *(Off.)* Ow! God!

HILARY: *(Calling upstairs.)* Okay, Linda?

LINDA: *(Off.)* Fine, thank you.

TIM: She'll be okay after her bath. *(Draining glass.)* Yes, not bad drop that. I'll crack open something special for tonight. What are we doing about grub, by the way?

HILARY: All under control. Beef Bourguignon – if that's okay?

TIM: Perfect. Got something that'll go quite nicely with that – a couple of things in fact. If I come across Neil I'll send him inside for kitchen duties, shall I?

HILARY: Good luck.

*TIM exits through the front door checking his mobile.  
HILARY gathers the wine glasses. TIM passes by the window.*

TIM: *(Off.)* Come on, England, pull your finger out!

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

*Sound of door slamming upstairs. HILARY exits into the kitchen.*

*Lights down.*

Scene 2

*Same evening. 9.45 p.m.*

*LINDA enters from the kitchen carrying her wine glass.  
TIM appears at the kitchen door with his wine glass.*

TIM: *(Talking back to kitchen.)* No, definitely Neil that was, I'm afraid. You'd wrapped the rope around that mooring post far too tightly, remember? Boat couldn't go anywhere except up in the air. It was a good job we had that axe. Sure I can't help out?

HILARY: *(Off.)* No, it's fine, Tim, go through.

TIM: Okay, like I say, our turn tomorrow.

*TIM enters the room.*

LINDA: I thought we'd agreed.

TIM: Agreed what?

LINDA: We're not going to be here tomorrow.

TIM: Still determined to hate it, are we?

LINDA: Yes, we are. It's filthy, smelly, the bed's on a slope, the bath struggles to fill, the toilet struggles to flush and we're still in the middle of bloody nowhere. Like I say, you certainly wouldn't be subjecting Serena Elvington to this ordeal.

TIM: Oh I don't know, I was thinking of inviting her down in the next few days – once you've gone of course. Can't have both of you here, that would be tricky.

LINDA: Cara was right, she warned me about you. She said you'd revert to type once the gloss wore off.

TIM: Oh, what type is that then?

LINDA: Scoundrel.

TIM: Cara Phillips is this?

LINDA: Yes.

TIM: Well, she should know all about the scoundrel type should your good friend Cara Phillips.

LINDA: Meaning?

TIM: I didn't tell you – I wasn't going to – but now you mention her.

LINDA: What?

TIM: She showed up at the house one weekend while you were on your 'cultural break' in Paris.

LINDA: Did she?

TIM: She arrived in a taxi, in a fur coat and under the influence of one or two – too many – G and T's. I told her you were away perusing the pleasures of the Louvre. She said she was well aware of that and that's why she'd come.

LINDA: What for?

TIM: Well I would have thought that would be fairly obvious – it was to me.

LINDA: You're lying.

TIM: Why would I lie?

LINDA: To taunt me. To disparage her.

TIM: I must say she's got quite a figure under all that fur. Shapely. Delicate heart tattoo on her left breast – or was it the right one?

LINDA: She showed you that?

TIM: She did... and more besides.

LINDA: The bitch! And did you?

TIM: Did I what?

LINDA: Did you fuck her?

TIM: Well, if I was the scoundrel type you imagine me to be...

LINDA: Did you! Did you –

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

TIM: Ah, Neil... come in and join us. (*Wine.*) How you finding this one? Really starts to open up about now, doesn't it? Those smooth, aromatic notes coming to the fore. Hils coming through? (*Calling off.*) Coming to join us, Hils?

HILARY: (*Off.*) Won't be a minute.

TIM: Don't miss out on all the fun.

HILARY: (*Off.*) I'll be right in.

*TIM crosses to the window and looks out.*

TIM: Seems to be a fire over there. Hope it's under control, things could go up like... well, wildfire in this heat. Hit thirty today apparently. No, don't know why I never brought you down here, Neil, in the summer holidays. Brought Toby Johnson, Si Fuller. Trots of course – Kenny Trotter. Remember him? He was a character and a half, wasn't he? No, we used to have fun here cavorting with the local wenches. Good place to begin one's education – if you get my gist, Neil. The girls were... playful. Must've been the good country air.

*HILARY enters from the kitchen with her wine glass.*

Ah, here she is, the culinary supremo.

HILARY: Thank you.

TIM: Tomorrow I'll rustle up one of my legendary ratatouilles... with the assistance of my trusty sous chef – possibly.

HILARY: Lovely.

TIM: Well, you say that now, they're legendary for a reason.

HILARY: Neil?

NEIL: Yes?

HILARY: Okay?

NEIL: Yes.

TIM: He's lost in the rapture of the Margaux.

HILARY: Still so warm, isn't it? It's going to be a sticky night.

LINDA: Yes... it is.

- TIM: Business retreat – another idea. A quiet place in the country to work on strategy and hammer out those all important deals. Renovate the workers’ cottages for accommodation perhaps.
- HILARY: Riding stables?
- TIM: Possibly, possibly. Know sod all about horses, but could employ someone who does. You used to ride didn’t you, Hils?
- HILARY: Once upon a time.
- TIM: There you go, you and Neil can manage it. I’ll run the bar.
- HILARY: The bar? In a riding stables?
- TIM: Well not everyone will want to get on a horse. They can enjoy a relaxing drink while their kids – or other half – is off in the saddle. What do you say, Neil, want to manage a riding stables?
- NEIL: Not particularly, thanks.
- TIM: *(To HILARY. Glass.)* Hey, 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: We all will. Won’t be as robust as this one, but something that should follow nicely on its heels.
- TIM exits into the kitchen. HILARY looks out the window.*
- HILARY: Oh, that must be them – their fire.
- LINDA: Whose fire?
- HILARY: Girl who passed by earlier. Said she and friends were going to be celebrating tonight. Midsummer’s Eve.
- LINDA: What was she, a Druid?
- HILARY: Don’t think so, wasn’t dressed like one anyway – unless she was in disguise. Off hunting for fresh virgins perhaps to toss on the fire. That’s probably why she asked us along. I should have put up that sign: ‘No virgins to be found on the premises’.
- TIM: *(Off.)* Bugger! Pardon my French.

LINDA: She asked us along?

HILARY: Yes.

LINDA: Then what are we doing sitting around here?

HILARY: Well... not sure if she was serious.

LINDA: Why wouldn't she be? How old was she?

HILARY: Twenty something.

LINDA: Then let's go! Neil's up for a party, aren't you, Neil?

NEIL: No thanks.

LINDA: Come on, Neil, let your hair down a bit – so to speak. All right, Hils and I will go, leave you menfolk to talk about man things.

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

TIM: Sorry for the delay, cork failure.

LINDA: We're going out.

TIM: What's that?

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: *(To HILARY.)* We can go like this, can't we? No need to dress up for dancing around a bonfire. And we mustn't go empty-handed.

*LINDA exits into the kitchen.*

TIM: *(Calling.)* If it's wine you're after don't pick up anything with Bordeaux on the label. *(To HILARY.)* Whose party?

HILARY: Some girl who passed by earlier. Sorry, shouldn't have said anything.

TIM: Not your fault, party happening she'd have sniffed it out sooner or later.

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

Two?

LINDA: There's two of us. *(To HILARY.)* Ready?

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

LINDA: You're not chickening out are you?

HILARY: Bit tired.

LINDA: Come on, a little dancing will wake you up.

TIM: You heard her, she's a bit tired.

LINDA: Well, I'm going.

TIM: Then you'll only need one of these.

*TIM takes a bottle from LINDA.*

I must say your broken knee seems to have made a miraculous recovery. Perhaps we should call the Vatican.

LINDA: *(To HILARY.)* Last chance. Okay, please yourself.

TIM: We will.

LINDA: See you later.

TIM: Bye.

*LINDA exits through the front door.*

HILARY: Maybe I... should go with her.

TIM: Not if you don't want to. She's a big girl now, she doesn't need a chaperone. Although, having said that, we'll probably find her face down in another ditch tomorrow morning.

HILARY: Hope not.

TIM: Another broken leg. Here, have some of this. A very palatable Cotes Du Rhone I think you'll find.

*TIM fills HILARY's glass.*

HILARY: Thanks.  
TIM: Neil?  
NEIL: No... thanks.  
TIM: Still savouring that one. Good man.

*TIM fills his own glass.*

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 do all wines, from the ordinary to the exceptional.

*TIM tastes noisily.*

Mmm. This is somewhere on the high end of the in between... in my opinion.

HILARY: It's lovely. I was mentioning to Neil, Tim, about the possible Basingstoke job.

TIM: Yes, *possible* being the operative word, Neil, you understand.

NEIL: It's okay thanks, I'm fine.

HILARY: Neil?

NEIL: What?

HILARY: Just listen to what Tim has to say.

TIM: Well there's not –

NEIL: I said, I don't need any charity hand-outs.

HILARY: It's not, Neil, it's just –

NEIL: And I don't need to be a bloody tea boy in Basingstoke, thanks!

HILARY: Don't be silly, Neil, it won't be that, will it Tim?

TIM: No – of course, no... It's not really anything at... at the...

*NEIL crosses to the front door.*

HILARY: Neil, where are you going?

NEIL: Out! To get some air.

HILARY: Neil – ?

*NEIL exits through the front door.*

TIM: Well... thought he might not... not from me. Too close. Proud man, Neil, wants to do things off his own bat.

HILARY: If only.

TIM: Give him time. He's still licking his wounds. Similar thing happened to a colleague at work – Lenny. He got shafted – for want of a better word – by his business partner. Company they'd built up from scratch together. The bastard ran off with his wife too – just to rub salt in. Took Lenny time to bounce back – but he did eventually. Needed a fair bit of counselling – he's not ashamed to admit it. Came to work for us. He's a key man now, Lenny is, couldn't do without him.

HILARY: I sometimes wonder if *I'm* the problem – with Neil.

TIM: You?

HILARY: Perhaps he might... do better if he was with someone who could galvanise him more, spur him more. That I'm too... too much of a push over.

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

HILARY: Well, I do, Tim.

TIM: You're his rock, his anchor, he couldn't function without you, Neil couldn't.

HILARY: He's not exactly functioning *with* me.

TIM: Give him time, give him time.

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

TIM: Listen... I'll see if I can find a moment to give him a bit of a pep talk – catch him when his guard's down a little. Give him a word of encouragement. Remind him what a treasure he's got in you. You're not to blame yourself, Hils, mustn't blame yourself. *(TIM yawns.)* Excuse me. Country air... *(wine)* mixed with this I should imagine. Everything will work out fine, you'll see.

HILARY: I... met someone, Tim.

TIM: What's that?

HILARY: A man – at one of the events.

TIM: A man?

HILARY: No, it's nothing... I mean we haven't... Not that he's not... wanting it to be... something.

TIM: Ah. He's knows you're with – ?

HILARY: Yes, he knows about Neil. He knows all about Neil. His name's Richard. Kind man, thoughtful man. We've had a few dinners together, some good talks. His wife died just over a year ago – skiing accident.

TIM: Ah. Whereabouts?

HILARY: Pyrenees, I believe. Completely shattered his life. He said he blamed himself somehow for her death – not that he was responsible. Went into a dark place... in himself – depression, despair. Hit the booze – hard by the sound of it.

TIM: Understandable.

HILARY: He's got two teenage boys. They both had to go and live with an aunt. Said if it wasn't for them he might have... you know...

TIM: Yes.

HILARY: And then... one day, he said, he just had this... moment of clarity. He knew he could carry on like this for... who knows how long, or he could decide that day to... make a new start. Not to forget about Helen, of course. He'd always keep the memory of her alive in his heart... the good times they'd shared together – not so good times even. He knew that's what she would have wanted for him: to live, to meet someone else perhaps, marriage again if he met the right person... kids again even. But most of all to... to be there for the boys.

TIM: Sure. (*Yawns.*) Excuse me. I'm listening.

HILARY: So that's what he did. Quit the booze. He went back to work. His boys returned and now he's... doing well. And... he thinks he's met the right person to find love again with... marriage... children too... perhaps. He's pretty convinced I'm the one. He's knows I'm not in a position to... Neil and I need to talk. We need to... talk. He said he'd wait... for however long I

needed. Well... all I do know, it's been nice to have the attention, to know someone – a man – thinks you're special... beautiful...

*TIM snores.*

*(To herself.)* Interesting.

*HILARY crosses to the window and looks out. She turns back into the room.*

Why not?

*She crosses to the mirror and checks herself. She then picks up the unopened bottle and exits through the front door. TIM snores once more.*

*Lights down. Sounds of the party: music, cheering and general revelry is heard during the blackout.*

### Scene 3

*The following morning. 10.30 a.m.*

*Windows and front door are closed. The room has been cleared of glasses and bottles. TIM enters from the kitchen with a cup of coffee and checking his mobile. Sound of dog barking.*

SAMMY: *(Off.)* Jip! Come back here, boy! Jip!

*TIM exits through the front door.*

TIM: *(Off.)* Hello, Jip!

SAMMY: *(Off.)* Stay there, Jip! Stay!

TIM: *(Off.)* Morning, Uncle Sammy.

*TIM enters through the front door.*

SAMMY: *(Off.)* Sit! Stay there!

*SAMMY enters through the front door.*

Timothy.

TIM: Another cracker by the looks of it.

SAMMY: You alone?

TIM: It appears so.

SAMMY: I'll bring up the paperwork then, if it's convenient.

TIM: Sure. I was hoping to be glued to a scintillating final day of the test match, but England have managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory – as is our wont.

SAMMY: Don't follow it myself.

TIM: Very wise, not good for one's health.

SAMMY: Any trouble for you last night?

TIM: Trouble?

SAMMY: Disturbances, outside?

TIM: No. Think I heard an owl at one point, but apart from that all blissfully quiet – outside *and* inside for that matter. Why do you ask?

SAMMY: There was somebody around my place last night. Jip knew it too, he were barking.

TIM: What time was this?

SAMMY: Before sunrise. I went out with my gun, didn't see anyone.

TIM: Not loaded I hope?

SAMMY: Not much use otherwise.

TIM: You ought to be careful, Uncle Sammy, going about with loaded guns. Last time I checked there was a law against shooting people – even defending one's own property. Not sure if discharging both barrels of a shotgun into someone chest can be argued as *not* unreasonable force... in a court of law.

SAMMY: Just put the fear of God into 'em, that's all.

TIM: Well that should do it.

SAMMY: Make sure they don't come back. There were evidence this morning.

TIM: Evidence?

SAMMY: Sticks in the ground, signs.

TIM: What signs?

SAMMY: Meaningless signs. They're around more and more nowadays – troublemakers. Like to vandalise the crops too. Alan Roper's had two of 'em in his fields this year alone.

TIM: Two...?

SAMMY: Those things they like to do.

TIM: Oh, those.

SAMMY: It's people's livelihoods they're messing with. Police don't do nothing. Bigger fish to fry they say. Well if they won't fry 'em someone has to. I'm counting on you to deal firmly with 'em, Timothy. We need to protect what's ours.

TIM: I'll do what I can, Uncle Sammy... within the law.

*SAMMY starts to cough. He takes out his hip flask.*

You okay, Uncle Sammy? Let me get you some water?

SAMMY: Don't bother, that don't help. This does.

*He takes a swig.*

TIM: Have you seen your doctor about that cough?

SAMMY: (*Flask.*) This is my doctor, I consult him regularly. I'll be back.

*SAMMY exits through the front door. Sound of dog barking.*

Jip! Get going! Get going, boy!

*TIM opens the windows. He checks his mobile, finishes his coffee and exits into the kitchen. KELLY appears outside the window. She looks in. She exits from the window and appears at the front door. She holds a bakery bag.*

KELLY: Hello?

*TIM enters from the kitchen.*

TIM: Hello?

KELLY: Let me guess, Tim?

TIM: That's me.

KELLY: Kelly.

TIM: Okay, now we've got that established.

KELLY: They're not back then, I take it.

TIM: Who?

KELLY: Linda, Hils, Nad.

TIM: Haven't seen them.

KELLY: You didn't come – to the party.

TIM: Wasn't invited.

KELLY: Was by me.

TIM: Lost in communication.

KELLY: She likes to have fun – your wife.

TIM: She's not my wife.

KELLY: Your partner then.

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

KELLY: Must've been right for her last night. Really going for it she was – dancing away – no-one could keep up with her... apart from Nad.

TIM: Whose Nad, boyfriend?

KELLY: Friend. Hils was having fun too.

TIM: She was there – at the party?

KELLY: She was. Nad took them off to get kitted out for today. They wanted to get dressed up for today.

TIM: Today?

KELLY: Midsummer's day.

TIM: Okay.

KELLY: I went to get breakfast. (*Bakery bag.*) Want something?

*TIM declines.*

Is that your car outside?

TIM: Which one?

KELLY: The shiny, green, sporty looking one.

TIM: It is.

KELLY: Nice.

TIM: I like it.

KELLY: You must be loaded.

TIM: I do okay.

KELLY: Sorry, rude. This your place?

TIM: It is. You don't sound local.

KELLY: I'm not.

TIM: Where are you from then?

KELLY: Dagenham – once upon a time.

TIM: What are you doing here, so far from home?

KELLY: Dagenham's not home. Like I said: once upon a time.

TIM: Where is?

KELLY: Good question.

TIM: Traveller?

KELLY: Free spirit.

TIM: Okay. And you're down here because...? If that's not prying.

KELLY: The magic.

TIM: Magic?

KELLY: The formations – crop circles.

TIM: Ah.

KELLY: Know about them?

TIM: Heard about them.

KELLY: Been in one?

TIM: Can't say I have.

KELLY: I bet that's where they've gone.

TIM: What's that?

KELLY: They should've been here by now. I bet Nad's taken them there.

TIM: Where?

KELLY: Crop circle. There was a new one this morning, we heard. We were gonna have breakfast here first and then go and see it – all together. Well... sod 'em if they have, I don't care. (*Bakery bag.*) Mind if I start?

TIM: Go ahead, they're yours.

KELLY: Sure you don't want one? They're tasty.

TIM: (*Declining.*) Thanks.

KELLY: (*Taking out pastry.*) These are nice. Nad's favourites.

*She eats.*

TIM: So, what do your family think about your traveller – sorry, free spirit lifestyle of yours?

KELLY: What family?

TIM: You don't have any?

KELLY: None that I care to remember.

TIM: Okay. Won't pry.

KELLY: You don't sound local either.

TIM: I'm not.

KELLY: Where are you from then?

TIM: Berkshire originally. London nowadays.

KELLY: So what you doing here? – If that’s not prying.

TIM: Family connections. Hence the house. Neil wasn’t at the party last night too, was he?

KELLY: Uh uh.

TIM: Didn’t think he would be. Just checking.

KELLY: You like to travel, Tim?

TIM: When I can.

KELLY: You know what I’d like to do – where I’d like to go?

TIM: Where’s that?

KELLY: Somewhere remote in the world.

TIM: Arguably here – according to some.

KELLY: I mean somewhere different – different country, culture. A village somewhere in the mountains – cut off. I’d go and live there – join them in their community. Learn their language, their customs, their stories. Make things, grow things. Even fight for them – if necessary.

TIM: Security not high on the agenda then for you, I take it.

KELLY: Who wants that?

TIM: Some do.

KELLY: Not me. What about you?

TIM: I like a bit of security – within reason, of course.

KELLY: No, I mean where would you like to go?

TIM: Oh. Probably not quite as adventurous as you. Somewhere sunny, beachy – or cultural. Not averse to ancient ruins – so long as it’s not the hotel I’m staying in, eh?

KELLY: Where’s the best place you’ve ever been?

TIM: Ever?

KELLY: Ever, ever?

TIM: Probably have to say Italy. Place on the Amalfi Coast. Know it?

KELLY: Never heard of it.

TIM: Lovely place.

KELLY: When did you go?

TIM: Few years ago now.

KELLY: With Linda?

TIM: Go no, long before her. A girl called Francesca.

KELLY: Nice name.

TIM: Nice girl. Although she had a temper on her, I recall. She gave me a black eye once for eyeing up another girl.

KELLY: Serves you right.

TIM: I thought so.

KELLY: Tell me about it – that place.

TIM: Like I say, a beautiful little fishing village on the Amalfi Coast. Francesca's uncle had a place down there. He was away on business so he let us housesit. We used to sit out on the terrace – the two of us – drinking cheap Italian plonk and watching the sun go down on the fishing boats bobbing in the water.

KELLY: Sounds like paradise.

TIM: It was. Hopefully still is.

KELLY: You've never been back?

TIM: No.

KELLY: What happened to Francesca?

TIM: God knows! Married with a hoard of bambinos by now, I should imagine.

KELLY: I'd like to go there.

TIM: You should.

KELLY: How about you and me go?

TIM: What's that?

KELLY: We can drive down there in your shiny, green, sports car.

TIM: Bit of a schlep in one day, I'm afraid.

KELLY: Who's talking about just one day?

TIM: We're not?

KELLY: I'm not.

TIM: No?

KELLY: We'll start driving and when you get tired you can pull over. We can sleep in the car – or a hotel, if you're paying.

TIM: Would definitely have to be a hotel, I'm afraid.

KELLY: Next day we'll set off again, carry on driving till we get there. Once we're there we can look around. When we get bored we can drive back again – or if I want to stay, you can leave me down there.

TIM: Bit of a risk for you to take, isn't it? You don't know me from Adam.

KELLY: Yes I do, you're Tim.

TIM: I could be a psychotic pervert for all you know.

KELLY: So could I. I guess it's a risk we'll both have to take.

TIM: What about passports?

KELLY: I've got mine.

TIM: I don't, I was only planning on coming to Wiltshire.

KELLY: We could drive back to your place to pick it up.

TIM: You're really serious.

KELLY: Sure.

TIM: It's a tempting proposition.

KELLY: But...?

TIM: But there may be objections to the idea from certain... quarters.

KELLY: Linda?

TIM: That's the name that principally springs to mind.

KELLY: Or your other one?

TIM: Other one?

KELLY: The one you're having an affair with.

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

KELLY: Are you?

TIM: Now that is prying.

KELLY: I say yes.

TIM: I say mind your own business, young lady.

KELLY: That's a definite yes. Anyway, if it's Linda you're concerned about she probably won't miss you. She seems to be having fun enough without you.

TIM: With Nad.

*SAMMY appears at the open front door, without Jip. He carries an old briefcase.*

SAMMY: Knock, knock.

TIM: Uncle Sammy.

SAMMY: What's this, visitors?

TIM: This is Kelly, Uncle Sammy, she dropped in to say hello.

KELLY: Morning.

SAMMY: What does she want?

KELLY: She wants to say hello.

SAMMY: I'm not talking to you, I'm talking to Timothy. I suppose you know nothing about that thing in Mr Roper's field this morning.

KELLY: Are you talking to me or to Timothy?

SAMMY: To you.

KELLY: If you're meaning the crop circle –

SAMMY: *(Derisively.)* Crop circle!

KELLY: I know about it.

SAMMY: I'm sure you do.

KELLY: What's that supposed to mean?

SAMMY: It may be fun 'n games to you, but it's people's livelihoods your messing with.

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

SAMMY: Don't you.

TIM: Look –

KELLY: If you think it's me who's making them –

SAMMY: You and your accomplices.

TIM: Listen, I think –

KELLY: Well you're wrong.

SAMMY: Am I?

KELLY: You've got no idea who it is.

TIM: Uncle Sammy, Kelly –

SAMMY: Soon I'll catch you at it –

KELLY: Oh yeah.

SAMMY: And I'll 'ave my gun with me. I don't care if there is a law against it. I'll 'ave you, the lot of you.

KELLY: Will you.

SAMMY: I will.

TIM: Okay –

KELLY: Stupid old sod!

TIM: Now, Kelly –

SAMMY: What did you say!

KELLY: Stupid old sod!

TIM: Kelly –

SAMMY: No-one speaks to me like that – not I'm my house, not anywhere!

*SAMMY grabs the fire poker.*

TIM: Uncle Sammy –

KELLY: It's not your house anyway, it's his.

TIM: Well –

SAMMY: Not yet it isn't! It's my house and I want you out of it! Out!

KELLY: I don't take orders from you, you old fart!

TIM: Kelly –

SAMMY: Why you... !

*SAMMY makes a move towards KELLY. TIM stands between them.*

TIM: Uncle Sammy –

SAMMY: Let me at her! Let me at her!

KELLY: Come on! Come on then!

TIM: Kelly! Uncle Sammy!

SAMMY: I want you out! Out!

*SAMMY starts coughing and wheezing.*

TIM: Okay, Uncle Sammy, let's put that down before someone gets –

SAMMY: She's vermin! Vermin! They all are.

KELLY: Who you calling vermin? You're vermin, you old sod!

TIM: Kelly, just...! Let me take that, Uncle Sammy?

*TIM retrieves the poker.*

SAMMY: I'll be back – back with my gun. I expect her gone, Timothy, or I'll not be responsible. I'll 'ave you all!

*SAMMY exits through the front door.*

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

KELLY: He started it. He's your uncle, poor you. I thought you said it was your house.

TIM: Family house. Not mine yet.

*TIM puts the poker with the rest of the fire irons.*

Well...?

KELLY: Well what?

TIM: Has he got a point? Is it... you – and whoever – making them?

KELLY: No... it isn't.

TIM: Okay, I believe you.

KELLY: If they show up tell them I've gone.

TIM: Not waiting for them?

KELLY: No. Besides he might be back – with his gun. Nice to meet you, Tim. Have a nice holiday... life. Sorry about him being your uncle again.

*KELLY crosses to the front door.*

TIM: Listen, Kelly... if you're still up for that ride. Can't promise Italy, I'm afraid, but if you don't mind somewhere a little more local perhaps. We can put the roof down, enjoy the thrill of some country lanes, feel the wind in our hair. We could even pick up a spot of lunch later – on me of course.

KELLY: What about your uncle?

TIM: What about him.

KELLY: He won't be too happy to see us in your car together.

TIM: I'll tell him I'm escorting you off the premises – he'll be delighted.

KELLY: Okay.

TIM: Good.

*TIM closes the windows.*

After you.

*They exit through the front door, closing it behind them. They pass by the window. Sound of car doors opening and closing, engine starting up, a couple of throaty revs and the car pulling away and into the distance.*

#### Scene 4

*Later that morning. 11.30 a.m.*

*NEIL enters from upstairs. He is dressed, but in a dishevelled way. He rubs his shoulder. He looks off into the kitchen and then goes to the window and looks out. He crosses to the front door and looks outside.*

NEIL: *(Calling.)* Hello? Hello? Hils?

*He closes the front door. He sits and examines the contents of the bakery bag. NAD appears outside the window. He briefly looks in and exits from the window. There is a knock on the front door.*

Hello?

*NAD opens the door.*

NAD: Hi.

NEIL: Hello?

NAD: Neil?

NEIL: Yes?

NAD: Thought so. Psychic. Not really, Hils told me – described you. Nad. Kelly around?

NEIL: Who?

NAD: Girl, early twenties, *(description of hair)* wearing a *(description*

*of clothing) top.*

NEIL: No.

NAD: No?

NEIL: No. Who are you?

NAD: I've said, Nad.

NEIL: What do you want?

NAD: I don't want anything. I was invited here.

NEIL: Who by?

NAD: Hils and Linda. It's okay, I'm not dangerous – only if I haven't been fed. (*Bakery bag.*) That yours? No? Must be Kelly's. She must've been and gone. We should've been here earlier. They wanted to see it – a new crop circle, appeared this morning. Linda insisted. I left them in it soaking up the sunshine. You should see what they're wearing. They wanted to get dressed up like a couple of Earth Goddesses. They look great. Tim around?

NEIL: Probably.

NAD: What car does he drive? Old blue... Volkswagen is it? It's the only one out there.

*NEIL rubs his shoulder.*

Bad shoulder? I can do you a good massage it if you want. I studied it for a while. Know all the core muscles.

NEIL: No... thanks.

NAD: Just say the word if you do. Another hot one. I love the sun, don't you? Everyone's a lot more relaxed, stripping off, having fun. That's right she didn't tell you, did she – Hils – that she was coming to join us – the party last night. She said you weren't up for it. I tell you who *was* up for it – Linda. Dancing like a wild thing she was. Put us all to shame. Hils wasn't doing too badly herself.

NEIL: Her name's Hilary.

NAD: Sorry. It's just that she introduced herself to me as Hils. (*Bakery bag.*) Mind if I...? (*Looking in bag.*) Aw she didn't buy my favourites... unless someone's eaten them. Not so keen on the others. They shouldn't be too much longer... unless

they've been abducted by aliens. I think aliens get a bad rap. I don't think they're as horrible as Hollywood makes them out to be... personally.

*NEIL rubs his shoulder again.*

You sure you don't want me to...?

NEIL: I'm sure, thanks.

*NAD has taken out his Zippo lighter. He flicks the lid.*

NAD: 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.*

Just need to know its weakness. Everything's got a weakness – if you know where to look for it. People too. Like when I do a massage, doesn't matter how tough they are, how big, find the right spot and you can make grown men squeal like babies. Not that that's the idea of course. Not good for repeat custom, eh? Hilary and I were having a little bit of a heart to heart last night. She was telling me about your...

NEIL: My what?

NAD: Situation. With your business partner – ex business partner.

NEIL: That's none of your business.

NAD: I know. She just wanted to tell me, it would've been rude not to listen. You know what I think: what goes around comes around. Things come back to bite you in the arse... eventually. Karma, retribution, call it what you will. He'll get what he has coming to him... sooner or later.

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

NAD: I'm not – specifically, I'm talking about... life. Here, here's a good example of it. You'll like this... I did. There was this kid I knew at school. Little skinny kid he was – always got picked on. Certainly not what one would call academic... not anything

really. Not true, he was a good runner. I guess he learned to be, to get away from the bullies. An outsider, kept himself to himself... understandably. You know what kids can be like when they've got it in for you. Anyway, one summer holiday, I came across him sitting on a tree stump, alone, crying. I asked him what the matter was, but he didn't want to talk, so I didn't push it. I just sat at some distance from him and spoke about myself. I wanted to see if he'd open up. I guess it worked 'cos after about half an hour he showed me a bruise on his arm – big nasty one. I asked him if one of the bullies had given it to him. He said no it was his dad who did it. He then lifted his shirt and showed me more bruises – bigger nastier ones, burn marks even... from God knows what. All his old man's handiwork. He told me his old man used to lay into him for trivial things, scuffing his trousers, tying his shoelaces up wrong, stuff like that. Another thing – the kid said – his old man believed he wasn't his – his own son. Said he suspected his mum had done the dirty with an uncle of his. The kid, I guess, was a constant reminder of it. His mum had died – he said – a couple of years before. It sounded like she was the only one who'd been protecting him from the sadistic bastard. Now she was out the way, well... it was open season on the kid.

NEIL: Did you report it?

NAD: No.

NEIL: Why not?

NAD: I just didn't.

NEIL: You should've done.

NAD: I know I should've done *now*, but *then* I didn't. Anyway that's not the point of the story. One day the kid stopped coming to school. He'd run off – we heard. Can't say I blamed him, learning about his home life. They never found him – not that we heard. Probably didn't bother his old man though, he was no doubt glad to be shot of him.

NEIL: And...? Is that is?

NAD: Oh no, that's not it, we're just getting to the good bit. Some years later – a friend told me – the kid came back, out of the blue. He was still alive – very much so. He was no longer the skinny little kid he was at school. He'd grown... strong. Life had given him some knocks no doubt – but probably not as bad as the old man had given him. After that he could probably survive anything.

NEIL: And... what happened?

NAD: He showed up at the old man's door. I guess the old man was in little doubt as to what the kid had in mind.

NEIL: What did he do – the kid?

NAD: He picked up a poker that was lying in the fireplace and brought it down on the old fucker's skull – hard.

NEIL: Killed him?

NAD: He wasn't coming back after that.

NEIL: What happened to him – the kid?

NAD: He made peace with himself I should imagine.

NEIL: I doubt it.

NAD: Why not?

NEIL: Murderers don't find peace.

NAD: It wasn't murder, it was revenge.

NEIL: Still murder – in the eyes of the law.

NAD: The eyes of the law squint up its own backside... sometimes.

NEIL: It's still the law.

NAD: Anyway, you've no idea if he found peace or not.

NEIL: So what happened to him?

NAD: He disappeared without trace... again. Retribution.

NEIL: Murder.

NAD: Okay, what would you have done then in his situation, come back, kissed and made up?

NEIL: No, but I wouldn't have killed him, I know that.

NAD: I bet you've thought about it though.

NEIL: Thought about what?

NAD: Taking something solid to his skull.

NEIL: Whose?

NAD: Your business partner – ex business partner.

NEIL: No.

NAD: No?

NEIL: No, I haven't.

NAD: So what are you doing about it?

NEIL: I'm dealing with it lawfully, legally.

NAD: No you're not. You're letting him get away with murder... in a manner of speaking. Hils says you're doing nothing about it. Zilch.

NEIL: I've said that's none of your business!

NAD: Okay.

NEIL: And her name's Hilary!

NAD: All right, let's not fall out about it, we've only just become friends, be a shame to turn enemies quite so soon.

NEIL: We're not friends.

NAD: Acquaintances then. Maybe I should go and look for Kelly. She's probably in a huff we took so long. Oh, there's something you probably ought to know. I've been wondering whether to tell you or not.

NEIL: What?

NAD: Something that she said – Hilary – during our little heart to heart last night.

NEIL: What? What did she say?

NAD: She won't be happy – me telling you this. I'm sort of betraying her trust – we'll I am, but as a friend – acquaintance – like I say, I think you ought to be informed.

NEIL: Of what?

NAD: Do you know anybody called Richard? Someone she works with – knows at work?

NEIL: No. What about him?

NAD: It sounds like this Richard might have certain... 'feelings' for her – from what she was telling me. Don't worry, I don't think anything's happened. Sounds like it's all just one way traffic... just reading between the lines of what she was saying. I thought you ought to know... there's a little bit of competition on the horizon.

NEIL: *(Annoyed.)* Okay... thanks.

NAD: Although – also reading between the lines of what she was saying last night – as a friend – acquaintance – I'd suggest you probably might want to start showing her a little bit more...

NEIL: More what?

NAD: Well... not to put too fine a point on it, a little bit more... 'attention' – if you get my gist.

NEIL: *(Angrily.)* Look, if you're suggesting –

NAD: Hey, hey, don't shoot the messenger! Just giving you a heads up, that's all.

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

LINDA: *(Off.)* Ah! Cheating bitch!

NAD: Sounds like the Goddesses are back.

*HILARY appears at the front door. She is flushed and breathless from the run. She is dressed in a rustic outfit, cornstalks, flowers in her hair perhaps. She carries her other clothes in another bag.*

HILARY: Here we are!

NAD: Hey, hey!

*LINDA appears at the front door behind HILARY, flushed and even more breathless. She is also dressed in a rustic outfit etc. and carries her other clothes in another bag.*

Well, what do you think, Neil, don't they look something?

*Blackout.*